



## PubPol 750.502: The National Security Decision-Making Process

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**Instructor Office Hours:** Wednesdays: 3:00pm-5:00pm\* (dates modified below)  
5 September: 2:00pm-4:00pm  
3 October: 1:00pm-3:00pm

**Course Term:** 7-week session Wednesdays, 5:30 pm – 8:30 pm  
September 5 – October 17

**Course Description:** The National Security Council (NSC) remains the pinnacle of national security decision-making more than 70 years after the National Security Act of 1947. The National Security Advisor and related NSC staff are the linchpins for providing the President and other senior officials with policy recommendations, options and courses of action to confront a range of complex national security challenges. At the same time, the NSC is arguably the least understood and most complex organization involved in the national security arena, since a complete understanding of the inner workings are difficult to discern without direct experience within it. This class will examine NSC organizational frameworks, bureaucratic processes and policy priorities adopted by a number of administrations--and will also compare and contrast the approaches that delivered desired results and those that led to unexpected outcomes. The course will also involve guest speakers, writing assignments geared toward NSC style and format, and a capstone simulation of an NSC meeting where students assume different interagency roles and examine potential courses of action on a key national security issue.

**Course Objectives:** The objectives of the course include:

1. Comprehending key NSC functions and how the NSC has evolved since 1947.
2. Gaining insights into the complexities associated with creating national strategies and developing policy options.
3. Understanding NSC responsibilities during crisis events.
4. Developing practical analytic, writing, and oral presentation skills relevant to national security career fields.

**Course Grading:** This class requires five graded assignments: three one-page memos, one four-to-six page discussion paper, and a simulated NSC policy meeting that will involve

teams role-playing interagency perspectives. In addition, another aspect of the course that will be graded is class participation, which has two components and is explained in further detail below. Late work needs to be negotiated **before** the day the assignment is due (just like you would do on a job). I am always willing to negotiate a new deadline if you have a reasonable reason for needing an extension. However, assignments that are turned in late without prior discussion or approval will be docked one grade step for every day they are late. ***Likewise, absent an emergency situation or unexpected illness, full participation is required for the simulated NSC meeting on 17 October, and failure to attend will significantly impact the grade.***

|                                    |            |
|------------------------------------|------------|
| Class participation and engagement | 20%        |
| Policy Memos                       | 30%        |
| Discussion Paper                   | 25%        |
| NSC Simulation                     | <u>25%</u> |
|                                    | 100%       |

***Class Participation and engagement:*** Half of the grade for this component will account for in-person attendance (any unexcused absence without prior notification will result in a loss of points allocated for attendance in each week), with the other half based on my assessment of individual participation in-class and virtually (Canvass, etc.) with questions, cross-student discussion, and reflection.

***Policy Memos:*** Three one-page policy memos (single-spaced) are required for this component, with due dates of 12 September, 19 September, and 26 September; each will comprise 10% with all three equaling 30% of the total grade. The required format for each policy memo is different and I will lay out the elements for these memos in the preceding week's class. Once you receive the format, I will be evaluating your ability to write cogently and concisely on different aspects of the NSC process--and this mirrors the expectation of senior policymakers who on a daily basis consume numerous short memos and longer papers in order to make informed recommendations or decisions.

***Discussion Paper:*** One four-to-six page discussion paper (single-spaced) is required for this component and is due 10 October, which will entail 25% of the total grade. Students can choose one of the following national security topics to address in their paper: Border Security, China, Counterterrorism, Cyber Security, Iran, North Korea, and Russia. Each discussion paper will be organized around the following elements: Introduction, Threat Overview, Policy Options, Risks and Opportunities, and Recommended Course of Action. During the class on 10 October, each student will deliver a five-to-seven minute presentation on their discussion paper. Of this allotted 25% weight for the discussion paper, 20% will focus on the quality of the paper with 5% on the quality of the oral presentation.

***NSC Simulation:*** The class concludes on 17 October with a simulated NSC meeting which will entail the final 25% of the total grade. I will chair this simulated meeting, and students will present perspectives from the vantage point of a key US government department or agency on one of the six national security topics (we will vote on that topic and the desired level of policy meeting at the end of the class on 26 September). Depending on the size of the class, students can act in teams of up to two or three or as individuals to represent views from the:

Central Intelligence Agency; Department of Defense; Department of Homeland Security; Department of Justice; Department of State; Director of National Intelligence; Office of the Vice President; and Treasury Department. Grading for this 25% will encompass the quality of each individual student/team presentation and participation in the facilitated discussion.

**Required Texts:**

Rothkopf, D. *National Insecurity*, First Edition, New York: PublicAffairs, 2014.

## **FORD SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY INCLUSIVITY STATEMENT**

Members of the Ford School community represent a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives. We are committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. While working together to build this community we ask all members to:

- share their unique experiences, values and beliefs
- be open to the views of others
- honor the uniqueness of their colleagues
- appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other in this community
- value one another's opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature
- use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in Ford classes and across the UM community

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** If you believe you need an accommodation for a disability, please let your instructor know at your earliest convenience. Some aspects of courses may be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. As soon as you make your instructor aware of your needs, they can work with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office to help determine appropriate academic accommodations. Any information you provide will be treated as private and confidential.

**Student Mental Health and Well-Being Resources:** The University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. We acknowledge that a variety of issues, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, and depression, directly impacts students' academic performance. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS) and/or [University Health Service](#) (UHS). For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit: <http://umich.edu/~mhealth/>

**Class Expectations.** It is my intent to conduct the class along the following lines, so that it:

- 
- **Provides a practitioner's perspective** on national security decision-making through the lens of the NSC and other government agencies. Insights on the challenges and dilemmas faced by a diverse range of national security experts will sharpen understanding of readings and enhance classroom dialogue.
- **Prepares students for the rigors** associated with drafting products for NSC consumption. Each student will prepare three one-page memos that provide insight on key NSC functions: creating national strategies; developing policy

options; and managing crises. In addition, each student will draft a four-to-six page discussion paper on a current national security topic to feed a simulated NSC meeting at the end of the course.

- **Develops interpersonal and team bonds** since these are important attributes in the national security field. During the first class on 5 September, please come prepared to speak briefly (two-three minutes) regarding your academic and/or professional background, your interest in the course and motivation for taking it, and whether you hope to pursue a career in national security. I would also like to schedule 30-minute sessions with each student at least once during the course during normal office hours (reminder that the office hours shift slightly on 5 September and 3 October) or other times as necessary. **This however is not required nor part of the class participation grade but more intended to give me a better sense of each student individually and our group as a whole.**
- **Expects punctuality.** We will start promptly at 5:30 p.m. and end promptly at 8:30 p.m. each session, with one 10-minute break. Please refrain from going in and out of the room during class outside of the break, unless absolutely necessary.
- **Prefers that during class, you do not check** your cell phone for any reason, send text messages/tweets, or video/audio record the contents of each session. This request preserves the integrity of the discussion and eliminates distractions—and upholds the same standard applied in the national security arena. Note-taking via laptop is appropriate but also expect no sending of text or instant messages/tweets, social media posting, or video or audio recording of classroom dialogue.
- **Takes seriously academic misconduct, to include** cheating, misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without acknowledgement and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. Any form of misconduct will be taken very seriously. Academic dishonesty also includes using something you produced for another class for an assignment without permission. Information regarding academic dishonesty, plagiarism (which includes copying and pasting text from primary documents without proper citation and formatting), and misconduct and their consequences is available at:  
<http://www.rackham.umich.edu/current-students/policies/academic-policies...>

**Please review additional information and policies regarding academic expectations and resources at the Ford School of Public Policy at this link:**  
<http://fordschool.umich.edu/academics/expectations>

## SYLLABUS

September 5, 2018      Introduction to the NSC

**Guest:**                      Dr. Melvyn Levitsky, University of Michigan Ford School of Public Policy

*Link to Dr. Levitsky's bio:* <http://fordschool.umich.edu/faculty/melvyn-levitsky>

**Summary:**                      This module examines the origins of the NSC, how it has evolved over the last 70 years, and highlights some of its key functions. It also places the NSC in the broader framework of other key factors that shape national security decision-making. It then provides an overview of different approaches that drive the NSC process lifecycle. The guest speaker will provide his perspectives on national security decision-making as a former Ambassador and academic. **The reading load for this week's module is lighter than in those that follow, and much of the material contained in the "Additional" section below will be covered in a powerpoint presentation I will deliver.**

**Key Questions:**

1. What are the origins of the NSC and why was it created?
2. What are the key functions and roles of the NSC?
3. What NSC models have been most successful and why?
4. What are the unique features of the NSC process lifecycle?

**Readings:**

Hooker, R.D. *The NSC Staff: New Choices for a New Administration*. National Defense University. November 2016. (20 pages)  
<http://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/strat-monograph/The-NSC-Staff.pdf?ver=2016-11-15-154433-837>

*National Security Presidential Memorandum-4*. White House. 4 April 2017. (4 pages)  
<https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nspm/nspm-4.pdf>

**Additional**

Daalder, Ivo and Destler, I.M. "How National Security Advisers See Their Role," *The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy*, 5th edition, pages 185-197. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006.  
<http://cisssm.umd.edu/publications/how-national-security-advisers-see-their-role-0>

DeYoung, Karen. "How the Obama White House runs foreign policy," *Washington Post*. 4 August 2015.

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/how-the-obama-white-house-runs-foreign-policy/2015/08/04/2befb960-2fd7-11e5-8353-1215475949f4\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.5cde9a7e3d04](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/how-the-obama-white-house-runs-foreign-policy/2015/08/04/2befb960-2fd7-11e5-8353-1215475949f4_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.5cde9a7e3d04)

Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, US Department of State. *History of the National Security Council: 1947-1997*. August 1997.

<https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/NSChistory.htm>

Rand, Dafna, Stokes, Jacob, Smith, Julianne and Brimley, Shawn. *Enabling Decision - Shaping the National Security Council for the Next President*. Center for New American Security. June 2015.

<https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/enabling-decision-shaping-the-national-security-council-for-the-next-president>

## **September 12, 2018      Creating National Strategies\* (One-page memo due)**

**Guest:**                      **Damon Stevens, National Counterterrorism Center**

*Mr. Steven's bio will be uploaded in Canvass*

**Summary:**                      This module begins with a comparative discussion on key aspects of the national security strategies from the Bush, Obama, and Trump administrations, and will identify common themes and highlight different approaches. The guest speakers will then provide insights on the critical role the NSC plays in shaping national strategies—and how these overarching frameworks drive interagency actions at the tactical and operational levels.

### **Key Questions:**

1. What were the common themes across these different strategies?
2. What were the major differences across these strategies?
3. What are the hallmarks of a coherent strategy?
4. What is the relationship between functional and regional strategies?

### **Readings:**

*National Security Strategy of the United States*. White House. September 2002.

<http://nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-2002/>

*National Security Strategy*. White House. May 2010.

<http://nssarchive.us/national-security-strategy-2010/>

*National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. White House. December 2017.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905-2.pdf>

Cleveland, Charles, Crocker, Ryan, Egel, Daniel, Leipman, Andrew, Maxwell, David. *An American Way of Political Warfare – A Proposal*. Rand Corporation. 2018.  
<https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE304.html>

#### Additional

*National Security Strategy of the United States*. White House. March 2006.  
<http://nssarchive.us/NSSR/2006.pdf>

*National Security Strategy*. White House. February 2015.  
<http://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2015.pdf>

### **September 19, 2018      Developing Policy Options\* (One-page memo due)**

**Guest:**                      **Dr. Jack Riley, RAND Corporation**

*Link to Dr. Riley's bio:*

[https://www.rand.org/about/people/r/riley\\_k\\_jack.html](https://www.rand.org/about/people/r/riley_k_jack.html)

**Summary:**                      This module begins by examining the different processes utilized to develop policy options for the Iraq Surge under the Bush Administration and the Afghanistan Surge under the Obama Administration. It also asks students to assess whether options and recommendations in each case study carefully considered the various pros and cons associated with each. It further evaluates how certain factors—like the role of individual personalities, the desire to generate consensus, and the impact of domestic politics—shaped policy outcomes. The guest speaker will then provide insights on the importance of developing policy options and how organizations like RAND support and inform U.S. government decision-making.

#### **Key Questions:**

1. What were the key policy issues that needed to be addressed?
2. How was the NSC process utilized to develop policy options?
3. What role did individual personalities play in shaping policy outcomes?
4. What are the lessons learned for policymaking?

#### **Readings:**

Baker, Peter. "How Obama Came to Plan for 'Surge' in Afghanistan," *The New York Times*. 5 December 2009.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/06/world/asia/06reconstruct.html>

Gordon, Michael. "Troop 'Surge' Place Among Doubt and Debate," *The New York Times*. 30 August 2008.



<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/31/washington/31military.html>

Rothkopf, David. "A Very Different President," *National Insecurity*, pages 45-73.

Rothkopf, David. "Hello, I Must Be Going," *National Insecurity*, pages 149-182.

## **September 26, 2018      Managing Crises\* (One-page memo due)**

**Guest:**                    **LTC Jason Schuerger, U.S. Army**

*LTC Schuerger's bio:*

Lieutenant Colonel Jason Schuerger is an Army Infantry officer with U.S. Army Special Operations Command. He recently served on the National Security Council Staff for both Presidents Obama and Trump as a Director of Counterterrorism. In this capacity, he implemented the policy to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS), advised on efforts to end the Syrian civil war, and worked to bring American hostages home. Previously, Jason developed U.S. strategy and military policy on Iraq for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and worked as a policy advisor and speechwriter for Generals David Petraeus and John Allen while they commanded forces in Afghanistan. Throughout his 17-year career, Jason commanded forces at the Platoon, Company, and Battalion levels in Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa, Europe, and the Levant, deploying a total of four years in combat zones. He earned a Bachelor of Science from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and a Master of Science from Georgetown University where he researched the national security implications of climate change. Born and raised in West Virginia, he and his family live in Pinehurst, North Carolina.

**Summary:**                    This module begins by assessing how the NSC responded during the summer of 2014 to the rise of ISIS and how this impacted the geopolitical landscape across the Middle East. The guest speaker will then share his experiences at the operational and strategic levels on the ISIS issue, and also provide insights on the NSC's role in managing crises. At the end of the class, we will discuss the parameters for the discussion paper due on 10 October and conduct a poll on which of the six topic issues should be the basis for the simulated policy meeting on 17 October.

### **Key Questions:**

1. What is the key role of the NSC in a crisis scenario?
2. Does the NSC guide and direct operations?
3. How does the interagency keep NSC staff informed?
4. What is the role of the Intelligence Community in a crisis?

## **Readings:**

Connable, Ben, Lander, Natasha, Jackson, Kimberly. *Beating the Islamic State – Selecting a New Strategy in Iraq and Syria*. RAND Corporation. 2017.  
[https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1562.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1562.html)

Rothkopf, David. “Leading from Behind,” *National Insecurity*, pages 269-309.

*Statement by the President on ISIL*. White House. 10 September 2014.  
<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/10/statement-president-isil-1>

## **Additional**

Brands, Hal and Feaver, Peter. “Was the Rise of ISIS Inevitable?” *Survival* 59(3): 7-54.  
<https://www.iiss.org/en/publications/survival/sections/2017-579b/survival--global-politics-and-strategy-june-july-2017-3a5f/59-3-02-brands-and-feaver-a7bf>  
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-memorandum-plan-defeat-islamic-state-iraq-syria/>

Leavitt, Matthew. *The Rise of ISIL – Counterterrorism Lectures*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy. 2016  
[http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus148\\_CT7.pdf](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus148_CT7.pdf)

**October 3, 2018**                      **Towsley Panel (Annenberg Auditorium) + Counterterrorism Policy**

**Guests:**                      **Peter Bergen, New American Foundation**  
**COL Christopher Costa, (USA, ret.), Executive Director, Spy Museum**  
**Barbara McQuade, University of Michigan School of Law**

*Link to Towsley Panel event and speaker bios:*  
<http://fordschool.umich.edu/events/2018/counterterrorism-2020-future-prospects-and-challenges>

**Summary:**                      This module first involves student participation in the panel discussion on counterterrorism (CT) policy and strategy with a diverse set of senior leaders. Following the panel discussion, the class will interact with the panel discussants to hear their individual and collective insights on CT.

## **Key Questions:**

1. How do we define counterterrorism?
2. Over the last twenty years, how have different administrations addressed U.S. counterterrorism policy?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of U.S. counterterrorism approaches?
4. What are areas of potential improvement or future development?

## **Readings:**

*National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*. White House. February 2003.

<https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/60172.pdf>

*National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*. White House. September 2006.

<https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nsct/2006/>

*National Counterterrorism Strategy*. White House. June 2011.

[https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism\\_strategy.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/counterterrorism_strategy.pdf)

Malley, Robert and Finer, Jonathan. "The Long Shadow of 9/11," *Foreign Affairs*. July/August 2018.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-06-14/long-shadow-911>

## **Additional**

Rothkopf, David. "The Beginning of the End of the Age of Fear," *National Insecurity*, pages 307-338.

Green, Emily. "Do we need a new strategy to prevent terrorist attacks on the United States?" *Center for International and Strategic Studies*. December 2016.

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/do-we-need-new-strategy-prevent-terrorist-attacks-united-states>

*Defeating Terrorists, Not Terrorism*. Bipartisan Policy Center. September 2017.

<https://bipartisanpolicy.org/library/counterterrorism-policy-from-911-to-isis/>

**October 10, 2018**

**Discussion paper presentations\* (Discussion Paper due)**

## **Summary:**

This module involves short (five-to-seven minute) student presentations of their individual discussion papers for informal feedback and evaluation. It will then lay out the parameters for the simulated NSC meeting that serves as the capstone event for the seminar.

## **Key Questions:**

1. Did the discussion paper provide a cogent summary and was the threat assessment grounded in fact?
2. Did the discussion paper frame the policy issue in the appropriate context?
3. Did the discussion paper adequately address possible courses of action and pros/cons of each?
4. Did the discussion paper provide a recommendation and justification for the decision?

**October 17, 2018**

**NSC Simulation**

**Summary:**

This module involves a capstone simulation of an NSC meeting where students assume different interagency roles and examine potential courses of action on a key national security issue. The meeting will evaluate the different options presented for consideration and seek to provide a formal recommendation for further action if consensus is reached. The module concludes with a wrap-up of the seminar and final observations.