PubPol 750.003/475.003: The National Security Council and Counterterrorism

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Instructor Office Hours: Tuesdays: 8:00am-9:30am

Course Term: 14-week session  Tuesdays, 10:00 am – 11:20 am
             September 3 – December 9 (no class October 15/December 17)

Course Description: In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, counterterrorism quickly became the most important national priority for the United States and dominated the security landscape for the rest of the decade. Even after the death of al-Qa’ida leader Usama bin Laden in 2011—which some experts thought might have signaled the potential demise of that group and the threat it posed to the United States, al-Qa’ida and other groups remained resilient even when faced with significant counterterrorism pressure. By the middle part of the 2010s, events such as the Arab Spring, the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), competition from China and Russia, and security threats from regimes like North Korea and Iran combined to force hard choices regarding the prioritization of counterterrorism and the U.S. focus on it. Over the last three decades, key decisions in the National Security Council (NSC) drove U.S. policy on counterterrorism, with different approaches adopted by different administrations.

This class will explore U.S. policy on counterterrorism before and after the September 11, 2001 attacks through the lens of NSC decision-making and some of the key personalities involved. It will first look at the NSC from a historical context and identify its key roles and functions, before transitioning into an examination of terrorist threats, and then the more specific aspects of NSC decisions and policy choices on counterterrorism. The course will also involve guest speakers, writing assignments geared toward NSC style and format, and simulated NSC meetings where students assume different interagency roles and examine potential courses of action on various counterterrorism issues.
Course Objectives:

1. Recognizing key NSC functions, the organization’s evolution since its creation in 1947, and how counterterrorism functions within it.
2. Identifying different terrorist threats the United States has confronted over the last three decades.
3. Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of counterterrorism policy choices across different administrations.
4. Developing practical analytic, writing, and oral presentation skills relevant to national security career fields.

Course Grading: This class requires five graded assignments: three two-three page memos, and two simulated NSC policy meeting that will involve 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 meetings on 8 October and 16 December, and failure to attend will significantly impact the grade.

Class participation and engagement: 20%
Policy Memos (x3): 60%
NSC Simulations (x2): 20%

Class Participation and engagement: Half of the grade (10%) for this component will account for in-person attendance (any unexcused absence without prior notification will be docked one grade step). The other half (10%) will be based on my assessment of your participation in-class and virtually (Canvass, etc.) with questions, cross-student discussion, and reflection.

Policy Memos: Three policy memos (two to three pages each) are required for this component, with due dates of 24 September, 22 October, and 19 November; each will comprise 20% with all three equaling 60% of the total grade. In these assignments there is no “right or wrong answer” on different aspects of the NSC and counterterrorism policy. However, students will be evaluated in their ability to: write cogently and concisely; present a logical argument within a coherent memo structure; and minimize grammatical or spelling errors, and avoid colloquial expressions. Students will be expected to conduct research to support their assessments beyond the material listed in the course readings, and details on all the potential issues are available through Internet-based sources from major newspapers like the New York Times and Washington Post; a variety of national security-related periodicals and websites; academic and research organizations;
and, U.S. government publications and documents. **Memos should be singled-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font, with bolded text to designate headers between key sections.**

- **Policy Memo #1:** Compare/contrast the leadership styles for two of the Assistants to the President for National Security Affairs (also known as the National Security Advisor) in the Clinton, Bush, Obama, or Trump Administrations, and argue which was more successful in achieving objectives or goals.

- **Policy Memo #2:** Assess the most significant terrorist threat to the United States and its future status in the next three to five years. Evaluate the intent and capability of the selected group to attack U.S. interests overseas or in the United States, and project whether the group will present more or less of a threat in the timeframe identified above.

- **Policy Memo #3:** Identify a strategic counterterrorism issue, provide three recommended courses of action/policy options and the pros and cons of each, and a final recommendation to address that issue.

**NSC Simulations:** Two simulated NSC meetings (8 October and 10 December) will comprise 20% of the course grade, with 10% for each. Students will provide inputs on their preferences regarding the governmental role they would like to assume; one of five potential crisis scenarios; and whether to simulate two different scenarios or one single one spread out over two different meetings. Students will be evaluated on the quality of each individual student/team presentation, and research and preparation for the role in each simulation.

Depending on the size of the class, students can act as individuals or small teams to represent roles from the: President, Vice President, or Chief of Staff; National Security council (multiple positions); Central Intelligence Agency; Department of Defense and Joint Chiefs of Staff; Department of Homeland Security; Department of Justice; Department of State; Director of National Intelligence; and Treasury Department. Students will choose their preferences on one of five potential counterterrorism crisis scenarios (hostage recovery in the Middle East; airplane hijacking in Asia; terrorist attack in Europe; terrorist attack in the United States; and U.S. embassy attack in Latin America).

**Required Texts:** There are no required texts for the course. However, required material is provided for each class based on publicly available documents via the Internet, and some weeks include additional readings that can supplement the main ones. In addition, students can familiarize themselves with a rich history of literature on U.S. national security decision-making and counterterrorism via recommended bibliographies for both topics, and a comprehensive list of PBS *Frontline* documentaries.
National Security Decision-Making


Counterterrorism


**PBS Frontline Documentaries**


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

- **Provides a practitioner's perspective** on counterterrorism 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 senior executive consumption, with an emphasis on clarity of analysis, concise summation of complex counterterrorism topics, and well-structured formats.

- **Develops interpersonal and team bonds** since these are important attributes in the national security field. During the first class on 3 September, please come prepared to speak briefly 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 15-minute sessions with each student at least once during the course during normal office hours 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 10:00 a.m. and end promptly at 11:20 a.m. each session and **will not have** a break. Please refrain from going in and out of the room during class unless absolutely necessary.

- **Prefers that during class, you do not check** your cell phone to 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 and misconduct and their consequences is available at: [http://www.rackham.umich.edu/current-students/policies/academic-policies...](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](http://fordschool.umich.edu/academics/expectations)
SYLLABUS

September 3, 2019  Class Overview

Guest: Dr. John Ciorciari, University of Michigan Ford School of Public Policy (confirmed)

Link to Dr. Ciorciari’s bio http://fordschool.umich.edu/faculty/john-ciorciari

Summary: This module involves student and instruction introductions. Each student should explain their academic or professional interest in the class and what they hope to achieve over the semester. The class schedule, grading schema and assignments, and instructor expectations will also be provided. The guest speaker will provide his perspective on the NSC within the framework of U.S. national security and international relations overall.

September 10, 2019  Introduction to the NSC

Guest: Ambassador Melvyn Levitsky, University of Michigan Ford School of Public Policy (confirmed)

Link to Ambassador 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 perspective on the NSC from his former experience as an U.S. Ambassador and senior State Department official.

Key Questions:
1. What are the origins of the NSC and why was it created?
2. How has the NSC evolved over time?
3. What are the key functions and roles of the NSC?
4. What are other important factors that drive national security decision-making?

Readings:

September 17, 2019     NSC Approaches

Guest: Megan Badasch, former Special Assistant to the President, NSC (confirmed)

Bio: forthcoming

Summary: This module provides an overview of how different approaches within the NSC and White House drive national security decision-making. It also examines an overview of the traditional NSC process lifecycle for how issues get considered, framed, and ultimately decided. The guest speaker will provide her perspective on the NSC based on her experience as the organization’s Executive Secretariat and how the process works to prepare, review, coordinate, and disseminate policy papers for decision.

Key Questions:
1. What key approaches influence NSC decision-making and why?
2. What personal, professional, academic attributes have National Security Advisors demonstrated?
3. What NSC organizational models have been most successful and why?
4. What are the unique features of the NSC process lifecycle?
Readings:


**September 24, 2019  Counterterrorism Overview* (Policy Memo #1 due)**

**Guest:** COL Tom Faust, (USA, ret.) (confirmed)  
**Bio:** forthcoming

**Summary:** This module provides a broad overview of the variety of different terrorist threats the United States has confronted since the 1970s. It compares and contrasts the intent and capabilities of various groups to attack the United States. The guest speaker will provide his perspective on the counterterrorism mission based on his experience as a career special operations officer.

**Key Questions:**

1. How do we define counterterrorism?  
2. How has the terrorist threat to the United States evolved over the past fifty years?  
3. What terrorist threats have endured and which diminished over time?  
4. What terrorist threat is currently the most concerning and why?

**Readings:**


*Additional*


**October 1, 2019 NSC and Counterterrorism**

**Guest:** (none)

**Summary:** This module examines how counterterrorism policy has been managed in the NSC both before and after the 9/11 attacks. It provides a comparative overview of the different individuals who have held the role of the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism (APHSCT) and how this position functions within the overall NSC structure. It also introduces the different counterterrorism strategy documents produced across the last five administrations that will be explored in more depth as the semester progresses.

**Key Questions:**

1. What is the history of counterterrorism policy in the NSC?
2. How does the role of the Homeland Security/Counterterrorism Advisor contrast with the National Security Advisor?
3. What are the different backgrounds and experiences of those individuals who held that role?
4. What are the most effective strategies for combating terrorism?
Readings:


October 8, 2019 NSC Simulation #1

**Summary:** This module involves the first simulated NSC meeting where students will assume interagency roles and examine potential courses of action in response to a terrorism crisis scenario. The meeting will evaluate the different options presented for consideration and seek to provide a formal recommendation for further action if consensus is reached.

October 15, 2019 No Class, Fall Study Break

October 22, 2019 Clinton Administration Counterterrorism Policy* (Policy Memo #2 due)

**Summary:** This module examines counterterrorism policy during the Clinton Administration from 1993-2001 through official documents on the topic. It also examines the dilemmas the administration faced in the run-up to the 9/11 attacks. The guest speaker will provide her perspective on different terrorist threats as a counterterrorism expert through her combined career in academia, public policy, and the U.S. government.

**Key Questions:**

1. What were the key features of the Clinton Administration’s counterterrorism policies?
2. What did the terms crisis response and consequence management mean?
3. What was the single most significant counterterrorism success and setback?
4. What was the administration’s approach to al-Qa’ida prior to 9/11?

Readings:


https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/items/show/12755

https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/files/original/664f853cb04951ec88a71662c9b6a200d.pdf

October 29, 2019 Bush Administration Counterterrorism Policy

Guest: (none)

Summary: This module examines counterterrorism policy and strategy during the Bush Administration from 2001-2005 through official documents. It also examines the dilemmas the administration faced following the 9/11 attacks, and some of the policy decisions including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, intelligence community reforms, and other counterterrorism-related topics.

Key Questions:

1. What were the key features of the administration’s national security and counterterrorism strategies?
2. Did the Bush administration continue the Clinton Administration’s approach to counterterrorism and the threat from al-Qa’ida, and if not, what were the major differences?
3. What was the single most significant counterterrorism success and setback?
4. What counterterrorism challenges were confronted with the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and reforms in the U.S. intelligence community?
Readings:


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

Additional

Gregg, Gary. “George W. Bush: Foreign Affairs.” Miller Center, University of Virginia.  
https://millercenter.org/president/gwbush/foreign-affairs


November 5, 2019  Bush Administration Counterterrorism Policy

Guest:  
Tom Warrick, Department of Homeland Security (confirmed)  
Steve Block, former National Geospatial Intelligence Agency (confirmed)

Bios: forthcoming

Summary:  
This module examines counterterrorism policy and strategy during the Bush Administration from 2005-2009 through official documents. It also examines how the administration changed direction on key issues like the global fight against al-Qa'ida, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan based the lessons learned and setbacks from the previous four years. The guest speakers will provide their perspectives on counterterrorism
issues during the Bush Administration based on their combined experiences across several departments and agencies.

Key Questions:

1. What were the noticeable differences between the Bush Administration’s national security and counterterrorism strategies between the first and second terms?
2. How did the Bush Administration’s counterterrorism policies change from the first to the second term?
3. What was the single most significant counterterrorism success and setback?
4. How was the issue of homeland security and terrorism inside the United States changing during this time?

Readings:


**November 12, 2019 Obama Administration Counterterrorism Policy**

**Guest:** (none)

**Summary:** This module examines counterterrorism policy and strategy during the Obama Administration from 2009-2013 through official documents. It also compares the key differences between the administration’s approach to counterterrorism from the previous administration. It also examines the impact of the death of former al-Qa’ida leader Usama bin Laden on that group and U.S. counterterrorism strategy overall.

**Key Questions:**

1. What were the key features of the administration’s national security and counterterrorism strategies?
2. What were the key differences and similarities with the Bush Administration on counterterrorism?
3. What was the single most significant counterterrorism success and setback?
4. What was the impact of the death of former al-Qa’ida leader Usama bin Laden on the group?
Readings:


Additional:


November 19, 2019 Obama Administration Counterterrorism Policy* (Policy Memo #3 Due)

Guest: Katrina Mulligan, Center for American Progress (confirmed)

Bio: Katrina Mulligan is the managing director for National Security and International Policy at American Progress, where she supports the team’s work on global security at a critical time for the United States. Previously, she served as an attorney adviser and director for
preparedness and response in the National Security Division at the U.S. Department of Justice, where she provided legal and policy advice on a broad range of national policies, including on foreign influence and election interference, immigration and watchlisting, and contributed to the 2017 National Security Strategy. Prior to joining the Department of Justice, Mulligan served on the NSC staff and in several roles within the office of the director of national intelligence, including as associate director for strategic communications initiatives, special adviser for detainee affairs, and chief of the mission management group. She also served as the assistant to the director of the National Counterterrorism Center during the response to Benghazi and the Boston Marathon bombings. Mulligan received her bachelor’s degree in law, letters, and society from the University of Chicago and her Juris Doctor from the University of California, Los Angeles School of Law.

Summary: This module examines counterterrorism policy and strategy during the Obama Administration from 2013-2017 through official documents. It also examines how the administration confronted the rise of ISIS and what approaches were used to combat the group. The guest speaker will provide her perspective on counterterrorism issues during the second term of the Obama Administration from her time at NSC and the National Counterterrorism Center.

Key Questions:

1. What were the noticeable differences between the Obama Administration’s national security and counterterrorism strategies between the first and second terms?
2. How did the administration's counterterrorism policies change from the first term to the second term?
3. What was the single most significant counterterrorism success and setback?
4. How did the administration react to the Arab Spring and the rise of ISIS?

Readings:


Statement by the President on ISIL. *White House*. 10 September 2014. 

[https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/](https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/)
November 26, 2019  Trump Administration Counterterrorism Policy

Guest:  (none)

Summary: This module examines counterterrorism policy and strategy during the Trump Administration beginning in 2017 through official documents. It also compares the key differences between the administration’s approach to counterterrorism from the Bush and Obama Administrations. It also explores how the administration confronted the ISIS threat following the Obama Administration’s earlier efforts.

Key Questions:

1. What were the key features of the administration’s national security and counterterrorism strategies?
2. What were the key differences and similarities with the Bush and Obama Administrations on counterterrorism?
3. What was the single most significant counterterrorism success and setback?
4. How did the administration respond to the ISIS threat? How did it respond to far-right terrorism?

Readings:


Additional:


Additional:


https://www.npr.org/2019/03/08/701671579/the-changing-u-s-strategy-for-defeating-isis

December 3, 2019 Counterterrorism Roundtable

Guests: 
Ellen Nakashima, Washington Post (invited)
Missy Ryan, Washington Post (invited)

Summary: This module attempts to project the future terrorist landscape by exploring potential drivers and factors that could shape how threats evolve. It will also assess how what U.S. government strategies and capabilities will be most effective in these possible scenarios. The guest speakers will provide their perspectives as journalists focused on different aspects of the counterterrorism mission.

Key Questions:

1. What does the counterterrorism landscape look in the future?
2. What are the most significant threats on the horizon?
3. What potential drivers can change the terrorism environment?
4. What should the United States do to anticipate and respond to future threats?

Readings:


Summary: This module involves the second simulated NSC meeting where students will assume interagency roles and examine potential courses of action in response to a terrorism crisis scenario. The meeting will evaluate the different options presented for consideration and seek to provide a formal recommendation for further action if consensus is reached.