

The National Security Council: An FPRI Primer
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Grade Level:

High School

Time:

Three to four classroom periods.

Standards:

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

[Thematic Strand Index:](#)

- Standard #2: Time, Continuity and Change
- Standard #6: Power, Authority and Governance
- Standard #9: Global Connections

National History Standards:

- US History Standard Era 9, Post World War II (1945-1968)
 - Standard 2A How the Cold War and conflicts in Korea and Vietnam influenced domestic and international politics
 - Analyze the change from confrontation to coexistence between the Soviet Union and the United States.
- US History Standard Era 10, Contemporary United States (1968 to the Present)
 - Standard 1C Recent developments in US foreign and domestic policies
 - Evaluate the reformulation of foreign policy in the post-Cold War era.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Science, 6-12

Key Ideas and Details

- RH/SS.2—determine and summarize central ideas and themes
- RH/SS.3—analyze text related individuals, events or ideas

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- RH/SS.9—analyze and/or compare primary/secondary sources

Comprehension and Collaboration

- SL.1—prepare and participate effectively in a range of conversations.
- SL.2—integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

- SL.4—present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Objectives:

1. Analyze the role of the National Security Council (NSC) in United States security and foreign relations.
2. Assess the impact of the NSC on United States security and foreign relations.
3. Assess the relationship of the NSC to the State Department.
4. Explain the impact of the NSC on presidential power.
5. Analyze the role of the NSC on at least one presidential administration.

Procedures:

1. After your students have carefully reviewed the LESSON INFORMATION below, begin an introductory discussion about what the NSC is and what it does.
2. Ask each student or pairs or groups of three students, to select a presidential administration from Truman to the present.
3. Each student or groups of students, will then assess the performance of the NSC and its Presidential Security Advisor(s) during that Administration. Its relationship to the State Department should also be examined. Students should be given a day in class and time at home, to do their research and discuss their findings. Teachers should determine the scope of the write-up and length of the report to the class.
4. Students should report to the class their findings. This can range from three to ten minutes, depending on the time teachers want to spend on the NSC. After the reports, the class should assess the overall performance and effectiveness of the NSC.
5. Grading can be based on the student research, class presentations, and class discussions.

(LESSON INFORMATION)

Watch the FPRI Primer Video at <https://www.fpri.org/multimedia/2017/09/national-security-council/>

Read the Primer Essay (included below and available at <https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/09/national-security-council-fpri-primer/>)

**The National Security Council
An FPRI Primer**

Article II, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution identifies the President of the United States as the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. It grants the President the power to negotiate treaties, appoint ambassadors, and generally run American foreign policy.

In order to fill those few sentences with practical meaning, presidents have created offices with officials who can help them make and execute foreign policy.

The most important of these special circles of advisers is the **National Security Council (NSC)**, which was created by the **National Security Act of 1947**. In addition to the NSC, the National Security Act created the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency. Each of these changes aimed to strengthen the President's ability to manage foreign affairs in the new world order of the emerging **Cold War**.

Members of the NSC include the Vice President and Secretaries of State, Defense, Energy, and Treasury. The President can also add other members, such as the Director of National Intelligence, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and White House Chief of Staff. Supported by a professional staff of hundreds, the NSC meets regularly to coordinate policy among the responsible agencies, and to deal with crises as they emerge.

The person responsible for managing the National Security Council on behalf of the President is the **Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs**, more commonly known as the **National Security Adviser**. This person is one of the President's closest advisers, but is not subject to the Senate confirmation required by Cabinet secretaries. The National Security Adviser is responsible to the president alone, and acts as both the coordinator of the different positions espoused by the other council members and as a spokesman for the president.

The powers of the National Security Adviser are officially vague but potentially vast, depending on the President's preferences. On paper, the job consists of chairing NSC meetings; supervising the work of the NSC staff; and managing the flow of policy memoranda between the Oval Office and the rest of the government. Over the years, however, National Security advisers such as **McGeorge Bundy** (1961-1965), **Henry Kissinger** (1969-1975), **Brent Scowcroft** (1989-1993), and **Condoleezza Rice** (2001-2005) have been central figures in making American foreign policy. The tug-of-war between the NSC (representing the White House) and Cabinet Secretaries has become a regular feature of American politics, and is worth watching if you want to understand how foreign policy is made.

One concrete example illustrates the positive and negative aspects of the NSC's ambivalent place in the foreign policy establishment:

President Richard Nixon relied on National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger to carry out delicate negotiations that he did not want to entrust to the State Department or discuss with the public. Their successes included both the negotiations to end American involvement in the Vietnam War and the preparations for Nixon's historic 1972 visit to China, but their actions also fed suspicion of the White House in the State and Defense departments, not to mention among the press and public. The Nixon Administration's addiction to secrecy led to the **Watergate Scandal**, and the eventual resignation of the President.

President Obama often relied on the NSC to maintain control of policymaking. It remains to be seen if the Trump Administration will do so as well.






Gen. H.R. McMaster, the current National Security Adviser, is known as a scholar as well as a soldier, and appears more likely to emphasize the NSC’s traditional role as coordinator of government policy rather than a high-profile advocate. In his work, he will be supported by the NSC staff, which includes both area experts on various regions of the world and specialists in issues such as nuclear weapons, cybersecurity, and terrorism. In meetings at the staff level and in detailed reports, the NSC synthesizes information from other government agencies, and produces the analyses the president needs to make difficult decisions, and to be prepared for possible crises before they flare up.

Every President needs close advisers whose primary loyalty is to the occupant of the Oval Office. Thus, the National Security Adviser will remain a key figure in making American foreign policy. The challenge for both Presidents and National Security Advisers is to understand both the possibilities and the limits of that relationship.

Structure of the United States National Security Council	
Chairman	President
Statutory Attendees	Vice President Secretary of State Secretary of Defense Secretary of Energy
Military Advisor (and regular attendee)	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
Intelligence Advisor (and regular attendee)	Director of National Intelligence
Drug Policy Advisor	Director of National Drug Control Policy
Regular Attendees	National Security Advisor Deputy National Security Advisor Homeland Security Advisor Attorney General White House Chief of Staff
Additional Participants	Secretary of the Treasury Secretary of Homeland Security White House Counsel Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Assistant to the President for Economic Policy Ambassador to the United Nations Director of Office of Management and Budget Deputy Counsel to the President for National Security Affairs

List of National Security Advisors

■ Republican (16)
 ■ Democratic (8)
 ■ Independent (2)

#	Portrait	Name	Term of office			President(s) served under
			Start	End	Days	
1		Robert Cutler (1895–1974)	March 23, 1953	April 2, 1955	740	Dwight D. Eisenhower
2		Dillon Anderson (1906–1974)	April 2, 1955	September 1, 1956	519	
3		William H. Jackson (1901–1971)	September 1, 1956	January 7, 1957	129	
4		Robert Cutler (1895–1974)	January 7, 1957	June 24, 1958	533	
5		Gordon Gray (1909–1982)	June 24, 1958	January 13, 1961	934	
6		McGeorge Bundy (1919–1996)	January 20, 1961	February 28, 1966	1865	John F. Kennedy
						Lyndon B. Johnson

7		Walt W. Rostow (1916–2003)	April 1, 1966	January 20, 1969	1025	
8		Henry Kissinger (1923–)	January 20, 1969	November 3, 1975	2478	Richard Nixon
						Gerald Ford
9		Brent Scowcroft (1925–)	November 3, 1975	January 20, 1977	444	
10		Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928–2017)	January 20, 1977	January 20, 1981	1461	Jimmy Carter
11		Richard V. Allen (1936–)	January 21, 1981	January 4, 1982	348	Ronald Reagan
12		William P. Clark, Jr. (1931–2013)	January 4, 1982	October 17, 1983	651	
13		Robert McFarlane (1937–)	October 17, 1983	December 4, 1985	779	

14		John Poindexter (1936–)	December 4, 1985	November 25, 1986	356	
15		Frank Carlucci (1930–)	December 2, 1986	November 23, 1987	356	
16		Colin Powell (1937–)	November 23, 1987	January 20, 1989	424	
17		Brent Scowcroft (1925–)	January 20, 1989	January 20, 1993	1461	George H. W. Bush
18		Anthony Lake (1939–)	January 20, 1993	March 14, 1997	1514	Bill Clinton
19		Sandy Berger (1945–2015)	March 14, 1997	January 20, 2001	1408	
20		Condoleezza Rice (1954–)	January 22, 2001	January 25, 2005	1464	George W. Bush

21		Stephen Hadley (1947–)	January 26, 2005	January 20, 2009	1455	
22		James Jones (1943–)	January 20, 2009	October 8, 2010	626	Barack Obama
23		Tom Donilon (1955–)	October 8, 2010	July 1, 2013	997	
24		Susan Rice (1964–)	July 1, 2013	January 20, 2017	1299	
25		Michael Flynn (1958–)	January 20, 2017	February 13, 2017	24	
–		Keith Kellogg (1944–) Acting	February 13, 2017	February 20, 2017	7	Donald Trump
26		H. R. McMaster (1962–)	February 20, 2017	Incumbent	197 days	

Modifications:

Teachers can choose to limit the scope of this lesson to a single Presidential Administration or one particular time period. Research can also be assigned as homework by individuals rather than in groups.

Extensions:

The lesson can be expanded to include the relationship of the NSC to the CIA and other intelligence services. There are 16 in all.

References:

FPRI:

- The National Security Council: An FPRI Primer
 - Video: <https://www.fpri.org/multimedia/2017/09/national-security-council/>
 - Essay: <https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/09/national-security-council-fpri-primer/>
- ORBIS—FPRI's Journal of Foreign Affairs
 - Numerous articles throughout its publishing history concerning the NSC

Organization of the National Security Council System

["Organization of the Nat#661F2C"](#)

Organization of the National Security Council

["Organization of the Nat#661F24"](#)

Records of the National Securities Council

[Records of the National #662246](#)

Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council by David Rothkopf. (2005)

The Reagan Files: Inside the National Security Agency by Jason Saltoun-Ebin (2012)

Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council by Karl F. Inderfurth and Loch K. Johnson (2004)

Honest Broker?: The National Security Advisor and Presidential Decision Making by John P. Burke (2010)

The National Security Council: An Organizational Assessment by Richard A. Best, Jr. (1992)

From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War by Robert M. Gates (1996)