

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Political Science 147B
Russian-American Relations

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Research Assignment: Policy Memorandum on American Policy toward Russia

You will write a policy memorandum (as described on the reverse side of this page) and present an oral background briefing on the issue. The finished product will be a twelve- to seventeen-page written memorandum and oral briefing, but to help you complete this project we ask you to submit the following four smaller projects that will result in a polished finished product.

1. Research project topic: Your policy question

Due: Friday, April 14

After consulting with the instructors, submit a brief one-paragraph description of the policy question you will address. This should include a simple one-sentence question such as “What should the United States do to counter Russian subversion in Montenegro?” Your topic should be important enough that it will be possible to find sources and yet focused so that you can address this issue in a twelve- to seventeen-page policy memorandum. While there is no penalty for failing to turn in this first assignment (it accounts for 0 per cent of your grade), it is definitely in your interest to clear your question first.

Ideas for topics are available in a file on the TritonEd course page.

2. Policy briefing: Background and definition of the problem

Due: Friday, April 28

This is a first draft of the first substantive part of your final memorandum. In this briefing you describe the problem confronting the United States. You may want to divided this briefing into two sections: First, you should describe for your client the background to the problem—what has happened on the ground so far, what Russia has done so far, and what Russia and others might do in the near future. Second, you should explain to your client why the United States should care—what is at stake for the United States in this situation? For example, why do we care about subversion in Montenegro? This briefing will constitute a third to a half of the final twelve- to seventeen-page memorandum.

Suggestions for finding research sources are available on the TritonEd course page.

3. Oral briefing

Due: Friday, May 5

You should prepare, record, and submit an oral presentation as though you were in a formal meeting with your client to present your Policy briefing (Step 2, above). This should be no more than 5 minutes long and summarize the major points of the written Policy briefing. You should record this on your laptop, review your recording (in private or with close friends), revise your presentation, record an improved version, and submit the final version after you are satisfied with the product. You should submit this on-line. Only the instructors to the class will see this unless you choose to share it.

Instructions on recording and submitting your Oral briefing are available on the TritonEd course page.

4. Policy memorandum

Due: Monday, June 12

This is the complete memorandum as described on the reverse side of this assignment. It incorporates the Policy briefing (Step 2, above) with any revisions that you decide to make in response to the TA’s comments on the first draft.

(over)

What is a Policy Memorandum?

Policy memoranda are prepared by analysts who work in any number of agencies in the public, non-profit, and for-profit sectors. These memoranda are consumed by all governmental agencies from the Department of Agriculture to the White House Staff and by a wide array of private clients from banks to charitable-relief agencies. A client typically requests such a memorandum when the client must make a decision to take action (or take no action). Analysts then provide the decision maker with background information, explain what is at stake for the decision-maker's agency, identify the options available to the client, assess the consequences (both positive and negative) that would follow from each option, and suggest one or the other of the options (or some combination of options).

For this assignment, your client is the U.S. Secretary of State.

When preparing your own memorandum you should keep in mind the following guidelines:

1. **Address the client who will receive your memorandum.** You should write your memorandum with a clear sense of the objectives of your client. You must put yourself in the client's position in order to help her/him solve her/his problem.
2. **Open with a summary of the central points of your memorandum.** You may want to give this section the heading "Summary" or (even better) a section heading that expresses the main point, such as "The Need for Action in Montenegro." You should state at the very beginning in a few sentences the major points of your memorandum that you want the client to take away. A client is almost always a busy person and you want your main message to grab her/his attention *immediately*.
3. **Frame "the problem."** What is the problem and what interests does the client's agency (in this case the United States Government) have at stake? This should begin with necessary background information so that the client understands what gave rise to the current "crisis" (a situation requiring a decision to act or not to act). Then you should identify how these developments affect the interests of your client's agency. (This particular assignment requires you to view developments in light of your understanding of America's primary foreign policy interests and objectives.) If you discover that your client's agency cannot serve all its interests simultaneously in this crisis and particularly if some interests conflict with others, you may need to suggest some priority in the ways in which it addresses these problems. Thus, different analysts will often reconcile these interests and define "what's at stake" in diverging ways.
4. **Enumerate the options for responding to these problems.** What can your client's agency (the United States Government) do? State the options clearly and crisply. Once again, remember that you are trying to grab the attention of a busy person. "Bullets" or numbered lists may make key points stand out, but each bulleted point normally should be at least one complete sentence.
 - a. **Predict the consequences of each alternative.** Commonly, these consequences are the responses of the other side (in this assignment, Russia) and of third parties (such as the Montenegrins, the European Union). Most options will have a mixture of desired and undesired consequences. Some options may be ineffective. Some consequences will be uncertain; you should identify these uncertainties. You should attempt to assign some (notional) probability to each consequence; that is, which consequences are highly likely and which are improbable if the client selects a particular option?
 - b. **Provide some "evidence" for your expectations.** Since we cannot know the future (such as the future consequences of our current actions), we develop expectations based on observed consequences of similar actions in the past. What is the evidence from the past for your expectations about the future? (For example, "in the past this worked in . . . when we . . .")
 - c. **Weigh the options with respect to the objectives of your client.** That is, will the net effect of one option serve the interests of the United States better than an alternative option?
 - d. **Your recommendation.** Which strategy do you recommend?

This discussion of options constitutes a half or more of the entire memorandum and is its most important part.

Organization of your memorandum: [1] Information for transmittal (e.g., DATE:, TO:, FROM:, SUBJECT:), [2] Opening paragraph labeled "Summary" or other title that captures the central recommendation, [3] Informatively labeled sections such as "Background," "What's at Stake for America," "Options," and "Recommendations" or brief subtitles that express the central point of each section.

Please remember that effective memoranda must be *brief, clear, direct, and crisply formulated*.