

## Gov391: Politics of Nuclear Weapons – Policy Memo

- What is this?** You will write a 12–15 page policy memo in which you analyze a current nuclear weapons policy issue of your choice and provide recommendations for addressing the issue. This memo takes the place of a final exam for this course.
- Why do it?** The policy memo gives you a chance to conduct original research on nuclear weapons policy and to apply the theories we learn in the class to some real-world issues. And did I mention it is instead of a final?
- What is it worth?** This assignment is worth 30% of your course grade.
- When is it due?** The policy memo is due by 10pm on May 3.

For the policy memo, you will:

1. *Choose a current nuclear policy issue.* Pick a topic that is current; that is, something that you think is of relevance to nuclear policy today. Pick a topic that addresses the subject matter of the second part of the course; that is, the topic should address questions of how nuclear weapons affect international security, not about the proliferation of nuclear weapons to states that don't already have them. You may write about nuclear weapons policy issues that we address in class, but your memo should go well beyond the class discussion and the assigned readings for that topic. Some possible topics include:

- New Russian weapons capabilities
- Arms control involving Russia or other states
- Maintaining US nuclear superiority
- Achieving North Korean denuclearization
- Countering a build-up of Chinese weapons
- Achieving strategic stability

These are just some possibilities—feel free to choose something not mentioned here. If you are not sure whether your topic is appropriate, please run it by me via email.

2. *Explain the nuclear policy issue and why it is important.* Provide at least some background on the policy issue to help the reader follow your argument. Make the case that this issue is important enough to warrant some action, even with all the other international security problems out there.
3. *Put the nuclear policy issue in the context of the relevant academic and policy literature.* Discuss the current state of the field with regard to your issue. Describe important theories or empirical findings from the academic literature, as well as any ongoing policy debate around the issue.

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For academic research, you might consult Google Scholar (beware of unpublished work), JSTOR, or the major academic journals that published the readings assigned for this course. Note that academic theory is unlikely to deal with the details of your specific policy issue, and that's fine. You don't need to find a theory of Russian underwater nuclear drones; instead you should discuss how more general theories of deterrence and new military technologies apply to this case.

To research the policy debate, consult policy journals (*Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy*, for example) and reports from major think tanks (Brookings, Council on Foreign Relations, IISS) or government agencies.

Talk to the staff at the library if you need help identifying appropriate sources or getting started with your research. Your memo should address the current debate regarding *both* theory (from the academic literature) and practice (from the policy literature).

4. *Provide concrete advice to a senior policymaker on how to deal with this nuclear policy issue.* Address your memo to a specific senior policymaker in a government (US or other) or international organization. Provide 2-3 policy options for addressing the nuclear policy issue your memo describes and make the case for your *one* preferred option. Only propose options that are feasible or reasonable (i.e. don't suggest nuking Russia or doubling the US defense budget). Be careful that your policy options don't read like a wish list—these should be specific actions that the recipient of the memo could actually implement.

You must do more than just describe the literature or summarize the arguments of others! I am looking for your own critical analysis of the policy issue. Use the arguments and theories of other scholars only as a starting point. Make sure that you clearly take a position on the best response to this policy issue. On the other hand, you must do more than just provide your opinion! Use facts and findings in the literature to support your analysis and conclusions.

Spend some time thinking about how best to organize your paper. Write clearly and concisely. Proofread. You cannot do well on this assignment if I am confused about your analysis or policy recommendation.

We will discuss some basics of writing policy memos in class. For additional thoughts on memo writing, see: <http://harris.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/files/writing.pdf>

Your policy memo should be 12-15 pages of double-spaced text (not including the bibliography), using a standard 12-point font. Please number your pages. You can use whatever citation style you prefer, but you must cite your sources correctly. Ask for help

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if you're not sure how or whether to cite material. For guidance on appropriate sourcing, see the following resources:

<http://guides.swem.wm.edu/writingandciting>  
<http://library.duke.edu/research/plagiarism>

Submit the memo via Blackboard (as a PDF file, if possible) by 10pm on May 3.

### Need help?

- Browse some of the resources under “Readings and other materials” on the syllabus.
- Check out additional readings from the syllabus on topics of interest.
- Consult a research librarian ([libraries.wm.edu/appointments](http://libraries.wm.edu/appointments)).
- Make an appointment at the Writing Resources Center ([www.wm.edu/wrc](http://www.wm.edu/wrc))
- Email me, visit me in office hours, or contact me to set up another time to meet.