POLS 2200 | Hot Topics in Political Science | National Security Decision-Making

Fall 2025
Tuesdays | 10/7/25-11/25/25 | 5:30-7:20 PM
Classroom: Baldwin 301; Faculty Office: Baldwin 306-A
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Note: This is a **1-credit hour** course

Office hours: By appointment – please contact General Punaro by email.

Course Description:
National Security Decision-Making is a dynamic, one-hour elective that offers an insider's look into how the U.S. navigates critical national security challenges. This course goes beyond theory, providing a deep dive into the key institutions, strategies, and decision-making processes that shape U.S security policy.

Through engaging lectures, thought-provoking readings, and exclusive guest speakers – including high-ranking former government officials and industry leaders – students will explore the intricate roles of the Department of Defense, the Intelligence Community, Congress, and private industry. By the end of the course, students will have gained an understanding of how national security decisions are made, how agencies collaborate (or clash), and what it takes to address evolving global threats. This course is essential for anyone aspiring to a career in national security, offering invaluable insights from experts and a behind-the-scenes look at how critical decisions are made.

This course is taught by **General Arnold Punaro, USMC (Ret.)**, a nationally recognized expert in national security, defense policy, and government operations. A retired U.S. Marine Corps Major General, he has served in key leadership roles, including Staff Director of the Senate Armed Services Committee and CEO in the defense industry. With decades of experience navigating the intersection of military strategy, policymaking, and private sector innovation, General Punaro brings insight into how national security decisions are made at the highest levels.

Students will leave this course understanding effective communication and decision-making required for careers in security, policy, agencies, and partners --- government and private sector and be better equipped to find employment in this field.

Please note: Guest speakers are scheduled in advance; however, due to the demands of their professional commitments (that might occur last minute), substitutions or schedule changes may occur.

Course Objectives: 1) to understand the different elements of the U.S. national security establishment and how those elements work together or at odds; 2) to understand how national

security decisions are made; 3) to understand the current issues in national security and how the U.S. is handling those challenges; 4) to learn to effectively communicate, verbally and in writing, in the manner expected in this field; and 5) to educate students on the various job opportunities available to them in the national security field.

Prerequisites for the course: 3rd and 4th year students only

Technical requirements of the course: To meet the technical requirements for the course you must be able to access a laptop, iPad or desktop computer and reliable internet service to enable you to use the Internet and get access to eLC. Your assignments must be submitted by using eLC drop box. The primary means of communication with the class is through email and announcements posted in eLC. If you have any issues accessing eLC, please contact:

EITS Help Desk: helpdesk@uga.edu or 706-542-3106
Business hours: 8am-10pm (Mon-Thurs), 8am-6pm (Fri), and 1pm-7pm (Sat-Sun)

Course readings:
Required readings are embedded as hyperlinks in this syllabus and some readings are on eLC.
Please come to each class having completed the required readings for that class session.
Professor Punaro has written three books pertaining to the course topic. Certain chapters will be posted on the eLC. If students would like to purchase one of the books to read in its entirety, they may do so. Amazon links below:
- On War and Politics
- The Ever-Shrinking Fighting Force
- IF CONFIRMED: An Insider's View of the National Security Confirmation Process

NOTE: All profits from the books are donated to the Marine Corps Scholarship Fund. The professor does not make money on books purchased.

Grading and Assignments
Class Participation 20%
- Active participation in class discussions required.
- Attendance is mandatory. Each class, students will pick up nameplates to mark attendance. (Students should contact professor ahead of time for any extenuating circumstances that would prevent them from attending class.)

Policy Memo 20%
Each student will write a **2-page, single-spaced policy memo** on a national security issue of their choosing. The memo should be addressed to Mike Waltz, the National Security Advisor of the United States and follow standard memo form. This assignment is designed to enhance your ability to **write concise, persuasive, and well-reasoned policy documents**—a critical skill in national security and government decision-making. Include the following:
- **BLUF (Bottom Line Up Front)** – A concise statement of the key issue and recommendation.
- **Executive Summary** – A brief overview of the context and importance of the issue.
- **Three Key Judgments** – The most critical findings supporting the recommendation.

- The memo must be **analytical and research-based**, providing well-supported justifications for its conclusions and recommendations.
- Arguments should be clear, concise, and backed by credible sources.
- **2 pages single-spaced** (excluding footnotes), using **Times New Roman, 12-point font** with standard margins.
- Properly formatted **citations** in an academic or policy-appropriate style.
- The policy memo must be submitted to **eLC by October 27, 2025**.

Current Issue Assessment Video Presentation (20%)
Students will work in teams of 3-4 to create and present a **briefing-style video** on a key national security issue that is still under active decision-making. Student teams will be assigned alphabetically and posted on the eLC by the second week of class. Topics must be selected in consultation with the professor, and the same topic will be used for the final paper that each student will write independently. This assignment is designed to develop your ability to **synthesize complex national security issues, communicate persuasively, and work collaboratively**, skills essential for careers in policy, intelligence, and defense. Feedback will be given via the eLC.
Assignment Requirements:
- The video should simulate a high-level **national security briefing** intended for a senior policymaker.
- Although real-world briefings are typically given by a single individual, teams should structure their presentation creatively to ensure all members contribute equally (e.g., assigning different sections or perspectives).
- The final product should be edited into a single, seamless video.
Content & Structure:
- Briefly introduce the issue and its national security implications.
- Present key background information and current status.
- Analyze pros and cons of potential policy actions.
- Offer clear recommendations and a well-supported conclusion.
Collaboration & Division of Work:
- Each team member must actively contribute to **research, analysis, visuals, and presentation delivery** in a balanced manner.
- Roles should be divided equitably to ensure fairness and engagement.
Technical & Presentation Standards:
- The **video must be 5-8 minutes long** to reflect real-world briefing time constraints.
- All participants must wear attire appropriate for a formal government briefing.
- The video should be clear and well-organized.
Submission Details:
- The final video must be submitted to **eLC** by **November 17, 2025**.
- Topic selection consultations with the professor will begin after the first class.

Final Paper (40%)
Each student will write an **individual** 5–7-page paper **justifying and expanding upon the recommendation** presented in the group video briefing. While the video presentation was a collaborative effort, this paper must be written independently and provide a **deeper analysis** of the selected national security issue. This assignment is designed to refine your **critical thinking,**

research, and policy-writing skills—key competencies for careers in national security, government, and international affairs.

Assignment Requirements:
- The paper should build upon the video presentation by offering a more comprehensive examination of the issue.
- It must provide the **research, evidence, and analytical reasoning** that support the proposed recommendation.
- Incorporate **feedback and critiques** received from video brief.

Structure & Content
- Clearly outline the national security issue, key considerations, and policy options.
- Defend the recommended course of action with strong **evidence, logical reasoning, and source-based analysis**.
- Address counterarguments and alternative perspectives where relevant.

Formatting Guidelines
- 5–7 pages in length (excluding footnotes and bibliography).
- **Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced** with standard margins.
- Properly formatted **footnotes and citations** following a recognized academic style.

Submission Details
- The final paper must be submitted to **eLC** by **December 5, 2025**.

Note: There is no final exam.

Total: 100%
Grade scale:

A	93.00 and above
A-	90.00 to 92.99
B+	87.00 to 89.99
B	83.00 to 86.99
B-	80.00 to 82.99
C+	77.00 to 79.99
C	70 to 76.99
D	65.00 to 69.99

10/7/25 Class 1: Introduction to U.S. National Security Decision-Making
- Course overview
- Constitutional foundations of U.S. National Security
- Overview of the institutions and players: Department of Defense, intelligence agencies, State Department, National Security Council, Congress, and industry

Required Reading:

1. Chin, John J., Kiron Skinner and Clay You. 2023. "Understanding National Security Strategies Through Time." *The Strategist*.

2. Punaro, Arnold. 2016. *On War and Politics: The Battlefield Inside Washington's Beltway.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press. (Chapter 1 - PDF).
3. Punaro, Arnold. 2021. "America Repeated Vietnam's Mistakes in Afghanistan." *Wall Street Journal,* August 19.

10/14/25 Class 2: The Department of Defense (DoD) and the Military
- How the DoD is organized and led
- The role of the DoD in national security
- Challenges and leadership lessons

Guest speaker: **Gen. Jim Jones, USMC (Ret.);** Former U.S. National Security Advisor; 32nd Commandant of the Marine Corps; Former Commander, U.S. European Command and Supreme Allied Commander Europe; CEO of Jones Group, International

Required Reading:

1. U.S. Department of Defense. 2022. 2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America. Washington, DC: Department of Defense.
2. Congressional Research Service. 2025. Defense Primer: The Department of Defense. Washington, DC: CRS.

10/21/25 Class 3: The Intelligence Community
- Who is in the Intelligence Community (IC) and what they do
- How intelligence is gathered
- Law, oversight, and ethics
- The role of the Intelligence Community in national security

Guest speaker: **The Honorable George Tenet**, former Director of Central Intelligence Agency; Former National Security Council Director of Intelligence; Former Staff Director, Senate Select Committee on National Intelligence; Former Visiting Professor, Georgetown University; awarded Presidential Medal of Freedom; Author, *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA*

Required Reading:

1. Congressional Research Service. 2025. Defense Primer: National and Defense Intelligence. Washington, DC: CRS.
2. Central Intelligence Agency. 2024. "Intelligence Reform: If We Didn't Do It Then, We'd Have To Do It Now." *CIA.gov.*
3. Tenet, George. 2007. *At the Center of the Storm: My Years at the CIA.* New York: HarperCollins. (Chapter 8 - PDF).

10/28/25 Class 4: The Role of the Executive Branch and Legislative Branch in National Security
- Explores the constitutional roles and authorities of the Executive and Legislative branches in shaping and executing U.S. national security policy.
- Examines how Congress and the president interact in areas such as war powers, defense funding, oversight, and intelligence.

- Discusses legislative trends and the confirmation process.

Guest speaker: **The Honorable Steve Hedger,** Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs; Former Special Assistant to the President for Senate Affairs; Former staff, U.S. Senate; CEO, American Rheinmetall Defense

Required Reading:

1. Congressional Research Service. 2016. [Separation of Powers: An Overview](). Washington, DC: CRS.
2. Congressional Research Service. 2024. [Congress and National Security: Selected Tools and Issues for the 119th Congress](). Washington, DC: CRS.

11/4/25 Class 5: The National Security Budget

- Understanding how defense and intelligence funding is structured, allocated, and prioritized within the U.S. government.
- Examining how Congress and executive agencies develop, approve, and implement the national security budget.
- How the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) forecasts defense spending

Guest Speaker: Mike McCord; former staff of the Senate Committee on Armed Services, House Committee on the Budget, and Congressional Budget Office; former United States Department of Defense Deputy Comptroller, CFO; former Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)

Guest Speaker: **Former Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA**); Former Chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee; Co-founder and Co-chair, Nuclear Threat Initiative; Fortune 5 Board Member

Required Reading:

1. Congressional Research Service. 2025. [Defense Primer: Budgeting for National and Defense Intelligence.]() Washington, DC: CRS.
2. Congressional Budget Office. 2024. [How CBO Projects the Long-Term Costs of the Department of Defense's Future Years Defense Program](). Washington, DC: CBO.

11/11/25 Class 6: National Security and Emerging Technologies

- The Role of Emerging Technologies in National Security
- Artificial Intelligence and Defense Applications
- Quantum Technology and Security Implications
- Challenges and Looking Ahead

Guest Speaker: **Dr. Arun Seraphin**; Dr. Arun Seraphin; Executive Director, Emerging Technologies Institute (ETI); Former Principal Assistant Director for National Security & International Affairs, White House OSTP; Former Professional Staff Member, Senate Armed Services Committee; Former Special Assistant for Policy Initiatives to the Director, DARPA; Ph.D., Electronic Materials (MIT)

Required Reading:

1. Congressional Research Service. 2024. [Emerging Military Technologies: Background and Issues for Congress](). Washington, DC: CRS.
2. Seeds, Michael. 2024. "[Pentagon Sorting Out AI's Future in Warfare]()." *National Defense Magazine,* October 22.

11/18/25 Class 7: The Private Sector and National Security
- The Role of the Defense Industrial Base in National Security
- Challenges in Defense Production and Readiness
- Strategic Implications for Policymakers

Guest Speaker: **David Joyce**; former CEO of GE Aviation and Vice-Chairman of General Electric; current member of the Board of the Boeing Corporation

Required Reading:

1. Congressional Research Service. 2023. [Defense Primer: U.S. Defense Industrial Base.]() Washington, DC: CRS.
2. Picket, Shands and Zach Beecher. 2025. "[A Guide to Refactoring the Defense Industrial Base.]()" *War on the Rocks,* February 6.

11/25/25 Class 8: Careers in National Security
- Overview of the various career options for students in the Executive Branch, the Legislative Branch, the Private Sector, and the Nonprofit Sector
- Early career on-ramps
- Hiring pathways

Guest speaker: **Ms. Jackie Arends**, Managing Director Russell Reynolds Associates; Former White House Liaison Officer for DOD; Head of Recruiting for Key Government Leadership Positions and For-Profit Companies, leading hundreds of US and global CEO, board, and executive-level searches

Final Paper due no later than December 5, 2025

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND OTHER COURSE CRITERIA
Academic honesty: The University of Georgia has an academic honesty policy. Academic integrity is required for a positive learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own, can result in disciplinary action. Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a failing grade in the course and your name will be forwarded to the University. This course follows all policies related to Academic Honesty and Student Code of Conduct as outlined by the University of Georgia.

http://ovpi.uga.edu/academic-honesty/academic-honesty-policy
http://www.conduct.uga.edu/code_of_conduct/codeofconduct.pdf

All written work must be typed, proofread, and well-written. All written work should be prepared in accordance with a widely accepted reference style, such as MLA, APA, or Chicago. Be consistent in using the style you choose. For on-line information about different citation style guides, a helpful website is: https://owl.purdue.edu

Note: The use of artificial intelligence software or word mixing software (e.g., Chat GPT, Copilot, etc.) to write your papers or PowerPoints for this class is not permitted. Any evidence of cheating, plagiarism or other unauthorized assistance will result in a zero on the assignment and may result in dismissal from the course.

All assignments will be administered through eLC and all assignments should be submitted electronically on eLC by the due date. Any questions you may have about your grade(s) should be addressed in writing to the professor.

Deadlines: All assignments are to be submitted at time specified in this syllabus or on the assignment posted to eLC. If an assignment is turned in after the due date, the assignment will receive an automatic failing grade.

Prohibition on recording lectures: In the absence of written authorization from the UGA Disability Resource Center, students may not make a visual or audio recording of any aspect of this course. Students who have a recording accommodation agree in writing that they:

- Will use the records only for personal academic use during the specific course.
- Understand that faculty members have copyright interest in their class lectures and that they agree not to infringe on this right in any way.
- Understand that the faculty member and students in the class have privacy rights and agree not to violate those rights by using recordings for any reason other than their own personal study.
- Will not release, digitally upload, broadcast, transcribe, or otherwise share all or any part of the recordings. They also agree that they will not profit financially and will not allow others to benefit personally or financially from lecture recordings or other course materials.
- Will erase/delete all recordings at the end of the semester.
- Understand that violation of these terms may subject them to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct or subject them to liability under copyright laws.

Disability Resource Center: If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with the Disability Resource Center. Additional information can be found here: http://drc.uga.edu/.