Department of Social Sciences, United States Military Academy
SS464: Homeland Security, Academic Year 2006-2

Policy Memo 1

100 points, due 15 Feb 06

Assignment:

You are an advisor in the Secretary of Homeland Security's policy planning staff.

In the wake of Katrina, the Homeland Security Advisor and National Security Advisor are convening a joint Homeland Security Council (HSC)/National Security Council (NSC) Principals Committee (PC) meeting next week, to discuss the appropriate role of military forces in responding to domestic incidents of national significance, and on the appropriate coordinating structures between the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security. The purpose of the PC is to achieve consensus among the HSC and NSC principals on their recommendations to the President, or, if consensus cannot be achieved, to limit the points of disagreement and frame the available options for the President's consideration.

The Secretary asks you for an analysis of the issue and recommendations. This memo is your response to the Secretary's request.

Administrative Requirements:

2-3 pages; single spaced; Times New Roman; one inch margins; no cover page; don't number paragraphs; no page number on page one; include page numbers on pages 2 and up, centered at the bottom of the page. For matters of style, refer to William Strunck, Jr. and E.B. White, The Elements of Style, Fourth Edition (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2000).

Follow the format and guidance in the policy memo format posted on the website (similar to memos prepared in the White House and many government agencies, most of which are usually about three pages, though sometimes longer if appropriate). The website also includes an example of a policy memo written in graduate school. You can include a lot of analysis in 2-3 pages. Your memo should provide analysis and recommendations, not simply summarize facts or issues.

Some Pointers on Writing Effective Policy Memoranda:

You don't necessarily need to satisfy every one of these pointers in your submission, but this list is based on experience and should prove helpful):

- Make it clear why the official is reading the memo.
- State your main point clearly up front.
- Use an effective title.
- Provide up front a "roadmap" for the rest of the memo.
- Use sub-headings that reinforce the "roadmap" and main argument.
- Make your memo as readable and quickly digestible as possible, while still including whatever level of detail and analysis are necessary -- don't oversimplify complex issues.
- Don't just dissect the problem -- provide solutions.
- Show how your recommendations will improve the current situation.
- Don't assume more or less familiarity with the issue than the official is likely to have.
- Think about the full dimensions of the problem.
- Think beyond the present . . . consider the future.
- Don't neglect the politics. Consider opposition.
- Discuss implementation.
- Be wary of adjectives, especially "clearly" and "obviously," which can backfire at the expense of your credibility. What if it's not clear or obvious to the official? If you say that "clearly, action is needed," and the official doesn't act, then you've (a) questioned their judgment, and/or (b) impugned the quality of your advice. Similarly, rare are the circumstances that you should tell an official that they "must" do something, though there are times when strong recommendations are necessary.
- Consider the consequences of non-action, if appropriate.
- Provide alternatives, if appropriate.