

The Purpose and Nature of an Options Paper

An options paper presents a problem for decision by the Secretary of State (or by the President or some other senior executive branch official), gives the pros and cons of different possible courses of action, and recommends one. It is not a research paper and should not repeat information that the Secretary already knows about the subject. It is an action document that gives the Secretary the reasons a decision is needed and the additional information he needs to make such a decision. It must make clear the realistic courses of action and their probable consequences. Remember that the memorandum is going to a very busy person. Keep the paper brief, no more than 1000 words. Please follow the following format:

Action Memorandum

To: S - The Secretary

Thru: P - The Undersecretary for Political Affairs

From: Assistant Secretary (your name)

SECRET or CONFIDENTIAL

February 6, 2017

Subject:

Introduction and Summary:

State the issue on which you want the Secretary to act. Summarize in no more than 150 words the main elements involved in the issue and your conclusions.

Discussion

Develop as full a presentation as possible within the overall limit of 1500 words, covering key elements of the background as well as consideration of the effectiveness of various components of the recommended action: e.g. unilateral,

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Due feb 6.

multilateral, use of military force, etc. Brevity as in actual policy debate is essential. Take note of the impact of the proposed action (or inaction) on other US interests, including how it could affect other US government policies. Address the role of public diplomacy and, if appropriate, possible congressional or public reaction.

Options: Two or more options for action or decision should be offered, with pros and cons under each in bullet format. Each option should have a brief heading such as Pursue Negotiations, Use Military Force, Do Nothing, Seek UN Security Council Resolution, Impose Unilateral Sanctions, Drop the Bomb, etc.

Recommendation: the paper should conclude by recommending a preferred course of action. The option advocated should be a logical outcome of the analysis and arguments in the paper and be realistic.

OPTIONS PAPER TOPICS

Following the attached format you should prepare a paper setting out options for the new Administration. Sample issues are listed below. Your paper should contain a clear recommended course of action. You may also choose to write from the perspective of another government or choose another current policy issue in which you are interested or about which you are knowledgeable. You are not expected to be an authority on any of these subjects, rather you should think through alternative courses of action which the government might take to deal with the particular topic that you have chosen.

1. What response should the United States make to the ongoing Russian intervention in Ukraine?
2. What should be the next step in US-Cuban official relations?
3. How should the United States deal with Venezuela's increasingly authoritarian government?
4. What steps, if any, should the United States take to follow up on the Iranian nuclear deal?
5. How should the United States deal with the Syrian civil war as it enters its sixth year?
6. What should the United States policy be with respect to promoting democracy in Egypt?
7. What can the United States do to reverse the anti-democratic trends in Russia and its current homophobic policies?
8. What can the United States do about the North Korean nuclear program?
9. What approach should the United States take to reform of the UN Security Council?
10. What should United States policy be with respect to the future use of drones in the Pak/Afghanistan region?
11. What steps should the United States take to confront growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea?
12. What can the United States do to promote a political settlement between the Israelis and the Palestinians.
13. How should the United States relate to NATO?
14. How can the United States improve relations with Mexico and Canada given political concerns about NAFTA?