

# The Crisis at Sea

## Executive Decision Making & National Security Simulation

Course: Civics / U.S. Government / Global Studies

Grade Level: 9–12

Time: 60–90 minutes

Focus Skills: Critical Thinking, Foreign Policy Analysis, Ethical Decision-Making

## Lesson Overview

In this high-stakes simulation, students serve as members of the National Security Council advising the President during an international hostage crisis. Students evaluate military, diplomatic, and economic strategies while considering risks, ethics, and long-term national security impacts.

## Essential Question

How should leaders make life-and-death decisions when every available option carries serious risks?

## Learning Objectives

- Explain the President's role as Commander in Chief
- Analyze the complexity of foreign policy decision-making
- Evaluate trade-offs between short-term success and long-term consequences
- Collaborate to develop a strategic recommendation
- Defend a policy choice using evidence, logic, and risk analysis

## Key Civics Connections

- Executive Power (Article II)
- Commander-in-Chief Authority
- Foreign Policy Tools: Military, Diplomacy, Economics
- National Security vs Civilian Safety
- Ethical Leadership

## Teacher Instructions

### 1. Set the Stage (5 Minutes)

Dim the lights and display a breaking news image. Introduce the crisis scenario and inform students they are the National Security Council tasked with advising the President.

## **2. Group Work (25–30 Minutes)**

Divide students into groups of 3–4. Provide briefing materials and a decision matrix. Circulate and challenge their assumptions with probing questions about risks, consequences, and long-term impact.

## **3. Presentations (20 Minutes)**

Each group presents their recommended course of action, explains their reasoning, and describes how they will mitigate potential risks.

## **4. Vote & Debrief (10 Minutes)**

Conduct a blind vote to determine the class decision. Debrief by discussing why real-world leaders rarely have perfect choices in crisis situations.

## **Debrief & Reflection Questions**

- Which option saved the most lives in the short term?
- Which option protected U.S. interests long term?
- Should the U.S. negotiate with terrorists?
- How much risk is acceptable when civilians are involved?
- Did your group prioritize ethics, politics, or strategy?