Student Briefing Packet for



**Inside the Situation Room:**

A Presidential Cabinet Meeting

on the threat of

the Islamic State of Iraq & Syria

Student Name:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Please open up the packet and wait for the video to begin.*

**Text of the National Security Video that you will soon be watching:**

**Mr. President**, As your National Security advisors, it is our responsibility to provide you with up-to-date information about situations in the world that may present a risk to the safety of the United States, or, to the well-being of human rights of people everywhere. With that said, over the past few months, a group called ISIS- *or the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria*—has grown to become the largest terrorist network in the Middle East. Starting as a splinter group of Al Quaeda during the Iraq War, ISIS is now a well-armed, violent, extremist organization whose goal is to establish a global Islamic state based upon strict religious law. This belief system includes a hatred of democracy, individual liberty, and respect and tolerance of different faiths.

In fact, ISIS is known for terrorizing religious minorities throughout the region, including Christians, Yazidis, Kurds, and Shiite Muslims. Beheadings, crucifixions, and other mass killings of innocent civilians have been widespread, with over a thousand murdered—with many more forced to flee for their lives. What is equally disturbing is ISIS’s treatment of women. Stonings have become common, with hundreds of young girls forced into marriage or face death. Recently, the world was also shocked to see the murder of American journalist James Foley, whose beheading was broadcast on YouTube and Twitter.

During the past year, ISIS has spread rapidly throughout eastern Syria and Iraq, controlling an area of close to 13,000 square miles, which is roughly the size of Indiana. It has conquered Mosul and other significant Iraqi cities, grabbing two billion dollars in cash from looted bank accounts, as well as income from oil and gas fields. According to the Huffington Post, It has formed a terrorist army with an estimated 30,000 - 50,000 fighters and is now armed with tanks and weapons stolen from the Iraqi army.

Likewise, because of its sophisticated use of social media and propaganda, ISIS has had over 2,000 Westerners join their cause, including over 200 Americans with passports, requiring only what the New York Times describes as “nothing more than a plane ticket to enter the United States.” Hence, it is a group that not only poses a significant threat to human rights around the world, but to the security of our nation here at home.

Mr. President, at this point, we kindly ask that you and the other members of the security team answer the questions on the worksheet that follows. Once everyone is finished, you can open up the floor for discussion and debate. **Teachers,** your job is to pick a student to be the President, then serve as their Chief of Staff, facilitating the discussion and making sure everyone is involved. After listening to the group, the President will then be asked to choose two courses of action that he or she feels are best. Good luck.

**White House Situation Room Security Briefing Worksheet:**

**Step One: *Analyzing the Threat*** (5-10 minutes)

Everyone in the room should reread the text of the security briefing that was just presented on the video, making sure to ***underline three facts about ISIS that each adviser feels especially concerned about.*** The teacher should then pause to lead a brief discussion lasting no more than five minutes.

**Step Two: *Understanding the warning signs of mass murder*** (5-10 minutes)

Through studying previous conflicts, historians have assembled a list of warning signs that indicate when a group like ISIS might be capable of widespread mass murder. Using the checklist below, everyone in the room should choose what warning signs of mass atrocities that ISIS represents. After, the President and Chief of Staff should lead a brief class discussion about which factor is most significant or disturbing, and whether that threat is low, medium, or high.

\_\_\_\_ Is there a pre-existing economic or social turmoil in the region that can be exploited by a group?

\_\_\_\_ Is their evidence of racism/hatred of those who are different?

\_\_\_\_ Are there land, resources, or power up for grabs?

\_\_\_\_ Does one side see this conflict as a “holy war”?

\_\_\_\_ Is one side using propaganda to dehumanize another group?

\_\_\_\_ Is there a pre-existing military conflict or civil war that one side can take advantage of?

\_\_\_\_ Is there a dictator or political party that appears to be losing their power and will do anything to keep it?

Based upon the checklist above, what type of threat does ISIS represent?

\_\_\_\_\_ Low \_\_\_\_\_ Medium \_\_\_\_\_ High

**Step #3: *Taking Action*** (10 minutes)

Using the checklist below—as well as your knowledge of world affairs—***each advisor should check three options that they feel the United States should take*** ***on ISIS,*** ranking them in order with a “1” going to the best option, to an “9” that represents the worst option. After completing this worksheet, the Chief of Staff should open the floor for discussion, culminating with the President choosing his or her top three:

\_\_\_\_ **A)** The President should speak out at a **press conference** to expose the situation to the world.

\_\_\_\_ **B)** **Air drop humanitarian assistance** such as food, blankets, medicine, to the minority groups that are being threatened, as well as aid the refugees who have escaped.

\_\_\_\_ **C)** Take direct military action as ISIS poses a terrorist threat that could eventually attack the United States. This would include **American airstrikes** and/or drone strikes on ISIS training camps, weapons, and leaders.

\_\_\_\_ **D)** Take **economic action** against ISIS by freezing its access to international banks and limiting trade, which will curtail its access to money and weapons.

\_\_\_\_ **E)** **Arm moderate rebels** with ammunition, machine guns, and other equipment who might help fight against ISIS. These rebels would be supported by American Special Forces and advisers.

\_\_\_\_ **F)** Send in **American ground troops** as well as those from other countries.

\_\_\_\_ **G)** **Propose an International Conference** with the United Nations to help coordinate, train, equip, and finance an alliance of countries in the Middle East to contain and defeat ISIS. (The United States will hold the presidency of the UN Security Council and could use that position to lead a coalition against ISIS.)

\_\_\_\_ **H)** **Monitor and watch**—as the situation presents too many risks. Once our military is there, we will be obligated to stay longer.

\_\_\_\_ **I)** **Do nothing**—there are many who feel that intervening would only cause more problems, especially when our own country faces many issues at home.