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*Short-Fuse Crisis Checklist: Executive
Decision Support Guide for Rapid Crisis
Response*

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This checklist is designed to be used when a crisis emerges with little or no warning, or when lead time is measured in days or hours, rather than weeks. It provides support guidance for essential decisions to help National Security Council (NSC) and State Department staff rapidly orient to critical priorities, stakeholders, and actions. For comprehensive guidance, see the full Crisis Response Playbook for the relevant crisis type.

1.0 First Six Hours: Immediate Orientation

Complete these actions to establish situational awareness and begin coordination.

1.1 Safety and Security (Priority One)

- ☐ Confirm status of U.S. embassy personnel in affected area
- ☐ Identify number and location of American citizens in affected area
- ☐ Assess immediate threats to U.S. personnel and facilities
- ☐ Determine if evacuation planning or shelter-in-place guidance is needed
- ☐ Establish communication with the Embassy Country Team

1.2 Situational Awareness

- ☐ Identify the triggering event and current status of the situation
- ☐ Determine key actors involved and their apparent objectives
- ☐ Request an intelligence community assessment (if not already provided)
- ☐ Identify likely escalation pathways and timelines
- ☐ Assess the involvement or interest of external actors (regional and global)

1.3 Internal Notification and Coordination

- ☐ Notify the NSC front office and relevant directorate leadership
- ☐ Notify the State Department regional bureau and relevant functional bureaus
- ☐ Identify Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (OSD-P) and Joint Staff/Combatant Command Personnel Accountability and Assessment System (CCMD) counterparts and establish contact

- ☐ Determine if a Deputies or Principals Committee meeting is warranted
- ☐ Identify congressional notification requirements

2.0 First Twenty-Four to Seventy-Two Hours: Decision Framework

These questions frame the critical decisions that must be made as the crisis unfolds.

2.1 U.S. Interests at Stake

- ☐ What are the directly affected U.S. interests (security and economic)?
- ☐ What are the indirect or second-order implications (for partners, global trade, and transnational threats)?
- ☐ How will a U.S. response be perceived by allies, adversaries, and regional actors?
- ☐ What is the risk of inaction? What are the risks involved at various levels of engagement?

2.1 Policy Goal Articulation

- ☐ What is the desired end-state for U.S. policy?
- ☐ Is this goal realistic given U.S. leverage and resources?
- ☐ What timeline is envisioned for achieving this goal?
- ☐ What level of commitment (in terms of resources and political capital) is appropriate?

2.3 Key Trade-Offs to Surface

- ☐ What competing objectives exist within this country and region?
- ☐ What global precedents might this response set?
- ☐ What resources would be diverted from other priorities?
- ☐ What assumptions are made that should be tested?

2.4 Constraints and Restraints

- ☐ What legal authorities constrain or enable response options?
- ☐ What legislative restrictions or requirements apply?
- ☐ What domestic political considerations must be factored?

- ☐ What international law or treaty obligations are relevant?

3.0 Response Tools

Identify which tools are immediately available and appropriate. See full Playbook Section 4 for detailed requirements and constraints.

Quick Reference Guide: Available Tools

Tool Category	Examples	Typical Timeline
Communications	Public diplomacy, press statements, counter-disinformation	Hours
Diplomatic	<i>Demarches</i> , public statements, consultations, recognition decisions, special envoys	Hours to days
Military and Intelligence	Force posture adjustments, intel sharing, security assistance, advisors	Days to weeks
Economic	Sanctions (targeted/sectoral), financial assistance, aid suspension	Days to weeks
Humanitarian	Disaster assistance, humanitarian aid, refugee support	Days to weeks
Coalition	UN action, NATO consultation, regional organization engagement, ad hoc groupings	Days to weeks

4.0 Strategic Communications: Immediate Decisions

Communications decisions are often the first required. Address these questions immediately.

- ☐ What is the initial public posture (statement, silence, or background guidance)?
- ☐ Who is the designated spokesperson and what level of government do they represent?
- ☐ What are the key messages and red lines for public comment?
- ☐ What private messages should be sent to allies, partners, or adversaries?
- ☐ Is there a disinformation threat requiring monitoring or counter-messaging?

- ☐ Are there declassification decisions that could support public messaging?

5.0 Coalition and Partner Engagement

Determine early whether an internationally coordinated approach is needed or beneficial.

- ☐ Which allies and partners have direct interests or equities?
- ☐ Is there value in a UN Security Council discussion or resolution?
- ☐ Are regional organizations (NATO, the European Union, the Organization of American States, or others) relevant?
- ☐ What coalition structures exist that could be activated (trilateral partnerships, quadrilateral partnerships, or other coalitions)?
- ☐ Is there need for a new ad hoc coordination mechanism?

6.0 Operational Decisions

Determine how the response will be organized and led.

- ☐ Who is the centralized lead for coordination (NSC, State Department, or other)?
- ☐ Is a DC-based task force or coordination cell needed?
- ☐ What is the embassy's status (evacuated, drawn down, or other)?
- ☐ Are additional platforms needed in the region?
- ☐ Is a special envoy or special representative warranted?
- ☐ What is the rhythm of interagency meetings and decision points?

Cross-Reference Points to Full Playbooks

This checklist provides rapid response decision support. For comprehensive guidance on tools, stakeholders, historical lessons, and detailed planning considerations, consult the full Crisis Response Playbook for this crisis type, particularly:

- **Section 3.3: Broad Policy Options** for detailed trade-off analysis
- **Section 3.4: Tools and Resources** for legal authorities and constraints