

## First Paper Assignment

**Paper Length:** 5-6 pages

**Due Date:** 3/28/2012

Write on one of the following five topics:

**Paper Topic 1:** Before the war in Iraq began there was a good deal of controversy over whether it was a good idea for us (the United States) to start such a war. Now that we have done so it is no less controversial. Your paper should answer the question of whether you think it is/was justified for the United States to go to war with Iraq, given reasonable judgements about the empirical facts.

**Paper Topic 2:** As you know the United States is a war in Afghanistan. What should the United States do? Should it continue its military engagement there, or should it end that engagement, given reasonable judgements about the empirical facts.

**Paper Topic 3:** Was the United States' recent involvement in bombing of parts of Libya, and other military activities in support of Libyan rebels justified? Explain why or why not.

**Paper Topic 4:** Should the United States intervene militarily in Syria, given the fighting between the government and dissidents there?

**Paper Topic 5:** There has been much recent talk about attacking Iran to stop their nuclear program. Should we do that?

**Normative Claims:** To the extent that your views rest on accepting some particular normative principle regarding wars and violence, say which principle or principles you rely on. (You may rely on more than one, or you may think that no matter what principle you rely on, your answer is justified. If so say so.) Also explain why the principles you rely on are appropriate. In other words, defend your normative assumptions.

As far as the normative claims you make are concerned, their persuasiveness should rest on the content of what you say in their support, as opposed to the authority of the people who espouse those views. You may use a quotation in support of a point, but that should be because the person puts the point particularly well, not because the person is a of moral authority whose views are beyond question. (Of course with the empirical claims, someone's status as an authority might count. For example, a biologist will be better at estimating the effects of oil spills than some other people.) Thus (for example), if you use principles that you accept for religious reasons, you should also include some defense of these principles that someone who does not share your faith might find reasonable.

**Empirical Claims:** Your conclusion will rest in part on your view of the empirical facts surrounding the war – how many people were at risk, which acts were acts of aggression, the likely effects of military action, etc.. To the extent that your views rely on such empirical assumptions, cite sources which substantiate these facts. For example, if your view depends on an estimate of the number of lives lost under various scenarios, cite a source for the figures. **Citations should be in a format that allows checking of sources and thus should include page references. If the source is on the internet, cite a URL.** (You may of course question official estimates. For example you may use the likelihood of a particular government's slanting an estimate as a reason to treat that estimate as exaggerated. At times it may make your paper more credible if you take the bias and reliability of sources into account.)

If your argument depends on estimates of the probable outcome of alternative courses of action, defend your view of those likelihoods. I realize that probability judgements cannot be fully precise, but some are better than others, and supported probability estimates are better than unsupported estimates. Since this paper is being written about contemporaneous and evolving events, we will be somewhat forgiving about an inability to supply hard data to back up claims. But a better paper will include more references to back up it's claims.

**Crediting Sources:** You must **cite all sources used**. You may use *any standard citation format* so long as it gives a reader the relevant information about sources. An appropriate citation format will allow a reader to easily locate the source of the information cited, and to check what you say. Hence, author, title, Journal (if a periodical), date and page number are usually required. References to web sites must include the URL so that they can be checked. You may feel free to consult with anyone you like in writing this paper, including us, your classmates, or anyone else who you think can be of help. **You must give credit where credit is due.** If you get help from a friend, credit that friend in a footnote. Essays must be in your own words with quotations clearly indicated using quotation marks or indentation of the standard sort. Paraphrases must indicate the source, and a quotation does not become something else with the substitution of a few words. Feel free to ask for advice if you are unsure of how to cite appropriately.

Many, if not most, of the empirical claims you will rely on stand in need of substantiation and you will need to supply support for them. Thus citations actually make your paper more persuasive. Be sure that the sources you cite are in a position to verify the claims you make on the basis of your citation. Be careful about this. It isn't clear that having been in a war by itself qualifies one as an expert regarding any and all facts relating to that war. One must also have been in a position to observe the claimed facts. Some sources will be better than others in this regard. (Fighting in the army, for example, doesn't make one an expert on a world leader or

a terrorist's psychology, though it may put one in a position to observe other things.) Controversial empirical claims not backed up by appropriate sources may be discounted by the reader.