

Date: September 21, 2004
To: 17.428ers
From: Steve Van Evera
Re: Paper assignment for November 30, 2004

FIRST PAPER ASSIGNMENT (CASE STUDY)

Please write a 6-10 page paper that uses one of the cases covered in this course, or another case, as a case study. You may:

(1) Use the case to **test general theories** previously discussed in this course. Or you can use the case to test other ideas (including common-sense or "folk" theories) if you prefer.

(2) Use theories previously discussed in this course to **explain the case**. Or you can use other ideas (including common-sense or "folk" theories) to explain the case, if theories discussed in this course don't seem adequate to you, or don't speak to important aspects of the case.

(3) Use the case to **infer a new theory** (or theories).

You are encouraged to do several or all of the above.

If you use your case as a lab to test general theories (Format #1), please **test at least two theories**, and comment on which performs better on your tests.

If you attempt to explain your case (Format #2), please **compare your favored explanation to its most plausible competitor**, and explain why you find the competing explanation less persuasive. This requires testing both your favored explanation and its competitor, with a special eye on critical tests (that is, those where the two explanations make opposite predictions about the same event, and which both therefore cannot pass).

Also, make sure you state clearly what aspect of the case you intend to explain. Decisions made by U.S. or other policymakers in the case? The motives of the governments or individuals involved? Background conditions that activated these causes? The main consequences of U.S. policies? Please be explicit.

Bear these considerations in mind as you proceed:

(1) If you are testing a general theory or explaining a case, your general format should follow that of a science experiment. First frame your theory or explanation, then **look for observable phenomena predicted by the theory**. You should take four specific steps:

a. Frame your theory or explanation.

For clarity I strongly recommend that you provide an arrow-diagram of each theory or explanation you discuss.

b. Infer predictions from the theory about how the case should unfold if the

theory were valid (or if the theory explained the case), and how it should unfold if the theory were false (or could not explain the case).

Please frame these predictions explicitly and explain them fully.

c. Examine the case, looking for congruence or incongruence between prediction and evidence.

d. Interpret the results of this examination.

(2) Some predictions provide decisive negative tests: if the prediction fails the explanation fails, but if the prediction occurs the explanation is not proven. Some predictions offer decisive positive tests: if the prediction is fulfilled the explanation is proven, but if the prediction fails the explanation is not disproved--"smoking gun" positive tests. A few predictions are decisive both ways. Most are not decisive either way, but simply weigh in the total balance of circumstantial evidence. Your interpretive discussion should reflect these differences.

Case selection is up to you. All cases covered in this course are ok. And you may do a case not covered in the course if you wish.

Make sure your paper includes a **clear summary introduction**, of perhaps a paragraph. This paragraph should clearly state your question(s) and should summarize your answer.

Please double space your paper and use standard 1-inch margins. Please observe the ten-page limit (2500-3000 words).

You are encouraged to share thoughts among yourselves as you prepare this paper.