



National Student/Parent Mock Election

Teacher's Guide to 2008 Presidential Election Issues – The Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

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OVERVIEW: The Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

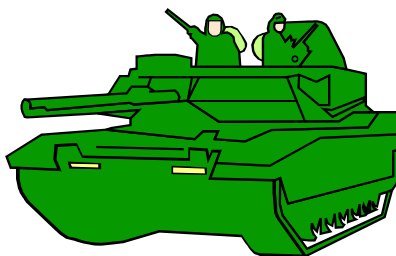
Possibly the most contentious issue of the presidential election will be the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The war in Iraq, which will enter its sixth year next spring, poses political as well as strategic problems for the candidates, as over 4,000 service men and women have lost their lives in the conflict. Most Americans are clamoring for a policy change. America's involvement in Afghanistan, alongside NATO, has not faced the same opposition here at home as the Iraq war has. But, our military forces in Afghanistan are beset by a lack of troops, which has prevented a full suppression of the Al Qaeda-led insurgency along the mountainous border Afghanistan shares with Pakistan. Alternatively, Iraq is still negotiating with its various ethnic factions – the Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis – into a representative government and a more stable political life. The Iraqi government is gradually transitioning from an inchoate authority into a legitimate democratic institution.

Claiming success for his 2007 policy of increased troop deployments to Iraq, called the 'surge,' President Bush has recently indicated that a substantial portion of American forces may be able to exit Iraq soon. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has also suggested that troop levels may indeed be substantially reduced from the 130,000 soldiers in country this summer, to a smaller figure by the end of 2008. Ancillary to the debate about troop levels and the potential need of further military force in Iraq is the question of what is actually in the best interests of the United States, and if our best interests are correlated to the responsibility we have to Iraq and its people.

Other related political and military issues related to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are:

- a) The strategic importance of Iraq and its Middle Eastern neighbors as major oil producers and transportation routes
- b)) Iran's desire to become a nuclear power despite opposition from world opinion
- c)) The security of our close ally Israel, especially with the bellicose nature of the current Iranian government.

Both John McCain and Barack Obama have the challenge of developing and communicating a coherent policy on the wars and related Middle East issues. Often specific current events in Iraq, Afghanistan and their neighbors are affecting public opinion in America.



OVERVIEW: Major Presidential Candidates' Positions – The Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

Directions: This summary focuses on several significant issues within the larger campaign issue- the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. For a more comprehensive description and rationale for their positions check news accounts and use the official web sites of the McCain and Obama campaigns cited in “Sources” below. **Due to the changing conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan (sometimes on a daily basis) the candidates’ positions on this issue’s specifics also change.** Neither McCain’s nor Obama’s official websites list the war in Afghanistan as a separate issue. You must look under Issue – Iraq.

After studying this issue through research and current events discussion, decide how you feel about each candidate’s position for the specific issues dealing with the wars and foreign relations. Go to the **Comparing Presidential Candidates** chart to record your viewpoint on candidate policies. To help you decide write an abbreviation next to each policy statement:

SA- strongly agree; A- agree; SD- strongly disagree; D- disagree; N- no opinion

Purpose of our military action:

John McCain:

- _____ Supports the moral justifications defined by President Bush for invading and occupying Iraq. In 2002 Senator McCain voted to authorize the use of U.S. Armed Forces against Iraq.
- _____ Supports the belief that “it is strategically and morally essential for the United States to support the Iraqi government to become capable of governing itself and safeguarding its people.”
- _____ Has criticized the management of the Iraq War.
- _____ Views the war in Afghanistan as part of our global war on terrorism.

Barack Obama:

- _____ Opposed the war from its start in 2002 when he was a Illinois State Senator.
- _____ Introduced the Iraq War De-Escalation Act in January 2007 that had the goal of withdrawing all our combat troops from Iraq by March 2008. It did not pass.
- _____ Supports the proposals made by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group.
- _____ Believes that our invasion of Iraq permitted Al Qaeda to reemerge in Afghanistan. “The scale of our deployments in Iraq continues to set back our ability to finish the fight in Afghanistan, producing unacceptable strategic risks.” (Obama website “War in Iraq”)

Relations with neighboring Iran:

John McCain:

- _____ Opposes unconditional diplomatic talks with Iranian government about its nuclear power program. States that he would work with allies to stop Iran’s activities within Iraq.
- _____ Supports the use of military force to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.

Barack Obama:

- _____ Supports having direct talks with Iran’s government.
- _____ Would consider providing economic incentives if Iran stopped meddling in Iraq and cooperates with the world community on nuclear issues.
- _____ Has not committed to using military action against Iran if it does not stop its nuclear weapons program.

Timetable to withdraw:

John McCain:

- _____ Supports the position that American troops can return home when Iraqi forces can safeguard their own country.

Barack Obama:

- _____ Supports an orderly, phased withdraw of American troops starting soon after the 2009 Inauguration. The Iraqi government recently agreed to this plan.

Other related issue(s) important to you: Use the candidate’s web sites cited below to learn their positions.

Issue: _____

Summarize the candidates’ positions on this issue on another sheet.

Sources:

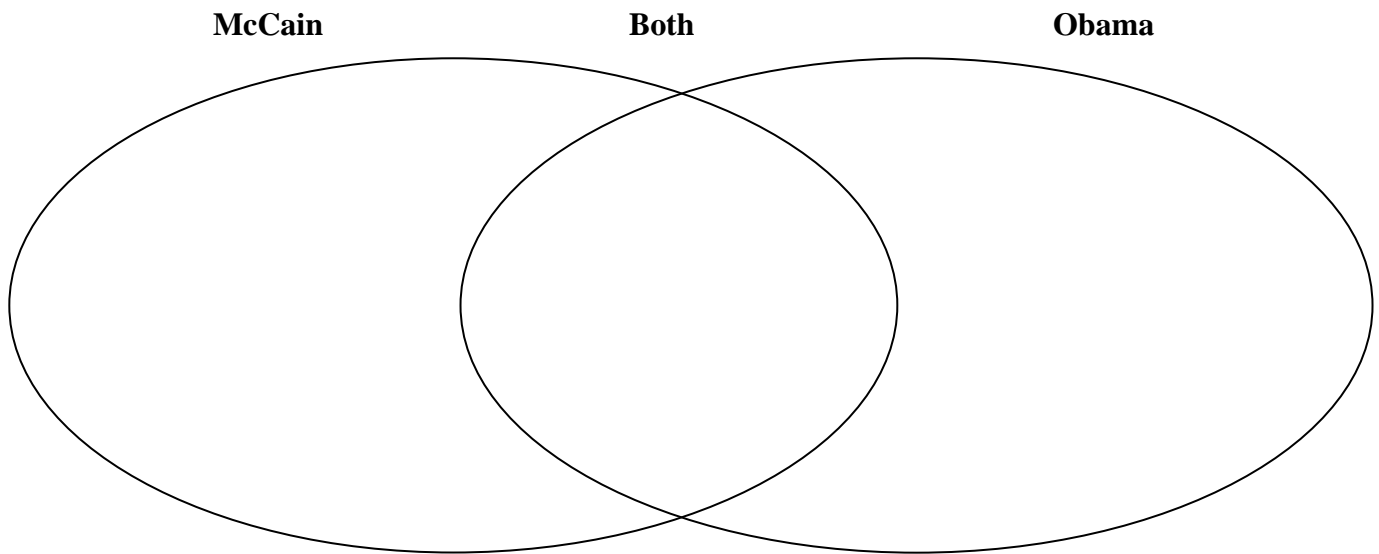
- Obama-McCain Comparisons at:
<http://www.obama-mccain.info/compare-obama-mccain-iraq.php>
- McCain campaign at: <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/issues>
- Obama campaign at: <http://www.barackobama.com/issues>
- Google Election Tolls for Teachers at:
http://www.google.comeducators/elections_tools.html

ACTIVITIES: Compare and Contrast – Candidates’ Positions on Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan

Part 1: Their Positions

Research the candidates’ positions on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Use their official campaign web sites, campaign literature, and news reports and speeches about these issues.

Using key words or phrases, record the viewpoints of McCain and Obama on this Venn Diagram:



Questions based on your research and the graphic organizer above:

1. Do McCain and Obama have any similar views or solutions for our country’s involvement in the wars? If so, what are they, and why did they agree on these specific topics?
2. On what issues about the wars do McCain and Obama differ the most? Describe their differences.
3. What might this comparison tell us about the differences between the Republican and Democratic Parties? Does either Party present the position in terms of ethics or morality?
4. Which candidate(s) is more likely to believe in the following statements about our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? Write **M** for John McCain and **O** for Barack Obama.

___ Has a time schedule for the withdrawal of our troops from Iraq starting early in 2009.

___ Believes President Bush’s surge in military action in Iraq has been a success.

___ Believes the invasion of Iraq gave Al Qaeda the opportunity to reemerge in Afghanistan.

___ Opposes talks with Iran; willing to use military force to prevent Iran from having nuclear weapons.

___ Willing to have formal talks with Iran’s government.

___ Against the invasion of Iraq since 2002.

___ Strong supporter of the invasion and occupation of Iraq since 2002.

___ Has been critical of the management of the Iraq war.

Part 2: Your Positions:

Directions: Use your **Presidential Candidates' Positions Sheet** for determining which candidate you agree with most about our involvement in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Write the key words or phrase representing your feelings about the candidate's position on specific issues of: war goals; current status of each war; relations with other countries; timeline for troop withdrawal.

John McCain, Republican

Agree with his position on: **Disagree** with his position on: **Uncertain or No Opinion:**

--	--	--

Barack Obama, Democrat

Agree with his position on: **Disagree** with his position on: **Uncertain or No Opinion:**

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Optional: Third Party Candidate: _____

You will need to research the candidate's positions on the issue using their official web sites. For links, see <http://www.politics1.com/p2008.htm>.

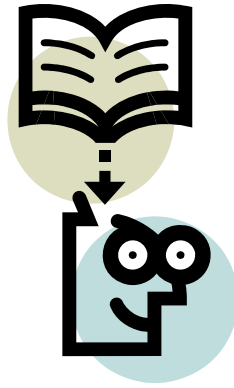
Agree with his position on: **Disagree with his position on:** **Uncertain or No Opinion:**

Agree with his position on:	Disagree with his position on:	Uncertain or No Opinion:

Your decision: Based on your research and the completed chart above, which presidential candidate's position do you agree most with about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan? Explain why their plans for the Iraq and Afghanistan are the best for the United States, now and in the future.

For this issue I believe that _____ has the best plans to deal with our country's involvement in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars because:





ACTIVITIES: The U.S. Constitution and War Powers

Big Question: *What does the U.S. Constitution say about the war powers of the President?*

Related questions:

- What are the powers delegated to the President in the U.S. Constitution?
- What branch of the federal government has the power to declare war? What branch(es) has the power to carry out the war?
- According to the U.S. Constitution and Supreme Court decisions, did President Bush have the power to invade Iraq and have American military forces occupy it for the last six years?
- What has the U.S. Supreme Court ruled about the war powers of a President?
- Is the war on terror a true war, as described in the U.S. Constitution?
- Is a “just war” a reason for starting a war? When is war justifiable?

Democratic candidate Barack Obama has been against the Iraq war since its start in 2003. Republican candidate John McCain has been an ardent supporter of the war. Opinion polls show that only 1/3 of Americans support the war effort; see:

<http://www.pollingreport.com/iraq.htm>

Many of the war’s opponents have claimed that the war is illegal because Congress did not declare war. Is this a valid argument? Study the case of Lieutenant Watada, who refused to be deployed to Iraq because he believed that the Iraqi war and occupation are illegal and unconstitutional. The case is on his website at: <http://www.thankyoult.org/>.

Activities:

Students review how the U.S. Constitution grants powers to Congress in Article I, Section 8, and to the President in Article II, Section 2. What does the Constitution say about war powers? Access the Interactive Constitution at <http://www.PearsonSchool.com/ElectionKit>.

Students find and summarize the viewpoints for or against the legality of the Iraq War. Editorials and commentary articles abound on this issue. Some web sites to consider are:

a) The Progress Report editorial “War and the U.S. Constitution” at:
<http://www.progress.org/2003/fold293.htm>

b) McCain (pro-presidential war powers) and Obama (against Iraq War) web sites

c) Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) 2002 speech against the war at:
<http://www.swans.com/library/art8/zip078.html>

d) CNN report “Senate approves Iraq War Resolution” at:
<http://archives.cnn.com/2002/ALLPOLITICS/10/11/iraq.us/>

e) “Court Backs Bush on Military Detentions” at:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/16/washington/16combatant.html>

Ethics in Democracy theme -- What is a just war? Is the Iraq war and the war on terror just war(s)? See an interesting dialogue between two ethicists -- “Iraq War Anniversary” at:
<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week1030/p-perspectives.html>

The teacher can guide students to do a <http://www.google.com/> search using combinations of key terms such as: U.S. Constitution, president, war powers, Iraq, Supreme Court; or use Google Election Tools for Teachers at:
http://www.google.com/educators/elections_tools.html and <http://googleblog.blogspot.com>

Using various sources, research answers to the specific questions listed above.
Class discussion or debate -- Develop a viewpoint and express it about the answers to the Big Question and its specific questions.

Additional Web Sites -- Supreme Court decisions:

<http://www.landmarkcases.org/>

<http://www.fedworld.gov/supcourt/index.htm>

<http://www.supremecourtus.gov/>

<http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/59.htm>

Ethical dialogue about just war and America’s involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan:

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week1030/p-perspectives.html>

“Iraq War Anniversary” -- Religion & Ethics Newsweekly, March 23, 2007

ACTIVITY: Survey News Reports – Have Recent Events in Iraq and Afghanistan Changed the Major Candidates’ Positions and the Campaign?

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are causing presidential candidates John McCain and Barack Obama to fine-tune and clarify their positions on these issues. For example, Obama visited Iraq in July and met with its Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. The meeting resulted in the Iraqi leader supporting Obama’s plan of a timetable for U.S. troop withdrawal. See the commentary of Charles Krauthammer, Washington Post, July 29, 2008 “Iraqi leader casts strategic vote for Obama” (Google search using its title). This caught many Republicans and Democrats by surprise. Would their Iraq position changed because of al-Maliki’s decision?

Journalism Survey: – The class can search for news reports, printed or online, about the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Find any changes in war conditions and related position statements made by the presidential candidates or the leaders of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Ethics in Democracy theme: *Are any leaders or Presidential candidates expressing a position based on ethical/moral grounds – what is right and what is wrong based on religious, legal or social standards?*

For example, Jeremy Iggers in an Op-Ed article in February 2005 posed the compelling question: “Is the US Military guilty of war crimes in Iraq?” See the entire article at:

<http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/views05/0206-30.htm>

Iggers states: “Some people believe it is unpatriotic even to ask this question, which may be why the issue has been largely ignored by American news media.... It isn’t only a question about the moral culpability of American troops, their commanders or their political leaders. While they bear moral responsibility for their actions, we as citizens in a democracy share responsibility for actions undertaken in our name.” During this Presidential Election do McCain or Obama ever deal with this moral dilemma for our president and for all Americans? Is it a “too hot to handle” issue?

Analyze the Campaign - After a significant event occurs in the wars, check the official websites for the McCain and Obama campaigns, and look under Issues. Are there any changes in the candidates’ positions? Is a campaign changing its approach to these issues?

McCain campaign at: <http://www.johnmccain.com/Informing/issues>

Obama campaign at: <http://www.barackobama.com/issues>

Google Election Tools for Teachers at:

http://www.google.com/educators/elections_tools.html and <http://googleblog.blogspot.com>

ACTIVITY: Socratic (Paideia) Seminar – “Compromising the Constitution”

Introduction:

Congress recently passed a bill to permit wartime spying on Americans. President Bush fought hard for this bill to ensure homeland security during the war on terror. The bill also protected communications corporations from being sued for wiretapping American citizens without their knowledge. Many Americans questioned this bill, now law, because they believed it was unnecessary or more importantly, unconstitutional. The July 8, 2008 New York Times editorial titled “Compromising the Constitution” stated that “Congress has been far too compliant as President Bush undermined the Bill of Rights and the balance of powers.”

See <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/08/opinion/08tue1.html>

Blog comments on this editorial:

http://www.blogrunner.com/snapshot/D/8/3/compromising_the_constitution/

In October 2002 when President Bush asked Congress to give him authority to use whatever force he deemed necessary in Iraq or elsewhere in the war on terror, longtime Democratic Senator Robert C. Byrd, West Virginia, gave an impassioned speech: “Rush to War Ignores U.S. Constitution” (found at: www.swans.com/library/art8/zig078.html).

Senator Byrd quoted ancient Roman historian Livius: “All things will be clear and distinct to the man who does not hurry; haste is blind and improvident.” Byrd implored Congress and President Bush:

“‘Blind and improvident,’ Mr. President. ‘Blind and improvident.’ Congress would be wise to heed those words today, for as sure as the sun rises in the east, we are embarking on a course of action with regard to Iraq that, in its haste, is both blind and improvident. We are rushing into war without fully discussing why, without thoroughly considering the consequences, or without making any attempt to explore what steps we might take to avert conflict.

The newly bellicose mood that permeates this White House is unfortunate, all the more so because it is clearly motivated by campaign politics. Republicans are already running attack ads against Democrats on Iraq. Democrats favor fast approval of a resolution so they can change the subject to domestic economic problems.”

Activity:

Information and procedures for Socratic teaching with Paideia Seminars can be found in the Paideia activity for the Energy Crisis Issue. Here are sample questions for teachers to ask to facilitate student discussion and analysis of the text read and the issues.

Opening question -- What is the problem with President Bush’s use of war powers as described in the New York Times editorial and Senator Byrd’s speech?

Core question(s) -- What example of long-term harm to our country does the editorial and speech present? What are the ethical issues of this law?

Closing question -- Is Senator Byrd’s statement still true 6 years later during this Presidential Election?

Beyond the Paideia questions, other questions can be considered. Some could even be the basis of separate debate(s), students writing a letter to the editor, or a mock Congressional Hearing (see the NS/PME Teacher Guides for the 2004 and 2006 elections for exemplars).

- How would the Presidential candidates respond to the editorial and Senator Byrd? Why?
- Should the next President request that Congress repeal the recent legislation allowing spying on Americans without a warrant?
- Should the next President heed Livius and Senator Byrd's strong advice to be more reflective before making big decisions such as war, and forego quick reactions to the enemy's actions?



ACTIVITY: Analyzing Op-Ed Articles on Candidates' Positions

Often in Presidential campaigns the issues take turns being the focus of the candidates' speeches, political ads and commentaries in the press. How does one make sense of the sparring between candidates or their ads whenever an issue becomes hot?

Activity – The class **collects a wide range** of editorials, commentaries and op-ed articles about the issue from print and online sources. **Identify the viewpoint** of each item and **categorize** them as: Pro-McCain, Pro-Obama, neutral or balanced, opposes both candidates, etc. Questions to inquire about each :

- What are the main ideas about the issue? Is the issue actually an important one for this election or is it campaign gamesmanship?
- Are the statements attributed to the candidate(s) consistent with their official positions as advocated on their web sites?
- Is the author a known supporter of one of the candidates? If so, could the item be considered propaganda for that candidate?
- Fact Check: Are there any inaccuracies in the article? If so, could it be a political (dirty) trick?
- Does it appear that one candidate has “won” public opinion on this issue? How? Was it his political ability, problem-solving or moral standing on the issue?

This activity can be used for any election issue, but here are sample articles about the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and on terror:

Michael Cooper in the New York Times July 24, 2008: “Candidates Spar Over Troop Surge and Iraq Chronology” at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/24/us/politics/24check.html> This link also has a blog that permits online discussion about the article.

Wall Street Journal July 25, 2008 editorial: “Baghdad, Berlin, Barack” at: <http://www.johnmccain.com/informing/news/PressReleases/6cd4a5f3-9536-4182-bd4a-0741666f1a75.htm> (also found on McCain’s official web site)

Commentary by Ellen Goodman “McCain locked in the past about Iraq” July 29, 2008 at: http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4188/is_20080725/ai_n27960834 (with a different title due to editorial license)

New York Times editorial “The United States v. the Driver” at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/10/opinion/10sun2.html>

ACTIVITY: Role Play – The Attorney General Advises the President on War Powers

Introduction:

In his current best-selling book *The Post-American World* Fareed Zakaria argues that the United States is actually doing better than many Americans believe, despite political and economic competition from China, India, the European Community, Russia and Brazil. Zakaria claims that our common core values of freedom, self-reliance, and diversity still give us an advantage over other countries.

However, he is concerned that today, the U.S. “needs to stop cowering in fear. It is fear that has created a climate of paranoia and panic in the United States and fear that has enabled our strategic missteps. Having spooked ourselves into believing that we have no option but to act fast and alone, preemptively and unilaterally, we have managed to destroy decades of international goodwill, alienate allies, and embolden enemies, while solving few of the major international problems we face. To recover its place in the world, America first has to recover its confidence.” (p. 250)

This leads to a probable election issue about our current wars: how should the next president conduct wars within the clear direction of the U.S. Constitution and Supreme Court rulings?

Zakaria observes that “the 2008 presidential campaign could have provided the opportunity for a national discussion of the new world we live in.... While the Bush administration has contributed mightily to this state of affairs, it is a phenomenon that goes beyond one president. Too many Americans have been taken in by a rhetoric of fear.” (p. 251)

President Bush has received strong criticism of his handling of the Iraq War from presidential candidates and from the public. McCain and Obama have also objected to his use of Guantanamo Bay Prison. The New York Times August 10, 2008 editorial “The United States V. the Driver” questioned what “President Bush is trying to achieve by trashing the Constitution at Guantanamo Bay..... Osama bin Laden’s hapless driver was sentenced to 5 years in prison while bin Laden is still free to act against the United States.... Mr. Bush is operating according to a logic that says the right way to win against Al Qaeda is to invade Iraq, which had no connection to Al Qaeda. And the right way to dismantle Mr. bin Laden’s terrorism network is to express unconcern about chasing him down while relentlessly pursuing his driver.”

The next president will need to pursue the Wars on Terror and in Iraq and Afghanistan differently. But how: on what legal and moral grounds? Imagine yourself advising either President McCain or Obama as the new Attorney General of the United States early in 2009.

The role of the United States Attorney General is being the counsel for all Americans in enforcing the laws of the nation. The U.S. Attorney General also gives advice and opinions to the president and cabinet departments.

Activity:

Write a memo or outline a line of argument detailing your recommendations on the powers given to a president during time of war and how to deal with terrorists.

Research the U.S. Constitution for specific powers given to the president. Also see relevant U.S.

Supreme Court cases and articles such as:

Hamdi et al vs. Rumsfeld, Secretary of Defense at:
<http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/03-6696.ZS.html>

Supreme Court: Guantanamo Detainees Have Rights in Court In Stinging Defeat for Government, Detainees Have Right to Challenge Detentions at:
<http://abcnews.go.com/TheLaw/SCOTUS/story?id=5048935>

Students portraying the next Attorney General can share their recommendations with the class, with other students making comments or asking questions like the new U.S. President would.

