Affirmative Case: Pragmatism

The 1920s saw the rise of an exciting new transportation technology: the airship. Many people dreamed of skies full of fast, inexpensive airships. But then came the Hindenburg disaster. An airship exploded while docking in New Jersey, killing 36 people.

The lesson we learned from that tragedy is reflected in every decision we make as a society, including in the resolution. I affirm that “When in conflict, the right to individual privacy is more important than national security.

Let me start with a…

# Value: Pragmatism

Pragmatism is operationally defined as: “The principle that truth and meaning can be derived from practical use.”

In other words, you should evaluate the resolution based on what the world would look like if it were upheld. Rather than splitting hairs about exactly what my opponent and I think about national security and privacy, we should focus on how they are actually used.

This is the best way to evaluate the resolution for two reasons.

## Value Link 1: Gives Meaning

When we say that something is true, we mean that it corresponds with reality. The claim: “The sky is blue,” can be measured pragmatically - we can say that this statement is usually accurate because the real-world sky actually has a real-world blue color. On an overcast day, a pragmatist says: “The sky is gray,” even if the sky *should* be blue – because what the truth should be doesn’t indicate what it actually is.

### Application: Copernicus

Up until the 1500s, the scientific community generally agreed that the Earth was the center of the universe. There were plenty of ideals that supported this notion. Astronomer Nicoloaus Copernicus ignored the ideals and focused on pragmatic observation. He proved that the Earth is not at the center of the universe; that it revolves around the sun. This made a lot of idealists very angry. There were even official condemnations from church leaders. Obviously, the pragmatists were right.

## Value Link 2: Removes Blinders

If something is not pragmatically true, it isn’t true at all. Pragmatism gives you the only accurate way to see the world. It strips away the blinders that conceal the universe and it forces us to confront reality.

### Application: Hindenburg

The public had a choice to make after the Hindenburg explosion. The idealistic perspective said to keep using airships because they were *supposed* to be safe. The pragmatic perspective said that ascending into the clouds in a floating bomb was a bad idea. That’s why we made the switch to planes—because they have been proven useful in the real world.

So moving forward, remember: don’t ask yourself what national security and privacy should be, but what they are. With the framework in place, let’s go to my two contentions.

# Contention 1: Privacy Is Useful

Privacy has dozens of everyday applications: your email password, your PIN, window blinds, door locks, shower curtains, and so on. Privacy is not the end-all and be-all of society, but it is valuable and it is worth protecting. Hundreds of years later, we should be confident saying that the fourth amendment is a pragmatic success.

# Contention 2: National Security Is Not Useful

My opponent may tell you that national security is the protection of a country from physical foreign threats, or any number of other ambiguous definitions that can’t seem to agree. But telling you to ignore the real world because of a definition is a textbook example of an idealistic blinder.

So instead of a definition, I’m about to give you a lot of examples. You don’t have to write these down; just listen to how national security is used to advance every conceivable agenda.

* Gun control is national security.  
  California Senator Barbara Boxer said in 2013 that loosening gun control on campsites and other army engineer property "sets up a national security threat."[[1]](#footnote-2)
* Climate change is national security.  
  Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said: “The area of climate change has a dramatic impact on national security.”[[2]](#footnote-3)
* Obesity is national security.  
  In an interview with Michelle Obama, Dr. Oz said: “From my perspective, the number one greatest national security threat that we have is obesity.”[[3]](#footnote-4) The first lady replied: “Absolutely.”
* Nuclear energy is national security.  
  Green America is a prominent non-profit advocacy organization. They say that “Nuclear reactors represent a clear national security risk,”[[4]](#footnote-5)
* Marijuana is national security.  
  A statement from the Office of National Drug Control Policy said: “… Trafficking and use of [marijuana] have a negative impact on many aspects of our lives, from public health to national security ...”[[5]](#footnote-6)
* Bacon is national security.  
  In 2013, CNN lamented the Chinese acquisition of a US company which sells items like bacon and salami, with the headline: “Is America's pig supply a critical national security asset?”[[6]](#footnote-7)
* Healthcare is national security.  
  PhD Gerson S. Sher of the non-profit global security advocacy organization Stimson Center says: “… health care is a security issue … directly related to the scarier things we worry about, like nuclear bombs.”[[7]](#footnote-8)
* Smog is national security.  
  International Business Times reported that the Chinese government has now identified smog as a threat to national security.[[8]](#footnote-9)
* SUVs are national security.  
  In 2003, Arianna Huffington ran a series of ads accusing SUV owners of directly funding terrorism. It closes with the words: “What is your SUV doing to our national security?”[[9]](#footnote-10)

In the next speech, you’re going to be told about *idealistic* national security, which is—like everything else—perfect in every way. You’ll be asked to ignore understandings of national security that make it hard for the negative to win, and just stick with the negative definition.

But that’s just the problem. When we look at the world with pragmatic eyes, we see that the term national security is stretched and warped so badly that it loses all meaning. However my opponent wants to define national security, the actual term is an all-encompassing license to trample on the individual liberties of citizens.

Everything from the car you drive to your business decisions to your choice of a doctor falls under the purview of national security, giving the government a blank check to pursue that is dangerous. Instead, let’s affirm something meaningful and positive: our right to be private.

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*This case was written by Travis Herche with the help of Olivia Rogers.*

1. Barbara Boxer, quoted by the Associated Press, “Sen. Boxer: More Guns at Campsites Create ‘National Security Threat’ FOX News, May 8, 2013. [*http://www.foxnews.com/us/2013/05/08/senate-rejects-firearms-on-army-corps-engineers-lands-boosting-gun-control.html*](http://www.foxnews.com/us/2013/05/08/senate-rejects-firearms-on-army-corps-engineers-lands-boosting-gun-control.html)

   Unedited: “Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., said allowing more guns onto Corps property would increase danger to the dams, flood control systems and other crucial water projects. ‘This critical infrastructure is a target for terrorists,’ she said. Allowing more guns ‘sets up a national security threat. It endangers people.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Leon Panetta, quoted. “Panetta: Climate Change has ‘Dramatic Impact on National Security’” Breitbart News, May 5, 2012 [*http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2012/05/05/panetta-climate-change-national-security/*](http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2012/05/05/panetta-climate-change-national-security/) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Dr. Oz, quoted in an article by Madeleine Moregenstern. “Michelle Obama Agrees: Obesity is ‘Absolutely’ a National Security Threat,” The Blaze, September 13, 2012

   Unedited: “‘From my perspective, the number one greatest national security threat that we have is obesity,’ Oz asked the first lady in an interview broadcast Wednesday. ‘Do you ever think about it that way?’ ‘Well absolutely,’ Obama replied.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. “Ten Strikes Against Nuclear Power,” Green America, Accessed online December 29, 2015. [*http://www.greenamerica.org/programs/climate/dirtyenergy/nuclear.cfm*](http://www.greenamerica.org/programs/climate/dirtyenergy/nuclear.cfm) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. “Marijuana: Know the Facts” Office of National Drug Control Policy. Accessed online December 29, 2015. [*https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/ondcp-fact-sheets/marijuana-know-the-facts*](https://www.whitehouse.gov/ondcp/ondcp-fact-sheets/marijuana-know-the-facts)

   Unedited: “Although marijuana is sometimes characterized as a “harmless herb,” the cultivation, trafficking, and use of the drug have a negative impact on many aspects of our lives, from public health to national security, transportation, the environment, and educational attainment.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Parija Kavilanz, “Is America's pig supply a critical national security asset?” CNN, May 31 2013. [*http://money.cnn.com/2013/05/31/news/companies/smithfield-foods/*](http://money.cnn.com/2013/05/31/news/companies/smithfield-foods/) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Gerson S. Sher, Ph.D, “Why Your Stress Test Is a National Security Issue,” Stimson Center, December 17, 2013. [*http://www.stimson.org/spotlight/why-your-stress-test-is-a-national-security-issue/*](http://www.stimson.org/spotlight/why-your-stress-test-is-a-national-security-issue/)

   “To be sure, health care is a security issue in a broader sense, with implications for workforce integrity, skyrocketing medical costs and the consequences of untreated mental disorders. But it's also directly related to the scarier things we worry about, like nuclear bombs. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Esther Tanquintic-Misa, “China Smog Pollution: Sickens 8-year-old, Develops Lung Cancer; Environmental Hazard Becomes Threat to National Security” International Business Times, November 6 2013.

   [*http://www.ibtimes.com.au/china-smog-pollution-sickens-8-year-old-develops-lung-cancer-environmental-hazard-becomes-threat*](http://www.ibtimes.com.au/china-smog-pollution-sickens-8-year-old-develops-lung-cancer-environmental-hazard-becomes-threat)

   Unedited: “An 8-year-old girl from China's Jiangsu Province has developed lung cancer, a fine testament to the seriousness of the country's smog pollution problem. The alarming PM2.5 and smog have been blamed as the underlying causes of her condition. Apart from the growing health hazard, the smog has likewise been identified as a threat to national security.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Katharine Q. Seelye, “TV Ads Say S.U.V. Owners Support Terrorists,” New York Times, January 8, 2003. [*http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/08/business/media/08SUVS.html*](http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/08/business/media/08SUVS.html)

   Unedited: "This is George," a girl's voice says of an oblivious man at a gas station. "This is the gas that George bought for his S.U.V." The screen then shows a map of the Middle East. "These are the countries where the executives bought the oil that made the gas that George bought for his S.U.V." The picture switches to a scene of armed terrorists in a desert. "And these are the terrorists who get money from those countries every time George fills up his S.U.V." A second commercial depicts a series of ordinary Americans saying things like: "I helped hijack an airplane"; "I gave money to a terrorist training camp in a foreign country"; "What if I need to go off-road?" At the close, the screen is filled with the words: "What is your S.U.V. doing to our national security?" [↑](#footnote-ref-10)