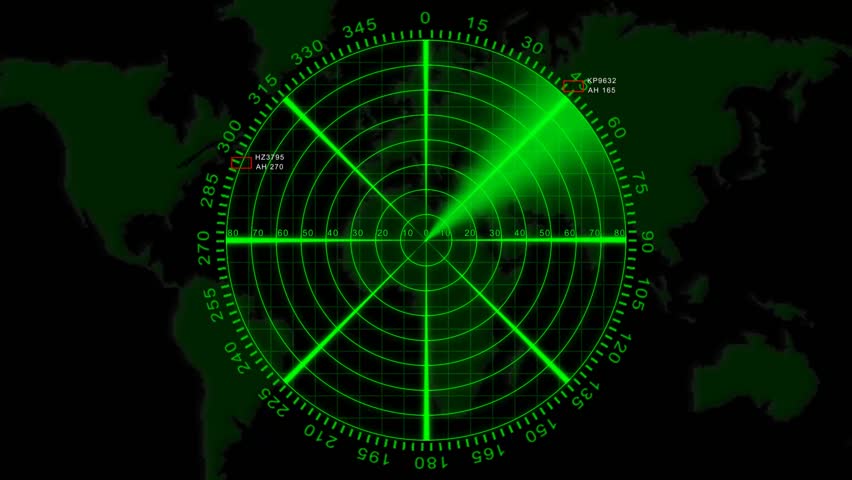
Self-Defense  
Affirmative Case by Nathaniel Braswell



“All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Thus reads Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter, which prohibits states from engaging in the use of force against other states. However, one main exception exists under this charter: cases of self-defense. The right to self-defense is a timeless concept that has ensured the security of both individuals and countries for centuries. Founding father Elbridge Gerry posited, “Self defense is a primary law of nature, which no subsequent law of society can abolish.” Using this notion as its thesis, this case provides a simple and common sense view of the resolution.

Instead of refuting the inherent legitimacy of the self-defense doctrine most, teams will attempt to disconnect it from preemptive warfare by claiming that self-defense is only legitimate when you have already been attacked. In order to respond to this argument, its important to understand a few things. First, if an aggressor pulls out a gun and aims it at me, I have been attacked regardless of whether or not he pulls the trigger. I have no less right to defend myself if he is merely threatening to shoot me than if he were to actually fire. Merriam Webster’s Online Dictionary defines an attack as:

“An aggressive action against (a place or enemy forces) with weapons or armed force.”

Note that an attack does not require any damage to be done; it only demands armed aggression. So even though a criminal might not decide to actually pull the trigger, he is still poised to do damage which justifies my self-defense. This same principle applies to countries. A country has a right to self-defense before any bombs have hit their soil, as long as there is clear intent of aggression. This is conveniently aligned with the definition of preemptive war:

“A war initiated on the basis of expectation and/or evidence that an enemy attack is imminent.”

To be preemptive, an attack must be in response to an imminent threat, and an imminent threat demonstrates clear intent of aggression. Thus, preemptive warfare is covered under the right to self-defense. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s quote confirms this comparison, “When you see a rattlesnake poised to strike, you do not wait until he has struck to crush him.” Similarly, if a country sees an aggressor poised to attack, the victim country does not have to wait to invoke their right of self-defense; instead, they can use preemption. This information is critical to know when running this case, because many affirmatives will try and claim that your right to self-defense begins only after you’ve been hurt.

The value for this case is human life since that is the main reason why we have a right to self-defense. No matter what arguments you assert in rebuttals, always impact them back to human life. After all, voting for the negative means standing idly by while watching an aggressor threaten your country. IF the aggressor decides to attack, your country can retaliate, but lives have already been lost. Because lost lives is a clear disadvantage to voting negative, constantly reminding the judge of your value will help greatly in winning your rounds.

Finally, this case is very logical. While applications can be added to give additional credibility, expect to win off of your rational explanations, not your real-world examples. Don’t let the negative team try and use applications to prove that preemption doesn’t qualify under self-defense. If they have such applications, they probably are irrelevant under your definition. The logic will hold up!

Self Defense

Thomas Jefferson wisely noted, "The chief purpose of government is to protect life. Abandon that, and you have abandoned all." Because the preservation of human life ought to be our primary concern, I ask that you affirm the resolution and support preemptive warfare.

# Definitions

To clarify the round, let’s present a few definitions

**Preemptive Warfare** is defined by the United States Army War College as, “A war initiated on the basis of expectation and/or evidence that an enemy attack is imminent.”

**Morally Justified** is defined by Oxford English Dictionaries as something that is, “Done for or marked by a good or legitimate reason.”

Now that we know what the terms mean, how do we decide if disrupting an imminent enemy attack is good or legitimate?

# Value: Human Life

In order to answer this question, I’ll be presenting the value of **Human Life.** By presenting this value, we are defining the goal of the debate round and giving you a weighing mechanism to judge each side of the resolution. Whatever team proves that their side is best for life ought to win your ballot at the end of the round.

## Value Link:

My value link, or reason why my value is relevant to the resolution, is **Purpose of Government.** As Jefferson posited, the government’s primary concern is to protect human life. This means that political authority is morally obligated to protect society from internal violence, but it also means that they are morally inclined to protect society from external threats. A government that is weak cannot stand up against international aggression and will fail at fulfilling their moral duty to life.

# Contention 1: Self-defense Is Morally Justified

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Jefferson’s landmark rhetoric paved the way for a new and exciting political narrative, a narrative of equality, dignity, and individualism. This belief that we all possess human rights gave birth to the notion that if one harms another in his or her sacred rights, the violator has surrendered his own rights as well. This belief that criminals have surrendered their rights is the reason why we are justified in using lethal force against an aggressor if necessary to protect our lives. The principle of self-defense extends beyond the realm of individual crime and applies to ethical standards for countries as well. If one country is attacked by another, the victim country has a right to use retaliatory force.

A famous example of this is the United States’ response to Pearl Harbor. When Japan attacked our military base in Hawaii, the US promptly invoked their right to self-defense and retaliated against Japan. Even though the resulting war was long and drawn out, the United States was justified in their military response. However, as we will see in the next contention, the right to self-defense extends to more than just conventional circumstances like Pearl Harbor.

# Contention 2: Preemptive Warfare Is Self-defense

People often possess a right to self-defense even if they have not been attacked. After all, I am justified in defending myself if someone starts to pull out a gun. I am *not* required to wait until a bullet is fired before I take proactive steps to protect myself and other innocent bystanders. No physical damage has to be done for my right to self-defense to be invoked, there only has to be reasonable suspicion of aggression.

Therefore, preemption is included under the right to self-defense. All cases of preemptive warfare include an imminent danger that could come to head at any time. If a country suspects an attack might eventually occur, but can’t confirm it will happen soon, then it is not an imminent threat and responding would not be included under the definition of preemptive warfare. If there truly is imminent threat, and a country is displaying violent aggression, then the victim country has a right to self defense.

## Application: Six-Day War

In 1967, Egypt and Jordan signed a mutual defense pact enforcing unity against their common enemy Israel. For years, Arab states had insisted on denying Israel’s sovereignty; even Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser at one point vowed to destroy Israel’s livelihood. This defense pact created a military coalition that outnumbered the Israeli army, making it possible for the Arab countries to finally mobilize and attack.

At the end of spring in 1967, Arab forces began moving near the edge of the Israeli border. On June 5, 1967, Israel preemptively launched fighter planes and caught the Arab militaries unaware, allowing the planes to almost completely destroy Egypt, Jordan, and Syria’s air forces in a single day. Even though the Arab countries had not yet pulled the trigger, they had still placed Israel at gunpoint, giving Israel a reason to invoke their right of self-defense.

If a country is about to launch a missile, there is the same right to self-defense as when the missile has already struck and killed innocent civilians. If Israel had opted out of preemption, they would have lost their military advantage and would have been ruthlessly attacked. The possible loss to human life alone justifies Israel’s decision to preempt.

In conclusion, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt summarizes the belief that the right to national self-defense includes preemption: “When you see a rattlesnake poised to strike, you do not wait until he has struck to crush him.” To vote for the negative team is to claim that is better to wait for lives to be lost than to take preemptive action. Just like we defend ourselves if an aggressor pulls out a gun, a country should likewise have the right to defense if they are the target of armed aggression. In either case, waiting to see what the enemy will do is simply not worth the risk to human life, which is why preemption is morally justified.

Opposing This Case

The biggest challenge in responding to this case is beating the notion that preemptive warfare is necessary to protect lives. The application of the Six Day War is a compelling one, but most applications are not so cut and dry. Usually, preemptive strikes are not so successful that the entire enemy’s fighting force is eliminated. In many cases, preemption actually does just as much harm as waiting, because the enemy will retaliate against the attack, which has the same potential for lost lives as waiting to retaliate in the first place. Consider the situation in North Korea. Many national security experts are warning against a preemptive strike, because it will catalyze harmful retaliation. By waiting, we are giving ourselves time to assess further options without considerably jeopardizing life.

Since this case justifies the affirmative side with the self-defense doctrine, disconnecting the two is also vital. The case compares the resolution with a bystander at gunpoint, but that comparison is flawed and irrelevant. If someone is being threatened with a gun, then the attack has already begun and any response would not be preemptive. Comparing this scenario with a preemptive attack is comparing apples to oranges. Additionally, once someone pulls out a gun, the danger isn’t just imminent; it’s present, meaning that there is no way to argue that the threat does not exist. International examples under the resolution are not as clear. What if the threat is only partially imminent, but there is not overwhelming evidence to prove that to be the case? Is self-defense still justified? What if there wasn’t any attack planned and it was a false alarm? The affirmative is assuming that every possible circumstance of preemption will be as clear as their analogy, when that couldn’t be further from the truth.

Finally, don’t forget to impact the negative aspects of preemption. Regardless of what you’re running as a case, it is important that you include some disadvantages associated with voting for affirmative. If you debunk the affirmative’s impact and our generous with building up your own, then your responses to this case will be much more effective.

1. "Chapter I." Un.org. N. p., 2015. Web. 5 Aug. 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)