Predictable Abuse Negative  
Negative Case by Nathaniel Braswell



This case is simple and effective. Instead of utilizing abstract moral theory, it emphasizes basic logical arguments that most judges can easily relate with. The underlying argumentation of the case starts by asking a simple question: Why can civilians not own weapons of mass destruction such as nuclear weapons? The most obvious answer is that they are much more likely to be used for wreaking havoc on society than for legitimate safety purposes. Because they are so likely to be abused, nuclear weapons are considered to be unsafe in civilian hands.

This analogy extends beyond citizens. The reasons why countries like the US are pushing for nuclear proliferation is because of the weapons’ potential for abuse. Nuclear weapons are not inherently bad, but their likelihood to be misused morally obligates responsible countries to safely reduce their presence. Likewise, preemptive warfare is easily abused. While there are a few times when it is used legitimately, the majority of “preemptive warfare” is just one country attacking another out of aggression and claiming that there was an imminent threat.

Many affirmatives will try and attack this case by referring to their definition of preemptive warfare. By noting that their definition limits preemption down to cases of self-defense, they will try and avoid all of these arguments. However, don’t fall into the trap of thinking that “self-defense” is an objective concept. For instance, every few months Russia sends a few planes into US airspace to communicate their strength and dominance. In return, the US military usually sends up a few F-16s, causing the Russian planes to return home. However, at any given time, the F-16s are never certain that these Russian planes won’t launch a surprise missile toward California. This remote threat does not give us justification to attack Russian airfields, which indicates that there is no clear bright line about how imminent a threat has to be in order for us to attack preemptively. If you press relentlessly for specifics on this standard in cross-ex, it’s quite possible you could get the Affirmative team to admit this as well.

In order to run this case effectively, you’ll want to impact the common sense of these ideas. Use analogies and comparisons to construct a down-to-earth narrative, and don’t get too caught up in the details. While a decent Affirmative team will present examples of successful preemptive warfare, always remember that those examples do not alone prove the resolution. Strictly speaking, nuclear weapons have had a 100% success rate of saving the free world from tyranny, but that does not mean that nuclear weaponry is now morally justified. In fact, many would posit that nuclear weapons are, on balance, immoral due to their impact on innocent life.

Because the focus of this case is on the reasons for abuse as opposed to examples of abuse, I recommend finding some extra applications to store away for rebuttals. There are many recent examples of countries that attacked preemptively and claimed that they were acting out of self-defense. If you have a robust bank of applications at your table to compliment your logic, then the Affirmative position won’t be nearly as persuasive.

Finally, be smart about responding to the cliché affirmative arguments. For instance, many teams will try to claim that. “Everything is open to abuse,” which means, “Nothing can be moral.” However, while that may be true, there is a clear bright line between owning a gun, which can be abused but has many legitimate civilian purposes, and owning a nuclear weapon, which has no legitimate civilian purposes and can only be used to destroy. Something has to be abused more than it is correctly utilized in order for us to say that that action is immoral. Luckily for us, preemption is very rarely used legitimately.

Predictable Abuse

Ernest Hemingway once wrote, “Never think that war, no matter how necessary, nor how justified, is not a crime.” In order to prevent unnecessary war and avoid unjust aggression, I urge you to negate today’s resolution and stand against justifying 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.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Morally Justified** is defined by Oxford English Dictionaries as something that is, “Done for or marked by a good or legitimate reason.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

# Value: Ethical Consistency

The value I will be running for today’s debate is *ethical consistency*. Ethical consistency is defined by Santa Clara University as: “The sense that our moral standards, actions, and values should not be contradictory.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Ethical consistency is a good measure of today’s debate since something can not be morally justified if it is not consistently moral. As the Markkula Center for Applied Ethics posits, “Ethics is supposed to provide us with a guide for moral living, and to do so it must be rational, and to be rational it must be free of contradictions.”

Basically, this means that an action must be repeatedly good for it to be moral; if the results of an action contradict themselves, then morality is lost.

# Contention 1: Frequent abuse destroys consistency

Even if there is nothing inherently wrong with an action, we can still say that that action is immoral if it is abused frequently. For instance, there is no intrinsic flaw in employing children, if the children agree to the work. However, child labor is illegal because of how easily corporations can abuse children. Because children are incapable of processing the full situation and standing up for themselves, companies abuse children far more than they use them legitimately, which is the reason why the government is morally justified in restricting it.

# Contention 2: Preemption is consistently abused

An attack is only preemptive if it is initiated because an attack is imminent. However, there is no clear bright line for whether a country is about to be attacked. According to E-International Relations, a foreign policy think-tank,

“The main problems here are that states can misjudge “threat”. What really constitutes an imminent threat? It is this confusion and blurred definition which leads to states acting out of aggression and uncertainty rather than a solid justified move which can constitute a pre-emptive war.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

## Application: Russo-Georgian War

In 1991, the Republic of Georgia declared its independence from Soviet Russia, which started a diplomatic crisis between the two nations. By 2008, Georgia had undergone a major administration change that had deeply aggravated Russo-Georgian relations. In 2008, Russia accused Georgia of planning to attack the Soviet state South Ossetia, and “preemptively” launched a large-scale land, air, and sea invasion.[[5]](#footnote-5) It was later confirmed that Georgia posed no threat to Russian security; however, in the moment, there was contradicting evidence. The term “imminent danger” is vague, and it leads to rampant abuse.

Now lets look at some of the arguments under the affirmative case.

Opposing This Case

One way to attack this case is to present a concrete bright line for imminent danger and define many cases of abuse out of the resolution. For instance, you could claim that there must be reasonable evidence of attack in order for it to be imminent. This would mean that the Russo-Georgian War was irrelevant to the resolution and does not accurately represent preemption. To use a different example, the Russian planes that fly into US airspace might be a nuisance, but there is no evidence that a missile will be fired, especially since they’ve conducted that drill numerous times. Thus, you could agree that attacking Russia would be a bad idea, but deny the fact that it classifies as preemptive warfare.

Another approach is to juxtapose the times preemption has been abused to the times it has succeeded. This method will require a hefty database of applications, but if run concisely and logically, it could be very hard to beat. A classic affirmative example is the Six-Day War, where Israel successfully used preemptive war to avoid a threat that could have quite likely destroyed their nation. However, be sure to not just throw out half a dozen applications and expect your judge to understand them. The best approach is to a few thought-out instances that you can explain persuasively and simply. Don’t forget to impact your examples to the resolution and explain the real-world affect of voting for the negative.

The value of ethical consistency can be responded to with an impact calculus / utilitarian argument. The negative team is claiming that preemption is abused more than it is legitimately utilized. However, even if it was abused 9 times out of 10, there are still circumstances where preemptive warfare has saved thousands or tens of thousands of lives, such as the Six-Day War. Therefore, an affirmative could respond by saying that the circumstances of abuse possess relatively low impact compared to the lives saved by preemption. In other words, it doesn’t matter that preemption doesn’t always work; it still, on balance, saves lives, which means it is morally justified. It doesn’t matter how consistent it is; if it saves more lives than it hurts, it is an inherently good action.

As always, a strong affirmative attack must be very focused on the big picture. Given the brevity of the first affirmative rebuttal, getting burdened by the details will most likely result in a confused or uninterested judge. Center your arguments around their impact, and you’ll be set.

1. Lieutenant Colonel(P) Michael J. Arinello (United States Army). “NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY OF PREEMPTION.” USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT, March 18, 2005. www.dtic.mil/get-tr-doc/pdf?AD=ada431862 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “Justified - Definition Of Justified In English | Oxford Dictionaries." Oxford Dictionaries | English. N. p., 2017. Web. 9 July 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. University, Santa. "Consistency And Ethics." Scu.edu. N. p., 2017. Web. 3 Aug. 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. #### "Is Pre-Emptive War Ever Justified?." E-International Relations. N. p., 2017. Web. 3 Aug. 2017.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Library, CNN. "2008 Georgia Russia Conflict Fast Facts". CNN. N. p., 2017. Web. 7 July 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)