9/11  
Opposition Brief by Thomas Sargent



It deeply moves Americans. Muslim extremists try to justify it. Postmodernists aren’t sure what to do with it. And we debaters debate it.

9/11 was a tragic incident in America’s history where a group of Muslim terrorists (known as Al-Qaeda) hijacked a few of our planes and flew them into several significant buildings. In doing so, they killed many innocent lives and rocked the hearts of millions of others. In this resolution, the affirmative has been known to use this a prime-time example of how we should have struck first. The argument goes like this:

A) Bill Clinton told the world that he could have stopped Osama bin Laden.

B) The next day, Al-Qaeda struck America.

C) Coincidence? I think not.

D) We should have stopped him with preemptive warfare.

The key to defeating this example is to hone in on the details. Sometimes debaters run applications by generalizing them, such as the syllogism above. For many debaters, their weak spot lies in the specifics. Did we know where Osama bin Laden was? Are you aware that before 9/11, FFA officials reported problems in their airport security? Were those issues ever resolved? Did Bill Clinton launch attacks on Al-Qaeda before 9/11?

Those questions highlight your opportunity to bring home the bacon. To win the round, you employ an age-old strategy. Whether you’re fighting for your life or just debating someone, you always need to find a person’s weak spot. When dealing with 9/11, you’ll do just that. How? You’ll look at the real evidence. Show things that were not pointed out. You can even use phrases like, “My opponent never mentioned…” or, “My opponent never told us this.” And don’t be afraid to “sow a few seeds” in the judge’s mind during CX.

I’ve mixed and matched two kinds of argumentation: some more evidence-based and some more logic-based. Both kinds are feisty – they put forth a battering ram that shatters the possibility of preemption. It might be worth it to try both styles in a debate round. And whether you’re a detail oriented debater or a logic buff, there should be something here for you. Don’t be afraid to tweak the end rhetoric, either. I’m personally a realist debater, but if you’re more emotional, make it move the hearts of your audience. If you’re more aggressive, write scary impacts that challenge your opponent. Whatever you do, have fun.

This brief isn’t very complicated. That’s because with 9/11, there really isn’t that much to do to take it down. You don’t have to spend 5 minutes talking about the ins and outs of how the bombastic Bill Clinton could have taken out the terrible terrorist. To be honest, I don’t think it’s that strong of an application. There are weak spots in it. Defeat ‘em and move on.

One last note: remember that when dealing with a tragedy like this, never use a political persona. Don’t get up there and just say, “WRONG!” Treat this event with *deep* respect. Innocent people died in 9/11. The judge will angrily throw tomatoes at you if you get up to the podium and talk super-hyped like a lawyer. Be slow and compassionate. 9/11 was a somber day in history and you shouldn’t disagree. With all the tragedy involved, however, your opponent cannot win it.

We indeed should have stopped 9/11 somehow or other. But is that enough to prove the resolution?

This brief says otherwise.

Opposition Brief: 9/11

Security was the problem

Stroller, Gary. “How 9/11 Could Have Been Prevented, and Why the Airline Safety System Still Isn’t Fixed.” The Gazette, 13 Sept. 2016, <http://gazette.com/how-911-could-have-been-prevented-and-why-the-airline-safety-system-still-isnt-fixed/article/1585385>

[Agent Brian] Sullivan alerted top FAA officials in Washington five times in the months before 9/11 about checkpoint security failures at Boston’s Logan airport, but the problems weren’t fixed. Hijackers passed through two Logan checkpoints on 9/11, commandeered two jets and crashed them into New York’s World Trade Center towers. Three other former FAA special agents — Bogdan Dzakovic, Steve Elson and Sherry Moran —repeatedly told their supervisors about security deficiencies that endangered the traveling public, but also say the flaws weren’t addressed or corrected.

While 9/11 was a tragic incident, the problem was airport machinery failures, not a lack of preemption.

Failed attacks

Kean, Thomas H, and Lee Hamilton. The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, 2004. Print. <https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf>

By the early hours of the morning of August 20, President Clinton and all his principal advisers had agreed to strike Bin Laden camps in Afghanistan near Khowst, as well as hitting al Shifa. The President took the Sundanese tannery off the target list because he saw little point in killing uninvolved people without doing significant harm to Bin Ladin… Later on August 20, Navy vessels in the Arabian Sea fired their cruise missiles. Though most of them hit their intended targets, neither Bin Ladin nor any other terrorist leader was killed. Berger told us that an after-action review by Director Tenet concluded that the strikes had killed 20-30 people in the camps but probably missed Bin Ladin by a few hours.

Before 9/11, Bill Clinton tried to take out Osama bin Laden. If he had done so, 9/11 would never have happened. However, even though he tried to destroy the terrorist leader, he utterly failed in the attempt. We’ve heard from my opponent how we should have tried to eliminate bin Laden. The funny thing is: we did. But in the attack, we missed him.

Unknown location

“National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States.” Great Seal of the United States, 21 Aug. 2004. <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report_Exec.htm.>

Although Bin Ladin was determined to strike in the United States, as President Clinton had been told and President Bush was reminded in a Presidential Daily Brief article briefed to him in August 2001, the specific threat information pointed overseas. Numerous precautions were taken overseas. Domestic agencies were not effectively mobilized. The threat did not receive national media attention comparable to the millennium alert.

While we wanted to prevent 9/11, we were misguided as to where the troops would be. Even if preemptive warfare would have been effective (it wouldn’t be, but I digress) it would have been impossible.

Preemption v.s. Prevention

We knew that Al-Qaeda hated us. But we didn’t know that they were going to attack us on 9/11. In that respect, we couldn’t have launched a preemptive strike. Why? Because war is only preemptive if it responds to a *known*, imminent threat.

The fact is didn’t know about the plan to attack the Twin Towers. Because of our lack of knowledge, any war we would use would be at best preventative - in other words, we would try to prevent them from attacking sometime in the future. That’s not preemption. This is because preemption is a response to an imminent threat. An attack on Al-Qaeda wouldn’t be a response to an *imminent* threat. The fact is…we *just didn’t know about the plan to attack the Twin Towers.* Even if we launched a strike right before 9/11, we would be using a preventative war, not a preemptive one.

**Hidden Information**

O'Connor / AlterNet, Rory. “How 9/11 Could Have Been Prevented.” Alternet, 7 Aug. 2006, <http://www.alternet.org/story/40005/how_9_11_could_have_been_prevented>

In his book, as well as a recent *New Yorker* article, Wright explains how the CIA withheld vital information from FBI agents who were in Yemen investigating after the attack on the Cole. In particular, the spy agency lied about its knowledge of a terrorist planning meeting in Malaysia that took place before the Cole bombing, which had been attended by two Al Qaeda operatives named Khaled Al-Midhar and Nawaf al-Hamzi. It also failed to reveal that the men -- both of whom ended up on planes involved in the 9/11 attacks -- were living in Los Angeles, information that the CIA was legally bound to share with the bureau.

What could have prevented 9/11 would be for the FBI to learn more knowledge about the fact that Al-Qaeda was here in America. We then could have arrested them and prevented 9/11. A big explosion upon Afghanistan wouldn’t have helped much.

**Vital Phone Calls**

Rory O’ Connor and Lawrence Wright. “How 9/11 Could Have Been Prevented.” Alternet, 7 Aug. 2006, <http://www.alternet.org/story/40005/how_9_11_could_have_been_prevented> (The quotation shown here was originally published in Lawrence Wright's book, "The Looming Tower: Al Qaeda and the Road To 9/11." It was republished in this article by Rory O' Connor.)

Author Lawrence Wright expresses his frustration at lack of information shared by the NSA. The agency monitored telephone calls made by Al Qaeda to Yemen. These calls occurred before and after the U.S. embassy bombings. As Wright says,

 "”Khaled al-Mihdhar was the son-in-law of the guy who owned the phone. He called there from California eight times! Had the NSA shared its information, the FBI could have mapped the entire global Al Qaeda network."

Instead of utterly destroying Afghanistan with a preemptive strike, we simply could have let the FBI discover the entirety of Al Qaeda’s plans.