National Security  
Affirmative Case by Nathaniel Braswell



This case is simple, logical and effective. Running national security as a value allows a debater to impact the resolution to real-world politics and provide an understandable framework for justifying preemptive warfare.

The basic premise of this case is that governments are morally obligated to protect a nation’s security, and, since preemptive strikes are often necessary to maintain or achieve security, preemptive warfare is morally justifiable. However, it is *crucial* to the success of this case that the judge understands the definition of preemptive warfare. For a strike to qualify as “preemptive,” the initiating country must be acting out of self-defense. For instance, if I were to preemptively attack someone, I would be attacking that person because I deemed her a threat and not simply because I wanted her wallet. As the definition of preemptive warfare specifically states, a country *must* be acting out of self-defense and not out of aggression.

Emphasizing this link to self-defense allows a debater to avoid the obvious negative argument that war endangers civilians and harms the economy. After all, a country must maintain the right to proactively safeguard its citizenry and its resources especially under conditions of imminent danger. This means that an action normally considered immoral is justified when the safety and stability of a country is at risk. Personal and national survival is a morally legitimate justification for a government to take preemptive action.

Some negative rebuttals might try to accuse this case of adhering to the Machiavellian “end justifies the means” mindset, where allegedly any action is justified by the end it produces. Machiavelli used this argument to rationalize tyranny, positing that it was justifiable since it often led to unity and victory in war. This argument can be disputed by making a vital distinction. The affirmative position is NOT that countries can do whatever they want so long as they make themselves more secure. Instead, this case posits that the security of a nation justifies any action that is completely vital to public safety. If a political tactic is not essential for security, it is not necessarily morally justifiable. In this case, preemptive warfare is *crucial* to national security and is therefore justified.

In order to win with this argument, it is important to avoid getting caught up in individual negative applications. Remember the most fundamental rule in debate states that *time = importance*. Spending excessive time on negative applications indicates to the judge that they are important. Instead, strive to guide the debate away from these applications by emphasizing your value and framework. For instance, if a negative team brings up three examples of abusive preemptive warfare, try to focus on proving why those particular countries were not acting out of self-defense. Brainstorming *general* ways to refute applications will greatly increase the amount of time you have to invest in your own case, bolstering its impact.

The impact of this case is one of its strongest persuasive attributes. A country that fails to protect its national security could be easily endangered and eventually eradicated. Because this danger must be avoided at all costs, preemptive warfare is morally justified. The ethical objections the negative side may present, many of which can be discounted, will pale in comparison to the impact of an entire society being shattered.

National Security

Thomas Jefferson once posited, “The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government.” It is because I agree with Thomas Jefferson that national security is the government’s central purpose that I am led to affirm today’s resolution and stand resolved that Preemptive Warfare is Morally Justified.

# 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)

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

# Value

In order to answer this question, I’ll be presenting the value of **National Security,** which, according to the US Legal Dictionary, refers to, “The protection of a nation from attack or other danger.”[[3]](#footnote-3) 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.

All political authority is morally obligated to look out for the safety of its people, which is why the United States neglected to join WWII until the attack on Pearl Harbor. When the US’s national security was infringed upon and innocent lives were hurt, they had a moral obligation to become involved in the war. This principle holds true in any circumstance: if the security of a country requires action, that action must be taken.

# Contention 1: Preemptive Warfare Necessary for National Security

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt once proposed an analogy in which he compared preemptive warfare to fighting a snake, “When you see a rattlesnake poised to strike, you do not wait until he has struck before you crush him.” Just like the threat of a rattlesnake is immediate and dangerous, the threats inherent to terrorist groups and rogue states are often significant enough that waiting to absorb a strike before reacting with armed force will greatly compromise our national security. It used to be that waiting to retaliate was a viable military option, but in the current age of chemical weapons and nuclear warheads, failing to mitigate a threat is morally antithetical to the interests of security.

**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.

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. According to an official at US Marine Corps University, “The Israelis were able to turn a potentially disastrous situation into a resounding victory by launching a preemptive attack on the suspecting Arab armies massing to attack its country.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

If Israel had waited to absorb the first wave of attacks, their national security would have likely been unrecoverable.

# Contention 2: Lack of Preemption Destroys National Security

The existence of terrorist groups and rogue states creates a vital need for preemption. Under normal circumstances, nations can use diplomacy and military deterrence to mitigate any brewing conflict; however, with threats like ISIS or Al-Qaeda, they care very little about their own security, making it almost impossible to de-incentivize their violence. Since we can not deter these threats with our own threats, terrorist groups or rogue states like North Korea leave us only two viable strategies: Either be strictly retaliatory and wait for thousands to die before using arms, or attack preemptively to disrupt the impending attack.

**Application: Al-Qaeda Intervention**

As we know, the attacks on September 11th were largely catalyzed by the work of Osama Bin Laden. During the Clinton administration, the opportunity to kill bin Laden, who at that time posed an imminent threat to the US, presented itself on four different occasions. President Clinton decided against a preemptive strike on Bin-Laden, even though it would quite likely have prevented the greatest terrorist attack the United States had seen. In addition to ignoring the opportunity to directly assassinate Laden, Clinton also neglected to strike the arms-manufacturers that were supplying weapons to Al-Qaeda. President Clinton’s strategy, while based on historical precedent, is inappropriate in today’s world due to the extreme potential for deadly attacks like 9/11.[[5]](#footnote-5)

In conclusion, governments are morally obligated to do whatever necessary to protect the lives of their citizens. For centuries, war could remain strictly retaliatory and not pose any substantial threat to security, but in the new age of chemical weapons and nuclear warheads, having the preemptive option is vital to our interests, as we saw in the applications of the Six-Day War and Al-Qaeda. Therefore, I urge an affirmative ballot on today’s resolution.

Opposing This Case

Since this case is simple, the negative’s best bet is to match this simplicity. Remembering the most important debate rule that *time = importance*, it is vital to not get busied with the details and to instead identify general responses. On balance, a value-centric response will help greatly when refuting this case. The affirmative greatly stresses the importance of upholding safety, but fails to specify when protecting national security can go too far. Throughout history, many terrible courses of action have been performed in the name of “national security,” and simply valuing this is not enough.

One instance of this is Japanese internment during WWII. Even though the Japanese posed a definite threat to US national security, the government went overboard by confining all Japanese Americans to internment camps where they were closely monitored. Because valuing national security would justify these actions, negative can make a strong argument that security isn’t of upmost importance. Instead, negative could argue that something like political legitimacy or justice leads to more desirable results without necessarily sacrificing national security.

In response to this, the affirmative might try to point out that some threats will certainly infringe on security if no action is taken. However, remember that the affirmative must prove that preemption is justified in general, not just in a few examples. The majority of the time, there is no clear way of knowing whether or not preemption is the only option. Quite often, there are other alternatives that do not possess nearly the same disadvantages as going to war preemptively. Stress these alternatives, focus on the negative impacts of preemption, and don’t get caught up in the few examples that the affirmative presents.

If the value-centric response does not meet your fancy, a negative could also argue that preemption actually jeopardizes national security. While it might seem to effectively mitigate some threats in the short-term, it actually aggravates conflict in the long-term. The reason for this is that preemption is speculative, which means it is easily abused. If countries start using preemption, even if it is justified, that opens the door for other nations to invoke invented threats to justify aggressive wars, which makes the world far more unstable and unsafe. To use an example, many claim that it was perfectly justified to use the nuclear bomb against Japan; however, that does not mean that nuclear warfare, as a whole, is justified, since it is so easily abused and so powerful.

Again, it is important to live in the big picture with your negative responses. Don’t get too detail-oriented, or you will lose your impact and consequently lose your judge. Keep calm when responding to the case, focus on general principles and arguments, 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](http://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. US Legal, Inc. "National Security Law And Legal Definition | Uslegal, Inc.." Definitions.uslegal.com. N. p., 2017. Web. 9 July 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Dtic.mil. N. p., 2017. Web. 9 July 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Good, Dan. "Bill Clinton's Chilling Statements Hours Before 9/11 Attacks". ABC News. N. p., 2017. Web. 7 July 2017. <http://abcnews.go.com/US/bill-clinton-hours-911-attacks-killed-osama-bin/story?id=24801422> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)