Oxygen Mask (Self-defense)  
Affirmative Case by Joseph Abell



Here’s a behind-the-scenes look at this case. First, we’re arguing that governments are moral entities. They can make decisions with definitive moral consequences. A government leaving us to die is an atrocity, and they are morally obligated to keep us safe. Bear in mind how aggressive this position is: it’s not simply saying that self-defense is acceptable, but that it is mandatory. Stick to your guns and don’t compromise this position.

When your opponent tries to counter with a broad value like human rights, identify if they believe governments should ever prioritize their citizens. If your opponent just advocates that governments protect all rights generically, then point out how problematic this is: it would be like paying a bodyguard to protect you and then watching him ditch you for someone else. In CX, ask if your opponent believes a nation’s own citizens deserve priority. If he says yes, then you can accept the value and point out that it is essentially the same as yours. Values like national security, domestic safety, etc., are no different from yours. You don’t need to win a wording quibble to get a logical advantage. Instead, point out how preemptive warfare prioritizes citizens through self-defense. The contention will win you the round.

A good number of your opponents will accept your value and simply say that preemptive warfare inhibits self-defense. It’s a coherent argument and one you must challenge.

But this is where subpoint magic kicks in. You illustrate three ways that preemptive warfare protects a nation. It’s the most balanced response to an imminent threat, inaction is downright irresponsible, and it’s the only option that sends a signal to other bullies on the playground. These are unique ways that preemptive warfare is self-defense, and since self-defense is morally justified, you prove the resolution true.

Oxygen Mask (Self-defense)

In the event of an aircraft emergency, parents aboard the plane are given very specific instructions. “Get your oxygen mask on. Then help your children get theirs.”

This imperative is not given out of selfishness or a distaste for the young. Instead, it exists out of a very basic truth: that if you can’t breathe, nothing else matters. You cannot help anyone—let alone children—if you are dead. The same principle applies to foreign policy. Nations that cannot defend themselves are powerless to do good things.

Because of that, I’m happy to support preemptive warfare. It is an essential tool that ensures nations both their safety and their supply of oxygen. Let’s kick things off with my

# Resolutional Analysis: Emergency Situation

Encyclopedia.com explains the meaning of preemptive warfare:

“Preemptive war occurs when a state that is about to be attacked decides to strike first at its enemy and thus disrupt the impending attack.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

In other words, preemptive warfare is more than simply a stray missile launched at a country we don’t like. Instead, it describes an emergency situation where we face imminent threat and choose to react by striking first. Voting affirmative doesn’t mean blindly supporting warfare, but supporting preemptive warfare. This phrase has a specific meaning and should be treated as such.

To measure this resolution, I’ll be providing a value that will help us know when any action is morally justified. It is the…

# Value: Self-defense

This is operationally defined as the right of a nation to defend itself from physical threat. Let’s talk about why this value should be used. I have two reasons:

## Value Link 1: Obvious Duty

The government is not some generous benefactor, giving us a police force and an army because they think we’re cool. We pay billions to the government in taxes every year precisely so that they can take care of us.

While there’s debate as to how this money should be used—say on education or healthcare—there is no debate on whether or not governments should protect us. To take our money and then ignore us in a deadly crisis would be a total rip-off. If self-defense isn’t a moral imperative, then nothing is. Making citizens not die is the most obvious duty of government, and governments are morally justified in keeping it.

## Value Link 2: Comes Before Everything

Outside of it just being a basic government duty, self-defense is enormously important for the nation at large. When a nation is crippled in its defense, it can’t do anything. It can’t grow its economy, help others in need, or even come close to flourishing.

Self-defense is the oxygen mask. It is necessary for literally any other function a nation wants to pursue. Our nation is morally justified in self-defense because it is a prerequisite for all good things.

Most importantly, using this value takes the guesswork out of your vote. If you believe preemptive warfare epitomizes self-defense, vote affirmative. If you believe preemptive warfare hinders self-defense, vote for my opponent.

With that, I have just one contention.

# Contention: Preemptive Warfare Is Self-Defense

The conditions set by preemptive warfare are narrow. Since it describes a scenario where we stand on the cusp of attack, a preemptive strike is by its nature self-defensive. Let’s prove this through three subpoints.

## It’s Proportional

While violence is never a pleasant concept, there are a few instances where using it is acceptable. For example, while you can’t slaughter someone for cutting you in line at the grocery store, an axe-wielding home intruder can be justifiably shot down.

The same logic applies to foreign policy. A nation’s foreign agent breaking through our kitchen window is no longer a rational agent we should make bargains with, but a dangerous fiend that must be stopped.

If this scenario was less extreme, then of course violence is unnecessary. Let’s say we wake up to hear that the leader of Bulgaria has insulted our tax policy. We could just swallow our pride, or if the disagreement got more intense, engage in diplomacy or stop trading with him. All of these responses would be proportional; they would match the threat leveled against us. In some cases, it might even be worth it to call upon international organizations like the United Nations to ameliorate things.

Here’s the point: given a low-level threat, violence is unnecessary. We have so many other peaceful alternatives!

But in an imminent threat, none of these options make sense. A nation planning to destroy us in a matter of hours does not deserve tolerance or diplomacy. They sacrifice such patience by going for the jugular. In the face of military attack, a counter-military attack is proportional—and the best way to keep our nation safe. This is preemptive warfare.

## It’s Decisive

As we mentioned previously, governments have a moral obligation to defend us. Part of this is because they’re the only ones that can, and the other part is byproduct of them taxing us into oblivion. If they’re going to take our money, they better be covering our backs.

Consider a scenario when an imminent threat barely gives us any time to choose between the options we don’t have. Preemptive warfare is morally justified because it is the most reasonable response within a tight time frame. When all the evidence suggests that you are about to be annihilated, you cannot react with anything less than force. You can only focus on self-defense.

Let’s take the application of Pearl Harbor: a moment in WWII history where the Japanese attacked the United States without warning. Imagine the story retold where the CIA fully knew Japan’s plan to attack us but did absolutely nothing. Wouldn’t there be outrage and frustration?

Of course there would! We would at the very least expect our government to ready our military, or even better, cripple their missiles with air strikes before they had a chance to kill our men.

Remember: preemptive warfare attacks in the face of destruction.

Voting affirmative means that we recognize the threats leveled against us and we do something about it. To knowingly lay down our weapons and watch our nation be destroyed is irresponsible—and ignores a nation’s need for self-defense.

## It’s Authoritative

War is ugly. As much as possible, we should avoid it—and only use force when we don’t have better options. Preemptive warfare protects a nation by deterring future conflict. By showing other nations that we aren’t afraid to defend ourselves, it sets a powerful precedent and sends a message to the international community.

For example, take Israel’s military strategy in the Six-Day War.

In 1967, tensions between Israel and Egypt became dangerous, as Egypt threatened Israel with a closer and closer military.

In the heat of the Six-Day War, Egyptian forces mobilized on Israel’s border and appeared set to pounce at any moment. However, instead of waiting for their own demise, Israel preemptively strikes Egyptian air forces and catches them by surprise.[[2]](#footnote-2) The result gave Israel air superiority and prevented their nation’s destruction. Less than a week later, Egypt gave up the fight and signed a ceasefire.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Israel’s swift and decisive military strategy is still praised by foreign policy experts. Especially given Israel’s small size, the move gave them the upper hand and discouraged other nations from stepping onto Israel’s turf.

When you can’t breathe, nothing else matters. Preemptive warfare gives nations their oxygen mask and stops those who would try to rip it away. I hope you’ll support it with me.

Opposing This Case

Short of dramatically redefining the phrase preemptive warfare, you have two ways to win: beat the value or beat the contention. Either we aren’t using self-defense to make moral decisions, or we are, but it just so happens that preemptive warfare isn’t self-defensive. As is true for any negative strategy, doing both is a bad idea.

If self-defense is a completely immoral way to make choices, then who cares if preemptive warfare happens to be a form of it? You don’t need to challenge the defensive nature of preemptive warfare when self-defense is already a bad measure for morality.

Your time is valuable, and following just one of the strategies will be enough to keep your hands full. Let’s walk through each one.

First, the value: your argument here is simple. Self-defense is useful for nations, and a decent model of legal policy, but a terrible way to determine morality. For example, given the military might of the United States, North Korea would probably be a little safer if we disappeared. Does that justify them wiping us off the face of the planet?

The case has a lot of great rhetoric surrounding self-defense. You’re just here to say that it’s a morally bankrupt standard. It justifies a nation killing anyone and anything that threatens them. Replace it with a value that measures morality in a legitimate way, and you’re on your way.

Second, the applications. If your argument is that self-defense is morally valid, but that preemptive warfare doesn’t get us there, here’s your road. Begin by arguing that preemptive warfare is not defensive at all: it’s the most offensive military move a nation could make. You can pick apart proportionality too: the affirmative says we should be proportional, so we should bomb the daylights out of a country that threatens us? Seems fishy.

Talk about applications where preemptive warfare legitimately endangers a nation. Is whipping out the bazooka a tried-and-true path to safety? You’re going to argue that nonviolent approaches, like with missile defense programs (I’m looking at you, boost-phase-intercept) or diplomacy. These are better approaches to danger. We can’t just gun-sling the nearest person that gives us a funny look. Violence isn’t the answer, and neither is voting affirmative.

1. Americans at War, Encyclopedia.com, [www.encyclopedia.com/defense/energy-government-and-defense-magazines/preemptive-war](http://www.encyclopedia.com/defense/energy-government-and-defense-magazines/preemptive-war). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Errol Morris: Election ‘04, [www.errolmorris.com/content/election04/blog\_102804.html](http://www.errolmorris.com/content/election04/blog_102804.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Six-Day War Ends.” History.com, A&E Television Networks, [www.history.com/this-day-in-history/six-day-war-ends](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/six-day-war-ends). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)