Life as a Moral Imperative  
Affirmative Case by Micah Chapman

  
*Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941.*

In Patrick Henry’s famous “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death” speech, he said these words:

“Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace — but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle?”

When a war has already, in essence, begun, action must be taken to minimize the devastation of the conflict. That’s what this case is built on. When the government has strong, undeniable evidence of an impending attack, they have no other morally upstanding choice but to attack first. Whenever the government has the chance to minimize casualties, they have a moral obligation to do so.

Here are a few simple tips when running this case:

1. Win the definition. This case is largely contingent upon it. Without it, preemptive warfare can be seen as risky and irresponsible. Make sure you remind the judge that an attack only applies to this resolution if it is initiated on the basis of incontrovertible evidence of an enemy attack.
2. Win the value. Pretty much every value is only important because it protects life or increases the quality of it. If you can establish that life is the end goal, then of course the government should do whatever it can to protect that life.
3. Remember, there can be no reward without risk. Neg may try to make this case sound risky, saying that there’s no way you can know if preemption will work. However, focus on the *morality* of the issue. Say that even if it fails, the government has the moral imperative to try anyways, because life is the end goal.

This case is simple, easy to run, and impacts back to the judges easily. Use these few tips and it should be a good debate. Good luck!

Life as a Moral Imperative

As Ronald Reagan once said, “Government’s first duty is to protect the people.” Although the federal government has many duties, they all go back to this: the protection of life.

It is because human life is sacred and must be protected whenever possible that I stand *Resolved: Preemptive warfare is morally justified.*

# Definitions:

## 1. Preemptive Warfare

Taken from The Free Dictionary, a derivative of “preemptive attack”: “An attack initiated on the basis of incontrovertible evidence that an enemy attack is imminent.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Now that we have the definition established we can move onto…

# Value: Life

The value, or weighing mechanism, in today’s round, which is that of **life**. Life is defined as not only the protection of basic human existence, but also the quality of that life. There is one primary reason to use this value in today’s round:

## Value Link: Foundational right

Not only is life an inherent right, it’s also a foundational right. Without life, nothing else can be achieved. When the government makes decisions that pertain to warfare, protecting human life should be the primary consideration. At the end of this debate round, whichever side secures life should win your ballot.

With the value in place, we need to explore a key contention, showing how affirming today’s resolution upholds the value of life.

# Contention 1: Governments Must Protect Life

In the end, the purpose of government comes back to the protection of life. When a government action protects lives, it is morally justified. So we can gather that the government should do everything within its power to protect the most lives possible.

Preemptive warfare is one of those actions. In the case of preemptive warfare, two things can happen. Either A) we refuse to use preemption and allow ourselves to be attacked, starting a war, or B) we attempt to stop the war before it can begin by destabilizing the enemy’s capabilities and decrease the chance of any further casualties.

As can be seen, B is the better option of the two. Even if the strategy to eliminate the enemy’s capabilities fails and we are plunged into a war, we will be no better off than if we had chosen option A. Remember, any action that protects human lives should at least be attempted, even at the risk of failure. The government has a moral obligation to try to protect lives through preemptive warfare.

## Example: Six-Day War

In the 1960s, Israel was in a dangerous standstill with the countries of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, all of whom had banded together against Israel. These countries had promised to completely destroy Israel, and were building up their offensive forces in order to do so. However, before they could take action, Israel preemptively acted, destroying most of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria’s air force capabilities, making an attack on Israel almost impossible.

Because of this attack, the war ended before it had even begun, and the Arab states no longer tried to attack Israel. Israel did what any government should do: they protected lives by ending a war with minimal casualties. Any government given the opportunity to take this type of action should attempt to protect life without any hesitation. Morally, the government has no other option.

# Contention 2: The Risk of Inaction Is Too Great

I think we can all agree that peace is always preferable to war. Unfortunately, peace is never free. In order to maintain peace, actions often need to be taken. There will always be conflict, and the government cannot sit idly by and allow this conflict to spread into its own borders. The negative would contend that it is morally justified to allow people to die before we take any military action. However, if we adhere to such mindsets, human life would be sacrificed, and the government would fail its core duty. The true risk of inaction is that we allow the conflict to begin without even trying.

## Example: Pearl Harbor

Although America has seen many gruesome and horrific attacks, Japan’s 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor is one of the worst. This attack ended with over 2,400 American soldiers dying and flung America into the worst war in modern history: World War II. Imagine if the U.S had known that Pearl Harbor was going to occur, and decided *not* to attack first. Imagine if the U.S had allowed thousands of its citizens to die. Would that have been morally justified? Of course not. Although preemptive warfare can seem messy and dangerous, the risk of inaction is too great.

When I say that preemptive warfare is morally justified, that does not mean that we should lash out against any country who even slightly threatens our security. It means that when an attack is about to occur upon us, we have no other option but to strike first, and attempt to prevent the attack from occurring. It means that because the government has an obligation to protect human life, they must take action to prevent any future loss of life. We cannot wait for people to die before we act.

It is because the government must do everything in its power to protect human life that I believe preemptive warfare is morally justified. Thank you.

Opposing This Case

Let’s face it, this case is a bit of a stretch. There’s no way that preemption can be as successful as it was for Israel every time. Focus on that. Exploit the lack of examples that Aff has, and make them point to more instances where this type of preemption worked.

It’s going to be extremely difficult to try and win this round using the definition provided. Use alternative definitions to make preemptive warfare sound reckless because, in reality, it is. There is no way that strong evidence can be “incontrovertible,” because the government can and does make mistakes often. Press them on that in CX. Get them to admit that there is room for error with preemptive warfare, and therefore we may never know that a country is planning on attacking us for *sure*.

Respond to the “risk of inaction” by saying that there is risk in everything regarding war; action or otherwise. The real risk is attacking someone based on “incontrovertible evidence” of an enemy attack. Whenever possible, the government should avoid such risk.

This case is pretty simple, so the responses to it are as well. Stick to realism, and don’t allow the affirmative to get away with arguments without proof or examples.

Good luck!

1. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/preemptive+attack> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)