Opposition Brief: National Security  
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# Overview of the National Security Case

National Security is one of the most intuitive moral justifications for preemptive warfare. Because most judges readily accept the notion that governments are morally obligated to the safety of the country, national security makes a simple, easy, and effective value.

However, if you strip away the appealing rhetoric, most national security cases possess ample opportunity for the negative to deconstruct the foundational arguments and raise questions about the value and its efficacy in measuring preemptive warfare. In this brief you’ll find an abundance of arguments, applications, and evidence to run against any national security case.

Happy debating!

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# Value Supremacy Arguments

## 1. National Security must be achieved ethically

Although national security is quintessential for nearly every nation, too much of a good thing is seldom a good thing. For example, in 1919, Nebraska passed a law banning students below 9th grade from learning the German language out of fear that they would become indoctrinated by fascism and pose a risk to U.S. national security. Although Nazi Germany posed a significant threat to the United States during World War I, Nebraska’s obsessive concern for national security violated the educational freedom of America’s youth. In a similar way, while each and every country ought to highly value the security of its own borders, it must be careful not to achieve that security unethically. For example, while it is true that dropping several nuclear bombs on North Korea would effectively diffuse the current North Korean nuclear threat to the US, the innocent lives lost would underscore how reprehensible such a strategy would be. National Security is important, but it must be limited by ethical standards.

The most critical element of this argument is its impact. If the judge votes for the value of national security, he or she is agreeing that it is the superlative moral standard of the round. However, by emphasizing the negative impact of excessive security, you can effectively persuade your judge that national security is an ineffective weighing mechanism. After all, if the pursuit of domestic wellbeing would require us to nuke North Korea at the cost of civilian lives, is it really of highest value? Without sounding pedantic, delineate for your judges what they are actually supporting when they vote affirmative. Convince the judge that security must be restricted, and then present your value as that limitation.

There are a multitude of examples that demonstrate the danger of pursuing national security without restrictions. In 1933, communist arsonists burned down the German parliament building. This aggressive action led the German President and Chancellor to issue an emergency decree condemning the communist presence in Germany. Known as the Reichstag fire decree, it “permitted the regime to arrest and incarcerate political opponents without specific charge, dissolve political organizations, and to suppress publications. It also gave the central government the authority to overrule state and local laws and overthrow state and local governments.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Ironically not only did German leadership successfully boost national security, they opened the door for the establishment of Hitler’s autocracy. Clearly, the pursuit of national security was taken too far.

An example closer to home is the FDR Gold Seizure. On April 5, 1933, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 6102, which required every citizen in the United States to forfeit his or her gold and exchange it for paper money. However, the government had set an unnaturally low exchange rate for the gold. This meant that people lost money when they complied with the executive order. Immediately after this, the administration spiked the exchange rate up by $14.33 per Troy ounce, earning the government billions of dollars in revenue.[[2]](#footnote-2) Because people had traded in their gold for an unfair value, millions of Americans lost significant amounts of money but because the government had threatened a $10,000 fine for non-compliance, few had any choice. One company lost an astounding eight hundred and twelve million dollars in today’s money.[[3]](#footnote-3) Roosevelt signed this executive order to stabilize the failing economy and help secure our country but he clearly used inappropriate means.

All of these examples highlight how the pursuit of national security is very prone to abuse, abuse which needs to be checked by a higher value. Consequently, this argument works best in conjunction with a negative value that broadly addresses ethical issues, such as Just War Theory, Morality, International Ethics, or Peace. It is a simple yet effective way to demonstrate that the pursuit of national security has ethical limits. All you have to do now is prove that preemption is unethical and you have defeated the affirmative case.

## 2. National Security is a self-defeating value

While it is tempting to think about the resolution from the United States’ perspective, the resolution asks us to discuss preemption universally. This means that any affirmative value should not exclusively apply to the US; it should apply to other countries—including our enemies—as well. When the judge votes for national security, he is valuing the security of the United States, as well as that of North Korea, Iran, and Russia. Within this broader perspective, national security is not equally valuable- it is only esteemed when it is present in a country with peaceful interests. Because of this, it is reasonable to convince a judge that a value such as morality or peace, which is objective and universal, ought to be preferred over the affirmative value.

The impact of this is that the value of national security is self-defeating. Because countries often possess conflicting interests, it is nearly impossible to value the national security of every country unanimously without bias. For instance, look at North Korea and the United States, both of which are in a militarily precarious position. The more nationally secure North Korea becomes, the greater a threat they pose to the United States, and if the US counteracts by bolstering its military, North Korea loses some of that security. Therefore, if we vote for the affirmative value, how do we know whose security we are voting for and at what cost?

In response to this argument, the affirmative might provide a blanket response, claiming we should side with the United States because its interests are the most virtuous. However, it is unreasonable to allow your opponent to take sides in cases of international conflict. The situation with North Korea is pretty cut and dry, but plenty of other tense situations, such as the one between Israel and Palestine, are far more complicated and morally problematic. The bottom line is that your opponent is not qualified to discriminate among different countries based on a relative standard of innocence.

If the affirmative debater is clever, he or she might decide to avoid this issue altogether by running a slightly more specific value such as “U.S. national security” or “Western national security.” While this will avoid the argument that national security is self-defeating, it will not earn them much ground in affirming the resolution. Because a value serves as a weighing mechanism, it is illogical for him to limit his value to a small portion of the world and then expect it to uphold a resolution that is supposed to hold true in an international context.

## 3. National Security is subjective

No matter how the affirmative team defines national security, there will still be a level of ambiguity associated with the term. For instance, the US Legal Dictionary defines national security as, “The protection of a nation from attack or other danger.”[[4]](#footnote-4) However, who determines what is dangerous to a country? There are obvious threats such as terrorists and power-hungry dictators, but what about less significant menaces such as fascists distributing anti-U.S. pamphlets[[5]](#footnote-5) or border patrol agents going on strike? Are these real issues of national security, or are they mere nuisances to the public? The affirmative team is unlikely to present a clear standard that answers these questions, leaving this value ambiguous.

One example demonstrating this ambiguity is the 1950s “Red Scare” that accompanied the rise of Communist China. During this time, New York State passed a law that allowed schools to fire teachers who belonged to communist organizations.[[6]](#footnote-6) Communism was clearly a danger to the United States, but were communist teachers dangerous enough to be labeled a national security threat? The answer to this question will differ depending on whom you ask, proving that national security is a subjective concept. Because this argument is simply seeking to prove that national security is vague, the fact that this application is disconnected from preemptive warfare is irrelevant.

Like with any value argument, impact is critical. If there is no clear way to distinguish issues of national security, then there is no definite way of knowing what is covered under the affirmative value and what isn’t. Consequently, it is impossible for a judge to definitively know what he or she is voting for.

If you decide to run this argument, be sure your own value does not fall victim into the same trap. Claiming that national security is subjective and then running an equally vague value is a blaring double standard that is likely to hurt you in the round. Define your value well, and if there are any unclear terms in your definition, be sure to define those precisely.

# National Security does not depend on preemption

## 1. Preemption is inherently a national security risk

## Link: Preemption requires speculation

According to the United States Army War College, preemptive warfare is defined as “A war initiated on the basis of expectation and/or evidence that an enemy attack is imminent.” Because military threats are intrinsically difficult to assess, there will always be some level of speculation involved in anticipating attacks. RAND Corporation, a global public policy think-tank created to advise the US Armed Forces, published a research paper titled “Striking First: Preemptive and Preventative Attack in U.S. National Security Policy,” in which they made the following assertion concerning surprise military attacks:

“It is possible to reduce the frequency of such surprises by improving intelligence collection and analysis, by increasing the responsiveness of armed forces, and by streamlining national security decision making, but intelligence will never be perfect because many threats are intrinsically difficult to anticipate. This is true in general, but is particularly so when considering anticipatory attack, because it is not enough to know that an enemy attack is possible; what is required is a high degree of confidence that the adversary is going to attack, or at least that there is a strong probability that this will happen.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

Throughout history, possessing the intelligence necessary to identify our enemies’ intentions has proven difficult. For instance, before the strike on Pearl Harbor, the United States was well aware that Japan had the military capacity to conduct a deadly strike on American soil; however, the Pentagon was not confident that Tokyo was indeed committed to do so.[[8]](#footnote-8) A similar scenario was present in the Cold War. Without a doubt, Soviet Russia’s unbridled aggression toward the US validated the prospect of an attack as probable. In spite of this, the Cold War ended without a single missile being fired, indicating that Russia’s combat intentions were at least slightly misestimated. If we had preempted on the assumption that an attack was imminent, the ensuing war would have been disastrous, with Russia likely using her vast collection of nuclear warheads in retaliation.

Because discerning combat intentions is virtually impossible and assessing the imminence of an attack relies at least partially if not wholly on speculation, military intelligence cannot help but overstate or understate the severity of a danger. Since preemptive warfare is initiated on the basis of an imminent threat, it is built on the foundations of speculation.

## Link: Speculation harms

Affirmatives will likely frame preemptive warfare as a political strategy- something we ought to utilize when necessary to gain a military advantage. This framework, however, ignores the massive stakes that countries gamble with when they launch an anticipatory strike. Unlike ineffective military sanctions or failed diplomatic efforts, unsuccessful preemption has unjustifiable repercussions on human life and national security. A compelling example of preemption’s potentially tragic impact is the Cold War. In the later years of this war, anticipatory attack was seriously considered by US leadership in order to mitigate the tensions in Eastern Europe. However, the US would have had to gamble on its understanding of Soviet intentions. The National Security Council prepared a report for President Truman on this topic, and concluded the following:

“The ability of the United States to launch effective offensive operations is now limited to attack with atomic weapons. A powerful blow could be delivered upon the Soviet Union, but it is estimated that these operations alone would not force or induce the Kremlin to capitulate and that the Kremlin would still be able to use the forces under its control to dominate most or all of Eurasia This would probably mean a long and difficult struggle during which the free institutions of Western Europe and many freedom-loving people would be destroyed and the regenerative capacity of Western Europe dealt a crippling blow.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

This report sounded the alarm, exposing the extent to which preemption advocates had misestimated the military potential of the Soviet Union. Had the US acquiesced to the demand for a preemptive strike, a nuclear war would have unleashed irreversible devastation to life, liberty, and happiness in Western Europe. International conflict cannot be treated as a political slot machine; if a course of action requires heavy speculation, it should be dismissed until the intelligence exists to make confident conclusions about the action’s repercussions.

## 2. Preemption comes at an inordinate political cost

In addition to the indefensible loss of life that preemption incites, there is an eclectic array of political detriments to consider as well. As RAND noted in the same study cited previously, “Anticipatory attacks usually entail significant political costs in the international arena…”[[10]](#footnote-10) Most noteworthy is the negative influence on nuclear proliferation. If a nation is morally justified in engaging in preemptive warfare, they undoubtedly will develop a powerful propensity for anticipatory strikes. As was the case in the Cold War, this proclivity often manifests itself in the stockpiling of a larger nuclear arsenal. This in turn provokes hostile nations to amass weapons of mass destruction as a deterrent against a preemptive attack.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The precarious relationship between the United States and Iran is indicative of this type of behavior. In 2003, the US initiated Operation Iraqi Freedom, in which America demonstrated its proficiency in preemptive warfare. Perceiving this as a threat, Iran immediately felt increased pressure to maintain a strong defense against the US by refusing to surrender its nuclear program.[[12]](#footnote-12) While there were other factors that contributed to Iran’s obstinacy, America’s threat of preemption was undoubtedly one of the main catalyzing influences.

Secondly, justifying preemptive warfare will indubitably motivate other countries to attack their enemies preemptively. As of recent, the predominant obstacle inhibiting other nations’ utilization of preemption was the consequence of violating international norms, norms which, for the most part, were against anticipatory attacks.[[13]](#footnote-13) If the judge affirms the resolution and justifies preemption, these life-saving norms will eventually be expunged, motivating more militaries to entertain preemption as a viable military strategy. This increases the risk of regional instability in geopolitical hotspots and threatens the national security of neighboring nations.

This argument splinters the connection between national security and preemption while uncovering two incriminating political flaws. Because both this argument and the preceding one concentrate on preemption’s disadvantages and their impact on the affirmative value, running them conjunctively is extremely persuasive, although it might be excessive depending on the quality of your opponent’s case.

## 3. Preemption poses a non-exclusive advantage

A decent affirmative strategy is to minimize the disadvantages of preemption by emphasizing its tactical necessity. After all, it is not difficult to persuade judges that striking first is strategically important. However, the utility of the initial hit is often exaggerated; it poses minimal benefit and is easily outweighed by the numerous costs discussed previously. As RAND documented, “Preemptive attacks are often of only marginal military value, if that, simply because striking first is not greatly superior to allowing the adversary to deliver the first blow.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

The supporting logic is reasonably simple. Successfully launching an anticipatory attack requires a certain degree of military power, but countries that already possess this capacity are likely equipped to deter or defend itself against any attack it might be trying to preempt. However, this principle depends largely on the size of the nation in question:

“U.S. military power gives Washington unrivaled ability to launch anticipatory attacks, but it also reduces the need for them: The more powerful a state is, the more likely it will be able to deter or defend itself against the threats it faces, although this depends greatly on the nature of the threat. The world is full of political actors who could attack the United States, but who are extremely unlikely to do so, and which U.S. armed forces could easily deal with if they did.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

Since this argument mainly applies to more powerful nations, it is useful as a response to U.S.-centric cases. When challenged, your opponent will unlikely be able to prove why alternative means of defense and deterrence are inferior to preemption. If you press those alternatives throughout the round and impact the costs of anticipatory attacks, you will be able to frame preemptive warfare as a reckless and costly strategy.

## 4. Preemption frequently fails

Since preemptive warfare is intended to diffuse impending attacks, effective preemption must at least partially cripple an enemy’s attacking capacity. If the country attacked has the ability to respond, historical precedent dictates that she will retaliate to protect her own national security. Unfortunately, sufficiently disarming a country is becoming increasingly difficult. Given the heightened existence of vast nuclear arsenals, a single strike will rarely be able to render an enemy’s ability to respond ineffective. Consider what RAND argues about the prospect of a preemptive strike against North Korea:

“The principal obstacle to launching an anticipatory attack to protect South Korea in the event of a severe crisis on the peninsula is that because effectively disarming North Korea with a conventional first strike is unlikely to be feasible.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

RAND offers a similar conclusion about a potential preemptive strike against China:

“The China-Taiwan situation has many parallels to the Korean one. Again, a U.S. preemptive attack to defend its ally would involve the probability of incurring extremely high costs (though these would differ significantly from those involved in a war with North Korea) and China would assuredly not cease to be a threat as a result of a U.S. attack.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

In spite of these two instances, there are admittedly many less significant examples of successful preemptive warfare, most of which were targeting terrorists. If the affirmative pieces together a few of these applications, impact the insignificance of those strikes compared to ones on North Korea and China. After all, if preemption succeeds on a small scale but fails miserably when applied to major conflicts, is it really safeguarding national security? An affirmative is also likely to utilize some larger examples of preemptive success such as the Six-Day War or Operation Iraqi Freedom. The best way to respond to these is either through using a separate application brief or through impacting the dangerous side effects to anticipatory attacks. No matter what your opponent decides to run, proving that preemption is often ineffective will prove useful in the debate.

# Conclusion

At this point, it should be obvious that this brief contains significantly more material than is possible to present in a single round. Because of this, you’ll want to do some picking and choosing with which arguments, applications, and evidence you decide to run at any given time. Your choice ought to depend largely on the strengths and weaknesses of the affirmative case, as well as the narrative that you want to present as the negative.

Remember that the resolution asks about the *moral* justification for preemptive warfare, so all of the technical language about military strategy must be impacted back to human life, peace, security, or some other intrinsically moral concept. Discussing the shortcomings of preemptive warfare is relatively ineffective unless you explain why those disadvantages prevent preemption from being morally justified.

Finally, don’t forget to experiment! Running only one or two arguments permits you to thoroughly analyze the issues in a way not possible if you run four or five. This brief presents a wealth of information for you to utilize, and now it’s up to you to study, optimize, and perfect it. Good luck!

1. <https://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/1933-1938/reichstag-fire-decree> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.usmoneyreserve.com/blog/did-fdr-confiscate-americans-gold-in-1933/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.moonlightmint.com/bailout.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://definitions.uslegal.com/n/national-security/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/268/652 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://law.jrank.org/pages/22808/Adler-et-al-v-Board-Education-City-New-York-Significance.html [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG403.pdf> pg. 95 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG403.pdf> pg. 95 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/coldwar/documents/pdf/10-1.pdf> pg. 53 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG403.pdf> pg. 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG403.pdf> pg. 105-106 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG403.pdf> pg. 106 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG403.pdf> pg. 106 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG403.pdf> Pg. 96 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG403.pdf> Pg. 96 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG403.pdf> pg. 100 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. <https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2006/RAND_MG403.pdf> pg. 100 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)