OPP: Cold War  
Application Response by Mark Csoros



This year, quite rightly, Negative debaters love to paint apocalyptic scenarios. Their job is to scare the judge away from the Wild West of uncivilized, unwarranted bloodshed. To that end, the Cold War has become a favorite application on Negative.

At first glance, it seems like a perfect application. The Cold War was recent enough to fire old memories, severe enough to spark old fears, and far enough within the realm of possibilities to happen again. There were moments of the Cold War where it seemed like a preemptive strike was inevitable, yet it never came, proving how diplomacy and not preemptive war is the best course of action.

But, in the context of the resolution, using the Cold War to justify a stance on the morality or immorality of preemptive war doesn’t make sense. This release contains three responses to the Cold War application, ranked from least to most effective. They are, in order: acceptance of the application, but minimization of relevance; straight refutation of the application; and a turn back onto the Negative.

OPP: Cold War

# Response 1: True, but irrelevant

As always, you can respond to this application merely by denying its relevance in the broader context of the round. Yes, the Cold War is an example of when negating the resolution was wise, but that doesn’t prove that preemptive warfare as a whole is unjustified. Rather, this application proves that in once specific scenario, preemptive warfare wasn’t used, and things worked out for the better. This isn’t the best way to respond the Cold War, but it is a quick and simple way to brush it aside, if you don’t have enough speech time for lengthy analysis.

# Response 2: We didn’t strike because it didn’t make sense to

This response is a direct refutation of the application’s entire premise. It’s akin to denying its relevance, but instead of accepting the application and denying its meaning, you deny that the application makes sense. To do that, make sure you use the term “Mutually Assured Destruction”. That term refers to the almost-certainty that a nuclear launch, or any kind of military action, would have resulted in a nuclear scenario that neither country would have survived. In that situation, a preemptive strike would have been suicidal. All of our best strategic minds were focused on avoiding nuclear conflict, because it would have been disastrous. Our reluctance to strike wasn’t because we couldn’t justify preemptive war, it was because a preemptive strike would likely mean the obliteration of America.

# Response 3: Threat deterrence

This is the best response of the three, and the one that is the most fun. This response argues that the only reason we survived the Cold War, and won the geostrategic struggle for power, was our willingness to engage in preemptive war. The mutually assured destruction argument works both ways. We were reluctant to push the nuclear button, but Russia was too. Our nuclear arsenal was locked and loaded, and Russia understood the dangers of international brinksmanship. Russia understood that it couldn’t cross certain lines, or we would be forced to strike. In other words, because preemptive warfare was justified, the Cold War stayed cold, and never became the Thermonuclear Hot War. If we were to accept the Negative mindset, and remove or severely restrict the use of preemptive war, we would be vulnerable. It would be like bringing a knife to a gun fight. It would be like having a nuclear armed Russia, unafraid to fire first, able to steal away our global preeminence merely because we’re unwilling to use the weapons we have.