Applications of the Resolution  
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Patrick Henry noted, “I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know no way of judging of the future but by the past.” Certainly, as Patrick Henry is positing, the practical implementation of an idea, as seen through the telescope of history, is one of the most important elements to any significant discussion or research.

Many cite the reason for communism’s failure as Karl Marx’s lack of practical knowledge about political interaction. Luckily for us, we can avoid the trap that defeated Marx! This topic has a rich history of historical applications, and understanding them will increase the quality of debate and make it easier for the judge to grasp the principles at play in this resolution.

# What is the purpose of applications in this resolution?

Before we jump into some details, it’s important to understand the purpose of applications in LD debate. It can certainly be tempting to stack up four or five examples and beseech the judge to vote for the “more supported view.” The strategy of application stacking ought to be avoided for two main reasons.

First, stacking applications often makes the judge’s job unnecessarily difficult. When debaters present excessive examples, the amount of time dedicated to each one will greatly decrease, increasing the probability that the judge will be confused on any given instance. Just because you’re comfortably familiar with your application does not mean your judge is in the same position, and even if you have an experienced judge, it’s important to sufficiently explain how your application relates to the round. If you are speeding through half a dozen applications, the judge will not be able to grasp the impact of the example, which lowers your chances of winning.

Second, running too many examples distracts from the main argumentation. Remember that in Lincoln-Douglas, applications are far from your only form of support! The narrative that you create for the judge requires flushing out your position with rhetoric and logical arguments. For instance, the argument that preemption is justified can easily be convoluted by the negative, and it is vital to help the judge understand why it is not as harmful or subjective as the negative claims. That level of clarity requires explanation, not examples.

Pick your applications wisely, so that you have enough time to invest in your narrative.

# How do definitions affect the application debate?

As always, the most popular response to applications under the resolution will be definition-based. To try and minimize these instances, both affirmative and negative can try to run applications that fit a standard definition. As the negative, it will be tempting to run examples where a nation went to war for a completely unjustified reason and claimed it was a preemptive attack. This strategy invites a definitional argument that you are likely to lose for several main reasons. First, there is a major difference between a preemptive and preventative attack.

Preemptive War: “A war initiated on the basis of expectation and/or evidence that an enemy attack is imminent.”

Preventative War: “A war initiated on the belief that armed conflict, while not imminent, is inevitable, and that delaying such action would involve unacceptable risk.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

As the US Army War College posits, there is a clear distinction between these two military strategies. Preemption is only preemption when there is evidence of an impending attack, whereas prevention is far more broad and undefined. If preemption was only meant to apply to circumstances where there *could* be a danger, even if that danger was remote, then the term “preventative war” wouldn’t even exist. There are certainly definitions that disagree with this mindset, but the fact that there are two separate terms makes it difficult to argue.

Negative ought to avoid applications that classify as “preventative” war. For instance, at first glance, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is an excellent example to use, since it was arguably unjustified. However, the US was not preparing for any kind of attack against Japan. Instead, Japan was attacking in order to reduce the United States’ ability to respond to Japanese hostile actions throughout Asia. In every way, this type of war was preventative, not preemptive.

Some debaters might claim that this description of preemption is actually defining justified preemption and not preemptive war as a whole. I would argue that this is incorrect. The US Marine Corps College conducted a study in which they discussed the justifiability of preemptive action. Despite their conclusion that preemption was often times unjustified, their definition of preemptive war was almost identical to the one presented above. This indicates that there is plenty of room for debate on both sides of this definition.

# Affirmative Applications

## Six Day War

The six-day war is likely to be a heavily used affirmative application due to its clear details and persuasive impact. Because of Israel’s success in the war, it is an excellent example of how preemption is *necessary* and *effective*. Quite likely Israel’s sovereignty might have shattered if it weren’t for their preemptive action.

Sufficient knowledge of the background is key. Arab leaders had already expressed a definite intention to eventually destroy Israel. Not only had the Egyptian President vowed to crush Israel’s livelihood, military and intelligence chiefs had actually secretly met at a hotel and all agreed on their animosity toward the Jews. Making matters worse was the fact that Soviet Russia was directly supplying resources and intelligence to Egypt and Syria. In May of 1967, a Russian intelligence report sent to Egypt contained information that Israeli troops had started massing on the northern border in preparation for a Syrian attack. Even though this information was later proved to be false, it catalyzed an immediate response from Syria, who signed a defense pact with Egypt and Jordan. Egypt immediately closed the Straits of Tiran to all Israeli shipping, which cut off Israel’s only supply route with Asia and stopped the flow of oil from its main supplier, Iran.

Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser also made almost-daily death threats. On one occasion he boldly declared, “Our basic objective will be the destruction of Israel. The Arab people want to fight.” His words were harmonized by Iraqi President Abdur Aref, “The existence of Israel is an error which must be rectified. This is our opportunity to wipe out the ignominy which has been with us since 1948. Our goal is clear -- to wipe Israel off the map.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

On June 4, Iraq officially joined the Arab alliance against Israel, which contributed to the approximately 465,000 troops, 2,800 tanks, and 800 aircraft that surrounded the Jewish state. Since there was a definite impending attack and no alternative for Israel, the conditions for preemption were ideal. On June 5, 1967, the Israeli cabinet voted for the military to counter-balance Egyptian aggression and attack the Egyptian air fields while the pilots were eating breakfast. By 11:00 a.m. that morning, 180 Egyptian fighter planes had been destroyed. Later that day, Israel conducted similar missions against Jordan and Syria.

In the end, Israel proved that preemptive war could be perfectly justified. If they had waited to absorb the first strike, it would have compromised their security and killed thousands of civilians. As Affirmative, you should stress that when the judge votes affirmative, they are not voting for another excuse for blanket aggression. Instead they are voting for the same necessary military strategy that was demonstrated in Israel.

## 9/11 Prevention

The mere shock of 9/11 to the average American makes it a strong application, if applied correctly. Applications like 9/11 are a powerful tool since you can use them to outweigh the negative disadvantages to preemption without ever directly refuting them. Unfortunately, the details of this application are slightly more muddled than the Six-Day War.

President Clinton had a chance in 1998 to preemptively strike a building that contained Osama bin Laden. This was after bin Laden had declared war on the U.S. and threatened to send terrorists across the world to conduct suicide missions. President Clinton witnessed another opportunity to act preemptively in 1999, but decided against approving either strike because of conflicting intelligence reports and the risk of civilian casualties.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Perspective is key in understanding President Clinton’s decision. The urgency with which we deal with terror threats now is something that would have been foreign to Clinton. Islamic radicalism was still a rising force and had not yet proven its deadliness. Despite this, at the time of these decisions, there was still existing evidence of the 9/11 threat. A preemptive strike would have certainly been justified in this scenario since it could have prevented 3,000 fatalities. One could likewise speculate that since ISIS first branched off from Al-Qaeda, destroying Al-Qaeda earlier would have prevented ISIS entirely, but I digress.

With this application, the main challenge will be proving that there was enough intelligence of the 9/11 attack at the time of President Clinton’s decisions. If that can be confirmed, then this example can be effectively used to demonstrate the necessity of preemptive warfare for national security and human life. Centering this application on the impact instead of the details will aid in this effort.

## Drone Strikes

This is less of a traditional application and more of a response to a negative case. One of the disadvantages that will be pressed against preemption is military negligence and civilian casualties. Undoubtedly, negative will use the classic, “What if you’re wrong?” question to distract from the impact of the affirmative position. In response, you can point out that the resolution takes place in the status quo. (Resolved: Preemptive warfare *is* justified.) We aren’t debating whether or not it was justified half a century ago, rather we are debating the topic in our current world with our current technology. This will be key to defeating the “what if” argument, since our military intelligence and capability has greatly exponentialized. Not only is our government effective at detecting threats, but our ability to accurately strike a threat with low citizen attrition has also increased.

One staple piece of technology is drones. While military drones aren’t perfect, they still maintain lower civilian casualty rates than manned air campaigns.[[4]](#footnote-4) Even with the errors that drones make, they still have proven potential to reduce civilian casualties in armed conflicts by mitigating threats prematurely. This argument will help you in barring the negative from distracting from the potent ideas in your case with their technical arguments. Using applications like drones will help you get the debate back on track.

# Negative Applications

## Russo-Georgian War

This application is an effective example of preemption’s easy abuse. As we will see in this instance, countries can fake a threat and use that as an opportunity to act on their aggression. In 1991, the Republic of Georgia declared its independence from Soviet Russia, which started a diplomatic crisis between the two nations. By 2008, Georgia had undergone a major administration change that had deeply aggravated Russo-Georgian relations. In 2008, Russia accused George of planning to attack the Soviet state South Ossetia, and “preemptively” launched a large-scale land, air, and sea invasion. As was confirmed later, Georgia posed no genuine threat to Russian security, indicating that they were using preemption as an excuse to lash out against Georgia.[[5]](#footnote-5)

This application must be impacted correctly. While this is not an accurate example of preemption, it is still an instance of the affirmative mindset. As was mentioned earlier in the article, even though nuclear weapons *can* be used justifiably, on balance they are unjustified since they are prone to abuse. Preemptive warfare is similar. From the negative perspective, voting for the affirmative means voting for a system that will inevitably be abused.

## Cold War

This application effectively proves that preemption is often bad tactically. The negative can certainly argue that governments are morally obligated to choose the best tactical options on the battlefield; after all it is immoral for a military commander to force his soldiers into a useless suicide mission. That being said, there are many tactical disadvantages to preemption, as shown in the Cold War. There was almost certainly an impending attack on the United States, and yet if they were to respond preemptively, it would have invited nuclear war. This application proves that diplomacy and deterrence are legitimate means of diffusing conflict.

No matter what applications you use, remember to keep the focus on your main arguments and their impact. Don’t ever respond or defend an application without impacting its validity, and don’t ever get laser focused on the details without taking time to discuss the big picture. If you keep these tips in mind, applications can be an incredibly effective tool in this resolution!

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. "Background & Overview - Six-Day War". Jewishvirtuallibrary.org. N. p., 2017. Web. 7 July 2017. <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/background-and-overview-six-day-war> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 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-3)
4. Sherman, Robert. "Drones Spare Troops, Have Powerful Impact". sandiegouniontribune.com. N. p., 2017. Web. 7 July 2017. <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/opinion/commentary/sdut-drones-troops-impact-2014oct09-story.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Library, CNN. "2008 Georgia Russia Conflict Fast Facts". CNN. N. p., 2017. Web. 7 July 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/13/world/europe/2008-georgia-russia-conflict/index.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)