Life  
Negative Case by Micah Chapman and Mark Csoros



It’s high noon in a small Texas town. Two rough-and-tough cowboys get into a scuffle at the local saloon. They decide to settle their differences in the most gentlemanly way possible: a draw. They stand facing each other, fingers ready to grab their gun and shoot down their opponent at any second. If one makes any move toward their gun, the other will see it as a threat and shoot him down.

There’s a reason we don’t use western-inspired draws to settle arguments any more: it nearly always ends in one person losing their life. Instead, we work out our differences through conversation, saving violence as a last resort. That’s what this case is about. Here are some tips when running this case:

1. Win the value. Pretty much no other value can precede life, as it is necessary for anything else to be achieved. If you win the value of life, the rest will come easy. If life is the end goal, then sacrificing (often needlessly) that life, as the affirmative does, will prove this resolution false.
2. Use other examples. If possible, use examples such as the current situation with North Korea/China, or the current situation with Iran. Examples are very effective, yet not necessary for this case to succeed. Any example of effective preemptive attacks on the affirmative can be negated by the *idea* of the case, saying that more lives could have feasibly been saved through a diplomatic solution.
3. Use the “Morally Justified” definition to your advantage. Because it is such a specific definition, you can way every example/argument that the affirmative brings up against those six criteria.

Remember to focus on how every argument impacts back to the moral justification of an action, not just whether or not that action led to increased national security. Good luck!

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It was our great founding father, Thomas Jefferson, who said, “The chief purpose of government is to protect life. Abandon that and you have abandoned all.” It is because the government has a moral obligation to protect the lives of its citizens that I stand in firm negation to today’s resolution, and believe that preemptive warfare is not morally justified.

# Definitions:

## 1. Preemptive Warfare

“An attack initiated on the basis of incontrovertible evidence that an enemy attack is imminent.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

## 2. Morally Justified

“Morally justified”, in the context of warfare, means conforming to 6 specific standards. These standards make up the “Just War Theory”, as outlined by philosopher Thomas Aquinas. They are:

1. War must be in a just cause, such as self-defense, the defense of others, the protection of the innocent, or corrective punishment.
2. A war can only be waged as a last resort.
3. A war has to be waged by a legitimate authority.
4. A war must not contain ulterior motives.
5. A war must have a probability of success.
6. The acts of war must be proportionate.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Essentially, a war is just if it meets the standards of common decency and common sense. Now that we have the definitions 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 prefer this value over that of my opponent’s.

## Reason to Prefer: 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 some key contentions, showing how affirming today’s resolution fails to uphold the value of life.

# Contention 1: Better Alternatives

Jumping headfirst into warfare is rarely a good idea. It is nearly always more effective to attempt a diplomatic solution first. As the Thomas Aquinas says, you must exhaust all nonviolent options before going to war.[[3]](#footnote-3) Otherwise you risk losing innocent lives that could have been saved.

Although warfare can be effective at thwarting enemy attacks, *preemptive* warfare leaves no room for negotiations. If a country sees a potential threat to its security, there’s always a possibility that they can negotiate themselves out of an all-out war. However, preemptively striking a country guarantees that a war will begin, and lives will be lost.

# Contention 2: Diplomacy Saves Lives

The government has a moral obligation to protect its citizens. That obligation means that the government of a country must do whatever it can to preserve life and avoid conflict. Diplomatically resolving a conflict is more effective at protecting life than the military alternative.

## Example 1: The Cold War

During the Cold War, tensions were incredibly high between the U.S and Russia. Both had the capability to destroy the other, and both nations lived in fear of an attack. But, by using sanctions, missile defense and nuclear deterrence, America was able to keep the Soviet Union at bay. Instead of lashing out, the U.S built up its defense systems and used defense and diplomacy to defuse the situation—at a time where a preemptive strike would have had tremendous consequences.

Diplomacy saves lives, and affirming the resolution costs lives. This is the reason for my third and final contention…

**Contention 3: Preservation Requires Rejection**

As we can see, affirming today’s resolution puts lives at risk. To save lives, reject preemptive warfare. When a government recklessly begins wars it needlessly puts lives at risk. History shows us that diplomacy saves lives, and that the protection of life is the foremost duty of a government. It is because the foundational right to life comes first that I ask you to negate today’s resolution. Thank you.

Opposing This Case

There are a couple things you can do to destabilize the foundations of this case:

1. Go real world. Let’s face it, not every problem can be solved peacefully. War is sometimes necessary and very effective. Point that out. In the examples negative may use, peace worked out. However, that’s usually not how the world works. Bringing some examples/cold hard facts of where conflict was unavoidable is the best way to combat this case.
2. Use the value of life to your advantage. Focus, as stated before, on examples of where war/conflict saved lives, and where sitting around talking would have done nothing. you have to be the realist in this situation.

Above all, make sure to go example-heavy. The negative is going to sound like a pacifist, peace-loving hippie. You have to be the one who points out the gritty reality. Philosophy of war is great, but examples win debate rounds. Focus on those examples and you should be good to go.

1. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/preemptive+attack> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lazar, Seth, "War", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/war/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Just War Theory” by St. Augustine and revised by St. Thomas Aquinas. <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/~jasingle/justwar.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)