Peace  
Negative Case by Naomi Mathew



Not a huge fan of economics? Then this case is for you. It avoids looking at the resolution through an economic lens and instead considers the international political implications of fair trade versus free trade. The main argument is that when governments prioritize free trade over fair trade, it leads to more peaceful international relations. This is why the value this case argues for is peace. Peace is the ultimate, foundational value that governments have a duty to promote. Defending this value is critical since both contentions and all the applications center around promoting international peace.

Instead of attacking the idea of fair trade, this case attacks the results of government involvement and enforcement of fair trade. Government restrictions on trade inevitably lead to political tensions that make war more likely to happen. On the other hand, free trade, connects countries. When countries across the world are allowed to exchange goods freely, everyone benefits. These beneficial partnerships create strong bonds between countries, which in turn bring about a more peaceful world.

Some of the most entertaining parts of the case are the applications. The applications include studies done using the “ultimatum game” that show free trade makes societies more selfless and cooperative. An analogy of tariff retaliation is used to illustrate that government control/restriction of trade creates hostility. In addition, a study using data spanning 40 years from every country worldwide empirically proves that free trade makes a country more peaceful.

This case generally stays away from economic arguments. However, it would be wise to have evidence with you that free trade promotes prosperity, if only to rebut the affirmative arguments. The affirmative might argue that peace is unachievable and that there are other ways to promote international peace. The responses are simple: world peace may never be fully achieved, but when governments can promote it they should. And even if there are other ways to promote peace, free trade is the way that has been empirically proven to work.

Peace

A group of economists invented something called the “ultimatum game.” In it, a person is offered an amount of money to split however they deem fit with a second player. What’s the catch? If the second player rejects the offer, neither person receives anything.

Social scientists use this game to measure selfishness of across cultures. For example, when playing this game, those in the Peruvian Machiguenga tribe behaved selfishly, sharing very little with the second player. Meanwhile, the nearby Achuar in Ecuador were extremely generous and offered almost half their winnings to the second player. Why is this? Matt Ridley, writing for the Foundation for Economic Education, explains:

"The Machiguenga are largely isolated from the world of markets and commerce. The Achuar are used to buying and selling to and from strangers at markets. The same pattern emerges throughout 15 small-state societies all over the world, in a fascinating study done by the Harvard anthropologist Joe Henrich and his colleagues. The more integrated into the commercial world people are, the more generous they are. As one of the authors, the economist Herb Gintis, summarises the results: “Societies that use markets extensively develop a culture of cooperation, fairness, and respect for the individual.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

As this example illustrates, free trade doesn’t just have economic benefits. It improves society as a whole. This is why I stand **Resolved: When in conflict, governments should not value fair trade above free trade**.

# Definitions

Let’s define some key terms:

Merriam Webster’s Dictionary defines **Fair Trade** as:

“a movement whose goal is to help producers in developing countries to get a fair price for their products so as to reduce poverty, provide for the ethical treatment of workers and farmers, and promote environmentally sustainable practices.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

The same source defines **Free Trade** as:

“trade based on the unrestricted international exchange of goods with tariffs used only as a source of revenue.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Essentially, fair trade means a government can place restrictions on trade to promote fairness, while free trade means people and countries can trade without government intervention.

# The Value

I propose the value, or standard, of **peace**. Dictionary.com defines peace as:

“the normal, nonwarring condition of a nation, group of nations, or the world.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Why is Peace important?

## Value Link: Foundational value

We see international peace as the default, and countries go to extreme lengths to promote peace. This is because war makes life difficult for civilians and causes extreme human suffering. It’s practically impossible for a government to to promote values like human rights and prosperity unless they first have peace. Because of this, governments have a duty to promote peace. Let’s explore this more in:

# Contention 1: Fair Trade Hurts Peace

The main issue with fair trade is that each government decides what is “fair.” What fair prices and ethical treatment look like will vary from government to government. To enforce their nebulous “fair trade standards,” governments must use force to stop trades that they deem “unfair.” Threats of sanctions and tariffs come into play and break the bonds created by unrestricted trade. Julian Adorney gives an example:

Third, protectionism promotes hostility. This is why free trade, not just aggregate trade (which could be accompanied by high tariffs and quotas), leads to peace. If the United States imposes a tariff on Japanese automobiles, that tariff hurts Japanese businesses. It creates hostility in Japan toward the United States. Japan might even retaliate with a tariff on U.S. steel, hurting U.S. steel makers and angering our government, which would retaliate with another tariff. Both countries now have an excuse to leverage nationalist feelings to gain support at home; that makes outright war with the other country an easier sell, should it come to that.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Fair trade separates countries and makes war more likely. Thankfully, there is an alternative:

# Contention 2: Free Trade Promotes Peace

As the ultimatum games shows, free trade connects people and makes them less selfish. Why is this? Well, something to keep in mind about trade is that both sides always come out a winner: If you didn’t benefit from buying something, you wouldn’t have bought it. And if a seller didn’t benefit from selling something, they wouldn’t have sold it. After a trade happens, both sides are always better off than when they started. Nobel Prize winning economist Milton Friedman said it this way:

“The most important single central fact about a free market is that no exchange takes place unless both parties benefit.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

This mutual benefit fosters goodwill between countries and makes them less likely to go to war with each other.

History supports the idea that free trade leads to a more peaceful world. Professor Patrick J. McDonald used data from every country in the world between 1960 and 2000, and empirically examined whether free trade improved international relations. Even when controlling for differing economies and political structures, he found that free trade and conflict were negatively related. Promoting free trade was shown to be twice as effective as democracy in promoting peace. [[7]](#footnote-7) The more freedom to trade a country has, the less likely it is to go to war. As English political reformer Richard Cobden said,

“Free trade is God’s diplomacy and there is no other certain way of uniting people in the bonds of peace.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Please side with free trade, the side that has been empirically proven to lead to a more peaceful world.

Opposing This Case

# Value

Worldwide peace is a utopian fantasy, or at least very, very unlikely to happen. You can argue that this unrealistic value shouldn’t come at the expense of more concrete, realistic values (like your value, potentially).

Point out that sometimes it’s necessary to sacrifice peace for more important goals. Most reasonable people would agree that stopping human rights violations (think examples like the Cambodian genocide or the Holocaust) is worth threatening our relationships with the countries responsible for them. Arguably, treating workers fairly and giving them basic rights should be more important than maintaining peace with other countries at all costs. While it’s generally a good thing, Peace isn’t the most important value.

# Contentions

First of all, fair trade isn’t synonymous with protectionism/isolationism, and do not let the negative speaker portray them as synonymous. Even if governments require some fair-trade regulations, countries aren’t likely to refuse all trade. Trade still occurs under fair trade, so peace can still be promoted.

Free trade isn’t the only tool governments can use to promote peace. Diplomacy, foreign policy, international aid, etc. can all be used to create goodwill between countries. This has two impacts: first, valuing free trade will not automatically lead to peace. The world isn’t that simple, and other crucial factors have large effects (potentially larger effects than free trade) on world peace. The second impact is that limiting free trade for the sake of fair trade is fine. Even without free trade, other methods of promoting peace still exist.

1. Matt Ridley. The Foundation for Economic Education, October 14, 2017. “Free Trade Makes People Nicer” <https://fee.org/articles/free-trade-makes-people-nicer/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Merriam-Webster, “fair-trade” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fair-trade> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Merriam-Webster, “free trade” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/free%20trade> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Dictionary.com, “peace” <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/peace> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Julian Adorney. The Foundation for Economic Education, October 15, 2013. “Want Peace? Promote Free Trade” <https://fee.org/articles/want-peace-promote-free-trade/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Milton Friedman. Brainyquote. “Milton Friedman Quotes” <https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/milton_friedman_173375> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Julian Adorney. The Foundation for Economic Education, October 15, 2013. “Want Peace? Promote Free Trade” <https://fee.org/articles/want-peace-promote-free-trade/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Matt Ridley. The Foundation for Economic Education, October 14, 2017. “Free Trade Makes People Nicer” <https://fee.org/articles/free-trade-makes-people-nicer/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)