Life  
Affirmative Case by Alisa Stringer



This case focuses on how a nation’s leaders should behave in times of potential crisis. It assumes that leaders have a special moral obligation to put their citizens lives above the comfort they may feel if they were to avoid difficult moral quandaries. Officials should have the fortitude required to make tough decisions when lives are on the line.

It is essential that debaters distinguish between individuals acting in their own interest and leaders acting for nations. If negative debaters attempt to compare preventive war to any sort of individual action, affirmatives should redirect the judge’s attention. The resolution is not about an individual’s moral prerogative. It is about what nation’s will do to protect their people. This case is grounded in the arguments presented by military leaders when they have been put in impossible moral dilemmas. In war, nations cannot afford to be nice. Countries must do what they can to minimize damage. If that includes preventive warfare, so be it.

The evidence for this case is drawn from modern history. While historical analysis has its place in Lincoln-Douglas debate, warfare has changed significantly in the twentieth century. As war itself has changed, nations have been forced to adapt tactics in order to survive. Because this case is focused on practicality, it only addresses recent and modern warfare. Affirmative debaters should be ready to address the scope of this case if necessary.

Debaters should also be prepared to discuss whether any military tactic that is effective should be considered moral. Negatives may want to argue that effectiveness is no scale of morality. Affirmatives should consider what it is that preventive warfare is effective at accomplishing. Practicality is an important consideration in any war, but practicality alone does not justify an action.

Preventive warfare can seem a cold option to judges when they are first introduced to it. It is the affirmative debater’s job to prove that preventive war is a practical and effective means of saving lives. Debaters need to remind judges that all war is cruel and when we naively believe that all conflict is avoidable, we do more harm than good.

Life

In the modern world, citizens are constantly criticizing their governments for their lack of initiative. If a refugee crisis begins, the country should have put clearer guidelines in place. If an economic downturn occurs, the nation’s leaders should have been prepared. If a shooting happens, the nation should have figured out how to stop gun violence before the tragedy. A good government does not simply put fire out as they occur; they anticipate problems and act before their people are hurt. A good government recognizes that it is their job to not only retaliate when attacked, but also to address threats that plague their citizens. They recognize that “Preventive warfare is ethical.”

# Framework

## Definitions

The Oxford English Dictionary defines warfare as,

“the action of carrying on, or engaging in, war.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

They go on to describe a preventive war as,

“a war initiated by one state, faction, etc., in anticipation of (suspected) hostile intentions on the part of another.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Furthermore, Oxford describes an action as ethical when the action,

“conforms to moral principles or ethics.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

# Value: Life

Even in war, the goal is to preserve life as much as possible. Life is inherently valuable, and it is right and ethical to protect people as much as possible. That being said, we preserve life most effectively through the criterion of strategic intervention.

## Criterion: Strategic Intervention

From the Persian Wars, through the Great War, and to the current Syrian Civil War, war is an unfortunate reality of our world. While we may wish for absolute peace, we cannot afford the cost of naivety. Therefore, our goal should be to minimize loss of life by using the most effective methods of warfare at our disposal. We should engage in strategic attacks, rather than using the blunt trench style warfare that resulted in the mass casualties seen in the first world war. Both sides of this debate should recognize that we cannot save everyone, but we ought to protect as many people as we can.

# Contention 1: Preventive Warfare Minimizes Collateral

The goal of preventive warfare is to strike before you can be struck. In doing so nations are able to protect the lives of their own citizens and to minimize the destructive impact of a strike. In traditional wars, citizens lives are lost in times when the wars move beyond strictly military positions. Preventive warfare involves striking military targets to ensure that military threats do not have the opportunity to arm themselves and move the battle to an area or more people would be hurt. Preventive warfare seeks to minimize the damage to both sides of a conflict.

## Application: Nuclear Security Threats

There was a time when a single weapon could only cause destruction to its immediate surroundings. Wars were fought on battlefields, and their horrors were contained on those grounds. That is not the world that we live in today. Instead, we face a world where a single weapon can wipe out entire cities and destroy the remaining land for generations. This fact has increased the cost of inaction to an unacceptable price. For that reason, President Eisenhower considered preventive action justified when faced with the threat of nuclear attack. As he wrote in a “Memorandum by the President to the Secretary of State,”

“In such circumstances, we would be forced to consider whether or not our duty to future generations did not require us to initiate war at the most propitious moment that we could designate.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

In other words, preventive action is not only acceptable, but is in fact the moral duty of a leader when the survival of their country is on the line.

# Contention 2: Avoiding Preventive Warfare is Too Costly

When nations choose to avoid the tactic of prevention, they may initially appear more responsible. But in the long run, nations who avoid preventive war have only themselves to blame when well-armed enemies appear at their borders.

## Application: German Rearmament in 1935

At the close of World War 1, Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles. In articles 159 through 213, the treaty severely restricted Germany’s military size and strength.[[5]](#footnote-5) However, after a short period of time, Germany grew discontent with their situation. In 1935, Germany blatantly violated the treaty by announcing a large-scale rearmament project.[[6]](#footnote-6) This move was largely ignored by the international community, despite the threat produced. The nations at the time believed that verbal reproof would be a sufficient response. Given the subsequent invasion of Poland and the widespread destruction that followed, they were wrong. We ought to learn from their mistakes.

# Conclusion

In his book on World War II, The Gathering Storm, Winston Churchill named the theme of his volume to be

“How the English-speaking peoples through their unwisdom, carelessness, and good nature allowed the wicked to rearm.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

We cannot afford the cost of inaction. When the lives of our citizen are on the line, nations must concede that preventive warfare is an ethical option.

Opposition Brief: Life

# Nuclear Security Threats

# Preventive War Leads to Retaliation

*Lt. Col. Daniel L. Davis, USA, Ret. "A 'preventive strike' against North Korea would trigger 'nuclear retaliation.'" CNBC, 30 Nov. 2017, www.cnbc.com/2017/11/30/preventive-strike-on-north-korea-would-trigger-nuclear-retaliation-lt-col-commentary.html. Accessed 3 July 2019*

On Tuesday, North Korea test fired what experts believe is its most advanced long range, nuclear-capable missile yet. In response, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) bluntly told CNN's that Trump will not allow North Korea to even possess a nuclear missile capable of hitting the U.S. ‘If we have to go to war to stop this we will,’ he said. ‘We're headed towards a war if things don't change.’ If Sen. Graham's binary choice accurately reflects the president's thinking, then war will come, and millions could die, including thousands of Americans. Such a war is too costly to seriously consider absent an imminent attack. It is difficult to overstate the negative consequences that would result should President Trump order any type of "preventive" military strike—that is, an attack to deprive them of a capability rather than to stop an actual, imminent launch—against North Korea. Choe Kang-il, Deputy Director General for North American affairs at North Korea's foreign ministry recently told the New York Times, ‘If the United States even hints at a strike on North Korea, we will proceed with a preemptive attack on the U.S.’

# Preventive War Ensures Bloodshed

Denmark, Abraham M. "The Myth of the Limited Strike on North Korea: Any U.S. Attack Would Risk a War." Foreign Affairs, 9 Jan. 2018, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2018-01-09/myth-limited-strike-north-korea. Accessed 3 July 2019.

Faced with the rapid advance of Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile capabilities, Americans have begun to debate the possibility of a limited, preventive U.S. strike against North Korea—one that could deter the regime from further testing while avoiding a full-blown war. One possibility is a so-called bloody nose strike, which would involve destroying a North Korean missile launch site (bloodying the regime’s nose, as it were) in order to demonstrate the United States’ resolve. Some have gone even further, calling for “air and missile strike[s] against all known DPRK nuclear test facilities and missile launching and support facilities” in the event of a North Korean atmospheric nuclear test over the Pacific Ocean. The goal of a limited strike would be fairly straightforward: demonstrate to Pyongyang that it cannot continue conducting tests without risking a U.S. response. Crucially, proponents of such a strike assume that the United States’ own massive conventional and nuclear capabilities could deter North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un from retaliating, as such an escalation would risk his own destruction. Advocates for a limited strike also tend to argue that, by assuring Pyongyang that the United States does not seek regime change but will never accept a nuclear North Korea, Washington can convince Kim that negotiations are the only viable way forward. It is unlikely, however, that a strike would work as planned. It would have no guarantee of successfully destroying North Korean capabilities, and Kim may well feel compelled to respond to even a limited attack. Any strike would thus risk igniting a full-blown war on the Korean Peninsula that would endanger millions of lives and ultimately diminish U.S. power and influence in the Asia-Pacific.

Preventive War Threatens Citizens Lives

Mazzetti, Mark, and Thomas Shanker. "U.S. War Game Sees Perils of Israeli Strike against Iran." New York Times, 12 Mar. 2012, [www.nytimes.com/2012/03/20/world/middleeast/united-states-war-game-sees-dire-results-of-an-israeli-attack-on-iran.html?searchResultPosition=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/20/world/middleeast/united-states-war-game-sees-dire-results-of-an-israeli-attack-on-iran.html?searchResultPosition=1). Accessed 3 July 2019.

A classified war simulation held this month to assess the repercussions of an Israeli attack on Iran forecasts that the strike would lead to a wider regional war, which could draw in the United States and leave hundreds of Americans dead, according to American officials. The officials said the so-called war game was not designed as a rehearsal for American military action — and they emphasized that the exercise’s results were not the only possible outcome of a real-world conflict. But the game has raised fears among top American planners that it may be impossible to preclude American involvement in any escalating confrontation with Iran, the officials said. In the debate among policy makers over the consequences of any Israeli attack, that reaction may give stronger voice to those in the White House, Pentagon and intelligence community who have warned that a strike could prove perilous for the United States. The results of the war game were particularly troubling to Gen. James N. Mattis, who commands all American forces in the Middle East, Persian Gulf and Southwest Asia, according to officials who either participated in the Central Command exercise or who were briefed on the results and spoke on condition of anonymity because of its classified nature. When the exercise had concluded earlier this month, according to the officials, General Mattis told aides that an Israeli first strike would be likely to have dire consequences across the region and for United States forces there.

Eisenhower Rejected Preventive War for Good Reason

Holloway, D. (2010). Nuclear weapons and the escalation of the Cold War, 1945–1962. In M. Leffler & O. Westad (Eds.), The Cambridge History of the Cold War (The Cambridge History of the Cold War, pp. 376-397). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521837194.019

Nuclear deterrence was now the organizing principle of US national security policy. Eisenhower rejected the idea of preventive war against the Soviet Union, which seemed to some senior officers to be a realistic option in the early 1950s; “there are all sorts of reasons, moral and political and everything else, against this theory,” he told a press conference in 1954. He speeded up the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), as well as reconnaissance satellites. He deployed tactical nuclear weapons to Europe and other theaters. The basic Cold War structure of US nuclear forces took shape during his presidency.

# German Rearmament

Intelligence, Not War, was Needed

Gordon, Brian J. "Long-Term Deception: The Rearmament of the German Air Force, 1919–39." Central Intelligence Agency, Mar. 2018, www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol-62-no-1/strategic-deception.html. Accessed 3 July 2019.

In March 1935, British and German officials scheduled a meeting of Adolf Hitler with several members of the British cabinet to discuss London’s continuing apprehension over German rearmament. Though Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin had assured his government and the public that the arms restrictions imposed after World War I provided Britain an advantage in aerial capability over Germany, British concerns had exponentially grown as Hitler’s foreign policy became increasingly belligerent. The meeting never took place. The release of a British Foreign Office white paper critical of German policies prompted Hitler to cancel, using the pretext that he had a cold. Shortly thereafter, the German government announced not only that military conscription in Germany had been reinstituted, but that it had rebuilt a functioning and powerful air capability superior to the Royal Air Force.1 How could the Germans have built up an effective air force seemingly under the nose of the British Empire so quickly and so quietly? The answer, apparent in hindsight, was that Germany had not. Germany’s airpower was neither as curtailed as chancellors of the Weimar Republic claimed in the 1920s nor as formidable as Hitler bragged in 1935. That both claims were plausible can be attributed to policies of deception pursued by successive German governments, beginning immediately after the signing of the Versailles Treaty in 1919 and into the Nazi regime. Frequent public expression of British fears of growing German airpower had revealed to Berlin the vulnerability of its former enemies to such deception.

Preventive War Could Have Been Worse

Laber, Jerrod A. "The Temptation for Preventative War Just Won't Go Away." The American Conservative, 9 Jan. 2019, [www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-temptation-for-preventative-war-just-wont-go-away/](http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/the-temptation-for-preventative-war-just-wont-go-away/). Accessed 3 July 2019.

This same logic applies to the 1930s and Great Britain’s reaction to a rising Nazi Germany. It’s very easy to sit in 1948, 1968, or 2018, and judge London’s actions with the clear vision of hindsight. But in 1936, the British government was forced to ask itself the hard question of how to successfully contain German aggression while creating lasting conditions for peace. They feared preventive war would only make things worse. “They were constrained by the preventive war paradox—the notion that victory on the battlefield would not deliver strategic success and truly neutralize the German threat,” Silverstone writes. Instead, they worried that “short-term victory would simply fire up the desire for revenge, adding to the pent-up frustrations that were already pushing Germany to change the terms of Versailles.” Confronting Germany in the Rhineland would “sow the dragon’s teeth of spiraling conflict and lead to the Armageddon they all wanted to avoid.” Instead of blind fools embarking on a suicide mission, Silverstone shows that Britain in the mid-1930s was in the midst of a complicated debate over the proper way to respond to Nazi Germany, recognizing that there was no silver bullet and preventive war could very well backfire and make things worse. True peace and security requires political solutions, not merely dominating your rival on the battlefield. The ingredients for a lasting political solution were not present.

Hindsight is 20/20

Bennett, Edward W. German Rearmament and the West, 1932-1933. Princeton University Press, 1979. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x1c3w](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x1c3w).

In early 1932, at the beginning of the Disarmament Conference, the impression was widespread in Britain and America that Germany had learned from its defeat in 1918, that the country had a moderate, responsible government, and that in military affairs, the Germans now wanted only the disarmament of others, for the sake of their own security. Germans did not want war, and they had no significant military power; thus there was no need to think of trying to balance German military power. If anything, it was French power that needed to be reduced.

Preventive War Creates More Problems Than It Solves

Levy, Jack S., Ripsman Norrin M. “British Grand Strategy and the Rise of Germany, 1933-1936.” The Challenge of Grand Strategy: the Great Powers and the Broken Balance between the World Wars, ed. By Jeffery W. Taliaferro, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Steven E. Lobell. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. 176-177

Our argument is that the British government was quite concerned about the appreciation of German power and German rearmament. Nonetheless, British leaders give little consideration to the possibility of preventive war, primarily because the British military assessments consistently asserted that Great Britain would not be ready for war for several years. On the few occasions when the issue of preventive war did arise, it was in the context of the possibility of a French preventive war to block the rise of German power, which British political and military leaders made every effort to discourage. They questioned whether such a war could succeed without creating a host of other problems. They also feared that such a war would prove very costly for Britain if it were forced to intervene to defend France, especially given the fragile state of the British economy, the general unpreparedness of the British military, the problems that a European War would create for the defense of the Empire, the possibility that such a war would lead to Bolshevism in Germany, and to a lesser extent, the war-weary public's preference for a negotiated solution. British leaders hoped, therefore, to avoid war and forestall the threatening growth of German power through disarmament negotiations, keeping a military response in a few years time as an option of last resort.

# Strategic Intervention

Future Attacks are not Inevitable (but deaths from preventive strikes are)

Thielmann, Greg. "Intelligence in Preventive Military Strategic." Matthew B. Ridgway Center for International Security Studies, U of Pittsburgh, [www.ridgway.pitt.edu/Portals/1/pdfs/Publications/Theilmann.pdf](http://www.ridgway.pitt.edu/Portals/1/pdfs/Publications/Theilmann.pdf). Accessed 5 July 2019. The Matthew B. Ridgway Center for International Security Studies at the University of Pittsburgh is dedicated to producing original and impartial analysis that informs policymakers who must confront diverse challenges to international and human security.

The detection of Soviet efforts to deploy nuclear-tipped missiles to Cuba in 1962 was the most conspicuous post-WWII triumph of the intelligence warning function. But even in its most triumphant manifestation, the limits of intelligence can be perceived. The reading of intentions in Moscow and Washington was done through a glass darkly. U.S. intelligence did not receive timely information when 3 the Soviet and Cuban governments decided on the deployments; it only detected the deployments once they were underway. Moreover, intense U.S. scrutiny of the island during the crisis missed entirely the nuclear capability of Soviet tactical missiles deployed there. One of the most serious limitations on confidently predicting hostile action by another state is that governmental leaders themselves may not know their mind or may not be in complete control of events. We are now well aware of how much trouble Washington was having discerning Soviet intentions during the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis. That Moscow was having similar difficulty assessing whether the Kennedy administration intended to invade Cuba was at least partly a consequence of mixed signals being sent by a government, which had not yet decided itself what its course of action would be. Both Kennedy and Khrushchev had concerns about provocative military actions being taken without their specific authorizations.7 The world is indeed fortunate that the United States chose a naval quarantine and diplomacy rather than a preventive attack. The Cuban Missile Crisis should stand as “Exhibit A” in making the case that intelligence will be insufficient to justify attacking first.

Preventive Warfare Backfires

Agnes Wilcox December18th 2012 Agnes Wilcox is the artistic director of [Prison Performing Arts](http://www.prisonartsstl.org/) in St. Louis, Mo. <https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/12/18/prison-could-be-productive/prison-theater-transforms-inmates?module=ArrowsNav&contentCollection=undefined&action=keypress&region=FixedLeft&pgtype=undefined>

By demonstrating Iraq’s vulnerability, the attack on Osirak actually increased Hussein’s determination to develop a nuclear deterrent and provided Iraq’s scientists an opportunity to better organize the program. The Iraqi leader devoted significantly more resources toward pursuing nuclear weapons after the Israeli assault. As Reiter notes, “the Iraqi nuclear program increased from a program of 400 scientists and $400 million to one of 7,000 scientists and $10 billion.” Iraq’s nuclear efforts also went underground. Hussein allowed the IAEA to verify Osirak’s destruction, but then he shifted from a plutonium strategy to a more dispersed and ambitious uranium-enrichment strategy. This approach relied on undeclared sites, away from the prying eyes of inspectors, and aimed to develop local technology and expertise to reduce the reliance on foreign suppliers of sensitive technologies. When inspectors finally gained access after the 1991 Persian Gulf War, they were shocked by the extent of Iraq’s nuclear infrastructure and how close Hussein had gotten to a bomb. Ultimately, Israel’s 1981 raid didn’t end Iraq’s drive to develop nuclear weapons. It took the destruction of the Gulf War, followed by more than a decade of sanctions, containment, inspections, no-fly zones and periodic bombing — not to mention the 2003 U.S. invasion — to eliminate the program. The international community got lucky: Had Hussein not been dumb enough to invade Kuwait in 1990, he probably would have gotten the bomb sometime by the mid-1990s.

1. "warfare, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, June 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/225718. Accessed 1 July 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "preventive, adj. and n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, June 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/151085. Accessed 1 July 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. "ethical, adj. and n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, June 2019, www.oed.com/view/Entry/64756. Accessed 1 July 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. "Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume II, Part 1, Memorandum by the President to the Secretary of State." Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, United States Department of State, history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p1/d89. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Peace Treaty of Versailles Articles 159-213: Military, Naval and Air Clauses” Brigham Young University. 11 Nov. 1998. https://net.lib.byu.edu/~rdh7/wwi/versa/versa4.html [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Lindsay, James M. "Lessons Learned: Hitler's Rearmament of Germany." Council on Foreign Relations, 13 Mar. 2012, www.cfr.org/explainer-video/lessons-learned-hitlers-rearmament-germany. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Churchill, Winston. *The Gathering Storm.* Boston, Published in association with the Cooperation Pub. Co. [by] Houghton Mifflin, 1948. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)