

POLICY DEBATE: Synopsis of the Problem Areas for 2019-2020

From the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

Coaches and students, you're invited to discuss these topics in-depth before casting your vote online by October 15. See page 32 for details!

I

PROBLEM AREA I: ARMS SALES

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reduce Direct Commercial Sales and/or Foreign Military Sales of arms from the United States.

In the movie *Iron Man*, upon his triumphant return to the United States, arms dealer Tony Stark reflects upon the world his products helped shape:

"I saw young Americans killed by the very weapons I created to defend them and protect them. And I saw that I had become part of a system that is comfortable with zero-accountability...I had my eyes opened. I came to realize that I had more to offer this world than just making things that blow up. And that is why, effective immediately, I am shutting down the weapons manufacturing division of Stark Industries."

Just as Tony Stark faced his day of reckoning, the United States is on the verge of facing a similar fate. President Trump is actively increasing the number of arms contracts offered and authorized by the United States. One must ask whether arms sales make us safer and strengthen our economy, or create blowback which increases terrorism or fuels conflicts in a variety of regions across the globe. Direct Commercial Sales affirmatives would limit the number or type of sales by American companies to foreign militaries. These affirmatives could prohibit the sale of drone technology, reduce small arms sold to nations like Saudi Arabia which are used to perpetrate human rights abuses, or strengthen export controls to prevent future resale of our technology. Foreign Military Sales affirmatives would reduce sales by the Departments of State or Defense to foreign militaries. These affirmatives could prohibit sales of F-35s to Israel which are used for

bombing raids, prevent Japanese acquisition of Tomahawk missiles which would provoke China or North Korea, or prevent sales to Qatar which may give U.S. munitions to terrorist organizations. Affirmatives addressing either type of sales could net advantages such as: terrorism, proliferation, human rights credibility, hegemony, and increasing stability in the world's most volatile regions. Negative teams will have access to alliance-based disadvantages highlighting the need for arms sales to create commonly equipped militaries, defending arms sales as a credible deterrent to prevent conflicts, acknowledging the economic impact of reducing the role of one of the largest economic sectors, or arguing countries like Russia or China would fill in and negate solvency. The only constant element of President Trump's foreign policy is to increase arms sold by the United States, which makes the literature base broad and accessible. We have not embraced the opportunity to debate arms sales since 1983, and the time to rekindle this debate is now.

II

PROBLEM AREA II: INDIA

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its development and/or military assistance to the Republic of India.

India has the second largest population in the world yet has never been the primary focus of a Policy Debate resolution. India is a country on the cusp of becoming a global power but is held back by its growing population and regional competitors. India's densely packed urban populations face environmental problems, and resource distribution challenges the nation. The rural areas struggle

with poverty, famine, and lack of access to education, healthcare, and the internet. While gaining military strength, India faces many challenges: terrorist groups, sabre rattling with Pakistan, competition with China, and cybersecurity. Development and/or military assistance could ameliorate these problems by increasing poverty aid, sharing clean energy expertise, expanding access to healthcare services, engaging in joint military training exercises, or sharing counter-terrorism intelligence. Negative counterplan strategies could include alternative modes of financing and disadvantages to the topic mechanism (Dutch Disease, Rent-Seeking). Military assistance would provide support to India but also creates negative ground about encroaching on spheres of influence and the consequences of international military engagements. Prime Minister Modi seems willing to work with President Trump, but it is yet to be seen how America will approach the relationship. Affirmatives would be forced to clash with the current foreign policy ideology of “America First,” which magnifies links to disadvantages about political flip-flops. Additionally, India’s government must decide whether to deal with a controversial Trump administration ahead of their own important elections. Critical arguments about the efficacy of development assistance create important debates regarding America’s role in the world, and how we should approach international engagement. Military assistance creates debates over the United States military-industrial-complex that have been a historically rich area of investigation.

bring stability to the region and further the U.S.’s goals of helping Iranians, but affirmatives will have to accept working with a government that is openly hostile to U.S. power. Syria is in the midst of a civil war that threatens great power conflict. Previous regimes have chosen to work with local opposition groups rather than Al Assad’s government, and the current regime seems to have no clear policy regarding how it wants to engage with this critical nation. Affirmatives can argue that stabilizing Syria is key to stopping the refugee crisis, human rights abuses, and ISIS. While engaging these nations may solve major issues, there are plenty of detractors from working with these three nations. From Bashar Al Assaad’s human rights violations, Iran’s hegemonic encroachment in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia’s tendency to overlook terrorism within its borders, these nations offer excellent case debate about whether to engage or shun. Possible affirmative cases include: protecting women’s rights in one or more of the countries, pursuing diplomatic solutions to conflicts, or attempting to engage economically. Negatives can focus on the problems associated with the United States attempting to help countries in the Middle East. Negatives also have a wealth of process CPs, relations DAs, and kritikal arguments to challenge the standing of any affirmative. This topic would give novice debaters the ability to correct misconceptions about the region while also giving them the opportunity to learn the activity on an easily accessible topic. While we have debated these countries as impact scenarios on other resolutions, we haven’t approached this region as a topic area.

III

PROBLEM AREA III: MIDDLE EAST

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its constructive engagement with one or more of the following: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria.

While the Middle East is comprised of a number of countries, it is important that we limit the scope to these three. Saudi Arabia, an ally in name, is participating in the destabilization of Yemen, has had a dubious record regarding terrorism within its borders, and a shameful record on women’s rights issues. But a strong relationship with Saudi Arabia may also be the key to peace in the Middle East. Iran seems to be inviting conflict by seeking to expand its sphere of influence: Engagement could

IV

PROBLEM AREA IV: NUCLEAR STRATEGY


Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially change its nuclear weapons strategy.

The debate over America’s nuclear weapons strategy is essential to our military and diplomatic relations throughout the world. This topic engages debaters on the timely question of: What should our nuclear weapons strategy be? President Trump expresses a strong preference for relying more heavily on the nuclear elements of our deterrent posture. His administration wastes no time in issuing a new Nuclear Posture Review that radically differs from his predecessors. Media coverage of Iran,

North Korea, and other countries showcase the wide interests and fears in a changing nuclear climate.

On the affirmative, debaters will find a variety of cases ranging from negotiating international nuclear arms control, declaring no first use, reducing the U.S. arsenal, reducing U.S. alert status, clarifying deterrence posture regarding non-nuclear attacks, clarifying U.S. deterrence/use posture in different regions such as Asia or the Middle East, or increasing U.S. commitment to nuclear treaties. “Change” is a word that has been absent from Policy resolutions for more than 20 years mostly because of the possibility of creating unlimited, bidirectional topics. The relative narrowness of the content area of this topic, focused on an established nuclear posture review, limits the affirmative to changing course from the existing strategy.

On the negative, debaters will find a variety of strategies from which to engage the affirmative and will enjoy core topic arguments that cover all facets of the topic. Specific disadvantages like deterrence and allied proliferation will cover every affirmative regardless of their direction and create vibrant link debates based on the literature on both sides. Specific counterplans would include consultation, condition/quid pro quo, doing a smaller change than the affirmative, excluding components of the strategy change, creating exceptions to the change, actions unrelated to changing the existing nuclear strategy, and taking actions outside the normal means. Specific critical arguments surrounding international relations, the evolution of nuclear weapons (testing, exclusion, securitization, etc.) and other critical approaches will provide plenty of negative approaches.

of the United States as an arbiter of international law. Since 1995, the U.S. has ratified only 10 treaties. Ratification of one or more of the treaties in this topic is widely regarded as a prerequisite toward regaining its standing as a defender of international law. Affirmatives on the topic could advocate unconditional ratification of any of the listed treaties or could alternatively advocate ratification with reservations excepting individual provisions. Paris Agreement affirmatives will focus on how the United States can address climate change at the national level. Implementation of the Paris Agreement could include affirmatives which focus on renewable portfolio standards, carbon taxes, cap-and-trade systems or favorable frameworks to increase alternative energy development. Rome Statute affirmatives could focus on why the U.S. should assist in choosing judges and prosecutors, how the ICC could limit drone strikes or other forms of unilateral military action, or how U.S. adherence to the ICC will effectively fight human rights violations. Trans-Pacific Partnership affirmatives could focus on the necessity of the Asia-Pivot strategy, the benefits of free trade on agriculture and alliances, and the U.S. economy. Finally, Law of the Sea affirmatives could focus on the benefits of freedom of navigation, security in the arctic, piracy, or conservation of our oceans. While there are only four treaties included in the topic, there are multiple ways to ratify (or accede to) and implement each one. Those options broaden what might seem a narrow topic. Affirmative cases could leverage the advantages specific to each treaty, and also hold critical and policy-based objections to American exceptionalism and unilateral action. A focused list of treaties allows negatives to develop a variety of strategies against each one to allow rigorous case debates. Counterplan options could include alternate actors and solvency mechanisms as well as reservations against particular provisions of the treaty. There is rich disadvantage ground in the areas of international relations, economic and political leadership, environmental impacts, and human rights. Critical positions arise from issues of American imperialism, exporting capitalist values, flaws in international law and securitization of the environment. 

V

PROBLEM AREA V: TREATIES

Resolved: The United States federal government should ratify or accede to, and implement, one or more of the following: Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, Trans-Pacific Partnership, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

In June 2018, the United States withdrew from the United Nations Human Rights Council to join Eritrea, Iran, and North Korea as the only nations who no longer participate in any of its meetings. This action reduced the credibility

Vote Online!

Students and one chapter advisor per school may vote online until October 15 at 4:00 p.m. CT. To access the link, visit www.speechanddebate.org/topics and follow the online ballot instructions. The two most preferred topic areas will be placed on a second online ballot in November.

NOTE: The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) handles selection of the annual Policy Debate topic where each state organization, the National Speech & Debate Association, the National Catholic Forensic League, and the National Debate Coaches Association all have voting privileges.