

## Synopsis of Problem Areas and Resolutions for 2027-2028

### PROBLEM AREA I: CHINA

***Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its negotiations toward an agreement with the People's Republic of China in one or more of the following areas: artificial intelligence governance, climate change, global health security, outer space.***

The U.S.-China relationship will define the careers of every student currently competing in high school policy debate. This topic asks whether the United States can substantially increase its negotiations with China toward agreements in specific high-stakes domains even amid strategic competition. Four topic areas are recommended: global health security, artificial intelligence governance, climate change, and space. Each has a clear departure from the status quo. U.S. withdrawal from the WHO eliminated bilateral pandemic preparedness infrastructure. The first U.S.-China AI dialogue produced no binding commitments. The Sunnylands climate working group is dormant following U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement. The Wolf Amendment prohibits most NASA-China collaboration by statute.

Affirmatives defend diplomatic initiatives that address these gaps directly. Negative teams challenge these efforts through relations impacts, technology leakage arguments, governance competition arguments, and the persistent question of Chinese good faith and compliance. This topic was last debated in 2016-2017 under a constructive engagement frame; the 2027-2028 topic asks the harder question of whether specific, meaningful negotiations or agreements are achievable amid active strategic rivalry. That is a new question that deserves a season.

### PROBLEM AREA II: EAST AND NORTHEAST AFRICA

***Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its economic and/or diplomatic engagement with one or more of the following: Arab Republic of Egypt, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Republic of South Sudan, Republic of Sudan, State of Libya.***

There has not been a high school topic that focused specifically on this group of nations from East and Northeast Africa, making them ripe for research and debate. The core question posed by this topic is whether US engagement is necessary or sufficient to address the challenges facing the region, and whether US engagement worsens the geopolitical situation there.

U.S. engagement in the region can involve facilitating peace talks, increasing trade, promoting democracy, and developing infrastructure. There is a range of core issues that offer accessibility for novices and depth and creativity for varsity debaters. These include Egypt-Ethiopia water tensions, Libya's oil resources, Sudan's public health environment, Ethiopia's democratic development, and South Sudan's famines. Negative teams will always have arguments regarding mission creep, the poor influence of the current U.S. government, and U.S. engagement forcing African dependence on Western nations. There is also a risk of backlash from influential powers in the region, such as China, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia.

The literature discussing this region is both accessible with simple Google searches and deep enough to promote nuanced debates. This topic will also encourage debaters to research non-U.S. sources to learn about global perspectives on the region. Further, all the topic's issues represent possible threats to the stability of both these countries and the broader region.

### **PROBLEM AREA III: LATIN AMERICA**

***Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its economic and/or diplomatic engagement with one or more of the following: Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Venezuela.***

In the aftermath of the removal of former Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro from power, President Trump's renewed interest in Latin America has made this the perfect time to revisit the region as a topic. Major changes to U.S. engagement with Latin America in the past decade have been shaped by mass migration, tariffs, and reduction in aid to Latin American countries. The willingness of Venezuela and Cuba to engage with the U.S., that was not possible before, is here now. This provides a unique opportunity for new and revitalized arguments to arise from debate about these countries.

The proposed resolution asks the affirmative to substantially increase economic and/or diplomatic engagement with one or more of the following: Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Venezuela. Students can access advantage arguments that include the removal of sanctions, trade and economic development, visa reform, energy and security cooperation, sustainable energy and environmental protection, cooperation on migration, and increasing foreign aid.

There is a stable literature base on the negative for sustaining the sphere of influence from regional powers such as China or Russia, political disadvantages to reforms, tradeoff disadvantages around direct spending and the foreign aid budget, and environmental disadvantages to non-renewable energy affirmatives. Counterplans around conditional engagement, international actors like the European Union, and consultation from other countries or actors are also possible under this topic. Finally, students have substantial access to kritikal arguments that call into question the motivation behind engagement with Latin American countries through critiques of capitalism, securitization, imperialism, and settler colonialism. This resolution provides students of all skill levels with the opportunity to learn more about our close neighbors while making for engaging debates in grounded literature bases across all six countries.

### **PROBLEM AREA IV: MILITARY PRESENCE**

***Resolved: The United States federal government should significantly reduce its military presence in the Gulf Arab States and/or Northeast Asia.***

U.S. forward military presence in Asia and the Middle East remains central to current controversies over assurance, deterrence, defense spending, and the future of the liberal

international order. One of the most powerful signals the United States sends to adversaries and allies is the physical basing of U.S. forces on foreign territory.

Although all international topics, for better or worse, become contests over who can best access internal links to American credibility and U.S. hegemony, one advantage of this topic is that it allows students to address these questions directly rather than through contrived internal-link chains that are unlikely to withstand scrutiny under the Trump administration. This topic is timely and durable because the United States is unlikely to eliminate its global military posture before the season begins, even if deployments shift.

Affirmative teams could argue that reducing the U.S. military presence in other countries would decrease escalation risks, reduce human rights and environmental harms, shift burdens to allies, or challenge militarism. Negative teams could defend deterrence, alliance reassurance, crisis response, humanitarian missions, and credibility while also advancing counterplans or critical objections. The topic has strong educational value because it gives students a concrete mechanism for debating international relations, alliances, domestic budget priorities, imperialism, deterrence theory, and the practical consequences of U.S. foreign policy.

#### **PROBLEM AREA V: NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL**

***Resolved: The United States federal government should negotiate and implement binding international nuclear arms control.***

Nuclear arms control is an urgent and durable topic for high school debate. Our students regularly debate nuclear war, but they do so based on unrealistic and contrived internal-link chains. This topic provides a direct entry point into this common discussion. The expiration of the New START in February 2026 ended the last remaining bilateral treaty limiting U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear forces. Russia, China, the United States, and other countries are modernizing their arsenals, while arms control institutions are weakening. As these dangers have grown, a substantial body of qualified literature has emerged advocating for and against new nuclear arms control agreements.

Affirmative teams could advocate for a New START successor, renewed inspections and data exchanges, limits on strategic or nonstrategic weapons, China-inclusive negotiations, test-ban commitments, or the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Negative teams could argue that arms control harms deterrence, damages allied assurance, is inferior to unilateral restraint or nonbinding diplomacy, or represents an outdated and unverifiable approach to nuclear peace. The topic is accessible to novices because the basic controversy is clear: treaties can reduce nuclear danger, but adversaries may cheat or refuse to cooperate. Should the U.S. choose to bind itself to a treaty when it cannot trust the other parties to comply? That question is simple and perfectly reflects the core controversy in the literature. The topic is also deep enough to support advanced debates about strategic stability, counting rules, verification technology, modernization, and multipolar competition. The result is a timely, educational, and balanced topic that gives students a direct way to debate one of the most important security questions in the world.