

Synopsis of Problem Areas and Resolutions for 2022-2023

PROBLEM AREA I: GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its support of multilateral greenhouse gas emission reduction regimes.

Climate change is a pressing global crisis that has the potential to dramatically change life on earth. Many of these risks, such as desertification in the Middle East and Africa and disparate health outcomes in urban America, can be seen today. Unfortunately, our students are already dealing with the consequences of these issues. A 2019 poll found that the prospect of devastating climate change is causing fear, anxiety and anger among a “solid majority” of American teenagers. The same Post-KFF poll found that Black and Hispanic teens expressed the strongest sense of urgency, because “they are more likely to live in vulnerable areas and less likely to be able to insulate themselves” from the drawbacks of the changing environment. There are a variety of people and groups with proposed solutions, ranging from de-growth of the industrial economy to more tech growth with energy efficient solutions. Some believe regulatory fixes similar to the Clean Air Act can solve the problem, while others think we may need to geo-engineer the earth itself. Although each solution is similar in that it attempts to address the problem of climate change, each comes with its own unique benefits and drawbacks.

This topic provides a fair division of affirmative and negative ground. On the affirmative, teams can use international regimes as a basis for affirmatives. Affs will require a command and control and top down approach to climate regulation. Negatives will have a variety of economic and political based disadvantages. Negative ground also includes unilateral counterplans and counterplans that focus on private sector solutions. Finally, there are a ton of relevant kritik arguments ranging from identity based arguments to arguments about neoliberalism.

Despite the importance of the climate change debate, fewer than half of K-12 teachers discuss the topic with their students. When it is discussed, it is most frequently taught in science classrooms, which, although important, misses the social, economic and political elements of the topic. This reality is reflected in national polling, which found that “the number of teenagers who say they are being taught in school how to mitigate climate change appears to be on the decline.” Thus, a debate topic focused on the contributing factors, harms and solutions to climate change has the potential to address a significant pedagogical gap in our nation’s educational system.

PROBLEM AREA II: GLOBAL GEO-POLITICAL CRISIS: EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its security cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in one or more of the following areas: artificial intelligence, biotechnology, cybersecurity.

Most Bond films open with 007 in the middle of some major crisis with the audience waiting for the opportunity of Q’s new technology to resolve the conflict. However, emerging technology like AI, biotechnology, and cybersecurity, can be easily created, intercepted, and used by the “enemy”. Clearly, the U.S. and its allies need to collaborate for the best solution. Possible case affirmatives would be creating a U.S.-NATO emerging technology investment fund; instituting a NATO treaty on autonomous weapons; increasing cooperation in biotechnology (e.g., on vaccine diplomacy, biofuels investment, or agricultural biotech cooperation); establishing a new U.S.-NATO infrastructure for thwarting and responding to cyber threats; banning offensive cyber operations; and forging U.S.-NATO partnerships with private technology companies to bolster the alliance’s leadership in emerging technologies. These emerging technologies are vulnerable to outside threats. The negative will have multiple strategies. These technologies create case specific disadvantages generating specific links and turns. Theoretical discussions of offensive and defensive cyber weapons, the effectiveness of deterrence, the role of the U.S. as a hegemon, and global politics will be

popular. Economic repercussions and interdependence of the global economy will be key. Negatives can argue alternative methods of engagement by using public/private non-military partnerships. Various perspectives on philosophically driven arguments will be intrinsic. The voices of the disenfranchised will be argued. A diverse set of arguments creates a level playing field for all students by debating emerging technologies. This topic affords students from across the nation in rural and urban areas from coast to coast, with ample research and provides scaffolded skills' development. The topic is broad, but the strength in it is the balance of affirmative and negative material. Debaters will gain experience in a well-rounded understanding of how emerging technologies are reshaping society, the advantages and disadvantages of different policy approaches, and how the issues surrounding emerging technologies will shape the global security agenda for decades to come. Students' knowledge of how crisis and opportunity work, with a collaborative approach to the solution, are essential skills for life.

PROBLEM AREA III: GLOBAL HEALTH SECURITY

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its international support for global health security against naturally occurring infectious disease.

Pandemics are becoming more dangerous and more common. Two of the deadliest pandemics in history have taken place within the lifetimes of current students. In July 2021, the biotechnology company Metabiota warned that there is a one in four chance of seeing a pandemic worse than COVID-19 within the next ten years. It is clear that the world was not prepared for COVID-19. A global response is critical; however, it is not at all obvious what should be done. A key aspect of the topic will be the global North's view that health strategies ought to focus on preventing diseases from spreading to the north, which further marginalizes the global South.

On the affirmative, teams can point to a wide range of problems with the world today: the introduction of novel zoonotic diseases crossing the animal/human boundaries, the international secrecy once a new disease is discovered, the lack of global coordination and access to effective medications for novel diseases, the uneven distribution of medical support and care between the global North and South and the tension between businesses and governments seeking profit for technology or vaccine creation. Possible affirmative cases include: adopting the "One Health" approach to Global Health Security, joining the international pandemic treaty, using USAID to build health infrastructure in nations with a high disease risk, expanding capacity for animal health activities, coordinating international response efforts, establishing international protocols for pandemic responses, coordinating public disease communication, or focusing on preventing and/or containing specific diseases.

Negative teams will be able to find topic-specific evidence for counterplans using other nations, international organizations, or non-governmental organizations as actors. Disadvantages will include arguments about countries targeted by the affirmative rejecting American assistance and other divisions between the global North and South, as well as antimicrobial resistance together with typical generics such as politics, economics, and spending. Critically-minded teams can run positions such as health securitization and medical populism as well as more traditional kritiks like biopower, neoliberalism, and cultural imperialism.

PROBLEM AREA IV: RUSSIA

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its diplomatic engagement with the Russian Federation on one or more of the following: the Arctic, cybersecurity, human rights.

It has become increasingly clear that the Kremlin poses a challenge to the United States. Moscow seeks to overturn the post-Cold War order, which it believes disadvantages Russian interests. The state of relations between the United States and the Russian Federation is an increasingly pressing issue for the Biden administration foreign policy agenda. The 2020 election caused a major shift in U.S./Russian relations as the Biden administration will need to find a balance between a return to

Cold War tensions versus active engagement with the Russian Federation. Declarations from Russian Federation President, Vladimir Putin, that he may soon step back from politics also adds to the timeliness of this topic. Cases dealing with the Arctic could focus on climate change, oil exploration, or military engagement. Cases dealing with cybersecurity could include election interference, hacking of government systems, or use of propaganda bots. Cases dealing with human rights could include diplomatic engagement on issues related to silencing democratic opposition in Russia or in the states of the former Soviet Socialist Republics or Russian treatment of minorities and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

There are strong negative links to the idea that a cooperative Russia and the U.S. would undermine economic trade relations. And a U.S./Russia plan could cause worsening relations with China, Iran, or other countries. Negative teams can also question the solvency of diplomatic engagement, given likely Russian opposition to Biden administration initiatives. Traditional generic arguments like politics, spending, and trade-off will expand the negative ground. Negative counterplans can argue that sanctions are preferable to diplomatic engagement or that relations with Russia can better be managed through consulting China, the UN or NATO, or that other international actors would do the job in a more efficient way. Critical ground can be found in hegemony, imperialism, neoliberalism, and militarism.

The debate community has not debated Russia for over 20 years. With the implications of a Russia that is positioning itself as a power in the world once again, it is time that U.S./Russian relations get discussed.

PROBLEM AREA V: TREATIES

Resolved: The United States federal government should consent to be bound by the entirety of one or more of the following:

- **Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty**
- **Convention on Biological Diversity**
- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women**
- **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.**

What should the role of the U.S. be abroad? What international commitments should the U.S. honor, why, and how? How does American exceptionalism guide U.S. policies? A treaties topic would have students engaging in these important questions of international relations. A treaties topic would allow students to differentiate research by interest because students can choose affirmative cases related to the personal interest students have; for example, a student interested in studying gender studies in college could read an affirmative to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, while still learning about treaties related to marine policy, the environment, and nuclear weapons on the negative. On the affirmative, ratification of one or more of the treaties in this topic is widely regarded as a prerequisite towards regaining its standing as a defender of international law. The idea of the affirmative ratifying entire treaties is key to a successful treaties topic because it provides a clear delineation of what arguments can be read on the affirmative and negative (i.e. affirmatives must ratify entire treaties, while negatives can choose to run a counterplan to ratify parts of treaties). There is a tremendous variety of advantage ground that affirmatives can claim, such as multilateralism, piracy, South China Sea conflict, or global warming. The way the topic is constructed, affirmatives can use a Congressional-Executive Agreement or the traditional treaty ratification procedure. This means there are multiple potential affirmatives with tremendous variety in advantages areas, which would allow students to cut new affirmatives late in the year. At the same time, the variety of advantage areas won't make prep impossible because many of these advantages, including multilateralism or hegemony, apply to multiple treaties. Considering the affirmative has the advantage of unlimited prep a more limited topic is appropriate to allow students to engage in deeper understandings of the inner workings of the treaties. On the negative, 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. Treaties is an innovative, exciting topic area that has never been explored by high school students. It's time to change that.