

SYNOPSIS OF PROBLEM AREAS AND RESOLUTIONS FOR 2014-2015

PROBLEM AREA I: OCEANS

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its non-military exploration and/or development of the Earth's oceans.

Oceans hold 99 percent of the space for Earth's living organisms; yet many experts argue humans know less about the world's oceans than outer space. This fact solidifies the topic as one which offers an opportunity to examine both U.S. and international law on matters related to the Earth's ocean resources. In early 2012, the National Ocean Council drafted an Implementation Plan to translate President Obama's National Policy for the Stewardship of the Ocean. The document indicates a readiness by the U.S. government to address oceanic exploration and development policies in the areas of marine planning, coastal communities, commercial fishing, agriculture and energy. Possible affirmative cases would include reducing overfishing, limiting ocean acidification, conducting disease research, restricting invasive species and decreasing ocean dumping. Other affirmatives could deal with changes in Arctic shipping routes or opportunities for oil and natural gas exploration. Negative positions can focus on international issues, especially with China or Russia, in regard to control of the Exclusive Economic Zone of oceans. Some negatives might take the route of environmental challenges or threats that development might encounter. Additionally, there is a wealth of negative information focusing on the burden additional exploration or development would place on the U.S. economy.

PROBLEM AREA II: INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase restrictions on the use of its military force to comply with one or more provisions of international humanitarian law.

International humanitarian law (IHL) is a set of rules which seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effects of armed conflict, protecting persons who are not or are no longer participating in hostilities and restricting the means and methods of warfare. IHL is not concerned with the reasons a nation uses military force, but instead assumes the presence of armed conflict and is therefore only concerned with humanizing conflict, balancing military necessities with the preservation of human dignity. Since the American Civil War, the United States has played an instrumental role in the development of IHL, offering the first modern codification of rules regulating battlefield conduct in 1863. 150 years later, the United States continues to be a leader in the development of IHL, but is increasingly the subject of criticism for violations of the law. Debates over the lawful use of unmanned aerial vehicles and systems ("drones"), the rules governing cyber operations, the deployment of autonomous weapons systems, and the scope of the battlefield dominate public discourse in the United States. With civilians accounting for 90% of casualties in modern armed conflicts and impunity for war crimes continuing to be a grave threat to peace, the need for greater adherence to IHL is clear. Examples of affirmatives include: prohibiting the use of particular military tactics or methods of warfare, regulating the use of emerging weapon systems, ratifying international treaties, and defining the geographic or temporal scope of the battlefield. The negative case ground is robust. Negative positions may focus on: the necessity of utilizing cutting edge military technology, address contemporary national security threats, the ability to project military power and the preservation of our military umbrella to protect allied nations, as well as the political and economic consequences of expanding limits on the use of force. This area is also uniquely suited for alternative agent counterplans, addressing the authority of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches to regulate the employment of military force abroad. Kritiks of militarism and the legal system would also be available the negative teams. As war and the tools to fight it continue to evolve, so too must our understanding of the limits on war. Where the appropriate balance is between military necessity and humanity is up for debate!

PROBLEM AREA III: MIDDLE EAST POLICY REFORM

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

The Middle East and North Africa is one of the most intriguing, dynamic, and volatile regions in the world. Russia and China are expanding their spheres of influence in the region and the U.S. is on the verge of being crowded out. The United States finds itself at a crossroads. The U.S. can continue down the path of hostile negotiations or slow disengagement, or we can reorient our policy to try to win some allies back in the region. As some countries in the region are tending towards reform and democracy and the US should engage while the opportunity is ripe. Countries, like Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Palestinian Authority, are calling for the United States to adopt the approach of constructive engagement, offering assistance in exchange for a change in policies, to foster more cooperation. Affirmatives could engage in debates on the peace process between Israel and Palestine, strategies to ease tensions between Iran and Israel, to consult the military of Egypt to ensure the rule of law is restored, or to attempt to improve human rights conditions in Saudi Arabia. Negatives have several unique areas for disadvantage ground looking at how a growing "non-military" influence in the region could encroach on our relations with our allies or enemies. Also, counterplan ground would include disengagement, only offering incentives, or more punitive measures instead of a carrot and stick approach, or questioning if the U.S. is the best agent of action. Finally, there is a wealth of literature that questions the success of a "constructive engagement" oriented strategy in a post-Apartheid world.

PROBLEM AREA IV: EXPORT CONTROL REFORM

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially strengthen its export controls on military and/or dual-use technology toward one or more of the following: China, Israel, Russia, Taiwan.

In an era where both domestic and international technology transfers are becoming necessary for a variety of reasons many continue to inquire if current export controls are adequate to protect U.S. technology from misuse by foreign powers. The U.S. faces many challenges in export control policy including threats from nations who illegally acquire technology. A fair division of ground exists in the literature base between those who want to prioritize security concerns and protect technology, and those who want to reduce export controls to stimulate growth in the technology sector. With this divide in mind, the topic offers debaters the opportunity to investigate a unique foreign policy tool, which has been only debated in small areas of past topics such as Russia, China, or arms sales. Affirmatives would have opportunities to investigate the role U.S. technology exports play in international terrorism, proliferation, security, and human rights issues. For example, they could strengthen controls on computers and microprocessors to China or Taiwan to prevent missile proliferation; stop all current or future arms sales to Israel, or eliminate transfers of microprocessors and database technology to Russia. Negatives would have the ability to highlight the impacts of export controls on trade, international relations, and domestic technological competitiveness. For example, negative teams would have ample ground to argue relations disadvantages to each of the countries listed in the topic, or negatives could argue business confidence disadvantages. Negatives would have access to counterplans on alternate export control mechanisms like sanctions or quid-pro-quo. Solvency debates will also be diverse on both the type of technologies and the types of controls.

PROBLEM AREA V: DOMESTIC WATER

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase restrictions on consumption and/or contamination of water in the United States.

People in the United States take for granted the idea that as a nation, the U.S. will always have safe water for our usage and consumption. The reality is that we are using water faster than the water supply is being replenished. Also, massive amounts of pollution are being released into the U.S. waterways. At this time, we are withdrawing more than a 143 billion gallons of fresh water for use in nuclear and fossil-fueled power plants. Agriculture use in the U.S. alone is staggering and we are facing agriculture run off that has already contaminated a third of the U.S. rivers. The Environmental Protection Agency states that 36 states are facing water shortages in 2013. Public water supplies in 42 states are contaminated with a 141 unregulated chemicals for which the EPA has never established safety standards. These pressing issues will give the debate community a focused area to address. Students and coaches will be able to research and debate something that will have an impact on their community and lives. Affirmative areas would include: water use by agriculture, commercial and industrial use, personal use, chemical standards, quality control, acid rain, wetlands, any type of pollution and run off. Negative areas of focus could include: funding issues, economic impacts, reducing production GDP, and politics. The negative's counter plan ground could focus on: states vs. federal and private agents. Critical ground might focus on the environmental impacts and positions with deep ecology type arguments. Capitalism could be used to show a disparity concern. Justification could make an interesting area as many will point to the failures of the federal policies.