

Debate Speech Sample

This House Would Negotiate with Terrorists

Proposition Case

Madam/Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, we are here to dispel an insidious and damaging myth. It is a myth perpetuated by Hollywood and many who would rather make war than create peace. It is a myth that ignores that fact the U.S. saved the life of British civilian Peter Moore via a prisoner swap with terrorists in 2010. It is a myth that would have sentenced American civilians on the hijacked TWA flight in 1985 to death, and it is one that we hope to put to rest today.

The myth that the United States does not negotiate with terrorists is outdated, inaccurate, and counter-productive. We on Side Government believe that preventing war and saving lives is more important than “looking tough.” We are proud to propose, “This House would negotiate with terrorists.”

We on Side Government acknowledge that many of European countries—among them France, Spain, Switzerland and Austria—already conduct activities that would be considered negotiations with terrorists. We believe it is high time that the United States and the United Kingdom follow suit.

We will begin with some clarifying definitions and then move on to my points of substantive matter.

Side Government understands terrorists as individuals or groups who utilize violence against civilians for political ends in ways unsanctioned by the international community. This includes governments engaging in campaigns of terror against their own civilians, as well as warlords fighting civil wars in failed states and independent violent groups. Especially in autocratic governments that do not represent their people, the mere fact that they claim control over territory should not prevent us from recognizing their actions for what they are—violence against non-combatants for political ends—in short: terrorism.

In context, then, Government’s motion means: The U.S. and U.K. governments should engage in mutual dialogue and bargaining with groups that utilize violence against civilians in instances where both sides are willing to compromise (often in the form of prisoner exchanges).

Contention 1: Negotiations are Key to Peace

It is impossible to destroy an enemy or ideology utterly. At some point after winning the major conflict, you have to negotiate some kind of peace with the remaining representatives of your opponents. In many cases, these are terrorists. Negotiation with terrorist groups and governments has benefits before the conflict, during the conflict, and at the end of the conflict.

Before the Conflict

- Negotiations with “terrorist regimes” can prevent the need for war. Ex: Iran
- War is always a tragedy; any reasonable chance to avoid it should be taken

- War has immediate casualties (soldiers and civilians who die in fighting)
- War has long-term casualties (destruction of infrastructure causes death)
 - Disease
 - starvation
 - exposure
- War can create a cycle of violence
 - economic ruin breeds despair, resentment, and violence
 - Ex. Germany WWII
 - Ex. Terrorist recruitment in Iraq
 - Lack of legitimate government leads to civil war and ethnic violence
 - Ex. Iraq
 - Ex. DRC

During Conflict

- Allows passage of food/medical supplies to civilians
- Can provide key cease-fires to open window for negotiations to end conflict early
 - Ex U.K. and Northern Ireland
- Creates connections between both sides necessary to overcome mutual hatred

Post Conflict

- Negotiations help establish a legitimate government—inclusive of elements of the defeated group.
- Failure to negotiate representation for the defeated group creates insurgency
 - Ex: “De-Ba’ath-ification” of Iraq
- Essential to find and prosecute leaders who orchestrated war-crimes (and deter those crimes by other in the future).
- Builds positive diplomatic and security relations to prevent future conflict.

Contention 2: Prisoners of War

Wars are rarely fought between recognized militaries of warring states these days, meaning that if we wish to do what we’ve always done in war—negotiate the release of our prisoners of war—then we must be willing to negotiate with terrorists. This is important both because it protects our troops and because it gives us a reasonable way to deal with enemy combatants.

Protecting Our Troops

- We have an obligation to our soldiers to bring them home
- Key to long-term recruitment and military-readiness
- Essential for troops to be willing to walk into danger and fight effectively
- Encourages more humane treatment of our troops if they're captured, since we are likely less willing to exchange high-value terrorist prisoners for them if they have been abused.
- Decreases troop death, since terrorists may opt to capture rather than kill them.
- Ultimately means more of our troops can come home alive.

Dealing with Enemy Combatants

- In other wars, most “enemy combatants” would be prisoners of war.
- Axis power troops attacked and killed U.S. people in WWII, but were still treated as POWs; same should be true for Taliban/Al Qaeda/ISIS troops now.
- Not possible/reasonable to charge POWs for attacking opposing soldiers. Not fair to hold them in prison forever. Negotiated prisoner exchanges are our best choice.
- Encourages enemy soldiers to surrender rather than fight to the death; leads to fewer casualties in war.
- Many low level terrorist soldiers are young, impressionable, and misinformed. If we treat them well and release them in exchange for our people, they may help dissuade others from joining terrorist groups.
- Best way to empty Guantanamo Bay; keeping it open continues to damage our image and encourage terrorist recruitment.

Conclusion

What have we told you today? We’ve told you that negotiations are essential to productive peaces—before, during, and after conflicts. We’ve also told you that exchanging prisoners of war is the rational way to handle enemy combatants and improves the lives of our soldiers. [2nd Speaker’s Name] will also tell you in [his/her] substantive material that **Negotiation is an effective tool to track and defeat terrorist organizations**. It is for this reason that we urge you to side with the Government today.

This House Would Negotiate with Terrorists

2nd Speaker's Proposition Speech

[REBUTTAL...] Now I'd like to get into my substantive material in today's debate:

Contention 3: Negotiation is an effective tool to track and defeat terrorist organizations.

For a productive negotiation to take place, information must be exchanged by both sides. At times, this information can be useful in providing critical intelligence to our military and law enforcement personnel. While terrorist organizations will likely go to great lengths to limit the use of this information (requesting ransom in gold Krugerrands, establishing unique meeting spots, etc.), the intelligence apparatus of Western nations is incredibly sophisticated. This can lead to positive outcomes:

Follow the Money

- Prisoner exchanges often include ransom money.
- Currency can be tracked
 - If electronic, wire transfers leave traces
 - If physical, radioactive isotopes can be used
- Tracking members of terrorist cells using the money they spend can reveal much
 - Are the new members of cells we can identify?
 - Are those members in the West, plotting attacks?
 - Who supplies the terrorists?
 - Where are they located?
- Affords the West the ability to diagram the network and effectively disrupt its operations.

Cyber-terrorism

- Not all terrorism is on the physical battlefield
 - Ex. Threats against Sony and *The Interview*
- Cyber-terrorism is on the upswing
- Negotiations and pay offs can force cyber-terrorists to make mistakes
- Negotiations may open the way for Trojan horses or other retaliatory cyber-strikes
 - Ex. Stuxnet

Conclusion

So, what have we told you? In addition to [1st Speaker's Name]'s matter regarding negotiation promoting peace and the benefits of prisoner exchanges, we've also told you [Key Item from Rebuttal Portion of the Speech]. We've further explored the strategic benefits from negotiations in both the physical and cyber realms. We find that the myth that the United States does not negotiate with terrorists is outdated, inaccurate, and counter-productive. We urge you to side with Side Government today.