

A TOPIC THAT CRIES OUT FOR COUNTERPLANS

by Marty Ludlum

In this article we will discuss the major types of counterplans on the Russia topic for 1998-1999. The simplest way to think of counterplans was the way it was taught to me, via a child's rhyme: "Anything you can do, I can do better." Counterplans would be a reason to vote against the affirmative plan, since there are other options more desirable, more effective, less expensive than the affirmative plan while accomplishing the same goals. Counterplans can take many forms, but the counterplans I envision on this topic would modify the agent of change from the United States (as mandated by the topic) and instead include a group of nations, always known by their acronyms, such as NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), EEU (European Economic Union) or the UN (United Nations).

Presently, American foreign policy is largely defined by Presidential leadership styles. President Clinton favors a style of foreign policy called Neo-Internationalism, which is also known as "assertive multilateralism." It has been highly promoted by Madeleine Albright, the Clinton Administration's Secretary of State and former U.S. representative to the United Nations. Neo-Internationalism seeks to build institutions that are more than the sum of their constituent parts. It argues that the United States should remain involved but at a substantially reduced cost. One assumption of this ideology is the potential for international cooperation. If they are cooperative, we should work with formal alliances and international organizations in almost all instances. Clearly, this ideology would favor a strong United Nations.

Examples of Neo-Internationalism abound in recent history. In the Gulf War, President Bush sought an alliance of our allies prior to taking a direct military action against Iraq. Even though many of the countries of the alliance gave little monetary or military support for the alliance, their consent was deemed to be vital to prevent the conflict from spreading. President Clinton has done the same type of diplomacy in regards to Bosnia (NATO involvement) and Somalia (UN involvement), always seeking alliances whenever possible prior to the use of military force.

The policy debate topic for 1998-1999 does not advocate Neo-Internationalism, since a policy topic could never advocate the status quo. Instead, the policy resolution advocates a foreign policy ideology of

Unilateralism, America acting first, acting alone in matters of foreign affairs.

A proponent of Unilateralism minimizes (and when possible excludes) the participation of other governments and organizations. Unilateralists are uncomfortable with alliances. They are strictly opposed to any transfer of sovereign authority to international organizations. In this way, unilateralists share the views of isolationists and minimalists in being critical of the United Nations, and similar organizations.

Unilateralism maximizes freedom of decision-making and implementation since one would not consult with any other country prior to acting. This allows for rapid decisions and improves the chances for secrecy. This would be a strategic advantage of unilateralism over any policy involving multiple nations.

Unilateralism is a unique ideology, since it is facially neutral. It does not imply what should or should not be done with our relations with Russia. Russia may be our best friend or our worst enemy. It only argues that any actions should be done by America alone, and not by the permission or consent of our allies.

Unilateralism eliminates problems of guessing the intentions of others, since the intentions of others are irrelevant. It is the best option when narrow interests at stake and the involvement of others is not necessary. However, as the energy topic showed, America acting alone cannot solve all problems. America's use of fossil fuels is but one cause. Other nations using fossil fuels must follow suit, or the actions will be ineffective. The same can be said for many potential areas of this topic. Conventional arms sales, nuclear weapons/technology transfers, nuclear waste disposal, bans on landmines, importing/exporting of cigarettes-alcohol-drugs, and many others are problems for all nations, not just Russia & America. In other words, if America and Russia agree not to transfer nuclear technology, that is fine. However, if China and India transfer that information to all the willing buyers, there is no advantage to an American and Russian agreement to prohibit transfers.

Another analogy can be seen in American/Cuban relations. America has an import prohibition on Cuban goods, largely to bankrupt the Cuban regime. However, while America will not import Cuban goods, and this hurts Cuba greatly, Cuba has other

options. Cuban cigars are readily available in Canada. Cuban sugar is easily sold in South America and Africa. Cuba sells their goods, perhaps with additional transportation costs, but they are sold. The only people denied Cuban products are American citizens. America's foreign policy, intent on bankrupting the Cuban regime, is a complete failure.

Like the prohibition on nuclear technology, and the prohibition of Cuban exports, such policies only work if they are world-wide or least fairly widespread. Dealing with international relations, several actors exist to help make uniform policies. NATO and the EEU are perfect choice for most problems specific to Europe. For world-wide implementation, the only possible alternative is the United Nations.

Many in politics, and many debate coaches put little faith in the United Nations, scoffing at it both in the real world and in applying it to debate topics. I think, however, in many areas of foreign policy the United Nations is a very viable alternative. I will briefly address the three major criticisms of the United Nations and explain why, under a fair assessment, we are far better by having the United Nations than being without it.

First, minimalists will argue that for all the peacekeeping efforts of the United Nations, wars have not stopped. True enough, but this misses the point. While wars have occurred since the founding of the United Nations following World War II, such as Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, and a host of others not involving America, this is not a proper tool for measuring success. We cannot measure the number of wars that were PREVENTED because of diplomacy and negotiations at the United Nations. Those cannot be counted, but they are certainly important.

We would not call police force a failure because crimes still occur. Prevented crimes cannot be measured, but they obviously exist, as the presence of the police seem to suppress anti-social behavior by their presence, and they also serve a function of catching those who do wrong (obviously after the fact) so that they can be punished by society. By analogy, the United Nations serves a similar purpose, preventing conflict when possible through (negotiation and diplomacy), trying to prevent conflict by more drastic means when imminent (use of peacekeeping forces), and when force is involved, trying to localize the conflict (by alli-

ances) and trying to end the conflict (through negotiations).

While the Korean War was tragic, the events would have been much worse had the UN not existed, since many in the American political scene wanted a military confrontation with the Soviet Union, including if necessary a nuclear attack. Negotiations at the United Nations (then in its infancy) helped prevent a potential nuclear exchange between the superpowers which would have cost millions of lives, far greater than the losses from the entire conflict.

Had the United Nations not been pressuring the Bush regime into a quick end the Gulf War, how many casualties would have occurred? What other parties might have gotten involved? What if Iraq (sensing the overwhelming military might of America) thought that their only means of continuing the conflict was through terrorism on American soil? Would that have been better? When we compare the relative benefits of political schemes such as the UN, the faults are obvious, and the benefits are more difficult to see. However, that does not mean that the benefits do not exist.

Second, minimalists will argue that the United Nations is a social policy sinkhole. There is always a problem to be solved, and always a UN bureaucrat wanting to set up a program to solve it. True enough, I suppose. There are plenty of problems out there, and many of the problems are easily within the means of those outside the area to solve. Would the world really be a better place if we turned our backs to prob-

lems that are within our ability to solve?

The United Nations has vaccinated millions from disease, preventable diseases which save countless lives and a great deal of suffering. The UN has kept millions more from starvation due to droughts, floods, civil unrest, and a host of other problems. Does the constant need for humanitarian relief really indicate a failure for those offering relief? Would we be prepared to call the International Red Cross a failure, since it still responds to disasters. We would not. But the UN gets criticized for the same actions done for the same purposes. Obviously this is a problem of image, not a real problem of the UN and its behavior.

Third, isolationists will argue that the United Nations is "spending my hard earned money" or other such language. Not quite. While the United States does pay a disproportionate share of the UN expenses, we do not pay all of them. In fact, unless I have missed something, Ted Turner is personally giving more to the United Nations than the U.S. government. In fact, we (America) are over a billion dollars behind in our dues to the United Nations. If this were any other club, we would be thrown out. Of course, we are not thrown out, because we constantly make claims that "we are about to" pay off that debt.

The United Nations does a great deal of good. It is not perfect by any means, but it is better than the alternative, no international action. It is important to realize that the reason we need and therefore have a United Nations is be-

cause of a failure of individual states to take action and effectively deal with these problems.

Question?

Would Peru have stepped in to stop Saddam Hussein?

Question?

Would Greece have paid for foodstuffs for the starving in Somalia?

Question?

Would Panama send its troops to stop the fighting in former Yugoslavia?

The answer to all of these is "no." They represent a failure of individual states to act in matters that do not directly concern them. Eventually, however, the conflicts cross state lines, and the starving masses move to areas outside the drought or flee from areas of civil unrest. If life tells us anything it is that our neighbor's problems, if ignored, may grow into being our problems. Best to deal with them while they are small problems.

The United Nations is a benefit both to the real world, and to our analysis in debate.

Best of luck on the Russia topic for 1998-1999!

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