



COUNTERPLANS IN POLICY DEBATE

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An Introduction to Counterplans on the Arms Sales
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WHAT IS A COUNTERPLAN?

- A counterplan is a policy defended by the negative team which competes with the affirmative plan and is, on balance, more beneficial than the affirmative plan.





RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COUNTERPLAN

Specificity: The counterplan text must be explicit

Nontopicality: Some theorists say the counterplan must represent the NON-resolution

Competitiveness: The counterplan must give the judge a reason to choose between the plan and counterplan.





COUNTERPLAN SPECIFICITY

Sample Counterplan Text:

- **Example 1:** The United States federal government will condition continued U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia on that government's willingness to support the UN-brokered ceasefire in Yemen.
- **Example 2:** The United States federal government will maintain the current level of arms sales to Saudi Arabia, but will substantially increase its financial assistance to United Nations programs providing humanitarian assistance in Yemen.





COUNTERPLAN NONTOPICALITY

Though some judges will continue to think this is important, many contemporary debate theorists say it is NOT, for the following reasons:

1. The affirmative team is asking for adoption of the PLAN not the resolution.
2. Competitiveness provides adequate protection against abuse.
3. Ground is preserved, since the affirmative team had free opportunity to choose its position first from anywhere within the resolution.



COUNTERPLAN COMPETITIVENESS

Mutual Exclusivity: It is logically impossible to do both the plan and counterplan.

Net Benefits: The counterplan alone is more beneficial than the plan plus the counterplan (in practice this means that the counterplan avoids a key disadvantage offered by the negative).

Other (suboptimal) Possibilities: Resource competition, Philosophical differences





MUTUAL EXCLUSIVITY

It is logically impossible to adopt both the plan and the counterplan.

Example: In the case of Counterplan Example 2: The counterplan maintains U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia while the plan proposes to reduce such sales. The negative would say that it is logically impossible to both maintain and reduce arms sales.

Problems with Mutual Exclusivity: Often the competitiveness based on mutual exclusivity is artificial because the text of the counterplan simply bans the plan. That is the case in the “Example 2” counterplan proposing funding humanitarian aid to Yemen. There is a provision of the counterplan maintaining arms sales, but it would certainly be logically possible to do BOTH reducing arms sales to Saudi Arabia and providing more humanitarian aid to Yemen. The provision in the plan “maintaining” U.S. arms sales is artificial – it has been placed in the counterplan simply for the purpose of claiming mutual exclusivity. This provision is not an essential part of the counterplan





NET BENEFITS

“Net Benefits” competitiveness shows why it would be undesirable to combine the plan and counterplan; as a practical matter, there is some disadvantage to the plan which the counterplan does not link to.

In the Counterplan 1 example, the negative team would claim that unconditionally reducing arms sales to Saudi Arabia would bring down the House of Saud and the ensuing chaos would provide a massive opening for international terrorism. Even if it is somehow possible to do both the plan and the counterplan, the counterplan alone is superior because it will end the fighting in Yemen while preserving U.S. support for the House of Saud, thus avoiding the disadvantage.





PERMUTATIONS

A permutation is an argument offered by the affirmative to demonstrate the non-competitiveness of a counterplan; it suggests a specific way that the plan and counterplan can be desirably combined in order to avoid the negative disadvantage.

Counterplan 2 provides an easy opportunity for a permutation. The affirmative team would claim that the superior option would be to reduce arms sales to Saudi Arabia AND to increase humanitarian assistance to Yemen. In other words, the plan and counterplan can be desirably combined.

