

# **A Coach's Notes<sup>1</sup>**

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**Connecticut Debate Association**

**Glastonbury High School**

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**Resolved: The use of drones for targeted killing of individuals should be prohibited.**

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## **Introduction**

This is the February edition of the 2013-14 CDA season. Previous year's editions can be found through the [Training Materials](#) page on the [CDA web site](#). Accompanying this document are my notes from the final round at Glastonbury High School presented in two formats, transcript and flow chart.

These Notes are intended for your benefit in coaching your teams and for the students to use directly. I hope that you will find them useful teaching tools. Please feel free to make copies and distribute them to your debaters.

I appreciate any feedback you have, good and bad. The best comments and suggestions will find their way into subsequent issues. I would also consider publishing signed, reasoned comments or replies from coaches or students in subsequent issues. So if you would like to reply to my comments or sound off on some aspect of the debate topic or the CDA, I look forward to your email.

## **Choosing Your Ground**

I have always felt that debaters are most successful when they take on the resolution as directly as possible. Once you have found the central point of contention, it's simply a matter of explaining why your side has the better of it. It tends to focus your choice of argument so that they clearly support or oppose the resolution rather than getting lost in side issues. And it forces you consider that there are some arguments you aren't likely to win. Rather than try, you have to balance them against the arguments that work for you.

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This month's resolution divides very cleanly. The Negative owns the short-run argument: targeted drone strikes have proven to be a very effective weapon against terrorists. If the Aff tries to argue that they aren't effective in killing terrorists they will probably lose. On the other hand, the Affirmative owns the long-run argument: targeted drone strikes generate ill-will towards the US, and if used by others spread a risk of greater violence, perhaps even directed against the US. Aff must argue that these long-term advantages outweigh any immediate benefit from killing terrorists. Neg must argue the long-term risks are small compared to the benefit of destroying terrorist networks today.

You want to use the line dividing pro and con on the resolution to properly frame your arguments. For example, in the final round at Glastonbury, the Aff first contention is that there are better uses for drones, such as surveillance. Neg immediately dismisses this by noting that it doesn't support the resolution: you can kill terrorists and still conduct surveillance flights.

Let's re-frame this argument in the long-run/short-run paradigm:

- Defeating terrorism is a long-term problem that requires the cooperation of governments and peoples everywhere.
- Limiting drone use to surveillance avoids alienating other gov'ts and peoples.
- As a result, they are more likely to cooperate when we feed them information on the location and activities of terrorists, helping us defeat terrorism.
- Surveillance still allows us to protect ourselves as we can pick terrorists up when they leave protected havens for targets elsewhere.

This is a much more complicated argument than the usual "three contentions" CDA case. The second point depends on the first, and the third on the second. The fourth is a preemptive attack on the likely Neg point that if we don't kill terrorists they will kill us.

But I believe it is a stronger argument. The first point is easy. The war on terror is at least 20 years old and arguably 40, with the recent campaign dating back to 2001. The Neg has a hard time with the fourth point, because if drone surveillance can't track terrorists it is hard to see how they can be killed by drones. The heart of the argument is in the second and third points, whether or not drone killings cause a backlash. If the Neg argues that it does not, imagine this exchange in cross-ex:

*Aff: You said drone killings don't alienate other governments and populations?*

*Neg: Yes we did. And there is a quote in the packet that says most Pakistanis favor the attacks.*

*Aff: Most but not all?*

*Neg: Most.*

*Aff: Do other countries have drones capable of killing individuals?*

*Neg: Some. But most don't.*

*Aff: But do you agree that it reasonable to assume they will develop this capability?*

*Neg: (Answer doesn't really matter—a simple "yes" is best, but even if they say "no, the technology is too complicated" you only asked this question to set up the next one.)*

*Aff: What do you think the US reaction will be the first time China or Russia zaps someone they consider to be a "terrorist" on US soil?*

*Neg: (Again, the answer is not important. The question made your point.)*

I think the Aff is on pretty solid ground at this point. There are easy answers to the Pakistan quote (what are they?), there's no doubt Russia and China could develop and deploy drone technology, and we all know how the US would react.

Three exercises for you to work on:

1. How does Neg beat the Aff argument above? Remember all arguments can be beaten. Consider how the Neg can use the long/short framework.
2. Go over your own case and those you saw during the tournament, or my notes on the Glastonbury final round, and re-frame the Aff and Neg arguments in the long-run/short-run paradigm. How does the Neg use this framework?
3. Finally, is there another way to analyze the resolution that works better? I haven't thought of one, but that doesn't mean you can't.

## **Fiat vs. Burden**

There was an interesting exchange during the cross-ex of the Second Affirmative in the final round at Glastonbury. The 2AC criticized the Neg counterplan to develop international rules to control the use of drones as unworkable. The Neg asks the Second Affirmative why their plan will work, as it is similar in concept: banning the use of drones for killing is simply another restriction on use. The Second Affirmative answers that the Aff simply argued in favor of the resolution and did not present a plan, so it is not an issue the Aff has to deal with. The Aff can simply assume the resolution comes into being. The Neg asks how the Aff can assert the Neg has a burden to show their plan is workable, and yet say the Aff has no similar burden.

There are actually two concepts here that debaters need to understand: burden and fiat.

All debaters have the burden of supporting the arguments they make. The Affirmative has a general burden of proof, in that they must provide a reason to adopt the resolution. If they fail the Negative wins the round.

Similarly, if the Negative present contentions, they assume the burden of supporting them. Neither team can simply assert an argument. They must present evidence and reasoning. The only exception would be something that everyone—teams, judges, audience—agree is obviously true.

Each team also has the burden of reply, that is, to answer arguments made by their opponents. This is otherwise known as clash, though a team may agree an opponent's argument or dismiss it if it does not contribute to or is not significant to the debate.

Fiat, on the other hand, has to do with implementing the plans of each side. Fiat allows each team, especially the Affirmative, to assume the resolution, the plan or the counterplan will be implemented without having to worry too much about the details of how that comes about.

For example the resolution may propose something wildly unpopular that is unlikely to be agreed, voted or approved. The Aff may argue in favor of a world in which the

resolution is implemented even if that world is unlikely to actually occur. Fiat is Latin for “let it be” as in the biblical phrase, “fiat lux” or “let there be light.”

But in debate, fiat is not magic. It does not permit the Aff plan (or Neg counterplan) to evade the laws of physics or human behavior. For example, with this month’s resolution the Aff might propose an international treaty to ban the use of drones for targeted killing. Getting all of the important nations to agree to acceptable terms and sign such a treaty would be an enormous task. Fiat lets the Aff assume such a treaty goes into force.

However, fiat does not let the Aff to assert such a treaty will be self-enforcing. Neg can legitimately raise questions such as whether North Korea would sign or abide by such a treaty, suggest that other signatories will cheat if it is in their interest and they think they can avoid getting caught, and that non-state actors such as al Qaeda won’t care about treaties at all.

The Aff can point to other arms control treaties for nuclear, chemical and biological weapons to argue that self-interest causes most countries to obey: people who live in large cities shouldn’t use weapons of mass destruction. By analogy, people who don’t want other countries zapping individuals on their soil will probably abide by an agreement not to do it themselves. International pressure can keep violations to a minimum. Alternatively, the Neg can point to chemical weapons use by Saddam Hussein during the Iran/Iraq war and against the Kurds and Bashar Assad in Syria today as examples that such treaties may not always work as hoped.

It is important for debaters to separate the concepts of burden and fiat. Simply put, burden is the requirement that all arguments be supported. Fiat is a tool that allows the debaters to move quickly to the interesting points of contention. Fiat properly used permits us to debate situations that may be difficult to bring about, like a treaty banning drones. Sometimes teams will try to use fiat to avoid burden, for example by assuming everyone will abide by the treaty. Don’t let them.

## **New Arguments in Rebuttal**

All debaters know that in general new arguments are not permitted in rebuttal, only new examples and extensions of existing arguments. (The only exception is to reply to a new argument presented in the 2NC, which must be answered in the 1AR.) I’m always asked for examples of new arguments, and the final round at Glastonbury provides a very clear one.

In the 1AR under counterterrorism, the Aff argues that drone killings destroy intelligence, noting the value of the materials seized in the bin Laden raid. This is not a new contention, it is simply a rebuttal argument to the second negative contention, that drones are an indispensable tool against terrorism. But there is no foundation for this reply in the constructives—look for yourself—so it is new.