

The Final Round¹

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Warde High School

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Resolved: The US should not target and kill foreign government officials.

A Note about the Notes

I've reproduced my flow chart for the Final Round at Warde High School augmented by what I remember from the debate. The notes are limited by how quickly I could write and how well I heard what was said. I'm sure the debaters will read them and exclaim, "That's not what I said!" I apologize for any errors, but I hope debaters will appreciate this insight: what a judge hears may not be what they said or what they wish they had said.

There are two versions of the notes. The one below is chronological, reproducing each speech in the order in which the arguments were made. It shows how the debate was presented. The second is formatted to look more like my written flow chart, with each contention running across the page as the teams argued back and forth. It's close to the way I take notes during the debate.

The Final Round

The Final Round was between the Greenwich team of Julia Blank and Toby Hirsch on the Affirmative and the Warde team of Peter Murphy and Finn Johnston on the Negative. The debate was won by the Negative.

1) First Affirmative Constructive

- a) Introduction
- b) Statement of the Resolution
- c) Definitions
 - i) "targeted killing" is assassination
 - ii) "government official" is someone of high rank
 - iii) We exclude action against an enemy in wartime
- d) A1²: Targeted killing is immoral
 - i) National and international law is against it
 - ii) Executive order in 1976 forbids assassination of a head of state
- e) A2: Targeted killing is ineffective
 - i) It generates resistance

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² "A1" indicates the Affirmative first contention, "N2" the Negative second contention and so forth.

- ii) After Qassem Suleimani Iran is still there, his plans remain, new leaders will step in
 - (1) New leaders could be more radical
- iii) Iran as a country reacted against us
- iv) This could lead to more brazen attacks
- f) A3: Assassination results in both short-term and long-term harm
 - i) It starts a spiral of escalation, causing regional instability
 - ii) Long-term the instability continues
 - (1) Economic contacts suffer
 - (2) Anti-US sentiment increases: “Death to America”
 - (3) Terrorism increases
 - (4) It invites retaliation in kind

2) Cross-Ex of First Affirmative

- a) Do you have examples of replacement by worse? Doesn’t happen often, but it seems likely
- b) Examples in South America result in a more pro-US leader? We don’t always have a choice of leaders
- c) Is respecting sovereignty more important than defeating terrorism? Both are considerations
- d) Are you aware US and Iran have agreed to reduce tensions, no retaliation? That’s short-term. We don’t know about the longer term
- e) Is non-binding international law more important than US objectives? We need allies
- f) Does Iran follow international law? Generally, yes.
- g) Haven’t they violated it with political prisoners? Agree int’l law isn’t strong, but ultimately countries care about it.

3) First Negative Constructive

- a) Intro
- b) Neg accepts the Aff definitions
- c) N1: The US has a right to defend itself
 - i) There are precedents for assassination
 - (1) WWII vs the Nazis
 - (2) ISIS and al Baghdadi
- d) N2: Targeted killing serves as a deterrent
 - i) China under Deng Xiaoping avoided confronting the US due to fear
 - ii) Targeted killings in South America
 - iii) ISIS and al Qaeda
 - iv) Maduro in Venezuela fears US
- e) N3: US has an ethical obligation to protect others from oppression
 - i) US greatest military power in history, has ability to define the course of history
 - ii) Drones, coups, etc., work
 - (1) Cambodia vs the Khmer Rouge
 - iii) Iran is a totalitarian state
 - (1) Imprisons political opponents, gays, etc.
- f) A1: There is no obligation to follow or enforcement of international law

- i) Saddam Hussein was tried for war crimes
 - ii) US tried to protect Iraqis
- g) A2: ISIS has been reduced by 90%
- 4) Cross-Ex of First Negative**
 - a) You said we have an ethical obligation? Iran was intent on violence
 - b) Is the defeat of ISIS due to targeted killing? Not entirely. Lots of ground forces, but a lot of drone strikes
 - c) How much? A significant portion was due to targeted killing.
 - d) Is it legitimate to overthrow a foreign government? If the leadership harms their own people, US should have the right
 - e) Does the Authorization to Use Military Force (AUMF) cover targeted killing? It authorized force against al Qaeda, in Iraq, to protect the US
 - f) Why not use criminal trials? We can use assassination too
 - g) Hasn't the world changed?
- 5) Second Affirmative Constructive**
 - a) N1: We broadly agree with the right to self-defense
 - i) Neg examples don't fall under the resolution
 - (1) WWII was wartime
 - (2) ISIS was defeated by soldiers on the ground
 - ii) Definition was attacks on individuals outside of the military
 - (1) No Neg examples here
 - b) N2: It's unlikely China was deterred by the threat of assassination
 - i) Maduro/Venezuela has not changed behavior
 - ii) Iran hates us, and it's not just government propaganda
 - iii) It's unethical to kill foreign leaders
 - c) N3: There is no protection if the replacements are more radical than those we kill
 - i) Neg examples all had military context and consequences
 - d) A1: International Law and the Geneva Conventions are generally followed by most nations
 - i) These are basic standards and should not be abandoned
 - ii) AUMF covers 9/11 based activities only
 - iii) South America had to be authorized under war power
 - e) A2: Neg examples are largely military engagements
 - i) Objective wasn't simply to kill the leaders
 - ii) Targeted killing generates a reaction, as in Iran, Cold War
 - f) A3: Shah was replaced by the Ayatollah, who detested the US
- 6) Cross-Ex of Second Affirmative**
 - a) Targeted killing is not war? The resolution is about assassination, not larger engagements
 - b) Does Iran follow the Geneva Convention? Yes
 - c) Stoning convicts? We are talking about behavior during war
 - d) Conflicts in Yemen and Syria follow Geneva Conventions? It's not Iran fighting, but their proxies. We are talking about countries
 - e) Doesn't Qassem Suleimani support Hezbollah in Syria? That's a terrorist group
 - f) Isn't the Iranian army a terrorist group? Perhaps the Revolutionary Guard, on part of the army

- g) So the Iranian Revolutionary Guard is a terrorist group? US has so designated
 - h) The entire army? No just the one part
- 7) Second Negative Constructive**
- a) Intro
 - b) Resolution
 - c) A1: International law is not binding, no enforcement
 - i) Iran and Russia break it all the time
 - ii) Targeted killing is a way to hold them accountable
 - d) A2: we have succeeded in regime change
 - i) ISIS, where targeted killing was one tool of many
 - ii) AUMF justifies assassination in Syria and Iraq
 - iii) Use in South America and Asia were not known or approved
 - (1) E.g., Castro, led to nukes leaving Cuba
 - (2) There were others
 - e) A3: targeted killing helps us protect US soldiers
 - i) E.g., Saddam Hussein was responsible for killing over 200,000
 - ii) He was replaced by a better regime
 - f) N1: US has a right to defend itself
 - g) N2: Regarding Maduro, neither side has evidence
 - i) Regime is unstable and near collapse due to threats by the US
 - h) N3: targeted killing is a needed tool
 - i) Iranians don't hate us, only 43% support the government
 - ii) We have an ethical responsibility to protect soldiers and civilians
- 8) Cross-Ex of Second Negative**
- a) Are you saying we shouldn't follow international law? Only on a reciprocal basis, with respect to others who follow it
 - b) So we should follow those who break it? We have a right to defend ourselves
 - c) Should we then use chemical weapons in Syria? No
 - d) Didn't Syria use them? Targeted killing doesn't have to do with civilians
 - e) Follow int'l law only when convenient? To protect our own
 - f) The poll was about whether they supported the Iranian government? We assume if they support the gov't, they hate the US
 - g) So at least 43% hate US? But the rest don't
 - h) Do we have a right to assassinate people? Iranian Revolutionary guard funds terrorism in Syria, Lebanon, so yes.
 - i) Won't they appoint a new leader? We can take them out if they work against us.
 - j) Isn't it possible the new leader will be better? No, for example, no real replacement for Osama bin Laden
- 9) First Negative Rebuttal**
- a) A1: CIA often acts with no Congressional or Presidential approval
 - i) E.g., action in Columbia led to peace and democracy
 - b) A2: Examples show it is effective
 - i) We may not have assassinated Castro, but we did try again with Che Guevara
 - c) A3: In many cases, people don't like their own government
 - i) Poll shows less than 50% support in Iran
 - ii) Our actions can lead to democracy

- d) N1: These targets are attacking US, civilians
 - i) ISIS persisted until we started using targeted killing

10) First Affirmative Rebuttal

- a) Intro
- b) N1: We have no real control over the outcome
 - i) We are just as likely to radicalize our enemies and create a greater threat
 - ii) The next leader can be worse, leading to escalating violence
- c) N2: Targeted killing encourages violence in return
 - i) It spurs aggressive rhetoric, ideology, invites tit-for-tat response
 - ii) This means greater danger for the US
- d) N3: With targeted killing we are doing what we condemn in others
 - i) Some of our targets are democratically elected
- e) A1: Legality and principles matter
 - i) Power to wage war has to be given by Congress
 - ii) AUMF covers response to 9-11 attacks only
- f) A2: The Neg examples of effectiveness were not due to targeted killing
 - i) Most are the result of “boots on the ground”
- g) A3: It’s clear at least 43% of Iranians hate us

11) Second Negative Rebuttal

- a) Intro
- b) Resolution
- c) A1: Why should we follow int’l law if others do not?
 - i) E.g., Iran, Russia, North Korea
 - ii) Aff has no plan to replace targeted killing
 - iii) Targeted killing is one of many effective tools, enabled by technology
- d) A2: Our examples show targeted killing is effective
 - i) In Columbia, FARC drew back and agreed to peace
- e) A3: Targeted killing helps in both the short and long run
 - i) Iran has not retaliated for Qassem Suleimani
 - ii) Trump and Khameni have said they won’t escalate
 - iii) Aff “logic” is a slippery slope argument
- f) N2: Threat wasn’t only reason for Deng Xiaoping, but it helped
- g) N1: We have a right to defend ourselves
 - i) Aff has no plan to do that

12) Second Affirmative Rebuttal

- a) Resolution is about targeted killing, not other strategies
 - i) The rest of the arsenal remains to protect us
- b) Coups are not targeted killing
 - i) During the Cold War, coups sometimes worked, sometimes were disasters
 - ii) Targeted killing doesn’t let you decide on a replacement
 - iii) Neg examples are about coups
 - (1) The coup against Mossadegh in Iran led to disaster in 1979
 - iv) Targeted killing can result in the same harms, without the benefit
 - v) Iran and Qassem Suleimani seems like the best case, but we don’t the full consequences yet
- c) Voting Issues

- i) Legality: targeted killing ignores both domestic and international law
 - (1) This encourages others to break the law
- ii) Ethics: international laws agrees it's unethical
- iii) Practical: Neg claims the replacements will be better for US
 - (1) Likely result is exactly the opposite