
Judge's Decisions

Jeremy Grace
Rice University

In this round, the Opposition team, from Pacific Lutheran did the better job of debating.

I would first and foremost like to congratulate each of you for having an incredible tournament. Your hard work, dedication to this activity, and passion for it is evident and appreciated. Thanks for giving the NPDA one of the BEST final rounds in years!

I find myself in a difficult position with this ballot, in my opinion, the cards are stacked against the Government from the get go. Upholding a resolution that states that the war in Iraq is justified seems a terribly heavy burden.

On face, I agree with the overall analysis of the Opposition team from Pacific Lutheran, yet on the flow I have more ink coming out of the Government from Wyoming. However, the Government really never seems to exploit these “drops” or make them “voters” so they become a wash. Push my pen; don't leave it up to me!

The most compelling arguments in the debate for me come from the Opposition analysis on “means to an end” becoming justified and this “we” focus, i.e. we justify war based on others perceived wants always has the “we” prior to any ethic.

Essentially, while I truly appreciate the rhetoric of ethics coming from the Government, the Opposition plants large doubts in my mind whether or not “ethics” is simply another centric label for the ends justifying the means.

Congratulations to two wonderful teams, and thank you for making this a VERY hard choice!

Christopher Pallanch
The Colorado College

In this round, the Government team, from Wyoming did the better job of debating.

This debate boiled down to two major issues for me: do we have an ethical obligation to help one another and is Iraq better off without Saddam?

In regards to the first issue... The government team contends that in the real world, in some cases, inaction is worse than action, because inaction in the face of suffering encourages more suffering. The opposition counters by saying the ends do not always justify the means and that the ever changing

motivation of the US for going to war shows it was not done for benevolent reasons (it's the Al-Qaida link, no it's WMD, okay maybe it IS oil).

The Member of Government makes clear to me the distinction that the government team is only responsible for showing that the war was justified, not that George W. Bush's justifications were valid. I think the opposition could have beaten the government on this ground, but the Member of Opposition makes a tactical error and tries to assert that the government must uphold GW's war and does not well enough refute the underlying analysis of the Member of Government.

In the end, I buy the Prime Minister's analysis that we cannot look to unjustified claims of cultural relativism because people in oppressed countries cannot express their causes. In this round, absent any real dissent, I think we do have an ethical obligation to help one another. This general line of argumentation was present throughout the Government case but fundamentally missed by the opposition. As a result I lean toward the government team in the round.

As for the second issue... Both sides agree that the US is responsible for initially creating the "Saddam mess" and therefore has a unique responsibility to resolve it. The government team claims that the war is justified if the Iraqi people are better off without Saddam than with him. The opposition tells me that going to war ignores other possible solutions to the problem. While on face I agree with the latter, the opposition does not go far enough in telling me what those alternatives are or how those may bear out to be better. I am not even told how keeping Saddam in power, but contained (presumably with ongoing inspections), would be a good idea.

So here my decision comes down to both sides agreeing that Saddam is a bad person. One side wants to do something about it; one side seemingly does not. The government team tells me that things could not be any worse than they were with Saddam. The opposition teams balks. I vote government.

As is generally the case in the real world, both sides were correct about different things and to different extents. I think the reality of the situation today is best summed up by the Iraqi citizen who said, "Iraq is more free today, but you can be blown up at any second." Unfortunately, I can only vote for one team and only one team gets the bigger trophy and the bottle of champagne. Both teams, though, are to be commended for their efforts.

Christi Siver
University of Washington

In this round, the Government team, from Wyoming did the better job of debating.

This was an excellent round on a highly contentious topic and I applaud both teams for grounding their arguments in logic and analysis without a resort to emotion.

In the end it seems like both teams agree that I should take some action to resolve the suffering of the Iraqi people, but that I can consider the consequences of the means. I take this to understand that I should vote for the team that proves that the war either will or will not address the suffering in a viable way.

I would like to have seen more specific comparison of impacts in the rebuttals that would have helped in the decision calculus.

Despite the fact that the long term future seems uncertain in terms of U.S. commitment (there is some thinking – the Iraqi oil trust fund) the action does seem just when short-term, one-time costs are weighed against the suffering the Iraqis otherwise would have experienced in perpetuity.

Larry Galizio
Portland Community College

In this round, the Opposition team, from Pacific Lutheran did the better job of debating.

Congratulations to both teams, their coaches, and their programs!

This round was extraordinarily close, and both teams should be congratulated again for demonstrating their excellence to an appreciative audience.

While the Government from Wyoming was stronger rhetorically, the Opposition from Pacific Lutheran had superior argumentation and pressed the Government on particular issues that persuaded me to vote for the Opposition.

If I were to choose one issue as the most significant in the round, it would be the argumentation over whether or not the Government's advocacy necessarily includes the Bush Administration. The Government claims a philosophical criteria for the round based on the notion of having an "undying obligation to others," and that "inaction as a response to the suffering of the others inevitably increases their suffering."

Taking a page out of former President Clinton's book, the Opposition reminds us what the importance of the word "is" is. According to the Opposition, "is" in the resolution, and placed contextually throughout the argumentation by the Government, refers to the present geopolitical reality that

includes the Bush Administration as the main actor in this “just invasion of Iraq.” The Government responds that it need not support the numerous and specious reasons offered up by the Bush Administration, as the criteria presented in the first constructive provides a philosophical baseline with consistent ethical principles that supercedes the status quo.

Unfortunately for the Government team in this debate, the Opposition teases out their philosophical position so that the Government spends much of their time discussing the very situation “on the ground” that they insist is evanescent. The Government asks the audience to weigh their arguments about sanctions not working, the U.N. as a flawed vehicle, Iraqi oil wells to be used to prop up the country etc....all very real concerns referring to the current situation, yet ostensibly irrelevant according to the same Government team that claims we should be weighing everything this atemporal ethical framework.

The argumentation throughout the round inevitably leads me to consider the “facts on the ground” and therefore I am weighing claims about the players and issues in the status quo. This means that Opposition arguments that the Bush Administration has provided numerous conflicting justifications for the invasion, that we cannot guarantee human rights violations won’t continue, and that a lack of international coordination, become tremendously significant in the present circumstances and within this debate.

Another major reason I voted for the Opposition is their argument that the extension of the logic of the Government’s criteria is to justify any means of action. The Opposition not only observes that the Government’s framework takes no account of the possibility that action can lead to increased suffering in Iraq, and perhaps more significantly, asks the audience to accept that claim that action is always better than inaction when people are suffering. The Opposition rightly points out the untenable nature of these lines of argumentation.

The historical analogies and references to other situations were decidedly the weakest part of this debate. The Government from Wyoming asks us to buy into the simplistic assertions made by National Security Advisor Rice and War Secretary Rumsfeld that we need only look to the newly liberated women of Afghanistan to see how successful that invasion was. The Opposition counters convincingly, albeit briefly, that warlords controlling many parts of the country has greater significance and is a superior barometer of perceived success in that attempt to relieve suffering.

Similarly, the argumentation concerning supposed analogies of Japan and Germany wasn’t developed enough by either side to influence my decision.

Finally, the Government presses the Opposition to offer an alternative to invasion and the Opposition answers with ending sanctions and continuing inspections. Perhaps mirroring the troubled discourse in the larger culture, neither side made compelling claims concerning the feasibility and wisdom of this alternative.

Here I would like to refer back to my position that the University of Wyoming team was stronger rhetorically but the Opposition from Pacific

Lutheran had superior argumentation. On one level, this is an interesting tension that exists not simply in the final rounds of NPDA when there is a large crowd, but is an important phenomenon throughout our public discourse that requires constant critical attention.

A dynamic delivery, captivating language choices, and appeals to a Manichean worldview can be extraordinarily seductive, especially at first glance. Yet a brief consideration of the historical record should lead us to reflect carefully and critically prior to granting legitimacy to regimes or individuals seek

Rob Klingler
University of Florida

In this round, the Government team, from Wyoming did the better job of debating.

Best NPDA Final Round I've Ever Seen!!!

I think Wyoming is winning the alternatives debate as Pacific Lutheran never answers that they're merely listing options. I would have liked Wyoming to have explained why that is a bad practice, but I have no answer on my flow and consistent advocacy by Wyoming.

Therefore, the two potential Pacific Lutheran winning arguments are that Bush's justifications aren't sufficient and that there's no long-term commitment. However, I believe Wyoming demonstrates that they are required to only justify Bush's actions and not his thoughts. Moreover, I'm never told what bad motives he supposedly has. Regardless, the lack of Bush's long-term commitment is answered on the Afghanistan cross-app in that Afghanistan is doing better, especially as to women and education, as conceded.

Therefore, I vote to affirm.

Reflections One Year Later:

While I still think this is one of the best NPDA Final Rounds I've ever seen, I was dismayed to hear how close the final decision was. In my opinion, I thought Wyoming clearly won the round. After hearing the decision, I informally discussed the round with several of the other judges, and clearly got the impression that those judges let their own personal views interfere with the decision. I heard things such as "there was just no way I can believe that Bush was right." Personally, I find this the greatest threat to the activity. If judges that theoretically represent the best of the judging pool can't put aside their own personal political beliefs in the most important round of the year, then I shutter to think what goes in some preliminary rounds.

Full Disclosure: I am a Republican, and while I did support the President, I was by no means a war hawk. Perhaps it was I who was

influenced by my personal political beliefs. Based upon my conversations with other observers of the round, I simply don't think so.

Melissa Franke
U.S.C.

In this round, the Opposition team, from Pacific Lutheran did the better job of debating. (Transcribed from ballot)

Great round by both teams. You both did an impressive job of approaching this resolution with the argument we have to think about as citizens trying to be ethical actors in our world.

My decision is for the opposition, primarily for the reasons that the alternatives to war were not sufficiently explored by the U.S. to warrant a justification for war and that ignoring the question of means to achieve an end we haven't fully understood means I cannot endorse the war on an ethical level.

Specifically, the analysis on the ethical and underlying obligation we have to each other carries through this round. Inaction cannot be endorsed. But, the opposition team presses the issue of actually helping the people of Iraq and fulfilling the ethical responsibility to overcome the situation it created, and because we have to acknowledge the actors and world framework this war operates in. I look (at some small level) the lack of clarity offered by the US gov't with respect to justifying the war. Government team says they don't need to justify the war with respect to Bush, but never tells us why 1) the war will (and is) be what it claims it will be – a war that solves the problems of human rights violations and oppressed. And 2) why this action is the one that is justified.

I don't have enough to make me feel comfortable endorsing a U.S. military action with grave consequences (the possible decimation of Iraq before rebuilding – which may not happen) when alternatives weren't explored.

Kate Huetteman
Notre Dame University

In this round, the Government team, from Wyoming did the better job of debating. (Transcribed from ballot)

Once again, you are all fantastic. I was honored to not only witness your fine debate, but also to participate as a critic. The criteria itself is somewhat problematic, as "ethics" does not seem to allow a way to effectively evaluate the justification offered by the Gov against the counter warrants

offered by the opp since opp did not present its own framework; rather, the opp offers argumentation that questions the gov-offered framework. This leaves me to step back and evaluate the gov's ethical framework and how well it holds up against the opp arguments. I am unclear as to the necessity of the opp presenting "viable alternatives," but gov repeatedly persuades me that war is the only [justifiable] alternative. Opp offers dropping the sanctions and/or giving aid to Iraq. The MG explains how sanctions have failed and aid can't be the answer due to the empirical evidence that Hussein is corrupt and will misuse any aid (i.e. oil for food programs). Because the opp never answers the analysis in case that inaction is worse than action, we need some sort of action and at the very least gov indicts the opp alternatives. Gov moves away from Gorman empirics but corrects its own offered counter-example of Afghanistan. Despite continuing warlord activity/control, Afghanistan is concededly better off today, having stopped genocide, implementing a post-war plan, and moving toward democracy (particularly the Civil Rights and Education Minister moving toward co-education). Finally, opp's best argument is that even though gov offers its justifications, this doesn't justify Bush's war. However, the opp d/n convince me gov needs to justify Bush's war without answering its (gov's) ethical framework and/or comparing it more specifically to Bush, especially since Afghanistan is better now.