

Counterplans

In many debate rounds, the affirmative defends their plan and the negative defends the **status quo**, arguing that somehow plan makes things worse. That is not the only strategy the negative can employ, however. Since it is the affirmative's burden to defend that the resolution is a good idea, the negative may in fact propose something else should be done, and that this thing is in fact **mutually exclusive** with the affirmative. The debate at that point becomes not a debate between the plan and the status quo, but rather a **competition** between two policies.

Because of this interesting twist of a counterplan, the negative must do certain things for the counterplan to be legitimate. First, the counterplan must be **non-topical**. That is, it can't defend the resolution. This is because of an idea called **ground** in the debate. Ground (basically) is what each side is allowed to advocate and defend. It is the **burden** of the affirmative team to defend the resolution; likewise it is the burden of the negative team to argue against the resolution. Therefore if a negative team were to advocate a topical counterplan, it would both **skew** ground (a vote for the negative would be a vote for the resolution, which is a contradiction), and it would be **abusive** to the affirmative team (since they are supposed to defend the resolution).

Second, the negative must prove that the counterplan **competes** with plan. Basically this means that the negative must show that the counterplan is a reasonable alternative to plan. This is normally done through the idea of **mutual exclusivity**: the negative attempts to show that it is not possible to do the plan and the counterplan, that is, a vote for the counterplan would necessitate a vote against the plan. In our example of the US ceding control of the reconstruction efforts in Iraq to NATO, one counterplan that we have debated is that we should instead disband NATO. NATO can't be in charge of the situation in Iraq if it doesn't exist; therefore the counterplan competes with plan.

Finally, and perhaps obviously, to win the negative must then go on to show that there are **net benefits** to the counterplan over the plan. That is, that there are reasons to prefer doing the counterplan instead of the plan. While net benefits come in many varieties, the most common things a negative will claim is that the counterplan will solve the case harms better than the plan (which they will couple with solvency case attacks), or that the counterplan solves different harms which outweigh the advantages of plan (which they will couple with harm case attacks), or that the counterplan and plan both solve the case harms, but the counterplan avoids some disadvantage (which they will then obviously couple with a disad).

Note that affirmative will try to **permute** counterplans to show that they aren't competitive – that is they will attempt to show that the plan and counterplan can be done at the same time. At that point the negative will sometimes use the net benefits to prove competitiveness; that is, the benefits of the counterplan alone outweigh the benefits of plan and outweigh the benefits of doing the plan and the counterplan together. This is a slightly more advanced idea, but it is important as it comes up in nearly every counterplan debate.

Suggestions:

COD: "The counterplan" (part 2, section 4)

Novice Videos: Part 8, "Counterplans"

Key terms from this training are in bold; you should strive to know what all of them mean before the next training session.