## CHAPTER ONE: The Resolution

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This 2023-2024 debate season, the debate community has an amazing opportunity to discuss an incredibly timely topic – the need to restrict the United States’ nuclear posturet. As the topic authors explain in their initial proposal to the college debate community to consider debating this topic (see *Chapter: The Topic Process* for more information on how we choose our yearly topic), debating the next steps in nuclear policy is critical considering where the world and United States is positioned in regards to nuclear policy: “The clear and constant trend at present, both in the United States and around the world, is toward greater reliance on nuclear weapons in an expanding number of contexts, as articulated in an increasingly expansive [declaratory policy](armscontrol.org/act/2021-03/features/toward-just-us-nuclear-declaratory-policy) and supported by both quantitative expansion and qualitative ‘modernization’ (including, e.g., via the development of hypersonic missiles, multiple independently-targetable reentry vehicles, and more) of the strategic arsenal.”

So this year, the college debate community will be debating whether or not:

*The United States should restrict its nuclear forces in one or more of the following ways:*

*-adopting a nuclear no-first use policy;*

*-eliminating one or more of the legs of its nuclear triad;*

*-disarming its nuclear forces.*

This italicized sentence is what we call a “resolution.” Policy debate is an activity modeled after the political process (surprise, surprise). Our use of resolution mimics how the word is used there.

“Resolutions, which are not legislative in character, are used primarily to express principles, facts, opinions, and the purposes of both the House and the Senate—that is, until they pass both houses. When Congress seeks to pass a law, however, it uses either a bill or a joint resolution, which must be passed by both houses in identical form, and then presented to the president for approval or disapproval.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Similarly, in debate, a resolution is the overarching topic that provides the affirmative team a direction of intent. Affirmative teams use the resolution as a jumping board to defend advocacies (usually in the form of legislation, although this handbook will also explain other means affirmative teams may take to debate the resolution) that would fit within the expressed principle or opinion of that resolution.

In college policy debate, this is the resolution that we will debate for the entire season. At first, this may seem like the recipe for boredom. How can one possibly stay engaged if they are only debating one thing? I promise you, a year-long topic sometimes is actually enough time to debate a topic. Ask any of your debate team mates or friends you have already debated, and there may be topics they can name with fondness – wishing they were debating that topic again!

In debate, we truly value the idea of in depth research and analysis of a topic. The great thing about policy debate is just how much we delve into the resolution. While some other debate styles change topics frequently or only provide debaters with limited time to prepare for a topic before they debate it for one tournament or one round of debate, policy debate expects the community to engage the topic for a lengthy time in order to investigate every controversy and angle of the topic. By the end of the year, debaters often garner enough knowledge on the yearly topic that they can cite themselves as experts on the subject. Just think of the opportunities that presents for you in terms of resume building!

With all this being said, let’s dive into the specific aspects of this year’s resolution!

For clarity, we will discuss each portion of the resolution.

First, if you notice – the resolution outlines a specific actor that should be taking some sort of action – **the United States**. Looking at definitions of what “the United States” means yields many slightly differing results.

A quick glance at the Black’s Law Legal definition shows probably the most common definition: “Made up of the 50 federated states, American Samoa, District of Columbia, Johnston Island, Guam, Wake and Midway Islands, Northern Marianas and US Virgin Islands.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Considering that nuclear weapons in the United States are controlled by the federal government[[3]](#footnote-3), we would assume the resolution proposes some sort of federal change to US nuclear posture.

While the actor of this resolution sets a direction in terms of how a restriction of US nuclear posture will be initiated (through legal action) – the next part of the resolution sets the stage for the actual topic we will discuss this year – “**restrict its nuclear forces**…” In order to understand the arguments an affirmative team should make to follow the directive of the resolution, we need to understand exactly what nuclear forces are, and exactly how they could be restricted? Well, this is a loaded question in many ways, as there are different ways you can define these terms. Some authors explicate nuclear forces rather broadly, defining it as everything from delivery platforms, weapons, support systems, command and control assets, to the military infrastructure that houses the weapons.[[4]](#footnote-4) Others have a more targeted understanding of nuclear forces, explaining that it contains the weapons themselves, their delivery platforms, and command and control.[[5]](#footnote-5) However, most agree that in order to restrict our nuclear forces, there must be some sort of reduction in nuclear weapons, either physically or doctrinally.[[6]](#footnote-6)[[7]](#footnote-7)

So the next question you may ask is if what a “restriction of its nuclear forces” is broad, how do we know what advocacy affirmative teams will propose to meet the directive of the resolution? That is a great question! In order to provide a little more clarification to the intent of the resolution, the resolution includes a list of three ways affirmative teams can advocate for nuclear forces to be restricted: “**-adopting a nuclear no-first use policy; -eliminating one or more of the legs of its nuclear triad; -disarming its nuclear forces.”** These bullet point actions place a limit on arguments. While there may be other ways that nuclear forces could be restricted, affirmative teams on this topic will advocate for actions within that list of three. So, an affirmative team that discusses increasing conventional weapons capabilities may ultimately restrict our reliance on nuclear weapons, but it does not on face establish a no-first use policy, eliminate a leg of the triad, or disarm nuclear forces.

So what are these restrictions? Well, that is another story. Debate teams will need to look into literature no-first use policies, the legs of the nuclear triad, and disarmament. There are many ways each of these restrictions can be achieved, meaning affirmative teams have the ability to identify their own plan of action that would enact one of those restrictions. They could decide to adopt a “full” nuclear no-first use policy, meaning that in no circumstance will the United States use nuclear weapons preemptively.[[8]](#footnote-8) Or they could advocate for a no-first use policy in specific circumstances, like against a particular country or against specific types of non-nuclear attacks.[[9]](#footnote-9) For the triad section of the resolution, they could advocate for an elimination of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMSs), air bombers, or submarine launched ballistic missiles.[[10]](#footnote-10) For those wanting to advocate for the dangers of nuclear weapons broadly, they can advocate for a disarmament of US nuclear forces.[[11]](#footnote-11) It all depends on the authors you are reading who attempt to define and advocate for these particular types of restrictions.

Now, this raises another question – if the terms in the resolution have so many different ways they can be defined, how exactly do we know what affirmatives should debate? This question will be answered in a different chapter (Topicality). Ultimately, for now you should know that resolutions are purposefully made to incite debate. Debate over the topic, what the topic includes, etc. In debate, everything – including what the resolution means – is debateable.

1. http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3401803581.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://thelawdictionary.org/united-states/#:~:text=UNITED%20STATES%20Definition%20%26%20Legal%20Meaning&text=Made%20up%20of%20the%2050,Marianas%20and%20US%20Virgin%20Islands. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/IF10521.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://cgsr.llnl.gov/content/assets/docs/CGSR\_Two\_Peer\_230314.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20220622/114818/BILLS-117HR7900ih-STR.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/declaratorypolicies> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Tytti & Petr, May 2020, SIPRI Insights on Peace & Security, “Towards greater nuclear restraint: Raising the threshold for nuclear weapon use,”, p. 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://tnsr.org/roundtable/its-time-for-a-u-s-no-first-use-nuclear-policy/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/01/18/donald-trump-russia-nuclear-cyberattack-216477/ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.globalzero.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ANPR-Final.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/abolishing\_nuclear\_weapons.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-11)