

A Coach's Notes¹

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Resolved: The United States should repeal the United States-India Nuclear Cooperation Approval and Nonproliferation Enhancement Act.

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Introduction

This is the third edition of the 2008-09 CDA season. If you would like to receive the previous editions of these Notes, please email me and I will send them to you. Accompanying this document are my notes from the final round in two formats, transcript and flow chart, and a copy of the packet from the tournament. I try to email these Notes to CDA coaches within two weeks of the tournament.

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 emails.

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Comparative Advantages Cases

I've written in the past about stock arguments in policy debate: harm, inherency, solvency and advantages.² In this month's resolution, however, these stock arguments don't seem to apply, or are largely moot. You are presented with a very specific policy: repeal the US/India Treaty. There is no question of inherency. I suppose a Negative could argue against repeal and propose non-compliance would achieve the same goals, but this is unlikely to be convincing. All you are left with are the various advantages and disadvantages of the two positions.

Welcome to the comparative advantages case! The Affirmative argues that if you adopt the resolution certain benefits will accrue. If you do not adopt the resolution, certain bad things will happen. The Negative argues the same sort of thing, only with benefits and harms that arise if you do adopt the resolution. This is often how we make decisions in everyday life—list the advantages and disadvantages and decide, on balance, which is best. How do you win this sort of debate?

It is possible that at the end of the debate you may have shown that none of your opponent's advantages and disadvantages are true and that all of yours are true. Certainly that should win the debate. But it is unlikely you can win every argument raised. The most probable result is that at the end of the debate both sides will be able to claim some of the benefits and harms that they presented. It's even conceivable that all of the advantages and disadvantages raised by both the Affirmative and Negative will stand at the end of the debate, if they don't overlap much. Clearly you need to provide the judge with some means of choosing between the two positions.

Structure of a Comparative Advantages Case³

A comparative advantages case is one of the standard types of Affirmative cases presented in debate texts alongside value and policy cases. In presenting a comparative advantages case, the Affirmative accepts the goals of the status quo, but argues that adopting the resolution will lead to more effective attainment of those goals.

There are four parts to a comparative advantages case:

1. Identify the goals;
2. Show how the goals are linked to the resolution;
3. Demonstrate significant advantages that are linked directly to the resolution; and
4. Show those advantages are better than what could occur without the resolution.

While you may not present each of these explicitly, like the stock arguments of a standard policy case (harms, inherency, solvency and advantages) they provide a useful frame of reference for building your Affirmative case, or, if you're the Negative, attacking it.

The goals provide a framework for the advantages that follow. Typically the goals specified are widely accepted, even by the Negative team. In this month's final round,⁴ for example, the Affirmative began by stating that their goal was political, economic and

² See *A Coach's Notes* for November 2007, and also for October 2008 on inherency.

³ This section relies extensively on Chapter 12, "Building the Affirmative Case," of Freeley, Austin J., and David L. Steinberg, *Argumentation and Debate*, 2005, Wadsworth.

⁴ My flow of the final round is available for this debate, for those who didn't take notes or who did not attend: *The Final Round*, December 13, 2008.

environmental safety. It would be difficult for the Negative to argue that safety is not a goal, and so one issue in the debate will be whether this goal is better met without the Treaty or with it. Many times the Affirmative will leave the goals unstated but implicit in the advantages they present. However, as we will see below, the goals help to properly summarize the debate, so they need to be specific at some point.

Next the goals must be integrated with the resolution, or, if the Affirmative is presenting a plan under the resolution, the details of the plan. The Affirmative in this month's final round implicitly argues that the treaty will have an impact on safety in the region by encouraging and enabling India's greater use of nuclear energy. Note that while the linkage is hard to dispute, the Affirmative and Negative will spend part of the debate arguing whether the Treaty promotes or reduces safety. But neither side will dispute that safety is a goal, and that the Treaty, by promoting nuclear energy, is connected to safety in its various forms in the region.

At this point the Affirmative has only given us an outline of how they intend to proceed. The third step is to show significant advantages, as measured by the stated goals, flow from adopting the resolution.⁵ In December's final round, the Affirmative needs to show that adopting the resolution will significantly improve safety, or that failure to adopt will significantly compromise safety. Their three contentions are: nuclear energy produces dangerous waste that is difficult and expensive to dispose of; the spending on nuclear energy will delay or prevent the adoption of better alternative energy technologies; and the Treaty will cause an arms race with Pakistan with risk of war.⁶

The final duty of the Affirmative is to compare those advantages to what could be obtained without the resolution. In this case, the Affirmative three contentions present what they expect to be consequences of leaving the Treaty in place.

Attacking a Comparative Advantages Case⁷

There are a number of ways that the Negative can respond to a comparative advantages case. The obvious way is to "slug it out" by challenging the advantages claimed by the Affirmative and presenting contrasting disadvantages. But let's consider a more complete list so that we can see more possibilities, some of which the Negative used in this month's final round.

1. Challenge the goals given by the Affirmative;
2. Challenge the topicality of the advantages, that is, show that they do not flow from adopting the resolution but are separate from it;
3. Show that the advantages can accrue without adopting the resolution through minor changes or adaptations to the status quo;

⁵ Traditionally the Affirmative arguments are called "advantages" and the Negative arguments "disadvantages." However, this resolution is "backwards" in that normally we would argue whether or not to adopt the Treaty. Unfortunately, the treaty process was completed in October, 2008, so we had to approach the topic in reverse. The Affirmative is arguing for repeal based on comparative disadvantages, and the Negative is arguing for its retention based on comparative advantages. But we will talk about Affirmative advantages and Negative disadvantages when describing the case in general terms.

⁶ I've simplified these a bit. The actual Affirmative contentions developed additional subpoints not presented here. See my flow notes for more details.

⁷ This section relies extensively on Chapter 13, "Building the Negative Case," of Freeley, Austin J., and David L. Steinberg, *Argumentation and Debate*, 2005, Wadsworth.

4. Show that the advantages claimed by the Affirmative will not accrue, or that they are unworkable or will not be significant; and
5. Present disadvantages to adopting the resolution that outweigh the Affirmative advantages.

The goal asserted by the Affirmative may be incorrect in some way, or may not be the only goal relevant to the debate. In the debate over nuclear energy, safety is not the only concern. Countries need a reliable source of energy in order to meet the needs of their population, and no source of energy is without some risk. As part of their third contention, the Negative team in December's final round noted that nuclear power would increase India's electric supplies leading to more economic development and better public health. While presented as an advantage to rejecting the resolution, it flows not from the Affirmative's stated goal of safety, but the goal of economic development and relieving poverty, which should be balanced against the need for safety.

The advantages argued by the Affirmative may not flow from the resolution. This is similar to an inherency argument: if you can achieve the same benefits another way, why adopt the resolution. This is one way of interpreting the Negative's response to the second Affirmative contention in December's debate. The Affirmative claimed retaining the Treaty would delay India's adoption of alternative renewable energy sources.⁸ The Negative argued that these technologies were unproven on the scale India required, and could not be implemented in any case. The Negative isn't arguing the disadvantage isn't a disadvantage, that is, the Negative isn't arguing alternative energy sources aren't desirable. Nor is the Negative arguing that alternative energy sources will be implemented. The Negative is simply arguing that this disadvantage is not a consequence of the resolution, but of the technology itself.

Third, the advantages claimed by the Affirmative might be obtained by minor changes short of adopting the resolution.⁹ This tactic was partly in evidence in the final round. In addition to arguing alternate energy technologies were immature, the Negative suggested other programs or entrepreneurs in India might support their development where practical and profitable, regardless of the treaty. So the benefits of using alternate energy sources may be obtained even with the Treaty in place if otherwise encouraged by economics or the government.

The Negative might also have used this approach against the Affirmative's argument on an India/Pakistan arms race. The Negative could have argued that continued diplomatic efforts to get both countries to destroy their nuclear arsenals and sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty would eventually succeed. Diplomacy would be necessary whether or not the Treaty was repealed, diplomacy is likely to continue even with the Treaty in place, and diplomacy might even be encouraged by the Treaty.

Most Negatives will attempt to show that the advantages claimed by the Affirmative will not accrue (and most Affirmatives will return the favor). In December's final round, the Negative argued that there were benefits gained by increased use of nuclear energy and

⁸ Remember, this resolution is upside down. The Affirmative is presenting a disadvantage, so the Negative is arguing that disadvantage is not unique to the resolution.

⁹ The Negative might abandon defense of the status quo entirely and propose a full counterplan, just like in a policy debate. They would then have to argue the advantages and disadvantages of the counterplan versus those of adopting the resolution.

that nuclear waste disposal was manageable with existing technology at reasonable cost. This directly opposed the Affirmative's first contention. The Negative also suggested that placing India's civilian nuclear program under IAEA supervision would reduce Pakistan's concerns that materials or technology would be diverted to India's weapons program, reducing the incentives for an arms race between the two countries. This directly counters the Affirmative's third contention.

Finally, the Negative can introduce disadvantages that will occur as a result of the adoption of the resolution or the Affirmative's interpretation of it. The previous four tactics are essentially reactions by the Negative to what the Affirmative has said. Introducing a disadvantage is direct action against the resolution and the Affirmative. In the final round the Negative argues as its third contention that the Treaty will improve the international climate in a number of ways for a variety of reasons.¹⁰

One example of a disadvantage that no one brought up is the direct consequences of repealing a recently signed treaty. As the packet indicates, the US-India nuclear cooperation treaty was controversial when it was signed, and was passed in both the US and India over significant political opposition. If the US unilaterally repealed such a treaty it could bring down the government in India, and it would likely make any country think twice about negotiating a treaty with the United States. The cost in diplomatic credibility could be very high, whether the Treaty is a good idea or not.

Comparing Advantages

The fourth component of an Affirmative comparative advantages case—demonstrating that the advantages of the resolution outweigh what would occur without it—is actually something both sides must do. Comparing the advantages and disadvantages presented by both sides is essential. But in order to compare, you need to present a yardstick.

In the December final round, the Second Negative used part of his rebuttal to present what he called “comparative worlds.” The Negative claimed that in the “Affirmative world” India would be poor, would build more nuclear weapons, would burn dirty coal and oil, and would buy technology from France rather than the US. They compared this to the “Negative world” in which India had less incentive to build weapons, and would have more power for economic development and better public health. This isn't really a comparison. The Negative doesn't concede any part of the Affirmative case. The Negative claims both reduced proliferation risk and better economic development as a result of the retaining the Treaty. This “comparison” basically concludes the Negative has won all of its points.

How do you balance proliferation versus development? The problem is that advantages are usually not directly comparable. Suppose at the end of December's final round, you agree with the Affirmative that the Treaty is likely to cause an arms race between India and Pakistan, and you agree with the Negative that the Treaty will result in increased use of nuclear energy and this is the best way for India to provide electric power to its growing population thereby reducing poverty and improving health. Who should win the debate?

¹⁰ Again, this resolution is sort of backwards, so the Affirmative is generally presenting disadvantages and the Negative advantages, opposite the usual conventions.

One way to compare is to reduce disparate advantages to a single, measurable standard. If you could make an argument that an arms race would increase the likelihood of war by so many percent, and that a war would claim so many lives, you could estimate the cost of that risk by the expected cost in lives lost over time. Similarly, if you could estimate how many lives would be lost without the economic development expanded nuclear electric power would bring, you would have a similar measure. The better option is the one that saves more lives.

If you lack this sort of detailed information, or find the logic difficult to swallow, then you need to find another way to make the comparison. This is where the goals come in. They are the essential yardsticks in a comparative advantages case. In December's debate, the Affirmative goal was safety. The two positions, Affirmative and Negative, can be compared on how they contribute to safety, even if this comparison is on a qualitative not quantitative basis. The Affirmative would argue that while economic development is nice, a nuclear war could set development back hundreds of years. The health benefits of development are outweighed by the risk and potential destruction of nuclear war.

It's more likely the two sides will put forth different goals, perhaps more than one. If there are multiple goals presented in the debate, your summary might include a comparison of the goals themselves. In the December final round one might say the Affirmative goal of safety was opposed by the Negative goal of economic development. An Affirmative summary might argue that safety is more important, because an unstable international climate causes countries to neglect economic development for military strength. Therefore the position that contributed the most to safety was the side to choose. The Negative might counter that economic development makes a nation and its people feel more secure. If they feel more secure, they will be less likely to depend on military strength or feel threatened by their neighbors. Therefore the position that contributed the most to economic development should win.

Note that in some ways a comparative advantages case is similar to a values based case one might see in a Lincoln-Douglas debate. There must be a yardstick for comparing the two sides. If each side proposes a different yardstick, each must argue why their yardstick is more appropriate.

In any debate, if you fail to provide a proper summary to the judge, then you leave the decision in his hands. You are always better off providing the judge with a rationale for his decision rather than forcing him to come up with his own. In a comparative advantages case, this summary should include both a standard by which to evaluate the merits of each side, and then an analysis as to why your side is better by that standard.

Effective Cross-Ex

I judged an excellent debate in the third round of December's tournament between teams from Newtown and Joel Barlow, one of the best I've seen in some time. I want to talk about one argument from that debate, not so much for the argument, but because I thought it provided an excellent example on how one could use cross-ex.

In that debate Newtown, as the Affirmative, set a dilemma for the Negative—the Newtown team called it a “double bind.” Their argument was that if the Treaty with

India were maintained, the US would have to do one of two things with respect to Pakistan. If the US signed a similar nuclear cooperation treaty with Pakistan, both countries, but certainly Pakistan, would divert technology for military purposes, fueling an arms race. If the US refused to sign a similar treaty with Pakistan, Pakistan would be angered and would assume India would cheat. This would increase Pakistan's fear of India, again fueling an arms race. Either way, the result would be greater instability and serious risk of nuclear war on the Indian subcontinent.

Posing a dilemma for your opponents is a good tactic. If you can demonstrate that no matter how they deal with a consequence of the resolution that something bad will happen, you have a strong argument against their case. Teams will often stumble replying to a dilemma if the logic is persuasive.

However, the weakest way to pose a dilemma—or any argument—is to simply assert it. Very few things in real life have only two options. There are usually many gradations of action and response. If you present two equally bad options to your opponents, they will probably deny your premises and suggest a third or fourth alternative that supports their side of the resolution. This is essentially how the Negative team dealt with the dilemma posed above. The Negative argued that strong IAEA safeguards would prevent diversion in India by opening India's civilian program to inspection. They also argued that India and Pakistan already have nuclear weapons and Pakistan's concerns pre-date the signing of the Treaty. Hence, if it makes any difference, the Treaty makes an arms race less, not more, likely.

You can make it more difficult for your opponent to slip away with this type of response if you can base your argument on your opponents own words. If they have agreed with your premises, it is much harder for them to avoid your conclusion. This is one of the best ways to use cross-ex, to get answers from your opponents that you can use as part of your own arguments. Consider the following (imaginary) cross-ex in relation to the dilemma explained above, with the Affirmative asking the questions and the Negative responding:

Q: Would you agree that Pakistan is concerned about India's military? We don't believe Pakistan will see the Treaty as a military matter.

Q: But Pakistan and India have fought wars in the past, Pakistan tested nuclear weapons in response to India, and the packet cites the Pakistani president saying his country would match India's offensive capacity? That's correct, but this Treaty is about civilian nuclear power.

Q: So you agree that if Pakistan felt India was increasing its military capability, it would feel compelled to respond? I suppose so, but this Treaty doesn't aid India's military.

Q: Do you also agree that if Pakistan felt India was diverting technology or material for military purposes they would feel compelled to respond? We don't believe that will happen with IAEA safeguards

Q: But if Pakistan thought India had, wouldn't Pakistan react? We don't believe diversion will occur.

Q: Didn't Pakistan sign an agreement with China for nuclear power reactors after India signed its Treaty with the US? Again, that is for civilian nuclear energy.

Q: Should the US sign a similar treaty with Pakistan? That's not part of this debate.

Q: Isn't it true, according to the packet, that the US has ignored Pakistan's request for a similar treaty because of Pakistan's poor record on nuclear proliferation? Yes.

Q: And isn't Pakistan a lot less stable than India? Yes.

Q: So, if the US did sign a similar treaty with Pakistan, our concern would be that technology and material would be diverted for military purposes? That's not the issue in today's debate.

Q: Does Pakistan trust India? I don't see how that's relevant.

Q: Do you think Pakistan believes India will only use US nuclear technology and materials for civilian purpose? Don't you think Pakistan will assume India will divert it for military purposes? I really don't know what Pakistan will think. The IAEA will provide safeguards under the Treaty.

Q: If we are worried Pakistan would cheat under a similar treaty, and Pakistan doesn't trust India, isn't it reasonable to think that Pakistan will assume India will cheat under this Treaty?

And I'll stop there.

One of the reasons why it's difficult to teach cross-ex is that it's impossible to know how someone will answer your questions in real life. I've tried to make this dialog above reasonably realistic, in that the answers given by my imaginary Negative speaker never give away anything obviously useful. In fact my Negative answers generally support the arguments the real Negative used in the debate I judged. It's important to remember that your opponents aren't likely to say anything in cross-ex that obviously hurts their case. You shouldn't expect them to, and you don't need them to.

Consider the arguments introduced by the cross-ex questions above:

- Pakistan is worried about India's military capability;
- Pakistan has responded to India in the past;
- Pakistan is less stable and trustworthy than India; and
- Pakistan is likely to believe India will cheat.

My imaginary Negative agreed with the first three, and passed on the last one. But the Negative could hardly disagree with any of the four—think of your follow up questions if they had said Pakistan trusted India! In cross-ex getting your opponent to avoid an obvious answer to a question is often as good as getting them to give that obvious answer.

Note that the Negative did not answer some questions and did not agree with the conclusion implied by others. The Negative rejected any attempt to connect military matters to the Treaty, refused to state how Pakistan would interpret such a treaty, and refused to answer what the US concerns with Pakistan would be.

However, the cross-ex provides a lot of material that can be used to set up the dilemma. Consider this segment of an imaginary Second Affirmative Constructive:

The Affirmative believes the Negative position leads to a dilemma with respect to Pakistan that will inevitably increase the risk of a nuclear arms race and nuclear war in the region. This risk increases even if India respects the Treaty.

First, in cross-ex the Negative agreed with us that Pakistan is concerned with India's military strength, and has reacted to India in the past. The Newsweek article in the packet reports the Pakistani president saying they will 'increase their deterrent to match India's offensive capability.'

Second, the Negative also agreed in cross-ex, as reported by the Wall Street Journal article in the packet, that the US has ignored Pakistan's request for a similar treaty over concerns with

Pakistan's proliferation record. So the US believes that Pakistan can't be trusted with a similar treaty even with IAEA safeguards.

Finally, the Negative also agreed that Pakistan is less stable than India, and this is also noted several times in the packet. While they didn't really answer our questions about whether Pakistan believes India will cheat, the Affirmative believes Pakistan will assume that India will cheat. After all, as our opponents agree, Pakistan is an unstable country, which is fearful of India, and which has reacted to India in the past and has promised to do so in the future. How likely is it that Pakistan will believe India won't exploit this Treaty for military purposes, even with IAEA safeguards?

So, either the US signs a similar Treaty with Pakistan—one that we don't trust Pakistan to keep—and they will likely divert technology and material to nuclear weapons. Or we refuse to treat Pakistan as India's equal, and they will believe India is cheating under the Treaty, and redouble their efforts to match what they see as a boost to India's nuclear weapons program. Pakistan has already signed a treaty with China similar to the US treaty with India. Either way you get a nuclear arms race with an increased threat of war.

We need to continue our old policy of refusing to provide nuclear technology of any kind to either side.

Note this is exactly the same argument the Affirmative made above. The Affirmative quoted some of the same items from the packet. But I believe my version is much stronger because my imaginary Affirmative as involved the Negative in building the argument.

Here the Negative has agreed with three of four parts of the argument. Even though those three are supported by some items in the packet, the Negative's agreement makes them difficult for the Negative to refute. The Negative's agreement with those three also make it more likely the judge will accept the Affirmative's fourth point, that Pakistan will assume India will cheat and react accordingly.

Note that the Negative can use the same response outlined above: favorable impact of effective IAEA safeguards; the India-Pakistan rivalry pre-dates the Treaty. But it is likely to be less effective given their responses on Pakistan's reliability and fears. The cross-ex involves the Negative in the Affirmative's argument against them, and those ties are hard to break.

Don't expect your opponents to make any major admissions under cross-ex. Do try to get them to agree with facts or premises that you plan to use in making your case. Introduce your conclusions as obvious consequences of the discussion, but don't expect your opponents will agree with them. They don't have to. By involving your opponents in the fabric of your arguments, you make it hard for them to rebut them.

Sixty Minutes Revisited

I received a comment from the team at Pomperaug High School on last month's piece on using the preparation period. Their suggestion was essentially to reverse the third and fourth steps. Rather than generate the contentions first and then develop supporting arguments for each contention, their preference is to develop a number of arguments, and then base their Affirmative and Negative contentions on the best of those. The table shows the difference between the two approaches.

November Coach's Notes	Pomperaug's Approach
Read and discuss resolution	Read and discuss resolution
Read the packet	Read the packet
Generate contentions	Develop arguments
Develop supporting arguments	Generate contentions based on best arguments
Outline the First Constructive speeches	Outline the First Constructive speeches

One way to describe the two approaches is that the first is top down, while Pomperaug's is bottom up. Both are perfectly acceptable ways to solve a problem. You will find bottom up and top down methods described in any number of texts on problem solving.

If the topic is unfamiliar, it may be easier to construct a series of arguments and build up to the contentions, rather than the reverse. If you start with strong arguments, and then write your contentions, you certainly won't find yourself with a contention you can't support. One method may be more suitable to some topics than to others.

To some extent, which method you choose is a matter of preference and style. Whatever your preference, remember that your preparation time is limited and you must plan to use it wisely. Unless you have a plan for using that time efficiently, you are likely to get hung up on one thing or another and find the first round starting before you are ready. Just like they teach you in an SAT prep class: finished or not, you have to move on to the next question.

Watch Your Time

I see many debaters who get so involved in one argument that they neglect others during their constructive or rebuttal speeches. First Affirmative speakers will spend four minutes of their constructive speech on their first contention, and then rush through the others in the last two minutes. Or the First Negative Constructive will start saying they intend to present their own contentions and then respond to their opponents—excellent tactics—and then spend five minutes on the former and leave only one for the latter.

In each speech you have to cover a certain amount of ground. Spend too much time on one thing and you may win one argument and lose the debate. You need to decide not only what to present in each speech but also how much time to spend on each point. Then you have to keep to those decisions. Some debaters even bring a kitchen timer with large numbers with them up to the podium to pace themselves.¹¹

As a first approximation, the more points you have associated with each contention or argument, the more time that contention or argument will take. When you prepare your outline before you get up to speak, make sure that outline is visually balanced to match the amount of time you think each point is worth. If you have more written on one item,

¹¹ Note to those of you with kitchen timers: turn off the alarm! No point in telling the judge your time is up if he doesn't know. If a distracted judge or timekeeper lets you get away with an extra 15 or 30 seconds, I say use it. On the other hand, some judges are very particular about debaters who go overtime. If you stop at the right time without an obvious signal, you'll look that much more skilled. But there is no benefit to you by interrupting your own speech with an alarm going off!

you are likely to spend more time talking about that point. Is that what you intend to do? Is that the best way to use your time?

Learn to make your arguments concisely. Try not to repeat yourself. Saying it once well is better than saying it twice poorly. Don't say more than you have to. Remember you don't have to use everything the first time you make an argument. If you have four points to support your second contention, use two, and save two for rebuttal.

Make sure you have considered the relative importance of the argument to the debate. You don't have to win or respond to every point, but you must win the important ones. In the rebuttals, identify which arguments have become key to winning the debate. Spend more of your time on those, leaving the minor ones to the end or dismissing them quickly. One of the secrets to doing this is to explain why the important arguments are important.

As you watch the final round at a tournament, note how the speakers use their time. The best begin each speech explaining what they intend to do, balance the time spent against the value of the argument, and finish their last point just as time is called. That is what you need to aim for.

Truth and the Packet

At the December tournament I heard comments and questions from both judges and debaters about the status of the packet. Specifically, should the packet be accepted as true for the purposes of the debate?

My answer is that the only thing that you can be certain of with respect to the packet is that we will be debating the resolution at the top of the first page, and that each article is correctly presented from the source cited.¹² Otherwise, those articles are no more reliable than any other article you may read from similar sources in the press, in books, in the media or on the internet. After all, those are the sources that we use to create the packet in the first place.

If we were to tell you to accept everything in the packet as true, we would create an immediate and insurmountable problem: the packet is only useful to you in preparing for debate if it contains contradictory opinions and facts. They can't both be true. It is possible that both could be only partially correct, or that both could be wrong.

Consider this month's packet on the US/India nuclear cooperation treaty. President Bush states that the Treaty will "strengthen global non-proliferation efforts." The following article from the St. Louis Post Dispatch quotes Senator Dorgan of North Dakota saying the Treaty "will almost certainly expand the production of nuclear weapons by India' and help dismantle the architecture of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty." I believe the quotes are correct, but I don't think that both the President and the Senator can both be right.

The packet is not a substitute for rational argument and analysis. It provides background on the topic and an outline of the opposing points of view to get you started on the debate. It's your job to analyze the issues and question the positions taken by each side,

¹² Unless, of course, the tournament is held on April 1, in which case anything goes.

and, presumably, by your opponents in the debate. You should consider the source of any opinion or fact, as well as the opinion or fact itself. The source may be biased, the “facts” may contradict common sense or what you know from other sources. All of this is grist for the mill of your debates.

Learning to Debate—A Personal Note

This academic year is the 40th anniversary of the year I learned to debate. I mean something very specific by that. I was a junior at Xavier High School, and had been debating since sophomore year, so I had a bit of experience. I’d even been to a summer debate workshop. My partner Michael Esposito and I were at the stage where we were winning more than we lost. But in those later rounds, when teams were power-matched, we struggled. We knew when we lost, but we didn’t know why, or how to win. Our arguments seemed to be the same as those the other teams were using, but against the better teams we couldn’t sway the judge.

There are three stages in the education of a debater. The first level is mostly mechanics: learning to speak, to present arguments and to ask questions. A debater at this level who uses all his time, has contentions that generally support the topic, and asks his opponents more than just to clarify what they’ve said is doing well. Most debaters pick this up their first year. The second level is about arguments. Debaters at this level understand the requirements of a good case. Their contentions are well-developed with solid supporting arguments. They present them in an organized and convincing manner. This is the level my partner and I were at.

We were at a high school tournament sponsored by Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts. We had just lost a round to a team of seniors from Archbishop Stepinac High School from New York, one of the better teams on the East coast that year. The judge was someone we knew, Brother Meric, the coach of Xaverian High School in Brooklyn.

After the round we were sitting in the hallway, obviously looking a bit down, when Brother Meric walked by coming back from turning in his ballot. He said hello and asked us how we were doing. We said we were doing as well as could be expected considering we had just lost the round. He replied, “You know, you could have won that debate.” We thought he was kidding. But he told us to take out our flowcharts, and for the next twenty minutes or so, he walked through the debate with us.

The third stage in the education of a debater—one that all debaters should strive to reach—is learning to adapt and apply your arguments to the circumstances of the debate. Brother Meric showed us that there was nothing wrong with our case, and that it was not inferior to that of our opponents. The problem was that all we were doing was presenting those arguments. The teams that were beating us were listening to what we said, responding to our specific arguments, and adapting their case to counter ours. We weren’t doing that. Those twenty minutes analyzing that debate were the most productive of my debating career.

There are two important lessons I drew from that experience. First, if you want to debate well, you have to learn to analyze your debates. You must become your own best judge and critic. It would be great if everyone could have a judge like Brother Meric observe

just the right debate and walk them through it, but you can't count on that. Most judges don't give a verbal critique, and what they write on the ballot can vary greatly in quality and usefulness. So you and your partner—with the help of your coach—need to be prepared to critique yourselves.

Second, if you don't take good notes, you can't analyze your debates. Brother Meric had his own notes of our debate, of course, but he spent most of the time walking us through the debate based on what my partner and I had written down, and I believe that was an important part of the lesson. Fortunately we were already taking notes that were good enough to recreate the important lines of argument. If he had used his notes to analyze the debate, I don't believe we would have been able to appreciate his analysis. You should be able to recreate your debates in a fair and unbiased fashion from your notes after the tournament is over.

Now it wasn't as if my partner and I never lost a debate after that lesson. It took us a number of tournaments and debates to put what we had learned into practice, analyze what we did, and then to do it better the next time. But we understood what we needed to do, and how to review our debates to do it. We steadily became more competitive, and went on to have a very successful senior year. But those twenty minutes made all the difference.