International Relations in Debates

Many people desperately try to avoid any debate dealing with international issues, start crying when they have to first propp on a motion dealing with the European Union, or just think that it is impossible to debate about a country they know nothing more of than its approximate location on the world map. This is weird, as IR debates, although they can be greatly helped if you actually know some stuff (reading a newspaper should be sufficient), are really just like any other debate: a couple of principles are enough to win them, even over people who know their stuff better. If they know international law: great for them. But really, international law is mostly non-binding anyway, and so many countries breach it that there's really no reason to stick to it, except for some morality issues. If they know loads of examples from countries with funny names, congratulate them on that knowledge, but unless they explain why their examples are relevant, just say they don't apply to your case.

In academics, international relations is really just a broad term covering everything that is not confined to one polity/society/country/state, but deals with relationships between states, relationships between states and international organisations, or with international organisations or really anything that crosses a border. IR debates, on the other hand, usually deal with the situation in one specific country and what outsiders (countries, the UN, the EU or something else) have to do with it, or they deal with the internal politics of an international organisation (the UN, WTO, IMF, World Bank, NATO or the EU and voting systems or their tasks), sometimes they deal with cross-border problems that need to be dealt with internationally, such as (illegal) migration, drug trafficking or the environment and sometimes they deal with relations between states in more general terms (retaliation and war, development aid, or trade agreements, for example). So basically there are four ir mainstays: war, intervention, international organisations and international problems.

War
This topic is what created the academic discipline of international relations: why do states go to war, and how can we prevent it. In IR debates, possible motions dealing with this topic are: This House Would (THW) invade Iran/bomb its nuclear facilities, This House Believes That (THBT) pre-emptive strikes are illegitimate, THBT all countries have a right to carry nuclear weapons, THW set up a missile defence shield over Taiwan. Debates in this area inevitably deal with so-called realpolitik (Bismarck): who has power enough to do what, who is a threat and how big is that threat. International law does have rules on this issue, and this may work to keep some countries in check and not attack other countries, but this is not always true. I will deal with the issue of humanitarian interventions later on, this part is about raw military power and military threats.

International law is rather simple on the issue of war: any country that is attacked by another country has a right to attack that country. Any other form of an attack on a country should be agreed upon by the United Nations Security Council (SC) under chapter VI of the UN Charter. Obviously, this means that the five permanent members (US, Russia, China, France and England) of the SC can block any such agreement with a veto. There are a number of reasons why an attack on another country might be allowed: the country is
funding or helping violent insurgents, the country is preparing a war on another country (and a pre-emptive strike could prevent an attack), or it has already attacked another country and a third country wants to protect the victim. Examples of these are: Afghanistan after the Twin Tower attack, Israel in the Six Day War attacking its Arab neighbours and Iraq when it attacked Quwait in 1991. In all cases, the country that is to be attacked, must be a clear and credible threat to international peace and stability. Article 51 of the UN Charter states the right to self defense, while article 2 states that no state should resort to violence. These two articles are clearly in conflict when dealing with pre-emptive strikes, as they are not 'real' self defense and this is why they are wonderful debates. In the debate, it does not matter whether the attack is consented to by the UN SC, but it is a model choice: you can attack without the consent, or with it, and this makes for different debates. If you are prop, try to bend the debate in such a way that it becomes something along the lines of: the SC should agree to attacking this country. This way the debate is not about whether the SC is going to agree in time, or whether the UN is going to be capable to do it (just say SC needs to agree and then a willing coalition will do the rest), nor will the debate focus on whether it is good to do this outside of the UN (generally bad) but just about whether the action is legitimate.

International relations theory has several things to say on war and peace, depending on the theory you like most. Realism, the foundational theory, basically says that states strive for continuing existence, and need to be able to defend themselves. Either because all states try to become more powerful than all others and try to invade smaller or less powerful countries when they can, or because some other states do so. Thus, states need to protect themselves from attacks by having military power, which is created by having economic power. No state ever knows what the others will do, or can fully trust them, so no state can let their guard down, and all states need to build up their defenses, and because some build up their defenses/military capacities, all states need to do this to prevent being wiped out. Decisions to go to war, or not, are based on calculations of power (effectiveness) but also on the need to create supremacy: the stronger a country vis-a-vis other countries is, the less likely it is going to be attacked. Liberalism, also called institutionalism (both European names), or idealism (in the US), agree that this is the basic idea of how countries and the state system work, but think that this can be solved, partly, by having institutions (international organisations) which make countries trust each other because they cooperate, and make them interdependent, because of international trade: if you are economically active in another country, you won't attack that country. Basically, most of this theory is best forgotten, but that some of these points can be useful in arguing how to deal with countries that are not so nice: even if most states don't behave like they are constantly under attack, some states do, and they are often likely to be the very same states which threaten others (North Korea, for example). Would we need to revert to the same kind of 'realist' logic? Or do we need to make them more like us, and revert to liberal tactics of increasing trade?

The basics of any debate about going to war (which is almost always pre-emptively) are these:
1) How big a threat is a country? How credible is that threat? Or why is it not really a threat?
2) Why is a threat enough to justify an attack? Or why is it not?
3) Who is going to attack?
4) Is this attack going to be effective: will it stop the threat, or decrease it, or will it be counterproductive?

1) Threat
This is where knowledge could be useful. For example, knowing that Iran is building up nuclear power plants and is probably going to build the capabilities for a nuclear bomb is good to know, as is the fact that North Korea has been trying to do the same. Knowing that Ahmedinejad has threatened to wipe out Israel and that the US is generally considered to be the Great Satan in Iran, is useful, as well as the fact that Iran's nuclear missiles are probably never going to reach the US. What you will need to do here is firstly, establish that a country intends to use its weapons on another country, and that it cannot be counted upon to be held back either by international law, or by threats that another country will protect it (Iran will attack Israel even though it knows the US will attack it if it does so, China will not attack Taiwan because it knows the US will attack it if it does so - these are not statements of truth, they are claims). Ways of arguing that a country is not going to be held back by the normal logic of states facing a greater power than their own, is to look at their internal dynamics: in the case of Iran, the fact that its regime is based on religion, which means they like life after death as much as life now, while they also face growing discontentment with the state of the economy and need to hold on to rule by creating legitimacy in a different way: by playing great power politics and (verbally) attacking their great enemies, at some point this may lead to an irreversible road in the wrong direction, as the only way to keep legitimacy is to attack). Other countries of course ask for other explanations. Then you need to show that the weapons they are building/massing are going to be sufficiently deadly to threaten a country and aren't just a couple of missiles that can be stopped by a simple Patriot shield (Iraq - Israel 1991).

The way for the opposition to win this argument is obviously to show that these countries, although led by mad dictators like Mugabe, Kim Jung Il, Khamenei, etc. are no different than, say the Soviet Union during the Cuban missile crisis: they will step down if the threat they are facing is big enough and credible enough, even though they are not normal law abiding 'citizens' of this world. Rulers generally want something to rule. Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) is a cool term to use in case both countries have nuclear arms. Else it is probably enough to mention that any country is never going to last when invaded by the US (even though insurgency and guerilla groups may win, the government is likely to fall). And as long as there's a credible threat of a counterattack when a wrong move is made, we don't have to bother with them wasting money on weapons instead of on industrial development.

2) Justification of pre-emptive attacks
The simple justification is that we save more lives than we kill if we attack. Such an attack is justified when there is a credible threat, and there is no other alternative to preventing an
attack, such as sanctions, boycotts, etc. You need to build upon arguments made before about the credibility of the threat: above, you established they are going to use them, even if they know they will be attacked in return. Here, you need to mention that they will not listen to other forms of powerplay, like boycotts or diplomatic sanctions. For purposes of structuring your speech, you may want to put these two together.

The opposition should obviously talk about all the reasons why there's actually going to be more deaths (given that it is also not such a big threat anyways) and that there are other alternatives. The other alternatives are again based on the leaders of the country being rational and the sanctions being painful enough to have an effect. The 'more deaths' argument builds on examples like current-day Iraq and Afghanistan: it may be easy to topple a regime, but hard to create order in a country that has just lost its leadership, especially if it was a divided country to begin with. In addition, you're certainly going to get collateral damage in the form of civilian casualties. In addition, you will need to talk about the precedent that is created, or confirmed, that states can attack a country whenever they perceive it as a threat. This can be used as a pretext by states with ill intentions when they attack a country, claiming they perceived a threat from them as an excuse for the attack (Iran could claim it feels threatened by Israel, or the US). This line of argumentation is much less valid when the plan is to get UNSC permission for an attack. This does, however, open up the plan for a number of other objections, such as the fact that such a trajectory is usually so slow that if there were a real threat, the bad stuff would have already taken place by the time the SC gave permission.

3) Who attacks
Most likely this will be a western country, a coalition of western countries (and others) or NATO. Make sure the attacker(s) are strong enough. Sometimes you will need to explain why the attacker(s) have a right to do so (in case of NATO: because one of their own is under threat). Quite often, you could talk about the importance of peace, security and order to prevail, in order to make this world a better place for trade and development, etc. All countries have a stake in that. Otherwise, you could talk about the attacker(s) having a stake in the economy of the victim or of being neighbours.

4) What are the consequences?
Is the attack going to be effective in toppling the regime, or reaching another goal (like decreasing their military power)? What is going to happen after the attack? Are the people in the country willing to accept the new situation and cooperate, or are they going to form resistance? Are they going to be resentful for the next three generations, or will they eventually see the rightness of the invasion, or an improvement in their daily lives so that they are able to accept it. This can only be done on a case by case basis.

The basics of a debate about defensive weaponry, like missile shields are:
1) What is the threat we are dealing with, is it big enough to demand such an expenditure?
2) What will be the effect on relations between states when the protection is there? How will the supposedly agressive nation respond?
3) What will this do to the balance of power between states? What will that change in balance of power do to relations between states?

1) threat
This is basically the same debate as in the first one, only prop now argues about a defensive policy and so opps case needs to be about the fact that the threat is not that great, or that the threat is different, and that this particular defensive policy is not going to work (and you cannot really choose both unless you do a very clear: even if there were a threat, this is not going to help you). Example: putting up a missile defense shield over Taiwan makes no sense: the Chinese are never going to attack the island (a boycott should be sufficient), and anyways, they have a huge navy which can deal with the attack.

2) relations
Will the 'aggressor' country think differently of the country providing or using a missile shield? Will the fact that it is treated as an agressive country change the way it behaves (in a negative way). Or will the fact that it can no longer effectively attack the country make it unlikely to be so mean to it, to ignore it, to try to bully it into agreeing with it, and threatening to attack it? This depends to a large extent on the internal situation in the state, and the extent to which common sense holds sway. For example, the Chinese communist party has slowly changed its tack to one that is focused on nationalism in which an undivided China is essential. A separatist (or well defended and therefore independent-minded) Taiwan cannot, therefore, be accepted. It also depends on what other mechanisms the country has to ensure that it gets what it wants without attacking.

3) power balance
The country getting a defensive shield might think that it can now do things it could not do before, because it felt threatened by the other state. For example, Taiwan might declare independence once it knows China cannot attack it. This might mean a deterioration in the relations between states, and too risky behaviour, so that war becomes inevitable, while this is the one thing the defensive measures were supposed to prevent. On the other hand, an equality in the balance of power might mean the threatening state will tone down its behaviour, creating a situation in which relations can be normalised, which should, eventually lead to de-escalation, possibly an increase in trade and economic relations and overall happiness (peace, love and understanding).

**Intervention**
Intervention debates are about countries breaching other countries' sovereignty in order to establish something in that country which is good. They basically deal with a country, say Zimbabwe, Birma/Myanmar or North-Korea in which all is not well, or something is rotten, more to the point. These countries make life hard for their own citizens, they violate basic human rights like the right to life, the right to physical integrity and protection from torture, and the right to freedom from arbitrary arrest. They can also be slightly less bad, but still not very comfortable places to live in, especially if you are part of a certain group, say a
religious or ethnic minority, gays or women (places like Iran, China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Turkey but also Poland, Slovakia and Estonia). These minorities are discriminated against, cannot live the life they want to (for example, their religion or language is forbidden practice) and sometimes face the same things that the countries mentioned above do to all their citizens. Or they can be relatively good places to live in, but very undemocratic, so they lock up political opponents, do not allow freedom of the press, and ban political parties, examples are: Egypt, Singapore, Cuba. The intervention can take different forms: it could be an invasion (in cases of genocide, or really harsh human rights violations), aiding opposition groups or insurgents, an all-out boycott, economic sanctions, diplomatic sanctions, or withdrawal of development aid (in cases that are slightly less bad), or political pressure and (financial) inducements to change.

Souvereignty
Souvereignty is well-established in international law since the Westphalian Treaty (otherwise known in the Netherlands as de Vrede van Münster, which was really just a part of the bigger treaty ending the Thirty Years War in Germany in 1648) It can be based on different things: self-determination of the people, protection of fundamental human rights and protection of international order and stability. The self-determination of people is the traditional ground for souvereignty ever since Woodrow Wilson focused on it after WWI. The idea is that each nation (group of people self-identifying as a group with a shared history, language, ethnic background, and/or culture) wants to organise itself according to its own principles on its own territory. A slightly different way of formulating this, is to focus on the protection of fundamental human rights, like freedom of religion, association and expression, right to life, etc. The state is essential in protecting these rights and in providing opportunities to enjoy cultural rights. A state represents its people (this becomes slightly more problematic when the country is not democratic, but can still be said to be true on a cultural level). Lastly, a more cynical justification is that even if some states are really bad for their own citizens, it would be worse to create a situation in which it becomes normal to intervene in countries which one does not like. War destabilises more than leaving a country like it is, while boycotts hurt the people one tries to safe: not intervening is much better, because it allows for stable and trusting relations between countries. Change can come through diplomacy, benefits if a country changes, or over time.

A debate about humanitarian intervention (actual war, that is) will deal with the following questions:
1) Is a humanitarian intervention justified?
2) Who is going to do it?
3) Is an intervention going to be effective?
4) What will be the consequences?

1) justification
On the prop side this is based on the rights idea and self-determination: if a state is really bad to its citizens, i.e. nation, it does not deserve to be its representative or ruler. You will
need to show how bad the human rights violations are, and that they need to be stopped. In international law, humanitarian intervention can only be based on a threat to peace and security, this is the only thing that has been accepted by the UN SC. It is, however, possible to argue this case in a debate without doing the peace and security thing, by focusing on a duty to protect citizens of other countries, because we share a common humanity and because no one else is doing it. The peace and security argument runs as follows: these regimes are really bad, they lead to loads of refugees, these refugees are an enormous burden to the countries taking them in (usually poor neighbouring countries) and they lead to unrest over there (because they are part of the same minorities present in those countries, particularly in the case of African countries, and they change the ethnic power balance of those countries), and because they form resistance movements in refugee camps. The opp needs to show how international stability is threatened more by the intervention, and/or that the violations are not that bad or not so much a threat to security. They could also mention that loads of people die in cases of interventions. Arguing that the human rights violations aren't as bad as prop says, may not be the best course of action, especially not in cases of genocide.

2) who?
A coalition of the willing, a western (or random) state (like the UK in Sierra Leone or Vietnam in Cambodja), NATO (in Kosovo), or a UN sanctioned international force. Anyone who is strong enough to do it well. Frankly, it doesn't really matter, although opp is probably going to complain it is. This is not true, unless the attacker is not going to let the UN in after the deed is done.

3) effective
This is similar to the debate about war: can we manage to win this war.

4) Consequences
This is similar to the debate about war, but the goal of humanitarian intervention is usually more ambitious, and an intervention should not just take away a threat, but also create a good government. Fun stuff to talk about is that the international community can take on a role in rebuilding the country: they do/did so quite well in East Timor, Kosovo, Rwanda (quite, not perfectly however). Why this will work is mostly because we have flattened all resistance, they are beaten. Unless the country harbours numerous equally powerful and aggressive minorities, and has a tradition of fighting, we can probably figure out a way that makes most people happy, and pump loads of money into the country in order to redevelop their economy, so that people will stay happy. Intervening in a country that is relatively developed, and has a history of at least some democratic governance, will probably make your chances of success higher than intervening in countries which have "prehistoric" societal structures like Afghanistan or the Sudan.
The latter is more relevant for interventions attempting to install democracy, but there's really not much else you can do in a debate. Good things to have when you want to install democracies in another country: a literate population, free and independent media (these two increase knowledge about politics and public scrutiny), middle classes (this is because they are usually the driving force for democracy: they have the capacities (in terms of education), time and money to want to have influence on politics (poor people don't have these things, rich people are usually connected to governing elites) and they are generally not favouring extremist opinions, "civil society groups" (maatschappelijk middenveld: groups that are not directly political parties, but allow for self organisation of citizens which builds trust through cooperation, as well as knowledge of political processes and breeds independent power centres - think of religious organisations, charity groups, human rights advocate networks, neighbourhood associations. environemental protection groups). Being economically developed leads to many of the previously mentioned and is therefore often assumed to be a necessary precondition for democratisation. This is not necessarily true (Costa Rica and India have been democratic for a longer period than Greece and Spain), but abject poverty and large inequalities usually lead to discontent amongst the poor and distrust of the poor amongst the rich, it also is likely to lead to corruption and the development of a shadow economy and to a high level of crime. All these things can be detrimental to democracy. Other things that are not favourable for democracy are: hostile relations between ethnic groups, political parties that are solely based on stuff like religion or ethnicity, economic inequalities, corruption and a military that likes intervening in politics.

This short detour was necessary to show you ways to argue that it is possible to create democracy in a country if opponents say: "It is impossible to impose democracy, it failed in Iraq" This is simply not true, the Western allies were quite succesful in imposing democracy in Germany, Japan and Italy after WWII. You can show how it is possible here.

Intervention does not have to be done militarily. We can also fund insurgents, or do boycotts or smart sanctions. The debate is a lot like the debate about invasion, but that all arguments about the attacker are replaced with arguments about the insurgents. Here's the deal with the debate about other sanctions than attacks:
1) Why do we need to do it?
2) What?
3) What is going to be the effect?

1) Why
This is really just the same as the debate about intervention. However, we can probably do these things in more cases, with "lesser" human rights violations as well. The opposition should probably just accept that it is bad, but argue that the solution is worse, and focus mostly on the effects. The difference with the humanitarian intervention point is that the measure is slightly less powerful, so that the counterargument is also slightly less strong.

2) What
Diplomatic sanctions: are mostly symbolic, they include taking diplomats out of the country, making negative comments about the country in international fora, not inviting leaders to negotiations, they may include sports sanctions as well
Economic sanctions: can be focused on specific products (oil in the case of Iraq, for example). The best tactic seems to be to stop all forms of luxury trade with the country, to freeze assets of the leaders of a regime, to make it impossible for leaders to travel, etc. (these are not strictly economic - their benefit is that you hit the leaders instead of an already suffering population)
All-out boycott: is going to hit everyone in the country, making most things a lot more expensive and taking away employment (depending on how dependent the country is on trade). This may be effective, if we can assume the people are going to rise up against a dictator because of their suffering.
Funding insurgents: has the benefit of being internal, and therefore more legitimate, but also being violent, probably representing a minority of the population, and unpredictable (they could turn dictator as well). The funder does, however, have some form of control over what the insurgency group does.

3 Effect
The prop needs to say that one of these things is going to happen: the bad leaders step down (1), the bad leaders stop their bad actions (2) or the bad leaders are overthrown by the people (3). This is going to happen because: (1) the leaders feel they can no longer rule the country, want to live comfortably without all this hassle, and want to prevent actual revolution; (2) the leaders do not like these measures, and rationally calculate they would like to go back to the previous situation; (3) the leaders have made themselves so unpopular, that these sanctions (also unpopular) are the tipping point for people to start protesting. How to prove these things depends a lot on the actual debate, but has to do with the (somewhat) rational calculations that the leader makes when deciding these things.

The opp needs to say that sanctions and boycotts don't work, these leaders just want to hold onto power, no matter what the costs, and that most sanctions hit the people instead of the leaders. Especially in case of all out boycotts, the people may be too focused on getting their daily bread to start revolting.

Independence

Independence of a group in a country is a debate that often comes up (Kosovo, Abkhazie, Tchechnya, Kashmir, Trans-Dnjestria, Quebec, Corsica, Kurdistan, Basques, just to name a few) In other cases, the debate is more about joining one part of a country to another country (Kosovo and Kashmir fall into both categories, Northern Ireland only in this one). The debate has different shapes: either you will argue in favour of or against the principle of having a group or territory in a country becoming independent, or you will argue in favour of or against countries supporting that independence. The latter adds another layer to it, which will mostly be about: will this create a good or bad precedent, what will it do with our
relations with the country that is losing a bit of its territory and the countries supporting it (Russia, in the case of Kosovo for example), it can also be about what the support will entail: just verbal statements, or actual military aid if independence goes awry and what the effect will be (for example, will a statement lead the minority to assume they will get military support? This can go bad, as Georgia illustrated this summer). Otherwise, the debate is much the same and goes like this:

1) right to self-determination
2) international stability
3) the new state

1) Self-determination
Woodrow Wilson already stated the right to self-determination in the 1910s. A nation (see above) has certain needs that can only be organised collectively, such as education in the language, culture and history of the group, support for religious and cultural activities, and a certain way of organising society that can only be organised through a state, and this means the nation needs to have self-determination and autonomy. This is why we have independent nation-states to begin with, but some peoples are placed in states in which they are a minority. The issue here is whether such a state can guarantee the minority's rights. If it cannot, then the minority should have its own state. When can the majority not guarantee these rights: when they have proven to be incapable of doing so in the past (Kosovo, Basques, Catalonia, Northern Ireland). They have discrimated against the minority, not allowed it to use its own language, or actively persecuted people from the minority. When the majority is unwilling to revert to more autonomy for the minority, for example in a federalist state (as is now done in Spain and Belgium) or when federalism is not possible (like in Northern Ireland), by granting rights to cultural independence. Even if the majority is quite willing to accommodate, prop could argue that just the fact that the minority wants independence is enough, because deciding about politics and laws within the own group is more important (an autonomous part never has full independence) especially if there have been violations of their rights in the past, which make it impossible to trust the majority. Opp will need to show that they can get most of their rights in the current state, they have to argue that the definition of a nation is always vague and can therefore be used by many groups in society, for example by those parts of the country that are richer and unwilling to pay for poorer parts of the country (Flanders - although the Walloons used to pay for Flanders' poverty until at least the 1960s) and that this is unfair. So this part of the debate is principled as well as practical.

2) International stability
This is mostly an opp argument: Having many smaller states does not create more stability, and setting a principle that it is okay to become independent spurs other minorities elsewhere into action as well, it may lead to more terrorist actions in Kashmir, Spain, or Chechnya, for example. The prop can put forward that stability is not helped by having people in a country who would rather have their own country, or to put groups of people together in a country who don't trust each other (one only has to look at Bosnia to
understand how hard that is). Another issue of stability is the response by greater powers in the region, which can be problematic. On the other hand, one could argue that breaking up the nations of the EU in many smaller states might make the EU more governable (as none has too much power).

3) The new state
Here there are a couple of issues to be dealt with. Firstly, is the new state going to be a viable entity. There are several 'requirements' for this. International law defines countries as states in the international system when they have a territory, people populating that territory and a government with effective control (Montevideo Convention article 1. The latter should be broken up into having a government and being capable to undertake international relations, but comes down to the same thing). In addition, we can ask whether the country has any chance of really being independent, in terms of economy and political control. To take Kosovo as an example, they have a clear territory, a people, and a government, even if that is officially still governed by the EU and NATO. Economically, however, there is close to zero chance that Kosovo ever reaches independence and the country is small and without access to ports, so it will always be dependent on other countries surrounding it. The Basques on the other hand, have a strong economy and a lot of autonomous government capacities, port access, etc. Secondly, we should wonder whether the new state will be good to its citizens, whether it will be democratic (especially if it separates itself from a democratic country) and whether it will treat its own minorities well. This is relevant for North Kosovars, who are mostly Serbs, but also for the whole 75% non-French native speakers in Quebec, for example. The democracy issue is already discussed above. Lastly, we will need to look at its future relationships with other countries in the neighbourhood, will they be favourable or at least neutral to their new neighbour, or dislike it and act against it. We don't want to get an international war as a result of preventing a possible internal war. And will the newly independent country possible choose to (re)unite with another country, uprooting the balance in the region again.

**International Organisations**

The most important international organisations in debates are: the UN, EU, NATO and, to a lesser extent, WTO, World Bank and IMF. A short description:

**United Nations**: Has a Security Council of 15 members, 5 permanent, 10 based on geographical spread. It can adopt resolutions condemning states, calling for boycotts or complete diplomatic sanctions, or calling for intervention, peacekeeping missions, etc. The General Assembly appoints the 10 non-permanent members of the SC, can make declarations, and has a large number of committees and subcommittees dealing with different topics (ECOSOC, for example, and the Human Rights Council). The resolutions of the GA and its committees attempt to set international standards of behaviour for states, for example expressing concern about actions by certain states, or stating an obligation for all countries to do a certain thing. But they have no influence whatsoever, except for establishing norms of behaviour.
Debates about the UN are going to be about: reform of the Security Council (increasing the number of members with a veto, improving the geographic spread, etc), the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping missions.

**European Union:** probably does not need to be introduced, and is too complicated to introduce anyway, still, an attempt. Simply put: the EU, unlike most other international organisations, is much more than an intergovernmental organisation, it is in many instances transnational, but not in so many instances to be able to say that there is a European government. The Council (all members' heads of state or relevant minister) adopts treaties, sets general guidelines and decides whether a certain policy area needs to be dealt with on a European level, and in what way it needs to be done with. The Commission is responsible for all implementation of policies set out by the Council in areas that fall under its authority (mandate), including justice and home affairs, agricultural policy, trade agreements with external parties and accession preparations with candidate countries (currently only Turkey and Croatia, I believe). The Council proposes a budget, the European Parliament needs to approve this. This is the most important power the EP has: it does not have the right to initiate legislation, often can only advise, although it sometimes has the right to co-decision. If the EP is not happy with the overall Council policies, it can refuse to accept the budget as a reprisal measure. The EP can sack the Commission as a whole, and also individual members since very recently. The EU has three pillars: the Community pillar, Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) pillar and the Justice and Home affairs pillar. The community pillar covers many of the traditional EU activities, like trade, internal movement of people, goods, services, agriculture and also more recent things like the environment and consumer protection (all those things that are logically connected to the earlier activities) and is dealt with almost independently by Commission and Parliament, so countries don't really have much of a say on these issues anymore. The CFSP is an innovation that came about in Maastricht. It states that some parts of foreign and security policy should be shared, but Council keeps full control here, and most decisions are taken by consensus, not through voting, or voting with a qualified majority (something that comes close to being: two thirds of all countries and enough countries to represent two thirds of the EU population). And as Iraq clearly showed, it is rather impossible to work with enormous disagreements, so the CFSP is largely a paper tiger. The Justice and Home affairs pillar deals with stuff like police cooperation, international crime syndicats and migration issues. Decision procedures here are not too relevant. When people talk about the fact that 70% of all legislation in our countries comes from the EU, this is not true, by the way, although it is true in certain areas: those that fall under the community pillar, those to which politicians have already agreed to leave state souvereignty behind.

Debates about the EU often cover these issues: Accession of a new country, adding a new task/policy sector (asylum policy, intelligence services, etc), imposing a 'common' European value/policy on one member that does not agree, increasing democratic power over the EU, foreign and security policy of the EU, abolishing agricultural subsidies or trade tariffs, and forcing a country out of the EU. These are too many debates to summarise quickly, but just shortly, they often, if not always, touch upon the issue of state souvereignty, why it is imperative to have democratic control and how that is reached (if the EP does not have a
say in something, democratic control goes through the ministers in Council who are checked
by national parliaments), the nature of the EU (international or supranational), the size of
the EU and where its borders end, whether a policy issue can be dealt with most effectively
on a national or international issue.

**North Atlantic Treaty Organisation**: has a few distinctive characteristics: if one country is
attacked, the other members are automatically obliged to support it and help it. Its
membership spans the Atlantic and much of the European continent, including Turkey, but
excluding Israel. Debates about NATO deal with the necessity to continue its existence, and
what role it should take now that the Cold War has ended (do more stuff like Kosovo?), or,
like in the case of the EU, expansion to new countries.

NATO debates are a lot more about the same issues dealt with under the title war, than are
EU debates, as they deal mostly with military power and its use.

**World Trade Organisation**: Set up in the same Bretton Woods system as the two next
institutions, the WTO is meant to stimulate trade, which is seen as beneficial for economic
growth. A member of the WTO needs to grant so called 'most favoured nation status' to all
other members, which means they cannot give some countries a more favourable treatment
than others. In addition, countries pledge to lower all economic and non-economic barriers
to trade and to refrain from prioritising homegrown businesses over international
businesses. The function of the WTO is to oversee the implementation of Trade Agreements
ratified by its members, for example the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS),
the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), or the Trade-Related aspects of Intellectual Property
rights (TRIPs), the agreements are negotiated in rounds, like the current Doha Round and
the previous Uruguay Round. All countries have an equal vote in these rounds. The WTO
has a dispute-settlement court, to which countries can complain when they think a country
is violating the principles agreed upon in the treaties. Although the mechanism is considered
rather imperfect, it provides countries with an opportunity to do something about 'unfair'
competition. For example, the US has been able to retaliate against the EU, because it
provides lower or no import tariffs on some agricultural products from the so-called Lomé
countries (most, if not all, are former colonies of European countries, they are definitely all
developing countries), while putting import tariffs on US products (bananas, sugar cane).
This led to the 'banana wars' and the WTO eventually decided that the US was right and
allowed it to retaliate, by putting higher import tariffs on EU products for the same amount
of money as it had lost by the EU ban. The mechanism thus does not require direct
repayment, but it directs a retaliation war that would probably ensue anyways, even if it
were not present. The WTO sets the limits to such a trade war, thus channeling it and giving
it legitimacy, so that the country being punished cannot start to retaliate again, while the
country that is punishing, needs to stop at a certain point. The WTO has also stopped the
state of California from banning shrimps from India because of their environmentally
unfriendly catching method, because environmental protection was not considered a good
enough ground (I believe this is called the Dolphin case)
Debates in which the WTO figures, are about International Property Rights protection (for example cases about HIV/AIDS or other medicines in Third World countries), any debate about setting up new barriers to trade (to protect environmental protection or ban child labour, for example), any debate about putting more sense in the overall framework of trade agreements (sorry political opinion here), for example by including labour standards or environmental protection in agreements. The most useful thing about the WTO for debates, however, is that most times when you get a motion about something that has to do with international trade (unless it is the EU), it is wise to say: we will add this to the general provisions of the WTO regarding the possibility to increase tariffs and other import barriers. It is one sentence, most people won't know what it means, but in case the opp knows anything about international trade, this takes away half of their arguments about the plan's implementation and effectiveness.

World Bank and International Monetary Fund: The task of the World Bank (actually a conglomerate of three different banks) is to aid developing countries, through providing soft loans and grants for development projects, and by providing expertise on government and development best practices through yearly reports. The World Bank's money comes from richer UN member states (the World Bank is not officially part of the UN family, but it is considered as close). A lot comes from private sources as well: the World Bank merely guarantees that the money will be repaid, private sources are the ones to lend it. The IMF is the watchdog of the international monetary system: whenever a crisis looms (the Asian financial crisis, the Mexican peso collapse, or currently the credit crisis), the IMF steps in with (hopefully) sufficient money to stop the crisis and stabilise currencies, exchange rates, interest rates, and the like. Because some countries had to use the IMF facilities more than once, the IMF started to develop so-called Structural Adjustment Programs, advices that needed to be followed in order to get necessary loans. The advice invariably include cutting government spending and increasing trade liberalisation (decreasing tariffs and other barriers), decreasing government regulation of markets, and privatising nationalised industries. These measures are often called into question, because they seem to be a one size fits all thing, as well as imposing a certain political view at a time when a country cannot really refuse. IMF's funds come from all countries participating in the program, paid on the basis of capacities.

Debates involving these two organisations can come up when dealing with: debt relief for developing countries, what are the best ways to develop or the best strategies for development aid, are structural adjustment programs good, international management of financial streams, and probably others as well.

International Problems

These can be stuff like environmental issues, migration and refugees flows, trafficking of human beings, free trade arrangements, the soon-to-be-empty-from-fish seas, energy and water security, international crime and piracy. These things often need to be dealt with internationally, because: they cross borders and so cannot be stopped by one state, they
spillover from one country to another (one gets gains and some burden, the other only the burden) and cannot be recompensed between countries, because some of the countries trying to deal with the issues are just too poor to do so effectively.

Motions will be about installing an international regime (a law, an organisation, an agreement) to do something (or stop doing something), or about whether certain countries should (be 'forced' to) join in (Kyoto). Sometimes they will be about other, more unilateral solutions (as opposed to multilateral organisations): when one country, or group of countries tries to impose the abolishment for child labour, for example, by banning products made by children. The issues in these debate usually deal with effectiveness of international organisations (can we prevent countries that do not cooperate), souvereignty, relations between powerful and non-powerful states.

**Trade and Development**

This really is about economics as well as politics. Debates will be about whether trade will improve economic conditions or not and for whom it will bring benefits and how we deal with those who lose out (the benefits of competition is economic, but the provisions for welfare are not), what mode of development is the best and who will benefit from it (focused on internal development of markets, or on exports, done with infrastructural projects, or with bottom-up things), whether we have a duty to provide development aid, whether we can set conditions on providing development aid to countries when there are so many people living on such a minimal income that they are always near starving. In order to prove a duty to do development aid, look at what makes us humans common, and argue that these basic human rights obviously include such basic things like right to food, medicine and shelter, stuff that development aid helps provide. Alluding to colonisation can be relevant, but is rather avoided, especially since some countries have not been colonisers, but do provide development aid (Poland, Norway). Another way is to argue: rich countries are profiting from the fact that these countries are poor (they provide cheap labour, making living costs in our countries a lot lower), so we might as well repay some of the debt we have. This directly touches upon the issue of setting conditions on development aid: if the duty to do this is so strong, and springs from moral issues, how can we attach conditions to it, other than that they should not go into dictators' pockets?