Keep the Genie in the Bottle   
Negative Case by Alexis Dryjanski



The premise of this case is that although preemptive warfare may have been a legitimate option in the past, times have changed. For thousands of years military tacticians have examined whether preemptive warfare is a morally justified strategy. But now there’s a new variable—weapons of mass destruction.

Nine countries now have nuclear weapons. This case looks at the big picture consequences, with a value of safety. Looking at the gulf war, we see a war based off a series of faulty information that cost the United States two trillion dollars. Examining the nuclear deterrence theory, we see the same weapons of mass destruction can be used as a defense and a warning. Misinterpretations and faulty or misleading information occur.

We shouldn’t start a catastrophic war until we have all the information. The cost is simply too high. War should always be a last resort, especially when weapons of mass destruction are on the table. Preemptive warfare is not a last resort.

Keep the Genie in the Bottle

We’ve all heard the story of a genie in a bottle—if you get the genie out of the bottle you get three wishes, and the genie gets free. Chances are, that genie deserved to be in the bottle.

We face a similar scenario here with preemptive warfare. At first glance it looks great. Win the war, disrupt the attack. But what happens once the genie is out of the bottle? What happens when wars are based on guesses and hunches? What happens when preemptive war includes weapons of mass destruction?

From examining these questions, I have concluded that preemptive warfare is absolutely not justified.

Gambling and guessing have no place in warfare—especially when weapons of mass destruction are on the table.

# Definitions

## Definition 1: Dual Imminence

Imminence is defined by dictionary.com as, “something that is imminent, especially an impending evil or danger.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Dual imminence is therefore impending danger with a dual nature.

## Definition 2: Preemptive War

“Military doctrine whereby a state claims the right to launch an offensive on a potential enemy before that enemy has had the chance to carry out an attack.” – Encyclopedia Britannica[[2]](#footnote-2)

## Resolutional Analysis 1: Dual Imminence

To truly understand the choice we must make, one must examine the nature of war in general. All war has a nature of dual imminence. No nation gets attacked and says, “Guess we and our allies should just leave you alone! No hard feelings!" Most rational nations would take an attack on their country as a serious offense and then strike back, possibly with the aid of their allies. War is clearly against the values of life, security, and peace.

My opponent would have you believe that in a situation in which one would consider preemptive force, war is the only choice. That is not so.

There are many situations in which military force is an option—but it is the worst option. War must always be the absolute last option. Preemptive war jumps the gun before other options are exhausted, shortening the time frame of diplomatic discussion, economic sanctions, or intelligence gathering, making it a much less reliable form of warfare.

# Value: Big Picture Safety

Rather than simply looking at the choice to preempt or not to preempt; I believe we should look beyond the immediate consequences to those of the long term. Does accepting preemptive warfare as a legitimate strategy turn out well? We must look at the consequences in the long run, specifically those connected to my criterion:

## Criterion: No Nuclear War

We can preserve safety, not only in the immediate future, but in the long run by taking every chance for peace. Preventing nuclear war at every turn is the only moral decision. Besides the obvious consequences of nuclear warfare, let’s look at a few of the unexpected ones--

“On Nov. 1, 1983, leading Russian and American scientists -- including author Carl Sagan -- discussed the possible consequences of a nuclear war. Apart from the immediate destruction of infrastructure and the loss of millions of lives, the scientists were mostly concerned about the possible aftermath of such a war. The detonation of some hundreds of atomic bombs would cause a nuclear winter, with disastrous impacts on the environment and human food resources. The ash and dust, transported by the atomic blasts into the higher layers of Earth's atmosphere, would form a cloud layer, making it impossible for sunlight and heat to reach the surface. Dropping temperatures would plunge Earth into a nuclear winter, maybe for decades or even centuries. Plants, no longer able to produce nutrients by photosynthesis, would quickly die off, followed by the starving animals and finally humans.” – Forbes, August 2017[[3]](#footnote-3)

Because of the world we live in, it is extremely unlikely that a war could be isolated to conventional weapons. We’ll see this in

## Background Point: Times Have Changed

The Six Day War is often brought up as an example of preemptive war. But in 1967, Israel’s nuclear program was not established, and they had no operational missiles. Fifty years later, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria still do not have nuclear weapons.

But, just as the tag of this point states, times have changed.

“More than two dozen nations have nuclear power. Only nine possess actual nuclear weapons: Russia, the United States, China, India, Israel, France, North Korea, Pakistan and the United Kingdom. The Ploughshares Fund, a global security foundation, estimates there are more than 15,000 nuclear weapons around the world; the U.S. and Russia possess 93 percent of them. The former Cold War foes keep nearly 2,000 nuclear weapons at the ready for immediate launch against each other, according to the Nuclear Threat Initiative.” – NBC News, March 2016[[4]](#footnote-4)

Going back to my resolutional analysis, once we understand that wars have a nature of dual imminence, what are the odds that a preemptive war will only include nations who do not have nuclear weapons and have no allies with nuclear weapons?

# Contention 1: Preemptive Warfare Neglects the Bigger Picture

According to Encyclopedia Britannica,

“the threatened state might be wrong in its assessment of the threat and launch an unwarranted destructive attack. Second, the use of a preemptive force by one state might set a precedent that would lead to widespread abuse of the preemptive option.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

We’ve seen several instances of deception and trickery in warfare which resulted in lost resources. Starting a war before we have all the information—before we even know with 100% certainty that an attack will happen—is simply starting a war. Striking before anything concrete occurs is inciting violence out of tension. There are several examples of this in the gulf war:

## Application 1: The Gulf War

“Under the guise of fear of weapons of mass destruction, or WMDs, the American public was lulled into a false sense of urgency, ultimately justifying an invasion that American intelligence had already deemed unnecessary - years of investigations and monitoring had come up with no evidence that Iraq had WMDs.”

“In late 2002, as Bush and the pro-war camp were getting ready to formally announce the US' commitment to war in Iraq, a mystery dossier, reportedly circulated by an Italian military secret service agent, landed on Vice President Dick Cheney's desk. The dossier claimed that there had been irregular sales of concentrated uranium, or "yellowcake", from Niger to Iraq. The dossier was invalidated by US diplomat Joe Wilson and the Italians, but Cheney ignored their warnings. Its claims would later be questioned by the French government and France would go on to become one of the most vocal voices against the Iraq war. The "yellow cake" document was finally refuted by Mohamed ElBaradei, the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency.” – Aljazeera, January 2017[[6]](#footnote-6)

In this example, we see not only that there wasn’t concrete proof of weapons of mass destruction (which were supposedly the main cause of the war), but there were additional false claims of irregular sales of concentrated uranium to Iraq.

If we had waited for concrete confirmation of the false uranium reports, we would know that they were false-- rather than trusting incorrect information to fuel an unnecessary war. The gulf war was based upon a series of falsehoods and uncertainties. Besides the obvious loss of life on both sides, the war cost the US an estimated two trillion dollars of public money *[according to the cited Aljazeera article].*

With a preemptive war, there is a much greater chance of having misunderstood information—simply because one must look at what is perceived as attack preparations and choose whether to strike or not.

For instance, the United States has kept nuclear missiles in operational condition in keeping with the deterrence theory.

“Nuclear deterrence has been a central element of American security policy since the Cold War began. The deterrence concept is straight-forward: persuade a potential adversary that the risks and costs of his proposed action far outweigh any gains that he might hope to achieve. To make deterrence credible, the United States built up powerful strategic, theater and tactical nuclear forces that could threaten any potential aggressor with the catastrophic risks and costs of a nuclear retaliatory strike against his homeland.” – Brookings, June 2010[[7]](#footnote-7)

The United States *could* threaten any potential aggressor. We stockpile nuclear weapons so that we are not threatened by other nuclear powers. What if another country thought our weapons were an imminent threat to them? (North Korea, for example) That country may misinterpret our routine troop movements, or our staffing of missile silos as being a credible and imminent threat.

The point being, often, stockpiling or storing weapons and keeping them in a condition to be deployed does not mean the plan is to deploy the weapons, it is simply a strategy of defense. Misinterpretations and trying to predict a country’s behavior could start a war where there shouldn’t be.

When we take a step back, look at the bigger picture, and wait for concrete proof, we avoid unnecessary loss of life, and unnecessary war. Keep the genie in the bottle. Prevent preemptive war.

Never accept gambles and guesses as a foundation for destructive, catastrophic, warfare.

Opposing This Case

This case’s primary point is that nuclear weapons are so dangerous we should not use them. But it is exactly because nuclear weapons are so dangerous that we should preempt their use by rogue nations. North Korea is a prime example of a nation in direct violation of multiple nuclear treaties—the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. If we could preemptively, or even preventatively, take out North Korea’s nuclear program, the world would be a much safer place.

“If a war were to break out now, North Korea could very well be destroyed. But if North Korea succeeds in building nuclear missiles that can reach the continental U.S., the equation changes. And having more than a few reliable missiles -- long-range ones, plus short-range ones that could, for instance, hit South Korea where 28,000 U.S. troops are deployed -- enhance North Korea's leverage.” – CBS News, August 2017[[8]](#footnote-8)

The sooner North Korea is bombed, the less resistance or threat North Korea will pose. Even since the writing of that evidence in 2017, North Korea has successfully launched an ICBM. The sooner we act, the more rudimentary and uncapable their nuclear program will be.

According to CNBC, North Korea still cannot hit the United States.

“A statement released by North Korean state media on Wednesday said the latest missile was indeed capable of reaching the U.S. Some experts, however, highlighted the unknowns about the missile's range. An ICBM capable of reaching the west coast of the U.S. mainland is still a year away, according to Michael Elleman, a senior fellow for missile defense at the International Institute for Strategic Studies and an analyst for watchdog group 38 North. More tests are needed to establish the missile's performance and reliability, he added. But even if the latest ICBM can enter U.S. airspace, that doesn't mean Pyongyang is capable of striking the world's largest economy with a nuclear weapon. "We don't know what payload it carries so it's not clear it can carry a nuclear warhead to that range," Wright told CNBC. "The real question is: how small North Korea has made a nuclear warhead and whether it can carry a warhead like that on the missiles it makes.” – CNBC, November 28, 2017[[9]](#footnote-9)

Per the estimates of Mr. Elleman, an ICBM that can reach the west coast of the United States is a year away. The sooner we act, the lesser the threat North Korean retaliation poses.

The United States is exceedingly capable of accurately launching a powerful missile towards North Korea, according to TIME Magazine,

“Davenport estimates that the range of a U.S. intercontinental ballistic missile exceeds 10,000 kilometers, or approximately 6,213 miles. “U.S. ballistic missiles are extremely reliable and very accurate and some of these weapons can be launched within minutes,” she explained. “That differs quite a bit from North Korea [where] their missiles are unreliable, they are inaccurate. North Korea has only in July tested a ballistic missile that’s capable of reaching the United States.”” – TIME, August 9, 2017[[10]](#footnote-10)

We have had the capability of accurately striking North Korea for a while, and the more we sit on our hands and wait, the more powerful North Korea grows. The sooner we strike lessens the risk of damages to the United States, and to civilian life in the surrounding areas.

If we wait, one day the risk will simply be too high.

1. *Dictionary.com, “Imminence”,* <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/imminence> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Encyclopedia Britannica, “Preemptive Force”,* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/preemptive-force> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Forbes, “Even A Small Nuclear War Would Still Have Effects On Global Scale”,* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidbressan/2017/08/12/even-a-small-nuclear-war-would-still-have-effects-on-global-scale/#78ea03f4507d> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *NBC News, “Fact Sheet: Who has Nuclear Weapons, and How Many Do They Have?”* <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/fact-sheet-who-has-nuclear-weapons-how-many-do-they-n548481> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Encyclopedia Britannica, “Preemptive Force”,* <https://www.britannica.com/topic/preemptive-force> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Aljazeera, “Iraq: A Deadly Deception”,* <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/specialseries/2017/01/iraq-deadly-deception-170108082649899.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Brookings, “US Nuclear and Extended Deterrence”,* <https://www.brookings.edu/research/u-s-nuclear-and-extended-deterrence-considerations-and-challenges/>*)* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *CBS News, “Estimates of North Korea’s Weapons are Difficult to Nail Down”,* <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/north-korea-nuclear-weapons-estimates-difficult-to-nail-down/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *CNBC, “Latest North Korea ICBM Can Hit Washington D.C”,* <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/11/28/the-missile-north-korea-launched-can-hit-washington-dc.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *TIME, “Here’s How Many Nuclear Weapons the US Has”,* <http://time.com/4893175/united-states-nuclear-weapons/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)