National Security  
Affirmative Case by Steven Errico



When resolutions like this show up on the debate circuit, a lot of people (including people like myself) seem to have PTSD flashbacks to George Orwell’s *1984*. But even small-government enthusiasts like me have to recognize that there is a legitimate role for government to play, namely the protection of its citizens. That is the focus of this case.

As the affirmative, you can grant that preventive warfare is not justified in every single case. Your position should be that when it is appropriate, preventive warfare should be an option for us.

Be sure to focus your attention on the historical examples as well as the cases in which we would need to wage preventive warfare. Concreteness is key.

National Security

It is always said that you never want to mess with a mama bear’s cubs, because she’ll come after you. When it comes to the security of a country’s citizens, governments should be just as committed to protecting its people when their safety is threatened.

# Definitions:

According to The Hoover Institution, “A **preventive war** is a military, diplomatic, and strategic endeavor, aimed at an enemy whom one expects to grow so strong that delay would cause defeat.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Merriam-Webster defines **ethical** as “conforming to accepted standards of conduct.”[[2]](#footnote-2) This will ultimately be determined by our value.

**Value: National Security**

National Security is the safety of a nation’s citizens, institutions, economy, etc. from internal or external threats.

## Reason to Prefer: Duty of Government

The role of government is to protect the rights of its people, and it must have security to be able to do that.

**Criterion: Protection**

The ultimate goal of any government should be to protect its people.

**Contention One: Appropriate Preventive Warfare Protects National Security**

According to an article from the Berkeley Law Scholarship Repository,

“We argue that there are deep and pervasive similarities between, on the one hand, a preventive war undertaken to protect American or allied civilian populations from an emerging threat that weapons of mass destruction might be used against them and, on the other hand, a humanitarian intervention- like that in Kosovo-to protect another population from genocide, forcible deportations, or other grave human rights abuses. In both circumstances, the intervening powers would have a *protective* purpose in view.”

The article goes on to say that,

“Viewed in this light, preventive war, in appropriate circumstances, can be justified for reasons that are closely analogous to those usually offered to justify humanitarian intervention. The key difference is that in preventive war the intervenors protect *their own* populations, whereas in humanitarian intervention the intervenors protect *the target state's* population.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

The idea here is that preventive warfare is ethical for the same reason that humanitarian intervention is: protection.

## Application: The Cuban Missile Crisis

The Cuban Missile Crisis was one of the tensest events in U.S. History. With nuclear-armed missiles being assembled less than a hundred miles from Florida, many people wondered if we were on the brink of nuclear war. Thankfully, the crisis was averted. The Encyclopedia Britannica says,

“After carefully considering the alternatives of an immediate U.S. invasion of Cuba (or air strikes of the missile sites), a blockade of the island, or further diplomatic maneuvers, Pres. John F. Kennedy decided to place a naval ‘quarantine,’ or blockade, on Cuba to prevent further Soviet shipments of missiles. Kennedy announced the quarantine on October 22 and warned that U.S. forces would seize ‘offensive weapons and associated material’ that Soviet vessels might attempt to deliver to Cuba. During the following days, Soviet ships bound for Cuba altered course away from the quarantined zone.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

## IMPACT: While we never ended up in a full-scale war, our naval blockade was an act of preventive warfare that protected our national security.

**Contention Two: Failing to Act Fails to Protect**

The same article from the Berkley Law Scholarship Repository argues that the most effective international policy on war is one that allows the use of preventive warfare in appropriate circumstances.

“The overarching goal of this regime should be the maintenance of international peace and stability as a means of advancing global welfare. Under this approach, the international legal system should be designed to produce international public goods. These public goods include ensuring the safety and security of civilian populations from both internal and external threats, reducing grave human rights abuses such as genocide and ethnic clean- sing, and promoting the nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Unlike the U.N. Charter system, which is designed to drive the use of force by states to near zero, a reconstructed international legal system based on global welfare would seek to enable and induce states to provide the optimal level of force, thus allowing armed interventions in proper cases for the purpose of preventing catastrophic harms.”

They argue that preventive warfare should be contemplated in at least two cases:

“In the first, a state has publicly and credibly threatened the mass destruction of innocent civilian lives in another state (as Iran has threatened the Israeli population), or its recent conduct indicates-even in the absence of such public statements -that it poses a threat of that nature and gravity (as Iraq's pre-2003 conduct toward Iran, Kuwait, and its own Kurdish and Shi'ite populations demonstrated). In the second, a terrorist group, by its public statements or recent conduct, has threatened the mass destruction of innocent civilian lives, and operates within a state that either deliberately supports it, wrongfully neglects to counteract it, or is in a failed or failing condition and therefore unable to suppress it (as evidenced by al Qaeda's presence in Afghanistan in late 2001).”[[5]](#footnote-5)

When it comes to our national security, if we fail to act, we put people in danger. We must prevent threats from becoming a reality. Ultimately, we must fight for the protection of our citizens.

Thank you.

Opposition Brief

**Iraq Was a Disaster**

Lindsay, James, and Ivo H. Daalder. “The Preemptive-War Doctrine Has Met an Early Death in Iraq.” *Brookings*, 28 July 2016, www.brookings.edu/opinions/the-preemptive-war-doctrine-has-met-an-early-death-in-iraq/.

“Not only have the costs of war escalated significantly in the 13 months since the president prematurely declared an end to major combat operations, but the emphasis on breaking regimes ignored the far more difficult task of rebuilding nations once their evil leaders have been ousted. As we now know all too painfully, our success in ousting a tyrant provides no guarantee that we will succeed in creating a stable and acceptable successor government. With the Iraqi threat having turned out to be far less than advertised and the cost of occupying Iraq far higher, it is hardly surprising that preemption suddenly looks far less attractive. Earlier this year, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell told the Washington Post that had he known then what he knows now about Iraq’s weapons capabilities, it would have changed ‘the political calculus; it changes the answer you get’ when asking whether to go to war or not. Many Americans now agree. Polls show that a majority now believes that the war in Iraq was not worth fighting. Persuading them, much less the rest of the world, to launch another preventive war elsewhere in the world would be a tough sell. It may not matter whether the public can be persuaded. The Iraq occupation has badly strained the capabilities of the U.S. military. To maintain adequate troop levels in Iraq, the Pentagon recently decided to redeploy 3,600 soldiers from South Korea—the first reduction in U.S. force levels on the Korean peninsula since the early 1990s. Congress is considering legislation to increase the size of the Army, but the Pentagon has so far resisted the idea, and even if it passes, it will take several years to expand the force. An overstretched U.S. military is still more than capable of preventive strikes against terrorist camps or presumed weapons factories. It is in no position, however, to wage a preventive war, let alone sort out the consequences. Iran and North Korea—the two other charter members of Bush’s ‘axis of evil’—present far more daunting military challenges than Iraq did. Iran has three times the population, far greater domestic political support and many more friends beyond its borders. North Korea probably has nuclear weapons and, by virtue of the fact that Seoul sits only a few dozen miles from the demilitarized zone, it effectively holds the South Korean capital hostage. Not being a man given to analyzing his missteps, Bush will not publicly bury the preemption doctrine he unveiled only two years ago. But all doctrines must eventually be measured against experience. And for that reason, Bush’s doctrine of preemption is, for all intents and purposes, dead.”

**Abuse in History**

Strauss, Barry. “Preemptive Strikes and Preventive Wars: A Historian's Perspective.” *Hoover Institution*, 29 Aug. 2017, www.hoover.org/research/preemptive-strikes-and-preventive-wars-historians-perspective.

“The Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.) is the granddaddy of all preventive wars. The Peloponnesians, led by Sparta, decided to make war on Athens less because of a series of disputes dividing the two blocs than because of the future that they feared, one in which Athens’ growing power would break apart Sparta’s alliance system. The Athenians wanted to decide the two sides’ dispute via arbitration, but the Spartans refused, which cost Sparta the moral high ground. Before Athens and Sparta could fight a proper battle, the war began. Sparta’s ally, Thebes, launched a preemptive strike on the nearby city and Athenian ally, Plataea. Both the preemptive strike and the preventive war succeeded but at no small cost. It took four years of hard fighting and considerable escalation before Plataea surrendered. Sparta emerged victorious against Athens but only after 27 years of intermittent and escalatory warfare. The price of victory was steep, leading to embroilment in war against Persia, a falling-out with Sparta’s former allies, and ultimately, the collapse of the Spartan regime after centuries of stability. Athens lost the Peloponnesian War, but managed to preserve and even strengthen its regime at home; it never successfully restored its overseas power. To turn to another ancient case, Rome frequently engaged in preventive war. The most egregious example was the Third Punic War (149-146 B.C.), when Rome declared war on Carthage. Carthage offered no serious threat for the foreseeable future, if ever, because Rome had thoroughly defeated it twice in the past. Yet some Romans feared the growing prosperity of its long-time rival. The war was hard-fought but led to a complete Roman victory. After a lengthy siege, Carthage was destroyed. It ceased to exist as a polity. For a century it wasn’t even a city, but then it was re-founded—as a Roman city.”

**Preventive Warfare Ignores Safer Options**

Boot, Max. “Calculating The Risk Of Preventive War.” *Hoover Institution*, 29 Aug. 2017, www.hoover.org/research/calculating-risk-preventive-war.

“But history is also littered with preventive wars that are widely considered a mistake and sometimes a crime. These include the German attack on France and Belgium in 1914 (motivated by fear of rising Russian power—in order to strike at Russia the German General Staff decided to first defeat Russia’s ally, France); the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941 (motivated, again, by fear of its rising power); the Israeli attack on the Sinai in 1956 (designed to avert an Egyptian threat, it led to a humiliating climb-down by Israel in the face of American pressure); and of course the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was based on a faulty premise (Iraq’s WMD program was not nearly as far advanced as U.S. intelligence feared) and plagued by faulty execution. In addition, the U.S. was lucky to avoid a preventive conflict with the Soviet Union during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962. If John F. Kennedy had given in to the advice of his more hawkish advisers and launched a military attack on Cuba, the result would likely have been a catastrophe; the Kennedy administration did not realize that the Soviets had already activated tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba and given their commanders discretion to use them. The track record of preventive conflict makes clear that such a use of force should be approached with great caution—more caution, certainly, than displayed in the Bush administration’s 2002 National Security Strategy, which declared: ‘Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today’s threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries’ choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first.’”

**Prevention vs. Preemption**

Gray, Colin S. “THE IMPLICATIONS OF PREEMPTIVE AND PREVENTIVE WAR DOCTRINES: A RECONSIDERATION.” *The U.S. Army War College*, July 2007, ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB789.pdf.

“Preemption is not controversial; legally, morally, or strategically. To preempt means to strike first (or attempt to do so) in the face of an attack that is either already underway or is very credibly imminent. The decision for war has been taken by the enemy. The victim or target state can try to disrupt the unfolding assault, or may elect to receive the attack before reacting. In truth, military preemption will not always be feasible. By way of the sharpest contrast, a preventive war is a war of discretion. It differs from preemptive war both in its timing and in its motivation. The preemptor has no choice other than to strike back rapidly; it will probably be too late even to surrender. The preventor, however, chooses to wage war, at least to launch military action, because of its fears for the future should it fail to act now. In other words, the preventor strikes in order to prevent a predicted enemy from changing the balance of power or otherwise behaving in a manner that the preventor would judge to be intolerable. Naturally, the more distant the anticipated menace, the greater the degree of guesswork as to the severity and timing of the danger. A precautionary war is one waged not out of strong conviction that a dangerous threat is brewing in the target state, but rather because it is suspected that such a threat might one day emerge, and it is better to be safe than sorry. Put in the vernacular, preventive war, the real subject of this monograph, refers to the option of shooting on suspicion.”

1. https://www.hoover.org/research/preemptive-strikes-and-preventive-wars-historians-perspective [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethical [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Bush Doctrine: Can Preventive War Be Justified, 32 Harv. J.L. & Pub. Pol'y 843 (2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Cuban Missile Crisis.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 21 June 2019, www.britannica.com/event/Cuban-missile-crisis. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Bush Doctrine: Can Preventive War Be Justified, 32 Harv. J.L. & Pub. Pol'y 843 (2009) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)