National Security  
Negative Case by Steven Errico



As the race for the presidency begins again, I’m reminded of just how much I despise politicians and their policies. Especially when it comes to foreign policy, it is exceedingly difficult these days to find a candidate who doesn’t want to wage war on any and every foreign entity that looks at us funny. I believe it is time for America to relearn the idea that we are not the police of the world, and we have no business in war of any kind unless we are provoked.

That is the thought process that this case comes from. My basic philosophy is that if we’re not in danger, we have no business attacking other countries. The very idea of a **preventive** war means that no one is yet in any real danger, and yet we’re waging war anyway. I think that’s ridiculous.

When you run this case, be sure to emphasize that it’s not only our national security that’s at risk but also the national security of others. Focus on the idea that we as a free country need to let others be free as well if we’re not in danger.

National Security

If someone who I just met for the first time started telling me how to live my life and trying to fix all my problems, I would get pretty upset pretty quickly, and rightly so. Why do we think it’s any different when it comes to international relationships?

# Definitions

According to Encyclopedia.com, “**Preventive war** occurs when a state launches a military conflict to prevent another state or other international actor from becoming a threat. This type of war differs from the more typical situation in which states go to war after a period of crisis or as a reaction to a particular event. Preventive wars are not in response to a specific crisis or direct threat to security, but rather to a perception of a potential change in the future balance of power between a state and its likely adversaries. Preventive war differs as well from preemptive war, in which a state attacks in order to disrupt an enemy about to attack first. The difference between prevention and preemption is often a blurred one, but preemption always occurs just before the outbreak of hostilities and is directed against an enemy clearly in the process of preparing an attack, whereas prevention can occur during times of relative peace.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Cambridge Dictionary defines **ethical** as, “morally right.”[[2]](#footnote-2) And in this case, that 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: Foundational

A nation’s security is the foundation on which it can operate in every other way. Without security, a nation cannot be effective. Thus, National Security is going to be our metric for what is ethical.

**Criterion: The Non-Aggression Principle**

The Foundation for Economic Education says that, according to the Non-Aggression Principle, “while it is legitimate to use physical violence in defense of one’s rights, initiating violence against another person is wrong and can be met with proportional violence in self-defense.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The idea is that if we are not in imminent danger, we should not be using violence.

**Contention One: Preventive Warfare Destroys Their National Security**

When we fight against another country unprovoked and uninvited, we unnecessarily harm the national security of that country.

## Application: The Iraq War

The Bookings Institute says,

“Bush’s preemption doctrine went well beyond anything previous presidents had contemplated. To be sure, the option of using force preemptively had existed for Bush’s predecessors. Some had used it—as Bill Clinton did in 1998 when he ordered an attack on a pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum, Sudan, that U.S. intelligence suspected of producing nerve gas. But Bush’s conception of preemption far exceeded responding to an imminent danger of attack. He instead advocated preventive wars of regime change. The United States claimed the right to use force to oust leaders it disliked long before they could threaten its security. Bush’s radical departure from past practice was based on two assumptions, both of which our experience in Iraq has shown to be flawed. The first was the belief that Washington would have access to reliable intelligence about the intentions and capabilities of potential adversaries. An enemy’s society might be closed, but our modern spy technologies could pry it open. We could peer into secret weapons sites from on high and listen to conversations and other communications without being detected. Our intelligence would be good enough to warn us of impending danger. That assumption looks dubious 14 months after the fall of Hussein. On the eve of the Iraq war, Bush told the nation that “intelligence gathered by this and other governments leaves no doubt that the Iraq regime continues to possess and conceal some of the most lethal weapons ever devised.” A week into the war, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld boasted that “we know where they are.” Yet more than a year later, American troops still have not found any weapon of mass destruction (unless a single artillery shell, produced in the 1980s, that possibly contained sarin nerve gas, counts). The prewar intelligence predictions were so far off the mark that the president no longer argues that the war was justified because Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction programs posed a grave threat to American security.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

## IMPACT: We sacrificed the lives of our troops and foreign citizens as well as the stability of an entire region to respond to a dubious prediction that would never have come true. That is the inevitable result of preventive warfare.

# Contention Two: Preventive Warfare Destroys Our National Security

Lest we think that preventive warfare only harms the national security of others, we have to realize that preventive warfare also puts us in grave danger of retaliation.

## Application: The Cuban Missile Crisis

According to History.com,

“During the Cuban Missile Crisis, leaders of the U.S. and the Soviet Union engaged in a tense, 13-day political and military standoff in October 1962 over the installation of nuclear-armed Soviet missiles on Cuba, just 90 miles from U.S. shores. In a TV address on October 22, 1962, President John Kennedy (1917-63) notified Americans about the presence of the missiles, explained his decision to enact a naval blockade around Cuba and made it clear the U.S. was prepared to use military force if necessary to neutralize this perceived threat to national security. Following this news, many people feared the world was on the brink of nuclear war. However, disaster was avoided when the U.S. agreed to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s (1894-1971) offer to remove the Cuban missiles in exchange for the U.S. promising not to invade Cuba. Kennedy also secretly agreed to remove U.S. missiles from Turkey.”

The article goes on to say,

“A crucial moment in the unfolding crisis arrived on October 24, when Soviet ships bound for Cuba neared the line of U.S. vessels enforcing the blockade. An attempt by the Soviets to breach the blockade would likely have sparked a military confrontation that could have quickly escalated to a nuclear exchange.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

## IMPACT: If either side had engaged in preventive warfare at any point in this conflict, it is likely that nuclear war would have broken out, and the national security of both countries would have been compromised.

Ultimately, the debate comes down to how willing we are to violate the freedoms of others in order to assert our dominance. Unless we want to be that guy who beats people up just for looking at him funny, we have no business waging preventive warfare.

Thank you.

Opposition Brief

**John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson**

The Bush Doctrine: Can Preventive War Be Justified, 32 Harv. J.L. & Pub. Pol'y 843 (2009)

“Consider, for example, Secretary of State John Quincy Adams's communication to the Spanish government on November 28, 1818. Adams's distinguished biographer, Samuel Flagg Bemis, described this as ‘[the greatest state paper of John Quincy Adams's diplomatic career.’ The episode that Adams addressed arose when General Andrew Jackson, without proper authorization, invaded Spanish Florida in response to a series of attacks across the U.S. border by Creeks, Seminoles, and escaped slaves, whose activities the Spanish authorities in Florida were unable or unwilling to control. Rather than apologize for Jackson's intervention, Adams warned the Spanish in unequivocal terms that they must take steps to suppress further cross-border incursions or face the invasion and loss of Florida to the United States. The application of Adams's doctrine to contemporary circumstances would unquestionably warrant the United States using force preventively against a failed or failing state that was unable or unwilling to take the actions necessary to suppress a terrorist group within its boundaries that was engaging in attacks upon the United States. John Quincy Adams was by no means the only American Secretary of State to maintain that preventive war would be justifiable in some circumstances. In a 1914 address to the American Society of International Law titled *The Real Monroe Doctrine,* former Secretary of State and then-Senator Elihu Root described instances in which earlier Secretaries of State had made plain that the United States would fight a war to prevent the occupation of a part of Latin America by a European power not previously in possession of it. Speaking for himself, Root declared,

‘It is well understood that the exercise of the right of self- protection may and frequently does extend beyond the limits of the territorial jurisdiction of the state exercising it. The strongest example probably would be the mobilization of an army by another Power immediately across the frontier. Every act done by the other Power may be within its own territory. Yet the country threatened by the state of facts is justified in protecting itself by immediate war. … Every sovereign state [has the right] to protect itself by preventing a condition of affairs in which it will be too late to protect itself.’”

**Historical Precedent**

The Bush Doctrine: Can Preventive War Be Justified, 32 Harv. J.L. & Pub. Pol'y 843 (2009)

“A succession of twentieth-century American Presidents also announced ‘doctrines’ of preventive intervention. These included Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin Roosevelt (through Secretary of State Henry Stimson), Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan. According to Philip Bobbitt, these Presidential doctrines ‘do not say when the U.S. will actually intervene, but rather when it will regard itself as rightfully contemplating intervention.’ For example, President Theodore Roosevelt's so-called ‘Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine’ made plain that the United States would intervene in the affairs of a Latin American nation in the event that any such nation experienced ‘[c]hronic wrongdoing, or an impotence which results in a general loosening of the ties of civilized society,’ especially if that disorder ‘had invited foreign aggression to the detriment of the entire body of American nations.’ President John Kennedy used force in the Cuban Missile Crisis-a naval blockade of Cuba-to pre- vent a dramatic change in the balance of power from the presence of Soviet nuclear missiles in the Caribbean. President Lyn- don Johnson announced in 1965 that ‘the United States would henceforth prevent by force 'a communist dictatorship' from coming to power in the Americas’; he subsequently sent 24,000 troops ‘to the Dominican Republic to accomplish this task in the political chaos that followed the assassination of the dictator Rafael Trujillo.’ President Jimmy Carter also announced a preventive doctrine by declaring that the United States ‘would regard any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region as an assault on the vital interests of the U.S. [to be] repelled 'by use of any means necessary' - which implied a possible resort to nuclear weapons."

**The Cuban Missile Crisis Was Preventive Warfare**

The Bush Doctrine: Can Preventive War Be Justified, 32 Harv. J.L. & Pub. Pol'y 843 (2009)

“The United States's ‘quarantine’ or naval blockade of Cuba in 1962, during the presidency of John F. Kennedy, provides a particularly noteworthy example of the use of preventive action as a policy tool. Plainly, this form of armed intervention fell short of an actual invasion, capture, or occupation of Cuban territory, and it failed to yield either an air strike on the nuclear weapon sites the Soviet Union was installing in Cuba or any nuclear exchange with the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, it was an armed interference both with the Soviet navy's right to traverse international waters and with Cuba's right to allow the Soviets to build military facilities on its territory.”

**Sometimes Preventive Warfare is the Safest Option**

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

“There are a few instances where preventive strikes were undoubtedly wise—e.g., Israel’s attacks on nuclear facilities in Iraq (1981) and Syria (2007)—even if not strictly sanctioned under international law. There are also widely cited examples of when a preventive war would have made sense—for example, against the growing power of Nazi Germany in the 1930s.”

**Waiting Doesn’t Fix Anything**

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.

“Preventive war is charged with being an act of aggression that is illegal and immoral. We find no value in this accusation, at least as a generality. Preventive war is claimed to be feasible only if intelligence is immaculate. Again, we are unimpressed. It is the view of the author that, with a few exceptions, intelligence needs only to be “good enough.” To demand perfect knowledge is to prohibit preventive action.”

The article goes on to say,

“Very often, arguments for more time for diplomacy, sanctions, political subversion, and so forth, are really efforts intended to stall a move to military action, rather than serious claims for prospective success. We need to beware of excuses for endless delay regarding the military option.”

**You Can’t Rule out Prevention Outright**

Buchanan, Allen. “Justifying Preventive War.” *University of Pennsylvania Law School*, www.law.upenn.edu/live/files/1307-buchanana-justifying-preventive-war.

“When you strike a person who is currently attacking you, your aim, so far as you are acting in self-defense, is to avert any further harm the attacker may do you; it is too late to defend yourself against the harm he has already caused. There seems to be no obvious bar to using force to defend oneself against an unjust harm that will occur further in the future rather than the harm that one expects in the next few seconds when an attack is already underway. Of course, one might be more likely to be mistaken about whether he is going to attack in the next moment, but that would only warrant special caution; it would not rule out preventive action. At least in the case of individual self-defense, then, it seems that mere temporal distance is not sufficient to cancel the right of self-defense, understood as the right to use proportional force, when necessary, to avert the unjust infliction of a serious harm on oneself. If the use of lethal force can be justified to avert an imminent harm, then presumably it can be justified to avert a harm that is just slightly more temporally distant than an imminent harm, and so on.”

**Preventive War Can Be Justified**

Dipert, Randall R. “Preventive War and the Epistemological Dimension of the Morality of War.” *University of Pennsylvania Law School*, 2006, www.law.upenn.edu/live/files/1291-dipert-preventive-war.

“First, and despite strong assertions to the contrary, it is far from clear that preventive war is absolutely prohibited in traditional Just War Theory, and it is also dubious that it is in all cases ‘clearly illegal’. Second, the morality of both preemptive and preventive wars is shown to turn on epistemological considerations: on what degree and kind of justification the primary metaphysical facts of threat can be reasonably believed. Third, an argument is made that whatever epistemic threshold is held to be necessary, some preventive wars will exceed it, and that this is more likely with advancing technologies of information acquisition.”

1. https://www.encyclopedia.com/defense/energy-government-and-defense-magazines/preventive-war [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/ethical [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ikeda, Sandy. “The Limits of the Non-Aggression Principle.” *Foundation for Economic Education*, 7 June 2013, fee.org/articles/the-limits-of-the-non-aggression-principle/. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 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/. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. History.com Editors. “Cuban Missile Crisis.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 4 Jan. 2010, www.history.com/topics/cold-war/cuban-missile-crisis. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)