Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, U.S. president George W. Bush articulated a new national security strategy based on striking terrorist organizations and the states that harbor them before they could endanger the United States. Though expressed in the language of preemption, the Bush strategy embodied a far more problematic doctrine of preventive warfare. Whereas the grounds for preemption lie in evidence of a credible, imminent threat, the basis for prevention rests on the suspicion of an incipient, contingent threat. We argue that an American national security strategy that embraces preventive war will set an inauspicious precedent, undermining normative restraints on when and how states may use military force.

**Keywords:** anticipatory self-defense, preemption, preventive war, international norms

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, demands for revenge reverberated across the United States. Essayist Lance Morrow (2001:48) gave voice to the nation’s fury when he advocated a foreign policy of fierce and relentless retaliation against Osama bin Laden’s Al Qaeda terrorist network. “Let’s have rage,” he insisted. “Enemies are enemies. You find them and put them out of business.”
Cries for vengeance were not surprising. Anger often follows in the wake of moral outrage. The vocabulary we use when discussing how to deal with perpetrators of grievous offenses is permeated with metaphors about debt ("repaying a wrong") and balance ("getting even") that underscore the central place of retribution in our conception of justice. What was surprising, however, was the Bush administration’s shift from a national security strategy based on deterring enemies through the threat of retaliation to one that emphasized preemptive military action. As Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld recently put it, “this isn’t punishment. We’ve got the wrong models in our minds if we’re thinking about punishment. We’re not. This isn’t retaliation or retribution” (quoted in Hersh, 2002:70). It is striking a menace before it is fully formed, even if the United States must act unilaterally.

Preemption and Anticipatory Self-Defense

The new national security strategy has been described as candid and bold, perhaps the most sweeping reformulation of U.S. strategic thinking in more than half a century (Gaddis, 2002). President George W. Bush (2002b) first sketched its contours during his commencement address at West Point on June 1, 2002. “We face a threat with no precedent,” he told the graduates. On the one hand, modern technology allows shadowy terrorist networks to launch catastrophic attacks against the United States. On the other hand, these networks cannot be deterred by traditional military means because they have no fixed territory or populace to defend. “We must take the battle to the enemy,” he exhorted, “and confront the worst threats before they emerge.” After urging Americans to be “forward-looking and resolute,” the president concluded by calling upon them “to be ready for preemptive action.”

Bush’s call for acting preemptively against terrorists and the rogue states that harbored them was echoed in his September 17, 2002, report, The National Security Strategy of the United States of America (NSS). Building on the proposition that “nations need not suffer an attack before they can lawfully take action to defend themselves against forces that present an imminent danger” (p. 15), the report argued that the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction by terrorists with global reach provided the United States with a compelling case for engaging in anticipatory self-defense, even if it was not clear when and where an enemy might attack. It was a theme that the president returned to frequently in subsequent weeks when talking about Saddam Hussein. Speaking in Cincinnati on October 7, 2002, for example, he warned that grave dangers were gathering in Iraq. “We have every reason to assume the worst, and we have an urgent duty to prevent the worst from happening” (Bush, 2002a). Something, it was alleged, had to be done to stop Hussein from arming with weapons of mass destruction and sharing them with groups like Al Qaeda. Regime change was imperative, and preemption was a mechanism for removing the Iraqi leader from office. America, Bush (2002a) insisted, must be proactive; it “cannot wait for the final proof—the smoking gun—that could come in the form of a mushroom cloud.”

By asserting that the United States could not wait for United Nations (UN) inspectors to find a “smoking gun,” Bush was laying the groundwork for a radical change in U.S. policy governing the use of force.1 The President was not “reserving

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1While the Bush NSS was a significant departure from the national security canon that guided the United States during the Cold War, Zelikow (2003:26) argues that various administrations used preemptive and preventive military action prior to the Cold War. Byers (2003:10) suggests its resurrection after the Cold War was foreshadowed by U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz’s January 15, 1986 address at the National Defense University, which proclaimed America’s legal right to use force against states that supported, trained, or harbored terrorists. Similar sentiments were expressed by other members of the Reagan administration, including National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane in a speech to the National Strategy Information Center on March 25, 1985, and by Ambassador Vernon Walters in a report to the United Nations on April 15, 1986.
a right’’ to counter imminent threats, noted one observer (Byers, 2002:5). He was
‘‘seeking an extension of the right of self-defense to include action against potential
future dangers.’’ In his opinion, waiting for threats to fully materialize was waiting
far too long.

Self-defense has been called one of the ‘‘fundamental principles’’ of international
law (Schwarzenberger, 1955). Although states have a legal right to defend
themselves against aggression, legal scholarship has not reached a consensus on
when that right may be invoked. Traditionally, the right of self-defense has been
understood as allowing states recourse to force when repelling actual as well as
imminent armed attacks (Arend and Beck, 1993:72; Schachter, 1989). As expressed
by U.S. Secretary of State Daniel Webster in the 1837 Caroline incident, to exercise
this right a state must face an ‘‘instant, overwhelming necessity...leaving no choice
of means, and no moment for deliberation.’’ In addition, the defensive reaction
must be proportionate to the danger, should not sacrifice others to minimize one’s
own risk, and cannot serve as a reprisal. Self-defense is thus restricted to protection,
not excessive or punitive measures aimed at redressing injuries.

Following the promulgation of the UN Charter, appeals to this customary right of
self-defense became controversial. The charter addresses self-defense in two places.
First, Article 2 (4) stipulates that ‘‘all members shall refrain in their international
relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political
independence of any State, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes
of the United Nations.’’ Second, Article 51 states that ‘‘Nothing in the present
Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an
armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security
Council has taken the measures necessary to maintain international peace and
security.’’ One school of thought about the charter interprets Articles 2 (4) and 51 as
superceding customary law, and thus limiting forcible self-defense to cases where
the Security Council has not yet responded to an armed attack. A second school of
thought disagrees. Highlighting the concept of ‘‘inherent right’’ in Article 51, it
argues that pre-charter, customary rules of self-defense continue in place. Some
support for the second school can be found in the travaux préparatoires of the charter
(Brierly, 1963:417) and in the position taken by the International Court of Justice in
the Nicaragua case. ‘‘Article 51 of the Charter is only meaningful on the basis that
there is a ‘natural’ or ‘inherent’ right of self-defense and it is hard to see how this
can be other than of a customary nature,’’ reasoned the Court. ‘‘It cannot,
therefore, be held that Article 51 is a provision which ‘subsumes and supervenes’
customary international law.’’

The language of the charter, concludes Anthony Clark Arend (2003:93), ‘‘admits
to two interpretations about the permissibility of preemptive force.’’ International
practice, however, is unambiguous: states can claim an independent right to use
military force in an anticipatory manner so long as the criteria of necessity,
proportionality, and protection are met. The difficulty is determining what
constitutes an ‘‘overwhelming necessity.’’ When clear, convincing evidence exists
of an attack being mounted, the victim need not wait until the perpetrators have
crossed the border (Waldock, 1952:498). But what if an attack is foreseeable rather
than imminent? Are preemptive actions a military necessity when, in the words of
the Bush NSS, ‘‘uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack’’

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2Throughout the ages, statesmen have tried to justify foreign policy undertakings by appealing to the exigencies
of necessity. The rhetorical strategy behind the argument from necessity is to frame situations of limited options as
situations where no alternatives exist. However, the dictates of necessity do not provide clear, objective criteria for
determining how a state should act in any particular situation. National leaders rarely have one unavoidable course
of action at their disposal. When leaders resort to the argument from necessity, they are generally using it to bolster a
personal preference grounded in expediency. Rather than following an absolute strategic imperative that makes it
practically impossible to do anything else, they are attempting to buttress a policy option that they believe is more
advantageous than any other alternative. For an elaboration of this point, see Raymond (1998–1999).
From Preemption to Prevention

The concepts of preemptive and preventive motivations for war are used in many different ways. A *preemptive* military attack entails the use of force to quell or mitigate an impending strike by an adversary. A *preventive* military attack entails the use of force to eliminate any possible future strike, even when there is no reason to believe that aggression is planned or the capability to launch such an attack is operational. Whereas the grounds for preemption lie in evidence of a credible, imminent threat, the basis for prevention rests on the suspicion of an incipient, contingent threat.\(^3\)

To illustrate the differences between military actions grounded in preemptive versus preventive motivations, let us briefly compare two historical cases. The Six Day War between Israel and an alliance of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq was a classic case of preemption (see Reiter, 1995:16–19). Tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors had been growing throughout the spring of 1967, and reached their zenith in May when Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser undertook a series of actions that raised fears in Tel Aviv of an imminent attack. Besides mobilizing his troops and cementing military ties with Syria, Jordan, and Iraq, Nasser ordered the UN Emergency Force to leave the Sinai, where it had been deployed since the 1956 Suez War as a buffer between Egypt and Israel. Furthermore, he announced a blockade of the Strait of Tiran, Israel's vital waterway to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, and proclaimed that his goal in any future war with Israel would be the destruction of the Jewish state. Assuming an invasion was forthcoming and survival doubtful if Egypt landed the first blow, the Israelis launched a surprise attack on June 5, which enabled them to win a decisive victory.

Whereas the Six Day War exemplifies preemption, the Third Punic War between Rome and Carthage (149–146 B.C.E.) illustrates preventive warfare (see Kegley and Raymond, 1999:84–89). Although reduced to the status of a minor power by losses to the Romans in two previous wars, Carthage had undergone an economic resurgence during the first half of the second century, which led some Roman leaders to worry about its future ambitions. Consumed with the fear that Carthage would regain its former strength and eventually threaten Rome, Marcus Porcius Cato ended every speech to the Roman Senate by proclaiming: “Carthage must be destroyed!” Heeding his advice, Rome annihilated Carthage in a brutal, unprovoked military campaign. In contrast to the Israelis who saw an immediate Egyptian threat in 1967, the Romans attacked on the outside chance that someday Carthage might become a threat. Israeli preemption involved striking a clear and present danger when the cost of inaction would have been devastating. Roman

\(^3\)Dinstein (cited in Carter and Trimble, 1991:1243) distinguishes between preemption based on interceptive self-defense and prevention based on anticipatory self-defense. Other analysts criticize these types of distinctions. Tucker (1960:144), for instance, argues that a preemptive attack is simply a form of preventive war. For him, the crucial point is that some preventive first strikes may be justified while others may be unjustified. Walzer (1977:80–82) proposes three criteria for identifying a threat sufficient to justify a first strike: (1) “a manifest intent to injure” demonstrated by explicit threats rather than boastful tirades; (2) “a degree of active preparation that makes the intent a positive danger;” and (3) “a general situation in which waiting, or doing anything other than fighting, greatly magnifies the risk” to one’s political independence or territorial integrity. Applying criteria such as these often generates further disagreement. For example, some commentators have pointed to Israel’s 1981 raid on the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq as a model for preventive military action (see Kaplan and Kristol, 2003; Pollack, 2002). Yet Betts (2003:29) and others remain skeptical, arguing that it “is hard to determine in fact whether the strike against Osirak retarded Iraq’s nuclear weapons program or spurred it.”
prevention entailed fighting a winnable war straightaway in order to avoid the risk of later clashing under less favorable circumstances (Walzer, 1977:85; Levy and Gochal, 2001:7).

The temptation to attack an adversary who may attack you sometime in the future is often overwhelming. “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” so a popular cliché advises. “Better to be rid at once of someone who does not yet threaten you,” quipped the protagonist in Umberto Eco’s (2000:250–251) Baudolino, “than leave him alive so that he may threaten you one day.” Some historians believe anxiety over increasing strategic vulnerability is an important explanation of warfare in an anarchical, self-help state system (see Taylor, 1954:166). It is “the right of every sovereign state to protect itself by preventing a condition of affairs in which it will be too late to protect itself,” proclaimed U.S. Secretary of State Elihu Root (cited in Fenwick, 1965:275) on the eve of the First World War.

A significant body of scholarship wrestles with the question of whether preventive military strikes of the sort envisioned by Root are legally permissible. While preemptive action is warranted when facing what Oliver Wendell Holmes called an “uplifted knife,” the scholarly consensus suggests that attempts to justify preventive wars are a “bottomless legal pit” (Kaplan and Katzenbach, 1961:213). Hugo Grotius (1949:73, 77), for example, argued that preemption was lawful when a danger became “immediate, and, as it were, at the point of happening.” Conversely, preventive uses of force were inadmissible. Taking up arms to weaken a rising power that might someday use violence was “repugnant to every principle of justice.”

Given the absence of a legal justification in both custom and the UN Charter for preventive war, what is problematic about the new Bush security strategy is its framing of preventive military action as preemption. As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (2002) warns, “Rebaptizing preventive war as preemptive war doesn’t change its character. Preventive war is based on the proposition that it is possible to foretell with certainty what is to come.” But predicting another state’s future behavior is difficult because leadership intentions are hard to discern. Information on an adversary’s long-range goals may be obscured by its attempts to shroud policy planning in secrecy. Evidence on the options being considered for attaining those goals may be misinterpreted due to a carefully crafted deception campaign. Finally, signals of impending moves may be distorted by background noise.

Acknowledging these difficulties, intelligence agencies often try to predict an adversary’s future behavior by evaluating its military capabilities. However, capability estimates can be misleading, especially when made over a long time horizon without reliable data on possible changes in training, command and control, maintenance, and logistics. Another drawback is divining whether projected capability enhancements are earmarked for offensive or defensive purposes. Weapons procurement by one state can provoke alarm in another, triggering round after round of countermeasures by each side, even when both have defensive motives. If prevailing international norms license preventive military action, these cycles of mutual suspicion could easily escalate to war.

Since antiquity, international norms have delineated when it is legitimate for states to use deadly force and how it should be applied. In some historical periods these norms have been permissive, giving political leaders considerable latitude to do whatever they believe must be done to protect the state and advance its position relative to competitors. At other times they have been restrictive, giving leaders little leeway over when and how force can be used legitimately. A key factor in shaping the normative climate of different historical periods has been the distribution of power within the state system.4 The interests of the powerful exert

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4For evidence that the distribution of power within the state system influences international norms, see Kegley and Raymond (1990:153–178).
a significant impact on whether prevailing norms will be permissive or restrictive, whether they sanction preventive military action or proscribe its use.

Hegemony and Normative Order

Power can be distributed in many ways within the international system. It may be concentrated in the hands of one preponderant state, spread between two roughly equivalent states, or diffused among several states. How power is distributed has significant implications for those international norms that pertain to the use of military force.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the United States is the world’s dominant power. Its military is not just stronger than anybody—it is stronger than everybody, with defense expenditures in 2004 estimated to exceed all other countries combined. Complementing America’s military might is its economic strength, which accounts for 43 percent of the world’s production and 50 percent of its research and development (Zakaria, 2003:23). What is more, America wields enormous cultural influence as the hub of global communications. In the words of former French foreign minister Hubert Védrine, the United States is not simply a superpower; it is a “hyperpower.”

This rare confluence of military, economic, and cultural power gives the United States an extraordinary ability to shape international norms. No country is better endowed with hard and soft resources than the United States, writes Joseph Nye (2002:12, 169). The test of American statecraft during this unipolar moment will be whether Washington can convert its preeminence into a normative order that ushers in a period of peace and justice.

General standards of prudent behavior have existed among all autonomous, independent political entities engaged in sustained interaction. When independent political entities share certain fundamental values, they are more than members of a state system that observe rules of prudence; they are participants in an international society whose behavior is guided by international norms. Simply put, international norms express a collective, socially sanctioned set of perspectives on what ought to be done, a collective expectation as to what will be done, and pronouncements about the costs of compliant versus noncompliant behavior with respect to potential norm violations. Communicated through a rich lexicon of legal symbols and reinforced by diplomatic ritual, international norms are more than modal regularities; they are intersubjectively shared understandings about the obligations of international actors to behave in specified ways (Raymond, 1997).

International norms do not exist in isolation. They fit together in a complex mosaic to form a normative order. At the base of every normative order is a set of foundational norms that define its axiology, or value orientation. Not all normative

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3During the history of the modern state system, unipolar dominance has evoked concerted opposition from other powers. Apparently recognizing this pattern, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz once recommended that the United States maintain its military preeminence in order to discourage other great powers from challenging American leadership. Wolfowitz’s proposal, along with similar arguments advanced by Richard Perle of the Pentagon’s advisory Defense Policy Board, suffer from two major problems. First, maintaining top-dog status will require the United States to expend enormous resources. Preponderant states have repeatedly burdened themselves with military expenses that eroded their long-term economic growth and, ultimately, contributed to their relative decline. The second problem with this strident approach to statecraft is that it will engender resentment among those countries Washington needs as strategic partners once America’s unipolar moment has passed. States rise and fall, and they will continue to do so throughout the twenty-first century owing to a mix of overextension and unequal growth. When the world eventually moves away from unipolarity, peace will depend more on entrenched norms of reciprocal self-restraint and institutions of cooperative security than the “take-it-or-leave-it” unilateralism espoused by neoconservatives (see Kegley and Raymond, 1994). Appreciating the dangers of an international backlash, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice (2002) professes that the number of cases in which anticipatory self-defense might be justified will be small. Other supporters of the Bush NSS are less judicious. For instance, former Director of Central Intelligence James Woolsey reportedly recommends undertaking preventive military action against various countries (Elliott, 2003:58).
orders mitigate the most pernicious aspects of international anarchy. Throughout history, permissive normative orders have been associated with the ruthless pursuit of advantage, whereas restrictive orders have sought to limit egoistic acts of military self-help (Raymond, 2000).

Unfortunately, the new Bush strategic doctrine encourages the growth of a permissive normative order. How the United States acts is an enormous influence on the behavior of others. When the reigning hegemon promotes a new code of conduct, it alters the normative frame of reference for virtually everyone else. In anarchical systems, what the strongest do eventually shapes what others do, and when that practice becomes common, it tends to take on an aura of obligation. As Stanley Hoffmann (1971) has put it, rules of behavior become rules for behavior.

In judging the impact of norm transformation, it is enlightening to recall Immanuel Kant’s famous principle, the “categorical imperative.” When contemplating an action or a policy, he urged considering what the consequences would be if everyone practiced that same conduct. Kant counseled that the only ethical activity is one that would be advantageous for humanity if it were to become a universal law practiced by all. Applying this principle to the policy of preventive war, we should ask: What is likely to result if international norms permit all states to strike suspected threats in advance, before an enemy launches an attack or inflicts an injury? What if the new Bush strategic doctrine became every state’s policy?

If other states act on the same rationale that the United States has proposed, and accept preventive military action as a legitimate response to potential threats, “a messy world would become a lot messier” (Keller, 2002:115). Once the United States claims that anticipatory self-defense justifies prophylactic military policies, “nothing will stop other countries from doing the same” (Ikenberry, 2002:57).

Still another problem with the Bush “nip-it-in-the-bud” strategy lies in its impact on longstanding jus in bello restrictions on the conduct of warfare. A policy of preventive war would not only undermine restraints on when states might use force, but also on how they may use force (O’Connell, 2002:19). If the objective of an attack is to prevent the acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, are pharmaceutical factories and nuclear power plants located in population centers fair game, even when targeting might cause collateral deaths among noncombatants? Adhering to the principle of discrimination and gauging proportionality is difficult in a preventive war. Any state acting in a discretionary, preventive manner against some hypothetical attack from a latent adversary must make a subjective judgment about how much force is needed to ensure a reasonable chance of success. Faced with such uncertainties, a reliance upon worst-case analysis is likely. Yet the devastation wrought by an unbridled first strike emanating from worst-case assumptions might outweigh whatever benefits the initiator hoped to gain. The short-term gain of neutralizing a possible threat would be eclipsed by the long-term rancor created by a disproportionate use of military might.

The Bush administration’s strategy thus raises anew the timeless moral and legal issues about the conditions under which, and the purposes for which, anticipatory self-defense is permissible to counter potential threats to national and international security. What does precaution warrant? How should the powerful behave in asymmetrical conflicts? Does strategic necessity absolve national leaders from observing the UN Charter regime’s limitations on the use of force? Do unconventional security threats excuse behavior that would otherwise be morally repugnant? Or, as Emmerich de Vattel suggests, does this strategy run the risk of casting those who use it as aggressors? We contend that disregarding customary and charter restraints on the use of force will herald the arrival of a new strain of American unilateralism. Rather than simply reflecting the traditional American preference for autonomy in world affairs, it will seek to establish rules for Washington that are different from those governing other members of the international community. Proclaiming an exclusive right to determine when
anticipatory self-defense is legitimate impugns the legal principle that no one may be a judge in his own cause.\textsuperscript{6} We submit that this muscular form of unilateralism will erode America’s reputation and squander the “soft” power that is so critical for it to exercise global leadership. To quote an insightful commentary on the moral dilemma facing those who confront ruthless enemies: “As soon as men decide that all means are permitted to fight an evil, then their good becomes indistinguishable from the evil they set out to destroy” (Dawson, 2002:xvii).

The Peril of Preventive Warfare

In a speech delivered on February 12, 2003, Senator Robert Byrd described the Bush national security strategy as a “revolutionary doctrine...a radical new twist on the traditional idea of self defense.” According to the administration, innovative thinking was necessary to deal with radically new security threats. It concluded that the tragic events of September 11, 2001, demonstrated that the United States was menaced by elusive nonstate actors who can strike almost anywhere at any time. To reduce America’s vulnerability, it was imperative to prevent these threats from becoming operational.

How does a state thwart nameless, faceless enemies who are willing to engage in indiscriminate, suicidal attacks against noncombatants? A national security strategy that embraces preventive war may yield short-term gains against such foes, but we believe it will also produce ominous long-term repercussions. Because the nontraditional security threats we now face are embedded in the context of wider political issues, we need to consider how the Bush administration’s proposed solution of today’s problems may generate new problems tomorrow. If a latent adversary’s mere potential becomes a justifiable cause for preventive war, then every truculent, self-indulgent ruler will have rough-and-ready pretext for launching a first-strike.

Foreign policy decision making cannot be divorced from the normative climate in which it occurs. During turbulent times, mistrust is endemic and suspicion pervasive. Unsure of the aims of others, political leaders become fixated on the hostility they perceive, exaggerate the susceptibility of their opponents to coercion, assume that decisive military action will yield a bandwagon of support, and frequently overlook the deleterious side effects of their national security policies.\textsuperscript{7} Anticipatory self-defense is appealing to leaders in such circumstances. It seems prescient to defuse prospective threats. Yet, as Thomas Franck (2002:107) points out, the concept of anticipatory self-defense is rife with ambiguity. When defined as preventive military action against what could happen or what might occur, it can encourage leaping through windows of opportunity that are shut. The long-term consequences of this kind of foreign policy folly can be so calamitous that earlier American statesmen such as George Kennan, Henry Stimson, George Marshall, and John Foster Dulles dismissed security strategies predicated upon preventive warfare as morally repugnant nonsense (Vagts, 1956:332–334; Smoke, 1993:51). Indeed, after weighing the costs and benefits of the idea, U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower concluded that he “wouldn’t even listen to anyone seriously that came in and talked about such a thing” (cited in Gaddis, 1982:149).

\textsuperscript{6}An application of the legal principle \textit{nemo debet esse index in propia sus causa} to preventive war can be found in the judgment of the 1945 International Military Tribunal of Nuremberg. According to the Tribunal, Germany wrongly asserted that it “alone could decide...whether preventive action was necessary, and that in making her decision her judgment was conclusive. But whether action taken under the claim of self-defense was in fact aggressive or defensive must ultimately be subject to investigation and adjudication if international law is ever to be enforced” (cited in Schachter, 1987:230).

\textsuperscript{7}Snyder (2003:30) cautions that preventive uses of military force expand rather than ameliorate security problems because they spark endless brushfire wars. Throughout history, “the preventive pacification of one turbulent frontier...has usually led to the creation of another, adjacent to the first.”
The Bush administration has been vocal about the need to arrest foreign developments that may mature into attacks on the U.S. homeland and its interests abroad. It has been silent about the consequences that are likely to follow from a doctrine of preventive war couched in the idiom of anticipatory self-defense. Does countenancing military strikes against potential dangers enhance the security and moral reputation of the United States? Would it increase security in the world at large? While granting that preemption is justifiable whenever an attack is truly imminent, we contend that the permissive normative order engendered by the Bush strategy of preventive war will ultimately undermine national security. Preventive war, Otto von Bismarck is reputed to have said, is like committing suicide out of the fear of death. It causes the very thing one hopes to forestall. If the United States embraces preventive warfare, states currently locked in bitter rivalries from the Korean peninsula through South and Central Asia would have an inauspicious precedent to emulate. An American security strategy that cloaks preventive military action in the language of preemption “would invite imitation,” warns Paul Schroeder (2002:13). “A more dangerous, illegitimate norm and example can hardly be imagined.”

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