



# **Preventive Attack in the 1990s?**

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## ***Abstract***

The decline of the Soviet Union upset the world's balance of power and opened the door to third world proliferation since the superpowers no longer have tight control over their client-states. This increase in proliferation raised the issue of how the United States (US) should respond to a third world nation that is acquiring nuclear weapons. Should the United States depend on preventive attacks to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons?

This is not a new issue. Proliferation and preventive war have both been issues since the end of World War II. The United States considered a preventive attack against the Soviet Union in the postwar years. The Soviet Union considered preventive attacks against the People's Republic of China in 1969. Israel conducted a preventive attack in 1981 against the Osiraq nuclear reactor in Iraq.

Preventive attacks are politically untenable and are not militarily possible. Without perfect political conditions, it is unacceptable for the only remaining superpower to attack a second-rate power. It is militarily impossible for the United States to guarantee the removal of all nuclear weapons in a single preventive attack. This study concludes that the United States should not depend on preventive attacks to stop proliferation of nuclear weapons.



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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The decline of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) has helped create another security problem for the United States (US)—the proliferation of nuclear weapons among third world countries. In the past, either the USSR or the United States stopped nonnuclear nations from acquiring weapons of mass destruction. Now that the USSR is not playing as active a role in world politics, nuclear weapon proliferation is rising to the top of major issues the US military must address.

There have been repeated articles in the press regarding the proliferation of nuclear weapons to countries with questionable motives. Iraq continues to dominate the coverage as United Nations (UN) inspectors attempt to find or destroy nuclear-related facilities.<sup>1</sup> North Korea abrogated the nonproliferation treaty. Although this does not guarantee that North Korea has a nuclear weapon, it does imply that they are close to acquiring one.<sup>2</sup> Iran has also been in the spotlight for attempting to acquire critical nuclear materials from the former Soviet republic of Tajikistan.<sup>3</sup> These three examples clearly demonstrate this problem will affect the vital interests of the United States in the near future. One option for stopping proliferation raised repeatedly in the past has been preventive attack. Currently there is nothing written establishing the conditions under which preventive attack is a sensible policy. Since the chances are high that the United States will get involved with a proliferation problem in the near future, the subject of preventive attack needs to be addressed. Should the United States depend on preventive attacks to stop proliferation of nuclear weapons?

In the short 50-year history of nuclear weapons, such stark options are neither new nor unique. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the United States was the predominate nuclear power, but the USSR was building its own arsenal. The dominance of the United States at the time incited interest in a preventive war. In 1969 repeated border clashes brought the USSR and the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the brink of a preventive war.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the most publicized example of a country opting for the preventive option was the Israeli bombing of an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981.<sup>5</sup> What can we learn from these past three experiences?

The primary lesson is that the United States should not depend on preventive attack as a solution to this proliferation problem. While policy elites may advocate "taking out" a country's nuclear facilities or weapons "while we still can," it is imperative that we consider the effects of taking such action both militarily and politically.

Should the United States readily employ preventive attacks? To answer this question, this study first describes the dimensions of preventive attack. Second, to establish a historical base, it looks at several cases of preventive war that have occurred since the advent of nuclear weapons. Third, it uses a threat assessment of North Korea to demonstrate the



problems with conducting a preventive attack, even against a second-rate power. Finally, the argument concludes with policy recommendations concerning preventive attack and proliferation.

#### Notes

1. Jay C. Davis and David A. Kay, "Iraq's Secret Nuclear Weapons Program," *Physics Today*, July 1992, 21.
2. Douglas Jehl, "U.S. Seeking U.N. Pressure to Compel North Korea to Honor Treaty," *New York Times*, 13 March 1993, 3L.
3. David Albright and Mark Hibbs, "Spotlight Shifts to Iran," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 1992, 11.
4. Richard K. Betts, *Nuclear Blackmail and Nuclear Balance* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1987), 79–81.
5. Senate, *Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations on the Israeli Air Strike and Related Issues*, 97th Cong., 1st sess., 1981, 1.

## Chapter 2

### Preventive Attack

In order to evaluate preventive attack as a possible strategy, the concept of preventive war and its general problems must be understood. This section begins with a definition of these two terms, followed by an argument that preventive attack is rarely a good idea. Finally, the continuing attraction of preventive attack will be considered. Since all past literature on the subject refers to preventive war and not preventive attack, most of the background and history of this subject is in terms of preventive war.

#### Preventive Attack Definition

A preventive attack is a short-duration military action designed to remove an enemy's capability before it can be used against us. It differs from preemption. We conduct a preventive attack before our enemy can prepare to attack us; we make a preemptive strike when an attack from our enemy is imminent.<sup>1</sup> A preventive attack eliminates a threat before it can do us harm, and a preemptive strike is to "cut losses" since an enemy attack is forthcoming. For a preventive attack, it is better to attack now, under favorable conditions, than it is to wait and attack later when an enemy has fielded a better capability to fight.<sup>2</sup> However, attacking a sovereign nation to remove a military capability without direct provocation is aggression. Preventive attack initiates war when an opponent might choose not to.

Given this definition of a preventive attack, what makes current-day preventive attack different? Changes in the world have resulted in a shift from military bipolarity toward unipolarity, with the United States as the only remaining superpower. The combination of "smart" and future "brilliant" munitions, stealth technology, and overall military dominance provides the United States with the capability to execute limited, nonnuclear strikes anywhere in the world. Since it now possesses the capability to attack specific targets without engaging in an attrition war, the United States has changed its emphasis from fighting its enemies to coercing them through limited attacks. Because of this, we need to refine what constitutes preventive attack. A preventive attack is an isolated incident, not a protracted event. It is designed to eliminate a specific enemy capability—ideally through surgical strikes. A preventive attack is not meant to be militarily decisive as in past preventive wars—it is designed only to remove a high-value target.

In the early 1960s, there were two presumptions concerning preventive war.<sup>3</sup> The first was that a preventive war involved hitting first with nuclear weapons. The second presumed that any preventive war would result in a total war. Neither of these two assumptions apply today in the realm of preventive attack. It is now possible to remove a threat with conventional smart weapons, thereby eliminating the need for a nuclear preventive war. Since nuclear weapons no longer need to be used, a total war will not

necessarily follow a preventive attack. The absence of nuclear weapons from preventive attacks also resolves another major 1960s' issue—the morality of preventive war.<sup>4</sup> In the sixties nuclear preventive war would have caused the deaths of countless civilians. With current conventional capabilities, these collateral losses are all but eliminated.

Important prohibitions to preventive wars and preventive attacks thus no longer apply. Why, then, should the United States not utilize a “preventive strategy” to solve difficult and dangerous security problems?

### **Preventive Attacks Are Not a Good Idea**

History has repeatedly demonstrated the fallacy of preventive war, suggesting avoidance. The evidence suggests that the same conclusion applies to preventive attack. The first argument against it centers on the trade-off between effectiveness and risk.

To be successful, a preventive attack must consider both military and political objectives simultaneously. A military victory does not always equate to the attainment of political objectives. Critical national interests must be affected if a preventive attack is to be considered. The risks of war are considerable and go well beyond the effectiveness of a single preventive attack. These risks range from political ostracism to military counterattack. For example, the better the military effectiveness of a preventive attack, the worse can be the political ramifications. In terms of regional or world opinion, military dominance over an inferior country tends to discredit the aggressor no matter how noble the cause.

A second argument against preventive attack centers on the concepts of surprise and secrecy. Past preventive wars depended on surprise to achieve military objectives. However, there is a problem with surprise and the secrecy required to plan a surprise attack—it virtually eliminates the chance of negotiating a settlement short of war.<sup>5</sup> A successful preventive attack generally needs surprise, but requisite eliminates the possibility of a diplomatic settlement and encourages an opponent to prepare for attack. Secrecy thus can adversely affect both the military and political aspects of a preventive attack.

The third argument against preventive attack centers on the duration and level of conflict. A preventive attack as defined above might remove an enemy's capabilities before he can use them. The problem, however, is that it also assumes that the military defeat of the enemy is not required. If the enemy decides to prolong the conflict—beyond the preventive attack—a war of attrition could result. The attacker faces the dilemma of either walking away after an initial strike or committing further troops to continue to demonstrate resolve. Such a scenario brings up three errors in thinking about preventive attacks.

The first is the belief that a preventive attack is a quick solution to remove a threat. In fact, the removal of a specific threat does not remove an attacked country's entire military capability. Because of this, after launching a preventive attack, the attacker must expect to remain in the area and stop possible retribution attacks against countries that may have cooperated in the attack. Although Operation Desert Storm was not a preventive war, it provides a good example of UN forces staying to

ensure a regional balance. The need to keep troops in the region after a war normally ensures the conflict will not be of short duration. The same holds true for preventive attack.

The second error is the assumption that a preventive attack will be decisive. The United States demonstrated in Desert Storm a tremendous capability to conduct precision warfare. However, precision by itself is not enough in executing a preventive attack. Consider the destruction of nuclear facilities in Iraq as a form of preventive attack within Desert Storm. During the air war, one of the 12 major target sets included nuclear facilities.<sup>6</sup> However, coalition air forces were not totally successful. While it is true that Iraq's nuclear program was set back through the bombing campaign, the continued identification and destruction of more nuclear facilities by UN inspectors suggests underestimation of the extent of Iraq's nuclear program and an inability to set it back as far as the Persian Gulf War allies intended.<sup>7</sup>

The final fallacy associated with preventive attack is one of omission—the failure to realize the political ramifications of a conflict between a major power and a lesser power. Conducting a preventive attack, especially by a superpower, against a third world nation means weighing the military gain against the possibility of UN condemnation, trade restrictions, and loss of regional interests. To ensure support for an attack in the world community, a clear threat must be identified, clear goals for the operation must be declared, and a coalition must be established among neighboring countries. Failure in accomplishing these actions will make the attacker appear to be the world's bully instead of the protector and promoter of democracy.

### **Why Preventive Attack?**

With all these considerations arguing against preventive attack, why is there a repeated tendency to consider it as a possible solution for new threats? As the above fallacies illustrate, it is easy to believe that a preventive attack will be quick and decisive because the attacker has a temporary, exploitable advantage. The attacker is beguiled “by visions of fading offensive opportunity or growing defensive vulnerability.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, he is lured into a preventive attack because he believes he has an advantage that he is about to lose. The window of opportunity is open but for one reason or another, it will soon close. Since it is closing, there is only a short time to react—thus the idea of a preventive attack while the opportunity still exists. This understanding of preventive attack now provides the groundwork to explore past cases of preventive war.

### **Notes**

1. Richard K. Betts, “A Nuclear Golden Age? The Balance before Parity,” *International Security* 11, no. 3 (Winter 1986–87): 19. See also Richard K. Betts, *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1982), 145–47.

2. Stephen W. Van Evera, “Causes of War” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, November 1984), 60. Van Evera further describes the difference between preemption and preventive war: “With both preemptive and preventive war the attacker strikes because he believes “a war now is better than a war later,” but the reason why

“now is better than later” differs. A preemptive strike forestalls a strike from the other side, while a preventive strike forestalls a shift in the balance of power. The attacker sees his power waning, so he strikes to avoid fighting a war later under worse circumstances. With preemptive war either side profits by striking first, while with preventive war one side wants war soon, while the other wants to defer war.

3. Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959), 229. In chap. 7, Brodie looks at the quest for “total solutions” to nuclear warfare. His perception is based strictly on an assumption that preventive war would be conducted with nuclear weapons. Therefore, although his definition of preventive war is usable in this writing, the attributes he associates with preventive war are in opposition to my definition of preventive attacks.

4. Brodie, 235-37.

5. Van Evera, 30. Van Evera describes “muffled diplomacy” and “hidden capabilities” as weaknesses of secrecy. His definition of muffled diplomacy says that planning a secret attack conceals a state’s grievances, capabilities, and perceptions. This promotes misperceptions by their enemy that could cause the situation to regress further. His definition of hidden capabilities states that the more a country appears capable of a surprise attack, the more their enemy will fear it and prepare countermeasures for it.

6. Department of Defense, *Conduct of the Persian Gulf War, The Final Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1992), 97.

7. “Gulf War Air Power Survey, Summary Report” (draft), 27 March 1993, 74.

8. Van Evera, 61.

## Chapter 3

### Past Cases of Preventive War

The most basic way to show why preventive attack is not a good idea is to look at past attempts to employ them. To ensure relevance, the three examples of past preventive wars will be from the nuclear era. The first, and most pertinent, is the US-USSR case from the late 1940s and early 1950s. The second example is that of the USSR and the PRC in 1969. The third and final example is the Israel-Iraq case of 1981. All three of these cases provide insight into why both the political and military ramifications of preventive attack must be adequately considered before initiating hostilities. The US-USSR example provides the most clear-cut military and political situations and will therefore dominate the discussion.

#### US versus the USSR—Late 1940s through Early 1950s

To better appreciate the problems of waging a preventive attack, we start by evaluating the strategy vocally advocated by several military officers in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Was preventive war politically acceptable? Was it militarily possible? What would have happened if we would have tried a preventive war against the USSR in the late 1940s or early 1950s? Addressing these questions will show that a preventive war against the Soviet Union was not a viable strategy for the United States in the late 1940s or early 1950s.

Our military experience of the late 1940s and early 1950s can be directly applied to our current situation. In the first period, our only nuclear adversary was the Soviet Union. It had a very limited number of nuclear weapons and no intercontinental delivery system to threaten the US homeland. Today, our most unpredictable threat comes from third world street-fighter states like North Korea, Iraq, and Iran—countries that either have or are likely to acquire nuclear weapons in the near future. These threats, like the post-World War II USSR, have or will have limited numbers of nuclear weapons and no advanced long-range delivery systems. These similarities tie the Soviet Union of the late 1940s and early 1950s with today's third world nuclear threats.

#### Nature of the Debate

From the end of the Second World War through the early 1950s, preventive war advocates were a vocal minority that included civilian heads of the Department of Defense (DOD), military leaders, and average US citizens. To better appreciate the problems of waging a preventive war, this strategy needs to be evaluated addressing the same questions as stated earlier.

The preventive war argument first surfaced in August 1945. Maj Gen Orvil Arson Anderson, soon to be the first commandant of the USAF's new Air War College (AWC), publicly raised the issue in an interview with Dr. Bruce Hopper on 6 August 1945. General Anderson enjoyed talking about

strategy and took every opportunity to bring it up, regardless of the interview subject. In the interview with Dr. Hopper, General Anderson fantasized about a world without war, but thought it impossible. Anderson believed if his country had to fight, it must do so on American terms: I can visualize keeping the Chase National Bank safe from robbery, just by taking the proper precautions, and I can visualize preventing war on the globe by taking proper precautions. We should never fight a war again. It should always be in the form of a slap, never in the form of that type of war which has just devastated Germany. It can be prevented.<sup>1</sup> General Anderson then described a group of “strategic thinkers” that would advise the president and Congress when a foreign country threatened the United States. “It is our firm conclusion now that we tell this nation—meaning anyone that threatened the peace—to stop doing this, because we consider it an act of war, a threat, the step to war; and if they don’t . . . we’ve got these two groups of B-29s . . . tell them we will hit them.”<sup>2</sup> Although General Anderson never used the term *preventive war*, his pronouncements soon popularized the term. Ironically, Anderson denied that his solutions constituted preventive war, and he argued that preventive war was illogical. Anderson seemed loath to admit that his strategy to eliminate the USSR’s nuclear buildup was a classic example of military prevention.

Secretary of the Navy Francis Matthews provides a second example of those who advocated preventive war in the cold war era. However, unlike Anderson, Matthews was an “out of the closet” advocate of prevention. He openly discussed his thoughts on the subject in a speech at the Boston Naval Shipyard on 25 August 1950.

The United States should be willing to pay any price to achieve a world at peace even the price of instituting a war to compel cooperation for peace. . . . [The Communists] would brand our program as imperialist aggression. We could accept that slander with complacency, for in the implementation of a strong, affirmative, peace-seeking policy, though it casts us in a character new to a true democracy—an initiator of a war of aggression—it would win for us a proud and popular title—we would become the first aggressors for peace. . . . We cannot escape the role as aggressors for peace, it is a cause to which we will be compelled to dedicate our total and ultimate resources. . . . It is for our generation to decide if it is ever again to be possible for men to live in freedom and peace.<sup>3</sup>

Was this Secretary Matthews speaking or was this a trial balloon sent up by then Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson? Hanson Baldwin, a columnist for the *New York Times*, accuses the secretary of defense of using the secretary of the navy to see if preventive war was a potentially viable strategy for the Truman administration. Baldwin describes the situation as follows. “The speech by Mr. Matthews, a man always open to suggestion from his superiors, was clearly a trial balloon; the method of launching it was a favorite one of Mr. Matthews’s political boss—Louis Johnson, Secretary of Defense, who has been selling the same doctrine of the preventive war in private conversations around Washington.”<sup>4</sup> If Baldwin was right, preventive war doctrine permeated the civilian leadership of the DOD. In any case, the Matthews speech certainly got a response. President Harry S. Truman personally called Mr. Matthews and chastised him for advocating a policy that was contrary to that of the administration.<sup>5</sup>

How did this disagreement between the Defense Department and the White House affect popular opinion? Looking at opinion polls, it seems that in the late 1940s and early 1950s the American people supported the idea of preventive war, at least with respect to the use of atomic weapons. In August 1949, 70 percent of those polled advocated the first use of atomic weapons.<sup>6</sup> This level of support continued through February 1951, when a similar question was asked. At that point, 66 percent of the public still favored the first use of atomic weapons.<sup>7</sup> It was only after the controversies involving the Truman administration and the above individuals were over that public opinion changed. In a September 1954 Gallup Poll, Americans were specifically asked, "Some people say we should go to war against Russia now while we have the advantage in atomic and hydrogen weapons. Do you agree or disagree with this point of view?" Thirteen percent of the sample agreed, 76 percent disagreed, 11 percent had no opinion.<sup>8</sup> The opinions changed significantly from 1950 to 1954—four years after the Matthews and Anderson incidents.

Clearly, preventive war was on the minds of the civilian leadership, the military, and the American people. However, even with the strong support of some military and civilian leaders, preventive war did not become the official military strategy of the United States. Why? The first answer is that it was politically untenable.

### **Preventive War Was Politically Untenable**

To demonstrate the point, AWC commandant General Anderson can serve as a representative example. General Anderson had been advocating preventive war as early as 1945. Most of his statements regarding preventive war derived from speaking engagements and interviews. When he became AWC commandant, he regularly made presentations to the student body, but none of his recorded lectures addressed preventive war.<sup>9</sup> However, on 30 August 1950, a columnist for the *Montgomery (Alabama) Advertiser*, Allen Rankin, came to General Anderson's quarters with a copy of an article to be released the next day by another columnist, Drew Pearson. Pearson's article claimed that Anderson was a proponent of preventive war with the Russians, and, "there has been concrete evidence that the General follows a deliberate program at the Air War College aimed at indoctrinating students with the idea of an immediate attack."<sup>10</sup> As stated above, there is no existing evidence that General Anderson's AWC lectures ever addressed preventive war. After telling Rankin that he would not respond to Pearson's rhetoric, General Anderson invited Rankin in to hear his views on preventive war and strategy "off the record." Even though Anderson told Rankin the interview was off the record, excerpts found their way to the front page of the *Montgomery Advertiser* on 1 September 1950.<sup>11</sup> "Give me the order to do it," said General Anderson Thursday, "and I can break up Russia's five A-bomb nests in a week! And," snapped Anderson, AWC commander here at Maxwell, "when I went up to Christ, I think I could explain to him why I wanted to do it—now—before it's too late. I think I could explain to Him that I had saved civilization!"<sup>12</sup> Anderson had gone too far. Most newspapers ignored his attempt at damage control.<sup>13</sup> He was relieved of his AWC position on 1 September 1950.



The Anderson and Matthews cases made clear that talking about preventive war in public was unacceptable for government officials. An Associated Press article from 2 September 1950 emphasized this point: “[The firing of a top Air Force general for offering to attack Russia made it abundantly clear Saturday the administration intends to squelch all official talk of waging a preventive war.”<sup>14</sup> President Truman had already reprimanded Secretary Matthews several months earlier. The line had been drawn and Anderson crossed it. Truman was trying to limit the Korean conflict and all this talk of attacking Russia was not helping his cause.

It is evident how President Truman felt—a preventive war was not going to take place. If, however, the political mood had been different, was the US military actually capable of prosecuting a preventive war against Russia? The second case against preventive war at the time was that it was not militarily possible.

### **Preventive War Was Not Militarily Possible**

Even if the political leadership of the United States had wanted to prosecute a preventive war against the Soviet Union in the late 1940s or early 1950s, the American military was not able to support it. During this period, the US Air Force had limited numbers of properly configured aircraft, the United States had only sporadic intelligence about the USSR, and the US Air Force had a limited number of atomic weapons. These conditions contributed to US military impotence.

**Aircraft Limitations.** The first military problem for a US preventive war was the limitations of available strategic aircraft. The most obvious limitation was numbers. In 1945 the 509th Composite Group had two B-29s modified for atomic weapons.<sup>15</sup> This situation significantly improved in 1946, but nuclear-capable aircraft numbered a paltry 27. By mid-1947, Strategic Air Command (SAC) owned approximately 160 B-29s but only 27 were atomic capable.<sup>16</sup> Even after SAC acquired 38 B-36s in 1951, low alert rates still kept the number of available bombers low.<sup>17</sup>

Another aircraft limitation was bombing accuracy. Precision delivery was essential for effectiveness—even with nuclear weapons. Visual bombing was a must if accuracy was to be achieved. US bombers could attack major Soviet cities (Royal Air Force-style), but this would not achieve the goal of a preventive war—the elimination of the Soviet Union’s nuclear capability.

**Intelligence Support.** The intelligence community painted a grim picture of trying to penetrate the Soviet Union. The Soviets had a primitive but usable radar system capable of vectoring their able fighter force to intercept US B-29s. Since the United States had no escort aircraft capable of accompanying the B-29s deep into Russia, the bomber force was open to a devastating Soviet fighter attack. Intelligence sources also emphasized the Soviet’s antiaircraft artillery (AAA) capability, which probably used proximity fuses. Any attempt at penetration would be a challenge.<sup>18</sup>

If the United States did penetrate the USSR, what was there to bomb? American intelligence failed in its efforts to identify viable targets. As stated earlier, limited atomic bomb technology required accurate attacks. These would be difficult with this lack of target data. The only good targeting intelligence was that captured from the Germans after World War II. German

records and photographs of the areas the Wehrmacht occupied during the war provided a good foundation for targeting. However, a vast majority of strategic targets were located east of the German occupation zones. The US intelligence community knew very little about these regions.<sup>19</sup>

**Numbers of Atomic Weapons.** By far, the biggest limiting factor in the prosecution of a preventive war in the late 1940s and early 1950s was the availability of atomic weapons. In 1947 the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) believed they needed 400 atomic weapons if the United States were to be successful in a war with the USSR.<sup>20</sup> Gen George C. Kenney, commander in chief, SAC, believed that 200 would suffice.<sup>21</sup> As late as 1950, it is doubtful that 400 atomic weapons were available. The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* estimates the following numbers of atomic weapons in the inventories of the superpowers (table 1). By 1950 the JCS still did not have the number of weapons they had felt were needed in 1947. It is important to remember that as of 1949, the USSR demonstrated their capability to manufacture atomic weapons. As a result, the number of weapons needed to neutralize the Soviet threat rose from 1947 to 1950.

**Table 1**  
**United States–Soviet Nuclear Stockpiles**

Year	United States	USSR
1945	2	0
1946	9	0
1947	13	0
1948	50	0
1949	250	1
1950	350	5
1951	650	25
1952	1,000	50
1953	1,350	120
1954	1,950	150
1955	2,600	200

Source: "US Soviet Nuclear Weapons Stockpiles, 1945–1989; Numbers of Weapons," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, November 1989, 53.

The United States's threat of preventive war was at best a dream through the early 1950s. Limitations on the quality and quantity of aircraft, intelligence, and atomic weapons all contributed to the impotence of SAC and the United States during this period. A military option of preventive war was clearly not possible.

### **What If the United States Had Tried a Preventive War?**

What if such a war had been tried? Just having the atomic bomb, in the numbers the United States had, would not have been enough to defeat the Soviet Union during the period studied. There were two distinct phases

within the 1945 through 1955 time frame: 1945–1950, when the United States had atomic weapons and the USSR didn't, and from 1950 onward when both countries were equipped with atomic weapons.

In the period through 1950, the United States derived benefits from being the only owner of atomic weapons, but as stated above, our military limitations precluded political leaders from endorsing a policy of preventive war. We did not have enough atomic weapons, we had a limited number of obsolete aircraft, and we did not have the capability to penetrate the Soviet Union with decisive strikes. Until 1950 the United States could have struck some targets, inflicted some damage, but could not have accomplished our preventive war objectives with the resources available.

After 1950 the picture changed significantly, but the predicted results remained the same. The United States started receiving deliveries of the B-36 in July 1950.<sup>22</sup> As a result, America finally had a bomber with intercontinental capability—but still faced the problem of penetrating Soviet airspace. The big change in 1950, however, was the advent of Soviet atomic weapons. For the first time, the United States could be threatened with atomic attack. Even though General Anderson said he could “break up Russia's five A-Bomb nests in a week,”<sup>23</sup> US intelligence and the SAC bomber force could hardly guarantee the total elimination of the USSR's atomic capability and certainly could not have stopped the Soviets from producing more atomic weapons. The results were the same for both periods—the United States could inflict damage but could not remove the threat posed by the USSR from 1945 through 1955.

A further complication for preventive war in this period would have been the possibility of ending up in a war of attrition with the Soviet Union. Even if the United States were successful in eliminating the Soviet's nuclear weapons, what is to say that they would just drop their conventional weapons and give up? The Soviets still had a sizable force from World War II. It would be hard to imagine that the United States could conduct a nuclear attack on the homeland of the Soviet Union without it attempting to fight a conventional war. A war of attrition with the Soviet Union would have been a disaster for the United States. It would have been a protracted war, fought thousands of miles from our borders, against a powerful opponent. This was clearly not a desirable outcome of a preventive attack.

### **Preventive War—A Declaratory Strategy?**

If the strategy of preventive war from the late 1940s and early 1950s were not executable, why did some educated and experienced military and civilian leaders espouse it? President Truman certainly showed that he was decidedly against it in 1950. In his speeches, General Anderson seemed to support it. The alleged controversy between Secretary Matthews and Secretary Johnson invites criticism of the prevention strategy. Was it really a credible strategy if the secretary of defense asked the secretary of the navy to send up the trial balloon? Where was the secretary of the air force during this possible “feeling out” process? If the preventive war strategy was a serious one, why was the Air Force not involved in promoting it?

With 20-20 hindsight, the only constructive explanation is that US military leaders knew a preventive war was not executable. The president also

believed it was not politically acceptable in the eyes of the world. So why all the publicity about it? If the United States could not defeat the Soviet Union militarily, it could conduct strategic psychological operations through publicized dialogue—thus creating a declaratory strategy. The Soviets did not know what atomic capabilities the United States held. With the United States involved in Korea, fighting for the containment of communism, why no rattle the saber to make the USSR think twice about escalating the proxy war in Korea, or perhaps starting a bigger war in Europe?

### **USSR versus PRC—1969**

The second historical example of the serious contemplation of preventive war occurred in 1969. Border disputes were causing friction between the USSR and the PRC. After the Chinese attack against Damansky Island, the Soviet Politburo considered its options. According to Soviet defector Arkady N. Shevchenko, the possible responses considered varied from a massive nuclear attack down to a surgical strike against the PRC's nuclear facilities.<sup>24</sup> However, Moscow felt it needed to find out how the United States would respond to a Soviet nuclear attack against the PRC. After making subtle inquiries about possible US responses, word got back to the Soviets that such an attack would solicit a negative reaction from the United States.<sup>25</sup> The Soviets backed down—but only after threatening the PRC.

What would have happened if the Soviets would have mounted a preventive attack against the PRC? Even if the Soviets were able to convince the United States not to intervene, and even if the Soviets were able to destroy the PRC's nuclear capabilities, they would not have been successful. A preventive attack would only have provoked a conventional response from the PRC. The USSR and the PRC would have ended up in a tremendous war of attrition on adjacent borders.

In this example, a preventive war was not even fought—only threatened. However, just the threat of preventive war soured relations between the two communist allies. Even though the Soviets probably had sufficient forces to attack the PRC, the political ramifications of doing so were unacceptable.<sup>26</sup> In this incident, the USSR obtained no real military objectives and the Soviets possibly pushed a valuable communist ally toward the US camp, at the height of the cold war.

### **Israel versus Iraq—1981**

The third and final example of a preventive attack was a stunning short-term military success but a dismal political failure. Israeli intelligence had been monitoring the construction of a French nuclear reactor in Iraq. By the summer of 1981 it was close to completion.<sup>27</sup> The Israelis saw this reactor as a source of weapons-grade nuclear materials for Iraq and as a threat to the delicate balance of power in the Middle East.<sup>28</sup> As a result, in June 1981 Israel launched an attack and destroyed the reactor building. The mission was highly successful in the military sense. However, the long-term effects of the attack are still with us. The Israelis miscalculated on the possible effects of their attack, which actually damaged the causes of Arab-Israeli

peace.<sup>29</sup> But what about the military results? Did they have a lasting effect? Not really. The Israeli attack did slow Iraqi efforts to acquire nuclear materials, but it did not stop them. In post-Gulf War inspections, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) located factories and equipment that would have yielded an atomic weapon for the Iraqis within 18 to 30 months.<sup>30</sup> In less than 10 years after the Israeli attack, the Iraqis were in position to have their nuclear weapons. Taking into account both the adverse political ramifications and the long-term military failure in stopping Saddam Hussein from manufacturing nuclear weapons, one can conclude that preventive war was not in Israel's best interest.

### Conclusions from Historical Examples

Preventive attack has not been a good option since the advent of nuclear technology. In the past three examples, we have seen that we must address both the military and political ramifications before setting out on a preventive attack. How do these examples pertain to the current world order? I submit that we must address the same considerations that President Truman addressed in 1950. New technology has not removed all the limitations on military capability, and political consequences will always exist. The next section addresses the outlook for conducting a preventive attack in today's world.

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## Chapter 4

### North Korea: A Representative Threat

With an understanding of the concepts of preventive attack from chapter 1 and the historical examples of preventive war from chapter 2, this study now looks to North Korea for a current situation that might lead the United States to consider a preventive attack as a result of proliferation. To evaluate North Korea, it begins by quantifying their nuclear threat. Next, it examines the political acceptability of conducting a preventive attack. Then it determines the probability of the United States militarily conducting a successful preventive attack. Finally, it determines why it is not in the US interest to become involved in a North Korean preventive attack.

#### North Korean Nuclear Threat

For the purposes of this analysis, North Korea has manufactured several nuclear weapons. These weapons pose a threat to a large part of the Far East region since the North Koreans have variants of the Scud missile. The North Korean models of the Scud have a range of more than 300 miles and a payload of more than 2,000 pounds.<sup>1</sup> According to the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, this problem will soon be complicated when the new North Korean Nodong-1 missile is deployed. The Nodong-1 has a similar payload and a range of over 600 miles.<sup>2</sup> This new missile is capable of striking Beijing, Vladivostok, most of Japan and all of South Korea. Although the North Korean Air Force has more than 300 ground-attack fighters and 80 bombers, a prepared US force should be able to contain the North Korean air breathing threat.<sup>3</sup>

North Korea can now threaten many of its neighbors. To consider what the United States can do to influence North Korea's behavior, it is necessary to evaluate the possibility of conducting a preventive attack against North Korea's nuclear weapons and production facilities. This section first looks at the possibility of gaining political acceptance for such an attack, then examines the military capabilities needed to execute a preventive attack.

#### Preventive Attack Could Be Politically Acceptable

The political problem evolves from one of the tenets of preventive attack. If the United States initiates the preventive attack, it becomes the aggressor. Since America is also the only remaining superpower, it must be sensitive to the perception that it is an aggressor nation. How does the United States ensure that its preventive attack is viewed positively in the world community? The first step would be to obtain UN support. Although there is no precedence for the UN intervening militarily without being invited into a country for other than humanitarian reasons, the magnitude of the Korean problem would probably ensure passage of a support

resolution. The second step would then be to forge neighboring countries into a politico-military coalition which could prove more difficult considering the cultural diversity in the region. These solutions to the political problem, however, create a tension with our ability to execute a military attack. Weeks of diplomatic haggling sacrifice military surprise. The resulting coalition would ensure the American image would not be tarnished, but the overt negotiations among possible allies would warn the enemy that attacks were forthcoming. The United States would yield the initiative to North Korea.

Overall, these concerns can be addressed successfully. Once political acceptance is gained, a military plan must be devised to accomplish the preventive attack. Because of coalition building, this will prove to be more of a challenge.

### **Preventive Attack Not Militarily Possible**

Under the present circumstances, a preventive attack against North Korea is not militarily possible. To prove this assertion, this section looks at target sets, North Korean defenses, US forces, a possible attack plan, expected results of a preventive attack, and finally, the possibility of a nontraditional response from the North Koreans.

**Possible Nuclear-Related Targets.** The first step in evaluating a preventive attack is to determine what target sets need to be struck. Remember that the purpose of a preventive attack is to remove North Korea's nuclear capability. With this in mind, the most obvious first targets are the warheads themselves, but they are mobile and of relatively small size. The long-term threat consists of research and production facilities. Although it may be hard to identify them initially, they are easier to strike since they are fixed, relatively large targets. In North Korea, the main nuclear research and production facility is located at Yongbyon, approximately 60 miles north of the capital, Pyongyang. Yongbyon is a massive facility consisting of approximately 100 buildings.<sup>4</sup> Within the complex is an operational, Russian-built, five-megawatt reactor.<sup>5</sup> Also, a 50-megawatt reactor presently under construction will be on-line in 1995.<sup>6</sup> Of even greater concern is a suspected fuel reprocessing plant located in Yongbyon. This 600-foot-long, six-story facility is thought capable of producing weapons grade plutonium from spent reactor fuel.<sup>7</sup> Last, several miles from Yongbyon, there is a 200-megawatt reactor under construction (table 2).<sup>8</sup> This reactor, near Taechon, is slated to be operational in 1996. When all three of these reactors are on-line, along with the processing facility at Yongbyon, the North Koreans may be able to produce between 400 and 600 pounds of plutonium per year.<sup>9</sup> All these facilities would qualify as important targets for attack.

**North Korean Air Defenses.** As a result of the 40-year rivalry between the North and South Koreans, both sides probably have the best prepared "dug in" border defenses in the world. To complement these set-piece deployments, the North has almost 400 fighter aircraft of varying age and reliability—mostly of Russian design. Along with their fighter force, the North Koreans have an elaborate AAA and surface-to-air missile (SAM) capability, although it is mostly concentrated on their southern border.



**Table 2  
Nuclear Facilities at Yongbyon**

<b>More than 100 Buildings</b>
Five-megawatt reactor—operational
50-megawatt reactor—under construction
Fuel reprocessing facility
200-megawatt reactor—Taechon

They have approximately 200 SAM sites consisting of SA-2s, SA-3s, and SA-5s (table 3). Although the numbers of aircraft and SAMs appear to be high, the North Koreans only have about 70 of what we would consider modern aircraft (MiG-23s and MiG-29s), and most of their ground-based defenses are concentrated on the south.

**US Forces.** To counter the North Korean defenses, the United States has a broad span of capabilities. If we are to consider a preventive attack, we have the perfect weapons to carry it out—cruise missiles and stealth fighters equipped with precision-guided munitions (PGM). There is no better capability worldwide to take out specific targets by surprise. During

**Table 3  
North Korean Air Defenses**

<b>SAMs</b>	<b>Fighter Aircraft</b>
SA-2: 72	Chinese Models: 180
SA-3: ~32	MiG-21: 120
SA-5: ~72	MiG-23: 46
	MiG-29: 30

Desert Storm, the United States employed 66 B-52 bombers along with more than 700 ground-attack fighters.<sup>10</sup> More than 800 Navy, Marine, and Air Force aircraft prosecuted a sustained campaign with air supremacy. These forces took months to deploy and ready for war. This luxury will not exist in North Korea. To initiate a preventive attack against North Korea, the United States will have to deploy and attack in secret if it is to successfully destroy North Korea's nuclear weapons before they are dispersed. This action eliminates most of the aircraft used in Desert Storm. A surprise attack against North Korean nuclear facilities would have to be launched with stealth and cruise missiles. Any other option requires a sustained campaign involving the removal of air defenses. Any prolonged campaign makes it harder to find and eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons. Will stealth assets be enough to carry out a successful preventive attack? This discussion looks at two scenarios to determine if a preventive attack against North Korea could work. The first maximizes surprise and consists of only F-117 aircraft and cruise missiles. The second scenario maximizes the destruction of North Korea capabilities and assumes the same force as we had in Desert Storm.

**Preventive Attack.** The objective of a preventive attack is to eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons and means of weapon production. To achieve our desired goal, all its existing weapons and much of its key manufacturing capability must be destroyed. Both target sets have problems associated with them. Manufacturing will be hard to eliminate because of the number and size of the facilities. Destroying the weapons will be difficult, if not impossible, since it is hard to find them with any measure of certainty.

### **Maximum Surprise**

In the maximum surprise scenario, forces are secretly built-up to a point where they can make a single, simultaneous attack against key targets. The first step in such a one-time attack is to identify the targets.

Two basic target sets must be struck in this preventive attack. The first consists of the already existing nuclear weapons. By far, these will be the hardest to hit since they are relatively small and can be moved with little notice. The existing weapons are the primary reason for the maximum surprise scenario—any warning received by the North Koreans allows them to disperse their weapons. The warheads would be hard enough to find in a day-to-day context. The second target set in the preventive attack would be the facilities needed to manufacture nuclear weapons and their components. Although most of these facilities can easily be located, they are harder to destroy due to their size and number. A target set for a maximum surprise preventive attack on North Korea might look like this (table 4).

The single-shot approach to destroying these 18 targets requires cruise missiles and stealth. Since manufacturing facilities are relatively soft targets, the low explosive yields of the Tomahawk land attack missiles (TLAM) or air-launched cruise missiles (ALCM) would be sufficient. However, for hardened targets like storage facilities and reactor buildings,

the higher yield of the F-117 PGMs would be required. A representative force structure would have 20 F-117 aircraft target the 10 active weapon

**Table 4**  
**One-Shot, Maximum Surprise Target Set**

<b>10 Targets for Warheads</b>	<b>8 Manufacturing Facilities</b>
Weapons storage areas	3 Reactors
Delivery system locations	2 Reprocessing buildings
Assembly sites	3 Centrifuge buildings

storage areas. Additionally, six F-117s would precede approximately 50 TLAM and ALCMs against the manufacturing sites.

Results of this preventive attack are hard to gauge. Equipment from the manufacturing facilities can be hardened or salvaged. The strikes against the existing weapons would only be successful if the attacker were guaranteed perfect intelligence. Considering the survival rates of facilities in Iraq, a conservative estimate is that 25 percent of North Korea's manufacturing capability and seven of the 10 estimated existing weapons would be destroyed. The attack would be considered a failure since weapons still exist, although their manufacturing could be set back several years with damage to the right facilities.

### **Sustained Preventive Attack**

A sustained preventive attack much like Desert Storm differs significantly from a single, maximum surprise attack. Sustained operations allow attacks, assessments, and reattacks of facilities if necessary. This process would contribute to the maximum destruction of North Korea's manufacturing facilities, since there is no limit on the number of attacks possible.

However, there is a disadvantage. In the interest of world opinion, a coalition against North Korea must first be built. On the surface, this would seem like the thing to do, but it would cost a key to possible success—surprise. Negotiations to establish a coalition could take weeks. During this time, North Korea could hide their weapons and move sensitive equipment from their facilities. US forces could end up bombing empty storage bunkers and gutted facilities. North Korea could still recover its nuclear program.

What would the target set be for a sustained preventive attack? Considering the uncertainty introduced by providing warning and including North Korean air defenses, the target base increases tremendously. Now, “suspected” storage locations and delivery systems must be hit, since it is not possible to positively locate the weapons. Coverage of manufacturing sites could also be increased with sustained operations. Finally, air defenses would have to be destroyed to ensure freedom of access to targets. A possible target list is noted in table 5. As stated earlier, this target set would necessitate a force much the same as in Desert Storm—a total of nearly 3,800 US aircraft.<sup>11</sup> B-52, F-16, A-6, and A-7 aircraft with “dumb” bombs could be used to strike manufacturing facilities and airfields. However, the warhead targets would still require F-117 and F-111 sorties with PGMs. Of course, this higher level of effort would require air refueling, reconnaissance, airborne warning and control system, electronic jamming, and air defense suppression support.

**Table 5**  
**Sustained Preventive Attack Targets**

<b>Targets for 10 Warheads</b>	<b>Manufacturing Facilities</b>	<b>Air Defenses</b>
30 Storage areas	3 Reactors	10 Airfields
50 Delivery system sites	2 Reprocessing buildings	200 SAM sites
3 Assembly sites	3 Centrifuge buildings	400 Attack aircraft
	25 Other facilities	

What would be the result of a sustained preventive attack against North Korea? The short-term results would be worse than the maximum surprise attack since even less of North Korea’s existing nuclear weapons would be destroyed. The long-term results, however, would be much better since intelligence could assess strikes and direct restrikes of surviving facilities. Again comparing with Desert Storm results, with sustained operation, 75 percent of the manufacturing facilities would be destroyed, but only three or four of the existing weapons would be located and eliminated. This would be another failure for preventive attack, since North Korea would still be a “nuclear nation.”

**Expected Results of a Preventive Attack**

A preventive attack, as described above, would be more successful in the long term over the short term. However, US forces would only be able

to destroy some of North Korea's fixed manufacturing and production capabilities. Although North Korean targets are more centrally located than Iraq's during Desert Storm, the same problems exist. There were five main centers to the Iraqi program: Ash Sharqat, Tarmiya, Al Fallujah, Al Atheer, and the home of the ill-fated Osiraq reactor, Tuwaitha.<sup>12</sup> The coalition against Iraq launched almost 2,500 sorties against nuclear, biological, and chemical targets, yet the UN and IAEA are still locating and destroying nuclear facilities and equipment in Iraq. Airpower alone did not eliminate the Iraqi nuclear weapons program.<sup>13</sup> There is no indication that airpower alone would succeed in North Korea either.

The highest value targets—the existing nuclear weapons—would be the riskiest. Since finding these weapons would depend on intelligence gathering, the preventive attacker could easily be deceived on the location or even the number of existing weapons. If even one of these weapons remained after the strike, the goals of preventive attack would not be achieved. The consequences of not destroying all North Korea's nuclear weapons could be catastrophic. As stated earlier, North Korea currently has Scud missiles deployed that are capable of reaching far inside South Korea, or even into Japan. In the next few years, they will expand their capabilities with the new longer-range Nodong-1. North Korea could use the remaining warheads to retaliate.

Desert Storm demonstrated how hard it is to intercept ballistic missile warheads. After analyzing the Army's data on the Patriot missile in Desert Storm, the Congressional Research Service concluded that only one Patriot missile actually destroyed a Scud warhead,<sup>14</sup> while the Government Accounting Office concluded that only 9 percent of Patriots fired in Desert Storm were "high confidence" kills.<sup>15</sup> The world witnessed the damage high-explosive Scud warheads inflicted even after engagements with Patriot. If Patriot cannot destroy incoming warheads, the system will certainly be ineffective against nuclear weapons.

The United States cannot always count on a passive enemy like it had with Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War. However, if the enemy cannot fly combat missions due to air defenses and cannot produce any ground or naval offensives due to air dominance, how can he respond? The last possible result of a preventive attack could be a terrorist-type retaliatory attack.

If a preventive attack was launched but failed to destroy all of North Korea's nuclear weapons, how could Kim Il Sung respond? There are several nontraditional methods of delivering a nuclear weapon without regard to the safety of the vehicle or operator. Suicide attacks must be considered in every aspect of our defense planning for the region. For example, the air threat cannot be limited to combat aircraft. What would be the US response to a civilian airliner taking off from a civilian airport and flying toward Japan? After the Vincennes incident, there might be much hesitation to shoot it down. Another consideration is the naval threat. A small yacht or pleasure boat could work its way close to the US fleet, or a diesel submarine could use the shallows to hide near the coast. Finally, in the heat of battle, how hard would it be for the North Koreans to drive a truck containing a nuclear weapon into the demilitarized zone?

The purpose here is not to exhaust every possible nontraditional example. Instead, the purpose is to emphasize that if the United States were to try to eliminate the North Korean nuclear threat through a preventive attack, there are many ways besides traditional military means to deliver a costly nuclear response.

### **Preventive Attack or Punishment?**

If a preventive attack is conducted against North Korea, how are the results to be assessed? When Kim Il Sung abrogated the Non-Proliferation Treaty, he denied the IAEA permission to inspect his nuclear facilities. These inspections could have proven one way or the other if North Korea was building nuclear weapons. His refusal fueled interest in a preventive attack. However, only known targets can be destroyed in a preventive attack. As in Iraq, inspectors on the ground must verify success (or failure), which leads back to the beginning of the crisis. Even after a preventive attack, inspectors must still be on the ground in North Korea to look for and inspect their nuclear facilities. What motives would Kim Il Sung have to allow inspectors in after a preventive attack when he would not allow them in before? The only means available to force North Korea to allow inspections is to prosecute a punishment campaign against it. What began as a preventive attack will turn into a war of attrition aimed at the surrender of North Korea. Only then could Kim Il Sung be forced to submit to IAEA inspections. If an attrition, punishment-style war must be fought to force inspections, then why bother with a preventive attack?

### **Should the United States Intervene in North Korea?**

The answer to this question hinges on US interests in the region. The United States should not consider a preventive attack unless two criteria are met—there must be a high level of interest in the region, and there must be a high probability of military success.

To evaluate this premise, return to our historical examples. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the United States had high political interests in controlling the expansion of the Soviet Union. However, it had a very low probability of a militarily successful preventive attack. There was no preventive attack. In the USSR–China confrontation of 1969, the USSR had no more than a moderate political interest and only a moderate chance of military success. The Soviets also chose to avoid a preventive attack. Israel provides the only example of both high political interest, and a high probability of military success. They successfully conducted a preventive attack against Iraq's Osiraq reactor. What lessons for North Korea can we glean from these examples?

In the North Korean scenario described above, the United States fails to meet both criteria for success. One could argue that the United States has economic and security interests in the region. However, are these interests important enough to warrant the risk of prompting a nuclear attack against the US homeland? No. Are US forces capable of destroying North Korea's nuclear threat? No. Considering our historical examples and the preceding evaluation of US capabilities against North Korea, a preventive attack against North Korea is a no-win proposition.

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## Chapter 5

### Policy Recommendations

The breakup of the Soviet Union has complicated attempts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. During the cold war, the United States and the Soviet Union policed its own client-states and, for the most part, managed to discourage proliferation. Now, countries without sponsors feel the need to defend themselves, even with nuclear weapons. The United States is the only superpower and consequently less effective in stopping nuclear proliferation than before. Although Russia has pledged to help, the Russians are having enough trouble keeping control over the nuclear weapons they have in the old Soviet republics. The final question to consider here is how should the United States protect its interests and those of its allies from the threat of nuclear weapons?

#### **Manage Proliferation**

The first step is to manage the proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons technology. There are several avenues to follow. First, the United States should continue to enforce the nonproliferation agreements already on the books. Most nations that are of concern have signed these treaties and should be held to their intent. Second, to ensure compliance with these treaties, the United States should support the efforts of the United Nations and the IAEA to control the spread of nuclear weapons and associated technology. Finally, the United States should work with the United Nations to provide trade, economic, and security incentives to encourage countries to seek other solutions to their defense needs. In the past, with the help of the United States and the USSR, these steps have helped slow the proliferation of nuclear weapons. However, no matter how hard the international community tries, more countries will acquire nuclear weapons. Once these weapons are in the hands of a belligerent third world country, how should the United States respond when her interests are threatened?

#### **Forget Preventive Attack**

If the United States is to consider intervening against a budding nuclear power, they must ensure the benefits outweigh the risks. The United States must answer this basic question: Are the United States's national interests in jeopardy to the point where it would risk the loss of life possible from a nuclear weapon? There are few circumstances that would warrant this risk, especially if the opponent could retaliate against the US homeland. Even if the United States chooses to intervene, preventive attack is the riskiest option.

The most probable outcome of a preventive attack against a third world nuclear power is continued combat and a negative backlash in world opinion. Given the right circumstances, the United States could solve the



political problem by involving the United Nations and building a coalition of allied neighbors against a nuclear renegade. A protracted attrition war, or any use of nuclear weapons by either side, would quickly turn world support into criticism. As previously described, the military side of a preventive attack cannot be executed successfully on today's regional battlefield. The United States still lacks the ability to find nuclear weapons and lacks the ability to stop both traditional military or suicidal nuclear attacks. Combine this with the historical examples cited earlier, the United States and USSR in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the USSR and the PRC in 1969, and the Israeli attack on Iraq in 1981, and clearly preventive attack remains an ineffective strategy both politically and technologically, against a budding nuclear power.