Can Democracies Initiate Preventive War?
America's Confrontation with the Soviet Union and Iraq

by

Scott A. Silverstone
Assistant Professor of International Relations
Department of Social Sciences
United States Military Academy
West Point, NY 10996
(845) 938-3331
E-mail: js6300@usma.edu

Comments Welcome

Paper prepared for presentation at the International Studies Association Annual Convention, February 27, 2003, Portland, Oregon.

During his commencement address to West Point graduates in June 2002, President Bush set in motion an extraordinary national and international debate over waging war with Iraq. While he never mentioned Iraq specifically, the new strategic vision he unveiled in this speech, a vision centered on initiating "preemptive" wars against "unbalanced dictators" seeking weapons of mass destruction,[1] was clearly inspired by this more immediate policy problem. Through the summer and fall 2002 this issue came to dominate American domestic politics as political leaders, opinion makers and the general public wrestled with the implications of this initiative. What makes this debate particularly important in terms of both American foreign policy and international relations theory is that it represents the first time the United States, or any democracy, has so openly debated and approved of fighting a *preventive* war. Moreover, this case would represent the first time a democracy has actually fought a preventive war. This cuts to the heart of a long-standing claim about democracy and the ethics of war: democratic states, so goes the argument, cannot initiate preventive wars.[2]

Preventive war is a persistent theme in the history of international politics and in theoretical explanations of war.[3] Unlike a conflict fought over concrete issues, preventive war is fought to prevent the erosion of relative power to a rising adversary. The logic of preventive war simply asserts that it is better to fight a war today under more favorable circumstances, than to fight what is perceived to be an inevitable war in the future after an adversary has achieved military gains that raise the likely costs and risks of war for the dominant state. According to Levy, if political leaders in a given state "fear what their rising adversary *might* do once he gains

---

[1] President George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President at 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy," June 1, 2002. Accessed on June 3, 2002 at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/print/20020601-3.html.

[2] For the most recent and systematic example of this claim see Randall L. Schweller, "Domestic Structure and Preventive War: Are Democracies More Pacific?" *World Politics* vol. 44, no. 2 (January 1992), 234-269.

[3] For the most thorough examination of the history of preventive war see Alfred Vagts, *Defense and Diplomacy: The Soldier and the Conduct of Foreign Relations* (NY: King's Crown Press, 1956), 263-350.

superiority, and if they believe that this is their 'last chance' to avoid a situation in which the adversary has the potential to do substantial harm, a war launched for these reasons should be considered preventive."[4] The objective for the dominant state then is to take advantage of what is seen as a current "window of opportunity,"[5] and to avoid the future prospects that an adversary will exploit a "narrowing military gap" to "challenge the status quo."[6]

The classic example of the preventive motivation for war is the Peloponnesian War, which Thucydides famously explained was made "inevitable" by the "growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta."[7] In another example from the late 19th Century, as Germany pursued an audacious plan to meet and surpass Great Britain in naval power, Teddy Roosevelt observed in 1897 that if he were "an Englishman, I should seize the first opportunity to crush the German Navy and the German commercial marine out of existence."[8] More recently, the 1981 Israeli attack against Iraq's Osirik nuclear reactor should be considered a preventive strike. The reactor complex, under construction at the time of the attack, was thought to be the future heart of an Iraqi nuclear weapons program. Israel was motivated to strike the reactor complex by fear of the long-term consequences of a shift in the relative strategic balance between Israel and Iraq that included nuclear weapons.

It is essential to note the difference between a "preventive war" and a "preemptive" attack, particularly as these terms apply to an American war against Iraq. While a preventive

---

[4] Jack S. Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motive for War," *World Politics* vol. 40, no. 1 (October 1987), 88. Also see Michael Howard, *The Causes of War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 18; Richard K. Betts, *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1982), 145; Richard Betts, "Surprise Attack and Preemption," in *Hawks, Doves and Owls*, eds. Graham T. Allison, Albert Canesdale, Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1985), 61-65.

[5] Richard Ned Lebow, "Windows of Opportunity: Do States Jump Through Them?" *International Security* vol. 9, no. 1 (Summer 1984), 147-186; Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 74-76, 88.

[6] Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War: The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 261.

[7] Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin, 1972), 49.

[8] Quoted in Vagts, 292-293. For additional examples of preventive war see A.J.P. Taylor, *The Struggle for Mastery of Europe, 1848-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954); Lebow, *Between Peace and War*, 254-263.

war is motivated by the fear of the future consequences of an on-going relative power shift – which is a "strategic response to a long-term threat" – "[p]reemption is a tactical response to an immediate threat…A preemptive attack is designed to forestall the mobilization and deployment of the adversary's existing military forces, whereas prevention aims to forestall the creation of new military assets."[9] A classic example of a true preemptive attack was the Israeli military initiative in 1967 against Egyptian troops massing in the Sinai for an obvious attack against Israel. When the immediacy of an actual Arab invasion became apparent, Israel made a tactical move to neutralize this invasion force before it could be deployed.[10]

The motivation to initiate a preventive war might even appear "if the declining state is expected only to be weakened rather than actually surpassed in strength. Victory might still be expected later, but with less certainty and at higher costs."[11] This is particularly relevant to the case of the United States and Iraq. Iraq hardly challenges American superiority as a global power or even a regional power in the Middle East. Since the Gulf War of 1991, however, American officials have claimed that an Iraqi nuclear capability would represent a serious shift in the distribution of power in the Gulf region. Specifically, it would erode America's ability to wield its power in the region without the fear of a potent retaliatory strike against its troops or regional allies.[12] Despite the gross asymmetries that would remain in the power distribution between the U.S. and Iraq, Iraqi nuclear weapons would dramatically increase the potential costs of a future U.S.-Iraq war. American officials have also expressed concern that should Iraq develop a nuclear arsenal, Saddam Hussein might brazenly test American resolve and make a

[9] Levy, "Declining Power and the Preventive Motive for War," 91.
[10] Betts, "Surprise Attack and Preemption," 57, 65-66.
[11] Levy, 89.
[12] Robert W. Chandler, *Tomorrow's War, Today's Decisions* (MacLean, VA: AMCODA Press, 1996); Henry D. Sokolski, *Best of Intentions: America's Campaign Against Strategic Weapons Proliferation* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001).

play to extend his influence over the Gulf region.[13] A preventive war would deny Iraq this particular type of military power to challenge the status quo and would reduce American costs in a future war.

This brings us back to the problem raised above: can democracies initiate preventive wars? Since before World War II American statesmen and scholars have explicitly ruled out this possibility, citing either normative reasons that make preventive war, in the absence of an immediate threat, anathema to democratic citizens and leaders alike, or constitutional issues, such as the separation of powers that would make secretive deliberations and authorization in preparation for launching a preventive war impossible. The obvious implication of this widely-held argument is that not only should President Bush be stymied by domestic forces in his efforts to launch a war against Iraq, his larger strategy of "preemption" should be untenable politically as a way to deal with the 21st Century threat environment as well.[14] The fact remains, however, that a majority of Americans declare support for war with Iraq, and a large majority in Congress (77% in the Senate and 69% in the House of Representatives) approved of a joint resolution authorizing the president to use military force in this case.

This paper addresses the obvious question that then arises: is there any validity to the claim that democracies cannot initiative preventive war? Specifically, it seeks to determine if there is any evidence to suggest that there actually is normative resistance in the United States to fighting preventive war, and if so, to what extent? Conversely, it also seeks to explain the

[13] According to the "National Security Strategy of the United States" of September 2002, "Today, our enemies see weapons of mass destruction as weapons of choice. For rogue states these weapons are tools of intimidation and military aggression against their neighbors. These weapons may also allow these states to attempt to blackmail the United States and our allies to prevent us from deterring or repelling the aggressive behavior of rogue states. Such states also see these weapons as their best means of overcoming the conventional superiority of the United States."

[14] Despite the repeated use of the term "preemption" to describe a war with Iraq or other regimes seeking weapons of mass destruction, such a use of military force, as discussed in greater detail below, should be called "preventive." See "The National Security Strategy of the United States" for this usage of the term "preemption." Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/20/politics/20STEXT_Full.html.

willingness of most members of Congress and the public to sanction preventive war – how is war justified by those who support it? What conditions make it more likely that a democracy might push aside normative restraints to engage in preventive war?

The main argument developed in this paper is that there is indeed normative reluctance in the United States to engage in preventive war, yet it is neither a dominant perspective nor a stable attitude applied consistently across the varying contexts of different conflict scenarios. The best evidence of normative resistance comes from an analysis of the congressional debate over war with Iraq, which shows that a sizable number of senators and representatives explicitly reject the preventive war doctrine for normative reasons and refuse to approve of war with Iraq in the absence of an imminent threat. In fact, among opponents of war, this is the major reason cited. However, the evidence also shows that with few exceptions this normative view is confined to political liberals. Moreover, while the vast majority of political conservatives and moderates in Congress show no normative resistance to a preventive war with Iraq, a sizable number of liberals in the Senate and the House also approved of war with Iraq. Overall, democratic normative resistance to preventive war against Iraq remains a minority opinion. The widespread support for preventive war in this case is overwhelmingly driven by an explicit link that most supporters draw between Iraq and the threat of future terrorist attacks with weapons of mass destruction. Even as most supporters of war acknowledge that this threat is amorphous, hard to prove and lacks immediacy, the risk is still considered compelling enough to justify preventive war in the absence of direct provocation. Much the same can be said about the attitudes of the general public. Survey data show that in the abstract most Americans do not embrace the logic of preventive war as a way to address the kinds of problems raised in the Iraq case. Yet the level of support for or opposition to preventive war is contingent on the context of

a specific case. Opposition to preventive war among the general public is concentrated among political liberals, but even with this group we find that in the post-September 11 context many are willing to shed any general distaste for preventive war to justify waging it against Iraq. Taken together, the data on Congress and the public undermine the general claim that democracies cannot initiate preventive wars.

To develop this analysis, the next section looks more closely at the widespread theoretical claim that democracies in general, and the United States specifically, face domestic normative restraints that keep them from initiating preventive wars. The majority of those who advanced this argument were writing in the early Cold War context, a time period in which the United States faced a similar question about preventive war as the Soviet Union moved to break America's nuclear monopoly and gain parity in nuclear weapons. Presidents Truman and Eisenhower both rejected preventive war. Of interest here is whether this choice to avoid preventive war is somehow rooted in democratic norms about limits to the legitimate use of military force. This early Cold War case analysis will help put the Iraq case in a broader historical perspective and provide additional data for considering the strength of the argument that democracies cannot initiate preventive war. After this theoretical and historical analysis, the paper turns to the Iraq case and presents evidence that shows there is no monolithic or dominant normative perspective on the legitimacy of preventive war in the United States, and which fundamentally challenges the larger claims that democracies cannot initiate preventive war.

Democracy and Preventive War in Theory and Practice

Democratic Norms and Preventive War

The general claim that democracies cannot initiate preventive wars can be traced back at least to the decade before America's involvement in World War II. Reflecting on President

Roosevelt's efforts to join the fight against Nazi Germany and prepare for war against Imperial Japan should it attack British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, former Secretary of State Cordell Hull flatly declared, "Democracies do not engage in preventive attacks except with great difficulty."[15] The most recent and systematic work to investigate the relationship between democracy and preventive wars comes from Randall Schweller, who asserts that "every preventive war launched by a Great Power – from Sparta's response to its fear of the growth in Athenian power to Nazi Germany's attack against the Soviet Union – has been initiated by a nondemocratic state."[16] According to Schweller, this is not a mere fluke, but directly linked to the normative and institutional features of democracy.

The key to his argument is public opinion on the use of military force, and it has two main components. First, he adopts the familiar Kantian dictum that democratic citizens are naturally averse to paying the high costs of war, which might include large-scale conscription, an increased tax burden and the loss of many lives. This aversion, he argues, will be particularly acute in cases of preventive war, in which the public is asked to accept the risks and costs of a war that has not been immediately provoked and which only can be justified by a long-range projection of possible future costs of not fighting in the present.[17] As Robert Tucker contends, calculating present costs versus *possible* future costs, and concluding that the state has no choice but to accept these present costs, "runs directly counter to the American interpretation of conflict." This "implies…the notion of war's inevitability," a key feature of accepting the logic of preventive war in most cases, and the denial of any possibility for resolving disputes as they

[15] Quoted in Vagts, 325. Vagts notes that political leaders in late 19th Century France and Britain were acutely aware that "a democratic politician must avoid even the appearance of wanting or starting any aggressive war," even if described in terms of the logic of preventive war. (p. 293)
[16] Schweller, 249.
[17] Ibid., 241-42.

arise through non-violent means or containing threats short of actual war.[18] Even a consummate statesman like Bismark had difficulty calculating the immediate costs of war against alternative futures: "The idea of undertaking a war because it might be inevitable later on and might then have to be fought under less favorable conditions has always remained foreign to me, and I have always fought against it…For I cannot look into Providence's cards in such a manner that I would know things beforehand."[19] This same point was made in a widely read book on U.S. strategy immediately after World War II, which rejected as quixotic any suggestion that the American people would agree to a preventive war against the USSR on the basis that war was allegedly inevitable. "The preventive war argument is…defeatist. Who knows what hopes the passage of time may bring to realization?"[20]

Unless a particular adversary's character or past behavior has made it so clear that war is inevitable or at least more likely than not, democratic citizens may have difficulty giving up hope that the adversary can be dealt with through means short of outright war. Under these conditions, political leaders in a competitive electoral system might be reluctant to accept the near-term political risks of initiating war,[21] particularly if it is impossible to demonstrate the counterfactual – that a future war would have been inevitable and much worse – and thus gain electoral benefits for their long-term wisdom. In addition to prompting risk-averse behavior from executive decision makers, the public's reluctance to accept the costs of preventive war may be reflected through the legislature which, given the particular institutional arrangement of a particular democratic state, may act to block an executive's efforts to initiate this conflict.[22]

---

[18] Robert W. Tucker, *Just War: A Study in Contemporary American Doctrine* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1960), 17.
[19] Quoted in Levy, 103.
[20] William L. Borden, *There Will Be No Time: The Revolution in Strategy* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), 223.
[21] Schweller, 242-243.
[22] Schweller, 246.

According to Vagts, "the argument in favor of preventive action has been basically aristocratic. It has been proposed by aristocratic elements, considered in secret councils, and rarely brought forward in public discussion." This is not possible in a democratic state for constitutional reasons, which reduces the democratic leader's ability to plan and execute a preventive war.[23] Following this argument about public aversion to the costs of war, there are two important aspects of the U.S.-Iraq case to examine: how likely the American public believes future war with Iraq or Iraq-inspired threats to be, and how the American public actually weighs the potential costs of fighting Iraq today against the costs of putting off war until a later date.

The second component of Schweller's argument on the importance of public opinion for preventive war rests on the claim that "the policies of a democratic state, in contrast to those of an autocracy, must ultimately conform to the moral values of that society."[24] In normative or moral terms, one problem with preventive war is that throughout history it has been closely tied to the concept of "wars of aggression." Witness the cast of characters most frequently cited as engaging in preventive war: Louis XIV, Frederick the Great, Napoleon, Kaiser Wilhelm, Hitler, Imperial Japan. For democracy, however, Vagts has declared that initiating preventive war is "taboo."[25] Schweller explains it this way: "citizens of governments founded on the enlightenment principles of individual liberty and the pursuit of happiness are naturally repulsed by the unethical and immoral aspects of preventive war, as it implies the unprovoked slaughter of

[23] Vagts, 269. George Kennan also dismissed the possibility of a democracy fighting a preventive war for constitutional reasons, but not because of public aversion to the costs of war that might be reflected through a democratic legislature. Instead, Kennan believed that preventive war would require secret deliberation, flexibility and promptness in decision-making. This is impossible in the American system given the separation of powers and the large numbers in various branches of government involved in this type of decision. George Kennan, *The Cloud of Danger: Current Realities of American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977), 4-5.
[24] Schweller, 245.
[25] Vagts, 324.

countless soldiers – and, in the nuclear age, millions of innocent civilians – on the mere assumption that future safety requires it."[26]

For the purposes of this study, the normative argument is potentially the most interesting. While any war will impose some costs that might give citizens pause, there is nothing in the first component of Schweller's argument to distinguish preventive war as a particular type of military conflict, the very character of which should have a strong impact on whether a democracy fights that conflict or not. Despite the widespread claim that preventive wars have a distinctively negative pall in democracies that keep them from initiating this type of war, we have very little systematic data on how deeply rooted this normative claim about preventive war actually is within any democratic society. Because the Iraq case is the first example of a possible preventive war that has been openly debated for an extended period of time, it provides an excellent opportunity to collect data on whether there is a normative dimension to how democratic citizens and political leaders think about preventive war, and to what extent we find these normative views distributed within society.

Decades before Schweller laid out this argument, a number of prominent American statesmen and scholars made the same claim that democracies cannot initiate preventive wars, for both constitutional and normative reasons. Not surprisingly, the bulk of these claims appeared in the early Cold War, a time when the United States first faced the dilemma of how to respond to a potential adversary that appeared to be developing nuclear weapons. As proposals for preventive war against the USSR floated through various parts of the government and academia, this option was dismissed by some as repugnant to the ethical or cultural standards of democratic American citizens, or as impractical in a divided democratic polity by others. For example, Henry Kissinger in 1955 simply wrote off a preventive war policy as "unreal":

[26] Schweller, 246.

"advocates of radical solutions propose to cut the Gordian knot by a policy of preventive war. But there has always been an air of unreality about a program so contrary to the sense of the country and the constitutional limits within which American foreign policy must be conducted."[27] Hans Morgenthau was even more blunt in describing the normative limits democracy imposes on preventive war, which he called "abhorrent to democratic public opinion." He argued that Americans refuse to "consider seriously the possibility of preventive war," because it fundamentally violates what Americans believe about the origins of war. "When war comes, it must come as a natural catastrophe or as the evil deed of another nation, not as a foreseen and planned culmination of one's own foreign policy."[28] Bernard Brodie, a key architect of early nuclear theory and strategy, argued that despite the "unemotional logic" that usually guides thinking on military strategy, this is impossible in the case of preventive war.

> To deny the relevance of moral values is to plunge ourselves immediately into absurdities, for example the absurdity of holding that the lives of any number of foreigners are as nothing compared to the freedom-from-fear of a single American. We instinctively reject such a proposition on moral grounds…The phrase 'preventive war' implies inevitably the unprovoked slaughter of millions of persons, mostly innocent of responsibility, on the inherently unprovable assumption that our safety requires it…It argues some want of imagination to assume…that the American people could acquiesce in such a deed and then go about their usual business of pursuing happiness, free of guilt as well as of fear.[29]

The question remains, to what degree was this attitude on preventive war actually reflected in decision making on how to deal with a nuclearizing Soviet Union?

---

[27] Henry Kissinger, "Military Policy and Defense of the 'Grey Areas'," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 33, no. 3 (April 1955), 416-428.
[28] Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), 229-230, 256.
[29] Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), 235-237. For further discussion of the morality of preventive war, see Robert W. Tucker, 14-19.

Preventive War Against the USSR?

According to many contemporary commentators, the terrorist attack of 11 September 2001 signaled an end to America's geographic insulation from foreign threats. In turn, this new sense of vulnerability has been used to justify a more proactive use of military force abroad, to include preventive war, to stamp out potential threats before they have an opportunity to build or strike. Despite the novelty of these particular terrorist acts on American soil, there is nothing new, of course, about long-range threats to the American homeland or proposals such as preventive war for dealing with this type of threat. From the closing months of World War II through the first decade of the Cold War, American defense planners saw a threat environment radically transformed by technology – rockets, long-range bombers, and particularly nuclear weapons – that for the first time truly confronted the United States with the prospects of large-scale destruction. Moreover, as this technology evolved further, the ability to defend the homeland from attack eroded rapidly.[30]

The evolving Soviet threat, and most importantly, America's response to it, provides an excellent historical baseline for studying the current problem of preventive war in the 21st Century. In 1946, General Leslie Groves, the Director of the Manhattan Project, described America's strategic dilemma this way: "If we were *ruthlessly realistic* we would not permit any foreign power with which we are not firmly allied, and in which we do not have absolute confidence, to make or possess atomic weapons. If such a country started to make atomic weapons we would destroy its capacity to make them before it had progressed far enough to

[30] For several views on this new American vulnerability see Michael S. Sherry, *Preparing for the Next War: American Plans for Postwar Defense, 1941-45* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 27-35; John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries Into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 143fn.

threaten us."[31] General Groves was not alone in advocating the "ruthlessly realistic" need to conduct a preventive attack on the USSR to preserve America's nuclear monopoly. Until the mid-1950s, proposals for preventive war surfaced within the military, among certain academics, and even at the highest official levels in both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. The fact remains, however, that preventive war was decisively rejected as a strategic option to protect American interests. This allowed the USSR to develop its nuclear arsenal unmolested and affect a dramatic power shift that eventually eliminated America's decisive superiority in atomic weapons. Why did the United States forego the ruthlessly realistic option to prevent this power shift? To what degree does a democratic normative resistance to initiating preventive war account for this choice?

The distribution of attitudes on the ethical dimensions of preventive war across the political leadership level and among the American public reveals some interesting findings on this core question. First, normative opposition to preventive war was woven throughout the early Cold War discussion of U.S. strategy for the Soviet Union. At every turn in the debate, prominent voices objected to preventive war on the simple grounds that it was morally repugnant, that dictators, not democrats, fight unprovoked wars, that alternative means were available to keep the Soviet challenge in check. In fact, preventive war was explicitly rejected in NSC-68, the seminal early Cold War statement on U.S. strategy for the Soviet Union. The American public reflected these attitudes as well, as we will see below. Despite the presence of strong normative concerns, preventive war was not rejected out of hand consistently or unambiguously. The problem of dealing with the Soviet threat and the awful prospects of a Soviet nuclear attack on the United States made the logic of preventive war irresistible for many.

[31] Quoted in Marc Trachtenberg, "A Wasting Asset: American Strategy and the Shifting Nuclear Balance, 1949-1954," *International Security* vol. 13, no. 3 (Winter 1988/89), 5. Emphasis added.

There was widespread consensus in the United States that the USSR posed a dire threat, that its power was on the rise, that it would challenge America's interests globally, that it would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons in any conflict with the United States, and that a future war with the Soviet Union was highly likely. In the face of such a threat, preventive war presents a powerful temptation.

Second, we do not find evidence of an unambiguous convergence among decision makers and opinion leaders on a single normative conception of the ethics of preventive war. In fact, there is sufficient ambivalence in the morality of the choice between allowing a potentially existential military threat to arise (as many saw it), and crushing that potential threat before it has the opportunity to fully form, to have allowed for alternative normative positions that led to both opposition and support for preventive war. During the early Cold War we find supporters of preventive war casting their arguments in terms of military necessity rooted in the morality of protecting the American people against the ruthless and evil regime of the Soviet Union. A preventive war with the USSR was often equated with the morality of any effort that might have been waged against the evils of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan before these regimes had the chance to take the offensive.[32] Finally, the evidence shows that any explanation for America's failure to initiate preventive war cannot ignore practical non-normative concerns about its military capabilities to actually pull off a successful preventive attack.[33] It is important to look at each of these points in more detail.

---

[32] Russell D. Buhite and Wm. Christopher Hamel, "War for Peace: The Question of an American Preventive War Against the Soviet Union, 1945-1955," *Diplomatic History* vol. 14, no. 3 (Summer 1990), 369.

[33] Among the three studies that look most closely at America's failure to launch a preventive war against the USSR, two conclude that both practical strategic reasons and normative opposition explain this outcome. See Trachtenberg, and Buhite and Hamel. For a similar conclusion, see Nathan F. Twinning, *Neither Liberty Nor Safety: A Hard Look at U.S. Military Policy and Strategy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966); Gaddis, 140-141. One major study concludes firmly that American democratic norms account for the decision to avoid preventive war. George H. Quester, *Nuclear Monopoly* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000). Also see Richard Smoke,

During the Truman administration it is possible to identify two distinct periods in American thinking on preventive war: from the end of World War II until late 1949, when the United States clearly had a nuclear monopoly, and from 1950 to 1952, in which the United States faced the duel pressures of a growing Soviet arsenal and the Korean War. In the former period we find early advocates of preventive war emerge to make their case, but a lackadaisical response from President Truman who took no decisive action to prevent the USSR from becoming a nuclear power. In the latter period, the Soviet nuclear test and the Korean War combined to initiate intense discussion of preventive war at the highest levels, yet the president decisively rejected the option in purely normative terms.

Prior to the Soviet's 1949 atomic test, arguments in favor of preventive war were cast in both strategic terms and as a moral imperative. Just months after the end of World War II, the Joint Intelligence Committee of the JCS recommended that the United States initiate a nuclear strike against the USSR if its "industrial and scientific progress suggested a capacity for an 'eventual attack against the United States or defense against our attack'."[34] Similarly, Air Force General Culbertson testified to a Senate committee that America was "facing within the next five or six years a preventive war by the capitalist world to eliminate the threat of the rising Russian giant state. And if that war does not take place, then we are facing in fifteen or twenty years a war for the control of the world by Communist Eurasia, led by Russia."[35] During the Berlin blockade crisis of 1948, both Secretary of Defense Forestall and Air Force Chief of Staff Vandenberg recommended that Truman consider initiating the BROILER plan, which would

---

National Security and the Nuclear Dilemma (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1984), 54; John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 88, 111.

[34] Sherry, 213.

[35] Buhite and Hamel, 373. Among the first advocates of preventive war to maintain America's nuclear monopoly from outside the military was Leo Szilard, the physicist who had convinced President Roosevelt to begin the Manhattan Project. Quester, 39.

consist of striking the Soviet Union with upwards of 100 nuclear bombs.[36] Beyond the purely strategic rationale for preventive war, some commentators crafted moral arguments to support this option. For example, Harvard political scientist James Burnham, well known for his virulent anti-communism, argued that

> If there is good reason to believe that a sudden and massive blow [to the Soviet Union would] save many lives and goods [in the United States], result in less destruction and social disintegration [than if the U.S. waited for the Soviets to attack first], give a better chance for building a workable world polity, then to strike such a blow, far from being morally wrong, is morally obligatory. If there is to be war in any case, it is hard to comprehend why a war is morally better because it is more difficult, longer, more cruel and costly and bloody.[37]

Similarly, British philosopher Bertrand Russell, a passionate advocate of banning the bomb once the Soviets had their own arsenal, was a strong proponent of the morality of preventing a bilateral nuclear war through U.S. preventive action before Soviet development made this possible. His belief in the inevitability of great power war led him to conclude that the costs of a preventive attack would be minimal compared to the costs of a large nuclear exchange once the U.S. and the Soviets had these weapons.[38]

Despite these scattered sources of preventive war logic, the United States took no action to prevent the USSR from breaking its nuclear monopoly. It is impossible, however, to declare decisively that normative objections impeded American action before 1949. This is primarily because there were extreme material limits to America's ability to deliver a sufficient blow against the Soviet Union.[39] In April 1947 David Lilienthal, the first chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, informed President Truman that there were no nuclear bombs in the

---

[36] While aimed at destroying half of Soviet industry, expected casualties among Soviet citizens reached seven million. Buhite and Hamel, 375.
[37] Ibid., 375.
[38] Quester, 16. See pp. 18-29 for an extended discussion of a moral argument justifying preventive war to retain America's nuclear monopoly and prevent a nuclear World War III.
[39] Anthony Cave Brown, ed., *Drop Shot: The United States Plan for War with the Soviet Union in 1957* (New York: The Dial Press, 1978), 20; Gaddis, *We Now Know*, 89.

American arsenal ready for immediate use,[40] and by July 1947 the U.S. only had 13 atomic weapons.[41] While Forestall and Vandenberg were advocating the 100 nuclear bomb attack of the BROILER war plan during the Berlin crisis, the United States only had 50 bombs in its inventory and 32 B-29 bombers to deliver them. This was not nearly enough to execute the existing war plans or to ensure a strike would be crippling enough to the USSR to prevent a potent conventional counterattack in Europe.[42] In essence, these material limits meant that America's moral limits were never truly put to the test in this earlier period. The normative argument would be more convincing as an explanation for the absence of an American preventive war if the United States had the military capability to carry it off successfully, yet still pursued a more moderate strategy.

Material limits notwithstanding, it is important to note that during the period of America's nuclear monopoly President Truman spent substantial time and effort trying to craft a program of international control over nuclear weapons, including America's own arsenal, yet never initiated a crash program to develop the military capabilities to actually execute a preventive war strategy.[43] And while Truman himself never commented publicly on the proposal for preventive war in this period, several prominent American statesmen do illustrate the normative reflex against preventive war. For example, former Secretary of War Stimson declared that to initiate preventive war against the USSR would be "worse than nonsense…We could not possibly take that opportunity without deserting our inheritance. Americans as

[40] McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988), 202.
[41] Gregg Herken, *The Winning Weapon: the Atomic Bomb in the Cold War, 1945-1950* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 343.
[42] Harry Borowski, *A Hollow Threat: Strategic Air Power and Containment Before Korea* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 92-93; Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, 109; David A. Rosenberg, "Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy, 1945-1960," *International Security* 7 (Summer 1983), 124-125.
[43] Bundy, 158-202; Quester, 58, Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, 109.

conquerors would be tragically miscast." John Foster Dulles, while recognizing the great danger posed by the Soviet Union, dismissed preventive war as "unthinkable."[44]

Prior to 1949, President Truman never addressed advocates of the preventive war strategy directly. He "believed firmly that the United States could remain decisively superior for years, long enough to make the prospect of a nuclear arms race quite undaunting."[45] In 1950, however, the president was forced to respond to renewed interest in preventive war brought on by international events – the Soviet atomic test of August 1949 and the North Korean invasion of June 1950 – and the public statements of prominent military officials that made the issue impossible to ignore. The Truman administration's response in this critical year provides the best evidence from the early Cold War of a normative resistance to preventive war that worked itself explicitly into American policy and the public face the administration put on this question.

The first bold statement against preventive war as a fundamental violation of American values is found in NSC-68,[46] the premier strategy document that laid out the vision for America's approach toward the Soviet challenge, a vision that lasted throughout the Cold War. NSC-68 is notable because it was the first systematic official articulation of containment as the basis for American policy and the role of nuclear weapons in this strategy. Often overlooked, however, is that it also contains an explicit, lengthy and thoughtful assessment of what was *not* possible from a normative perspective as part of this strategy. This normative claim centered on a rejection of preventive war as a means to deal with the existential threat posed by the Soviet Union.

The document spares nothing in its vivid description of the dire threat posed by the USSR and the conflict now joined by the United States. The introduction states the problem bluntly: "The issues that face us are momentous, involving the fulfillment or destruction not only of this

[44] Vagts, 332.
[45] Bundy, 195.
[46] "NSC-68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security," April 1950.

Republic, but of civilization itself…The Soviet Union is developing the military capacity to support its design for world domination….Thus unwillingly our free society finds itself mortally challenged by the Soviet system. No other value system is so wholly irreconcilable with ours, so implacable in its purpose to destroy ours…" NSC-68 even identified mid-1954, four years hence, as a "critical date" at which the Soviet Union was expected to have an atomic arsenal of 200 bombs (the estimate provided for the mid-1950 Soviet arsenal was 10-20 nuclear bombs). This was projected to be the time the Soviets could deliver at least 100 weapons to U.S. targets. The analysis states, "In time the atomic capability of the USSR can be expected to grow to a point where, given surprise and no more effective opposition than we now have programmed, the possibility of a decisive initial attack cannot be excluded." Furthermore, "From the military point of view, the actual and potential capabilities of the United States, given a continuation of current and projected programs, will become less and less effective as a war deterrent."

In the face of such beliefs about this fanatical and relentless adversary and a clear appreciation for the perpetual erosion of America's relative nuclear advantage, one could assume that the logic of preventive war would prove overwhelmingly tempting as a way to beat down this mortal threat. NSC-68, however, rejected preventive war in surprisingly frank and uncompromising language, and grounds its objections to this policy firmly in American domestic politics and the limits the American people place on what is normatively acceptable for the use of military force. It is worth quoting the key statements from NSC-68 on this at length:

> Some Americans favor a deliberate decision to go to war against the Soviet Union in the near future. *It goes without saying* that the idea of 'preventive' war – in the sense of a military attack not provoked by a military attack upon us or our allies – is *generally unacceptable to Americans*…[A] surprise attack up the Soviet Union, despite the provocations of recent Soviet behavior, would be repugnant to many Americans. Although the American people would probably rally in support of the war effort, the shock of responsibility for a surprise attack would be morally corrosive. Many would doubt that it was a 'just war' and that all reasonable possibilities for a peaceful

> settlement had been explored in good faith…[I]t is important that the United States employ military force only if the necessity for its use is clear and compelling and commends itself to the overwhelming majority of our people. The United States therefore cannot engage in war except as a reaction to aggression of so clear and compelling a nature as to bring the overwhelming majority of our people to accept the use of military force.

Ultimately, NSC-68 takes the kind of long-term optimistic view described by Tucker as inherent to democracies.[47] Rather than taking the "defeatist" approach of preventive war, NSC-68 reflects hope that eventually America could convince the USSR to coexist peacefully and perhaps experience a regime change that would make it less hostile to the United States.

Even with NSC-68 in the background as the most authoritative statement on this issue, the Korean War prompted several high level officials to reconsider preventive war and even advocate it publicly. The president's response to this, however, served to reaffirm the normative claims against preventive war laid out in NSC-68. Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson advocated preventive war in private discussions but was careful not to discuss this bold option publicly.[48] Public discussion was most dramatically raised by Secretary of the Navy Francis Matthews and by General Orvil Anderson, commandant of the Air Force's Air War College. In his "Aggression for Peace" speech at the Boston Navy Yard on August 25, 1950, Matthews brazenly argued in favor of launching preventive war against the USSR.[49] General Anderson followed suit a few days later in comments to a reporter: "We must conclude civilization demands that we act. Give me the order to do it and I can break up Russia's five A-bomb nests in a week." Anderson was summarily fired for these provocative comments.[50] George Marshall, as the new Secretary of Defense, argued that the moral advantage of avoiding such aggressive acts would outweigh any military advantage from preventive war, and Army Chief of Staff Omar

[47] Tucker, 17.
[48] Vagts, 333; Buhite and Hamel, 376.
[49] Buhite and Hamel, 376-77.
[50] Vagts, 333; Trachtenberg, 20; Quester, 42-44; Buhite and Hamel, 377-78.

Bradley noted that the United States "will not provoke a war against anybody. And we will not wage a preventive war against an archenemy."[51] President Truman had the last word on the subject in 1950 when he stated decisively that preventive wars are "weapons of dictators, not of free democratic countries like the United States, arming only for defense against aggression."[52]

Unlike Truman, President Eisenhower never demonstrated any reflexive normative distaste for the idea of preventive war. In fact, the logic of preventive war was compelling enough to attract Eisenhower's active consideration in response to the Soviet H-bomb test in 1953. By the end of 1954 he had finally rejected this option, but for strategic and practical constitutional reasons, not because he believed that preventive war was in itself an illegitimate use of military force. Three episodes best capture Eisenhower's initial thoughts on the problem of Soviet nuclear advances and America's response options. Each episode demonstrates that instead of rebuffing the preventive war idea from a normative perspective, he actually advanced arguments sympathetic to preventive war that were rooted in normative or moral reasoning.

The first episode is an exchange of ideas between Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles in the summer and fall of 1953. By this period Dulles was arguing forcefully for détente with the USSR, "a spectacular effort to relax world tensions on a global basis," as the best way to reduce America's vulnerabilities to what he saw as a relentless Soviet drive to match or outpace America militarily. Dulles believed that in terms of extracting resources for military development, the United States was no match for the USSR: "No single country, not even the United States, could, out of its own resources, adequately match the strength of a powerful totalitarian state. We are in no position to extract from our own people what tyrannical rulers

[51] Vagts, 333-34.
[52] Ibid.

could extract from their people. The attempt to do so would 'bust us'."[53] Eisenhower agreed with Dulles on the degrading effects of an arms race: "if the contest to maintain this relative position should have to continue indefinitely, the cost would either drive us to war – or into some form of dictatorial government." Eisenhower did not accept detente, however; he thought of preventive war as one way to deal with this problem, and in turn he could cast a preventive war as a normative obligation to the future: "In such circumstances, we would be forced to consider whether or not our duty to future generations did not require us to initiate war at the most propitious moment that we could designate."[54]

Several months later Eisenhower again reflected a willingness to consider preventive war as a logical and normative response to the Soviet challenge, this time in a conversation with Prime Minister Churchill. Churchill made the point that "anyone could say the Russians are evil minded and mean to destroy the free countries. Well, if we really feel like that, perhaps we ought to take action before they get as many atomic bombs as America has." According to Churchill, Eisenhower responded, "it ought to be considered."[55] In the summer of 1954 the president again indicated his willingness to consider preventive war. During an NSC meeting Dulles warned that the allies might not tolerate a tougher policy with the Soviets for the long term. Notes of the meeting record that Eisenhower responded, "we should perhaps come back to the very grave question: should the United States now get ready to fight the Soviet Union? The President pointed out that he had brought up this question more than once at prior Council meetings, and that he had never done so facetiously."[56]

---

[53] Quoted in Trachtenberg, 38.
[54] John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 149.
[55] Trachtenberg, 39.
[56] Notes of NSC meeting June 24, 1954. Quoted in Ibid.

Despite the president's willingness to acknowledge the preventive war option as the administration wrestled with a shifting balance of power and Soviet nuclear advances, Eisenhower too finally rejected it. In an August 1954 press conference he discussed the idea publicly: "A preventive war, to my mind, is an impossibility today…[F]rankly, I wouldn't listen to anyone seriously that came in and talked about such a thing."[57] By the end of 1954 he signed NSC 5440, which stated, "The United States and its allies must reject the concept of preventive war or acts intended to provoke war."[58] He did so, however, for three non-normative reasons. First, it was clear by 1954 that the United States could not prevent a smashing Soviet nuclear response to any American strike, a response that was expected to cost millions of American lives.[59] Second, he was overwhelmed by thoughts of the nature of the world after a nuclear preventive war. "What do you do with the world after you have won victory in such a catastrophic nuclear war?"[60] Finally, Eisenhower did offer one argument against preventive war rooted in American domestic politics, but it was not about any American norms that prohibited it. Instead, he offered an expediency argument about the drawn out public nature of any decision that involved Congress. He knew that from a constitutional perspective it would be virtually impossible to assemble Congress secretly, deliberate and vote on a declaration of preventive war.[61] True to his earlier position on the question, Secretary of State Dulles continued to see preventive war in normative terms, even if the president did not. "No man," he wrote, "should arrogate to himself the power to decide that the future of mankind would benefit by an action entailing the killing of tens of millions of people."[62] By the mid-1950s, however, speculation

[57] Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 149.
[58] Buhite and Hamel, 381.
[59] Gaddis, *The Long Peace*, 143.
[60] Trachtenberg, 40.
[61] Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 174.
[62] Trachtenberg, 44.

over preventive war gave way to the simple realization that the United States had lost any opportunity it may have had to initiate a preventive war without suffering a brutal counterblow.

Turning from elites to the American public, a large amount of public opinion data from the end of World War II through the 1950s shows that if policy makers had pursued a preventive war strategy against the USSR, the American public would have been resistant or outright opposed. Interestingly, by the spring of 1946 the majority of Americans believed that the Soviet Union was pursuing world domination as its primary international objective, and this majority grew over the next several years [see figure 1]. By 1954-55, a strong majority of Americans

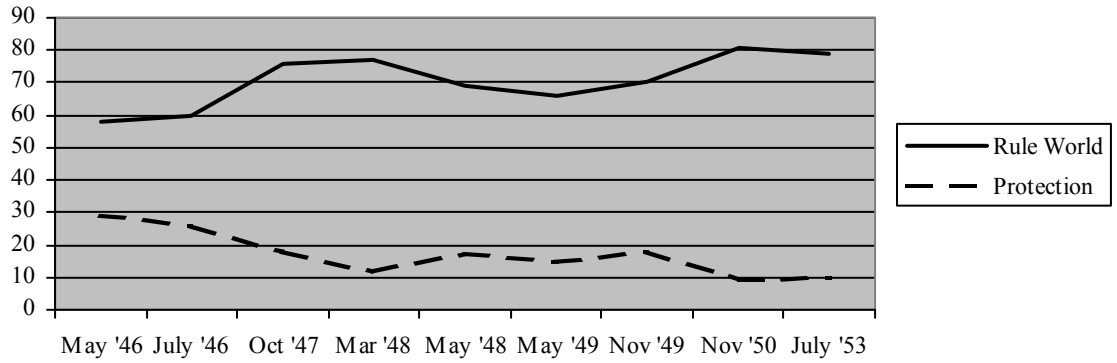

Figure 1. Why is the Soviet Union Building its Military Forces?[63]

believed that a major war with the USSR was likely sooner or later.[64] Despite this widespread concern over Russia's growing threat to the United States and the likelihood of war, the American public decisively rejected preventive war as a way to deal with this threat. In a survey taken several weeks into the Korean conflict, just 15% of Americans believed that the United

[63] The exact question read: "As you hear and read about Russia these days, do you believe Russia is trying to build herself up to be the ruling power of the world, or is Russia building up protection against being attacked in another war?" George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1971* Volumes 1 and 2 (New York: Random House, 1972), 564, 581-82, 591, 682, 721, 743, 827, 881, 949, 1163.

[64] An October 15-20, 1954 poll asked: "Do you think the United States and the other western countries can continue to live more or less peacefully with the Russians – or do you think there is bound to be a major war sooner or later?" 23% responded they can live peacefully, 64% responded that a major war is likely, and 13% had no opinion. A February 12, 1955 Gallup poll asked the same question, which produced the same numbers. Gallup, Volume 2, pp. 1277, 1309.

States should declare war on the USSR. A full 79% of Americans rejected war with the Soviet Union outright. In 1954, as the American advantage in nuclear weapons seemed a temporary condition, 76% of Americans surveyed explicitly rejected preventive war to preserve America's nuclear superiority. Only 13% agreed with the preventive war option.[65]

Instead of military confrontation, the American public consistently expressed strong support throughout this period for diplomacy as the best way to manage U.S.-USSR relations [see figures 2 and 3]. And while a majority of Americans wanted to keep the United States' nuclear arsenal, develop the H-bomb, and prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons to other

August 29-September 3, 1947

Which one of these four statements do you agree with most?

1) It is very important that we make every effort to keep on friendly terms with Russia even if we have to make many concessions to her. 6%
2) It is important that we be on friendly terms with Russia, but we should not make too many concessions to her. 50%
3) If Russia wants to be on friendly terms with us, that's all right, but we should not make any special effort to be friendly. 18%
4) We will be better off if we have just as little as possible to do with Russia 21%
5) No opinion 5%

December 2-7, 1954

Do you think it would be a good idea or a poor idea for the United States to break off diplomatic relations with Russia at this time?

Poor idea: 65%
Good idea: 21%
No opinion: 14%

Figure 2. American Relations with the Soviet Union[66]

states, including allies,[67] a strong majority also supported efforts to establish international control over these weapons to neuter the danger of the Soviet's arsenal [see figure 4].

[65] The July 9-14, 1950 survey asked: "Do you think the United States should declare war on Russia now?" 79% responded "no", 15% responded "yes" and 6% had "no opinion." Ibid., 930. The August 26-31, 1954 survey asked: "Some people say we should go to war against Russia now while we still have the advantage in atomic and hydrogen bombs. Do you agree or disagree with this point of view?" 76% disagreed, 13% agreed, and 11% had no opinion. Ibid., 1271.

[66] Ibid., 649, 1301.

November 11-16, 1951

Would you like to see Truman and Churchill meet with Stalin to try to settle the differences between their countries?

Yes	70%
No	21%
No opinion	9%

January 9, 1953

Would you favor or oppose a meeting between President Eisenhower and Premier Stalin to try to settle the differences between the U.S. and Russia?

Favor	69%
Qualified Approval	7%
Oppose	20%
No opinion	4%

March 28-April 2, 1953

Would you favor or oppose a meeting between President Eisenhower, Prime Minister Churchill and Premier Malenkov of Russia to try to settle world differences?

Favor	78%
Oppose	15%
No opinion	7%

October 9-14, 1953

Would you favor or oppose a meeting between Eisenhower, Churchill, and Malenkov to try to settle world differences?

Favor	79%
Oppose	12%
No opinion	9%

Figure 3. Favor or Oppose Summit Meetings to Settle World Differences?[68]

[67] Survey question: "Should the United States continue to manufacture the atom bomb?" Yes, 61%; No, 30%; No opinion, 9% (April 12-17, 1946); Yes, 70%; No, 26%; No opinion, 4% (October 18, 1947). Ibid., 578, 680. As news of a "super bomb" circulated, The Gallup Organization asked this question: "There is a possibility that a new bomb may be made that might be up to a thousand times more powerful than the atom bomb. Some people say the U.S. should try to make such a bomb because other countries may make it and use it against us. Other people say we should not take the responsibility of making a bomb that could kill so many people at one time. With which point of view do you agree?" Should make bomb, 73%; Should not, 18%, No opinion, 9% (January 28-February 2, 1950). Ibid., 888. After hydrogen bomb tests had begun, this survey question was posed: "Some people say that the U.S. should call off the rest of the hydrogen bomb tests that have been planned. How do you feel about this?" Go ahead with tests, 71%; Call off tests, 20%; No opinion, 9% (April 8-13, 1954). Ibid., 1279.

[68] Ibid., 1029, 1114, 1136, 1182-83.

January 28-February 2, 1950

Do you think we should try again to work out an agreement with Russia to control the atom bomb before we try to make a hydrogen bomb?

Should	48%
Should not	45%
No opinion	7%

February 5-10, 1950

Do you think we should try to work out an agreement with Russia to control the atom bomb and the hydrogen bomb?

Yes	68%
No	23%
No opinion	9%

April 19-24, 1953

Would you favor or oppose a plan for the international control of atomic energy which would allow the UN to inspect atomic plants in all member countries, including Russia and the U.S.?

Favor	59%
Oppose	31%
No opinion	10%

April 8-13, 1954

The U.S. and Russia have both suggested plans for outlawing the atom and hydrogen bombs as weapons of war.

- the US should go further than ever if it means giving in on some of our demands for strict inspection. 10%
- We should keep trying to reach an agreement – but not accept any plan that doesn't meet our demands for strict inspection. 69%
- We should give up trying to reach an agreement altogether 13%
- No opinion 8%

Figure 4. Support for International Control Over Nuclear Technology[69]

Unfortunately, surveys from this period did not ask respondents exactly why they rejected preventive war with the Soviet Union or why they felt persistent diplomacy was a preferred approach. Such data is necessary for a valid measure of the extent to which Americans were sensitive to the normative dimensions of preventive war. Based on the data we do have, however, we can claim that by rejecting preventive war and supporting cooperative efforts to manage the Soviet threat, American citizens consistently demonstrated that they never gave up the "democratic" hope that war was not truly inevitable. Despite the seriousness of the public's

[69] Ibid., 888, 895, 1144, 1231.

perception of a menacing Soviet threat, it is clear that the vast majority were not willing to engage in serious speculation of the merits of assuming the costs of fighting a near-term war with the USSR to avoid the higher costs of a possible military conflict in the future that was by no means a certainty. Moreover, while Americans were not asked whether moral qualms explain this reluctance to initiate a preventive war, any valid question to gather this data would have to be clear as to the nature of an American attack. Not only would America launch an unprovoked war, it would have to do so with nuclear weapons that would exact a horrible death toll on civilians within the USSR. While still speculative, it is hard to imagine the American public approving of such an attack based simply on the logic of preventing a power shift in the U.S.-Soviet relationship. This point will be discussed further below to suggest that ultimately the early Cold War does not present a fair test of the argument that democracies cannot initiate preventive war. The Iraq case, however, is the best test of this argument to date.

The Domestic Politics of Preventive War Against Iraq

The Iraq Case as Preventive War

Despite repeated use of the term "pre-emptive" by the Bush administration to describe its National Security Strategy and a possible war with Iraq, and the nearly wholesale adoption of this term by members of Congress, pundits, and the press, it is important to point out that U.S. military action against Iraq would in fact be a preventive use of force. As noted earlier, these terms have distinct meanings that bear directly on the logic justifying war and how this justification is perceived both domestically and abroad. Before we examine the domestic politics of preventive war in the Iraq case, it is necessary to establish that it actually fits this category.

To justify calling this conflict preventive war we need look no further than how supporters of war characterize the threat. While the term "imminent" is used on occasion,

supporters of war acknowledge that there is no evidence of an impending Iraqi attack on the U.S. or its allies, or evidence that Iraq is actually preparing to use terrorist surrogates for a coming strike. Instead, American leaders describe their concerns with Iraq's *growing* capabilities, a power transition that will occur over time that could present *future* vulnerabilities to the United States. The president's 2002 State of the Union address noted that the "Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade." These efforts, he argued, "pose a grave and growing danger" and the possibility that Iraq "*could* provide these arms to terrorists" and "*could* attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States."[70] In his West Point speech the president recognized that this threat has not actually materialized, but that this was no reason for inaction. "If we wait for threats to fully materialize," he declared, "we will have waited too long." The answer to this growing threat is preventive war: "We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats *before they emerge*."[71] In the National Security Strategy released in September 2002, the president notes that the use of force under these circumstances would constitute a departure from traditional practice and what international law allows in cases of self-defense, but that the changing nature of the threat justifies preventive war: "For centuries, international law recognized that nations need not suffer an attack before they can lawfully take action to defend themselves against forces that present an imminent danger of attack. Legal scholars and international jurists often conditioned the legitimacy of pre-emption on the existence of an imminent threat – most often a visible mobilization of armies, navies and air forces preparing to attack. We must adapt the concept of imminent threat to the capabilities and objectives of today's adversaries." According

[70] President George W. Bush, "The President's State of the Union Address," 29 January 2002. Emphasis Added. Available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/print/20020129-11.html.
[71] President George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President at 2002 Graduation Exercise of the United States Military Academy," June 1, 2002. Emphasis added. Available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/print/20020601-3.html.

to the strategy, adaptation means "America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed…even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack."[72] As in previous cases of preventive war, supporters justify this decision with the assumption that war at some future point is inevitable. Or even if war is not a certainty, the odds of future conflict are considered high enough to justify preventive war now while the risks and costs are lower.

In a crucial speech on Iraq given in October 2002, President Bush revealed that the United States does not really know how far along Iraq is with this power transition to nuclear weapons, but that "we have every reason to assume the worst," even in the absence of clear evidence, "and we have an urgent duty to prevent the worse from occurring." The president described the threat in terms of worst-case scenarios – for example, "Iraq *could decide* on any given day to provide a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist group…" – while not suggesting that any of these scenarios was on the verge of actually occurring. The president cited the possibility alone as a risk he was unwilling to accept.[73] Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld has argued that the U.S. cannot wait for proof that Iraq is actually building a nuclear capability. In other words, the mere possibility of a power transition of this type, rather than an actual

[72] "The National Security Strategy of the United States," September 20, 2002. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/20/politics/20STEXT_FULL.html.

[73] President George W. Bush, "The Iraqi Threat," speech delivered in Cincinnati, Ohio, October 7, 2002. Emphasis added. Available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/10/20021007-8.html. Vice President Cheney made a similar point during a speech in late August 2002, that the "administration could never know with precision the extent and type of Mr. Hussein's programs to develop weapons of mass destruction," but that "we will not simply look away, hope for the best, and leave the matter for some future administration to resolve…Time is not on our side." Elisabeth Bumiller and James Dao, "Cheney Says Peril of a Nuclear Iraq Justifies an Attack." Accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/27/international/middleeast/27IRAQ.html. National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice noted that "if Saddam Hussein is left in power doing the things he is doing now, this is a threat that will emerge, and emerge in a very big way." Glenn Kessler, "Rice Lays Out Case for War in Iraq." Accessed at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A21333-2002Aug15.html. Outside the United States, Prime Minister Tony Blair of Great Britain is the strongest supporter of preventive war against Iraq. He too acknowledges the preventive character of such an attack: "If we do not deal with the threat from this international outlaw and his barbaric regime, it may not erupt and engulf us this month or next, perhaps not even this year or next, but it will at some point." Warren Hoge, "Blair Speech Mutes Protests by Union Leaders on Iraq." Accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/11/international/europe/11BRIT.html.

growth in Iraq's military capabilities, is enough to justify preventive war.[74] Early in the debate over "phase II" of the war on terrorism, Secretary of State Colin Powell (the only administration official who often calls action against Iraq "prevention" rather than "pre-emption"[75]) based his opposition to war with Iraq on the observation that the Iraqi threat did not demand any immediate action: "Iraq isn't going anywhere. It's in a fairly weakened state. It's doing some things we don't like. We'll continue to contain it. But there really was no need at this point, unless there was really quite a smoking gun, to put Iraq at the top of the list…He'll be there, unfortunately, a week, a month, two months from now."[76]

Like Secretary Powell, the Central Intelligence Agency's official position was that Iraq did not pose an imminent threat. In a letter dated October 7, 2002 to Senator Bob Graham, Chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, CIA Director George Tenet declared that "Baghdad for now appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks with conventional or CBW [chemical and biological weapons] against the United States." A senior intelligence official testifying to the committee noted, "The probability of [Saddam Hussein] initiating an attack…in the foreseeable future, given the conditions we understand now, the likelihood I think would be low." According to the CIA's assessment, the likelihood of an Iraqi attack with weapons of mass destruction would be highest if America itself initiated a conflict.[77]

Among supporters of the use of force in Congress we find the same characterization of the Iraqi threat; it is not imminent, but the risks and costs of a future conflict, after Iraq has developed a more potent military capability, makes preventive war necessary today. These

---

[74] David Rennie, "Attack Saddam Now and Let History Judge, Says Rumsfeld," *London Daily Telegraph* (August 21, 2002), p. 1.
[75] James Dao, "Powell Defends a First Strike as Iraq Option." Accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/08/international/middleeast/08POWE.html.
[76] Bill Keller, "The World According to Powell," *New York Times Magazine* (November 25, 2001), 63.
[77] For the full text of the CIA letter and declassified portions of the Senate hearing with intelligence officials see the *Congressional Record,* 148 Cong Rec H7413 of October 9, 2002.

views were captured best by Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) and Senator John Warner (R-VA), co-sponsors in the Senate of the resolution authorizing force against Iraq. Like the president, Senator Warner acknowledged "we do not know a great deal about what he has today by way of nuclear capacity. The best knowledge that is in the open is that he does not have a finished weapon, but we do not know whether it is 6 months, 6 years, or what time it may be" until Iraq reaches this point. Nevertheless, Warner argued, "It is now we must act. For those who say take time and wait…what is the cost of waiting if he were to finish his program…In my view it's the riskiest of all options, because the longer we wait, the stronger and bolder Saddam Hussein will become."[78] Senator Lieberman too argues from the logic of preventive war: "if we do not stop Saddam now, we will look back on some terrible day, with a profound sense of remorse and guilt, and say why didn't we do it?"[79] The mere fact that the issue of war with Iraq has been debated within the administration, in the public domain, in Congress and at the United Nations for nearly 18 months before U.S. forces were prepared to conduct an attack, shows that the threat is not truly considered "imminent."

How Much Normative Resistance to Preventive War?

With the logic of preventive war driving the administration and its Congressional supporters toward a military showdown with Iraq, we have an excellent case for evaluating the claim that a democracy cannot initiate preventive war. Arguably, the Iraq case poses a better test of this claim than the early Cold War decision not to initiate preventive war against the USSR. In the Cold War case, the magnitude of an American attack and the risks associated with a Soviet response, even with just conventional forces, would dwarf the size and risks of an American attack against Iraq. Even until the mid-1950s, those years when America maintained a clear

[78] *Congressional Record* 148 Cong Rec S10063 of October 8, 2002.
[79] Ibid.

nuclear superiority, there was never broad confidence in the American government that the U.S. could execute a preventive war without suffering a substantial Soviet attack in return, at least in Europe. In this case it is easy to take the moral high road by rejecting preventive war, while much of the revulsion against this option could be inspired by the great fear of the risks involved. Analytically it is difficult for us to separate normative concerns from strategic calculations as explanations for America's decision to avoid preventive war. Moreover, because an American attack on the Soviet Union would require a large number of nuclear weapons, the mass death of innocent Soviet citizens would make such a preventive war truly unprecedented historically. No non-democratic leader ever initiated a preventive war knowing that he would inflict such a horrendous number of guaranteed casualties. This fact creates an uneven test of the argument that regime type matters for preventive war; the option that Presidents Truman and Eisenhower faced was so extreme that it is not hard to imagine many non-democratic leaders rejecting it as well.

In the case of war with Iraq, however, the risks of an Iraqi counterattack are so much lower than those faced with the Soviets that many more decision makers and American citizens would find the risks tolerable. From a strategic perspective, therefore, we would expect more individuals to approve of preventive war against Iraq than in the earlier case. Being able to fight this war at relatively lower costs makes any normative resistance to preventive war more relevant as a reason not to fight it in the first place. Furthermore, American precision conventional weapons would make the number of Iraqi civilian casualties miniscule compared to the mass casualties that would unavoidably be imposed on Soviet citizens. The number of Iraqi casualties would not be inconsequential, of course. In the Gulf War of 1991, Iraqi civilian deaths have

been estimated at anywhere between 10,000 and 100,000.[80] In a future U.S.-Iraq conflict, a confidential UN report describes an immense humanitarian crisis, which includes estimates of 500,000 direct and indirect casualties.[81] Nevertheless, historically Americans have demonstrated much less sensitivity to the costs of war for the adversary's citizens compared to its own soldiers.[82] The question remains, however, will this relative insensitivity hold in the case of preventive war? Or, despite America's efforts to minimize civilian casualties in a future war, would these deaths be normatively distasteful because they were the result of the logic of preventive war, rather than a U.S. response to some form of provocation or for immediate self-defense?

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence showing that at least some Americans, at both the leadership and mass public levels, strongly object to war in this case specifically because of its preventive character. In other words, some Americans distinguish clearly between conditions of actual imminent threat, in which case the use of force may be justified on normative and practical cost/benefit grounds, and cases involving the preventive motive for war that do not present such concrete danger. These individuals, we see, set a much higher threshold for legitimizing the use of force, which the logic of preventive war does not meet. Interestingly, over the summer and early fall of 2002, the most vocal critics of the president's push toward war with Iraq were members of his own party, such as Brent Scowcroft, former National Security

---

[80] John Mueller, "The Perfect Enemy: Assessing the Gulf War," *Security Studies* vol. 5, no. 1 (Autumn 1995), 77-117.

[81] United Nations, "Likely Humanitarian Scenarios," 10 December 2002, accessed on January 20, 2003 at http://www.casi.org.uk/info/undocs/war021210notes.html.

[82] Mueller demonstrates that while large majorities of Americans typically express high levels of concern for civilian deaths within an adversary state, in practice the level of civilian deaths has very little impact on attitudes toward fighting the conflict. See *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 79. Mueller traces the relative indifference of Americans toward adversary casualties in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Somalia, and under the UN sanctions against Iraq following the Gulf War in "Public Opinion as a Constraint on U.S. Foreign Policy: Assessing the Perceived Value of American and Foreign Lives." Paper presented at the 41st Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, March 14-18, 2000. Available through C*olumbia International Affairs Online*.

Advisor to the first President Bush, Senator Chuck Hagel of Nebraska, a Vietnam veteran and a traditionally staunch supporter of the American military, and Congressman Dick Armey of Texas, the majority leader in the House of Representatives. Both Scowcroft and Hagel illustrate the first type of opposition to preventive war that Schweller says may be found within a democracy – that which is rooted in practical considerations of what level of threat justifies the costs and risks of war. According to Scowcroft, while Saddam Hussein is a brutal "menace" and his previous efforts to obtain weapons of mass destruction are disturbing, "There is little evidence to indicate that the United States itself is an object of his aggression." Scowcroft argued that the costs of war with Iraq in terms of American lives and the stability of the current global coalition helping America fight the war on terrorist groups are simply too high while America does not face an imminent threat from this adversary.[83]

One of the most interesting and unexpected critics of war with Iraq from a normative democratic perspective was Congressman Armey, who argued that fighting an unprovoked war, even against an adversary as odious as Saddam Hussein, was simply an illegitimate use of force. Armey claimed, "I don't believe that America will justifiably make an unprovoked attack on another nation. It would not be consistent with what we have been as a nation or what we should be as a nation."[84] During the October 2002 congressional debate over war with Iraq this normative anti-preventive war argument was articulated in greatest detail by another Republican member of the House, Jim Leach of Iowa. In a speech drawing from history, international relations theory, international law, and Just War Doctrine, Congressman Leach concluded that

---

[83] Brent Scowcroft, "Don't Attack Saddam," *Wall Street Journal* (August 15, 2002); Todd S. Purdum and Patrick E. Tyler, "Top Republicans Break with Bush on Iraq Strategy," *New York Times* (August 16, 2002), accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/16/international/middleeast/16IRAQ.html.

[84] Eric Schmitt, "Iraq is Defiant as G.O.P. Leader Opposes Attack," *New York Times* (August 9, 2002), accessed at http://www.nytimes.com/2002/08/09/international/middleeast/09IRAQ.html. While Armey eventually voted in favor of authorizing the use of military force against Iraq, he gave an emotional speech on the House floor that reflected the normative difficulty this issue was causing him.

the United States must uphold the high standards limiting the doctrine of preemptive attack. For Leach, any preemptive use of force can only be justified on the grounds described by U.S. Secretary of State Daniel Webster in 1842, if there was a "necessity of self-defense, instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation." True preemption is morally and legally sound as the basis for using military force, while the preventive motive is not. To exceed international standards limiting the use of force and to enter such unprecedented territory for American foreign policy, Leach argued, is to "undercut core American values and leadership around the world."[85]

In the Senate, this argument was made most passionately by Democratic Senators Kennedy of Massachusetts and Durbin of Illinois. In the first speech in the Senate debate, Kennedy declared, "the coldly premeditated nature of preventive attacks and preventive wars makes them anathema to well-established international principles against aggression… Historically, the United States has condemned the idea of preventive war…Earlier generations of Americans rejected preventive war on the grounds of both morality and practicality, and our generation must do so as well." To do otherwise, he argued, would not only jeopardize American national security, it would violate "our core beliefs" as well.[86] While introducing an amendment to the Iraq resolution that would authorize force under conditions of imminent threat, Senator Durbin observed, "historically we are a defensive nation. Even at the height of the Cold War, we did not endorse a first strike against the Soviet Union. No, we are a defensive nation. This new foreign policy reflected in the resolution before us is a dramatic departure from that." This departure, he warned, is "unwarranted and unwise." For Durbin, an attack on Iraq in the

[85] Rep. James Leach, in *Congressional Record* 148 Cong Rec H 7706 of October 9, 2002.
[86] Sen. Edward Kennedy, in *Congressional Record* 148 Cong Rec S 10001 of October 7, 2002.

absence of an immediate threat would make America an "aggressor nation," and fundamentally violate America's "principles and values and norms of conduct of our foreign policy."[87]

To understand the key question raised in this paper it is important to go beyond this anecdotal evidence to more precisely measure how extensive this normative position against preventive war actually is within the United States. In short, the data presented below demonstrate that while there is recognizable normative resistance to preventive war within American society and among its political leadership, this attitude is not absolute but highly context contingent. Like attitudes on the legitimacy of using military force in other circumstances, attitudes on preventive war are diverse across this democratic society. Interestingly, while a large majority of Americans support a deterrence policy over a preventive war policy in the abstract, in the specific context of the Iraq case the norm against preventive war is a minority view. As we might expect, political ideology is the best predictor of opposition to war with Iraq. The best predictor of support for war is the degree to which an individual ties Saddam Hussein to the types of terrorists that carried out the attacks of September 11. The following sections explain this data in greater detail.

Congressional Attitudes on Preventive War Against Iraq

The data presented in this section was derived from a content analysis conducted on the complete written transcripts of the October 2002 congressional debate in both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives on a resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq. During the course of this debate, a full 95% of the Senate and 84% of House members voting on the resolution actually participated in the debate to explain their reasons for either supporting or opposing this measure. As a result, the transcripts provide a highly representative source of data on the distribution of specific congressional attitudes concerning war under the circumstances

[87] Senator Richard Durbin, in *Congressional Record* 148 Cong Rec S 10233 of October 10, 2002.

presented in the Iraq case.[88] The content analysis quantifies how many members of Congress cited each of the eleven different specific reasons offered during the debate to justify support or opposition to war. The content categories quantified for supporters of war include: 1) concern over Iraqi weapons of mass destruction development or use against the U.S. or its allies; 2) concerns over Iraqi links to terrorism in general; 3) references to the terrorist attacks of September 11 and efforts to prevent future similar attacks; 4) comparisons between the Iraq case and the failure to prevent German rearmament and World War II; 5) a current war with Iraq is simply a continuation of the Gulf War of 1991. The content categories quantified for opponents of war include: 1) specific normative rejection of preventive war; 2) the practical costs of war (for example, American lives, Iraq's use of chemical or biological weapons, breakdown of the coalition in the war on terrorism, financial costs, stability of the Middle East, and the domestic priorities sacrificed); 3) no imminent threat from Iraq or September 11 link to justify war; 4) rejection of the unilateral use of force; 5) Congress cedes too much authority to the president with the resolution; 6) general pacifist/anti-war sentiment. These content categories not only capture all reasons cited during the debate for support or opposition to war with Iraq, they also allow for close comparison of the extent of normative opposition to preventive war to other reasons for opposing the use of force. The data within these content categories also show why normative resistance to preventive war did not restrain a majority in Congress.

[88] The content analysis database is available from the author. The full transcripts from the House debate can be found in these sections of the *Congressional Record* from the 107th Congress, 2nd Session: 148 Cong Rec H 7010 of October 3, 2002; 148 Cong Rec H 7176 of October 8, 2002; 148 Cong Rec H 7178 of October 8, 2002; 148 Cong Rec H 7189 of October 8, 2002; 148 Cong Rec H 7268 of October 8, 2002; 148 Cong Rec H 7309 of October 9, 2002; 148 Cong Rec H 7375 of October 8, 2002; 148 Cong Rec H 7706 of October 9, 2002; 148 Cong Rec H 7739 of October 10, 2002; 148 Cong Rec E 1867 of October 15, 2002; 148 Cong Rec E 1921 of October 17, 2002; 148 Cong Rec E 2083 of November 15, 2002. For the full transcripts of the Senate debate on Iraq, see these sections of the *Congressional Record*: 148 Cong Rec S 9867 of October 3, 2002; 148 Cong Rec S 9933 of October 4, 2002; 148 Cong Rec S 10001 of October 7, 2002; 148 Cong Rec S 10006 of October 7, 2002; 148 Cong Rec S 10077 of October 8, 2002; 148 Cong Rec S 10145 of October 9, 2002; 148 Cong Rec S 10164 of October 9, 2002; 148 Cong Rec S 10233 of October 10, 2002; 148 Cong Rec S 10233 of October 10, 2002.

In the House of Representatives, the resolution authorizing the use of military force against Iraq was supported by 69% of its members, in a final vote of 296 in favor to 133 against. Clearly, the vast majority in the House was not restrained by an anti-preventive war attitude. When we look at the reasons cited by opponents of war we find that, despite their minority status in the chamber over all, a large majority of opponents offer one or both of the general arguments against preventive war described by Schweller. Specifically, a full 84% of opponents, which is 28% of all participants in the House debate, argued explicitly that war is not justified on normative grounds because of its preventive character, and/or because in the absence of an imminent threat or a direct September 11 terrorist link the practical costs of war are simply too high. When we distinguish between these two reasons for opposition we find that the explicit normative rejection of preventive war is by far the most frequently cited; 70% of all opponents, which is 23% of all House members in the debate, reject preventive war on normative grounds. In contrast, 31% of opponents, which is 11% of the all debate participants, cite the practical costs in the absence of imminent threat argument to justify their stance. [See figure 5 for a summary of the distribution of supporting and opposing arguments offered in the House of Representatives.]

Perhaps not surprisingly, political ideology is the strongest predictor of opposition to war in this case. Using the political ideology rating scale provided by Americans for Democratic Action we find that 89% of those voting against war can be considered clear political liberals, while 8% are political moderates, and only 3% clearly conservative.[89] Of all political liberals in the House, less than a third (29%) broke from the liberal majority to vote in favor of the use of

[89] The Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) scale is based on how individual members vote on a set of key issues in a given Congress that can be treated as indicators of political ideology. A score of 0 falls at the extreme conservative end of the scale, a score of 100 at the extreme liberal end. This study uses a minimum score of 80 to code a specific member of Congress as a political liberal. Based on this threshold, 172 members, or 40% of the

Reasons Cited for Support of War	Reasons Cited for Opposition to War	
1) Iraq link to terrorists		38%
2) Specific September 11 terror attack reference		33%
3) Iraq weapons of mass destruction are intolerable		33%
	4) Normative rejection of preventive war	23%
	5) Practical costs of war	11%
	6) No imminent threat or September 11 link to justify war	9%
7) Reference to failure to prevent German rise and World War II		9%
	8) War must be multilateral, not unilateral U.S. initiative	7%
9) Just a continuation of Persian Gulf War of 1991		3%
	10) Resolution cedes too much Congressional power to president	2%
	11) General pacifist/anti-war sentiment	<1%

Figure 5. Frequency of Arguments For and Against War in the House of Representatives, % of All Participants in the Debate

force resolution, while 71% voted against it. Political ideology is also a good predictor of support for war in the House, however, it is important to note that a significant number of moderates and liberals were willing to vote in favor of preventive war against Iraq. In other words, the pro-resolution bloc is more diverse ideologically than the anti-resolution bloc. 67% of the resolution's supporters can be considered clearly conservative, while 16% are moderates and 17% clear liberals. Conservatives in the House of Representatives voted more solidly as a bloc than liberals did, with 98% of conservatives voting in favor of the resolution, and only 2% voting no. Together with the data presented above on the dominance of normative anti-preventive war argument among opponents of war in the House, this additional data show that

---

House, are liberal. The average ADA score for all House members voting against the resolution was 88. 122 liberals voted against the resolution, 50 voted in favor. An ADA score of 20 or lower was used to code members as conservative. The ADA scores for the 107th Congress, Second Session, can be accessed at http://www.adaction.org/2002voting.html.

attitudes on preventive war are far from monolithic. Instead, the anti-preventive war norm is concentrated at the liberal end of the political spectrum, and clearly not shared evenly among most political actors.

In the Senate, support for the resolution authorizing the use of force was even higher than in the House, with 77% supporting and 23% opposing. While the debate in the House was characterized by bold statements on the policy as either clearly right or clearly wrong, many participants on both sides of the Senate debate were more nuanced in their attitudes, more willing to acknowledge some of the points raised by their opponents, and to speak about the decision making difficulties presented by this specific problem. Each speaker, however, clearly articulated the reasons for either supporting or opposing the use of force in this case. As in the House debate we find a clear bloc of Senators (22%) explicitly rejecting preventive war as an American strategy (this is comparable to the 23% in the House of Representatives). Interestingly, 9 of the 22 Senators in this anti-preventive war group actually voted *for* the resolution authorizing the use of force.[90] This means that 41% of the Senators that felt strongly enough about the normative dimensions of preventive war to speak out against it in principle, found sufficient reasons to support preventive war in the specific case of Iraq. Another way to measure the extent of normative resistance to the logic of preventive war is to examine how many supported an amendment to the resolution authorizing force introduced by Senator Durbin.[91] Durbin's amendment was designed explicitly to strike the preventive war basis for using military force against the "continuing threat posed by Iraq" and the concern that this threat would grow with time. His amendment would replace this phrase with a truly preemptive motive

[90] These include Kerry (D-MA), Hagel (R-NE), Dodd (D-CT), Biden (D-DE), Clinton (D-NY), DeWine (R-OH), Kohl (D-WI), Dorgan (D-ND), Feinstein (D-CA).
[91] Senate amendment #4865 to amendment #4586. For the text of the amendment and debate on it see 148 Cong Rec S 10233 of October 10, 2002.

for war if the U.S. actually faced "an *imminent threat* posed by Iraq." Anyone voting in favor of the amendment was clearly expressing a preference for restricting the use of force to a preemption situation rather than a preventive war situation. While this amendment was defeated, 30 senators did support it, which represents the high point of anti-preventive war sentiment in the Senate proceedings. Once it was defeated, eight of these 30 senators ended up voting for the original preventive war resolution.[92] When we total the number of senators who spoke out against preventive war in their floor speeches while voting for the use of force resolution (9) and the additional senators who voted for the Durbin amendment and the use of force resolution (5), while not double counting those who did both, we find that 14% of the Senate (18% of the resolution's supporters) voted for the resolution authorizing force while at some point expressing disapproval or discomfort with the policy. In this context it is also important to note that 32% of the resolution's supporters (23% of the entire Senate) expressed at least in general terms their great discomfort or reluctance in their positions because of the potential costs involved, remaining uncertainty over the actual threat, and the unilateral use of force that may be involved.[93] The reasons cited to justify these apparent contradictions will be explored later.

Unlike in the House, the anti-preventive war perspective was not the dominant motive cited by opponents of the resolution for their no vote. The practical costs of war in the absence of imminent threat or a September 11 terror link was cited by 87% of opponents, while the explicit rejection of preventive war was cited by 65% of opponents. This is the same number of opponents who cited concerns over the lack of sufficient multilateral support for U.S. policy toward Iraq (65%) as another objection to the resolution. [See figure 6 for the total distribution

[92] The senators voting for the Durbin amendment then also voting to authorize force against Iraq include Cantwell (D-WA), Carper (D-DE), Dodd (D-CT), Dorgan (D-ND), Harkin (D-IA), Kerry (D-MA), Nelson (D-NE), Schumer (D-NY).

[93] In contrast, 68% of the resolution's supporters, or 49% of the entire Senate, expressed support for war without reservation.

of Senate attitudes in favor of and opposition to the resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq.]

As in the House, the vast majority of opponents of the resolution are political liberals.[94] 83% of opponents are clear political liberals, while 13.5% fall just below the ADA score threshold of 80 and another 13.5% are moderates on the liberal side of the scale.[95] Every political conservative in the Senate voted in favor of the resolution. Most surprising is that not only did Senate liberals split on the question of war with Iraq, more liberals actually supported than opposed the resolution authorizing the use of military force as well (21 yea, 19 nay). Despite the misgivings some Senate liberals expressed about the preventive war strategy in the debate, most liberals were willing to support the "ruthlessly realistic" policy of preventive war against Iraq. If the liberal bloc in Congress is unlikely to remain consistently solid in opposition to preventive war, it is hard to have confidence in the general argument about democracies not being able to initiate it.

Why has the logic of preventive war against Iraq had such broad appeal with the American Congress? What accounts for the absence of greater resistance to preventive war in this case, based on either the costs involved or the normative dimensions of initiating an attack in the absence of direct provocation or a more immediate threat? As one might suspect, the terrorist attack of September 11 provides the dominant framework most members of Congress

[94] The same threshold score of 80 on the ADA scale was used to code senators as liberal on political ideology. The average ADA score for opponents of the resolution was 87.
[95] These include Senator Byrd with an ADA score of 75, Senator Chaffee with 70, Senator Inouye with 60, and Senator Jeffords with 55.

Reasons Cited for Support[96] of War	Reasons Cited for Opposition to War	
1) Iraq weapons of mass destruction are intolerable		52%
2) Iraq link to terrorists		44%[97]
3) Specific September 11 terror attack reference		42%
	4) Practical costs of war	20%
	5) War must be multilateral, not unilateral U.S. initiative	15%
	6) Normative rejection of preventive war	13%
	7) No imminent threat or September 11 link to justify war	11%
8) Reference to failure to prevent German rise and World War II		8%
9) Just a continuation of Persian Gulf War of 1991		7%
	10) Resolution cedes too much Congressional power to president	3%
	11) General pacifist/anti-war sentiment	0%

Figure 6. Frequency of Arguments For and Against War in the U.S. Senate, % of All Members of the Senate

use to evaluate the level of threat facing the United States. This single event has dramatically lowered the threshold of future risk and uncertainty most members are willing to tolerate without taking some form of preventive military action. The content analysis of the debate in the House of Representatives reveals that the terrorism concern is the single biggest factor cited by individual members. 71% of those who supported the resolution authorizing force justified their position by citing specifically the shock of September 11 and their determination to prevent another such catastrophe, and/or a belief that Saddam Hussein has or could provide weapons of mass destruction technology to terrorists. Members making the terrorist-related argument make up a large plurality (47%) of all participants in the House debate [See figure 5]. This is

[96] Each of the various arguments in favor of the resolution could be up to 5% higher. Five senators voting in favor did not participate in the debate or provide sufficient press statements to reconstruct their positions, so their attitudes could not be included in these figures.

[97] Categories 2 and 3 can be combined (while eliminating overlap) to determine the total number of senators making a terrorism-related argument to justify war with Iraq. When combined, 49% of the Senate fit this category.

significantly higher than the number of members opposing preventive war because there is no imminent threat (28% of all participants in the debate). Interestingly, while 50% of the resolution's supporters cited concerns over Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) development as a justification for war, over half of these House members linked WMD to the possibility of future terrorism, and only 24% cited WMD alone as sufficient cause for war (only 16% of all participants in the debate).

In the Senate we find the same general distribution of attitudes explaining support for the resolution. A slightly larger majority cited concerns over Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (72% of supporters participating in the debate, for 52% of the entire Senate) than made an explicit September 11 or Iraqi terrorist link reference (68% of supporters in the debate, for 49% of the entire Senate) to justify their positions. However, a large majority of senators citing the WMD threat (65%) established a tight link between an enhanced Iraqi WMD capability, particularly nuclear weapons, and the worst-case scenario that these weapons could be used in a future terrorist attack against the United States.[98] Importantly, more than twice as many senators cited the WMD argument (52%) and the terror-link argument (49%) to explain their views on the Iraq question as cited a normative anti-preventive war attitude (22%) [See figure 6].

These findings suggest that for members of Congress the most compelling reason leading to support for war is not just the preventive logic of keeping Iraq from going through a power shift by developing new weapons capabilities, but the meaning of this potential military capability for future terrorist acts, a threat that is no longer considered conjectural since the events of September 11. For those who make this link, war against Iraq is not merely based on projections of possible future threats that remain highly uncertain, which might seem too distant

[98] In fact, only 23% of the resolution's supporters participating in the debate cited WMD alone as sufficient justification for war, which is 18% of the total Senate. The rest made the link to terrorism.

to produce political momentum for war. Rightly or wrongly, war against Iraq is seen as part of the war on terrorism, a very real threat that produced actual attack in the recent past.

Public Attitudes on Preventive War Against Iraq

Throughout 2002 and into 2003 a substantial amount of survey data has been collected on public attitudes regarding various aspects of a potential preventive war against Iraq. The key question for this paper, of course, is whether there is any recognizable normative resistance to preventive war in general, and in the Iraq case specifically. It is important to note up front that the legitimacy of fighting this war does matter to the American public; preventive war logic in the abstract is problematic for most Americans. The public is sensitive to aspects of a possible war that reflect on the legitimacy of fighting it, such as whether the U.S. has UN or allied support, the degree and reliability of evidence available that Iraq is actually pursuing a nuclear weapons capability, even the level of Iraqi civilian casualties. Despite sensitivity to these legitimacy issues, there is no dominant, stable normative evaluation of preventive war as a specific motive for using force. Like Congress, the public's willingness to initiate preventive war is highly context contingent, and it shifts substantially based on the demographic characteristics of the individual and the context of the question asked. There is a strong relationship between political ideology, political party and willingness to wage war on Iraq. Willingness to initiate war in this case is also affected by age, education level, and race. Across each demographic group we also find opinion shifting based on the level of U.S. casualties assumed and the degree to which an individual believes there is a strong link between Iraq and terrorism in general or the September 11 attack specifically. The most important conclusion discussed below is that any general normative resistance to preventive war has been subsumed by these concerns with future terrorism supported by an Iraqi regime in possession of weapons of

mass destruction. The power transition argument alone does not generate substantial support for war, but when linked to terrorism, all indicators show a surge of support for the logic of preventive war.

As the debate over President Bush's "preemption" policy intensified during the summer of 2002, a substantial majority (63%) of the American public agreed that preemption was an effective way to deal with rogue states like Iraq. However, when asked to choose between either preemptive action or a deterrence policy to keep these regimes contained, the public overwhelmingly chose deterrence (66%) over preemption (25%). The preference for deterrence over preemption was consistent regardless of political party, ideology, gender, and age. In the abstract, then, there is evidence to support the claim that the democratic public is reluctant to fight preventive war when there is an effective alternative.[99]

Despite this preference for deterrence, we must immediately grapple with the fact that as the Bush administration has pursued preventive war over deterrence in the case of Iraq, a majority of the American public has consistently supported this policy. While the precise level of support has fluctuated over time, support for the use of force to remove Saddam Hussein from power has never fallen below 50% [see figure 7]. When we look closely at how support and opposition to war break down among various demographic groups, it becomes apparent that there is no overarching "democratic" attitude on the normative dimensions of fighting this type of war. As in Congress, a strong predictor of support for preventive war in this case is political ideology and party. As figure 8 shows, conservative Republicans favor war at much higher rates than liberal Democrats, while liberal/moderate Republicans and conservative/moderate Democrats fall consistently between these extremes. Figure 8 also shows that, again like in

[99] 74% of Americans considered deterrence an effective policy for rogue states, compared to 63% for preemption. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Domestic Concerns Will Vie with Terrorism in Fall," July 3, 2002. Available at http://people-press.org/reports.

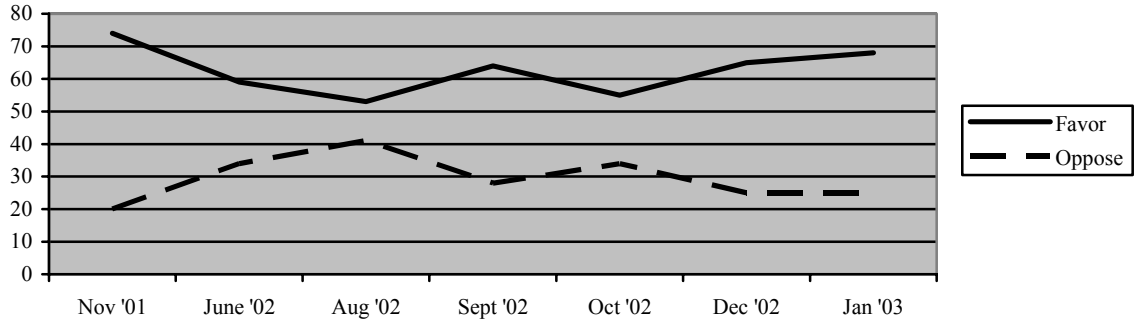

Figure 7. Opinion on Using Military Force to Remove Saddam Hussein From Power[100]

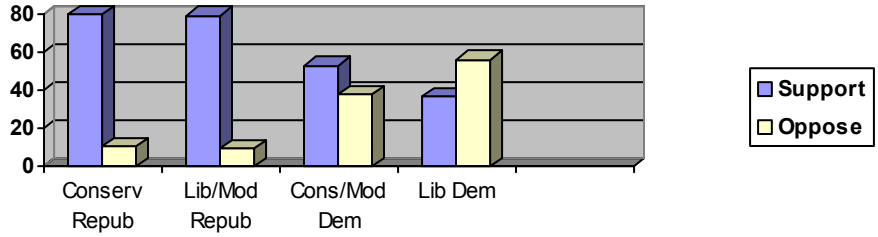

Figure 8. Opinion on Using Military Force By Political Ideology and Party[101]

Congress, conservatives and Republicans are much more solid as a bloc in support of war than liberals and Democrats are in opposition to war. So despite the ideological split on this question, the pro-war position attracts enough liberal and moderate Democrats to provide majority support for war in general terms.[102]

---

[100] November 2001, June 2002 and August 2002 survey data from The Gallup Organization. See David W. Moore, "Majority of Americans Favor Attacking Iraq to Oust Saddam Hussein," August 23, 2002. Available at http://www.Gallup.com/poll/releases/pr020823. September 2002 through January 2003 survey data from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. See "Bush Engages and Persuades Public on Iraq," September 19, 2002; "Americans Thinking About Iraq, But Focused on the Economy," October 10, 2002; "Support for Potential Military Action Slips to 55%," October 30, 2002; "Public More Internationalist than in 1990s," December 12, 2002; "Public Wants Proof of Iraqi Weapons Programs," January 16, 2003. All Pew Research Center reports available at http://people-press.org/reports.

[101] Percentages responding to this question: Would you favor or oppose taking military action in Iraq to end Saddam Hussein's rule? Answers broken out by these categories: Conservative Republicans; Liberal/Moderate Republicans; Conservative/Moderate Democrats; Liberal Democrats. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "Americans Thinking About Iraq, But Focused on the Economy," October 10, 2002.

[102] Attitudes split on other demographic characteristics too: men support war more than women, whites support war more than blacks, and people under 49 years old support war more than those 50 and older. Ibid.

It is important to look beyond this general support for the use of military force to oust Saddam Hussein to examine whether the public is sensitive to particular aspects of the question that reflect on mass willingness to initiate preventive war. Other survey results show that public support is contingent on the expected costs of the war, on the level of allied support, and the amount of evidence available to support the claims made about the actual threat. Public opinion on each of these issues can be treated, to a degree, as an indicator of the public's willingness to engage in preventive war. One important variable that dramatically shifts support downward is the casualty rate and other costs of fighting this particular war. Figure 9 shows the difference between general support for using military force and support if the U.S. expects to suffer several thousand casualties. When respondents were asked in an open-ended question

	Aug 23	Sept 15	Sept 19	Jan 16
General Support for Military Force	53%	68%	64%	68%
Support if High Casualties for US	43%	41%	48%	43%

Figure 9. The Effect of Casualties on Level of Support for Military Force Against Iraq[103]

why they oppose war with Iraq, military and civilian casualties was the leading reason (24%). This was offered over two times more often than other reasons related to discomfort with preventive war logic, such as "not enough proof/reasons not explained" to justify war (10%) and "haven't hurt us/no preemption justified" (9%).[104] When asked how worried they were about various potential consequences of war, chemical/biological attacks against American troops led

[103] David W. Moore, "Majority of Americans Favor Attacking Iraq to Oust Saddam Hussein"; Gary Langer, "Broad Support for 'Last-Chance' Plan," ABCNEWS.com, September 15, 2002. Available at http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/ThisWeek DailyNews/Bush_iraq_poll020915.html; Pew Research Center, "Bush Engages and Persuades Public on Iraq"; Pew Research Center, "Public Wants More Proof of Iraqi Weapons Programs."

[104] Respondents were allowed three open-ended responses to this question. See Pew Research Center poll "Americans Thinking About Iraq, But Focused on the Economy."

the list, with many U.S. casualties close behind [see figure 10]. Surprisingly, 70% of respondents expressed at least a "fair amount" of concern for Iraqi civilian casualties. This is lower than all other reasons that more directly affect the United States, but the difference is not by such a large margin to suggest that costs to the adversary are negligible compared to costs to Americans. One the other hand, Mueller has shown that in past military conflicts Americans respond in similar ways when asked about the enemy's civilian casualties, yet in practice the level of civilian casualties did not affect the level of support for the war or a particular strategy being pursued.

	Great Deal	Fair Amount
Chem/bio attacks on US troops	59%	26%
Many US casualties	52%	28%
More domestic terrorism	51%	26%
All-out MidEast war	46%	27%
Long postwar role	43%	25%
Iraqi civilian casualties	40%	30%

Figure 10. Worries About War With Iraq[105]

The data on falling support for war under conditions of high casualties is clearly consistent with the first reason Schweller provides to explain why democracies have not initiated preventive war. American citizens are consistently expressing added reluctance to initiate a conflict with Iraq with this condition specified. While consistent with Schweller's argument,

[105] Pew Research Center, "Support for Potential Military Action Slips to 55%." For more details on the point that concern for Iraqi civilian casualties has less importance than what is indicated by this survey, see Mueller, "Public Opinion as a Constrain on U.S. Foreign Policy."

casualty aversion is a poor indicator of how the American public thinks about preventive war as a distinct motive for using military force and whether it is justified. Reluctance to accept high casualties is certainly not limited to preventive war cases; it may prove to be an impediment in other types of conflicts as well.[106] As a result, these figures alone fail to support the claim that a democratic citizenry is reluctant to fight preventive war *because* it is preventive in character.

A better indicator (though clearly an imperfect one) that the American public cares about the legitimacy of using military force under preventive war conditions are attitudes on launching an attack on Iraq without allied or UN backing. The absence of international support is the condition that most dramatically and consistently pushes support for war downward, even more than high casualties do [See figure 11]. One political scientist explains these

	Aug '02	Sept '02	Oct '02	Jan '03
Approval of Military Force if Allies Support	64%	64%	55%	68%
Approval of Military Force if Allies Do Not Support	30%	33%	27%	26%

Figure 11. Changing Approval for War if Allies Do Not Support[107]

results this way: "When people hear that others support going to war, it becomes a reason to favor it. And when they hear that others are opposed they question whether it's the right thing to do."[108] With the data available, however, it is hard to confirm this interpretation. While survey research on this question establishes that Americans care about international support, no study

[106] For example, general support for war with Iraq in the days before war began stood at 60%, decreased to 52% if 1000 American troops would be killed, and declined further to 37% if 10,000 were expected to die. *Washington Post* poll of 11-15 January 1991. When asked if U.S. troops should be sent to Bosnia for peacekeeping under varying levels of casualties, American approval declined steadily as casualties increased (no soldiers killed, 67% approval; 25 killed, 31% ; 100 killed, 29%; 400 killed, 21% approval). Gallup/CNN/USA Today poll of 19-22 September 1995.
[107] Pew Research Center, "Public Wants More Proof of Iraqi Weapons Program."
[108] Herb Asher quoted in Richard Benedetto, "Majority Support War Against Saddam," *USA Today* (September 24, 2002), 10.

has asked *why* Americans put such stock in it. It may be seen as a burden-sharing issue by some respondents, which would impact the overall costs of prosecuting the war. Or, it could cause Americans to question whether using military force is a legitimate way to handle this particular problem. Even if we confirm that Americans see international backing as an indicator of the normative legitimacy of using military force, it is still difficult to distinguish this attitude in preventive war situations from other cases involving military force. In the Gulf War, for example, when the United States was responding to an Iraqi military initiative and not engaged in preventive war, public support for war hovered around 37% until the UN Security Council approved the use of force to remove Iraq from Kuwait. Once the UN passed this resolution, consistent majorities in subsequent polls supported war.[109] In summary, neither casualty aversion nor a desire for international backing distinguishes preventive war from other situations involving the use of force.

From the survey data on the current Iraq case, the best indicator we have of public sensitivity to the legitimacy of launching a preventive war involves the amount of evidence available on how far the Iraqis have actually progressed toward developing weapons of mass destruction. Support for war reaches its highest level under scenarios in which the UN obtains solid evidence that Iraq has WMD. In other words, the public provides its strongest support for using military force when it is determined that the Iraqi power shift is well under way, and military force is to be used to prevent further Iraqi progress. Under this condition, the public approves of the logic of preventive war to address the problem. As the evidence of an actual power shift becomes more remote, however, public support for preventive war drops sharply [see figure 12]. These data suggest that the American public is willing to engage in preventive war

[109] Andrew Kohut, "Simply Put, the Public's View Can't Be Put Simply," *Washington Post* (September 29, 2002), B05. 37% support for war in 1990 prior to the UN resolution is just slightly higher than support for war without international backing in 2002-2003. See figure 11.

when the danger appears more concrete, but are increasingly reluctant when the danger appears more remote or speculative.

While concern over WMD does have an impact on public willingness to support preventive war, the single best explanation for support is the fear of an Iraqi link to terrorism and a future September 11-type attack with WMD. Generic arguments about the need to prevent Iraq from obtaining WMD do not have nearly the same resonance in the abstract as they do when put in the context of WMD use by terrorists with Iraqi assistance. As discussed previously, this is the same rationale driving most support for war within Congress.

Use military force if inspectors find…	Favor Military Force	Oppose Military Force
Iraq is hiding weapons of mass destruction	76%	17%
Iraq is hiding ability to easily make WMD	46%	47%
No weapons, but Iraq can't prove otherwise	29%	63%
No weapons, but inspectors can't assure Iraq has none	28%	62%

Figure 12. Changing Support for War Based on Evidence of Iraqi Power Shift[110]

The best evidence to support this claim comes from a multiple regression analysis conducted by the Pew Research Center that examined how much influence various aspects of the crisis have on whether an individual supports or opposes war. The two most important determinants of an individual's position are whether or not he or she believes that "Saddam helped 9/11 terrorists" and if a war against Iraq would "help or hurt the war on terrorism." These two terrorism related questions had a much greater impact on attitudes toward war than whether

[110] Pew Research Center, "Public Wants More Proof of Iraqi Weapons Programs."

an individual believes Iraq has nuclear weapons or how many casualties an individual expects the United States to suffer.[111] Among supporters of war we find a full 86% sharing the belief that Iraq is close to or already has nuclear weapons. While this number is significant, it is important to note that among opponents of war a full 70% also believe Iraq is close to or has nuclear weapons. Despite the large percentage of opponents sharing this view on Iraqi WMD, they obviously do not consider this a good enough reason to launch a preventive war. While beliefs about WMD are a weak discriminator between supporters and opponents of war with Iraq, beliefs about Iraq's involvement in terrorism are a strong discriminator. 79% of supporters of war believe Saddam Hussein had a role in the September 11 attack, while only 13% of supporters believe he did not. In contrast, opponents of war split evenly on this question, with 42% believing Hussein was involved and 41% believing he was not. Furthermore, while 52% of the general public believes war with Iraq will help the war on terrorism, this attitude splits sharply between supporters and opponents of war. Over three times as many supporters (67%) as opponents (21%) believe it will help the war on terrorism.[112] When supporters of war were asked in an open-ended question to explain their reasons for this position, nearly three times as many people noted fears of an Iraqi terrorism link (30%) than concerns with Iraqi nuclear, chemical or biological weapons (13%) as their leading reason.[113] Recent surveys also show that the higher an individual rates his or her concern about future terrorism, the higher their support for war with Iraq. In a September 2002 poll, 78% of those who said they were "very worried" about future terrorist attacks against the United States also supported war against states

[111] Pew Research Center, "Americans Thinking About Iraq, But Focused on the Economy."
[112] Ibid. A Gallup Poll confirms the general public belief that war against Iraq would be an extension of the war on terrorism (at 55%). Frank Newport, "Americans' View: U.S. Should Not Go It Alone in Iraq." Another Pew study finds that 58% of Americans agreed that using military force against rogue states developing nuclear weapons was a good way to conduct the war on terrorism. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, "One Year Later: New Yorkers More Troubled, Washingtonians On Edge," September 5, 2002. Available at http://people-press.org/reports.
[113] Pew Research Center, "Americans Thinking About Iraq, But Focused on the Economy."

developing nuclear weapons.[114] In December 2002 this number was a bit lower, with 71% of those saying they were "very worried" about future terrorism also expressing support for war, while 54% expressing "little concern" with future terrorism supported war.[115]

Conclusion

The question addressed in this paper – can democracies initiate preventive war – emerged most forcefully in the specific historical context of the early Cold War. Despite the magnitude of the potential Soviet threat and the tremendous danger created by Soviet acquisition of nuclear weapons, preventive war was rejected outright by most foreign policy makers and analysts. Extrapolation from the decisions made during this one time period, and the absence of preventive war by any other democracy, has been the basis for the general theoretical claim that preventive war is something that a democracy is incapable of launching. It is difficult to generalize, however, from American behavior in this time period for the simple reason that an American initiated preventive war against the USSR would not only be an unprovoked war, it would inflict a horrendous level of guaranteed casualties on innocent Soviet citizens. From this period we would be on safe ground to claim that democracies will not initiate a *nuclear* preventive war. This generalization, of course, fails to exhaust the range of more likely scenarios in which a democracy might initiate a conventional preventive war. In fact, statistically there is nothing significant about the absence of nuclear preventive war by a democracy because there has never been a case of nuclear preventive war by a non-democracy either. While observers such as Henry Kissinger, Bernard Brodie, John Foster Dulles, and Hans Morgenthau may not have distinguished between a preventive war based on nuclear or conventional weapons, it is

[114] Pew Research Center, "One Year Later."
[115] Pew Research Center, "Public More Internationalist Than in 1990s: Terrorism Worries Spike, War Support Steady," December 12, 2002. Available at http://people-press.org/reports.

impossible to remove their conclusions about democracy and preventive war from the nuclear context.

When we move beyond the early Cold War case, the general argument about democracies being incapable of initiating preventive war loses it potency. The evidence from the Iraq case shows there is no absolute normative standard against preventive war in the United States. This is not to say that American political leaders and the general public are readily willing to accept the "ruthlessly realistic" logic of preventive war. The data presented in this paper show that Americans are sensitive to both its costs and normative legitimacy. Support for war in this case falls markedly under conditions of high casualties, when the United States is unable to convince allied states or the UN to sanction the use of force, and when the evidence of an actual power shift by the adversary is murky. These conditions do matter as Americans consider whether this is a war the United States should take on, and could conceivably form the basis for strong opposition in Congress and the public under the right circumstances. In other words, we can reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between democracy and the initiation of preventive war. In the abstract we find that Americans do not like the idea of preventive war, and that the speculative nature of assessing the threat and the difficulty of accepting near-term costs in exchange for projections of long-term costs will remain a hurdle any American president must mount to initiate military conflict in this type of case. But whether these concerns over casualties, international backing or evidence of future risks will actually impede a president determined to initiate preventive war is highly contingent on the context of a specific case.

In the Iraq case we find that the shock of the September 11 terror attack has made preventive war possible politically. This was confirmed by the content of the Congressional debate on war with Iraq as well as survey data on American attitudes regarding war. Americans

in large numbers are concerned about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and the power shift the Bush administration has argued is underway. Action to halt this power shift, as unclear as it may be, is the essence of preventive war logic. It is important to make clear, however, that fear of such a power shift only has real resonance with Americans when linked to future terrorism. This single event has produced a sense of vulnerability that makes worst-case scenarios of a possible Iraq-terrorist link concrete, and for a majority of Americans this understanding of the threat is concrete enough to justify preventive war normatively and in terms of the near-terms costs entailed. Despite remaining misgivings in the United States about war, the post-September 11 context has lowered the threshold on justifying preventive war far enough to give President Bush strong Congressional backing and consistent public approval for the general policy of using military force to disarm Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein from power. In terms of domestic politics, there are no restraints on the president's drive toward preventive war with Iraq. Preventive war in this case would be unprecedented for both American foreign policy and international relations theory on democracy and war, but this does not mean that it will set a precedent easily repeated in the future. America's long-running military engagement with Iraq, combined with the September 11 attack and the plausibility of an Iraq-terror connection, have produced a case uniquely suited for a democracy to overcome what practical and normative resistance there might be to initiating preventive war. The broader question remains as to the duration of the 9/11 shock. Has this one event permanently altered how Americans think about the legitimacy of using military force? Has it emboldened Americans to be less risk averse and to more readily accept the range of costs that inevitably accompany war? While the data on Congressional and public attitudes in the Iraq case present a mixed picture on Americans'

willingness to engage in preventive war, this fact alone suggests that all concerns about preventive war have not been swept away by recent events.