

# **Using Military Force to Prevent Proliferation: Consequences and Alternatives**

**Presentation for**

***Harvard International Review***

**May 5, 2009**

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**PROJECT ON  
MANAGING THE ATOM**

# Project on Managing the Atom is...

- The Harvard Kennedy School's primary research group and fellows program on nuclear policy;
- Engaged since 1996 in research and analysis, public and policy-maker education, development and promotion of policy proposals, and graduate and post doctoral training;
- Focused on
  - reducing the risks from nuclear & radiological terrorism
  - stopping nuclear proliferation & shrinking nuclear arsenals
  - examining the barriers to expanded nuclear-energy use
  - addressing the connections among these problems.

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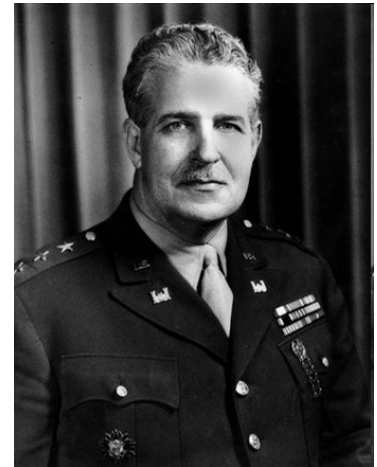
# Using Force to Prevent Proliferation: Key Points

- Doctrine of prevention is longstanding, widespread, and likely to persist.
- Consequences of using force are highly uncertain. Obstacles to success are numerous.
- Conditions for successful prevention are rare.
- Alternatives means of preventing proliferation should be strengthened.

**Long-standing,  
Widespread, and  
Likely to Persist**

# General Leslie Groves (1946)

“if we were ruthlessly realistic, we would not permit any foreign power with which we are not firmly aligned, 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 enough to threaten us.”



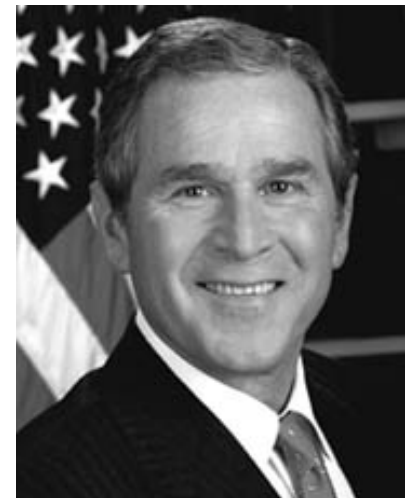
# Menachem Begin (1981)

“We chose this moment: now, not later, because later may be too late...tell anyone you meet, we shall defend our people with all the means at our disposal. We shall not allow any enemy to develop weapons of mass destruction turned against us.”



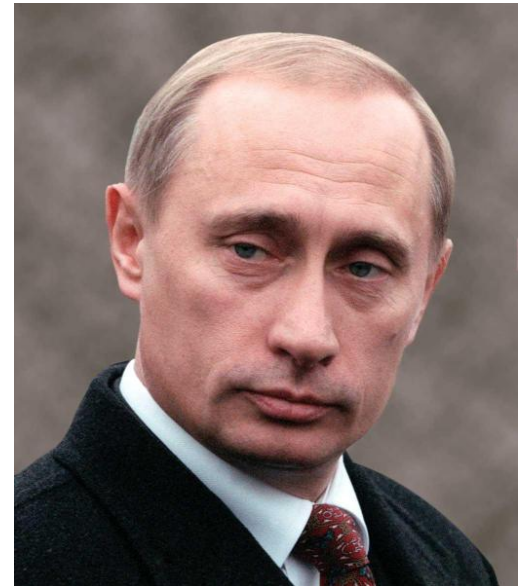
# U.S. National Security Strategy (2002)

“The greater the threat, the greater is the risk of inaction—and the more compelling the case for taking anticipatory action to defend ourselves, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy’s attack. To forestall or prevent such hostile acts by our adversaries, the United States will, if necessary, act preemptively...”



# Vladimir Putin (2003)

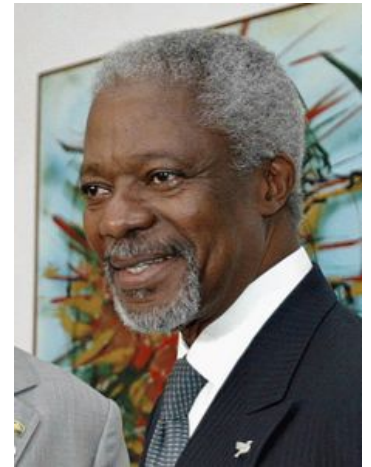
Russia "retains the right to launch a preemptive strike, if this practice continues to be used around the world."





# U.N. High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change (2004)

“In the world of the twenty-first century, the international community does have to be concerned about nightmare scenarios combining terrorists, weapons of mass destruction and irresponsible States, and much more besides, which may conceivably justify the use of force, not just reactively but preventively and before a latent threat becomes imminent.”



# Obama Administration

## **Hilary Clinton, Secretary of State**

- “We are not taking any option off the table at all...”

## **James Steinberg, Deputy Secretary of State**

- “Preventive force has a legitimate role to play in tackling some of the most dangerous security problems.”

## **Anne Marie Slaughter, Policy Planning**

- Author: “Duty to Prevent”

## **Ashton Carter, Undersecretary of Defense**

- Author: *Preventive Defense*



# Preventive force is...

...any use of force that has the intention of substantially degrading or delaying a state's acquisition of nuclear capability.

This definition includes:

- Limited strikes
- Full-scale war to remove WMD threat
- Intra-war operations

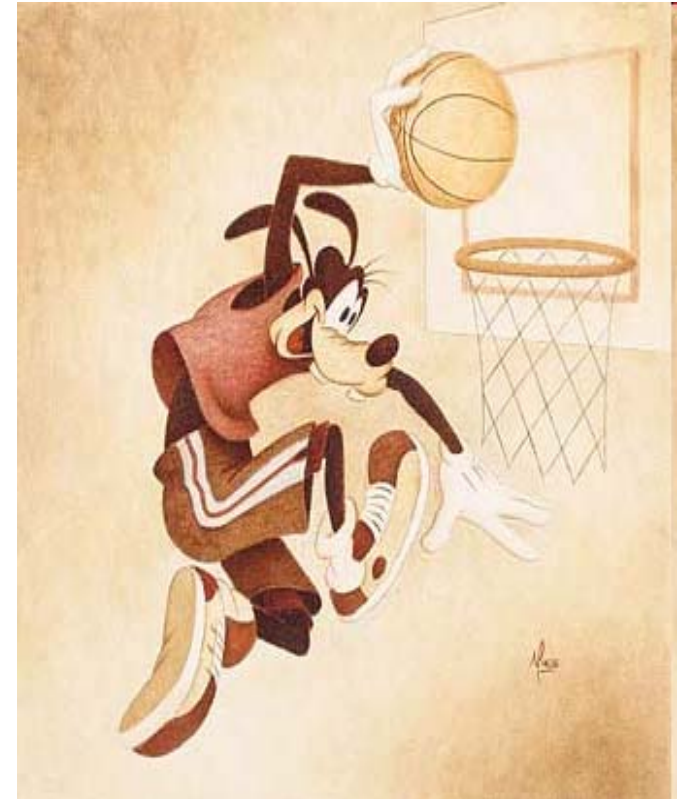
Prevention means striking before a threat is imminent.

# Cases

<b>Year</b>	<b>Attacker</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Target(s) destroyed?</b>
<b>1942-44</b>	<b>Allied forces</b>	<b>German heavy water production</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>1980</b>	<b>Iran</b>	<b>Iraqi Osirak reactor</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>1981</b>	<b>Israel</b>	<b>Iraqi Osirak reactor</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>1984-88</b>	<b>Iraq</b>	<b>Iranian reactors at Bushehr</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>1991</b>	<b>US and Coalition</b>	<b>Iraqi nuclear program</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>1993</b>	<b>US and Allies</b>	<b>Iraqi nuclear facilities</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>1998</b>	<b>US and Allies</b>	<b>Iraqi WMD infrastructure</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>2003</b>	<b>US and Allies</b>	<b>Iraqi WMD program and regime</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>2008</b>	<b>Israel</b>	<b>Syrian reactor at al-Kibar</b>	<b>Yes</b>

# Obstacles to Success (I)

- *Attacks have frequently failed to eliminate key targets due to inadequate intelligence.*
  - Germany (by US and allies, 1945)
  - Iraq (by Iran, 1980)
  - Iraq (by Israel, 1981)
  - Iran (by Iraq, 1984-1988)
  - Iraq (by US, 1991)
  - Iraq (by US, 2003)



# Obstacles to Success (II)

- *The nuclear knowledge base in target countries is relatively impervious to limited force.*
  - Germany
  - Iraq



“We have also learned that what we need to fear most in WMD proliferation are not pieces of metal and stocks of supplies, but intellectual capital.”

--John Bolton (2004)

# Obstacles to Success (III)

- *The cost to the attacker of using preventive force varies with scale of operation...*
  - Intra-war strikes, low cost
  - Limited strikes, low cost
  - Regime change, high costs

*...But slope is slippery*

# Obstacles to Success (IV)

- *The use of force may have an adverse effect on nuclear ambitions in the target state.*

–e.g., Iraq, 1981

“Until Israel's attack, we were only dabbling...After the Israeli attack, We embarked upon it full-heartedly. Investment and resources were heavily poured into the programme over the next 10 years.”

--Imad Khadduri, 2006





# Obstacles to Success (V)

- *Coercive diplomacy and regime change don't mix.*

“My administration is now committed to ... pursuing constructive ties among the United States, Iran and the international community. This process will not be advanced by threats.”

--Barack Obama



“If you are right that change has come, where is that change? What is the sign of that change? Make it clear for us what has changed.”

--Ali Khamenei



# Enablers of Success (I)

- *Limited political aims*
- *Short target list*
- *Confidence in intelligence*



# Enablers of Success (III)

- *International support for the use of force.*

Iraq, nuclear sites bombed, 1991



Iraq, declared sites, 1998



# **Practical Implications**

# **Strengthen the nonproliferation regime, not military capabilities**

- Prevent black market trafficking in sensitive nuclear technologies
- Tighten export control regulations
- Secure stocks of bomb-grade nuclear materials to prevent theft
- Discourage new national enrichment and reprocessing facilities
- Bolster IAEA capabilities
- Nuclear weapons states should take substantive steps to fulfill their NPT obligations

# Use force only with UNSC authorization



# **If authorization is not possible...**

...Use of force will be most effective when:

- Evidence of danger is unambiguous
- Political objectives are clear
- International support is broad
- Response is proportional to the threat
- Intervention is timely
- Assurance of cessation if compliance is forthcoming is credible

# For more information...

- Website of the Managing the Atom project:
- <http://www.managingtheatom.org>
- For regular e-mail updates from Managing the Atom, or to explore volunteer internships, write to [atom@harvard.edu](mailto:atom@harvard.edu)

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