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# Book Reviews

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By Mr. Reid Kirby

*Preventive Attack and Weapons of Mass Destruction: A Comparative Historical Analysis*, Lyle J. Goldstein, Stanford University Press, 2005.



One of the most controversial aspects in the national security strategy of the Bush administration has been the concept of preemptive war. Lyle Goldstein examines this concept using examples from the Cold War era. He correctly clarifies the concept of preemptive war as preventive war, with a perfunctory caveat that timing is the main distinguishing feature.

This book is a scholarly study that many may find difficult to read. Numerous examples of crises during the Cold War are revealed, showing several instances when war was narrowly averted.

The discussion and examples on the true nature of the Cold War and the likelihood of a nuclear conflict are interesting and thought-provoking.

Mr. Goldstein examines the policy options considered when China, Iraq, and the former Soviet Union attained nuclear weapons. The recurrent theme demonstrates that planning preventive attacks is commonplace, but execution of those attacks is almost nonexistent. In the United States, preventive war plans failed to reach maturity due to conflicts with American values, the marginal payoff potential, or other deterring factors.

Unlike Ingrid Detter's *The Law of War* and Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars*, Goldstein more or less ignores the legal and ethical arguments against preventive war. While he seems to favor the policy of the Bush administration, his study is intellectually honest and reveals some surprising results. While the moment immediately surrounding a nation's acquisition of nuclear weapons is tense and unstable, there is evidence that supports the notion that counterbalancing nuclear arsenals is stabilizing.

The term *weapons of mass destruction* is almost exclusively used to describe nuclear weapons. It is unclear if the lessons in "Preventive Attack and Weapons of Mass Destruction" are transferable or even applicable to chemical and biological weapon proliferation.

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