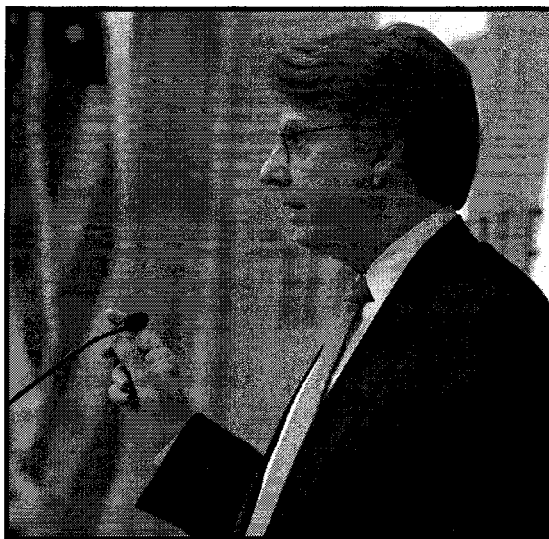

INTRODUCTION

Preemptive Use of Force: A Reassessment

Excerpted Introductory Remarks
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Just over two years ago, in September 2002, the Bush Administration published its National Security Strategy Statement. The Statement espoused a policy of forestalling or preventing threats to the United States' national security. The doctrine generated no little controversy, at home and also among the United States' European allies. In response, Secretary of State Powell suggested that the Administration's



preemption policy is in reality nothing new—the United States has long maintained the option of using armed force to stop an attack before the attack occurs. Some critics have actually agreed and argued that the real issue is not the propriety of *preemption* but the propriety of *prevention*—that the real issue is the *imminence* of the threat.

Our aim with this conference is to focus on substance rather than semantics and to consider the issue that policymakers confront in the real world: when should armed force be used to counter an emerging threat? When is it lawful to use force before an actual attack occurs? Are there “undeterrable rogue states,” in William Perry’s words—or undeterrable *non-state* actors—against whom armed force is the only realistic alternative? If so, is it productive to articulate a formal policy of preemption? Henry Kissinger has said that “it is not in the American

national interest to establish preemption as a universal principle available to every nation"; does *telling* the world that *we* will act preemptively encourage other nations to adopt a hair-trigger defense posture and make the world a more dangerous place, for ourselves and everyone else? Or, is it *possible* that a universal policy of preemption might actually *discourage* states from confronting one another and thereby engender greater *restraint* in use of force? How should policymakers deal with the empirical uncertainty that is inevitable concerning the reliability of intelligence, the relative capability of the military, the likelihood of diplomatic success, and the political consequences of preemptive action? How should policymakers resolve the central paradox of preemption—that WMD are much easier to preempt *before* they are operational, but that as the use of preemptive force is moved earlier, the capabilities and intentions of an adversary become less certain and the dangers of mistake become greater? Do the dangers of mistake counsel spreading the risk of error among multiple coalition partners? Or, is the difficulty of operational coordination and the danger of weak-kneed partners too great a price to be paid for the benefit likely to be derived? Can any of these questions actually be answered in the abstract, apart from a live, concrete crisis—and if not, what is the utility of promulgating a doctrine?

These are some of the questions—by no means all of the questions—that the distinguished participants in this conference will be addressing over the next twenty-four hours. I want to extend our thanks to each of the eminent panelists and speakers who have so generously agreed to share their time and thoughts with us. We are deeply grateful—as we are to our sponsors, and to the many Fletcher students and staff, too numerous to name, who have helped out in so many ways to make this conference possible. ■