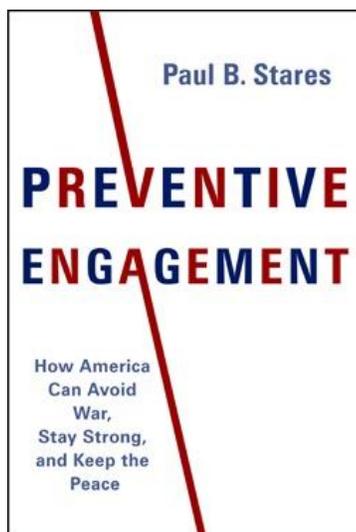


COUNCIL *on* FOREIGN RELATIONS

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Teaching Notes

Preventive Engagement: How America Can Avoid War, Stay Strong, and Keep the Peace

By **Paul B. Stares**

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Summary

As the most powerful country in the world, the United States has the greatest capacity to avert the potential unraveling of the liberal international order, and it is without question in its security and economic interests to do so. The United States, moreover, has not only the most to gain by perpetuating the liberal international order but also arguably the most to lose if it mismanages this task. As the principal guarantor of global peace and security, the United States is—like no other country—at great risk of being drawn into potentially costly military engagements to counter emerging threats to the international order.

Preventive Engagement offers a strategy for the United States to remain the preeminent global power by adopting a more forward-looking and preventive approach to managing foreign policy challenges. By harnessing elements of U.S. power, preventive engagement offers the United States a way to avoid costly conflicts that drain its resources and distract leadership from addressing pressing domestic priorities. Contrary to prescriptions that call for military reliance for the United States to defend its interests around the world—what can be broadly termed supply-side approaches—Stares proposes a comprehensive preventive strategy to reduce the demand for U.S. power.

The book provides recommendations for long-term policies that lower the general risk of conflict and instability in the world such as encouraging global trade agreements; medium-term efforts to avert crises likely to precipitate U.S. military engagement including supporting external mediation over Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea; and short-term tools like financial sanctions to react rapidly to mitigate conflicts before they escalate and increase pressure for U.S. intervention.

Read an excerpt from [*Preventive Engagement*](#).

This book is suitable for the following types of undergraduate and graduate courses:

- U.S. Foreign Policy
- Grand Strategy
- U.S. National Security
- The History of American Foreign Relations
- International Relations

Discussion Questions

Courses on U.S. Foreign Policy:

1. How does the United States identify and assess threats to its national interests?
2. What are the tools the United States can utilize to prevent conflict? What can the United States do to better prepare for unexpected national security threats?
3. How does the structure of government enable or constrain the U.S. approach to conflict prevention?
4. Should the United States adjust its approaches to conflict when global threats emerge? If so, how?
5. What challenges and opportunities does globalization pose to the exercise of U.S. preventive engagement?
6. Are international organizations like the United Nations effective partners for conflict prevention? Why or why not?

Courses on Grand Strategy:

1. What are the main strategies that are currently advocated to guide U.S. foreign and security policy? What are their advantages and disadvantages?
2. How does a strategy of preventive engagement differ from traditional approaches?
3. What are the principal preventive priorities for the United States in the long-, medium-, and short-term?
4. How should the United States best address the strategic challenges posed by China and Russia?

Courses on U.S. National Security:

1. How can the United States integrate conflict prevention into its national security or national defense strategies?
2. How can the United States better anticipate new security threats?

3. What are the benefits and pitfalls of an integrated whole-of-government approach to conflict prevention?

Courses on the History of American Foreign Relations:

1. What factors contributed to the rise of the United States as a global power in the twentieth century?
2. How has the U.S. approach to early conflict warning and conflict prevention evolved over time?
3. How did the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama conceive of the United States' role in conflict prevention?

Courses on International Relations:

1. Is the liberal international order at risk of dismantling? Why or why not?
2. What is the United States' role in preserving the current global order? What should its future role be?
3. How do international organizations like the United Nations approach conflict prevention? What are some of the barriers they face?
4. Provide instances in which states or international organizations have successfully prevented conflict. What made these efforts successful?

Further Projects

Op-Ed

Write an 800-word opinion piece that argues in favor of taking preventive action to address one of the following contingencies to advance U.S. interests:

- A nuclear war between India and Pakistan;
- Conflict between Israel and Iran; or
- Political instability in Nigeria.

Analytical Essay

Write a 1,500-word essay on one of the following prompts:

- Provide a conflict risk assessment of a potential crisis that dissects motives, means, and opportunities of relevant parties. Identify the conflict's early warning indicators, likelihood, and potential impact on U.S. interests.
- Write a preventive policy memorandum offering a deliberate strategy for preventing a specific, plausible conflict.
- Write a "lessons learned" report on the success or failure of a prevention policy for a specific conflict, deconstructing what happened and why.

Speechwriting

In a speech to the UN Security Council's open debate on "Maintenance of International Peace and Security: Conflict Prevention and Sustaining Peace" in January 2017, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres argued that conflict prevention should be a priority for all member states. Respond to his remarks as if you were the leader of another nation. Your speech may be critical, supportive, or mixed in its assessment of his speech,

relating your understanding of conflict prevention—including forecasting, risk assessment, and mitigation—to your country’s national interests and the maintenance of international order.

Supplementary Materials

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