I think the book is a useful resource for those contemplating their own place-based identifications and experiences, saturated as those inevitably are in multiple forms of mediation, and inextricable as they also are from the material, social, and ideological forces of the global culture industry.


Reviewed by Seth Kahn, West Chester University

From its onset in Fall 2002, the Bush administration’s case for attacking Iraq presented a problem many peace activists couldn’t put our collective finger on—along, of course, with several we could. There was a disjuncture, many of us pointed out, between the administration’s rationales for invading Iraq and any of the evidence they offered for doing so. At protests and vigils, that disjuncture manifested in the chant “No blood for oil,” an assertion that capital-driven imperialism was the motivating force behind the pending attack. Our chant, while cathartic and correct (at least in part), wasn’t satisfying or complete.

*Hitting First: Preventive Force in U.S. Security Strategy*, a collection of essays from scholars in rhetoric, political science, history, philosophy, and public policy, helps to clarify the problem caused by the disjuncture between the Bush administration’s public stance and the evidence by focusing its attention on the Bush administration’s conflation of “preventive” and “preemptive” war. Beginning with a document called NSS [National Security Statement] 2002, which announces the administration’s intentions to attack any nation that it decides constitutes a threat to U.S. security, contributors analyze four dimensions of the administration’s policies: the historical roots of preventive strikes; rhetorical justifications for preventive war; institutional and tactical considerations in executing preventive war; and the future of U.S. foreign policy. The book develops
and analyzes these dimensions within a complex matrix of theoretical and methodological lenses, ranging from rhetorical to policy to philosophical analysis.

It’s notable that the editors and contributors met twice during the writing of the book. The result of this collaboration isn’t so much unified thinking on the topic (although there’s little visible disagreement among contributors) as much as conceptual and structural clarity. In their meetings, participants in the study agreed on meanings and uses of core terms and, just as significantly, exchanged drafts and ideas in order to minimize working at cross-purposes. The result is a collection that addresses both the theoretical and practical problems with preventive war from several disciplinary and political grounds.

The multidisciplinary perspectives and analyses add up, in the end, to a very rich consideration of the problems with a foreign policy rooted in preventive force. While the editors frame the study with the Bush administration’s NSS 2002 document, the administration is not the primary target. Instead, the contributors—taken as a whole—content that preventive war strategy has a long, often unsuccessful, and politically-motivated history; that is to say, the current administration didn’t think of this themselves, nor is it the first administration to articulate the policy. On the other hand, the historical evidence in the book reveals that many of the key players in the administration have been working towards establishing a preventive war doctrine for decades.

At the nexus of these historical trajectories, readers who already blame the administration for pursuing an illegal and unjust policy (one of whom is me) will find their positions both affirmed and complicated. Readers who are more concerned with theoretical questions about war and foreign policy will find a wealth of concrete data to test or extend their theories. Readers who were persuaded by the administration’s rhetorical stances prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq will find astute analyses of ways the administration cultivated favorable data from the intelligence community and constructed public perception of Saddam Hussein’s threat to the U.S.

The opening chapter, “Preemption, Prevention, Prevarication,” introduces the key terms and concepts that organize the study. Drawing from both U.S. and international law, William W. Keller and Gordon R.
Mitchell distinguish the terms “preemption” and “prevention” as follows: preemption is a response to an imminent threat of attack, while prevention is a response to a less direct, potential threat. Certainly, the threshold that separates imminent from potential is unclear; rather than attempting to clarify the distinction, however, Keller and Mitchell argue that the Bush administration has capitalized on this problem in order to advance an aggressive foreign policy agenda. More specifically, they invoke the notion of “policy entrepreneurship” to argue that the neoconservative wing of the administration took the tragedy of September 11, 2001, as an opportunity to assert a growing threat of terrorism coming from Iraq.

At the same time, Keller, Mitchell, and their contributors are very careful to map out the historical roots and precedents for this administration’s actions; the effect of this move is to keep the tone of the book from becoming too accusatory or vitriolic. Two chapters, “The Curious Case of Kofi Annan, George W. Bush, and the ‘Preemptive’ Military Force Doctrine” and “By ‘Any Measures’ Necessary,” situate current policy in different historical contexts. In “The Curious Case of Kofi Annan,” political scientist Simon Reich argues that the U.S. preventive first-strike stance is enabled by United Nations policy that has redefined sovereignty. Traditionally referring to “the rights of states” (52), U.N. peacekeeping interventions in Africa through the 1980s and 1990s, according to Reich, enabled a new definition of sovereignty, what he calls “sovereignty as responsibility” (59), under which other nations can intervene on the grounds that governments aren’t protecting their own people well enough. Reich’s conclusion is that while this notion emerges from peacekeeping, members of the Bush administration (through a complicated genealogy) began applying this new definition to more imperial forms of intervention, most obviously in Iraq and Afghanistan. In other words, Reich contends, the very issues that have driven a wedge between the U.S. and the U.N. result from U.N. policy, and more significantly, the U.S. uses U.N. policy to justify actions that the U.N. stands against.

“By ‘Any Measures’ Necessary,” by communication studies scholars Gordon R. Mitchell and Robert P. Newman, focuses less specifically on the strategy of preventive strikes and more on the doctrine’s rhetorical
construction and use. Like Reich, Mitchell and Newman ground their analysis in a specific historical trajectory: the doctrine of containment articulated in a document called NSC-68, the Truman administration's report on the state of worldwide Communist threats, issued in 1950. In terms of current preventive first-strike doctrine, NSC-68's impacts are two-fold. First, the document introduced (and hence has propagated) the kind of melodramatic language of fear that has marked the Bush administration's foreign policy justifications since September 11, 2001. Second, following from this marketing of fear, NSC-68's authors and primary advocates convinced a second generation of war planners and intelligence analysts to rethink the role of intelligence-gathering in strategic and tactical planning. Mitchell and Newman describe at length a 1970s project, strongly informed by NSC-68 and its aftermath—the "Team B exercise in 'competitive intelligence analysis'" (78)—in which a team of CIA analysts and a team of academics and think-tank members worked through simulations involving Soviet threats against the U.S. and its allies.

Careful readers of news over the last several years will recognize some names (for example, Richard Perle and Paul Wolfowitz) from among the list of the Team B architects and participants and will therefore recognize them also as key members of the current administration’s Iraq policy planners. More than simply establishing the historical linkage between Team B and Iraq, Mitchell and Newman detail the rhetorical stance enabled by the exercise's emphasis on worst-case scenarios instead of available evidence; many of us refer to this stance as "fear mongering." Likewise, by tracing this rhetorical stance to its Cold War origins, the authors contend that the administration's WMD arguments justifying the invasion were persuasive because they piggybacked so neatly onto more than fifty years of fear of nuclear annihilation.

As a rhetorician, I find the emphasis on persuasive tactics in these chapters (and three others I'm not detailing here) very interesting for the histories and motives they expose. What these chapters don't address directly, though, is why the administration has had to work so hard to justify its position. Certainly, history and international law have frowned upon preventive war; however, if the administration is correct that the "war on terrorism" justifies new thinking about the legitimacy of first-
strike strategy, then we have to consider questions about the efficacy of the strategy as well as its theoretical and legal status. Three chapters that consider preventive strikes in strategic and policy terms address this need.

Political scientist Dan Reiter’s “Preventive Attacks against Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical [NBC] Weapons Programs” examines twenty-four concrete instances of preventive attacks against unconventional weapons programs; he focuses on strikes against NBC programs because the original Bush administration justification for invading Iraq centered on their acquisition and distribution of “WMD’s” (a term the book rejects, choosing instead to name specifically the types of weapons the authors discuss at any given moment). He finds, briefly, that of twenty preventive strikes that were “limited” (that is, directed specifically at weapons production facilities), all failed to substantially delay or end programs, and that of four “regime change” strikes (strikes directed at toppling governments developing weapons programs), two worked and two (Afghanistan and Iraq) are uncertain. He also finds that the regime-change strikes, whether successful or not, have all come at extremely high costs in financial, material, and international-relations terms. In sum, even when preventive strikes are successful in the short term, there’s no evidence whatsoever that they accomplish useful long-term goals that outweigh their consequences.

Former State Department official Greg Thielmann’s “Intelligence in Preventive Military Strategy” takes up the question of how the intelligence community (IC) would need to function in order to make preventive strategy work well, and he contends that the gap between intelligence data and the threat-management tactics that justify the doctrine can never be filled adequately:

Intelligence does not need to be infallible to be valuable, but neither should it be pushed beyond its natural limits. For intelligence analysts to overstate their confidence level is to set up the policy-maker for disaster, and for the political leadership to exaggerate the precision of estimates is to break trust with the public. (156)

Thielmann examines several instances, beginning with Pearl Harbor, that have motivated analysts and policymakers to exaggerate (or at least overestimate) threats based on inadequate data.
The introduction of "non-state actors" (so-called "terrorist organizations") into the equation has only amplified this problem. Now, policymakers and strategists have to contend with threats that are less easily defined and hence more difficult to predict, much less respond to. Taken together with the shifting terrain of sovereignty that Reich describes, the administration tells us, the United States has to protect both its own citizens and the citizens of other nations from enemies who are nearly impossible to analyze and organize responses to. And it has to do so with intelligence that's inevitably insufficient for the task. As Thielmann puts it, "Preventive war is not a feasible formula for addressing the urgent security challenges facing the nation, because it unleashes problems even worse than those it is intended to remedy" (174).

The problem of insufficient intelligence is only part of the story. International relations and strategic research scholar Peter Dombrowski describes, in "Military Capabilities in Preventive Military Strategy," what a functional first-strike military force would require. His expertise in the area is on full display in the chapter, as he accounts for troop counts, armaments, budgetary issues, and deployment logistics across a range of strategic possibilities (different kinds of strikes for different purposes, against different kinds of targets, in different kinds of countries). It's possible that as a rhetorician and a peacenik I'm simply overwhelmed by the quantity of numerical data in his piece. However, when he contrasts his projection for the capabilities necessary to enforce preventive doctrine with the current (or even currently imaginable) capabilities of the U.S. military, it's very clear that Dombrowski doesn't see prevention as a viable option.

That conclusion should come as no surprise within the context of the book's project. If Reiter is right that preventive strikes have never worked; if Reich, Mitchell and Newman, G. Thomas Goodnight, Rodger A. Payne, and Tom Rockmore are correct that the administration's attempts to persuade the public that preventive war is justifiable are—at best—far removed from reality; if Thielmann and Dombrowski are right that our current intelligence and military capabilities can't actually sustain the doctrine, then why are we still talking about this?

Rather than answering that question (the editors don't explain why, but I have to imagine that it has something to do with how unsatisfying
the answers would be), the final section of the book, entitled “Outlook,” turns to the future of preventive war. William Hartung, Director of the New School for Social Research’s Arms Trade Resource Center, argues that a more effective foreign policy would emerge from what he terms “preventive diplomacy.” The details of preventive diplomacy are just what most people would imagine—leaving military intervention as the last resort; enacting legal, economic, and diplomatic pressures on enemies; and so on. In short, there’s not much new in the proposal. The real value of Hartung’s chapter is in his analysis of whether the situation in Iraq is unique or whether it signifies the failure of preventive doctrine writ large. His short answer is:

Perhaps the most important contribution of the Iraqi case to the discussion of preventive war is as a cautionary tale. It is a reminder that there are cases when, contrary to the Bush administration’s mantra, the costs of military action can be considerably higher than the costs of pursuing the same objective using other tools (or what Bush officials refer to as “inaction”). (228)

As he develops the claim, it becomes quite clear that he sees the doctrine as untenable. Each cost he examines—financial, political, and ethical—is, in his estimation, too high to be sustainable.

Where Hartung focuses his analysis on the policy horizon, co-editors Keller and Mitchell use the final chapter to focus on discursive and rhetorical responses to preventive war doctrine. They offer up three “Dialogue Strategies” designed to ensure that the United States doesn’t repeat the errors of Iraq: “Shake the Tree for Unpicked Cherries” (250–52); “Cast a Pebble into the Pond” (252–56); and “Only Fools Rush In” (256–59). The proposed strategies call on citizens and policymakers to interrogate the intelligence community and war planners during the deliberative stages before a preventive strike. Ironically, as Keller and Mitchell point out in their introduction, a strategy of prevention actually enables these interrogations to the extent that threats are distant (in both space and time), whereas preemptive military action occurs in response to imminent danger. That is, the very time lag that makes prevention problematic in ethical and political terms, and difficult to manage in intelligence-community and
military terms, leaves open the possibility for undercutting it before it can go wrong.

I'd love to believe that the November 2006 elections and resignation of Donald Rumsfeld rendered this book less crucial and timely than it was before. Unfortunately, that's not the case. *Hitting First* makes a clear and convincing argument that both the rhetorics and policies of preventive war strategy are long-term concerns. The book also makes a strong case that preventive war has little history and future chance of success. Finally, it's important to recognize the relationships among the disciplines and discourses in the project. The rhetorical analyses in the text neither dominate nor are dominated by the analyses emerging from other fields. Instead, the strengths of each discipline's discourse speak clearly, and the weaknesses of each are addressed by the others. Along with the strengths of its content and conceptual work, this collection should interest rhetoricians who want to see our work speaking with other fields rather than to or about them.

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Reviewed by Joyce Irene Middleton, East Carolina University

I was happy to discover a new book-length publication on African-American "orality," a theoretical term that is often a problematic one for analyzing "minority" and "feminist" discourses. Not only does DoVeanna S. Fulton claim this important modern concept for her study in *Speaking Power: Black Feminist Orality in Women's Narratives of Slavery*, but she also carefully builds her case for rejecting other possible word choices (for example, "oral discourse," "oral literacy," "oracy," or even "oral tradition") in her introduction. She decides on the term "orality," building on a 1992 essay (in *The Culture of Sentiment*) by African-American poet-