To prevent war it is important to criticize wrong policies—such as bombing civilians to end terrorism— but this is not enough. We must also propose alternatives. The following analogy suggests a better way.

Few of us are in a position to make daily decisions about national security, but we are all familiar with another environment prone to conflict, which is road traffic. Let's compare the two.

Until about 1880, there were no traffic laws. Whoever was more aggressive crossed an intersection first, as pedestrians still do on sidewalks. But with the invention of motor vehicles, collisions became more dangerous, and something had to be done.

The solution was to create traffic laws:
- We observe certain rules, such as driving on the right (or left in some countries), stopping at red lights and obeying speed limits.
- We drive more carefully than the law requires, to avoid accidents even if others make mistakes.
- We undertake a course of study to learn to drive and must pass a test before obtaining a license.
- We build safe roads, wide enough for two vehicles to pass, with fences along cliffs, etc.

All these measures improve the common safety of everyone, not only our safety at the expense of others. Though accidents still happen when these rules are violated, it is clear that without rules we would be much worse off.

Nuclear weapons have now made war far too dangerous. To wait until war breaks out and then to react with military force is comparable to driving a car with closed eyes until we hit something and then reacting, instead of looking ahead to avoid dangers.

Similarly, we must now pursue an active peace policy that seeks to avoid or resolve conflicts long before they lead to war. What would a security policy based on analogous principles look like?

First, we would observe international law and cooperate with other nations to strengthen it. The United States' refusal to accept jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court sets a bad example for others and makes the world more dangerous.

Even if others violate the law, it is not in our interest to do the same. Even if others run red lights, it does not help us to imitate their folly.

Some argue that international law restricts our sovereignty and freedom. But only by adhering to certain mutually beneficial norms can we gain better control over our destiny. Clearly, traffic laws restrict our freedom to drive zigzag, but give us the more important freedom to reach our destination safely and on time.

Second, a country should avoid provocative behavior. Some Americans wonder why the Iraqis are not more grateful to the United States for trying to convert their country into an image of the United States. But Americans
would hardly appreciate it if Iraq invaded the United States and tried to convert it into a God-fearing Islamic Republic.

Third, it is ironic that anyone must pass a driving test before being allowed to drive a car, but before taking control of the nuclear arsenal, a President only needs to pledge to defend the constitution. Would we issue a driver's license to anyone based on a pledge to drive safely?

Of course, being elected is a kind of test, but more a test of popularity than competence. Imagine a group of air travelers choosing the most popular among them to be their pilot. This could be a prescription for disaster. Like controlling an airplane, defusing international conflicts is a skill that can be taught and learned. Good intentions alone are not sufficient. We would not allow our own mothers to perform open-heart surgery on us, even though there is no doubt that she has the best intentions. What would traffic look like if we applied the same principles that now guide our national security policies?

"Flexible response," still NATO's official doctrine, threatens the first use of nuclear weapons against a conventional attack. This is as if we loaded our car with dynamite, wired to explode on impact, to kill anyone hitting us (and ourselves too). This should indeed deter others from hitting us intentionally, but the slightest accidental collision would mean our end.

Proponents of "preventive war" advocate destroying the forces of an opponent before he can use them, if war appears imminent. That would be like mounting a machine gun on our car, threatening to kill anyone who drove dangerously close to us. Others of course would be tempted to get an even bigger gun and, if in doubt, kill us before we could kill them.

"Star Wars" and other space-based weapons and defense systems are no solution either. They are like driving over a cliff assiduously wearing a safety belt.

Some argue that we will have to live with nuclear weapons as long as civilization exists, because they cannot be un-invented. We have not un-invented cannibalism either, but we abhor it. Can't we learn to abhor equally the thought of incinerating our planet?

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