

## **Ted Hopf, “Polarity, The Offense Defense Balance, and War.”**

Waltz’s 1979 Theory of International Politics portrays the threat of war as a function solely of the number of poles in the international system: a bipolar world will be stable, but a multipolar one, with its jostling for allies, will not. Waltz’s analysis, however, is based solely on the Cold War era. Using a definition of “stability” somewhat expanded from Waltz’s, Hopf applies Waltz’s theory to early Renaissance Europe to determine its broader applicability. For comparative purposes, Hopf presents a theory of “offense-defense balance,” which takes into account not only each state’s cumulative power resources, but also the relative advantage of offensive vs. defensive positions (both tactical and strategic), and the beliefs of the élites of the various powers.

In order to test Waltz’s theory, the definition of a pole must be determined. Generally following Waltz’s system of classification, Hopf concludes that Europe was multipolar from 1495-1521, but bipolar (with the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires as its poles) from 1521-1559. As to his own criteria, he claims for the 1495-1525 period tactical offensive but strategic defensive advantage; makes no assertions about the ease of relative power cumulation during this period; and concludes on the basis of a few tenuous reports that strategic belief favored the offensive. After 1525, Hopf sees some change, but only at the margins. Therefore, his offense-defense balance theory predicts little change in the amount of conflict in the system, while the shift in patterns of polarity predicts a significant decrease.

Hopf finds only an insignificant difference between the two periods in terms of levels of warfare; further, Waltz’s theory also fails to predict the patterns of alliance formation during the multipolar period. This case also trips up the Christensen-Snyder theory of offensive domination leading to “chain-ganging” of allies. In the light of these theory failures, Hopf suggests that the offense-defense balance hypothesis, though not yet scientifically tested, applies to the Cold War as well, and suggests that it provides a more viable explanation of world politics overall.