

Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

Ch. 6 Offense, Defense, and the Security Dilemma

- Hypothesis 5: War is more likely when conquest is easy.
- this is offense-defense theory, and Van Evera claims that it is “the most powerful and most useful Realist theory on the causes of war.” [117]
- defining offense/defense
 - “offense dominant” means that conquest is fairly easy
 - “defense dominant” means that conquest is very difficult
 - “Military technology and doctrine, geography, national social structure, and diplomatic arrangements (specifically, defensive alliances and balancing behavior by offshore powers) all matter. The net offense-defense balance is an aggregate of these military, geographic, social, and diplomatic factors.” (122)
- Van Evera lists 11 ways in which the offense/defense balance affects the decision to go to war
- the chapter is quite clear on why offense dominance causes war; see pp. 123-151

- there is a short section that discusses how offense dominance may cause peace:
 - “Symmetrical offense dominance—a situation where both sides have strong offensive capabilities—is always more dangerous than symmetrical defense dominance, other things being equal. Asymmetrical possession of offensive capabilities by one of two adversaries, however, can sometimes reduce the risk of war. Specifically, the possession of offensive capabilities by a status quo power that faces an aggressor state can lower the risk of war under eight conditions.” (152)
- these factors include: offense can defend allies that cannot be defended by other means; the “aggressor” knows that balancing coalitions are forming; the “aggressor” knows that the status quo power, which is offense dominant, is benign; the offensive force can only attack the potential attacker; the aggressor cannot “cut the noose”; when the aggressor cannot be deterred by lesser punishment; conquest can lead to domestic regime change or mitigate the harmful international effects of the aggressive state; and offense can end or limit war.

CAUSES of Offense-Defense Balance

- this is an important section because it clarifies the meaning of the “offense-defense balance” and provides some guidance on how to think about the otherwise difficult term.
- 1. Military Factors
 - Technology and doctrine
 - technology may favour the offense or the defense
 - doctrine must also be considered; in WWII, doctrine was much more important than technology
 - Military Force Posture, Deployment, and Wartime Operations
 - military posture and force deployments can affect O/D balance
- 2. Geography
 - conquest harder when geography insulates states from invasion

-Israel is a good example of how geography affects a state's response to threats

3. Social and Political Order

-“popular regimes” are better at conquest and self-defense (probably true historically)
“Popularity of regime probably aided offense before roughly 1800 but aided defense since then.” (164)

4. Diplomatic Factors

-three things strengthen the defensive: collective security systems, defensive alliances, and balancing behaviour by neutral states
-it is important to think of balancing versus bandwagoning. If states tend to bandwagon, that gives the system a more offensive tint-states that are aggressive in the system would tend to be rewarded (although this is a confusing application of aggression and power).
See Morgenthau on revisionist states and balancing

OFFENSE-DEFENSE THEORY

-there are three theoretical predictions:

1. War will be more common in period when conquest is easy, or is believed easy, than in other periods.
2. States that have, or believe they have, large offensive opportunities or defensive vulnerabilities will initiate and fight more wars than other states.
3. A given state will initiate and fight more wars in periods when it has, or believes it has, larger offensive opportunities and defensive vulnerabilities.

[all on pg. 166]

-Van Evera “tests” this theory for a variety of historical time periods and epochs.

-he ends by claiming that O/D theory is very important to understanding the causes of war; perceived offense dominance is a “pervasive” problem in the international system.

-Van Evera also ends with a note against “defensive” realists:

“Security motives for war are in fact ubiquitous. The search for security played a role—sometimes minor, often major—in triggering the vast majority of ancient and modern wars where the motives of the belligerents are known. Often both defenders and aggressors were driven by security concerns; aggressors expanded to gain security, while defenders refused to concede in order to preserve their security.” (185)

“perceptions of insecurity are pervasive in international affairs, and the search for security is a pervasive motive for war.” (189)

O/D is a good theory: it has “large importance,” “wide explanatory range”; “wide real-world applicability.” It also has large “prescriptive utility.”