

Gov. 2710, Wk. 10, Van Evera – Offense, Defense, and the Security Dilemma (Ch. 6, pp. 117-151)

Hypothesis 5: War is more likely when conquest is easy, or rather, when governments believe conquest is easy. (NB. Offense dominance is historically rare, but perceptions of such are common.)

Eleven War-Causing Effects of (Perceptions of) Offense Dominance:

1. States often pursue opportunistic expansion because, w/OD, attempts at expansion succeed more often and pay greater rewards. There is potential for great gains at low cost.
2. States more often pursue defensive expansion: They feel less secure in an offense-dominant world and so want to shore up their borders and preventively weaken strong potential adversaries. They are aggressors as they expect others to be aggressors. (NB. Van Evera says most of modern Europe's great wars were fueled by security-driven expansionism.)
3. Their greater insecurity drives states to resist others' expansion more fiercely and violently, especially as resources are more cumulative when conquest is easy. This approach makes disputes more intractable.
4. First-move advantages are greater, because: (i) more territory can be overrun/defended with any material advantage that first strike provides w/OD, (ii) a first strike can disrupt the other's mobilization plans. This creates the risk of preemptive war and other dangers, because: (i) states are even more likely to be secretive to hide their surprise plans, and will correspondingly be more jumpy about surprise attacks, (ii) states may compensate for this insecurity by adopting hair-trigger first-strike military doctrine.
5. Windows of opportunity/vulnerability (depending on which side you're on) are larger w/OD because: (I) a shift in the relative size of national forces causes a larger shift in relative national power, (ii) if a state is in a period of decline, using force offers a more effective LR remedy than peaceful build-up (iii) OD fosters secrecy and arms-racing, states are more likely to misjudge another state's power to open fleeting gaps favoring overreacting states. All of these create the risk of preventive wars as states are more likely to use force to shut them.
6. States more often adopt *fait accompli* diplomatic tactics (in which another side moves w/out warning, often on the decision of a small group and without much open scrutiny, to a position from which it can't really retreat without losing face). When security is scarce (because of OD), winning disputes is more important than avoiding war (which is more structurally likely anyway). Such tactics more often trigger war because a successful *fait accompli* can confer more resources and power, and knowledge of this makes threatened states fight back more hastily and more strongly.
7. States negotiate less readily and cooperatively. Negotiations fail more often and disputes fester unresolved because (i) cheating pays larger rewards w/OD, (ii) because relative power matters more, agreements have to be very finely tuned, (iii) verification of compliance w/agreements is more necessary but also more difficult.

8. States (and even state bureaucracies, such as the general staff) are highly secretive about foreign and security policy because an information advantage confers more rewards. Secrecy raises the risk of military miscalculation and political blunders because: (i) it causes false optimism, (ii) first-move advantages are greater, (iii) states' reactions to others' military buildups are delayed, (iv) it promotes diplomatic *faits accomplis*, 7 above, (v) it causes deterrence failure because states conceal their war plans and 'leave others unaware of their shape until after the state is overcommitted to elements of a plan that are *casus belli* for the others,' (vi) secrecy can lead state A to unknowingly trigger state B's war plans, (vii) secrecy promotes arms racing, causing windows and false optimism, (viii) secrecy inhibits arms control agreements by impeding verification measures, (ix) secrecy narrows the circle of experts consulted on national policy and so raises the chance for blunders.
9. States react faster and more belligerently to others' moves as they may present larger threats, making blunders more dangerous.
10. Arms racing is faster and harder to control, raising the risk of preventive wars of false optimism. States have eight incentives to build larger forces w/OD: (I) resources are more cumulative, (ii) self-defense is more difficult, (iii) states are more expectant of war, (iv) the early phase of war is more decisive, (v) states transfer resources from defense to offense as the latter is more effective, and this provokes counter-build-up, (vi) as others are more secretive, states 'rationally over-arm' to prepare for worst-case scenarios, (vii) arms are hard to keep in check as negotiations are hard to make, (viii) national militaries have more influence due to secrecy, and group politics kick in.
11. Offense-dominance is self-reinforcing and self-exporting (as is defense-dominance). As conquest grows easier, states adopt policies (i.e. offensive military doctrines) that make conquest still easier, in part due to strong military and political currents, and this magnifies the above 10 effects.

But... Whether or not offensive capabilities are dangerous depends on whether or not states are status quo power. One-sided offensive capabilities held by a status-quo power may offer a strong deterrent to potential aggressors.