

Offense-defense theory argues that the character of international politics is influenced by whether offensive military operations are easy or difficult. When offensive operations have the advantage over defensive operations, the theory suggests that war and conflict will become more likely; when defensive operations have the advantage, peace and cooperation are more likely. Most offense-defense theorists describe the relative efficacy of offense and defense as the offense-defense balance. This balance may change as new technologies emerge and are applied to military operations. Some offense-defense theorists argue that a broader set of political, economic, and social factors also influence whether the offense-defense balance favors offense or defense.

Although earlier writers developed rudimentary elements of offense-defense theory, the theory in its present form is largely the result of scholarship published since the late 1970s. During the 1980s and 1990s, several major books and articles elaborated, refined, and applied offense-defense theory. At the same time, critics published objections to offense-defense theory, and a vigorous debate emerged.¹

Offense-defense theory has been used to explain many aspects of international politics and foreign policy. The most general prediction of the theory is that international conflict and war are more likely when offense has the advantage, while peace and cooperation are more probable when defense has the advantage. The theory thus has been used to explain the propensity for war (or peace) in various international systems, ranging from ancient China to Europe in the 19th century. Variants of offense-defense theory also have been used to explain important issues in security studies, including alliance formation, grand strategy and military doctrine, arms racing, the international consequences of revolutions, deterrence and nuclear strategy, and escalation. The theory also has been used to explain specific events, such as the outbreak of World War I and the conflicts that erupted in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

The basic elements of offense-defense theory have been invoked or endorsed by many scholars who have not participated in its development and initial applications. For example, Kenneth Waltz writes that “Weapons and strategies

1. For an overview of this literature, see the suggestions for further reading at the end of this volume.

that make defense and deterrence easier, and offensive strikes harder to mount, decrease the likelihood of war."² Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin argue that the importance of relative gains "is *conditional* on factors such as . . . whether military advantage favors offense or defense."³

The theory also has made important contributions to more general theories of international politics. The different variants of offense-defense theory should be classified as structural-realist (or neorealist) theories. Offense-defense theory resolves many problems in the standard neorealist theory of Kenneth Waltz and enhances its explanatory range and power.

Offense-defense theories share the basic assumptions and approach of structural realism, as Charles Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann point out in their contribution to this volume. Like other structural theories, they focus on the international incentives and constraints that states face as they pursue their goals—which often require the threat or use of military capabilities. They share the main assumptions of other structural realist theories: states seek to maximize their security by employing self-help strategies in an anarchic world.⁴

Offense-defense theory offers several important theoretical contributions to structural realism. It enables realism to explain a wider range of behavior than can be explained by changes in the distribution of power alone. Unlike structural-realist theories that argue that the international distribution of power is the only important element of international structure, offense-defense theories contend that other factors, particularly the offense-defense balance, are important determinants of state behavior. The most parsimonious versions of structural-realist theory offer very general predictions on the basis of changes in the aggregate distribution of capabilities. Waltz's argument that war is more likely

2. Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory," in Robert I. Rotberg and Theodore K. Rabb, eds., *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 50. See also Waltz, "Toward Nuclear Peace," in Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, eds., *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, 4th ed. (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1993), pp. 528–529, 555.

3. Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin, "The Promise of Institutional Theory," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Summer 1995), p. 44. Emphasis in original. See also Charles Lipson, "International Cooperation in Economic and Security Affairs," *World Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (October 1984), pp. 15–16.

4. Lists of the assumptions of structural realism vary slightly, but these assumptions are prominent and widespread. See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979); Joseph M. Grieco, *Cooperation Among Nations: Europe, America, and Non-Tariff Barriers to Trade* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990); Robert O. Keohane, "Realism, Neorealism and the Study of World Politics," in Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 1–26; and John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. 30–32.

in multipolar systems and less likely under bipolarity is the most prominent prediction. Integrating the offense-defense balance into structural realism makes it possible to explain and predict particular wars.⁵

Adding the offense-defense balance to structural-realist theories also enables structural realism to identify the conditions under which peace and cooperation become more likely, thereby countering the pessimism of many realist theories and removing the need to use nonrealist theories to explain such outcomes. Traditionally, realists have been regarded as pessimists who depict international politics as an unending cycle of conflict, hostility, and war. This image of realism now applies only to offensive realists, who generally argue that the international system fosters conflict and aggression.⁶ Security is scarce, making international competition and war likely. Rational states often are compelled to adopt offensive strategies in their search for security.⁷ On the other hand, defensive realists—many of whom embrace offense-defense theory—argue that the international system does not necessarily generate intense conflict and war, and that defensive strategies are often the best route to security.⁸

Proponents of offense-defense theory also suggest that the theory has much relevance to security policy. First, some advocates of the theory claim that it

5. Stephen Van Evera calls the offense-defense balance and other related variables the “fine-grained structure of power” and argues that “Realism becomes far stronger when it includes these fine-grained structures and perceptions of them.” Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 256.

6. For explications of the differences between offensive realists, defensive realists, and neoliberals, see Robert Jervis, “Realism, Neoliberalism, and Cooperation: Understanding the Debate,” *International Security*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 42–63; Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 11–12; Sean M. Lynn-Jones and Steven E. Miller, “Preface,” in Michael E. Brown, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller, eds., *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), pp. ix–xiii; Benjamin Frankel, “Restating the Realist Case: An Introduction,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring 1996), pp. xiv–xx; Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); Sean M. Lynn-Jones, “Realism and America’s Rise: A Review Essay,” *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Fall 1998), pp. 157–182; and Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (October 1998), pp. 144–172.

7. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* is the most definitive statement of offensive realism.

8. Van Evera, *Causes of War* is often regarded as the clearest statement of defensive realism. For an explicit discussion of the connection between offense-defense theory and a more optimistic version of realist theory, see Charles L. Glaser, “Realists as Optimists: Cooperation as Self-Help,” *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 50–90. For a defense of defensive realism, see Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, “Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited,” *International Security*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Winter 2000/01), pp. 128–161.

provides a basis for unilateral or multilateral efforts to control weapons that make offense easier.⁹ Limiting or banning such weapons might reduce international tensions and the risk of war. This aspiration was central to some of the earliest writings on offense and defense in international politics. The 1932 World Disarmament Conference unsuccessfully attempted to limit or prohibit “offensive” weapons. During the 1980s, West European proponents of non-offensive defense who argued that NATO and the Warsaw Pact should limit themselves to defensive weapons and doctrines embraced this idea.¹⁰ To some extent, both superpowers adopted aspects of this approach. The Soviet Union under Gorbachev attempted to reduce tensions with the West by proclaiming that it had adopted a defensive military doctrine. In the negotiations on Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE), NATO sought to limit weapons with offensive capabilities. Even if it was hard to define which weapons were offensive, some (e.g., bridging equipment) would only be useful for offensive action.¹¹ Limitations on offensive potential can be pursued multilaterally or unilaterally. States might attempt to limit offensive weapons through negotiated agreements with other states, or they might unilaterally adopt defensive postures to signal their benign intent and reduce tensions.

Second, even if offense-defense theory does not offer a basis for multilateral or unilateral arms control, the theory might be used to reduce the likelihood of war. If defense has an advantage—particularly if that advantage is large—states that understand this fact are likely to conclude that war is unprofitable. In practice, however, states often exaggerate the strength of offense. Offense-defense theory might therefore reduce the likelihood of war by offering accurate assessments of the offense-defense balance and correcting these misperceptions.

Third, offense-defense theory could be used to guide military policies. If it is

9. It is often difficult to classify weapons as offensive or defensive and offense-defense theory does not depend on this distinction. Thus the idea of controlling offensive weapons may not be completely consistent with offense-defense theory. In fact, not all proponents of offense-defense theory are strong advocates of arms control. Nevertheless, the basic notion of reducing the risk of war by reducing the prospects for offensive action is compatible with the main thrust of offense-defense theory.

10. For overviews of nonoffensive defense, see Bjørn Møller, *Common Security and Nonoffensive Defense* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1992); and Stephen J. Flanagan, “Nonprovocative and Civilian-Based Defenses,” in Joseph S. Nye Jr., Graham T. Allison, and Albert Carnesale, eds., *Fateful Visions: Avoiding Nuclear Catastrophe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Ballinger, 1988), pp. 93–109.

11. I am indebted to George Quester for reminding me of the virtually unambiguous offensive character of bridging equipment, which is mainly useful for enabling attacking forces to cross rivers inside enemy territory.

possible to assess the offense-defense balance, the results of such assessments could be used to help states adopt optimal military postures. For example, the existence of a large defensive advantage might imply that a given state should avoid offensive action unless it has a very large advantage in capabilities. At the very least, awareness of the offense-defense balance would enable states to avoid gross blunders, such as being overly confident of fighting a successful defensive war when offense is relatively strong. Recently, many analysts have claimed that a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) has tilted the offense-defense balance back toward offense. Although other analysts question this conclusion, it is a prime contemporary example of how an element of offense-defense theory can influence defense and military policy.¹²

Critics and skeptics argue that offense-defense theory is far less promising than its proponents claim. The standard litany of criticisms includes the arguments that weapons cannot be classified as offensive or defensive, that states fail to perceive the offense-defense balance correctly, that other variables may be more important than the offense-defense balance, that offense-defense theory explains little because the offense-defense balance always favors the defense, and that states manipulate the offense-defense balance to create offensive and defensive advantages to serve their strategic goals.¹³

More recent criticisms argue that some of the most prominent attempts to define the offense-defense balance are seriously flawed. For example, several critics have suggested that Stephen Van Evera's broad definition of the offense-defense balance, which includes technological, doctrinal, geographical, domestic, and diplomatic factors, is an inadequate basis for further research.¹⁴ They have suggested that this definition includes too many variables, thereby conflating the offense-defense balance with other factors and making it impossible to measure, and that its primary prediction—that war is more likely when conquest is easy—becomes tautological.¹⁵ The alternative definition of the offense-defense balance offered by Kaufmann and Glaser has been criticized on

12. For a skeptical view of the RMA, see Stephen Biddle, "Victory Misunderstood: What the Gulf War Tells Us about the Future of Conflict," *International Security*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Fall 1996), pp. 139–179.

13. In addition to the relevant essays in this volume, many seminal works that criticize offense-defense theory are listed in the suggestions for further reading at the end of the book.

14. Van Evera suggests that the offense-defense balance is synonymous with "the feasibility of conquest." For Van Evera's definition and list of the factors that determine the offense-defense balance, see his "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War" in this volume and Van Evera, *Causes of War*, pp. 160–166.

15. See the contributions of Betts, Lieber, Davis, Goddard, and Finel in this volume.

the grounds that it ignores interaction effects in warfare and conflates the offense-defense balance with other variables, such as power and skill.¹⁶

Other critics argue that offense-defense theory lacks empirical support. They have attempted to test whether various definitions of the offense-defense balance can explain the outcomes of battles and the frequency of wars—the most important predictions of the theory—and have concluded that offense-defense theory fails these tests.¹⁷

The debate over offense-defense theory has raged for over two decades, but proponents and critics often have talked past one another. Reading the literature, one gets the sense that proponents of offense-defense theory regard it as an established theory that should take its place alongside deterrence theory, balance-of-power theory, and other major theories in international security studies. The writings of the critics, on the other hand, give the impression that offense-defense theory is dead or dying, and convey a sense of surprise and bewilderment that the theory has any advocates at all. This volume collects important essays that have developed and challenged offense-defense theory so that readers will have an opportunity to understand and assess the debate.¹⁸

The first two essays in this volume present the foundations of modern offense-defense theory. In “Cooperation under the Security Dilemma,” Robert Jervis develops many of the basic concepts and insights that have inspired subsequent scholarship on offense and defense in international relations.¹⁹ Jervis argues that the security dilemma makes it difficult for states to cooperate in international politics. In the absence of a common sovereign and any assurances of the benign intentions of other states, states frequently attempt to expand their control and influence over resources or land outside their own territory.

16. See the contributions from Finel and Goddard, and the reply from Kaufmann and Glaser, in this volume.

17. In addition to Keir Lieber’s essay in this volume, see James D. Fearon, “The Offense-Defense Balance and War Since 1648,” paper prepared for the 1995 annual convention of the International Studies Association, Chicago, Illinois, February 21–25, 1995; and Stephen D. Biddle, “Rebuilding the Foundations of Offense-Defense Theory,” *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (August 2001), pp. 741–774.

18. Most previous *International Security* Readers have contained only articles that were originally published in *International Security*. This volume, however, includes works by Robert Jervis and George Quester that first appeared elsewhere. These expositions of offense-defense theory are so seminal that they merit inclusion in any volume that attempts to offer an overview of offense-defense theory.

19. For a retrospective analysis of Jervis’s article and its influence, see Charles L. Glaser, “The Security Dilemma Revisited,” *World Politics*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (October 1997) pp. 171–201.

These attempts to increase a state's security often reduce the security of other states.

According to Jervis, the security dilemma can vary in severity. When states are less vulnerable, they are more likely to be able to trust others and to cooperate. Under such conditions, states do not need to launch preemptive attacks or to match every real or potential military capability of other states. States can attain security more easily in such circumstances and they can pursue more passive foreign policies.

Jervis argues that "this situation is approximated when it is easier for states to defend themselves than to attack others, or when mutual deterrence obtains because neither side can protect itself." Jervis enumerates many other factors that affect the severity of the security dilemma and the probability of international cooperation, including subjective security requirements, threat perceptions, the existence of collective security systems, the magnitude of the advantages of cooperation, and whether leaders understand the operation of the security dilemma and recognize that their adversaries may have defensive motivations. Ultimately, however, he focuses primarily on two variables that influence whether an increase in one state's security reduces the security of others: (1) "whether the defense or the offense has the advantage," and (2) "whether defensive weapons and policies can be distinguished from offensive ones." When defense has an advantage over offense, a large increase in one state's security only slightly decreases the security of other states, enabling all states to enjoy a high level of security.

Jervis defines offensive advantage as a condition in which "it is easier to destroy the other's army and take its territory than it is to defend one's own." Conversely, "when defense has the advantage it is easier to protect and to hold than it is to move forward, destroy, and take." Offensive advantages make the security dilemma severe, because the best route to security is aggression and expansion. When defense has the advantage, aggression becomes less feasible and states can make themselves secure without threatening others.

Jervis enumerates what is likely to happen when it is easier to attack than to defend. Cooperation will be less likely because wars will be short and profitable for the winner. States will maintain high levels of arms and recruit allies in advance. Decisionmakers will perceive ambiguous information as threatening because they cannot afford to be the victim of an attack. The opposite results will emerge when defense has the advantage.

Geography and technology are the two main variables that influence the

offense-defense balance. Geographical factors such as buffer zones or natural barriers like mountain ranges, large rivers, or oceans make successful offensives less feasible. Under these conditions, both sides can have sufficient defensive capabilities without threatening the other. On the other hand, when it is easy to attack across borders, frequent wars are much more likely.

Technology determines the characteristics of weapons and thereby affects the offense-defense balance. When weapons are highly vulnerable, they must be used first, making offense more effective and attacks more likely. When fortifications are impregnable, a small number of defenders can hold off many attackers. Highly mobile forces may give offense the advantage, but the implications of particular weapons are often unclear. Tanks and tactical airpower did not appear to enhance the offense in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Jervis argues that second-strike nuclear deterrence creates a “result [that] is the equivalent of the primacy of defense.” Mutual nuclear deterrence renders security relatively cheap, makes each side secure, can be maintained even with highly unequal force levels, and reduces incentives to strike in a crisis.

When offensive and defensive weapons can be distinguished, a state can increase its security without reducing the security of others. If defense is at least as potent as the offense, a clear differentiation between the two enables status-quo powers to signal their benign intentions and to identify one another. It will be easy to identify aggressor states before they attack, and states will find it easier to negotiate arms control agreements.

Jervis recognizes that many observers argue that it is impossible to distinguish between offensive and defensive weapons. Whether a weapon is offensive or defensive often depends on the situation in which it is used. The offensiveness or defensiveness of many weapons is ambiguous, but forces that are not mobile tend to be defensive, whereas those that can reduce fortifications or depend on surprise tend to be offensive.

Even if weapons are distinguishable, states may choose offensive weapons if the offense has a large advantage over the defense, if offensive forces are necessary to recapture territory, or if only offensive action will compel an adversary to seek peace. In addition, aggressor states will often include some defensive weapons in their arsenals.

Jervis determines that the two key variables—the offense-defense balance and whether offense and defense can be distinguished—combine to form four potential worlds: (1) When offense has the advantage and weapons cannot be differentiated, arms races and wars are likely. (2) When defense has the advantage but offensive and defensive weapons cannot be distinguished, the secu-

rity dilemma operates but is not insurmountable. Status-quo states may be able to adopt compatible security policies under these conditions. (3) When offense has the advantage but weapons can be differentiated, states should be able to remove the security dilemma by procuring nonthreatening defensive weapons. The offensive advantage, however, may tempt states into launching aggressive wars. (4) The safest world of all is one in which defense has the advantage and offensive and defensive weapons can be distinguished.

In “Offense and Defense in the International System,” which consists of the introductory and concluding chapters of his book, *Offense and Defense in the International System*, George Quester summarizes some of his hypotheses relevant to offense-defense theory.²⁰ Noting that the terms “offense” and “defense” have created semantic confusion because most states prefer to claim that their actions are defensive, Quester argues that objective factors, such as military technology, often determine whether it is easier for states to defend than to attack. The central questions of his work are: “Can we identify the technical, political, and social factors that make it advantageous to strike out offensively at the enemy, rather than to sit in prepared defensive positions waiting for him to strike? And what then are the military and political consequences of such an offensive or defensive preponderance?”

Quester suggests that offensive actions become more likely when attacking forces can inflict more casualties on the enemy than they suffer themselves. In general, when weapons and forces are more mobile, offense becomes more advantageous. Weapons that are only potent for temporary durations also create incentives for offensive action. Thus a mobilization of forces may necessitate an attack because the forces cannot be kept mobilized indefinitely.

In Quester’s view, other technological and geographical conditions make defensive actions more likely. If, for example, light weapons are mainly useful in ambushes, they will offer a defensive advantage to forces familiar with the territory they are defending.

Quester argues that the extreme “countervalue” capabilities associated with nuclear weapons—the ability to kill many enemy civilians without first defeating the enemy’s armed forces—appear to be offensive, but this ability to retaliate actually tends to support peace and prevent war. He thus uses “offensive”

20. In his book, *Offense and Defense in the International System* (New York: Wiley, 1977), Quester develops these ideas in more detail and illustrates them with many historical examples. Unfortunately, space constraints make it impossible to reproduce all of this important material in this volume.

to “refer to technology and techniques that reward counterforce initiatives” (emphasis in original).

Defensive advantages tend to make peace more likely. States will not attack other states if offensive military action does not produce victory. In crises, a defensive advantage will encourage states to avoid initiating war. Quester notes that this conclusion is not new. Karl von Clausewitz and Sun Tzu recognized the advantages of remaining on the defensive and the tendency of defense to cause peace.

A defensive advantage, according to Quester, tends to render states unconquerable and thereby enables small political units to remain independent. An offensive advantage, on the other hand, makes a universal empire more possible. Paradoxically, either situation may be peaceful. States may avoid wars of conquest when there is a large defensive advantage. At the other end of the spectrum, peace would exist in a universal empire because conquest on such a scale would abolish war and international politics.

Quester recognizes that the human race often values the autonomy of its political units more than it values peace. He also acknowledges that offensive and defensive advantages are not the only causes of war. Political disagreements, exaggerated estimates of the chances of victory, and mistaken assumptions about the opponent’s resolve or hostility all can cause war. Quester suggests, however, that the “state of military technique that rewards taking the offense . . . is now the most worthy of attention, because it may indeed be more manageable than the others, because it in recent times has received less analysis than the others, and because it may increase or decrease the problems caused by the others.” Quester also points out that “What statesmen believe about war and weapons is crucial” and that illusions of an offensive advantage helped to cause war in 1914.

Although Quester’s analysis suggests that a defensive advantage is preferable, he qualifies his general endorsement of defense by pointing out that the high level of political fragmentation that might accompany a defensive advantage is not always desirable. Effective defenses may also prolong wars. Although peace is better than a short war, a short war is better than a long one. Even if a defensive advantage might be conducive to peace, it might be better to have an offensive advantage during war so that the conflict could be terminated quickly.

Quester also qualifies his arguments by pointing out that a defensive posture on one front might make it possible to launch an attack on another. The stalemate in the West in 1939 enabled Hitler to invade Poland.

Quester considers the potential objection that offensive advantages are a function of numerical superiority, not the technology of weaponry. He points out that “The significant impact of defensive or offensive technology shows up in the minimum ratios of numerical superiority required for such an offensive. With a basically defensive technology, perhaps a three to one, or five to one superiority, will be required to break through; with a more offensive technology, far less of a superiority may suffice, or no numerical superiority at all may be required, as either side can win if it only beats the other to the offensive.”

Quester concludes by noting that many factors can make war more or less likely: “We will need to be certain that technology does not too much favor the offensive. We will also want to be sure that neither side outweighs the other so much in military terms that it can by sheer numbers override any advantages of the defense. But we make our task easier for the second category, as we succeed in the first.”

The next section of essays examines the role of offense and defense in World War I. The outbreak of the Great War in July 1914 has inspired much scholarship on offense-defense theory. The general image of states mobilizing and launching offensives in hopes of winning quick victories has contributed much to the development of offense-defense theory. In few other cases does the connection between perceived offense dominance and the onset of war seem to be so strong. At the same time, the apparent dominance of defense in the years of trench warfare on the Western Front suggests that perceptions of offensive advantage were tragically mistaken. The essays in this section explore the consequences of beliefs in offensive advantage, the sources of those beliefs, and some of the reasons why World War I may not support offense-defense theory.

In “The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War,” Stephen Van Evera develops offense-defense theory and applies it to the outbreak of war in 1914. He argues that Europe’s militaries shared a belief in the power of offense on the eve of World War I. In Berlin, Paris, London, St. Petersburg, and even Brussels, generals embraced a “cult of the offensive” that held that offense was superior to defense and that victory depended on offensive action. According to Van Evera, these perceptions of a significant offensive advantage had several consequences, all of which contributed to the outbreak of war in 1914. First, belief in the power of offense made expansionist policies seem possible and attractive. Second, perceived offensive advantages made preemptive war seem more necessary. Third, perceptions of offensive advantage also made preventive war seem imperative. Fourth, states adopted more competitive styles of diplomacy based on brinkmanship and *faits accomplis*. Fifth, the cult

of the offensive led militaries to place a premium on secrecy, leaving civilian leaders in the dark about the war plans of their generals and unaware of the magnitude of the dangers of the July Crisis. In combination, these factors made it very difficult for diplomats to manage the July Crisis. Thus the cult of the offensive directly contributed to the outbreak of war in 1914.

Jack Snyder, in “Civil-Military Relations and the Cult of the Offensive,” offers an explanation of why Europe’s militaries preferred offensive doctrines. He argues that a crisis of civil-military relations in Germany, France, and Russia was the cause of the cult of the offensive. Offensive military doctrines enabled military organizations to enhance their autonomy, minimize civilian interference, improve their ability to plan, increase their importance in national policy, and receive bigger budgets for larger military forces. By allowing militaries to plan on assuming the initiative, and by making conquest seem feasible, if not easy, and external threats consequently seem great, offensive doctrines served these purposes even though, on the battlefield, they were to prove to be disastrously unsuccessful.

In “1914 Revisited: Allies, Offense, and Instability,” Scott Sagan argues against the claim that perceptions of a significant offensive advantage were a major cause of World War I. Whereas Van Evera and Snyder contend that domestic and organizational biases led most European states to exaggerate the power of offensive military action, Sagan suggests that states adopted offensive military strategies to serve their broader political objectives. France and Russia, for example, required offensive military doctrines so that they could assist potentially vulnerable allies. They preferred offense because it was the only means to assist allies, not because they embraced a more general cult of the offensive.

Sagan questions whether the offense-defense balance actually strongly favored defense in 1914. In contrast to writers who claim that defense was dominant, Sagan points out that Germany’s Schlieffen Plan almost succeeded in the West and that offensives on the Eastern Front were often successful. If military offensives could succeed or come close to succeeding, there may not have been a significant technologically based defensive advantage in 1914.

Sagan also argues that offensive military postures and a general belief in the efficacy of offensive action were not decisive causes of the instabilities that led to war in July 1914. He suggests that critical military vulnerabilities of the Entente powers and Belgium created military incentives for preemptive attacks. These vulnerabilities, which included the inability of the Russian army to mo-

bilize rapidly and the lack of permanent defenses at the Belgian railway junction of Liège, were more important causes of war than perceptions of an offensive advantage.²¹

In a section of correspondence on “The Origins of Offense and the Consequences of Counterforce,” Jack Snyder replies to Scott Sagan’s arguments, and Sagan responds.²² Their exchange reveals the complexities of determining whether offensive military doctrines are stabilizing or destabilizing in a multipolar system with several alliances. Snyder argues that the Schlieffen plan did not come close to success. Although the French forces made many errors in August 1914, they were still able to deploy superior forces at the battle of the Marne and halt the Germans. The advantages of being on the defensive enabled the French to shift forces rapidly to this decisive sector at a time when the German troops were overextended. Snyder points out that Schlieffen himself was aware of the flaws of his plan, but covered them up because he did not want to consider defensive alternatives.

Snyder contends that the need to assist allies did not mean that the European powers required offensive military strategies, except in the case of Russia, which needed to attack Germany to relieve pressure on France. Even in this case, however, the cult of the offensive appears to have driven Russia to launch a premature and disastrous offensive in East Prussia. Germany, on the other hand, did not need an offensive doctrine to assist its ally, Austria-Hungary, because attacking France did little to assist Austria-Hungary. Similarly, France did not need to go on the offensive against Germany to assist Russia. French offensive war plans actually hurt Russia’s strategic interests by making a rapid decision on the Western front likely and forcing Russia to mobilize and attack prematurely—policies that made the July Crisis harder to manage and contributed to Russia’s military defeats in 1914.

Sagan replies by noting that Russia had strong incentives to adopt an offensive military policy in 1914. It needed to attack Germany to assist France, and it needed to attack Austria-Hungary to prevent that country from sending all of

21. Sagan’s essay, as well as the subsequent exchange with Jack Snyder, also raises several arguments about the place of counterforce in U.S. nuclear strategy during the Cold War—issues that now seem to be of largely historical interest.

22. It would have been logical for Stephen Van Evera to respond to Sagan’s article, but at the time Van Evera was managing editor of *International Security* and he felt it would be inappropriate for him to contribute a letter to the editor to the journal. See Van Evera, *Causes of War*, pp. 152–160 for a discussion of some of the issues raised by Sagan.

its forces to attack Russia's ally, Serbia. Austria-Hungary also required an offensive capability to attack Russia, thereby relieving Russian pressure on Germany.

Recognizing that the alliance motivations behind French and German choices for offense are complex, Sagan argues that France needed only an offensive option to help protect its Russian ally. The biases of the cult of the offensive explain why France embraced offense far too enthusiastically in 1914 and launched an attack when initially remaining on the defensive might have made more strategic sense. In the German case, Sagan points out that Germany required an offensive capability against Russia to relieve pressure on Austria-Hungary. He also argues that exaggerated faith in the power of the offensive does not explain Germany's decision to launch its offensive against France. German military and civilian leaders opted for the Schlieffen Plan because they felt it was imperative to avoid a war of attrition, a belief that seems warranted by the ultimate course of World War I.

Jonathan Shimshoni offers an important challenge to offense-defense theorists' interpretation of World War I in "Technology, Military Advantage, and World War I: A Case for Military Entrepreneurship." Shimshoni argues that technology does not determine the offense-defense balance. Instead, he suggests that innovative "military entrepreneurship" can use technology to create and manipulate offensive or defensive advantages. There was no technologically determined defensive advantage in 1914, only a failure of the military leadership to devise offensive capabilities that would successfully serve the political goals pursued by their governments. Like Sagan, Shimshoni argues that political and strategic objectives should determine military doctrine. Before 1914, strategic goals dictated offensive doctrines, but the militaries of Europe did not develop offensive operational advantages. Far from being condemned to accept an existing offense-defense balance, military leaders can and should manipulate such advantages through "military entrepreneurship." The course of World War I shows that such innovation was possible. The Germans successfully developed infiltration tactics and the allies learned to mount assaults with tanks. Offensives ultimately ended the war on all fronts.

The final section in this volume offers two important recent explications of offense-defense theory, as well as recent critiques of the theory.²³

23. For an explication and critique of other prominent criticisms of offense-defense theory, see Sean M. Lynn-Jones, "Offense-Defense Theory and Its Critics," *Security Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Summer 1995), pp. 660-691.

Stephen Van Evera's "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War," examines how the offense-defense balance affects the probability of war.²⁴ He defines the offense-defense balance as the feasibility of conquest. The balance is shaped by military factors, geography, domestic social and political factors, and the nature of diplomacy.

Van Evera argues that shifts in the offense-defense balance toward the offense have at least ten effects that make war more likely: (1) empires are easier to conquer; (2) self-defense is more difficult; (3) states become more insecure and thus resist others' expansion more fiercely; (4) first-strike advantages become larger; (5) windows of opportunity and vulnerability open wider; (6) states adopt fait accompli diplomatic tactics; (7) states negotiate less readily and less cooperatively; (8) states maintain greater secrecy in foreign and defense policy; (9) arms racing becomes faster and harder; and (10) as conquest grows easier, states adopt policies such as offensive military doctrines, which make conquest even easier, thereby magnifying all the other effects. These effects emerge whether the offensive advantage is real or only perceived. They operate individually or collectively to make war more likely when conquest is easy.

In Van Evera's version of offense-defense theory, the offense-defense balance is determined by multiple factors. Van Evera argues that military factors, such as technology, doctrine, and force posture and deployments have important effects on the balance. For example, the ability to build impregnable fortifications favors the defense. Motorized armor and the doctrine of blitzkrieg favor the offense. Geography—especially the presence or absence of defensible borders and natural obstacles to conquest—is also important, as is the domestic political and social order of states. Popular regimes, for example, are better able to organize guerrilla resistance to potential conquest, thereby strengthening the defense. Finally, diplomatic factors influence the offense-defense balance: "collective security systems, defensive alliances, and balancing behavior by neutral states" all "impede conquest by adding allies to the defending side."

Van Evera tests offense-defense theory by looking at three cases: Europe since 1789, ancient China during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States eras, and the United States since 1789. Van Evera deduces three prime predictions from the theory: (1) war will be more common when offense is easy or is perceived to be easy; (2) states that have or think they have offensive opportu-

24. For a more complete explication of Van Evera's ideas, see his *Causes of War*.

nities will be more likely to initiate wars than other states; and (3) states will be more likely to initiate wars during periods when they have or believe they have offensive opportunities. The theory also predicts that the ten war-causing effects listed above will be present in eras and states where there is a real or perceived offensive advantage. Although each case can test only some of the theory's predictions, taken together they allow a test of most of the predictions.

The cases offer broad support for offense-defense theory. In Europe since 1789, the amount of war tends to correlate loosely with the offense-defense balance and tightly with perceptions of the balance. States that faced real or perceived offensive opportunities and defensive vulnerabilities were most likely to initiate war. In ancient China, Van Evera finds that from 722–221 BCE there was a long-term shift in the offense-defense balance that strengthened the offense. As the theory predicts, war became more common as the offense became more powerful. The history of the United States since 1789 also supports the theory. In general, the relative geographical invulnerability of the United States has enabled it to fight only a few great-power wars. Few of the predicted intervening variables—the processes that cause offensive advantages to lead to war—are present in U.S. diplomatic and military history. The United States has fought few preemptive and preventive wars, has been less prone to acquire colonies than other great powers, has not based its diplomacy on *fait accompli* tactics, has been less secretive than other great powers, and engaged in arms racing only during the Cold War. The level of U.S. bellicosity also has varied with changes in U.S. perceptions of external threats.

Van Evera concludes that offense-defense theory is a robust theory that can pass some difficult tests. He also contends that it is a useful theory that can be applied to prevent war. Unlike variables such as the polarity of the international system, the state of human nature, or the strength of international institutions, the variables identified by offense-defense theory—especially perceptions of the offense-defense balance—can be manipulated by national policies. Van Evera argues that the theory suggests that war can be limited or prevented if states adopt defensive military doctrines and limit offensive military capabilities through arms control. Defensive alliances, such as U.S. security guarantees in Europe and Asia since 1949, also can make conquest harder and war less likely.

In “What Is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It?” Charles Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann note that the absence of an agreed definition of the offense-defense balance is a serious shortcoming of offense-defense theory and explicate how they believe this variable should be defined and measured.

They argue that the offense-defense balance should be defined as “the ratio of the cost of the forces that the attacker requires to take territory to the cost of the defender’s forces.” Glaser and Kaufmann hold that offense-defense theory is only a partial theory of military capabilities, because the offense-defense balance is analytically distinct from two other variables: power, defined as relative resources, and military skill. Each of these three variables might be more important in a given situation. For example, a powerful attacker might prevail over a much weaker defender even if the offense-defense balance favors defense.

Glaser and Kaufmann offer six specifications and assumptions that are necessary to define and measure the offense-defense balance: (1) the need to specify the cost of fighting that the attacker would incur; (2) the need to specify the attacker’s territorial goal; (3) defining the offense-defense balance on the basis of the outcomes of wars, not battles; (4) assuming that states act optimally: “within reasonable limits of analysis, states make the best possible decisions for attack or defense, taking into account their own and their opponents’ options for strategy and force posture” which means that “the offense-defense balance is the cost ratio of the attacker’s best possible offense to the defender’s best possible defense”; (5) measuring the balance across specific dyads of states: “the offense-defense balance is well defined only for specific dyads, not for the entire international system” because it “depends on a number of diverse factors—including geography, cumulativeness of resources, and nationalism” that are not shared across dyads; and (6) the need to evaluate the “compound balance” between two states.

Glaser and Kaufmann argue for a “broad” approach to measuring the offense-defense balance. All factors that influence the cost-ratio of offense to defense should be used to measure the balance, including technology, geography, the size of forces, the cumulativeness of resources, and nationalism. Alliance behavior and first-move advantages should be excluded, however. Glaser and Kaufmann conclude that the offense-defense balance can be measured using the same analytical tools used to perform military net assessments.

In the section of correspondence, “Taking Offense at Offense-Defense Theory,” several critics of the preceding two essays have their say, and Van Evera, Glaser, and Kaufmann respond. The ensuing exchange provides an excellent and illuminating overview of some of the central issues in the contemporary debate over offense-defense theory.

James Davis faults Van Evera for broadening the concept of the offense-defense balance by adding diplomatic factors such as collective security sys-

tems, defensive alliances, and the balancing tendencies of neutral states to it. He contends that these additions make the theory less parsimonious and that they are variables that the offense-defense balance should attempt to explain, not part of the balance itself. Davis also argues that Van Evera wrongly combines objective and perceptual variants of the offense-defense balance in the same theory. He also argues that Van Evera's methodology is flawed, because Van Evera does not test his theory against plausible contending explanations.

Bernard Finel offers four objections to how Van Evera and Glaser and Kaufmann approach offense-defense theory. First, he argues that Glaser and Kaufmann ignore the complicated interaction effects of different strategies when they call for measuring the offense-defense balance by using the tools of net assessment. In complex war games, a common tool of net assessment of maneuver warfare, outcomes are extremely sensitive to small changes in strategies. Second, Finel argues that Van Evera and Glaser and Kaufmann are wrong to claim that states are more likely to use force when it is easy to seize territory, a central proposition of offense-defense theory. Instead, the rapidity of victory is the crucial determinant in decisions to use force. Rapid victory does not always require seizing and holding territory. Third, Finel contends that Van Evera attempts to aggregate too many variables into his measure of the offense-defense balance, producing a theory that is not parsimonious and that depends on subjective assessments. Many of the variables cited by Van Evera and by Glaser and Kaufmann—mobility, geography, social and political order, diplomatic factors—are difficult to code clearly. It is even more difficult to aggregate them. Finally, Finel argues that offense-defense theory in general lacks parsimony and is unlikely to be useful.

Stacie Goddard argues that neither Van Evera nor Glaser and Kaufmann distinguish the offense-defense balance from the balance of power or military skill, which renders their versions of offense-defense theory tautological and difficult to test. In her view, Van Evera confuses offense-defense balance with the probability of success in war, which may be a function of superior power or other factors unrelated to the offense-defense balance. Like Davis and Finel, Goddard also argues that Van Evera includes too many variables as determinants of the offense-defense balance. Goddard praises Glaser and Kaufmann for their attempt to address methodological shortcomings of earlier definitions of the offense-defense balance, but concludes that their broad definition of the offense-defense balance fails to distinguish the balance from other variables such as power and skill. In particular, she argues that whether states behave in accordance with Glaser and Kaufmann's optimality assumption can only be

determined on the basis of war outcomes. She suggests that offense-defense theory may be useful, but it needs a definition of the offense-defense balance that avoids subsuming power and doctrine, as well as far more rigorous empirical tests.

Stephen Van Evera replies to Davis, Finel, and Goddard by making three main arguments. First, he argues that some military technologies and force postures can be characterized as offensive or defensive, rejecting Finel's contention that such characterizations always depend on the context of combat. Secure nuclear deterrents, for example, are fundamentally defensive, as is modern guerilla warfare and the barbed wire, machine guns, and trenches of World War I.

Second, Van Evera argues that offense-defense theory actually is parsimonious, because aggregating lesser-included concepts actually simplifies discussion of security problems and policies. Decisionmakers often focus on whether conquest is easy or hard as they formulate national security policies. Theorists should not hesitate to aggregate factors that influence the ease of conquest, because this corresponds to the way policymakers think. Offense-defense theory also simplifies our understanding of power and war by identifying the taproot cause of many different phenomena.

Third, Van Evera responds to Davis's claim that Van Evera's offense-defense theory is not testable because it conflates objective perceptual variables. Van Evera acknowledges that his article conflated the two sets of predictions because those predictions are essentially the same.

Van Evera concludes with a series of brief replies to criticisms, arguing that victory is necessary to seize territory; historians favor his interpretations, not Finel's; his definition of the offense-defense balance is distinct from the balance of power; there is no methodological problem with using the behavior of states to explain the behavior of states; and others are free to define terms differently in their theories and analyses.

Charles Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann reply to Goddard by arguing that her views on offense-defense theory are not at odds with their own, but her criticisms reflect a misunderstanding of their arguments. They point out that their optimality assumption means only that states choose optimally "within reasonable limits of analysis" not that states choose the best possible force posture, doctrine, and strategy. Thus it is possible to assume optimality for analytical purposes without relying on the evidence provided by war outcomes.

Glaser and Kaufmann reply to Finel's argument about interaction effects by pointing out that many military policy decisions do not depend on interaction

effects. Between the two world wars, for example, all navies would have been better off if they had invested less in battleships. In other cases, “interaction” means responding to an adversary’s attempt to pursue an optimal policy, which becomes part of the structural constraints that shape a state’s own policies. Glaser and Kaufmann recognize that there are some cases in which whether a state’s military strategy succeeds or not does indeed depend on guessing its adversary’s strategy, just as it does in the “rock-paper-scissors” game. In such cases, the offense-defense balance cannot be measured exactly but spreads out into a “band of uncertainty.” In practice such bands are likely to be narrow, because strategic and grand strategic choices, which have the greatest effect on war outcomes, are constrained by geography and resource endowments, rendering strategic choices more like a mutual optimization model than a guessing game.

Glaser and Kaufmann also reject Goddard’s argument that their definition of the offense-defense balance includes the balance of power, arguing that some elements of the offense-defense balance that seem to be part of aggregate power are actually determinants of offensive and defensive capabilities. Nationalism is a component of the offense-defense balance, for example, because it makes it easier to defend a national homeland. Nationalism may also increase aggregate power, but it is part of the offense-defense balance because it makes it easier to defend territory.

In response to Finel’s argument that the techniques of net assessment may not be adequate for measuring the offense-defense balance, Glaser and Kaufmann say that further research is necessary, but that Finel’s pessimism would only be justified if net assessment were never possible. They also reject Finel’s argument that their concept of the offense-defense balance assumes that victory depends on conquering territory, arguing that the offense-defense balance reflects the impact of territory only when territory influences war outcomes.

In “Must War Find a Way? A Review Essay,” Richard Betts offers a critical review of Stephen Van Evera’s *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, a book that presents one of the most prominent and important variants of contemporary offense-defense theory. Betts uses his review essay to criticize Van Evera’s book in particular, and offense-defense theory more generally. He makes four main arguments.

First, Betts argues that offense-defense theory “has been overwhelmingly influenced by the frame of reference that developed around nuclear weapons and the application of deterrence theorems to the conventional case of World

War I.” This approach has limited the applicability of offense-defense theory to intrastate wars. The influence of nuclear deterrence concepts, which have focused on weapons and military postures as causes of war, has also diverted offense-defense theory away from the substantive causes of war.

Betts faults offense-defense theory for its argument that mutual nuclear deterrence is a situation of defense dominance. He argues that this turns traditional logic on its head by defining the ability to attack with nuclear missiles as a defensive advantage. Earlier definitions of the offense-defense balance of conventional forces held that defense had the advantage when it was operationally difficult to mount a successful offensive. In contrast, mutual nuclear deterrence is a situation in which the political—not military—effect of nuclear weapons makes peace more likely. Thus the U.S.-Soviet nuclear stalemate and the defensive deadlock of 1914–17 do not belong in the same category.

Betts further argues that offense-defense theory has exaggerated the stabilizing effects of nuclear weapons. In his view, Van Evera and other offense-defense theorists fail to consider how stability at the nuclear level may actually make the world safe for conventional war. He argues that Van Evera ignores many arguments against missile defense programs.

In a brief discussion of the outbreak of World War I, Betts points out that some historians do not agree that a “cult of the offensive” caused war in 1914. He criticizes Van Evera for testing offense-defense theory with the case that has inspired much of the theory. Finally, he points out that Van Evera concedes that if the Western allies had developed offensive capabilities in the 1930s, they might have deterred World War II and argues that this indicates that offense-defense theorists have relied too much on the World War I case.

Second, Betts argues that Van Evera “crams so many things into the definition of the offense-defense balance that it becomes a gross megavariable.” By including military technology and doctrine, geography, national social structure, diplomatic arrangements, military manpower policies, and other factors in his list of determinants of the offense-defense balance, Van Evera creates a variable that is almost the same as relative power. Betts argues that Van Evera does not explain how to aggregate all these factors to measure the offense-defense balance. He suggests that analysts should rely instead on the distribution of relative power in their attempts to explain the outbreak of wars. Noting that Van Evera argues for his definition of the offense-defense balance on the grounds that it includes variables that can be manipulated by leaders who hope to prevent war, Betts points out that revisionist powers also could manipulate the balance to make conquest easier.

Third, Betts argues that Van Evera—and offense-defense theory more generally—does not consider the substantive stakes of conflict. Whether conquest is easy or hard may be less important than the value states attach to their objectives. In some cases, motivations such as honor may lead states to fight unwinnable wars. In others, Betts argues changes in values and interests are more important than the offense-defense balance in decisions to start or avoid war. He thus contends that the Cold War ended, for example, because the Soviet Union abandoned the ideological struggle with the West, not because Gorbachev embraced offense-defense theory. Betts argues that offense-defense theory says little about internal wars, which are about who rules a state, not territory. Offense-defense theory is also unlikely to be relevant to irregular and guerilla warfare.

Finally, Betts faults Van Evera for adopting a normative bias in favor of peace and the status quo. He argues that Van Evera's version of offense-defense theory seems to assume "that war is justified only to defend what one has, not to conquer what others hold." This assumption has much moral appeal, but it fails to recognize that states often take offensive action to change an unjust status quo. Betts suggest that theories should not assume that peace is more natural and just than war.

Keir Lieber's "Grasping the Technological Peace: The Offense-Defense Balance and International Security" presents a deductive and empirical critique of offense-defense theory. Lieber concludes that the technological offense-defense balance, whether real or perceived, has limited effects on political and strategic behavior.

Lieber chooses to test what he calls the "core" version of offense-defense theory. This version holds that the offense-defense balance is primarily determined by technology. The "broad" version, on the other hand, incorporates many additional factors as determinants of the offense-defense balance, including geography, nationalism, regime popularity, the ease of exploiting resources from conquered territory, and others. Lieber argues that the core version is a better candidate for testing because it is more parsimonious and more likely to apply across space and time.

Drawing on the work of offense-defense theorists, Lieber derives two hypotheses from the core version of offense-defense theory: mobility-enhancing technologies favor offense, and firepower-enhancing technologies favor defense. He suggests that the logical case for these hypotheses may be weak. Mobility, for example, may be necessary for a defender that is trying to rush reinforcements to thwart an attack. Nevertheless, Lieber argues that testing

these hypotheses constitutes a valid test of offense-defense theory, because proponents of the theory generally accept these hypotheses.

Lieber tests the two hypotheses by examining the impact of four major technological innovations: railroads, the artillery and small arms revolution, tanks, and nuclear weapons. He considers whether the innovation altered military outcomes by making victories more likely for the attacker or the defender, and whether the innovation altered political outcomes by making decisionmakers more likely to initiate war when they perceived an offensive advantage.

Railroads, in Lieber's view, had relatively little impact on military outcomes. The quick and decisive victories by, for example, Prussia in 1864, 1866, and 1870–71 coincided with the spread of railroads in Europe, but were actually the result of Prussia's superior doctrine, organization, and power. In World War I, railroads appear to have contributed to defensive successes by enabling defenders to shift forces to halt attacks. Lieber argues that railroads also did not have the political effect of making war more likely. Between 1850 and 1871, European decisionmakers believed railroads favored the defender, but several wars broke out during this period. After 1871, decisionmakers believed railroads enhanced offense, but this belief coincided with a long era of peace in Europe.

Lieber finds that the technological revolution in small arms and artillery of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had relatively small military effects. Although the increase in firepower due to improvements in range, accuracy, and rate of fire favored defenders by making massed frontal assaults more difficult, tactical innovations made offensives possible in the Franco-Prussian War, the American Civil War, and World War I. Politically, Lieber argues that European decisionmakers opted for offensive military strategies and war even though they believed that the firepower revolution favored defense, exactly the opposite of what offense-defense theory predicts.

Although many observers argue that the development of the tank enhanced the relative power of offense, Lieber finds that they had indeterminate effects. In World War I, tanks had little impact on operational military outcomes. In World War II, Germany's initial victories with armored offensives reflected German doctrinal and material superiority, not the offensive potential of the tank. When other countries—particularly Russia—became proficient in armored warfare, tanks enhanced the defense. The advent of the tanks also did influence political decisions for war. Lieber argues that Hitler's decision to attack France in 1940, for example, was not based on confidence in the offensive potential of tank forces.

Lieber finds that the nuclear revolution has had mixed effects. Offense-defense theorists generally argue that nuclear weapons enhance defense, because a state with a secure nuclear retaliatory capability becomes unconquerable. Recognizing that no war has occurred between major nuclear powers, Lieber points out that offense-defense theory is undermined by the conflicts between India and Pakistan, the U.S.-Soviet nuclear arms race, and the frequency of U.S. and Soviet military intervention in the third world.

On the basis of the empirical evidence, Lieber concludes that offense-defense theory has exaggerated the extent to which technology—and beliefs about it—shape military and political outcomes.

In “Attack and Conquer? International Anarchy and the Offense-Defense-Deterrence Balance,” Karen Ruth Adams presents an empirical test of offense-defense theory. In contrast to offense-defense theorists who have used the theory to explain and predict war, Adams focuses on other predictions of offense-defense theory. She argues that the logic of the theory leads to two broad predictions. First, states are more likely to be conquered in offense-dominant eras. Second, states are more likely to conduct offensive military operations in such eras. Adams holds that “the most direct way” to test hypotheses about the consequences of variations in the offense-defense balance is “to examine the effects of the balance on the incidence of attack and conquest.” When the offense-defense balance shifts, these variables are likely to vary more than the incidence of war.

Before testing offense-defense theory, Adams refines the concept of the offense-defense balance by distinguishing between deterrence and defense. Although other offense-defense theorists have argued that nuclear deterrence is equivalent to an extremely large defensive advantage, Adams argues that deterrent operations are different from defensive operations. When deterrence—not defense—is dominant, conquest should be less likely and states will have few incentives to expand. Adams therefore replaces the offense-defense balance with the offense-defense-deterrence balance, which she defines as “the relative efficacy of offense, defense, and deterrence given prevailing conditions.”

Adams measures the offense-defense-deterrence balance by examining “the potential lethality, protection, and mobility of state-of-the-art offensive, defensive, and deterrent operations.” In contrast to, for example, Van Evera, she treats technology as the sole determinant of the balance. Technology includes the “methods, skills, and tools” that influence how states conduct offensive, defensive, and deterrent operations.

To determine how the offense-defense-deterrence balance has varied since 1800, Adams assesses how technological changes have affected force lethality, protection, and mobility in military operations. After integrating these factors, she codes the 1800–49 period as offense dominant, 1850–1933 as defense dominant, 1933–45 as offense dominant, and 1946–present as deterrence dominant.

Using data on conquest of and attacks by great powers and nuclear states from 1800 to the present, Adams quantitatively tests her hypotheses against alternative explanations of attack and conquest. Her tests find that historical trends in both attack and conquest offer strong support for her hypotheses. She also finds that relative capabilities matter. Great powers are less likely to be conquered and more likely to attack, regardless of the offense-defense-deterrence balance.

Adams argues that her findings have broader implications for international relations theory. With regard to offense-defense theory, she reiterates that “incidence of war is not the best dependent variable to use in testing” theories of offense and defense, that technological factors have significant effects, and that defense and deterrence should be distinguished. Adams also notes that variations in the balance do not explain all of the variation in military doctrine, arms racing, and international cooperation. She also calls for further tests to explain why attack is much more likely than conquest in offense-dominant eras. Factors such as homeland advantage, power balancing, military doctrine, force employment, and attrition may account for this pattern.

More generally, Adams argues that her findings support structural realist theory while casting doubt on offensive realism, defensive realism, and “arguments about the pacific effects of unbalanced power and rising audience costs.” Turning to the implications of her findings for contemporary international politics, she argues that the spread of nuclear weapons will accelerate if even one nuclear state pursues a policy of conquest and expansion.

The essays in this volume indicate that offense-defense theory has generated an active research program and some significant theoretical contributions. The intuitive appeal of the various versions of the theory and the existence of historical evidence that suggests that decisionmakers sometimes consider the relative efficacy of offense and defense has stimulated much conceptual innovation and empirical research.

Nevertheless, the debate over offense and defense in international politics suggests that offense-defense theory has some limits. Offense-defense theory—especially when the offense-defense balance is defined narrowly—may not explain as much as its proponents initially hoped and claimed. The narrow,

global balance of offensive and defensive military technology may be useful for explaining overall trends in a given international system, such as the likelihood of war, attack, or conquest; whether there are a few large states or many small states; and whether alliances are tight and balancing rapid and vigorous. It may not, however, explain all decisions to initiate war or the outcome of each war. In this sense, offense-defense theory has the same limitations as many other structural theories of international politics.

Some of the variables identified by the theory (e.g., technological factors) may not always be very powerful, compared to others, including relative capabilities and state-level variables. The global technological offense-defense balance may only have a strong effect when it takes on an extreme value, and even then other factors may exert a stronger influence on the foreign policies of individual states.

Defining and measuring the offense-defense balance remains difficult, whether the balance is measured systemically or across particular dyads. The attempts of Van Evera and Glaser and Kaufmann to define and measure the offense-defense balance illustrate that conceptualizing and operationalizing this variable is neither easy nor uncontroversial.

Offense-defense theory also may seem less relevant at a time when traditional patterns of conflict between states and territorial conquest appear to be changing. In an era when security issues often revolve around the “privatization of violence” and the potential use of weapons of mass destruction by terrorist groups, concepts like defense-dominance may not shed light on the most important threats to contemporary global security.²⁵

These limits notwithstanding, the essays assembled in this collection, as well as a review of the literature listed as suggestions for further reading at the end of this volume, suggest many potential avenues for future research.

First, other researchers might adapt and apply Van Evera’s version of offense-defense theory to other cases. In particular, Van Evera’s theory could be extended to cases of internal conflict.²⁶

Second, Van Evera’s offense-defense theory could be recast as theory of foreign policy. Critics complain that the many elements of Van Evera’s version of the offense-defense balance make it difficult to use the balance to make pre-

25. Offense-defense theorists might respond that the 2003 U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq is a reminder that territorial conquest remains important.

26. See, for example, William Rose, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict: Some New Hypotheses,” *Security Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Summer 2000), pp. 1–51.

dictions about the overall pattern of international politics. These problems might be less significant if some or all of the components that Van Evera incorporates into the balance were used to explain variations in the foreign policy of a particular state.

Third, scholars might attempt to develop security dilemma theory instead of offense-defense theory. Although the two theories have much in common and are often conflated, security dilemma theory could be regarded as taking into account the range of political, economic, military, and psychological factors that contribute to the potential for suspicion and hostility in a particular dyadic relationship. Several scholars have adopted this approach.²⁷

Fourth, the essay by Glaser and Kaufmann in this volume suggests that offense-defense theory could be integrated into the process of military net assessment, with particular focus on the analysis of the sources of offensive potential.

Fifth, it may be necessary to recast offense-defense theory so that it focuses on other sources of offensive capabilities, such as force employment practices, instead of the technological variables traditionally associated with offense-defense theory.²⁸ Some observers might question whether this type of approach even qualifies as offense-defense theory, but this classification question is less important than the potential for interesting research.

Sixth, disaggregating elements of offense-defense theory and incorporating these variables into other theories may contribute to theory development. Several important works in international security studies have used concepts borrowed from offense-defense theory, even when they have not used the offense-defense balance as an explanatory variable. Stephen Walt's *The Origins of Alliances*, for example, employs concepts that are central in offense-defense theory—offensive power and geographical proximity—in constructing the broader concept of “threat.”²⁹ T.V. Paul uses the concept of offensive capabilities to explain why states start wars when they are obviously weaker than their adversaries.³⁰

Seventh, it may be possible to incorporate offense-defense variables into

27. See Rose, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict: Some New Hypotheses”; Barry R. Posen, “The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict,” *Survival*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring 1993), pp. 27–57; and Stephen M. Walt, *Revolution and War* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

28. See Biddle, “Rebuilding the Foundations of Offense-Defense Theory.”

29. Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987).

30. T.V. Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

formal models. The basic logic of offense-defense theory would appear to lend itself to formal approaches, but they have been rare in the existing offense-defense literature.³¹

Finally, there may be many ways in which exploring the causal logic of offense-defense theory could open up new directions for research. In this volume, the essay by Karen Ruth Adams breaks new ground by reexamining the deductive logic of offense-defense theory and concluding that the dependent variables of attack and conquest deserve more attention. Adams also suggests that states may expand when defense has the advantage if they anticipate future offense-dominance. This observation implies that future research might consider the “intertemporal offense-defense balance” and the extent to which states make decisions on the basis of future expectations of the relative efficacy of offense or defense.³²

There are almost certainly many other ways in which offense-defense theories, or aspects of them, can inspire innovative new research. In many cases, debates over what the offense-defense balance is and whether it can be measured need not impede further explorations of the role of offense and defense in international politics. Offense-defense theorists need to consider these general issues of definition and measurement, but they also need to focus on identifying variables that appear to have explanatory power, deriving hypotheses, and testing them empirically.

The essays assembled in this volume are only a small portion of the vast literature on offense, defense, and war. The suggestions for further reading at the end of the book include many other books and articles. We nevertheless hope that this collection of essays will help readers to understand the central elements of offense-defense theories, the main themes in the debate over offense and defense in international politics, and potential avenues for further research on these topics.

31. For an important exception, see Robert Powell, “Guns, Butter, and Anarchy,” *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 87, No. 1 (March 1993), pp. 115–132.

32. This type of analysis is prominent in research on preventive war and how states respond to anticipated shifts in their relative power. It also has been applied to expectations of future levels of trade. See Dale C. Copeland, “Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations,” *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (Spring 1996), pp. 5–41.