

Hypotheses on Operational Power, the Offense-Defense Balance, and War

Paper prepared for the International Studies Association
Annual Meeting, February 20-24, 2001

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I would like to thank Jeffrey Legro, Dale Copeland, John Owen, Stephen Van Evera, Charles Glaser, Sean Lynn-Jones, Alex Vacca, Kelly Erickson, Dennis Smith, and Eric Cox for their comments and critiques.

How do the military doctrines states adopt in order to enhance their security in the international system, in turn determine the likelihood that war will break out among them? What is the relationship between military doctrinal innovation and the origins of war? While the relationship between military doctrines and the origins of war was posited almost two decades ago, the field of international relations has only a rough understanding as to how military doctrines promote peace and induce war. Specifically, two prominent literatures examining the doctrine-war relationship, military strategic interaction theory and offense-defense theory, suffer from conceptual and theoretical weaknesses which render them unable to clearly specify the causal mechanisms linking military doctrines to the outbreak of war.

The literature on the effects of military strategy on international stability offers two distinct explanations for the outbreak of war. The first explanation, offered by Stephen Van Evera, Jack Snyder, and Barry Posen, states that as more states adopt offensive military doctrines, the probability of war in the international system increases. Offensive doctrines are argued to be destabilizing to the extent that they facilitate preemption by bolstering first move advantages and, consequentially, by making windows of opportunity and vulnerability loom larger. Defensive military doctrines, on the other hand, decrease the probability of war by ameliorating the pernicious effects posed by such windows and by mitigating the incentives for being the first to mobilize and attack.¹ This paper will argue that the “cult of the offensive” explanation for the

¹ Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), chs. 3-4; Van Evera, “The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War,” in Steven E. Miller, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Stephen Van Evera eds., *Military Strategy and the Origins of the First World War*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Jack Snyder, “Perceptions of the Security Dilemma in 1914,” in Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow, and Janice Gross Stein eds. *Psychology and Deterrence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and the Disasters of 1914* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 214-16;

origins of war is limited because it can neither account the timing of war initiation, nor can it explain the absence of war among states adopting offensive military doctrines. The second explanation, offered by Dan Reiter and Allan Stam, challenges the idea that the mere existence of offensive doctrines necessarily increases the probability of war.

Crucial to the causal story are the incentives and disincentives for war resulting from the *interaction* of two or more states' military strategies. War is more likely to breakout when one state's military strategy is "superior" to that of its opponent.² This argument overcomes the limits of the "cult of the offensive" argument concerning the expectation that as more states adopt offensive doctrines the probability of war necessarily increases. Nevertheless, the argument remains inadequate because it cannot explain why a state with a superior strategy would be motivated to launch a war. Indeed, if both states knew that one possessed a dominant military strategy, the superior state would be in a better position to coerce the state with an inferior strategy by means short of war.

The second literature examining the relationship between military doctrines and the origins of war is offense-defense theory. This literature is divided over the role that military doctrines play in determining the outbreak of war. The "core" version sees military doctrines as a by-product of the offense-defense balance. According to this version, factors other than the military policies of states determine the effectiveness of offense and defense as a means to achieving security. At most, military doctrines are an

Snyder, "Civil-Military Relations and the Cult of the Offensive, 1914 and 1984," in Miller et al., *Military Strategy*; and Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 20.

² Dan Reiter, "Military Strategy and the Outbreak of International Conflict: Quantitative Empirical Tests, 1903-1992," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 43, 3 (June 1999); Allan C. Stam III, *Win, Lose, or Draw: Domestic Politics and the Crucible of War* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996), 147.

intervening variable in the casual chain.³ A second, broader version sees military doctrines as playing a crucial role in determining the nature of the offense-defense balance itself. As more states adopt offensive military doctrines, the effectiveness of offensive operations increases, and the likelihood of war rises.⁴ This paper will argue that both versions of offense-defense theory are unsatisfactory. The core version of the theory has not fared well in empirical tests while the broader version lacks the necessary conceptual development for the construction of non-tautological theories.

Despite these limitations, military strategic interaction theory and offense-defense theory offer a number of valuable insights into the origins of war. The argument offered in this paper synthesizes these strengths and, in so doing, suggests new ways of understanding the origins of war by focusing on how the interaction of military doctrines creates asymmetrical constraints and opportunities available to states in their search for security in the international system. Specifically, I will argue that certain combinations of military doctrines will afford some states with superior “operational power” over their adversaries. Superiority in operational power (a concept distinct from broader notions of material power such as the overall balance of military forces or relative economic capacity) results when the operational concepts underpinning a state’s military doctrine enable it to conduct military missions with greater effectiveness than its opponent as a result of superior speed, deception, and the ability to locate and attack the critical support nodes of its adversary’s armed forces (i.e., its command, control, communication, and

³ Charles L. Glaser and Chaim Kaufmann, “What is the Offense-Defense Balance and Can We Measure It?” *International Security*, 22, 4 (Spring 1998); Sean M. Lynn-Jones, “Offense-Defense and Its Critics,” *Security Studies*, 4, 4 (Summer 1995); Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” *World Politics*, 30, 2 (January, 1978); and George H. Quester, *Offense and Defense in the International System* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1977).

⁴ Van Evera, *Causes of War*, 160-66.

intelligence, or C³I). This paper will argue, further, that operational power can be manifest in two forms: offensive and defensive. Properly conceived, the offense-defense balance is a structure, determined by the interaction of two states military doctrines, affecting the range of choices available to states in their search for security.

By bringing together the interactions of military doctrines and the notion of the relative efficacy of offensive and defensive actions as means of enhancing state security, the argument offered here will suggest ways of overcoming the limitations evident in both bodies of literature. In conceiving of the offense-defense balance as being determined by the interaction of military doctrines, I will demonstrate how this critical variable affecting the intensity of security competition among states can be clearly operationalized and will offer new hypotheses on the policy options available to states fearing a challenge to their security.

A common weakness of military strategic interaction theory and of offense-defense theory is the inability to determine the causal mechanisms that induce war and peace among states. This limitation stems from the static nature of the two theories: by examining only snapshots of their independent variables, these approaches fail to determine the specific nature of the threats that motivate states to adopt increasingly belligerent policies. Drawing from insights in the literature on preventive war, the argument offered here will overcome this weakness by focusing on how the expectation of decline in operational power can induce states to take hard-line actions against their opponents. Because operational power is derived from the interaction of two or more states military doctrines, operational power varies when one state undergoes doctrinal innovation. To the extent that a state with superior operational power believes that its

opponent is beginning to innovate its doctrine in ways that will significantly challenge its ability conduct effective military missions on the battlefield, the superior state will be induced to adopt increasingly belligerent policies before the opponent's new doctrine is fully operational. The choices available to states declining in operational power are not uniform, however. The this paper will demonstrate how different values of the offense-defense balance affect the range of options available to states facing threats to their security resulting from diminishing operational power.

The primary goal of this paper is the construction of a set of falsifiable hypotheses on the relationship between the offense-defense balance and the intensity of security competition among states. The paper is divided in three sections. In the first section, I review the literatures on military strategic interaction theory, offense-defense theory, and preventive war theory, demonstrate their conceptual and logical weaknesses, and suggest means of overcoming these limitations. In the second section, I offer a new argument for the origins of war and peace that synthesizes the strengths of these approaches and offer the specific hypotheses deductively derived from the argument. In the conclusion, I discuss potential contributions to the study of the origins of war suggested by this analysis.

Three Approaches to the Doctrine-War Relationship

The literatures on which my argument builds are: military strategic interaction theory, offense-defense theory, and preventive war theory. This section presents each theory's key arguments, discusses how military doctrines factor into each theory,

demonstrates how each is limited conceptually and logically, and suggests ways of overcoming these limitations.

Military Strategic Interaction Theory

Two schools of thought address the relationship between military doctrine and the origins of war. The first school examines the connection between military doctrinal type (offensive vs. defensive) and the stability of the international system. This school locates the cause of war in the exacerbation of the security dilemma that is induced when one or more states adopt offensive doctrines. The second, more recent school examines how the adopted military strategies of states interact to create incentives and disincentives for the initiation of war. This school focuses on the type of military strategy (attrition vs. maneuver) in conjunction with offensive and defensive doctrines, and argues that not all offensive military doctrines lead to war. What matters in determining if a state initiates a war is how its military strategy is expected to fare against that of an opponent in a future conflict. That is, the interaction of two or more states' military strategies, rather than the presence of offensive force postures, is seen as the primary causal variable affecting the intensity of security competition in the international system.

According to the first school of thought, if one or more states adopt an offensive military doctrine, the security dilemma is intensified, international crises are more likely to emerge, and the probability of war increases. According to Posen, “. . . even if only one side holds an offensive doctrine, preemption is encouraged—for that side. If all sides hold offensive doctrines, and all know that the others do, then when war appears possible, all will begin contemplating a first strike and all will know that everyone else is doing

so.”⁵ According to Robert Jervis, the intensity of the security dilemma is determined by the degree to which the offense has an advantage over the defense, and the ability of states to distinguish between offensive and defensive weapons.⁶ Because offensive military doctrines make windows of opportunity and vulnerability loom larger, the more states with offensive doctrines, the greater the intensity of security competition.⁷ Defensive doctrines, conversely, dampen spirals of hostility and decrease the probability of war.⁸

While this standard explanation is suggestive, it nevertheless obscures the causal processes determining the outbreak of war in two primary ways. First, while offensive military doctrines may be a precondition for interstate aggression, the mere existence of offensive doctrines cannot account for the timing of war initiation.⁹ For example, both German and French doctrines were offensive in nature for many years prior to 1914 during which time no war ensued. Simply put, extant theorizing on the relationship between military doctrines and the origins of war cannot account for both the absence of war in Europe from 1905 to 1913 and its outbreak in August 1914. Second, this approach cannot explain the complete absence of war among states that adopt offensive military doctrines. For example, during the Cold War, both the United States and the Soviet

⁵ Posen, 20.

⁶ Jervis, 186-87.

⁷ Both Snyder and Van Evera discuss the pernicious effects of misperception on the security dilemma. Snyder, “Perceptions of the Security Dilemma in 1914,” 161-65; Van Evera, *Causes of War*, ch. 6 esp. 185. On windows and offensive doctrines, see *ibid.* chs. 3-4.

⁸ Posen, 23, argues that the adoption of defensive doctrines by France and Britain prior to World War II caused the “Phony War” in which war was declared, but not actually fought. Others in the “cult of the offensive” school include: Van Evera, “The Cult of the Offensive;” and his *Causes of War*, chs. 6-7. It is important to note that Van Evera argues that the offense-defense balance (or, the ease of conquest) is determined, in part, by the types of military doctrines states adopt (160-62). Snyder, “Civil-Military Relations;” and his *Ideology of the Offensive*, 214-16. For the argument that offensive military doctrines can lead to international stability, see Scott D. Sagan, “1914 Revisited: Allies, Offense, and Instability,” in Jervis, et al., *Military Strategy*, 116-24.

⁹ This paper argues that the presence of offensive doctrines in the international system is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for the initiation of war.

Union adopted offensive nuclear and conventional doctrines designed to destroy the opposing side's military forces. Despite years of offensive preparations, the Cold War passed without the outbreak of major war. In short, "Mutually Assured Destruction" was predicated on the mutual offensive orientation of the two states and exerted significant pressures on policymakers to be cautious throughout the Cold War. The "cult of the offensive" school fails to explain and predict the outcomes of these two cases because its analytical focus centers on the presence of offensive military doctrines, rather than on leader's estimates of how their doctrine will fare against that of an opponent in a future conflict.

The second school of thought does examine relationship between the interactions of states' military strategies and the probability of war. This school argues that certain combinations of military strategies demonstrate a higher correlation with the outbreak of war than do other combinations. Specifically, Reiter contends that states with maneuver strategies are more likely to start a war if an opponent adopts an attrition strategy. However, states that have maneuver strategies are not more likely to initiate war if they face another state with a maneuver strategy.¹⁰ Stam argues, "It is the interactive effects of the strategies during peacetime that may lead to the increased probability of war . . . It was the combination of German blitzkrieg and French forward defense that led to the rapid defeat of France, not either state's particular strategy choice considered in isolation."¹¹

¹⁰ Reiter, 381.

¹¹ Stam, 147. John Mearsheimer also argues that Germany's blitzkrieg was able to achieve decisive results against France's forward defense and contributed to the outbreak of World War II. Indeed, Mearsheimer dedicates a substantial portion of his book to the analysis of the effects of the interaction of military strategies. Nevertheless, his causal argument is one sided: states that adopt blitzkrieg strategies (offensive-maneuver military doctrines) are more likely to start wars. See his *Conventional Deterrence*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 30-66.

This school of thought¹² makes two contributions to the study of the relationship between military doctrine and the outbreak of war. First, by examining how the interaction of military doctrines determines international political outcomes, Reiter and Stam are able to show that states with offensive military doctrines are not necessarily more likely to go to war.¹³ This overcomes one of the major limitations with the “cult of the offensive” school, the expectation that as more states adopt offensive doctrines, the probability of war necessarily increases. Second, Reiter and Stam suggest an important conceptual advance by demonstrating that more nuanced conceptions of military power have an independent relationship with the origins of war. That is, they posit that gross power variables are distinct from those that capture the interaction of military doctrines.¹⁴

Despite these strengths, this second school of thought is theoretically limited in three ways. First, Reiter and Stam employ a simple expected utility calculation as their

A note on terminology: Reiter and Stam use the term “military strategy” to refer to state’s choice along the attrition—maneuver spectrum. They use the term “military doctrine” to refer to refer to a state’s military policy goals which are either offensive or defensive (Stam 52). This taxonomy is backwards. Military doctrine, properly conceived, deals with “operational art.” As such, the concept of military doctrine must incorporate *both* the notion of offense vs. defense and the notion of attrition vs. maneuver. Military strategy, on the other hand, deals with the political ends toward which military doctrine is employed. My categorization of military doctrine discussed below is the same as Reiter’s and Stam’s coding of doctrine/strategy combination, but it more accurately reflects the standard conceptions of doctrine and operational art in the scholarly and defense communities. See: John F. Antal, “Maneuver and Attrition: A Historical Perspective,” *Military Review*, (October 1992), 22-27; Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 239-41; and B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd ed., (New York: Meridian 1967), 322-33. This conception does differ from Posen and Kier who contend that military doctrines are either offensive or defensive. See Posen, 14-15; and Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrines Between the Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), ch. 1.

¹² In addition to the works already cited, see: Scott Bennett and Allan C. Stam, “The Duration of Interstate Wars, 1816-1985,” *American Political Science Review* 90, 2 (June 1996); Dan Reiter and Allan C. Stam, “Democracy, War Initiation, and Victory,” *American Political Science Review*, 92, 2 (June 1998); Robert A. Pape, *Bombing to Win: Air Power and Coercion in War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 15-19; and H.E. Goemans, *War & Punishment: The Causes of War Termination & the First World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 310.

¹³ For example, if two states adopt offensive attrition doctrines, according to their analysis, the probability of war would be *lower* than if one state adopted an offensive maneuver doctrine while the second state adopted a defensive attrition doctrine.

¹⁴ Both Reiter and Stam test the doctrinal interaction variables against broader notions of state power. They do not argue, however, that such interaction constitutes a separate conception of power. Their analysis merely points in this direction.

causal mechanism linking the independent variable (combinations of military doctrines) to the dependent variable (the initiation of war). Specifically, their argument is: 1) strategies that minimize military losses permit states to continue fighting, and 2) quicker outcomes are better than slower outcomes for the state that is trying to alter the status quo.¹⁵ The primary conclusion drawn from the empirical tests is that blitzkrieg strategies offer the prospects of quick victory, which makes attack more likely as decision makers seek to maximize benefits and minimize costs. Two problems stand out. First, by conceiving of costs and benefits in terms of military losses, their initial conceptual advance of differentiating gross power variables from finer-grained notions of military power is diminished. The notion of relative power that emerges from the interaction of military doctrine should be kept distinct from broader conceptions of state power. In arguing that military losses matter because they diminish overall state capacity, Reiter and Stam fail to distinguish their notion of power from standard realist notions of power.

Second, others have argued that the military losses do not have the imputed causal effects that such studies assume. Robert McQuie has shown that there is no systematic pattern of influence between mounting battle casualties and the decision to succumb to a coercer's demands. Rather, McQuie found that in more than half of the eighty battles he examined, "attackers or defenders admitted defeat when they perceived themselves to have been outmaneuvered by the opponent—meaning that enemy forces had encircled, penetrated, or enveloped them; or adjacent friendly units had withdrawn; or else the enemy had occupied key terrain."¹⁶ The implication is that the causal mechanism linking

¹⁵ Reiter and Stam further assume that states are able to execute the strategy they chose at the outset of a war.

¹⁶ Quoted in Barry D. Watts, "Ignoring Reality: Problems of Theory and Evidence in Security Studies," *Security Studies*, 7, 2 (Winter 1997/98), 158; see Robert McQuie, "Battle Outcomes: Casualty Rates as a

the interaction of military doctrines with the probability of war (that is, the relative rate and magnitude of mounting battle casualties) is incorrectly specified. In short, their analysis does not adequately explain *how* the interaction of military doctrines affects state behavior.

The final theoretical limitation to this approach is shared with the “cult of the offensive” arguments: their analysis cannot adequately explain the timing of wars begun by states that have a “superior” military doctrine. Again, the case of World War I is illustrative. Germany employed a maneuver strategy¹⁷ against the French attrition strategy. Yet, the Schlieffen Plan and Plan 17 existed for years before August 1914. In order to fully explain the effects that the interaction of military doctrines has on the outbreak of war, it is necessary to also account for the rather late initiation of the war.

In sum, the interaction of military doctrines is an important, yet under theorized factor that affects the outbreak of war. The argument offered below will demonstrate how the interaction of military doctrines can give one state added power vis-à-vis its opponent. This added power, what I term “operational power,” is distinct from broader notions of state power. Moreover, as the section on preventive war will show, by examining the dynamic trends in operational power, I will be in a better position to logically resolve the issue of the timing of war that plagues both the first and second school of thought concerning the relationship between military doctrine and the outbreak of war.

Measure of Defeat,” *Army* (November 1987). This is akin to the notion of “operational shock.” See Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory*, (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 16-20.

¹⁷ The concept of maneuver is relative. The Schlieffen Plan sought a broad envelopment of the enemy’s forces, rather than a head to head attrition style contest, which was the foundation for France’s methodological battle doctrine. See Michael Howard, “Men Against Fire: Expectations of War in 1914,” in Miller et al., *Military Strategy*, 4-5.

Offense-Defense Theory

The second body of literature on which my argument builds is offense-defense theory. Offense-defense theory contends that certain structural conditions affect the relative efficacy of offensive and defensive actions in the international system. In some cases, the security of a state is best achieved by attacking an opponent before it attacks; in other cases, state security is best assured by waiting to absorb the blow should war breakout. According to this theory, if one state holds an “offensive advantage” vis-à-vis another state, the probability of war increases. If one state holds a “defensive advantage,” the probability of war decreases.¹⁸ The offense-defense balance is considered by most theorists to be a continuum, rather than a dichotomy, affecting state behavior by determining the amount of resources one state must invest in offensive capabilities to offset an opponent’s investment in defensive capabilities.¹⁹ In short, offense-defense theory argues that offensive and defensive military capabilities do not have the same effectiveness across time, nor are they equally efficacious against all adversaries. Structurally, the offense-defense balance induces heightened security competition (and a higher probability of war) when the return on offensive investments increases.²⁰

The intuitive appeal of offense-defense theory is compelling, and while it offers important conceptual and theoretical contributions to the study of war and peace, the

¹⁸ An alternative set of hypotheses is offered by James D. Fearon, “The Offense-Defense Balance and War Since 1648,” draft manuscript (University of Chicago, 1997).

¹⁹ Lynn-Jones, 665-66. See also Jervis, 188; and Glaser and Kaufmann, 50-51. For alternative definitions of the balance see, Jack S. Levy, “The Offense/Defense Balance of Military Technology: A Theoretical and Historical Analysis,” *International Studies Quarterly* 28 (1984).

²⁰ In addition to the works cited above, see Quester, “Defense Over Offense in Central Europe” (Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies, 1978); Thomas C. Shelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), ch. 6; Ted Hopf, “Polarity, The Offense Defense Balance, and War,” *American Political Science Review*, 85, 2 (June 1991); and Stephen D. Biddle, *The Determinants of Offensiveness and Defensiveness in Conventional Land Warfare* (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1992).

theory is problematic in its current manifestations for two primary reasons. First, offense-defense theory has yet to adequately theorize the conditions under which a state is afforded either an offensive or defensive advantage. For some, offensive and defensive effectiveness are determined solely by technology.²¹ Others posit a role for military doctrine (offensive vs. defensive), cumulativeness of resources, nationalism, and force size in addition to technology and geography.²² The narrower conception, or “core offense-defense theory,” has not fared well in empirical tests. Kier Lieber tests the core version of the theory against four periods of technological change and finds that offense-defense theory’s hypotheses fail in each case.²³ Broader conceptions, on the other hand, are criticized for failing to clearly differentiate the offense-defense balance from the broader notions of state power.²⁴ Further, broader conceptions of the balance are prone to loose operationalization because no criteria have been given by offense-defense theorists as to how multiple factors combine to form a given advantage.²⁵ In short, extant offense-defense theory either overly circumscribes the concept of the balance or bloats it with ad hoc variables rendering the balance both untestable and indistinguishable from other notions of state power.

Second, offense-defense theory has yet to clearly demonstrate how an offensive advantage determines war and how a defensive advantage induces peace. Many theorists

²¹ Lynn-Jones, 666-67 argues for a strict technological foundation for the balance; Quester, *Offense and Defense*, 1-5 and Jervis, 186-94 contend that the interaction of technology and geography determine the status of the balance.

²² Van Evera, *Causes of War*, 160-66, Glaser and Kaufmann, 61-68; Biddle, 8, 59.

²³ Kier Lieber, “Grasping the Technological Peace: The Offense-Defense Balance and International Security,” *International Security* 25, 1 (Summer 2000).

²⁴ Richard K. Betts, “Must War Find a Way?” *International Security* 24, 2 (Fall 1999), 185-86; Stacie E. Goddard, “Correspondence: Taking Offense at Offense-Defense Theory,” *International Security* 23, 3 (Winter 1998/99), 190-92. This problem is exacerbated if diplomatic factors (such as power balancing or bandwagoning and defensive alliances) in addition to military factors are posited as the sources of offensive and defensive effectiveness.

²⁵ Betts, 187; Bernard I. Finel, “Correspondence,” 186-87.

contend that leaders clearly understand the particular advantage confronting both their state and the opposing state, and adopt policies with the benefit of full information. According to Glaser and Kaufmann, “. . . states make the best possible decisions for attack or defense, taking into account their own and their opponents’ options for strategy and force posture.”²⁶ The reason given for assuming optimality in doctrinal creation and force deployments turns on what they contend to be the requirements of structural theorizing: because states act in accordance to structural constraints and opportunities, the only way to test whether the offense-defense balance is a robust causal variable vis-à-vis other structural variables is through such a priori assumptions. Yet, the optimality assumption fails to account for the inherent uncertainty induced by the anarchic international system. Simply put, in order for offense-defense theory to explain the origins of war, it must explicitly incorporate *uncertainty* concerning the enemy’s military capabilities and the possibility for asymmetries in the quality and quantity of such information.²⁷

Other offense-defense theorists argue that accurate perceptions of the balance are rare, locating the causes of war in the false perception that the offense is advantaged over defense more frequently than it actually is. For Van Evera, the *misperception of offensive advantage* “plays a major role in causing most wars.”²⁸ Misperceptions of offensive and defensive advantages are also seen as the cause of failed alliance policies

²⁶ Glaser and Kaufmann, 55. Lynn-Jones contends that accurate perceptions of the offense-defense balance are necessary if the theory is one of international politics (as opposed to one of foreign policy). Lynn-Jones, 671.

²⁷ How states respond to the balance (that is, whether they consider attack or defense to be the more efficacious strategy) is conditioned by what Glaser termed in another article the “national evaluative capabilities of states.” These capabilities can differ from state to state and should be brought into a theory of foreign policy. See Charles L. Glaser, “Political Consequences of Military Strategy: Expanding and Refining the Spiral and Deterrence Models,” *World Politics*, 44, 4 (July 1992), 515.

²⁸ Van Evera, *Causes of War*, 185.

prior to the First and Second World Wars.²⁹ The strength of these arguments lies in their ability to account for the possibility of states to incorrectly assess the nature of the offense-defense balance. Their limitation, however, appears in the causes of misperceptions and the frequency with which they are manifest. If misperceptions of the balance are the cause of most wars, then the balance as a structure cannot be considered as a cause of state behavior. Rather, the origins of war must be found in national and individual level pathologies that stand apart from the structure of the offense-defense balance.

Despite its limitations, offense-defense theory holds promise as a powerful explanation for the origins of war. Specifically, the offense-defense balance should be seen as a structure imposing constraints and opportunities on states with respect to the choices states make for ensuring their security. When a state is afforded either an offensive or defensive advantage, it possesses a multiplier to its overall economic and military strength. In order to explain how this multiplier to power affects state behavior, offense-defense theory needs to be refined. This paper offers four such refinements.

As noted above, the core version of offense-defense theory has not fared well in empirical tests. This should not come as a surprise because in general, technology has its most direct effects at the tactical battlefield level, not at the strategic level where issues of foreign policy are more salient.³⁰ The ability to maneuver more quickly than an opponent, or an increase in the lethality of weapons, poses tactical constraints with which

²⁹ Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization*, 44, 2 (Spring 1990).

³⁰ This proposition is not absolute, however. The increased lethality of weapons over time (especially the destructiveness of nuclear weapons) poses explicit constraints on strategy. The role of nuclear weapons is considered below in the discussion of the effects of decline in operational power under a neutral offense-defense balance.

policymakers must contend when considering whether it is better to attack or defend. The same is true for the other potential variables that broader versions of the theory point out: the degree to which resources cumulate in a given campaign, or the degree to which troops will be more cohesive as a result of high levels of nationalism, are directly manifest at the tactical level. What is of critical importance in explaining the origins of war are the ways in which states attempt to exploit or overcome these tactical considerations when they conduct military missions. Military missions are structured according to a state's operational military doctrine. As such, the first refinement to offense-defense theory offered here is the use of military doctrine as the unit of analysis in determining whether or not a state should initiate war.³¹

Yet, it is not a state's military doctrine in isolation that determines the nature of the offense-defense balance. Rather it is the interaction of two or more states' operational doctrines that affects whether military missions are likely to succeed or fail. In certain interactions, a state employing either an offensive or defensive military doctrine can expect that its doctrine will enable its military to achieve desired battlefield ends. In such cases, a superior military doctrine affords the state greater "operational power" than its opponent. If a state has greater operational power than its opponent and employs an offensive doctrine, then it is afforded an offensive advantage. If a state has greater operational power than its opponent and employs a defensive doctrine, then it is afforded a defensive advantage. The second refinement to offense-defense theory is the

³¹ Similarly, Biddle proposes that force employment be seen as the unit of analysis for offense-defense theory. Four factors are of particular importance: "the 'tempo,' or assault velocity of the invader's offensive; the depth of the defender's prepared positions; the allocation of the defender's forces between mobile reserves and forward garrison of those prepared positions; and the allocation of the defender's mobile reserves between counterattack and passive reinforcement." Biddle, 17-18, 312-13.

proposition that the interaction of two or more state's military doctrines that determines the nature of the offense-defense balance.³²

The third refinement to offense-defense theory concerns the ways in which the offense-defense balance affects policy, or the decisions to initiate war. As I discuss in greater detail below, military doctrines are structured according to the operational concepts of the state. As such, a complete picture of an opponent's doctrine may not be as evident as the quantity of its forces or the way in which its forces are deployed. Nevertheless, states do possess the means, with varying degree of effectiveness, of determining the broad contours of an opponent's doctrine. How a state calculates the nature of the offense-defense balance (the means it has of determining the other's doctrine and of calculating how its own doctrine is likely to fare against that of the opponent) is conditioned by the effectiveness of its national evaluative capabilities. The decision to initiate war is thus determined by the nature of the balance as it is calculated by these capabilities. In short, the assumption is that states do act rationally on the information they possess, however the information of one state may be more complete than that of another as a result of superior evaluative capabilities.³³

³² This refinement builds on the notion of "directional balance" developed in Glaser and Kaufmann, 58. ". . . within each dyad of states there are really two offense-defense balances: one with state A as the attacker and state B as the defender, and one with B attacking A." Because they see no relationship between military doctrine and the offense-defense balance, this notion and the analysis stemming there from is argued to affect state behavior by determining the structural constraints and opportunities for the adoption of either offensive or defensive force postures. My conception of the offense-defense balance does take into account states' military doctrines. As such, the structural effects of the balance determine the probability of war, rather than the determination of military doctrine and strategy.

³³ Many contend that due to the nature of bureaucracies and, more specifically, military organizations, "rational" evaluation and execution of strategy is extremely rare. Systematic parochial biases exist within military organizations that hinder clear-headed evaluation of the international environment as well as the development of appropriate military policies. See Posen, 41-47; Snyder, *Ideology of the Offensive*, ch.1; and "Civil-Military Relations, 27-34; and Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971). By national evaluative capabilities, I am referring to the institutions, including but not limited to the armed forces, that are dedicated to analyzing military and foreign policy. See Glaser, 515.

Together, these refinements to offense-defense theory offer a more precise conception of the structural nature of the offense-defense balance than is evident in the extant approaches. By conceiving of military doctrines as the unit of analysis, many problems concerning the aggregation of the numerous variables identified by the broader variants of the theory are overcome. Conceiving of the offense-defense balance in terms of the interaction of military doctrines, I offer a simpler, yet more precise means of operationalizing the balance than is suggested by others.³⁴ By explicitly considering the uncertainty inherent to the international system and the incomplete information concerning adversaries' capabilities stemming there from, the reliance on misperceptions in explaining state behavior can be corrected.

Nevertheless, a static conception of the offense-defense balance does not resolve the remaining limitation to offense-defense theory, specifically the inability to explain *why* a state possessing an offensive advantage would opt for war as a means to ensuring its security. Logically, a state possessing an offensive advantage would find its security enhanced in much the same way that a defensive advantage would. Indeed, if one state possessed a significant advantage (either offensive or defensive), no state would logically opt for war: the advantaged state would find security plentiful, while the disadvantaged state would find war too costly to initiate. In short, offense-defense theory remains incomplete in its static form. What is necessary is an understanding of how changes in the offense-defense balance can engender heightened security competition among states.

³⁴ Critics have charged that extant offense-defense theory's variables are either incapable of being operationalized non-tautologically, or that the requirements for effective operationalization are exceptionally complex. See Betts, 186-87 and Reiter, 369, n. 4.

Preventive War Theory

The third body of literature that my argument builds on is preventive war theory. Preventive wars occur when a state with superior power expects its favorable position to significantly erode relative to that of another state. Because of the inherent uncertainty that anarchy entails, the declining state fears that once it assumes an inferior power position, the new leader will either initiate a war that the former leader cannot win, or will extract concessions from the former leader with greater ease because of its new found bargaining power. Perceiving that its vital national interest may be threatened and believing that it will be unable to be victorious in a future conflict, the declining state is trapped by a “better-now-than-later” logic and launches a war with the intention of forestalling its decline.³⁵

Preventive war theorists make a distinction between preventive and preemptive motivations for war. Preventive war motives stem from the fear of a longer-term decline in national military and economic power. Although some preventive war theorists contend that shorter-term military mobilization and deployments can affect the overall balance of power between states and induce preventive incentives³⁶, most focus on the broader conceptions of state power as the causal force behind preventive war.³⁷

³⁵ Jack Levy, “Declining Power and the Preventive Motivation for War,” *World Politics*, 40, 1 (October 1987), 87-88; Van Evera, *Causes of War*, 73-74; Snyder, “Perceptions of the Security Dilemma in 1914”; Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), ch. 2; Randall L. Schweller, “Domestic Structure and Preventive War: Are Democracies More Pacific?” *World Politics*, 44 (January 1992), 235-38. For the argument that it is the rising state that initiates a war see, A. F. K. Organski, and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 19-20, 28; and Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chs. 1-2 (although Gilpin does contend that declining states do occasionally launch preventive war, *ibid.* 191). For a more skeptical view of the salience of preventive motivations for war see, Richard Ned Lebow, “Windows of Opportunity: Do States Jump Through Them?” *International Security*, 9, 1 (Summer 1984).

³⁶ Van Evera, *Causes of War*, 75 argues that “actions that quickly change the balance of power, including military mobilizations and deployments” create short-term windows and can thus be considered a cause of preventive war. See also Levy, 90.

³⁷ Levy, 90; Copeland, 5-6; Gilpin, 13-14, Organski and Kugler, 8-9.

Preemptive war motives, on the other hand, stem from the fear that another state will launch war in the short-run. Fearing that the opponent will gain a military advantage from striking first, the state is pressured into preempting the opponent's move.

Preemptive motivations derive from "first move advantages" as conditioned by technology and geography (or, the offense-defense balance) and the belief that the first state to mobilize its armed forces in a crisis will have a significant advantage.³⁸

The distinction between preventive and preemptive war motivations and the different notions of power shifts that drive the two logics is analytically important because it underscores two crucial elements that affect decisions to go to war. The first is the temporal factor: preemptive wars are launched out of the fear that an opponent's first strike is imminent, while preventive wars are initiated by the declining state out of fear that the rising challenger will choose to initiate a war in the more distant future.³⁹ The second element of importance is the type of power shifts that motivate the decision to start war. Many consider preventive wars as those fought to forestall the creation of new military assets, and preemptive attack as that which forestalls the mobilization and deployment of existing forces.⁴⁰ Simply put, if war is initiated because of the fear of a change in the status of a state's power to conduct military missions with its existing

³⁸ Van Evera, *Causes of War*, ch. 3, esp. 37-45; Copeland, 44-45, 266 n. 27, "Preemptive war therefore depends on technology and geography; the system must be offense-dominant. Preventive war is a function of a different independent variable, namely, shifting power differentials." For the view that preemptive wars rarely, if ever, occur see, Dan Reiter, "Exploding the Powder Keg Myth: Preemptive Wars Almost Never Happen," *International Security* 20, 2 (Fall 1995).

³⁹ Distinguishing preventive from preemptive war along temporal lines is not without detractors. See Reiter, 7 n. 2; Levy 90-92; and Jervis, 188-89 for those who favor distinguishing along temporal lines. Van Evera, *Causes of War*, 40 n. 18 argues that such a distinction is not useful because it does not clarify whether the "better-now-than-later" logic is prompted by a first move advantage or by impending power shifts.

⁴⁰ Snyder, "Perceptions of the Security Dilemma in 1914," 160; Van Evera, *Causes of War*, 40 n. 18.

armed forces⁴¹, then it is a preemptive war; if war is initiated because of the fear of the expected future decline of broader notions of power, then it is a preventive war.⁴²

Among the strengths of preventive war theory is the focus on the long-term security of the state as conditioned by slower changing power trends. Where extant preventive war theory is limited is in its conception of the type of power that induces preventive war motivations. I argue that an unfavorable change in relative balance of “operational power” (as determined by the interaction of two or more states’ military doctrines) is an important yet distinct cause of war. The ways in which states structure their armed forces through their military doctrines are crucial to understanding sources of international threat and the ability for states to respond militarily to those threats. Moreover, because the process of doctrinal innovation is frequently slow-paced, a perceived change in the military doctrine of an adversary can engender the same fear of the future and spur the same motivations for war that decline in broader notions of power do.⁴³ In short, existing preventive war theory suffers from an inability to capture the

⁴¹ The power or ability to perform military missions is a term used by Glaser and Kaufmann, 48. This type of power refers to a state’s ability to successfully attack, deter, and defend. I argue that while broader notions of power certainly do affect a state’s ability conduct such operations, an analytical distinction must be made. Properly speaking, the power to conduct military missions (or, what I term “operational power”) refers to the relative ability of a state to successfully implement its military operational doctrine (be it offensive or defensive in orientation).

⁴² Again, Van Evera and Levy do consider military mobilization and force deployment as causing shorter-term windows of opportunity/vulnerability. I will argue that mobilization and deployment can prompt preventive motivations for war, but for reasons other than they suggest. Properly speaking, mobilizations and deployments pose potential threats to states only through the operational doctrines that structure the armed forces of states. As many argue, military doctrine and strategy are “force-multipliers.” The degree to which mobilization and deployments constitute threats to other states must be seen through the lens of operational power.

⁴³ Posen, 30-31. As Goldman and Andres note, “Military innovations usually require changes in how military organizations operate.” The requisite development of organizational principles and, especially, the adoption of new operational concepts are time consuming endeavors. Emily O. Goldman and Richard B. Andres, “Systemic Effects of Military Innovation and Diffusion,” *Security Studies*, 8, 4 (Summer 1999), 95. In their review of the history of the effects of innovation and diffusion, Goldman and Andres mention four possible responses to successful military practices abroad: emulation, reinvention, counterinvention, or no response. Because their study’s analytical reference point is the response by the state(s) forced to play catch-up, they do not examine the responses the state that was first to innovate is likely to take when facing

causal effects that perceived doctrinal change in an adversary's armed forces has on the outbreak of war.

With the understanding that variations in operational power serve as the critical motivation for state behavior, the final refinement to offense-defense theory can be offered. Building on the insights of preventive war theory, the fourth refinement to offense-defense theory is the proposition that changes in the offense-defense balance (specifically, the anticipated loss of operational power) structure the incentives for the initiation of war. States possessing superior operational power do not have an immediate incentive to initiate war, even if the probability of victory may be high. A state with either an offensive or defensive advantage has the ability to extract concessions from its opponent without employing its armed forces. According to this logic, the decision to initiate war comes when a state holding either an offensive or defensive advantage believes that its operational power is declining as a result of a change in the military doctrine of its opponent. That is, if a state believes that its offensive (or defensive) advantage is waning, it will initiate a war intended to forestall its opponent's acquisition of superior operational power.

Operational Power, the Offense-Defense Balance and War: The Argument

The argument offered here draws on the combined strengths of the three literatures reviewed above. From military strategic interaction theory, my argument takes the interaction of military doctrines as a critical variable affecting the intensity of security

a state that is about to reactively innovate. My argument does consider the responses that a state superior but declining in operational power will have in light of the opponent's attempts to overcome its disadvantaged position. To their list of possible responses, I offer an additional option: the initiation of war against an innovating state.

competition among states. Specifically, I focus on the concept of “operational power” that this literature merely suggests, but does not develop. Borrowing from preventive war theory, which identifies the importance of relative trends in power as the motivating factor for the initiation of armed conflict, I argue that it is the decline in operational power that induce states to enact increasingly belligerent policies against opponents. Because operational power is derived from the interaction of military doctrines, a state is likely to adopt hard-lined policies if it believes that its opponent’s innovations will thwart its ability to perform successful military missions. Offense-defense theory provides the causal mechanism linking changes in operational power to relevant political outcomes. Specifically, I will show how “offensive advantages” and “defensive advantages” share a common foundation: both provide the advantaged state with superior operational power over its opponent. Yet, the incorporation of the structure of the offense-defense balance logically entails that a state facing declining *defensive* operational power will have a more restricted set of preventive actions available to it than does a state facing declining *offensive* operational power. States facing a decline in operational power from the point of a *neutral* offense-defense balance will find themselves afforded an even more circumscribed set of available preventive actions.⁴⁴

Three Key Concepts

In order to derive the hypotheses on the relationship between operational power, the offense-defense balance, and war, three key concepts require further elaboration.

⁴⁴ The conception of the offense-defense balance offered here differs from that widely employed in the literature insofar as the balance is neither seen as a continuum, nor a strict dichotomy. The categories “offensive advantage,” “defensive advantage,” and “neutral” are offered as the causal mechanisms linking the independent variable (military doctrinal interaction) with the dependent variable (the probability of war). As such, conceiving of the balance as a continuum would hinder a clear understanding of the structural effect of the balance on state behavior. Lynn-Jones, 665-66 and Glaser and Kaufmann, 50-51 both contend the balance is a continuum, rather than a dichotomy.

This section will develop the concepts of military doctrinal interaction, operational power, and the offense-defense balance.

Military doctrine⁴⁵ as a concept can be operationalized along two lines: according to the orientation of military missions performed and according to the operational concepts employed.⁴⁶ The orientation of military missions can be either offensive or defensive. Offensive doctrines seek to neutralize the threat posed by the adversary, specifically its armed forces, through attack. Defensive doctrines aim to deny the adversary the objectives it seeks. It is important to note that the orientation of military missions do not determine a state's foreign policy or grand strategic goals. Rather, the ideal-typical military doctrine will accommodate a state's grand strategy by structuring military missions in a politically acceptable manner should war occur.⁴⁷

The second means of classifying doctrines is based on the operational concepts guiding force employment in a theater of operations. Two extreme forms of operational concepts exist: attrition and maneuver. Attrition doctrines seek victory through battles characterized as tests of material strength; victory is a function of the number of weapons a state has and is able to amass on the battlefield. It is the amount of firepower that can

⁴⁵ For a review of the contending theories on the origins of military doctrine, see Scott D. Sagan, "The Origins of Military Doctrine and Command and Control Systems," Peter R. Lavoy, Scott D. Sagan, and James J. Wirtz eds., *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers Will Use Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Weapons* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

⁴⁶ Posen argues that military doctrine is the subcomponent of grand strategy concerning the military means of achieving state security. Doctrine answers the questions, "What means shall be employed? and How shall they be employed." Posen, 13.

⁴⁷ Most of the literature on military doctrine contends that "punishment" or "deterrence" is a third form of orientation. This is incorrect because successful deterrence is a strictly political response to forces that are *not* employed. Military doctrines, properly conceived, are useful for many political ends. If deterrence fails, then forces must be employed either offensively or defensively. In other words, deterrence is achieved militarily through the *threat* of offensive or defensive action. The concept "deterrent doctrines" conflates military means with political goals. Posen, 13-14; see also Jonathan Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1953 to 1970* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 25-26; and Shai Feldman, *Israeli Nuclear Deterrence: A Strategy for the 1980s* (New York, 1982), 26. Shimshoni and Feldman both use the concept "active deterrence." Mearsheimer correctly argues that military strategy and doctrine can influence the *political* decision to initiate war. Mearsheimer, 60-66.

be brought to bear on the enemy that determines the movement of the front line. Victory under attrition comes only with the annihilation of the enemy's forces. Significantly, nothing differentiates one target for another under attrition doctrines. Rather, victory is achieved through the aggregation of individual battles. Maneuver doctrines, on the other hand, are predicated on speed and surprise. For maneuver to be successful, the enemy's weakness must be accurately identified and then struck with quickness and precision. Surprise and speed are reciprocally related: in order to achieve surprise, high levels of tactical and strategic mobility are necessary; to achieve high degrees of tactical and strategic mobility, it is necessary to attack where the enemy least expects it.⁴⁸ Most importantly, maneuver doctrines achieve victory through the disruption and decapitation of the enemy's forces. Unlike attrition doctrines, which do not differentiate among targets, maneuver doctrines seek to destroy the enemy's ability to conduct further operations by employing pressure at crucial nodes, specifically, a state's C³I.⁴⁹

In arguing that attrition and maneuver are operational "concepts," my intention is to underscore the ideational and informational components of military doctrines.⁵⁰ Many contend that mobility-enhancing technologies (such as mechanized armor) are a

⁴⁸ Tactical and strategic mobility are discussed in Mearsheimer, 48-49, 225-26 n. 103.

⁴⁹ Luttwak, 91-99; Mearsheimer, 30-43; Hart, 144-47; Naveh, 8-29; Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret eds, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), ch. III, books 8-9, 14.

⁵⁰ Thus, the concept of military doctrine offered here differs from those who consider only the material sources of military doctrine. See Posen, ch. 2; Mearsheimer, 31; and Dan Reiter and Curtis Meek, "Determinants of Military Strategy, 1903-1994: A Quantitative Empirical Test," *International Studies Quarterly*, 43 (1999). The ideational aspects of military doctrine and strategic culture are discussed in Kier, *Imagining War*; Jeffrey W. Legro, *Cooperation Under Fire: Anglo-American Restraint during World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Jack Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Options*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1977); and Alastair Ian Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). By stressing these factors, my conception of military doctrine differs from Biddle's conception of force employment, which examines the strictly material aspects of the interaction of two adversary's doctrines on the battlefield. Biddle, 312-13.

necessary condition for the emergence of true operational maneuver.⁵¹ To be sure, technology is important to the extent that an army with a tremendous technological advantage over another may be able to achieve increased relational maneuver with greater ease than it would otherwise. But technology alone does not determine the content of operational concepts. Indeed, many technologically primitive armies achieved a high degree of relational maneuver against their opponents with dramatic effects.⁵² What distinguishes maneuver from attrition are the speed and surprise of the attacking forces, in addition to the amount of information required to achieve disruption and decapitation, and the way in which command and control systems are established.⁵³

In sum, operational concepts concern the beliefs about how the use of military capabilities against an opponent can be most effective. Operational concepts are the ideational components to military doctrine. As the attempt to achieve a greater degree of relational maneuver takes on greater importance in a doctrine, the quality of information regarding the adversary's capabilities and doctrine, and the location of the enemy's political and military weaknesses, becomes increasingly crucial.⁵⁴

Taken together, the orientation of military missions and the operational concepts guiding them produce the following typology for the concept of military doctrine. The x-axis maps orientation, and the y-axis maps operational concepts.

⁵¹“With the introduction of the tank, however, the stage was set for a fundamental shift in the nature of modern warfare. In retrospect, this point seems obvious. At the time, and in fact during the twenty year period between the world wars, most experts did not accept the claim that the tank had the potential to revolutionize warfare.” Mearsheimer, 31.

⁵² Naveh discusses three such examples, the Peninsular War (1808-14), the Balkan Campaign (1877), and the Palestinian Campaign (1917). Naveh, 49-55.

⁵³ See Naveh, 49-62.

⁵⁴ By focusing on the ideational aspect of military doctrines, this argument overcomes the challenges leveled against offense-defense theory that contend that military skill is a critical factor in the link between military strategy and the origins of war. See Jonathan Shimshoni, “Technology, Military Advantage, and World War I: A Case for Military Entrepreneurship,” in Miller et al., *Military Strategy*, 137-48; and Betts, 195-97.

	<u>Defense</u>	<u>Offense</u>
<u>Attrition</u>	<i>Static Defense</i> (Maginot Line) <i>Forward Defense</i> <i>Defense in Depth</i> (“Islands of Resistance”)	<i>Attrition-Offense</i> (Plan 17) <i>Envelopment and Annihilation</i> (Schlieffen Plan)
<u>Maneuver</u>	<i>“Mobile” Defense</i>	<i>Blitzkrieg</i>

In order to identify the type of military doctrine a given state employs, the nature of the two elements must be ascertained. Determining orientation can be accomplished by examining whether the state in question seeks to invade and occupy the enemy’s territory after mobilization, or whether it intends to allow the enemy on to its territory and subsequently wear down the attack on its own ground. Determining the content of the state’s operational concepts is more difficult. At this stage, the goal is to determine *how* the state intends to achieve victory over its opponent in a future war. Thus, operational concepts must be considered in absolute terms (that is, only from the perspective of the state in question). Considered absolutely, the degree to which maneuver principles are employed in a given state’s doctrine can be measured by comparing an ideal-typical attrition doctrine to the actual doctrine adopted. For example, France’s Plan 17 would score near the ideal-typical attrition doctrine⁵⁵, while American AirLand Battle would score close to pure maneuver.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Howard, 4-5.
⁵⁶ Naveh, ch., 8.

Yet, it is the interaction of two states' military doctrines, rather than the mere existence of certain doctrinal types, that determines whether a state has a high or low probability of victory in a conflict as well as the intensity of security competition among states. In a dyad, some combinations of military doctrines will give one state a greater probability of victory than will others. Specifically, doctrines that entail greater maneuver-based operational concepts are likely to be more successful against those that have attrition-based operational concepts. The reason for this turns on the way attrition doctrines attempt to structure the battlefield: victory is predicated on the aggregation of successful battles. A maneuver-based doctrine can thwart the ability of attrition doctrines to determine the next target at a faster rate than they can acquire it. Moreover, maneuver doctrines can engage forces at the preferred time and location and have a better chance of choosing the axis of attack than can attrition doctrines. The following combinations of military doctrines give the first state a greater probability of victory than the second state, or in other words, superior operational power: OMOA, OMDA, DMOA, DMDA.⁵⁷

Yet, not all combinations give one side superior operational power. In these cases, operational power is washed out for one of two reasons: either the same type of maneuver principles are adopted by both states resulting in no inherent doctrinal superiority, or both states adopt attrition principles that in themselves offer neither state the potential to achieve operational power. The following combinations of military doctrines offer no superiority in operational power to either state: OMOM, OMDM, DMDM, OADA, DAOA, OAOA.

⁵⁷ Where OM is offensive maneuver, DM is defensive maneuver, OA is offensive attrition, and DA is defensive attrition. OMOA, for example, is read: state A has an offensive maneuver doctrine; state B has an offensive attrition doctrine.

Determining which type of military doctrine a state employs requires considering the *absolute* level of maneuver principles within the state's doctrine. In order to determine whether a state is afforded superior operational power vis-à-vis an adversary, the operational concepts must be examined *relatively*. Simply put, it is the relative measure of the content of operational concepts that determines the amount of operational power that a state is afforded. By comparing how both states attempt to employ speed and surprise, the ways in which information is gathered and disseminated, and the extent to which command structures are organized, the relative measure of operational power can be obtained.⁵⁸

As argued above, military strategic interaction theory fails to distinguish the causal effects of military doctrinal interaction from the causal effects associated with broader notions of state power. By conceiving of military doctrines in terms of both the orientation of military missions and according to the operational concepts that govern force employment, this crucial conceptual distinction is maintained. Moreover, because of the disrupting effects that encirclement and breakthrough have on the opponent's ability to perform military missions, the conception of military doctrine presented here captures the causal effects of doctrinal interaction more fully than does military strategic interaction theory.

Finally, the inability for military strategic interaction theory to logically demonstrate the causal relationship between the interaction of military doctrines and the origins of war suggests that a static conception of the independent variable is of little

⁵⁸ It is crucial to recognize that although one state's existing doctrine may be predicated on maneuver principles, it may still suffer a decline in operational power if its adversary is able to innovate its doctrine in a manner that will enable it to achieve unprecedented levels of maneuver. For example, although the Soviet's Deep Operations doctrine was the most advanced maneuver doctrine ever developed until the 1980s, it became increasingly obsolete as a result of American doctrinal innovation afterward.

theoretical value. Preventive war theorists, on the other hand, contend that the trends in power, rather than static power relations, serve as the motivating factor for state behavior. Declining states are induced to take preventive action, while rising states are logically inclined to wait until they assume a superior power position from which they can extract concessions from the former leader with greater ease. As such, I argue that states expecting a decline in operational power stemming from an adversary's doctrinal innovation will be motivated to take preventive measures.⁵⁹ Because operational power serves as a force multiplier to overall state capacity, even states that are weaker in terms of gross power, but which possess superior operational power in the present, can be induced to launch preventive war. Not all combinations of military doctrine provide one state with superior operational power, however. In such cases, a state facing a pending deficit in operational power due to the doctrinal innovation of its adversary is likely to take preventive measures, but will aver from launching preventive war unless it is superior in terms of gross power to the adversary.

Thus far I have argued that the interaction of military doctrines can lead to two outcomes: either one state is afforded with superior operational power over its adversary, or neither state achieves added operational power. Moreover, I argued that it is the potential loss of operational power that serves as the impetus for preventive action. If a state faces decline from a position of superiority, the probability of war increases dramatically because even a weaker state in terms of its gross power can start a war and expect to be victorious. If a state faces decline from a position of equality, then the probability of war increases, but not to the extent as in the former case, because weaker

⁵⁹ Again, because the implementation of doctrinal innovation can consume a great amount of time and resources, the political responses of a state facing an adversary undergoing doctrinal change are preventive, rather than preemptive.

states in terms of gross power cannot rationally expect victory; in such cases only superior states in terms of gross power can rationally expect victory.

The third concept on which my argument builds concerns the casual relationship between the offense-defense balance and war. I argued above that in order to overcome the limitations of offense-defense theory, four refinements are necessary: that military doctrines be employed as the unit of analysis, that the interactions of military doctrines constitute the offense-defense balance, that the national evaluative capabilities of states be theoretically incorporated, and that the change in the offense-defense balance be seen as the factor exacerbating the intensity of security competition. These refinements can now be specified in greater detail. I argue that the doctrinal combinations OMDA and OMOA afford the first state with superior *offensive* operational power, or in terms of offense-defense theory, an *offensive advantage*. Further, the doctrinal combinations DMOA and DMDA afford the first state with superior *defensive* operational power, or a *defensive advantage*. Finally, the doctrinal combinations OMOM, OMDM, DMDM, OAOA, OADA, and DADA afford neither state an offensive or defensive advantage. These combinations thus result in a *neutral* offense-defense balance. These distinctions are crucial because they serve to qualify the types of actions states can take if they are confronted with a decline in operational power.

The following table illustrates these points. The x-axis maps the doctrine choice for State A; the y-axis maps the doctrine choice for State B. The internal cells describe the outcome of doctrinal interaction.

State A

		OM	OA	DM	DA
State B	OM	1. Neutral—no operational power gained by either.	2. Offensive operational power for B (offensive advantage)	3. Neutral—no operational power gained by either.	4. Offensive operational power for B (offensive advantage)
	OA	5. Offensive operational power for A (offensive advantage)	6. Neutral—no operational power gained by either.	7. Defensive operational power for A (defensive advantage)	8. Neutral—no operational power gained by either.
	DM	9. Neutral—no operational power gained by either.	10. Defensive operational power for B (defensive advantage)	11. Neutral—no operational power gained by either.	12. Defensive operational power for B (defensive advantage)
	DA	13. Offensive operational power for A (offensive advantage)	14. Neutral—no operational power gained by either.	15. Defensive operational power for A (defensive advantage)	16. Neutral—no operational power gained by either.

The table above presents the three values for the offense-defense balance resulting from the interactions of the military doctrines of two states. Statically conceived, the offense-defense balance determines *only* which, if either, of the two states is afforded an offensive or defensive advantage. Moreover, in static terms, the most that can be logically inferred from the balance is that if a state is afforded with an advantage (either offensive or defensive), then it will find security more plentiful than the disadvantaged state. Significantly, the static offense-defense balance does not present either state with a motivation for war: a state with either an offensive or defensive advantage will have, *ceteris paribus*, no security-driven motivation for initiating conflict. A state facing either an offensive or defensive disadvantage will not be structurally induced into launching

war because its inferior military doctrine offers little chance of succeeding on the battlefield. Finally, if the offense-defense balance is neutral, then as a structure, the balance plays no role in motivating states to launch a war as a means of achieving security.

The causal effects of the offense-defense balance are manifest only when one state, superior or equal to its adversary in operational power, expects its operational power to decline in the future. As noted above, decline in a state's relative operational power position occurs when its adversary innovates its doctrine in a manner that significantly challenges the first state's ability to successfully perform military missions. Yet, the ability for a state to accurately determine the new operational concepts of its opponent's doctrine is never perfect. Imperfect information concerning an adversary's doctrinal innovation stems from at least two sources. First, the innovating state has every incentive to hide its innovation until its new doctrine is operational. A state in the process of changing its doctrine, even if for the better, is in a precarious position at this time because new methods for employing forces on the battlefield are being developed. As Posen contends, "Should a war come during the transition, the organization will find itself between doctrines. Under combat conditions, even a bad doctrine may be better than no doctrine."⁶⁰

Second, the state facing an opponent undergoing doctrinal innovation may not "understand" the operational concepts being employed, even if they can be ascertained. If the new operational concepts are determined, the state facing an innovating opponent may not be able to fully assess the implications for the effectiveness of its own doctrine in the future. A state with an offensive advantage, for example, facing an innovating

⁶⁰ Posen, 55.

opponent may not be able to immediately determine whether its own doctrine will be inferior, superior, or equal to its opponent's doctrine in the future. Simply put, the process of evaluating the future effectiveness of an existing doctrine against one that is currently developing is not self-evident and straightforward, especially if the opponent's operational concepts are not fully known. It is the uncertainty of the future that motivates states to adopt hard-lined policies toward an opponent undergoing doctrinal innovation.⁶¹

Hypotheses

In order to facilitate hypothesis construction, six assumptions concerning the nature of the international system are offered. First, the international system is anarchic. Second, because of anarchy, states must rely on themselves for security. Third, states are motivated by security concerns above everything else. As such, the focus of this argument is on the *responses* to an adversary's doctrinal innovation, rather than on the motivations that induced the adversary to undergo doctrinal development. Fourth, states can never know with certainty the future intentions of other states (i.e., whether today's ally will be security seeking or expansionist tomorrow). Fifth, states have incomplete information concerning the operational doctrines that guide the employment of their opponents' armed forces. Finally, the argument holds constant the dynamic trends in gross power across the system. In so doing, my intention is to theoretically demonstrate the causal effects of changes in operational power apart from changes in broader notions of power.

⁶¹ Resende-Santos states the problem quite clearly, "Uncertainty means that a state could never have a sophisticated notion of where it is positioned relative to others. Nor could it anticipate when and how relative position will shift. The future is unknowable with respect to the intentions, actions, or capabilities of others." Joao Resende-Santos, "Anarchy and the Emulation of Military Systems: Military Organization and Technology in South America, 1870-1930," *Security Studies*, 5, 3 (Spring 1996), 204.

From these assumptions and from the refinements made to offense-defense theory, the following hypotheses are offered. A state facing a declining offensive advantage has available two means of preventive actions. First, the state will attempt to implement a new doctrine designed to maintain its superiority in operational power if it believes that it has the time, financial resources, and political capacity to do so. Second, the state will initiate war if it believes that its offensive advantage cannot be maintained otherwise. Because the state has in place an offensive doctrine, the path to war is straightforward.

H1: If a state with superior offensive operational power (offensive advantage) expects that its position is waning, it will act preventively to forestall its decline.

H1a: This state will implement a new doctrine designed to maintain its superiority in operational power if it believes that it has the time, financial resources, and political capacity to do so.

H1b: This state will initiate war if it believes that its superior position cannot be maintained otherwise.

The path to war is indirect for a state with a defensive advantage, however. Because the strengths of defensive doctrines are predicated on the attack by an adversary, the state facing a declining defensive advantage will be forced to initiate a crisis with the intention of putting the adversary on the horns of a dilemma: either halting the doctrinal innovations that promise to overcome its inferiority in operational power, or initiate a war that it is doctrinally not in a position to win. In other words, because the state has a defensive doctrine, it must induce its adversary to initiate hostilities. In sum, although the probability of war increases when a state superior in operational power expects that power to decline, the probability of war does not increase at the same rate for all values of the offense-defense balance. The state facing a declining offensive advantage does not have to rely on crises for war to occur, while a state facing a declining defensive advantage does.

H2: If a state with superior defensive operational power (defensive advantage) expects that its position is waning, it will act preventively to forestall its decline.

H2a: This state will implement a new doctrine designed to maintain its superiority in operational power if it believes that it has the time, financial resources, and political capacity to do so.

H2b: This state will initiate a crisis designed to induce the adversary into attacking, if it believes that its superior position cannot be maintained otherwise.

Finally, when the offense-defense balance is neutral, the multiplier to overall state capabilities that superior operational power affords is absent. Thus, states will not initiate war unless they are superior to the enemy in terms of gross power. States that are declining in operational power, and that are equal to the adversary in terms of gross power, must rely solely on crises in its attempt to prevent the opponent from continuing its process of doctrinal innovation. In this case, crises are initiated with the intention of signaling resolve, not to induce the other to attack. Finally, states facing a decline in operational power from a position of neutrality, and that are inferior to the adversary in terms of gross power, will be forced to accommodate the rising state because no action will forestall its decline.⁶²

H3: If a state expects that its adversary, with whom it currently has parity in operational power, is gaining operational power through doctrinal innovation, it will act preventively to forestall its decline.

H3a: This state will implement a new doctrine designed to augment its operational power if it believes that it has the time, financial resources, and political capacity to do so.

H3b: If this state is superior to its adversary in terms of gross power, it will initiate war if it believes that its operational power position cannot be maintained otherwise.

H3c: If this state is equal to its adversary in terms of gross power, it will initiate a crisis designed to signal resolve if it believes that its operational power position cannot be maintained otherwise.

H3d: If this state is inferior to its adversary in terms of gross power, it will accommodate the rising state if it believes that its operational power position cannot be maintained otherwise.

The refinements to offense-defense theory offered here suggest, contrary to extant approaches, that defensive advantages do not have the stabilizing effects that are widely believed. Indeed, from a static perspective, both offensive and defensive advantages are equally stabilizing. From a dynamic perspective, the loss of a defensive advantage is less

⁶² The role that nuclear weapons have on the intensity of security competition is best analyzed through the lens of a neutral offense-defense balance. Most of the history of the Cold War concerns the relationship between two states that possess nuclear weapons. Because of their destructiveness, policymakers were loath to consider their use. Nevertheless, I contend that the effects of nuclear doctrinal change (as conditioned by the relative balance of overall state capabilities) can be understood in terms of the modest rise and decline in operational power by one side, or the other, from a neutral offense-defense balance.

destabilizing than the loss of an offensive advantage, but is *more* destabilizing than the loss of parity.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this paper was the construction of a set of testable hypotheses on the relationship among operational power, the offense-defense balance, and the origins of war. To that end, I examined the literatures on military strategic interaction theory, offense-defense theory, and preventive war theory and demonstrated how each is limited both conceptually and theoretically. Despite these weaknesses, I argued that each offers a number of important insights into the causes of war and suggested a method of synthesizing their strengths into a single logical framework. The argument offered above posits that the effectiveness of offense and defense in the international system is determined by the interaction of two states' military doctrines. Military doctrines can interact in two ways. The interaction of the operational concepts underpinning each doctrine (attrition vs. maneuver) determines the balance of operational power between two states. In some cases, one state will be afforded superior operational power over its opponent; in other cases, neither state will achieve superiority in operational power. The second form of doctrinal interaction determines the value of the offense-defense balance. If a state is superior in operational power and its armed forces are oriented offensively, it then possesses an offensive advantage vis-à-vis its adversary. If a state is superior in operational power and its armed forces are oriented defensively, then it is afforded a defensive advantage. If neither state has superior operational power, the offense-defense balance is then neutral.

Recognizing that a static conception of the offense-defense balance is of little theoretical utility in determining the motivations for war, I argued that a state would be induced to take increasingly hard-line policies toward its opponent if it expected its operational power to be diminishing. Because operational power is determined by the interaction of military doctrines, variation in operational power comes when one state innovates its doctrine in a way that challenges its opponent's ability to effectively perform military missions. The offense-defense balance structurally determines the severity of responses that a state declining in operational power can take in order to bolster its security. Finally, I argued that due to the uncertainty the inherent to the anarchic international system, the information that any state can possess regarding the future directions of an adversary's doctrinal innovation and, more importantly, the implications for the declining state stemming from the adversary's innovations, will necessarily be imperfect.

Because no empirical tests of the hypotheses were conducted here, the argument remains strictly suggestive. Nevertheless, I contend that the analysis above does offer three contributions to the study of the international conflict. Two contributions are conceptual in nature; one is theoretical. The first is the notion of "operational power." Many have argued that gross power variables are indeterminate with respect to state behavior. Van Evera argues strongly for a theoretical reorientation of realism that explicitly considers the effects of "finer-grained" notions of power on the relations among states.⁶³ By conceiving of operational power as being determined by the interaction of two states' military doctrines, specifically the operational concepts underpinning those doctrines, I offer a variable that is both conceptually autonomous

⁶³ Van Evera, *Causes of War*, 7-11.

from broader notions of power yet not dependent on misperceptions as the causal mechanism linking fine-grained power to state behavior.

The second conceptual contribution offered here is the proposition that the offense-defense balance be conceived in terms of military doctrinal interaction. To the extent that the orientation and operational concepts of two states' armed forces can be ascertained, a consistent and straightforward identification of the offense-defense balance can be determined. I contend that such a conception is superior to both the "core" and broad versions currently employed by offense-defense theorists. On the one hand, the tactical-strategic disjunct plaguing the core version's explanatory power is overcome. On the other hand, the proliferation of the multiple independent factors adopted by broader versions is kept to a minimum. In sum, the concept offered here holds the dual promise of conceptual clarity and explanatory power.

The third contribution offered in this paper is theoretical in nature. I argued that a static conception of the offense-defense balance is of limited theoretical utility because it cannot determine the security motivations (causal mechanisms) inducing states to adopt increasingly belligerent policies toward their adversaries. To overcome this, I argued that an expected decline in operational power, subject to the structural nature of the offense-defense balance, would motivate states to adopt hard-line policies for security reasons. Two implications for existing offense-defense theory follow. First, the contention that offensive advantages are inherently less stabilizing than defensive advantages is incorrect. *Both* afford the advantaged state with greater security than its opponent. Moreover, the disadvantaged state, although less secure than its opponent, will opt not to initiate war because doing so would likely further decrease its security. Second,

diminishing marginal returns will likely result from the continued examination of the offense-defense balance as a static structure. In order to understand how the relative effectiveness of attack and defense affects state security, the relationship between variations in the balance and the intensity of international competition must be examined.