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## Technology, Military Advantage, and World War I: A Case for Military Entrepreneurship

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### In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Technology, Military Advantage, and World War I: A Case for Military Entrepreneurship  
ity dimension of grand strategy, statesmen face the question: 'Should we adopt an offensive or a defensive doctrine?' In formulating the crucial decision: should we? How most effectively can one approach this question? Should leaders first assess the technological state of the art, to see whether it favors offense or defense, and adapt their doctrines and grand strategies accordingly? Or should they determine independently their best grand strategy, and expect or direct that their military leaders will create the necessary supportive military advantage, be it offensive, defensive, or both? The answer depends on where one believes military advantage comes from. The "bottom-up" approach posits that there is—at any given moment—a ubiquitous technological condition that determines, exogenous to the actors, whether offense or defense has the advantage. The "top-down" alternative recommends that advantages are manufactured and destroyed by the actors. I would like to thank Barry

Posen, Steven Miller, Edward Rhodes, Stephen Van Evera, and John Mearsheimer for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to Samuel Huntington and Harvard University's Center for International Affairs for their assistance, and am most indebted to Barry Posen, Jack Ruina, and the entire staff at MIT's Center for International Studies for their financial and scholarly support. As ever, my mother Rose Shimshoni provided critical assistance. Jonathan Shimshoni, the author of *Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1953 to 1970* (Cornell University Press, 1981), received his doctorate in public and international affairs from Princeton University. This article was written while he was a Visiting Scholar at MIT's Center for International Studies, and an Associate of Harvard's Center for International Affairs.

1. Grand strategy is a state's overall "theory of how it can best 'cause' security for itself." Barry R. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 13. Such a theory should be supported by a military doctrine, which is the national military organization's applied theory of victory. Military doctrine integrates and institutionalizes the principles of force organization and operation at all levels. In this article, I focus on the higher-level operational principles, such as offense or defense, and at a slightly more detailed level, on doctrines such as "elastic defense" or "blitzkrieg." The operational level refers to the operations of large units (corps and armies, for example) in pursuit of goals that serve strategic aims. This notion applies doctrinal principle (e.g., blitzkrieg) in the execution of specific war plans. See also Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1987), chaps. 6 and 7.

International Security, Winter 1990/1991 (Vol. 15, No. 3) 1990 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College and of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology 187 International Security 15:3 188 actors themselves, endogenously. If the first be true, as many authors have argued, then indeed a leader's job is to diagnose and adapt; if the second, as I argue in this essay, then he must analyze and create. Jack Snyder writes of World War I that: Military technology should have made the European strategic balance in July 1914 a model of stability, but offensive military strategies defied those technological realities, trapping European statesmen in a war-causing spiral of insecurity and instability. As the Boer and Russo-Japanese Wars had foreshadowed and The Great War itself confirmed, prevailing weaponry and means of transport strongly favored the defender. . . . Why then were these self-defeating [offensive] war-causing strategies adopted? 2 This passage reflects one prominent response to this essay's central questions. Snyder, not alone in the security field, is really arguing the following: (1) military technology in 1914 created an overall and system-wide defensive advantage, and therefore (2) a central failing of decision-makers at the time was the adoption of offensive military doctrines and strategies despite this diagnosis. ~ This offense/defense balance approach is flawed. I argue that, while technology is important to warfare (and advantages surely exist), the first does 2. Jack Snyder, "Civil-Military Relations and the Cult of the...

# Technology, Military Advantage, and World War I

Jonathan Shimshoni

## A Case for Military Entrepreneurship

In formulating the military dimension of grand strategy, statesmen face a crucial decision: should they adopt an offensive or a defensive doctrine?<sup>1</sup> How best effectively can one approach this question? Should leaders first assess the technological state of the art, to see whether it favors offense or defense, and adapt their doctrines and grand strategies accordingly? Or should they determine independently their best grand strategy, and expect or direct that their military leaders will create the necessary supportive military advantage, be it offensive, defensive, or both?

The answer depends on where one believes military advantage comes from. The "bottom-up" approach posits that there is—at any given moment—a ubiquitous technological condition that determines, exogenously to the actors, whether offense or defense has the advantage. The "top-down" alternative recommends that advantages are manufactured and destroyed by the

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Jonathan Shimshoni, the author of *War and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1935 to 1970* (Cornell University Press, 1999), served his national military and international affairs from Harvard University and other elite colleges while he was a Visiting Scholar at MIT's Center for International Studies and an Assistant Professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

1. Grand strategy is a state's overall "policy of how it will use its own security for itself." Harry C. Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: Tactics, Posture, and Grand Strategy Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 13. Since a theory should be supported by a military doctrine which is the real and military organization's applied theory of war, military doctrine integrates and institutionalizes the principles of a war organization and operates, at all levels, in this article, I focus on the higher-level, operational principles, such as offense or defense, and on a slightly more detailed level, on doctrines such as "be on defense" or "be on offense." The operational level refers to the operations of large units (groups and armies, for example) in pursuit of goals that serve strategic aims. This notion applies to tactical principles (e.g., "flanking") in the execution of specific war plans. See also Edward M. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 1997), 2 (pp. 6 and 7).

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