

Better military technology does not lead to shorter wars

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It is generally assumed that military technology that is offensive rather than defensive in nature leads to shorter wars. Yet, a new doctoral thesis from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, shows that this assumption is not correct.

For long, researchers have thought that offensive military technology, such as armoured cars and attack jets, makes it easier to shorten the duration of a [war](#). It is also generally perceived that when the offensive technology is more effective than the defensive technology, it is more advantageous to start a war.

'While this may be seen in some wars where the attacker is clearly superior, it is not true on average. This means that the improved military technology has not resulted in any advantages for the attacking force, at least not in terms of war duration,' says Marco Nilsson, who recently earned his PhD from the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg.

To investigate the effect of offensive technology on war duration, Nilsson statistically analysed all wars in the state system from 1817 to 1992. Interestingly, he did not find any effect at all.

'I found that, in reality, the potential advantages of attack-oriented technology is limited by for example terrain, technological development, training of military personnel, climate, weather and norms. Due to these limitations, attack-oriented technology normally does not allow a state to

run over an enemy as easily as expected. Unless the attacked country collapses right away, the duration of most wars is decided at the negotiation table,' says Nilsson.

If two fighting countries could sit down at the negotiation table and base their demands only on military capacity, it would be easy for them to reach a mutually acceptable solution to their armed conflict - the stronger would make high demands and the weaker would accept them. Yet, this hardly ever happens in real life. Nilsson's study of four different wars (the Winter War 1939, the Continuation War 1941-1943, the Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988 and the war between India and Pakistan 1965) shows that states do not always base their demands at the negotiation table on military capacity.

'A major problem arises when a state has offensive expectations that do not match what is actually seen on the battlefield. These seemingly unrealistic expectations can for example be a result of a conviction that God will step in and influence the outcome of a war. Another reason may be that a country for some reason expects its offensive ability to soon improve,' says Nilsson.

Unfortunately, some states start wars expecting their attack-oriented technology to warrant quick success. Therefore, too much confidence in offensive technology may increase the likelihood of new wars and speed up arms racing, all due to a misunderstanding among decision makers. A better understanding of the potentials and limitations of military technology could lead to a world where many drawn-out and costly wars are avoided.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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