



Causes of War

By Stephen Van Evera

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What causes war? How can military conflicts best be prevented? In this book, Stephen Van Evera frames five conditions that increase the risk of interstate war: false optimism about the likely outcome of a war, a first-strike advantage, fluctuation in the relative power of states, circumstances that allow nations to parlay one conquest into another, and circumstances that make conquest easy.

According to Van Evera, all but one of these conditions—false optimism—rarely occur today, but policymakers often erroneously believe in their existence. He argues that these misperceptions are responsible for many modern wars, and explores both World Wars, the Korean War, and the 1967 Mideast War as test cases. Finally, he assesses the possibility of nuclear war by applying all five hypotheses to its potential onset. Van Evera's book demonstrates that ideas from the Realist paradigm can offer strong explanations for international conflict and valuable prescriptions for its control.

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Editorial Review

Review

"Van Evera's book is a masterful work of positivist social science . . . He offers convincing evidence to show that offense-defense theory is a major explanation for the onset of modern wars."? *Choice*

"An important book on the roots of war, remarkable in its theoretical rigor and historical sweep. Van Evera demolishes the view that war is an inevitable outgrowth of an anarchic world that encourages belligerence."? *Foreign Affairs*

"Van Evera's volume is sure to become a core work in the field of war studies. It deserves to be read by anyone with a serious interest in the causes of war."? *Journal of Strategic Studies*

"This is a very logical and historically well-informed book, which argues that the realist explanations of war may be missing one of the most important aspects of power: whether the offense is thought to be favored instead of the defense."? *Political Science Quarterly*

"Stephen Van Evera's eagerly anticipated book is rich in theory and thoroughly anchored in history. It is indispensable reading for anyone interested in understanding the wars of the past and preventing those of the future."? Jack S. Levy, Rutgers University

"Stephen Van Evera tackles the central question in international relations?why war occurs between major powers?and presents theoretical arguments that shed important light on this age-old subject. *Causes of War* effectively supports its findings with a wide reading of history. This unusually ambitious book promises to be the point of departure for all future work on the topic."? Charles L. Glaser, University of Chicago

"I strongly recommend *Causes of War* for course use. As the main textbook in my advanced undergraduate course on peace and war, the book raised the level of student writing and class discussion significantly. Stephen Van Evera's clear and thorough discussion about research methods made it easy for students to understand challenging issues. This book is a cutting-edge work of theory and a fine text for classroom

use."?William Rose, Connecticut College

"*Causes of War* is a beautifully written and brilliant work that will cast a giant shadow over the study of war for years to come. Not every student of international politics will agree with Van Evera's theories, but each of us will have to confront them."?John J. Mearsheimer, University of Chicago

From the Back Cover

What causes war? How can military conflicts best be prevented? A prominent political scientist here addresses these questions, offering ideas that will be widely debated. Stephen Van Evera frames five conditions that increase the risk of interstate war: false optimism about the likely outcome of a war, a first-strike advantage, fluctuation in the relative power of states, circumstances that allow nations to parlay one conquest into another, and circumstances that make conquest easy.

About the Author

Stephen Van Evera is Ford International Professor in the Political Science Department at MIT.

Users Review

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Mark Hernandez:

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