War and the Engineers: The Primacy of Politics over Technology (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs)

By Keir A. Lieber

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Do some technologies provoke war? Do others promote peace? Offense-defense theory contends that technological change is an important cause of conflict: leaders will be tempted to launch wars when they believe innovation favors attackers over defenders. Offense-defense theory is perhaps best known from the passionate and intricate debates about first-strike capability and deterrence stability during the cold war, but it has deeper historical roots, remains a staple in international relations theorizing, and drives modern arms control policymaking.In War and the Engineers, the first book systematically to test the logical and empirical validity of offense-defense theory, Keir A. Lieber examines the relationships among politics, technology, and the causes of war. Lieber's cases explore the military and political implications of the spread of railroads, the emergence of rifled small arms and artillery, the introduction of battle tanks, and the nuclear revolution. Lieber incorporates the new historiography of World War I, which draws on archival materials that only recently became available, to challenge many common beliefs about the conflict. The author's central conclusion is that technology is neither a cause of international conflict nor a panacea; instead, power politics remains paramount.

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War and the Engineers: The Primacy of Politics over Technology (Cornell Studies in Security Affairs) By Keir A. Lieber Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1070645 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Cornell University Press
- Published on: 2008-10-09
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.18" h x .56" w x 6.30" l, .75 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 256 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"Keir A. Lieber's War and the Engineers challenges one of modern strategic studies' most important body of ideas?offense-defense theory?at its intellectual core: does technology really have the military and political effects theorists so often attribute to it? His resounding 'no' will be both controversial and influential, and will play a central role in not just the scholarly literature but also the defense policy debate for years to come. It is essential reading for anyone who cares about war's conduct, outcomes, and political effects."?Stephen Biddle, Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College, author of Military Power

"Scholars and strategists steeped in the history of costly wars have leapt at ideas that offer technological fixes to prevent these tragedies. Hopes have been raised that with proper planning and regulation, countries can configure military capabilities in ways that give decisive advantages to defensive military strategies and thus channel conflict into peaceful competition. Unfortunately, Keir A. Lieber goes a long way toward demolishing these hopes. He shows how seldom military innovations create clear and consistent advantages for defense and reminds political scientists that political incentives remain the driving force in decisions for war or peace."?Richard K. Betts, Director, Saltzman Institute of War and Peace Studies, Columbia University

From the Back Cover

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