

Anarchy & the Security Dilemma

Political Science

Why defensive measures can make everyone less safe.

Measures taken for defence are indistinguishable from preparations for attack.

A arms for defence → B feels threatened → B arms → A feels threatened

Arms build-up

Neither is safer.

Reciprocal build-up

Alliance formed

Counter-alliance

Both prefer restraint

Neither can risk it

THE COMMON MISTAKE

✗ **Assuming the dilemma requires hostile intent**

✓ **It operates between states with none**

Uncertainty about future intentions is enough. Capabilities are observable; intentions are not, and they can change.

Educational reference. Arms control and transparency measures aim to make intentions more legible and defuse the spiral.