

Social Defence

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November 19, 2022

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2022). *Social Defence*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=39469>

The term "social defence" is used to describe non-military action by a society or social group, particularly in a context of a sustained campaign against outside attack or dictatorial rule - or preparations for such a campaign in the event of external attack or usurpation. There are various near-synonyms, including "non-violent defence", "civilian defence", "civilian-based defence", and "defence by civil resistance". Whatever term is used, this approach involves preparations for and use of a range of actions - which can be variously called nonviolent resistance and civil resistance - for national defence against invasion, coup d'état and other threats.

Writings about this concept include works by Theodor Ebert (Germany); Brian Martin (Australia); Adam Roberts (UK); Gene Sharp (USA); Heinz Vetschera (Austria); and others.

Application of idea to particular countries

A number of studies have considered the possible application to particular countries of the idea of a defence policy based on civil resistance. In the United Kingdom, in 1959 Commander Sir Stephen King-Hall supported unilateral nuclear disarmament by Britain, and proposed an alternative containing some reliance on conventional force plus "a defence system of non-violence against violence". In 1983 an independent non-governmental body in the UK, the Alternative Defence Commission, examined the idea thoroughly and saw possibilities in it, but came out in favour of NATO countries adopting a posture of "defensive deterrence" - i.e. deterrence based on non-nuclear weapons and strategies, including an element of military defence in depth. Regarding Sweden, Adam Roberts did an officially-commissioned study in 1972 which concluded: Civil resistance would be unlikely to be effective in replacing some of the functions of the Swedish armed forces - for example the defence of sparsely populated parts of the country. However, it might be the best means of resisting alien control in certain types of circumstance (e.g. total occupation by a super-power, attack by a liberal democratic state, occupation with the aim of economic exploitation; or occupation of urban and highly developed areas)." Since the end of the Cold War the idea of defence by civil resistance has been pursued in a number of countries, including the Baltic states. However, with the partial and limited exception of Sweden, it has generally not attracted support from major political parties, and it has not been adopted as a major plank in the security policy of any country. In a 2009 survey of various studies of the viability of defence by civil resistance, Adam Roberts concludes by raising a question, not about the utility of civil resistance generally, but about its capacity to be a complete substitute for military force.

Other usages of term

"Social defence" as defined and summarized here is distinct from certain other usages of this term. For example, within the framework of its system of Total Defence, the Singapore government's civil defence / national security policy uses the term "social defence" as a synonym for social inclusion

policies.

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