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***Milinko S. Vračar***\*

*Strategic Research Institute, University of Defence, Belgrade*

***Igor I. Barišić***\*\*

*Strategic Research Institute, University of Defence, Belgrade*

### **THE DEFENSE FUNCTION OF THE STATE – TRADITIONAL AND MODERN UNDERSTANDING\*\*\* (Translation *In Extenso*)**

#### **Abstract**

A vast body of literature in political science, security studies, and military affairs provides general definitions of the state's defensive function but lacks a deeper understanding of its essence – namely, the fundamental characteristics that define it and distinguish it from other state functions. Based on this premise, the research question arises: What constitutes the defensive function of the state? In pursuit of an

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\* Email address: milinko.vracar@mod.gov.rs; ORCID: 0000-0002-2851-1043.

\*\* Email address: igor.baristic@va.mod.gov.rs; ORCID: 0000-0003-4593-9196.

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answer, this paper draws an analogy between the defensive mechanisms of the state and those of the human body. By identifying the essential characteristics of human defense mechanisms, the study seeks to determine what the state defends, the threats it faces, and the nature of its responses to those threats. Applying this analogy, the authors conclude that defense falls within the category of protective state functions but differs from other functions of this type in two key aspects. First, it is specifically aimed at safeguarding the survival and vital values of the state from violent threats. Second, its protective actions are also of a violent nature. For this reason, the defensive function of the state was long equated with its military function. However, in recent decades, there has been a shift away from the traditional military-centric understanding of this function. The authors argue that the growing significance of non-military threats to the survival and vital values of the state drives this shift. This evolution inevitably affects how the state conducts its defensive actions, altering the essence of its defensive function.

**Keywords:** defense, human, state, defensive mechanism, defensive function

## INTRODUCTION

To understand a phenomenon means to know its essence, that is, all those characteristics that make it what it is and different from other phenomena. Since the defense function of the state is a complex phenomenon encompassing biological, anthropological, philosophical, sociological, psychological, political, security, military, strategic, and other aspects, comprehending its essence is by no means an easy task. It requires a multidisciplinary approach and the use of concepts such as man, society, state, values, interests, power, politics, and strategy. The starting point in understanding its essence is undoubtedly man, given that his nature is imbued with the instinctual needs for survival and security. Since the origin and functioning of the political community are based precisely on these human needs, the state's defense function can be explained more closely by applying an analogy with the identical function of man. This analogy, moreover, is grounded in the theory

of political realism. Realists believe that “politics, like society, is subject to objective laws rooted in human nature” (Aćimović 1987, 61). Therefore, the essence of the defense function of the state should be sought within the framework of human needs and human action aimed at satisfying them.

## **DEFENSE AS A CORE FUNCTION OF THE STATE**

Despite disagreements in understanding human nature, whether it is good or evil, social contract theorists, such as Rousseau, Kant, Hobbes, or Locke, share the view that “the transition of man from the natural to the social state is conditioned by his need to solve his existential problems, primarily the problem of his survival and security. They believe that equal and free people voluntarily unite into a political community to protect themselves from mutual violence and other injustices” (Stupar 2010, 245, 255–257, 279–281; Bodin 2007, 30–31). Thus, in pursuing security, a man renounces his absolute freedom, submitting to the standard rules that govern the community. In this way, the political community rises above the people who create it and takes the place of supreme authority. By applying its instruments, it maintains and protects the established social order, among other things, by limiting and restraining the violent behavior of man that is characteristic of his natural state (Stojanović 2012, 87–124).

Another reason for establishing a political community goes beyond the framework of man’s existential environment. It reflects man’s desire to protect his security from the violent threat of people from other communities, that is, from people outside his existential environment. Therefore, some authors, such as Slobodan Jovanović, believe that “the reason for the emergence of the state lies in the need of people to defend themselves from external threats, from attacks by other people organized for plunder and enslavement” (Jovanović 1990, 30–39).

By establishing a social order within a political community, man has created a security mechanism to limit the violent behavior of people within the community. But, in the absence of supreme authority over all political communities, he has failed to create a security mechanism to prevent violence between communities. Therefore, each was forced to develop its security mechanism to protect itself from the violent threat of other political communities. From the moment the first human political

communities were formed until today, this protective mechanism has been considered defensive. In contrast, its inherent function has been considered the defense function of the state.

Historically, defense has been traditionally considered a military function by which the state protects its survival and vital values (security) from armed violence, i.e., military threats from other states. Therefore, the problems of this function have always been inextricably linked to military activity and the question of war.

However, today's understanding of the state's defense function goes beyond the military activity framework. To explain this change, it is necessary to know what the state defends (the subject of defense), from what it defends itself (threats/attacks), and how it defends itself (defense). Knowledge of these questions also offers an understanding of the essence of the defense function. Namely, they indicate the state's defense function and how it differs from other state functions. Knowledge of why, today, the essence of this function is changing requires knowledge of the fundamental law that governs it, which is the law of the dialectical connection between defense and attack.

### **ANALOGY OF DEFENSE MECHANISMS OF A HUMAN AND A STATE**

The state is a creation of man, and this fact is the foundation for understanding its defense function. By transitioning from a state of nature to a social state, man has instilled his nature, values, and needs into the very being of the political community (state). Thus, the role of the state, or the meaning of its existence, lies in satisfying man's needs, especially in protecting his survival and security. To protect the survival and security of the people who create it, the state must first preserve its survival and security. Therefore, like a human, it develops a defense mechanism. Since man has instilled his pattern of thinking and behavior into state thinking and action, the functioning of the state's defense mechanism cannot be explained without drawing an analogy with the functioning of the exact mechanism in humans.

However, this analogy should be approached with extreme caution. The state is a complex social phenomenon and cannot be viewed from the perspective of a human. It represents a 'multitude' of human

values and needs contained in 'one', which are numerous and diverse. Simply put, each person is different from another; he is a 'world unto himself'. The complexity of human nature generates a different value system in each person and stimulates different needs and behaviors to satisfy them. Therefore, it is impossible to understand the state as a homogeneous whole, as an indivisible 'one', a simple sum of human values and needs that stay the same over time. This diversity within the state shapes its internal dynamics, that is, the dynamics of its internal existential environment.

In addition, the complexity of the state is reflected in the fact that it, as an entity in itself, that is, independently of the people who create it, has its values such as survival, territory, sovereignty, and population. The last three are vital values of the state without which it would not exist. The state must preserve or improve these values and protect them, which are most threatened in its external existential environment (international environment). In this environment, the state functions through relations with other states, and "at the ends of these relations are different interests that, in addition to cooperation and competition, often generate conflicts" (Višnjić 2005, 25). Such diversity within the external existential environment of the state produces its external dynamics.

The existential environment of the state is, therefore, significantly more complex than the existential environment of a human. Two internal and external dynamics shape it, and their result substantially affects the development, security, and even the state's survival. This certainly makes a difference in the functioning and defensive action of the state and the human. Namely, in the existential environment of a human, threats to his survival and security usually come from other people. On the other hand, such threats can occur in the state's internal and external existential environment. On this basis, the state's defense mechanism is significantly more complex than the exact mechanism of a human. However, despite these differences, there are inevitably similarities in their defensive action. What makes the state a compact 'one', and similar to a human, are "the values people share, around which they gather and develop a sense of closeness and belonging, or a common identity. These are inherited, common values, such as language, religion, ethnicity, history, beliefs, customs, territory, etc."

(Mijalković 2011, 116). On these values, the state builds its subjectivity and functions as a separate political entity in the international system. From the perspective of the modern state, these shared values can be understood through the concept of “national values”.<sup>1</sup> They constitute the value category of the state, and within it lies the meaning of its existence and functioning. Like a human being, the state strives or exhibits an interest to protect its values. Therefore, the value category of the state is considered the object of its protection and, more narrowly viewed, the object of its defense.

National interests represent the political articulation of national values. They indicate the state’s attitude towards national values. Therefore, national interests, as the institutional aspiration of the state to preserve, improve, and protect its values, can be understood as a political category of the state. This category also includes the institutional action of the state, but it is also considered a strategic category. Namely, the action of the state through practical policies to satisfy its needs, including those for survival and security, is not the result of arbitrary state decisions but of strategic thinking.<sup>2</sup> As fundamentally rational, strategic thinking is characteristic of both the individual and the state. The logic of strategic thinking, contained in the sensible calculation of set goals, available means, and ways of using those means, is deeply embedded in the pattern of human thinking and, thus, its behavior. As man has transferred this logic from his natural to his social state, it shapes state thinking on preserving, improving, or protecting national values and interests. True, state thinking is significantly more complex than the rational thinking of the ordinary man. Still, despite such a difference, their logic is the same, and that is the logic of strategy.

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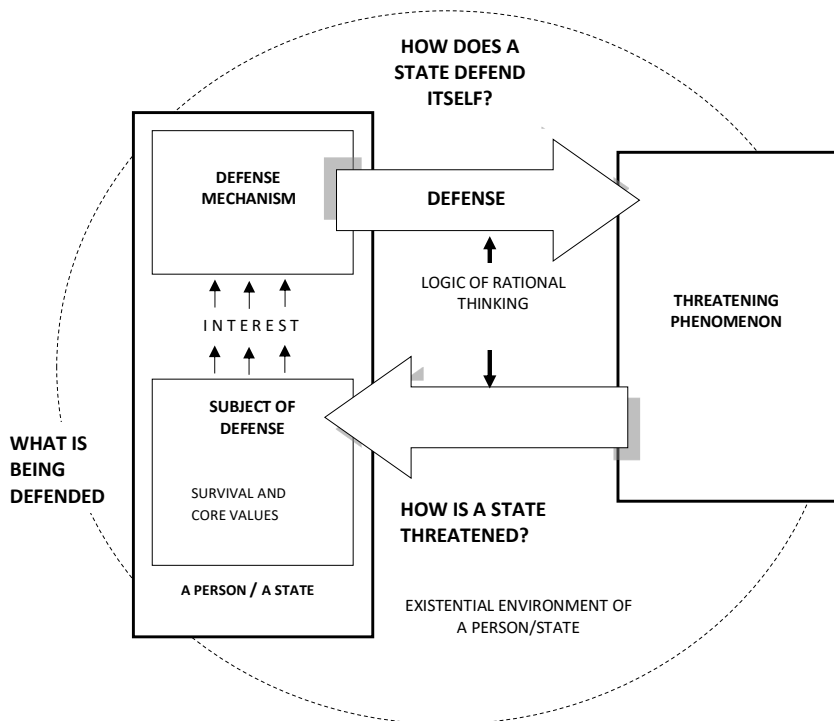
<sup>1</sup> State values are part of national values. Territory, sovereign power and population are the constituent elements of a state without which it would not exist. Therefore, these are vital state values. However, since a nation cannot exist without a state, because it represents a politically (state-forming) organized people, then vital state values are also considered vital national values.

<sup>2</sup> Strategic thinking, in the broadest sense, can be explained as “mental activity that is applied in the context of achieving a goal, and in the field of national security in the context of finding rational conceptual solutions to achieve policy goals in accordance with national interests”. (Vračar i Ćurčić 2022, 49).

## **DIALECTICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN DEFENSE AND ATTACK**

The congruence in the functioning and defensive action of the state and the individual certainly forms the basis for drawing an analogy of the functioning of their defense mechanisms. However, the very process of drawing it is based on the knowledge of the fundamental law equally present within the defense mechanisms of the state and the individual. It reflects the ever-present “dialectical connection between defense and attack, their inseparable and interdependent relationship” (Group of Authors 1973, 251). Namely, the path to understanding the essence of the defensive function of the state and the individual leads through the knowledge of the dialectical connection between defense and attack, and this is not an easy task. It first requires an answer to what the state and the individual defend: what values are considered the subject of their defense. Only by knowing those values, in the next step, can the phenomena that threaten them be identified. In the last step, through knowledge of the phenomena threatening the subject of defense, a conclusion can be drawn about how the state and the individual defend themselves, and it is drawn using the logic of strategic or rational thinking.

Image 1. – Model of the defense functions of the state and the individual



Source: Adaptation by the author

Namely, the rational way of a state's and a person's defensive action is based on finding solutions that bring maximum benefit and minimum damage to satisfying their needs. Therefore, the logic of the functioning of the state's and the person's defense mechanisms is based on the choice of opposing threatening phenomena that achieve efficiency (economicalness) and, above all, the most excellent effectiveness (efficacy). As the logic of strategic thinking is linked to the calculation of power, the defensive action of the state is viewed through the calculation of its power and the power of another state that threatens it.<sup>3</sup> If a state is under military threat, it is expected to defend itself using military force, as this achieves the most excellent effectiveness in countering military threats from another state. The same is true for an individual. The most excellent effectiveness in opposing the violent behavior of

<sup>3</sup> At the core of every strategy lies power. Strategy is a kind of dialogue between politics and national power. It explains how to use national power in accordance with state policy (Owens 2007, 114; Lykke 2001, 180).



another person is also achieved through the use of violence. The key difficulty in understanding the defensive functions of the state and the individual is not the dialectical connection between defense and attack but the understanding of the subject of human defense and, analogously, the state. Namely, human existence is determined by a complex system of needs. It is not based solely on the satisfaction of his instinctual needs, such as those for survival and security, but also other needs that arise from his nature as a conscious, intelligent, curious, and creative being. Only by satisfying all his needs does a person fully realize himself, both as a conscious and as a biological being, striving for a safe and, at the same time, high-quality way of life. When satisfying his needs, a person faces various difficulties, including those threatening his values. That is why a person strives to protect his values, which can be considered the subject of his protection.

However, not all values that a person protects are also defended values. This distinguishes a person's defensive function from his protective function. In this sense, it is essential to understand that the adopted opinion about those values determines the defended values of a person. Accordingly, according to the same principle, one can understand the phenomena that threaten those values, as well as how to oppose those phenomena. Namely, the defensive function of a person is only a generally accepted idea of what it is within the totality of his protective function, which is a natural given, something that a person possesses as innate, instinctual. Therefore, a person's defensive mechanism does not exist outside of his protective mechanism. It is only a part of it, determined by adopted understandings of what the defended values are, what they are threatened, and how they are defended. Such thoughts about the defensive function of a person are only analogously transferred to the level of the state.

## **DEFENSIVE MECHANISM (FUNCTION) OF A HUMAN**

In the search for an answer to the question of which values are considered the subject of human defense, it should be repeated that human existence rests on "a complex system of values" (Despotović 2000, 11). This makes it different from other living beings because man also strives for a quality of life, survival, and security. This is the basis

of Plato's and Aristotle's understanding of human needs. "According to Plato, every person, in addition to basic needs, such as those for food, strives to satisfy more complex needs, such as culture and education, while Aristotle believes that man, like everything that lives, thinks about preserving himself (survival, life), but also asks how he should live. Human life wants 'goodness', fulfillment in a 'happy life'" (Stupar 2010, 94–97; Simeunović 2002, 22).

However, on the scale of values on which human existence rests, survival (life) occupies the place of a fundamental value for which man expresses a biological (instinctual) need. As such, it is the strongest motivator of human behavior. It is precisely from this particularity of survival that the widely accepted belief arises that it is not only a value that a person protects but also one that he defends. This conclusion can be drawn with the help of Maslow's theory of personality (Abraham Maslow), which is explained by a pyramidal (hierarchical) model of human needs.

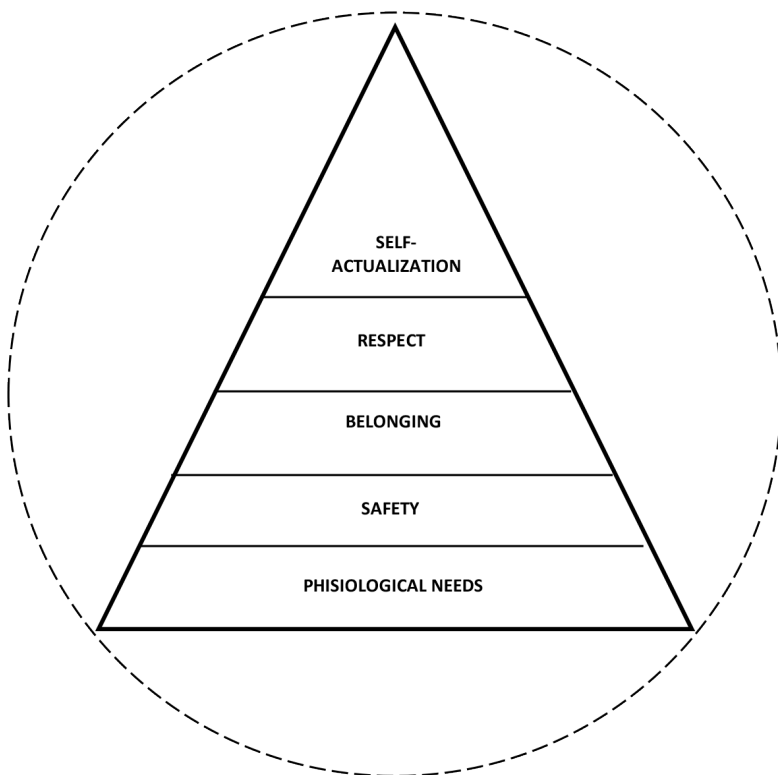
"The most basic physiological needs are at the bottom of the pyramid. They include the needs for food, water, air, procreation, etc. These are instinctual needs directly linked to human survival, as with any other living being. Human life, or rather its survival, is not possible without satisfying these needs, nor is it possible to satisfy all of his other needs at a higher hierarchical level" (Pajević and Kasagić 2001, 214–215). "Only after satisfying physiological needs does a person begin to think about other needs, which are less intense than physiological ones" (Puljić 1980, 270–271). These are the needs for security, belongingness, respect, and the highest need for self-actualization.<sup>4</sup> After physiological needs, the following instinctual needs of a human are those for security. They are broad in their scope because they imply the need for protection, certainty of future states, etc. They are closely related to physiological needs because a person strives to achieve, maintain, or protect conditions in their existential environment that allow them to undisturbedly satisfy basic needs for food, water, etc. Above them is the human need for belongingness,

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<sup>4</sup> "Maslow refers to these highest needs as 'meta-needs', recognizing them in man's search for values such as justice, beauty, goodness, order, unity, etc." (Hol and Lindzi 1983, 261).

respect, or self-actualization. These are higher needs related to the period of human socialization and his development as a social being.

Image 2. – Maslow's hierarchical representation of human needs



*Source:* Adaptation by the author

Indeed, in its natural state, human existence is shaped most by the need for 'bare survival' and a sense of security rather than by needs for belonging, respect, or self-actualization. Antagonisms and violent relationships among people in the human natural state arose primarily due to the inability to satisfy these needs and not others. However, even later, in the period of the primitive human community and during the development of the political community, the leading cause of violent relationships among people was found in the satisfaction of needs for survival and security. The lack of the most fundamental values, such as water, food, etc., conditioned a person, whether as an individual or as a community member, to master new

habitats (territories), which resulted in mutual endangerment of the security (life) of people. "Thus, over time, in addition to animals and dangers of natural origin, such as natural disasters and diseases, the greatest danger to man became man himself" (Mijalković 2011, 40). More precisely, the greatest danger to man's survival (life) became another person's violent and aggressive (attacking) behavior. This is precisely the answer to what is considered a phenomenon that endangers the object of human defense: his survival. It could be concluded that a person protects all of his values from a broad spectrum of threatening phenomena of natural and social origin and defends his most fundamental values, survival and physical security, from the violent threats of other people. Thus, protecting the aforementioned values from the violent threats of other people is considered the purpose of man's defensive function.

The fundamental causes of human aggression can be found in the human need for survival and security. This explains the logic of the operation of its defense mechanism. The state of unsatisfied, hierarchically higher needs, such as belonging, respect, or even self-actualization, can also lead to the emergence of human aggression. However, the fundamental cause of human aggressive behavior is primarily protecting its survival. Fromm speaks about this. He states, "Aggression is innate and manifests itself in all living beings faced with the species' survival or the danger to the security of the individual. He believes that aggression is an instinctive reaction to a situation of threat to vital interests" (Redžić 2012, 395–396). Nietzsche sees in human aggression "the inevitability of wars" (Popović 1975, 83). Hobbes shares his opinion considering that "the drive for power, which dominates human nature, is a constant cause of mutual endangerment of people and the occurrence of wars" (Stojanović 2012, 8). In a state of threatened existence, fear dominates in humans. It creates a feeling of discomfort that develops into a need to achieve security. "To protect himself, and thus feel secure, a person needs power, and the more, the better" (Simeunović 2009, 43).

Understood as the ability to achieve what one wants, power is the essential means of achieving a goal, where the most crucial goal of every person is his life or survival. Therefore, a person, like any living being, strives to gain excess power because it guarantees the preservation of his life, and the nature of that power is often destructive. In the pursuit of survival, a person usually exhibits aggression or

violence towards another person. This is precisely where the logic of the operation of the human defense mechanism is recognized. In relations with other people, faced with a direct threat to their survival and security, a person instinctively acts aggressively, either defending themselves against other people's violence or attacking them. This explains the dialectical relationship between defense and attack within the human defense mechanism.

## **DEFENSE MECHANISM (FUNCTION) OF THE STATE**

In seeking an answer to the question of what is considered the subject of state defense, it must be repeated that the human need to protect one's survival and security from the violence of other people lies at the very foundation of the emergence of the political community and its defense function. It can be concluded that the subject of state defense is found in its own and the survival of the people who create it. However, the state, analogous to man, strives to satisfy other needs, such as belonging, respect, and self-actualization. These needs undoubtedly shape the behavior of the state in its relations with other states.

The state's need for belonging is reflected in its striving for identity-based categorization, whether ideological, religious, ethnic, or, in the broadest sense, 'civilizational' (Huntington 2000). The state also strives for self-actualization- full realization by its being and respect from other states. The aforementioned needs of the state can be recognized in the thesis of the 'end of history' advocated by Francis Fukuyama. It points to the post-Cold War moment in which the states of the Western world, which cultivate a liberal political philosophy, have achieved their full realization. Fukuyama triumphantly announced the victory of liberalism over collectivist ideologies, such as socialism, political Islam, and others. He believed that after the Cold War, liberal states had risen above others and positioned themselves as morally superior (Fukuyama 2002).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Liberal philosophy is, incidentally, the foundation of American 'exceptionalism', a sense of moral superiority of the US in relation to other states of the world. The notion that its values are the best and universally acceptable inevitably seeks unconditional respect from others. However, the need of a state for respect does not arise exclusively from a sense of its superiority over other states. It is equally

However, in interstate relations, the need for survival outweighs the significance of all other state needs. Mearsheimer states, 'If a state is subjugated, it is unlikely to be in a position to pursue its other goals' (Mearsheimer 2017, 64). Therefore, existence is necessary for a state to satisfy all its higher needs. This is undoubtedly in agreement with Maslow's opinion that a person can meet their higher needs only if they have previously satisfied their most basic needs related to survival. Therefore, survival and the state's vital values, such as territory and sovereign power, are the focus of its defense function.<sup>6</sup>

Conditionally, it can be stated that a state, like a human being, expresses physiological needs for values on which its survival depends. These needs are primarily reflected in the state's need for territory, identical to the human need for living space. Just as a habitat provides human access to water, food, and other resources, the territory offers a state the resources and population necessary for its survival and development. Friedrich Ratzel and Rudolf Kjellen point out that "territory is an organic part of the state's being from which it draws power and cannot be separated because otherwise it will disappear. The land is a fundamental, unchanging given around which the people's interests revolve, so their struggle for living space boils down to a typical struggle for survival" (Stepić 2016, 143–148; Dugin 2004, 39–43).

Therefore, the answer to what the state defends is primarily found in the territory, as a vital value of every state and nation. If the territory is threatened, if it is subject to domination and enslavement, then other crucial values of the state are also threatened, such as sovereignty or the physical security of its citizens. Therefore, Ljubomir Stajić concludes "that territory is defended, while other state values are protected" (Stajić 2006, 32). In the search for an answer to the question of what the state is defending itself from, which phenomena threaten its territory, thereby sovereignty and the security of its citizens, it must be said that the struggle for living space has always

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characteristic of less powerful states that strive to preserve their own identity, independence, and certainly an equal relationship with significantly more powerful states than themselves, especially in relations with great powers.

<sup>6</sup> For this reason, Mearsheimer views state survival through its endeavor to maintain territorial integrity and the autonomy of its internal order.

been violent. No nation (state) is willing to give up its living space, but it is often willing to appropriate someone else's. Just as the fundamental reason for violence among people, in their natural state, is related to the mastery of new habitats to satisfy physiological needs, it can be concluded that violent relations between states are primarily determined by the need to control territories, or rather the resources that are located on them. This is indicated by the fact that the main reason for most wars in the history of international relations is the desire of states to control the spaces and resources of other states, and this has always implied a greater or lesser use of armed violence.

It could be concluded that a state's violent behavior is primarily linked to its need for survival. However, the need for belonging, respect, and self-actualization can also stimulate violent behavior. This is indicated by the founder of political realism, Thucydides. He says that wars are fought out of fear and interest and out of honor. However, the main reason for a state's violent behavior is its fear of extinction: its need to survive. The fear of extinction generates the state's need to increase its power. In such an endeavor, it often converts its power into violent (aggressive) behavior in relations with other states.

The aforementioned behavior of the state is explained by the theories of offensive and defensive neorealism by John Mearsheimer and Kenneth Waltz. "Analyzing the relations of great powers, Mearsheimer states that they fear each other. They view each other with suspicion and concern about possible conflict. The level of fear among them varies across space and time, but it never ceases" (Mearsheimer 2017, 64). Unlike the classical realism of Hans Morgenthau, who considers power to be a goal of the state in itself because the human drive for power is rooted in its being, neorealists emphasize the instrumental nature of power, which is necessary to achieve the security and survival of the state, with particular reference to military power. They emphasize that the structure of the international system, anarchic in nature, is the primary source of state fear and the driver of its continuous thinking about the issue of survival and increasing its power.

Violence is undoubtedly the outcome of a state's defense mechanism, and it is applied in various ways. On the one hand, a state defends itself with violence from the violent threats of other states, and on the other, it uses violence to threaten the security of different states. The aforementioned fact requires a closer explanation of the paradoxical connection between the state's defense function and offensive, violent behavior. Namely, realists see the international system as anarchic and consider the state's security the central issue of international relations. The theory of offensive neorealism suggests that states preemptively use force to prevent rival states from becoming militarily stronger, thus becoming capable of threatening their survival. This explains the fact that a state's defensive action can also be offensive in nature. Such state action is primarily associated with extraordinary powers.

The previous considerations explain why, throughout the history of international relations, the defensive function of the state has been identified with the military function. Colin S. Gray calls this history the history of strategy, which is a military strategy (Gray 2007, 1–3). In other words, he believes that the history of international relations is the history of warfare. Although it cannot be wholly identified with the history of warfare, it is essentially so. That is why, within the state, as an institutional form of social organization, the role of the instrument of its defense mechanism has been assigned to the military. Thus, the military aspect of the overall protective function of the state is considered its defense function. This is where the essence of the state's defense function is recognized. It belongs to the corpus of the state's protective functions. Still, other functions of that type differ in that it is directed at violent (military) phenomena that threaten the survival and vital values of the state. In that, the way of its protective action is also violent (military).



## **CONTEMPORARY UNDERSTANDING OF THE STATE'S DEFENSE FUNCTION**

In recent decades, there has been a significant departure from the traditional understanding and practice of the state's defense function. An indicator of this departure can be seen in developing and applying the strategic concept of comprehensive (total) defense. It differs significantly from the previous military-centric defense concept, as its logic is based on integrating and synchronizing the military component of national power with other non-military components. The explanation for developing and applying this concept is complex and requires unique research. However, referring to the logic of the operation of the state's defense mechanism, the fundamental reason for the change in the traditional understanding and practice of the defense function should be sought in the changing nature of the threats that endanger the survival and security of the state.

Today, it is unnecessary to apply military power to another state to occupy its territory, dispute its sovereignty, and exercise control over its resources and population. Military power is not even necessary to threaten the survival of other states. Such a fact is not a particular novelty of the modern era, but it is significantly more pronounced today than in the past. This has been contributed to by globalization and technological development, especially in information and communication technologies. Along with the democratization process of most of the world, they have produced greater openness, connectivity, and interdependence of states. This has made many states weaker in terms of survival and security or more vulnerable to the subversive activities of other states.

In contemporary reality, often described with terms such as the global or information society, values such as ethnic or religious affiliation, living standards, freedom of thought, speech, movement, the right to choose, participation in political life, etc., are increasingly gaining importance both within states and in their relations. The inability to meet the needs for these values in many states creates an internal dynamic that often reflects antagonistic relations between the bearers of political power and citizens, between different social

strata, and even between opposing political elites. Such internal instability represents a weakness of the state and is used as a focus of subversive activities of other states.

The security and survival of a state are threatened in this way, perhaps best indicated by the turbulent political period that began at the end of 2010 in the Arab states of the Middle East and North Africa (Maghreb), symbolically called the “Arab Spring.” In just six months, demonstrations resulted in the violent overthrow of governments in Tunisia, Egypt, and Jordan. It led to the government’s fall, and the Sudanese president and Iraqi prime minister announced elections. The Yemeni president offered to resign in exchange for immunity. At the same time, the Libyan leader refused to step down, leading to a bloody civil war in Libya and the *de facto* division of the state. The Syrian regime is still resisting the pressure of the rebels, which is why a civil war is still raging in this country, with massive casualties and loss of sovereignty over a large part of the territory. During this period, many states were threatened with disintegration to create another state on their territory. It started as a spontaneous mass protest of dissatisfied people who no longer wanted to live within the limitations imposed on them by authoritarian regimes, but it was not so spontaneous. Behind it were the geopolitical interests of Western countries that, directly or indirectly, encouraged and directed these events by applying a full spectrum of military and non-military power through armed interventions, violent regime change, weakening economic systems by imposing sanctions, anti-regime propaganda, etc. (Janković 2013, 74–90).

Such a way of threatening the security and survival of a state is also present between great powers. Namely, in today’s world, there are numerous limitations to direct conventional military conflict between great powers. In such circumstances, indirect warfare, often referred to today as hybrid or multidimensional, becomes dominant in their relations (Korybko 2015, 9).

One of the frequent claims in the current Russian narrative is that the West seeks to weaken, dismember, or even divide Russia into smaller parts to make it less relevant in international relations. Many Russian analysts believe that the economic sanctions imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and especially after

the outbreak of armed conflict in Ukraine in 2022, were seen as a means of its destabilization and disintegration (Hosoe 2023, 305–319). For this purpose, the West supports the so-called civil society through various non-governmental organizations and foundations. In the Russian narrative, these activities are often interpreted as an attempt to incite internal unrest, undermine the regime, and overthrow the state (Finkel and Brudny 2012, 1–14).

It could be said that in contemporary international relations, especially in relations between powerful and developed countries, the focus of conflict is shifting from action against the enemy's military forces to its weaknesses. Two key moments explain such a trend. First, the effectiveness of non-military instruments of power has become much more significant due to the impact of globalization and technological development on the nature of relations between international actors, and second, the use of military force is increasingly becoming counterproductive.<sup>7</sup> If military power is applied, it is done so in integration with other elements of national power. Such action is multidimensional and comprehensive and relies on a more significant application of diplomatic, political, informational, economic, and other control instruments. By the nature of the threatening phenomena to the survival and security of the state, its defense requires a different way of opposing than the traditional military-centric way. Therefore, the contemporary understanding and practice of the state's defense function is changing and is increasingly viewed through comprehensive (total) defense (see Vangel and Božić 2023, 7–32).<sup>8</sup>

Suppose one were to search for an adequate definition of the contemporary defense function of the state. In that case, one should undoubtedly start from the conflict of the full spectrum, which, due to its actuality, is increasingly the subject of strategic studies. However, the discipline theory still does not define it clearly enough. Oscar

<sup>7</sup> Since the end of World War II, and especially during the Cold War period, the use of military force has been losing its legitimacy and legality, and has increasingly become uneconomical (see Milenković and Vračar 2022, 157–175; Milenković and Vračar 2023, 387–405).

<sup>8</sup> Besides acting on the enemy's military capabilities, in the concept of comprehensive defense, the protection of one's own vulnerabilities plays an important role, and it is achieved through non-military means of action.

Jonsson and Robert Seely provide a more straightforward definition of this type of conflict, saying that it represents “the use of military and non-military means under a single central command, directed towards the same political goal” (Jonsson and Seely 2015). In this definition, equal importance is attached to both military and non-military activities that can threaten the survival and security of the state. Accordingly, the contemporary defense function of the state could be understood as its protective function by which the state, applying military and non-military instruments of national power, both in peace and war, protects its survival and vital values from various threats of a military and non-military nature.

## CONCLUSION

The essence of a phenomenon lies in those characteristics that make it what it is and different from other phenomena. The essential characteristics of the defense function of the state are recognized in its subject of defense, the phenomena by which it is threatened, and the state's response to the action of those phenomena. By analogy with the defense function of a human being, it is concluded that defense belongs to the category of protective functions of the state and that it differs from other functions of that type in that it is directed in its action to the protection of the survival and vital values of the state from violent threats, as well as in that its protective action is also violent. Therefore, until recently, the defense function of the state was equated with the military function. In recent decades, however, there has been a departure from the traditional military-centric understanding of the defense function of the state, and the reason for this is the increasing importance of non-military threats to its survival and vital values. This certainly affects how the state defends itself, which also leads to a change in the essence of its defense function. Namely, while the subject of state defense remains the same: its survival and vital values, the nature of the state's defense function changes in the dialectical relationship between defense and attack. Accordingly, the contemporary defense function of the state could be understood as its protective function by which the state, applying military and non-military instruments of national power, both in peace and war, protects its survival and vital values from various threats of a military and non-military nature.

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