

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ACTIVE DEFENSE VERSUS NON-OFFENSIVE DEFENSE IN SECURITY STUDIES FRAMEWORK

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Abstract. *Security is the primary responsibility of the nation-state and the most important issue that has attracted the attention of scholars in international relations. Despite this, security is a complex, contradictory concept that heavily relies on the approaches and theories employed by observers and researchers. Various theories have been proposed to describe, explain, and predict security issues. National security is one dimension of security, referring to the strategies that a government adopts to ensure safety, which may take an offensive or defensive stance depending on the circumstances it faces. If defensive decisions are categorized by type, they can be classified into active defense and non-offensive defense, where researchers sometimes interpret active defense as akin to preemptive attack, advocating the notion that "the best form of defense is attack." Non-offensive defense entails responding to enemy attacks after being attacked; in this case, the country must remain in a defensive posture and react to enemy operations. Active defense differs from non-offensive defense in aspects such as defense strategies, building trust, and presence in the region. However, their commonalities include being defensive in nature and supporting extensive diplomacy. Ultimately, countries with limited economic resources tend to support guerrilla warfare and adopt a non-offensive defense model or advocate for non-offensive defense. In contrast, countries seeking to expand their defensive capabilities and whose interests depend on regional presence tend to adopt an active defense model and support active defense policies.*

Keywords: *security, preemptive war, active defense, non-offensive defense, state and international relation.*

Introduction

Security is one of the most fundamental human needs. Since the dawn of humanity, there has always been an unbreakable connection between the essence of human beings and the pursuit of security. It may not be an exaggeration to claim that the concept of security is even older than that of society and community; even when humans had not yet developed a social identity, they were aware of and sought security. Furthermore, security is a basic necessity and a long-standing desire that has always concerned humanity. Without security, it is difficult and challenging to fulfill other human needs, and it is within the realm of security that the potential for human talents can flourish. Therefore, security can be considered one of the most important social needs, alongside virtues such as justice and freedom.

Although security has been a fundamental concern for humanity throughout history, the conceptualization of it, particularly when combined with the term "national," represents a new domain that has not been around for long. The term "national" has its historical roots in the emergence and development of the state as a modern unit for analyzing politics and international relations, dating back no more than a century. In fact, the concept of national security became prevalent after World War II as a framework for understanding the ways and methods to achieve security within the context of the nation-state. With some leniency, national security can be seen as the ability of a political system to preserve and enhance the core and vital values of that country.

Thus, one can identify two fundamental aspects of national security for any country: the first is a negative aspect, which refers to the elimination and reduction of existing threats, and the second is a positive aspect, which relates to the improvement and optimization of the living conditions of societies across various political, social, economic, military, and other domains. In terms of the negative aspect that addresses the elimination of threats, countries define security models within their national security doctrines, such as active defense and non-offensive defense.

So far, there has been no specific research conducted on the topic of "Comparative Analysis of Non-Offensive Defense and Active Defense within the Framework of Security Studies." This study will examine the effectiveness, similarities, and differences of both models and will demonstrate which security model is more effective.

Research Objectives

- To compare active and non-offensive security patterns within the framework of security studies.
- To clarify the concept of security and the patterns of active and non-offensive defense within the context of security studies.

The necessity and importance of research

Since humans began to emerge from the mountains and forests to live together in communities, the need for security has become increasingly apparent, especially after the 19th century, when we witnessed the invention of advanced and long-range weapons. This raised the question of how to maintain the security of one's country. According to scholars who support defensive strategies, a country can only ensure its security through defense. Defensively-oriented realism suggests that insecurity leads to the need for defense and armament. Today, countries are all seeking to enhance their power in the arena of international relations. Currently, the topic of defense is contentious; each state aims to bolster its defensive capabilities and employs active and non-offensive security models in its national security doctrine. These models serve different functions in terms of both building trust and defense. Active defense initiates actions to counter threats before they enter the borders (outside the borders), aiming to eliminate them before they can spread within. In contrast, non-offensive defense justifies actions within the borders and waits for an attack from an aggressor to respond, often resorting to guerrilla warfare to neutralize the threat. For the reasons mentioned, it is essential to conduct research on this topic.

The Concept of Security

The term "security" first became widely used in American political literature. Subsequently, significant changes in international politics after World War II led to a greater relevance of this concept. Buzan, who offers a broad conceptual approach to the issue of security, considers the term to be underdeveloped.

According to Buzan, merely focusing on the notion of "national security" is insufficient.

In the overall landscape of international relations, states are the most important entities; however, states themselves can also be sources of threats to their own issues, often justified under the banner of "security." Therefore, security is a concept subject to different interpretations because policymakers and political theorists primarily define "security" in relation to national power, leading to a problematic consensus.

In one of the most comprehensive attempts to analyze the concept of security, prior to Buzan, Arnold Wolfers described security as a vague sign and symbol, pointing to the existence of ambiguous potential forces and the way politicians exploit them. Thus, conceptual ambiguity can have significant political consequences, as referencing security requirements can be used to justify exceptional actions. According to him, security in its objective sense identifies the absence of threats to acquired values, while in its subjective sense, it denotes the absence of fear and anxiety about attacks on those values.

Non-offensive defense pattern

Horst Afheildt is more deserving than anyone else of the title of the originator of the "non-offensive defense" theory. He first articulated the concept of "defensive defense" based on a relatively straightforward interpretation of the nuclear deterrence model. According to this concept, states should prioritize strategies to prevent war (as the first line of security in a realist approach) and neither initiate nor invite preemptive attacks. The notion of non-offensive defense, on one hand, rejects any threatening actions towards rivals that could reinforce the security dilemma of action-reaction and motivate preemptive strikes, while on the other hand, it emphasizes the scattered deployment of military forces in very small units throughout the country. Such an approach reduces the incentive for preemptive attacks. This principle, known as "non-provocation," is one of the key foundational principles of non-offensive defense.

In defining non-offensive defense, it can be stated that this concept signifies a security perspective based on having sufficient defensive capabilities while lacking offensive capabilities, and it can relatively be described as simultaneously enhancing defensive abilities and diminishing offensive capabilities.

Objectives of Non-Offensive Defense

A: Facilitating Disarmament by Eliminating the Action-Reaction Element

According to the action-reaction model, which is a key feature of the security dilemma, both states arm themselves out of fear of each other's weapons. This leads to an endless cycle of escalating arms competition, where weapons, instead of providing security, result in insecurity.

The theory of non-offensive defense, based on non-threatening defensive weapons, aims to eliminate or weaken the action-reaction element by reducing the mutual threat involved in the acquisition of arms.

B: Strengthening Negative Peace by Eliminating Factors of Preventive War

Proponents of non-offensive defense believe that this theory will eliminate the possibility of preventive attacks by removing threatening factors posed by adversaries. They argue that if a state's military posture during peacetime does not suggest an impending war and military activities are purely defensive, adversaries will not perceive it as preparation for an attack, and therefore, there will be no justification for preventive measures.

A: Increasing mutual trust among governments that have hostile relations with each other.

States that are suspicious of one another are very sensitive to each other's military movements. Non-offensive defense, according to its advocates, can eliminate the grounds for distrust and, consequently, hostility between two countries. One way to achieve this goal is through restructuring the defense capabilities of the armed forces. Restructuring defense based on non-offensive principles is an effective strategy for demonstrating defensive intentions, aimed at enhancing security and dispelling the hostile image of a country. This can serve as a costly signal toward building mutual trust.

Characteristics of Non-Offensive Defense

A: The presence of a defense structure in the armed forces.

One of the characteristics of a non-offensive defense as a security model is the presence of armed forces with a defensive structure. If the structure of the armed forces confirms their defensive nature, it signifies that one of the criteria for establishing non-offensive defense has been met. The determination of a defensive structure is assessed based on personnel criteria, logistics, and deployment.

B: The Position and Conditions of the Country

Some countries, due to their geopolitical situation, power, national security laws, strategic culture, military-civilian relations, and other characteristics, automatically and inevitably fall into the non-offensive defense model. Conversely, other countries, based on these same characteristics, cannot fit within this framework. Ultimately, some nations also possess the internal conditions for either adopting or rejecting this model. Countries whose constitutions prohibit the establishment of large armies, weaker nations that lack the capability to attack others, and those that are geographically distant from strategic locations or are island nations are among the actors with the potential to embrace the non-offensive defense model. On the other hand, very powerful states that inevitably feature a mix of defensive and offensive capabilities, countries where the military has historically held political power, and nations positioned in strategically significant conflict zones are less likely to adopt the non-offensive defense model.

A: Defensive Strategies

Countries that have concepts such as "retaliation," "defense on enemy territory," or "extensive response" in their national security strategy cannot fit within the framework of a non-offensive defense model. In this model, only aggression and confrontation with the enemy on one's own territory are considered acceptable.

Non-Offensive defense patterns

A: The spider and its web model

This model combines a territorial defense network (web) with mobile forces (spider), which includes tanks, armored vehicles, and mobile military units. It is suitable for conducting offensive operations within a specific territory, but these operations must be integrated into and dependent on the fixed web to the extent that they maintain high mobility within the web while remaining stationary beyond its boundaries.

B: Trench Defense

This model, also known as "Selective Area Defense," is recommended for long borders or regions with limited forces. On the other hand, according to this model, defense is concentrated in a specific area that is politically and strategically important, with troops and equipment positioned in trenches and fortifications, thereby facilitating defensive operations.

D: Proactive Defensive Strategy

This model is designed and implemented based on barriers such as fire, fortifications, and prominent obstacles along borders. It represents a costly form of defense that heavily relies on advanced weaponry. In this model, the territorial defender is protected by advanced weapons without depending on mobile ground forces. These models are just examples of designs within the framework of non-offensive defense, and it does not imply that all theorists and supporters of this model endorse them. The common stance among all theorists of non-offensive defense emphasizes the importance of specialization and adapting the model to the specific geographical conditions. They believe that forces should be designed to operate effectively within national borders, and this design is crucial for aligning structure and specifications with the land and geography of the operational scene. Within the framework of non-offensive defense, there is no need for extensive operations in diverse environments. In this type of defense, ground forces hold significant importance, while air and naval forces have only secondary and supplementary roles, as they cannot secure ground positions or provide protection for them.

Active Defense

Active defense is the most intense form of defense-oriented strategy, bordering on a war-oriented approach. In active defense, the structure, forces, and military technology are applied in a combined manner. On the other hand, while the objectives of this country are defensive, it also pursues some offensive security policies and strategies that are primarily related to a specific country. The distinction between the boundaries of active defense and war-oriented strategies is understood based on certain indicators, including the official declaration of the country in choosing a defensive strategy, transparency and provision of necessary information regarding military activities to members of the security ensemble, trust-building, and historical precedents.

In recent decades, especially after the collapse of the bipolar system and the end of the Cold War, a new type of defense known as "active defense or preemptive defense" has emerged in military discourse. According to the traditional concept, legitimate defense requires an armed attack from the enemy. Proponents of active defense go further, offering a new definition of legitimate defense that involves defending against an imminent armed attack—an attack that has not yet occurred but is almost certain to happen soon. Accordingly, states must identify and anticipate potential attacks and proactively prepare to take military action before the enemy does, thereby neutralizing the potential threat. Since September 11, active defense has gained a special place in the doctrines of Western countries. These nations, considering their military and financial capabilities, strive to present this doctrine as acceptable.

Objectives of Active Defense

1: Extensive Presence in the Region

The security and military strategy of each country is a response to threats arising from its security environment and its fundamental objectives. Regional crises and threats have created new geopolitical conflicts. The foreign policy and military strategy of any country equipped with defensive weapons are based on two main goals: "establishing national and regional security" and "development and progress." Countries that follow the model of active defense seek a broad presence in the region.

2: Addressing Security Threats

Security threats can be both internal and external. Internal threats can be managed through domestic security policies; however, external security threats depend on the national security doctrines of countries. Countries that adopt a non-offensive defense posture will refrain from taking action until a threat materializes, while those that follow an active security model

will act upon sensing that a threat or attack from the opposing side is imminent, thus neutralizing the threat. Active defense begins addressing the threat at its source and aims to eliminate it before it can manifest.

3: The possibility of preserving the first strike.

"The best defense is attack." This statement is now a cornerstone for advocates of active defense. Countries that possess defensive weapons, created to protect their sovereignty, still contribute to security tensions. This is because defensive weapons can also be seen as a form of aggression; all weapons are inherently offensive. Therefore, active defense represents a form of preemptive warfare. In other words, countries with an active defense strategy will strike first if they detect an imminent threat before the aggressor can attack.

Characteristics of Active Defense

The characteristics of active defense include building trust through a different approach than non-offensive defense. Countries with an active defense model strive to convey to the opposing side that their forces are in a defensive posture, even while being in an offensive stance at the borders. The structure of forces in active defense remains defensive and in a state of readiness; for example, the borders of the People's Republic of China follow offensive policies in the event of a threat, aiming to eliminate the threat before it materializes.

A Comparative Study of Active Defense Models versus Non-Offensive Defense

Non-offensive defense has deep roots in history, dating back at least to arms control negotiations between the two world wars and the unilateral practices of states. In the 1950s and 1960s, to ease the tensions along the Central European front that divided Eastern and Western Europe—especially along the border between West and East Germany—proposals for establishing defensive buffer zones were overshadowed by the strategic doctrines of major powers that relied on nuclear weapons and offensive mutual deterrence. However, in the 1980s, interest in non-offensive defense emerged in two interconnected areas. First, as relations between East and West deteriorated and NATO's plans to modernize its intermediate-range nuclear forces were introduced, along with the adoption of conventional deep strike concepts aimed at halting Warsaw Pact forces deep within member countries, proponents of non-offensive defense argued that NATO's formation had actually exacerbated the security dilemma between East and West. Second, from the mid-1980s, non-offensive defense ideas were integrated into Mikhail Gorbachev's reformist agenda known as "new thinking." Within this framework, Gorbachev and his supporters, by embracing non-offensive defense—which at the time was closely linked to the concept of common security—proposed measures to make NATO's and the Warsaw Pact's military stances more defensive and secure. Countries that follow active defense policies adopt an offensive posture at their borders, leading to the conclusion that active defense includes offensive policies, whereas non-offensive defense policies are fundamentally defensive (defending in a shell or on one's own territory).

Differentiating Points

A: Defense Situation

In non-offensive defense, the structure, forces, and military technology are entirely non-offensive. Furthermore, the policies and security strategies do not reflect any form of offensive behavior or actions. Other countries, at least those that are part of the same security arrangement, are unlikely to perceive the actions of the country in question as threatening. However, in active defense, the approach is heavily focused on defense and borders on a war-oriented strategy. In active defense, the structure, forces, and military technology have a combined application.

Although the intentions of this country are defensive, it also pursues some offensive goals, policies, and security strategies that are specific to that country. Countries that follow the active defense security model may resort to preemptive warfare; if a threat is imminent, they may launch an attack that is perceived as defensive. Military forces in the active defense model are always on alert at the borders and respond to the slightest threats. While a defensive policy may be defined in active defense, certain factors can lead to war. For example, if Country A conducts a military maneuver, even if it is defensive, Country B may perceive this as a threat and may resort to a preemptive strike, believing a threat or imminent attack exists, even if such a threat may not be real. In contrast, in non-offensive defense, not only is a non-offensive stance defined in defensive policy, but the structure of military forces at the borders and beyond also indicates a non-offensive posture. In non-offensive defense, there are no military maneuvers (even defensive ones), thereby eliminating factors that could lead to mistrust among countries that follow such a model.

B: Presence in the area

A government that follows a non-offensive security model remains in its shell and will not emerge until it faces an attack. It does not show any reaction until it is threatened; only then does it respond. In this case, it is unwilling to engage in the region and avoids any intervention in matters beyond its borders.

However, a government that follows an active defense model does not merely remain in its shell; it also engages in preemptive attacks. Active defense requires a significant presence of the state in the region, meaning it must defend its national interests even outside its borders.

Today, through this approach, a country may launch an attack on another to secure its interests. A relevant example in this context is Russia's recent attack on Ukraine, where Russia has cited Article 52 of the United Nations Charter to justify its self-defense.

D: How to build trust

Non-offensive defense, according to its proponents, can eliminate the grounds for distrust stemming from hostility between two countries. One way to achieve this goal is by restructuring the defense capabilities of the armed forces. A defensive restructuring based on non-offensive principles serves as an effective means to demonstrate defensive intentions aimed at enhancing security and dispelling the hostile image of a country. This can also serve as an expensive signal for fostering mutual trust.

However, the situation is different in active defense. Although it is a defensive posture, it operates offensively at the borders and reacts to even the smallest actions. For this reason, it undermines trust between states. For instance, when country A conducts military maneuvers, country B may become sensitive to this and might take similar actions, leading to a deterioration of trust between the two nations. This could potentially result in preemptive attacks.

Subscription tips

A: The defensiveness of both models.

In active defense and non-offensive defense policies, an offensive approach is not observed. Although active defense is referred to as the most intense form of defense, it never resorts to aggression against another state unless it is threatened. If trust-building occurs in both security models and does not present any threats, the policy of both security models is defensive.

B: Extensive Support for Diplomacy

All strategies and policies of an active defense model and non-offensive defense are defensive in nature and provide extensive support for diplomacy. Countries that adhere to one of these defensive approaches are committed to principles, laws, and peaceful solutions.

Conclusion

The effort to enhance national security is one of the most significant concerns for governments and a fundamental foundation of their foreign policy. Establishing political and economic relations, strengthening military and defensive capabilities, seeking allies, forming military alliances, and cooperating with collective security systems are all aimed at achieving this goal. National security is one of the serious challenges facing political systems today. As a result, governments adopt behaviors in their national security doctrines and defend their national interests on the international stage, which may be either offensive or defensive. This article examines two models: active defense and non-offensive defense, comparing them with each other. It was noted that active defense is the most intense form of defense, pursuing some war-based strategies at the country's borders. In contrast, non-offensive defense does not exhibit any form of movement or threat against another country. The primary aim of this research is to analytically assess both security models (active defense and non-offensive defense) to determine which model will aid in building trust among nations. In this context, the non-offensive defense model emerges as the best defensive strategy for enhancing trust. One of the secondary objectives was to explore security models that countries can incorporate into their doctrines, including collective security, cooperative security, regional partnership security, and deterrence security, which were discussed in detail. The main question of this article is which security model is effective in the national security strategies of countries. Given the natural and unnatural conditions of different countries, the answers vary. For instance, some countries may need to adopt a non-offensive defense model due to their geographical circumstances, while the opposite may apply to others. One of the secondary questions is which security model reduces the likelihood of war. It has been shown that active defense tends to launch a preemptive strike when war seems imminent, whereas non-offensive defense does not engage until it is attacked and conducts its defense from its own territory. Therefore, non-offensive defense reduces the likelihood of war and can even bring the probability of conflict to zero.

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