"Defenders” in American Political Discourse

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Abstract: The article reviews the opinions of American political scientists, who interpret the use of force as a strictly defensive measure applicable only in the case of a direct military action on American soil. The research first time in political science practice uses the term “defender” to classify non-intervention experts. The survey provides clear criteria when American experts can be defined as “defenders” and estimates the practical implementation of «defender’s» ideas.

Key words: Humanitarian intervention • Regime change • Preventive defense • Isolationism • Self-defense • Defenders • Offshore balancing.

INTRODUCTION

In the novel of modern Russian fantasy writer, Sergey Lukyanenko, the main character attains supernatural power in the very moment when he makes important choice. In the end of the novel the most important decision of the hero was to remain an ordinary man and refuse from the superpower to change other people’s lives.

If we use this story as an analogy we can say that all influential, leading think tanks and political experts have made a different choice than Lukyanenko’s hero. They approved the US Government’s politics of active use of force and received a kind of super power to participate in the Government’s decision-making process. It is worth noting that these decisions are capable of changing conditions in any part of the world; Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya are recent proof of this thesis.

The most general classifications of American grand strategies are based on assumption that the authors adhere to a soft variant of hegemony that is built on leadership and cooperation by international organizations; and those who promote rough hegemony are created on Washington’s perception of justice.

This classification is used by the representatives of the Russian political science school T. Shakleina [1] and by Barry Posen [2] - who is the representative of the American science tradition.

American and Russian experts recognize that either way each group of American political experts does advocate the use of force abroad. Therefore it would be interesting to know whether adherents of non-intervention exist in American political society. If they do, then is their influence on official Washington significant and what are perspectives of their ideas?

Finding out the answers on these questions is the aim of our research. Materials that are taken into consideration in the survey belong to the period from the September 11 attacks to February 2013.

“Defenders”, Not “Isolationists”: While speaking about American political experts who uphold non-intervention political scientists use the term “neoisolationists” or “isolationists”, this term can be met in the work of Barry Posen [2] and Eric Voeten [3]. It is a great disappointment that the Russian experts use this term by way of loan translation (V. Torkunov [4] and V. Konishev [5]).

We consider that this term does not suit the description of the original ideas and adequate characteristic of the group we are aiming to study. For a more suitable and sufficient description of the target group we propose to use the definition “defender” or “defenders”.

Firstly, the term “isolationists” was created by those who are proponents of active military operations’ conduction. Via this word, they attack and strongly
criticize the position of those who support non-offensive way of coexistence with other nations. Thus advocates of force oppose non-intervention to active military policy and arrogate to “defenders” negative meaning. This approach falsifies the very essence of the group positions since the main characteristic is missing: the key word in “defender’s” works which is “self-defense” is omitted. Therefore, they are not against use of force at all, however, they treat it only in connection with self-defense while imminent and direct threat to the territory of the United States exists. We consider that this characteristic is important and reflects the essence of the group’s point of view more effectively.

In order to prove our position about self-defense as an essential characteristic for the group we will provide evidence from “defenders” works from the main information resources “American conservative” and “Antiwar.com”.

Jeffry Record in the article, “The American Way of War” points out that “The U.S. defeat in Vietnam, embarrassing setbacks in Lebanon and Somalia and continuing political and military difficulties in Afghanistan and especially Iraq underscore the limits of America’s hard-won conventional military supremacy” [6]. The author concludes that “the United States should abstain from intervention in such wars, except in those rare cases when military intervention is essential to protecting or advancing U.S. national security”[11] and insists that “it will not be evidence from “defenders” works from the main reasonable guidelines” [11] and insists that “it will not be possible, without preventive war, to physically stop all potential new nuclear weapons programs” [Ibid]. Therefore we can see that the author does not belong to the group that recognizes only self-defense incites the use of military force.

The professor of Saint Petersburg University V.N. Konishev equates “defenders” with proponents of offshore balancing and selective engagement categorizing them in one group: “neoisolationists”.

This approach is appropriate if we are speaking about grand strategy. In this case, positions of “defenders”, offshore balancing and selective engagements are similar since all of them are against the aggressive policy of hegemony.

Our classification is based on another criterion: we used an attitude of American political experts towards use of force as a key element of our systematization. Therefore, the point of view which equalizes three above-mentioned strategies is not suitable for our survey. We can explain our position by comprehending the arguments of selective engagement and offshore balancing theories about military interventions.

We will start the review of the strategies from selective engagement by basing it on the works of the main proponent Robert Art [12]. The strategy implies active engagement only in the case when the US vital interests are at strike.

Regardless of the fact that R. Art stands apart from aggressive and active interventionist policy the works of the author clearly says that Art is not against military operations abroad in principle.

In the frames of Center for new American security project’s report the author expresses his thoughts about cases when the US should apply military force abroad:
Threat towards US vital interests, avoiding costly military actions. It is worth to note that vital interests are interpreted more broadly than protection from direct attack on American soil. The vital interests are: 
(a) preventing the spread of nuclear weapons; (b) keeping the deep peace in Europe, deepening the peace in East Asia and, if possible, keeping the peace in the Persian Gulf; (c) preserving two elements of a stable framework for an open international economic order – freedom of the seas and assured access to Persian Gulf oil; and (d) containing, if not also destroying, al Qaeda or any other group that plans terrorist actions against the U.S. homeland” [12].

In the case of serious humanitarian catastrophe in the frames of international coalition.
When there is a danger of terrorism. The author points out preventive strikes as effective mechanism for terrorist threat prevention.

Taking into consideration all above-mentioned points, we can say the theorist of selective engagement R.Art views the defense concept more broadly than ‘defenders’ therefore, there is the necessity to differentiate “defenders” and selective engagement positions.

John J. Mearsheimer a representative of offshore strategy, writes: “In general terms, the United States should concentrate on making sure that no state dominates Northeast Asia, Europe or the Persian Gulf and that it remains the world’s only regional hegemon. This is the best way to ensure American primacy. We should build a robust military to intervene in those areas, but it should be stationed offshore or back in the United States” [13]. The author recommends use of force guidelines: “In the event a potential hegemon comes on the scene in one of those regions, Washington should rely on local forces to counter it and only come onshore to join the fight when it appears that they cannot do the job themselves. Once the potential hegemon is checked, American troops should go back over the horizon” [Ibid].

Taking into consideration the quotation of the offshore balancing ideologist we can say that offshore balancing does not include only self-defense use of force therefore it does not correlates with “defenders” point of view. Thus we can say that offshore balancing is not a part of “defenders” group.

Description of “Defender’s” Ideas: If we refer to the papers of “defenders” we notice that the main characteristic of this group is the point of view towards 9/11. “Defenders” consider that the reason for the 9/11 terrorist act is internal rather than external, they are sure that the aggressive military policy of United States have led to the national tragedy.

Thus Tomas Moor doubts the official point of view that terroristic activity is directed towards democracy and freedom. The author stays: “Terrorists have not attacked Switzerland, Sweden, Canada, New Zealand, or many other nations that have no military presence in the Muslim world. The fable that Muslims are attacking us because they don't like our democracy or our freedoms implies that they should also be bombing Stockholm and Geneva, which are less protected and easier to attack than New York City or London. Clearly those cities and nations have little to fear from al-Qaeda” [14]. In order to restore security T.Moor proposes: “U.S. scaled back its military to a level that would allow us simply to defend our shores, this nation might become the city upon a hill” [Ibid].

N. Chomskiy [15] and E. Wallerstain [16] who can be defined as “defenders” express the point of view that the US Government is guided by other directives than bringing democracy, restoring civil rights and freedoms, or fighting terrorism while applying military force abroad. According to their opinion the true reason for intervention is satisfaction of private companies’ interests of natural resources. Experts point that the discrepancy of declared and true goals along with an aggressive military policy possesses threat to United States. In this case they consider 09/11 Act of Terror to be a signal to the US to revise its policy and turn to a peaceful coexistence.

It is worth paying special attention on Chomskiy’s point of view about safety reassurance. Along with the rejection of aggressive imperial policy the author recommend to the Government of the US to limit its power by:

- Granting the United Nations Organization a core role in conflict’s resolution;
- Supporting UN Charter traditional interpretation;
- Refusal from veto power in UN Security Council and manifestation of proper respect to world community opinion;
- Rapid reduction of military appropriations and withdrawal from all military bases.

The last proposal shows one more characteristic of the “defender’s” ideas. The experts are convinced that leaving military bases would restore US’s security and reputation significantly.
W. Pfaff indicates that “U.S. military bases have generated apprehension, hostility and fear of the United States and they have facilitated futile, unnecessary, unprofitable and self-defeating wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and now seeming to be inviting enlarged American interventions in Pakistan, Yemen and the Horn of Africa. The 9/11 attacks, according to Osama bin Laden himself, were provoked by the “blasphemy” of U.S. military bases in the sacred territories of Saudi Arabia. The global base system, it seems, tends to produce and intensify the very insecurity that is cited to justify it” [7]. The author proposes to leave all the abroad bases and shift towards a self-defense military policy.

T. Moor asks: “Why do we need troops in Germany? The Cold War is over. Why do we need troops in Japan? Is it to intimidate the Chinese or the North Koreans? In Okinawa, among other places, the local population strongly objects to the presence of our military, which also breeds resentment in neighboring countries, many of whom feel threatened” [14].

Paul Roberts questions the appropriateness of military bases abroad. He agrees with T. Moor that bases abroad are diminishing US security rapidly. The arguments of the author about rationale of military personal deployment abroad are mentioned: “The rationale for the U.S. troops in South Korea is to remind North Korea that an attack on South Korea is an attack on the U.S. itself. The rationale for U.S. troops in Germany disappeared when Reagan and Gorbachev brought the Cold War to an end.

There is, of course, no similarity between Iraq and Korea. There was no insurgency in Korea and no attacks on U.S. troops based in South Korea once the fighting stopped. The presence of U.S. troops in South Korea has produced many protest demonstrations by South Koreans, but the U.S. troops in South Korea have had no exposure to combat since the war ended in 1953” [17].

“Defenders” strongly opposes idea to use force beyond self-defense. Therefore, this group does not support the concept of preventive strike.

Justin Raimondo questions the very reason of preemptive attacks: “It is hard to imagine under what circumstances a threat could be so potentially devastating that it would justify preemptive military action. After all, the United States is in no danger of being conquered by a foreign power: and, in spite of Rick Santorum’s paranoid ravings about Iran’s plans to invade South America and march on the Alamo, it shares no border with its antagonists” [18].

A. Bacevich names preventive strategy to be “not only wrong, but also stupid. Indeed, the Bush Doctrine poses a greater danger to the United States than do the perils it supposedly guards against” [8].

Regardless of the fact that “defenders” are strictly against offensive use of force their opinions on humanitarian intervention are different. There are those who firmly condemn humanitarian interventions. We can put N. Kramer in this group.

Thinking about military operation in Libya N. Kramer questions the morality of humanitarian intervention and came to the conclusion that there is no necessity to punish people which are not guilty: “The self-defense aspect of the argument is absent from the American rationale for so-called humanitarian military intervention, in which we kill some people in order to protect other people, none of whom threaten us in any way” [19].

Preceding the reflection the author recommends the United States refrain from the immoral situation when the US considers them the main arbiter and dictates what is right and what is wrong. He writes: “Are we gods with the moral authority to determine who will live and who will die? If not, then what business do we have proclaiming what is “worth” the deaths of people halfway around the world? More importantly, what business do we have killing (or causing the deaths of) those people in the first place?” [5].

In contrast to N.Kramer A.Bacevich recognizes the fact that in some cases humanitarian intervention is necessary. The quote from his work will illustrate Bacevich’s point of view: “There are times when, in response to horrific events, there’s an obligation to intervene and Rwanda certainly met those criteria” [10].

The author makes an important reservation which makes clear the impartiality of the mechanism he proposed: “That said, we should recognize that you can stop the killing, but it doesn’t follow that you’re going to eliminate the conditions that led to the killing” [Ibid]. The last reservation excludes interference on the ground of political changes and regime replacement it means only to stop the mass killing.

We can call N. Kramer, A. Bacevich, J. Raimondo, T. Moor, N. Chomskiy, I. Iland, W. Pfaff, I. Wallerstein to be “defenders”.

CONCLUSION

Whatever important strategic goals are set by the Government in the end they are materialized by society by
their actions or inactions. Experience of the last 10 years has shown that the US Government is determined in their intentions to use force abroad. However it is not clear if the society shares this plans or not. Do American people truly want to sacrifice tremendous victims in the name of democracy in Iraq or Afghanistan? Or is there is an influence by the manipulation from outside?.

We think that the best way to describe American attitude to a war is to use Plato allegory of the cave.

Plato portrays a group of people who have lived chained to the wall of a cave all of their lives, facing a blank wall. The people are watching shadows projected on the wall by things passing in front of a fire behind them and begin to ascribe forms of these shadows. According to Plato, the shadows (not the true objects) are the only reality they know. If someone tries to set the prisoners free he faces strong opposition to his actions. If he persuades them to stand up (it is very hard task to make people believe that their reality is not true) the prisoners would not go out of the cave. Sitting in one pose for the whole their life prisoners are feeling pain when they change the pose or try to walk, the real sun blinds the eyes of those who have enough courage to get out of the cave. The pain forces them to return into the cave where they feel comfortable and forget about the experiments.

If we use Plato’s analogy of the cave we can say that American society sees only shadows of the real objects and considers them to be the reality.

In order to understand the reality and come out from the cave American society needs a fresh point of view of “defenders”. They can lead to some reflection about the place of the United States issue and prove that nonintervention does not equate the neoisolationism. Active diplomatic, cultural and economic activity will bring positive results without a fear of hegemonic monster.

“Defenders” by their independent point of view may induce American people to decide without the government’s propaganda interference what choice to make. Probably they will make a choice against violence and prefer to stay home.

REFERENCES


