EPIS Basics: Total Defense

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"In a world where the big fish eat small fish and the small fish eat shrimps, Singapore must become a poisonous shrimp." (Lee Kuan Yew, 1966)

History and Conceptualization

Total defense arose during the Cold War in neutral countries like Switzerland, Finland, Sweden, and Singapore. Faced with the prospect of having to defend the country without the assistance of allies, and living in a world where "big fish eat small fish and small fish eat shrimp", small neutral countires sought to become poisonous shrimps. They thereby implememted the concept of total defense, involving the entire society in defense efforts. Borrowing from Singapore's conceptualization, we may conceive total defense as entailing five components: military, economic, civil, social, and psychological defense. In the following, we look at each element.

Military Defense

Military defense is characterized by territorial defense. Territorial defense sees a country develop defensive military capabilities to deter by denial. Military defense also entails mandatory military service and an emphasis on modern military technology. These measures were intended to overcome an aggressor's numerical advantage over a neutral country.

Economic Defense

Cicero once remarked that money is the sinew of war. This remains true today, as the economy dictates a country's fiscal capabilities and consequently influences military budgets. Current debates on securing supply chains and protecting intellectual property are intended to ensure the continuing prosperity of economies, therefore contributing to economic defense.

Civil Defense

Civil defense incorporates the protection of critical infrastructure. The privatization of industry sectors after the Cold War means that public-private cooperation is crucial in safeguarding critical infrastructure. Securing critical infrastructure is essential to upholding the population's morale and

military logistics. Civil defense also concerns capacity building amongst citizens. In crises, the functioning of institutions is impeded, making citizens first responders. Therefore, citizens must know how to act during crises. For this purpose, Sweden has distributed leaflets informing individuals on how to behave during emergencies and how to detect fake news.

Social and Psychological Defense

The ability to detect fake news is also relevant for social defense, which aims at preserving societal unity. Especially in democracies, the risk of malicious actors purposely exploiting democratic debates to polarize society is high. Only a unified society can resist aggression and have common principles to fight for. Hence, social defense, together with upholding morale through civil defense, is key to psychological defense, that being the willingness of society to resist aggression.

Conclusion

The concept of total defence originated during the Cold War. Today, Singapore, Finland, and Sweden employ this concept. In today's multifacetted threat environment, and the war in Ukraine, the whole of society approach advocated by total defense might well proliferate.

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