



## SOCIETY RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE ARMED FORCES ROLE IN THIS PROCESS



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*The world has been facing, since the beginning of 2020, a medical crisis – a pandemic that could be classified in the category of known knowns – known dangers. Human history has recorded such situations before. They are known to us because they have been immortalised through art, literature or films – from both historical and futuristic-dystopian perspectives. There have also been warnings over time, from international organisations in the healthcare field, about such a health security risk. However, the pandemic generated by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, which causes COVID-19 disease, is the security scenario for which humanity, in general, has been very poorly prepared.*

*Framing a pandemic as a security issue means neither “it’s time to panic” nor a pandemic should be equated with a war or a military problem. However, it is certainly a security issue. Therefore, managing the situation requires lucid minds and the best possible information, often when data are incomplete or insufficient. This type of crisis illustrates*

*the complex nature of security, in which several actors are involved, and good civil-military cooperation is essential for understanding the big picture. The COVID-19 pandemic is not one of the challenges that is commonly seen in militarised security (the use of force), but it has shown us that it could, however, destabilise entire societies. Therefore, it is not a big surprise that when things got really complicated, the armed forces were involved. This is not an event that is unprecedented. Whenever a natural or man-made disaster occurs, the armed forces become one of the basic solutions for governments in generating their response. Most countries have legislation in place that allows for the use of armed forces to support civilian authorities in crisis situations and non-military emergencies.*

*The Romanian armed forces supported the central and local authorities by installing three ROL 2 hospitals in Bucharest, Constanța and Timișoara, by installing over 50 epidemiological triage units in military and civilian hospitals in the country, by performing approximately 25,000 tests to detect COVID-19, by ensuring the temporary management of three county hospitals in Suceava, Deva and Focșani. Moreover, the military participated, during the state of emergency, in about 100,000 missions, being near the people in difficulty, distributing about 4,000 packages containing food and hygiene products to war veterans and widows in 10 counties. The military personnel in the Romanian Air Force conducted over 20 missions through which they ensured the air transport of approximately 270 tons of medical protection equipment, as well as the evacuation of some Romanian citizens from abroad. Military researchers managed to execute, in record time, a transport isolette, which was homologated and entered series production, as well as a technological demonstrator for a mechanical ventilator, two products extremely useful to the medical system. Last but not least, because, in such moments, there is a need, more than ever, for solidarity, compassion and unity, military specialists and medical staff have been co-opted into the teams deployed to support the efforts of the Moldovan and the US authorities to manage the pandemic.*

*Therefore, when faced with critical deficiencies in the capabilities of civilian institutions during a major disaster, governments naturally*



*turn to military capabilities. Why the military personnel can manage a crisis situation more efficiently is a question that can be answered by providing some reasons that underlie the existence and functioning of the military system.*

*First of all, strong leadership is essential. The transition to war conditions requires leaders who are constantly prepared for it, not decision-makers who deny reality. As organisations, military systems are uniquely configured to deal with the harshest war conditions, war being a situation that tests, stresses and extends the limits of all human faculties – physical, psychical and mental. It includes a range of capacities and capabilities that very few other organisations implement – from command and control to logistics and resource management, from healthcare and CBRN protection to transportation and engineering, from intelligence and surveillance to strategic communications and even internal research and development and so on.*

*Secondly, information makes the difference. Although not always complete or fully accurate, information underpins all military decisions. Navigating the “fog of war” is impossible without information. Many authorities ignored the pandemic early warning signals, and some governments failed to make the necessary efforts to have a complete picture of the spread of the infection within their borders.*

*Thirdly, the military personnel are trained to consider time a critical resource that cannot be recovered when it is lost. Under such conditions, availability entails permanent and rigorous planning, which constantly adjusts the courses of action and the allocation of resources, because a dynamic situation evolves rapidly and uncertainty increases exponentially. Therefore, the reaction speed and a proactive approach matter a lot. Once the spread of the pandemic generated an exponential increase in many countries, the authorities were constantly behind the curve, wasting precious time as a result of the implementation of half measures, thus having to react rather than model events.*

*In another train of thoughts, for the military, “logistics is the component that ensures success in combat”. Some observers have compared the situation of under-resourced doctors to sending military troops into battle without weapons and protective equipment. The military personnel are*

*educated in the management of war logistics and have the advantage of learning much from military history and, not infrequently, from their own experience. Moreover, in the military mindset, reserve stocks are very important. The military personnel know that they must have reserves for absolutely anything, because losses will inevitably occur and will have to be replaced quickly.*

*Last but not least, mental training and morale are aspects that are strongly emphasised. Through a variety of techniques and practices, military structures aim to maintain the cohesion of units and the morale of individuals under the spectrum of warfare. These techniques can, in some cases, be replicated in society during crisis situations, such as the ongoing pandemic. An example in this regard is the principle that “no one is left behind”, which underlies the morale of the military personnel in battle. Many governments and societies have embraced this technique in the face of the coronavirus pandemic – no one has been left without support following the border closures, the elderly have not been abandoned in self-isolation, teams of volunteers have distributed food to those in need etc. It was an extremely strong message, which contributed to the management of the pandemic, so that its effect could be as limited as possible.*

*The conclusion is that military organisations and their members internalise many elements of resilience in extreme situations as part of their work and lives, and can therefore inspire, guide and support parent societies in times of need if asked for support. Yet, as the military personnel are well aware of, the road to resilience begins long before war hostilities break out and it is often based on the ability to keep a healthy focus on worst scenarios, even when times are relaxed and peaceful. It is clear from the current pandemic that in order to manage crises we need to think critically about the role of comprehensive approaches involving multiple actors, starting from governments, civil society, the private sector, the military and the police, and last but not least, the citizens and their communities.*