



THE IMPACT OF MULTI-DOMAIN OPERATION ON THE MILITARY STRATEGY

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Currently, there are more and more discussions about multi-domain operation, as an advanced method of approaching military action, superior to the joint operation, and, last but not least, able to revolutionise the way the Armed Forces respond to the specifics of new threats to the security of states and alliances. As a result, in my opinion, it can be said that if the multi-domain operation continues to develop doctrinally and subsequently in practice, at the operational level, it will greatly influence how the strategic military level will be organised. Moreover, the fact that the multi-domain operation can offer new opportunities to address conflicts leads us to the idea that military strategies, national and allied, as programmatic documents, will be largely influenced by it. Given that, in my view, strategic goals can be met to the extent that operational and tactical capabilities allow it, this article will address issues related to how multi-domain operation can transform military strategy.

Keywords: military strategy; military art; multi-domain operation; military action; capabilities;

INTRODUCTION

At present, few aspects are known to the general public regarding the multi-domain operation. The fact that it is becoming more and more popular and it is gaining some ground in the face of the joint operation arouses the interest of the military and civilians involved in the national or allied defence system.

Although it can be intuited, at first sight, that it comes with a higher degree of centralisation than the joint operation, as well as a much greater freedom of action (by using the concept of “mission command”), the details of how this type of operation will revolutionise the planning and conduct of military actions are quite unclear, mainly due to the fact that this type of operation is not yet put into practice.

Given that the military has identified the multi-domain operation as a solution to current threats in the geopolitical environment without taking into account the current military strategy, expecting policy makers to decide its implementation (Watling, Roper, 2019, p. 23), I consider that, through a qualitative analysis (focused on understanding the phenomenon), it can be made the connection between the multi-domain operation and what the military strategy represents, in order to translate military concerns into the current national reality.

Thus, in the first chapter I will present the relevant aspects related to the way in which the multi-domain operation manifested itself in its incipient forms, the reasons why the joint operation is no longer considered sufficient, taking into account the new threats and changes that this type of operation begins to inflict in the strategic environment.

In the second chapter I will highlight the links that are established between the operational level (the level at which the multi-domain operation takes place) and the tactical and strategic levels, as well as the new perceptions on military strategy.

Through the mentioned conclusions, I intend to draw a parallel between what is currently happening in Romania and the multi-domain operation.

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PECULIARITIES OF MULTI-DOMAIN OPERATION IN THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The multi-domain battle has emerged based on the idea that disruptive technologies will change the nature of war. It is trying to repeat the course of the ground-to-air combat, which has long been considered a successful model for conducting military action, developing as a concept in itself, before force structures can implement it (Townsend, 2018).

However, the alignment of the multi-domain battle with the strategic direction in which the missions, the emerging operational environment, technological advancement, enemy anticipation, threats and enemy capabilities are presented (Ibid.) must materialise as soon as possible to have a comprehensive picture of the interdependencies that exists between concrete situations in the geopolitical environment and the multi-domain battle.

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The multi-domain operation materialised as a continuation of the multi-domain battle concept, with the publication of TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, in 2018. The authorship of the concept is attributed to the US Land Forces but it continued to be developed, and subsequently adopted by other military forces services as well as at the political-military level, through an inter-institutional approach, being considered, by some experts, even a “conceptual successor of the joint warfare” (Spears, 2019).

With the changing paradigm of war, in the sense of the diverse types of threats to the US security, they had to adopt a series of military, doctrinal and organisational measures so as not to lose the initiative in the global geopolitical and geostrategic environment.

Thus, the separation of US and allied forces in time, space and function, to be defeated by engaging them using multiple dimensions of defence, in all domains (TRADOC, Ibid., p. iii) (air, sea, land, cyber and outer space), is seen as the main threat to current US policy that is based on the ability to project power on the American continent and integrate the actions of the united force globally (Ibid.). If the enemy succeeds in this separation, the strategic depth is lost, this being the one that gives the joint operation the necessary operational advantage, materialised by the support of the offensive. (Ibid.).

The solution identified by the USA to the threat represented by stratified confrontation, adopted mainly by Russia and China through the use of long-range systems, combined with non-lethal means of aggression, capable of shaping the operational environment, especially before the conflict (Watling, Roper, 2019, p. iii), is the “*rapid and continuous integration of all domains of warfare*” (Ibid.), which means, in fact, the conduct of multi-domain operations.

The fact that Russia and China continue to improve the concept of use as well as the means for A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) made the joint operation not keep pace with the new concepts used by the opponent, it being limited to sequencing the naval and air superiority, in predictable variants, based on hitting the enemy with aviation and navy, subsequently resorting to defeat through the land forces (Ibid.). Unlike the joint operation, the multi-domain operation has as main purpose to discourage the opponent from creating favourable conditions for the development of the conflict in advantageous terms, through joint operations.

However, this solution (multi-domain operations), which the USA intends to implement in competition with global players, close in military and economic value, comes with a number of needs to build new capabilities or to recalibrate and strengthen those already existing.

In this regard, the USA intends to improve the ability of the Allies to respond to the increasingly complex challenges posed by Russia and China; preparing the operational environment by establishing bases on the territory of the allies, prepositioning equipment and supplies, ensuring all necessary access rights and carrying out information collection activities; ensuring the necessary authority and permissions for the rapid transition from competition to conflict; improving the capacity to conduct multi-domain operations in urban areas, by developing tactics and capabilities that lead to increased accuracy, speed and timing of lethal and non-lethal effects; facilitating the visualisation of a fight in all areas by commanders, by using the capabilities of the staff of the units they lead, together with those existing at different levels, to be engaged in the place considered decisive; making available to the commander of the combined force of formations capable of fighting in all domains, capable of engaging certain vulnerabilities in the systems and forces deployed in several layers (defensive and offensive) of Russia and China (Ibid.)



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It should also be mentioned that the multi-domain operation refers, in addition to the clearly delimited aspects of being conventional, to the unconventional aspects, this being in fact one of the reasons why it has distanced itself doctrinally and conceptually from the joint operation.

Examples of multi-domain operations and joint operations can facilitate the understanding of the differences between the two: a joint action of the Marines and Land Forces in a ground attack is considered a joint operation but cannot be considered a multi-domain operation, and an action of an anti-submarine ship together with the anti-submarine aviation of its staff, may be considered a multi-domain operation but may not be considered a joint operation (Spears, 2019).

It should be emphasised that there are, in the opinion of many specialists, advantages that position the multi-domain operation above what until now was the main form of planning and conducting military actions – the joint operation. According to these critics, the joint operation is considered to start with deconfliction and is often reduced to this, while the multi-domain operation crosses the barrier of cooperation and targets selective interdependence, pushing the integration between the armed forces services from operational level to tactical (Ibid.).

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Although there are a number of arguments that place the multi-domain operation above the combined operation, in terms of efficiency, there are also many voices arguing that the multi-domain operation is in fact an extension of the joint operation (Clare, 2020), which, in my opinion, is not very far from the truth, but it must be borne in mind that the vast majority of revolutionary concepts started from something with which they could be compared, in order to have a reference and to be understood.

For example, the multi-domain operation is based on asymmetry, as does the joint operation, the difference is that the asymmetry of the joint operation is given by the services, while, in the case of multi-domain operation, it is given by the possibility of action in the five

domains, resulting in a greater number of asymmetric employment opportunities. In this respect, asymmetry represents the possibility of employing two services (in the case of joint operation) to exploit the vulnerabilities of one service when exposed to the action of a type of capability it is not prepared to respond. In the case of multi-domain operation, the five domains allow for more asymmetric employment opportunities compared to the joint operation.

The problem that I appreciate will arise in the near future is related to the complexity of these possibilities and how to implement them, because, as a rule, during a high-intensity conflict (war) there is a tendency to simplify plans and actions, to be able to respond in a timely manner to threats that may differ greatly from those considered at the beginning of the conflict. As a result, I consider that we can talk about a multi-domain operation, especially in crisis situations and at the beginning of the war, after which the joint operation, with all its disadvantages, is very likely to play a central role.

Another aspect that represents a challenge for the USA as the initiator of the concept of multi-domain operation is its implementation both at national level and especially within NATO. Thus, the differences between the level of equipment with capabilities as well as the different policies (Ibid.) will be a challenge for a long time.

Despite all these problems, to which are added the difficulties in disseminating information between the 29 members states, the multi-domain operation may be the answer to counteracting A2AD (Ibid.). It is very possible that this could represent the revival of NATO and ensure a timely response to the challenges posed by potential adversaries.

For example, the United Kingdom renamed, in 2019, the command of the joint force in the strategic command of Great Britain, thus becoming responsible for the development of capabilities in the five areas (land, air, maritime, space and cyber). (Ibid.).

From what is presented, it appears that the multi-domain operation can also be approached through intermediate variants, which do not fully reflect this concept but which can make the transition easier. Thus, the multi-domain operation represents in fact the environments in which services operate (the joint operation) to which the space and the cyber environment are added. As a result, it may be possible



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Regardless the variant considered optimal for the implementation of the multi-domain operation, the connection between this type of operation and the military strategy is vital not only for the coherence of military actions but also for their link to the other national, multinational and allied bodies having responsibilities in the field of security.

for each service to be responsible for the specific environment along with space and cyberspace, as it is currently the situation in the UK Air Force (Ibid.). Another option would be for the space and cyberspace to be managed by a structure located at a higher level than the joint force command (strategic inter-institutional level) and services to lead the fight only in their specific environment, being part of the joint operation.

Regardless the variant considered optimal for the implementation of the multi-domain operation, the connection between this type of operation and the military strategy is vital not only for the coherence of military actions but also for their link to the other national, multinational and allied bodies having responsibilities in the field of security.

Therefore, I consider that thought flexibility is necessary, in terms of what military strategy was, is, and will be, through the prism of multi-domain operation, so that the above-mentioned connection could be achieved.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE MILITARY STRATEGY AND ITS CONNECTION WITH THE OPERATIONAL AND TACTICAL LEVEL

Strategy can be defined from different perspectives, as a component part of military art, along with operational and tactical art, as a way of connecting power sources with power factors and interests, as well as a plan to achieve a goal.

We note that the definition of strategy has “*evolved*” according to the instruments of power that were predominant in a certain historical period. Thus, throughout history, strategy has been defined having as a reference the military instrument of power, therefore, in terms of engaging the opponent with military means. In this regard, the most well-known definitions of strategy present it as “*the art and science of employing the armed forces of a nation to achieve national political objectives through the use of force or the threat of its use*” (Freedictionary.com).

Subsequently, with the decrease in the share of the military instrument as a means of imposing foreign policy and the increase in the share of political, economic and diplomatic instruments, strategy

began to be approached in terms of each instrument of power, that being the reason why, as a means of connecting power sources with power factors and national interests, strategy can be applied from the highest (political) level to the level of any political, military, commercial organisation, in terms of the factor considered relevant to that organisation.

As a result, at present, the definition of strategy in terms of the military instrument has undergone some changes in approach, which no longer places the armed forces at the centre, being supported by the other instruments of power. The idea that war is considered the last resort in resolving disputes is now being challenged. Thus, even Clausewitz's famous statement that "war is only a continuation of politics by other means" (Clausewitz, 1982, p. 18) can be extended, given the new connotations of the term "war" (economic, information).

One such definition, which captures exactly the nature of military strategy today, is set out in *Joint Publication 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*: "Strategy is a prudent idea or set of ideas for engaging national power in a synchronized and integrated manner in order to meet the objectives of the theater of operations and the multinational ones" (2017, p. I-7).

Although, as I have presented, the share of the military instrument has decreased, especially after the end of the Cold War, at present the military instrument is, in my opinion, a guarantor of the other instruments of state power. Thus, the military instrument finds its applicability, within strategies, at all levels, starting with the political level and reaching the subsidiary levels, in which the economic, military, information and diplomatic instruments coexist.

In this regard, a comprehensive approach to the mentioned idea is that of Lucian Scipanov in the article *Possible Solutions for Achieving a National Security Strategy – Identifying the Place of the Maritime Strategy*: "At the politico-military level, strategy covers much more than the military aspect. In different situations, strategy covers the fields of security (security strategy), the field of defence (defence strategy), the military field (military strategy), the maritime field (maritime strategy)" (Scipanov, 2020, p. 69).

Regarding the connection of the strategy with the operative art and tactics, an approach, which I consider realistic from the point



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Hughes Wayne, in the paper "Naval Tactics and Their Influence on Strategy", argues that strategy must be based on the capabilities available, so decisions on how to approach a particular strategy must be based on tactics appropriate to the forces available. The "bottom-up" approach means the substantiation of the military strategy based on the correlation of effective tactics that can be adopted by the available forces.

of view of the interdependencies between the factors influencing the conduct of actions, in this case, by the Naval Forces, is that of Hughes Wayne, in the paper *"Naval Tactics and Their Influence on Strategy"*. He argues that strategy must be based on the capabilities available, so decisions on how to approach a particular strategy must be based on tactics appropriate to the forces available. The *"bottom-up"* approach means the substantiation of the military strategy based on the correlation of effective tactics that can be adopted by the available forces. (Hughes, 1986, p. 2).

This approach contradicts US political-military practices that support the *"top-down"* theory, in which national policies define military strategy and are based on the fact that available forces will be able to implement it. In the author's view, this is only appropriate if it is necessary to identify the need for forces to guide the acquisition process, which requires a long time and a strategy that cannot be put into practice at present. (Ibid.).

The author's perspective on the link between tactics and strategy is summarised in the following statement: *"If the forces are inadequate then a strategy that is partially bluffing may be necessary, but it is important for everyone to understand that the strategy itself cannot be thus, its part, which is a bluff, cannot be forgotten and leads to self-deception"* (Ibid.), which we consider should give us food for thought when we decide to correlate tactics with strategy.

We can clearly understand through this approach that it is important to realistically identify the vulnerabilities that are inherent in the actions of a certain service and not to consider it irrelevant that the missions outlined can only be partially fulfilled.

I have presented this approach in order to draw a parallel with the multi-domain operation, given that it is a new concept and few issues have been debated and presented in public works.

Thus, the multi-domain operation, identified as the solution to the current threats to the USA and its allies, is, in my opinion, as in the previous case, a bottom-up approach.

As it can be understood, the vast majority of the capabilities needed to develop the multi-domain operation exist or are under construction, the problem is to achieve the necessary synergy so that they deliver the expected strategic effects. Meeting this goal will require a realistic plan

and adequate funding of the armed forces, without which, no matter how good the intentions are, the expected effect cannot be produced.

Another aspect related to the incorporation of the multi-domain operation by the military strategy is represented by the need for high class education of the military, which can give it a comprehensive character and the necessary flexibility.

Moreover, in order to be coherent, multi-domain operations must also be based on appropriate tactics and largely on advanced technology and preferably artificial intelligence. However, I believe that they cannot replace the tactics practiced and confirmed over time by the services but they can use their capabilities as needed.

CONCLUSIONS

The multi-domain operation is, as I have mentioned, a concept of the US Land Forces that finds its role in the US military strategy, not necessarily directly but more through a similarity to the joint operation. For Romania, the fact that the strategic partner has chosen to adopt this type of operation largely dictates the way in which the national defence strategy of the country and the military strategy are conceived. Thus, it can be seen that in the National Defence Strategy for the period 2020-2024, the emphasis is on cooperation with the strategic partner (USA) and NATO as well as on own defence policies (Armed Forces 2040 Concept).

Romania's pressing problem is represented, at the moment, by the lack of capabilities. It follows that the implementation of multi-domain operations, in the case of Romania, will require a fairly long period, not a classic "top-down" or "bottom-up" approach but everything starts from them "down" and "up" (from operational level to tactics and strategy).

However, on closer inspection, it can be seen that what is currently happening in Romania, militarily, is, in fact, a gradual and perhaps very little observable implementation of the multi-domain operation.

Thus, by providing with equipment directly purchased from the USA (equipment taken into account by them as part of systems compatible with the multi-domain operation), such as Patriot surface-to-air missile systems, F-16 aircraft and, in perspective, the NSM (Naval Strike Missile) coastal missile batteries, we are in line



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We should not neglect the steps that have been taken to achieve a joint force capable of responding to all own security needs, given our country's position at the NATO periphery.

with the US proposed pattern, by which partner states considered vital for the application of the multi-domain operation (and which are willing to grant the necessary permissions to use national C4ISR systems by the USA) are supported in the procurement of capabilities.

However, I consider that we should not neglect the steps that have been taken to achieve a joint force capable of responding to all own security needs, given our country's position at the NATO periphery.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the evolution in the military field. By using the multi-domain operation, we are not only part of counteracting Russia's actions but we are also in line with the new global trends in the use of the armed forces.

It should also be mentioned that, as currently presented, the multi-domain operation is a means of achieving a very sophisticated "conventional" asymmetry, but which can only be achieved through major investments in capability development. The question is whether the political decision-maker is willing to take on this transformation and whether there will be continuity in its implementation even when public opinion is influenced by misinformation.

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