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Through the agency of this journal, all officers, belonging to all branches, who are in active duty, will be able to publish their personal papers and the ones that interest the Armed Forces".

*Carol – King of Romania
Issued in București on 8 December 1897*

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A LEGACY SINCE 1864

The Romanian Armed Forces road to modernity started in 1859, once the United Principalities General Staff Corps, currently the Defence Staff, was established.

Soon after it, in 1864, a group of nine captains, graduates of the first series of the Officer Cadet School in Bucharest, took the initiative to develop a "military science, art and history journal" named "România Militară/Military Romania".

The initiators of the publication – **G. Slăniceanu** (Captain, Chief of the Engineer Battalion), **A. Gramont** (Staff Captain), **G. Borănescu** (Engineer Captain), **G. Anghelescu** (Staff Captain), **A. Anghelescu** (Artillery Captain), **E. Arion** (Artillery Captain), **E. Boteanu** (Staff Captain), **E. Pencovici** (Staff Captain) and **C. Barozzi** (Engineer Captain) –, educated not only in Romania but also abroad, were inspired by the necessity to develop a substantial theoretical activity in the Romanian Army too.

The journal manifesto¹, included in the first issue, which appeared on 15 February 1864, contained innovative ideas and approaches that were meant to:

- contribute to the organisation of our military system the Legislative Chamber is about to decide upon soon;

- assemble and examine the Country old military institutions that had made for the glory of Romania for several centuries and ensured our existence;

- explore, in the absence of any military study, all the aspects related to the Army training, the most solid basis of the armed forces;

- get the Romanian Troops well-informed about the military events in the world;

- join efforts to work concertedly and whole-heartedly to develop and strengthen the edifice that is meant to ensure the future of our country"².

"România Militară" was an independent publication, under the aegis of the War Ministry, and it ceased to appear in 1866 as there were no sufficient funds and subscribers. The publication was resumed in 1891, about a quarter of a century later, also as the result of the initiative of a group of officers in the Great General Staff who intended to "reproduce the serious studies on the organisation, strategy and art of commanding troops under any circumstances"³. Shortly after it, by the Royal Decree no. 3663 issued on 8 December 1897, "România Militară" became the "Great General Staff official publication".



¹ Din trecutul României Militare cu prilejul aniversării a 75 de ani de la apariția ei în viața armatei. 1864-1939, București, 1939, p. 31.

² Ibidem, p. 32.

³ România Militară, no. 1, 1981, p. 6.

English version by **Diana Cristiana LUPU**.



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MILITARY STRATEGY OF ROMANIA – 2021*

CREDIBLE DEFENSIVE CAPABILITY, FOR A SECURE ROMANIA, IN A WORLD MARKED BY NEW CHALLENGES

Lieutenant General Daniel PETRESCU
CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE STAFF



Romania's military strategy operationalises the defence dimension established in the National Defence Strategy for 2020-2024 and customises the implementation of the defence policy objectives and of the capability targets derived from the provisions of the White Paper on Defence, 2021 edition.

At the same time, the Military Strategy is a way to present to the general public the main risks and threats of a military nature to Romania, the national military objectives, the necessary defence capabilities and the priorities to achieve them, as well as to detail for the internal and external audience the guidelines on the Romanian Armed Forces configuration, size, preparation, equipment, and the operational concepts established for fulfilling the objectives and missions.

Within the Strategy, Romania's security is seen in terms of a comprehensive and integrated approach to a strengthened national defence, a context in which all state structures and institutions as well as the population participate in a coordinated manner in the overall effort to ensure national security.

This approach also takes into account the current context, in which NATO undertakes its own strategic reflection process, adapts its posture and defines a new strategy, the EU configures its Strategic Compass, and at national level we have just completed, for the first time, a defence strategic analysis process. The result of these simultaneous processes will determine the national military posture in the current decade. Our long-term security may depend on the actions we take and the resources we invest now.

The current strategy is part of a broader planning effort, carried out over a period when security and defence challenges acquire new dimensions, while the COVID 19 pandemic continues to have manifest influence not only over the healthcare system but also

* <https://www.mapn.ro/legislatie/documente/STRATEGIA-MILITARA-A-ROMANIEI.pdf>



over the social, economic, diplomatic and security ones. It provides the necessary guidelines until 2024, and, at the same time, lays the foundations for the sustainable transformation of the Armed Forces until 2040.

The present military strategy incorporates a number of elements of continuity from previous strategies, in particular with regard to the security guarantees offered by membership of NATO, the EU and strategic partnerships, by addressing risks and threats in an allied context, by continuing essential procurement programmes and force structure transformation plans. At the same time, the new strategy emphasises the need for innovation, adaptation and implementation of certain objectives along the lines of effort related to the units' reaction capability, the peace and war establishment, the digitalisation and the use of new technologies.

The document is aimed at establishing achievable objectives and assuming responsibility for meeting these objectives. That is why we focus on what we can complete by 2024, namely strengthening the reaction capability of the units established by order, modernising the education system, the reserve preparation system, the medical system, and adapting the legal framework necessary to conduct missions in peacetime, crisis situations and at war.

In addition, the important lines of effort also concern the construction of dual-use capabilities, the support for the development of the national defence industry to sustain these capabilities, as well as the development of a security culture and a new mentality, in which the Armed Forces, as the main binder of the capability and unity of the state in crisis situations, through their actions, are responsible for national resilience.

Therefore, we consider continuing the military's involvement in combating the pandemic caused by the new coronavirus. This pandemic has highlighted not only the need for developing and maintaining robust resilience, for the existence of material stocks, but also the need for professional leadership, for an adequate legal framework allowing to meet the justified expectations that the population has from its armed forces, in difficult situations, which can be other than security crises.

As a whole, the strategy thus provides the necessary guidelines for a new generation of military leaders, urging conceptual flexibility and actional efficiency in going through the stages of the Romanian Armed Forces transformation process by 2040, to implement a flexible, multidomain force structure, with a broad spectrum of technologically advanced capabilities, based on knowledge, multispectral camouflage, deception, focused on the multi-skilled fighter, equipped with means to ensure survival in the tactical field, extensive situational awareness and increased firepower.





WAYS TO CARRY OUT THE MECHANISED BRIGADE COMBAT DISPOSITION IN THE OFFENSIVE OPERATION BY EFFICIENTLY USING MISSION COMMAND

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Due to the modern war conditions, governed by the avant-garde technologies, the military actions of all the forces services acquire new features and dimensions with special implications for the participating forces.

Carrying out a campaign involves combat-type actions that only a military force can accomplish, and its objectives are achieved both through a wide range of offensive or defensive operations, and through interaction with other military and non-military entities. At the tactical level, commanders must ensure a balance between the various elements of the functional framework to achieve the objectives set, in accordance with the campaign purpose.

In line with current trends in the field of modern armed struggle, the issue of the combat disposition of the forces in order to conduct operations must be addressed, in the context of the development of military technology, increasing force mobility, maneuverability and combat power. reconsidering, at the same time, the role of different categories of armed forces, in the sense of ensuring interoperability with NATO partner forces, spatial extension of the direct engagement of supple and mobile combat disposition. Nowadays, in the Romanian military literature, it is considered that the joint tactical large units combat disposition consists of: the command system, maneuver forces, the reserve and the logistics system.

Keywords: combat disposition; mission command; offensive; command and control; detailed command;

INTRODUCTION

In the military literature, it is considered that the magnitude of a military action is represented by the indicators of time, space and dynamics, which individualises an action in relation to all the factors of the situation. In military practice, it is considered that they are: the width of the offensive strip, the depth of the missions and the rhythm of the action.

In our opinion, the modern battlefield no longer accepts classical linearity, uniformity, with offensive stripes, alignments or deep rays. There has been a lot of talk lately about fluid combat space, in which the forces disposition can no longer be rigid, linear or circular, but asymmetrical (nonlinear). The linear, static, positional struggle is considered outdated and will be categorically avoided.

We appreciate that future fights and confrontations will take place in a multidimensional space where asymmetrical and hybrid actions will take place, characterised by mobility, deception, increased maneuverability, flexibility and the use of a wide range of actions carried out, continuously and at a fast pace, in order to decisively hit centers of gravity and critical points of the opponent.

In our scientific approach we want to present a series of aspects specific to the offensive operations carried out by a brigade-type military structure within the land forces, which is why it is necessary to make, from the beginning, some clarifications regarding this type of structure. The mechanised brigade (infantry) is characterised mainly by modularity and a structure of variable value forces, able to act together, integrated or assembled, for a period of time, under a single command, to fulfill independently a mission of a relative nature. The composition of the force structure is influenced by a number of factors, in our opinion, the most important being: the specifics of the mission, the available forces and means, as well as the geoclimatic characteristics of the area of operations where military actions



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In order to establish the mode of action of the mechanised brigade, in the complex operational environment, it is necessary to take into account the following aspects: the purpose of the operation, the force structure and the combat disposition adopted by the enemy, the composition of own forces; the importance of the objectives, the infrastructure, social and economic characteristics of the area, as well as the possibilities of logistical support of the operation, which is a determining factor in achieving success.

will take place. We estimate that the brigade could have the following composition: 3 infantry battalions, 1 tank battalion, combat support forces (artillery battalion; missile and anti-aircraft artillery battalion; reconnaissance company; communications and informatics company; CBRN company, engineer company; military police platoon), as well as logistical support forces.

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In offensive operations, the structural elements are identical, namely: *the combat disposition, the striking system* (weapons system) and the *engineering planning. Mission command*, the concept that generates the way of action of joint tactical large units, has been adopted by Romanian military structures and implemented up to subunits, and the need to identify ways to achieve effective combat disposition is current and challenging for the military specialists.

THE EFFICIENCY OF USING THE COMMAND BY MISSION CONCEPT IN LEADING JOINT TACTICAL LARGE UNITS

Command by mission has become, as a result of the transformation of the Romanian Armed Forces, the main concept of command and control. Mission command, as we well know, has been the philosophy of commanding American forces since the 1980s and has been adopted by other NATO states, such as Germany and the United Kingdom. Romania's accession to the North Atlantic Alliance involved the alignment of operating procedures, but also the synchronization of principles by its own armed forces, as a necessity for the execution of operations in a multinational framework, in various theaters of operations. The implementation of this concept has evolved quite difficult, given the procedural changes, reorganisation of forces,

rethinking combat disposition and adjusting tactical rules, increasing firepower, but also identifying security threats. The insufficiency of the explicitness of this concept in military doctrines and manuals, at that time, led to a difficult understanding of its essence, but also to the peculiarities in the non-uniform constitution of the combat disposition of the joint tactical large units.

The implementation of the concept in the doctrine and combat manuals was somewhat retained, for the first time finding it as command of the operation, later much better outlined, under the title: mission command statement, mission command (Manualul pentru luptă al batalionului de infanterie, 2012, p. 26), command by missions, single command – decentralised execution or command by mission/missions (Doctrina Operațiilor Forțelor Terestre, 2006, p. III-3).

The Doctrine of the Land Forces Operations, designed in 2006, mentioned the term of command of the operation which meant *“the authority and responsibility of the commander over an operative level force and has two fundamental components: the decision and the leadership”* (p. 61). Thus, the term is a sum of two fundamental components, the first – the decision, by which the commander puts into practice his intention and anticipates the development of the operation in reaching the desired final state. The decision is the exclusive attribute of the commander which involves understanding, visualizing the operation in time and space, but also directing the combat functions that converge to fulfill the mission and achieve the objectives. In terms of leadership, it refers to the commander's ability to exert influence over subordinates, strengthening the relationship that is established between them. When we talk about leadership, from our point of view, we must understand that it also involves taking decisions that produce effects, the commander shows loyalty to subordinates, as well as the application of all measures necessary to fulfill the mission. We also believe that the term leading can be associated with the term leadership (Army Leadership and the Profession, 2019, p. 1-3), which, in the military sense, is the activity of influencing and motivating subordinates by providing a purpose. and a direction for the fulfillment of the mission and the improvement of the organisation and which,



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as an element of the fighting power, together with the information, strengthens the fighting functions.

We find the concept of mission command at the smallest tactical level structure, namely – the battalion. The infantry battalion's combat manual presents the mission command as *“the commander's attribute to exercise authority and orientation, using orders of operations, to allow the initiative of subordinate leaders, according to the commander's intent, by delegating authority to lead the whole spectrum of military actions”* (Manualul pentru luptă al batalionului de infanterie, 2012, p. 42).

The participation of land forces in external missions provided an opportunity to improve and gain military expertise, both for commanders and military planners, in aligning training and evaluation with specified standards. This aspect is found in the Land Forces Operations Doctrine, developed in 2017, which details the concept of command by mission/missions.

A definition of the command by mission concept, very similar to the one presented above, is found in the General Tactical Manual of Land Forces, 2013 edition, under the phrase *command by missions* and represents *“the commander's attribute to exercise authority and guidance, using orders of operations, to allow the initiative of subordinate leaders, according to the commander's intention, by delegating authority in leading the whole range of operations”* (p. I-15). The difference in the nuance of the concept consists only in the fact that the battalion can perform punctual actions, and from the brigade echelon upwards, where we find joint structures, extensive operations can be performed. Also in this context, the role of the commander in the management of the mission remains the same, in order to direct and coordinate, from the planning stage to the end of the execution phase, continuously evaluating the actions. In our opinion, the central element is represented by the commanders' initiative, expressed during the conduct of military operations, which aims to integrate combat functions to achieve certain objectives or fulfill the mission.

The participation of land forces in external missions provided an opportunity to improve and gain military expertise, both for commanders and military planners, in aligning training and evaluation with specified standards. This aspect is found in the Land Forces Operations Doctrine, developed in 2017, which details the concept of command by mission/missions *“which involves centralised planning and decentralised execution and promotes freedom of action and the initiative of subordinate commanders on how to execute missions”* (p. III-10).

Command by mission ensures clear centralised intent and decentralized execution, in fact it is a command style that specifies *“what needs to be done”* and not *“how to do it”*. Within American forces, we emphasise two definitions of the concept of command by mission, as follows:

- conducting operations, in accordance with orders of operations, through decentralised execution, in order to carry out the mission effectively (FM 6-0 Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces, 2003, p.1-17);
- empowering subordinates in decision-making and decentralised execution of the mission (ADP 6-0 Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces, 2019, p.1-3).

In our opinion, the success of the mission command is the result of the exercise of the initiative by the commanders from the subordinate echelons, within the limits of the operation commander's intention.

To use this concept, a working environment must be created in which commanders and subordinates trust and understand each other. Mission command is the preferred concept of command and control for planning operations, emphasising the timeliness of decisions and the subordinates' understanding of the commander's intent. *Command by mission* accepts the uncertainty characteristic of combat actions, reducing the degree of security required to act. We appreciate that in such a philosophy, commanders use less formal command relations, ensuring the freedom of action of subordinates and waiting for them to show initiative. In this situation, orders and plans are as simple and short as possible, with commanders relying on subordinates' coordination skills and ability to understand, using a minimum exchange of information.

Therefore, the last clarification of the term is the one that comes closest to the original meaning of the concept of command by mission, but beyond the explanations presented, we must remember the origin, evolution and meaning of the concept of command by mission.

The famous military history professor Martin van Creveld, in the study of command and control systems, stated that it is a continuous struggle between the human desire for certainty and the need



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to function, despite the uncertainty of the situation. (1985, p. 6). This struggle results in the development of the two fundamental philosophies of command and control: centralised and decentralised. As we have previously analysed, from our point of view, the differences between these philosophies are strictly related to the essence of command and control.

In the combat manuals of the US Army, we find the concept of *command-control (C2)*, at all levels, which defines the command as the process by which the will and intention of the commander are transmitted to subordinates (Corps and division command and control, 1985, p. 3-1). This process has the role of directing and has as a premise a behavior of subordinates in accordance with the intention of the commander. Control is the process by which the behavior of subordinates who do not respect the will and intention of the commander is identified and corrected. This behavior may result from a misunderstanding of the doctrines, procedures or terminology used and, why not, a lack of trust.

On the other hand, a centralised style places more emphasis on control than command and does not allow subordinate echelons to express their freedom of movement or responsibility to make decisions, compensating with a high degree of certainty. The advantage of such a detailed system is the training of subordinates in a shorter period, because their training must not include skills and decision-making skills. The extent to which military planners incorporate detailed planning techniques into plans and orders depends first on the nature of the task or action, then on the qualities of command personnel, but also on the capabilities of the adversary. In this case, the upper echelon assesses the situation on the basis of reports from lower entities, sets out the set of measures and actions to be taken and directs subordinates to the implementation of decisions.

The detailed command, as described in Field Manual 6-0 of the US Army, centralises all information, and the decision-making authority belongs to the higher levels. The orders and plans are detailed and explicit, and for a successful action the plan must be strictly followed, with the maximum limitation of the initiative and decision of the

subordinates (p. 1-16). We believe that this command encourages the vertical flow of information, in the sense that information and reporting are transmitted to the upper echelons, and commands and tasks are transmitted from top to bottom, so that commanders lead by detailed orders or instructions provided personally to subordinates.

Using detailed command, commanders impose discipline and coordination, from superior to subordinate, to ensure the timely execution of the tasks set out in the plan. Detailed commands can create a very high level of coordination in the planning phase, but after the operation starts, it allows subordinates a little “*freedom of manoeuvre*” and will have to constantly ask for instructions or approvals from the echelon that issued the order.

In our opinion, detailed command is not effective for leading joint tactical large units in order to exploit opportunities that arise during combat. It is also not functional when the flow of information in the chain of command is interrupted because it causes gaps in decision-making at lower levels. As a result, detailed command is less efficient in dynamic operations, which involve rapid changes in the situation or which require analysis, creativity and initiative on the part of the commanders.

Given these disadvantages, *command by mission* was adopted, as a basic principle, in the leadership of military structures belonging to the land forces.

Following our own analysis, we can conclude that the principle of mission/mission command is a process by which the act of command is exercised, adapted to the uncertainty and complexity of the operational environment and must be applied and practiced to produce effects.

Freedom of movement and maneuver on the battlefield, as well as building a coherent decision-making framework are aspects that demonstrate the effectiveness of applying the command by mission and allow commanders to exercise the virtue of command, respecting the concept approved by the upper echelon, and to achieve the success. The command of the joint tactical large units, of brigade level, supposes the integration in a unique plan of all the structural elements, and the maneuver of the subordinated battalions falls within the intention of the brigade commander.



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WAYS TO CARRY OUT THE JOINT TACTICAL LARGE UNITS COMBAT DISPOSITION IN THE OFFENSIVE OPERATION

The combat disposition of the joint tactical large units adopted in offensive operations is the vital structural element for the success of military actions, being designed and dimensioned in direct correlation with the striking system (fires) and the sapper activities. For the successful conduct of military actions it is not enough to allocate a certain amount of forces and means, just as important being the achievement, based on them, of a functional system.

The arrangement of the combat disposition is usually influenced by the following factors: the entrusted mission and the conception of the operation; the combat procedure adopted depending on the type of operation; the value and capabilities of the enemy; the number of offensive directions; the content and objectives of combat missions; combat composition of joint tactical large units and subordinate units; the amount of means of struggle and logistical support, but also of the characteristics of the terrain (Mureşan, 2004, p. 19).

The command system must be designed in such a way as to ensure the continuity of the exercise of the command act and the achievement of a secure and functional communication and information system (CIS) with the upper echelon, subordinate structures, forces cooperating in the area of operations and those attached. The command of the forces is usually carried out *“by centralising the entire activity by the commander, combined with the wide manifestation of the initiative by the subordinates during the accomplishment of the received missions”* (Mureşan, 2004, p. 19).

The direct command of the forces is ensured by its commander, who in turn is subordinated, as a rule, to the commander of a group of forces, which can be national or part of a coalition. In case the military structure executes multinational joint operations, its commander will be subordinated to OPCOM or TACOM (Doctrina Operațiilor Forțelor Terestre, 2006, p. 140) to the commander of the designated mission. The participation of Romanian forces in operations carried out outside the national territory, together with NATO allies or partners, requires the alignment of the command system with the operational requirements of the mission, as well as the creation of computer and radio communications networks

We appreciate that the command system is based not only on the creativity, judgment, intuition and individual experience of the commanders, but also on a set of scientifically in-depth methods or ways of accomplishment. Today, however, the situations in which decisions have to be made change very quickly, many new and very complex situations appear, determined by the enemy's movements or political negotiations.

In our opinion, the command system, nowadays, involves alignment with unanimously accepted standards in the alliance, in compliance with operating or system procedures, in order to use a common language during the execution of operations.

The specificity of the command system in offensive operations must be analysed from a double perspective, from a structural point of view, highlighting its component parts, and on the other hand, from a functional point of view, regarding the organisation and functioning of information subsystems.

From a structural point of view, the command system in offensive operations comprises the decision-making, operational, security and logistics structures, organized in such a way as to ensure a single command and continuous control.

Regarding the functional perspective of the command system, we can admit it includes the relations and functional responsibilities of the information subsystems, as well as the connections with all the forces participating in the operation carried out in the entrusted area.

So, the accomplishment of the informational subsystem presupposes, based on rational principles and norms, the process of critical analysis and redesign of the system, as a whole, as well as its elements, in order to increase its functionality and amplify the efficiency of the decision act (Dumitru, Stoian, Baltă, Toma, 2000, p. 100). The rationalisation of the informational subsystem leads to the increase of the efficiency of the whole activity, but not always by reducing the operating costs of the informational subsystem.

We believe that the improvement of the command system of the joint tactical large units can be achieved through the following ways:

- development of a unique information subsystem, which would allow the efficient integration and interconnection of the obtained data;



From a structural point of view, the command system in offensive operations comprises the decision-making, operational, security and logistics structures, organized in such a way as to ensure a single command and continuous control.

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The improvement of the command system of the joint tactical large units can be achieved through the following ways: implementation of secure information flows and circuits; providing the raw data and information necessary for staffs to substantiate decisions.

- implementation of secure information flows and circuits;
- providing the raw data and information necessary for staffs to substantiate decisions;
- simplification, reduction of the number and volume of documents, by formalising and standardising them in standardized procedures, and moreover, the use of information systems, in order to reduce the time required for staff in decision-making centers or resources for administrative and routine activities and increase weight planning, management, coordination and control activities at the command points;
- the use of high-performance computer systems to ensure the protection of classified information, as well as the development of applications for the generalization of automatic data processing, in key areas of activity, such as Intelligence, so that the decision of commanders is computer-assisted and commander of the upper echelon.

From our point of view, the purpose of improving the command system is to provide with maximum efficiency and accuracy the information and data necessary for commanders, staffs and all decision-making structures, to know the status and efficiency of offensive operations, such as and developing the ability to draw multiple courses of action, adapted to the evolution of the situation in the confrontation space.

During the land forces operations, the joint tactical large units organise mainly command, base and reserve points. Ensuring their operation, in conditions of safety and efficiency, implies the observance of some operational requirements regarding their positioning within the combat disposition, being recommended to use localities that allow a good masking and a high protection.

The integration and synchronisation of the operations in depth, in contact and in the rear determines us to rethink the way they are commandes and, implicitly, the arrangement of the command points. Therefore, the specifics of modern combat, the new configuration of the current battlefield, but also the existence of many types of weapons that have the ability to execute precise shots at long distances, more than likely, will require the identification of new ways of arranging command points.

In general terms, the place and role of the mechanised brigade (infantry) depend on the group of forces to which it belongs (national or multinational), the structure to which it is subordinated and the missions received. The destination of the joint tactical large units corresponds to the forces and means in the staff, the capabilities available, as well as the structures (groups of forces) within which it operates.

Depending on the tactical or operational situation, the armed struggle of the brigade can be manifested in offensive operations (contact, movement, combined, pursuit) and defense (mobile, in the area, on intermediate alignments, in encirclement). Within the engagement group, the brigade forces are divided and arranged according to the mode of use in combat, as follows: the forces on the main direction of effort, the forces on another direction of effort and the forces directly supporting the main effort (Manualul pentru luptă al brigăzii mecanizate (infanterie, infanterie uşoară), 2004, p. 42).

Analyzing all these possibilities and hypostases we can say that the ways of using the forces of a joint tactical large units in the offensive operation are multiple but, in our opinion, the establishment of battle echelons must be adapted to the current needs of the operational environment specialised in the fight against drones, which have capabilities of engagement and neutralisation from considerable distances, so that the control points are not affected and, to the same extent, the attachment of structures that can perform EW (electronic warfare) tasks, which is increasingly used in contemporary conflicts (since 2014 in Donbass – Ukraine or between September 27 – November 10, 2020 in Nagorno-Karabakh, in the conflict between Armenians and Azeris).

Currently, the Romanian Armed Forces have major procurement programmes in place, and the purchase of HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket System) is a good opportunity to rethink combat disposition and tactical rules, and from our point of view, the integration into the brigade staff of such a battalion would greatly optimise the fighting power and striking system of joint tactical large units.

Therefore, we can admit that the elements of the combat disposition for the offensive operation, as well as the current tactical



ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING

Depending on the tactical or operational situation, the armed struggle of the brigade can be manifested in offensive operations (contact, movement, combined, pursuit) and defense (mobile, in the area, on intermediate alignments, in encirclement).



We consider that the improvement of the combat disposition of the joint tactical large units, in the offensive operation, is achieved mainly through its optimisation, namely, the rationalisation of the constituent elements, by: clear specification of the tasks and conception of the operation of the upper echelon; accurate knowledge of the value, capabilities and possibilities of the enemy; elimination of parallels in the collection, synthesis, transmission and processing of data and information.

norms, which we find in specialised manuals (for combat) decisively influence the organisation and structure of the command-control system for leading joint tactical large units, aspects that we consider important and we propose that they be taken into account during the analysis and design of the force disposition.

Depending on the tactical situation, the operational environment, the combat procedure adopted, the terrain, the actors involved, as well as other factors that influence the conduct of the fight, the tactical rules are purely indicative.

Making even a minor change to a system, in our case the combat positions of joint tactical large units, without taking into account what has been previously established, by rules and patterns, can cause unintended effects and undesirable in the evolution of the struggle. These effects can cause damage that is accounted for in the loss of personnel, military equipment or expensive equipment. Therefore, all stages of the cycle of development and evolution of military systems, as a whole, allow returning to the starting point, at any time of the planning process.

Our scientific approach involved the activity of identifying ways to achieve and improve the combat disposition, which consisted in providing with maximum objectivity the information and data necessary for commanders and staffs to know the status and effectiveness of offensive and defense operations.

Thus, we consider that the improvement of the combat disposition of the joint tactical large units, in the offensive operation, is achieved mainly through its optimisation, namely, the rationalisation of the constituent elements, by:

- clear specification of the tasks and conception of the operation of the upper echelon;
- accurate knowledge of the value, capabilities and possibilities of the enemy;
- identification of the objectives to be conquered and reduced vulnerability;
- creating the conditions for interoperability with allied forces;
- developing the capabilities of real logistical support;

- elimination of parallels in the collection, synthesis, transmission and processing of data and information;
- ensuring its own ability to hit the opponent's center of gravity;
- realisation of IPB (Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield) – in due time for the development of own courses of action;
- ensuring the compatibility of information to facilitate their centralisation and decision making;
- the functionality of the command-control system (C2) and the accomplishment of the information management.

It is well known that, in general, in the offensive operation, multilateral support and assurance are indispensable for creating the conditions for success and that through support and maneuver the main content of the complex category called the combined arms struggle is achieved.

CONCLUSIONS

Over time, commanders have applied the two variants of the command-control concept, namely, command by mission and detailed command. Some armed forces preferred detailed command, but understanding the nature of the war, the dynamics of the operational environment, or its uncertainties, highlighted the advantages of mission command. Although its principle plays a predominant role in the conduct of day-to-day operations, commanders, regardless of echelon, cannot rely solely on detailed planning or mission control techniques.

We can say that a particularly effective way to improve the combat disposition of joint tactical large units is to introduce, at least at the brigade command level up, computer systems with battle simulation possibilities, which have software and applications. It is necessary in the practice of war games, but more, the implementation of those that have capabilities of artificial intelligence used in the conduct of combat actions. Thus, the mechanical operations and routine data processing functions is performed, which machines do more efficiently than humans.

From our point of view, this capability gives the military the freedom to focus on the tasks of conception (analysis and evaluation)





that require knowledge (knowledge management) and self-judgment. Automation has made great strides in information processing, but people remain the most effective means of determining the relevance and combination of information. Technology can help these exclusively human activities, but it cannot replace people, being ubiquitous in decision-making throughout operations.

In our opinion, in the current war, the maneuver of the offensive forces and the multilateral support of the actions have become intrinsic components of the operations, an indispensable dimension of the battlefield.

In conclusion, the combat disposition of joint tactical large units must ensure reduced vulnerability, rapid maneuverability, flexibility and real support, and the organization of missions according to rational rules and principles has direct consequences on increasing the efficiency of the whole operation by reducing planning and preparation time, and especially by creating all the conditions for quick and fair decisions.

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* Operational Command/OPCOM – the authority entrusted to a commander to establish *missions* or *tasks* to subordinate commanders to deploy units, to re-subordinate forces and to maintain or delegate *operational* or *tactical control* as needed. Does not include administrative or logistical responsibilities.

** Tactical Command – Tactical Command/TACOM – authority delegated to a commander to give *tasks* to the forces received under command/assigned to fulfill the mission established by the upper echelon.



CONSOLIDATING GAINS AND THE CONSOLIDATION AREA IN NATO DOCTRINE

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Consolidating gains is an integral part of combat operations that leverages tactical, operational, and strategic level advantages to retain the initiative and create irreversible momentum towards the desired end state (TRADOC, 2017). How successfully armed forces consolidate their gains often informs the outcome for how a conflict is viewed today. Successfully consolidating gains in NATO operations have a clear impact at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war. By increasing the importance of consolidating gains and incorporating the consolidation area as a new geographic framework within Alliance doctrine, NATO will be better prepared to maintain the initiative, while creating the required momentum to achieve the military and political end state.

Keywords: NATO operations; NATO Doctrine; battlespace management; support area command post;

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*Motto:
"Armies that win battles without following through to consolidate gains tend to lose wars, and the U.S. Army has experience on both sides of the historical ledger in this regard".*

Lieutenant General Mike Lundy,
Former Commanding General of the U.S. Army
Combined Arms Center

INTRODUCTION

Throughout modern military history, there are some notable examples where armies successfully consolidated gains after major offensive operations that ultimately led to the defeat of an adversary. Examples include the 1918 French and U.S. Army Meuse-Argonne Offensive, the 1944 Allied breakout from Normandy, and the Israeli counterattack on Egyptian forces during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

With the NATO Alliance being a strategic political and military organization, consolidating gains through stability and security tasks are essential to accomplish political aims. Deliberately disregarding the importance of planning how a unit will consolidate gains will impact the commander's ability to maintain operational reach and tempo, while also decreasing the predictability of phasing and transitions. When reviewing the Allied Joint Doctrine of NATO, there is an important gap to be considered between consolidating gains and the transition between the close and rear area geographic frameworks for operations.

Success in a military campaign requires a comprehensive approach with synchronised consolidation-of-gains activities before, during and after the conflict. The ability of a commander to plan for upcoming phases and transitions is a mark of a successful commander; this is not a new idea. The U.S. Army Doctrine of World War II stated that, *"In his planning, the army commander must project himself well into the future; his plans must cover considerable periods of operations;*

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and while one operation, which may extend over many days or weeks, is progressing, he must be planning the next". (Field Manual 100-15, 1942).

Successfully consolidating gains enables a Joint Task Force to retain the initiative, prevents the adversary from regaining lost terrain, and creates new opportunities. Consolidation-of-gains activities ultimately lead to reduced operational risk and provide a marked advantage over an adversary to achieve military and political aims.

Without planning the necessary ends, ways, and means required to consolidate gains at all echelons, a military operation will entail significant risk. Experience in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria indicates that consolidating gains after tactical success against enemy forces requires deliberate planning and sufficient combat power. While assigned as the Deputy Commanding General of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster stated, "*The chaos in Afghanistan and the parts of Iraq and Syria then held by ISIS was the fault of multiple parties, but stemmed from a single cause: a failure to consolidate gains*". (Tucker, 2017).

This article seeks to explain and recommend three things: 1) the importance of consolidating gains during combat operations, 2) after securing gains, land forces should immediately establish a consolidation area to maintain the initiative, and 3) recommend who should be responsible for commanding this transitional area between the close and rear geographic frameworks. This article ultimately recommends that NATO Joint Allied Doctrine adopts the consolidation area as a new geographic framework and elaborates on the importance of consolidating gains.

BATTLEFIELD MANAGEMENT AND GEOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORKS

A critical function for a commander assigned an area of operations (AO) is to coordinate and synchronise all military and non-military actions that take place within his/her area of responsibility (AJP-3, 2019). When elements are operating within a battlespace that are not assigned to a commander, such as logistical and non-governmental organizations, the commander must strive to de-conflict these activities through unified effort. The risk of uncoordinated action within

an AO leads to an absence of situational awareness and potentially friendly fratricide. Coordination and synchronization require effective Command and Control through information and communication systems to maintain a shared situational awareness throughout an assigned AO. A unit's battlespace management provides the necessary means to enable the effective synchronization and reduce risk across the joint force and non-NATO actors.

To assist with battlefield management within an AO, NATO doctrine conceptualizes three geographic frameworks for land operations: deep, close, and rear operations (ATP-3.2.1, 2018). These frameworks allow commanders to visualize the application of combat power in time, space, and purpose to achieve assigned objectives. Within this framework, offensive, defensive, and stability tasks, along with non-military activities, are organized within an operation to achieve unified action and the end state. To achieve the military end state, decisive shaping and sustaining operations are coordinated and synchronized within these three geographic frameworks. To organize battlespace management and geographic frameworks further, commanders assign boundaries to distinguish and organize areas of responsibility between subordinate units (AAP-6, 2019).

❖ *Close operations* are those involving friendly forces in direct contact with the enemy or operations in which commanders anticipate direct contact taking place (ATP-3.2.1, 2018). The close area is a portion of the land force commander's AO assigned to subordinate manoeuvre units. Close operations take place within the area of the Forward Line of Own Troops (FLOT) and include both military and non-military activities. Typically, decisive operations take place within the close area as military commanders look to defeat an opponent to set conditions for the military end state. Manoeuvre assets within the close area require mobility, protection, and fire power to rapidly concentrate overwhelming combat power at the right time and place to exploit success (FM 3-0, 2017).

❖ *Deep operations* are generally shaping operations to set conditions for friendly forces to achieve objectives within the close fight or in future operations. To set conditions for future action, deep operations can occur prior to, after, or concurrent with close



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operations. Long range fires, aviation, and special operation forces are typically used to shape the deep fight. Using a multi-domain approach, deep operations can also entail non-kinetic means such as information activities, cyber, and space effects. Division and corps level headquarters are normally the first echelon with the capabilities to conduct deep operations. Non-military activities at the strategic and operational level also occur in the deep fight to enable friendly forces to maintain the initiative as the FLOT continues to move forward within the battlespace.

❖ *Rear operations* are typically administrative, logistical, and security related, that fall out of contact with conventional adversary forces behind the close fight. To mitigate asymmetric threats, rear area security operations focus on securing lines of communication, command posts, and logistical bases. Operations within the rear area help sustain close and deep operations and involve military and non-military activities. Traditionally, international and non-governmental organizations operate within the rear area, and when coordinated, these organizations assist in supporting the organised comprehensive approach to achieve military and political objectives.

CONSOLIDATING GAINS AND THE CONSOLIDATION AREA

During successful offensive operations, friendly forces gain terrain by increasing the size of the close area until conditions shift rear area boundaries through phasing and transitions. Consolidation begins immediately after the enemy is defeated and/or an objective is secured to prevent the adversary from gaining time to reconstitute their forces or disrupt battlefield gains by counterattack (ATP-3.2.1, 2018, pp. 4-23).

To emphasise the importance of consolidating gains in high intensity operations, the 2017 U.S. Army Field Manual 3-0 Operations added the consolidation area as a new geographic framework. The consolidation area is considered a portion of the commander's AO designated to facilitate tasks related to security and stability operations that are necessary for freedom of action in the close area and to support the continuous consolidation of gains (FM 3-0, 2017, pp. 1-35). The consolidation area also enables friendly forces to reorganize and prepare for the next operation through shaping

and sustaining operations (see *Figure 1*). Although NATO doctrine does not use or define consolidating gains or a consolidation area, it defines "*consolidation of position*" as organizing and strengthening a newly captured position so that it can be used against the adversary (AAP-6, 2019, p.31).

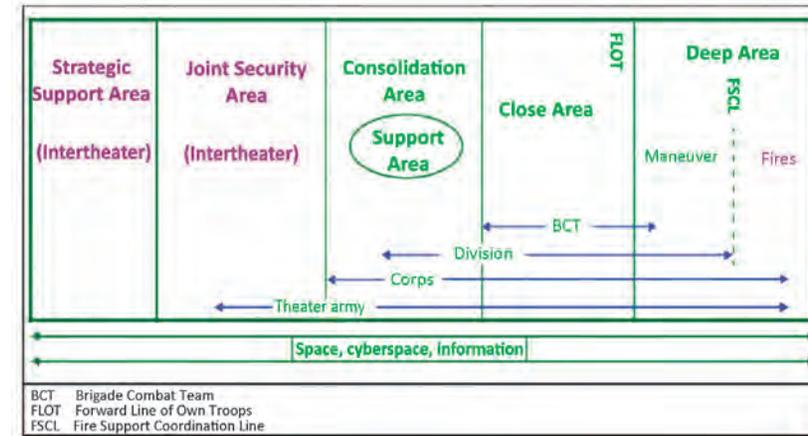


Figure 1: Corps area of operations within a theatre of operations
U.S. Army Field Manual 3-0, Operations,
(Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 2017, pp. 1-30).

Planning and allocating a dedicated force to conduct security operations is essential prior to an operation to ensure the appropriate assets are allocated to protect friendly forces and maintain the initiative. Security operations are operations undertaken by a commander to provide early and accurate warning of adversary intentions while providing friendly forces with time and manoeuvre space to react to the adversary (Ib., p. 115).

The concept of operation, coordinating instructions, and control measures provide subordinate units their tasks within the consolidation area. These include phasing, terrain selection, passage of line operations, and fire support considerations. Effective security operations within the consolidation area prevent gaps or seams within the close area that an adversary could exploit. A screen, guard, or cover operation are typical security tasks that can be an additional friendly force mission. Units with a high level of mobility should be assigned security operations as they are likely to achieve the greatest effectiveness. Command and Control, intelligence collection,



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sustainment, force protection, and civil-military cooperation activities are all critical joint functions that require coordination and synchronization to achieve specific effects within a consolidation area. Military police and engineering assets are also required within the consolidation area. During offensive high intensity operations there will likely be considerable tasks that military police and engineers have to complete to maintain operational tempo. These tasks include, amongst others, engineers repairing and maintaining critical infrastructure destroyed by adversary forces or military police units, securing prisoners of war, managing traffic control points, and protecting key command nodes.

Activities within the consolidation area are important for maintaining operational tempo, but also to legitimise the operation and reassure the local population through sustained stability operations. Before transitioning the consolidation area into the rear area, stability operations should focus on identifying, targeting, and mitigating the key causes of instability in order to set conditions for rebuilding local and national infrastructure. Completing these tasks will enable long-term development and consolidation of gains at the strategic level. Through a comprehensive approach, military and non-military stability activities should be coordinated and synchronized through civil-military integration and nest with the overall NATO campaign objectives.

Immediately following high intensity operations, an area of operations may be so depleted that a land force could easily become constrained by the stabilisation activities they must achieve. The quote below from a U.S. service member from World War II helps explain the importance of developing a comprehensive approach that incorporates consolidating gains with required stability and security tasks to win the peace. *“In many towns there had been so much destruction by bombardment and shell fires and the people so frightened and paralyzed that no local administration existed. In fact, in many cases all of the machinery of modern life had ceased to exist: there was no government, no police, no food supply, no water, no electric light, no transportation and no organized medical service. All of these things had to be reorganized from the ground up, the dead buried, the streets*

cleaned of debris, water and food brought in, etc.” (Coles, Weinberg, 1986).

The level of intensity within the operational environment (OE) will determine the balance of requirements within a consolidation area; but a commander dealing with a hostile population or large asymmetric threat will require more capabilities within the consolidation area to prevent any decreases in operational reach, tempo, and deliberate phasing and transition shifts. Using a *“minimum force”* mindset during military operations adversely affects the ability to consolidate gains at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels (Lundy, Creed, 2019). Accomplished tasks in the consolidation area have positive impacts within both the rear and close area. When these activities are completed, they rarely receive great credit; but when poorly planned and executed even the most competent commander can fail.

ESTABLISHING A SUPPORT AREA COMMAND POST

As friendly forces maintain the initiative through offensive operations the distance between the close and rear area grows. Establishing a consolidation area (between the close and rear area) helps organize the joint action required to stabilize and secure newly gained terrain. To coordinate and synchronize joint action, a dedicated consolidation area commander with a clear mission, tasks and authorities to direct action is prudent. Mobility, logistical, intelligence collection, security, and fire support missions are all activities expected to take place within a consolidation area. Without a dedicated subordinate commander to coordinate and manage shaping and sustaining operations to the rear of the FLOT, a land force commander could become distracted away from his main effort. Furthermore, the establishment of a support area command post (SACP) is a new imperative in war because threats in the consolidation area will likely be different from the close and deep areas (Fenzel, Torgersen, 2018, p. 49).

Depending on the situation in an OE, such as the number of ongoing operations, the size and location of an adversary threat, and the complexity within a battlespace, corps and division headquarters may establish multiple command posts (CPs). To maintain flexibility and effective mission command within these echelons, the U.S. Army



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Together, the objective of support and consolidation areas ensures freedom of action and continuous operations. During high intensity operations the physical and doctrinal integration of protection, sustainment, and warfighting functions within a consolidation area is best controlled by a SACP.

recommends a main CP, tactical CP and SACP (FM 3-0, 2017, pp. 2-35). When the commander is not present, a dedicated deputy commander normally takes charge of alternate CPs.

The main CP includes the command group and most of the staff to control current operations, perform detailed analysis, and plan future operations. A tactical CP is an alternate command post and provides a location for the commander to exercise mission command while the main CP deploys or repositions. In a high-threat situation, the tactical CP may offset from the main CP to provide redundancy in the event of an attack on the main CP. When significant shaping operations occur, such as a passage of lines or wet gap crossing, a headquarters may employ a tactical CP to facilitate command and control for a distinct operation.

A SACP enables commanders to exercise mission command over the distinct functional units operating within a consolidation area that may exceed the effective span of control of a division or corps main CP (Center for Army Lessons Learned Handbook, 2017, p. 5). Support areas are designated into a consolidation area to facilitate the positioning, employment, and protection of base sustainment assets required to sustain, enable, and control operations (see Figure 2) (FM 3-0, 2017, pp. 1-34).

Together, the objective of support and consolidation areas ensures freedom of action and continuous operations. During high intensity operations the physical and doctrinal integration of protection, sustainment, and warfighting functions within a consolidation area is best controlled by a SACP (Fenzel, Torgersen, p. 49). The SACP must have the proper command authority and assigned forces to control and direct operations that may occur to the rear of the FLOT. Assigning a dedicated commander that outranks all subordinate commanders operating within the consolidation area is considered a best practice within the U.S. Army (US Army Combined Arms Center, p. 2).

When resourcing the requirements for a SACP, corps and divisions must include all joint functions. This will ensure that the SACP is capable of planning and executing the full spectrum of military operations while remaining synchronized with operations in the close and deep fight (Ib.).

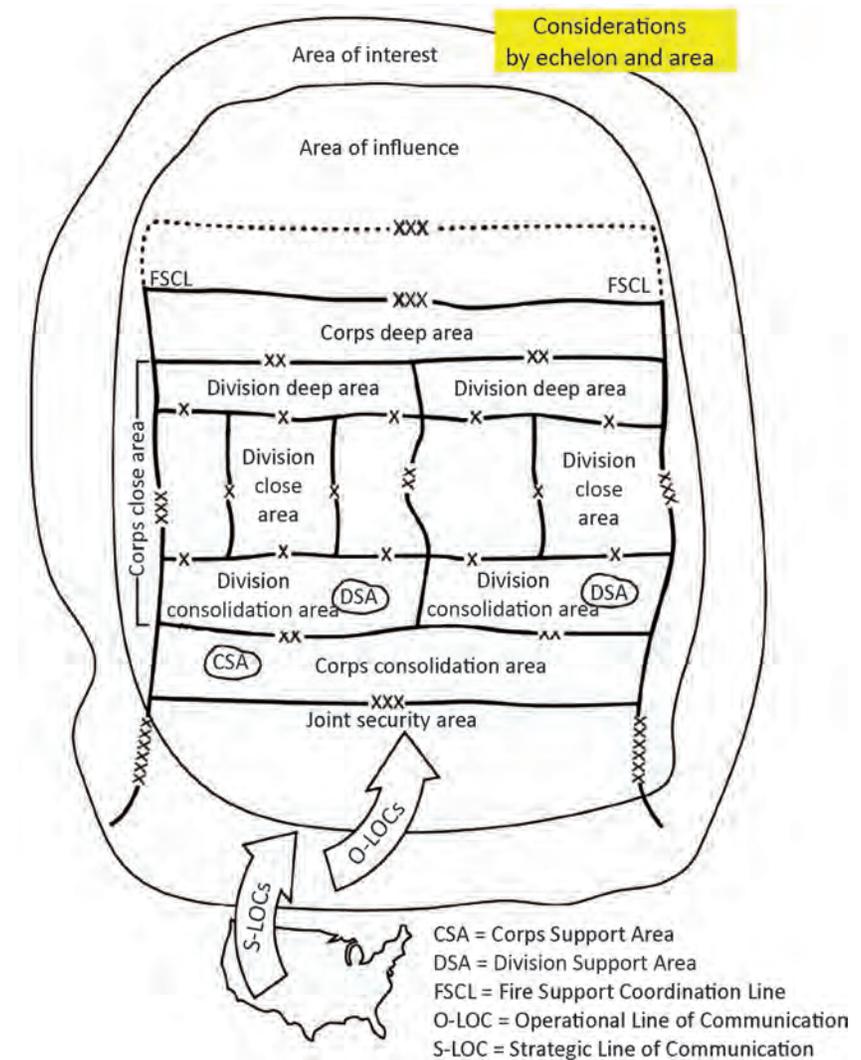


Figure 2 :Considerations by Echelon and Area. Author's chart rendition in U.S. Army Field Manual 3-0, Operations (Washington, D.C. Government Printing Office, 2017, pp. 1-32).

CONCLUSION

Successfully consolidating gains in NATO operations have a clear impact at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels of war. How well a joint force consolidates their gains will influence the level of success in a campaign, and ultimately, how a population views the conflict. With peer competitors now actively seeking to gain strategic



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The endurance of public support and political will in the 30 countries that form NATO's Alliance will determine how long individual countries will allocate their resources, specifically manpower and funding to an operation.

advantages with advanced technologies in all domains, NATO must adapt and prepare to conduct high intensity operations against potential adversaries.

By increasing the importance of consolidating gains and incorporating the consolidation area as a new geographic framework within Alliance doctrine, NATO will be better prepared to maintain the initiative, while creating the required momentum to achieve the military and political end state. Having the appropriate force and capabilities to consolidate gains will have an exponential effect on the future battlefield (Pough, 2019, p. 45).

By not planning or allocating forces appropriately, the adversary could easily conduct disruption operations in the consolidation area, affecting both military and civilian forces attempting to stabilize and secure military gains. A dedicated commander with the right level of command and control authorities should lead the joint coordination and synchronization within the consolidation area via a SACP. Furthermore, establishing an effective SACP will allow the land force commander to concentrate on the main effort.

The long wars in Afghanistan, the Balkans, and Iraq have taught the military that no politician desires a protracted conflict. The endurance of public support and political will in the 30 countries that form NATO's Alliance will determine how long individual countries will allocate their resources, specifically manpower and funding to an operation. When directed, the military must determine how best to quickly accomplish military and political aims. Incorporating the importance of consolidating gains with a new consolidation area geographic framework into NATO doctrine will assist the military to achieve these aims.

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THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROMANIAN INFANTRY DEFENCE ACCORDING TO THE LATEST INSTRUCTIONS USED DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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This article discusses the characteristics of the Romanian infantry defence during the last part of the Second World War according to the instructions received from the General Staff or various Higher Commands. It presents aspects relating to the role of the defence that regained its specific mission to hold its position to the last man or bullet. This article presents the tactical rules of an infantry division in a position of resistance, the arrangement of the battalions, the role of the heavy artillery units and the course of action when the enemy started the attack.

At the same time, it also lists the differences between the instructions and directives relating to defence, given under the German influence between 1941-1943 and the last ones during the war. Furthermore, it also defines the concept of fire plan with all the necessary firings to be delivered against an enemy, with the assessment of the role of the cooperation between the aviation and the artillery once the preparatory firing is started or its use against tanks.

Keywords: defence; infantry; division; artillery; fire plan;



INTRODUCTION

On the brink of the Second World War, the military training, infantry regulations and modern technique equipment were inconsistent with the new requirements of the battlefield.

Beginning with 1941, the Romanian infantry training included the battle principles of the German Army (Șuța, p. 210), to the same effect various regulations being tailored to meet the specificity and requirements of the Romanian infantry. Nevertheless, the military failures to follow proved that the German doctrine and strategy had some shortcomings and could not be completely adapted to the Romanian specificity. This included the strategy of entering deep into the enemy lines, without securing the flanks and rear, without the consolidation of conquered alignments and neglecting defence (Romanescu, Tudor, Cucu & Popescu, p. 257).

The lessons learned from the Second World War led to the emergence in 1945 of the *Command and Troops Training Directives, part I (offensive) and part II (defence)*, which represented a collection of instructions given by the General Staff or various Higher Commands which became allies during the war.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this article is to assess the principles of defence during the last part of the Second World War, based on the following assumption: there are differences between the instructions and directives relating to defence given under German influence between 1941 and 1943 and the last ones during the war of 1944-1945. This research was conducted by studying the documents from the national military archives of Pitești, the *Command and Troops Training Directives – 1945*, the *Artillery Regulation – 1941* but also from the analysis of relevant literature published from 1941 to 1985.

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DEFENCE PRINCIPLES

These directives were the last instructions used by the Romanian infantry during the war.

The defence executed by the infantry during the last part of the war was characterised by achieving static defence without withdrawing the troops, on almost every front, the increase in the defence depth, achieved on the one hand by the increase in the depth of the position

The defence executed by the infantry during the last part of the war was characterised by achieving static defence without withdrawing the troops, on almost every front, the increase in the defence depth, achieved on the one hand by the increase in the depth of the position of resistance, and on the other hand, by planning other successive positions and strengthening them with very strong works.

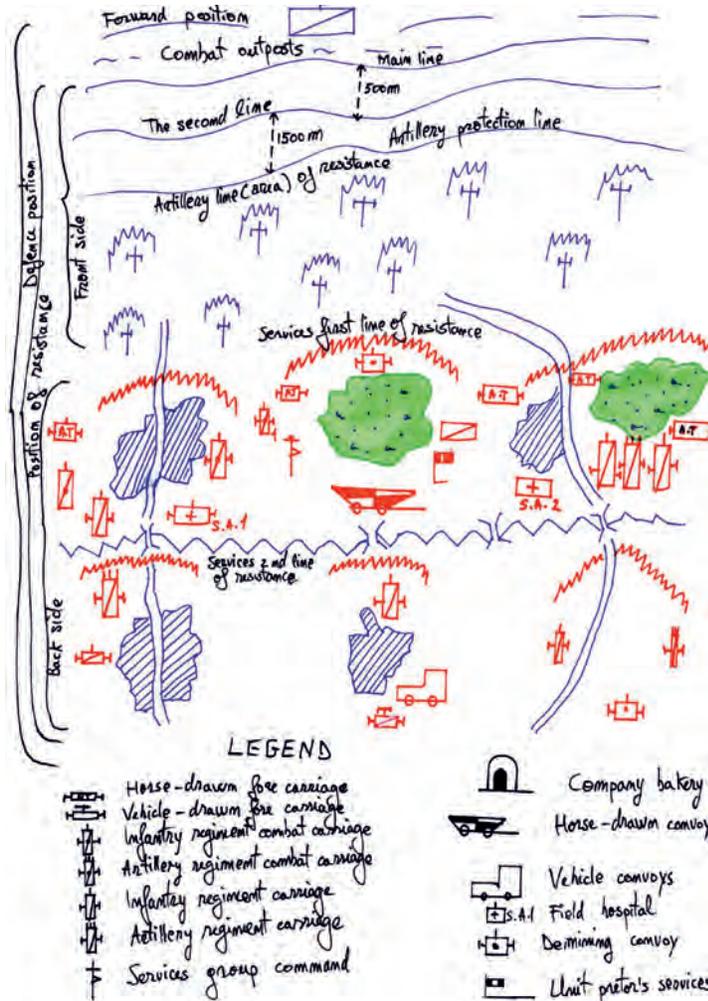


Figure 1: 1945 Defensive plan
Source: Depozitul Central de Arhivă, p. 149.



of resistance, and on the other hand, by planning other successive positions and strengthening them with very strong works (Șuța, p. 284). Therefore, it was restored the classical concept of defence according to which "defence means to maintain the position of resistance to the last man and last bullet" with no retreat in the face of the battle (Șuța, p. 192), by impeding the offensive in achieving its purpose – the imposition of one's will – because only the defence could decisively prevent the offensive from acquiring the decision (Command and Troops Training Directive 1945 Part II Defence, art. 149). The position of a defence unit – the land on which defends itself contained 3 elements: forward position, combat outposts (located 500-1000 m from the main line) and the position of resistance (Ibid, art. 153).

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The forward position was confirmed by the operations that took place in 1944, because the modern technique (tanks, assault cannons, antitank guns) made possible to send an infantry unit before the position of resistance, without the risk of being destroyed separately. If a forward position could not be achieved, they sought to mask the position of resistance against the enemy ground search.

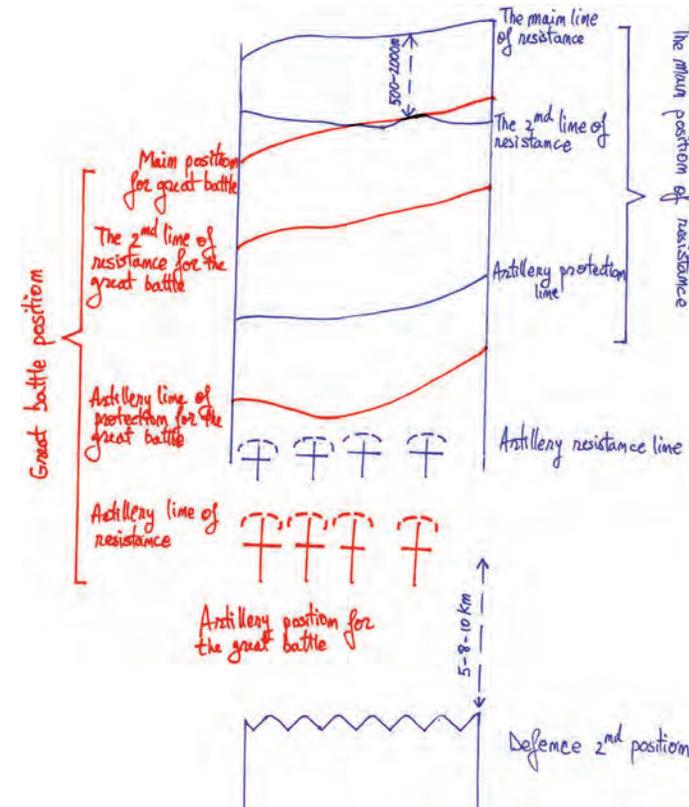


Figure 2: Defensive position
(Ib., f. 154)



of resistance, without the risk of being destroyed separately (Depozitul Central de Arhivă, p. 3). If a forward position could not be achieved, they sought to mask the position of resistance against the enemy ground search.

The position of resistance had gained, due to echeloning, a very deep depth and structure, because it had encapsulated the entire area where the unit was displaced, until its last service formation. The position of resistance contained two successive areas: the internal area of the position of resistance, defended by the division troops, including the artillery and the rear area of this position, defended by the men of the trains and service formations (Ibid, p. 6).

The front area contained the following lines: the main line of resistance, the second line of resistance, the artillery protection line and the artillery line (area) of resistance. The main line of resistance was the very edge situated in front of the position of resistance. The second line of resistance was situated at a variable distance from the main line and which could reach approximately 500 m. It was conditioned by the need that the weapons on this line and the ones in its immediate vicinity to reach in front of the main line of resistance. The artillery protection line was drawn approximately 1,500 m behind the main line, the old stopping line in the Regulation of great units of 1938. The role of this line was to protect its own artillery against the penetration of infantry or tanks (Command and Troops Training Directive 1945 Part II the Defence, art. 158).

The position of resistance for the great battle overlapped the position of resistance, except for the regrouped lines which were situated at a distance ranging from a few hundred meters up to 2 km. changing the centre of gravity of the forces from the position of resistance to the great combat position, was just a change in the effort on the depth of the same position (Ibid, art. 194). Transmissions played an important role and the experience had proven that the various telephone cross-sections must not be installed either on the ridges or in the valley, due to the risk of being attacked by the enemy artillery and launchers. It was preferable that the tranches be installed halfway down because the wires broke often and the transmission personnel was insufficient to repair them. It was also noted the need for liaison officers, trained to repair the broken wires (Romanescu et al., p. 409).

INFANTRY DIVISION TACTICS

The formation of a division into the position of resistance contained: the active units in front of the position, the forward position (Șuța, p. 283), the line units with their combat outposts, the artillery and the reserve (Romanian General Staff, 1945, p. 66). In front of the position of the division, the divisionary search group ensured the search (Cupșa, Tudor, Cucu, Romanescu & Popa, p. 38). The infantry battalions represented the units in the forward position being arranged one by one at 4-5km. Normally, an infantry division generally fought only with the organic artillery, but when it was positioned on the directions most favourable to enter the enemy lines or when it was confirmed that the enemy grouped important forces in its sector, this could receive reinforcement artillery. Direct support groups were proportional to the number of infantry regiments in the line, the strength of each support group also took into account the amount of available artillery (Command and Troops Training Directive 1945 Part II the Defence, art. 285).

According to the experience gained in 1944, in order to increase the efficiency of the combat, the support group also contained heavy artillery units (The Artillery Regulation/1941, art. 86-87). The mission of the direct support groups was: counterpreparatory, stopping, antitank combat or, in certain cases, to participate in counterbattery and distant battlefield. Overall grouping was done in the rest of the organic and reinforcement units, having the mission of counterbattery, distant battlefield, antitank combat and to support the overall counterattack (Depozitul Central de Arhivă, p. 68).

Splitting the artillery division into direct support and general groups did not lead to a definitive specialisation of the various groups, because the units and batteries destined to provide direct support were used for counterbattery and harassment in the back of the enemy line, and the counterbattery units were used to provide direct support to the infantry (The Artillery Regulation, art. 144). Directing firings inside the division had to be made taking into account of the tactical situation, therefore making easier for several artillery units simultaneously to fire. However, in general, defence fire control was more centralised than in the case of an attack (Ibid. art. 169).

The moment the enemy was approaching the forward position, the artillery in that position and the heavy artillery were starting



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a harassment attack (Depozitul Central de Arhivă, p. 122). Once the enemy infantry started the assault, the stopping firings of the infantry, artillery and antitank guns opened fire in order to destroy the enemy infantry and tanks (Ibid, p. 123). The infantry division could execute a counterattack only when the enemy was “supressed in the field” (Ibid, p. 124), and if no reserves for counter-attack were available, they were trying to stop the enemy by concentrated fire with all the weapons on the place of incursion (Ibid, p. 128).

ARTILLERY POSITION

The experiences of the year 1944 and the Artillery Regulation indicated that initially the entire artillery of the position of resistance had to be pushed forward so that they can execute preparatory fire or fire on sight on the enemy’s bases of departure in front of the forward position; later on, during the combat, in order to support the units to move in the forward position, the resistance artillery must be with its batteries in front of the main line retreated back, the device having a deep staggering to fire deeper and with its observers forward on the line of combat outposts. As the attack approached the main position, the entire artillery occupies locations much more staggered in the depth of the defence of the position of resistance, the observers holding their position on the main resistance line (The Artillery Regulation, art. 167).

In this regard, there were big differences between the instructions and directives given in 1943 and those of 1944-1945. According to the last directives, the artillery had to be staggered in depth so that it can stop the enemy, especially the tanks entering the position of resistance. All batteries had to be able to deliver destruction firings on the enemy bases of departures. In order to deliver harassment firings behind the enemy front, the batteries had to be pushed during firings in forward position, but no more than 4 km from the main line. Also, the artillery position could not be placed in populated areas, forests (Romanescu et al., p. 414) or in their proximity, these places being usually targeted by enemy airstrikes.

They had to be placed, preferable, on open field, but in camouflage (Depozitul Central de Arhivă, p. 72).

FIRE PLAN

The fire plan included all the preparatory firings and those foreseen to be delivered against an enemy during the defensive combat. This was intended to be adapted to the enemy’s manoeuvres, including the firings delivered during the approach, against preparatory firings as well as the stopping firings and strengthening the firings in the effort zone (Romanescu et al., p. 417).

While the enemy approached, the artillery delivered firings of harassment, interdiction and a stronger concentration on the sight, on various moving or sheltered enemy elements. From their masked or camouflaged positions, the infantry also fired their heavy weaponry (Command and Troops Training Directive 1945 Part II the Defence, art. 304).

Firing against the preparations for the attack aimed at crushing it on its basis of departure, representing a massive set of firings delivered by the artillery towards the enemy infantry, infantry’s heavy weaponry and against the aviation. If they started before the artillery is prepared, firings were delivered by massive concentrations of fires “on the sight”. After the attack preparation had started, firing against it was done based on a predetermined plan, called “systematic counterpreparation fire plan” (Depozitul Central de Arhivă, p. 85) which included both variants and hypotheses made about the enemy, being executed by the infantry’s heavy weaponry (80 mm larger throwers and 75 mm cannons) (Ibid, p. 87).

Also, according to those directives the aviation played an important role, because the planes took off at the same time moment the attack preparation fires started, with the mission to fight the enemy artillery (Cupşa, et al., p. 38). Fighting against the enemy using the aviation had a very short time frame and the aviation had to be the first to know about the moment of initiation of artillery preparatory firings (Command and Troops Training Directive 1945 Part II The Defence, art. 311). The aviation was also used against tanks by anti-tank aircrafts, dive-bombing and heavy bombardment. The anti-tank aircraft had a cannon of 75 mm with a long barrel which delivered firings at an altitude of 200-300m with a 1 in 6 chances of hitting the target (Romanian General Staff, 1945, p. 95). For the anti-missile defence, it was used the individual fire of the infantry weaponry on the airplanes



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flying bellow 1000 m, although the results were average. According to one study, the individual fire delivered by each Russian shooter or automatic weapon caused only 20% of the total German airplane losses on the Eastern front (Ibid, p. 110).

The main infantry barrage was meant to destroy the enemy, being unleashed by surprise at a distance of 100-300 m (Ibid, p. 88), so that every weaponry category to deliver efficient firings. Therefore, it allowed a better camouflage of the most of the forces, not allowing to be struck by the enemy artillery for lack of safety area. Artillery stopping firings were delivered as close as possible to the first line of infantry (Command and Troops Training Directive 1945 Part II the Defence, art. 313) in order to ensure strengthening the fire if this was too weak, or in case of overlapping fires by the infantry and artillery. Firing stopped at the signal of the infantry or upon demand of the artillery observers. During stopping firings, the heavy artillery firing strengthened and extended the firings of the light artillery, being placed as close as possible to infantry. These firings being more rigid, they needed to prepare multiple variants and hypotheses about the enemy attack strategy. Stopping firings were delivered when the enemy attacked during the night, in foggy weather, on covered ground or when the dust and smoke from the explosions caused by the preparatory firings delivered by their own artillery impeded the delivery of observed concentrations, but on fronts not bigger than 150 m (The Artillery Regulation, art. 173).

CONCLUSIONS

This article confirms the hypothesis that provided the basis for this research. There are differences between the instructions and directives relating to defence between 1941-1943 and the last ones during the war between 1944-1945. The last instructions were defined by achieving a static defence and without removing the troops to the last drop of blood. The 1944 operations have confirmed the need for a forward position due to the use of modern technique. Also, the position of resistance gained a higher depth, incorporating the entire displaced formation to the last service formation. If initially it was considered that the artillery from the position of resistance had to be as forward as possible in order to be able to deliver preparatory firings, afterwards, the experiences of 1944 have imposed the need

that the resistance artillery has its batteries placed in front main line withdrawn to the back with a staggering in depth in order to fire deeper. At the same time, the last directives strengthened the role of the aviation, which had to take off with the beginning of the attack preparatory firings in order to fight the enemy artillery.

To conclude, the historical turn of the 23 August 1944 and the adoption of some new principles based on the instructions received from the General Staff or Higher Commands led to the opening of a new stage in the Romanian military thinking.

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THE VISUAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT ON THE ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

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The recent evolution of social media networks has brought to the attention of researchers in the field of security studies new resources and methods for understanding international dynamics, as well as new media actors such as the military forces. Today, the Romanian Armed Forces have their own official Facebook pages through which they produce and promote media content, mainly visual, which reaches a significant number of individuals. Thus, the visual representations that are disseminated in the online environment and, especially on the military social networks, become important sources of knowledge and interpretation of reality, true spaces in which policies are born.

The main purpose of this paper is to explore how the “responsibility to protect” is visually constructed in the photos published by the Romanian Armed Forces on own Facebook pages. To accomplish this objective, photographs illustrating interactions between Romanian soldiers and Afghan children during the Resolute Support Mission were collected. The method used for the analysis of these photographs is visual social semiotics, a recent approach in the study of security issues, which brings to light the meanings hidden in the various modes of representation.

Keywords: visual construction; responsibility to protect; (de)legitimation of war; visual securitisation; Resolute Support Mission;

* In this paper, the concept of “responsibility to protect” refers to the feelings of civic and moral responsibility of individuals and states to protect those in suffering. Not to be confused with the principle of “responsibility to protect”, also known as R2P, adopted by the UN in 2005. According to this principle, states affirm their obligation to protect the population from crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, or genocide and accept a collective responsibility to help each other to fulfil this commitment (A.N.).



INTRODUCTION

For a long time, a significant part of security studies’ theorists considered that the actions of states can be explained only by rational means, that is, by understanding the distribution of power in the international system and the factors that influence political decisions. Other researchers argued that the actions of states can be explained by analysing the reasons and visions that prevail within them. This debate along with the evolution of the media and the emergence of social platforms have amplified the need to understand how individuals perceive reality. Hence, new methods of analysing international events have emerged, whereby previously ignored resources, such as images or films, are treated as valid empirical sources.

Currently, all events presented in the media are accompanied by images, meaning that all people with access to the media receive information through visual language (Weber, 2008, pp. 137-153), which can influence how individuals perceive reality. “*Photographic images must be engaged ethically as well as socio-politically because they are implicated in history and they often work to suppress the very conditions that produce them. Often framed within dominant forms of circulation and meaning, such images generally work to legitimate particular forms of recognition and meaning marked by disturbing forms of diversion and evasion*” (Giroux, 2004, pp. 790-791). Thus, in the study of politics, a new approach emerged, namely, the aesthetic approach, which assumes that “*there is always a gap between a form of representation and what is represented therewith. Rather than ignoring or seeking to narrow this gap, as mimetic approaches do, aesthetic insight recognizes that the inevitable difference between the represented and its representation is the very location of politics*” (Bleiker, 2001, p. 510). Thus, the most important forms of knowledge of the political world come from sources that examine how visual representations contribute to political processes because their relevance comes from the way people perceive and construct the reality in which they live.

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With the emergence of social networks in the last two decades, the boundaries between propaganda and information transparency have dissipated. Today, social media plays a central role in disseminating reports of conflicts or military interventions, especially as it is used by political leaders, ordinary people, rebel groups, activists or representatives of the military.

The analysis of the visual representations that are spread through the media highlights that, in the process of communication, the media uses various framing techniques that have the power to influence public opinion. For example, *“the photographic (de-)legitimation of war would lead to a veritable vocabulary of visual topoi – images that recur time and time again in relation to different wars and in different guises: individual soldiers, tired, muddy, bandaged perhaps, but smiling courageously, a cigarette in their mouths; or soldiers protecting women and children; or images of the enemy’s cruelty – emaciated prisoners behind barbed wire, mothers holding dead or wounded children, summary executions. Photography has also been used to de-legitimize wars, all through the same topoi – photographs of victims, for instance – but victims of <our> action”* (Leeuwen & Jaworski, 2003, p. 256). Thus, in the reporting of military conflicts, two types of journalism emerged, war journalism and peace journalism, with conflict-related frames often focusing on events and political leaders, rather than soldiers and victims. Although they use different means, the two types of frames are complementary and have the same goal, to promote the end of the war.

Over time, many social researchers have analysed how the traditional media presents military conflicts and leads to (de)legitimising them (DiMaggio, 2008; Entman, 2004; Gowing, 1994; Maltby, 2013; Robinson, 2002, 2005). However, with the emergence of social networks in the last two decades, the boundaries between propaganda and information transparency have dissipated. Today, social media plays a central role in disseminating reports of conflicts or military interventions, especially as it is used by political leaders, ordinary people, rebel groups, activists or representatives of the military. Nevertheless, the role of social media in the perpetuation of war imaginary is insufficiently explored by social scientists. This paper aims to contribute to the existing literature by analysing the visual construction of the *“responsibility to protect”* in the photos published by the Romanian Armed Forces on its Facebook pages. Thus, photographs that illustrate the interactions of the Romanian military with Afghan children during *Resolute Support Mission* – more precisely, between 2015 and 2019 – were collected. Although the mentioned mission is not a combat one, the case of Afghanistan continues to be representative for observing the effects of war

and the process of post-conflict reconstruction. Moreover, even though peace negotiations in Afghanistan are ongoing, Western military forces are not immune to threats, as observed in September 2019, when the Green Village complex was bombed by Taliban forces. For the interpretation of the collected photos, the visual social semiotics method will be used, whose purpose is to formulate hypotheses and obtain answers by understanding and associating the messages and meanings hidden in the elements of the photos as well as in how the images are captured.

Although the images illustrating war and military operations, transmitted through traditional media channels, have been intensely analysed by researchers in the field of international relations, the same cannot be said about the images that are promoted by the armed forces on their social platforms. Hence, this paper aims to fill this gap by examining how the images promoted by the Romanian Armed Forces on Facebook contribute to the visual construction of the *“responsibility to protect”*, emphasising the securitising power of the photos. The first part of this paper exposes the media’s role in the governments’ decision to initiate military interventions and in (de)legitimising military conflicts. In the next section are identified both the vulnerable victims of military action – children, and how the visual discourse built around them promotes the narrative of liberation. The third part describes the methodology used in this paper. The last section analyses the interactions between the Romanian military and the Afghan children, highlighting the visual construction of the *“responsibility to protect”* using the visual semiotics.

VISUAL SECURITISATION AND (DE)LEGITIMATION OF MILITARY CONFLICTS

The fall of the *Iron Curtain* marked an important turn in the political and media world because, during the 1990s, the media turned its attention to reporting on humanitarian crises, which led to military interventions in states such as Somalia, Rwanda, or Yugoslavia, a phenomenon known as the *“CNN effect”*. The terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, and the outbreak of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan marked a second turning point in international politics, with the United States of America as the defender of democracy and the liberator of the oppressed. Thus, it can be seen that the visual



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THINKING

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The end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a new era in international dynamics, and the international community showed high interest both in the humanitarian crises caused by inter-ethnic conflicts and in the growing influence of the media. With the spread of images portraying victims of ethnic violence, more and more states decided to intervene militarily in countries such as Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda, a phenomenon known as the "CNN effect".

representations of military conflicts acquire a securitising dimension, with an important role in decisions to (de)legitimise war. Moreover, images can be used in the armed forces psychological operations, as persuasive means, to gain the support of the civilian population and intimidate the enemy.

The end of the Cold War marked the beginning of a new era in international dynamics, and the international community showed high interest both in the humanitarian crises caused by inter-ethnic conflicts and in the growing influence of the media. With the spread of images portraying victims of ethnic violence, more and more states decided to intervene militarily in countries such as Iraq, Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda, a phenomenon known as the "CNN effect". These interventions are significant, as they represent an important evolution in the way peace operations have been carried out so far: "earlier Cold War UN peacekeeping operations were normally non-coercive in nature and involved the supervision of consenting parties and the reaffirmation of territorial borders and sovereignty. Intervention in northern Iraq and Somalia, however, appeared to represent the development of a norm of forcible humanitarian intervention in which state sovereignty could be violated in order to preserve and to protect basic human rights" (Robinson, 2002, p. 8). These new developments have led to many debates regarding the loss of control over foreign policy decisions in favour of the media. But decision-makers soon realised that the potential of the media to encourage such interventions must be exploited.

A new turning point in international relations was marked by the September 11 terrorist attacks, when a new type of threat to Western states emerged. As expected, the new events had major consequences (Robinson, 2005) for the media and, implicitly, for the "CNN effect". Thus, the declaration of "war on terror" turned humanitarian crises into a secondary concern for the political decision-makers in the USA, with the media becoming an important factor in gaining support for the intervention in Iraq. In this context, humanitarian narratives became a means of justifying and legitimising the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Last but not least, the "CNN effect" was affected by political actors' attempts to influence the information disseminated in the media and the way it was used to justify war. Thus, the discourses that followed 9/11 focused on promoting antithetical frameworks such as

good-evil, civilised-barbarian, through which the progressive character of Western society was contrasted with the violence and refusal to evolve of the Eastern world.

Although visual representations have long been used in the narratives of the liberation and defence of the weakest, the recognition of images as acts of securitisation has emerged more recently, with the introduction of the concept of "visual securitisation". Starting in the '80s, the concept of security area of application began to transform, so that, in addition to ensuring the security of the state, the focus of decision-makers has also shifted to the security of individuals and the community. However, the process by which political actors turn a certain event into a security issue and then adopt policies to solve it is called *securitisation* (Wæver, 1995). For a long time, researchers in the field of international relations and security studies considered that securitisation is a discursive practice, which communicates the existence of certain threats and the need to eliminate them, so that other elements of communication such as language, non-verbal or images were ignored. However, with the emergence of social networks and, implicitly, with the large flow of visual representations circulating in the media today, there was a need to analyse how images contribute to security processes, thus emerging the concept of *visual securitisation* (Hansen, 2011, pp. 51-47). Visual securitisation can be therefore analysed using four components: the image itself, the immediate intertextual context, the extended political discourse, and the texts that give meaning to the image, thus noting that the meaning of the images is not fixed, but often depends on the text that accompanies them. An example of visual securitisation was highlighted by *Time magazine* in 2010, by publishing the image of a young Afghan woman with her nose and ears cut off, along with the text: "What happens if we leave Afghanistan" (Heck, Schlag, 2013, p. 903). In addition to exposing the physical violence, this image is representative of the process of visual securitisation because it communicates an "if-then" idea, which conveys to the receiver that it is their responsibility to protect those who are suffering.

However, the images are not used only by governments to gather the necessary support for military intervention, but they are used in the armed forces psychological operations conducted during the war, as persuasive means to gain the support of the local population



ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING

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Analysing the persuasive leaflets disseminated by NATO in Afghanistan, Sarah Maltby and Helen Thornham note that the main message communicated through these leaflets is built around the concept of responsibility. Moreover, they illustrate biological bodies, because the bodies reflect political events and transmit stories that can be reproduced in the mind of the receiver.

and intimidate the enemy. Analysing the persuasive leaflets disseminated by NATO in Afghanistan, Sarah Maltby and Helen Thornham note that the main message communicated through these leaflets is built around the concept of *responsibility*. Moreover, they illustrate biological bodies, because the bodies reflect political events and transmit stories that can be reproduced in the mind of the receiver. For example, one of the leaflets depicts an old man holding a child in his arms, along with the message “*Afghans are the country’s greatest treasure... Help keep them safe !*”. Thus, the two bodies highlight the age’s vulnerability and contribute to the evocation of feelings of civic responsibility and protection of the helpless. The significance of biological bodies becomes even more important as images are devoid of political messages: “*this has dual significance. As a persuasive discourse, it utilises the body as mechanism of disassociation with the wider political context. It disembodies the political <threat> and embodies the private one. Moreover, these bodies become metaphors for a particular understanding of Afghanistan and a supposed <capturing> of lived reality of life in Afghanistan*” (Maltby & Thornham, 2012, pp. 33-46).

THE VISUAL CONSTRUCTION OF CHILDHOOD IN THE NARRATIVES OF LIBERATION

With the end of the Cold War, the role of the United States of America and its allies as defenders of the world against communism disappeared, being replaced by the idea that Western states are constrained to save children from hunger and violence. Due to the fact that the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century were marked by humanitarian crises and military interventions, the media quickly turned its focus on the children. Generally, the governments involved in various wars have sought to reduce the spread of images depicting material and physical damages, especially if they portray children’s suffering so that most visual narratives involving children are about rescuing and protecting them. There is, however, an alternative narrative about children and war, so that sometimes children are presented as soldiers capable of killing, which suggests that in the visual discourse about the impact of war on children two types of extreme frames are used, which highlight either the suffering of children or their ability to become violent.



The fall of the “Iron Curtain” marked the end of a bipolar world, divided between “the good ones” and “the bad ones” so that the vacuum of empathy created by the disappearance of figures fighting for democracy was filled by innocent victims of suffering – children. An important reason why politicians, the media, and ordinary people are attracted to stories about children is that they are not just simple stories about children in a particular space. “*Children are a synecdoche for a country’s future, for the political and social well-being of a culture. Stories about children are sentimental. They employ the same emotional hooks that <tearjerker> movies do. Stories about children goad adults into a response. The image of an endangered child is the perfect <grabber>. It is so powerful that it short-circuits reasoned thought*”. (Moeller, 2002, p. 39). Thus, images depicting children have become a valuable product, as they are used to capture the public’s attention and influence their perceptions, to obtain donations, or to evoke a moral obligation.

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In reporting war stories, Western states have tried to reduce the spread of images illustrating the suffering and consequences of military conflict, believing that they can adversely affect the viewer, especially if children appear in photographs. Through this way of reporting the news, around the child’s figure, an almost universal discourse of vulnerability, innocence, and the need for protection from adults was constructed. For this reason, the process of framing war photographs, in which children appear, contributes to shaping and promoting the narrative of liberation because “*adult society compromises the innocence of childhood, so children must be separated from the harsh reality of the adult world and protected from social dangers*”. (Boyden, 1997, p. 188). In other words, being the representatives of innocence and spontaneity, children are much closer to nature than to the cultural values of society, existing in the tense space between the need of adults to prepare them for social life and their regret that they must initiate them. Thus, in this whole transition process from childhood to adulthood, children lose their closeness to nature, becoming symbols of progress.

In her study regarding the visual language of war photos published by the British press, which illustrate children in Iraq in the context of the country’s invasion in 2003, Karen Wells identified two main types of visual narratives (Wells, 2007, pp. 55-71) used in the process



In her study regarding the visual language of war photos published by the British press, which illustrate children in Iraq in the context of the country's invasion in 2003, Karen Wells identified two main types of visual narratives used in the process of framing children. The first concerns the liberation of children from the brutal society in which they live, even though there were doubts about the legitimacy of the war in Iraq. The second narrative is correlated with the innocence of children and their depiction as separated from their own families, thus becoming visual topoi for the justification of military interventions.

of framing children. The first concerns the liberation of children from the brutal society in which they live, even though there were doubts about the legitimacy of the war in Iraq. The second narrative is correlated with the innocence of children and their depiction as separated from their own families, thus becoming visual *topoi* for the justification of military interventions. In the images that convey the narrative of liberation, children are portrayed as innocent and friendly, and the actions in which they are involved highlight the gentle nature of the Western occupation. For example, in one of the photos is visible an Iraqi boy looking through the binoculars of a British soldier, an action that at a symbolic level can be interpreted as a look into a better future, due to the intervention of military troops. Moreover, in these photos, the children are smiling, while the soldiers' gaze contributes to the construction of the protective parent's image, despite the presence of the military uniform and weapons. Thus, because the represented children seem unaffected by the consequences of the war, the war becomes a necessary evil, even more so, it is presented aesthetically. The second visual narrative highlights the loneliness of Iraqi children, making them symbols of abandonment so that *"the child's injury becomes a consequence of neglect rather than attacks"* (Ib., p. 66). By removing the family and adults from the photos, the soldiers and implicitly the image receivers are placed in the role of the absent caregivers. Thus, this category of images conveys the idea that if children are not saved, they will remain at the mercy of fate.

Although discourses about the liberation and innocence of children predominate in war discourses, they are not always presented as innocent victims of military conflicts, but can also become soldiers capable of killing. Child soldiers are often characterised by the media as *"barbarians"*, *"monsters"*, *"killing machines"*, fully aware of their actions. Moreover, it is assumed that once involved in the vicious circle of war, their violent actions will continue even after the end of the conflict, as children remain permanently traumatised. However, the evolution from victim to the perpetrator is never linear or complete. Instead, *"children's experiences indicate that they are constantly oscillating between committing acts of violence and becoming victims of the violence of others"* (Denov, 2012, p. 288). By promoting the image of child soldiers, the media tries to convey the horrors by which childhood was diverted from the natural course.

Moreover, these photographs highlight the deviance from Western civilised society, and the figure of the child soldier reinforces the idea of the civilised world's moral superiority. Therefore, in the visual construction of children's status in war, the media uses two extreme frames, either by presenting them either as innocent victims or as ruthless soldiers, often ignoring the fact that the reality of children oscillates between the two extremes.

The end of the Cold War created a vacuum of empathy, which, on the background of ethnic wars and humanitarian crises, was quickly filled by the image of children as victims of hunger and suffering. In the context of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which marked the beginning of the 21st century, two main narratives have been identified about children's connection with war, so that they have been portrayed either as innocent victims of war or as symbols of liberation and hope in a better future. In opposition to these images, there is the portrait of the child-soldier, who becomes the symbol of deviance from childhood innocence, although more often than not, children are at the same time perpetrators of violence and victims of terror and suffering.

METHODOLOGY

Although not yet formally included in NATO at the time, since 2002 Romania participated in the *International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)* and *Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)* missions deployed in Afghanistan. The mentioned missions ended in December 2014 and were replaced by *Resolute Support Mission*, which continues today as a training and support mission for Afghan troops. The activities conducted by the Romanian military in Afghanistan, including those within the *Resolute Support Mission*, are made known to the general public through the Facebook pages of the Romanian Ministry of National Defence. Given the objective of this paper, namely to examine how the *"responsibility to protect"* is visually constructed on the armed forces social networks, photographs that illustrate the interactions between Romanian soldiers and Afghan children were collected. These photographs will be analysed using the visual social semiotics method.

The 9/11 terrorist attacks produced a major change in the Western states' foreign policy practices, by outlining Islamist terrorism as the most important threat to the security of the United States of America



By promoting the image of child soldiers, the media tries to convey the horrors by which childhood was diverted from the natural course. Moreover, these photographs highlight the deviance from Western civilised society, and the figure of the child soldier reinforces the idea of the civilised world's moral superiority.



Romania participated in both missions – OEF and ISAF – starting in 2002. Among the responsibilities of the Romanian soldiers were: “basic missions of education and training of Afghan military forces – ANA Training Mission, which intensified in 2008 by the deployment of the first Romanian military garrison; assisting specialised brigades and involving military police subunits, special-forces, and air detachments to ensure the security of Kabul International Airport. Also, Romanian soldiers were operating mainly in the province of Zabul”.

and its allies. By invoking Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the USA initiated the war in Afghanistan. Thus, two concurrent operations were conducted, *Enduring Freedom (OEF)*, in which the USA and Great Britain attacked the Taliban and Al Qaeda forces, and the *International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)*, a NATO security mission. Although not yet officially included in NATO at the time, Romania participated in both missions starting in 2002. Among the responsibilities of the Romanian soldiers were: “*basic missions of education and training of Afghan military forces – ANA Training Mission, which intensified in 2008 by the deployment of the first Romanian military garrison; assisting specialised brigades and involving military police subunits, special-forces, and air detachments to ensure the security of Kabul International Airport. Also, Romanian soldiers were operating mainly in the province of Zabul, a mountainous area in southern Afghanistan, where they had the mission to ensure the security of the A1 highway, which connects the city of Kandahar with Kabul and Pakistan*” (Scarlat, 2015). However, OEF and ISAF ended in December 2014 and were replaced by the *Resolute Support Mission*, which is a training, guidance, and support mission of the *Afghan National Security and Defence Forces (ANDSF)* continuing today.

Currently, individuals in Western states live the experience of military interventions indirectly, through the narratives promoted by various media channels. But in today’s digitalised world, the number of actors producing media content is constantly growing, so state and non-state actors have been forced to adapt to new trends in communication and use social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. Among the new media actors that promote their activities on these social networks are the military forces from several states, including Romania (Crilley, 2016, pp. 51-67). Thus, military social networks are populated by impressive war-related content, mostly visual, that can provide meaningful information about how decision-makers use their power in today’s digital world. Moreover, being very popular and appreciated by the civil public opinion, the content on these pages reaches an impressive audience that has the opportunity to interact with the information published through the *like*, *share* or *comment* features. By using the new social platforms and through the information transparency they demonstrate, the military forces seek

to strengthen the individuals’ trust in state institutions, especially in the armed forces.

To be in line with NATO’s strategy regarding information transparency and public relations, in 2012, the Romanian Ministry of National Defence (MAPN) created an official Facebook page through which it distributes online images and videos illustrating the activities conducted by the Romanian military forces around the world. Thus, several official Facebook pages are corresponding to the various Romanian armed forces services, such as the Land Forces (2012), the Air Force (2013), the Naval Forces (2015), or even the Television and Film Centre of the Ministry of National Defence, which has a Facebook page since 2013. As previously mentioned, the purpose of this paper is to examine how the “*responsibility to protect*” is visually constructed in the photos published by the Romanian military on the mentioned Facebook pages. To achieve this goal, we collected 140 photos illustrating the interactions of the Romanian military with Afghan children, published on the pages mentioned above, during the period 2015-2019, namely the year in which the *Resolute Support Mission* began and the year in which the data collection process ended.

The method used for the interpretation of the collected photos is visual social semiotics, which “*involves describing semiotic resources, what can be said and done with images (and other visual means of communication), and how statements about images and actions made with them can be interpreted*” (Jewitt, Oyama, 2001). However, semiotic resources are not means of communication formally accepted in all cultural contexts, so their interpretation may differ depending on the individual beliefs of the researcher. The visual semiotics method brings to the fore three types of meanings of visual representations: representational, interactive, and compositional.

Representational meaning refers to the significance attributed to the elements illustrated in the image. As in the case of language where there are verbs that show the action, in the case of photographs these verbs are called *vectors*. Thus, two patterns that define how the participants interact with each other can be observed. When there is a vector that expresses a dynamic relationship through which participants are connected and illustrated as performing a certain type of action, the photos fall into the narrative pattern. If this



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vector is absent, the photographs are characterised by the conceptual pattern, which includes symbolic and analytical structures, with the help of which the represented elements are defined and analysed.

The interactive meaning refers to the symbolic relationship established between the represented participants and the viewers of the images, a relationship that influences the attitudes of the latter. In this case, there are three important elements for understanding the interactive meaning: the contact (refers to the direction in which the portrayed people look), the distance (is the symbolic distance between the represented and the viewers, meaning the distance from which the images were captured), and the perspective or point of view (the angle from which the photograph was captured, which defines the viewer's involvement and identification with what is represented).

The compositional meaning of the image helps to establish the relationships between those who look at the photos. Moreover, in this case, there are three important resources in interpreting the photos: the value of the information (which comes from the way the elements in the photo are placed within it), framing (indicates whether the items are connected and belong to the same identity), and the modality (the authenticity of the photo in the representation of reality).

THE VISUAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE "RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT" ON THE SOCIAL MEDIA SITES OF THE ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES

Representational Meaning

From a representational point of view, the images that illustrate the Romanian soldiers' interactions with Afghan children fall into both narrative patterns, because the Romanian soldiers are constantly involved in an action, and conceptual patterns, because children are the symbol of a new beginning. As it can be seen in the photos exposed below, they are part of peace journalism because the images bring to the fore the humanitarian aspect of the intervention in Afghanistan. Secondly, in very few cases, children are accompanied by an adult, so the Romanian soldier is presented as responsible for defending the weakest. Thirdly, by presenting the Romanian soldiers – the security providers alongside the Afghan children – the security consumers, the securitisation power of the images is brought to the public's attention.



The photos illustrating Romanian soldiers with Afghan children highlight two semiotic resources, very different in symbolism because they are at the extremes of war activities. As it can be seen in the photos, the Romanian soldiers are presented in narrative patterns, meaning that they are always in action, participating in various missions during which they interact with the civilian population in the area. But the most meaningful semiotic resources from the collected photos are the Afghan children. They are more often than not presented in conceptual patterns because they are the participants on whom the action is made as well as the symbols of the future of the nation. Thus, from a representational point of view, by joining the two patterns of social semiotics, these photographs contribute to the construction of an aesthetic image of military operations.



Photos no. 1 and no. 2: Afghan children – Peace frames (MApN's Television and Film Centre, 22.09.2019, 30.01.2017)

As it can be seen, the images published by the Romanian armed forces on Facebook are part of peace journalism, highlighting the peaceful nature of the *Resolute Support Mission*. In most of the photos, the Afghan children are presented as curious and smiling in the presence of Romanian soldiers, who offer them food and school supplies. The photographs that bring to the public's attention the friendly relationship between the military and the children convey the fact that they were not physically affected by the military conflict, thus becoming the symbol of the progress of the Afghan society and culture. However, although these representations contribute to the visual construction of a peaceful operation, by associating with the military, the children go through a process of symbolic militarisation, becoming causes through which the Western states have legitimised their intervention in Afghanistan. Moreover, because they are represented

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in peace frames, the Afghan children, who symbolise the innocence and the future of the Afghan nation, are used for gaining public support for these interventions. Thus, this type of image provokes the audience's emotional response, often being used by military forces around the world to motivate humanitarian interventions.

In most of the collected photos, the Afghan children are not accompanied by any adults, leaving the impression that they are orphans or abandoned. Being separated from their own family and, implicitly, from their society, Afghan children become a symbol of the destruction caused by the war. However, when children are accompanied by soldiers, the latter becomes a substitute for the absent parent. This process of visual framing outlines the idea that military operations are the only means by which children can be saved, the alternative being total abandonment. In other words, Romanian soldiers receive the role of protectors of the weakest, while the viewers of the images feel empathetic and responsible towards these children. Thus, the photos promoted by the Romanian Armed Forces can be included in a universal discourse on the responsibility to protect children around the world from acts of violence carried out by adults. Through this type of visual language, images convey that children's suffering is caused more by their parents and the society in which they were born than by the actions of soldiers, the images thus becoming arguments that support the narrative of liberation.

The third important element identified for the analysis of the representational meaning of the images refers to their securitising power, through which the need to defend the weakest is brought to the attention of the audience. Moreover, these photos illustrate both actors present in the securitisation process, the security providers – the Romanian soldiers and the security consumers – the Afghan children. Unlike the textual language, in the process of securitisation, images can have a much greater impact on the receiver, because visual representations provoke an emotional response characterised by compassion and the desire to offer a better life to those children. Also, at a symbolic level, the visual representations of Afghan children convey the idea that soldiers contribute to the preservation and sustainability of Afghan identity and cultural values.

From a representational point of view, it can be stated that both the narrative and the conceptual patterns are visible in the analysed photos, because they illustrate two very different types of participants – Romanian soldiers and Afghan children. Moreover, these visual representations can be included in peace journalism, because they present the friendly character of the Romanian military, which contributes to constructing an aesthetic image of military operations. In addition, the collected images evoke in the audience a sense of responsibility to protect those in need, thus supporting the narrative of liberation.

Interactive Meaning

The interactive meaning of the visual semiotics brings to the fore the process of "othering" by which Afghan children become means used to legitimise military interventions. In the analysed photos, the Afghan children rarely look at the person who captures the image and, implicitly, at its receiver, the photos thus offering the audience the possibility to formulate own ideas regarding the represented elements. Moreover, the distance from which the photos were captured is a social and public one, hence highlighting that the symbolic relationship between children and viewers can be framed in the "us"- "them" discourse. This visual narrative is completed by the high angle from which the photos were captured, the children being thus represented as defenceless.

From an interactive point of view, it can be said that Afghan children are slightly involved in the symbolic relationship with the viewers because they look more often at the soldiers with whom they have contact than at the person taking the pictures. Through this way of distant representation, two types of cultural identities are highlighted, contributing to the consolidation of the Western discourse "us" and "the others", in which the "other" is presented as belonging to an inferior world. Thus, Afghan children are not only the symbol of innocence and the victims of wars between "us" and "them", but can become political means by which wars and military operations are legitimised. Also, the framing of children as happy at the sight of soldiers along with the lack of a symbolic interaction between children and viewers creates an imaginary border, which separates the reality of children in a military theatre from the comfortable reality of the public.



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In most of the collected images, Afghan children's gaze is directed towards the Romanian soldiers who give them food rather than towards the viewers. However, there are some exceptions when these children are aware that a person is photographing them and both the children and the soldiers adopt specific photo postures. However, the gaze's absence towards the viewer indicates that a symbolic relationship is not established between the represented and the interactive participants.

Moreover, it gives the impression that the war and its consequences have left the innocence of children unscathed.

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Photo no. 3: Visual construction of "responsibility to protect" (MApN's Television and Film Centre, 01.06.2015)



Photo no. 4: Visual construction of "responsibility to protect" (The Land Forces, 24.11.2019)

The second element of the interactive meaning reinforces the linguistic and visual narratives regarding the antithesis between "us" and "them" because the distance between the represented and the interactive participants is a social and public one, barely personal or intimate. The far symbolic distance is consistent with the absence



of a symbolic visual interaction between Afghan children and the audience, thus shaping two distant worlds, both geographically and culturally. Thus, through the lack of identification with the represented participants, the children's suffering becomes something abstract, and the public is emotionally protected from the consequences of military interventions. For these reasons, the photographs highlight the image of soldiers as defenders of the weakest, rather than the reality of the military conflict experienced by children in Afghanistan.

As can be seen in *photos no. 3 and no. 4*, the angle from which the photos are taken is often high, which contributes to the visual construction of children as defenceless. This positioning evokes the viewer's feelings of compassion, contributing to supporting the idea that the presence of military forces is the only chance for these children to have a better life. However, considering the absence of images that illustrate the physical and material damages caused by war, the public tends to ignore post-war reality while the problems of children living in a war-torn country remain unresolved. In other words, the absence of visual representations illustrating the war's consequences contributes to the construction of an aesthetic image of war and military interventions.

Compositional Meaning

The compositional meaning of visual semiotics strengthens the process of the visual construction of the "responsibility to protect" by highlighting the connection between those who need protection and those who have the power to provide it. As it can be seen from the displayed photos, the Romanian soldiers are often located on the right side of the photo, thus indicating that they are the new elements present in the familiar space of Afghan children. As for the framing process, in most photos, soldiers and children are connected through their arms or eyes and less through their bodies. Considering the modality of the image, the background in which the Afghan children are illustrated is a detailed one, indicating that the represented participants are connected to the space where the photos were captured and, moreover, they accurately present the reality.

The position of the represented participants in the photograph reveals information regarding the degree of their belonging to the environment in which the photo was captured. It is visible, therefore,

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The absence of visual representations illustrating the war's consequences contributes to the construction of an aesthetic image of war and military interventions.



that Romanian soldiers are often on the right side of the images, which indicates that they are the new elements that invade the Afghan space. Instead, Afghan children are positioned on the left side of the photo, thus conveying the idea that they are the stable inhabitants of the country, the symbols of the Afghan nationhood. The photo below shows a Romanian soldier, on the right side of the image, establishing a friendship with an Afghan child positioned on the left. Thus, Afghan children are the representatives of the mother nation, while Romanian soldiers are its invaders. An important feature of this photo is that the image was captured from a low angle, so that militarised masculinity is not presented as superior, but protective, like a parent. Even if Romanian soldiers are considered the invading elements of the Afghan space, the protective image towards the children outlines the idea that the future of the country is defended against any threat.

According to the visual semiotics, framing refers to the degree of connectivity established between the represented participants, thus, by its absence, the identity of a group is highlighted, while its presence emphasises the differences between the participants' individuality.



Photo no. 5: The aestheticisation of military operations (MApN, 01.06.2017)

According to the visual semiotics, framing refers to the degree of connectivity established between the represented participants, thus, by its absence, the identity of a group is highlighted, while its presence emphasises the differences between the participants' individuality. In the presented case, the framing process is done through the context and the discrepancy and discontinuity of colours rather than through the free space between those represented. Although, as mentioned earlier, there is a physical interaction between soldiers and children, which conveys a friendly connection between the two, the colour differences between children's clothes and the military uniform are clear

in all images. Thus, through the way they are dressed and the body language they adopt, it is visible to anyone that the children's identity is closely linked to the space in which the images were captured. In contrast, although the military uniform helps the soldier integrate into the Afghan landscape, the presence of weapons and the curiosity with which children look at them indicate that they are foreigners. Although soldiers and children are culturally and visually disconnected, they essentially carry the same symbolism, of change and hope for a more peaceful future.

The third dimension of the compositional meaning refers to the modality of the image, namely the degree of accuracy in illustrating reality, which consolidates the pattern identified so far regarding the connection of children with the homeland. Thus, it is not surprising that the background in which children are presented is visible, as much as a photo allows, thus contributing to the visual construction of children as particular elements, connected to the time and space in which the photos were captured. Moreover, due to the high modality of the photo, the extreme poverty in which Afghan children live is brought to the attention of public opinion. Therefore, these images trigger, again, the viewers' compassion, emotions used to gain public support for war and military operations. However, by emphasising the precarious living of Afghan children, their friendliness towards the soldiers who offer them things they have not had access to before can be explained. In other words, the high modality of the photo offers the viewer the chance to grasp the distant reality of children in Afghanistan, while the feelings of compassion evoked by these images help the governments to motivate military interventions.

The three meanings of the visual semiotics method bring to the public's attention the subtle messages and meanings transmitted by visual representations. Although sometimes produced unconsciously, certain types of frames and framing processes can influence public perceptions about military interventions. Thus, the images with Afghan children collected for this paper provide a visual perspective on the narrative of liberation and the "responsibility to protect", discourses heavily publicised after 9/11 to gain popular support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.



The three meanings of the visual semiotics method bring to the public's attention the subtle messages and meanings transmitted by visual representations. Although sometimes produced unconsciously, certain types of frames and framing processes can influence public perceptions about military interventions.



CONCLUSIONS

The increasing interest in the way in which the media presents political events has contributed to the development of a new sub-field in security studies, namely *visual security*. Thus, it was observed that the visual can fulfil 3 important roles in relation to security (Guillaume et al., 2018): the visual as a modality of representing security, the visual as a security practice, and the visual as a research method. Visuality as a modality of representing security highlights the role of images as acts of communication, through which security practices are constructed and communicated. Thus, the images promoted by one of the most important security institutions – the armed forces, become sources of knowledge through which an aesthetic image on military interventions is constructed. Secondly, visibility as a security practice refers to the operability of visual practices through which social and political norms are relevant. For example, the presence of the Romanian soldiers and the military uniform brings to the public's attention information about how individuals are socialised in the armed forces as well as about the practices adopted by the Romanian armed forces during military missions, so that security standards become visible. Last but not least, visibility as a research method highlights the fact that topics in the field of international relations and security studies can be analysed with the help of visual resources.

This paper brings to the fore the aesthetic methods and visual representations as forms of knowledge of the political world because, being a border between what is visible and what is invisible, aesthetics contributes to determining the place and political stakes as forms of experience (Ranciere, Zizek, 2004, p. 13). Therefore, aesthetics acquires political value when individuals construct a reality different from the one known and presented. However, the impact of aesthetic sources refers not only to the processes of interpretation of visual representations, but also to the emotions they evoke in viewers and which can generate social and political changes or, as noted above, legitimise war decisions.

By using a visual perspective alongside the fact that the sources of the images are the social media pages of the Romanian Armed Forces, this research brings to the fore the role of the military as a media producer, but also the relationship between media coverage and militarisation, which contributes to the dissipation of borders

between soldiers and civilians. The photos analysed in this study fall into peace journalism, because they highlight the friendly nature of the Romanian armed forces, thus conveying the idea that military operations are under control and children are not physically affected by the consequences of the war. By applying the visual semiotics, it can be seen that the images with Afghan children published by the Romanian Armed Forces are part of a complex and almost universal process of the visual construction of the *"responsibility to protect"*. First of all, the image of the child comprises multiple meanings, so the child figure symbolises innocence and purity, but also the sustainability of Afghan culture and hope for a better future. Secondly, the framing process contributes to the construction of the Romanian soldier as a defender of the powerless, as their only hope in a post-conflict reality that children must face. Also, the absence of images illustrating physical suffering and material destruction contributes to the aestheticization of conflicts and military interventions. Thus, this paper can be included in the extensive literature on how the media constructs the narrative of liberation and contributes to the (de) legitimization of war.

Although the visual approach in the study of international and security issues brings to the attention of researchers aspects ignored so far, it also has some limitations. Perhaps the most important of them refer to the results obtained using the visual semiotics method. Unlike the results obtained by applying a quantitative method, in which the results are representative for a significant mass of the population, in this case, the results are representative for a widespread phenomenon in society, a process known as *"theoretical generalisation"* (Luker, 2008). Moreover, due to the reduced dimension, the images emphasise the processes of visual construction identified on the military social media sites, rather than the real truth behind them. Moreover, the interpretations offered to semiotic resources are dependent on the cultural factor and the perception of those who construct them.

The role the traditional media plays in promoting the imaginary of war is not a new research topic. However, with the emergence of social networks and the diversification of media actors, the interest of researchers in the field of security regarding the impact that images can have on the way security policies are formulated has increased. Thus, this paper is only a starting point for future studies on the new status of the Romanian Armed Forces, that of media actor, as well as



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on how military values are spread in society through social networks. Another research topic could refer to the role of social media sites in the recruitment processes of military institutions. Last but not least, the researchers in the field of international relations and security studies could focus on comparative analyses between the contents and images published on the social media platforms by various military forces around the world.

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CONCEPTUAL APPROACHES ON INFORMATION WARFARE AND SOME OF ITS COMPONENTS

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In the case of information warfare, it no longer exists a demarcation line between the state of peace or the state of war, this type of war being used by the state and non-state actors because of its effectiveness and the difficulty of being traced and repelled. In addition, it is known that the Russian Federation used information activities against Western and Eastern European countries. To see the specificity of information operations, we must define the concepts and components that underlie information warfare and the perspective Russian military thinkers have on information activities. Even if the paper does not describe in detail all the components of the information warfare, it is important for us to clarify the role of information operations and its components as part of information warfare, as well as the terms that are often used in the public and academic area, such as disinformation, manipulation, propaganda, fake news etc. To better understand the Russian information activity, the paper provides some specific examples from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Keywords: information warfare; psychological operations; information disorder; alternative media;



INTRODUCTION

Although the issue of information warfare – and, implicitly, of information operations – is found in the public and academic space through approaches to misinformation and disinformation, fake news, manipulation of information, propaganda, information taken out of context, the emergence of “*alternative media*”, etc., in few cases the issue was approached more deeply.

The European public space and its citizens have been severely assaulted in recent years by conspiracy or radical narratives, confusing and biased messages, misinformation and disinformation that provoked emotions and rumors, all producing social reactions that hindered the efficient functioning of states. It should be noted that there are many actors who have contributed to the dissemination of false information, like state actors, such as the Russian Federation, Iran, China, North Korea (Nemr, Gangware, 2019, pp. 14-25), and non-state actors such as terrorist organisations. Focusing on state actors, we note that the common element of these states is the purpose of the information operation to promote their own national agendas, with different operating modes. More specifically, the Russian Federation is revitalising the spectrum of active measures; China is launching campaigns to influence public perceptions of economic, political and bilateral personal relations; Iran prefers a classical approach to disseminating false information, similar to Russian and Chinese, focusing on pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli narratives, and North Korea uses a mix between influence and propaganda operations to alter reality and get rid of sanctions (Ib.). The channels used by these states are diverse, ranging from printed materials to the dissemination of information in the online space, depending on objectives, target groups and their capabilities.

On the other hand, the information operations executed by these states have certain particularities that consist in their strategic culture, experience and tradition use of information operations,

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in the operating modes, doctrines etc. However, in order to analyse the information actions carried out by these states, it is necessary to define, even briefly, the concepts and terms used when referring to the context of the information warfare. Following the various approaches from the public and academic space, there are sometimes ambiguities regarding the understanding of how this information operations works, what concepts and tools are used or what are the links between components and concepts.

Thus, this paper will try to clarify a number of features of information warfare, especially since this topic develops a whole theoretical and practical approach. Also, we will start from the conception that, in peacetime, information warfare is part of the hybrid warfare/hybrid threats, where the information warfare is included likewise among the spectrum of asymmetric, irregular and unconventional warfare, active measures, public diplomacy and so on (Theohary, 2018, pp. 4-5). It should be noted that we will describe some examples from Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, focusing on the information activity of the Russian Federation on these states.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

Regarding *information warfare*, there are two main approaches that try to define it: one focuses on the technical specifics of information warfare, where information activities take place in cyberspace and/or the electronic area, and the other approach concerns information warfare comprehensively, from the intelligence perspective.

For the first approach, we can take as an example NATO's perspective on information warfare, which classifies it as "*Undertaking actions to obtain computer field superiority through deterioration of enemy information technology systems and protect own devices*". (AAP-6, 2018, p. 430). However, regarding the second approach, information warfare is an accumulation of organised actions in the information environment that tries to use all means to have control over the flow of information and its interpretation (Robinson, 2010, p. 169). The target can be a decision-maker, a public opinion of a state or the international one.

Michael Herman writes that "*Warfare is becoming 'information warfare'; 'war begins and ends with intelligence... Information is a critical resource in war, and the same applies increasingly to international competition in peace*" (Herman, 1996, p. 347), thus the conflict becomes constant in the context of international competition and the logic of information warfare becomes universal, involving methods and tools that, in the past, were limited to the military sphere.

In this sense, Edward Waltz defines the concept of information warfare as *information-based warfare* where the ultimate goal is to achieve information superiority through the acquisition, processing and exploitation of information, resulting in knowledge, which will subsequently be protected by defensive actions (information warfare-defend) or offensive actions (information warfare-attack) against the enemy's knowledge (Waltz, 1998, pp. 20-21). Definitions regarding information warfare may continue, but if we simplify this concept, we could define it as the combination of separate or integrated, interdisciplinary actions, carried out by at least two fighters/competitors whose goal is to gain a strategic advantage over the other, using available channels, opportunities and own means by collecting and disseminating data and information.

The space in which the information war takes place is the *information environment*, which is defined as "*The aggregate of individuals, organizations, and systems that collect, process, disseminate, or act on information*". (DoD, 2020, p. 104). In turn, the information environment is composed of three dimensions (Waltz, *ib.*, p. 27):

- *the physical dimension*, where the actions aim at the protection; physical destruction and/or theft of equipment, materials/documents, databases, communication nodes, facilities for collecting, processing and disseminating information;
- *the information dimension*, where the actions seek the protection, destruction, interception, alteration and/or dissemination of false information, and this dimension represents the link between the physical and the cognitive dimension. From the perspective of opponents, this field offers more opportunities, as it can affect the opponent's C4 infrastructure without involving the physical risks of an operational action of their own forces. On the other hand,



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Information operations should be perceived as a particular element (or pillar) in the information warfare, through which actions are taken, at a specific level, in the field of psychological operations (PSYOPS), security operations (OPSEC), cyber operations, military deception (MILDEC), electronic warfare (EW) or operations that support activities like subversion, counterintelligence.

the conduct of misleading operations or strategic surprises may have an increased efficiency in the field of information infrastructure, due to the possibility of intercepting data and information, parasitizing a channel and inserting false/partially true data and information or the possibility of taking actions act punctually, depending on the vulnerabilities of the opponent;

- *the dimension of human cognition/perceptions*, where actions seek to influence and exploit the emotions, perceptions, trends, motivations and behaviours of targeted social groups, decision-makers or the population by using tools specific to information disorder.

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Information operations can be defined, from a military perspective, as an activity that integrates its own information capabilities in close connection with other lines of operations, with the ultimate goal of interrupting, corrupting, usurping or influencing adverse decision makers, while the systems of the initiator are protected. (DoD, Ib.). Information operations optimize information elements in the context of data and information flow and focus actions specifically on certain topics and targets. Another approach classifies information operations as actions of governments or non-state actors to distort internal or external opinion, in order to achieve a strategic and/or geopolitical result, using a spectrum of methods composed of disinformation, false information or false amplifiers – accounts on social platforms that try to manipulate public opinion (Wardle, Derakhshan, 2017, p. 6).

In information operations, we can identify *information disorder* as a relatively new concept, subordinated to information operations, which seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of what is considered in the public space as fake news. The need to use this concept is due to: 1) the abusive use – and sometimes inappropriate – by politicians

and journalists, of the term in various contexts, causing the alteration of its meaning; and 2) due to cultural differences between the West and the Eastern space. For example, when we refer to fake news, we understand that the term refers to false or misleading information. In contrast, in Russian culture, there are terms such as “*lozh*” (Hamilton, 1986, p. 43), “*dezinformatsiya*” and “*maskirovka*”, which refer to forms of falsehood and misleading, but each of these terms differs in meaning depending on the particularities as linguistic, cultural and contextual. Thus, in order to correctly understand the development of information activities by an initiating actor, it is necessary to analyse them in terms of their cultural particularities. In this light, the use of a concept as comprehensive as possible, which diminishes these cultural differences between the initiator and the target, becomes a necessity.

Information disorder includes tools and techniques such as misinformation, disinformation, malinformation (Ib., p. 20), but due to the role of the concept in altering reality, we can include other techniques and tools such as propaganda (white, gray and black¹), manipulation of information, spread of rumors, use of “*alternative media*”, mystification of reality, use of memes, spread of political-historical exceptionalism on target groups to radicalize them. It is important to note that information disorder generally works better in *echo chambers* (Wardle, Derakhshan, p. 50), which are the spaces through which individuals or groups targeted by information disorder can share and disseminate their own perspectives and opinions. The main vulnerability of these chambers is that the exchange of information is generally subjective and presents cognitive biases that can later be used by infiltrated external factors to direct the emergence of trends, to excite the target(s) on certain topics or to determine/stimulate acceptance, refusal or action towards an idea, a symbol or an event.

Information operations can be viewed in the context of the hybrid war/hybrid threats, which, in Europe, had significant implications on the cognitive dimension/perceptions, especially when elections, referendums, protests, etc. were organised. In general, it turned

¹ Other approaches define propaganda as a distinct activity within psychological operations, being an action covered and specific to joint military operations (Col. Frank L. Goldstein, Col. Daniel W. Jacobowitz, “*Psychological Operations. An Introduction*”, in *Psychological Operations: Principles and Case Studies*; col. Frank L. Goldstein (ed.), col. Benjamin F. Findley (ed.), Air University. Press Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama, 1996, p. 6).



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The Russian Federation carried out, in European states, information operations that tried to determine the formation of trends in the societies of states or to influence them in various directions depending on the civilisational particularities of European nations and as a part of the conflict between the Russian Federation and the West.

out that the Russian Federation carried out, in European states, information operations that tried to determine the formation of trends in the societies of states or to influence them in various directions depending on the civilisational particularities of European nations and as a part of the conflict between the Russian Federation and the West (Darczewska, 2014, p. 12). They also sought, using information disorder, the constant dissemination in public and social media of conflicting messages and narratives that were intended to convince audiences of multiple versions of truths, eventually confusing them (Wardle, Derakhshan, p. 30).

Thus, regardless of the way we define information operations, their theoretical approach will adapt to the specifics of Russian military thinking and strategy, where the conceptual essence will have its origins in military thinking, but the applicability will extend beyond the military sphere to civilians.

In this sense, taking as an example of the Russian perspective the vision of Ivan Vorobev, Major General with a long military career and expert in military theory, relevant in a conflict are not only the dynamics of the attack and manoeuvring space, but also the means to stop the opponent's access to correct information. He defines the concept of information attack or information shock in three directions: the initiation of psychological offensive and misleading operations, the use of special measures for psychotronic attacks and the attack of computers in order to affect adverse command and control systems (Franke, 2015, p. 23). He added that, during the information war, coordination of counterintelligence, electronic warfare, physical destruction of C2 points and nodes through precise bombing and the use of deception must be coordinated. Other approaches describe information operations/information warfare (Ib., pp. 25-26)² beyond

² Like in the West, also in the case of the Russian Federation, the theoretical perspectives on information warfare and information operations are multiple and present a combination of approaches ranging from classical (specific to Soviet military thinking) or unconventional to those based on technical-military ones or trying to find a special relevance to a particular military specialty. Because of this, as Major General Charis Saifetdinov mentioned, certain concepts – especially those in the field of information warfare – can be understood and interpreted subjectively, due to the lack of solid expertise, well-defined principles and/or terminology that is not clearly understood. Although there may be explanations to argue that the theoretical basis of Russian information warfare/information operations is the experience of active measures, according to KGB defector Yuri Bezmenov, active measures are limited to the spectrum of actions specific to psychological warfare/psychological operations (PSYOPS), so they are a component of information warfare and, implicitly, of information operations.



Psychological operations are activities undertaken in order to influence, in a direction favourable to their own forces, the emotions, thoughts and behaviour of target groups or decision makers, being carried out in time of peace and war.

the military sphere, as in the case of Colonel Anatoly Streltsov, who leads the information war in the political and governmental sphere. He considers that the main task of the government, in this context, is to counter the attempts of illegitimate actors to use information warfare in the area of political ideology, in the technical area and in terms of government policies. In the information war in the political sphere, he emphasises three main tasks: identifying and stopping harmful ideological propaganda, stimulating civil society to counter adverse propaganda, and stopping disinformation about state policy (Ib., pp. 28-29).

We note that the Russian perspective on information operations takes into account, to a significant extent, the experience of active measures – psychological operations -, which leads us to include in the discussion the relevance of the PSYOPS component.

Psychological operations are activities undertaken in order to influence, in a direction favourable to their own forces, the emotions, thoughts and behaviour of target groups or decision-makers, being carried out in time of peace and war. It is important to mention that the activity of psychological operations is thought and carried out in reverse, more precisely the design of the action plan and its implementation depend on the cognitive and behavioural characteristics of the target – group or individual – and the quality of intelligence products (Robinson, p. 137). If, in the other components of information operations, the use of information disorder is minimal or optional, in the case of PSYOPS, we can say that it is maximum, being used all the tools and techniques that can contribute to the successful completion of operations. From the perspective of the process, psychological operations can be divided into three categories (Findley, 1996, p. 54): a). strategic psychological operations aim at achieving long-term objectives, in order to create a subsequent environment favourable to their own actions and objectives; b). operational psychological operations aim at obtaining medium-term benefits, at the level of military and non-military campaigns, regional or global; and c). tactical psychological operations aim to achieve short-term, immediate goals, having more of a supporting role than the development of independent and large-scale psychological operations.



When setting the target, the cultural specificity and the environment from which it comes must be analysed. The cultural environment to which the target belongs can determine perceptions and preconceptions, its perspectives on life and the world, behaviour and inclinations towards certain systems of values and ideas. It is essential that the granting of psychological operations be tailored to the cultural specificity of the target to produce effects.

Although psychological operations are a vast and complex topic, which has its own methodology and approach, in this paper, it is relevant to highlight some common features that psychological operations must take into account when planning and conducting (Ib., pp. 55-59):

❖ *Cultural differences* – when setting the target, the cultural specificity and the environment from which it comes must be analysed. The cultural environment to which the target belongs can determine perceptions and preconceptions, its perspectives on life and the world, behaviour and inclinations towards certain systems of values and ideas. It is essential that the granting of psychological operations is tailored to the cultural specificity of the target to produce effects.

❖ *Social influences* – depending on the social affiliation to a class or group, the target may have certain habits or preferences regarding the acceptance or rejection of an idea or perspective promoted by opinion formers. In this sense, the expertise on a target can be done in the opposite direction, starting from the environments it frequents and the opinion formers it pursues.

❖ *Motivations* – there is a close link between the needs, motives and behaviour of a target, all ranging from primary needs to the need for self-determination. Although the reasons are usually the result of satisfying or not satisfying basic needs, they can lead to the conceptualization of one's own existence based on feelings, perceptions, experiences, the environment, interactions and, finally, self-assessment. These can be very useful for PSYOPS analysis, because, through its motivations, the target acts in a certain direction, providing significant clues about who it is or what it wants to be and what it wants to achieve.

❖ *Perceptions and attitudes* – target's understanding of the individuals, the context and the environment is achieved through its own perspectives on life and the world, the set of values it assumes, experience and trends it adheres to, all of which determine the perception of the individual to be selective and subjective. Attitude is the predisposition of the individual to act in a certain direction, being conditioned by the cognitive, affective and behavioural dimension, directly affecting the perceptions of individuals. In this sense, psychological operations can act on: a) changing attitudes

and perceptions by using a constant flow of new information and narratives that are repetitive, follow a narrative logic and be carried out over long periods of time; and b) the change of emotions determined by an action, idea, fact or event through the use of information, through any channel, which would be contradictory to the initial reasoning – preconceived perceptions –, ultimately causing the triggering of emotional impulses.

It should be noted that significant help in the operation of psychological operations consists in intelligence, as it can provide useful information to help calibrate and refine operations and provide analysis of the compatibility between the effects of psychological operations and the desired result. In the case of psychological operations (but not limited to them), intelligence (Waltz, p. 219) can warn in advance when an enemy information action is underway, can provide a real perspective on a situation, perceive subtle indicators, can investigate, analyse and make recommendations where a vulnerability has been exploited, etc.

Even if, so far, we have highlighted briefly the role and significance of information operations, some subdivisions and related activities that engage in achieving an objective, it is worth noting the high degree of complexity and synchronization throughout the process. Starting from factors that are independent from the target such as culture, environment, social influences, it reaches the motives, feelings, perceptions and attitudes of a target. And after all the parts are in place, the psychological operations aim to use the analysed information to influence the target, in a specific way.

Given the above, the definition of information warfare and information operations highlights a much more comprehensive perspective on the current information environment, which is more than just a disinformation campaign and fake news or propaganda. Also, the inclusion of several Russian approaches to information warfare highlights the military origins in terms of conception and action, especially in the sense that, through psychological operations, the spectrum of active measures is revitalised on essential elements of societies. Especially when those operations try to influence the opinion formers or groups whose actions can cause destabilisation, chaos or can favor actions contrary to national interests of their states.



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EXAMPLES

The cases presented are not isolated, and the examples in which the Russian Federation used the range of information warfare on key moments in the domestic policy of European states are not few. But unlike Western Europe, Russian information activity was somewhat more felt at the level of the former socialist bloc states, as a result of Marxist-Leninist legacies, cultural ties, common origins (in some cases) and historical interactions. Thus, we took as examples, to highlight the activity of Russian information operations, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Russian information operations on Poland aimed at fracturing the unity of Polish society through the use of information disorder, more precisely by intoxicating the information environment with memes aimed at deepening tensions between different factions, such as xenophobes, nationalists and pro-Europeans.

Poland

Although Poland can hardly be oriented to a perspective that is at least a little “warmer” toward the Russian Federation, it is still subject to the information warfare. Even if it does not present vulnerabilities that could generate any direct link with the Russian Federation, in reality, there is a range of opportunities that are exploited by the Russian Federation. In the case of Poland, the attempt to introduce a pro-Russian narrative into public opinion would be an action doomed to failure, which means that the approach here must be a complex one. Russian information operations on Poland aimed at fracturing the unity of Polish society through the use of information disorder, more precisely by intoxicating the information environment with memes aimed at deepening tensions between different factions, such as xenophobes, nationalists and pro-Europeans (Lucas, Pomerantsev, 2017, p. 23). Given that Russian information operations seek to support and exacerbate Polish nationalism, we note that in this regard, they use the cultural component of psychological operations to determine radical groups to promote ethnocentrism and anti-Western sentiment (along with the anti-Russian one). In some respects, obscure sites (falanga.org.pl, konserwatyzm.pl) have tried to praise the actions of extremist groups in Poland’s past and compare their effectiveness, determined by the lack of political correctness and constraints, with current times. For example, the news portal kresy.pl had established a regular flow, which repeatedly commemorated the massacre of Poles in western Ukraine, carried out by the Ukrainian Insurrectionary Army (UPA) during World War II (Gajos, Rodkiewicz, 2016, p. 264).

Thus, the information disorder generates a beautification of Polish personalities with ethnocentric and radical inclinations, promoting them also at the societal level it tries to determine some anti-EU and anti-NATO trends, based on negative criticism, nostalgia for the communist regime, anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism and anti-democratic ideologies (Ib., p. 24). The emotions and perceptions of Poles about their existence as a nation and their past are the most significant vulnerabilities, being susceptible to information flows that can radicalize them, especially in the context of the Polish political environment – which is beginning to be characterised by ultraconservatism – fuels ethnocentrism and anti- feeling.

Czech Republic and Slovakia

At the information level, the case of the two states is a remarkable one, because they are deeply penetrated by the Russian information operations and can become a working point for the dissemination of the elements of the information warfare.

In these two states, Russian information operations seek to highlight, in general, the presence of anti-Western currents, and in particular, of anti-American currents, within the two societies, in an attempt to generalize them. Using information disorder here as well, the primary narrative is based on antagonizing the opponent (the West) and, depending on the context, it tries to create an image of the Russian Federation, if not favourable in the sense of an alternative for these two states, at least acceptable as a partner. While mainstream media usually acts as a correction element for information disorder within social media and the mass-media, in the case of the two states, an “alternative” media with strong pro-Russian influences has recently developed (Lucas, Pomerantsev, p. 25). Thus, in the Czech Republic, the media is the main channel for conducting Russian information operations, and due to this fact, there are four trends (Vit, 2016, pp. 279-280): 1) the traditional media, established after the transition period, which resists the pressures of Russian information influences and which is underfunded and gradually deprofessionalised; 2) the new online media, connected to the main news flow that was formed mainly in the period 2012-2014, being equally resistant to Russian informational influences; 3) online media, published after 2010,



In the Czech Republic, the media is the main channel for conducting Russian information operations, and due to this fact, there are four trends: the traditional media; the new online media; online media and online journals.



which niches on political and social topics, disregarding the main news flow, and which includes in its articles also Russian “*alternative*” narratives; and 4) online journals, which claim to present uncensored perspectives on the world and base their articles on arguments focused on the right to opinion (subjectivisation of reality in accordance with the preconceptions of the target audience), including conspiracy theories. Another very interesting aspect is the action mode of the Russian information operations in the Czech space, because overt and covert operations are carried out, where the overt ones have the role of distraction. As an example, the *Aeronet* website (Lucas, Pomerantsev, p. 26), originally founded by aviation lovers in 2001, changed owners several times, until 2014, when it published its first pro-Russian article. This site may be included in the area of covert information operations, due to the difficulty of tracking the owners of this domain, the title of the site is not suggestive for the content it distributes, being difficult to intercept; and the authors are anonymous or use pseudonyms and the contents have questionable or fictitious sources. The sum of these covered sites, which disseminate pro-Russian narratives and elements of information disorder such as conspiracy theories, gray or black propaganda, fake news, etc., may exceed that of overt sites, which would aim to mislead and influence (Sputnik, Russia Today, TASS etc. can be framed in the sphere of open channels through which the main objective is to influence the perceptions of the target audience).

In contrast, in Slovakia, Russian information operations mainly exploited two vulnerabilities of the state: the Slovak state’s dependence on oil/gas imports from the Russian Federation, which led to a deepening of relations (especially diplomatic) between the two states – in contrast to the Czech Republic, which diversified its sources – and the existence of socio-economic problems, which generated a tendency of the Slovak society to appreciate and have nostalgic feelings for the Marxist-Leninist past. This time, the Russian information activity on the Slovak public focused on the use of psychological operations, due to the fact that it tries to determine, at a cognitive level, perceptions and attitudes nostalgic and favorable to anti-capitalist or anti-Western trends. Also, along with the constant and repeated flow of messages that positively subjectivise the memory of Czechoslovak communism, the theme of pan-Slavism is introduced, in an attempt

to substantiate the perception of the Slovak public on a cultural, historical and ethnolinguistic link with the Russian Federation (Fischer, 2016, pp. 295, 301).

A major problem of the information warfare in the Czech Republic and Slovakia is that information operations have led to political subversion (Rosenau, 2007, pp. 6-7) by creating an information environment favourable to the infiltration of subversive factors in key institutions, and in the situation where they are exposed, in whole or in part, to benefit from the support or indifference of the public. For example, in the Czech Republic, Russian information operations have created an entire infrastructure which, according to the Czech Counterintelligence Service (BIS) (EURACTIV, 2016), consisted in the infiltration of agents of influence and the information monopolisation of the media and social media. The distortion of information also generated an “*alternative reality*” to Miloš Zeman, which significantly contributed to his election as President of the State for the second time. Milos Zeman (Santora, 2018), as a vector of influence, did not hesitate to manifest, over time, ethnocentric tendencies and affinity for the Russian Federation and China, to the detriment of Western partners and allies, developing pro-Russian and anti-Western rhetoric.

From this point of view, we notice a link between information operations and subversion, because, along with Zeman, there are two other personalities who have external links or intentions contrary to the national interests of the Czech Republic (PBJ, 2020): Vratislav Mynář, who was Head of the Presidential Office since 2013, but without a security clearance from the Office of National Security (NBU), and businessman Martin Nejedlý, who has ties to Lukoil and the Russian political environment, and who holds a position in the Presidential Office, without being paid from public funds, but who often accompanies the President on foreign trips. In Slovakia, a form of political subversion is being tried, which can be exemplified by the work of former Prime Minister Jan Čarnogurský, president of the Slovak-Russian Association, based in Bratislava, who in 2015 tried to gather signatures for a referendum on whether Slovakia should remain in NATO. Instead, at the societal level, Russian information operations are trying to spread pan-Slavism both inside Slovakia and abroad, by promoting an information vehicle, such as the Slovak motorcycle club



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“Night Wolves” (Gotev, 2018). The elements that characterise this motorcycle club³ are the fact that some members actually contributed to the process of annexation of the Crimea in 2014, are promoters of Russian nationalism and supporters of Vladimir Putin, and in 2018 initiated the project “Slavic World”, which involved a tour to promote the project through most Eastern European states and probably to send a message of support or excitement to individuals and groups followers of pan-Slavism, ultranationalism or supporters of the actions of the Russian Federation. It is worth mentioning that, such in the case the example of “Night Wolves”, Russian information and subversive activities use any vehicle that can help them achieve their objectives/mission and is not limited to the classic activities of intelligence services.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, the dynamics of the security environment are changing and, if until recently, elements related to military threats were treated as such, the infusion of these elements in the civilian area may be due to hybrid warfare and the threats it generates. The information warfare can be perceived as a hybrid threat, because, as we have seen in the case of Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, its targets consist of specific groups (with certain religious and ideological preferences, from certain social classes, with certain cultural particularities, etc.) and the ambiguity of the timing, form and practices used makes it difficult to prevent and stop.

It is interesting that the threat of information warfare molds to the particularities of states and hunts down its vulnerabilities. For example, in Poland, we have seen that it focuses on the scourge of radicalism from the Polish society.

In this sense, history and geopolitics can offer many opportunities for exploitation in the case of several states, being difficult to interpret

³ The Motorcycle Club (MC) is both a formal and informal organization, composed of motorcycle enthusiasts, who develop their own lifestyle and customary rules. The ties between the members are strong, and within the organization, there is a well-established hierarchy, usually based on military ranks recognized and applied only within the organisation. Due to its libertine and sometimes anti-system character, some motorcycle clubs have been involved in activities specific to organised crime, such as human trafficking, drugs and weapons, blackmail and threats, money laundering, custom crimes, etc.

whether the information actions are determined by an aggressor state or only belong to groups that have their own interests. There is also the dilemma of protecting political and military decision-makers who, as part of society, are connected to the flow of information on social media and the mass-media, and their regular exposure to information degeneration leads to conditioning and, subsequently, to altering the correct perception of the reality in which they live.

Thus, defining and providing operational concepts to clarify the role and significance of information warfare and information operations, together with its components, become essential. Given the current context in which confrontations in the information environment no longer distinguish between peace and war, it becomes imperative for states to clarify their concepts and develop their own strategies and information weapons – as in the case of conventional weapons and doctrines –, by which to obtain advantages, to protect or to limit the opportunities of the opponent. Although the literature has been mentioning, since the 1990s, the increasingly significant role that information will play for citizens and decision-makers, today, there are still perspectives that classify information warfare and information operations as taking place only within the military universe and intelligence services. Here again, the superficial use of terms and techniques of information disorder determines the need to resort to new concepts and resize the way we perceive information activities, especially in the context in which approaches, concepts and techniques that once belonged to the military and intelligence began to extend to the civilian environment.

Finally, we can say that what gives the information warfare the perspective to develop consists in its effectiveness due to the ambiguity and unpredictability with which it acts, regardless of the target. However, the most interesting fact is that information warfare is a concept based on military thinking that produces effects beyond the military sphere.

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FINANCIAL ASPECTS RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY – ATHENA MECHANISM –

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The efforts on creating, at EU level, a functional mechanism to support the operational commitments got materialised by the establishment, in February 2004, of a new instrument. Much better known as ATHENA Mechanism, it was dedicated to the overall administration of common costs associated with military crisis management operations.

This article puts forward a comprehensive picture of the main evolutions meant to lead to the development of this instrument, while analysing the implications for the operational domain, generated by augmenting the procedures for financial management of certain costs under the auspices of Common Security and Defence Policy.

Keywords: CSDP; military operations; crisis management; military financing; ATHENA Mechanism;

INTRODUCTION – FIRST UNDERTAKINGS

At the end of March 2003, the European Union launched in the Balkans its very first military crisis management operation. This undertaking was integrated in a more cohesive effort to consolidate the operational profile of European security and defence cooperation. The mentioned approach was meant to steadily continue for the next decades through a significant number of missions and operations deployed in various geographical areas.

The implementation of the mentioned approach was one of the most laborious processes, becoming gradually one of the most important strands associated with the European project in the field of defence. Furthermore, the specific character of the analysed initiative is closely related to the specific nature of the way in which the EU security and defence component has evolved, in accordance with the political consensus between member states but in the absence of a normative framework.

The development of European cooperation in the field of security and defence included, from the very beginning, the topic of ensuring the adequate financial resources for this project. The implementation process was conducted in a tailored way, taking into account the specific character of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), and induced by the normative and institutional context of the EU. Thus, the defence aspects were approached from the perspective of intergovernmental patterns, underpinned, first and foremost, by the national prerogatives and exercising consensus as the main procedure. From this perspective, the EU Treaties framed the practical aspects of cooperation in the field of defence, contributing essentially to a synergic development of procedural framework in the context of CSDP advancement. It also includes the development of a dedicated system for the management of the financial implications derived from the CSDP operational component.



The EU Treaty provisions include certain restrictions on the possibility of using the EU budget for expenditures arising from operations having military or defence implications (Art. 41 TEU). Obviously, this approach generated the need for adapting the way in which financial resources are provided in order to ensure a proper functioning of the defence cooperation under CSDP. The main option was to develop ad-hoc mechanisms based exclusively on the political consensus between member states.

The main features of this undertaking are not necessarily related to the systems used by other organisations (e.g., NATO), being generated from a more flexible perspective corresponding to the normative framework of CSDP. It is worth mentioning that the EU Treaty provisions include certain restrictions on the possibility of using the EU budget for expenditures arising from operations having military or defence implications (Art. 41 TEU). Obviously, this approach generated the need for adapting the way in which financial resources are provided in order to ensure a proper functioning of the defence cooperation under CSDP. The main option was to develop ad-hoc mechanisms based exclusively on the political consensus between member states. Using this approach was induced by the necessity to support political ambitions for the development of EU crisis management profile through financing operational aspects and contributing to the improvement of capability shortfalls.

OPERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE FINANCIAL COMPONENT OF THE DEFENCE AND SECURITY COOPERATION

Operationally, these efforts should be seen from the perspective of developing a functional model for providing financial resources, based on the primary legislation of the EU, but through a tailored approach and in support of national contributions in operations. The main parameters of the mechanism for financing the operations with military implications were adopted in the middle of the year 2000 through the decisions of the General Affairs Council – GAC (Luxembourg, 17 June 2000). Based on the provisions of the EU Treaty which allow that “*where the international situation requires operational action by the Union, the Council shall adopt the necessary decisions*” (Art. 28), the consensus achieved in Luxembourg contributed significantly to the effort of establishing the governance of financing military operations. In the aftermath of the GAC meeting the focus was placed on identifying the types of costs related to military operations and associated contributions of member states. In spite of the initial aspects, this undertaking was capable to rally the political support of the member states for defining an operational budget based on distinct regulations.

There were established two types of expenditures associated with military operations:

- ❖ *Common expenditure* – which cannot be assumed only by participating member states for covering the costs for facilities and capabilities that are of common interest in conducting the operations. Specifically, the following costs were considered: transport; communications; movement in the theatre of operation; infrastructure (barracks, lodging); support for deployed forces.

- ❖ *Individual costs* – including the expenditures associated with the presence in operations, which were to be ensured by contributing states according to the principle “*costs lie where they fall*”.

Afterwards, the Seville European Council (21-22 June 2002) endorsed this formula, while highlighting the importance of creating an efficient financial management system. At the same time, it was stipulated that it was not meant to finance the capabilities engaged by member states in military operations. Therefore, the costs related to deployment, sustainment and redeployment had to be covered by the member states that owned the capabilities. On this path, it was also assumed the relevance of the idea to create a budget for financing the common costs of EU military operations. At the same time, a special emphasis was placed on defining institutional and procedural features in an as comprehensive as possible manner, in order to capitalise on the participation of third countries in operations. Last but not least, defining a sound and effective system was also needed for managing the financial aspects derived from the implementation of NATO-EU cooperation agreements¹ in operations.

Moreover, the merit of Seville’s decisions should be seen from the perspective of providing the very first inventory of common costs that could be managed through such mechanism. For member states, this undertaking was perceived as a potential factor to alleviate own contributions, while potentially implementing a fair sharing of costs associated with operations, irrespective of concrete participation.

¹ Known as “Berlin+” Agreements, they are cooperation arrangements signed on 15 December 2002 between NATO and EU. Through them were defined the practical aspects of cooperation in operational field, with a focus on procedures and institutional interaction in the context of EU-led operation conducted with the recourse to NATO command and planning capabilities.



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It can be seen as a way to redistribute some expenditures components between member states, in addition to the individual regular contribution to the budget. The main principle in this endeavour was to define contributions for all member states, based on overall financial regulations applied in the EU. In this respect, the common costs were structured along two components:

- Common costs associated with financing certain activities at HQ level (static and deployable) for EU operations. It would include: headquarters (HQ); operational headquarters (OHQ); force headquarter (FHQ); command element at headquarter level (CCHQ). The expenditures that could be financed in common, according to the Presidency Report, (Haine, 2003, pp. 14-15) were dedicated to:
 - transportation costs – to and from the theatre of operations to deploy, sustain and recover;
 - administrative – offices, lodging, utilities, building maintenance;
 - contracting personnel in support of operations (civilian staff and international consultants);
 - communication – acquisition of services, renting and use of additional equipment;
 - transportation/travel within the area of operations (fuel, maintenance, renting vehicles, insurances);
 - lodging for HQ in theatre – acquisition, renting, facilities recovery;
 - public information – media and public information campaign;
 - representation and hospitality.
- Common costs associated with providing support for the forces deployed in the theatre of operations:
 - infrastructure – essential expenditures for fulfilling the missions (airports, railways, roads, electric networks, water);
 - additional equipment based on the request of operation commander;
 - distinct marks for forces – badges, flags, uniforms and so on;
 - medical – renting air medevac capabilities.

These aspects should be seen in the specific context of that period in which the main focus was placed on launching first substantial EU operational commitments under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). The main priority was to consolidate the EU operational footprint in the Western Balkans, including by taking over largest components of NATO activities in this area. Thus, the financial management became very important, Seville decisions creating the necessary conditions for launching the first EU military operations (31 March 2003 – EUFOR Concordia/Macedonia; 12 June 2003 – EUFOR Artemis/D.R. of Congo).

Operational realities indicate, very soon after the deployments of EU contingents, the stringent need for a truly financial management system. The option of ad-hoc management, used for the mentioned operations was rather limited to involving only the Contributors Committee², which was not enough to encompass both the complexity of the situation on the ground and the institutional dynamic of the EU. Moreover, the functional parameters of the military operations required a certain degree of predictability with regard to the availability of financial resources, especially in the initial phases of preparing and deploying forces in the theatre. In the absence of such certitudes, delays in generation process were unavoidable, with negative impact for operations deployed at long distances and in a demanding environment.

The importance of having initial financial availability could be seen from multiple perspectives. Firstly, it would help to overcome the diversity of national procedures by creating a minimum financial start-up to facilitate a timely initiation of operations. Secondly, it would allow more flexibility in synchronising the financial negotiations between member states with the demanding timeline required by operational generation process and, subsequently, by the deployment in theatre. The experience of the operations conducted by the EU in the Balkans testifies that this kind of discussions are constantly complex, generating lengthy negotiations (Missiroli, 2003, p. 13). Last but not least,

² Contributors Committee is the main structure responsible for the daily management of various aspects pertaining to a given operation. It comprises the representatives of all contributing states, its meetings being coordinated by the Operation Commander.



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On 1 March 2004 the European Council adopted the decision to create a new instrument dedicated to the financial management in relation to EU military operations. Known as "ATHENA Mechanism", it had the necessary legal profile in order to perform financial activities and to sign administrative arrangements.

the financial predictability becomes more relevant due to the need for urgent and practical solutions for equipment and acquisition of means necessary for conducting the operation (Emmerson, Gross, 2007, p. 51).

All the above-mentioned elements were meant to highlight the complexity of the tasks to which the development of the financial mechanism should respond in a practical way. Additional challenges were related to the development of the EU concept for rapid military response, which led to the adoption of the Headline Goal 2010³ and, subsequently, the generation of Battle Groups. The focus placed by European defence cooperation on rapid reaction capabilities would consolidate, in its turn, the sense of urgency regarding the need of a financial system to provide required resources for operational commitments in this regard.

NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK AND INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS REGARDING THE ATHENA MECHANISM

The mentioned expectations were met on 1 March 2004, when the European Council adopted the decision to create a new instrument dedicated to the financial management in relation to EU military operations (2004/197/CFSP, *Official Journal of the European Union* L063, 2004, pp. 0068-0082). Known as "ATHENA Mechanism", it had the necessary legal profile in order to perform financial activities and to sign administrative arrangements. The primary function was to ensure the management of financial contributions advanced by the member states, its activity being monitored by those countries. In the aftermath of this decision, ATHENA was meant to develop continuously in terms of correlating normative framework with operational evolutions including the development of capabilities that could be employed in EU operations, such in the case of Battle Groups

³ The new Headline Goal, adopted by the EU at the European Council in 17-18 June 2004, is much more known as Headline Goal 2010 (HLG2010). The main feature was the qualitative approach in capabilities development and generation process for operations, including the EU rapid military response. The nucleus of this approach was represented by the Battle Groups Concept which envisaged the development of highly deployable force battalion level structure (1,500 personnel) and sustainable up to 120 days. For further details regarding HLG 2010 see https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/sede110705headlinegoal2010/_sede110705headlinegoal2010_en.pdf, retrieved on 18 April 2021.

[Council Decision 2011/871/CFSP of 19 December 2011; Council Decision 2015/528 (CFSP) of 27 March 2015].

From the structural perspective, the management of ATHENA involves three entities – administrator, operational commander and accounting officer. Their activity is under the control and guidance of the Special Committee in which all participating⁴ countries are represented. The meetings of this structure take place regularly under the chairmanship of the country that fulfils the six-month Presidency of the EU Council. This format has the potential to ensure a better interaction between ATHENA and EU structures, since the Commission has the possibility to attend to these meetings regularly. At the same time, third countries contributing to military operations can participate in the Special Committee meetings except the voting sessions.

The main role in implementing the Committee decisions is with the Administrator who is designated for a three-year mandate by the Secretary General of the EU Council, informing the Special Committee. The Administrator is responsible for the coordination of financial aspects related to all EU military operations. Moreover, it has the main role in drafting the ATHENA annual budget, being authorised to adopt the necessary decisions for implementing it. At the same time, it will ensure proper interaction with competent national authorities, while representing the EU in relations with other international organisations on competence domains.

With regard to the financial management at operational level, the role of Operation Commanders is exercised by monitoring the expenditure made in implementing the decisions adopted by ATHENA Committee. At the same time, their contribution is highly relevant in the process of drafting the annual budget, being simultaneously the sole evaluating authorities on how the financing mechanism is working in the field. The executive component of ATHENA Mechanism is the full responsibility of the accounting officer, who is designated in a similar way for a three-year mandate. Besides the duties related to regular

⁴ With the exception of Denmark that has an opt-out for participation in military aspects of CSDP. The Danish position was adopted following the referendum on Maastricht Treaty in June 1992. In this vein, Denmark does not participate in military operations and, consequently, it does not contribute to the Athena Mechanism.



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The interaction between the three actors – administrator, operational commander and accounting officer is particularly relevant in the process of drafting the annual budget. Without being an iterative process, the outcome is to consolidate the predictability character of the financial mechanism and to enhance the synergy with operational realities.

financial activities, he is responsible for providing advice and expertise for the national structures involved in this area.

The interaction between the three actors – administrator, operational commander and accounting officer is particularly relevant in the process of drafting the annual budget. Without being an iterative process, the outcome is to consolidate the predictability character of the financial mechanism and to enhance the synergy with operational realities. Regarding the last-mentioned aspect, the ATHENA way of working was correlated with the main phases of the generation process for operations. The main sequences taken into account were:

- *Preparation phase* – between the decision to launch an operation and nomination of the operation commander.
- *Active phase* – between nomination of the operation commander and decision to cease the activity of the operational headquarter.
- *Withdrawal phase* – between the cessation of operational actions and the end of force and equipment repatriation.

From this perspective, the budget includes, practically, the common costs identified, according to the decision to establish the ATHENA Mechanism, for every military ongoing operation. There are also the expenses related to EU military exercises, which contribute to the consolidation of operational potential with positive effects on the efficiency of ongoing military commitments. Practically, for exercises, the types of expenses that can be financed through ATHENA reflect a similar approach with the one used for identifying the common costs for operations. Therefore, it was decided to finance⁵ (CFSP 2015/528, *Official Journal of the European Union*/L 84, 28/03/2015, pp. 39-63) expenses related to headquarters (static and deployable), which are involved in exercises, and to the similar structures used in the context of implementing the NATO-EU cooperation agreements.

The budget is drafted by the administrator, including the operational commander recommendations and a forecast on the EU operational

⁵ From this context are excluded the expenses related to the acquisition (buildings, infrastructure and equipment). At the same time, for planning and preparation phases of exercises were taking into account the expenses for transportation in and from area as well as lodging facilities for participants.

developments. These elements are essential for setting-up the annual ceiling, including the amount potentially to be refunded in case that some payments were made in advance during the previous year. Moreover, all member states contribute to the budget irrespective of their contribution to operations. The individual share is established based on GDP key, which is used according to the EU Treaty (Art.28). From this perspective, the final approval of the annual budget is made at the level of the Special Committee.

Within this framework, the typology agreed in Sevilla was further refined leading to a new functional matrix that introduced more granularity in getting closer the financial support to the operational dimension of CSDP. Moreover, the aspects related to the rapid reaction capabilities were approached gradually by consolidating the normative framework regarding early financing. In this regard, it was developed an early financing scheme in which interested countries could contribute to the establishment of a fund/deposit that could be used as financial resources for initial stages of operations. In implementing this approach there were envisaged two options, namely anticipated full payment of annual contribution and full payment in the five-day limit after the decision to use Battle Groups in an operation. Furthermore, countries that chose to use one of the mentioned options had the possibility to decide on committing 75% of the advanced amount for another operation. All of these aspects were meant to consolidate extensively the political support for early financing mechanism within ATHENA. Practically, more than 50% of the member states participated constantly in this scheme.

STRUCTURING COMMON COSTS THROUGH THE ATHENA MECHANISM

For the common costs, the undertakings in this field did not have the same level of ambition. The progresses achieved were merely on clarifying the expense types with some positive results in extending the domains in which common financing could be applied. Even so, certain changes were made in moving beyond the HQ component, which was the main norm for defining the common cost. To an equal extent, it was a direct consequence of the operational dynamic





in the EU in which the number of operations increased while diversifying the types of missions and tasks. All of the mentioned aspects generated some adaptation of normative framework governing the ATHENA Mechanism. It was also considered the option to increase the flexibility of operational commanders in managing unexpected circumstances that may occur during and after the deployment process.

From this perspective, the ATHENA common costs structure was adjusted in the following way:

1. Operational common costs related to the active phase of an operation comprising:
 - Costs for headquarters⁶ including: transportation (in and from the theatre of operations for FHQ and CCHQ); travel and lodging for HQ personnel; transportation in the theatre of operations (e.g., vehicles and fuel); administrative costs (offices, services, HQ building maintenance); civil personnel recruitment for HQ; communications between HQ and assigned forces; lodging infrastructure for HQs; public information (HQ information activities); representation and hospitality at HQ level.
 - Financing the support activities generated in the deployment context:
 - construction works for deployment/infrastructure required by the force (use of airports, ports, roads, disembarkation points, water reservoir, warehouse, logistics spaces, technical assistance for commonly financed infrastructure);
 - identification (IDs, medals, insignia, flags excepting uniforms and clothes);
 - medical: Medevac (Role 2, 3 and assigned facilities according to the OPLAN);
 - information (satellite imagery in case that it cannot be provided by the EU Satellite Centre).

The ATHENA common costs structure was adjusted in the following way: operational common costs related to the active phase of an operation, additional common costs associated with the active phase, operational costs requested by operation commander and approved by the Special Committee and costs for the final stages of operations.

⁶ There are taken into consideration the headquarters (static and mobile) for EU-lead operations (HQ; OHQ; FHQ; CCHQ; Mission Headquarters – MHQ, deployed in the area of operations to replace OHQ and/or FHQ functions.

- Costs generated by the use of NATO capabilities for EU operations.
 - Costs for construction works or capabilities and equipment made available by a member state, international organisations or third states.
2. Additional common costs associated with the active phase based on the Council decision:
 - transportation in and from the theatre of operations for deployment, support, recovery for forces required by operations;
 - “task force” type multinational headquarters deployed in the theatre.
 3. Operational costs requested by operation commander and approved by the Special Committee:
 - lodging infrastructure and barracks – acquisition, renting, upgrading the facilities in the area of operations necessary for deployed forces;
 - additional equipment – acquisition, equipment renting in unexpected circumstances;
 - additional medical services;
 - information – extended spectre focused on ground situation;
 - niche capabilities (e.g., demining, CBRN, storage facilities for armaments ammunition);
 4. Costs for the final stages of operations:
 - identification of the final destination for the equipment and infrastructure funded in common;
 - management of the accounts opened in the context of operations.

FUNCTIONALITY IN AN OPERATIONAL DYNAMIC CONTEXT

It is beyond any doubt that the development of the ATHENA Mechanism was generated by a real need to sustain the political commitments assumed by the member states to develop the EU operational role. In this vein, the record of the previous years offers a rather mixed picture from both the efficiency perspective and the level of ambition assumed in this context indicating positive results and persistence of certain limitations.



Historically speaking, the EU military operations benefited extensively from the opportunities created by this mechanism. The record is rather impressive, with 11 operations deployed in various areas such as the Western Balkans, Africa and the Mediterranean, which received financial support through ATHENA.

Historically speaking, the EU military operations benefited extensively from the opportunities created by this mechanism. The record is rather impressive, with 11 operations deployed in various areas such as the Western Balkans, Africa and the Mediterranean, which received financial support through ATHENA. In fact, almost 30% of all EU operations and missions benefited from common financing. This aspect should be also seen from the perspective of the member states appetite for generating military commitments, given that the financing system for civilian operations under CSDP is much more attractive. According to the EU Treaty [Art. (42) 1 and 43], the expenses for civilian commitments (administrative and operational) are financed through the EU budget, under the heading Common Foreign and Security Policy. For the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020, the ceiling was 3,145 billion € (*Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 and EU budget for 2014. The figures*, European Union, 2013), which is 3,8% of the EU budget. Within this amount, the component for operational expenses is 250-300 million €, annually for all EU civilian operations. At the same time, TEU [Art. 41(3)] allows the possibility to finance from the EU budget all the preparatory measures for conducting a civilian operation, based on the adoption of a Council Decision and the information of the European Parliament. With regard to the costs associated with the personnel deployed by member states, they remain national responsibility.

Obviously, the integration of the civil management component within the Multiannual Financial Framework of the EU budget provides the necessary predictability character in sustaining the operations, while ensuring the proper conditions for extending the deployment period and continuity in implementing the mandate. It can be argued on a high degree of asymmetry between financing models for civilian and military CSDP components, in terms of both the resources volume and the procedural and institutional typologies. For the entire functioning period, the ATHENA budget was relatively constant, between 60-75 mil. € (Fiott, 2019, p. 85; Fiott, Theodosopoulos, 2020, p. 219). But this figure is merely orienting given the possibility to commit additional financial support pending on the operational evolutions, especially for the initial phases of operations. In this stages, additional expenses

could occur especially on creating the conditions for deployment and accommodation for the personnel transported in theatres of operations. An illustrative example of the magnitude of these costs, which have to be generated by ATHENA, is the case of EU operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR ALTHEA, since 2004), D.R. of Congo (EUFOR DR Congo, 2006) or EUFOR TCHAD/RCA, 2007, in Chad and Central African Republic. For the latter, the particular security local conditions imposed considerable logistical works, while involving an extremely high number of surveillance and air transportation actions in the area of operations. All the mentioned aspects were reflected in the amount of costs that reached approximately 120 mil., which was financed through ATHENA (EU Military Operation in Eastern Chad and North Eastern Central African Republic, 2009). A similar case is the EU operation in the D.R. of Congo, where the common costs reached 17 mil., most of which being associated with the force protection measures and activities performed by the deployed contingents. (*EU ISS Yearbook of European Security*, 2013, p. 277). As regards ALTHEA operation, the maximum level of common financing was above 71 mil. €, it thus being the largest EU military operation with more than 7,000 military personnel between 2004-2007 (Chaillot Papers, no. 75, 2005, p. 36).

Of course, these aspects could not be seen as definitive in a comprehensive analysis of the ATHENA Mechanism, being rather exceptions in the force generation process. More relevant for analytical purposes is the contribution of this instrument within the general financial envelope for military operations. From this perspective, the ATHENA efficiency is one of the debatable topics. It is commonly agreed that the ATHENA opportunities are covering only 10-15% of the entire amount involved by an operation. From this perspective, it is highly debatable how the flexibility of the normative framework should be enhanced in order to match the specifics of every single operation. In this respect, it was agreed that a regular revision of the ATHENA Mechanism should be performed every three years.

At the same time, the attention was focused on the potential expansion of the common costs. Considering the experience of the significant number of operations with different intensity





The discussions between member states were concentrated on the possibility to include the costs for troops transportation. This topic was approached due to the expensiveness of transport capabilities for both low level readiness operations and rapid reaction ones. So far, the methods employed for deploying EU contingents encompassed three options: use relevant national capabilities; rent airlift and sealift capabilities; optimise the cooperation and coordination formulas in the field of transportation.

levels and multiple tasks, the discussions between member states were concentrated on the possibility to include the costs for troops transportation. This topic was approached due to the expensiveness of transport capabilities for both low level readiness operations and rapid reaction ones. So far, the methods employed for deploying EU contingents encompassed three options: use relevant national capabilities (rather limited in EU member states); rent airlift and sealift capabilities; optimise the cooperation and coordination formulas in the field of transportation, especially by using different multinational arrangements⁷ developed between some member states. All of the mentioned options pose certain challenges, being very expensive and quite unpredictable with regard to the availability in the short term, which is essential for potential Battle Groups deployment.

The issue of adapting to meet the mentioned requirements was approached at the highest political level. During the European Council that took place between 19-20 December 2013, it was underlined the necessity of identifying the best options for optimising the financing mechanism (Conclusions of the European Council, 2013). From this perspective, the revision of the ATHENA Mechanism approached the topic of including the costs related to the Battle Groups deployment. The recommendations were incorporated in the decisions adopted by the European Council in March 2015 endorsing the possibility to finance Battle Groups deployment with specific provisions regarding the periodic renewal of this decision (Andersson, 2017, p. 2). Definitely, this step was a major achievement in consolidating the financial predictability with positive potential for boosting member states interest in generating military operational commitments.

⁷ The main multinational cooperation formulas developed in the field of transportation are: Strategic Airlift Capability – SAC (C-17); Strategic Airlift Interim Solutions – SALIS (Antonov); Movement Coordination Center Europe (MCCE); European Air Transport Command (EATC); Nordic Movement Coordination Center (NMCC); Multinational Sealift Coordination Center (MSCC).

CONCLUSIONS

As it can be noticed, the creation of a financing management system for EU military operations was a feature that constantly followed the development of European cooperation in the field of defence. Given its importance for consolidating the EU's profile in crisis management, it was underpinned by political consensus between member states on establishing such a system. The convergence on this subject was strengthened considering the specific provisions of the EU Treaty that does not offer structural possibilities to finance military operations through the EU budget.

It is evident that, in the absence of a common perception, the establishment of the ATHENA Mechanism could not take place. The way and the pace at which this instrument developed was frequently criticised especially from the perspective of the ATHENA modest contribution to the general expenditures generated by operations.

Nevertheless, there are certain positive effects that have to be highlighted, especially in terms of facilitating the conditions for generating operations with a particular relevance for initial stages. The specific cases of the most demanding EU military operations presented above indicate without any doubt the importance of this new instrument. Thus, it can be considered the added value of ATHENA by the significant potential for employing important resources and overcoming difficulties and challenges, including the employment of rapid reaction capabilities.

Obviously, the efficiency of using this mechanism should be seen in connection with the EU high operational dynamic. Currently, the ATHENA Mechanism is financing six operations in different geographical areas (the Balkans, the Horn of Africa, Somalia, Mali, the Mediterranean Sea) with different profiles and financial features. Equally, the evolution of European cooperation in the field of defence indicates that the EU has become one of the most important international actors, underpinned by a significant number of military and civilian operational commitments conducted under CSDP auspices.

Even in the case of simple evaluation, it is evident that this tendency will consolidate in the coming period. It requires an adequate adjustment of the instruments and mechanisms that the EU could



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The creation of a financing management system for EU military operations was a feature that constantly followed the development of European cooperation in the field of defence. Given its importance for consolidating the EU's profile in crisis management, it was underpinned by political consensus between member states on establishing such a system. The convergence on this subject was strengthened considering the specific provisions of the EU Treaty that does not offer structural possibilities to finance military operations through the EU budget.



The ATHENA Mechanism is a cooperation framework developed in a specific stage of the development of the EU operational profile for providing necessary answers. The experience so far is a valuable acquis, which has to be taken into account in developing future financial management systems in the field of EU external action.

employ for operations. The common financing will represent one of the most important aspects that can be approached in a functional matrix that is equally adapted to the fast-changing security environment. The main implications could be seen in the rapid reaction capacity, in the ability for integrated management of the financial resources in a specific geographical area or in implementing a security sector reform programme in a country that is a receptor of EU assistance.

The ATHENA Mechanism is a cooperation framework developed in a specific stage of the development of the EU operational profile for providing necessary answers. The experience so far is a valuable acquis, which has to be taken into account in developing future financial management systems in the field of EU external action. In this vein, it is worth highlighting the political agreement reached by member states at the end of 2020, which gives green light for a new instrument for the integrated management of the financial resources for external action. Known as the *European Peace Facility – EPF*, its parameters incorporate, while maintaining certain distinctiveness, two structured pillars – military operations and assistance measures in the field of defence. The financial envelope associated with this new instrument is around 5 billion € for the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027.

In the new context created by EPF, the operation component incorporated the entire normative framework of the ATHENA Mechanism allowing for a smooth transition towards a new EU financial management system in the field of defence. At the same time, this approach will contribute to consolidating the integrated character of external action. This would be facilitated by an efficient and complementary connectivity and complementarity between the operational commitments and the assistance measures designed by the EU for different countries.

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THREE SCENARIOS FOR REGIONAL GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS AFTER THE TALIBAN RETURNED TO POWER IN AFGHANISTAN

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On 14 April 2021, US President Joe Biden announced that, starting on 1 May (2021), US troops will withdraw from Afghanistan, ending 20 years of war on Taliban terrorism. At a first glance, the Americans’ decision seems to be a hasty withdrawal from a very costly war of attrition. On closer inspection, however, the events in Afghanistan seem to part of a realpolitik strategy, which seeks to reset the geopolitical game in Eurasia and beyond. So, what could be the potential geopolitical impact of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan? How could the regional game be reset after August 2021? This article, written immediately after the “fall” of Kabul on 15 August 2021, and the return to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan, proposes three scenarios for regional geopolitical dynamics and their global implications.

Keywords: Afghanistan; Pashtuns; Taliban; “World Balkans”; Realpolitik;



Motto:

“Asia is a body of water and clay, of which the Afghan nation forms the heart; The whole of Asia is corrupt, if the heart is corrupt; Its decline is the decline of Asia; Its rise is the rise of Asia; The body is free only as long as the heart is free; The heart dies with hatred but lives with faith”.

Mohammed Iqbal (1877-1938),
Pakistani poet and politician

WHO ARE THE TALIBAN ?

The Taliban Movement is described as a Deobandi Movement, a title taken from the *Darul Uloom Deoband – House of Knowledge from Deoband* seminar, founded in 1867 in Deoband, Uttar Pradesh, India. The founders of the Deobandi Movement belonged to the moderate Hanafi legal school¹, which standardised Sunni Islam in the Mughal and the Ottoman Empires (except for North Africa). Aiming at the revival of Indian Islam assaulted by British and Hindu civilizations, the founders of the Movement thought the development of a system of clerical educational institutions designed to train imams capable of “awakening” the conscience of the Muslims in the Indian Peninsula. Thus, in 1967, 100 years after the founding of the first seminary, there were 8,934 Deobandi schools, mostly in the Indian Peninsula, as well as in other countries such as China, Afghanistan, Malaysia (Puri, 2009). Deobandi teachings created followers, especially among the Pashtun population, located on either side of the Durand line² – the 2,670-kilometer-long colonial border separating Afghanistan from today’s Pakistan, passing through the middle of the Pashtun-populated territory. They did not have the same success in Punjab, where the population preferred the Barelvi Islam, also Hanafi, but accompanied

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¹ Founded by the cleric Abū Hanīfa an-Nu‘man ibn Thābit (700–767). It accepts the largest share of secular sources in the Shariah structure of all Sunni law schools. Therefore, it combines the precepts of the Qur’an, the custom and consensus of scholars with individual reflection, analogy (Qiyas), legal preference (Istihsan) and local tradition (Urf). See Popescu (2020).

² From the name of the British diplomat Henry Mortimer Durand (1850-1924), who, on 12 November 1893, negotiated and drew the border between Afghanistan led by Emir Abdur Rahman Khan (1840/1844-1901) and British India. See Smith (2004).



An important role in altering the political philosophy of the Deobandi towards Hanabilah ultra-conservatism was played by the deep poverty that affected the majority Pashtun population in the 1990s and made them vulnerable to aids received from the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamist Network. Another important role was played by the presence in the Pakistani area, since the late 1940s, of the teachings and organisations established by the local leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, the journalist and cleric Sayyid Abū'l-A'īā Mawdūdī (1903–1979). Mawdūdī was the founder of *Jamaat-i-Islami – the Islamic Society*.

by a significant Sufi practice³, a mystical practice rejected by the Deobandi and especially by the followers of the ultra-conservative Hanabilah law school⁴, gathered in the *Ahl-e-Hadith – The People of the Command Movement*, established in the mid-19th century in Northern India.

The Hanafi moderation of the Deobandi seminaries was replaced by Hanabilah radicalism during the 1980s, amid the Afghan-Soviet War (1979-1989), when Saudi petrodollars and the entire financial system of the Muslim Brotherhood, along with US logistics, provided by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the Pakistani intelligence service, supported the mujahideen front, in which the vast majority of combat-able Pashtuns enlisted (Berman, 2003). This is a publicly acknowledged issue by Pakistani cleric Akbar Zaidi, who said the Deobandi Islam in Pakistan and Afghanistan strayed from its Indian “roots” due to several factors, one of them being the influence of Saudi Wahhabism (Zaidi, 2009). An important role in altering the political philosophy of the Deobandi towards Hanabilah ultra-conservatism was played by the deep poverty that affected the majority Pashtun population in the 1990s and made them vulnerable to aids received from the Muslim Brotherhood's Islamist Network. Another important role was played by the presence in the Pakistani area, since the late 1940s, of the teachings and organisations established by the local leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, the journalist and cleric Sayyid Abū'l-A'īā Mawdūdī (1903–1979). Mawdūdī was the founder of *Jamaat-i-Islami – the Islamic Society*, which became the largest Islamist organisation in Asia. He was a continuator of the ideological line opened by the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Egyptian theologian Hassan al-Bannā (1906-1949), according to whom “political power exists only to enforce Shariah, the only system of laws able to eradicate the secular, socialist and liberal-democratic ignorance in which the Islamic world sank” (Popescu, p. 84). The ideology of the mentioned teachings and organisations resonated with that of the already existing *Ahl-e-Hadith*, so that the traditional Pashtun Deobandi capitulated in front of the ultra-conservative assault, becoming part of the Global Islamist Network (Ib., pp. 144-210).

³ The inner, mystical dimension of Islam emphasises the Great Jihad, man's struggle with his sins, and man's relationship with an accessible God. See Asghar (2009).

⁴ From the name of its founder, the Bedouin cleric Ahmad bin Hanbal (780–855). He completely rejects the secular sources in the Shariah structure.



There is a major risk of ultra-conservative ideological contamination, followed by radicalisation, of Indian Deobandi Muslims, which would detonate security and stability throughout the Indian Peninsula. Risk is closely monitored and controlled by Indian authorities that have called on local Deobandi leaders to go public and condemn the insurgent Islam of terrorist organisations belonging to the Secret Apparatus of the Muslim Brotherhood.

As the population shift, following the partition of India in 1947, was not absolutely perfect, a significant percentage of Indian Muslims (about 10% of the total population of India today, representing about 160 million) chose to stay in Hindu India, especially in the North of the state, the birthplace of the Deobandi Movement. Therefore, there is a major risk of ultra-conservative ideological contamination, followed by radicalisation, of Indian Deobandi Muslims, which would detonate security and stability throughout the Indian Peninsula. Risk is closely monitored and controlled by Indian authorities that have called on local Deobandi leaders to go public and condemn the insurgent Islam of terrorist organisations belonging to the Secret Apparatus of the Muslim Brotherhood (Ib., pp. 147-192). Thus, on 25 February 2008, *Darul Uloom* hosted a conference of scholars in Deoband to discuss the issue of terrorism, at which a *fatwa – a religious edict* unanimously condemning all acts of terrorism in the name of Islam – was unanimously adopted (Puri).

Not coincidentally, the Deobandi Movement in Afghanistan is named after the Taliban, which in Arabic means students, knowing that the Islamist Network places a special emphasis on Islamic education and the complete memorisation of the Qur'an, Sunnah and al-Banna's writings, also considering that, originally, Deobandi was built on a system of theological seminaries designed to educate students in the spirit of Islamic teaching.

The Taliban movement was founded in 1994 by Mullah Mohammed Omar (1960-2013), former *mujahedeen – soldier of Allah* in the Afghan-Soviet War, a graduate of the Deobandi seminary in the Pakistani town of Akora Khattak (Waraich, 2015). The seminar was led by cleric Maulana Sami-ul-Haq (1937-2018), a member of the Islamist political movement *Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam – Assembly of Islamic Clerics*, also known as the “father of the Taliban” (Imtiaz, 2007). In 1996, Omar established the *Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan*, with its *de facto* capital in Kandahar and *de jure* one in Kabul. In 2001, he ordered the destruction of Buddha statues in Bamyan, carved in the 6th century. After 11 September 2001, Omar was black-listed by the United States government, which issued a warrant for hosting and supporting Al Qaeda's actions against America. But Omar was never arrested and died of tuberculosis on 23 April 2013. Some authors claim that the Islamist's death occurred in the Afghan town of Zabul,



The initial success of the Taliban Movement is closely linked to the Muslim Brotherhood, the CIA and the Pakistani secret service (Inter-Services Intelligence – ISI). The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan left the “Pashtun belt” in a state of glaring poverty, administrative disintegration and chaos. In this context, the region fell under “warlords” rule, former mujahideen commanders who took control over the main access routes, especially the strategic corridor Quetta - Kandahar - Herat, which links Pakistan, in the Southeast, with Iran, Turkmenistan and Turkey, in the Northwest.

near an American military base (Deutsche Welle, 2019), others that it happened in Pakistan, in a hospital in Karachi (Goldstein, Shah, 2015). For two years, his death was hidden by the Taliban, being revealed in July 2015 by the National Security Directorate of Afghanistan (Onyanga-Omara, Lackey, 2015).

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Figure no. 1: Political map of Afghanistan
(Source: http://www.ettoremazza.com/mapimages/middle_east/afghanistan/afghanistan.gif, retrieved on 15.08.2021).



During the Afghan-Soviet War and after the Soviet withdrawal, there are well known the links among the CIA, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Mujahideen Front in Afghanistan, whose main ideologue was the Palestinian cleric Abdullah Yusuf Azzam (1941–1989). Nicknamed “Father of the Global Jihad”, Azzam mentored Osama bin Laden (1957–2011). He was the founder of Al-Qa’ida, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and other terrorist organisations as well as of the Maktab al-Khidamat (Al Kifah) logistical structure, which provided material support to the mujahideen, from training camps and field hospitals to military equipment and military vehicles.

As a result, in October 1994, the Taliban Movement emerged in the region. Well-armed and equipped with vehicles that it would have found following a raid on a warehouse on the border with Pakistan, the Movement was able to take control of the corridor and the city of Kandahar. In December 1994, the Taliban already controlled 12 of the country’s 31 provinces, and in 1995 about 90 percent of the Afghan territory.

There are many voices linking the Movement to the Pakistani secret service, ISI (India Today, 2021), and explaining its military victories through the support received from Pakistan (Smith, Grey, 2021).

Moreover, during the Afghan-Soviet War and after the Soviet withdrawal, there are well known the links among the CIA, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Mujahideen Front in Afghanistan, whose main ideologue was the Palestinian cleric Abdullah Yusuf Azzam (1941–1989). Nicknamed “Father of the Global Jihad”, Azzam mentored Osama bin Laden (1957–2011). He was the founder of Al-Qa’ida, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba and other terrorist organisations as well as of the Maktab al-Khidamat (Al Kifah) logistical structure, which provided material support to the mujahideen, from training camps and field hospitals to military equipment and military vehicles (Popescu, p. 184). During the previous Taliban administration, the Emirate’s main sources of income came from smuggling – which prospered so much that, between 1993 and 1997, led to a \$ 400 million drop in Pakistani customs revenue – and, in particular, from trafficking opioids, which had exceeded \$ 1 billion in 1997 (Berman).

Therefore, we can conclude that the Taliban Movement is an ultra-conservative, radical Islamist movement, included in the Global Islamist Network of the Muslim Brotherhood. The circumstances of its occurrence and its subsequent evolution argue in favour of the logistical support received from Pakistan, without completely excluding, at least in its early days, its links with the CIA, knowing that in the 1990s the Agency was still in a close connection with Muslim Brotherhood and the forces of the mujahideen in Afghanistan.

THE GEOPOLITICAL AND GEOSTRATEGIC VALUE OF AFGHANISTAN

Geographically, according to data provided by the CIA WorldFactBook, Afghanistan is a medium-sized country (652,230 sq km), landlocked, located in South Asia. In the North, it borders China and three former Soviet states: Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In the West,



it borders Iran. In the South and East, it borders Pakistan (see the map in *figure no. 1*). Its relief is predominantly mountainous. The Hindu Kush Mountain range, with altitudes between 3,000 and 7,000 meters, which extends from Northeast to Southwest, separates the Northern provinces from the rest of the country (see the map in *figure no. 2*). In the Southwest and North there are plains. The climate is arid and semi-arid. The hydrographic network consists mainly of rivers that either flow outside the country into the Arabian Sea, or flow into endorheic basins in Afghanistan.

Also in the North, on the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, the Amu Darya River originates. It offers navigable access, along a length of 1,200 km, for ships up to 500 DWT. The Amu Darya River corridor partially opens the country, as it communicates, through the Karakum Canal, with the Caspian Sea, and ends in a Delta in the Aral Lake (Britannica, 2021) (see the map in *figures no. 2 and 3*). Afghanistan has two river ports at Amu Darya, in Kheyraabad and Shir Khan.

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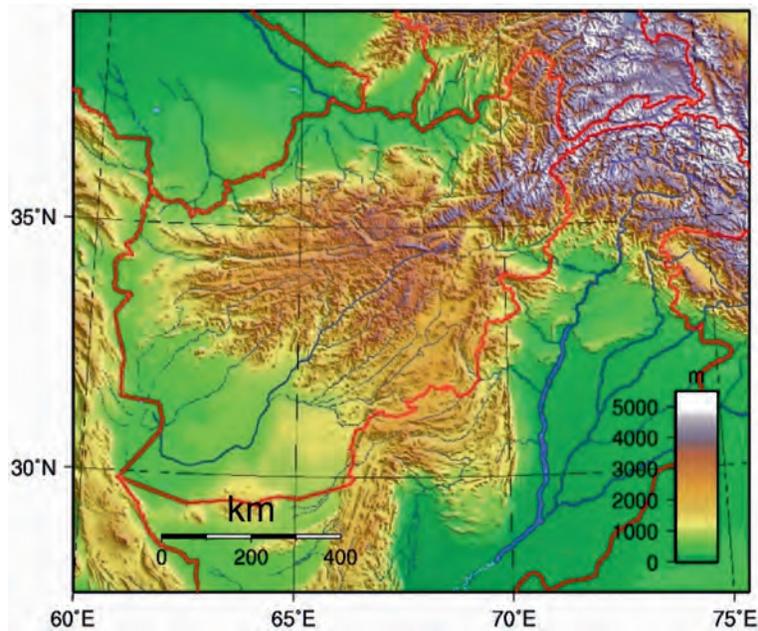


Figure no. 2: Topographic map of Afghanistan

(Source: <https://www.mapsland.com/maps/asia/afghanistan/large-topographical-map-of-afghanistan.jpg>, retrieved on 15.08.2021).



Figure no. 3: The Amu Darya and the Syr Darya rivers

(Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/85/Aral_map.png, retrieved on 15.08.2021).

The main natural riches of Afghanistan are natural gas, oil, coal, copper ores, gold, chromite, barium, lead, zinc, lithium, iron ore, talc deposits, salt, precious and semi-precious stones, arable land covering 11.8% of the total area of the country and agricultural land representing 58.1% of the Afghan territory (CIA WorldFactBook, 2021).

Geopolitically, Afghanistan is a compact state, with no exclaves or enclaves on its territory. The capital, Kabul, is located eccentrically, in the North of the country, in the mountainous area. This is the reason why it does not exert a sufficiently strong force of attraction on the entire territory, thus being explained the periodic appearance of a second *de facto* capital in the Southern town of Kandahar. Kabul is located at the crossroads of Asia – about halfway between Istanbul in the West and Hanoi in the East, on the transport corridor that connects Europe to Central and South Asia – and is one of the destinations on the route of the old Silk Road (Haidari, 2017). Kandahar was the historical capital of the Pashtuns – initially, the Afghan name referred to the Pashtuns, later it was transferred to other ethnic groups.



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The introduction of the phrase Middle East (and of Afghanistan in this area) to the public circuit is due to American Admiral Alfred T. Mahan (1840-1914), the author of the article entitled *The Persian Gulf and International Relations*, published in 1902 in "National Review" magazine. In this article, the great strategist defines the Middle East as the area of great strategic value, between Arabia and India, which surrounds the Persian Gulf, the most important corridor that Great Britain will control, after the Suez Canal.

It is currently the second largest city in the country and an important trade centre, being known as a major market for marijuana and hashish (Burch, 2010).



Figure no. 4: Middle East

(Source: <https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcTHO2IiBQzFGQx4vU4BhdEda8qL7oTv2uS76w&usqp=CAU>, retrieved on 15.08.2021)

Also from a geopolitical point of view, Afghanistan belongs, according to some authors, to the Middle East region (see the map in figure no. 4), while other authors include it in the Extended Middle East (see the map in figure no. 5). The introduction of the phrase Middle East (and of Afghanistan in this area) to the public circuit is due to American Admiral Alfred T. Mahan (1840-1914), the author of the article entitled *The Persian Gulf and International Relations*, published in 1902 in "National Review" magazine. In this article, the great strategist defines the Middle East as the area of great strategic value, between Arabia and India, which surrounds the Persian Gulf, the most important corridor that Great Britain will control, after the Suez Canal. The region is later described, in 1957, by the US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (1888-1959) as "the area between, and including Libya in the West and Pakistan in the East, Syria and Iraq in the North and the Arabian Peninsula in the South, plus Sudan and Ethiopia" (Davison, 1960). Subsequently, during the George W. Bush Jr. Administration (2001-2009), the phrase *Extended Middle East* is introduced, defining a geopolitical over-zone that includes the Maghreb, Central Asia and the Caucasus.



Figure no 5: Greater Middle East

(Source: <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/3a/13/56/3a13560b14c78127236c1c6651540e02.jpg>, retrieved on 15.08.2021).

Geopolitically, the Middle East is a buffer zone located at the confluence of six religions and civilisations: Sunni Islam and Shi'a Islam, Mosaicism, Christianity, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Animism. Its borders, disputed and almost always "bloodied", correspond to the description of the Islamic civilisational space made by Samuel P. Huntington (1927-2008). This inter-civilisational buffer, currently predominantly Islamic, is considered to be the "cradle" of the humanity and one of the areas of centrality on which the macro-balance of the Afro-Eurasian continental mass depends.

Geostrategically, the Middle East belongs, together with the Maghreb, to the compression zone with pivot status between two large global spaces, maritime and continental (see the map in figure no. 6). A pivotal status that, when controlled by any of the competitors (a matter possible only by unifying the Middle East under a single authority), transforms the Middle East into a "gateway", a transit corridor between the macro-components of the continental mass, with exceptional strategic value for any dominant power. When control of this global pivot is disputed between the two spaces, subsequent geopolitical dynamics predispose it to instability, conflict, fragmentation, state failure, poverty, and underdevelopment, and turn it into a "shatterbelt".



Geopolitically, the Middle East is a buffer zone located at the confluence of six religions and civilisations: Sunni Islam and Shi'a Islam, Mosaicism, Christianity, Brahmanism, Buddhism, Animism. Its borders, disputed and almost always "bloodied", correspond to the description of the Islamic civilisational space made by Samuel P. Huntington (1927-2008).



An area that holds in its subsoil 38.4% of the world's known natural gas reserves (in 2018) (NS Energy, 2019) and 48.3% of the total proven oil reserves on the planet (in 2020) (BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2021).



Figure no. 6: Middle East and North Africa

(Source: <https://i2.wp.com/www.timpromanesc.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/orientul-mijlociu.jpg?fit=653%2C426&ssl=1>, retrieved on 15.08.2021).

Therefore, not coincidentally, the compression zone of the Middle East has been the subject of concern for American, Russian, Chinese and other strategists. For centuries under the Ottoman rule, during the decline of the Empire, the area began to be disputed between the British and French metropolises, the increasingly incisive Tsarist Empire and the new emerging European powers of the late 19th century: the Italian Kingdom and the German Empire. The race for the domination of the Orient accelerated with the Second Industrial Revolution and the introduction of hydrocarbons into the global energy equation. This issue motivated the outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918) followed by the dismantling of the last remaining territories in the Ottoman Empire (1920-1923). In this troubled historical context, Afghanistan became a much-needed "buffer" between the Tsarist Empire and later the Soviet one, and the British Indies, a geopolitical status under which it gained independence on 19 August 1919.

Since then, the Middle East has been at the forefront of geopolitical competition between major global geostrategic players, eventually turning into a shatterbelt. Largely stabilised at its current borders after the 1960s (with the exception of Sudan, which underwent a fragmentation process in 2011), the Middle East continues to be the subject of strategic plans to resettle ethnic borders, officially, for the purpose of creating fairer borders and, unofficially, for an easier domination of the region. In this respect, on 1 June 2006, US Lt Col (ret.) Ralph Peters published in the "Armed Forces Journal" the article entitled *Blood Borders: How a Better Middle East Would Look*, in which he suggested a new division of this geopolitical area, as it can be seen in the map in figure no. 7.

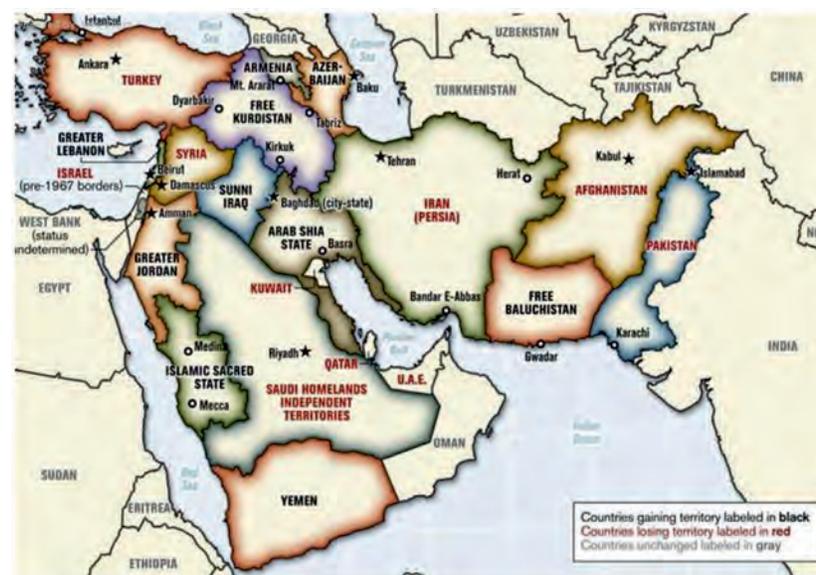


Figure no. 7: The New Middle East

(Source: <https://resboiu.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/harta-ciudatelor-modificari.png>, retrieved on 15.08.2021).

In the *New Middle East* suggested by Peters, Afghanistan would be reduced to Pashtun-populated territory, so that its Western provinces, in the Herat area, populated by other ethnic groups (Turkmen, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Aimaqi) would be included into a Greater Iran, while its Eastern border would move across the Durand Line encompassing the Pashtun territories now under Pakistani sovereignty. Thus, Pakistan would also lose the provinces South of Afghanistan inhabited by Baluchis and transformed into the independent state of Baluchistan.



The Middle East has been at the forefront of geopolitical competition between major global geostrategic players, eventually turning into a shatterbelt. Largely stabilised at its current borders after the 1960s (with the exception of Sudan, which underwent a fragmentation process in 2011), the Middle East continues to be the subject of strategic plans to resettle ethnic borders, officially, for the purpose of creating fairer borders and, unofficially, for an easier domination of the region.



The American geostrategist and statesman Zbigniew K. Brzeziński (1928-2017) included the Middle East and, implicitly, Afghanistan, in the “World Balkans”, “an area stretching from the Suez to Xinjiang, an angry and volatile region, resentful of foreign domination, extremely rich in hydrocarbons and gold, at the intersection of the corridors linking Western Europe to East Asia and a geopolitical prize for any power capable of dominating it” (Brzeziński, 1997, pp. 123-124). Moreover, Brzeziński drew the attention of US policymakers that preventing at all costs the unification of this region under one of the regional powers (Russia, Turkey, Iran, China) is one of the American geostrategic imperatives in Eurasia (see the map in figure no. 8).

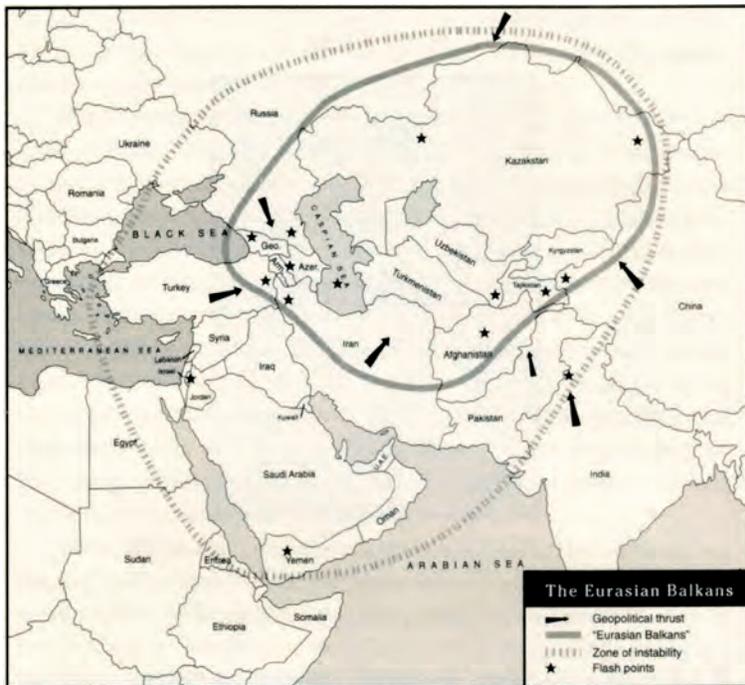


Figure no. 8: The “World Balkans”
 (Source: http://orientalreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/EB_map.jpg, retrieved on 16.08.2021).

A global pivot, as the “World Balkans” were described by another geopolitician, the Frenchman Xavier Martin, with a huge geoeconomic and geostrategic value, located at the intersection of land roads connecting Russia with Africa and South Asia, China with Europe and Africa, and Europe with Asia.



Figure no. 9: TAPI gas pipeline project
 (Source: http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-ORStthAe7us/UD0IB1S8OqI/AAAAAAAAARU/akwMfh0gA4s/s1600/Tapi_Map_01.gif, retrieved on 15.08.2021).

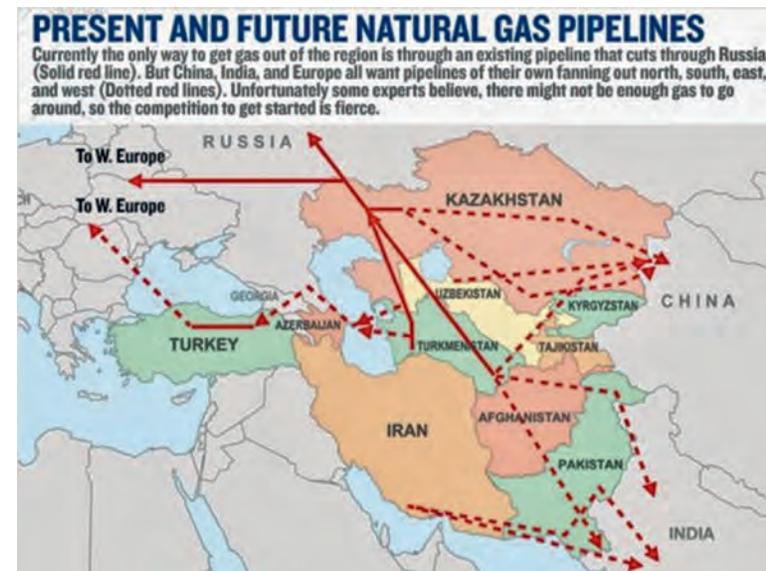


Figure no. 10: Energy corridors through the “World Balkans”
 (Source: https://stevehynd.files.wordpress.com/2011/09/gas_image004.jpg, retrieved on 15.08.2021).



The projects of energy and transport corridors, which cross the “World Balkans” and implicitly Afghanistan support the mentioned idea. Examples in this regard are the *TAPI gas pipeline* (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India), which would have brought Turkmen and Afghan gas into the Pakistani and Indian pipelines (see the maps in *figures no. 9 and no. 10*) or the inclusion of Afghanistan in the Chinese strategic and geoeconomic project of the “*Silk Road*” (see the map in *figure no.11*). Projects at which the administration of the fugitive Afghan President Ashraf Ghani had acquiesced, with Afghanistan becoming the “*heart of the Silk Road in Asia*” (Haidari).



Figure no. 11: (Silk) Belt and Road Initiative map

(Source: https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/proxy/GNXp0cKHmgsPtgWD09p4iUQgt_fx_0tnbBFvH_gTc6qXb8YZkR9EAca9fQ43qDpbfdEUXMZM3n4AONhpUaCLa27wrHzDeyONDcz_wjvdNYjsBg, retrieved on 15.08.2021).

From the perspective of the Russian Federation, Afghanistan, as a component of the intermediate security ring of pivotal power, is and must remain a buffer state. An area targeted by Moscow’s domination interests, materialised in the Soviet period by the invasion of this country in 1979. A space that, in its current context, could export Hanabilah Islamist ideology to the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus, belonging to the internal security ring of the Federation, much more strategically important. All the more so as in the immediate vicinity of Talibanized Afghanistan is the Fergana Valley, known for the radical Islamism of its inhabitants (Akchurina, Lavorgna, 2014) (see the map in *figure no. 12*).



Figure no. 12: South Asian security complex

(Source: <https://www.matrixmag.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/CSF989.jpg>, retrieved on 16.08.2021).

And, last but not least, Afghanistan is considered by Iran as belonging, *de facto*, to its own sphere of influence, a potential region of a Greater Iran, by virtue of the former borders of the late Persian Empire, as it can be seen in the map in *figure no. 13*. And in the immediate vicinity of Afghanistan there are: Kashmir, a disputed region between India and Pakistan, which could, in turn, be attracted in the regional geopolitical dynamics, leading to the heating of the conflict between the two nuclear powers of South Asia; the Chinese province of Xinjiang, former East Turkestan, where the Uighurs live. In Xinjiang have expanded over time both the moderate, Hanafi Chinese Yihewani Muslim Brotherhood, founded in the 19th century, and the ultra-conservative, Hanabilah Ikhwan, the local branch of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (Popescu).

Therefore, we can conclude that Afghanistan is:

- from a geopolitical point of view, a buffer zone, which kept the Russian pivotal power away from India and the Indian Ocean;
- from a geostrategic point of view, a bridgehead for any non-Asian power interested in projecting its strength in the immediate vicinity of the main Asian geostrategic players: China, India, Iran, Pakistan and the Russian Federation;



Afghanistan is: from a geopolitical point of view, a buffer zone, which kept the Russian pivotal power away from India and the Indian Ocean; from a geostrategic point of view, a bridgehead for any non-Asian power interested in projecting its strength in the immediate vicinity of the main Asian geostrategic players: China, India, Iran, Pakistan and the Russian Federation.



Its relief is rugged mountainous, which allows its transformation into an impregnable natural fortress, with conventional weapons, and, very importantly, in its subsoil there are important mineral and energy resources.



Figure no. 13: Greater Iran/Persia

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/4/45/Greater_Iran_Map.png, retrieved on 16.08.2021).

- geoeconomically, a hub and a nexus of the corridors linking Central Asia and the Caucasus to South Asia.

Geopolitically, it belongs to the compression belt of the Middle East and the Greater Middle East, being subjected to geopolitical pressures generated by the competition for domination of this space. It is included in one of the most active geopolitical fault lines, the global pivot, also known as the “World Balkans”, made up of the states of Central Asia, South Asia and the Caucasus. It is located inside the internal, vital, security ring of the Russian Federation, in the immediate vicinity of China and the interethnic and religious conflicts in Kashmir and former East Turkestan. This exceptional strategic position is all the more valuable as its relief is rugged mountainous, which allows its transformation into an impregnable natural fortress, with conventional weapons, and, very importantly, in its subsoil there are important mineral and energy resources. In addition, the Amu Darya basin provides river access from Afghan ports to the Caspian Sea and Lake Aral.

THEREFORE, WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL GEOPOLITICAL IMPACT OF THE RE-TALIBANIZATION OF AFGHANISTAN?

From the data presented above it is hard to believe that the American withdrawal from Afghanistan was due to a military defeat in front of poorly armed groups, without access to military high technologies, made up of semi-nomads, though some of them were trained by the CIA, in the years leading up to the 11 September 2001 attacks. Semi-nomads that waged a long guerrilla war, favoured by the rugged mountainous terrain and the neighbourhoods hostile towards America. The geopolitical value of this area and the bridgehead settled by the Americans in “the rib” of Russia and China were far too important to imagine that such a military superpower, which holds technological supremacy and develops new categories of forces for new theatres of operations, spatial and cybernetic, was defeated by a band of pseudo-soldiers, even “fighters of Allah”. The reasons of this withdrawal are in the need to reset the global and regional game in the context of the security challenges facing America, both domestically and internationally, especially on the axes with China, Russia, Israel/Iran and Europe. A withdrawal announced long before, in 2013 (Petersen).

China’s global power ambitions, translated into the military research programmes, the spatial programme, the Belt and Road Strategy for the economic conquest of the Afro-Eurasian continental mass, the naval domination of the Southern hemisphere’s Aquatic mass through the “string of pearls” of the Chinese naval bases, the strategy of taking control of the global maritime straits and chokepoints, have pointed out, for sure, both to the Americans and the Russians, that China wants to transform itself into a:

- *naval superpower*, by developing the military fleet and naval bases to ensure its ability to project its force over the Planetary Ocean;
- *continental superpower*, by controlling the shores of Eurasia, which will lead to the containment of the Russian pivotal power;
- *spatial superpower*;
- *commercial superpower*, by controlling the maritime traffic through the straits and through the maritime chokepoints;
- *technological superpower*, through research centres developed in the coastal area of Mainland China;



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China’s global power ambitions are translated into the military research programmes, the spatial programme, the Belt and Road Strategy for the economic conquest of the Afro-Eurasian continental mass, the naval domination of the Southern hemisphere’s Aquatic mass through the “string of pearls” of the Chinese naval bases, the strategy of taking control of the global maritime straits and chokepoints.



China was behind the TAPI pipeline construction project, and sought to take economic and political control of the state by investing in wells and refineries in the highly oil-rich basin of the Amu Darya, by acquiring a few mines, by investing in the local mobile phone network, by building a thermal power plant.

- *institutional superpower*, through the political influence exerted in the UN bodies and in other international institutions and organisations.

These valences of power are added to the already existing Chinese demographic power, its economic and financial power, the richness of strategic ores – the raw materials of today’s industrial revolutions – and, most importantly, the national will of the Chinese people to wash away the shame of a *“century of humiliation”*. Or, in other words, to carry out the objectives of the Great Strategy of *“China’s Dream”* to transform the great Asian power into the hegemon of this world (Popescu). Strategic objectives for which the Chinese state spares no effort and is not influenced by any ideological slogan. With one exception – that of international partners’ compliance with the *“one China”* geopolitical status. Or, in other words, to agree to cut international relations with Taiwan. This Chinese pragmatism has been extremely useful in Beijing’s relationship with states that once have been blacklisted as *“rogue states”* by the US administrations, including the Ayatollah regime in Iran or the regime of Omar al-Bashir in Sudan (Wilson Center, 2011). Therefore, not coincidentally, the first state to recognise the Taliban state in August 2021 was China (Shah, Lahiri, 2021).

China had managed to attract the regime of the fugitive President Ghani, who was negotiating Afghanistan’s role as the *“heart of the Silk Road”*, a euphemism for its status of hub and nexus for Chinese geopolitical, geoeconomic and geostrategic interests. A status for a country where the Americans spent billions to rebuild and stabilise after the 2001 War. In addition, China was behind the TAPI pipeline construction project (Petersen), and sought to take economic and political control of the state by investing in wells and refineries in the highly oil-rich basin of the Amu Darya, by acquiring a few mines, by investing in the local mobile phone network, by building a thermal power plant, and so on (Ib.). Inclusive in this *“key”* should be understood the *“withdrawal negotiations”* initiated by the former US administration of President Donald Trump with the Taliban (BBC, 2020), with signal value for the fugitive president, as well as the statement of former Head of the CIA, General David Petraeus, that the Americans did not properly assess the level of corruption that could grind the Afghan society (NPR, 2021).

In addition, China was unhindered in implementing its *“Silk Road”* geoeconomic and geopolitical mega-project, taking advantage of the regional stability provided by the US money and US military presence. In parallel, it developed a close strategic partnership with Pakistan, where it built the naval base for docking nuclear submarines in the deep-sea strategic port of Gwadar. Moreover, China has developed the already existing partnership with Iran, the two states being also founders of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a financial body enslaved to the Chinese geoeconomic megaproject of the *“Silk Belt and Road”* (AIIB, 2021).

However, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan detonated all the calculations related to the stability of the region. Moreover, the unexpected *“victory”* of the Taliban – who managed to take control of a large territory of the country in only 10 days, by the capitulation or the retreat of the Afghan military – has brought chaos, the mass refuge of Westernised Afghans and a lot of televised emotion. Emotion generated by the despair of the Westernised urban Afghan population (in minority relative to the large mass of the population), which was abandoned and doomed to a tragic end. A horrendous end of life that will be applied by Hanabilah fanatics to the so-called heretics that allowed themselves to abandon Salafist dogma. Shortly after the Taliban stormed the presidential palace in Kabul, in the mass-media began to circulate the calls for resistance from Ahmad Massoud, who was located in the Panjshir Valley, a territory in Central-Northern Afghanistan, 150 kilometres North of Kabul, near the Hindu Kush Mountain range, that remained unoccupied by the Taliban. Massoud has been joined by former Afghan Vice President, Amrulla Saleh, and by former Defence Minister, Bismillah Khan Mohammadi (The Week, 2021). Massoud is the son of former Mujahideen guerrilla commander Ahmad Shah Massoud (1953-2001) (Coll, 2021), who was killed by the Taliban before the 9/11 attacks and who was known for his links with the CIA (Ib.). At this moment, at least three probable scenarios are outlined.

THE FIRST SCENARIO, POTENTIALLY CARRIED OUT IN THE SHORT AND MEDIUM TERM

We are witnessing a possible repetition of the 1979 scenario, from the period immediately following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, this time in the format of an internationalised civil war. Public emotion will ensure and legitimise support for anti-Taliban forces, this time



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Public emotion will ensure and legitimise support for anti-Taliban forces, this time internationally. In the first instance, China, which has rushed to recognise the Taliban, will receive a portion of public disgrace, especially if the Taliban begin punishing Westernised apostates.



It is very possible that the Muslim Brotherhood will mobilise its network and activate its Special Apparatus in support of the Taliban "brothers". A very strong, global network that brings together Turkey, Qatar, Iran, Pakistan, the Palestinians and so on. A network that can reactivate globally dispersed terrorist cells that have been apparently "dormant" during the pandemic.

internationally. In the first instance, China, which has rushed to recognise the Taliban, will receive a portion of public disgrace, especially if the Taliban begin punishing Westernised apostates. Russia will most likely choose the path of neutrality, preferring to turn into a transmission belt between the conflicting parties. And the other regional players, with connections to the Muslim Brotherhood as well as to China – such as Pakistan, to Russia and secondarily to the Muslim Brotherhood and China – such as Iran, or only to Russia and secondarily China – such as Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, will be targeted not only by the masses of Afghan refugees, but also by the risks of an open internationalised conflict at the borders. Europeans, though highly critical of the way the Americans have handled the withdrawal from Afghanistan, will probably prefer not to recognise the Taliban regime (Cook, Grieshaber, 2021) and to financially support refugee-targeted states.

Subsequently, it is very possible that the Muslim Brotherhood will mobilise its network and activate its *Special Apparatus* in support of the Taliban "brothers". A very strong, global network that brings together Turkey, Qatar, Iran, Pakistan, the Palestinians and so on (Popescu). A network that can reactivate globally dispersed terrorist cells that have been apparently "dormant" during the pandemic. Therefore, it is possible to witness the outbreak of a fifth wave of Islamist terrorism, which can act either by the classic means of self-detonation and knife killings, or by burning forests, by using dirty bombs or vectors of biological warfare disseminated by drones etc. However, it is possible to witness a fractionalisation of the network, as there are also former or descendants of former Mujahideen on the side of the anti-Taliban resistance. As well as in the management of the network there are agents of different geostrategic players active globally.

On the other hand, Afghan anti-Taliban resistance will benefit from the support of those who do not want a neighbouring Hanabilah emirate, such as the Russian Federation, which has publicly stated it (TOLONews, 2021), and India, which has 160 million Muslims, many educated in Deobandi seminars, and a frozen conflict with Pakistan over Kashmir sovereignty (Simina, 2016). Moreover, the support of those who do not want the Chinese hegemonic megaproject in Eurasia to materialise such as: the Russians, who understand that the Great Chinese Strategy ends up by the containment of the Russian Federation;

the Indians, who feel threatened by the Chinese economic and military presence in the Indian Ocean; and obviously, the Americans, who understand that China's hegemonic rise is a reality. They are joined by other players who do not want the Muslim Brotherhood to build a Caliphate in Afghanistan and to settle down an Islamist "belt" that will start in Qatar, Gaza and the Palestinian territories, going in Lebanon and then in Turkey, to reach Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan (Popescu). An Islamist belt that would blow up the already fragile balances of the Middle East and endanger Russia's internal security ring in Central Asia, also called "its soft belly". Russia, India, Israel, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the Maldives etc. are also included here. And, it would not be out of the question that other Asian allies of the Americans may come into the play, interested in dispersing China's attention from its targets in the Pacific region. On the other hand, the Taliban's response is expected to be sustained, given that by the capitulation of the Afghan military units, Islamists have taken possession of their weapons and ammunition (France 24, 2021).

Such an internationalised conflict on China's border, in the immediate vicinity of the Uighur region of former East Turkestan, may lead the oppressed Uighur population to revolt against Beijing's Communist dictatorship. Pakistan, in turn, could face a new episode of insurgency of the Baluchi people, driven by secessionist ideas (Gatani, 2021), and/or the Sindh people, also driven by the "seeds" of Sindhudesh separatism (Khan, 2020), and/or the people of Gilgit-Baltistan province where there is a movement that militates for the independence of Balawaristan (Bolda, 2014), a situation that would create a corridor of instability that could stretch from the Amu Darya basin to the Gulf of Oman. And, a reheating of the conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir would raise the issue of a confrontation between two nuclear powers.

Destabilising processes can also affect Iran, where there are separatist groups, but the likelihood of success is lower, given the strong Russian support for Tehran's theocrats. Similarly, instability could lead to the Fergana Valley, which stretches across Eastern Uzbekistan, Southern Kyrgyzstan and Northern Tajikistan, where ethnic conflicts and Islamist movements have a history since the Soviet era. But given the exceptional strategic value of the Central Asian states for the security of the Russian Federation, instability is less likely to turn into a major conflict.



Pakistan, in turn, could face a new episode of insurgency of the Baluchi people, driven by secessionist ideas, and/or the Sindh people, also driven by the "seeds" of Sindhudesh separatism, and/or the people of Gilgit-Baltistan province where there is a movement that militates for the independence of Balawaristan, a situation that would create a corridor of instability that could stretch from the Amu Darya basin to the Gulf of Oman.



The US withdrawal from Afghanistan can seriously destabilise the security situation in the "World Balkans", involving regional and extra-regional players in a potential civil conflict, confirming Iqbal's words in the motto of this article that Afghanistan is the "heart" of Asia, and that from its discord, the discord of Asia is born, and, conversely, from its concord, the concord of Asia is born.

With a fragmented South Asia, with the "World Balkans" threatened by instability and ongoing conflicts, neither the unification of the Eurasian coast (the Rimland) under the domination of a single regional power (China) nor the hegemonic mega-projects of pan-continental (Chinese) economic "bridges" can materialise with the same success as before. The same strategy that the Russian Federation applied in the former rebel Soviet states, riparian to the Black Sea. And, with a major outbreak of instability at its own border, in the immediate vicinity of an own region where Islamist insurgency is very possible, it is hard to believe that China's aggressive intentions toward Taiwan and its domineering behaviour toward the other states in the South China Sea will materialise just as easily.

Here is how the US withdrawal from Afghanistan can seriously destabilise the security situation in the "World Balkans", involving regional and extra-regional players in a potential civil conflict, confirming Iqbal's words in the motto of this article that Afghanistan is the "heart" of Asia, and that from its discord, the discord of Asia is born, and, conversely, from its concord, the concord of Asia is born.

In addition, the withdrawal of the USA and its NATO allies from Afghanistan reduces costs for Western taxpayers, a matter that supports budgets severely affected by the Covid 19 pandemic. And, last but not least, America puts an end to small wars to prepare for the potential hegemonic war that could break out at some point and to restore its financial balance, severely destabilised by the costs of attrition wars, turning geopolitical areas, whose regional balance is vital for its strategic competitors, into stakes of competition and geopolitical domination.

And the Europeans will receive more and more refugees, under the conditions of the economic crisis generated by the pandemic with the Chinese flu virus, a matter that will contribute to further weakening the European construction and fuelling the Europhobic discourse. A potential situation valid for all the three scenarios.

THE SECOND SCENARIO, CARRIED OUT IN THE SHORT AND MEDIUM TERM

The Afghan resistance announced by the group gathered around Massoud fails. The Taliban take over the entire power and establish an ultra-conservative regime. They proclaim the Salafi Emirate, supported by the huge network of the Muslim Brotherhood, which will turn Afghanistan into a safe haven for its Secret Apparatus.

The "Islamist belt" of the Middle East becomes functional, with Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Qatar and the Palestinian Territories as vectors. Pursuing the materialisation of the central objectives of the Muslim Brotherhood – the building of the Global Caliphate with its capital in Jerusalem – but also partisan interests in the power game within the Islamic area, the Hamas, the Taliban, Hezbollah, Pakistani Islamists, possibly joined by former and current fighters from DAESH, Al Qa'ida, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Houthi militias, African and Central Asian Islamists, Sri Lankan and Indonesian Islamists etc., could build a common front against Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other monarchies from the Gulf region. An issue that could greatly destabilise not only the "World Balkans" but also the entire Middle East and even states in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. As in the previous scenario, a fifth wave of Islamist terrorism is likely to break out, and it is not out of the question to witness even a second "Arab Spring" that will wreak havoc on states such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and others.

It is likely that the Taliban regime will only be recognised by the states connected to the Muslim Brotherhood and by China (possibly Russia). China's political support for the Taliban will generate public image costs for the Asian state, in the context of the chaos and the televised despair of the Westernised Afghan population after "the fall" of Kabul. Image already "wrinkled" by less and less veiled allegations about the laboratory origin of the SARS-COV 2 virus, of which China might be no stranger (BBC, 2021). Russia, worried about the resurgence of Hanabilah Islamism in the immediate vicinity of its Central Asian "soft belly", will seek to strengthen its military presence in the region and its alliances with states interested in the containment of the Islamists. Russian-Chinese relations are likely to strain as a result of the Chinese-Taliban and Muslim Brotherhood ties, and mutual suspicions about underground games might become increasingly intense. Tensions could affect the Russian-Chinese binomial, which acts in areas of great geostrategic value to Russia, such as the North-South East-European Corridor or the Caucasus. Russian-American relations could be further improved, given that China's hegemonic ambitions are disturbing both great powers. And, Beijing's support for the Taliban Islamism, by recognising their regime and, implicitly, the Emirate, is affecting Russia's security interests. A Russian state that must also manage an advanced Chinese economic and political presence in the Arctic,



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It is likely that the Taliban regime will only be recognised by the states connected to the Muslim Brotherhood and by China (possibly Russia). China's political support for the Taliban will generate public image costs for the Asian state, in the context of the chaos and the televised despair of the Westernised Afghan population after "the fall" of Kabul. Image already "wrinkled" by less and less veiled allegations about the laboratory origin of the SARS-COV 2 virus, of which China might be no stranger.



part of the strategic plan of the “Polar Silk Road”. The “Islamist belt” will also disturb India, which not only has a frozen conflict with Pakistan, but also has a wide border with it. This could lead to the creation of a system of regional and extra-regional alliances to counter the Islamist emergence, along with the Chinese emergence, alliances that could bring together Russia, India, the USA and the United Kingdom, the Europeans, Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the other aligned states of the Gulf Region, as well as states of Southeast Asia. In such a security environment, the risk of fragmentation of the Rimland increases exponentially and it is hard to believe that the “Silk Belt and Road” mega-project can be continued with the same success as before. It is also hard to believe (but not impossible) that the Chinese state will allow itself to open a front in the Pacific, as long as there is a major outbreak of instability on its Eastern border.

There may be a possibility for the Chinese state to engage militarily in Afghanistan as a result of the export of Islamist insurgency to the Xinjiang region. This is an unlikely, but not impossible, scenario, given the risks of such a decision for China.

As it can be seen, in both cases the final strategic result is the same: delaying the materialisation of the “Silk Belt and Road”; preventing the coagulation of the coastal land of Eurasia under a regional hegemony (China); creating a hotbed of instability and of radical ultra-conservative Islamism on the Chinese border in the immediate vicinity of the Uighur-occupied region; dissipating China’s attention from the strategic situation in the Pacific; emergence of a major outbreak of instability in the immediate vicinity of the Russian Federation’s vital, internal, security ring; inevitable tension in Russian-Chinese relations through divergent interests towards the Taliban Emirate; interference of India, directly threatened by a potential export of insurgency among Deobandi Muslims from its national territory. An Asian trilateral directly targeted by the outbreak of ultra-conservative Islamism, which has become active shortly after the Taliban took power.

THE THIRD SCENARIO, IN THE MEDIUM TERM

And, there may be a possibility for the Chinese state to engage militarily in Afghanistan as a result of the export of Islamist insurgency to the Xinjiang region. This is an unlikely, but not impossible, scenario, given the risks of such a decision for China. Not so much from the point of view of the military management of Afghanistan, where the Chinese military could be much more efficient than the Russian and American predecessors, due to the native, Confucianist discipline, and the austerity of the lifestyle, to the huge number of soldiers

who could also be mobilised, the economic and technological force that could ensure the logistics of such an approach, but, especially, from the point of view of being involved in a war with the Global Islamist Network, considering the risk of such conflict internationalisation, on the model of the 1979 War, in the context in which China is already in a fiercer competition with the USA. In addition, Russia would have no reason to want a Chinese-dominated Afghanistan, transformed into an impregnable fortress, in the immediate vicinity of its Central Asian “soft belly” – directly targeted by the Chinese strategic plans. Nor would India be very comfortable with an Afghan-Pakistani bloc dominated by China on its border.

Obviously, even in this case, China’s strategic plans in Eurasia will no longer have the same dynamics.

All of these scenarios, and others that are less plausible, because they involve unforeseen “black swan” events, serve some of the American strategic imperatives in Eurasia:

- preventing the unification of the coastal zone of the continental mass (Rimland) under a unitary regional leadership;
- preventing the unification of the “Western Balkans” under a regional power;
- preventing the establishment of the Russian-Chinese geopolitical bloc.

A cynical *realpolitik* exercise demonstrating that idealism in international relations is just a utopia.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Of course, the question arises as to why the Biden Administration ordered the withdrawal of the US military in such a hurry, severely damaging his country’s image, through similarities to the evacuation of Saigon at the end of the lost War in Vietnam, on 30 April 1975, and disregarding the fact that, at that time, more than 11,000 Americans and many other citizens of the partner states were still in Afghanistan?

One explanation could be related to the need to move troops urgently to other theatres. Another one could be related to a huge mistake, induced or not induced to the current president, which could cost him his chair, given that he is suspected of not being in perfect health. A change that would bring the current Vice President, Kamala Harris, to the White House, along with her own political entourage,



All of these scenarios, and others that are less plausible, because they involve unforeseen “black swan” events, serve some of the American strategic imperatives in Eurasia: preventing the unification of the coastal zone of the continental mass (Rimland) under a unitary regional leadership; preventing the unification of the “Western Balkans” under a regional power; preventing the establishment of the Russian-Chinese geopolitical bloc.



The idea of cultural globalisation through economic globalisation and consumerism is a utopia.

It is absolutely necessary to have a deep understanding and acceptance of the culture and civilisation of the target state.

different from that of President Biden. A change that would propel Kamala Harris to the forefront of the upcoming US presidential election, to the detriment of the ambitions of former First Ladies, Michelle Obama and Hillary Clinton. A pretty likely option, if we look at the huge propaganda machine which went against Joe Biden. And, a last option, which does not exclude the other two, would be that we are witnessing a well-thought-out and implemented scenario, a well-controlled public chaos and emotion, to reset both the American internal game and the external one, the global political game, at a time when the costs of the US military presence in Afghanistan outweighed the strategic and economic benefits.

Another question is how much this *realpolitik* exercise will cost America. How hard will it be for the US Government to erase the image of a defeated state by a gang of pseudo-nomads armed with AKMs, image generated by the staging of the helicopter evacuation of American personnel from Kabul? And how much will this decision weigh on America's future partnership with the rest of the world? If we were to follow the Russian, Chinese and a certain part of the American and European press, it will weigh heavily. If we understand that no alliance is eternal, only the national interest and geography being eternal, then we would avoid falling prey to emotions, remaining confined to the sphere of cold analysis and drawing the appropriate conclusions. Even if they do not make us feel comfortable.

And, last but not least, the military and political experiences of the Allies in Afghanistan have reiterated some well-known conclusions from the history, even recent, of humanity:

- the export of democracy and Western civilisational models to other civilisational spaces is counterproductive and illusory;
- the idea of cultural globalisation through economic globalisation and consumerism is a utopia;
- the idea of a new non-Westphalian Western world order, which would replace both the Westphalian world order accepted by all civilisational spaces and the own, traditional, orders of those spaces, is also a utopia;
- it is absolutely necessary to have a deep understanding and acceptance of the culture and civilisation of the target state;
- in the absence of a vital motivation, related to own state survival, any war of attrition, waged at a great distance

- from own borders and for reasons understood by very few, ends in a withdrawal, equivalent to a defeat, of the external military forces engaged in the field, in the absence of effective post-conflict stabilisation mechanisms;
- in the absence of an unconditional surrender of the enemy, no victory can be total;
- the mountainous terrain and, especially the high, rugged mountain ranges, facilitate the guerrilla war, a war in front of which the conventional combat tactics are not effective;
- in a hostile civilisational space, the wars that are initiated must be of the proxy type;
- economic and political interference in military decision-making is devastating;
- the high quality of the information is the result of the activity of a whole chain of professionals, who do not have to be dependent on some ideologies and politically correct slogans;
- it is impossible to turn a militarily occupied nation/population into a real ally.

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Brief Data on Statistical and Social Demography

According to the *CIA WorldFactBook*, in July 2021, the total population of Afghanistan was 37,466,414. The distribution of the population is uneven, being concentrated mainly in the valleys of the mountainous areas and in the plains of the North and South. The age pyramid is a broad-based one, specific to poor and underdeveloped countries with high birth rates and low life expectancy at birth, 40.62% of the population being made up of children aged 0-14 years and just 6% of the population being over 55. In July 2021, Afghanistan recorded the highest infant mortality rate in the world, at 106.75 deaths per 1,000 live births, indicating an extremely low level of civilisation and education of mothers and of the development of healthcare networks and sanitation. In fact, the density of doctors in 2016 was 0.28 per 1,000 inhabitants and the density of hospital blankets was 0.4 per 1,000 inhabitants. Life expectancy at birth in July 2021 was 53.25 years (51.73 years for men, 54.85 years for women).

The 2004 Constitution, still in force at the time of writing, recognises 14 ethnic groups: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Baluchi, Turkmen, Nuristani, Pamiri, Arab, Gujar, Brahui, Qizilbash, Aimaq and Pashai. The official languages are Afghan Persian or Dari, spoken by 78% of the population, and Pashto, spoken by 50% of Afghans. Afghans are 99.7% Muslim (84.7-89.7% Sunnis, 10-15% Shiites). The favourite residence environment is the rural one, only 26.3% of the population being urbanised. In July 2018, only 43% of the population over the age of 15 was literate (55.5% of men and 29.8% of women).

Brief Political-Administrative Data

At the time of writing, on 16 August 2021, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a presidential republic with its capital in Kabul. It consists of 34 provinces: Badakhshan, Badghis, Baghlan, Balkh, Bamyan, Daykundi, Farah, Faryab, Ghazni, Ghor, Helmand, Herat, Jowzjan, Kabul,



Kandahar, Kapisa, Khost, Kunar, Kunduz, Laghman, Logar, Nangarhar, Nimroz, Nuristan, Paktika, Paktiya, Panjshir, Parwan, Samangan, Sar-e Pul, Takhar, Uruzgan, Wardak, Zabul. The Constitution, still in force, was ratified on 26 January 2004. The legal system is mixed, secular and Islamic. National Day celebrates independence from British rule on 19 August 1919 (CIA WorldFactBook, 2021).

Brief Economic Data

According to the *CIA WorldFactBook*, in 2019, Afghanistan was one of the poorest countries in the world, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of only US \$ 78.557 billion and a GDP per capita of 2,065 USD. In 2016, 54.5% of the Afghan population lived below the subsistence threshold of 1.5 USD/capita/day and 23.9% of Afghans did not have a job. In 2016, Afghanistan's main export products, totalling \$ 784 million, were gold, sandstone, scrap metal, grapes, opium, fruits and nuts, insect resins, cotton, hand-woven rugs. The main export partners were the United Arab Emirates 45%, Pakistan 24%, India 22%, China 1%. Also in 2016, the main import products, totalling USD 7.616 billion were wheat flour, radio broadcasting equipment, refined oil, rolled tobacco, aircraft parts, synthetic fabrics. The main import partners were the United Arab Emirates 23% , Pakistan 17%, India 13%. As it can be seen, the state's trade balance is intensely unbalanced in favour of imports, which further deepens the country's economic stagnation. Unlike the sub-Saharan states, which in turn face poverty and underdevelopment, Afghanistan is 100% electrified in urban areas and 98% in rural areas and access to drinking water is 95.9% in rural areas and 61.4% in rural areas. In 2019, 63.18% of the population owned a mobile phone. Afghanistan has, in addition to the two river ports in the North, 34,903 km of roads, of which 17,903 km are paved, a heliport, 29 airports with paved runways and 17 with unpaved runways, as well as 466 km of gas pipeline.

Challenges related to the Quality of the Environment

According to the same site, *CIA WorldFactBook*, the main challenges regarding the quality of the environment are represented by the limited volume of natural freshwater resources; inadequate supply of drinking water to the population; soil degradation; overgrazing; deforestation.





POLITICAL THREATS TO ENERGY SECURITY IN THE BLACK SEA

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The International World Order is the system of states we function in. It has been the dominant narrative, especially since 2014, that revisionist powers are trying to challenge and destabilise the order and replace it with one where they influence geopolitical outcomes exclusively in their favour and exert much more power than they would be able to in the current international system. This competition for strategic dominance is often called Great Power Competition having the US as the centre and the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China as challenger great powers. The overall purpose of the current study is to succinctly analyse Russia's approach to grand strategy and understanding national interest, and to apply the mentioned aspects to the energy realm specifically, all the while being geographically focused on the Black Sea.

Keywords: Black Sea; energy security; NATO; Russian Federation; hard power;



INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the Kremlin has been successful in achieving important strategic goals as they relate to the Black Sea, positioning itself advantageously in the geopolitical theatre. The most recent victory is the fact that a bilateral meeting framework with Washington was secured, the first step materialising on 20 May 2021 when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken met in Reykjavik, on the sidelines of the Arctic Council. Moreover, a Russia-USA Summit took place mid-June 2021. *Hard power* with an emphasis on influence campaigns has been the instrument of choice in Russia since the 1920s and there is clear evidence that it is effective in achieving the political goals of the Kremlin, in spite of numerous messages from the EU and the White House that Russian aggression will not be tolerated, that further economic sanctions will be imposed and that the international system will not tolerate “*revisionist behaviour*”. In essence, this is probably the biggest challenge, namely how the transatlantic community and, implicitly, regional actors can effectively manage such posture without crossing the threshold of war.

The study focuses on the energy element of security, which will be analysed from a Russian perspective. Thus, the article analyses Russia's approach to *grand strategy* and *understanding of national interest*, exploring the impact of the two concepts in the energy realm specifically, all the while being geographically focused on the Black Sea. Moreover, the study is aimed at outlining why energy and the Black Sea play such a vital role in Russian strategic output.

Not understanding or not addressing the mentioned aspects in a more targeted way could lead to an increased energy security dilemma in the Black Sea and inherently to strategic instability in the region

Hard power with an emphasis on influence campaigns has been the instrument of choice in Russia since the 1920s and there is clear evidence that it is effective in achieving the political goals of the Kremlin, in spite of numerous messages from the EU and the White House that Russian aggression will not be tolerated, that further economic sanctions will be imposed and that the international system will not tolerate “revisionist behaviour”.



From a security standpoint, the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit Communiqué expressed the changing structure of the international system and implicitly of the Black Sea strategic space: "Russia's recent activities and policies have reduced stability and security, increased unpredictability, and changed the security environment".

as well as beyond. Furthermore, focusing on exclusively military means could lead to escalation, miscalculations and, ultimately, conflict.

The methodology combines various sources, including strategic guidance documents, official Russian policy statements, official speeches and declarations, interviews of Russian political decision-makers and writings by Russian and international military analysts and academics.

This paper takes a narrow, security-focused perspective on energy, in general, and on oil and gas, in particular. Because of the nature of Russian strategic structure, the article also explores the developments in the maritime domain. Throughout the article, energy security is to be understood as the *"provision of affordable, reliable, diverse, and ample supplies of oil and gas... (and) adequate infrastructure to deliver these supplies to market"* (Cooper, Kalicki, Goldwyn, 2005).

THE STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

The complexity of the Black Sea strategic environment is often mentioned by practitioners of security, political decision-makers and academics alike. This complexity is due in large part to the energy dynamics. From a security standpoint, the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit Communiqué expressed the changing structure of the international system and implicitly of the Black Sea strategic space: *"Russia's recent activities and policies have reduced stability and security, increased unpredictability, and changed the security environment"* (NATO, 2016, art. 9). Regional stability was mostly affected by Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. This event strongly altered the course of international patterns of engagement with the Russian Federation, however, it was not the only catalyst for change. Regional *hard power* dynamics today in the Black Sea is dominated by the Russian Federation and NATO. The Alliance includes three littoral states: Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. Finally, the Black Sea represents a *Great Power Competition* theatre, one where one of the powers already had a territorial victory. *Great Power Competition* is, in essence, a race to become the power capable to shape the future of the region as well as the most influential actor in the international system, one that shapes outcomes and influences other actors behaviour to its advantage. The innate intricacy of the strategic environment is obvious

in the non-homogenous allied and partner range of national, regional and even global perspectives. Everyone can agree the environment is complex. However, not many can agree on a comprehensive strategy. There is no consensus yet within NATO as to how to engage Russia in the Black Sea and there is no NATO Black Sea Strategy.

The constellation of stakeholders in the Black Sea is diverse from multiple points of view: cultural, ethnic, economic, political and religious. During the Cold War, the Black Sea was a frozen area and the macro level control of the bipolar system ensured strategic stability. The Soviet Union dominated the Black Sea and NATO was deterring through the Republic of Turkey. After a period of transformation and structural geopolitical shifts following the end of the Cold War, the Black Sea is once again a laden strategic theatre for Europe, for the transatlantic community, and, implicitly, for the international system in its entirety. Given the key role the Black Sea plays in Russian *grand strategy* paired with a lack of a comprehensive, tailored NATO strategy towards different areas, the Black Sea runs the risk of becoming either a geopolitical space dominated by one great power or a conflict generator. Both situations would be damaging to the International World Order. However, the mentioned situations are preventable.

In the context of the present article, the analysis will focus on one stakeholder, mainly, the Russian Federation. The reasoning is grounded in the reality that, at present, Russia dominates the Black Sea from a military viewpoint and the paper is aimed at underpinning how this dominance affects energy security in the area.

Russia has a unique geostrategic position, *"unlike any other nation in the world"* (Covington, 2016, p. 7). The Kremlin and Russian military decision-makers will think about how to defend the country in a way that meets the requirements of this unique strategic environment and in line with the political goals of Russian leadership. In this regard, the words of Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov are illustrative: *"Many different opinions have been expressed in this connection including the fear that we have a distorted view of the international situation and Russia's international standing. I perceive this as an echo of the eternal dispute between pro-Western liberals and the advocates of Russia's unique path"* (Lavrov, 2016). Russian strategic thinking is built



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What the West defines as Russian hybrid warfare is in fact "a single form of warfare that couples the ambiguous, non-attributable means of war to <non-ambiguous> means of war – conventional and nuclear forces". Conventional military and non-military structures are under the same leadership, employing a single overarching strategy to achieve a set of objectives defined by national interest.

on strong pillars, pillars which the Russian leadership understands very well and cultivate. The General Staff is the brain of the armed forces, the General Staff Academy and other academies and universities support it in institutionalising this culture of strategic thought into their officer corps. Russian Armed Forces act in concert with the nation's security services and other government ministries. The holistic approach is typical to Russian attitude toward defence planning and represents a very powerful advantage vis-à-vis any other power, alliance or competitor. There is no separation of powers in the state's structure, thus fostering a cohesive grand strategy and an effective operational approach as well as the capability to act as a whole nation at war. What the West defines as *Russian hybrid warfare* is in fact *"a single form of warfare that couples the ambiguous, non-attributable means of war to <non-ambiguous> means of war – conventional and nuclear forces"* (Covington, p. 9). Conventional military and non-military structures are under the same leadership, employing a single overarching strategy to achieve a set of objectives defined by national interest. This is different from the US *"seamless integration of multiple elements of national, and military power – diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military"* (DoD, 2018). Vladimir Putin announced at the beginning of his presidency that he would consolidate political powers in Russia into the so-called *"power vertical"*, also referred to as the *"l'état, c'est Putin"* model (Bremmer, Charap, 2006, p. 83). In this governance model power is concentrated *"in the executive at the expense of the legislative and judicial branches of the federal government and the once-powerful regional bosses"* (Ib., p. 84).

Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020 defines the *"national interests of the Russian Federation"* as *"the aggregate of the internal and external needs of the state in ensuring the protection and stable development of the individual, society and the state"* (Giles, 2009). A threat to national security is considered *"the direct or indirect possibility of damage to constitutional rights and freedoms, quality of life, sovereignty/territorial integrity, stable development of the Russian Federation, defence and security of the state"* and the *"system of national security"* encompasses *"the forces and means which ensure national security"* (Ib.).

In order to operationalise the strategy, Russia has steadily increased its capabilities as well as operations of air, sea, and land forces in the region. The Russian Navy has been modernised and the Black Sea Fleet has undergone major technological developments. Russia has also leveraged the increased capabilities in real combat, for example in the intervention in Syria, when the Black Sea served as main access road for troop and equipment transport.

If post-Cold War Russia entered a period of decline both militarily and economically, under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, Russia has built credible combat power and invested heavily in modernising its armed forces, implicitly the Russian Navy. Not few in western circles warn about the Russian *A2/AD fortress* in the Black Sea. From the Russian shores this is viewed as sound defensive posture to deter NATO as well as to project power beyond the region. Tzar Ivan the Terrible referred to this posture as attrition and attack of supply lines in periphery/buffer zones.

THE ROLE OF ENERGY IN RUSSIAN STRATEGIC OUTPUT

According to official doctrine, the Black Sea is designated as being one of high strategic importance because it plays a crucial role in the ultimate political objective of the Kremlin: *"Foreign interest in energy reserves to which Russia feels it has a moral, if not necessarily a legal right, is treated as a potential threat"* (Ib., p. 8). A significant amount of resources are in the Black Sea and the Wider Black Sea Area. The energy sector in Russia is state owned. To add to the power of the energy companies, in July 2007, Russia's Duma passed a bill that would allow energy companies Gazprom and Transneft the right to create private, internal armies. In Russia, energy companies are in effect protected by private armies. Transneft controls Russia's oil pipeline infrastructure while Gazprom embodies the Russian natural gas monopoly (Hurst, 2010, p. 62). Gazprom is one of Russia's most important instruments of state power and, sometimes, a very feared weapon. In political science, *"traditional militarisation theory argues that as the armed forces increase their influence in government, because of an increase in their capabilities, the state becomes more likely to adopt an aggressive*



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foreign policy that can lead to war" (Schofield, 2007). It is not the case in Russian strategic thinking. Soviet and later on Russian *grand strategy* have been a sort of art in itself, carefully crafted by taking into account not only military capabilities, technologies and political ends, but also an enemy's cultural sensitivities, values, level of education, religion and socio-demographic as well as well as socio-economic make-up. It would be reductive to limit the role of energy in Russian strategic thinking by deeming it to be militarised or labelling it as *hybrid warfare* or *grey zone combat*. The Russian Federation Security Strategy calls on energy as being a pillar of overall Russian security: *"One of the main long-term directions of national security in the economic sphere is energy security"* (National Concept of the Russian Federation, 2000). The same document also explains what that means in Russian perspective, what conditions have to be met: *"Essential conditions of national and global energy security include multilateral cooperation in the interests of creating markets for energy resources that correspond to WTO principles, the development and international exchange of promising energy-saving technologies, and likewise the use of ecologically clean, alternative sources of energy"*. It continues by outlining what is understood by energy security: *"The main aspects of energy security are the stable supply of sufficient standard quality sources of energy; the effective use of energy resources by increasing the competitiveness of domestic producers; the prevention of possible fuel-energy resource deficits; the creation of strategic stocks of fuel, reserve capacities and standard equipment; and ensuring the stable functioning of the system of energy and fuel provision"* (Ib.).

President Putin has been able to use energy as a very damaging political tool against the states in the post-Soviet space. It is worth noting that inflicting damage is not a guarantee of victory. Often Russia uses energy in order to obtain desired political outcomes or to punish countries, especially states in its *"near abroad"*, if the Kremlin concludes that they have not acted in line with Russian interests. State control over the supply of energy is a major source of leverage for the Kremlin: in January 2006 Gazprom cut off energy supplies to Ukraine and then turned them back on a day later, in February 2008 Gazprom accused Ukraine it had accumulated over \$1.5 billion in debts

for supplies from 2007, the tension peaked, contradictory statements from both ensued, and it all culminated with Gazprom cutting oil and gas supplies in half (Grigas, 2012). Pipelines were turned back on to maximum power after Russia reached an agreement to its liking regarding supply intermediaries like RosUkrEnergo, which eventually got eliminated. The Kremlin was successful in reaching a political goal. In the winter of 2008 to 2009: *"Gazprom cut off all supplies for Ukraine's use on January 1, after weeks of negotiations on outstanding debts and prices for 2009. Gazprom proposed to raise the price to \$250 from \$179.5. Ukraine said it was prepared to pay \$201 and wanted to raise gas transit fees. Gazprom then raised the price again to \$458"* (Reuters, 2009). This mode of operation goes further back to the early '90s, when Russia turned off energy supplies to the Baltic states, then not yet EU nor NATO members, in an attempt to influence and destabilise their pursuit for integration with the Western security and political structures. In 1992, the same tactic was used in response, some say in retaliation, following demands by the Baltic states for Russia to remove its remaining military forces from the region.

It is very important to understand that to a centralised energy economy under state monopoly, the end is obtaining, maintaining and strengthening geopolitical power, not so much economic profits and market valuation. The long game is protecting and furthering Russian national interests. The Russian approach sees energy as a military means to an end, a weapon with a strong coercive effect.

Russian national interests have several components: *"Russia's five core interests include defence of the country and the regime, influence in the near abroad, a vision of Russia as a great power, non-interference in domestic affairs, and political and economic cooperation as an equal to other great powers"* (Radin, Reach, 2017). Access to abundant energy resources gives Russia power. Power after all is *"having the ability to influence another to act in ways in which that entity would not have acted otherwise"* (Wilson Center, 2009, p. 114). Russia is exercising its power because it can and it will continue to do so until it no longer serves its interests or the price to pay is too high. The price for example is sanctions, but even from this vantage point, Russia is playing, so to speak, a very smart political game and calls US's bluff. Russia is working



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with some Western countries on building pipelines that will facilitate even more Russian energy exports to Europe and by doing so it not only generates revenues but it also fuels tensions between allies. In turn, tensions eventually translate into policy as well as consequences for the European security structure. The typical example for this is Germany and the Nord Stream II Pipeline that, in essence, is a direct hit to Ukrainian energy revenue.

Due to its vital role in Russian strategic output, energy has serious effects on the power dynamics internationally, regionally, on the maritime security regime in the Black Sea and, implicitly, on the international system. The oil and gas pipeline architecture in the Black Sea includes Russian controlled Blue Stream and Turk Stream (Gazprom).

ENERGY SECURITY IN THE BLACK SEA – THE MILITARY DIMENSION OF RESOURCE COMPETITION

The effects of political threats on energy supply in the Black Sea have long had a destabilising effect on the region. In *Russian National Security Concept*, energy, just as much as any other vital interest of the state is defended by the armed forces: *“The interests of ensuring the national security of the Russian Federation predetermine necessity of a Russian military presence in certain strategically important regions of the world in appropriate circumstances”* (Russian National Security Concept, lb.).

At global level, the Black Sea is an arena for great power competition with both Russia and China. *Great Power Competition* is not warfare. It is a contest in the international system and the winner will be able to shape/decisively influence the structure of the system through *“security architectures, as well as norms and practices worldwide, including trade and investment regimes and the development and regulation of new technological infrastructures”* (Wilson Center, 2021). A veteran of NATO, retired US General Ben Hodges wrote about the high potential for conflict in the event there is no effective strategy for the Black Sea: *“Great power competition prevents great power conflict. Conversely, failure to compete and to demonstrate*

and protect interests, in all domains, can lead to power vacuums and misunderstandings that can, in turn, lead to an escalation of tensions and actual conflict” (Hodges, 2021).

At regional level, in the Black Sea, Russia needs to counter a military alliance, NATO, as well as two states that are EU members: Romania and Bulgaria. From a Russian perspective, these are all threats even if some countries are closer to the Kremlin than others. Energy security is directly tied to the military. Russian (Soviet and modern Russia) naval strategy historically relies on strategic deterrence and layered defence. Its strategic defence force remains about nuclear-capable ballistic missile submarines able to threaten the homeland of aggressor countries. The layered defence is provided by increasing defensive circles from the coast to hundreds of miles out to sea. After a period of decline post-Cold War, the Russian Federation has embarked on a modernisation of the armed forces. Geopolitically, Russia has also been very active after the rise to power of Vladimir Putin and, slowly, the military power balance in the region shifted in its favour. The 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea and the subsequent build-up of combat capabilities as well as military infrastructure in the region worked as a force multiplier in shifting the military balance. If the annexation in itself is viewed through fundamentally different vantage points by the Russian Federation, on the one hand, and by the transatlantic community, on the other hand, the Kremlin was very transparent about its intentions to militarise the Crimean Peninsula. The legitimisation of the military build-up came under the pretence of defending itself from an ever expanding, aggressive NATO and, what the Kremlin perceived as American influence.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that all official Russian documents consistently reiterate the five core interests that guide Russian Foreign Policy: defence of the country and the regime, influence in the near abroad, a vision of Russia as a great power, non-interference in domestic affairs, political and economic cooperation as a partner equal to other great powers (Radin, Reach, lb.). All the mentioned core interest are directly tied to the Black Sea. The Chief of Russia’s General Staff, Valery Gerasimov concluded in 2016: *“Several years ago the Russian fleet’s combat capabilities were in stark contrast*



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with that of the Turkish Navy. Some even said that Turkey was in full command of the Black Sea. Now it's different" (TASS, 2016). General Gerasimov furthermore pointed out that the Black Sea Fleet had been reinforced by submarines carrying the Kalibr missile system. The Kalibr missile system is very important to the Russian navy since it provides for long range nuclear capabilities that can reach land based enemy states (Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, 2021).

The diplomatic posture changed in the Black Sea. There have been very tense moments at times, like November of 2018, which was quintessential coercive naval diplomacy: a maritime operation was carried out by the Russian Federation coast guard vessels under the Flag of the Federal Security Service in order to seize three Ukrainian vessels and detain the crews. At the same time, Su-25 fighters and Ka-52 combat helicopters from Crimea provided *"a showy enforcement of the blockade of the Kerch Strait leading into the Sea of Azov"* (Cenciotti, 2018).

A hindrance for NATO in the Black Sea is, firstly, the lack of a comprehensive Black Sea approach and, secondly, the fundamentally different way the Russian Federation, on the one hand, and the transatlantic community, on the other hand, view the world order and its moving parts, one being energy security. It is important to talk about NATO in the Black Sea because only through NATO can stability be preserved in the region. A Black Sea NATO Comprehensive Strategy will hopefully become reality at some point, most likely in a more distant future. Nonetheless, in order to engage Russia effectively, NATO will need to widen its definition of energy security and move past calling it an emerging or hybrid threat. If NATO is looking to build an effective approach, then, especially in the Black and Baltic Seas, it will need to plan on including energy transport routes and maritime extraction sites as part of the big picture maritime security framework. It will also need to increase political/cultural understanding efforts. According to Ukrainian Energy Ministry, the country lost 80% of oil and gas deposits in the Black Sea and a large portion of the port infrastructure because of the annexation of Crimea (Cohen, 2019). There are concerns about the freedom of navigation in both the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea. These are maritime issues and energy security issues at the same time.

Earlier this year at a news conference in Cairo, when asked about the Black Sea, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called US presence there *"regular occurrence"*. Mr. Lavrov also declared: *"Questions are being asked about what Russia is doing on the border with Ukraine. The answer is very simple: we live here, this is our country"* (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021).

Hard power must stay, but it should be complemented by NATO political efforts as well as educational effort. NATO and the USA, on bilateral basis, have a pronounced presence in the Black Sea. Romania, for example, is a pivot of the security architecture in the Black Sea. Now, more than ever, when Turkey is having its own strained relationship with some of its allies, Romania can become the anchor, the platform from which trust building measures and resilience building programmes originate. For Romania, NATO membership has meant a permanent break with the turbulent past and a guarantee that such times will not be returning. This speaks to the concept of including energy in a NATO Black Sea Strategy. It does not mean NATO will weaponize energy, it will mean that the concept of energy security will be widened to include deterrence and the pursuit of strategic dialogue with Russia.

George Kennan noted in his 1951 paper on American diplomacy: *"I see the most serious fault of our past policy formulation to lie in something that I might call the legalistic-moralistic approach to international problems. This approach runs like a red skein through our foreign policy of the last fifty years"* (p. 82). This is good advice from one of the most decisive figures of the Cold War.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to underscore some of the key motivations behind Russian Strategic thinking, especially in relation to energy. The focus on the Black Sea is in part due to the strategic importance the Black Sea has in Russian strategy thinking and in part due to the fact that the Black Sea is home to a significant amount of natural resources, especially oil and gas. It is very important to discuss it because energy is not an exclusively commercial element, but also an element of maritime security and the freedom of navigation.



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It is important to talk about NATO in the Black Sea because only through NATO can stability be preserved in the region. A Black Sea NATO Comprehensive Strategy will hopefully become reality at some point, most likely in a more distant future. Nonetheless, in order to engage Russia effectively, NATO will need to widen its definition of energy security and move past calling it an emerging or hybrid threat.



Energy is not an exclusively commercial element, but also an element of maritime security and the freedom of navigation. If the Black Sea is not given more strategic attention by both NATO and the EU, it runs the risk of becoming the most vulnerable area in European security. Moreover, European security itself is currently undergoing a period of structural changes.

If the Black Sea is not given more strategic attention by both NATO and the EU, it runs the risk of becoming the most vulnerable area in European security. Moreover, European security itself is currently undergoing a period of structural changes. The EU seeks to define its role as a security and defence actor, within the EU Strategic autonomy process. Two EU member states, Bulgaria and Romania, are Black Sea littoral states. Inadvertently, the overarching debate over how the EU intends to proceed in the realm of defence will affect future military/security dynamics in the region. It is the right time to have such a discussion. Key for NATO will be to move faster towards a common, comprehensive Black Sea strategy, ensuring its complementarity with EU efforts, not duplication. The lack of consensus among allies is an asymmetry that competitors are leveraging and will continue to do so. It is a vulnerability that the Russian Federation is capitalising on, as it does so in its military cooperation with Turkey and the energy cooperation with Germany.

This aspect will be hard to manage but necessary to address, as the then Chief of General Staff, now Romanian Minister of Defence, General Nicolae Ciucă declared in 2017 at the Defence and Security Committee of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Bucharest: *“the security situation from the Baltic Sea through the Black Sea and into the Mediterranean is not seen merely as a regional issue, but it is of concern to the entire Alliance. Considering the threats towards the Eastern Flank as a whole, NATO deterrence and defence posture rely on coherence and consistency”* (Ciucă, 2017). Consensus is only built with effort, effective communication and transparent consultation, it takes time. The longer the transatlantic community will wait to develop a Black Sea Strategy, the more the risk for conflict or miscalculation will increase.

Energy is vital to the Russian Federation. That is the reason why the security establishment will plan to defend and promote the energy sector regardless of NATO posture. Energy means power to the Russian Federation, power in all dimensions: political power because it allows Russia to directly and indirectly influence policy in other states and the EU, military power because energy fuels the Russian revenue stream, exports and therefore the GDP, which in turn will partly

be reinvested in arms technologies, military personnel, military reform and, finally, diplomatic power because, through energy, Russia projects power and it secures the continuation of its global reach. It will be very challenging for the transatlantic community to reach a consensus on how to engage Russia in the Black Sea because the interests are varied. However, it can be done, and it has to include transparency and very well thought through strategic messaging.

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THE BALTIC STATES – BETWEEN NATO’S PROTECTION AND RUSSIA’S THREAT –

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The three Baltic countries carry with them the heavy burden of the Soviet past, alongside their positioning in an area of interest to both the North Atlantic Alliance and Russia. The main research directions and the hypothesis of the present paper are grounded on the premise of the realistic approach in the study of international relations, according to which states are rational actors and lead a permanent competition to increase their power towards hegemony, as well as on the theoretical grounds of the balance of power. This article analyses the situation of the three Baltic states in the context of the tense relationship between NATO and Russia, but also in terms of the ability of each actor to project its power in the Baltic Sea. The main research hypothesis is that although the Baltic states are part of NATO and the EU, they are the most exposed members to the threat of Russian aggression, and hence, the more Russia strengthens its presence in the region, the more NATO will try to rebalance the balance of power to ensure the security of its members. The first direction of research consists in analysing the increasing level of risk to the security of the Baltic countries following the annexation of Crimea and, at the same time, the strengthening of military presence and scale of exercises carried out in the region, by both Russia and NATO. Moreover, the Baltic states need to identify potential vulnerabilities while facing the alternative fighting methods Russia may draw upon, such as hybrid actions, and therefore strengthen their defence capacity. Another direction hereby analysed is NATO’s vulnerability to Russia in the context of the Suwalki Corridor, which must be addressed during the forthcoming period. Following these directions, the article mostly relies on the qualitative research method, whilst also including the analysis of quantitative data.

Keywords: Baltic countries; NATO; Russia; Suwalki Corridor; military exercises;



INTRODUCTION

Events on the international political scene in recent years have brought changes to regional security in Eastern Europe. Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014, followed by the outbreak of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, determined both the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Alliance (NATO) to make major decisions to ensure the stability of the region and the security of their members on the eastern flank. At that time, the Baltic countries appeared as the most vulnerable to a Russian attack – although being members of NATO and the EU, by bordering Russia and being geographically located on the northeastern border of the North Atlantic Alliance, they could have presented a greater interest for Kremlin such as to challenge the Alliance and test its ability to defend its members, in accordance with the provisions of Article 5 (The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949)¹.

This article analyses several factors that influence the security in the Baltic region and that tip the balance of power in favour of one political and military actor or another. Based on the cultural and linguistic peculiarities that some Baltic citizens still share with the Russians, dating back from the period of the common history as part of the Soviet Union, the analysis proceeds to the current security challenges and the Allied response to counter Russia’s intimidation efforts and to discourage any of its potential aggressive actions. I believe that a better understanding of the cultural, social and linguistic context, as well as of the existing political and military context in the Baltic Sea, helps us to have a broader perspective on the events therein.

¹ “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.”



The Baltic region remains extremely important for maintaining security and stability throughout Eastern Europe, as well as for safeguarding international peace.

THE SITUATION OF THE BALTIC STATES AND RUSSIA'S LEVERAGE IN THE REGION

The integration of the Baltic countries within the Euro-Atlantic bodies

Between 1999 and 2004, the Baltic states did not clearly outline the direction of their foreign policy. On one hand, out of the three of them, Estonia had the clearest perspective of joining the European Union and Lithuania the North Atlantic Alliance, but, on the other hand, such a configuration, according to Zbigniew Brzezinski, would have placed Latvia in an extremely vulnerable position, especially as it has a large Russian population (Dahl, Järvenpää, 2014, p. 75). Since the late 1990s, there had been discussions about Russia's possible intentions in the region, with the EU Commissioner Leon Brittan drawing attention towards the need of bringing the Baltic states closer to Western Europe and acknowledging their prospects for joining NATO. Thus, according to Brittan, even in the absence of a guarantee regarding national security, they would send the message that they were making every effort to be part of NATO's peacekeeping efforts and that they are negotiating with the West for further integration (Mole, 2012, p. 155). The message was meant to make Russia understand that it could not prevent the former Soviet states from setting their own domestic and foreign policy priorities. In the end, the three states chose the path to the West all together, joining both NATO and the EU in 2004.

After the integration of the Baltic countries into the European and North Atlantic bodies, it was clear that Russia had lost influence over an important strategic and geopolitical area. The desire to maintain total control over the entire ex-Soviet territory was no longer valid for the Baltic region. The three Baltic states eventually became some of the strongest and most active supporters of NATO and the EU among the new states that joined in 2004, experiencing a successful post-communist transition, from the USSR to their integration within the Western structures (Jakniūnaitė, Berg, Ehin, 2009, pp. 125). Together with their accession, the new members also brought relevant

experience and information regarding the situation of the former Soviet states, information which could thus contribute to the creation of appropriate policies and the adoption of proper financial support measures for the countries in the Eastern neighbourhood (Paulauskas, 2006, p. 26).

The vulnerabilities of the Baltic states facing the Russian threat

Russia not only was disgruntled with the integration of the three Baltic states within the Euro-Atlantic structures, thus neighbouring NATO and the EU, but did not even fully accept their independence. Following the annexation of Crimea, Russia's General Prosecutor's Office issued a statement presenting the intention to review the legality of the 1991 decision by the Baltic countries to gain independence from the Soviet Union, following the request made by two members of the Parliament on behalf of the United Russia party (RFE/RL, 2015). This turned out to be a statement that caused concern among Baltic officials, given the existing tensions and the security context at that time.

Relations between Russia and the Baltic states are very asymmetrical, being marked by some peculiarities. They are based on the geostrategic position and history of the three Baltic states rather than on the existence of a friendship or real collaboration (Sleivyte, 2008, p. 32). To these are added the cultural influence exerted by Russia and the large number of Russian speakers settled on the Baltic territory, who are more likely to be the target of disinformation actions coming from Russia through various media channels and social networks. This results in a combination of factors that produce sufficient reasons for the Baltic states to fear a possible aggression from the largest eastern neighbour.

In my opinion, as far as the Baltic countries are concerned, Russia is not pursuing a new territorial gain, but rather a strategic one. With an invasion of the Baltic states, Russia would significantly undermine NATO's position in the region and question the Alliance's ability to ensure the collective security of its members, as enshrined in Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. Russia's actions in the Baltic area are provocative rather than aggressive, examples of which may be the violation of the air border and the abduction of an Estonian agent in 2014 (Braw,



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The imperialist and Russification tendencies of the Baltic territory originate in the 18th century, under the rule of the Russian Tsar Peter the Great and, later, of Catherine the Great. Moreover, seaports play an important and strategic role for Russia.

2015). The main encouraging factor and, at the same time, Russia's main pretext for intervening in some way in that region could be the Russian-speaking population, as well as the high percentage of Russian minorities, especially on the eastern border of the Baltic states. According to the Estonian *Population and Housing Census*, in 2012, Russian was declared as mother tongue by 383,062 citizens, representing a share of 29.6% of the total population, while ranking second among spoken languages². Russian ethnic minorities in Estonia are about 24% of the total population, with Latvia accounting for a higher share, 27% of the population, and 34% being Russian speaking, also including other minorities, such as Poles, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. Lithuania, on the other hand, stands much better in this respect, with minorities of Russian origin being below 6%, and Russian speakers representing around 8% of the total population (Grigas, 2015). Another important thing to note is that, in all three Baltic countries, the largest concentration of the Russian minority population is in the capital cities, Riga, Tallinn and Vilnius, respectively, followed by the other large cities in each country.

In addition to Russia invoking the defence of minorities as reasoning for its actions, a possible Russian occupation of the Baltic states could also be motivated by historical pretexts. The imperialist and Russification tendencies of the Baltic territory originate in the 18th century, under the rule of the Russian Tsar Peter the Great and, later, of Catherine the Great. Moreover, seaports play an important and strategic role for Russia. If at the Black Sea, before being annexed, Crimea was a long-term host of the Russian navy, in the Baltic Sea as well, the seaports of the Baltic states were used to transport Russian oil to Western Europe until 2000-2001. It is a strategic position that Russia has managed to consolidate in Crimea, but lost in the Baltic region, with the accession of the three states to NATO. However, the Baltic ports continue to play a rather important role from an economic point of view, whilst still having a major transit role for the routes of Western goods imported in Russia. If we were to compare, again, with the antecedent in Ukraine, Russia's intervention in eastern Ukraine, where the most important coal mines are, could be repeated by a similar scenario in the Baltic

² "1,294,455 permanent residents enumerated in the census", https://vana.stat.ee/63780?parent_id=39113, retrieved on 13 June 2021.

countries, even if they do not have very rich natural resources. An exception is the Ida-Viru County in northeastern Estonia, located at the border with Russia, which has rich energy resources, providing about 80% of Estonia's electricity consumption (Ib.). This region could be a rather tempting strategic target for Moscow.

Russia has understood very well that, first and foremost, a non-military strategy is required to target the Baltic countries. As early as 1992, the Russian Foreign Ministry's magazine, *Diplomaticheskii Vestnik*, presented the Karaganov doctrine, which "encouraged the use of Russian compatriots in the so-called 'close neighbourhood' for foreign policy purposes" (Maliukevičius, 2015, p. 118). This doctrine argued the need to maintain Russia's interest in the region and to increase its influence on the territory of the Baltic states. It was to be put into practice by facilitating the establishment of Russian speakers in the close neighbourhoods, especially in the former Soviet republics, and then, by preventing the integration of ethnic minorities in those countries, they could be used as a foreign policy tool for safeguarding Russia's interests. Concepts such as "compatriot policy" and "close neighbourhood" have been intensely promoted and used in Russia's foreign policy actions, especially in the Baltic countries (Ib.).

At the beginning of Vladimir Putin's first term, the main foreign policy resources aimed for the Baltic states were considering the so-called "humanitarian dimension", specifically aiming to assist and support the Russian minorities on the territory of neighbouring states and to protect their rights and interests. The strategy was meant to assure the control of the post-Soviet region, mainly through soft-power, non-military instruments, such as: "dodgy investments, energy blackmail and manipulation through the media" (Ib.). In 2008, and then in 2013, such a doctrine, which was based on the "humanitarian dimension", was included in the provisions of the concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation. The following aspects were declared as objectives for the country: "protecting the rights and legitimate interests of Russians living abroad; (...) Supporting the strengthening of compatriots' organisations in order to enable them to effectively uphold their rights in the countries of residence, while maintaining the cultural and ethnic identity of the Russian Diaspora and its links with the historical homeland; (...) Facilitating the widespread learning and



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According to Lithuania's National Security Strategy, the main risks and threats are: the economic and energy dependence on other states; the development of nuclear energy by other states in the region, without taking into account international safety standards; cyber attacks as well as information threats aiming to manipulate the public opinion or to exert external influence on Lithuania's domestic policy, military capabilities, economy, society and cultural identity.

use of the Russian language; (...) countering extremist manifestations, neo-Nazism, any form of racial discrimination, aggressive nationalism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia, as well as the attempts to rewrite history while using it to build a confrontation which can provoke revenge in world politics and review the results after the Second World War (...)" (apud Maliukevičius, lb., 1). Through this approach in foreign policy, Russia practically legitimizes its possible future interventions on the territories of neighbouring states.

This type of foreign policy, such as Russia's, directly influences the political and security strategies of the countries concerned. For instance, according to Lithuania's National Security Strategy, the main risks and threats are: the economic and energy dependence on other states; the development of nuclear energy by other states in the region, without taking into account international safety standards; cyber attacks as well as information threats aiming to manipulate the public opinion or to exert external influence on Lithuania's domestic policy, military capabilities, economy, society and cultural identity (apud Maliukevičius, lb., p. 119, 2). If Russia's strategy is to legitimise possible interventions, by building various pretexts, then the strategies of the states targeted by these actions rather seek to find solutions to avoid conflicts and to develop alternative ways of defence. Moreover, such states also aim to minimise the risk of foreign interference in domestic policy, making efforts to reduce their dependence on other states.

Among the major national security risks mentioned by the State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania are the following: *"control of economic and energy resources, the creation and support of Lithuanian influence groups, (...) informational activities, ideological policy and <rewriting history>"* (Maliukevičius, lb.). According to the cited document, they have the potential to encourage ethnic and political dissensions, thus leading to a decrease in the capacity to integrate ethnic minorities into society and to promoting distrust in the country's democratic political system. The introduction of these provisions is rather a precautionary measure taken by Lithuania so that it does not give reasons to an aggressor state to intervene in its domestic policy. If Karaganov's doctrine was to facilitate the placement of Russian speakers in neighbouring states, such that afterwards to

make it as difficult for them as possible to integrate into that society and therefore, later use them as a foreign policy instrument, then, among the provisions of the Lithuanian Security Department, the actions that undermine the process of integration of ethnic minorities in the society are clearly mentioned as a danger to national security.

In my opinion, the historical and ethnic reasons, as well as the economic, energy and strategic interests, would be sufficient for Russia to seek to intervene, or at least to destabilise the situation in the Baltic region. The Baltic countries are in a different situation from Ukraine, with all three being members of NATO and the EU. Unlike in the case of the eastern Ukraine conflict, where NATO only condemned Russia's aggressive actions, in the event of an aggression against one of its members, the Alliance's inability to honour its responsibilities and guarantees under Article 5 would lead not only to the destabilisation of the region, but even to a serious shaking of international security.

The continuous pressure targeting the Baltic states suggests they are in a non-traditional and non-military war with Russia. For example, in recent years, several research and consultancy centres on security affairs have been established in the Baltic States: the NATO Centre of Excellence for Cyber Defense Cooperation (Tallinn, Estonia, 2008); NATO Centre of Excellence on Energy Security (Vilnius, Lithuania, 2013) and NATO Centre of Excellence on Communication (Riga, Latvia, 2014) (lb. P. 120). By mentioning the Alliance within the name of each centre, the Baltic states demonstrate not only that they are dedicated to the concept of common security, but also that they need NATO's protective umbrella against Russia's threats.

Another vulnerability, or even internal threat, encountered mainly among the population of the former Soviet states, is the nostalgia for the Soviet past. The popularity of the Russian culture and language among Baltic citizens, as well as the widespread presence of the Russian media, along with the coordinated actions of disinformation and propaganda coming from Moscow, both create a favourable environment for informational aggression against the citizens of these states. Kęstutis Petrauskis, a media expert, conducted a survey in 2013 that showed the audience shares of television channels in the Baltic States. The results showed that, in Lithuania, more than 23% of the population preferred alternative television channels and almost 16%



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A survey conducted in 2020 showed that 1/3 of adult media consumers in Latvia consider the Russian press and radio to be somewhat trustworthy, and about 50% watch Russian-language news. In Lithuania, also in 2020, 3% of survey respondents affirmed that they believe Russian TV channels and radio stations are very reliable, and another 16% considered that they are somewhat reliable. In addition, 64% of all respondents stated that they access Russian-language news.

the Russian television channels; more alarming is the situation in Latvia and Estonia, where shares of 29% and 19% respectively were identified for Russian TV channels (Ib., pp. 120-121). The situation has not changed much after Russia's aggressive actions undertaken in Eastern Europe during the following years. A survey conducted in 2020 showed that 1/3 of adult media consumers in Latvia consider the Russian press and radio to be somewhat trustworthy, and about 50% watch Russian-language news (Cesare, 2020). In Lithuania, also in 2020, 3% of survey respondents affirmed that they believe Russian TV channels and radio stations are very reliable, and another 16% considered that they are somewhat reliable. In addition, 64% of all respondents stated that they access Russian-language news (Public Opinion Poll, 2020). These figures show the extremely high exposure of the population to Russia's propaganda and manipulation tools, which have proved their effectiveness both through mass media and online. Latvia and Lithuania have taken some steps in this regard, aiming to reduce the share of the Russian press in the national listing and hence banning the Russian RT channel in 2020. Despite a fairly large influence from Russia, in the Baltic region there are cities with a majority Russian ethnic population or a share of Russian speakers of over 80%, as it is the case of the Lithuanian city of Daugavpils, but in which the new generations declare themselves as being "Russian speakers" rather than "Russians" (Cesare, Ib.), aspect which shows that the strategy for the integration of minorities implemented by the Baltic countries is effective and offers real results.

The situation in the Baltic region describes a favourable context for hybrid attacks on the territory of the three countries. Hybrid activities can be carried out by both state and non-state actors. These types of threats are multidimensional, combining subversive, informational, economic and diplomatic means with coercive measures. They are designed in such a way that it is difficult to identify the source where they come from (European Commission, 2018). Hybrid campaigns use conventional and unconventional means and tactics in order to intervene in the internal affairs of another state, but whilst trying to avoid a direct military confrontation. In addition to the use of conventional forces, Russian hybrid threats also use the method of creating conflicts. The Russian military has defined this type of war as

one at strategic level, seeking to shape the governance of a targeted state and its geostrategic orientation, in which all actions taking place are subject to an information campaign. The use of conventional military forces in regional conflicts is also part of the hybrid warfare tactic (ISW Report, 2020). If in the ex-Soviet space, we have created more regional conflicts, then the European space is increasingly facing hybrid threats related to the field of misinformation, counterintelligence or cyberattacks. The EU, together with NATO, is working to address these challenges and to respond appropriately (European Commission, Ib.).

THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE BALTIC SEA

Russia's military forces

Ultimately, the hottest spot in the Baltic region remains Kaliningrad. Located between two NATO member states, this Russian territory is home to a significant amount of military equipment. Even if it is not directly linked to Russia from a territorial point of view (separated by Poland and Belarus), it still gives Russia an important strategic advantage in the Baltic Sea. Since 2014, Russia has increased the number of military exercises both in Kaliningrad and in its western territorial area. Lithuania has been forced to respond to Russia's intimidation by preparing, at a high level, its own military capabilities and rapid reaction forces. The pretext for Russian intervention in Ukraine to protect minorities in the region can always also be invoked in the case of the Baltic countries.

In the year of the annexation of Crimea and the eastern Ukraine conflict, there were multiple incidents in the Baltic region as well as various actions were taken by Russia, events which caused concerns, among which: the abduction of an Estonian secret agent on the border with Russia; frequent violations (about 50 times) of Latvia's maritime borders during military exercises; conducting multiple military exercises with short-range ballistic missiles in Kaliningrad, where the base point for the Baltic Sea Fleet is also located (Rosen, 2014). All of this is a real cause of concern for the Baltic countries, and Russia's habit of interfering in its neighbours' internal affairs and territorial annexations is one of the reasons for the state of distrust and the precautionary measures taken in the region, thus explaining the numerous military exercises that were conducted in the years to come.





In Kaliningrad, Russia built one of the A2/AD systems. The range of such systems covers a wide region, including even the territory of some NATO member states. Russia's air defence and anti-missile system in Kaliningrad puts NATO in a very difficult position, making it much more difficult for it to access the Baltic Sea if naval or air interventions are needed.

Following the annexation of Crimea, Russia continued to strengthen its military presence and capabilities in Eastern Europe. A significant increase in Russian military resources also took place in the Baltic region, with Kaliningrad being heavily militarised using ground, naval and air combat capabilities. Although facing economic problems, Russia still continues to allocate large sums for its defence budget. Its military spending in 2020 was estimated at \$ 61.7 billion, up 2.5% from the previous year. At the same time, the US had approximately \$ 778 billion in military spending in 2020, the largest military spending in the world and accounting for 39% of total defence spending in 2020 internationally (SIPRI, 2021).

Russia has divided its military forces into five districts so as to cover its defences throughout its entire territory, from Eastern Europe to Asia. Out of the four older districts, two have a strategic position on the western border: the Western Military District and the Southern Military District. The Western Military District also includes Kaliningrad, where the Russian Baltic Fleet is stationed (RAND Corporation, 2015, p. 6). A novelty regarding the reorganisation of Russia's military bases came in January 2021, when Russia's Northern Fleet was elevated to the status of a military district, which means that Russia's military capabilities stationed there will be strengthened in order to consolidate its position in the Arctic region (McDermott, 2021).

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³ "Those actions and capabilities, usually long-range, designed to prevent an opposing force from entering an operational area."

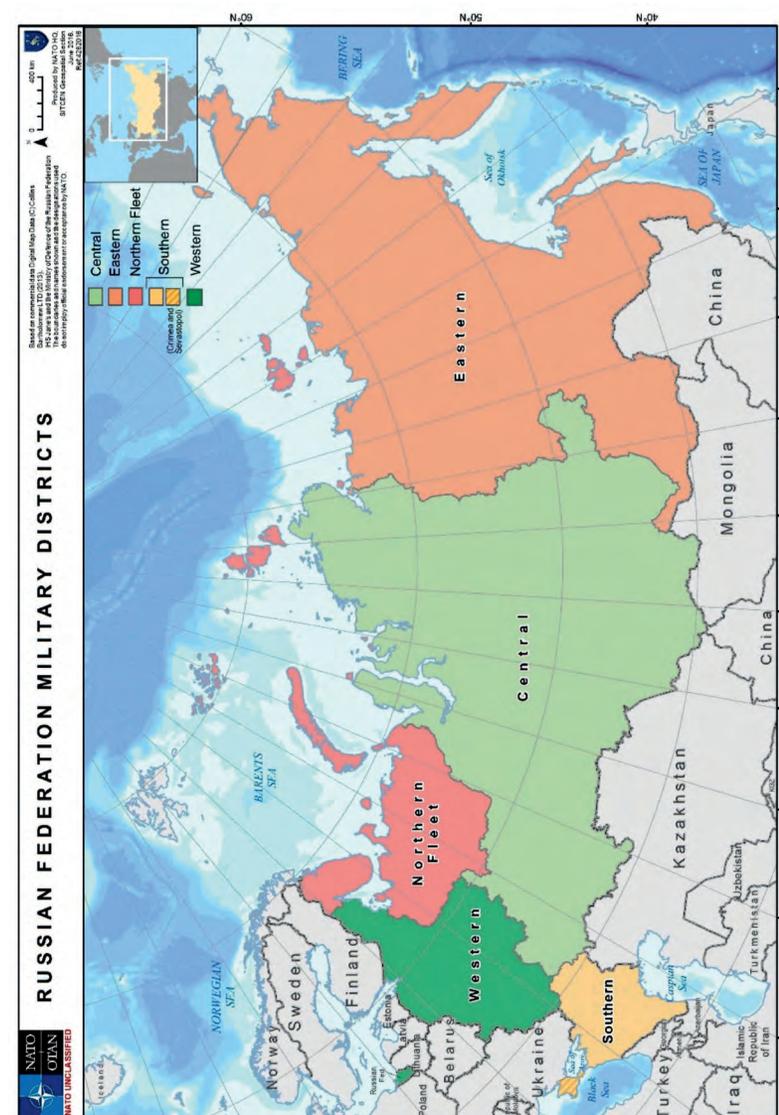


Figure 1: Military districts of the Russian Federation (NATO, 2017)



In recent years, Russia has been repeatedly accused of approaching or even violating NATO's airspace. In 2020 alone, NATO air forces intercepted Russian aircrafts about 350 times near its airspace (NATO, 2020). Most such interceptions took place near the borders of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, being flights carried out between Russia and Kaliningrad.

exercises, a war simulation took place, one that would include if required the use of nuclear resources owned against Western countries. The figures conveyed by some Western analysts show that about 100,000 soldiers were mobilised to take part in these demonstrations in the Baltic region (CEPA Report, 2019, p. 24). Nevertheless, other experts claim that the number of Russian soldiers involved in the Zapad exercises would have been much lower, approximating the mobilised troops as around 48,000, among which 23,000 already active in the region where the exercises took place (Giles, 2018).

Russia also conducted other military exercises in the Baltic region in the following years. The missile test conducted in 2018 near Latvia raised concerns for the states in the region. It was the first time that Russia tested real ammunition in a military exercise so close to NATO, which even led to the partial suspension of civilian flights in the Latvian airspace and their redirection towards the Swedish airspace, as precautionary decisions taken by the two states. In 2019 too, military exercises took place in the Western Military District – *Union Shield*, conducted together with Belarus (CEPA Report, lb.). Following the international resonance of Zapad-2017, in autumn this year will take place another round of military exercises for Russia, Zapad-2021. Once again, a strong display of forces is expected from Kremlin, where it will most likely mobilise its capabilities in other military districts, including Russia's Northern Fleet. Regarding the mobilization of military troops, this time too, it is very likely that tens of thousands of soldiers will be conveyed, if not more than 100,000 (Hurt, 2021).

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when two Russian fighter jets entered the Estonian airspace over an island in the Baltic Sea, belonging to Estonia. This time as well, Moscow denied the incident, stating it was a routine flight over the international waters of the Baltic Sea (Tanner, 2021).

Russia's way of acting ambiguously and unpredictably, as well as the irregular combat tactics previously used, persuade NATO to adequately improve its ability to defend its members, but also to deter the aggressive actions of its opponents. The Alliance is also constantly modernizing its military capabilities, techniques and tactics as well as developing new strategies to counter Russia's A2/AD capabilities and to discourage other aggressive actions, thus balancing the military power in the region. Throughout his actions, Putin has shown that he is willing to take great risks and use military force in exchange for political and territorial advantages. Russia's military doctrine, as well as its military capabilities strategically located along the eastern flank, under the umbrella of the A2/AD systems, pose challenges to the security of both NATO members and their Eastern European partners (Hicks, Conley, 2016, p. 2).

NATO presence in the Baltic Sea area

Challenges coming from Russia in the Baltic region have been frequent, such that the annexation of Crimea has raised additional concerns for countries in the region, whilst Poland, along with Lithuania, have even called for an emergency NATO meeting, citing Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, alleging that there is a threat of some NATO member states being militarily at risk. Poland's defence adviser, Marek Matraszek, declared at the time that, in the event of a Russian aggression, *"Poland will fight on the front lines"* (Day, 2015). Poland's concern was largely caused by the border near Kaliningrad, where it neighbours Russia directly. Two major NATO meetings followed in Wales in 2014 and in Warsaw in 2016.

Relevant decisions were taken at the NATO Summit in Warsaw in order to strengthen the Alliance's deterrent and defence capacity. To this end, the military presence on the territory of Eastern European

⁴ "The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened".



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Poland's geographical position on the border with Ukraine and the Baltic States gives it a key role in managing the crisis in Eastern Europe and hence, an important position within the North Atlantic Alliance. Following the crisis in Ukraine, Poland has increased its involvement in initiatives organised on NATO's eastern flank, such as to ensure the collective security of the region.

members has been strengthened, including that of Poland, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. In the four member countries of the Alliance, the military presence was strengthened by the creation of four multinational battle groups with battalion dimensions. The presence of military forces is ensured through rotation by the allies. These battle groups are being deployed together with the military forces of the host countries, the main purpose being to be prepared to intervene at any time in order to defend the security of the states within the region. The four battle groups are led by the United States, Germany, Canada and the United Kingdom (NATO, 2021-1). The orientation of NATO defence resources towards the Baltic Sea area signalled the Alliance's concern about a possible Russian aggression there or of some hybrid actions potentially coming from Russia.

Poland's geographical position on the border with Ukraine and the Baltic States gives it a key role in managing the crisis in Eastern Europe and hence, an important position within the North Atlantic Alliance. Following the crisis in Ukraine, Poland has increased its involvement in initiatives organised on NATO's eastern flank, such as to ensure the collective security of the region. It is among the founders of the Three Seas Initiative and the Bucharest Format (B9). Former Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski emphasised Poland's role as the European leader in the context of the Ukrainian crisis, stressing that *"the EU will not take any decision on Ukraine without Poland. Many European governments expect Poland to play a leading role in this issue, given Poland's historical and diplomatic experience and the role it plays in the politics of the Eastern Partnership"* (Larsen, 2014, p. 18). Sikorski also argued the need to strengthen the Alliance's military presence in Poland, saying he would be *"content and happy"* if 10,000 troops or two NATO brigades were deployed in his country (Bornio, 2021). In addition to the presence on its territory of one of the four multinational battalion-sized battle groups, in 2018, the Polish government decided to build a national transportation hub – *Central Transportation Hub (CPK)*, which, on one hand, would have the role of consolidating the logistical dimension of the NATO military presence and, on the other hand, would strengthen the defence position in the region and increase the transportation capacity. Additionally, this centre would contribute to the economic development of the countries in Central and Eastern

Europe and would become a key point for the Three Seas Initiative in the process of developing a solid NATO infrastructure, linking central Europe with the entire eastern flank and hence, increasing the mobility of military forces and capabilities (CEPA, 2019, pp. 7-8). Poland's role in the region remains extremely important, being the first country that could intervene directly and quickly to defend NATO members in the event of a Russian aggression in the Baltic Sea.

Following the scale of the Russian military exercises in the Baltic region, especially those in Zapad-2017, NATO members also came up with a response, organising a series of military exercises in the region during 2019, in Poland and the Baltic countries, in which thousands of soldiers and warships took part. Among these are included: *Dragon 19* in Poland, with the participation of 12 countries and 18,000 soldiers; *Kevadtorm 2019* in Estonia, with 12 countries taking part and more than 9,000 soldiers; *Geležinis Vilkas* in Lithuania, together with 10 participating countries; *BALTOPS 19* naval exercises involving 18 countries, 50 warships, two submarines and 36 aircrafts (Mezhevich, 2020).

In 2020, the largest NATO military exercises in the last 25 years, *Defender Europe-2020*, were planned. The United States alone announced that they would participate in these exercises with 85 Abrams tanks, 45 armoured personnel carriers and about 20,000 soldiers. Approximately 37,000 soldiers from 18 countries were planned to participate (Ershova, 2020). However, the scale and manner of the exercises have undergone some changes due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In January-March 2020, the United States sent about 6,000 troops, 9,000 vehicles and a lot of military equipment to Europe. Even under these conditions, *Defender Europe-2020* was the third largest military exercise deployed by NATO in Europe ever since the Cold War. Some of the most valuable results and lessons of these exercises relate to testing the mobility of the NATO capabilities, including the transport of military forces and equipment overseas (Thomas, Williams, Dyakova, 2020). Although NATO officials said the exercises did not target any particular country, Moscow reacted negatively to the fact that they took place in the Baltic region. Russian military expert Konstantin Sivkov considered that the scenario on which those exercises were based would be that of an invasion



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Once again this year, between March and June, a new round of military exercises took place, Defender-Europe 21. More than 30,000 soldiers from 27 countries took part in this year's edition. This time, most of the exercises focused on the Black Sea region and the Balkan Peninsula. Among the exercises that took place this year there were also included rapid threat response operations, which took place in the air and territorial space of Romania, Bulgaria, and Estonia.

of the Baltic Sea and part of Poland by an enemy state, in its efforts to reach Kaliningrad. NATO would react by sea, land and air to mobilize and deter the enemy, and then, after defeating it, would continue the attack on its territory (Ershova, Ib.).

A few months later, in June 2020, new military exercises were conducted in the Baltic Sea – *BALTOPS 2020*. These exercises have been conducted annually for a long time and are organised in order to train the military forces of NATO members and partners, especially in the field of maritime and air defence. These exercises were attended by over 3,000 soldiers from 19 countries (SHAPE Public Affairs Office, 2020). Earlier this year (2021), NATO conducted military exercises again, this time simultaneously on the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. For this exercises, two US Air Force B-1 bombers, were conveyed, which, together with fighter jets from Poland, Germany, and Italy, flew over the airspace of the Baltic countries, while in parallel, military exercises were conducted in the Black Sea, with the participation of two French fighter jets, two Spanish F-18s and several NATO warships in the Black Sea (NATO, 2021-2). Once again this year, between March and June, a new round of military exercises took place, *Defender-Europe 21*. More than 30,000 soldiers from 27 countries took part in this year's edition. This time, most of the exercises focused on the Black Sea region and the Balkan Peninsula. Among the exercises that took place this year there were also included rapid threat response operations, which took place in the air and territorial space of Romania, Bulgaria, and Estonia. This year's exercises were conducted also with a significant involvement of the US Air Force and Naval Forces (U.S. Army Europe and Africa, 2021).

Some Russian analysts believe that the role of these military exercises, carried out in recent years by NATO, is much greater than the one intending to discourage the opponent. In their view, the exercises are in fact based on offensive scenarios against Russia, and the exercises in the Baltic area implied a battle scenario to neutralize the heavily militarized Russian region, Kaliningrad, and to protect the Suwalki Corridor. As for this corridor, they say, NATO fears a blockade of access to the Baltic area for its military forces, which could be created by Russia and Belarus through a counterattack in this access strip (Mezhevich, Ib.).

The strategic importance of the Suwałki Corridor

The Suwalki Corridor is of strategic importance to both Russia and NATO. For NATO, it is more of a weak link or “Achilles’ heel”, as some analysts call it. This corridor is a narrow strip of 65 km in a straight line, located between the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad and Belarus, on the border between Poland and Lithuania, being the only part connecting the three Baltic countries to NATO by land, through two narrow roads and of a railway line. At the same time, a threat to this corridor could create serious problems for the North Atlantic Alliance in defending its members from the Baltic Sea: Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania (CEPA Report, 2018, pp. 15-16).



Figure 2: Suwałki Corridor
(LETA / TBT Staff, 2018)

For Russia, the Suwalki Corridor is quite strategically important, because this part of the territory separates Belarus, a reliable partner state that does not pose any problems, from the militarised Kaliningrad region and the Baltic Sea Fleet. Moreover, if Russia would manage to block this corridor, it would block NATO's ground access to the three Baltic countries and leave them exposed to the threats of a Russian attack. And, last but not least, the occupation of this part would give Russia another military front on the eastern flank of NATO, after the one in Ukraine, would strengthen its power of control over Belarus



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THINKING

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CEPA experts also came up with a set of recommendations to increase NATO's response speed, especially for NATO member states situated on the border with Russia, such as: "early warning of Moscow's covert subversion of a target in the area, which can be defeated or taken over; the presence of forces capable of responding quickly to an attack on the integrity of the national territory; and adequate infrastructure and properly positioned equipment to enable the rapid deployment of NATO troops".

and would increase the degree of threat to Poland (Ib., P.22). For NATO, the Suwalki Corridor is the weak point that can create serious security problems if the right measures are not taken to prevent this and to discourage possible aggressive actions from outside. CEPA experts carried out a detailed analysis of the situation in the region and the danger posed by this corridor. The biggest risk they identify is that, in the event of a conflict with Russia, a competition for controlling Suwalki will begin, and the Kremlin, through ground forces in Kaliningrad and Belarus, will be able to close the Suwalki Corridor and prevent NATO from defending the three Baltic countries, leading to their isolation from the rest of the continent and the impossibility of ground access for NATO forces (Ib., p. 3).

This corridor, through the two connecting roads between Poland and Lithuania, ensures the European Union's civilian traffic in the region, but it does not have the required space for establishing significant military forces and it could not cope with long military convoys. In order to avoid possible bottlenecks that may occur in this region, NATO would consider alternative routes to reach the Baltic countries, such as landing in the Polish river and seaports of Szczecin/Świnoujście (CEPA Report, 2021). In the event of an escalating conflict between NATO and Russia in the region, in a first phase, Russia would be at an advantage, because it already has a large number of soldiers stationed in the Western Military District. CEPA experts even mention estimates of about 330,000 military forces, as well as the capabilities needed for a possible military attack. To prevent and deter such a scenario, NATO has made efforts in recent years to increase the mobility of its forces, both on the ground as well as naval and aerial. CEPA experts also came up with a set of recommendations to increase NATO's response speed, especially for NATO member states situated on the border with Russia, such as: "early warning of Moscow's covert subversion of a target in the area, which can be defeated or taken over; the presence of forces capable of responding quickly to an attack on the integrity of the national territory; and adequate infrastructure and properly positioned equipment to enable the rapid deployment of NATO troops" (CEPA Report, 2018, p. 14). Although this part of the territory raises concerns among NATO members and may pose serious impediments to the need to deploy forces in the Baltic Sea, Russia

also faces some limitations. Kaliningrad can give the Kremlin headaches, because the access to the Baltic Sea can be fully controlled by NATO and Sweden, which would limit the flexibility of Russian military forces in the region (CEPA Report, 2019, p. 25).

CONCLUSIONS

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Baltic states were the only ex-Soviet states that managed to integrate into Euro-Atlantic structures. In 2004, they became members of NATO and the European Union, managing to break with Russia's demands for the reunification of the former USSR in another form. Russia was losing at that time an important part of its influence in Eastern Europe. However, the Baltic countries' membership of NATO and the EU has not made the threats to their security and territorial integrity disappear. Russia has continued, in various forms and methods, to maintain its presence in the region, including using hybrid tactics. An important lever which has been used is that of Russian minorities and Russian language speakers, which are instrumented whenever required to justify some of its undertaken actions. Situated between the protection offered by the North Atlantic Alliance and the threat coming from Russia, the Baltic states are forced to face this combination of factors and risks in order to maintain peace and stability in the area. Fortunately, they have successfully integrated Russian minorities into their own territory, reducing the reasons Russia could invoke in the event of an aggression.

In 2014, with the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, there was a major change in the position of forces on NATO's eastern flank and a new demand for urgent action to be taken by the Alliance such as to defend its most exposed members. The tensions between NATO and Russia have reached new, alarming levels. The degree of militarisation in the area and the number of military exercises carried out in recent years have both increased. NATO has taken real steps to improve its military capabilities, the mobility of its forces as well as the speed of response to a possible attack. Russia further militarized the Kaliningrad enclave, whilst also consolidating its Baltic Sea Fleet and turning the Northern Fleet into a military district.

Even though military tensions between the two powers have risen, NATO has shown that it has the capacity to react quickly to protect



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its members from the potential Russian aggressive actions. One of the NATO member states with a major role in security and stability in the Baltic Sea region is Poland. It has allocated relevant resources to the field of defence and continues to be extremely active. A security issue in the Baltic area, which has been increasingly discussed in recent years, is the Suwalki Corridor - a narrow strip on the border between Poland and Lithuania, which could separate the Baltic countries from the rest of the continent if Russia intervened militarily from Kaliningrad and Belarus, in the scenario of an attack. This vulnerability of the Alliance will most likely receive significant attention in the coming period from defence experts, who will come up with various scenarios and solutions to adequately protect the area. The situation in the region is constantly changing, but all the measures taken in recent years and the military exercises carried out by NATO, in response to Russia's actions, seem to have balanced the balance of power and had the deterrent effect NATO members intended.

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IMPACT OF THE 2015-2016 MIGRATION CRISIS ON BALKAN STATE RELATIONS REGARDING REGIONAL COOPERATION

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This article explores the impact of migration on interstate relations of source, transit, and target states by focusing on the Western Balkan migration route post-2015. The theoretic approach of the Copenhagen School is employed as it allows to interpret the securitising logic of discourse acts as well as the logic of regional security complexes. The article identifies the recurring themes of “unmanageable numbers” and “unmanageable integration” which were prevalent in the European discourse. Next, the article recounts a series of Europe wide unilateral border measures which were the result of individual governments attempting to limit the flow of migrants. Unilateral actions can result in flow blockage, diversion, or aggregation. The transnational nature of migration management is explored, as well as why states might act unilaterally or multilaterally and what negative or positive impacts could such actions have on other states involved.

The article concludes that the Balkan region’s EU and NATO aspirations played a key role in shaping its response to the crisis synergising with the regional EU’s security overlap. As far as Romania is concerned, it must continue to expand its migration management capacities in order to successfully do its part to mitigate its risk exposure and maximise its strategic diplomatic leverage vis-à-vis the issue of migration, especially in the eventuality of its inclusion into the Schengen area.

Keywords: migration management; Western route; Balkans; European Union; interstate relations;



INTRODUCTION

During 2015, a dramatic increase occurred in the number of irregular migrants on their way towards Central, Western, and Northern EU states. This became a socio-political issue with wide ranging implications. States and their citizens were bearing witness to a large flow of peoples from outside of Europe. Target or transit states found themselves strained to unprecedented levels, having their capacities surpassed. This article will examine the impact on the Balkan interstate relations and cooperation relying on the Copenhagen School of Security. Then, a timeline of the measures taken at the level of the European border will be detailed, measures taken in order to control the migration flow. The article will further exemplify the way how such measures divert the migration flows along alternative routes, and the last chapter will discuss how mismanagement of migration routes like these can lead to friction between neighbouring states, or between transit and target states. The concluding chapter will look at where these dynamics have brought the Balkan region and offer some suggestions for how the Romanian state might consider acting.

In general, the discourse of European reactions focused on two principal points:

1. *Unmanageable numbers*: the flux surpassed the managing capacity of individual states. The ability to manage such a flow requires a lot of institutional infrastructure for processing the migrants. This infrastructure was not large enough.
2. *Unmanageable integration*: the issue here is one of integration and what repercussions would occur on the host state, if it were to accept such large numbers of migrants.

It is beyond the scope of this article to investigate in detail the legitimacy of these two concerns. The author’s view is that there was indeed a lack of processing capacity and a lack of political will to develop it (Edmonda, 2018, p. 198).

During 2015, a dramatic increase occurred in the number of irregular migrants on their way towards Central, Western, and Northern EU states. This became a socio-political issue with wide ranging implications. States and their citizens were bearing witness to a large flow of peoples from outside of Europe.



The voices in favour of accepting migrants have pointed to how small the number migrants is in proportion to the population of the EU, however, the rise in Eurosceptic and populist movements in recent years made incumbent EU decision makers lean towards the closure of borders (Morvai, Djokovic, 2017, p. 277).

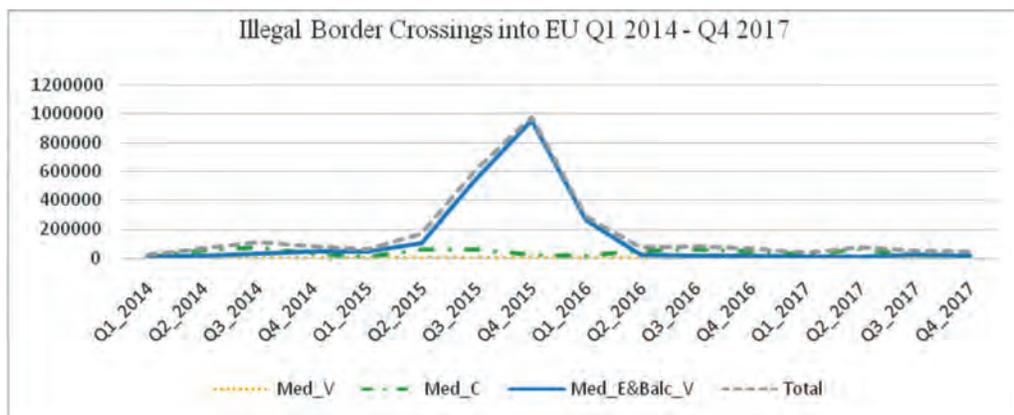


Diagram no. 1
(Frontex, Migratory Map, 2019)

The migration was initially split across the Mediterranean in a Western, Central and Eastern route. Events leading up to the migrant crisis, caused the western and central routes to fall out of use. This has resulted in a funnel effect of migration through the Eastern Route.

Thus, the people migrating from distant places like the sub-Saharan, horn of Africa, Middle East, Afghanistan and South-East Asia (Frontex Risk Analysis, 2015-2016) reached a Europe fairly divided on the issue of their arrival. The migration was initially split across the Mediterranean¹ in a Western, Central and Eastern route. Events leading up to the migrant crisis, caused the western and central routes to fall out of use. This has resulted in a funnel effect of migration through the Eastern Route. This disproportionate weight on the Eastern Mediterranean and West Balkan route is clearly visible in *diagram no. 1*².

The primary path of the route started from Turkey by land or sea into Greece then to North Macedonia, Serbia and into Hungary towards

¹ There is also an eastern land route through Ukraine, Belarus or Russia, which saw smaller use.
² The data presented refer to detections of illegal border-crossing rather than the number of persons, as the same person may cross the external border several times. However, there is currently no EU system in place capable of tracing each person's movements following an illegal border-crossing. Therefore, it is not possible to establish the precise number of persons who have illegally crossed the external border (according to Frontex, Migratory Map, 2019; FRAN&JORA, 2021, <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-map/>).

central Europe (Frontex Western Balkan Route, 2017). Secondary flows passed through other Balkan states, like Bulgaria into North Macedonia or Serbia. However, Frontex reports based on recorded border crossing attempts show that migrants tend to follow the main path, until obligated to change course.

THE COPENHAGEN SCHOOL AND SECURITIZATION THROUGH DISCOURSE ACTS

The Copenhagen School of Security Studies was developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde and formally outlined first in their joint work *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. The Copenhagen School looks at Security as a result of discourse acts performed by social agents, for example a Head of State. These acts of discourse can securitise a topic, for example declaring that state sovereignty or the fabric of society is threatened by unrestrained migration. Such a speech act turns the regulation of migration into a security problem which may permit extraordinary measures to be taken in the interest of security, for example constructing a border wall.

The Copenhagen School of Security Studies has the following central features:

- Securitisation is resulted through successful *Speech Acts* which require a referent object, a securitising actor, functional actors and a legitimising audience.
- Security is divided into five interlinked and overlapping *Sectors* of activity: Societal, Political, Environmental, Military and Economic.
- *Security Complexes* are formed around an issue. Actors from sub-state to international levels can be a part of a single such complex.

The Copenhagen School approach is useful for analysing the issue of securitisation of immigration because of its focus on discourse acts. Its breakdown of security into sectors is useful because immigration tends to be linked to the social sector primarily, as well as the political and economic sectors, perhaps even environmental. Furthermore, the theory's focus on discourse acts allows the consideration of a broad



The primary path of the route started from Turkey by land or sea into Greece then to North Macedonia, Serbia and into Hungary towards central Europe.

Security is divided into five interlinked and overlapping Sectors of activity: Societal, Political, Environmental, Military and Economic.



typology of actors, from supra national organisations to influential non-governmental organisations. The Copenhagen School use of security complexes for analysing the interdependence of multiple unit actors of different types operating in different areas but all linked to the same issues.

When thinking about security sectors, the analyst must consider the following questions:

- *What the security agenda is within the sector?*
- *What types of actors are distinctive to the sector?*
- *What logic of threats and vulnerabilities operates within the sector?*
- *How the security dynamics within the sector divide among the local, regional, and global scales?* (Buzan, Waever, de Wilde, 1998, p. 19).

Sectors are useful in order to split a situation into more specific focus spaces. This is useful for analysis as it allows the thinker to limit the scope of observation by reducing the number of variables at play to a manageable degree.

According to Buzan, Waever and de Wilde (Ib., p. 12), internal security complex dynamics can be placed on a spectrum consisting of:

- *Enmity* – the complex member states act out of fear, rivalry and mutual perception of threat. States linked to the Syrian civil war can be placed in this category, Iran, US, Russia, Syria, Israel, Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Gulf States.
- *The middle* – the complex is a security regime in which states still treat each other as potential threats but have made reassurance arrangements to reduce the security dilemma among them. The Western Balkan states can be placed here.
- *Amity* – the complex members interrelate as a pluralistic security community. An example of this is the EU (for the most part).

Beyond Amity, a region is so integrated that the security complex it formerly hosted becomes eliminated, “transforming it from an anarchic subsystem of states to a single, larger actor, within the system” (Ibid.).

There are two condition under which security complexes may not be present, according to Buzan, Waever and de Wilde:

❖ *Lack of capabilities* – in this case, there is no security complex formed because the states do not have the capacity to project their power externally. Such an arrangement is especially possible in isolated regions where major actors have agreed not to get involved.

❖ *Overlay* – in this case, the security complex is not formed because a strong external actor has managed to suppress it. This usually “involves extensive stationing of armed forces in the areas overlaying by the intervening great power(s). Intervention usually reinforces the local security dynamics; overlay subordinates them to the larger pattern of major power rivalries and may even obliterate them” (Ibid. pp. 12-13).

When changes to a Security Complex are triggered, the structural options are:

- *Maintenance of the status quo* – when the changes have supported or have not seriously undermined the structure.
- *Internal transformation* – when the changes within the complex’s outer boundary are caused by regional political integration, decisive shifts in balance of power, or major alternations in the pattern of amity and enmity.
- *External transformation* – occurs when the outer boundary is redrawn to allow addition or deletion of major states from the complex.
- *Overlay* – occurs when external powers suppress indigenous security dynamic.

That being said, Buzan, Waever and de Wilde claim security complexes’ regionalizing logic may be weak in the case of units not being fixed or threats not being conditioned by distance (Ibid. p. 16). This observation is important for the topic of this thesis, as the issue of migration is one that can be difficult to define concretely in space and time. Thus, it is possible for a security complex to develop a weak regionalising security logic. This may offer another explanation to why the issues of migration are so close to other more concretely definable ideas such as borders and sovereignty, history and nation.



There are two condition under which security complexes may not be present, according to Buzan, Waever and de Wilde: lack of capabilities – in this case, there is no security complex formed because the states do not have the capacity to project their power externally. Such an arrangement is especially possible in isolated regions where major actors have agreed not to get involved: overlay – in this case, the security complex is not formed because a strong external actor has managed to suppress it.



Perhaps these more fixed concepts allow for the strengthening of security logic on the topic of migration.

A TIMELINE OF EUROPEAN BORDER MEASURES DURING THE HEIGHT OF THE MIGRANT CRISIS

This chapter collects a timeline of telling events regarding unilateral border control measures all throughout 2015 and early 2016. This timeline depicts the cascading nature of such actions on a European level.

- *Early 2015* – Greece turns into the key entry point towards Europe for refugees and irregular migrants. Authorities declare themselves overwhelmed by the large number of asylum seekers. The Greco-Turkish land border had been already reinforced in 2012 with a 12.5 km fence. In the wake of the migrant flux of 2015, European Union authorities request of Greece to register, identify, and collect fingerprints from individuals (Coelho, Kjuka, Musanipova).
- *4 August 2015* – Bulgaria completes a 4.5m high razor wire fence on its border with Turkey in an attempt to dissuade refugees and irregular migrants. The construction of the fence had been ongoing since 2013 (Mortimer, 2015).
- *13 September 2015* – Germany puts in action border controls on Southern border with Austrian (BBC, *Migrant crisis*, 2015).
- *14 September 2015* – Austria starts to make border checks on its Slovenian and Hungarian frontier. A barbed wire fence that was already in construction to counter illegal crossings from Slovenia sparks protests by Austrian winemakers who want its construction to be ceased (Murphy, 2015).
- *Second event on 14 September 2015* – Hungary finishes a border fence along its southern frontier with Serbia to oppose the flux of irregular migrants and refugees, most of which are reported to be heading for states in western Europe (BBC, *Refugees “exhausted” after Serbia-Hungary border closes*, 2015).
- *Third event on 14 September 2015* – Slovakia begins enforcing border checks (Reuters, *Slovakia putting temporary border controls in place*, 2015).

- *15 October 2015* – Hungary completes the construction for a fence on its frontier with Croatia (Feher, 2015).
- *10 November 2015* – France indefinitely enforces border checks in the wake of terrorist strikes in Paris that were unleashed by Islamist militants. In Calais, the governments of the United Kingdom and France intend to construct a protective enclosure to counter migrants from reaching the Channel Tunnel. Approximately 2,500 persons reside in camps referred to as “the Jungle,” on the outskirts of Calais (Coelho, Kjuka, Musanipova, Ib.).
- *11 November 2015* – Slovenia starts the construction of a frontier razor-wire fence on its Croatian border. Ljubljana warns it is considering enforcing stricter border checks if Germany and Austria do the same (Milekic, 2015)
- *Second event on 11 November 2015* – Sweden introduced border checks on its bridge link with Denmark and on its ferry ports which link it with Denmark and Germany (Maurice, 2015).
- *27 November 2015* – Norway begins enforcing border checks in order to stop refugees from coming over the Swedish border (Coelho, Kjuka, Musanipova, Ib.).
- *28 November 2015* – Former Republic of Macedonia deploys soldiers to begin construction of a 3m high razor-wire fence on southern frontier with Greece (The Guardian, *Migrants attack Macedonian police*, 2015).
- *4 January 2016* – Sweden begins enforcing ID checks for people coming via rail from Denmark (BBC, *Migrants Crisis: Sweden Border Checks Come into Force*, 2016).
- *Second event on 4 January 2016* – Denmark increases border checks on its border with Germany (Tange, Dickson, 2015).
- *14 January 2016* – Norway calls for refugees to go back to Russia (Luhn, 2016). In reply, Russia shuts its borders due to “security reasons” (Deutsche Welle, 2016).
- *28 February 2016* – Hungary declares its intentions to construct a fence on its frontier with Romania in the event that migrants begin using that path instead of passing through Croatia. (Chiriac, 2016).



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The resulting image is the result of a domino of unilateral actions to regulate border crossings and deny access to illegal migrants. In *figure no. 1*, in red highlight, the border restrictions listed in this chapter can be noticed.



Figure no. 1: Fencing Off Europe
(Coelho, Kjuka, Musanipova)

MIGRATION PUSHBACK, PUSHFORWARD, SPILLOVER AND BLOCKAGE

Unilateral border closures such as the ones listed in the previous chapter are labelled as pushback measures and can have a spillover effect. “What these fences often do is simply divert migrants from one border to another” (Collins, Mohdin, 2016). See below the example taken from the West Balkan route.



Figure no. 2: Greece built a wall along its border with Turkey at the end of 2012; so did Bulgaria, in the middle of 2014
(Collins, Mohdin, 2016)



Figure no. 3: Hungary spent over 100 million dollars to build a fence along its border with Serbia, in September 2015 (lb.)



Figure no. 4: Hungary built a wall along its border with Croatia, thus cutting a vital route towards Western Europe. (lb.)



Figure no. 5: The immigrants who were crossing Croatia were stopped, again, after Slovenia completed the construction of its wall (lb.)



Figure no. 6: North Macedonia built a wall along its border with Greece, thus leaving more than 50,000 people stuck (lb.)

After the construction of the land fence along the Turkish border, the flow diverted (*spillover*) through the Aegean. In the event that the migration flow cannot be diverted or cannot overflow elsewhere, a damn-like (*blockage*) effect can occur, whereby irregular migrants begin to aggregate in the last state they had arrived in, before encountering the unpassable border. This happens as migrants still on the way may have limited access to accurate information and even if they do, they may have limited ability to change route until they reach a blockage. Such a situation leads to ad hoc camps appearing near the closed border or for the “*aggregating*” state to spend resources so as to care for the stranded migrants. Such state efforts can take the form of improvised housing camps (der Brelie, Salfiti, 2018). This was the case with the closure of the Greek-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia border, which left 50,000 people stranded in Greece (Collins, Mohdin, lb.). States like Serbia and North Macedonia adopted a *push-forward* strategy, whereby they would facilitate the migrant’s transit across their territory, in an effort to limit the amount of internal disruption (Edmonda, lb.).

After the construction of the land fence along the Turkish border, the flow diverted (*spillover*) through the Aegean.



ANALYSING HOW THE WESTERN BALKAN ILLEGAL MIGRANT ROUTE CAN IMPACT STATE RELATIONS

The very transnational nature of migration makes it a multi-state issue. The multilateral management of migration flows in some ways are like multilateral river management. Migration source, transit and target states all have a stake in the issue. Furthermore, states that neighbour the transit states also have an interest in the good management of such phenomena, as they can become transit states if the flow is diverted accordingly.

States have a responsibility to respond to migration flows and their governments are expected to act in the interest of the state, their citizens and to some extent their strategic partners. However, the internal and external factors pressuring the state to act might not be aligned. Details matter on a case by case basis. A transnational issue can presumably be addressed through multiple unilateral actions. It can be argued that a multilateral coordinated action would be more likely to yield a positive outcome. Such multilateral action could involve all parties with an interest in the management of the migration flow. These parties are now partners in a collective effort to solve a problem they all share. By sharing this responsibility and the actual effort of managing the challenge, the outcome may come more surely and more fully. That being said, the timeline might illustrate how unilateral actions were required because of the slow collective reaction. Coordinate action takes time and effort to coordinate and enact.

The Balkan states have a complex internal dynamic with historic alliances and rivalries, ongoing disputes as well as common aspirations – not to mention the influences from local powers such as Turkey or greater powers such as Russia, the US and EU. However, in the interest of brevity regarding the case of the Balkan states this article will risk reducing this complexity by looking on those things that might be most relevant to the management of migration.

Before looking at how migration figures into the interests of Balkan states, it is worth noting one predominant regional interest: The Balkan states desire to participate in supra-regional partnerships for their benefit. The two biggest such institutions are those

of the EU and NATO. Membership into either of these institutions brings significant advantages to security, stability and prospects of development. Momentarily all Balkan states are either members of the EU or in aspiring to negotiate their way in. Likewise, aside from Serbia, all are either already NATO members or also aspiring to join the collective security alliance. The fact that most states desire to belong to some form of multilateral socio-economic and political collective like the EU or military alliance like NATO is already an incentive for the states to find ways to work together and maintain good relations. Such shared interests (as well as the interests of the EU and NATO) arguably temper the intensity of local disputes around topics like the case of Kosovo. In fact, recent breakthroughs such as Greece's settlement of disputes with North Macedonia is a sign that given enough effort, tenacity and political will, compromises can be made and the path for accession opened for the respective candidates.

Thus, the good management of migration from the Balkan states is not only something that they must come to terms in the interest of their own state resources, but also as part of their bids for EU (and perhaps to a lesser extent NATO) accession. This EU aspiration has two aspects to consider:

- *The standard of conduct aspect:* EU membership prerequisites demand states adhere to certain standards of conduct with regard to human rights (Salamon, 2016, vol. 54, pp. 151-163). This means if the states want to be favourably reviewed for membership, they must conduct themselves accordingly vis-à-vis the migrants.
- *The negotiative token aspect:* from a realpolitik point of view, transit states hold leverage over both downstream and upstream states. This leverage can be used as a token in the negotiations for the EU membership status³.

The ideal strategy for a state would be to contribute to the migration control while upholding standards of conduct. This ideal execution requires the most planning and coordination, subsequently

³ Turkey is a prime example of how a transit state can use its control over the migration flow as a negotiation token. Using this token, Turkey pressured the EU to give it foreign aid and to return to the discussion table regarding EU accession (Ibid.)



The good management of migration from the Balkan states is not only something that they must come to terms in the interest of their own state resources, but also as part of their bids for EU (and perhaps to a lesser extent NATO) accession. This EU aspiration has two aspects to consider: the standard of conduct aspect and the negotiative token aspect.

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considerable resources – especially given the scale of the migration through the Balkan route. When state capabilities are limited these two aspects can come into contradiction. Reducing migration flow into the EU heartland, might require methods which are in breach of the EU standards.

What occurred during the height of the flux across the Balkan route was a disjointed series of actions which seemed governed by an attempt to keep migrants out of every state's territory by either closing the borders to deny entry or speeding their transit out of the current country and into the next. These sort of disjointed actions which are not backed by coordinate shared responsibility opens the space for finger pointing and passing the blame from one state to another. Even after the supposed closure of the Balkan route in the wake of the EU-Turkey accord⁴ migrants continue to be a source of dispute between EU and Balkan states as to how to distribute responsibilities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ROMANIA

The framework for an asylum system and capacities for migration management of the EU aspiring Balkan states were set up as part of accession negotiations. However, under the extreme stress of the 2015 migration surge, the system showed itself inadequate to meet the challenges. The states were “neither willing nor able to process the quantity of asylum applications that could potentially be lodged by all the persons transiting” (Salamon, lb.). The situation was made worse by failures to uphold commitments from the EU (Deutsche Welle, *Germany Limits Refugee Family*, 2017) and even media reports (Deutsche Welle, *Germany limits refugee family*, 2017), claiming that there are agreements between states to intentionally slow down processing of requests such as family reunification. Transit states find themselves becoming encumbered with ‘trapped’ migrants who can neither be sent back, nor forward, nor truly settled (UNHCR, 2017).

⁴ Patrick Kingsley, *Tens of thousands migrate through Balkans since route declared shut*, The Guardian, 30.08.2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/30/tens-of-thousands-migrate-through-balkans-since-route-declared-shut> (accessed: 13.06.2021).

Management of migration requires a state infrastructure in place that can receive, process, and integrate or effectively refuse incoming migrant numbers. As such, migration flow management can be a considerable drain on state resources⁵. The Balkan states are relatively small by comparison to the core EU states. This indicates that their individual ability to handle a migration flux increase is limited. Thus, migration can become a source of conflict as it can cost states resources to handle. Unilateral border closures or transit facilitation merely externalise the resource drain and responsibility to another (usually adjacent) state. This pattern of action risks to sour relations, which is something generally undesirable, particularly between Balkan states some of which have historically antagonistic relations with neighbours to begin with. When dealing with an issue that is as geographically fluid as irregular migration, actions in the short-term self-interest of a state can have consequences in the long-term on other states in the region. The border closures may obstruct migration, but it creates conditions for human smuggling networks to appear (der Brelie, Salfiti, 2018). Amongst the perceived chaos and combative rhetoric, irregular “migrant hunter” paramilitary units have appeared along the Balkan route (Than, 2017). This is a dangerous development as it erodes the state's monopoly on the use of legitimate violence. Croatian President Kolinda Grabar Kitarovic warned that the Balkan route can destabilise the entire south-eastern region of Europe through its criminal repercussions (Agenzia Nova, 2016). States with an interest in the migration issue together with the European Commission declared that a multilateral collective effort would bring about a successful solution (European Commission, 2015).

The supra-national aspirations of the Balkan states to join structures such as the EU and NATO, as well as the influence of these institutions has likely had a beneficial tempering effect on the region. However, should these tempering influences dwindle, and should the flow of migration increase again, it would be likely that the regional stability would decrease.

⁵ It can also be a source of benefits, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this article.



The supra-national aspirations of the Balkan states to join structures such as the EU and NATO, as well as the influence of these institutions has likely had a beneficial tempering effect on the region. However, should these tempering influences dwindle, and should the flow of migration increase again, it would be likely that the regional stability would decrease.



The Copenhagen Approach would argue that the many extra-ordinary actions were enabled through the successful securitization of the immigration issue. Applying the concept of security complex analysis on the Balkans, the interpretation would be that there is a strong degree of security overlap from the EU (and to some extent NATO) unto the region. This overlap synergises with the region's EU aspirations, which has a catalytic effect on regional cooperation and integration. However, the region's historic tensions and contemporary disputes are a source for conflict at worst, frozen relations at best.

In this context, Romania ought to continue to consider itself a EU and NATO member, to embrace these roles and to act accordingly. Adopting a role of support towards the transit countries' efforts to manage the migration flow, which can be in the form of aid materials and funding to help develop migrant processing and improve migrant housing. Romania could also consider developing a rapid response team of experts, specialist soldiers. Such a unit could be small and nimble, capable of rapidly integrating into an ongoing operation at a processing centre or a camp to help in the event of a capacities' shortage.

Romania can also be of help by expanding its own capacity for migrant housing and processing. The ability to share the burden of this EU wide challenge can be a source of prestige and even diplomatic leverage if correctly treated as a strategic advantage. Although internal political competition might make it difficult to form a wide enough consensus in order to implement such policies, without political adversaries engaging in anti-immigrant fear mongering for political gains.

So far, the Romanian state has been mostly avoided by the major migration transit routes, but as this article has shown, things can change and escalate in a short time span. Dormant routes can re-activate, they can shift, or new routes can appear. Migration flows can surge, and neighbouring states might decide to push migrants forward disregarding the negative effects of such unilateral decisions. In this case, Romania has a responsibility to itself to develop adequate strategic capacities to be a proactive participant of migration management, especially in the eventuality of its inclusion into the Schengen area.

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Romania has a responsibility to itself to develop adequate strategic capacities to be a proactive participant of migration management, especially in the eventuality of its inclusion into the Schengen area.



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FUTURE BATTLESPACE MANAGEMENT. FIGHTING AND WINNING IN THE INCREASINGLY COMPLEX AIR OPERATIONS ENVIRONMENT OF THE FUTURE

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In the context of technological progress and of the combination between conventional, asymmetric and hybrid capabilities across traditional domains as well as the cyber and space ones, NATO's freedom of manoeuvre could be compromised, and its effectiveness in deterring potential aggressors could be reduced. Thus, in order to deal correctly with these security threats and to operate effectively in this type of "multi-domain environment", it is necessary for NATO to have a more comprehensive approach and to develop new strategies that allow a more integrated and synchronised use of forces.

Keywords: A2/AD; multi-domain environment; Mosaic Warfare; interoperability;

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INTRODUCTION

Robust *Anti-Access and Area-Denial (A2/AD)* structures, coupled with the proliferation of advanced technologies across multiple domains, will dominate the third dimension in the coming decades. Potential adversaries will blend conventional, asymmetric, and hybrid capabilities across each of the traditional physical domains (Air, Land and Maritime) plus Cyber and Space, and will adjust their strategies by utilising these advancements in an attempt to overwhelm NATO's strengths. This could compromise NATO's freedom of manoeuvre, reduce its effectiveness in deterring potential aggressors and undermine stability along the Alliance's borders. A more comprehensive approach is needed for correctly dealing with these security threats, and effectively operating in this type of "multi-domain environment". It will be fundamental for NATO to develop new strategies that allow a more integrated and synchronised use of forces which can outmanoeuvre adversaries across multiple domains at speed. Recently, there have been numerous papers, studies, and articles proposing a new way of viewing the future battlespace. The previous United States (US) Air Force Chief of Staff (CSAF) General David L. Goldfein, recently summarised his vision in a simple comprehensive concept "*Victory in future combat will depend less on individual capabilities and more on the integrated strengths of a connected network available for coalition leaders to employ*" (Pope, 2019). It is time to embrace a transformation process that leads NATO forces to effectively conduct joint operations across all domains. This will drive the need for advanced Command & Control (C2) systems able to properly connect, integrate, and synchronise forces, regardless of their service or domain affiliation. Systems that can guarantee future commanders the possibility to "*consider all domains from the beginning of the planning process and be empowered to coordinate dynamic all-domain re-tasking throughout execution*" (US Air Force Doctrine, 2020).

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The future will be characterised by an exponential growth in airspace operations, both in number and complexity; this will pose new challenges to the battlespace management of the Air domain. The purpose of this article is to highlight the importance, for NATO, of developing modern battlespace and airspace management strategies, as the “*condition sine qua non*” for fighting and winning in the increasingly complex air operations environment of the future.

SEEKING ADVANCED C2 SYSTEMS

In a recent report, JAPCC depicts a possible scenario for explaining a future vision of Close Joint Support. In this scenario, a Multi-Domain Command and Control System (MDC2S) will be able to share data with all connected systems across all domains and will process multiple “*calls for fire*” in real-time. After receiving a digital urgent troops-in-contact message, while considering time-on-target and weapons effect radii, the MDC2S presents a computer prioritised list of available attack options together with the respective Collateral Damage Estimation (CDE) to the Joint Fires Support Coordinator (JFSC). The attack options will include everything from long-range, network-enabled missiles fired from a ship in blue water to artillery and Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRSs), to fixed- and rotary-wing manned aircraft, to overhead, long-endurance Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) with on-board payloads able to be directly controlled by ground units (Cochran, Haider, Stathopoulos, 2020). JAPCC’s study anticipates the search for a new approach to combat operations; an approach that can enable forces to plan and execute operations rapidly, but above all, using the capabilities offered by all domains in a synchronised, cooperative, and efficient manner. Indeed, more than the speed of the war platforms, in future fights, the rapidity and the way the commanders at all levels will understand and visualise the battlespace, will be a determining factor for victory. To win future battles, the speed and availability of information sharing will be crucial to accelerating the decision-making process, exploiting the initiative, and creating a position of relative advantage. Current decision-making, planning, and execution processes seem to be slow and predictable. Competing with future peer adversaries will require advanced battlespace management

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concepts to facilitate rapid synchronisation of efforts to create dilemmas for adversaries. This will require “*continuous and iterative near-term tactical planning, longer-term operational-level planning, and refinement as conditions change*” (Curtis, 2020). Focused on this need, the US CSAF presented the necessity for an enhanced C2 system. A system that is capable of improving situational awareness, speeding up the decision-making process, and providing a refined capability to direct forces across multiple domains. Following this senior officer’s request, the US Department of Defense (DoD) started a new initiative called Joint All Domain Command and Control (JADC2).

JADC2 could be defined as a new battle management vision. A vision in which future forces will be characterised by the capability “*to support operations in a highly contested fight, ensuring not just cars, but aircraft, munitions, satellites, ships, submarines, tanks, and people are at the right place at the right time prosecuting the right target with the right effects, in seconds*” (Nishawn, 2020). With this initiative, the DoD is stating that it is no longer the time for developing domain-specific solutions. It is time to think about, develop and adopt a network-centric approach to connect each sensor from every domain with any shooter. In line with this, the “*Mosaic Warfare*” concept is being developed by the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).

“*Mosaic Warfare*” can be described as a revolutionary new warfighting platform built upon an interconnected and interoperable force package, able to leverage the best characteristics of different platforms (DARPA, undated). A kind of “*system of systems*” characterised by dedicated new interfaces, communication links, and precision navigation and timing software that will allow platforms to work together. It is based on the concept, that “*everything that has a sensor could be connected to everything that can make a decision, and then to anything that can take an action*” (Ib.). NATO should leverage the possibilities offered by new technologies and develop advanced battle concepts that will enable future commanders, at all echelons, to understand the battle rapidly, direct forces faster than the enemy, and deliver synchronised combat effects across multiple domains. As recently postulated by General Goldfein, “*The goal [is to] produce*



The US CSAF presented the necessity for an enhanced C2 system. A system that is capable of improving situational awareness, speeding up the decision-making process, and providing a refined capability to direct forces across multiple domains. Following this senior officer’s request, the US Department of Defense (DoD) started a new initiative called Joint All Domain Command and Control (JADC2).



multiple dilemmas for our adversaries in a way that will overwhelm them ... an even better outcome ... is to refine Multi-Domain Operations [MDO] to the point where it produces so many dilemmas for our adversaries that they choose not to take us on in the first place” (lb.).

The above mentioned innovative conceptual battlespace-management models have one thing in common: the use of the third dimension. These concepts will work only if an adequate airspace management system guarantees the commanders rapid and flexible tactical execution through a fast re-tasking of assets, and the dynamic apportionment of airspace.



Figure no. 1: Artificial rendering of a future multi-domain battlefield scenario, Lockheed Martin

NEW CHALLENGES FOR FUTURE AIRSPACE MANAGEMENT

The above mentioned innovative conceptual battlespace-management models have one thing in common: the use of the third dimension. These concepts will work only if an adequate airspace management system guarantees the commanders rapid and flexible tactical execution through a fast re-tasking of assets, and the dynamic apportionment of airspace. This will require revised airspace management focused on an innovative approach that can guarantee dynamic, real-time airspace coordination while ensuring an adequate level of traffic de-confliction. The situation gets more complicated when considering that the usage of the airspace by all actors will increase significantly in the future, resulting in exponential growth of airspace operations. During the forecast period 2019 to 2026, for example, the usage of UAVs in military operations as well as civil

and commercial applications, is expected to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 15.8% (CISION PR Newswire, 2020).

Moreover, all services are developing long-range, precision-guided “multi-domain” weapons, which will drive the need for tighter joint management of the airspace. To highlight a few of these new systems, the US Navy is fielding a new Electromagnetic Railgun, which would be able to zero in on targets from 100 nautical miles away and fire a solid metal slug that could travel at speeds of 4,500 miles per hour (Suciu, 2020). The US Army is developing the long-range hypersonic weapon, a rocket-powered boost-glide missile whose expected range is classified but could easily be thousands of miles. The US Army is also pursuing a strategic long-range cannon, a supergun using gunpowder to launch guided projectiles over one thousand miles (Freedberg, 2020). Futuristic hypersonic weapons, which promise to cross more territory in a shorter time, will break the traditional norms of long-range weapons, including the maximum altitudes reached. Furthermore, it has to be considered that changes in the A2/AD environment, coupled with adversary advancements in Cyberspace and the electromagnetic spectrum, will limit the use of conventional aircraft tracking systems and will drive the growth of demand for stealth platforms. Managing airspace in the near future will become more complex than it is today. Anticipating the future vision of airspace management which is able to face such a complicated scenario, DARPA launched a new initiative for a programme named Air Space Total Awareness for Rapid Tactical Execution (ASTARTE). “The goal of the ASTARTE Program is to provide real-time, low-risk de-confliction between airspace users and joint fires to enable support to tactical units and build a resilient air picture under an A2/AD bubble while conducting JADC2 operations ... It will interoperate and coordinate with existing C2 systems to ensure airspace users and operators have the most current and relevant information available” (DARPA, 2020). Even if only focused on the airspace above an Army Division, (a block of airspace approximately 100 km by 100 km, from the ground up to 18,000 feet) DARPA leads the way for a project that, if fielded, could radically change the current concept of airspace management and make a difference in planning, and conducting future battle strategies.



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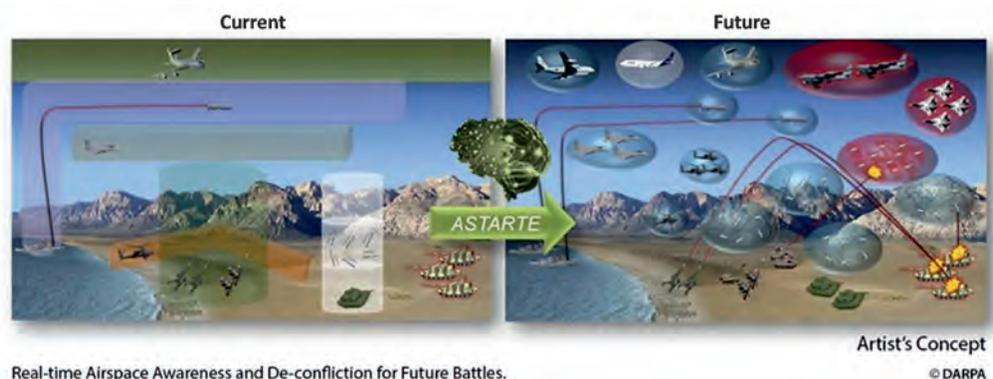


Figure no. 2: Real-time Airspace Awareness and De-confliction for Future Battles, DARPA

INTEROPERABILITY: A LONG-STANDING PROBLEM

The operating principle of these new battle and airspace management initiatives is mainly based on the possibility offered by leveraging technologies to connect all the available sensors and to process the related data by using artificial intelligence. The Director of the JAPCC and Commander, Allied Air Command, (Ramstein Air Base, Germany), General Jeffrey L. Harrigian, warns that “sensors exist across every domain, but connecting those sensors remains challenging” (Harrigian, 2019, pp. 6-8). The current situation, in NATO, contains a plethora of different systems, and sensors, that do not guarantee an adequate level of interoperability. ASTARTE promises to solve this issue by adopting new algorithmic solutions designed with an Application Programming Interface (API) that enables easy integration and interoperability with the full range of currently existing US military C2 Systems (Ib.). Perhaps, the moment has arrived for the Alliance to make wide-ranging holistic political-military changes that can address and solve the long-standing problem of interoperability, keeping in mind that “interoperability does not necessarily require common military equipment. What is important is that the equipment can share common facilities, and is able to interact, connect, and communicate, exchange data and services with other equipment” (NATO, 2020). DARPA’s initiative with the ASTARTE project aimed at obtaining an API that integrates and makes the different C2 systems currently in use interoperable is undoubtedly something that deserves to be sponsored and supported.

CONCLUSIONS

The motto “*divide et impera*” meaning divide and rule, although of uncertain origin, highlighted a policy dear to the ancient Roman emperors. The strategy aimed at maintaining their territories or conquering new ones, dividing and fragmenting the power of the opposition, so that they could not unify toward a common goal. In reality, this strategy helped to prevent a series of small entities, each with a precise amount of power, from uniting and forming a more relevant and stronger entity. NATO is an intergovernmental military alliance between 30 different countries and could encounter difficulty competing with an enemy who shows himself strongly united by the use of the same language, tactics, techniques, procedures, and technologies. Using the motto mentioned above as a warning, NATO will have to be capable of promoting new strategies to ensure that the Alliance’s entities are joined to form a centre of power, ready to provide the military forces needed to deter war “*et impera*” for a long time to come. To achieve this, NATO must seek innovative C2 systems, able to properly connect, integrate, and synchronise forces from all domains. This will require revised airspace management, too. A new one focused on an innovative approach, able to guarantee dynamic, real-time airspace coordination while ensuring an adequate level of traffic deconfliction. Initiatives such as JADC2, “*Mosaic Warfare*” and the ASTARTE programme will make the difference if developed and adopted collectively by all 30 NATO Nations. As stated by General Harrigian, “*as we think about existing and developing sensors, we must connect them to form a cohesive, resilient, and self-healing collective network. Therefore, it is crucial that we build in multi-domain interoperability from early design with any future capabilities*” (Ib.). It is time to focus on a common framework by which it will be possible to build the future battlespace management as a comprehensive and integrated solution, creating the conditions to position NATO to fight and win in the increasingly complex air operations environment of the future.

It is time to focus on a common framework by which it will be possible to build the future battlespace management as a comprehensive and integrated solution, creating the conditions to position NATO to fight and win in the increasingly complex air operations environment of the future.



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THE ROLE OF SENTIMENT ANALYSIS AND DATA MINING SOLUTIONS IN THE STUDY OF FAKE NEWS AND COUNTERING DISINFORMATION

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The proposed article highlights the importance of studying the phenomenon of fake news spreading based on sentiment analysis solutions (use of natural language processing techniques) and data mining (obtaining relevant information from the study of data), given the diversification and travel speed of these types of news, as well as the need to implement mechanisms to assist us, in a first stage, in gaining a thorough understanding of them and, subsequently, in taking the necessary steps to limit the spread of the phenomenon.

The method of qualitative analysis of specialised studies was used for this article.

Keywords: mass-media; trolling; fake news; sentiment analysis; public opinion;



Motto:
“There is no communication without emotions and without communication there is no social life”

Jacques Cosnier
(Introduction to Emotions and Feelings Psychology)

INTRODUCTION

To understand the phenomenon of fake news, it is first necessary to place it in the context of the human society. Thus, even if the appearance of fake news in its current form is still debatable, it is unanimously accepted that false stories, rumours about aspects of community life have always existed in human groups, the favourite way for their transmission being, for many decades, via “word of mouth” (Burkhart, p. 5).

The advent of writing and, later, of printing led to a first form of theorising the news stories, as well as to a first set of deontological requirements, namely that the news should be objective, correct, and reflect, above all, the truth (Schudson with Edson C. Tandoc, Zheng Wei Lim & Richard Ling, p. 140). However, Lippmann separates the truth from the news in his work “Public Opinion” (Lippman, p. 363) and notes that while the purpose of the news is to signal the occurrence of an event, the truth comes to unveil the hidden facts behind the respective event.

With the access of humankind to the third stage of its development, a stage characterised by the evolution of technology as a trigger for the development of interpersonal communication to the detriment of the printed one (McLuhan), information sources have widely diversified. Thus, one can notice not only a development of media (radio, TV, print media), but also the emergence of a new phenomenon, important in the equation of fake news, namely the diversification of the news program, which starts to become more flexible and to “attack” the rigor

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In this context characterised by media diversification, the Internet comes into play and the news begin to be analysed more scrupulously, to have multiple approaches, nuances, to be sometimes more detailed, sometimes briefer, depending on the technical possibilities and the interest of the media, as well as its ability to adapt to the new "virtual" context. This is the birth of the "new media", defined, at the time of its appearance, as "the result of the convergence between traditional media and computerized systems".

of classic news journals. At this moment, a new form of entertainment appears in the US media, which starts from the real news and is then satirised through exaggerations, changes of the context, sometimes even by adding untrue facts (Edson C. Tandoc et al., p. 139).

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However, the appearance of social networks shortly after will almost completely change the media landscape, several elements contributing to this fact almost simultaneously. First, the constant access to news, now in a digital format and very accessible by masses of users, resulted in a more diverse and an exponential increase of the volume of news available to those interested. Secondly, non-journalist users who in the previous stage were very active on discussion forums provided

by the online versions of media institutions, have now at their disposal free online platforms and their own constantly expanding audience. This outlines the concept of participatory journalism, enshrined by Melissa Wall (2012) in "Citizen journalism: valuable, useless or dangerous", a concept according to which any user of the Internet (and, implicitly, of a social platform), having an opinion and an interest in informing, can produce any kind of content (which can become news) globally and whose veracity is the almost exclusive contribution of the author.

In conclusion, today's media landscape, for the most part unregulated and characterised by the coexistence of traditional media institutions and Social/New/Citizen media, brings a huge volume of news (real, partially real, complete false, etc.) in the same place, the most important challenge being a clearer distinction of them.

DEFINITIONS AND TYPES OF FAKE NEWS

From the linguistic point of view, the term of fake news implies that the event described in the news is not true, did not exist or the report about it is completely incorrect. However, given that most current news falling in the category of fake news have a true component (which can be presented, as such, in the beginning or within the body of the news), the notion of "false news" could be debatable. For this reason, the notion of "fake" is more appropriate, and the most appropriate equivalent in the Romanian language is "counterfeit", "tricked" or "fabricated". It is also the reason why the notion of fake news will be used to designate, in most of the cases, such news.

A study on fake news, in general, and on the identification of methods to counter them will have to consider definitions and classifications of these types of news in the first place, so that the effort to combating them is focused on the relevant ones. Such a distinction, which can be a starting point in identifying other subtypes of fake news, divides this type of news into two broad categories: economically and ideologically motivated (Alcott, Gentzkov, p. 217). But for a better understanding of how these types of news are spread, even more detailed classifications are required.



Today's media landscape, for the most part unregulated and characterised by the coexistence of traditional media institutions and Social/New/Citizen media, brings a huge volume of news (real, partially real, complete false, etc.) in the same place, the most important challenge being a clearer distinction of them.



The results of a study coordinated by Edson C. Tandoc et.al. in 2017 on several scientific papers in the field identified a typology of fake news that included: satire, parody, completely invented news, photo manipulation, masked advertising, and propaganda. The strengths of this classification are given by the identification of several common elements of fake news, such as preference for how they are spread in the virtual space or the use of emotions to make them more attractive.

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On the other hand, the crisis in Ukraine in 2014, the US elections in 2016 and BREXIT (2017-2020) were events that not only accentuated and made more visible the fake news, but also witnessed the intensified spreading of those ideologically motivated news, created with the purpose to diminish the trust in authorities or in political or politico-military organisations. Moreover, a large study conducted by the NATO Center of Excellence in Strategic Communication¹ called “*Internet trolling as a tool of hybrid warfare: The case of Latvia*”, also identified a new vehicle for transmitting false news, namely the trolling. These two elements, fake news and its transmission vehicle, placed in a certain geopolitical (Ukraine crisis, BREXIT), political (US elections in 2016) or health-related context (COVID pandemic of 2020 and 2021) outline a phenomenon that is met more and more frequent and continues to produce harmful effects: the phenomenon of disinformation.

This phenomenon is also maintained by a set of factors such as the confusion created by the insufficient explanation of the differences between sources of information. Moreover, the thin line between the presentation of facts versus opinions results in an effervescence of dialogue, which is beneficial for the good information of the community. However, this effervescence becomes a hotbed for the alteration of the initial information and the generation of news whose degree

¹ NATO StratCom Center of Excellence (www.stratcomhcoe.org) is a NATO center of excellence in Strategic Communication located in Riga, Latvia established in 2014 as a result of the North Atlantic Alliance’s need to deepen the StratCom field and support allies by providing expertise in this field.



A non-exhaustive classification of fake news, subject to the need for constant update given the dynamics of the current media landscape, identifies, among others, some important categories that, through content and addressability, will have to be treated and analysed thoroughly.

of veracity can be profoundly affected. In addition, the automatic extraction of news from the virtual space by the traditional press and insufficient time for documentation or incomplete documentation may result in major discrepancies between the information transmitted by the broadcaster correctly, completely, timely, and the final piece of news that reaches the audience.

The problem of fake news spread intensifies in crisis situations when the emotional state of the public and, implicitly, the impact this news can have are more significant. Moreover, the effects can be felt in the medium and long term, given that the spread of these type of news and the disinformation they generate can lead to the erosion of traditional communication systems, which are based on mutual trust between sender and receiver.

A non-exhaustive classification of fake news, subject to the need for constant update given the dynamics of the current media landscape, identifies, among others, some important categories that, through content and addressability, will have to be treated and analysed thoroughly:

- a) **Ideological** – types of news that aim to change the perception of general concepts and approaches, such as public attitude toward membership in international organizations or the support at national level for international approaches;
- b) **The news-pamphlet** – types of news intentionally created as such, which may include elements of sarcasm or irony and whose emphasis falls not on the veracity of the news, but on the humour that characterises this news;
- c) **Commercial news** – news whose purpose is exclusively to have the reader reach a landing page, access specific sites and expose the viewer to advertisements on those pages;
- d) **Erroneous news** – unintentional false news obtained through insufficient documentation or reliance on unofficial sources and published without verification the information from various sources.



THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS MEASUREMENT IN COMBATING FAKE NEWS

As described in the previous chapter, information is practically available anywhere and anytime, and it is often proactively sent to the reader, thus exposing the public to an unprecedented flow of information. And if we look at the “*new information ecosystem dominated by technology*” (Bărgăoanu, p. 33) as the right place for the development of the fake news phenomenon, we will have a clearer picture of the impact on the individual and society, impact that can be reached at with little resources through the extensive use of today’s interpersonal communication networks.

A key point in the effort to outline a strategy to combat fake news and disinformation must be to identify, as objectively as possible, the potential emotional impact that fake news has on people, both at individual and at collective level. The intent in obtaining an emotional impact can be easily noticed by the presence of words describing feelings of fear, using capitalisation and the excess of exclamation marks, by inserting suggestive photos or videos (illustrations that also begin to be altered, both partially and in full). However, the key elements that may lead to the emotional impact will have to be accurately measured so that it can answer the question “*but what harm did the news produced (or distributed) by me do?*”

That is why the measurement of the emotional impact fake news, both at individual and societal level, can lay the grounds for the creation of strategies to counter the disinformation phenomenon. Such measurement performed with the help of data mining techniques as part of sentiment analysis systems will bring relevant information about the emotional impact that fake news has on their audiences. However, it is important to mention that the measurement of the individual or collective reaction to such news will have to be corroborated with other elements, such as the predilection for information consumption, the general emotional state of the individual, age, level of education, and so on.

Currently, there are numerous fake news detection solutions on

the market, the current challenge being the complete automation of this process in the coming years, as the algorithmic processing capacity of fact-checkers continues to advance. Approaches in this direction fall into two categories: the first focuses on linguistic aspects (which follow patterns in the use of certain words and expressions), and the second focuses on identifying “*information connections*” that seek to identify where information is transmitted, network reaction speed etc. (Burkhart, p. 16). Joanna M. Burkhart identifies in her 2017 paper “*Combating Fake news in the digital age*”, four directions for researching linguistic aspects to detect misleading information in a given text.

The first of these called the “*Bag of Words*” measures the use of words in a news story in order to identify patterns that may be associated with the presentation of unreal information. Studies on automatic word processing have shown that fake news can be identified and separated from real by this method, in the case of fake news prevailing the use of words that express real, concrete things (Certainty), compared to the factual news that leaves more place of words that express feelings, faith, thinking (Insight) (Mihalcea and Strapparava, p. 312). A similar study (Ott et al, apud Feng et al, p. 171) reveals the predominant use of first-person verbs and personal pronouns in misleading statements, while truthful information uses more nouns, adjectives or prepositions.

Another direction of research in the study of linguistic approaches is presented under the generic name “*Deep Syntax*” (Burkhart, p. 16) which analyses words out of context and compares them with the syntax specific to misleading expressions. This study improves the effectiveness of detecting misleading claims to an estimated level of 91.2%, with an error probability of 14% (Feng et al, p. 173).

The third approach of the study is “*Semantic Analysis*” (Burkhart, p. 16), where the emphasis falls on the comparison between written information from several sources describing the same event and the statistical measurement of inconsistencies can highlight misleading information.



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A final approach in this study, called the “*Rhetorical Structure*” (Ibid.), identifies the relationship of various linguistic elements in an analysed text that can be later presented graphically, using spatial vector models, thus bringing these linguistic combinations closer or further away from the truth.

In conclusion, the study of how emotions at the individual level are influenced by news will provide insights as to how such news is thought, structured and created, as well as their clear purpose.

Given that the response to disinformation cannot be a partial or complete block of the communication activity of government institutions, public or private organisations, a detailed analysis of these types of news is needed, so that the response is accurate, consistent, and adapted to this type of threat posed by their spread. Thus, it becomes increasingly necessary to identify, catalogue and measure the impact on public opinion of fake news using information technology, by adapting and operating search engines based on well-defined algorithms, and by using big data solutions (data volumes too large to be analysed separately) and data mining (extracting information from large volumes of data). Sentiment analysis solutions can be added to these efforts so that algorithms for measuring the frequency of keywords and the feeling induced by a well-defined set of news, posts, blogs, articles can be catalogued according to the period and context of their appearance in the public space (pandemic, post-pandemic, regional security crisis, period of election campaign and elections, etc.).

In his book “*Introduction to the psychology of emotions and feelings*”, Jacques Cosnier identified an axis of the emotions (Cosnier, p. 46). According to this figure, emotions can be categorised on two main axes: pleasant/unpleasant and attention/rejection, each including feelings such as joy, happiness (corresponding to the axis of pleasure) and anger or fear, which describe feelings diametrically opposed to pleasure. Similarly, capturing attention is achieved by triggering feelings such as surprise or suffer, while rejection is achieved through feelings of disgust or contempt.



Cosnier also brings together a set of basic emotions defined as such by most specialists in the field, the French author specialised in the study of affections, emotions and feelings proposing 12 basic emotions to be studied: joy, surprise, fear, anger, sadness, disgust, contempt, despair, interest, guilt, shame, love (Cosnier, p. 30) like presented in *Table no. 1*.

	Joy	Surprise	Fear	Anger	Sadness	Disgust	Contempt	Despair	Interest	Guilt	Shame	Love
Woodworth and Scholsberg (1964)	+	+	+	+	+		+	+				
Ekman and Friensen (1975)	+	+	+	+	+		+	+				
Izard	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	+
Schwartz and Schaver (1987)	+	+	+	+	+							

Table no 1: The basic emotions table (Cosnier, p. 30)

The American psychologist Robert Plutchik proposes, in his study called “*The Nature of Emotions*” (2001), one of the best-known classifications of emotions, also called “*the wheel of emotions*” (Plutchik, p. 349), which includes a number of eight basic emotions (joy, confidence, fear, surprise, sadness, aversion, anger and anticipation), as well as their combinations, called compound or secondary emotions (*Figure no. 1*). According to the author, these emotions have developed over time in individuals as a form of adaptation to the external environment and argues that each of them has a well-established role in terms of survival and adaptation (Plutchik, p. 345).

This synthesis of emotions, starting from the basic ones and ending with the compound ones, has the advantage of allowing the grouping of the few hundred words (from English) that express emotions in these eight main types, which facilitates the development of research methods and study in the field of clinical psychology (Plutchik, p. 350).

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The study of how emotions at the individual level are influenced by news will provide insights as to how such news is thought, structured and created, as well as their clear purpose.



Laros and Steenkamp propose a diagram of feelings in terms of the effect produced on the individual, namely positive or negative. Thus, in the case of positive effects, joy, happiness, love, and pride are retained, while negative emotions are triggered by feelings of anger, fear, sadness and shame, each including emotional subdivisions that lead to a hierarchy of emotions and affections.

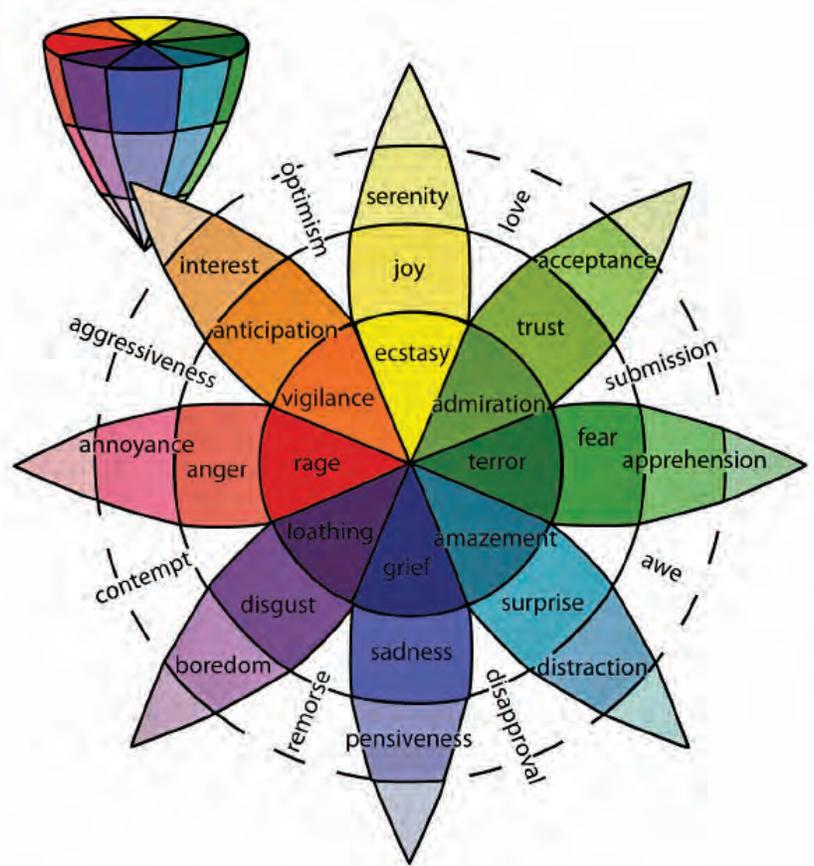


Figure no. 1: Wheel of emotions (Plutchnik, p. 349)

A more appropriate view for the purpose of this study on the impact of fake news on emotions and feelings is found in the work of Fleur J.M. Laros and Jan-Benedict E.M. Steenkamp, "Emotions in Consumer Behaviour: A Hierarchical Approach". The two authors propose a diagram of feelings in terms of the effect produced on the individual, namely positive or negative. Thus, in the case of positive effects, joy, happiness, love, and pride are retained, while negative emotions are triggered by feelings of anger, fear, sadness and shame (Laros, Steenkamp, p. 1441), each including emotional subdivisions that lead to a hierarchy of emotions and affections, according to the model in Figure no: 2.

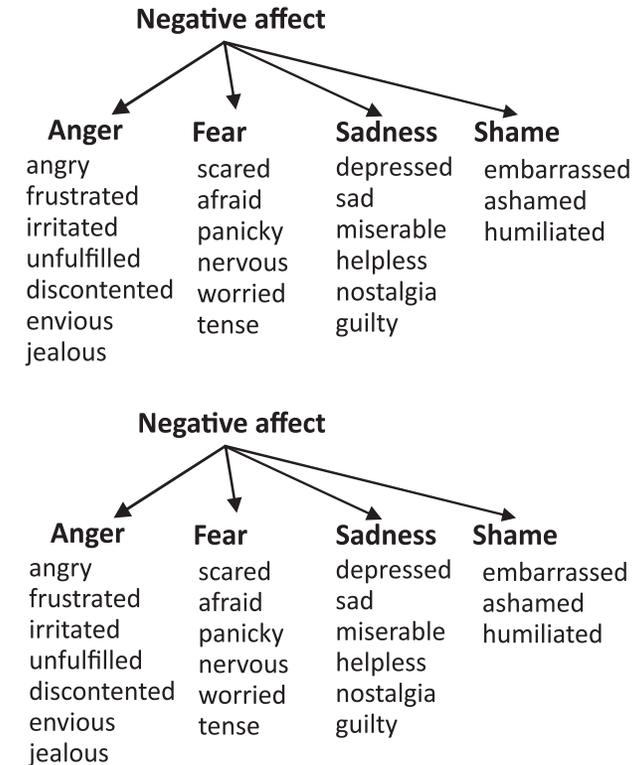


Figure no. 2: Hierarchy of emotions from the perspective of consumers (reproduction according to Figure no. 1, Hierarchy of consumer emotions (Laros, Steenkamp, p. 1441).

The final integration of these measurement and analysis solutions in a unitary system can take the form of an application for mobile devices and a complete version in a software solution, which can be then used by communication professionals to streamline the media analysis process. The software could, in principle, have three major components:

- the component formed by sets of keywords (including their semantic combinations, derived forms, compounds and synonyms) and their combinations that define certain feelings, sets that can be adapted according to the feelings to be analysed and created with the support of linguists;



- the component formed by the *corpus of fake news* in a certain field, in a certain period of time or in a certain context (pandemic, post-pandemic, regional security crisis, electoral campaign period and elections, etc.);
- the *basic software component*, made in a similar way to a search engine, which will perform *an extensive search of the words that define the feelings targeted on the news corpus* preloaded in the program.

The result of this search will take the form of graphs that will show the percentages of words describing a certain feeling in a news set, thus providing conclusive, objective, measurable and verifiable information about the feelings targeted by the initiators of this news. Identifying these feelings will reveal fake news that aim to induce a feeling of fear, apprehension, imminent danger, news to which the reaction will have to be immediate and include, for example, messages to reassure the population. Another type of news, which aims to induce feelings of mistrust in the ability of the authorities to deal with social phenomena, humanitarian, or security crises, will require, in response, information campaigns that explain, in detail and using multiple means and channels of communication, the role of institutions in the relationship with its citizens.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we believe that the debate in the public space on the impact of fake news on public opinion can move to another stage, from raising awareness to that of drawing clear response strategies, to protect the media space from the negative influence of this phenomenon. For the drawing up of such strategies, it is necessary to have an extra knowledge of this phenomenon, so that the reaction to fake news is channelled toward the decrease of their effect on audiences. In-depth knowledge of the mechanisms in the field of psychology of emotions and feelings used in the development and dissemination of fake news can be capitalised at the level of news aggregators or other online platforms specialised in fact-checking or distribution of news.

Given the large volume of news that should be verified in a particular social context (e.g. political, health or national security crisis), the proposed instruments may highlight the preponderance of words and phrases in certain news which, beyond certain pre-established thresholds, can be marked accordingly, separated from the other news, and subsequently limited or even blocked in terms of their distribution/redistribution.

Regarding the conclusions of such a study, as well as the concrete proposals for capitalising on the results of research in the public, private, academic, or non-governmental organisations they could take the form of strategies aimed at responding to fake news and disinformation, implemented in programs, such as:

- *media education*: programs designed to explain how the media works and exposure to the phenomenon of fake news and disinformation, completed with measures to protect against their spread;
- *public information campaigns*: consistent communication effort that brings together a wide variety of information and communication tools on a certain field identified as insufficiently explained or exposed to disinformation;
- *rapid reaction to the appearance of false news*: official statements to clarify the issues mentioned in the news, reports of inaccuracy of information, exposing the news itself as false;
- *drawing up of deontological codes* associated with the professional fields of journalism and public relations regarding the way in which news should be verified, written, and posted, so that the phenomenon of fake news and disinformation is reduced.

Therefore, the setting up of rules and procedures as part of appropriate response mechanisms, including in terms of legislation, needs a more accurate and objective measurement of the impact that this fake news can have on the emotional level, especially in the context of social, security or medical crisis, while the sentiment analysis of fake news can provide the information needed for a more accurate analysis of their impact, so that the reaction is as effective as possible.



The result of this search will take the form of graphs that will show the percentages of words describing a certain feeling in a news set, thus providing conclusive, objective, measurable and verifiable information about the feelings targeted by the initiators of this news.



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THE BLACK SEA REGION – GEOGRAPHICAL, GEOPOLITICAL, GEOSTRATEGIC AND GEOECONOMIC IDENTITY –

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One of the most competitive subareas in Eurasia is the Black Sea Region. For the last century, this region has undergone spectacular upheavals in its geopolitical status, which have resulted in changes in terms of borders, wars and frozen conflicts, land fragmentations, multiplication of regional and extraregional players.

Which are the geographical, geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic features that cause the regional geopolitical dynamics? Why is the Black Sea Region still included in the category of fault line areas, a statute that makes it prone to an increased geopolitical competition, instability, insecurity and regional conflict? These are some of the questions that generate a particular interest in this study and which will be answered by going through the information presented below.

Keywords: Black Sea region; geopolitical limes; geoeconomic hub; nexus; the Pentagon of the five strategic seas;

Translated by Iulia SINGER.



Motto:

“The dark clouds make the black sea”.

Charles de Leusse

INTRODUCTION

The Black Sea region is one of the most contested geopolitical subareas in Eurasia. In the last hundred years, there have been spectacular upheavals of geopolitical status in this region, resulting in border changes, wars and frozen conflicts, territorial fragmentation, changes of regional and extra-regional players. In the first half of the twentieth century, under the devastating impact of the two world conflagrations, the monarchical regimes in Russia, Romania, Bulgaria and present-day Ukraine were replaced by communist republics, and the Caliphate and Ottoman Sultanate became the secular Republic of Turkey today. If, between 1918 and 1940, Moldova was a province of the Kingdom of Romania, along with Herța, Bugeac and Northern Bukovina, after 1940, all these territories were incorporated into the Soviet Union. Ukraine and Georgia also suffered the same fate, for a short time between 1917 and 1921, in the context of the collapse of the Tsarist Empire and the chaos generated by the Bolshevik Revolution (1917-1923), they declared independence but, after 1921, they were occupied by the Soviets.

Then, after 1991, all these states and territories freed themselves from the occupation of the Soviet Empire. Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia declared their independence, and the rest of the Romanian territories occupied by the Soviet aggressor remained part of the newly established Ukrainian state. Also after 1991, the states belonging to the communist bloc, i.e. all the riparian states, except Turkey, became either democracies, part of the Euro-Atlantic area (Romania and Bulgaria), or autocracies (Russia), or failed in their western becoming, consumed by frozen conflicts orchestrated by the Russian Federation (Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova).

If, at the beginning of the 20th century, the Black Sea region brought together three empires (Habsburg, Ottoman, Tsarist)

In the first half of the twentieth century, under the devastating impact of the two world conflagrations, the monarchical regimes in Russia, Romania, Bulgaria and present-day Ukraine were replaced by communist republics, and the Caliphate and Ottoman Sultanate became the secular Republic of Turkey today.



At the beginning of the 20th century, the Black Sea region brought together three empires (Habsburg, Ottoman, Tsarist) and two constitutional monarchies (Kingdom of Romania and Kingdom of Bulgaria), at the beginning of the 21st century, the same space brought together: supra-state formations; national states; federal states; military alliances; extra-regional state actors; international organisations; non-state actors.

and two constitutional monarchies (Kingdom of Romania and Kingdom of Bulgaria), at the beginning of the 21st century, the same space brought together:

- supra-state formations – the European Union (EU) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS);
- national states – Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Turkey;
- federal states – Russian Federation;
- military alliances – North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO);
- extra-regional state actors – United States of America (USA), China, Israel, etc.;
- international organisations – the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC), etc.;
- non-state actors – multinational companies, organised crime and terrorism networks, separatist regions (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia – Tskhinvali, Crimea).

Looking at all these geopolitical processes that affected the region in the last century, we find that after an initial fragmentation following the implosion of continental European empires at the end of World War I, the region coagulated through the emergence of the Soviet Empire and the creation of the Soviet bloc. At present, we are witnessing a new and much more intense fragmentation, a dissipation of power between the riparian states, an aspect that favours the domination of the region by a great global power – the Russian Federation – and its main circumstantial ally – China.

What are the geographical, geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic attributes that generate regional geopolitical dynamics? Why, even today, is the Black Sea region included in the category of fault line areas, a status that prones it to increasing geopolitical competition, instability, insecurity and regional conflict? Let us try to answer these questions below.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

The Pontic region, described as “a varied coastline surrounding an inland sea” (Sundseth, Barova, 2010), stretches counterclockwise around the Black Sea, starting from Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria,

through northern Turkey, to Georgia, the Pontic coast of the Russian Federation and ending with the coast of Ukraine.

Reminiscence of the Thetys Ocean and the Sarmatian Sea, the Black Sea is a semi-closed, intercontinental sea located in southeastern Europe, between the parallels of 40°54'– 46°38' north latitude and 27°27' – 41°42' east longitude (Encyclopedia of Romania, *Black Sea*).

It has an oval shape, with a maximum length of about 1,149 km, on the East-West axis, between Burgas and the Caucasian coast, and the minimum, of about 267 km, on the North-South axis, between Cape Sarici (Crimea) and Cape Kerempe. (Turkey). It has an area of 413,488 km² (451,490 km² with the Sea of Azov), a maximum depth of over 2,258 m, reached in the central-southern sector, and a slightly lacy coastline (ib.) (*Appendix no. 1*). The northern and north-western shores are low, furrowed by the mouths of the great continental watercourses (Danube Delta, Dniester, Dnieper, Bug estuaries, to which the Don estuary from the Sea of Azov, Casimcea, Rioni, Kuban etc. rivers are added). The eastern and southern shores are steep and furrowed by the mouths of the rivers Yerşilirmak, Kâzâlırmak, Sakarya. The northern coast is dominated by plain, with the exception of the Crimean Mountains, while the south and east are mostly mountains (*map in figure no. 1*).



Figure no. 1: Physiography of Black Sea Region (https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/physiography-of-black-sea-biogeographical-region/image_large, retrieved on 10 May 2021).

In the north, the land enters the sea, forming the Crimean Peninsula and the Kerch Peninsula, and in the west, it forms the region with a peninsular appearance Dobrogea. The islands are few and small,



Reminiscence of the Thetys Ocean and the Sarmatian Sea, the Black Sea is a semi-closed, intercontinental sea located in southeastern Europe, maximum length of about 1,149 km, an area of 413,488 km².



the largest being Snake Island (Zmiyinyy), east of the Danube Delta, and Berezan Island near the mouth of the Dniester Estuary (both in Ukraine). And, also in the north, the Black Sea communicates, through the Kerch Strait, with the Sea of Azov and, from here, through the Volga-Don river corridor, with the Caspian Sea.

In the southwest, it is connected with the Marmara Sea through the Bosphorus Strait and, further with the Aegean Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean through the Dardanelles Strait.

Some bays are wide (Burgas, Varna, Sinop, Samsun, etc.) and do not provide efficient shelter for ships during storms, and others are separated by wide ridges, which turn them into estuaries (Dobrogean and Dniester estuaries).

At the regional level, there are 54 sea and river ports, many natural, some of which are deep, such as Odessa, Chornomorsk, Pivdenny in Ukraine, Erdemir and Rize in Turkey, Burgas in Bulgaria, Novorossiysk, Tuapse and Taman in Russia and, the largest of them, the Romanian port of Constanța (Appendix no. 2). Deep-sea ports enable the construction of naval bases for surface and deep-sea fleets.

Due to the increased volume of fresh water discharged by the rich riparian network, the salinity of the Black Sea, of about 15-22 ‰, is low compared to the salinity of the Planetary Ocean, of 35 ‰. At the mouths of the Danube, the salinity of the sea is even lower, reaching up to about 3-10 ‰ (Enciclopedia României, Ib.).

GEOPOLITICAL ASPECTS

The Black Sea region consists of the geopolitical complex formed by the Black Sea and its riparian states, represented by the Republic of Ukraine to the north, the Russian Federation to the northeast, the Republic of Georgia to the east, the Republic of Turkey to the south, the Republic of Romania and the Republic of Bulgaria to the west. Also in the west, the Republic of Moldova, although a landlocked state, is also riparian to the Black Sea through the port of Giurgiulesti, located at km 133.8 of the Danube River.

The ancient astronomer Ptolemy (87-165 AD) went down in history through his observations on the status of the Eurasian border of the strip of land between the two aquatic masses of Eastern Europe, the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, later called, Ponto-Baltic Isthmus (Parker, 1960, p. 293) (map in figure no. 2). Although, on the north-south axis,

it is well delimited by the coasts of the two seas, on the east-west axis, the Isthmus has a less clear delimitation, between the Moravian Gate and the Georgian coast (Romer, 1917).

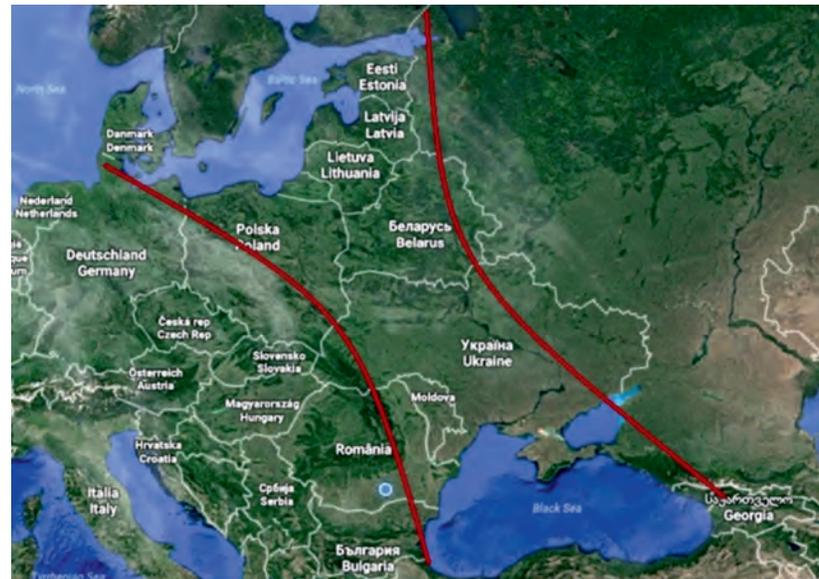


Figure no. 2: Ponto-Baltic Isthmus

(https://media.hotnews.ro/media_server1/image-2016-10-24-21370829-0-istmul-ponto-baltic.jpg, retrieved on 10 May 2021).

The Ptolemaic thesis, later shared by some geographers, gained geopolitical and geostrategic features, as, from East Asia and Western Europe, the dominant powers developed that coagulated around them the great civilisation spaces of Eurasia¹ and transformed the confluence area near the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus into a *geopolitical limes*.

Or, in other words, they transformed the North-South Central and Eastern European corridor into a *buffer, inter-civilisation space, subject to geopolitical pressures from the Catholic and Reformed West and the Orthodox East. A compression space, with the potential to turn into a "ruin belt"*, a fact demonstrated, at present, by the existence of frozen conflicts in the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, as a result of the intensified competition between the players of the two mentioned geopolitical spaces.

¹ Meaning the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (962-1806), respectively the Austrian Empire (1804-1867), the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1867-1918) and the Kingdom of Prussia (1701-1918), in Western Europe, and the Tsarist Empire (1721-1917), in Eastern Europe.



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As far as the Pontic region is concerned, the geopolitical pressure is accentuated by the existence of a third space, southern, Islamic, which amplifies the geopolitical dynamics, increasing the potential for the “ruin belt”, already demonstrated in the Caucasus, by maintaining and periodically reheating the frozen conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Also from a geopolitical perspective, the unitary and distinct geopolitical area of the Ponto-Baltic Isthmus is “composed, on the north-south axis, of two geopolitical regions:

- Northern, Baltic, mostly Catholic, with three subregions:
 - of the Baltic states: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia;
 - Central European: Poland;
 - CSI: Belarus;
- Southern, Pontic, mostly orthodox, with two subregions:
 - of the EU member states: Romania, Bulgaria;
 - of the former Soviet states: Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, Georgia” (Popescu, 2020, p. 231).

Consequently, any geopolitical process developed within the geopolitical macro-complex related to the Isthmus affects the security and stability of the Black Sea region, an aspect demonstrated by its recent history, common to the space in question, marked by:

- “the assertion of the sovereignty of the riparian states during the 20th century through the implosion of the Habsburg, Ottoman, Tsarist Empires in 1918, and the Soviet one in 1991;
- involvement in the two world conflagrations;
- the borders drawn after the Peace Treaties signed in 1919-1920 and 1947, between the belligerent powers in the two world wars, borders reconfirmed in 1975 by the Helsinki Final Act, and subsequently re-established by the Border Treaties signed after the implosion of The Soviet Empire in 1991;
- inclusion in the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War” of all states in the region, except Turkey,
- and the fact that, “starting with the medieval period, the historical dynamics of the borders of the states of this area has been generated by the geopolitical pressure exerted on the axes:
 - East-West: Russian-German;
 - northwest-south: Habsburg-Ottoman;
 - northeast-south: Tsarist-Ottoman

- and reached its peak in the 20th century, following the two world wars and the implosion of the Soviet Empire in 1991” (Ib., p. 231).

The same status of *geopolitical limes* is valid in the case of Turkey, which is:

- a state caught between the northern Orthodox pioneer front, the southern Arab Sunni pioneer front and the eastern Iranian Shiite;
- a sovereign over the Turkish Straits (Bosporus and Dardanelles), one of the seven points of global maritime constriction;
- entitled, by the 1936 Montreux Convention, to regulate maritime traffic in the Black Sea.

Through the status of “guardian” of the straits, Turkey can turn the Black Sea into a closed sea, with important economic and military consequences for all other riparian states.

And, we must also mention the non-riparian state actors, such as the USA, Germany, France, Israel, China, the supranational ones, such as the EU, CIS or the non-state ones, such as NATO, CSTO, UN, OSCE, multinational companies, etc., present in the Pontic space, which complicates and dynamises regional competition.

GEOSTRATEGIC ASPECTS

From a geostrategic point of view, the Black Sea region is “a pivot, a transition space between Western Europe, Eurasia and the Levant, part of the inner ring, of security, of the power that dominates the northern pivot area” (map in figure no. 3), as noted by the British geostrategist Sir Halford J. Mackinder (1861-1947).

The same geostrategist made an essential observation about the isthmus between Germanic, Western, and Eastern Russian Russia, which includes the Black Sea region, saying that the pivotal area is surrounded by “a succession of natural barriers, from the Arctic ice and the forests of Lena County in the mountains and arid plateaus of Central Asia, with one exception, that of the “wide open gate” between the pivot steppes and the European peninsula, the thousands of miles of communication line that stretches along the connecting isthmus connecting the Baltic Sea with the Black Sea” (Ibid., p. 228). Therefore, the Black Sea region belongs to a *pivotal space* that can become:

- “a great vulnerability for the state that dominates the northern pivot area, as it requires a wide deployment of its armed



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forces, which turns the control of the Isthmus into a strategic imperative for that state;

- a strategic advantage, such as a “bridgehead”, for any European/ non-European power/alliance/coalition interested in blocking the emergence of the Eurasian continental bloc, the political, economic and military control of the Isthmus becoming a strategic imperative for that power”.



Figure no. 3: Geographical Pivot of History (1904) (Mackinder, 1904, p. 435)

Or, in other words, “the “gemstone” of the “security ring” of the pivot zone is on the European isthmus” (Ib.).

A “gemstone” that “sparks even brighter” and more “attractively” in the Black Sea Region, through the presence of Turkish straits and mouths of inland waterways, real strategic corridors of naval transport and communication, which unite or will unite:

- the Pontic region with the Caspian region, through the Volga-Don river corridor;
- the Pontic region with central Europe, through the river corridor of the Danube;
- the Pontic region with Western Europe and the Atlantic Ocean, through the Danube-Elbe-Oder, Danube-Main-Rhine corridors;
- the Pontic region with the Baltic region, through the river corridors of the Dniester, Dnieper and Bug.



A “gemstone” on whose control the future status of Europe, the Atlantic promontory or the peninsula of Asia depends. Or, in other words, a “gemstone” on whose control Europe’s Euro-Atlantic future versus its Eurasian future depends.

It should also be mentioned that the Black Sea Region belongs to the security macro-complex of the “Eurasian Balkans” or “World Balkans”, described by the author of the concept, the American geostrategist Zbigniew K. Brzezinski (1928-2017), as the “central area of global instability” (map in figure no. 4), a region “where injustice and social deprivation, overcrowding and latent violence are most concentrated”, but also “the largest amount of natural gas and oil resources”, respectively “68% of the planet’s oil reserves and 41% of natural gas ones” (Brzezinski, 2005, p. 60).



Figure nr. 4: Eurasian Balkans and instability areas (https://fromestopwarscampaign.files.wordpress.com/2014/10/eb_map.jpg, retrieved on 1 July 2021).

Referring to the “World Balkans” and the explosive challenges they could pose to global security, Brzezinski said that, “for the next period, the region with the greatest potential to cause global chaos

Referring to the “World Balkans” and the explosive challenges they could pose to global security, Brzezinski said that, “for the next period, the region with the greatest potential to cause global chaos is that of the New Balkans. This is where America could collide with the Islamic world. In addition, the differences in the approach of this region, between Europe and America, could cause the disintegration of the Atlantic Alliance.



is that of the New Balkans. This is where America could collide with the Islamic world. In addition, the differences in the approach of this region, between Europe and America, could cause the disintegration of the Atlantic Alliance. These two possibilities, together, could jeopardize even American hegemony” (Ib., p. 59).

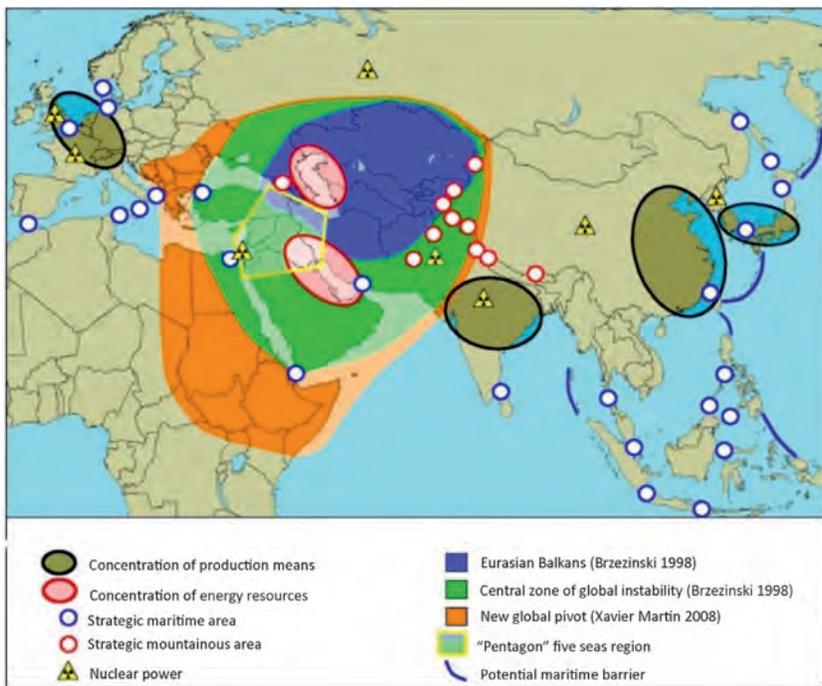


Figure no. 5: Fault lines areas in Afro-Eurasia

(<https://external-preview.redd.it/FaUW0W6qpS44Tx5ZF0J2ymjnqkHVlx8xDn8QB53OfRw.jpg?auto=webp&s=3c16f4ec5bfe6d418962be0d2341823e2a90cbcd>, retrieved on 1 May 2021).

And, last but not least, as can be seen in the map in figure no. 5, the Black Sea region belongs to the *macro-space of compression* between the maritime and the continental block and between the West and the East, known as the “*new global pivot*”, thus defined, in 2008, by the French geopolitician Xavier Martin. This extremely valuable geostrategic area, stretching from the Horn of Africa and the Middle East to the Greater Black Sea Region and the Eurasian Balkans, is considered the main strategic fault of the Afro-Eurasian continental mass, at which future cleavages between the dominant powers can be recorded. the level of the international system. In this area are concentrated large energy deposits, there are four of the global maritime constriction points (Turkish Straits, Bab-el Mandeb

Strait, Hormuz Strait and Suez Canal), three strategic mountain ranges (Caucasus, Carpathians, Balkans) and, very importantly, “*Pentagon of the 5 Strategic Seas*”, consisting of the Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Gulf of Aden and Persian Gulf, a strategic area of inestimable value, the permeability and stability of which depend on the flow of goods and energy transport globally.

GEOECONOMIC ASPECTS

The Black Sea region is a hub of economic corridors for the transport of goods, hydrocarbons, data, people who, on the north-south axis, unite northern Europe of the Levant and, on the east-west axis, unite Asia of Europe.

It is also a nexus of intercontinental trade and politics, strengthened by the existing sea and river ports in the region and by the river corridors Danube, Dniester, Dnieper, Bug, Don, interconnected, in turn, with other continental rivers.

As a result of this status, states of the Black Sea Region are included in the transport and communications master plans linking the Scandinavian Peninsula with the Balkan Peninsula and the Levant, such as the *Three Seas Initiative*² and the *17 + 1 Format*³ (map in figure no. 6), or in those that unite China and Russia with Western Europe, such as the *Belt and Road Initiative*⁴ (map in figure no. 7) or the “*Razvitie*” Trans-Eurasian Belt⁵ (map in figure no. 8).



ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING

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² Platform for political and economic cooperation established in 2015 at the level of state presidents. Currently, the platform brings together 12 geographically located states between three seas: Baltic, Black and Adriatic (BABS), respectively Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia (<https://3seas.eu/>, retrieved on 1 July 2021).

³ In 2011, the 16 + 1 Framework Format for Economic, Political and Cultural Cooperation between China and 11 Member States of the European Union was initiated, plus five other Balkan states: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia. In 2019, the format expanded with the accession of Greece, becoming 17 + 1, and in March 2021, it returned to the initial number of participants, by leaving the partnership by Lithuania (<http://www.china-ceec.org/eng/>, retrieved on 1 July 2021).

⁴ Officially presented on 28 March 2015, the strategy envisages the construction of a maritime and terrestrial economic “*bridge*” between three continents (Asia, Europe, Africa) and three/ four oceans (Pacific, Indian, Atlantic/Arctic) (<https://www.beltroad-initiative.com/belt-and-road/>, retrieved on 1 July 2021).

⁵ The Trans-Eurasian Razvitie – Development or TEBR belt will represent a new telecommunications network, energy transport, as well as high-speed road and rail, which will unite the markets of Europe and Asia (<https://blog.iiasa.ac.at/2015/09/21/a-new-vision-of-trans-eurasian-transportation/>, retrieved on 1 July 2021).

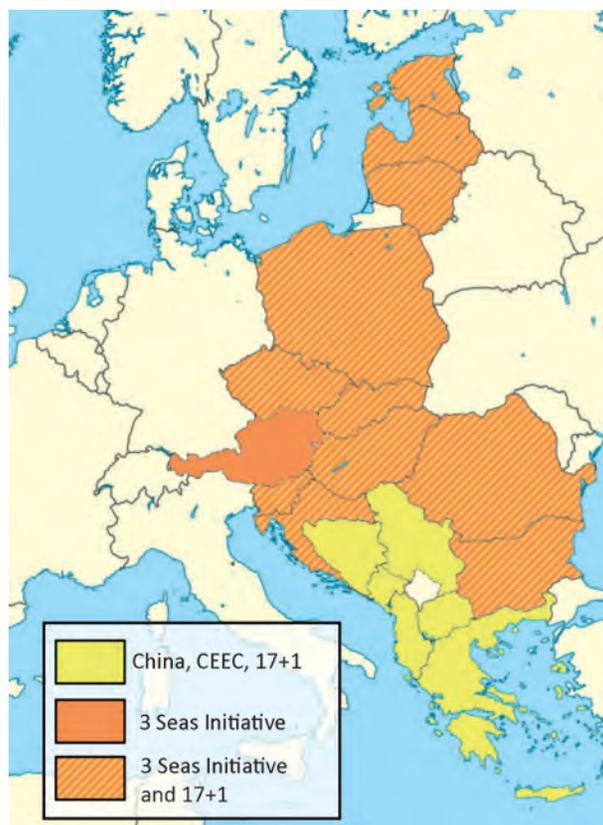


Figure no. 6: Three Seas Initiative and the 17+1 Format
 (https://www.oboreurope.com/en/three-seas-initiative-bri-europe/, retrieved on 1 July 2021).

The Black Sea Region is also an independent geoeconomic area, which by 2020 has brought together over 308 million consumers (including the Russian Federation), mostly educated, and a total GDP (PPP) of 7,771.2 trillion USD.

The Black Sea Region is also an independent geoeconomic area, which by 2020 has brought together over 308 million consumers (including the Russian Federation), mostly educated, and a total GDP (PPP) of 7,771.2 trillion USD. It is an insufficiently developed and exploited geoeconomic space as a result of the geopolitical pressure to which it is subjected.

And last but not least, the Black Sea Region is known for its rich natural, terrestrial, aquatic and underground resources. Thus, according to data provided by the *CIA WorldFactBook* portal:

- Romania has oil, natural gas, wood, coal, uranium, copper, gold, silver, iron ore, salt, arable land, hydropower, etc.;
- Bulgaria has bauxite, copper, lead, zinc, coal, wood, arable land, etc.;

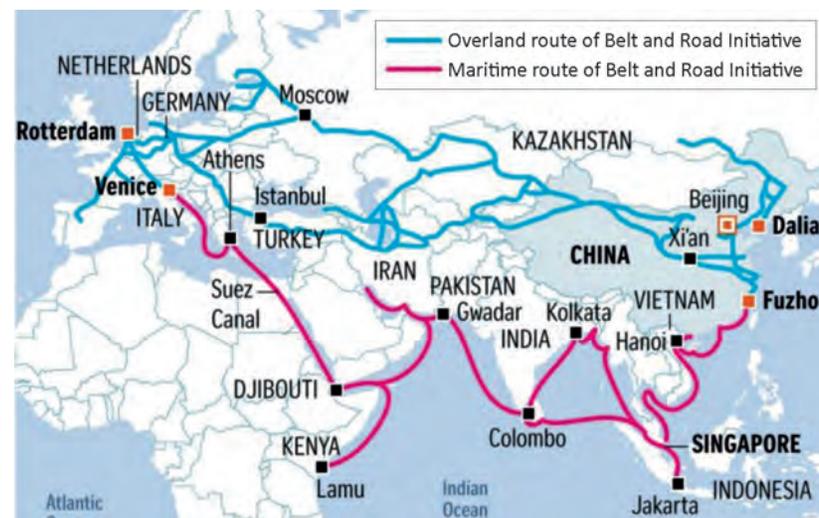


Figure no. 7: The Belt and Road Initiative
 (https://www.asiagreen.com/en/news-insights/the-belt-and-road-initiative-and-the-rising-importance-of-china-s-western-cities, retrieved on 1 July 2021).

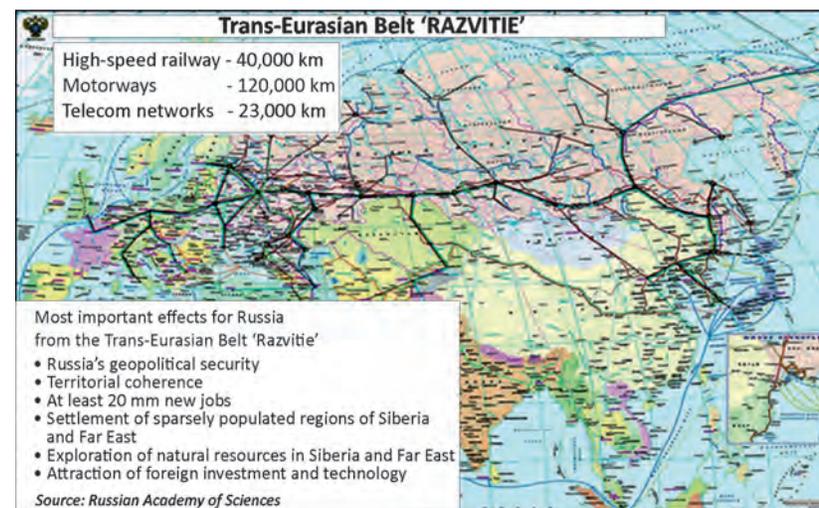


Figure nr. 8: Trans-Eurasian Belt "Razvitie"
 (https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:AND9GcSYGORKcsQvL0bNt1IW-SOX1eM4bQPXWzIHew&usqp=CAU, retrieved on 1 July 2021).

- Turkey has coal mines, iron ores, copper, chromium, antimony, mercury, gold, barite, borate, celestite (strontium), emery, feldspar, limestone, magnesite, marble, perlite, pumice, pyrite (sulfur), clay, arable land, hydropower;



Ukraine is known for the quality of the arable land that turned it into the granary of Europe. At the same time, it holds deposits of iron ore, coal, manganese, natural gas, oil, salt, sulphur, graphite, titanium, magnesium, kaolin, nickel, mercury, wood.

- Georgia has manganese, iron ore, copper, wood, hydropower, coal and oil deposits; the coastal climate and soils allow the intensive growth of tea trees and citrus fruits;
- The Russian Federation is one of the richest states in the world, benefiting from large deposits of oil, natural gas, coal, strategic minerals, bauxite, rare earths, wood;
- Ukraine is known for the quality of the arable land that turned it into the granary of Europe. At the same time, it holds deposits of iron ore, coal, manganese, natural gas, oil, salt, sulphur, graphite, titanium, magnesium, kaolin, nickel, mercury, wood;
- Moldova is rich in lignite, phosphorites, gypsum, limestone, arable land (World Fact Book).

To these riches are added the fish reserve in the Black Sea and in the riparian river basins, the fauna of the forests (some still virgin), of the Danube Delta and of the estuaries of the riparian rivers, as well as the abundant vegetation.

CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, we can say that the Black Sea Region represents:

- a space of geographical transition between the great Russian plain, in the North, and the Carpatho-Caucasian alpine mountain relief, in the South;
- a buffer geopolitical *limes* (arranged between the Russian Federation and Central and Western Europe), a compression zone at risk of turning into a ruin belt, due to its location at the intersection of three civil and geopolitical spaces (Western, orthodox, islamic);
- a pivotal space with bridgehead potential, of exceptional geostrategic value for any power interested in dominating Eurasia, part of the “*Pentagon of the 5 Strategic Seas*”, the central area of global instability related to the World Balkans and the *new global pivot*;
- a *hub* and a *nexus* of transcontinental and intercontinental transport geoeconomic and geopolitical corridors, as well as an attractive geoeconomic market.

This very valuable geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic status explains the intense regional geopolitical dynamics of the last century, expressed by frequent border changes, the existence

of periodically reheated frozen conflicts, the multiplication of regional state and non-state players and their intense competition for control and domination. And, very importantly, it announces future tensions in the conditions of intensifying competition between the main regional players: the Russian Federation, China and the Western bloc.

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Appendix no. 1

The Main Physical-Geographical Data of the Black Sea

(Boşneagu, 2018, pp. 584-585; *Marea Neagră, lucr. cit.*)

Total surface area	451,490 km ²
Volume	529,955 km ³
Maximum depth	2,258 m
Average depth	1,271 m
Maximum length	1,149 km (662 nautical miles – M)
Maximum width	650 km (332 M)
Minimum width	267 km (144 M)
Coastline length	4,047 km (2,200 M)
Distance to the White Sea	1,300 km
Distance to the Persian Gulf	1,300 km
Distance to the North Sea	aprox. 1,300 km
Distance to the Mediterranean Sea (Gibraltar)	aprox. 1,300 km
Distance to the Suez Canal	aprox. 650 km
Distance to the Caspian Sea	aprox. 350 km



Extreme points	North - 46° 33'N Berezan Estuary, near Oceakov; East – 41°42'E between Batumi and Poti; South – 40° 56'N Giresun; West – 27° 27'E Burgas Bay
Romanian coastline length	225 km – from Vama Veche to Musura River mouth
Ukrainian coastline length	1,200 km – from Musura River mouth to Kerci Strait
Russian coastline	239 km – from Strait Kerci la Psou River mouth
Georgian coastline	310 km – from Psou River mouth to Chorotka River mouth
Turkish coastline	1,695 km – from Chorotka River mouth to Rezovka River mouth
Bulgarian coastline	378 km – from Rezovka River mouth to Vama Veche
Hydrographical basin	2,405,000 km ²
The difference of level between the Elbrus peak (5.633 m) and the maximum depth	7,878 m
Continental shelf	133,000 km ² (40% of the total surface)
Bosporus Strait water flow rate	450 km ³
Fresh water flow rate	400 km ³
Hydrogen Sulphide	From the depth of 150-200 m

*Distances are measured in straight line.

Appendix no. 2

Black Sea Region Ports

(Ib., pp. 585-586)

Nr.	Country	Port	Type	Size
1.	Romania	Brăila	Fluvial	Medium
2.		Galați	Fluvial	Medium
3.		Tulcea	Fluvial	Small



Nr.	Country	Port	Type	Size
4.		Sulina	Fluvial/Maritime	Medium
5.		Midia	Maritime/Danube-Black Sea Canal	Small
6.		Constanța	Maritime	Largest port
7.		Medgidia	Fluvial	Small
8.		Mangalia	Maritime	Small
9.	Bulgaria	Varna	Maritime	Large
10.		Balchik	Maritime	Small
11.		Nessebar	Maritime	Small
12.		Bourgas	Maritime	Large
13.	Turcia	Istanbul	Maritime	Large
14.		Eregli	Maritime	Small
15.		Zonguldak	Maritime	Small
16.		Bartın	Maritime	Small
17.		Sinop	Maritime	Small
18.		Samsun	Maritime	Small
19.		Giresun	Maritime	Small
20.		Espiye	Maritime	Small
21.		Tirebolu	Maritime	Small
22.		Trabzon	Maritime	Small
23.		Rize	Maritime	Small
24.		Hopa	Maritime	Small
25.	Georgia	Batumi	Maritime	Large
26.		Supsa	Maritime/Oil Terminal	Small
27.		Poti	Maritime	Large
28.		Kulevi	Maritime	Small
29.		Sukhumi	Maritime	Medium
30.	Russian Federation	Sochi	Maritime	Small
31.		Tuapse	Maritime	Small
32.		Novorossiysk	Maritime	Large
33.		Port Kavkaz	Maritime at Azov Sea	Small
34.		Taganrog	Maritime at Azov Sea	Small
35.	Ukraine	Kerch	Maritime	Small

Nr.	Country	Port	Type	Size
36.		Mariupol	Maritime at Azov Sea	Small
37.		Berdyansk	Maritime at Azov Sea	Small
38.		Theodosia	Maritime	Small
39.		Yalta	Maritime	Small
40.		Sevastopol	Maritime	Large
41.		Evpatoria	Maritime	Medium
42.		Chernomorsk	Maritime	Small
43.		Kerson	Maritime	Small
44.		Nikolaev	Fluvial	Medium
45.		Dneprobugsky	Fluvial	Small
46.		Youzhny	Maritime	Small
47.		Odessa	Maritime	Large
48.		Ilicevsk	Maritime	Medium
49.		Belgorod - Dnestrovsky	Fluvial	Small
50.		Ust Dunaysk	Fluvial	Small
51.		Kilia	Fluvial	Small
52.		Izmail	Fluvial	Small
53.		Reni	Fluvial	Small
54.	Moldova	Giurgiulești	Fluvial	Small





NUCLEAR WEAPONS REMAIN THE MAIN DETERRENCE AGAINST POSSIBLE AGGRESSION

Romică CERNAT, PhD

The renewal of superpower status competition has led, among other things, to enhancing the emphasis on nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence, all of which relate to China and/or Russia. The challenge of deterrence – discouraging states from taking unwanted actions, especially military aggression – has again become a main issue in defence policy. The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), which was signed by the United States and Russia, could be seen as “just one step in a longer journey”. Russia’s reassertion of its status as a major world power has mostly included recurring references by Russian officials to Russia’s nuclear weapons capabilities and its status as a major nuclear power.

China’s nuclear-weapon capabilities are much more modest than Russia’s, but China is modernising its nuclear forces as part of its overall military modernisation effort.

Across the globe and in many different domains, the United States is now dealing with a more immediate requirement for effective deterrence than in any other time since the end of the Cold War. Because many potential adversaries are significantly more capable than they were a decade or more ago and the risks of actually fighting a major war are more significant than ever, deterring such a conflict becomes even more imperative.

Keywords: nuclear weapons; nuclear deterrence; ballistic missiles; constraint; international security;



INTRODUCTION

The world is changing rapidly and fundamentally. We are seeing long-term shifts in the balance of global economic and military power, increasing competition between states, and the emergence of more powerful state and non-state actors. It is increasingly likely to deal with unexpected developments, given that the national security of any state depends on economic security and vice versa.

From the rise of The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, the terrorism, pandemics and other biological risks, the escalating climate crisis, cyber and digital threats, international economic disruptions, protracted humanitarian crises, greater instability in the Middle East, the migration, the Ukraine crisis, the threat of cyberattacks, the radical Islam, the potential use of weapons of mass destruction – particularly by non-state actors, which makes militant Islam a threat – the frozen conflicts, the erosion of the rule-based international order, making it harder to build consensus and tackle global threats to the rise of nondemocratic Great Powers – the West’s old Cold War rivals, China and Russia – and the risk of pandemics, all of the above make the world more dangerous and uncertain today than it was ten years ago.

The competition between states and the threats they pose to each other can have a significant impact on international security and Great Powers interests. At the extreme, this risks drawing the Great Powers into military conflict. Russia has become more aggressive, authoritarian and nationalist, increasingly defining itself in opposition to the West. The illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the continuing support to separatists in eastern Ukraine through the use of forbidden, hybrid tactics and media manipulation have shown Russia’s willingness to undermine wider international standards of cooperation in order to secure its perceived interests.

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Russia is mid-way through a major investment programme to modernise and equip its armed forces, including the nuclear ones. It has also increased its nuclear exercises and rhetoric, by threatening to base nuclear forces in Kaliningrad and Crimea. Its military activity around the territory of NATO allies and close to their airspace and territorial waters is designed to test NATO countries response. Russia's behaviour will continue to be hard to predict and, though highly unlikely, we cannot rule out the possibility that it may feel tempted to act aggressively against NATO Allies.

More generally, wider states competition can be a risk to stability. In the Middle East and North Africa, regional powers have been pursuing competing security interests, driven by growing military and economic capabilities. Both South Asia and South East Asia continue to grow in economic importance and political significance, and this has come with increased tensions, exacerbated by unresolved historical disputes. North Korea is the only state to test a nuclear weapon in the 21st century and its continued pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles is a serious concern.

NUCLEAR DETERRENCE – A TACTICS TO PROVIDE GLOBAL BALANCE OF POWER –

Defence and protection start with deterrence, which has long been at the heart of the Great Power's national security policy. They will use the full spectrum of their capabilities – armed force including, ultimately, nuclear deterrence, diplomacy, law enforcement, economic policy, offensive cyber and covert means – to deter adversaries and to deny them opportunities to attack. The states will use these means to ensure that there are consequences for those who threaten their security (Clausewitz, 1989, pp. 80-83). Consequently, they will build their resilience to reduce their vulnerabilities.

The collective defence and cooperative security provided by membership of NATO further enhances the credibility of deterrence. In NATO, there is a renewed focus on deterrence to address current and future threats and to make sure that its potential adversaries have no doubts about the range of responses they should expect to any aggressive action on their part.

Any great power has been under constant threat from ballistic missiles since World War II and non-Euro-Atlantic states and non-state actors now have access to ballistic missile technology. Nuclear deterrence for a state's national security will remain essential as long as the global security situation demands it. It has existed for over 70 years especially in order to deter the most extreme threats to national security, the Western value system and to ensure the security of NATO allies.

Other states continue to have nuclear arsenals and there is a continuing risk of further proliferation of nuclear weapons. Is not excluded the risk that states will use their nuclear capability to threaten, try to impede the crisis decision-making process or support nuclear terrorism.

In general, weapons of mass destruction owning states are committed to maintaining the minimum amount of destructive power needed to deter any aggressor. This requires them to make sure that their deterrence is not vulnerable to pre-emptive action by potential adversaries. As a rule, only the highest office in the state can authorise the launch of nuclear weapons, which ensures that political control is maintained at all times.

Deterring a deliberate nuclear attack against the United States and its allies is one of the keys to prevention and is the fundamental purpose of US nuclear forces. These forces exist to ensure that the costs of aggression by potential adversaries will far outweigh any political or military gain. Any rational adversary facing the prospect of such costs should be deterred, and by the same token, US allies should be reassured. These dual outcomes have been the main objectives of US military power for seven decades (Blair, 2018, p. 15).

China feels its nuclear deterrent is at risk because of US targeting capabilities, missile accuracy, and potential ballistic missile defences. Beijing is, therefore, modernising and expanding its missile force to restore its deterrent value.

On the other hand, the United States' ability to attack and destroy Russian nuclear forces is not without cost. Russia and China are all too aware of their vulnerability and try to compensate through operational



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measures. In the case of Russia, these may include launching their weapons on warning of an incoming American attack. This tactic will get many of the Russian missiles into the air before they can be destroyed on the ground but would have catastrophic consequences if Russian early warning was actually a false alarm.

The Russians may take other risky measures during a crisis if they perceive their forces are vulnerable, such as pre-delegating launch authority to lower echelons for fear of a decapitating strike on national leaders. Moreover, dispersing weapons to improve survivability increases the possibility of accident and theft by or diversion to terrorists.

The counterforce capabilities of the United States also affect Russian and Chinese force structure decisions. Because a large fraction of US forces is on invulnerable submarines, Russia has no hope of a disarming first strike against the United States. Russia is forced to give up to a retaliatory attack (or at best a very limited counterforce attack) so part of the Russian calculation of an adequate force structure is to have enough weapons after an American first strike to still retaliate with forces adequate to deter.

While nuclear deterrence remains a pillar of US national security and a security umbrella for US allies, its central organising principle of threatening massive destruction in response to nuclear aggression was more suited to the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union and China than to the modern rivalry among the United States, Russia, and China. But despite the anachronistic nature of today's nuclear postures, these competitors have been unable to replace the paradigm of nuclear deterrence with a new security architecture. They remain under its yoke, seemingly condemned to maintain and rebuild vast arsenals by permanently relating to technological evolutions.

Russian defence and security documents have not only emphasised that Russia views NATO enlargement as a key threat to its security, they have also highlighted the need for Russia to be able to deter NATO's use of precision conventional weapons, such as the U.S. Navy's Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missiles (*The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, 2010, pp. 3-6; 23-31). Russia already has a wide

range of conventional and nuclear capabilities that can threaten US allies in NATO. For example, its shorter-range systems, like the Iskander missiles, which can carry either conventional or nuclear warheads, can reach into Poland and the Baltic states, particularly if they are deployed in Belarus or Kaliningrad (Mizokami, 2017).

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

A few very brief introductory remarks could usefully be made in order to set out the concept of *deterrence* and to situate this analysis in the historical context of the time. Although the precise wording of definitions may vary with particular authors, the core components remain constant. *Deterrence* means that any potential aggressors know that any benefits they may seek to gain by attacking a state will be outweighed by the consequences for them. *Military deterrence* can be defined as the process of convincing a potential enemy, by the threat of force, that he is better off if does not use military force against you (Carnesale, 1983, pp. 32; 146).

One of the leading figures of the deterrence literature, Glenn Snyder, employed the following statement: "*Deterrence means discouraging the enemy from taking military action by posing for him a prospect of cost and risk outweighing his prospective gain*" (1961, pp. 3; 9-41). Further, the perception of credibility is inherent to effective deterrence: "*deterrence works on the enemy's intentions; the deterrent value of military forces is their effect in reducing the likelihood of enemy military moves*" (Ibid.) In its basic dimension, the deterrent posture seeks to convince a potential adversary that any hostile action undertaken will result in unacceptable costs and risks in relation to any gain that could result from that hostile action.

Credibility in turn consists of two independent dimensions. The deterring State or actor must not only have the necessary capabilities to withstand the threat of retaliatory action, but must also convey to the opponent that it has the necessary will and resolution to answer to the use of force with equivalent or greater force in defence of the interests at stake (Craig, George, 1983, p. 172).



"Deterrence works on the enemy's intentions; the deterrent value of military forces is their effect in reducing the likelihood of enemy military moves".



Deterrence is an effort to affect the thinking of an adversary in order to discourage a resort to nuclear weapons. History shows that deterrence has been useful only under very specific conditions. In the Cold War, mutual assured destruction was very good at preventing one outcome: total nuclear war that could kill hundreds of millions of people. But nuclear deterrence did not prevent the Soviets' other bad behaviour, including invading Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan. The key Cold War takeaway is not that policymakers should use deterrence more. It seems that some things are not deterrable, no matter how much we wish they were.

Meanwhile, changes in the international security environment have altered the context for deterrence, possibly challenging long-held assumptions and creating new requirements. This perspective has drawn on a range of recent and classic studies to review the concepts and fundamental principles about deterrence.

Any strategy to prevent aggression must begin with an assessment of the interests, motives, and imperatives of the potential aggressor, including its theory of deterrence (taking into account what it values and why). In the process, as it will be argued, history strongly suggests that aggressor motivations are varied and complex, and as often grounded in a desperate sense of a need to act as they are the product of aggressive opportunism (Mueller, Castillo, Morgan, Pegahi&Rosen, 2006, pp. 19-38).

Deterrence turns out to be about much more than merely threatening a potential adversary: it demands the nuanced shaping of perceptions so that an adversary sees the alternatives to aggression as more attractive than war.

Deterrence is the practice of discouraging or restraining someone – in world politics, usually a nation-state – from taking unwanted actions, such as an armed attack. It involves an effort to stop or prevent an action, as opposed to the closely related but distinct concept of “*compellence*”, which is an effort to force an actor to do something.

Denial versus punishment. The classic literature distinguishes between two fundamental approaches to deterrence. *Deterrence by denial strategies* seeks to deter an action by making it infeasible

or unlikely to succeed, thus denying a potential aggressor confidence in attaining its objectives – deploying sufficient local military forces to defeat an invasion, for example (Beaufre, 1965, pp. 23, 51). At their extreme, these strategies can confront a potential aggressor with the risk of catastrophic loss. Deterrence by denial represents, in effect, simply the application of an intention and effort to defend some commitment. A capability to deny amounts to a capability to defend; “*deterrence and defense are analytically distinct but thoroughly interrelated in practice*” (Morgan et al., *ib.*, p. 32).

The most common way of measuring the health of a deterrence threat grounded in denial capabilities is the immediate balance of forces in the contested territory – but, the local balance of forces is not the only, or even always the most important, factor. Deterrence by denial should not be equated with military balances alone.

Deterrence by punishment, on the other hand, threatens severe penalties, such as nuclear escalation or severe economic sanctions, if an attack occurs. These penalties are connected to the local fight and the wider world. The focus of deterrence by punishment is not the direct defence of the contested commitment but rather threats of wider punishment that would raise the cost of an attack. Most classic studies suggest that denial strategies are inherently more reliable than punishment strategies (Huth, Russett, 1988, p. 42). The steps taken to deny, such as placing significant military capabilities directly in the path of an aggressor should be enough relevant. An aggressor might doubt, on the other hand, a defender's willingness to impose punishments.

An aggressor might also convince itself that the defender will hesitate to follow through on threats to punish because of attendant risks, such as further escalation, respectively the deterring state may not be willing to run once the moment arrives. As Thomas Schelling noted, there are threats that a state would rather not fulfil, and weakness in deterrence can emerge when an aggressor believes the defender will ultimately prove unwilling to carry out its threats (1980, pp. 175-177; 187-189; 207-208; 230; 257-266).

The strategic weapons are deployed on a “*triad*” of delivery systems: submarine- and land-based ballistic missiles and long-range bombers.



Deterrence by denial represents, in effect, simply the application of an intention and effort to defend some commitment. A capability to deny amounts to a capability to defend; “deterrence and defense are analytically distinct but thoroughly interrelated in practice”.



Few terms in discussions of nuclear weapon are more misused, misunderstood, or distorted than “deterrence”. The Department of Defense’s 2009 *Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report* (2009) defines deterrence operations as “integrated, systematic efforts to exercise decisive influence over adversaries’ decision-making calculus in peacetime, crisis, and war” (p. 5). Without mentioning whom or what is being deterred, the word can refer to either nuclear deterrence or conventional deterrence, and to either retaliatory or first strike attacks. Throughout the Cold War – and even today – nuclear “deterrence” had many definitions and many roles.

Cold War Deterrence. For example, during the Cold War, nuclear forces based in the continental United States were intended to deter, among other things, Soviet conventional attacks on NATO Europe, Japan, and South Korea, by threatening nuclear damage to the Soviet Union as the likely response. But the threat of Soviet nuclear retaliation – whether counterforce or counter value – tended to weaken the plausibility of any American nuclear threat. That is, Soviet nuclear forces deterred the US deterrent, thus, the ability to execute a “first strike” to destroy Soviet nuclear systems on the ground was ironically viewed as a valuable part of the U.S. nuclear “deterrent” mission, and enormous resources were devoted to that goal.

Similar intentions were ascribed to the Soviet defence establishment, which, some believed, might be tempted to alter the balance of power by launching a disarming first strike against US central strategic nuclear forces. As a result, in the strange logic of the Cold War, both sides felt that threats of surprise nuclear first strikes were counted as “deterrence”. While this might have contributed to deterring a conventional attack, it created a dangerously unstable nuclear competition because both sides knew or suspected the other of preparing to execute a first strike. “Deterrence” has become to be defined as whatever it is that nuclear weapons do. Nuclear weapons have simply become deterrence no matter what mission they have.

Deterrence Today. US State Department documents describe “nuclear deterrence” as the fundamental component of national

security policy. The US Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy that entered into effect in 2004 stated in part: “US nuclear forces must be capable of, and be seen to be capable of, destroying those critical war-making and war-supporting assets and capabilities that a potential enemy leadership values most and that it would rely on to achieve its own objectives in a post-war world” (Kristensen, Norris, Oelrich, 2009, pp. 15-16). “Safe, credible, and reliable nuclear forces continue to play a critical role. We are strengthening deterrence by developing a New Triad composed of offensive strike systems (both nuclear and improved conventional capabilities); active and passive defenses, including missile defenses; and a responsive infrastructure, all bound together by enhanced command and control, planning, and intelligence systems. These capabilities will better deter some of the new threats we face, while also bolstering our security commitments to allies. Such security commitments have played a crucial role in convincing some countries to forgo their own nuclear weapons programs, thereby aiding our nonproliferation objectives” (2006, p. 22). “For example, the United States will maintain its nuclear arsenal as a primary deterrent to nuclear attack, and the New Triad remains a cornerstone of strategic deterrence” (2008, p. 12). The new triad offers a portfolio of capabilities and the flexibility required to address a spectrum of contingencies.

The deterrence challenge of today is quite different from that of the Cold War, partly because of differences in who is being deterred, but primarily because of differences in what is being deterred. Simply carrying forward the deterrence logic and assumptions based on “the who” and “the what” of the Cold War thinking results in profound and dangerous fallacies in today’s radically different world. It is quite remarkable that discussions about deterrence and what may be needed for it often avoid mentioning any actions that are supposed to be deterred. Indeed, the new strategy intentionally leaves that unclear. Uncertainty about what the US response will be and when it will be triggered, so the argument goes, helps make deterrence work.



The Department of Defense’s 2009 Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report (2009) defines deterrence operations as “integrated, systematic efforts to exercise decisive influence over adversaries’ decision-making calculus in peacetime, crisis, and war”.



NUCLEAR WEAPONS – TYPES AND DEPLOYMENT

During the Cold War, the US nuclear arsenal contained many types of delivery vehicles for nuclear weapons. These included short-range missiles and artillery for use on the battlefield, medium-range missiles and aircraft that could strike targets beyond the theatre of battle, short and medium-range systems based on surface ships, long-range missiles based on US territory and submarines, and heavy bombers that could threaten Soviet targets from their bases in the United States.

Nuclear States. *Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)* signed in 1968 and entered into force in 1970 commits the five officially recognised nuclear weapons states (United States, United Kingdom, Russia, France, and China) to disarmament but is not an outright ban on possession. Nonnuclear weapon states, NPT foreswear nuclear weapons and place nuclear materials and facilities under international safeguards.

The NPT nuclear weapon states, also the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, oppose the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons also known as the nuclear “*ban treaty*”. Negotiations ended on 7 July 2017, when 122 countries voted to approve the treaty. The United States, UK, and French UN Permanent Representatives issued a joint press release stating: “*A purported ban on nuclear weapons that does not address the security concerns that continue to make nuclear deterrence necessary cannot result in the elimination of a single nuclear weapon and will not enhance any country’s security, nor international peace and security*” (*Joint Press Statement, 2017*).

Eight sovereign states have publicly announced successful detonation of nuclear weapons. Five are considered to be nuclear-weapon states under the terms of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. In order of acquisition of nuclear weapons these are the United States, Russia (the successor state to the Soviet Union), the United Kingdom, France, and China. Since the NPT entered into force in 1970, three states that were not parties to the Treaty have conducted overt nuclear tests, namely India, Pakistan, and North Korea. North Korea had been a party to The NPT but withdrew in 2003. Israel

is also generally understood to have nuclear weapons, but does not acknowledge it, maintaining a policy of deliberate ambiguity, and is not known definitively to have conducted a nuclear test. Israel is estimated to possess somewhere between 75 and 400 nuclear warheads. One possible motivation for nuclear ambiguity is deterrence with minimum political cost.

Arms control and nonproliferation efforts have produced formal treaties and agreements, informal arrangements, and cooperative threat reduction and monitoring mechanisms. Progress in negotiating and implementing these agreements was often slow, and subject to the tenor of the broader US-Soviet relationship (Durkalec, 2019). States that formerly possessed nuclear weapons are South Africa (developed nuclear weapons but then disassembled its arsenal before joining the NPT) and the former Soviet republics of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine, whose weapons were repatriated to Russia.

According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the worldwide total inventory of nuclear weapons as of 2019 stood at 13,865, of which 3,750 were deployed with operational forces. In early 2019, more than 90% of the world’s 13,865 nuclear weapons were owned by Russia and the United States (World nuclear forces, 2020, pp. 326-330).

The United States and Soviet Union signed the *Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty* in December 1987 (*INF Treaty, 1987*). In the INF Treaty, the United States and Soviet Union agreed that they would ban all land-based ballistic and cruise missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometres. The ban would apply to missiles with nuclear or conventional warheads, but would not apply to sea-based or air-delivered missiles. The United States suspended its participation in the treaty and submitted its official notice of withdrawal 2 February 2019. Russia responded by suspending its participation on 2 February 2019, as well. The treaty lapsed on 2 August 2019, six months after the United States submitted its notice of withdrawal (Durkalec, lb.).

The New START Treaty. The United States and Russia has participated in numerous arms control and nonproliferation efforts



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over the past 60 years. These efforts have produced formal treaties and agreements that impose restrictions on US and Russia military forces and activities, informal arrangements and guidelines that US and Russia have agreed to observe. The changing international environment in the 1990s led many analysts to believe that the United States and other nations could enter a new era of restraint in weapons deployments, weapons transfers, and military operations. These hopes were codified in several treaties signed between 1991 and 1996, such as the *Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties (START I and START II)*, the Chemical Weapons Convention, and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. START limited long-range nuclear forces – land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers - in the United States and the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. The United States and Russia began to hold talks on a new treaty.

The formal talks resumed in late January 2010, and the parties concluded the *New START Treaty* in early April 2010. Presidents Obama and Medvedev signed the *Prague Treaty* on 8 April 2010; it entered into force on 5 February 2011. *The New START Treaty* contains three central limits on U.S. and Russian strategic offensive nuclear forces. First, it limits each side to no more than 800 deployed and nondeployed ICBM and SLBM launchers and deployed and nondeployed heavy bombers equipped to carry nuclear armaments. Second, within that total, it limits each side to no more than 700 deployed ICBMs, deployed SLBMs, and deployed heavy bombers equipped to carry nuclear armaments. Third, the treaty limits each side to no more than 1,550 deployed warheads. Deployed warheads include the actual number of warheads carried by deployed ICBMs and SLBMs, and one warhead for each deployed heavy bomber equipped for nuclear armaments (*New START Treaty*, 2010).

The warhead limits in New START differ from those in the original START Treaty regarding the sublimits on warheads attributed to different types of strategic weapons and each side will simply declare the total number of warheads deployed across their force. The *New START Treaty* contains a monitoring and verification regime that resembles the regime in *START*.

The United States and the Russian Federation have agreed to extend the treaty through 4 February 2026 (*New START Treaty*, 2020). The information provided through the treaty’s implementation contributes to reducing the risk of strategic surprise, mistrust, and miscalculations that can result from excessive secrecy or decisions based on worst-case assumptions.

Table no. 1 consists in a list of states that have admitted the possession of nuclear weapons or are presumed to possess them, the approximate number of warheads under their control, and the year they tested their first weapon and their force configuration (List of states with nuclear weapons, 2020, p. 316). This list is informally known in global politics as the “*Nuclear Club*”. With the exception of Russia and the United States (which have subjected their nuclear forces to independent verification under various treaties) these figures are estimates, in some cases quite unreliable estimates.

From as much as 70,300 active weapons in 1986, as of 2019 there are approximately 3,750 active nuclear warheads and 13,890 total nuclear warheads in the world. Many of the decommissioned weapons were simply stored or partially dismantled, not destroyed. It is also noteworthy that since the dawn of the *Atomic Age*, the delivery methods of most states with nuclear weapons has evolved with some achieving a nuclear triad, while others have consolidated away from land and air deterrents to submarine-based forces. P.19. The New START Treaty contains three central limits on U.S. and Russian strategic offensive nuclear forces.

Table no. 1: “States that have admitted the possession of nuclear weapons or are presumed to possess them, the approximate number of warheads under their control, and the year they tested their first weapon and their force configuration”
(List of states with nuclear weapons, lb.)

Country	Warheads		Date of first test	Site of first test	CTBT status	Delivery methods	Tests
	Deployed	Total					
The five nuclear-weapon states under the NPT							
United States	1.750	5.800-6.185	16 July 1945 (<i>Trinity</i>)	Alamogordo, New Mexico	Signatory	Nuclear triad	1,054



The United States and the Russian Federation have agreed to extend the treaty through 4 February 2026 (New START Treaty, 2020). The information provided through the treaty’s implementation contributes to reducing the risk of strategic surprise, mistrust, and miscalculations that can result from excessive secrecy or decisions based on worst-case assumptions.



A nuclear triad is a three-pronged military force structure that consists of land-launched nuclear missiles, nuclear-missile-armed submarines, and strategic aircraft with nuclear bombs and missiles. Specifically, these components are land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and strategic bombers.

Country	Warheads		Date of first test	Site of first test	CTBT status	Delivery methods	Tests
	Deployed	Total					
Russia	1.572	6.372-6.490	29 August 1949 (RDS-1)	Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan	Ratifier	Nuclear triad	715
United Kingdom	120	200-215	3 October 1952 (Hurricane)	Monte Bello Islands, Australia	Ratifier	Sea-based	45
France	280	290	13 February 1960 (Gerboise Bleue)	Sahara, French Algeria	Ratifier	Sea and air-based	210
China	(?)	300-320	16 October 1964 (596)	Lop Nur, Xinjiang	Signatory	Nuclear triad	45
Non-NPT nuclear powers							
India	(?)	150	18 May 1974, (Smiling Buddha)	Pokhran, Rajasthan	Non-signatory	Nuclear triad	6
Pakistan	0	160	28 May 1998, (Chagai-1)	Ras Koh Hills, Balochistan	Non-signatory	Land and air-based	6
North Korea	0	30-40	9 October 2006	Kilju, North Hamgyong	Non-signatory	Terestru și de pe mare	6
Undeclared nuclear powers							
Israel	0	90	1960 - 1979	Unknown	Signatory	Suspected nuclear triad	N/A

These five states are known to have detonated a nuclear explosive before 1 January 1967 and are thus nuclear weapons states under the NPT also happen to be the UN Security Council's permanent members with veto power on UNSC resolutions.

A nuclear triad is a three-pronged military force structure that consists of land-launched nuclear missiles, nuclear-missile-armed submarines, and strategic aircraft with nuclear bombs and missiles. Specifically, these components are land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and strategic bombers.



The purpose of having this three-branched nuclear capability is to significantly reduce the possibility that an enemy could destroy all of a state's nuclear forces in a first-strike attack. This, in turn, ensures a credible threat of a second strike, and thus increases a state's nuclear deterrence.

Nuclear weapons share. Under NATO nuclear weapons sharing, the United States has provided nuclear weapons for Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Turkey to deploy and store. This involves pilots and other staff of the "non-nuclear" NATO states practicing, handling, and delivering the U.S. nuclear bombs, and adapting non-US warplanes to deliver US nuclear bombs. However, since all U.S. nuclear weapons are protected with Permissive Action Links, the host states cannot easily arm the bombs without authorisation codes from the US Department of Defense. US nuclear weapons were also deployed in Canada as well as Greece from 1963 to 1984. However, Canada withdrew three of the four nuclear-capable weapons systems by 1972. The single system retained, the AIR-2 Genie, had a yield of 1.5 kilotons, was designed to strike enemy aircraft as opposed to ground targets, and might not have qualified as a weapon of mass destruction given its limited yield. As of April 2019, the United States maintained around 150 nuclear weapons in Europe, as reflected in table no. 2.

Table no. 2: "US nuclear weapons in host countries" (Kristensen, Korda, 2019, pp. 122-134)

Country	Air base	Custodian	Warheads
Belgium	Kleine Brogel	52 nd Fighter Wing	20
Germany	Büchel	52 nd Fighter Wing	20
Italy	Ghedi Torre	52 nd Fighter Wing	40
	Aviano	31 st Fighter Wing	
Netherlands	Volkel	52 nd Fighter Wing	20
Turkey	Incirlik	39 th Air Base Wing	50
Total			150



States formerly possessing nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons have been present in many nations, often as staging grounds under control of other powers. However, in only one instance has a nation given up nuclear weapons after being in full control of them. The fall of the Soviet Union left several former Soviet republics in physical possession of nuclear weapons, though not operational control which was dependent on Russian-controlled electronic Permissive Action Links and the Russian command and control system. South Africa.

South Africa produced six nuclear weapons in the 1980s, but dismantled them in the early 1990s. South Africa could not have constructed such a nuclear bomb until November 1979. South Africa signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1991.

Former Soviet Republics renounced the nuclear weapons inherited from the Soviet Union (Lisbon Protocol, 23 May 1992). **Belarus** had 81 single warhead missiles stationed on its territory after the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. They were all transferred to Russia by 1996. In May 1992, Belarus acceded to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. **Kazakhstan** inherited 1,400 nuclear weapons from the Soviet Union, and transferred them all to Russia by 1995. Kazakhstan has since acceded to the NPT. **Ukraine** has acceded to NPT. Ukraine inherited “as many as 3,000” nuclear weapons when it became independent from the Soviet Union in 1991, making its nuclear arsenal the third-largest in the world. By 1994, Ukraine had agreed to dispose of all nuclear weapons within its territory, with the condition that its borders were respected, as part of the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances. The warheads were removed from Ukraine by 1996 and disassembled in Russia. Despite Russia’s subsequent and internationally disputed annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ukraine reaffirmed its 1994 decision to accede to the NPT as a non-nuclear-weapon state.

Not everyone wants nuclear weapons. What most people do not realise is that 12 countries have either abandoned nuclear programs and, dismantled existing weapons. By contrast, only nine have nukes today (the United States, Russia, Britain, France, China, India, Israel,

Pakistan and North Korea) (Wilson, Ford, Quiles, Tertrais, 2013, pp. 2-9). Nuclear weapons were born out of fear, nurtured in fear and sustained by fear. According to NPT five states have the right to possess nuclear weapons, but it does not give them the right to keep those weapons forever. On the contrary, its Article VI unequivocally commits them to “nuclear disarmament” and “a treaty on general and complete disarmament” (NPT, 1968).

There were six nuclear powers in 1989, eight in 1998 (India, Pakistan) and nine in 2006 (North Korea). Measures of unilateral, multilateral, even coercive disarmament prevented six countries from acquiring or keeping nuclear weapons.

CONCLUSIONS

The most important overarching lesson of this review is that deterrence and dissuasion must be conceived primarily as an effort to shape the thinking of a potential aggressor. Deterrent policies are often viewed through the perspective of the state doing the deterring and focus on actions that it takes to raise the costs and risks of an attack. Whatever the utility of nuclear weapons during the Cold War, nuclear weapons today threaten the security of the United States and the world more than they enhance it.

Nuclear deterrence can also be regarded as a solution, a way of action, a means, a method, a manner, that is used as a justification by nuclear weapon states and their allies for the continued possession and threatened use of nuclear weapons. The circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote. As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance (*Politica NATO în domeniul nuclear*, 2020). The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States and the independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own and contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies. NATO is committed to maintaining an appropriate mix of nuclear, conventional,





and missile defence capabilities for deterrence and defence to fulfil its commitments as set out in the *Strategic Concepts*.

The security strategies of the great powers are stated that safe, credible and reliable nuclear forces continue to play a critical role in the deterrence strategy and strengthen deterrence. These capabilities will better deter some of the new threats with which democratic states are facing, while also bolstering security commitments between allies. Such security commitments have played a crucial role in convincing some countries to forgo their own nuclear weapons programs.

The sole reason for possessing nuclear weapons is to deter the use of a nuclear weapon against their own state and its allies. In recent years, much broader reasons have been given for the utility of nuclear weapons. Their numerous roles led to huge stockpiles and elaborate war plans. The purpose of nuclear strike planning is no longer to achieve an advantage over an adversary's nuclear forces or limit damage to its own state, but entirely to provide a secure retaliatory strike capability to deter nuclear attack. Knowing that the attack on infrastructure would follow if any nation were unwise enough to attack the United States or its allies with nuclear weapons should be enough of a deterrent – to the extent anything is – to prevent an attack in the first place.

The White House policy statements does not specify that it is a nuclear deterrent but assumes that a strong deterrent in this context means nuclear. As long as other states maintain nuclear arsenals, the US must maintain a reliable, safe, and secure nuclear deterrent.

It is very difficult to explain the absence of any major-power war since 1945 without acknowledging the role of nuclear weapons. Alternative explanations are not satisfying. Nuclear deterrence as a theory was developed for ex-post-facto rationalisation of the nuclear arms race. So, when we speak of the future of nuclear disarmament it is inextricably tied to the future of the nuclear arms race and theories of nuclear deterrence.

Some of the post-Cold War nuclear players, however, most notably Pakistan and North Korea, have displayed a propensity for maintaining

instability as a means of establishing deterrence. Therefore, besides an increase in the number of nuclear players, there is now a lack of understanding, or a lack of desire to play by the established rules of the game of nuclear deterrence. As more countries join in, the complexities can only increase.

In a crowded nuclear world, one can only hope that each player has an equally effective control over its nuclear assets, so as to minimise the existential risks of accidental or unauthorised use of the nuclear weapon. In addition, non-state actors threaten forcing access to the nuclear “sanctuary”. Al-Qaeda is, of course, the most well-known case in its desire to acquire nuclear weapons, but there could be others. And if that were happen, classical nuclear deterrence would not be able to prevent the use of nuclear weapons.

Despite all security measures in place, peace proved to be elusive. The acquisition of nuclear weapons, whether through national possession or extended deterrence, brought security but not peace. It is an irony that, while the risks of a nuclear confrontation have come down, the risks of a nuclear attack have increased.

It can be found that some of the security challenges of today cannot be solved by military means – whether in Kashmir, India and Pakistan, the Middle East; Israel, Palestine or Iran, China and Taiwan, or the Korean peninsula for example. However, the degree to which this policy provides a genuine deterrent is debated. Some analysts argue that Israel's nuclear deterrence prevented a chemical weapons attack by Iraq in the first Gulf War. Others argue that the fact that Israel has been attacked by Egypt and Syria (1973) and Iraq (Scud missile attacks in 1991), despite Israel's nuclear arsenal, as indicate that it is not an effective deterrent.

Of course, new initiatives for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation will have to be introduced in order to achieve the goal of a nuclear weapons-free world. But this cannot be achieved outside a multilateral framework. This is why it is crucial that eventually all nuclear Weapon-States become fully incorporated in the disarmament process. It is clear that the United States and Russia, holding some 95% of the world's nuclear armaments, have a special responsibility.



The acquisition of nuclear weapons, whether through national possession or extended deterrence, brought security but not peace. It is an irony that, while the risks of a nuclear confrontation have come down, the risks of a nuclear attack have increased.



Academics and policy analysts focus on aspects of the power of nuclear weapons, including the military power, destructive power, political power and coercive/persuasive power. The principle focus of analysts, however, is the destructive power of nuclear weapons and the relationship between this and military power.

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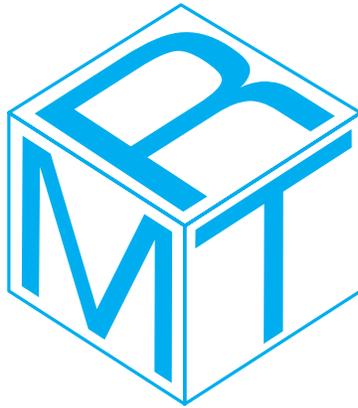
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 in the rank of “Knight”,
 F Category
 – “Promotion of Culture”
 (Presidential Decree no. 646
 on 24.08.2004)**



**Order “Meritul Cultural”
 in the rank of “Officer”,
 F Category
 – “Promotion of Culture”
 (Presidential Decree no. 483
 on 30.06.2014)**



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