



ROMANIAN MILITARY THINKING



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FOUNDED IN 1864 UNDER THE NAME "ROMÂNIA MILITARĂ"
- NEW SERIES, YEAR XXII -

1-2/2026

JOURNAL OF MILITARY SCIENCE AND SECURITY STUDIES PUBLISHED BY THE DEFENCE STAFF



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ROMANIAN MILITARY THINKING

Journal of Military Science and Security Studies Published
by the Defence Staff

Founded in 1864 under the name "*România Militară*"
– new series, year XXII –

ISSN Print: 1841-4451
ISSN Online: 1842-824X
10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2

Romanian Military Thinking is a scientific journal
with acknowledged prestige in the field
of "*Military Science, Intelligence and Public Order*", in keeping
with the evaluation carried out by the National Council for Titles,
Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU) in 2011
(<http://www.cnatdcu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/reviste-militare1.pdf>)

Romanian Military Thinking Journal is included in the Journal Master List
of the **ERIH PLUS, INDEX COPERNICUS INTERNATIONAL, DOAJ, CEEOL,**
MIAR, EBSCO's and **ROAD Catalogue**

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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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C. Barozzi
(Engineer Captain)



E. Pencovici
(Staff Captain)



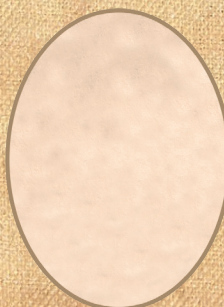
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G. Borănescu
(Engineer Captain)



G. Anghelescu
(Staff Captain)



A. Gramont
(Staff Captain)



E. Arion
(Artillery Captain)



G. Slăniceanu
(Captain, Chief
of the Engineer
Battalion)



A. Anghelescu
(Artillery Captain)



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*“Lieutenant Colonel
Mircea Tomescu”
Award*



*“Army Corps
General
Ioan Sichitiu”
Award*



*“Marshal
Alexandru Averescu”
Award*

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Lieutenant General Dragoş-Dumitru IACOB

Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff



Dear readers,

*I am contented to announce the release of this **Gândirea militară românească/Romanian Military Thinking** journal double issue and to express my satisfaction for the sustained effort of the authors and the scientific quality of the articles.*

But, before making you curious about the content, I would like to draw your attention, once again, to the need to be intellectually active, to write, to communicate new ideas, to discuss strategic concepts, to offer the world a personal view on military-related events and phenomena.

Any organization that wants to progress needs an intellectual community, people willing to leave the comfort of daily routine and lean towards study. However, in my opinion, this alone is not enough. It also requires the courage to publish, to expose yourself to not only the appreciation but also the constructive criticism of a knowledgeable audience.

*The **Gândirea militară românească/Romanian Military Thinking** editorial platform is the perfect medium to make your opinions known, to contribute to increasing the level of knowledge of us all as an organization. Therefore, I consider that the efforts to keep this platform functional must be acknowledged, appreciated and encouraged.*

However, even these two ingredients are not enough. A third is needed, and it is you, the readers! This journal should not be just the medium through which authors meet the requirement of publishing



another article for a certain score necessary to develop their didactic career or to obtain a scientific title.

Gândirea militară românească/Romanian Military Thinking belongs, in equal measure, to you, the readers, and we invite you to use it! You will find interesting and useful information in it, which can help you understand the evolution of the military phenomenon and, who knows, “Appetite comes with eating”, according to an old Romanian saying, which is, in this case, that you, our readers, will join those who have the courage to write!

In this double issue you will find articles about the way we can plan and make innovative, fast decisions with the help of new technologies. In the modern battlefield, decision-making speed has become a differentiating factor between success and failure, between survival and death. Nothing new under the sun, you will say, and I will reply, stating that the speed offered by the information system is different.

You will also find in this issue of the journal articles related to resilience and the need to prepare society for protracted conflicts. We have been looking to the East for several years and we have found that the power of resistance and the will to fight of a people remain fundamental ingredients in combating aggression.

By browsing the pages of the journal, you will discover articles about European programs dedicated to strengthening the defence capacity, as well as a systemic description of the new National Defence Strategy.

As it has become familiar, the military history section brings to your attention novel articles related to both national and international past. Mihail Kogălniceanu told us, in his introductory speech to the national history course at the Mihăileană Academy in Iași, on 24 November 1843, that “history must be, as it has always

been, the guidebook of the peoples and of every man in particular; because every state, every profession finds in it rules of conduct, advice to deal with uncertainty, instruction for its ignorance, exhortation to glory and good deeds”¹.



*So, we have before us a new issue of **Gândirea militară Românească/Romanian Military Thinking**, a result of the 3 ingredients: the authors, the editorial team and you, the readers.*

Thank you all and I wish you would enjoy reading the present issue and get inspired to contribute to the future ones!

¹ Kogălniceanu, M. (1946). *Opere Alese*. București: Editura Cugetarea – Georgescu Delafras.



THE PERSPECTIVE OF DECISIONAL ARCHITECTURES FOR MILITARY OPERATIONS PLANNING AND CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION

Colonel Assoc. Prof. Daniel ROMAN, PhD

"Carol I" National Defence University

DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.01

The complexity of the current operational environment, shaped by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war near Romania, requires new strategies for crisis anticipation and risk management with major societal impact. Military operations planning and critical infrastructure protection are key elements for ensuring national security and societal stability.

In this uncertain and interconnected context, "decision architecture" emerges as an essential predictive tool. This approach to decision-making integrates actors, information flows, and support tools, while technologies such as artificial intelligence and advanced data analysis enable the development of adaptive systems designed to anticipate and prevent negative outcomes. The coordinated efforts of civil and military authorities enhance prevention, enable rapid response, and ensure the continuity of vital societal functions.

The article proposes a decision-making system based on three pillars: improving risk anticipation by identifying vulnerabilities, optimising decision options through adaptive mechanisms, and creating a multi-actor framework for predictive analysis, all contributing to strategic resilience and integrated security.

Keywords: military operations; critical infrastructures; vulnerability cluster; artificial intelligence; sensemaking;

INTRODUCTION

The issue of emerging crisis situations or the potential materialization of adverse events with major societal impact has been, is, and will remain one of the major concerns of security and defence specialists. If the answer to the question: *“Can a crisis situation or the materialization of a negative event with major societal impact be anticipated?”* is affirmative, we will investigate the mechanisms that result in such an answer. In operational art, the *planning of military operations* develops specific dimensions of knowledge about the current operational environment, while situation analyses allow investigation of a potential enemy’s behaviour – an approach through which courses of action can be constructed and, based on identified criteria, transformed into concepts of operations, plans, and subsequent orders. In other words, possible future situations are identified to pursue advantages, much like a roadmap describing the path to achieving victory.

A similar approach to analysing and anticipating the future is found in the societal domain of *critical infrastructure protection*, where threats and vulnerabilities to an entity or critical infrastructure are monitored – factors that can transform a state of normality into a crisis or into the materialization of an adverse event with major societal impact: loss of human life, considerable material damage, or large-scale economic and social effects. In the same context, the unprecedented pace of technological development – especially the operationalization of decision-assistance platforms using artificial intelligence – calls for a new approach to the future and particularly to risks. In this way, risks – or rather risk management – shift their operational attributions from prevention alone to prediction and prevention, as mechanisms for generating solutions to warn of and counter potential crisis situations.

In operational art, the planning of military operations develops specific dimensions of knowledge about the current operational environment, while situation analyses allow investigation of a potential enemy’s behaviour – an approach through which courses of action can be constructed and, based on identified criteria, transformed into concepts of operations, plans, and subsequent orders.



The scenario method aims to construct courses of action by situating events in space and time and by mapping effects and consequences – results that drive a shift from a current situation toward a crisis or toward favourable conditions for a given context.

RESEARCH METHOD

Given the complexity of the chosen subject, multiple methods are employed to support the attainment of concrete results that can be validated in opening new perspectives on the *typology of decisional architectures*. In this context, a combined method is used that brings together features of comparative analysis, systemic analysis, and the method of scenarios, in relation to an applied case study. In anticipating the content and final outcome of this article, two guiding questions are posed: “*What is the new conceptual framework of decisional architectures?*” and “*How might these architectures function in a current crisis situation?*”. Through the comparative method, defining features are identified for a crisis situation – the *Great Famine* in Ireland (1845–1852) – and for current critical infrastructures; through systemic analysis, an examination is conducted of how some decisional networks of critical infrastructures and those specific to the military domain are built, as interdependent systems that seek to identify vital functions, critical nodes, and cascading effects. The *scenario method* aims to construct courses of action by situating events in space and time and by mapping effects and consequences – results that drive a shift from a current situation toward a crisis or toward favourable conditions for a given context. The article concludes with a series of findings and proposals regarding the efficiency of anticipating and managing crisis situations through the lens of integrated decisional architectures. It is argued that decision ecosystems correlate the systemic analysis of vital societal functions with critical interdependencies, in a context where crises do not occur in isolation but as interconnected phenomena with the potential to propagate in cascade across the societal whole.

FROM THE CENTRE OF GRAVITY OF OPERATIONAL ART TO VULNERABILITY CLUSTERS WITHIN DECISION ECOSYSTEMS

The frequent use of the phrase “*modern society*” is justified by the fact that, at certain intervals, specific societal transformations occur that confer this characteristic upon a given historical period. Yet situations evolve, and not always toward the positive, depending on the angle from which analysis is conducted and on the way events similar to those of the past are referenced. In any case, situation

analysis is about *knowledge* – about how events unfold, what causes and, more precisely, what influencing factors are at play, how they interact, and what effects and consequences they generate.

To identify relevant aspects regarding the concepts of *decision ecosystems*, *critical infrastructures*, and *societal resilience*, this article references a complex historical event that unfolded for over seven years and claimed many victims – the *Great Irish Famine* of 1845–1852 (Mokyr, Ó Gráda, 2002, pp. 339–363). In brief, in 1840s Ireland, the potato had become the staple food for more than a third of the population; excessive dependence on a single crop, without redundancy or dietary alternatives, constituted a structural vulnerability. From a systemic perspective, the potato represented a vital function without which the rural poor could not survive. The infestation of the potato by the pathogen *Phytophthora infestans* and the lack of dietary diversification transformed an agricultural hazard into a national catastrophe. Classified as an adverse event with major societal impact – given approximately one million deaths and over two million emigrants – the *Great Irish Famine* stands as a *societal collapse* with lasting effects on Ireland’s demographic, cultural, and political structure, leading to the irreversible loss of public trust in authorities and generating cascading effects that fostered Irish nationalism and fuelled subsequent conflicts in the region.

The onset of the 1845 food crisis was generated by a series of decisions taken in isolation by the British government, local authorities, and landowners; in the absence of collaboration or societal feedback, those decisions led in subsequent years to what is termed *societal collapse*. Given the shortage of food resources and the failure to seize opportunities to halt or reduce food exports from Ireland, negative effects intensified, resources were not redistributed, defensive preparedness (stocks, dietary alternatives) was absent, and decision alternatives were not converted into societal advantage to counter the crisis.

Another important aspect concerns the cascading or network effect at the societal level: the famine affected not only food supply, but also health, migration, public trust, and political stability. Today, it corresponds to inter-institutional work – e.g., among different ministries and national and international organizational structures



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region.*



“The efficiency of anticipating and managing crisis situations depends on the existence of integrated decisional architectures that connect the systemic analysis of vital societal functions and critical interdependencies with mechanisms of adaptive and collaborative resilience”.

(holders of national critical infrastructures/CI and international critical infrastructures/ICI).

Succinctly formulated, the first hypothesis advanced in the above context is: *“The efficiency of anticipating and managing crisis situations depends on the existence of integrated decisional architectures that connect the systemic analysis of vital societal functions and critical interdependencies with mechanisms of adaptive and collaborative resilience”.* Thus, the need has been identified for decisional structures that operate on realistic ground data while also relying on courses of action whose plausible results define the foundation of systemic societal analysis. A first argument is that crisis situations never manifest in isolation; they are part of interdependent systems.

On this basis, modern critical infrastructures (energy, food, health, cyber, transport etc.) function as nodes within a complex network (Roman, 2016, pp. 67-73). Isolated analysis of a single component (such as the Irish food crisis) cannot explain cascading effects when a local vulnerability propagates at national or transnational level. Therefore, only an integrated decisional architecture that considers vital societal functions and the links among them can provide a solid basis for anticipation and effective response. As Barabási (2016/2021) shows, complex systems operate based on critical nodes and scale-free distributions, meaning local shocks can transform into systemic disruptions through network effects. In the context of critical infrastructure protection, this type of analysis is indispensable for identifying vulnerability clusters and the decision points required by operational design during the planning phase (Barabasi, 2002, pp. 14-20).

Vulnerability clusters are groups of nodes and interconnections within a societal network (military, economic, transport, health etc.) where a local vulnerability has the potential to generate disproportionate cascading effects at the level of the entire societal system. In other words, vulnerability clusters are those “*weak zones*” of the network where shocks propagate rapidly and can destabilize the societal system even if the starting point is small. The *Great Irish Famine* of 1845 was triggered by a single agricultural deficiency – the infestation of the potato by *Phytophthora infestans* – and, in the absence of a societal security plan, the mentioned cause unleashed the cascading propagation of effects and consequences discussed

above, summarized as: *potato dependence + lack of logistics infrastructure + trade policies = vulnerability cluster*.

Approaching societal reality as a network of nodes and links opens new analytical perspectives, both for military operations planning and for critical infrastructure protection. These perspectives are generated by a conceptual shift from “*identifying the centre of gravity*” to “*identifying vulnerability clusters*”. The main arguments for this replacement centre on the defining characteristics of vulnerability clusters:

- high connection density – nodes are interconnected with varying intensities, enabling the transmission of a societal shock either slowly or rapidly, depending on the nature of the links among societal nodes;
- existence of critical dependencies – nodes depend on the same resource, supplier, or infrastructure, leading to crisis through direct impact on sources of supply;
- lack of redundancy – alternatives are few or non-existent; thus, failure of a key node blocks the entire cluster, raising the issue of sustainability based on interoperability;
- operational proximity – in which entities in the cluster are linked through common processes or functions (e.g., energy + transport + hospitals).

Bridging concepts of threats and vulnerabilities by shifting situation analysis from identifying the centre of gravity to describing the vulnerability cluster is justified by the connective thread of past events (e.g. the 1845–1852 *Irish Famine*), ongoing events (the war in Ukraine), and the prediction of future events that may occur through the extension of an ongoing crisis or the onset of new crises. It is evident, due to the relevance of vulnerability clusters for decisional architectures, as follows:

- identifying vulnerability clusters is the first step in designing Operator Security Plans (OSP) – a requirement also present in operational design during the military operations planning stage;
- shifting the paradigm away from seeking a single centre of gravity, cluster analysis shows where redundancies and protective capabilities must be placed for critical entities and infrastructures;



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Bridging concepts of threats and vulnerabilities by shifting situation analysis from identifying the centre of gravity to describing the vulnerability cluster is justified by the connective thread of past events (e.g. the 1845–1852 Irish Famine), ongoing events (the war in Ukraine), and the prediction of future events that may occur through the extension of an ongoing crisis or the onset of new crises.



The combined integration of risks and vulnerability clusters into the concept of decisional architectures – for example, in the processes of military operations planning and critical infrastructure protection – ensures the transition from security based on reaction to resilience based on anticipation and adaptation.

- decision ecosystems are the only entities able to integrate such multi-criteria analyses (on influencing factors) to prioritize resources and increase the resilience of the societal system as a whole;
- correlating risks within a systemic methodology by identifying zones of vulnerability across the entire system (instead of a linear approach in which each risk is treated in isolation, decision ecosystems enable visualization of the *risk network* – how a threat can propagate simultaneously across multiple societal domains).

The combined integration of risks and vulnerability clusters into the concept of *decisional architectures* – for example, in the processes of military operations planning and critical infrastructure protection – ensures the transition from security based on reaction to *resilience based on anticipation and adaptation*. In this context, new concepts can be developed regarding decision ecosystems that support decision-making not only by identifying risks, but also by simulating scenarios, comparing courses of action, and validating optimal options for responding to crisis situations or to the materialization of adverse events with major societal impact. In this way, critical infrastructure protection and military operations planning converge within a common framework of critical thinking capable of transforming uncertainty into operational opportunities.

A PARADIGM SHIFT IN DECISION-MAKING FOR MILITARY OPERATIONS PLANNING AND CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION

The theoretical confirmation of the hypothesis formulated in the first part of the article opens new perspectives for military operations planning and for developing mechanisms to protect critical infrastructures by shifting the paradigm *from linear to systemic thinking*. For many years, both military planning and critical infrastructure protection relied on *linear causal logic* by identifying the centre of gravity and applying the convergence of decisive actions to achieve victory or ensure functional continuity. However, the current reality – characterized by interdependencies and network effects – renders these models insufficient. The new paradigm is grounded in *systemic*

critical thinking, wherein emphasis shifts from a single vulnerable point to the concept of vulnerability clusters and the interactions among societal domains.

Decision-making has become increasingly complex due to the sheer volume of information, generating difficulties in solving decisional problems. The specialized literature indicates four main stages of the decision process: *investigation and problem definition*; *the design of potential solutions*; *the choice of the best option* in line with established objectives and criteria; and *the evaluation of effects along with decision implementation*.

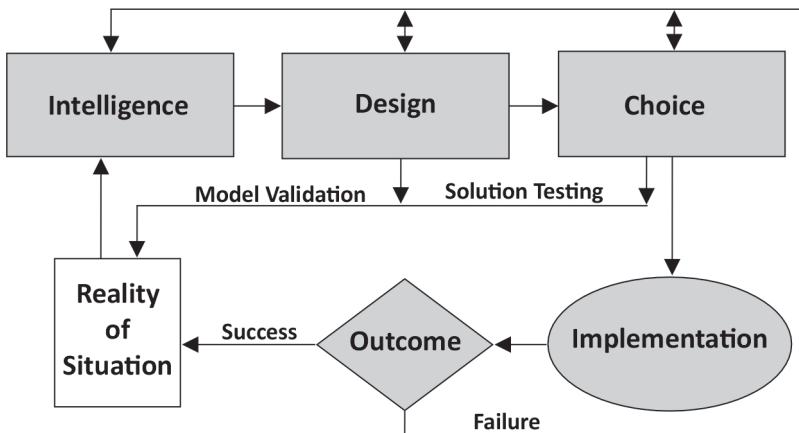


Figure 1: Logical support schema of the system for decision development (Marakas, 2003)

The specialized literature indicates four main stages of the decision process: *investigation and problem definition*; *the design of potential solutions*; *the choice of the best option* in line with established objectives and criteria; and *the evaluation of effects along with decision implementation*.

To support decision-makers in taking rapid, high-quality decisions, Decision Support Systems (DSS) are employed (Sprague, Carlson, 1982). These are interactive information systems that integrate concepts and applications from diverse fields such as economics, medicine, military operations, computer science, and artificial intelligence. A decision-assistance system must be flexible, offer *multiple options for analysis*, develop *diverse styles and classifications*, and allow the *evaluation of alternatives together with their consequences*. DSS can be successfully used in industrial environments (e.g., production management, resource allocation, systems planning, process supervision and control) as well as in any other domain that involves problem-solving under risk. In the military domain, solving problems under risk and uncertainty is accomplished through the mechanisms of operational art – the intermediate level between strategy and tactics.



Operational art is itself “a mechanism for solving unstructured problems”, referring to how resources and forces are arranged, coordinated, and integrated in space and time to achieve operational and strategic objectives.

Operational art is itself *“a mechanism for solving unstructured problems”*, referring to how resources and forces are arranged, coordinated, and integrated in space and time to achieve operational and strategic objectives. In synthesis, military operations planning entails successive – but also simultaneous – steps: systemic analysis of the operational environment, identification of centres of gravity, synchronization of forces and resources, and integration across domains (land, air, maritime, cyber, and space) (Bolia, Smith, 2006, art. 13). Following the logic of operational art in the military context as well as that of systemic thinking, *clusters* can be seen as agglomerations of capabilities, units, and interconnected resources designed to create synergy and superiority effects in confrontation with a potential adversary.

From the standpoint of operational art and systemic critical thinking, both centres of gravity (CoG) and vulnerability clusters are conceptual instruments for solving unstructured problems – *situations in which a single clear solution does not exist and multiple courses of action are possible* (Nguyen, Armarego, Swatman, 2002).

With respect to such problems, we note high uncertainty about the dynamics of the operational environment, the adversary, and its intentions, as well as about the nature of the formulated objectives, which may be conflicting or insufficiently clear; numerous interdependent variables (political, economic, social, military) are at play. Given this context, military operations planning cannot rely solely on algorithms and procedures; conceptual approaches are needed to provide flexibility for decomposing unstructured problems into structured ones.

In the military decision process, situation awareness and the design of courses of action enable the formulation of a concept of operations. Logically, the process has two components: one referring to situation awareness for anticipatory projection – describing the operational environment and the adversary’s behaviour – *Sensemaking*; and a second component in which the actual planning process constructs courses of action – *Planning* – followed by the concept of operations and operations orders to achieve the formulated end-state.

If the anticipated results in the form of alternative scenarios or prospective courses of action (which explore the likely impact of each action on the estimated cascading effects) are unacceptable, actors will attempt to reconfigure them toward more favourable end-states



(Albino et al., 2016). This presupposes understanding the actions and the direct/indirect effects that can generate those objectives that drive the operation toward the desired final state. In this context, analysing vulnerability clusters – unlike identifying centres of gravity – means focusing on interconnected agglomerations of weaknesses across logistics, information, political, social etc. aspects, whose coordinated exploitation can accelerate attainment of the desired end-state. (Cîrciumaru, 2023). Thus, “*what if*” projections must include not only courses of action oriented toward neutralizing centres of gravity, but also options designed to test how exploiting vulnerability clusters can generate cumulative and disproportionate effects upon the adversary’s entire system.

Because operations unfold within a multi-level, complex, and adaptive system, end-states never manifest at a single level or within a single domain. They produce cross-domain impact – political, military, economic, social, informational, and infrastructural – and influence behaviours in subsequent cycles of interaction (Cucinschi, Chiorcea, 2022, pp. 29-39). From this perspective, *identifying vulnerability clusters* becomes a critical component of planning, enabling the generation of flexible, feasible, and synchronized options capable of shaping the operational environment in the desired direction.

By integrating the *Sensemaking* module, one obtains “*the process necessary to make sense of a situation*” through which a decision-maker/ commander, a staff, or a decisional community transforms fragmentary, incomplete, and ambiguous data about the operational environment into a coherent and usable understanding for decision-making.

Building the workflow of social/societal, cognitive, and informational components enables the assessment of a societal situation and highlights the cognitive working module – *Sensemaking*. The role of this module is not merely to collect information, but above all to construct meaning in problem formulation, namely: *the interpretation, integration, and projection of the obtained data into scenarios and courses of action* according to the effects and consequences that may occur. In other words, sensemaking is the “*bridge*” between reconnaissance/intelligence and the design of courses of action – a way of providing the necessary support for anticipating the future. This aspect is important because it enables not only reaction to the materialization of an event, but also future

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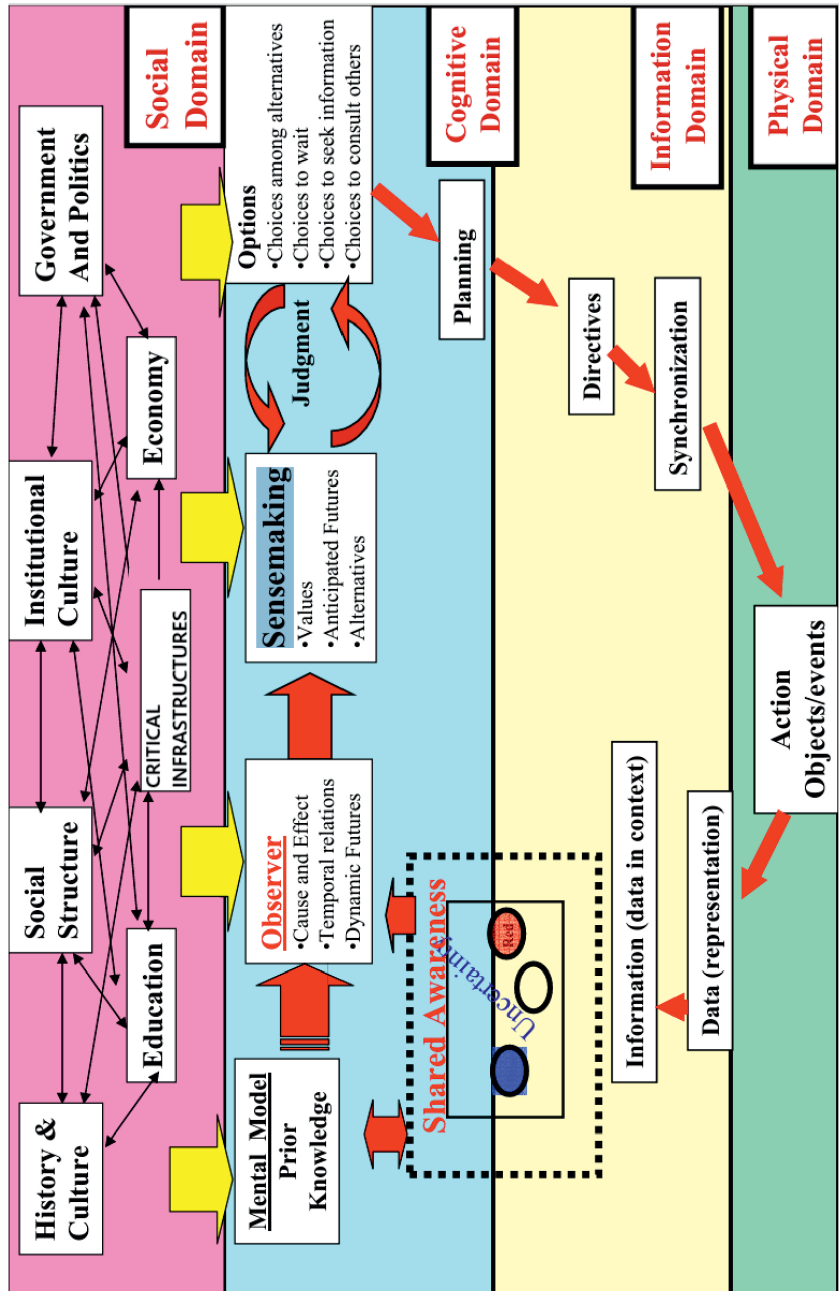


Figure 2: An example workflow diagram of social/societal, cognitive, and informational components in assessing an operational-environment situation (Smith, 2005, p. 4)



projection/prospection through the “*what if*” conditionality needed to test possible consequences for the desired end-state. In relation to the processes of CoG and vulnerability-cluster identification, this approach enables the integration of AI and emerging technologies, which – through data-analysis algorithms and predictive simulations – thus become extensions of the sensemaking process rather than mere technical tools.

In this context, starting from the “*what if – Sensemaking*” analysis point, three fundamental directions open for solving unstructured problems:

1. strengthening anticipation and risk-analysis capacity, grounded in identifying vulnerability clusters rather than a single centre of gravity;
2. optimizing the selection of decision options through adaptive mechanisms in relation to the complex of effects and consequences;
3. developing a multi-actor framework for predictive analysis that is sufficiently comprehensive to be meaningful.

By including the sensemaking cognitive module and “*what if*” scenarios, decisional architecture allows not only reaction to the materialization of risks, but also future prospection and testing of possible consequences for the desired end-state. The integration of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies transforms the decision process from a simple technical act into an extension of the organization’s cognitive mechanism, wherein predictive analytics, simulations, and data algorithms provide support for continuous anticipation and adaptation. Through this approach, advanced decisional architectures emerge as indispensable solutions for achieving resilience and transforming the uncertainty of the operational environment into an opportunity to prevent a crisis situation.

The integration of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies transforms the decision process from a simple technical act into an extension of the organization’s cognitive mechanism, wherein predictive analytics, simulations, and data algorithms provide support for continuous anticipation and adaptation.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

In developing this article, the starting hypothesis concerns the efficiency of anticipating and managing crisis situations in relation to the evolution of integrated decisional architectures that connect the systemic analysis of vital societal functions with critical interdependencies as mechanisms of adaptive and collaborative resilience. This hypothesis finds its foundation in the reality of the current operational environment, whereby crisis situations never manifest in isolation, but as part of interdependent systems in which



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the vulnerability of one domain can rapidly turn into a disruption with cascading effects and consequences across the societal whole.

Accordingly, starting from the specifics of the 1845-1852 crisis in Ireland, this article highlights the need for decisional structures capable of operating on realistic field data as well as on prospective scenarios that test the possible consequences of courses of action – measures necessary given the dynamics and unpredictability of the current operational environment. Modern decisional architectures, supported by artificial intelligence, predictive simulations, and multi-actor mechanisms, can transform the decision process from a reactive act into an *anticipatory and adaptive mechanism*. By integrating elements of systemic analysis, shifting from identifying a centre of gravity to identifying and describing vulnerability clusters, and by addressing mechanisms of resilience and inter-institutional collaboration, the premises of an advanced decisional system – here assimilated to the concept of a *decision ecosystem* – take shape. On this basis, viable solutions can be designed to address most challenges generated by the complexity and uncertainty of today's operational environment.

Another observation concerns how problems specific to military operations planning and critical infrastructure protection – two essential reference points in contemporary decisional architecture – are solved. In an operational context characterized by uncertainty, interdependencies, and time constraints, the concept of the decision ecosystem emerges as an indispensable predictive instrument for managing complex situations. In both the military environment and that of critical infrastructures, the decision-making process entails integrating key elements – actors involved, information flows, and decision-support tools – that can be leveraged in developing new planning concepts.

By including the *sensemaking cognitive module* and *what if scenarios* within decisional architectures, new horizons open regarding how analysed entities react to the materialization of identified risks. In the same equation, new opportunities are leveraged to prospect the future and test possible consequences for the desired end-state. The integration of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies transforms the decision process from a simple technical act into an extension of the organizational cognitive mechanism, wherein predictive analysis, simulations, and data algorithms provide support for continuous anticipation and adaptation.

As a final conclusion, the perspective on decisional architectures for military operations planning and critical infrastructure protection changes substantially due to the possibility of solving unstructured problems by strengthening anticipation and risk-analysis capacity within decision ecosystems. It becomes possible through a paradigm shift – from identifying a centre of gravity to identifying and analysing vulnerability clusters – which enables the optimization of decision-option selection through new adaptive mechanisms of analysis, planning, and decision-making.

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AUTONOMOUS COLLABORATIVE PLATFORMS (ACP): THE FUTURE OF AUTONOMOUS SYSTEMS

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.02

The rapid progress of artificial intelligence and the advancement of digital communication technologies have facilitated the emergence of autonomous collaborative platforms (ACPs), systems capable of independently executing complex missions, cooperating with other platforms with or without a crew on board, and adapting to the challenges of the operational environment.

In the military sector in particular, ACPs are leading to the modernization of combat tactics, reducing risks for human personnel, optimizing resources, and expanding operational capabilities. The introduction of these technologies also brings new ethical and legal challenges, requires doctrinal changes, and their evolution is prompting a profound re-thinking of how combat actions are planned, coordinated, and executed, leading to a transformation of tactics, procedures, and the interaction between autonomous systems and human personnel on the battlefield.

Keywords: ACP; CCA; loyal wingman; artificial intelligence; collaborative;



INTRODUCTION

The pace of technological progress is constantly redefining how society functions, and the concept of *Autonomous Collaborative Platforms (ACPs)* is at the heart of this transformation. ACPs refer to intelligent systems capable of operating independently, collaborating with each other or with human operators, and responding quickly to challenges in their environment. These platforms not only automate tasks, but also bring a high level of adaptability and coordination, opening up new horizons for innovation and operational efficiency.

In a military context, ACPs will change the way combat operations are conducted, providing armed forces with tools to manage complex missions with minimal risk to human personnel. They can operate autonomously or in teams, integrating with other systems to ensure a rapid and effective response in different situations. These platforms can also operate in civilian sectors for the development of smart cities, transport optimisation and security surveillance, helping to reduce costs, improve quality of life and increase safety.

The adoption of ACPs is driven by advances in artificial intelligence, high-speed communications systems, and the miniaturization of hardware components, which enable the development of increasingly autonomous and interconnected systems. Thus, autonomous collaborative platforms are emerging as new technologies of the future, with the potential to revolutionize the way high-risk missions are managed as well as many other tasks that can be handled by autonomous vehicles.

The research is based on an analysis of existing literature, focusing on relevant, current, and credible sources in the field of collaborative autonomous platforms. As this is a developing field, the main resources have been accessible online, including scientific articles, reports from international institutions, specialized websites, and ongoing projects. The approach adopted is interdisciplinary, combining

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technical, operational, and ethical perspectives to highlight both the challenges and opportunities associated with the development and implementation of ACPs.

CONCEPT DEFINITION

The term ACP refers to a new category of unmanned combat aircraft that use artificial intelligence (AI) to execute missions, from specific commands to general objectives with a high degree of autonomy. Autonomy can vary depending on the mission and can range from a “loyal wingman” working directly with another piloted aircraft to a fully autonomous platform that can receive mission updates from a human (Anderson, 2025, p. 35). The unmanned aircraft capable of executing “loyal wingman”-type missions are totally autonomous platforms at operational level (shooting, reconnaissance, jamming etc.), but they are directly monitored, guided and commanded by the pilot of the classical combat aircraft. In the United States of America, this concept is now known as the “collaborative combat aircraft” (CCA) (Venckunas, 2023), a term that is becoming increasingly used in the literature.

These collaborative autonomous aircraft have been defined and cover five mission categories: collaborative combat aircraft (CCA), collaborative reconnaissance aircraft (CRA), collaborative bomber aircraft (CBA), collaborative mobility aircraft (CMA), and collaborative training aircraft (CTA) (Anderson, 2025, pp. 35, 36). The best-known category of ACPs is CCAs, which are designed to fight alongside piloted combat aircraft to increase lethality and survivability in high-risk missions. CCA is a US Air Force initiative aimed at the rapid development and deployment of highly autonomous unmanned aircraft capable of interacting and collaborating with fifth- and sixth-generation operational aircraft, such as the F-35 or the Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) program (Airforce Technology, 2024).

The US Air Force’s Next Generation Air Dominance (NGAD) program marks a major paradigm shift in military aviation, adopting a “system of systems” approach. NGAD is not limited to the development of a sixth-generation fighter jet, but involves its integration into an extensive network that includes manned platforms, autonomous drones, and advanced command and control systems. The new sixth-generation

aircraft in the NGAD program is estimated to cost approximately \$300 million per unit, which has prompted the US Air Force to seek more affordable complementary solutions. As such, the concept plans to implement CCA-type platforms, which will operate both in tandem with piloted NGAD aircraft and independently, providing the necessary force on the battlefield at a much lower cost and increasing pilot safety (lb.).

When unmanned aircraft systems operate autonomously in groups, in a coordinated manner, the notion mentioned in the literature is that of “*multiagent system*”. Colloquially, it is called “*swarm*”, which is a term used erroneously more often than not, especially in the situation when saturation attacks are executed, meaning that more single-use drones are launched against a defeated objective.

Unlike classic autonomous systems, which usually operate independently and perform predefined tasks, ACPs are designed to operate in an integrated ecosystem, where constant information exchange and cooperation with other platforms (autonomous or manned) become essential. Active collaboration is not limited to the transmission of simple directives, but involves complex real-time decision-making processes, assessment of the operational context, and optimal distribution of tasks among the members of the formation.

The high level of autonomy of ACPs would allow them to interpret and execute complex commands without direct human intervention, quickly adapting to unforeseen situations, emerging threats, or mission changes. These platforms will not only respond to external stimuli, but will anticipate the evolution of tactical situations and make decisions to resolve them.

The flexibility of ACPs will consist of their ability to be quickly reconfigured for various missions, such as reconnaissance, surveillance, electronic warfare, logistics, support, or even direct combat actions. Thanks to their modular architecture and the possibility of integrating various sensors and payloads, the same platform can quickly switch from one role to another, depending on mission requirements. In addition, network collaboration allows them to act as part of an intelligent distributed system, sharing tasks, maximizing resource efficiency, and increasing the chances of success in complex and dynamic operational environments.



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In recent years, autonomous collaborative platforms have become one of the most dynamic and contested areas of military technology. The development of these systems marks a fundamental change in the way air forces conceive their future strategies, promising a combination of efficiency, flexibility, and risk reduction for human crews.

It should be noted, however, that, with the exception of CCA platforms, the other categories of collaborative aircraft (CRA, CBA, CMA, CTA) have not yet been developed or operationalized to a level that would allow for a detailed analysis of their performance and impact. Currently, these concepts remain at the project or theoretical stage, without concrete demonstrations or relevant examples of operational implementation. In the absence of an internationally accepted common standard, the tendency is to talk, in general, only about CCAs that can be quickly reconfigured to perform other types of missions.

CURRENT STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, autonomous collaborative platforms have become one of the most dynamic and contested areas of military technology. The development of these systems marks a fundamental change in the way air forces conceive their future strategies, promising a combination of efficiency, flexibility, and risk reduction for human crews. From single-use drones designed for high-risk missions to strategically valuable aircraft capable of operating in tandem with piloted aircraft, ACPs represent the response of the major powers to the challenges of the digital age and the competition for air supremacy. In a geopolitical context marked by increasingly intense rivalries, these platforms are no longer just technological experiments, but instruments of power.

The Royal Air Force (RAF) has adopted an ambitious strategy to integrate collaborative autonomous platforms into its force structure by 2030. The goal is for these systems to operate alongside manned platforms to provide decisive military capabilities, both nationally and within coalitions. The RAF's strategy is not limited to technological development. It also targets organizational and cultural transformations to accelerate the adoption of ACPs and keep pace with technological progress and emerging threats. Thus, it has been considered that the RAF should work in collaboration with the Royal Navy, the Army, and the British industry to ensure the rapid and integrated development of new ACP capabilities.

The concept is to divide ACPs into three categories: Tier 1 – “disposable”: single-use drones for high-risk missions, Tier 2

– “*attritable*”: with chances of recovery, but loss is acceptable, and Tier 3
– “*survivable*”: platforms of strategic value, whose loss is unacceptable. These new autonomous platforms will be designed for a wide range of missions, from critical infrastructure protection, reconnaissance and surveillance to attack, logistical support, or electronic warfare. At the same time, official documents emphasize the need for organizational, operational, and cultural changes to harness the potential of ACPs and manage the associated risks (Royal Air Force, 2024).

A significant milestone for the development of autonomous collaborative technology in military aviation was the flight on 2 May 2024. US Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall participated in flight sessions with students from the Pilot Test School, including international students, highlighting the crucial role of the test and evaluation community in maintaining the technological advancement of the Air Force. During this visit, Kendall had the opportunity to fly the F-16 (X-62A VISTA), a test aircraft equipped with specialized software and machine learning algorithms to simulate and test autonomous air combat scenarios in real time. The most important feature of the X-62A VISTA is its ability to develop and test autonomous flight manoeuvres using integrated software agents that can react instantly to simulated threats. This technology has been developed in collaboration with DARPA’s Air Combat Evolution (ACE) program (Gary, Mary, 2024). This event marked a milestone in the testing and validation of autonomous air combat capabilities based on artificial intelligence in real time.

Moreover, the United States of America is investing heavily in the development of these types of platforms. Among the most important examples are the YFQ-42A (formerly known as the XQ-67A or Gambit), developed by General Atomics, and the YFQ-44A (Fury) from Anduril Industries, both of which were selected in 2024 for prototype development and testing phases under the US Air Force’s official CCA program (Air Force, 2025). These unmanned aircraft are characterized by a high degree of autonomy, real-time collaboration with manned aircraft, and adaptability to a variety of roles, from combat, reconnaissance and electronic warfare missions to logistical support.



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As part of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) collaborative combat aircraft program, Boeing Australia has developed the MQ-28A Ghost Bat aircraft, specifically designed to operate in tandem with manned aircraft such as the F/A-18, EA-18G, F-35A, and E-7 Wedgetail, integrating autonomous behaviours and advanced communication and data fusion capabilities between platforms.

The Kratos XQ-58 Valkyrie is another example of “loyal wingman” experimental aircraft developed to meet Air Force requirements under the *Low-Cost Attritable Strike Demonstrator* program. The first flight of this unmanned platform was in March 2019. It was designed to assist fighter jets using artificial intelligence. Although Kratos was initially awarded a contract in 2021, the Air Force subsequently opted to continue working with General Atomics, the developer of the XQ-67A, considering that the XQ-58 was too small to meet all the requirements of the “loyal wingman” role (Spray, 2024). However, Valkyrie remains relevant due to its competitive cost and the fact that it was one of the first platforms to use AI to expand tactical capabilities.

There are also numerous initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region. As part of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) collaborative combat aircraft program, Boeing Australia has developed the MQ-28A Ghost Bat aircraft, specifically designed to operate in tandem with manned aircraft such as the F/A-18, EA-18G, F-35A, and E-7 Wedgetail, integrating autonomous behaviours and advanced communication and data fusion capabilities between platforms (Donald, 2025). The MQ-28A Ghost Bat is considered a pioneer in the field of collaborative combat systems and has high potential for integration into the CCA program.

South Korea has also significantly accelerated its efforts to develop autonomous collaborative platforms and unmanned aircraft of the “loyal wingman” type, relying on integration between the local defence industry and the government sector. This strategy aims not only to accelerate the modernization of own military capabilities, but also to increase compatibility with Western systems, given the tense regional context and the need for interoperability at the level of strategic alliances. In early 2025, the first prototype of the “loyal wingman” stealth drone, LOWUS (Low Observable Unmanned Wingman System), was unveiled, designed to be operated primarily alongside the next-generation KF-21 Boramae aircraft. Developed by Korean Air in collaboration with the Agency for Defence Development (ADD), LOWUS marks an important step in the integration of the “manned-unmanned teaming” concept at the national level.

Equipped with radar signature reduction technologies and featuring an aerodynamic configuration reminding of American models, LOWUS is designed to perform reconnaissance, electronic warfare, and ground strike missions in support of manned aircraft. The prototype's maiden flight is scheduled for the end of 2025, and formation tests with piloted aircraft are expected to begin by 2027 (Newdick, 2025). By integrating these advanced unmanned aircraft, South Korea is strengthening its industrial autonomy and military capabilities.

Over the past decade, China has significantly accelerated its investment in advanced military technologies, positioning itself at the forefront of the global competition for air supremacy. One of the most dynamic and innovative segments of this effort is the development of "loyal wingman" drones as part of the CCA program designed to support and extend the capabilities of piloted fighter aircraft. Programs such as Feihong FH-97A (Saballa, 2024) and initiatives by Chinese aerospace industry giants reflect Beijing's ambition to catch up with other countries and establish itself as a leader in military autonomous aviation.

Russia is actively developing advanced "loyal wingman" drone programs or collaborative autonomous platforms with the aim of increasing the efficiency and flexibility of its air forces. The best-known project is the S-70 Okhotnik-B stealth drone, designed to operate in tandem with the Su-57 fighter jet, providing escort, attack, and reconnaissance capabilities with a high degree of autonomy (Suciu, 2025). Moreover, Russia is exploring new concepts, such as Grom, a drone focused on strike and support missions, and is testing the integration of artificial intelligence for the autonomous control of multiple types of drones on the battlefield (Defense News Aerospace, 2024). Although the implementation stage of these projects is still under development, Russia aims to strengthen its technological capacity and reduce the gap with Western initiatives.

Europe is also investing heavily in the development of autonomous collaborative platforms for future generations of air forces, with a view to ensuring strategic competitiveness, technological autonomy, and interoperability with NATO allies. The most ambitious European project in this field is the Future Combat Air System (FCAS), initiated by France,



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The analysis of the current state of development in the field of autonomous collaborative platforms shows that they are far from being experimental projects, becoming central capabilities in the great powers' military architecture. From the USA and its Western allies to the Asian states, there is an accelerated and intense competition for the integration of such systems into the Air Force.

Germany, and Spain. FCAS aims to build a “family of systems” that will include both a sixth-generation fighter jet and “loyal wingman” drones, called “remote carriers”. These drones will escort piloted aircraft, carry out reconnaissance, electronic warfare, or attack missions, and will be integrated into a network for rapid information exchange and optimized decisions on the battlefield (Orbital Today, 2025).

The analysis of the current state of development in the field of autonomous collaborative platforms shows that they are far from being experimental projects, becoming central capabilities in the great powers' military architecture. From the USA and its Western allies to the Asian states, there is an accelerated and intense competition for the integration of such systems into the Air Force. Recent developments demonstrate that success in the field depends on technological progress as well as on the the organizational, doctrinal and cultural adaptation of military structures. In a world marked by geopolitical rivalries and rapid innovation, autonomous collaborative platforms will redefine the balance of power and shape the conduct of future conflicts.

HUMAN AND CULTURAL DIMENSION

While for engineers in test labs or aerospace companies the challenge of collaborative autonomous platforms is one of code, sensors and algorithms, for pilots, the revolution is more subtle and much more personal. Flying “side by side” with an autonomous drone is not just about adapting to new technology, but changing a professional culture built on the idea that the person in the cockpit is the ultimate arbiter of aerial combat. In 2024, the US Air Force's X-62A VISTA program brought this issue to the forefront when an experimental F-16, equipped with artificial intelligence software, performed autonomous manoeuvres in a dogfight scenario, while a human pilot in the rear cockpit served only as a “safety net” (Kohler, 2024). The tests clearly showed that artificial intelligence systems react and make decisions much faster than pilots, and the conclusions are that AI is already entering their space and doing so very quickly.

Many recognize the enormous tactical advantage of having “loyal wingman” drones that will assume the risks of the mission, enter enemy

territory first, or perform time-consuming tasks. But on the other hand, there is a degree of instinctive reluctance toward autonomous systems that make decisions without always explaining the logic behind them. The adaptation process involves a transition from a model centred on direct human control to a collaborative model, in which the pilot acts as a combat manager, supervisor, and arbiter of decisions generated by autonomous algorithms.

DARPA's Air Combat Evolution (ACE) program explores how human pilots and autonomous systems can cooperate effectively in air combat missions. Unlike traditional tests, the focus is not only on the technical capabilities of autonomous platforms, but also on how human pilots adjust their behaviour and trust in the algorithm's decisions. In practice, the pilot becomes a combat coordinator, intervening for strategic or safety decisions, while autonomous aircraft handle tactical tasks that are impossible for the human in the cockpit to perform at such speeds (DARPA, 2024). As part of the program, pilots are exposed to scenarios in which drone autonomy can be activated or deactivated in real time, thus learning to delegate micro-decisions to AI. At the same time, DARPA monitors pilots' physiological responses, such as heart rate or stress levels, to assess their confidence in autonomous systems and identify any points of frustration or anxiety. The tests include air combat simulations where AI algorithms can execute faster and more aggressive manoeuvres than a human pilot could, providing a practical lesson on the limits and advantages of human-machine collaboration. The ultimate goal of ACE is not only to demonstrate that autonomous aircraft can fly on their own, but to create an air combat ecosystem in which pilots and autonomous platforms work together, increasing efficiency and reducing risk to humans. Moreover, the program faces cultural and ethical challenges: pilots must accept that AI can make faster decisions, and organizations must integrate this change without undermining trust in the human leader of the mission (Halpern, 2022).

Therefore, the human and cultural dimension of introducing autonomous collaborative platforms is at least as difficult as the technical side. It requires professional training to transform pilots from direct executors into human-machine formation leaders, interfaces that briefly explain the algorithm's intent, and an organizational culture



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that accepts that AI can sometimes be faster. Essentially, the success of ACPs will depend not only on technological developments, but also on the willingness of a generation of aviators to share the skies with a new category of “crewmembers”.

ETHICAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

The implementation of autonomous collaborative platforms raises a number of ethical challenges, as there are currently no legal instruments that can address the challenges posed by these emerging technologies.

One of the most important concerns is the delegation of critical decisions to artificial intelligence systems, especially when ACPs operate in a military context where they can have lethal consequences. This delegation requires a clear definition of responsibility for the actions of the autonomous system. Who is responsible in the event of misjudgements, collateral damage, or human rights violations: the user, the developer, the operator, or even the platform (which has no legal personality)? Collaborative autonomous platforms are often “black box” systems, making it difficult to understand *how* and *why* certain decisions are made. This lack of clarity undermines user trust and makes human oversight difficult. It is essential that these systems should provide explanations so that their decisions can be understood and challenged when necessary. Trust in autonomous systems must be calibrated to avoid excessive trust and automation, which can lead to de-professionalization, meaning the degradation of the essential human skills needed for decision-making. Solutions such as “override points” (mandatory points of human intervention) and error detection training are essential (Merchán-Cruz et al., 2025).

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Regulation of autonomous platforms and artificial intelligence at the global level is far from uniform. In the United States of America, the traditional approach favours voluntary standards and manufacturer responsibility, which leaves room for rapid innovation but can create gaps in user safety and protection. In the European Union, a much stricter framework is taking shape through the AI Act, which classifies AI applications according to their level of risk and establishes clear obligations for transparency, auditing, and accountability. In contrast,

China and other Asian countries have adopted centralized measures with strict rules on cybersecurity, data labelling, and the obligation to locate data within national territory (Consensus Labs, 2025). This diversity of regulations reflects cultural, economic and political differences, while also leading to fragmentation of the international legal framework. For companies developing or operating autonomous collaborative platforms, this context means legal uncertainty, additional compliance costs and difficulties in scaling projects globally. The lack of a common global framework also raises issues of harmonization of ethical and safety standards, especially in cross-border sectors such as autonomous transport, defence, or digital security.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

Autonomous collaborative platforms are at the beginning of a technological revolution that will profoundly reshape future combat operations.

One of the current trends is the development of drone swarms. Using the collective intelligence of swarms, ACPs can react quickly to changes in the operational environment, automatically redistribute resources, and influence tactical decisions in real time, significantly increasing mission efficiency and resilience. Inspired by the behaviour of social insects such as bees or ants, this intelligence is based on the decentralized coordination of a large number of aircraft which, through their interaction, exhibit emergent behaviour that is much more complex and efficient than the sum of their individual actions (SDI, 2024). In the context of ACPs, this approach allows multiple autonomous aircraft to cooperate in an adaptive and flexible manner, performing complex tasks such as reconnaissance, surveillance, or coordinated attacks together, without requiring direct control of each individual unit.

Moreover, integration with “*legacy systems*” (classical systems) represents both a technical and economic challenge. In many industries, the current infrastructure was designed before the advent of autonomous platforms and was not designed to work with intelligent or self-adaptive entities. This lack of compatibility means



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Cybersecurity remains a critical factor in the development and operation of collaborative autonomous platforms. As the number of connections and interactions increases, so do the attack opportunities available to malicious actors. Attacks can range from unauthorized access to data to taking control of autonomous components or systems, with potentially catastrophic consequences.

that implementing new solutions requires significant investment in modernization, adaptation, and interoperability. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many organizations operate with critical systems that cannot be quickly interrupted or replaced, forcing them to find “plug-and-play” solutions or middleware to facilitate communication between the old and the new (Geihs, 2020). These challenges are not only technical but also organizational: integrating collaborative autonomous aircraft requires adapting work processes, training staff, and defining new standards to ensure the coherent functioning of the entire system.

Cybersecurity remains a critical factor in the development and operation of collaborative autonomous platforms. As the number of connections and interactions increases, so do the attack opportunities available to malicious actors. Attacks can range from unauthorized access to data to taking control of autonomous components or systems, with potentially catastrophic consequences.

A predictable development is the migration of ACPs to all operational environments (air, land, sea, and space), creating multi-domain networks for rapid information exchange and optimized decisions. Generative AI and adaptive algorithms will enable systems to constantly improve their performance, anticipate complex threats, and adapt to unpredictable changes. Therefore, the evolution of collaborative autonomous platforms is shaping up to be an accelerated process, in which technological progress must be accompanied by standardization, security, and sustainable integration in order to reach its full potential.

CONCLUSIONS

Autonomous collaborative platforms represent a technological revolution, bringing a significant leap in the efficiency and flexibility of military operations. The ability of these systems to operate both autonomously and in collaboration with piloted aircraft opens up new possibilities on the battlefield, fundamentally changing the way missions are designed and executed.

The widespread adoption of autonomous collaborative platforms will require profound changes in military doctrine and the structure

of the armed forces, which are necessary for the integration of new technologies.

Ethical and legal challenges remain a major obstacle to the full implementation of these technologies. There is an urgent need to develop clear international legislative frameworks and regulations that define responsibilities and ensure transparency in how these autonomous systems make decisions.

Major investments by key state actors reflect the major strategic importance of ACPs in the race for air and technological supremacy. States that manage to integrate these technologies quickly and efficiently will gain a decisive competitive advantage in the field of security and defence. Thus, collaborative autonomous platforms are not only a technological innovation, but also a transformative factor that requires a balanced approach between progress and responsibility.



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THE CONCEPT OF THE “HUNTER-KILLER” PLATOON AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN MARINE INFANTRY FORCES FOR COASTAL DEFENCE IN THE DANUBE DELTA AND THE RAZELM-SINOE LAGOON COMPLEX (I)

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The security environment in the Black Sea region is characterised by instability, strategic competition and increased risks of hybrid and conventional military actions. In the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, the ability to rapidly detect, decide efficiently and strike accurately has become essential for the defence of the coastal areas in the Danube Delta and the Razelm-Sinoe lagoon complex. Naval infantry, as a manoeuvre force operating in a riverine environment (delta and lagoon areas), must be adapted for distributed, mobile and low-signature operations. The implementation of the “Hunter-Killer” Platoon concept responds to these requirements by integrating reconnaissance, command and control and strike elements into a flexible tactical structure. This concept enables the rapid transformation of intelligence into target effects through the use of modern sensors, communication networks and distributed firepower. The article analyses how the “Hunter-Killer” Platoon concept can be adapted and integrated at the level of the Romanian Naval Infantry units for coastal defence operations in the Danube Delta.

Keywords: “Hunter-Killer” Platoon; coastal defence; riverine environment; FPV attack micro-UAS; loitering munitions;



INTRODUCTION

In the modern era of hybrid warfare, coastal defence has evolved beyond the traditional concept of fixed maritime anti-landing defence positions reinforced with permanent fortification systems (bunkers) and supported by coastal artillery, naval minefields and coastal naval patrols. As a rule, this concept is often applicable to coastal defence in large sectors of sandy beaches favourable to the landing of potential enemy amphibious forces.

Much more complicated, complex, discontinuous and heterogeneous is the unique operational environment of the Danube Delta and the Razelm-Sinoe lagoon complex. It presents both strategic advantages and major vulnerabilities in the context of a potential combined aggression originating from the Black Sea and its northern coastal sector, through amphibious assault, riverine incursions or even by offensive river crossings conducted by forces dispersed across a wide front, which makes the paradigm of coastal defence in this area require a different type of approach.

The Danube Delta, together with the Razelm-Sinoe Lagoon Complex, forms a strategically sensitive littoral and riverine complex within Romania's coastal area and continues to represent the “Achilles’ heel” of coastal defence. Their geomorphology – a dense network of fragmented channels, marshlands, abundant vegetation (forests, reedbeds), islands, lakes and shallow lagoons – provides natural concealment and camouflage opportunities for small and mobile forces, while simultaneously presenting vulnerabilities to unconventional or hybrid incursions from the Black Sea or along the Danube River (through river branches and connecting canals).

The adoption within the Naval Infantry of an advanced reconnaissance and strike model, only partially described in allied doctrinal publications – namely the “Hunter-Killer” concept or “Hunter-Killer” Platoon – can transform these terrain characteristics into defensive advantages by combining persistent target acquisition, decentralised tactical decision-making and the distributed application of precision fires.

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To strengthen deterrence and defence capabilities in the Danube Delta and the Razelm-Sinoe Lagoon Complex, the Naval Infantry could adopt the “Hunter-Killer” Platoon concept – initially employed by both in the US Marine Corps and the US Army, adapting it to the specific riverine (delta and lagoon) environment. This article analytically explores how such a doctrinal adaptation could improve Romania’s defensive posture in these critical areas.

THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE DANUBE DELTA AND THE RAZELM-SINOE LAGOON COMPLEX

The Danube Delta, the second-largest delta in Europe, is a complex labyrinth of canals and an alluvial plain consisting of marshes, islands, sandy ridges covered with dense vegetation (reedbeds and forests), offering both concealment opportunities and a series of constraints for coastal defence forces.

The Danube Delta, the second-largest delta in Europe, is a complex labyrinth of canals and an alluvial plain consisting of marshes, islands, sandy ridges covered with dense vegetation (reedbeds and forests), offering both concealment opportunities and a series of constraints for coastal defence forces (figure 1). To the south, the Razelm-Sinoe Lagoon Complex forms a natural barrier between the Black Sea and the inland coastal area.

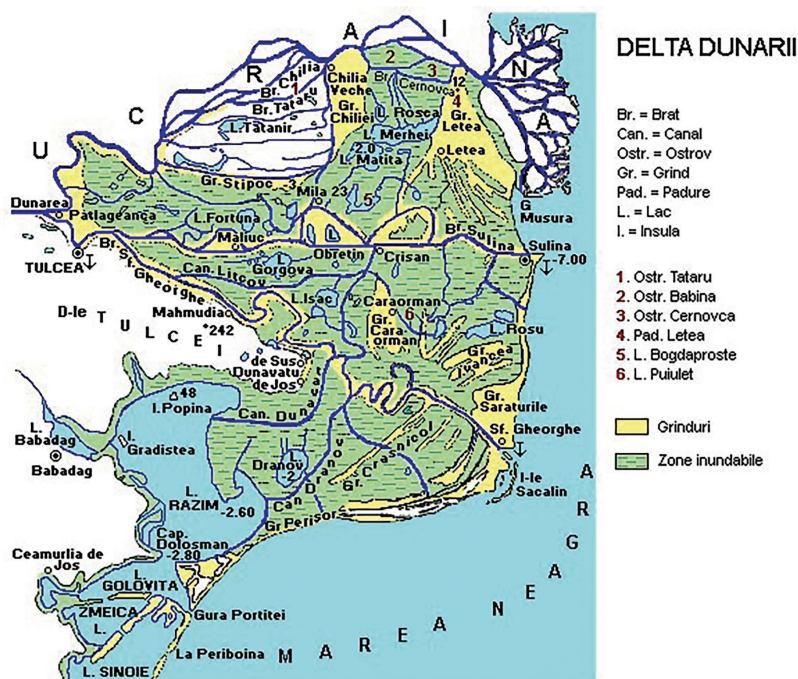


Figure 1: Danube Delta and Razelm – Sinoe Lagoon Complex
(<https://roteaprofu.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/delta.jpg>)



Although the geomorphologic configuration of the Danube Delta (including the Razelm-Sinoe Lagoon Complex) makes a large-scale mechanised invasion extremely difficult, it nevertheless provides a number of potential infiltration routes for small specialised enemy detachments (riverine, amphibious or airborne), Special Operations Forces, ISR groups or unmanned systems (aerial/UAS, surface/USV or submarine/UUV), launched from the northern or northwestern coast of the Black Sea or even from the occupied Crimean Peninsula.

The Razelm-Sinoe Lagoon Complex consists of a system of large, semi-enclosed, shallow lagoons (littoral lakes) connected to the Black Sea and the Danube Delta through canals; depths are typically shallow (often below 4 meters), while the hydrological conditions vary depending on the season and freshwater inflow. These physical constraints severely limit the mobility of large combat systems and mechanised units (large units), while favouring the mobility of small craft, amphibious forces, and unmanned systems – precisely the platforms that both defenders and an potential adversaries would use in a localised incursion.

The Danube Delta’s maze-like of combat systems and islands further enhances concealment opportunities and complicates large-scale military operations, facilitating a highly applicable, sensor-based *distributed* defence.

RECENT HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

Lessons learned from the Russo-Ukrainian war – which combines reconnaissance, electronic warfare, artillery/land-based missiles, irregular troops movements and the widespread use of FPV reconnaissance-strike drones – make these areas particularly vulnerable if insufficiently defended. In this regard, two recent examples are especially relevant to the nature of combat in a riverine environment and provide an appropriate transition to the subject of this article: *the battle for the Krynky bridgehead* and *the battle of Siverskyi-Donets near Bilohorivka*. These areas in Ukraine display geomorphologic similarities to the Danube Delta area and the Razelm-Sinoe Lagoon Complex.

Lesson Learned no. 1 (Ukrainian): the Russian victory in the battle for the Krynky bridgehead (October 2023-June 2024) on the eastern bank of the Dnieper River, where Ukrainian Marines (supported

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by territorial defence forces), attempted to secure a bridgehead through a riverine amphibious operation. The objective aimed to redirect Russian efforts from Donbas to the southern front by disrupting Russian logistical support along the M-14 highway and opening an offensive direction for access toward the Crimean Peninsula. The Ukrainian forces suffered a severe defeat, regarded as one of the most difficult chapters of the war. The terrain in the Kherson-Nova Kakhovka River sector of the Dnieper shares many similarities with that of the Danube Delta and the Razelm-Sinoe Lagoon Complex. Military analysts and frontline reports highlighted several lessons relevant to riverine warfare:

- *high-cost static attrition is the main lesson learned* – namely, the extreme human cost of capturing and holding a “symbolic” bridgehead without the means to expand it. Ukrainian Marines were frequently subjected to intense and protracted fire while operating in an environment with very limited space of manoeuvre. Survivors and analysts noted that the ultimate goal of penetrating deep into occupied territory (up to 80 km) was almost impossible to achieve under such conditions (figure 2).



Figure 2: The concept and probable intent of the Ukrainian Marines operations at Krynky to seize and secure a bridgehead in support of subsequent operations (<https://www.nzz.ch/english/is-the-ukrainian-army-preparing-a-breakthrough-strike-ld.1770483> https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/1b4nun6/battle_for_krynky_kherson_oblast_ukraine/#lightbox)

- *vulnerability of riverine logistics* – amphibious operations conducted across a major river such as the Dnieper face extreme risks of “*blocking effect*”; first of all – riverine supply lines – Ukrainian amphibious landings relied on small craft operations, which became constant targets for Russian FPV drones and artillery; also, medical evacuation operations were also severely affected due to the extreme risks involved, often resulting in “*countless casualties*” among elite units, such as the Ukrainian 126th Territorial Defence Brigade and 35th Marine Brigade;
- *the role of riverine interdiction operations conducted by Russian forces with drones* – the battle of Krynky demonstrated that modern electronic warfare systems and drone saturation can neutralise traditional amphibious/riverine advantages. Although Ukrainian drones initially helped neutralise Russian armoured forces defending the eastern bank, the absence of Ukrainian heavy support equipment on the eastern bank often left Ukrainian Marines “*stuck*” to a small operational footprint. By June 2024, the bridgehead had become untenable after Russian forces intensified combined and protracted fire, destroying most Ukrainian defensive positions within the bridgehead. In July 2024, Ukrainian forces officially withdrew from the Krynky area after the positions were deemed destroyed and impossible to sustain (*figure 3*).



Figure 3: After about nine months of fighting, the Krynky bridgehead had been transformed into a completely devastated area.

(<https://english.nv.ua/russian-war/ukrainian-marines-secret-dnipro-landing-exposed-chaos-heroism-and-unfinished-goals-50520483.html>)



Historically, the Naval Infantry Regiment within the Naval Forces remains the only unit organised, trained and experienced as an amphibious assault force intended for riverine and amphibious operations in the coastal environment, possessing both doctrinal expertise and practical operational experience in the defence of riverine sectors of the coastal area.

Lesson Learned no. 2 (Russian): the blocking and destruction of the Russian Battalion Tactical Group (BTG) from the 74th Mechanised Brigade during its attempted crossing the Siverskyi-Donets River¹ (figure 4); on 11 May 2022, Ukrainian forces from the 79th Air Assault Brigade succeeded in destroying a Russian Battalion Tactical Group (BTG) attempting to cross the strategically important Siverskyi-Donets River in the Donbas region. Employing forces, supported by artillery (27th Artillery Brigade, including Uragan multiple-launch rocket systems – MLRSs), reconnaissance drones and Switchblade-300 (anti-personnel)/ and Switchblade-600 (anti-tank) loitering munitions, Ukrainian forces destroyed a Russian pontoon bridge together with at least six tanks, 14 BMP infantry fighting vehicles, seven MT-LB amphibious vehicles, a tugboat and five other armoured vehicles during the crossing. This effectively neutralised the entire Russian Battalion Tactical Group (BTG) at the moment of maximum vulnerability, when forces were concentrated both in on the staging areas near the crossing point and during the crossing (moving on the pontoon bridge), with insufficient security measures for crossing operations.

It should also be emphasised that the terrain in the Siverskyi-Donets River crossing sector shares many geomorphologic similarities with the Danube Delta terrain.

Historically, the Naval Infantry Regiment within the Naval Forces remains the only unit organised, trained and experienced as an amphibious assault force intended for riverine and amphibious operations in the coastal environment, possessing both doctrinal expertise and practical operational experience in the defence of riverine sectors of the coastal area. The transformation of this institutional base into a modern set of “Hunter-Killer” Platoons requires doctrinal adjustments (with an emphasis on decentralised mission command), organisational transformations (through the creation of small mixed reconnaissance-strike teams), specialised training and investments in critical equipment, such as: drones of different categories (micro/mini-UAS), loitering munitions, portable anti-tank guided missile – ATGM

¹ Digital Forensic Research Group, *Russian War Report: Drone Footage Confirms Failed Russian Military Pontoon Crossing*, Atlantic Council, 13 May 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russian-war-report-drone-footage-confirms-failed-russian-military-pontoon-crossing/>.

systems (optimised for riverine and littoral operations), MANPADS and C-UAS systems, portable Electronic Warfare systems, encrypted tactical communications and information solutions, ultra-light tactical vehicles and fast riverine patrol crafts.



Figure 4: The crossing point over the Siverskyi-Donets River footage after Russian BTG was neutralised by Ukrainian artillery.

(<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russian-war-report-drone-footage-confirms-failed-russian-military-pontoon-crossing/>; <https://dupuyinstitute.org/2022/06/09/the-severskii-donets-river-crossing-operation/>)

The unit’s existing focus on riverine and littoral areas provides a solid basis for such a transformation.

(The second part of the article will be published in the next issue.)

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STRATEGIC HEDGING AND RESILIENCE DYNAMICS ON THE EASTERN FLANK: ROMANIA BETWEEN USA, NATO AND EU

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.04

Starting from the theoretical framework of strategic hedging, Romania does not adopt a classic model of balancing between major powers, but rather a limited and intra-ally hedging, compatible with its Euro-Atlantic commitments. The Strategic Partnership with the USA, as a pillar of military security and deterrence on NATO's eastern flank, contributes substantially to Romania's strategic balance/hedging position, while simultaneously leveraging the European dimension for development, resilience and strategic stability.

Looking ahead, Romania is not undergoing a strategic reorientation from the USA toward the European Union, but rather a pragmatic and resilient recalibration of the balance between the two dimensions, in line with national and Euro-Atlantic strategic documents. In this regard, strengthening Romania's strategic profile in the Black Sea region, increasing the level of national capabilities, as well as maintaining cooperation within NATO and the EU define the conditions for transforming strategic hedging into a multiplier of resilience and geopolitical influence.

Keywords: deterrence; hedging; Black Sea region; military security; Romania;



PROLEGOMENA

Security – a fundamental concept in the trilogy of the existence of the state, the defence of sovereignty and the axiological framework of the state, preserved in culture of the population culture and on the national territory. State security is defined by the capabilities that a state possesses and uses in order to deter not only internal threats, but also external ones. In the case of Romania, national security requires particular attention, given the permanent dynamics of geopolitical developments, especially in its geographical proximity. The volatility of the environment's security, the numerous risks, vulnerabilities and threats, global competition and the growing worldwide instability collectively shape a scenario marked by uncertainty, fear and confusion.

The concept of *national security* has evolved in recent years beyond conventional military defence. In addition to armed combat, contemporary threats have become more and more complex, manifesting through disinformation campaigns, cyber-attacks, economic pressure and, evidently, diplomatic isolation (Constantin, 2025). Therefore, the need for feasible strategies has become a pressing concern. Romania recognised that alignment and cooperation with international organisations represent key strategic advantages. It not only benefits from political and decision-making support, but, through its involvement in regional formats such as NATO training exercises, the Three Seas Initiatives and EU's foreign policy efforts, it also benefits from a mutual and collective security agenda (NATO, 2022). All these organisations play a role in consolidating security commitments and expanding diplomatic reach.

Romania, being positioned at the confluence of interests in the Black Sea Region, does not have the luxury of aligning itself exclusively with the policy direction of a single state, coalition or alliance. Instead, Romania is compelled to maintain a certain degree of flexibility in the diversification of international relations. Hence, as a member of both NATO and EU, Romania pursues a European policy in parallel

National security requires particular attention, given the permanent dynamics of geopolitical developments, especially in its geographical proximity. The volatility of the environment's security, the numerous risks, vulnerabilities and threats, global competition and the growing worldwide instability collectively shape a scenario marked by uncertainty, fear and confusion.



The consolidation of the Strategic Partnership with the US, formally established in 1997 and subsequently deepened through sustained military, political and technological cooperation, has transformed Romania into a frontline NATO ally and a genuine pillar of regional stability. This once again confirms the significance of Romania's role within the security architecture of the Alliance Eastern Flank.

with a transatlantic one, thereby forming a broad spectrum of strategic options and opportunities for different alliances. This dual approach helps Romania in emerging as both a beneficiary and a provider of stability in the Black Sea region.

Within a context defined by insecurity and numerous unforeseen “Black Swan” events, as well as predictable yet neglected “Grey Rhino” scenarios, compounded by hybrid methods ranging from cyberattacks to espionage, disinformation and sabotage, the concept of **strategic hedging** acquires decisive relevance, particularly with regard to state resilience in international relations.

In this sense, the consolidation of the Strategic Partnership with the US, formally established in 1997 and subsequently deepened through sustained military, political and technological cooperation, has transformed Romania into a frontline NATO ally and a genuine pillar of regional stability. This once again confirms the significance of Romania's role within the security architecture of the Alliance Eastern Flank. This ambivalence – the strategic partnership with the US alongside membership in the EU – provides Romania with a dual set of responsibilities and, at the same time, a dual security umbrella. The current study examines the interaction between these two dimensions, highlighting the benefits associated with maintaining a coherent strategic balance.

ROMANIA'S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS – PILLARS OF ROMANIA'S FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY

Romania currently maintains 14 strategic partnerships: with the United States, Azerbaijan, the Republic of Korea, France, Bulgaria, Italy, Japan, Georgia, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Poland, Türkiye, Hungary, Spain and Moldova. At the same time, Romania has also outlined special relationships with India and the People's Republic of China. Chronologically, Romania's relations with these states were elevated to the level of strategic partnerships as follows (MFA, 2025):

❖ 1997 – United States (11 July): The consolidation of the strategic partnership between the two countries was formalised over time through the *Joint Declaration on the Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century between Romania and the United States of America*,



adopted on 13 September 2011 in Washington by the Presidents of Romania and the United States; the *Joint Declaration on the Implementation of the Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century between Romania and the United States of America*, adopted on 19 June 2018 in Bucharest during the Romania-US Strategic Dialogue at political level and the *Joint Declaration of the President of Romania, Klaus Iohannis and the President of the United States of America, Donald J. Trump* signed on 20 August 2019 in Washington, D.C.

❖ 1997 – Italy (17 April): through the signing of the *Joint Declaration of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Romania and Italy on the Romanian-Italian Strategic Partnership*. Subsequently, on 9 January 2008 in Bucharest, the foreign ministers of the two states signed the *Joint Declaration on the Consolidated Romanian-Italian Strategic Partnership*.

❖ 2002 – Hungary (29 November): through the signing of the *Declaration on Cooperation and the Romanian-Hungarian Strategic Partnership for Europe in the 21st Century*.

❖ 2003 – United Kingdom (June): through the adoption of the document entitled *Britain and Romania in Europe: Strategic Partnership*. Later, in June 2011, a Joint Declaration on Relaunching the Strategic Partnership between Romania and the United Kingdom was agreed.

❖ 2008 – Republic of Korea (8 September): through the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between Romania and the Republic of Korea*.

❖ 2008 – France (February): through the signing in Bucharest of the *Joint Declaration* by the Presidents of the two states. Subsequently, in November 2018, the two Heads of State signed a new Political Declaration on the *Strategic Partnership* in Paris.

❖ 2009 – Azerbaijan (30 September): through the signing of the *Declaration on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between Romania and the Republic of Azerbaijan*, on the occasion of the official visit to Romania of President Ilham Aliyev (28-30 September 2009).

❖ 2009 – Poland (7 October): through the signing of the *Joint Declaration of the Presidents of Romania and the Republic of Poland*, on the occasion of the Polish President's visit to Romania.

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Italian Strategic
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On 8 March 2013, in New Delhi, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Romania and India signed the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of an Extended Partnership between Romania and India.

❖ 2010 – Moldova (27 April): through the signing in Bucharest of the *Declaration on establishing a Strategic Partnership between Romania and the Republic of Moldova* for Moldova's European integration.

❖ 2011 – Türkiye (12-13 December): through the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Strategic Partnership between Romania and the Republic of Türkiye*, on the occasion of the Romanian President's state visit to Türkiye.

❖ 2013 – Spain (22 July): through the announcement by the Prime Minister of Romania and the Prime Minister of Spain, during a joint press conference, regarding the political decision to establish a *Strategic Partnership* between the two states.

❖ 2022 – Georgia (11 October): through the signing of the *Declaration on the Establishment of a Strategic Partnership between Romania and Georgia*, on the occasion of the official visit to Romania of Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili (10-12 October 2022).

❖ 2023 – Japan (7 March): through the signing of the *Joint Declaration Establishing a Strategic Partnership between Romania and Japan* by President Klaus Iohannis and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, during the official visit of the Romanian Head of State to Japan (6-9 March 2023).

❖ 2023 – Bulgaria (15 March): through the signing in Sofia of the *Declaration on the Strategic Partnership between Romania and the Republic of Bulgaria* by the two Heads of State in Sofia.

On 8 March 2013, in New Delhi, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Romania and India signed the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of an *Extended Partnership between Romania and India*. Subsequently, on 23 February 2024, a Joint Anniversary Declaration was adopted, marking ten years since the establishment of the Extended Partnership between Romania and India in 2013 (*Joint Declaration following the 10th Anniversary of the Signing of the Joint Statement on Establishing an Extensive Partnership between Romania and India*). Additionally, in 2004, a joint political declaration at presidential level was signed on the occasion of the visit to Romania of Chinese President Hu Jintao, entitled *Joint Declaration of Romania and the People's Republic of China on Establishing a Comprehensive Partnership of Friendship and Cooperation* (MFA, 2025).

These partnerships define a substantial part of Romania's foreign and security policy, each representing a success within Romania's strategy for managing international relations.

***The Strategic Partnership between Romania
and the United States – An Essential Element of the Action Triad
in Romania's Foreign and Security Policy***

Since its launch, the Strategic Partnership has represented a key landmark of Romania's foreign policy, as well as an effective instrument of cooperation supporting the country's reform efforts in the political, economic, military, and administrative domains (Ibid.).

In line with Romania's previous National Defence Strategy (2020-2024) (Presidential Administration, 2020), as well as the current one covering the period 2025-2030 (Presidential Administration, 2026), deepening and expanding the Strategic Partnership with the United States constitutes one of the components of the action triad underpinning Romania's foreign and security policy.

Romania builds its security strategy on the premise that its primary guarantees are NATO membership and the privileged relationship with the United States, a partner that shares Romania's perception of the level of threat along the Alliance's eastern border (Ibid.).

Within the current national security strategy for 2025-2030, the central concept is that of *"solidary independence"*, which, according to analysts, emerged both from an assessment of the current situation on the ground and from a medium-term development vision. *"(...) Thus, Romania is seen as a country increasingly confident in its own capabilities, even though institutions have not yet fully adapted to the pace of societal and economic change"* (Popovici, 2025). According to the current strategy, solidary independence cannot exist outside the international environment. In this regard, membership in structures such as NATO and the EU contextualizes this concept, providing it with relevance and credibility. *"Romania has consolidated its position through solidarity and loyalty toward its allies, while consistently pursuing its own interests. Thus, independence and solidarity reinforce one another: **neither can fully exist without the other**"* (Ibid.). At the international level, the document also assigns major importance to the Strategic Partnership with the United States, considered



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The military dimension of the partnership experienced significant consolidation beginning in the mid-2000s. The agreement on the presence and activities of US forces on Romanian territory created the conditions for expanded operational cooperation, while the decision to deploy the US missile defence system in Romania represented a major strategic step.

an essential pillar of Romania's security and prosperity (Popovici, 2025). In this context, the US military presence and American investments in strategic domains are viewed as strengthening the foundations of national security.

The Evolution of the Strategic Partnership between Romania and the United States

The elevation of Romanian-American relations to the level of Strategic Partnership in the summer of 1997 marked a major inflection point in Romania's post-Cold War foreign and security policy. The visit to Bucharest of US President William (Bill) J. Clinton sent a strong political signal of support for Romania's Euro-Atlantic trajectory and paved the way for deeper cooperation anchored in shared values and convergent strategic interests. Subsequent diplomatic dialogue, materialised through official exchanges at the level of foreign ministries and the identification of priority areas of cooperation, laid the foundations of a structural and long-term bilateral relationship.

In the years that followed, US support for Romania's integration into NATO was reinforced by commitments undertaken by Bucharest in the field of domestic reforms, as well as by Romania's increasingly active profile as a security provider. After the attacks of 11 September 2001, Romania firmly aligned itself with Washington in global counterterrorism efforts, contributing troops to operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and strengthening bilateral security cooperation. This strategic convergence was also reflected in enhanced collaboration in combating transnational crime and hybrid and unconventional threats, within which context an FBI office was opened in Bucharest as an expression of mutual institutional trust.

The military dimension of the partnership experienced significant consolidation beginning in the mid-2000s. The agreement on the presence and activities of US forces on Romanian territory created the conditions for expanded operational cooperation, while the decision to deploy the US missile defence system in Romania represented a major strategic step. The certification of the operational capability of the Aegis Ashore facility at Deveselu and its integration into NATO's defence architecture confirmed Romania's role as a security pillar on the Alliance's Eastern Flank (Bâtcă, 2026).



The year 2011 marked the adoption of the *Declaration on the Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century*, a document that provided the bilateral relationship with a coherent conceptual framework and a long-term vision. This expanded cooperation beyond the strictly military sphere, encompassing areas such as the economy, energy, research, education, science, and people-to-people exchanges, and established a bilateral strategic dialogue mechanism conducted periodically at both political and technical levels.

High-level dialogue between Romanian President Klaus Iohannis and US President Donald J. Trump, materialised through official visits in 2017 and 2019, contributed to recalibrating and adapting the Strategic Partnership to new security realities. The Joint Declaration of August 2019 set clear directions for cooperation in areas such as defence, energy security, investments, good governance, and anti-corruption, while also introducing new axes of collaboration, including 5G network security and the civilian nuclear sector.

More recently, on 4 February 2026, the President of the Romanian Senate participated in the Interparliamentary Security Forum held in Washington, D.C., where he reaffirmed Romania's commitments at the allied level, including the objective of allocating 5% of GDP to defence and security by 2035: *"It was emphasized that Romania maintains its allied commitments, including the objective of allocating 5% of GDP to defence and security by 2035, as well as efforts to develop military capabilities and the national defence industry, in close cooperation with Euro-Atlantic partners and especially with the United States of America"* (Eduard, 2026). At the same time, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio praised Romania's efforts to meet defence spending commitments and its role as a security provider in the Black Sea region (Bâtcă, 2026).

Against the backdrop of the deteriorating regional security environment, Romania and the United States are currently coordinating efforts alongside their Euro-Atlantic allies to manage the consequences of the war of aggression launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Cooperation addresses both support for Kyiv and the mitigation of indirect effects on regional and global security, including in the food and energy sectors.

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THE CONCEPT OF “HEDGING” IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND ITS CONNECTION TO RESILIENCE

“National security can no longer be viewed solely in terms of military prowess in a time of uncertainty and multifaceted threats, especially when diplomacy provides states with a flexible and peaceful means of anticipating, managing and reducing risks through its people, institutions and values”.

Traditionally, Romania has regarded diplomacy as an important instrument of statecraft, especially in light of its membership in multilateral organisations such as NATO and the EU. As for the benefits derived from its allies, particularly NATO and the EU, Romania enjoys significant opportunities to project stability and influence in the region due to its strategic position, historical ties to Eastern Europe and commitment to Euro-Atlantic principles: *“National security can no longer be viewed solely in terms of military prowess in a time of uncertainty and multifaceted threats, especially when diplomacy provides states with a flexible and peaceful means of anticipating, managing and reducing risks through its people, institutions and values”*. (Constantin, 2025). The foundation of security consists of facilitating the creation of alliances, developing cooperation and mitigating challenges before they intensify and evolve into crises. All these elements are, no less, outcomes of diplomatic strategies and policy. In other words, diplomacy continues to be the first and most effective line of defence, both in times of peace and in times of crises (Ibid.).

In our opinion, *hedging* represents the art of maintaining a balanced and broadly cooperative diplomacy. In theory, *hedging* is a foreign policy strategy through which a state seeks to reduce risks in an uncertain or unstable international environment without fully committing to an exclusive alliance or coalition and without antagonising other major powers. In other words, it reflects a balanced diplomatic approach towards all relevant actors. In short, the state does not select one path or camp outright, but instead keeps its options open in order to prevent potential future risks and threats. Hence, *hedging* represents a risk-management strategy whereby a state simultaneously pursues policies of cooperation and caution towards certain major powers, allowing it to benefit from collaboration while also protecting itself against potential threats.

The key characteristics of *hedging* include:

- strategic ambiguity – the state does not fully align with one actor, but maintains a certain degree of flexibility;

- diversified options – developing multiple partnerships across PMESII (*political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, information*), technology and other domains;
- avoidance of extreme costs – *hedging* lies between direct confrontation with a power (*balancing*) and full alignment or unconditional affiliation with a dominant power (*bandwagoning*);
- minimisation of risk – preparation for unforeseen or adverse events.

In essence, *hedging* is a strategy through which a state reduces geopolitical risk by diversifying its options, maintaining a balance among major powers and preserving strategic flexibility. It functions as a protective mechanism in an uncertain world, conceptually positioned between *balancing* and *bandwagoning* (Ciorciari, 2019).

Resilience, however, represents a set of strategies carried out by actors ranging from individuals to central public authorities and institutions, whose responsibilities include ensuring the continuity of governance, maintaining essential services and core functions during crisis situations that may affect national response capacity, and restoring normality following disruption (Glod, 2025). Therefore, *enhancing resilience* becomes a central pillar of collective defence, contributing to the reduction of security risks and the preservation of state cohesion, independence, national security and the security of NATO member states (Ibid.).

Romania's status as a full NATO member has required the development of domestic policies capable of addressing new types of risks and potential threats to national security, such as the expansion of terrorism, religious radicalisation, and the emergence of state and non-state actors capable of acquiring weapons of mass destruction or generating a high level of instability and insecurity in the Black Sea region. (Ibid.)

From this perspective, *strategic hedging* can be understood as a distinct form of resilience that any state may adopt, particularly those that have, at some point, existed within a sphere of influence. A concrete example can be found in Southeast Asian states such as Singapore and Vietnam, which cooperate economically with the People's Republic of China while simultaneously strengthening



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The concept of “strategic hedging” defines a strategy through which a state, instead of aligning exclusively with a single power pole, employs measures of cooperation and layered partnerships with many actors, with a unique goal of reducing vulnerabilities within an uncertain international environment. As opposed to balancing and bandwagoning, hedging seeks neither direct confrontation nor total subordination, but rather the preservation of strategic room for manoeuvre.

their security ties with the United States. Similarly, India cooperates with the United States in the Indo-Pacific region while maintaining relations with the Russian Federation.

The application of this concept to Romania is somehow nuanced, given that Romania is a member state of both NATO and the EU, with firm security commitments that significantly constrain the possibility of adopting a classical, *Asia-style hedging strategy*. Nevertheless, Romania does practice *selective* yet functional forms of *hedging*, particularly in the economic, energy and diplomatic domains.

STRATEGIC HEDGING: ADVANTAGES AND CAVEATS FOR ROMANIA

As aforementioned, the concept of *strategic hedging* defines a strategy through which a state, instead of aligning exclusively with a single power pole, employs measures of cooperation and layered partnerships with many actors, with a unique goal of reducing vulnerabilities within an uncertain international environment. As opposed to *balancing* and *bandwagoning*, *hedging* seeks neither direct confrontation nor total subordination, but rather the preservation of strategic room for manoeuvre.

Romania is not a typical example of *classical hedging*, as it is firmly integrated into NATO and the EU, with a predominant strategic orientation towards the United States. However, within a multipolar environment, Romania may occasionally adopt micro-forms of *hedging* in order to diversify its economic relations, manage dependencies and, more importantly, strengthen its national resilience. Hence, in Romania’s case, *strategic hedging* primarily refers to a two-pronged approach consisting of the consolidation of the partnership with the United States and, at the same time, the leveraging EU membership for economic growth and technological development. That way, Romania may play a significant part in maintaining resilience within a dynamic, volatile evolving regional environment.

According to some authors (Caloianu etc.), *hedging* offers the possibility of “*playing*” several cards simultaneously by maintaining diplomatic and economic relations both with major Western powers and with states such as the People’s Republic of China or the Russian Federation. We would go further with a counterargument



suggesting that *hedging* is neither limited to nor dependent upon geographic or political categorisations that divide actors into friends and adversaries. In essence, *hedging* represents a mode of survival in uncharted waters, not necessarily more hostile ones (Caloianu, Ibid.). From this perspective, in Romania's case, *hedging* can be observed in the effort to strike an optimal balance between NATO and the EU, while simultaneously aligning with certain US security objectives, given the United States' role as a key strategic partner in Romania's foreign and security policy.

A major advantage of *strategic hedging* consists in reducing strategic risks within a volatile security environment. In other words, by anchoring itself in its strategic relationship with the United States and, at the same time, by strengthening the European dimension of security, Romania avoids exclusive dependence on a single security provider. Furthermore, *strategic hedging* contributes to the diversification of partners, sources and options across multiple domains beyond the political sphere, including the economy and energy. This way, Romania seeks to reduce dependence on resources originating from the Russian Federation while simultaneously developing transatlantic and European cooperation, which strengthens not only energy security but also autonomy in the decision-making process.

In this context, one may also refer to the increase in Romania's strategic relevance. As a connecting actor between the EU, the United States and NATO on the Eastern Flank, particularly in the Black Sea region, Romania is able to benefit from both the transatlantic and the European dimensions of security. At the same time, *controlled hedging* provides diplomatic flexibility. Romania can support European initiatives aimed at strengthening strategic autonomy without contradicting its transatlantic commitments, while maintaining its profile as a loyal ally, but not a passive one.

However, the main drawback stems from Romania's status as a NATO ally, as the space for *hedging manoeuvres* remains relatively limited due to collective security commitments that require strategic clarity and predictability. Any perception of confusion, ambiguity or duality may be interpreted as reluctance or, worse, as a lack of commitment. From this outcome, additional disadvantages may emerge, especially in the adversaries' narratives. An external perception of strategic

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For Romania, hedging cannot constitute a core strategy in the classical sense, but rather a complementary instrument to a clear strategic alignment with the Euro-Atlantic space. While Romania may benefit from selective hedging, it may also face certain risks. Its advantages are maximised when applied selectively, transparently and in coordination with allies, while its risks increase when hedging is perceived as ambiguity or indecision.

ambivalence can fuel rhetoric about a lack of cohesion on the Eastern Flank and the weakening of Euro-Atlantic solidarity.

When European and transatlantic priorities do not fully coincide, a *hedging* position may generate institutional tensions and decision-making incoherence. In the absence of clear, organised strategic coordination, the possibility of contradictory messaging and even missed opportunities becomes quite high. Divergent institutional perspectives are frequent in the domestic affairs of any state, but when there are two strategic directions that Romania seeks to maintain in a state of convergence or, at least, complementarity, such differences may lead to disruptive decisions and a weakening of international credibility. Moreover, for a medium-sized state such as Romania, *excessive hedging* risks becoming *reactive rather than strategic*. In the absence of strong and efficient national capabilities, the diversification of external relations may result in the dispersion of resources and the dilution of efforts, rather than in the consolidation of a coherent deterrence posture.

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Thus, Romania illustrates a model of *limited and responsible hedging*, in which diplomatic flexibility and economic diversification coexist with firm security commitments, transforming this approach into a multiplier of resilience, rather than an alternative to an exclusive alliance-based security.

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So, is Romania less oriented towards the US in the context of the Greenland geopolitical issue?

No, at least not in a structural sense. For Romania, the strategic relationship with the United States remains a central pillar of its national security strategy for a straightforward reason: at present, neither the EU nor individual European states are able to provide military guarantees equivalent to those offered by the US, particularly



on the Eastern Flank. More specifically, military bases¹ (GlobalSecurity, etc.), rotational military presence (US Department of State, 2025), missile defence systems (US Department of State, 2025)², ISR capabilities (Secretary of the Air Force International Affairs, 2021), and indirect nuclear deterrence (NATO, 2025) are provided by the United States. From this perspective, Romania does not possess a functional alternative to the United States. Therefore, what we are witnessing is not a “*distancing*” from the US, but rather a prudent adjustment of exclusive dependence.

The projection of a state’s power is defined by its capacity to influence the international environment through military, economical, scientific and technological instruments. (Simileanu, 2025). Currently, the United States, the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation are all seeking to achieve synergy between resources and national strategy, while adapting this approach to their own strategic interests and vulnerabilities. (Ibid.). At present, the United States preserves its hegemonic status through a wide range of combined measures and capabilities, such as: its global network of military bases, NATO’s operational presence in Europe, global naval capabilities (*blue-water navy*), and technological, cyber and intelligence assets. When comparing such a strategic partner with a regional organisation such as the EU, the choice is not a realistic one. Therefore, a *hedging policy* represents the only mature position that a state can adopt.

The central issue in the current strategic debate lies in Romania’s positioning within the current context, shaped both by the Greenland controversy and by the relationship between the Trump administration and the Russian leadership, which appears more cooperative than confrontational. In this regard, Romania is not strategically “*shifting*” from the United States towards the EU, but it is adjusting its *hedging*

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¹ In July 2006, the Romanian parliament ratified the historic agreement that allowed U.S. troops to deploy to Romanian military facilities for training and other purposes, part of the larger U.S. Global Defense Posture Review.

² Romania hosts a key element of the U.S. *European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA)* missile defense effort for NATO. The fully operational system was integrated as part of NATO’s ballistic missile defense at the Warsaw NATO Summit in July 2016. The two countries signed a ballistic missile defense agreement in 2011. In October 2014, the U.S. Navy formally established *Naval Support Facility Deveselu* – the United States’ first new Navy base since 1987 – where the EPAA *Aegis Ashore* missile defense site has been constructed. The base houses over a hundred US sailors and Navy contractors on a persistent, rotational basis.



The Greenland episode does not shift Romania exclusively towards the EU, but it does reinforce its inclination for strategic diversification. Indeed, Romania is becoming more strategically oriented towards the EU, though not in a substitutive sense, but rather a complementary one, especially in areas such as economic security, energy security, societal resilience, critical infrastructure, military mobility and the defence industry.

in a context where the centre of gravity of European security guarantees is beginning to shift partially. The growing role of Romania as a pillar of stability in the Black Sea region is supported both by *NATO 2030* (Blessing, Elgin, Ewers-Peters, 2021) and by the *EU Strategic Compass*, both of which highlight the strategic importance of this region for Euro-Atlantic security. In this context, Romania has the potential to become a strategic nexus of convergence between NATO and EU initiatives, contributing both to military deterrence and to regional resilience and broader security.

Regarding the support expressed by EU member states for Denmark in the Greenland issue, in the context of statements made by Donald J. Trump, this episode conveys an important political signal, although not a decisive military one. For Romania, the message is that the EU is beginning to respond more coherently at the political level to external pressures, including those originating from the US. However, this cohesion does not automatically translate into credible military deterrence. Romania interprets this episode not as a “*transatlantic rupture*”, but rather as an indicator of the unpredictability of US policy, particularly as influenced by electoral cycles.

In this sense, the Greenland episode does not shift Romania exclusively towards the EU, but it does reinforce its inclination for strategic diversification. Indeed, Romania is becoming more strategically oriented towards the EU, though *not in a substitutive sense, but rather a complementary one*, especially in areas such as economic security, energy security, societal resilience, critical infrastructure, military mobility and the defence industry. Nevertheless, it must be emphasised that real military security remains transatlantic. This is the essence of Romania’s current *hedging approach: the United States for military deterrence and the EU for strategic sustainability*.

Romania does not practice a form of *hedging* aimed at “balancing among great powers,” as observed in parts of Asia, but rather a type of *intra-allied hedging*, remaining firmly anchored within NATO, strengthening its position within the EU and avoiding, as far as possible, exclusive dependence on a single political axis. This type of *hedging* is *defensive, transparent* and fully *compatible* with existing alliances. In fact, commitments within NATO, the continued enhancement of Romania’s strategic profile within the EU, and its strategic partnerships

constitute the action triad underpinning Romania's foreign and security policy.

The evolution of Romanian *strategic hedging* towards a more coherent and institutionalised form is compatible with the vision articulated in Romania's National Defence Strategy, which introduces the concept of "*solidary independence*". This concept captures the balance between strengthening national capabilities and assuming allied responsibilities, confirming that Romania's strategic flexibility is not an expression of ambiguity, but rather of decision-making maturity in a volatile international system. Within this logic, Romanian strategic hedging is expected to become more sophisticated and institutionalised, evolving from ad hoc responses towards coherent diversification policies integrated into national and European strategies for security and resilience.

CONCLUSIONS

In the current volatile security environment, characterised by strategic competition, structural vulnerabilities and hybrid threats, Romania's geostrategic position requires not only a flexible approach to national security, but also the systematic strengthening of national resilience. In this context, Romania cannot build its security exclusively around a single power axis, but rather through a carefully calibrated balance between alliances, partnerships and the development of its own military, institutional and societal resilience capabilities.

Simultaneous membership in NATO and the EU provides Romania with a dual strategic advantage, enabling it to combine transatlantic military security guarantees with European instruments for development, resilience, cohesion, and economic stability, all of which are essential for sustaining long-term security and reducing internal vulnerabilities.

Romania's *strategic hedging* is *limited, selective, and intra-allied*, oriented towards the diversification of economic, energy, and diplomatic options, with a direct role in enhancing the state's strategic resilience, without calling into question Romania's firm commitments to the Euro-Atlantic space or to the collective security architecture.

Recent geopolitical developments do not necessarily point to a strategic reorientation of Romania, but rather to a pragmatic



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recalibration of the balance between the transatlantic and European dimensions, aimed at further strengthening Romania's resilience and strategic relevance in an unpredictable international environment.

The success of Romania's *hedging* strategy will depend decisively on the consolidation of national capabilities, both military and civilian, so that national resilience transforms strategic flexibility into an *instrument of anticipation and influence*, rather than merely a reactive mechanism for adapting to external pressures.

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THE ROLE OF AUTONOMOUS DRONES IN THE BLACK SEA NAVAL WAR AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE NAVAL STRATEGY

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.05

The future of naval warfare is shaped by a series of technological innovations such as autonomous ships and remote-operated vehicles, advanced submarine technologies, naval cyber warfare, naval sensors, naval missile systems, maritime patrol aircraft, hypersonic missiles, underwater drones, satellite communications, laser weapons and stealth technology. These advancements enhance the capabilities of naval forces, ensuring they remain effective in the face of ever-evolving threats. As these technologies continue to develop, they will play a key role in redefining the maritime strategy.

This article highlights the fact that autonomous drone is the key technology of the new naval war. The Black Sea is a relevant case that confirms this trend, with a major impact on how naval fleets and strategies will be designed in the coming decades. Doctrinal adaptation, investment in military AI and international regulation will become priorities for fleet reform.

Keywords: Distributed Maritime Operations; stealth technology; Trans Adriatic Pipeline; NATO Sea Shield 25; Black Sea Fleet;

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, naval warfare has gone through significant changes, fuelled by technological advancements and major geopolitical changes. Thus, in the ever-evolving naval warfare strategy, a profound transformation is about to take place, due to the operational integration of new USV-type technologies. The use of these technologies has grown from a smaller scale use in Yemen in the mid-2010s to a genuine Ukrainian naval program of USVs, operational since 2023. At the heart of this change is the advent of autonomous naval drones, equipped with sensors and explosives, which offer an effective and cost-effective alternative to traditional naval forces. In this context, the conflict in the Black Sea, triggered after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and amplified by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, became an operational laboratory for testing and validating new autonomous means of combat. The Russian war against Ukraine has transformed the Black Sea into an experimental space for drones, electronic warfare and naval missiles, being the first region where autonomous maritime drones (e.g.: Sea Baby, Magura V5) are systematically used in combat. These unmanned technologies are introducing new norms in naval warfare and are close to revolutionizing the theatre of maritime operations. Unquestionably, the emergence of autonomous combat systems and anti-access technologies will produce a profound transformation in contemporary naval strategy. These technologies increase the possibilities of data collection and processing in certain maritime districts of interest, extend the operational reach of naval combat groups and, very importantly, introduce new tactics for asymmetric warfare and anti-access strategies (A2/AD).

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Ukraine's use of these technologies during the Black Sea war has resulted in the restoration of the strategic balance at sea and a fundamentally altered maritime operational environment. These developments forced Russia to make radical decisions on the withdrawal



Ukraine's success in blocking Russia's Fleet at the Black Sea leads to the conclusion that the emergence and development of autonomous systems and anti-access technologies are calling into question the traditional naval strategy, centred on large ships, missiles and artillery, and the physical control of the seas.

of most Black Sea Fleet ships from Sevastopol port and their relocation to relatively safe ports further east. It is evidence of a strategic victory for Ukraine in demonstrating how a state with an incomparably smaller maritime power manages to ban maritime control of a large naval power in its own area of responsibility. Undoubtedly, the key element in breaking the blockade of Russian ships and reopening vital sea routes for Ukrainian exports was the fleet of sea drones. Of course, this success is a real lesson in countering a superior conventional opponent by capitalizing on the advantages of asymmetric tactics. It was not achieved by building a fleet that would equal the Russian ship-by-ship fleet, but by prohibitively increasing the cost of maintaining a tight blockade.

Ukraine's success in blocking Russia's Fleet at the Black Sea leads to the conclusion that the emergence and development of autonomous systems and anti-access technologies are calling into question the traditional naval strategy, centred on large ships, missiles and artillery, and the physical control of the seas. The use of sea drones in combination with the Neptune and Harpoon coastal missiles allowed the neutralization of the Russian Fleet and the cancellation of its effective control over the western Black Sea – *without Ukraine owning a classic fleet*. What conclusions can we draw from these events? First, Ukraine, without having a classic fleet of surface ships and submarines, managed to challenge Russian naval dominance. Instead, it used naval drones and demonstrated how large ships become vulnerable to drone swarms, especially in narrow and close coastal districts. Thus, it became apparent that the classical naval warrior paradigm, based on naval dominance with heavy ships, is no longer current. The coordinated approach of aerial/naval drones, electronic jamming and precision strikes marks a transition towards what American literature calls *distributed and hybrid maritime operations (Distributed Maritime Operations/DMO)*. This concept involves the dispersion of the fleet in small and autonomous units, coordinated through AI and C4ISR networks.

Russia's reaction to the current operational situation in the Black Sea is uncertain due to various factors, such as military, political, economic, and technological. We know, however, that *Russia*

will not give up the Black Sea, as this maritime space is essential for its projection of regional power and control. Its strategy will become *more asymmetric, more autonomous and more aggressive-dissuasive*. Most likely, instead of a large fleet, it will stake on a lethal combination of technology, denial of access and hybrid warfare.

This study examines the role of autonomous drones in the naval war in the Black Sea and how these technologies will change the paradigm of the classical naval strategy.

GEOPOLITICAL AND STRATEGIC CONTEXT OF THE BLACK SEA

Located at the intersection of three major regions – Europe, Middle East and Caucasus –, the Black Sea has become an area of major strategic interest, both for regional actors and for external actors interested in this region. At the forefront is the illegal war started by Russia against Ukraine, which generates an intense military dynamic at regional level. This dynamic, felt since 2014, has been marked, at first, by the indirect and then increasingly direct use of modern military means, including autonomous maritime and air drones, and has produced increased effects in maritime space as well.

The Black Sea holds a key geostrategic position, being a connecting point between Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, it communicates with the Mediterranean Sea, and through its connection with the Caspian Sea, it leads to Central Asia.



But, apart from military and geopolitical interests, there were other reasons related to the geographical position, energy resources



The projects of capitalization on the important offshore natural gas resources, discovered, in particular, in the economic area of Romania and Ukraine, have turned the region into an energy corridor that avoids Russia-controlled distribution routes.

or interests of global actors, which made the Black Sea an area of major strategic interest. For example, the Black Sea holds a key geostrategic position, being a connecting point between Europe, Asia and the Middle East. Through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, it communicates with the Mediterranean Sea, and through its connection with the Caspian Sea, it leads to Central Asia. The Black Sea also provides strategic access to the Balkans, the Caucasus and Ukraine, which, in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, becomes extremely important. These communications make the Black Sea a strategic axis of commercial and military transit, a transport artery for goods, grain, oil and armament, in which the key ports of Constanta, Odessa, Varna, Novorossiysk have turned into strategic logistics hubs. That is why maritime traffic and maritime surveillance have become intensely disputed.



In addition, the projects of capitalization on the important offshore natural gas resources, discovered, in particular, in the economic area of Romania (the Neptun Deep perimeter, operated by OMV Petrom and Romgaz, with deposits estimated at over 100 billion cubic meters



of gas, Neptun Deep) and Ukraine (the deposits off Crimea, mostly taken over by the Russian Federation after its annexation by Russia in 2014), have turned the region into an *energy corridor* that avoids Russia-controlled distribution routes. In this context, control over maritime energy infrastructure, in particular those within projects such as AGRI (Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania Interconnector – planned to transport liquefied gas from the Caspian Sea to Europe via Constanta), TAP (Trans Adriatic Pipeline) and TANAP (Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project, which bring natural gas from Azerbaijan to Europe, via Turkey and Greece) is essential for Europe's energy independence from Russia. Thus, the energy interests of the Black Sea region play an important role in regional geopolitics and are essential for Europe's energy security. Therefore, the Black Sea becomes a regional energy hub, and whoever controls access to these resources and infrastructures has a significant influence on European energy policy and geopolitical relations with Russia and Central Asia.

After 2014, with the annexation of Crimea by Russia, regional tensions have increased exponentially, turning the area into an hotbed of direct military competition. After taking control of the peninsula, Russia massively militarized Crimea, placing advanced Bastion/Bal coastal defence systems, S-400 missiles and complex A2/AD (Anti-Access/Area Denial) devices (Minich, 2018), which blocks almost the entire sea for adverse forces. In addition, the Black Sea fleet has submarines and frigates equipped with Kalibr missiles that can hit targets including inside Turkey, Bulgaria or Romania.

In these circumstances, the North Atlantic Alliance decided to strengthen its presence in the region and to conduct a series of complex military exercises, such as *NATO Sea Shield 25* (which was conducted by Romania in April 2025, with the involvement of more than 2,300 troops from 12 allied states)¹, intensifying the training for asymmetric tactics, including defence against fast and hard-to-detect naval drones on the model used by Ukraine in attacks against the Russian fleet².

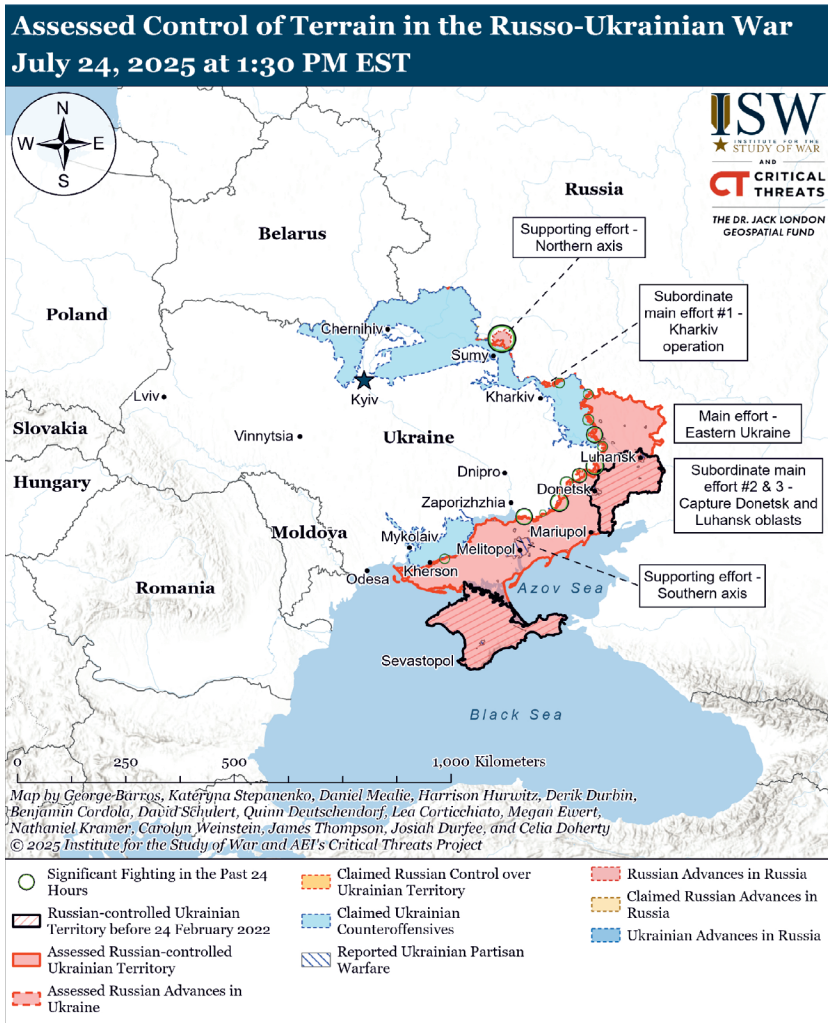
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1 *Exercițiul militar anual 'Sea Shield' al NATO în Marea Neagră se încheie după 12 zile tumultuoase*, Euronews, <https://www.euronews.ro/articole/sea-shield-2024-pest-2-000-de-militari-vor-participa-la-cel-mai-mare-exercitiu-n>.

2 *U.S. Warships Train to Survive Drones that Beat Russia's Black Sea Fleet*, Business Insider, <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-navy-train-survive-drones-battered-russian-black-sea-fleet-2025-7?utm>.



So, the Black Sea is today a space of strategic confrontation between Russia and the West (NATO/USA/EU), in the context of the war in Ukraine and the competition for the control of energy and trade routes. Militarization, geopolitical tensions and the lack of clear regulations on collective security in the area make it a hotbed of direct military competition.



Assessment of land control during the Russian-Ukrainian war (24 July 2025).
(Simeonova, 2025, <https://ridl.io/wp-content/uploads/pdf/18257/black-sea-in-security-in-2025.pdf>)

Russia is using this area as a platform for attacks on Ukrainian targets and military activities that have an impact on the transport of goods and supplies, especially on exports of Ukrainian grain from Black Sea ports. In this war, a determining factor was the use of various types of autonomous combat systems and anti-access technologies, in which maritime drones are the central element.

From this point of view, the Russian war against Ukraine has transformed the Black Sea into an experimental space for drones, electronic warfare and naval missiles. It is the first region where autonomous maritime drones (e.g.: Sea Baby, Magura V5) are used systematically in combat.

NEW PARADIGMS OF THE NAVAL WAR

Over the centuries, the evolution and technological innovation in the maritime domain have marked important transformations in the design of ships, armaments and communications, as well as complex propulsion and navigation systems, representing a powerful catalyst for strategic change. Ever since antiquity, when naval warfare was based on the tactics of striking and approach actions, and until contemporary times, when drones and other state-of-the-art technologies have penetrated significantly into the naval field, technological innovation has always overturned the strategies and tactics of war at sea, which determined their change/adaptation.

Early strategies of Antiquity were replaced by artillery-dominated strategies that emerged as a result of the invention of gunpowder at the end of the Middle Ages. This discovery revolutionised the tactics of naval engagement and laid the foundations for the sailing ship era, when European galleon and frigate fleets competed for global dominance, engaging in battles that were largely based on the on-board rifles and complex ship manoeuvres. Another major change came with the discovery of steam power in the Industrial Revolution era, which favoured the emergence of armoured warships and later steel-bodied battleships. These technological developments marked the entry into a new era of naval warfare, dominated by battleships, which represented national power and, by the middle of the 20th century, played the main role of strategic deterrence. The maritime strategies of that period, based on the principles of the maritime power



The naval war went through a crucial moment in the Second World War, with the advent and development of aircraft carriers, which would become the main battleships of the military fleets, replacing traditional battleships. Air power created by carriers redefined naval engagements by facilitating long-distance attacks and introducing the concept of air superiority at sea.

of Alfred Thayer Mahan, emphasized the concentration of fleets on the defence of domestic waters and the establishment of naval bases in the areas of interest.

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After the end of the Cold War, technological innovations in the naval field facilitated the adoption of maritime strategies based on attack groups of nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and submarines, whose main mission was the projection of power in the areas of interest. It was mainly the US strategy, which emerged as a dominant global naval power. Over time, this strategy has evolved to combine sea command, submarine warfare and power projection. But technologies have continued to evolve, and what we see today in the maritime conflicts in the Red Sea/Suez Canal and the Black Sea, we believe is the beginning of another radical change in the naval war. In April 2022, Ukrainians sank the Moskva cruiser (*"the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet"*), the largest Russian warship sunk since the Second World War, using a combination of drones (for data collection and tracking) and cruise missiles. This combination of cruise missiles, aerial and maritime drones has proven to be lethal (A New Naval Warfare Paradigm). The success prompted the Ukrainians to plan other attacks of this kind, in which they managed to sink or damage about 1/3 of the pre-war Russian Black Sea fleet (Jucan, 2025).

In addition to the Russian-Ukrainian war, there are other dynamics highlighting that in a conflict situation, the use of unmanned technologies can be as effective against global maritime infrastructure as in the case of sunken or damaged Russian warships. Not only can global maritime routes be disrupted, as in the case of transport routes in the Suez Canal, but other types of infrastructure such as internet/telecommunications cables or submarine pipelines can also be targeted

with the use of unmanned technologies. Therefore, military systems based on unmanned technologies are increasingly being used at sea, and there is every reason to believe that these trends will continue and accelerate in the coming years.



THE ROLE OF AUTONOMOUS DRONES IN THE NAVAL CONFLICT IN THE BLACK SEA

Autonomous drones, both surface (USV) and underwater (UUV), have been used extensively by Ukraine to hit Russian Navy ships in the Black Sea. Notable examples include attacks on the Sevastopol naval base and damage to logistic ships. The key features of these drones are: low cost, ability to operate in swarms, lack of direct risks to personnel and the ability to circumvent traditional defence systems.

Maritime drones, as the main elements of autonomous systems, are described in the literature as any remotely controlled or autonomous vehicle operating in the maritime domain: either on the surface (sometimes known as unmanned surface vehicles or USV), or underwater (unmanned underwater vehicles or UUV) or in the airspace above the sea (unmanned air vehicles or UAV). We must note, however, that not all maritime drones fall easily into one of these categories: for example, some glider drones can collect data at depth underwater, so that they then come to the surface to transmit them (Larter, 2021) to command centres, while other drones are able to operate in several areas, such as the amphibious C-Ray drone, which can operate on land or water³, or the so-called sea glider (*Flying Sea Glider*), developed by the U.S. Naval Research Center, which is intended to fly in water and then turn into an underwater vehicle (Trevithick, 2019). These systems can be operated remotely by a human controller or can operate autonomously via computerised control systems; they can also be operated in mixed mode, switching between human and autonomous operation depending on the role they play and the situation they are in.

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³ ***, *Prehistoric sea creature-like robot can navigate surf, crawl up onto the beach* (March 2023), in *Military Times*, <https://dronewars.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/DW-Next-Wave-WEB.pdf>.



Future naval drones could support the protection of critical maritime infrastructures, providing highly effective deterrent against sabotage or direct attack. In asymmetric warfare, their use allows smaller but technologically advanced forces to effectively challenge larger adversaries. By the fact that sea drones are designed to operate autonomously or semi-autonomously, they facilitate various missions at sea without endangering human lives.

The growing demand for enhanced surveillance, reconnaissance and precision attack capabilities in complex maritime environments has led to an unprecedented rise in these technologies in recent years. Since the use of smaller-scale naval drones in Yemen in the mid-2010s, the use of these technologies has steadily increased to a genuine Ukrainian naval program of functional USVs since 2023 (Cowen, 2025). At the heart of this change is the advent of naval drones, equipped with sensors and explosives, offering a cost-effective alternative to traditional naval forces. They allow naval forces to gather information and conduct operations more efficiently, often overtaking traditional platforms. The use of these unmanned systems goes beyond the traditional norms of naval warfare and is ready to revolutionize the theatre of maritime operations. In addition, future naval drones could support the protection of critical maritime infrastructures, providing highly effective deterrent against sabotage or direct attack. In asymmetric warfare, their use allows smaller but technologically advanced forces to effectively challenge larger adversaries. By the fact that sea drones are designed to operate autonomously or semi-autonomously, they facilitate various missions at sea without endangering human lives. With this, maritime drones are becoming a transformative element in modern warfare, and their integration into modern naval fleets marks a significant change in maritime strategy.

History records that certain conflicts have become true *laboratories* for technological innovation materialized in new weapon systems and doctrines that have fundamentally altered the character of war. For the beginning of the 21st century, it seems that the Black Sea has become that laboratory of military innovation, and the catalyst of fundamental strategic transformations is represented by the unmanned autonomous systems widely used by Ukraine to defend its coastline and keep the Russian Black Sea Fleet away from its own shore. Thus, Ukraine has created and deployed in naval combat this new class of sea drones with which it successfully challenged the naval power, much superior, of Russia and rewrote the rules of coastal employment, offering a new vision for the future of maritime conflicts.

The use of drones in the naval war in the Black Sea began as a desperate measure of Ukraine's defence against Russia's asymmetric actions on the Ukrainian fleet and maritime infrastructures. Gradually,



sea drones have far surpassed their original role as *single-use kamikaze* systems, turning into a sophisticated and dynamic offensive capability. Thus, sea drones became versatile, multi-mission platforms that successfully attacked and destroyed high-value Russian warships, played a central role in breaking a paralyzing naval blockade and forced a strategic repositioning of the entire Russian Black Sea Fleet. All of this has fundamentally altered the regional balance of power, with Ukraine managing to position itself in a much more advantageous position without having a traditional navy of its own. We can say that this state of affairs is the result of not only a strategic adaptation of Ukraine, but also of a new paradigmatic approach to naval warfare, built on the principles of adaptability to technological developments, distributed lethality and cost efficiency⁴. That is why, for all maritime security specialists, both theorists and practitioners, the Ukrainian experience provides an extremely important case study on the potential of unmanned naval systems and the need to adapt the maritime strategy in order to exploit this potential with maximum efficiency.

In 2022, at the beginning of the large-scale invasion of Russia, the strategic situation at the Black Sea was deeply unbalanced. Ukraine, overwhelmed by the conventional power of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, has faced the potential for a total naval blockade, supported by rocket attacks launched from the sea and the constant threat of an amphibious attack. In this situation, Ukraine realized that a traditional response based on an extremely small conventional fleet was impossible to achieve. In addition, shortly after the start of the invasion, the Ukrainian flagship, the frigate Hetman Sahaidachny, of the Krivak-III class, was sunk at its mooring in Mykolaiv (James, 2022), and as the Russian offensive advanced, ships in Ukrainian ports on the Sea of Azov were destroyed or captured (Kimr, 2022). Ukrainian ships that attacked the Russians directly did not succeed, and the Sloviansk patrol ship, despite having significant air defence, was quickly sunk in March 2022 by Russian aircraft. Thus, shortly after the invasion began, the Ukrainian fleet became almost non-existent, while the Russians

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⁴ ***, *The Naval Drone: How Ukraine Reinvented Maritime Warfare* (27 May 2025), in *Defence Ukraine*, <https://www.defenceukraine.com/en/insights/ukrainian-naval-drones-reinventing-maritime-warfare/>.



It turned out that the attacks with Ukrainian anti-ship missiles (both Neptune, manufactured in the country, and Harpoon, supplied by the West) forced the Russians to withdraw from the north-west of the Black Sea, losing control of the maritime districts in this area. But land-based missiles launched by Ukrainians, with limited range, could only threaten Russian ships up to a certain point, beyond which other means were needed.

enjoyed complete freedom of navigation off the northern coast of the Black Sea.

But a month later, the situation would change with the sinking of the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, the Moskva cruiser of the Slava class, being hit with two of the Neptune anti-ship missiles launched by the Ukrainians⁵. It was the first success of Ukraine, which marked the beginning of the change of the strategic situation in the Black Sea imposed by the Russians with the invasion. Thus, it turned out that the attacks with Ukrainian anti-ship missiles (both Neptune, manufactured in the country, and Harpoon, supplied by the West) forced the Russians to withdraw from the north-west of the Black Sea, losing control of the maritime districts in this area. But land-based missiles launched by Ukrainians, with limited range, could only threaten Russian ships up to a certain point, beyond which other means were needed. And from that moment on, Ukraine began to innovate, discovering that USVs could meet this requirement. Such type of unmanned means were considered the most handy solution, as they could be equipped with camera, satellite communications and an ogive at the top, and the technological manufacturing process was simple, USVs being the type of craft that can be built in a garage or in a small industrial facility.

Once the issue of high-capacity communications and targeting were resolved throughout the mission, the actual use of USVs in military actions against the Russian Fleet was switched to. Missions using the USV intensified between spring and summer 2023, peaking when the Ropucha-class landing ship Olenegorsky Gorniyak was hit in the port of Novorossiysk⁶. The ship was badly damaged, hardly avoiding sinking, being towed and taken to the port. Olenegorsky Gorniyak survived the attack, but other ships had a less fortunate fate. Thus, another landing craft, a rocket-carrying corvette, a patrol ship, a mine dragger and several landing and smaller vessels were sunk or destroyed in attacks with USVs. These successes of the Ukrainians prompted the Russians to move almost all of their main maritime resources to the port of Novorossiysk, on the east coast of the Black Sea, and consistently

⁵ ***, *Russian warship: Moskva sinks in Black Sea* (15 April 2022), in *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61114843>.

⁶ ***, *Ukraine says it has put Russian warship out of action in sea drone attack* (4 August 2023), in *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/04/ukraine-says-it-has-put-russian-warship-out-of-action-in-sea-drone-attack>.



reduce their actions at sea. On the other hand, Ukraine has moved to the construction of a growing number of USV drones, the responsibility of their operation being assumed by the GUR (Defense Intelligence Service of Ukraine) and the SBU (Ukraine Security Service). GUR is known for Magura drones, while SBU is associated with Sea Baby drones.

Early models such as Magura V5 and Sea Baby proved to be the perfect response Ukraine could provide under the pressure of the direct threat of the Russian Fleet. Initially, these platforms were designed with one purpose: to deliver an explosive payload to a target. It can be said that it was a *David vs. Goliath* strategy, in which a platform of several hundred thousand dollars could threaten the ships of the Russian fleet worth hundreds of millions. And, perhaps in an unexpected way, this strategy proved to be extremely effective, which is why it was expanded and used throughout 2023 and 2024. But the ongoing pressure of the conflict has prompted Ukrainian specialists to look for solutions to perfect this concept through the rapid and iterative development of new models of USVs, adapted to the immediate demands on the battlefield. Thus, in the first half of 2025, Ukrainians tested a new type of USV, capable of performing several missions simultaneously and putting multiple problems to the opponent.

Early models such as Magura V5 and Sea Baby proved to be the perfect response Ukraine could provide under the pressure of the direct threat of the Russian Fleet.

The first innovation they resorted to was the integration into the USV platform of offensive missile systems, which led to the transformation of drones from contact detonation weapons into remote attack platforms. Basically, USVs become mobile rocket launchers, which can project danger at a significant distance. The solution to integrating offensive missile systems into the USV platform proved its effectiveness in January 2025, when naval drones of this type successfully destroyed Russian helicopters, posing a new and powerful threat to Russia's maritime resources at the Black Sea⁷. This evolution has enormously complicated the operational situation, causing the enemy to face a small platform, transformed into a real rocket launcher.

⁷ *** , *Dronele navale înarmate cu rachete au distrus cu succes elicoptere rusești* (7 January 2025), Digi 24, Cum au reușit ucrainenii să doboare elicoptere rusești cu dronele navale. „Am mers special să vânăm ținte aeriene”, <https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/cum-au-reusit-ucrainenii-sa-doboare-elicoptere-rusesti-cu-dronele-navale-am-mers-special-sa-vanam-tinte-aeriene-3071143>.



Sea drones played a substantial role in Ukraine's strategy of blocking the actions of the Russian Fleet at the Black Sea and the destruction or damage of the means of combat and the infrastructure to support it. As response measures, Russia strengthened its physical defences around key naval bases and the Kerch Bridge employing signal jamming techniques to alter the drone guiding systems.

Another innovation introduced by Ukrainian specialists was to adapt USVs to act as launch platforms for smaller aerial drones. In this way, Ukraine has made true *miniature aircraft carriers*, with which it has managed to dramatically extend the range of air reconnaissance and attack capabilities (ib. note 4). Such a USV can carry a group of FPV⁸ or UAV⁹ drones reconnaissance deep into the enemy device, away from launch sites at the coast. Once in the enemy area, small drones are launched to conduct surveillance and provide data on certain targets, as well as to directly attack pre-established targets. It can create a complex, layered threat with extremely high operational effects.

But perhaps the most daring innovation of Ukrainian specialists seems to have been the equipment of naval drones with anti-aircraft missile systems. The vulnerabilities of surface ships, especially small dominions, to airborne attacks by helicopters and fighter jets are well known, and this innovation turns vulnerability into a great advantage. Ukraine has achieved a highly effective means of combat for anti-aircraft defence of ships and coastline targets beyond their safe distance to air strikes. It was to be proven in May 2025, when Ukraine claimed a world premiere: the downing of two Russian fighter jets using naval drones equipped with these systems¹⁰.

Thus, it is more than obvious that sea drones played a substantial role in Ukraine's strategy of blocking the actions of the Russian Fleet at the Black Sea and the destruction or damage of the means of combat and the infrastructure to support it. As response measures, Russia

⁸ FPV (First Person View) drones are drones that allow you to view the situation in real time. They feature an on-board camera that transmits real-time video to FPV glasses or screens, providing an immersive experience. FPV drones are used for activities such as aerial photography, aerobatics and competitive flights, but can also be used for military purposes, having an important role in reconnaissance and surveillance.

⁹ UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) drones are drones that can be used in various fields, including military, civilian and commercial. Drones are used for reconnaissance, surveillance, espionage, filming, topographic measurements and competitions. They can have payloads such as reconnaissance devices, sensors or other equipment.

¹⁰ ***, *Demonstrație uimitoare de inovație în război: Lecția pe care Ucraina a predat-o doborând două avioane Su-30SM cu drone* (8 May 2025), Defense Romania, https://www.defenseromania.ro/doborarile-su-30sm-arata-ca-dronele-ucrainene-reprezinta-acum-o-amenintare-serioasa-la-adresa-avioanelor-de-lupta-rusesti_633651.html.



strengthened its physical defences around key naval bases and the Kerch Bridge employing signal jamming techniques to alter the drone guiding systems (Zafra, McClure, 2023). A decrease in reports on the activity of Ukrainian drones towards the end of 2023 could mean that such countermeasures have been a certain degree of success.

In addition to surface sea drones, Ukraine is also developing unmanned underwater vehicles/UUVs. As early as 2023, a prototype of a UUV called Toloka was presented. It is, in fact, a torpedo that is capable of carrying explosives and that would be built in three different versions, with different action beams and explosive payloads. At this point, it is not known whether the drone was approved or used operationally (Sutton-1, 2023). At the same time, it seems that the Ukrainian arms industry is developing a new autonomous underwater vehicle with larger dimensions, called Marichka. It is said that it was in the prototype phase in the summer of 2023, and Marichka was promoted as being intended for anti-ship and bridge attacks, information collection and transport (Sutton-2, 2023).

The strategic implications of Ukraine's innovations in the field of sea drones are huge. These advances illustrate a model to follow: identifying a successful technology and then rapidly developing it to expand its capabilities, thus maximizing its strategic impact. The technological successes registered by the Ukrainians have led to the significant expansion of the operational area of the USVs and to the maximization of their utility. Technological innovation and the adoption of an asymmetric strategy to exploit the vulnerabilities of the opponent was the only viable way forward and it produced the expected effects. For now, the Russian-Ukrainian war in the Black Sea has decreased in intensity, but it remains to be seen how things will evolve in the future.

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TECHNOLOGICAL AND DOCTRINAL IMPLICATIONS

The technological and tactical innovations of Ukraine in the war against Russia on the Black Sea had a tremendous strategic effect. Ukraine's drone fleet has restored strategic balance at sea and has fundamentally altered the maritime operational environment. Under these conditions, Russia was forced to make decisions that,

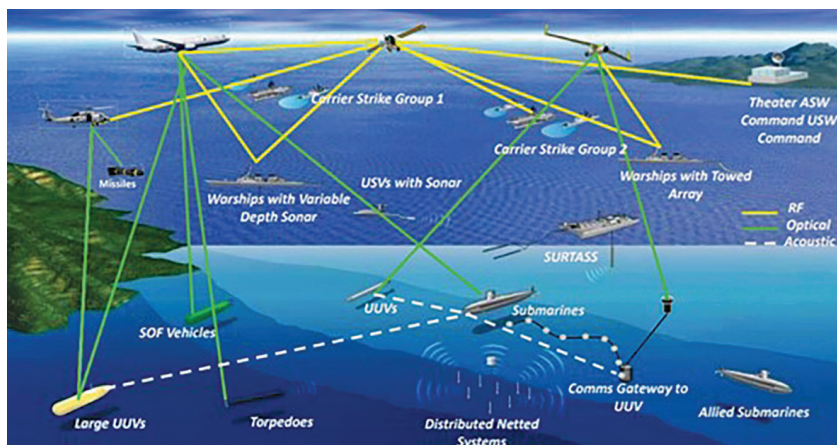


Ukraine's success in blocking Russia's Fleet at the Black Sea can lead us to the conclusion that the use of unmanned means will profoundly change the strategy of naval warfare. It is clear that the emergence and development of autonomous systems and anti-access technologies are calling into question the traditional naval strategy, centred on large ships, missiles and artillery, and the physical control of the seas.

before the war, would have been unthinkable. The lamentable withdrawal of most Black Sea Fleet ships from the abusively occupied port of Sevastopol in Crimea and their relocation in relative safety to the ports further east is evidence of a strategic victory for Ukraine, demonstrating how a state with an incomparably smaller maritime power manages to ban maritime control of a large naval power in its own area of responsibility. Unquestionably, Ukraine's fleet of sea drones was a key element in breaking the blockade of Russian ships and reopening vital sea routes for Ukrainian exports. Of course, this success is a real demonstration of capitalizing on the advantages of an asymmetric campaign led by a state forced to counter a superior conventional opponent. Moreover, it is true that it was not achieved by equalizing the Russian ship-by-ship fleet, but by prohibitively increasing the cost of maintaining a tight blockade.

Undoubtedly, Ukraine's success in blocking Russia's Fleet at the Black Sea can lead us to the conclusion that the use of unmanned means *will profoundly change the strategy of naval warfare*. It is clear that the emergence and development of autonomous systems and anti-access technologies are calling into question the traditional naval strategy, centred on large ships, missiles and artillery, and the physical control of the seas. In the context of the Black Sea, where freedom of manoeuvre is restricted and surveillance is constant, the use of sea drones in combination with the Neptune and Harpoon coastal missiles allowed the neutralization of Russian ships and the constraint of their retreat from Sevastopol to more remote ports such as Novorossiysk. Thus, effective control over the western Black Sea held by Russia was lost in favour of Ukraine – *without Ukraine owning a classic fleet*. What conclusions can we draw from these events? First, Ukraine challenged Russian naval dominance without carriers, frigates or submarines. Instead, it used naval drones as a form of lethal asymmetric response with low cost and high efficiency. The fact that large ships are becoming vulnerable to swarms of drones, especially in narrow and near coastal districts, shows us that naval dominance is no longer guaranteed by mass and tonnage, and this is clearly at odds with the classical paradigm of classical naval warfare. The key to Ukrainian success was the coordination between aerial/naval drones, electronic

jamming and precision strikes, which marks a transition towards distributed and hybrid maritime operations (Distributed Maritime Operations/DMO). They involve the dispersion of the fleet in small and autonomous units, coordinated through AI and C4ISR networks. At the same time, challenges are emerging regarding human control, legal responsibility and vulnerabilities to electronic warfare.



Distributed maritime operations (<https://sl.bing.net/h4iJEsz5s4>)

These are undeniable advantages, which, however, could create the illusion that we are somehow witnessing the end of traditional fleets. But no, *we are not witnessing the end of traditional fleets, but a radical transformation of their role and composition, in which autonomous drones become a basic element of the new naval doctrine.*

The ships do not disappear, they will only redefine their role. For example, *for the global projection of power (mobility on large oceans), the transport of heavy troops and equipment, the launch of intercontinental missiles or aircraft, aircraft carriers, destroyers and nuclear submarines they will remain essential.* They will also serve as *command-and-control centres*, having complex infrastructure, which drones cannot replace (yet). At the same time, these vessels will be able to coordinate *swarms of autonomous drones* (air, naval, underwater) and will become communication, logistics and *decision hubs for autonomous platforms*, thus shifting from the concept of *heavy ship* to *distributed network*. Most likely, a balance will be

For the global projection of power (mobility on large oceans), the transport of heavy troops and equipment, the launch of intercontinental missiles or aircraft, aircraft carriers, destroyers and nuclear submarines will remain essential. They will also serve as command-and-control centres, having complex infrastructure, which drones cannot replace (yet).



reached between the piloted ship and the drone, the concept of a *fleet of ships* being replaced by that of an *ecosystem of autonomous and semi-autonomous platforms*. Given the vulnerability of classic ships to drones and the fact that small and fast drones can easily fool air/classical defence, some missions (recognition, rapid attack, and mining) could be attributed exclusively to drones as happened in the Black Sea, when large Russian ships were badly damaged or sunk by low-cost Ukrainian sea drones.

These transformations are briefly presented in *table 1*:

The fleet of the future will be more like a network of sensors, drones and interconnected units than a line of massive ships. Autonomous drones do not eliminate classic ships, but redefine their function – from weapons carriers to autonomous weapons command nodes.

Traditional naval model	New emerging model (hybrid)
Homogeneous, heavy fleet	Network of heterogeneous, autonomous platforms
Large ships + crew	Large ships + swarms of drones coordinated by AI
Visible permanent presence	Flexible, hidden, dynamic presence (stealth, mobility)
Linearity in action	Simultaneous strikes, from multiple angles, decided by AI

What is preserved from traditional fleets? *Nuclear submarines* are likely to survive because they are still hard to detect and impossible to replace for strategic dissuasion. Similarly, carriers, which, even if more vulnerable, will continue to play a major role in high-intensity conflicts. *Modern destroyers and frigates*, if equipped with lasers, anti-drone systems and AI, will certainly survive the transformation.

In conclusion, we are not witnessing *the end of traditional fleets*, but their *rebirth* in a mixed, intelligent and distributed form. The fleet of the future will be more like a *network of sensors, drones and interconnected units* than a line of massive ships. Autonomous drones do not eliminate classic ships, but *redefine their function* – from weapons carriers to autonomous weapons command nodes.

So, we can say that *the future of naval warfare will no longer be dominated by massive fleets, but by dispersed, autonomous, digitally coordinated forces capable of hitting the swarm and operating*

in contested environments. Therefore, this reality requires both a redefinition of the maritime projection of power, and a doctrinal rewording, simultaneously with resizing and redefining the role of warships.



STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVES: THE FUTURE OF NAVAL WAR IN THE BLACK SEA

Given the current trends, technological innovations and the regional geopolitical context of the Black Sea, we can say without reservation that the naval war is moving towards new *strategic perspectives*. Although the Black Sea is not regarded as one of the most disputed maritime regions globally, being defined as a closed strategic space, semi-closed geopolitically and militarily, with limited access through the Bosphorus Strait, controlled by Turkey, however, from the perspective of redefining the strategic paradigms of naval warfare, it occupies a central place. Geopolitically, the Black Sea is the eastern flank of NATO and a direct contact area between the Russian Federation and Western allies – Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. The illegal war started by Russia against Ukraine transformed the Black Sea into an active naval combat theatre, with the involvement of modern military means, including autonomous maritime and air drones and precision weapons, and produced increased effects in the maritime space, giving the region an intense military dynamic. And as long as the war lasts, the Black Sea will remain in the attention of global actors whose interests in the region will be seriously affected.

On the other hand, *Russia will not give up the Black Sea*, because it considers it essential for its projection of regional power and control. And, in order to understand what will happen in the near future in the naval war in the Black Sea, we need to analyse what Russia's reaction to the current operative situation in the maritime space could be. It is an essential and difficult strategic analysis, because Russia's reaction to the current situation in the Black Sea will depend on several factors – military, political, economic and, obviously, technological. However, from the analysis of recent developments and Russian naval doctrine, we can outline some probable directions of action.

Geopolitically, the Black Sea is the eastern flank of NATO and a direct contact area between the Russian Federation and Western allies – Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. The illegal war started by Russia against Ukraine transformed the Black Sea into an active naval combat theatre, with the involvement of modern military means, including autonomous maritime and air drones and precision weapons, and produced increased effects in the maritime space, giving the region an intense military dynamic.



Russia is developing a new strategy to increase security risks in the Black Sea in response to the defeat of the Black Sea Fleet, Part 4 (17 January 2025) (<https://www.blackseanews.net/en/read/226500>)

It is very likely that Russia will act to strengthen the A2/AD (anti-access/denial) strategy in order to turn the Black Sea into a zone denied for Western fleets, especially NATO.

First, taking into account the significant losses suffered since the early stages of the war (e.g. the Moskva cruiser), Russia will probably work to reduce the risk of losing large ships and preserve the asymmetric striking capacity. In this respect, it is very likely that Russia will proceed to a military recalibration of the Black Sea Fleet, reorienting its fleet to remote strike systems (Kalibr missiles, Onyx, Zircon missiles) on submarines and coastal platforms. At sea, it will bet on smaller, more mobile and harder to detect platforms, which is why it will most likely resort to the use of autonomous naval and underwater drones in response to Ukrainian tactics (Sabanadze, Dalay, 2025).

Secondly, it is very likely that Russia will act to strengthen the A2/AD (anti-access/denial) strategy in order to turn the Black Sea into a zone denied for Western fleets, especially NATO (<https://www.blackseanews.net/en/read/226500>). In this respect, it could strengthen its strategic points, especially the Crimean Peninsula, by deploying S-400, Bastion and Pantsir systems. Moreover, it will seek to control air and sea space by *integrating radar, anti-aircraft and electronic jamming*, and will continue to create threats on navigation

routes by *using marine mines and underwater drones* at key points such as the Danube mouths and even the Bosphorus.

Thirdly, in order to maintain an information advantage and create a climate of naval uncertainty, it is very likely that Russia will adapt its tactics to the realities of the new hybrid war. To do this, Russia will continue to carry out indirect attacks (using paramilitary groups, modified civilian ships, false flag operations), threaten naval communications and allied sensors through cyber and electronic warfare actions, and use kamikaze drones and reconnaissance drones for permanent surveillance (Bechev, 2025).

Fourthly, Russia can act to strategically isolate the Black Sea from the rest of NATO forces. Through *aggressive diplomacy*, Russia could persuade (or even press) Turkey to limit the access of NATO vessels through the Bosphorus (according to the Montreux Convention) and could intensify political and economic pressure on pro-Western coastal countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine) (Sabanadze, Dalay, ib.). And last but not least, Russia could step up innovation and technological production in order to restore the strategic advantage over Ukraine, even if Ukrainians continue to receive Western support. To this end, Russia can develop and test new autonomous platforms (including unmanned submarines), accelerate stealth ship projects and hypersonic ships (type “Gromkiy”, “Karakurt” or “Laika”), and increase the role of space forces and military satellites for maritime surveillance (<https://www.blackseanews.net/en/read/226500>).

In view of these considerations, *Russia will not give up the Black Sea*, on the contrary, its strategy will become *more asymmetric, more autonomous and more aggressive-dissuasive*. Instead of a large fleet, it will rely on a lethal combination of technology, denial of access and hybrid warfare.

In order to respond to such a scenario that Russia could follow, Ukraine has no solutions other than to continue to rely on *emerging technologies*. Therefore, the drone of the naval conflict at the Black Sea will continue through the use of *maritime drones* (e.g. Sea Baby, Magura V5), *autonomous and AI systems, precision weapons and remote strikes*, as well as through A2/AD strategies.



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The Black Sea has become a laboratory of global naval transformation, which enshrines the fact that actors who innovate faster in the area of autonomous drones, military AI, sensor networks and naval mobility will dominate the future of naval conflict in the region.

CONCLUSIONS

The conflict in the Black Sea will evolve, in large part, taking into account technological trends, especially the evolution of unmanned, AI and high-precision striking systems. It will have a major impact on future naval strategies. Consequently, the process of *transformation of naval fleets will continue*. We will see a decline in traditional fleets and the birth of *distributed fleets*, based on small, mobile and autonomous units, capable of operating in the network without human presence. The sea thus becomes more *transparent*, and satellites, drones and ISR networks (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) will make the enemy easier to detect and attack.

The Black Sea has become a *laboratory of global naval transformation*, which enshrines the fact that actors who innovate faster in the area of autonomous drones, military AI, sensor networks and naval mobility will dominate the future of naval conflict in the region.

The rapid evolution of Ukrainian naval drones is more than just a series of technological fixes; it points to an emerging doctrine of distributed and adaptable lethality. This new doctrine emphasizes agility and innovation as supreme strategic assets, proving that a decentralized network of intelligent systems can overcome a traditional, centralized naval hierarchy. It is a model that will be studied by navies around the world, especially those of smaller nations that want to discourage larger and more powerful aggressors.

The development of the Ukrainian USV is far from over. Future developments will likely focus on integrating more sophisticated sensor suites, increasing autonomy and coordination for complex swarm operations, and integrating a wider diversity of weapon systems. However, the lessons are already clear. The defence technology sector in Ukraine has demonstrated an unparalleled ability to iterate and rapidly implement solutions in direct response to the needs of the battlefield, presenting a unique and powerful paradigm in the development of modern defence.

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INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND DECISION SUPPORT IN NATIONAL SECURITY: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF ROMANIA'S DEFENCE CAPABILITIES

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.06

The article analyses the role of information systems in configuring and optimizing Romania's defence architecture, highlighting their contribution to supporting strategic governance and decision-making processes. The study starts from the premise that the efficiency of the defence system depends essentially on the capacity to integrate, process and capitalize on data from multiple sources, in order to build a coherent and updated operational picture.

In this context, the paper highlights the role of integrated information infrastructures in increasing institutional interoperability and facilitating coordination between defence actors. Advanced information systems allow the correlation of operational requirements with available resources, supporting strategic planning, efficient allocation of capabilities and substantiating decisions through risk assessment and investment prioritization.

At the same time, integrated digital platforms contribute to the aggregation and correlation of heterogeneous data flows, supporting the development of situational awareness and the anticipation of strategic developments through the use of big data and artificial intelligence technologies. In addition, the article highlights the role of information systems in supporting the national defence industry, through the development of collaborative platforms dedicated to research and development management, monitoring industrial capabilities and aligning production with operational requirements. Overall, the study highlights the contribution of information systems to increasing the coherence, efficiency and adaptability of the defence architecture, in the context of a dynamic security environment.

Keywords: information systems; national security; decision support; digital sovereignty; interoperability;



INTRODUCTION

The contemporary security environment, marked by complexity, uncertainty and increasing interdependencies, requires a profound rethinking of the way in which defence systems are configured and managed. Information is becoming a fundamental strategic resource, and the capacity to collect, integrate, analyse and capitalize on data is emerging as a determining factor in decision-making efficiency and organizational performance. Thus, information systems no longer represent just a technological support, but a central element in the functional architecture of modern defence systems.

In the case of Romania, the need to consolidate an adaptive and coherent defence architecture is closely linked to the development of information infrastructures capable of supporting rapid, substantiated and integrated decision-making processes. From this perspective, institutional interoperability, coordination between relevant actors and efficient use of resources directly depend on the level of maturity of information systems and their degree of integration. Moreover, technological developments in the field of big data and artificial intelligence create significant opportunities for improving situational awareness and anticipating strategic dynamics.

The article aims to analyse the role of information systems in configuring and optimizing Romania's defence architecture, with a focus on their contribution to supporting strategic governance and decision-making processes. The approach is based on the premise that the efficiency of the defence system depends essentially on the capacity to integrate and capitalize on data from multiple sources, in order to build a coherent and updated operational picture. In this framework, the paper examines the contribution of integrated information infrastructures to increasing institutional interoperability and facilitating coordination between defence actors, highlighting the role of advanced information systems in correlating operational requirements with available resources. It also analyses the implications

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The analysis of Romania's current defence architecture reveals the existence of systemic vulnerabilities that go beyond the strictly operational dimension and reflect profound dysfunctions at the level of strategic governance.

of using integrated digital platforms and emerging technologies in supporting strategic planning, risk assessment and forecasting processes.

Finally, the article addresses the role of information systems in supporting the national defence industry, emphasizing the importance of developing collaborative platforms for research and development management and aligning production with operational requirements. Through this approach, the study contributes to the outline of a conceptual and application framework for the integration of information systems into the defence architecture, in order to increase its coherence, efficiency and adaptability.

STRUCTURAL DEFICIENCIES AND VULNERABILITIES OF THE DEFENCE ARCHITECTURE

The analysis of Romania's current defence architecture reveals the existence of systemic vulnerabilities that go beyond the strictly operational dimension and reflect profound dysfunctions at the level of strategic governance. These vulnerabilities are not generated exclusively by budgetary limitations, but especially by the absence of a coherent information structure that integrates decision-making processes.

One of the main dysfunctions is institutional fragmentation. Relevant actors in the defence field – the Ministry of National Defence, intelligence structures, institutions responsible for the defence industry and regulatory bodies – often operate in the absence of a common digital framework, which limits information exchange and strategic coordination. In the absence of information interoperability, decisions are made on the basis of incomplete data sets, which reduces efficiency and increases the risk of strategic errors.

Another critical element is the decision-making vacuum generated by the absence of integrated planning mechanisms. The lack of IT tools capable of correlating operational needs with available resources and strategic priorities leads to incoherence in the procurement process and inefficient use of resources. In this framework, planning becomes reactive, dependent on external pressures or immediate constraints, instead of being the result of data-driven strategic analysis.

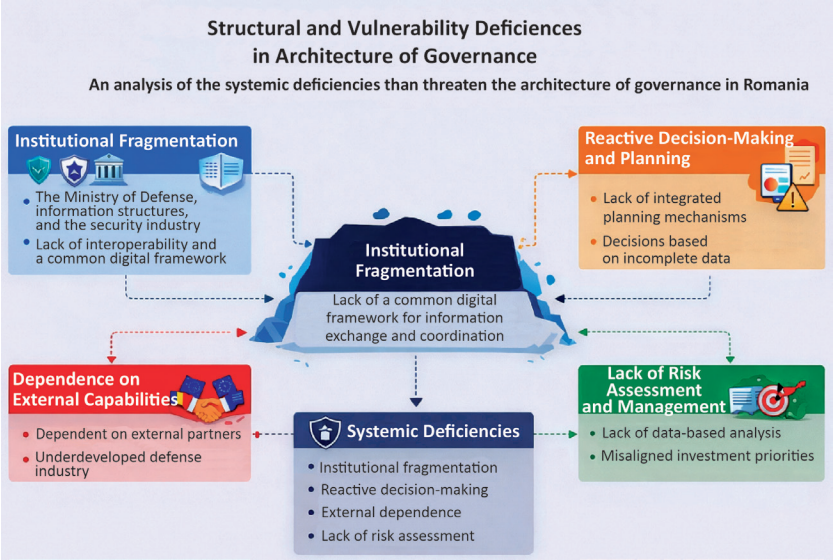


Figure 1: Structural deficiencies and vulnerabilities of the defence architecture

Dependence on external capabilities is another major vulnerability. In the absence of a functional defence industry and an information infrastructure to support its development, Romania is forced to rely on external partners to ensure security. This dependence limits decision-making autonomy and reduces the state's ability to act independently in crisis situations.

Also, the lack of a systematic risk assessment and clear prioritization of investments highlights the absence of a data-based decision-making culture. In a security environment characterized by uncertainty and complexity, the ability to anticipate developments and allocate resources optimally becomes essential. Without adequate information tools, this capacity remains limited. These deficits indicate the existence of a structural problem: the absence of an integrated information architecture to support strategic governance. Its absence determines that institutional reforms and material investments cannot produce sustainable effects, because there is no coherent coordination and evaluation mechanism.



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In a security environment characterized by uncertainty and complexity, the ability to anticipate developments and allocate resources optimally becomes essential. Without adequate information tools, this capacity remains limited.



A defining function of modern information systems is the integration of data from operational, logistical, economic and intelligence sources into a unitary analytical framework. Their strategic value derives from the ability to transform large volumes of data into contextualized and decision-relevant knowledge, through interoperability, semantic standardization, and real-time analysis.

INFORMATION SYSTEMS AS A SUPPORT FOR STRATEGIC DECISION

The military decision-making process requires information infrastructures capable of managing large volumes of data and providing analytical support in real time, becoming essential components of the command-and-control architecture and directly influencing the efficiency of military leadership. In this context, the transition from a model based predominantly on intuition to one based on data represents a paradigmatic change, in which decisions are supported by complex analyses generated by advanced information systems, contributing to reducing uncertainty and increasing accuracy.

A defining function of modern information systems is the integration of data from operational, logistical, economic and intelligence sources into a unitary analytical framework. Their strategic value derives from the ability to transform large volumes of data into contextualized and decision-relevant knowledge, through interoperability, semantic standardization, and real-time analysis (Onwujekwe, Weistroffer, 2025; Rane, Chika, Rane, 2026). Multi-source integration allows the construction of a unified operational picture, in which performance indicators, risks, and external environmental dynamics are correlated coherently and predictively (Li, Zhang, 2025; Jafari, Akhavan, Akbari, 2026).

This information convergence supports the development of an extended situational awareness and improves the ability to anticipate developments. Studies show that the integration of data from multiple sources contributes to increasing the quality of situational diagnosis and the formulation of adaptive responses in contexts characterized by complexity and volatility (Onwujekwe, Weistroffer; Adha et al., 2026). At the same time, integrated digital infrastructures allow for early identification of vulnerabilities and opportunities, by simultaneously analysing the dynamics associated with resources, logistics, and the operational environment (Sarkar, Gunasekaran, Patil, 2025; Sentia et al., 2026). Centralizing real-time data is associated with optimizing resource allocation, reducing decision latency, and increasing institutional agility (Kazak et al., 2025; Su, 2026), facilitating the shift to a proactive approach based on anticipation (Shoaib et al., 2026; Li, Zhang). The integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies extends these capabilities, allowing for the identification

of patterns and the estimation of developments based on historical correlations and current dynamics. These technologies facilitate the transition from descriptive to predictive analytics, providing support for scenario simulation and decision support in real time (Hurochkina, Bondarenko, 2025; Jimoh, Adejobi, 2026). Simulation models allow for the probabilistic assessment of different courses of action and the development of robust planning mechanisms capable of integrating uncertainty and optimizing responses in dynamic environments (Lee et al., 2023; Ruther, Strohal, Stütz, 2023). The use of digital twin technologies also facilitates the testing of strategic hypotheses without exposure to real risks (Saha, Gupta, Rao, 2026).

In this context, predictive analytics supports the development of a proactive approach, in which decisions are adapted anticipatory of expected developments. Artificial intelligence-based models allow the assessment of adversary behaviour and the impact of strategic options, contributing to improving the quality of decisions and situational awareness (Kase et al., 2022; Lemieux, Abouzeid, 2026). The integration of these capabilities into information systems leads to the development of intelligent decision-making support systems, capable of recommending optimal actions based on advanced analytical models, such as deep learning or Bayesian models (Kumar et al., 2026; Pfaff, Hickey, 2025).

In this context, the role of the human factor is redefined, with the decision-maker having the function of validating and interpreting the results generated by intelligent systems, in a framework of human-machine collaboration (Kase et al. ib.). Thus, information systems evolve from monitoring tools to anticipatory strategic support platforms, contributing to reducing uncertainty and optimizing the decision-making process in environments characterized by complexity and dynamism.

DIGITAL RECONFIGURATION OF THE NATIONAL DEFENCE INDUSTRY

The national defence industry in the case of Romania is facing a series of persistent structural dysfunctions. They derive not only from underfunding or lack of investment, but especially from the absence of an integrated information framework that allows for the efficient



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The digital reconfiguration of the defence industry involves the adoption of an integrated information platform model, designed as a central hub for the aggregation, analysis and distribution of strategic data.

coordination of the actors involved and the alignment of strategic objectives with existing capabilities.

The institutional fragmentation between the Ministry of National Defence, the Ministry of Economy, the industrial and academic environments generate systemic blockages, in the absence of a common digital planning and communication mechanism. Each actor operates on the basis of distinct data sets, without interoperability, which leads to decision-making incoherence and the inability to develop integrated procurement and innovation programs.

The digital reconfiguration of the defence industry involves the adoption of an integrated information platform model, designed as a central hub for the aggregation, analysis and distribution of strategic data. This type of digital architecture allows the synchronization of actors in the defence ecosystem (public institutions, industry, research centres), reducing information fragmentation and increasing the ability to respond to dynamic operational requirements (Galdino, Pellanda, 2026).

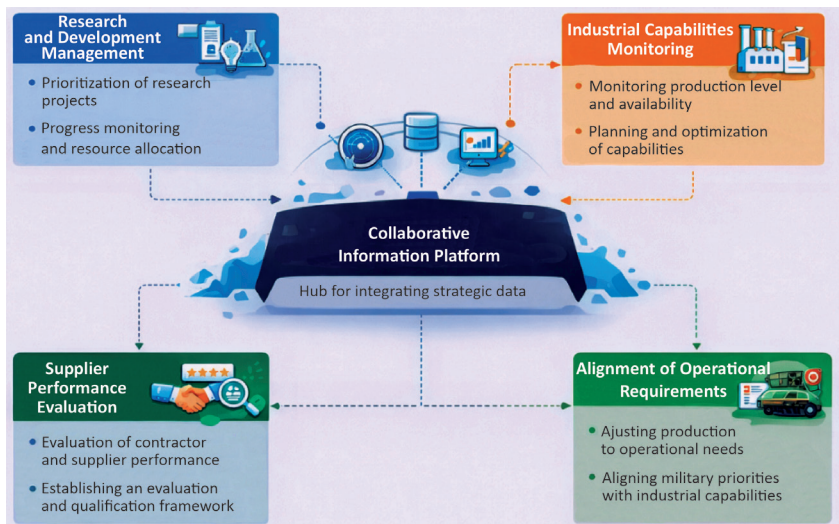


Figure 2: Digital reconfiguration of the national defence industry

Recent literature highlights that the digitalization of the defence industry is not limited to process automation, but involves a systemic reconfiguration of data flows and decision-making mechanisms, in which digital platforms become critical infrastructures for innovation

and production management (Öztürk, Sîr, 2024; Kim, 2025). In this sense, a collaborative platform must integrate several interdependent functional modules.

A module dedicated to the management of research and development (R&D) activities must be designed in such a way as to ensure integrated monitoring of the entire innovation cycle, coherently covering the stages from the early phase of conception (front-end of innovation) to the final phases of implementation and production, under conditions of complete traceability of decisions and intermediate results. The specialized literature highlights that the efficiency of innovative processes in the defence sector is deeply conditioned by the early integration of relevant actors and the use of advanced digital decision support systems, capable of correlating heterogeneous data and supporting complex evaluation and selection processes (Girardi et al., 2024; Galdino, Pellanda, 2026). The information platform should facilitate, in a systemic and data-driven manner, the prioritization of research and development projects according to strategic relevance, risk level and estimated operational impact, thus contributing to the optimization of the investment portfolio. At the same time, it would allow the dynamic allocation of resources in real time, by integrating information on the availability of technological, financial and human capabilities, which would lead to increased efficiency in their use and reduced operational bottlenecks. The platform would also support inter-institutional collaboration within the triple helix model (state – industry – academia), fostering knowledge exchange, co-creation of innovative solutions and synchronization of strategic objectives between the actors involved. Therefore, the implementation of such integrated digital mechanisms becomes essential for accelerating innovation cycles and for reducing the gap between technological development and its application in the operational environment, contributing to increasing the adaptive capacity and consolidating the strategic advantage (Turnip, Kristian, 2026).

Another essential module of the information platform is the one aimed at ensuring the visibility and integrated assessment of existing industrial capacities, since, in the current context marked by geopolitical instability, disruptions of supply chains and intensified strategic competition, industrial resilience becomes a critical component



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Operationally, the platform would allow for detailed mapping of production capacities, by integrating data on industrial infrastructure, resource utilization and technological capabilities, contributing to a systemic understanding of the available industrial potential.

of national security and strategic autonomy (Gunnarsson, 2025). In this sense, recent literature highlights the role of digitalization in creating systems capable of providing a coherent and up-to-date picture of industrial infrastructure and its performance, thus facilitating strategic planning and adaptation processes (Hu et al., 2026; Li et al., 2026).

Operationally, the platform would allow for detailed mapping of production capacities, by integrating data on industrial infrastructure, resource utilization and technological capabilities, contributing to a systemic understanding of the available industrial potential. At the same time, it would facilitate the identification of bottlenecks and vulnerabilities in supply chains, by analysing the interdependencies between suppliers, processes and critical resources, an essential aspect in the context of increasing risks associated with logistical discontinuities and external disruptions (Samuels, 2025; Plevnik, Rupnik, 2026). In addition, the use of advanced modelling tools would allow the simulation of production scenarios, including through digital twin technologies, offering the possibility of assessing the impact of different strategic decisions on industrial performance and system resilience (Albanna, 2023; Li et al., 2026).

In line with these directions, recent strategic documents emphasize that the digitalization of industrial processes and supply chains is an essential condition for the development of a “*resilient and adaptive*” defence ecosystem, capable of responding rapidly to changes in the operational environment and supporting military modernization efforts (Hicks, 2023). Thus, the integration of these functionalities into a unified digital platform contributes not only to increasing operational efficiency, but also to strengthening the anticipation and reaction capacity of the entire defence industrial system.

One of the major structural advantages of an integrated information platform lies in its ability to dynamically correlate operational requirements of the armed forces with the available industrial capacities, thus contributing to significantly reducing the latency between identifying needs and delivering the appropriate technological solutions. In the absence of effective alignment mechanisms, the literature highlights the emergence of systemic failures, manifested by production delays, inefficient use of resources and the inability

of industry to promptly respond to emerging requirements of the operational environment (Wasser, Sheers, 2025; Mariscal, Cornish, 2025).

Within this framework, the digital platform should ensure, first of all, the full traceability of operational requirements by integrating them into standardised digital flows, allowing them to be tracked throughout the decision-making and production chain. Secondly, the system would facilitate the rapid adaptation of production by using real-time data and flexible production mechanisms specific to the Industry 4.0 paradigm, allowing industrial capacities to be adjusted according to evolving requirements and strategic context (Kaur, 2025). Thirdly, the platform would contribute to the optimisation of the product portfolio by continuously linking operational demand with industrial supply, reducing redundancies and targeting investments towards solutions with high strategic relevance. This integration logic is supported by the emerging transition trend from traditional “project-driven” models, characterized by rigidity and long development cycles, to “product-driven” models, which privilege product modularity, reuse and adaptability in relation to dynamic end-user requirements (Sundell, 2025). In this context, the continuous alignment between requirements and production becomes a determinant of industrial performance and operational efficiency.

A central element of this transformation is the integration of the concept of dual-use technologies, which allows the exploitation of synergies between the civil and military sectors, through the two-way transfer of innovation, knowledge and technological capabilities. Advanced information systems can facilitate the identification of these opportunities through integrated analysis of data from the economic, academic and technological environment, thus contributing to accelerating innovation and expanding the industrial defence base (Parikh, 2025; Smiljanic et al., 2025). Overall, the collaborative information platform is shaping up as the core of the digital transformation of the defence industry, as it enables the integration of data flows, the coordination of institutional and industrial actors and the optimization of decision-making processes at strategic level. By modularising functionalities – from R&D management and industrial capacity monitoring to supplier evaluation and correlation



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Advanced information systems can facilitate the identification of these opportunities through integrated analysis of data from the economic, academic and technological environment, thus contributing to accelerating innovation and expanding the industrial defence base.



The use of big data and artificial intelligence technologies can radically transform the way defence investments are planned. By analysing large volumes of data, it is possible to identify technological trends, assess risks and optimise the allocation of resources.

of operational requirements –, it becomes an essential tool to increase the efficiency, resilience and competitiveness of the defence ecosystem in the context of contemporary challenges.

In addition, the use of big data and artificial intelligence technologies can radically transform the way defence investments are planned. By analysing large volumes of data, it is possible to identify technological trends, assess risks and optimise the allocation of resources. Thus, the defence industry can move from a reactive model to a proactive one, oriented towards anticipation and innovation.

The digitalization of the defence industry is not only a technological process, but also a strategic one, which involves redefining the relationship between the state and its industrial infrastructure. By creating an integrated information ecosystem, Romania can develop autonomous capabilities and reduce dependence on external suppliers.

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APPLICATIONS OF CRISPR-CAS9 TECHNOLOGY IN MILITARY AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.07

CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) is an adaptive immunity mechanism that occurs naturally in bacteria, protecting them against viruses by incorporating viral sequences into their genome, which confers specific resistance to pathogens. Based on the understanding of the CRISPR mechanism in bacteria, the system was subsequently adapted as a reference technology in the field of genome editing; its principle relies on the precise recognition and cleavage of DNA sequences by the Cas9 protein complex. This genome-editing capability enables the correction of genetic mutations and the modification of heritable traits, opening new possibilities for enhancing population resilience as well as managing biological risks. From this point of view, its impact on demographic factors inevitably influences the international security environment, as well as the trends of military evolution. The main objective of the paper is to analyse the applications of CRISPR-Cas9 technology in the military field, and to assess its implications for the security environment, encompassing not only the applications, but also the risks, threats and vulnerabilities that may arise from the use and proliferation of gene-editing technologies.

Keywords: CRISPR-Cas9; Gene Editing; Biosecurity; Emerging Biotechnologies; Bioethics;



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INTRODUCTION

The essential element of the military field is man. Regardless of technological developments, man remains a historical constant of the military element and of war. Whether we are talking about political control, military planning or command, or even the civilian population – we can see that man is the primary element, guiding the principles of military science. From this point of view, regarding the context and conditions of war – J.F.C. Fuller noted that there are two conditions of war: natural and artificial. The natural condition is represented by predetermined, unmodified elements such as the geographical area, meteorology, or the human quality of armies. The artificial condition is represented by modified elements such as equipment, gear, or technologies used in warfare. Even though these conditions were outlined two centuries ago, they remain relevant today (Fuller, 1993, p. 182).

Taking this into account, for the first time in human history we can speak of combining the two conditions – natural and artificial – to create the best possible form and to control something that was previously beyond technological possibilities. Through genetic modification, the human being can control the natural condition, thus bringing a revolutionary contribution to security, warfare, and demography. With this technology, security policies and strategies, as well as military doctrines, will need to be modified and readjusted to this new condition – the symbiosis between natural and artificial.

From this perspective, we considered it necessary to provide a very focused analysis of the applications of *CRISPR-Cas9 technology*. The possibilities of use, limitations, and risks have not been fully studied, representing a major gap. Due to the impact it could have on humans, genetic modification technology is no longer just a medical or biological issue but extends into security sciences, military sciences, and other humanities. Thus, it is necessary to analyse the main applications in the military field, as well as the risks, disadvantages,

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CRISPR-Cas9 technology represents a vital tool of future armies, radically changing the security environment and the way wars and international conflicts are fought. It could add value to the human resource and radically alter natural exponents previously considered immutable.

threats, limitations, and impact it could have in the international security environment. The purpose of this paper is not limited to a mere enumeration of practical applications but to provide a compact, yet multilateral analysis to reorient research in this field and connect a subject previously studied only in biotechnological and medical sciences with the field of security and military sciences.

The main hypothesis of the paper is that *CRISPR-Cas9 technology* represents a vital tool of future armies, radically changing the security environment and the way wars and international conflicts are fought. It could add value to the human resource and radically alter natural exponents previously considered immutable. Moreover, the paper does not aim only to justify the use of such technologies but to present, as a whole, both the advantages and practical applications, as well as the risks, threats, and vulnerabilities that exist, highlighting a complex and almost unknown process.

The first chapter will address the new type of warfare and the way future armies will look, the paradigm shift, and the revolutionisation of technological and natural elements. The first chapter will also cover the basic process of *CRISPR-Cas9 technology* to be explored in more depth in the second chapter. The second chapter will present the practical applications of *CRISPR-Cas9*, as well as the problems and vulnerabilities that can be solved through this technology. The third chapter will analyze the impact on the security environment, potential risk factors, threats that may arise, as well as political, legislative, and technological vulnerabilities and limitations.

PERSPECTIVES OF TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION. BETWEEN INTELLIGENTIZED WARFARE AND TECHNO-SENTIENT WARFARE

The beginning of the third decade of the 21st century was marked by a revolution in military affairs. Even though there were earlier precedents, attention turned to the use of emerging technologies in the military field to complement traditional military forces. This form of “*intelligent warfare*” appeared as an official doctrine (since there had previously been conceptual strategies and abstract forms) in China’s strategic document *China’s National Defense in the New Era*. China’s new strategy was adjusted in response to U.S. political changes.

In 2019, the United States made a significant strategic shift – from the War on Terror back to conventional rivalry with Russia and China. This document highlights China’s readjustment to a strong adversary, both economically and militarily. Intelligent warfare was a form of adaptation to both the quantitative and qualitative gaps between the United States and China (Cordesman, 2019, pp. 1-2).

According to China’s National Defense in the New Era: *“Driven by the new round of technological and industrial revolution, the application of cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), quantum information, big data, cloud computing and the Internet of Things is gathering pace in the military field. International military competition is undergoing historic changes. New and high-tech military technologies based on IT are developing rapidly. There is a prevailing trend to develop long-range precision, intelligent, stealthy or unmanned weaponry and equipment. War is evolving in form towards informationized warfare, and intelligent warfare is on the horizon.”* (State Council Information Office, 2019, p. 6).

Informationalized or intelligentized warfare represents, for the Chinese state, a way to gain real operational advantages over a new battlefield environment, thereby eliminating conventional gaps or vulnerabilities (Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019, p. 24). China’s form of intelligentized warfare was conceptualized much more broadly during 2020–2021. Expanding the concept of complementarity between traditional military forces and emerging technologies, Chinese researchers defined a new type of warfare – meta-war. By using virtual reality, meta-simulations, or integrated brain-computer interfaces, a *“super-space”* of combat can be created, merging the real and the virtual, connecting the real battlefield with the *“mental”* one. It can be said that the first step toward merging the natural with the artificial was achieved through the notion of meta-war (Baughman, 2024, p. 31).

In contrast with China’s strategy, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization does not have a well-defined doctrine or strategy as a paradigm, like China’s concept of *“Intelligentised Warfare”*. Western thinking considers cyberspace and the digital domain as complementary tools within a much broader concept of defense. From this perspective, huge differences can be observed between China’s comprehensive



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In the West, as evidenced by strategic documents, emerging technologies are viewed as complementary tools to traditional military techniques – a separate part of a complete system. Chinese thinking emphasises merging traditional and technological concepts to create a single environment – essentially, a single domain combining technology, information, and traditional techniques under a new defense paradigm.

“Intelligentised Warfare” paradigm and NATO’s elements of cyber defense. This is evident in NATO’s 2022 Strategic Concept, which does not clearly delineate informational warfare but frames it as a tool of *“hybrid warfare”*. NATO’s central missions focus mainly on resilience, cyber defense, development, and digital domain control (NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, 2022, p. 7).

Indeed, the concepts of informational warfare and net-centric warfare first appeared in American research. In 2004, Eliot A. Cohen noted the emergence of a revolution in military affairs regarding technology. He argued that the transformation of armies is a result of geopolitics – specifically American supremacy – calling the modernisation and transformation process an *“American process”*. He emphasised that the technological gap is far more important than training, morale, or professional preparation. Thus, a technologised army is harder to defeat, as it can complement traditional methods with technological ones. He also noted that most revolutionary processes start bottom-up, with military leadership and political decision-makers needing to adapt and readjust strategic thinking in line with technological innovations. Interestingly, he remarked that the revolution in combat technologies would reach its peak with the implementation of *“biological technologies”* (Cohen, 2004).

The main difference between how Western and Chinese thinking approach the implementation of emerging technologies is, at most, doctrinal. In the West, as evidenced by strategic documents, emerging technologies are viewed as complementary tools to traditional military techniques – a separate part of a complete system. Chinese thinking emphasises merging traditional and technological concepts to create a single environment – essentially, a single domain combining technology, information, and traditional techniques under a new defense paradigm. This difference is worth noting because genetic modification through CRISPR-Cas9 is a component of what China calls *“Intelligentised Warfare”* (Billore, 2024). This is important because *“Intelligentised Warfare”* has evolved significantly, reaching the concept of *“Meta-War”*. Biotechnological developments are unfolding in a similar way. The lack of adaptation to the current context and the absence of a new paradigm will create problems of coordination, planning, and adjustment to future technological developments.

A component of “*Intelligentized Warfare*”, according to the Chinese state, is “cognitive dominance” and the “*informationalization of man*”. Thus, for the first time in human history, man becomes the subject of technological innovation. Using new brain technologies (brain implants, genetic modification), the People’s Liberation Army seeks to enhance the cognitive abilities (intelligence, decision-making, courage) of its officers through these technologies – the human brain becoming a new operational battlefield. Through this fusion of man and technology, the PLA aims to create a new form of command and control (C2), where humans can be directly connected to technology (Kania, 2024, p. 86).

Techno-sentient warfare is a relatively new concept, developed by the U.S. Army War College publication *Techno-Sentient Warfare* in 2035, published in 2024. It envisions a new paradigm for the West to counterbalance China’s “*Intelligentised Warfare*” concept and to create a new form of waging war. The authors argued that techno-sentient warfare is not simply a Western alternative but a continuation, an evolution of the “*Informationalized Warfare*” paradigm. Within techno-sentient warfare, the contribution of the human resource will be considerably reduced through the gradual automation of emerging technologies. Thus, political decision-makers and military leaders will be able to operate outside traditional environments – air, land, maritime – in areas that until now were beyond the scope of the military. The main lines of action of techno-sentient warfare will not focus on the traditional fields of the military but on technological aspects that will grow in importance in the next decade. Among these are: quantum neural networks – neurotechnology that will connect the human being to quantum computers; informational and cognitive warfare that will evolve into neuro-warfare (control of the adversary’s cognitive power); enhancement of human performance and hyper-enhancement through genetic modification technologies, pharmaceuticals, technological augmentation, and decision-support systems (Carlson et al., 2023, passim 6-9).



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By redesigning the guide RNA sequence, Cas9 can be directed to almost any region of the genome, allowing genes to be inserted, removed, or modified with unprecedented precision in biomedical practice. A notable example is Casgevy, the first CRISPR/Cas9 therapy approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of sickle cell disease and transfusion-dependent beta-thalassemia.

PRACTICAL MILITARY APPLICATIONS OF CRISPR-CAS9 TECHNOLOGY

CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) is a natural system of adaptive immunity found in bacteria and archaea. This mechanism works by recognizing and neutralizing genetic material from viruses or other invasive genetic elements. The system is based on short DNA sequences derived from past pathogens, stored in the bacterial genome like a “*molecular registry*” of previous infections. A central element of the CRISPR complex is the Cas9 protein (CRISPR-associated protein 9), an endonuclease capable of cutting DNA at the region indicated by a fragment of guide RNA. This guide RNA, complementary to the target sequence in the viral genome or any other DNA of interest, gives the system the specificity it needs for recognition. The interaction between Cas9 and the guide RNA enables precise identification and cleavage of invading DNA molecules.

Recent research has adapted this natural mechanism into an extremely powerful tool for genome editing. By redesigning the guide RNA sequence, Cas9 can be directed to almost any region of the genome, allowing genes to be inserted, removed, or modified with unprecedented precision in biomedical practice. A notable example is Casgevy, the first CRISPR/Cas9 therapy approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the treatment of sickle cell disease and transfusion-dependent beta-thalassemia (Singh et al., 2024). This therapy involves ex vivo editing of hematopoietic stem cells, which increases the expression of fetal hemoglobin (HbF) and leads to a significant reduction in vaso-occlusive crises as well as a decreased need for blood transfusions. In most patients included in clinical trials, the transition to transfusion independence was maintained for at least 12 months, confirming the robustness and efficacy of the intervention. Beyond these remarkable advances in treating hereditary hematologic diseases, there are promising preclinical results in areas such as Duchenne muscular dystrophy, where animal models subjected to genome editing have regained expression of a protein essential for normal muscle function – indicating major potential for corrective genetic therapies in severe neuromuscular pathologies. Emerging uses of CRISPR are also extending to metabolic

and cardiovascular conditions; one example is the treatment of familial hypercholesterolemia, where base editing combined with lipid vectors has produced marked reductions in LDL cholesterol levels (Hoekstra et al., 2024; Hughes-Castleberry et al., 2023). In addition, applying genome-editing techniques to chronic granulomatous disease has provided early clinical data suggesting restoration of immune function, with a favorable safety profile and minimal adverse reactions reported so far. CRISPR-Cas9 technology is becoming increasingly relevant in combating antimicrobial resistance, which the World Health Organization considers one of the main threats to global public health (CAS Insights, 2024). Through the FAB-CRISPR platform, which uses antibiotic-resistance markers to rapidly select modified cells, the efficiency and traceability of genetic editing are improved (Adarska et al., 2025), opening avenues for innovative therapies against multidrug-resistant infections.

Beyond the medical sphere, CRISPR technology has proven its relevance in agriculture, where it contributes to strengthening food security by developing crops with optimized genetic traits, such as increased drought tolerance, pathogen resistance, and higher yields. These innovations have the potential to redefine the resilience of global agri-food systems and provide sustainable solutions in the face of contemporary climate pressures.

Gene therapy can increase the efficiency of the military human resource. First, by editing certain genes, soldiers could have enhanced cognitive abilities such as: highly developed memory, concentration, and problem-solving skills—giving them an advantage during high-pressure situations. In terms of physical abilities, strength, endurance, and muscle mass can be modified and enhanced (Billore, 2024).

Another aspect that can be altered is resistance to external stress factors. Until now, military science has assigned responsibility to eliminating these factors, seeking solutions and technologies that could mitigate their effects. Gene therapy can improve resistance to such factors by increasing lung capacity and tolerance to uncomfortable temperatures, enabling soldiers to cope with hostile environments. These traits can be modified genetically, and such mutations also exist in the natural state of human physiological evolution. For example, soldiers guarding Siachen Muztagh have acquired hereditary resistance



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CRISPR-Cas9 technology opens new perspectives on optimizing human performance. Human enhancement, often referred to as “Human Performance Enhancement”, marks a transition from the use of pharmaceuticals, supplements, and nutritional strategies aimed at maximizing individual performance toward the integration of CRISPR-type biotechnologies, with the potential to increase biological resilience, amplify physiological functions, and correct genetic predispositions.

to temperatures of -50°C , and other demographic groups have developed resistance to very high altitudes that would cause physical and psychological disorders in an average person (Ibid.).

Possibly the greatest discovery in this field is a radiation-resistant gene. Based on microscopic organisms – tardigrades (water bears) – Chinese specialists have identified cells resistant to high levels of radiation. Tardigrades are of interest for genetic biotechnology – they can withstand temperatures of -200°C , survive for more than an hour in boiling water, and endure outer space. The mechanism of their cells is unique, working by creating “shields” around all their cells. A team of military researchers stated that they inserted such genes into a human embryo, generating increased resistance to radiation. The resistance is not total, but it is estimated that it could prevent cellular irradiation in the event of a nuclear war (Chen, 2023.)

FUNDAMENTAL SECURITY ISSUES OF GENETIC MODIFICATION TECHNOLOGIES

In addition to clinical studies in the medical field, *CRISPR-Cas9 technology* opens new perspectives on optimizing human performance (BioSpark Studio, 2025). Human enhancement, often referred to as “*Human Performance Enhancement*”, marks a transition from the use of pharmaceuticals, supplements, and nutritional strategies aimed at maximizing individual performance toward the integration of CRISPR-type biotechnologies, with the potential to increase biological resilience, amplify physiological functions, and correct genetic predispositions. Within this framework, recent reports indicate that research directions in China are increasingly oriented toward applying these genetic optimization technologies for military purposes, with an implementation horizon estimated around 2030 (Carlson et al., 2023). This evolution illustrates how biotechnologies, and especially genome editing through CRISPR-Cas9, are being integrated into national security strategies, transforming from biomedical tools into strategic resources with major geopolitical implications.

The concept of demographic security, defined as the ability of a state or community to maintain the numerical, qualitative, and structural balance of its population, offers a framework for understanding how CRISPR-Cas9 could be instrumentalized politically.

Genetic editing promises to correct hereditary mutations, extend life expectancy, and strengthen population resilience to environmental factors, thus functioning as a potential instrument of demographic policy. However, the anticipated benefits face significant risks, especially the emergence of “*biological stratifications*” generated by unequal access to technology. In such a scenario, certain social groups would accumulate systematic genetic advantages, while others would be marginalized, leading to new forms of inequality and exclusion. These tensions are amplified in authoritarian regimes, where biotechnologies can be turned into instruments of social control. State-imposed genetic standardization raises major ethical dilemmas concerning individual autonomy and respect for biological diversity, issues that become even more problematic in the absence of transparent regulatory mechanisms.

In this context, China has adopted an explicit strategy of “*Military-Civil Fusion*”, through which discoveries and innovations from the civilian biotechnology sector are directed toward military programs. Strategic documents indicate Beijing’s goal of becoming a global leader in human enhancement technologies through CRISPR and other genetic editing methods by 2030 (Stone & Wood, 2020, pp. 25-26). Ongoing programs target the development of traits such as increased resistance to fatigue, accelerated recovery after trauma, superior reflexes, and enhanced sensory adaptations, going beyond the therapeutic sphere and opening debates on redefining the human condition in relation to military and political needs (Carlson et al., 2023, p. 66).

The functioning of laboratories dedicated to genomic editing for human enhancement depends on three essential dimensions: biosecurity infrastructure proportional to risk, institutional governance mechanisms, and the integration of computer-based (in silico) modelling into the experimental process. The World Health Organization’s Laboratory Biosafety Manual (4th edition) proposes a risk- and evidence-based framework that emphasizes local adaptation of facilities, equipment, and microbiological practices, but especially the existence of an organizational culture of safety and the systematic training of personnel (World Health Organization /WHO, 2020). It is also worth noting the central role of the digital component, whereby



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Strategic analysis of CRISPR technologies must be complemented by a strong bioethical and legal anchoring, since in the absence of clear normative frameworks, genetic editing risks being absorbed into the security and competitive logic of contemporary geopolitics.

computer models (in silico), including those based on artificial intelligence (AI), are becoming indispensable tools for planning genetic editing interventions. These allow the design of optimized CRISPR guides, the prediction of efficiency, and the identification of unwanted effects through statistical and machine learning algorithms. By integrating these methods, the development cycle is shortened, and risks are reduced through the pre-experimental selection of variants with the most favorable molecular profile (Zhang et al., 2020; Listgarten et al., 2018; Sherkatghanad et al., 2023).

This technological orientation, however, requires a broader reflection beyond strategic analysis. The integration of genetic enhancement into military and demographic planning demands an evaluation of the moral limits of human genome modification and of the social and political consequences it generates. In particular, the focus falls on equity in the distribution of benefits, the risk of new forms of genetic inequality, and the potential erosion of biological diversity. Likewise, individual autonomy becomes vulnerable in a context where state imperatives tend to prevail over personal rights. Strategic analysis of CRISPR technologies must be complemented by a strong bioethical and legal anchoring, since in the absence of clear normative frameworks, genetic editing risks being absorbed into the security and competitive logic of contemporary geopolitics. Such an evolution would transform a biomedical tool with undeniable therapeutic value into an instrument of social control and genetic standardization, with structural effects on the organization of society and on how the concept of humanity is redefined.

In this sense, the bioethics literature highlights the fundamental distinction between somatic interventions – which affect only the patient's body and are not passed on to descendants – and germline interventions, which become part of the collective genetic heritage and carry intergenerational implications. Savulescu and Singer (2019) formulate a normative framework that conditions the responsible use of genetic editing on the fulfilment of strict criteria, including empirical demonstration of safety, the absence of reasonable alternatives, and the guarantee of informed consent. In the absence of these safeguards, the application of the technology risks undermining essential principles of bioethics – personal autonomy, distributive

justice, and responsibility toward future generations. These principles have been enshrined in international legal documents, such as the Oviedo Convention (1997), which allows interventions on the human genome only for preventive, diagnostic, or therapeutic purposes but explicitly prohibits modifications with hereditary effects passed on to descendants, and the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights (UNESCO, 1997), which establishes the human genome as the common heritage of humanity. Although these legal instruments set fundamental normative benchmarks, they prove insufficient in the face of the accelerated pace of technological progress and the diversity of geopolitical contexts in which *CRISPR-Cas9 technologies* may be used.

From the perspective of demographic security, CRISPR-Cas9 can be presented as a technological solution for major issues: reducing the incidence of hereditary diseases, strengthening population resilience in the face of climate change, and countering demographic decline. However, the central risk lies in the instrumentalization of genetics for political purposes, through the imposition of biological standards of health or performance that can lead to systemic inequalities and genetic discrimination. In the absence of effective bioethical and legislative regulations, such instrumentalization could inaugurate new forms of coercive biopolitics, in which the individual becomes an object of social engineering and demographic planning with authoritarian overtones. Consequently, the need for a standardized technical-scientific framework that complements the ethical-legal dimension is becoming increasingly evident. Such a framework should include procedures for traceability of genetic interventions, through which each editing project is documented and reported in an international registry accessible to competent authorities. Traceability would serve not only transparency but also accountability, ensuring the ability to reconstruct the decision-making and technological chain in the event of incidents or non-compliant uses.

In addition to traceability, it becomes essential to establish mandatory protocols for risk assessment and biosafety management, designed not to limit the development of biotechnologies in the military sphere but to guarantee that such use takes place under conditions of security and predictability. These protocols should operate



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within the logic of global biosecurity, setting uniform standards for laboratories, genomic data flows, and the circulation of scientific results, so that military applications of CRISPR-Cas9 remain compatible with the principles of scientific responsibility and international stability. Integrating such standards into an international framework requires the involvement of global organizations with normative authority and coordination capacity, such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

A major vulnerability is represented by the opening of a new market – the biotechnology market, especially the genetic economy. According to a report of the International Security Advisory Board, operating within the U.S. Department of State, even though the United States dominated the biotechnology sector for two decades, China has managed to narrow the research, development, and implementation gap in biotechnology solutions. This began in 2016 with the adoption of the 13th Five-Year Plan. China's progress in the biotechnology sector has been achieved through practices lacking transparency. Biotechnology research and development are funded and often subsidised by the state. The main purpose is to generate profit and align the biotechnology sector with the country's strategic interests. This contravenes the principle of open market and international scientific cooperation (U.S. Secretary of State, 2024, *passim* 16-20).

Given that it is a new economic sector, there is a major gap in both domestic legislation and international regulations. As a result, some states or communities may be exposed to exploitation through predatory practices. Likewise, the absence of state policies for coordination, control, and limitation could create major incidents and undermine individual security – or genetic security. For example, there have been cases, even starting at the end of the 20th century, of “*gene hunters*” in China. They collected DNA through blood samples from local populations to find certain genes relevant to the research and development process, generating commercial profit. At the height of the “*Gene War*” in China (between the Chinese scientific community, the Chinese government, and the “*gene hunters*”), the main actors had primarily financial interests in Chinese genetic resources. The local population, especially those with specific conditions

who would have benefited the most from gene therapy, were ignored by both the actors involved and the media (Guo, 2013, pp. 497-499).

Usually, when referring to CRISPR-Cas9 technology, authors prefer to emphasize therapeutic benefits and applications for human augmentation. But this does not exclude the fact that CRISPR-Cas9 technology can acquire offensive capacities in the form of biological weapons. In Chinese military science, the idea of “*biological deterrence*” is currently being discussed, intended to amplify the destructive and lethal potential of war, even through “*ethnic-specific gene weapons*” (Kania, 2024, p. 92).

These fundamental problems – from the tension between U.S. and Chinese economic and research-development practices, to the militarization of *CRISPR-Cas9 technology* and its use to create weapons of mass destruction, to the lack of control and legal norms (a legislative void) – could lead to the amplification of an arms race, carried out chaotically and without constraints regarding bioethics or morality. From this point of view, if the arms race in genetic modification begins, it will turn into a zero-sum game, with no possibility of returning to today’s status quo.

CONCLUSIONS

The way wars are fought will constantly evolve, adapting to contextual requirements, political initiatives, and technological progress. Regardless of how it evolves, man remains a central element of war and of national defence. Whereas in the past, the human condition was considered a predetermined constant, the development of genetic modification technologies, such as CRISPR-Cas9, has created a connection between the natural and the artificial, allowing not only doctrinal or paradigmatic adaptation of the armed forces but also the adaptation of man himself to the evolutions of warfare.

Genetic modification, especially through the CRISPR-Cas9 process, is an emerging form of biotechnology that has not yet been fully explored – many specifications, particularly long-term ones, remain unknown. This does not prevent its research, development, or theoretical implementation. On the contrary, it is absolutely necessary to research this field and its ramifications beyond the biological or medical sphere before it is implemented on a large scale.



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From a military perspective, it is important to monitor how warfare evolves, requiring the creation of solutions and responses to new problems such as the genetic arms race or the proliferation of genetic weapons.

Political decision-makers and military leaders must keep pace with technological advances, particularly those in genetic modification. At present, a paradigm shift can be observed in the academic world. In the future, the concept of war and the role of the human being within it will be completely redefined. Man and technology will merge, and the operational environment will become increasingly diffuse.

Genetic modification through *CRISPR-Cas9* is no longer a simple complementary technology; it directly alters the human being. From this perspective, even though there is not yet a mass practical implementation, *CRISPR-Cas9* technology requires much greater attention and effort, given the impact it carries on both humans and nature.

Furthermore, genetic modification technology does not stop at humans; all living beings can be altered according to the desires, needs, and strategic imperatives of states or private actors who facilitate such solutions. From this point of view, it is necessary to approach genetic modification (especially of human beings) from the perspective of legal norms (both national and international). At present, the legislative void, lack of cooperation and transparency, and the scientific community's enthusiasm toward a new and revolutionary process may generate serious problems that will affect international security.

From a military perspective, it is important to monitor how warfare evolves, requiring the creation of solutions and responses to new problems such as the genetic arms race or the proliferation of genetic weapons.

The precedent for human genetic modification, particularly for adapting to the new type of techno-sentient warfare, has already been set. The issue is no longer stopping the implementation of genetic modification programs but controlling and limiting them. From this point of view, the implementation of human genetic modification will generate new international security problems, new challenges for territorial defence, as well as other problems of economic, legal, and political nature. In the future, research in the field of genetic modification requires a multidimensional approach, involving contributions from biology, medicine, economics, law, bioethics, and military sciences, considering that it is no longer merely a medical research topic.

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DEFENCE THROUGH STRATEGIC ACTIONS AGAINST POTENTIAL HYBRID THREATS

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.08

The world of exponential change is marked by multiple risks that loom everywhere. Peace requires social, economic, and educational protection, strategic resilience, and security in border defence, combined with partnerships and collaborations. In this context, shaped by the evolving security environment both globally and regionally, there is an urgent need to identify potential threats and conduct impact studies based on scenario-building methods, forecasts, and planning for potential civil intervention and emergency actions. The resulting solutions should, on the one hand, be managed and disseminated in a timely manner and, on the other hand, support decision-making processes at the military, political, and administrative levels.

The unpredictable nature of current developments, the transformations occurring in the regional and international environment, and the pace of change require the continuous review of the scenario-based findings and conclusions. This review must be carried out in an active, proactive, and creative manner with regard to the projected, identified solutions, applied methods and models, including the development of new scenarios. All these factors generate continuous change that requires rapid adaptability, continuous involvement from working groups, the use of AI for effective management and governance, and the implementation of optimal measures and decisions to counter hybrid threats.

Keywords: hybrid threats; impact studies; scenario method; planning; strategic resilience;

INTRODUCTION

The current reality indicates a significant increase in security risks generated by phenomena such as armed conflicts and hybrid wars/threats, which require a multidimensional and coordinated approach both in the management of crisis situations and in the development of national and international security strategies. In the 21st century, under the impetus of multivalent technological progress, globalisation has reduced distances, significantly influencing the international security environment: *“Generated by the unprecedented development of technologies, especially in the fields of transport and communications, globalisation has led to the emergence of processes of time-space compression and the diminishing relevance of national borders, which considerably influence the evolution of the international security environment. Although states remain the main actors of the international system, a range of non-social actors have emerged alongside them, becoming voices on the international arena, voices at least as influential as those of state actors”* (Frunzeti, 2020, p. 9).

Referring to the concept of *hybrid warfare*, the specialised literature uses a variety of terms, including: *hybrid threats*, *hybrid influence* or *hybrid adversary* (as well as concepts such as *nonlinear warfare*, *non-traditional warfare* or *special warfare*) to describe a wide range of conflict manifestations. American military institutions often use the term *hybrid threats*, while academic literature prefers the phrase *hybrid warfare* (Simileanu, 2018, pp. 33), conceptualised as a *“multimodal asymmetric conflict”* (Ibid., p. 34). For the purpose of conceptual clarification, *table 1* presents the most relevant definitions identified in specialised sources consulted in order to elaborate this material.

In the 21st century, under the impetus of multivalent technological progress, globalisation has reduced distances, significantly influencing the international security environment.

Table 1: Conceptual framework of hybrid threats¹

No.	Concept	Explanation
1.	To threaten	1. To express an intention to cause harm to someone (to intimidate them or to obtain something from them). 2. To make a threatening gesture. 3. To pose a danger to someone or something.
2.	Threat	1. The act of <i>threatening</i> and its result. 2. The expression, through words, gestures, etc., of an intention to cause harm or inconvenience. 3. A danger or peril. 4. A criminal offense that consists of alarming a person by expressing the intention to commit a crime or harmful act against them or a close relative.
3.	Threat	(Long-term) armed conflicts between two or more states, nations, groups for pursuing economic and political interests.
4.	Hybrid threats	1. <i>“The combination of conventional and unconventional, military and non-military, overt and covert actions, the aim of creating ambiguity and confusion on the nature, the origin and the objective of the threat; the ability to identify and exploit vulnerabilities of the target; the ability to keep the level of hostility below the threshold of open conventional warfare”</i> (Anderson, Tardy, 2015). 2. Hybrid threats are coordinated harmful activities, carried out with malicious intent, aimed at undermining a target, such as a state or an institution ² .

¹ According to <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/amenin%C8%9Bare>.

² <https://www.bing.com/search?pglt=43&q=Amenin%C8%9B%C4%83ri+hibride&cvid=c95f2ac10cdc4ff4ab97cb0>.

No.	Concept	Explanation
5.	War	A short or long-term conflict between two or more groups, social categories or states pursuing financial, ethnic, territorial, economic and/or political interests (dexonline.ro).
6.	Civil war	Armed struggle waged for the purpose of seizing power or achieving political supremacy within a state (dexonline.ro).
7.	Information warfare	Actions intended to achieve information superiority by compromising an enemy's information systems while protecting one's own information resources. According to the US Department of Defense: <i>"actions taken to achieve information superiority in support of national military strategy by affecting enemy information and information systems while leveraging and defending friendly information and information systems"</i> . (Solescu, 2000)
8.	Hybrid warfare	It is a combination of conventional and unconventional tactics, including cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns and economic pressure, used to undermine a state's stability without resorting to direct armed conflict.
9.	World war	An armed conflict involving directly or indirectly numerous states around the world (dexonline.ro).
10.	Cold war	A state of tension in relations between states, particularly between the United States and the Soviet Union after 1950 (dexonline.ro).
11.	Psychological warfare	A state of tension and psychological pressure deliberately created and maintained to undermine the morale of opposing forces and demoralise the population (dexonline.ro).



No.	Concept	Explanation
12.	Total war	An armed conflict in which the aggressor state uses all available means of destruction not only against military forces but also against the civilian population (dexonline.ro).
13.	Full-spectrum warfare	Encompasses a wide range of integrated military and non-military instruments of state power and clandestine actions available to a hybrid actor. (Chifu, Grigore, 2025, p. 15).
14.	Strategic superiority	Achieved through “the development of Autonomous Weapon Systems (AWS) or even Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) as a major advantage” (Barac, 2025, p. 183; Stancu, 2025, p. 183).

Therefore it can be observed that *“there are periods in the history of mankind during which political, social or economic events generate changes, transformations and even innovations in the field of thought and reflection, across all its dimensions. The military dimension of such periods could not escape efforts to generate new concepts and ideas, many of which eventually evolved into substantial and enduring doctrines”* (Papoi, 2017, p. 130).

MANIFESTATIONS OF VIOLENCE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF HYBRID OPERATIONS

Hybrid threats manifest themselves through a variety of forms of violence and complex actions, characterised by:

- initiatives of the adversary with the intention of influencing and destabilising the domestic environment;
- the use of advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, facial recognition technologies and intelligence-gathering methods, aimed at collecting information;
- the exploitation of critical targets, such as critical infrastructure and energy and industrial resources, with the aim of disrupting the normal functioning of society;

- specialised communication and disinformation campaigns designed to generate confusion and chaos;
- asymmetric and non-linear methods of warfare, as well as actions aimed at domination, control, and the attainment of supremacy;
- extended preparation periods and response strategies adapted to different phases of a conflict;
- the use of terrorism and subversion for destabilisation and intimidation;
- the maintenance of a climate of instability, fragmentation frozen conflicts, and political diversion.

“The current geostrategic context and the security climate in which we find ourselves require rapid adaptation to ongoing changes, regardless of whether these relate to economic, social, political or, especially, security-related issues” (Bălan, 2025, p. 9).

“In this complex landscape, Romania no longer has the luxury of neutrality” (Barac, p. 9).

In the face of hybrid threats, the European Union faces a series of complex challenges, that complicate efforts to identify, prevent and counter such risks. In particular, we can highlight three key elements that significantly influence the EU’s ability to respond effectively:

1. *Differences among member states:* one of the most important obstacles to the coordination and implementation of common measures against hybrid threats is the diversity of interests, levels of development, capabilities and priorities among member states. This heterogeneity results in varying perceptions of risk, different levels of resource allocation and distinct approaches to security issues. Thus, coordinating a common response becomes difficult, while interoperability between national and European structures may be affected, reducing the efficiency of the entire collective security and defence system.

2. *Heterogeneity:* economic, legal, institutional, cultural, natural resource and environmental dimensions. The European Union comprises states with different socio-economic and cultural contexts, as well as with distinct institutional structures. This diversity leads to variations in legislative framework, administrative capacities and the preparedness of security and defence structures. For example,



In the face of hybrid threats, the European Union faces a series of complex challenges, that complicate efforts to identify, prevent and counter such risks. In particular, we can highlight three key elements that significantly influence the EU’s ability to respond effectively: differences among member states; heterogeneity; limitations of the legislative harmonisation.



EU member states transpose and implement European directives according to their own national circumstances, taking into account their specific resources and requirements, which may result in variations in the application of European rules.

differences in legal regulations and in the capacity to implement policies may create gaps within the common defence system. In addition, disparities in natural resources and environmental conditions may shape specific vulnerabilities to hybrid attacks, such as those targeting critical infrastructure, energy systems or cyberspace.

3. Limitations of the legislative harmonisation: another critical issue concerns the opportunities and limitations associated with harmonising national legislation with European directives and regulations. Although a common European framework exists for addressing hybrid threats, implementation at the national level varies according to each country's specific circumstances. As a result, a minimum common standard is achieved which, while necessary, is not always sufficient to ensure coherent and effective protection of citizens' interests and critical infrastructures.

In conclusion, these three factors represent major obstacles to building an effective common defence against hybrid threats. Overcoming these challenges requires intensified cooperation and coordination, as well as the development of flexible instruments and mechanisms, adapted to the national specificities while ensuring the coherence and unity of the European response.

The EU acquis on hybrid threats includes the NIS 2 Directive on cybersecurity and the CER Directive on the resilience of critical entities – which replaces Directive 2008/114/EC. In this regard, adherence to and alignment with the European acquis on cybersecurity and hybrid threats constitute fundamental pillars for ensuring effective and coordinated defence at regional and international level.

EU member states transpose and implement European directives according to their own national circumstances, taking into account their specific resources and requirements, which may result in variations in the application of European rules. Countries neighbouring the EU adopt the Union's security models and integrate them into their national systems, while candidate countries implement the *aquis communautaire* to align themselves with European standards. By applying these frameworks, the aim is to establish a minimum level of harmonisation, ensuring a common basis for security and protection throughout the Union. In this context, we can recall the European Parliament Report of 28 February 2024, which focuses on strengthening

EU support for Ukraine, enhancing partnership with like-minded partners and allies to ensure the successful implementation of the CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy), reinforcing EU security and defence capabilities, complementing security and defence policies with civilian instruments and strengthening complementarity with NATO while preserving European strategic autonomy. The report also sets the ambition of transforming the EU into a strategic international security provider through deeper integration in the field of defence (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/ro/sheet/159/politica-de-securitate-si-aparare-comuna>).



**A POSSIBLE STRATEGIC MODEL
FOR IDENTIFYING HYBRID THREATS**

According to the conceptual model we propose, the process of identifying and managing hybrid threats should follow several stages, ranging from preliminary analysis to consequence assessment and the restoration of normality. This model aims, in our opinion, to support the creation of a stable and favourable environment in which knowledge, predictability and resilience are ensured, as well as to minimise the impact of hybrid threats on national and regional security (*table 2*).

Table 2: Strategic model for identifying hybrid threats (author’s conception)

No.	Stages	Activities to be carried out
1.	Identification of potential crisis-related threats	Studies to identify potential crisis threats in the following areas: economic; legal; institutional; cultural; natural resources; environmental resources. Selection of potential crisis situations. Analysis of selected crisis situations. Obtaining results. Verification of results in order to build a list of possible crisis situations.



No.	Stages	Activities to be carried out
2.	Development of a list of potential crisis situations	Based on the results of Stage I, a list of potential crisis situations will be drawn up.
3.	Risk analysis for selected potential crisis situations	Identification of threats in the following areas: economic; legal; institutional; cultural; natural resources; environmental resources. Activities include: – risk estimation; – risk assessment; – estimation of potential effects; – development of response solutions to threats associated with selected crisis situations.
4.	Development of a crisis program	Preparation of a crisis programme based on the identified list of potential crisis situations.
5.	Threat-level risk management	Designation of a team with clearly defined responsibilities.
6.	Early identification of crisis situations	Actions supported by artificial intelligence.
7.	Simulations for anticipated crisis-response situations	Actions supported by artificial intelligence.
8.	Anticipated response actions for crisis situations	Actions supported by artificial intelligence.
9.	Assessment of the consequences of the crisis situation	Evaluation of all types of damages.
10.	Restoring the initial state	Achieving the pre-crisis state.
11.	Analysis of the crisis	Conducting post-crisis analyses.
12.	Identification of the causes of the crisis	Determining the actual causes that generated the crisis.

No.	Stages	Activities to be carried out
13.	Special post-crisis programmes	Developing scenarios for newly emerged situations and correlating them with historical data and information.
14.	Special programs for unforeseen situations	Building scenarios for unforeseen situations.
15.	Decision-making process programme	Development of specific decision-support tools adapted and implemented in real time.



Such a strategic model for identifying hybrid threats, based on clearly defined stages and specific procedures for analysis, assessment and response, could, in our opinion, serve both a planning and control tool and could contribute to strengthening response capabilities at national and international levels. This model would facilitate a proactive and adaptive approach, which would enable an effective management of emerging risks. As such, we believe that the implementation of such a strategic framework would generate several benefits, such as:

❖ Supporting a stable IT, logistical, technological environment – through the early identification of hybrid threats, protection and resilience measures can be implemented for critical infrastructures, IT systems and communication networks. This reduces the vulnerability of essential systems and ensured the continuity of economic, administrative and military activities. In addition, strengthening technological and logistical infrastructure becomes an integral part of the prevention strategy.

❖ Developing knowledge and strategic vision – assessing and monitoring hybrid threats stimulates the accumulation of relevant information, creating a knowledge base for the development and constant adjustment of security policies. In addition, this approach facilitates the formation of an integrated understanding of the security environment, supporting informed and coherent decision-making.

❖ Strengthening and raising awareness of education – implementing a systematic model for identifying and managing hybrid threats also requires continuous education and training of personnel

Through the early identification of hybrid threats, protection and resilience measures can be implemented for critical infrastructures, IT systems and communication networks.



A well-defined strategic model enables the early identification of vulnerabilities and weak points, facilitating the adoption of prevention and mitigation measures. This contributes to preventing large-scale hybrid attacks, as well as reducing the impact of adverse events on society.

involved in the security field, as well as among the population. Raising awareness contributes to the development of a resilient society capable of recognising and responding effectively to hybrid events.

❖ Promoting institutional unity and coherence – a coordinated and common process for identifying and responding to hybrid threats ensures effective collaboration among different defence, intelligence, security and crisis management institutions and structures. This institutional unity is fundamental to avoid duplication of efforts and to create a common front against adversaries.

❖ Enhancing national and regional security – by monitoring and anticipating hybrid threats, preventive measures can be implemented to reduce the risk of conflict escalation and destabilising events. Thus, a higher level of general security is ensured for both citizens and strategic infrastructures.

❖ Avoiding and reducing vulnerabilities – a well-defined strategic model enables the early identification of vulnerabilities and weak points, facilitating the adoption of prevention and mitigation measures. This contributes to preventing large-scale hybrid attacks, as well as reducing the impact of adverse events on society.

❖ Minimising the consequences of adverse events – by applying an adapted prevention and response system, the harmful effects of hybrid attacks can be limited, reducing human, economic and social costs. In addition, this process supports rapid and efficient recovery after incidents, ensuring the stability and continuity of the functioning of critical systems.

“The future is not written in binary code, but in choices. And choices, especially in the field of security, must be made lucidly, responsibly and – above all – consciously” (Barac, 2025, p. 9).

“The increase in risks and threats in the geopolitical and strategic security environment, as well as in cyberspace, creates conditions for increasing the vulnerabilities of military communication and information systems for command and control. There is a need for effective and timely implementation of protection measures for own systems, as well as for the development of cyber defence capabilities compatible with those of NATO member states” (Prokopiev, Pavlova, Vasileva, 2025, p. 319).

In conclusion, adopting such a strategic model for identifying and managing hybrid threats represents a fundamental approach to strengthening national and regional resilience. It facilitates integrated, proactive and adaptive risk management, contributing to the creation of a safer, more stable and future-ready environment based on the “early identification of radicalisation patterns” (Dragomir, 2025, p. 168), particularly in a context where *technology will play an increasingly important, and in some cases critical, role* (Ibid., p. 226).



CONCLUSIONS

Hybrid threats represent a complex phenomenon, characterised by diverse and often subversive manifestations that exist in the grey zone between peace and war. Addressing and countering these risks require a continuous culture of knowledge and education, as well as the implementation of proactive measures of anticipation and resilience. In addition, it is essential to develop integrated strategies that include:

- the capacity to anticipate and adapt to rapid changes in the global environment, in which sense we have developed a model for identifying hybrid threats, presented in 11 gradual stages designed to support the identification of potential hybrid threats;
- resilience in the face of disasters, understood as the capacity to withstand and respond to adverse events – whether deliberate, accidental or natural – and to return as quickly as possible to a minimum functional level.

The transition of society towards the digital age and artificial intelligence represent major challenges, requiring an adapted legislative framework and an ethical approach to ensure that technological benefits are harnessed responsibly. Anticipating future risks and opportunities has become a crucial component of security and development strategies, enabling societies to adapt proactively to the rapid transformations of the global environment.

Clarity in security rules and procedures is an essential pillar for ensuring a common understanding and the effective implementation of protective measures. A minimum framework for the protection of critical infrastructure is required to prevent vulnerabilities and ensure the continuity of societal functioning. The required level of protection

Hybrid threats represent a complex phenomenon, characterised by diverse and often subversive manifestations that exist in the grey zone between peace and war. Addressing and countering these risks require a continuous culture of knowledge and education, as well as the implementation of proactive measures of anticipation and resilience.



should be adapted to the realities of each country while maintaining a common standard capable of guaranteeing security. Last but not least, a minimum system for emergency preparedness and response is essential for effectively addressing threats and protecting both the population and critical infrastructure.

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ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP AND HUMAN CAPITAL IN THE DIGITAL AGE: RECONFIGURING MILITARY DECISION-MAKING THROUGH INFORMATION SYSTEMS

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.09

The accelerated transformations of the security environment, characterised by digitalisation, operational complexity, and strategic volatility, calls for a profound redefinition of military leadership. While information infrastructure constitutes the systemic foundation of modern defense, the human dimension – represented by leadership and cognitive capital – becomes the determining factor in decision-making effectiveness.

This article analyses how information systems reshape the profile of the military leader, decision-making processes, and organisational culture within the defense domain. It explores key concepts such as adaptive leadership, decision superiority, algorithm-assisted decision-making, and strategic digital competencies.

The study highlights the need to integrate human capital into the military information ecosystem and proposes directions for reform in leadership development, the use of artificial intelligence, and the cultivation of an organisational culture grounded in continuous learning.

Its central conclusion is that, without the simultaneous transformation of both infrastructure and human capital, the digitalisation of defense will remain incomplete and ineffective.

Keywords: adaptive leadership; digital human capital; information systems; decision superiority; digital transformation;



INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the contemporary security environment, marked by accelerated digitalization, strategic competition, and the emergence of hybrid conflicts, calls for a profound reconsideration of how military leadership is exercised. In this context, the ability to collect, process, and interpret information becomes essential to decision-making effectiveness and to adaptation to operational dynamics.

If information infrastructure constitutes the structural framework of modern defense, the cognitive and organizational dimension of military leadership is what determines how effectively that framework is used. Complementing analyses focused on strategic information architectures, this study concentrates on the transformation of leadership and human capital in the context of the digitalization of defense.

The central hypothesis of this paper is that the effectiveness of military leadership depends on its integration into the information ecosystem, and that the absence of digital competencies and of an adaptive organizational culture limits strategic decision-making capacity.

The objective of the article is to analyse how information systems influence military leadership and to propose reform directions aimed at developing human capital and optimising the decision-making process.

Effectiveness of military leadership depends on its integration into the information ecosystem, and that the absence of digital competencies and of an adaptive organizational culture limits strategic decision-making capacity.

MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN THE DIGITAL AGE: A PARADIGM SHIFT

The profound transformations of the contemporary security environment, generated by digitalization, globalisation, and the acceleration of technological progress, are driving a fundamental redefinition of the concept of military leadership. Whereas leadership was traditionally associated with hierarchical authority, operational control, and the capacity to command under conditions



Unlike the traditional model, adaptive leadership does not rely exclusively on formal authority, but on competence, flexibility, and the ability to manage complexity. This transition implies a redistribution of the decision-making process, in the direction of decentralisation and increased autonomy for operational structures.

of relative certainty, it must now respond to radically different demands characterized by complexity, uncertainty, and systemic interdependence.

The emergence of new information technologies, the growth in the volume of available data, and the accelerated dynamics of the operational environment have turned decision-making into a process that depends on the ability to integrate and interpret information. In this context, military leadership can no longer be reduced to a function of coordinating resources; it becomes a complex cognitive process supported by advanced information infrastructures.

The paradigm shift in military leadership thus reflects the transition from a command-and-control-centered model to one based on adaptability, anticipation, and the strategic use of data. This transformation involves not only the adoption of new technologies, but also a redefinition of the role of the military leader within the organization and in relation to the operational environment.

❖ From Hierarchical Command to Adaptive Leadership

The traditional model of military leadership, grounded in rigid hierarchical structures and in the one-way transmission of orders, was effective in a relatively stable operational environment characterised by predictability and a clear delineation of the battlefield. In the current context, however – defined by hybrid threats, asymmetric conflicts, and global interdependence – this model becomes inadequate.

Adaptive leadership emerges as a strategic necessity. It is defined by the leader's ability to respond rapidly to change, integrate information from multiple sources, and adjust strategies in real time. Unlike the traditional model, adaptive leadership does not rely exclusively on formal authority, but on competence, flexibility, and the ability to manage complexity. This transition implies a redistribution of the decision-making process, in the direction of decentralisation and increased autonomy for operational structures. Leaders are no longer merely issuers of orders, but facilitators of the decision-making process, able to coordinate multidisciplinary teams and integrate the expertise of the organisation's various components.

At the same time, adaptive leadership presupposes a stronger capacity for organizational learning, in which accumulated experience

is rapidly integrated into decision-making processes. This dimension is essential in an environment where operational lessons must be leveraged in real time to ensure the effectiveness of actions.

❖ Information as a Strategic Resource

In the contemporary security paradigm, information becomes a fundamental strategic resource, comparable to traditional material and human resources. The ability to collect, process, and interpret data in real time provides a decisive competitive advantage, directly influencing operational effectiveness and anticipatory capacity. This transformation is driven by the exponential growth in the volume of available data and by the development of analytical technologies that make it possible to extract relevant information from complex data sets. In this context, military leadership must adapt in order to capitalize on informational potential by integrating data analysis into the decision-making process.

Information is no longer merely a support tool; it becomes the foundation of strategic decision-making. Military leaders must be able to interpret complex indicators, identify correlations, and anticipate developments on the basis of available data. This capability transforms the way strategies and operational plans are designed.

At the same time, information management also involves significant challenges, such as ensuring data security, avoiding information overload, and filtering relevant information. In the absence of effective management mechanisms, large volumes of data can themselves become a risk factor, affecting the quality of decisions.

Modern military leadership must therefore integrate information-management competencies, becoming capable of transforming data into knowledge and knowledge into strategic action.

❖ The Concept of *Decision Superiority*

In the context of contemporary strategic competition, operational advantage is no longer determined exclusively by numerical or technological superiority, but by the ability to make decisions faster and more accurately than the adversary. This concept, known as *decision superiority*, becomes a central objective of modern military organizations.



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The military information ecosystem represents the totality of technological infrastructures, operational processes, and organisational mechanisms that enable the collection, processing, integration, and dissemination of information relevant to the decision-making process.

Decision superiority entails the effective integration of information, the use of advanced analytics, and the capacity to act rapidly on that basis. In this respect, information systems play an essential role by providing analytical support and facilitating the decision-making process. Achieving this type of superiority requires reducing the time between information collection and decision-making, while also increasing the accuracy of decisions. Through the use of artificial intelligence technologies and predictive analytics algorithms, it becomes possible to identify optimal scenarios rapidly and anticipate the adversary's actions.

At the same time, decision superiority is not merely a technological outcome, but also an organisational and cognitive one. The ability to capitalise on information depends on the level of preparedness of leaders, on organizational culture, and on the structure of decision-making processes. Decision superiority therefore represents a synthesis of information infrastructure and human capital, and serves as an indicator of the effectiveness of the military system as a whole.

THE INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM AND DECISION SUPPORT IN MILITARY LEADERSHIP

The complexity of the contemporary operational environment requires the development of an integrated information ecosystem able to support military decision-making under conditions of high uncertainty, large data volumes, and time pressure. In this context, military decision-making can no longer be conceived as a linear process, but rather as a dynamic, iterative system dependent on continuous information flows and advanced analytical capabilities.

The military information ecosystem represents the totality of technological infrastructures, operational processes, and organisational mechanisms that enable the collection, processing, integration, and dissemination of information relevant to the decision-making process. It functions as a distributed architecture in which the interdependence of components determines the system's overall effectiveness.

In the absence of such an architecture, military decision-making becomes fragmented, reactive, and vulnerable to systemic errors. By contrast, an integrated information ecosystem makes decision

superiority possible by reducing uncertainty, accelerating the decision-making process, and improving the accuracy of strategic assessments.

❖ The Information Architecture of Military Decision-Making

The information architecture of military decision-making can be conceptualized as a multilayered system structured around four main functional levels:

(1) Data acquisition layer

This layer includes sensors, ISR systems (*intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance*), HUMINT, SIGINT, and OSINT sources, as well as other mechanisms for capturing operational and strategic data. The defining feature of this layer is data heterogeneity, both in terms of format and reliability.

(2) Data processing and filtering layer

Raw data are subjected to cleaning, normalization, and validation processes. At this stage, redundancies are eliminated and inconsistencies are identified through preprocessing algorithms and primary data-fusion techniques.

(3) Analytics and interpretation layer

This layer involves the use of advanced analytical tools, including:

- machine learning algorithms;
- predictive models;
- network analysis;
- decision support systems (DSS).

The result of this process is the generation of operational and strategic insights that can be used in decision-making.

(4) Decision dissemination and execution layer

Relevant information is transmitted to decision-makers in formats adapted to the level of command. This stage includes visual interfaces (dashboards), C2 (*command and control*) systems, and secure communication mechanisms.

Integrating these levels into a coherent architecture is essential for ensuring a continuous information flow and avoiding decision discontinuities. In the absence of such integration, informational bottlenecks emerge and affect operational effectiveness.



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The information architecture of military decision-making can be conceptualized as a multilayered system structured around four main functional levels: data acquisition layer; data processing and filtering layer; analytics and interpretation layer; decision dissemination and execution layer.



The capability for real-time analytics is a critical factor in achieving decision superiority. It entails the continuous processing of data streams and the generation of analytical outputs within a time frame compatible with operational requirements.

❖ Digital Command Centers and Information Fusion

Digital command centers are critical components of the information ecosystem, functioning as nodes for data aggregation and analysis. They are designed to integrate information from multiple sources and provide a Common Operational Picture (COP).

The functioning of these centers is based on the principle of information fusion, which involves:

- correlating data from disparate sources;
- eliminating redundancies;
- identifying relevant patterns.

Information fusion takes place at several levels:

- data-level fusion;
- feature-level fusion;
- decision-level fusion.

By using these techniques, digital command centers can generate complex operational scenarios and assess the impact of different strategic options.

An emerging concept in this area is the **operational digital twin**, which makes it possible to simulate the operational environment in real time and test different scenarios before implementation. This approach reduces decision risk and increases anticipatory capacity.

❖ Real-Time Analytics and Advanced Decision Support

The capability for real-time analytics is a critical factor in achieving decision superiority. It entails the continuous processing of data streams and the generation of analytical outputs within a time frame compatible with operational requirements.

Modern systems use technologies such as:

- stream processing;
- edge computing;
- military cloud infrastructure;
- distributed artificial intelligence.

These technologies make it possible to reduce information latency and facilitate rapid decisions.

Decision support systems (DSS) play a central role in this process by providing:

- automated recommendations;

- risk assessments;
- prioritisation of strategic options.

Integrating DSS into command processes enables the transition from intuitive decision-making to algorithm-assisted decision-making, reducing variability and increasing decision consistency.

❖ Strategic Interoperability and Information Standardization

In the context of membership in collective security structures, information interoperability becomes an essential condition for operational effectiveness. It implies technological, semantic, and procedural compatibility among the information systems of different states and organisations.

Interoperability can be analyzed at three levels:

- **technological** – compatibility of IT infrastructures;
- **semantic** – use of common data formats and standards;
- **operational** – alignment of procedures and doctrines.

Within NATO, information standardization is achieved through common protocols and architectures that enable rapid information exchange and coordinated action.

The lack of interoperability generates significant risks, including:

- delays in the decision-making process;
- misinterpretations of data;
- fragmentation of operations.

The development of an information ecosystem compatible with international standards is therefore essential for Romania's effective integration into the Euro-Atlantic security architecture.

The military information ecosystem represents the critical infrastructure of the modern decision-making process, in which the effectiveness of leadership depends directly on the quality and integration of information flows. Through the development of advanced information architectures, digital command centers, and decision support systems, military organizations can achieve decision superiority and respond effectively to contemporary challenges.

In this context, military leadership can no longer be separated from information infrastructure, but must be analysed as an emergent function of the interaction between the human factor and technological systems.



Military leadership can no longer be separated from information infrastructure, but must be analysed as an emergent function of the interaction between the human factor and technological systems.



HUMAN CAPITAL IN THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF DEFENSE

The digital transformation of the military system cannot be reduced to the implementation of advanced technological infrastructures; it requires a profound reconstruction of the human capital that operates those systems. In the absence of adequate competencies and an adaptive organisational culture, technology remains underused and the potential of information systems goes unrealized.

In this context, human capital must be conceptualised not merely as an operational resource, but as a strategic element of decision superiority. The ability of military leaders to interpret data, integrate analytical models, and operate in complex information ecosystems becomes decisive for the effectiveness of the defense system.

Digital transformation therefore involves a dual adaptation: technological and cognitive. If information infrastructure defines the operational framework, human capital determines how that framework is actually used.

❖ The New Profile of the Military Leader

Within the digital paradigm, the profile of the military leader undergoes a structural transformation, moving from the traditional model of the operational commander to that of the strategic information manager. This evolution entails an expansion of the competence set beyond the tactical and operational dimension toward fields such as data analysis, understanding information systems, and interpreting predictive models.

The contemporary military leader must operate in an environment characterized by informational complexity, where decisions are influenced by continuous data flows and advanced analytical tools. In this sense, the role is no longer limited to issuing orders, but includes:

- integrating information from multiple sources;
- evaluating algorithmically generated scenarios;
- managing uncertainty through probabilistic analysis.

This transformation also implies a paradigm shift with respect to decision authority. The leader becomes a node within an information network, and effectiveness depends on the capacity to interact with digital systems and with other organisational entities.

The contemporary military leader must operate in an environment characterized by informational complexity, where decisions are influenced by continuous data flows and advanced analytical tools.

❖ **Essential Digital Competencies in the Military Environment**

The digital transformation of defense requires a profound redefinition of the set of competencies needed by military leaders, expanding them beyond the traditional operational dimension toward a much more complex cognitive and technological sphere. In an environment characterized by high data volume, uncertainty, and systemic interdependence, the effectiveness of decision-making becomes directly dependent on leaders’ ability to understand, integrate, and strategically exploit information. In this context, digital competencies should not be seen as isolated technical skills, but as constitutive elements of an integrated cognitive ecosystem that enables effective action in dynamic information environments. These competencies can be grouped into several categories, as shown in figure 1.



The digital transformation of defense requires a profound redefinition of the set of competencies needed by military leaders, expanding them beyond the traditional operational dimension toward a much more complex cognitive and technological sphere.

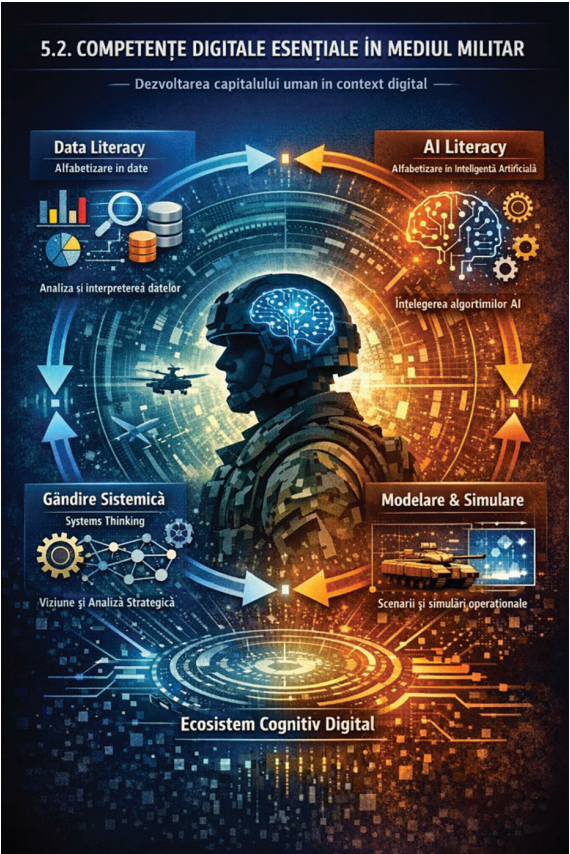


Figure 1: Digital Competencies of Human Capital in the Military Environment



AI literacy does not necessarily require advanced programming knowledge; rather, it involves the ability to understand the basic principles of algorithms, the logic of predictive models, and their limitations.

These competencies are organised around fundamental, interdependent dimensions that contribute to the development of an adaptive, data-oriented leadership profile.

(1) Data literacy

Data literacy represents the foundation of digital competencies and is defined by the ability to understand, interpret, and use data in decision-making. In an environment where information is abundant, yet often heterogeneous and imperfect, military leaders must be able to distinguish relevant data from informational noise, assess the credibility of sources, and identify meaningful correlations.

This competence involves not only identifying relevant data sources, but also evaluating information quality according to criteria such as accuracy, timeliness, and consistency. In addition, the interpretation of statistical indicators becomes essential for grounding decisions, allowing raw data to be transformed into useful information. In the absence of this capability, the decision-making process risks being affected by interpretive errors or by information overload, which may lead to suboptimal decisions.

(2) AI literacy

As artificial intelligence systems become increasingly integrated into command-and-control processes, understanding how they function becomes a critical competence for military leaders. AI literacy does not necessarily require advanced programming knowledge; rather, it involves the ability to understand the basic principles of algorithms, the logic of predictive models, and their limitations.

This competence is essential for the proper use of decision support systems, given that algorithms may generate recommendations based on incomplete data or on models that reflect certain biases. Leaders must be able to evaluate critically the outputs generated by such systems, understand the degree of uncertainty associated with them, and integrate this information into decision-making without absolutizing it.

In this sense, AI literacy contributes to the development of informed leadership, capable of collaborating effectively with technological systems and avoiding excessive dependence on automation.

(3) Modeling and simulation capability

The ability to use modeling and simulation tools represents an essential dimension of digital competencies, enabling leaders to assess complex operational scenarios before implementation. Through simulations, it becomes possible to test different strategic options, analyse the impact of decisions, and identify points of vulnerability.

This competence facilitates the transition from a reactive decision model to an anticipatory one, in which decisions are grounded in the evaluation of multiple scenarios and in the estimation of probabilities of success. In addition, the use of simulations contributes to the reduction of operational risks and to the optimization of resource allocation, providing a controlled framework for strategic experimentation.

In the context of the development of digital-twin-type concepts, modeling capability becomes even more relevant, enabling the virtual replication of the operational environment and the real-time analysis of developments.

(4) Systems thinking

Systems thinking is a cross-cutting competence that makes it possible to understand the interdependencies among the components of the defense system and to analyze the effects of decisions in a broader context. In an environment characterized by complexity and interconnectedness, decisions cannot be assessed in isolation, but must be analyzed in relation to their impact on the system as a whole.

This competence involves the ability to identify causal relationships, anticipate secondary effects, and integrate multiple dimensions of a problem into the decision-making process. Systems thinking thus helps avoid overly simplistic solutions and supports the development of coherent and sustainable strategies.

In addition, it facilitates interinstitutional collaboration by providing a common conceptual framework for understanding complex problems and coordinating actions.

Taken together, these competencies do not function independently, but integrate into a complex cognitive ecosystem that enables military leaders to operate effectively in a digitalised environment. The interdependence among data literacy, understanding artificial intelligence, modeling capability, and systems thinking reflects the need for a holistic approach to human-capital development.



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Systems thinking is a cross-cutting competence that makes it possible to understand the interdependencies among the components of the defense system and to analyze the effects of decisions in a broader context. In an environment characterized by complexity and interconnectedness, decisions cannot be assessed in isolation, but must be analyzed in relation to their impact on the system as a whole.



Assessing the effectiveness of military leadership in the digital context requires the development of quantifiable performance indicators that reflect the capacity to use information systems and the impact of decisions on operational outcomes.

The formation of these competencies therefore represents not merely an educational requirement, but a strategic condition for achieving decision superiority and adapting the military system to contemporary challenges.

❖ Digital Performance Indicators in Military Leadership

Assessing the effectiveness of military leadership in the digital context requires the development of quantifiable performance indicators that reflect the capacity to use information systems and the impact of decisions on operational outcomes.

Digital Key Performance Indicators (DKPIs) may include:

- **decision latency** – the time interval between the emergence of a situation and the making of a decision;
- **decision accuracy** – the degree of correctness of decisions in relation to the outcomes obtained;
- **resource optimisation rate** – the way resources are used relative to objectives
- **information integration index** – the ability to use data from multiple sources.

Integrating these indicators into information systems makes continuous performance monitoring and the real-time adjustment of strategies possible. At the same time, the use of DKPIs contributes to making leadership assessment more objective, reducing dependence on subjective criteria.

❖ The Educational Ecosystem and Continuous Development

The transformation of human capital requires the development of an educational ecosystem adapted to digital requirements. Military educational institutions must redefine their programs so as to include advanced digital competencies and integrate interdisciplinarity.

This ecosystem should include:

- training programs in data science applied to defense;
- courses in artificial intelligence and predictive analytics;
- modules in operational simulation and strategic modeling.

Collaboration with the civilian academic environment and with the private sector becomes essential for accelerating knowledge transfer and gaining access to emerging technologies.

Public-private partnerships can contribute to the development of innovative solutions and to rapid adaptation to technological change.

Training should also not be limited to the initial stage, but should become a continuous process, integrated throughout the military career. This approach allows for the constant updating of competencies and adaptation to developments in the operational environment.



❖ An Organisational Culture Based on Digital Learning

Beyond individual competencies, digital transformation also requires the development of an organisational culture that supports continuous learning and adaptation. Organisational culture thus becomes a determining factor in the success of technology implementation.

An effective digital culture is characterised by:

- openness to innovation;
- acceptance of change;
- encouragement of controlled experimentation;
- integration of feedback into decision-making processes.

In the absence of such a culture, organisations risk adopting technology only superficially, without generating real changes in the way they function.

Organisational culture must also support interinstitutional collaboration and information sharing, both of which are essential to the functioning of the military information ecosystem.

Human capital is the central element of the digital transformation of defense, as it is the factor that determines the effective use of information infrastructure. The development of digital competencies, the implementation of objective assessment mechanisms, and the building of an adaptive organizational culture are essential conditions for achieving decision superiority.

In this context, military leadership becomes the result of the integration of technology and human capital, and the success of digital transformation depends on the organization's ability to synchronize these two dimensions.

The development of digital competencies, the implementation of objective assessment mechanisms, and the building of an adaptive organizational culture are essential conditions for achieving decision superiority.



Human capital thus becomes a force multiplier, while the development of digital competencies, systems thinking, and the ability to operate in complex information environments represents an essential condition for effective military leadership.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis carried out in this paper shows that the digital transformation of defense is not merely a technological process, but a structural reconstruction of the way military leadership is conceived and exercised. In the context of a security environment characterized by volatility, complexity, and informational interdependence, decision-making effectiveness becomes the primary determinant of strategic performance.

The results of the study confirm the hypothesis that contemporary military leadership is deeply dependent on integration into advanced information ecosystems. The ability to collect, process, and interpret data in real time, together with the use of predictive analytics and decision-support tools, transforms decision-making from a reactive process into an anticipatory one. Within this framework, the concept of decision superiority becomes an essential operational objective, and achieving it requires convergence between information infrastructure and human capital.

At the same time, the research underscores that technology, in the absence of adequate competencies and an adaptive organisational culture, cannot generate strategic value. Human capital thus becomes a force multiplier, while the development of digital competencies, systems thinking, and the ability to operate in complex information environments represents an essential condition for effective military leadership. The transformation of the military leader's profile, from operational commander to strategic information manager, reflects this paradigm shift.

Moreover, the integration of digital performance indicators and the institutionalization of data-based evaluation mechanisms contribute to making decision-making more objective and to increasing organisational transparency. In parallel, the development of an adapted educational ecosystem and the strengthening of an organizational culture based on continuous learning become critical factors for the sustainability of digital transformation.

The strategic implications of this analysis are significant. In the absence of a simultaneous transformation of information infrastructure and human capital, the military system risks remaining in a hybrid paradigm characterised by dysfunctions and limited effectiveness.

By contrast, integrating these dimensions makes it possible to develop a model of adaptive leadership capable of responding to contemporary challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities offered by digitalisation.

In conclusion, military leadership in the digital age can no longer be conceived as an individual function, but as the emergent result of the interaction between the human factor and information infrastructure. Only through the synchronisation of these components can a high level of strategic autonomy, institutional resilience, and operational relevance be achieved within the architecture of contemporary security.



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VOLUME 1 (I)

Disclaimer: The research and analysis underlying this report and its conclusions were conducted by the NATO S&T Organization (STO) drawing upon the support of the Alliance's defence S&T community, NATO Allied Command Transformation (ACT), and the NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCIA). This report does not represent the official opinion or position of NATO or individual governments but provides considered advice to NATO and Nations' leadership on significant S&T issues.

FOREWORDS

Now more than ever, geopolitics and strategic decision-making are impacted by, and even driven by, science and technology (S&T). As this trend intensifies, it is vitally important that NATO and Allies understand how decisions made today affect future options, opportunities, and preparedness. To do this, as leaders, we must assess the evolving science and technology environment and Macro Trends against the backdrop of the current era of heightened strategic competition. Taking a 20-year outlook, this report offers an opportunity to better understand these complex relationships. As these trends unfold, it will be increasingly vital that political and military decision-makers not only learn from relevant technical experts but also work closely with trusted partners across society. Ensuring the Alliance benefits from science and technology advancements to the greatest extent possible will also require us to give priority to ethical and legal safeguards, global partnerships, and collaboration both with the private sector and within the scientific community. This whole-of-society approach will enable leaders to assess future risks, opportunities, and choices as they prepare for future scenarios and work to minimise future shocks for the over 1 billion citizens our Alliance defends.

Radmila Shekerinska

NATO Deputy Secretary General

Science and technology is the bedrock of our modern society, ensuring our prosperity and driving our progress. As the body tasked with meeting the collective science and technology needs of the Allies and partners, it is incumbent upon the Science & Technology Organization to provide evidence-based strategic advice for NATO leadership. Given the increasing importance of science and technology for strategic decision-making, it is vital to build on existing



technical knowledge and understand the context in which scientific and technological developments are occurring. The overview of interdependencies between scientific and technical areas and their economic, geopolitical, and social effects and enablers provided by this report offers useful context for understanding our current and future geostrategic environment. The six S&T Macro Trends described in this report therefore empower NATO and Allies' decision-makers to consider the choices before them and how they can best prepare the Alliance today to face future challenges. Continued knowledge-building and investment in science and technology will strengthen NATO's and Allies' ability to outperform the competitors of today and tomorrow and ensure that we remain robust, resilient, and ready to respond to any threat.

Dr Bryan Wells

NATO Chief Scientist

INTRODUCTION

This Science & Technology (S&T) Macro Trends Report provides an overview of the socio-technical trends that will shape the technology landscape from 2025 to 2045. It analyses links between emerging and disruptive S&T areas and their macro-economic, geopolitical, and societal effects and enablers.

This Public Release volume represents the latest iteration of the NATO Science & Technology Organization's (STO) flagship research report and builds on the previous version, the S&T Trends Report 2023-2043 published in March 2023. In alignment with previous S&T Trends Reports, this volume aims to build understanding on the impact of S&T on the Alliance's political decision options, defence capabilities, military operations, and enterprise functions.

As a response to the increasing linkages and dependencies between technology and geopolitics, this publication complements existing foresight work across NATO by offering an S&T perspective on trends that will affect diverse aspects of the Alliance over the next 20 years. While targeting a senior leadership audience, this report also aims to be accessible to a wide range of readers, including practitioners from within and outside of the S&T environment.

In offering insights into how S&T shapes geopolitical priorities and vice versa, this report offers a perspective for senior decision-makers on how to respond to challenges on (and over) the horizon by making strategic choices now.



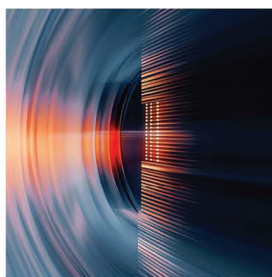


Executive Summary

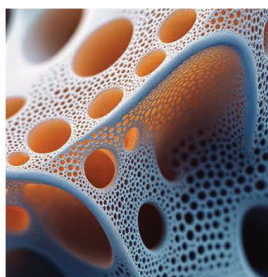
Each of the S&T Macro Trends describes a distinct global trend that is uniquely impacted by and distinctly impacts S&T. These six trends are shaping and/or will shape NATO's strategic landscape and influence how emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs) continue to evolve. They will also impact how Alliance governments and societies respond to and develop future S&T policy. The following trends are anticipated to define the S&T landscape from 2025-2045, with differing impacts and timelines expected for each.



MACRO TREND 1
Evolving
Competition Areas



MACRO TREND 2
Race for AI and
Quantum Superiority



MACRO TREND 3
Biotechnology
Revolution



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MACRO TREND 1

Evolving Competition Areas

As global strategic competition intensifies, S&T advances will shape and transform the nature of competition, in traditional domains and in non-traditional ones – for example, cyber, space, hybrid and information, and in geographical regions such as the High North. In turn, the continued hybridisation of warfare and heightened importance of multi-domain operations (MDO) are expected to fuel further reliance on S&T across all domains.

Key judgements

- Emerging technologies offer leaders a spectrum of strategic choices to be made now to ensure that the Alliance is fit for the future operating environment.
- Critical technology areas will shape the future of geopolitical competition and, simultaneously, geopolitical competition will fuel future S&T development.
- The continued hybridisation of warfare has not only made shocks from tactics such as economic coercion more likely, but has also heightened the importance of the cyber and space domains in future contests and conflicts.

MACRO TREND 2

Race for AI and Quantum Superiority

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and quantum not only represent technology areas that will transform a diverse range of industries



in the next 20 years, but they are also areas in which competition between dominant actors will accelerate over time. An essential and long-term aspect of this trend will be the challenge of finding, training, and retaining talent.

Key judgements

- Digital transformation (including access to large quantities of quality data, as well as storage and dissemination tools) will remain essential as AI and quantum technology continue to develop.
- Talent acquisition, training, and retention will be a key battleground for technology competition.
- Like-minded nations will need to pool expertise and resources to win this race.

MACRO TREND 3

Biotechnology Revolution

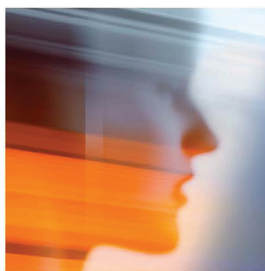
The next revolutionary technology cycle will be driven by synthetic biology. In addition to continuing developments in related technology areas (e.g., biodata and biosensors), this trend will bring issues such as research security (safeguarding sensitive research) and regulation to the forefront.

Key judgements

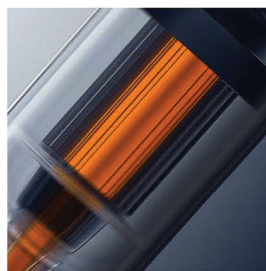
- Synthetic biology and related technologies will have a disruptive, revolutionary impact within the next 20 years, in both the civilian and military realms.
- While the potential benefits from increased biotechnology use are substantial, especially for healthcare, the risks of harmful uses are also enormous. This necessitates careful consideration of security and defence implications, including the protection and sharing of research.
- Research safeguards need to align with our shared values and norms.



MACRO TREND 4
Resource
Divide



MACRO TREND 5
Fragmenting
Public Trust



MACRO TREND 6
Technology Integration
& Dependencies



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MACRO TREND 4

Resource Divide

S&T advancement serves both as a driver of deepening resource divides and as a potential enabler of economic development via AI-enabled solutions, bio- and green technology, and novel/advanced materials. Economic resilience and security as well as NATO's global partnerships will become increasingly crucial in relation to this trend. Techno- nationalism is also expected to be further prioritised by leaders who view technological capability as increasingly integral to economic, societal, and national security needs.

Key judgements

- Climate change will impact the Alliance's shared access to critical resources for S&T innovation.
- Upcoming shocks, especially but not exclusively stemming from climate change, will exacerbate existing tensions between nations that can more easily recover from such shocks and those that cannot.
- Future technology advancement and adoption will act as both a solution to these growing tensions as well as an accelerator of them.

MACRO TREND 5

Fragmenting Public Trust

Trust in science, institutions, and governments is vulnerable to further undermining and fragmentation, and technology acts primarily as an accelerator of these challenges, especially via AI-generated information threats. As a result of these developments, topics such as



strategic communications, digital sovereignty, the need for trustworthy S&T solutions, and improved technology education are expected to increase in importance within the next 20 years.

Key judgements

- Global leadership is needed to encourage the responsible use of EDTs.
- Technology, especially AI, is being used to decrease public trust (in governments, institutions, and science), and the future impact of these developments will be further complicated by rising political polarisation.
- In the long term, tech-fuelled solutions may offer tools for combatting disinformation and misinformation, but in the short term, strategic communications, legal/regulatory mechanisms, and technology education will be increasingly vital.

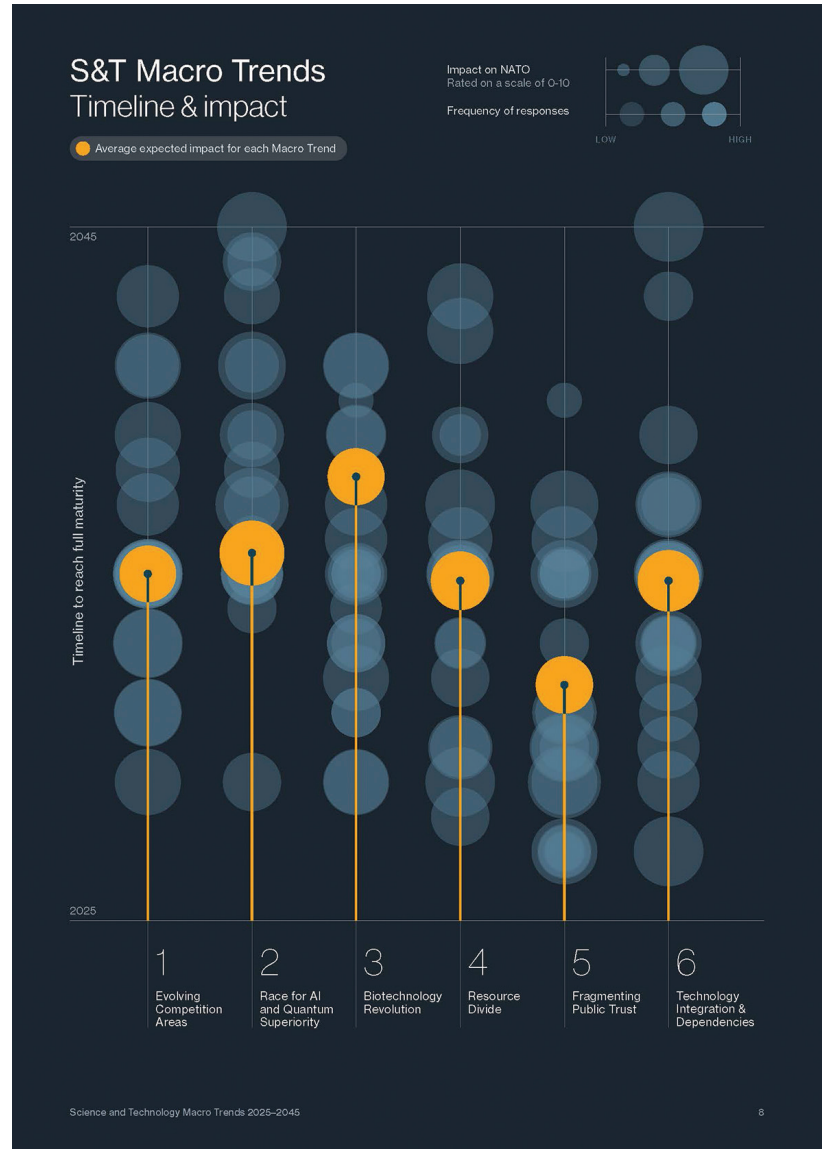
MACRO TREND 6

Technology Integration & Dependencies

While S&T advancements will continue to provide solutions to complex challenges, access to these solutions will be unequal. For those with cutting-edge technology, differences in Concepts of Operations and regulation will pose challenges for interoperability and standards. Meanwhile, as innovation is increasingly driven by the private sector, new challenges for civilian-military integration will emerge, and the long-term effects of increased dependency on S&T across civilian and military domains may bring unexpected consequences.

Key judgements

- Future S&T capabilities need to be interoperable by design.
- Interoperability will become more critical than ever for Allies in the next 20 years, yet new challenges to achieving it will also arise as disparities in technology access, usage, and regulations become more pronounced.
- Economic cooperation is needed with like-minded nations and private sector partners.
- Increasing dependencies on private actors for critical defence needs will become a greater challenge as S&T becomes increasingly essential for a wider range of military operations.





Cross-cutting issues

Within these six S&T Macro Trends, several key themes cut across the S&T and geopolitical areas discussed in the following report. Four primary issues are identified as being particularly significant for all Macro Trends. These are:

- Challenged Rules-based International Order (RBIO)
- Climate change
- Global partnerships
- Increased role of the private sector

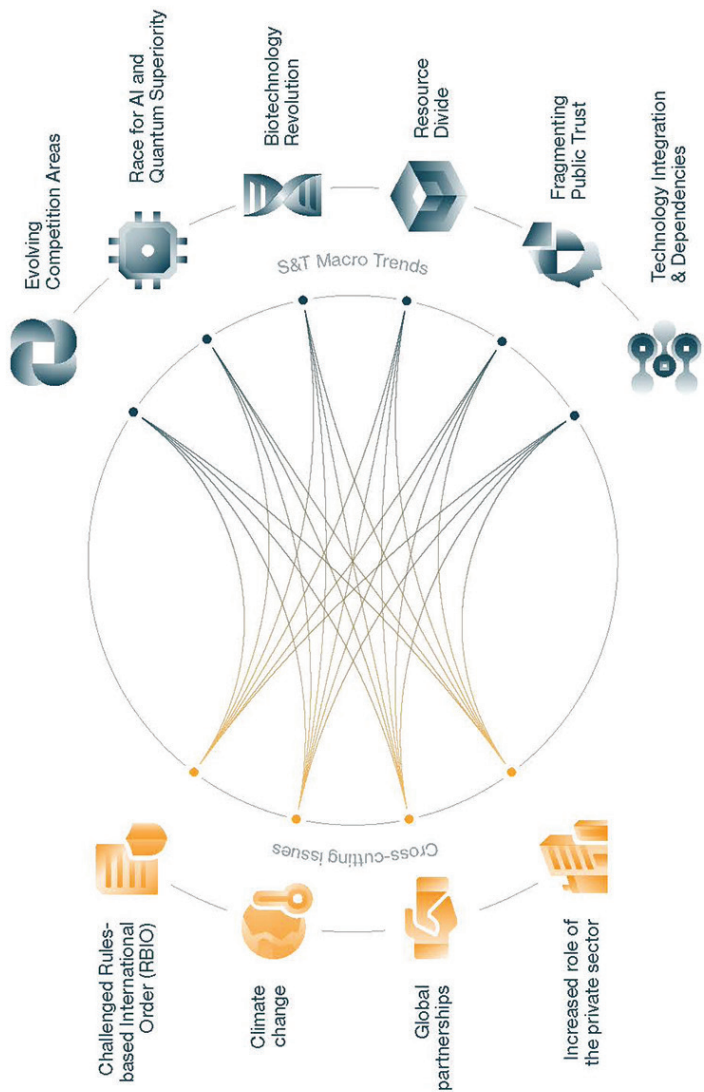
Each represents a driver and/or result of multiple Macro Trends, hence these four issues are simultaneously enabling future S&T advancement and/or will be significantly affected by future S&T development. The cross-cutting issues provide a thematic lens through which to view the S&T Macro Trends and their combined impact, and are therefore highlighted in the trend implications.

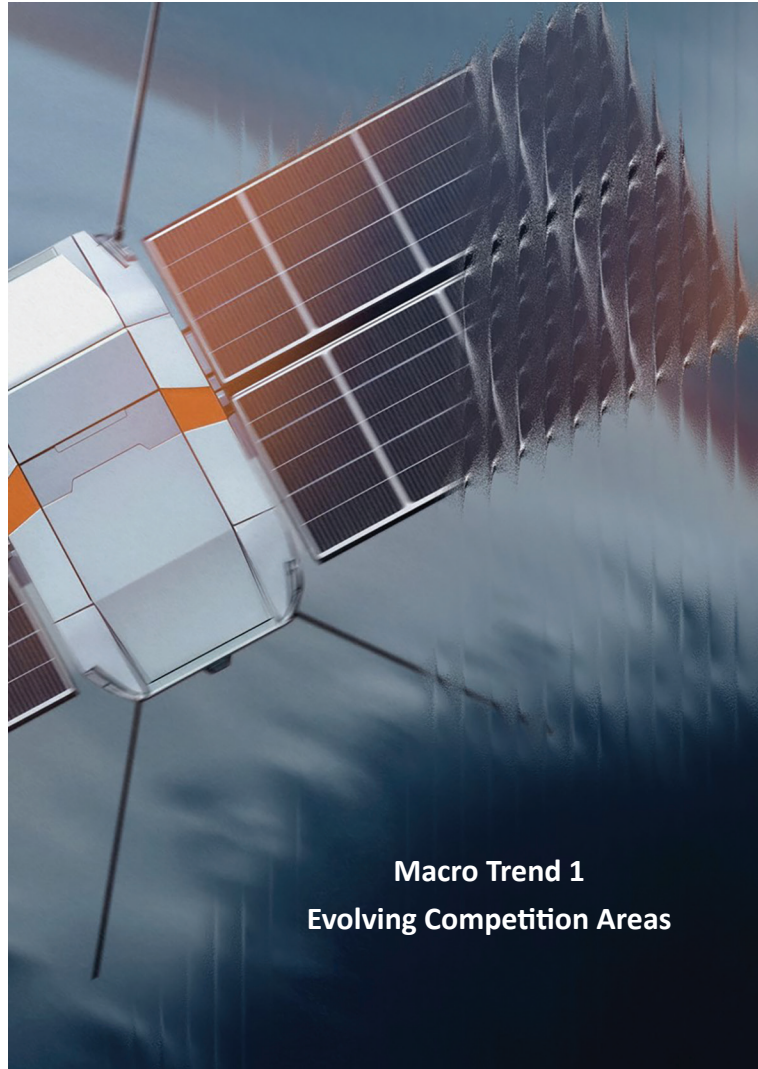
Considerations regarding the promotion of scientific collaboration while simultaneously safeguarding sensitive research or ensuring “research security” is also highly relevant for several Macro Trends. Research security refers to the protection of scientific research – especially that which has defence and security applications – from undesirable foreign state (or non-state) access, influence, or espionage, with the aim of protecting national security and achieving decisive advantage from technology across all instruments of power. These concerns are vital to consider when assessing future S&T development. However, research security was not identified as a primary cross-cutting theme across all six trends.

Report structure

In addition to the key judgements outlined above, this report assesses the six S&T Macro Trends by explaining the background, implications, state of play, and choices for leadership related to each trend.

Cross-cutting issues for the S&T Macro Trends





Macro Trend 1
Evolving Competition Areas



Key judgements

- Emerging technologies offer leaders a spectrum of strategic choices to be made now to ensure that the Alliance is fit for the future operating environment.
- Critical technology areas will shape the future of geopolitical competition and, simultaneously, geopolitical competition will fuel future S&T development.
- The continued hybridisation of warfare has not only made shocks from tactics such as economic coercion more likely, but has also heightened the importance of the cyber and space domains in future contests and conflicts.

1.1 Background

As stated in the NATO Strategic Concept (2022), the current security environment is characterised by “*strategic competition, pervasive instability and recurrent shocks*” (NATO, 2022). In this environment, EDTs are gaining strategic importance and becoming key arenas of global competition. As global competition intensifies, S&T advancements will shape and transform the nature of strategic competition, including in traditional domains and non-traditional ones – for example, hybrid and information warfare or contests in the High North. In turn, the continued hybridisation of warfare (i.e., the combined use of traditional military aggression with tactics such as coercion, influence operations, or sabotage) and heightened importance of multi-domain operations (MDO) will fuel further reliance on S&T across domains, since technology offers vital links between military systems and operations.

Experts widely accept that great power competition is on the rise and shows no sign of abating in the short term (United States Space Force, 2024). While current trends do not necessarily result in the eruption of additional kinetic conflicts, it is especially critical to monitor the full spectrum of friendly-to-confrontational interactions between



great powers and their allies at a time when direct confrontation between powerful (nuclear-armed) nations appears a greater danger than it has been for the past three decades (Lynch, 2020). Viewing this trend through the S&T lens explains how critical technology areas are likely to shape the future of competition as well as how geopolitical competition may fuel future S&T development.

1.2 Implications

Strategic competition is a key driver of S&T development, and at the same time, S&T advancement allows for new areas of competition. This is especially true for the cyber and space domains, where below-threshold attacks are expected to significantly increase in the future. Furthermore, the likelihood of action taken in the cyber or space domain to spur a direct, kinetic conflict is also increasing. Given that everything from the global stock market to GPS relies on space assets, this domain is of particular concern as space becomes more congested and contested.

(idee de pus în stânga) Conflicts in non-traditional domains [...] are highly likely to become more commonplace in the next 20 years.

Continuous technology advancements have also created opportunities for both state and non-state actors to engage in more diverse forms of conflict – for example, in the cyber domain or through other non-kinetic, hybrid, or grey-zone attacks. Therefore, conflicts in non-traditional domains as well as below-threshold attacks are highly likely to become more commonplace in the next 20 years. Additionally, the fact that innovation, including defence innovation, is primarily driven by the private sector will allow super-empowered individuals to play a role in shaping the future of strategic competition. These developments pose significant challenges for attribution, norm-setting, and crafting proportional responses.

Compounding these challenges, the exponential increase in AI integration could transform standard methods for conflict prevention, leading experts to doubt whether traditional crisis communication mechanisms can sufficiently address coming risks (Lawfare, 2024).

1.3 State of play

Technology has always been central to determining victors in all forms of competition and conflict. However, the current landscape offers more options than ever due to both the existence of additional military domains and evolving applications for technologies in military contexts. Today, advantages from technology are increasingly determinant of battlefield success (NATO, 2022), and these dynamics are generally understood by strategic decision-makers. Taking the United States and the People's Republic of China as examples, the past 2 years alone have demonstrated a notable uptick in US initiatives to prevent China from gaining a technological advantage, as policymakers in both nations clearly consider innovation to be a key factor of economic and military superiority (The Economist, 2024).

Space

The space domain is widely considered to be an increasingly contested environment in which competition for geopolitical and military supremacy is expected to play out, a challenge for which no international consensus exists (United Nations, 2023). While space has long been an enabler of all other military domains, from communications and weather forecasting to tracking adversaries and providing position, navigation, and timing (PNT), its increasing applications have led to greater reliance on its assets over time, making it a critical arena not only for power projection but also operational effectiveness. Space is also characterised by rapid transformation (United States Space Force, 2024) due in large part to increasing access to technology and, as a result, access to space itself.

The increased strategic importance of space and related dependencies for military activities has naturally led to the space domain becoming more militarised over time – for example, through reinvigorated efforts to develop anti-satellite weapons and counter-space capabilities, such as conducting cyber-attacks or jamming/spoofing satellites. In the longer term, accelerated proliferation of earth-to-space (especially anti-satellite) weapons, directed energy weapons, and more sophisticated counter-space capabilities enabled by emerging technologies is not difficult to imagine, especially



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if international norms and regulations for what operations can be conducted in space are not updated to address the risk of a potential space arms race (Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, 2023). These developments are already illustrating the potential for a substantial uptick in space contest and conflict, even if it remains below the threshold of kinetic warfare (Francis et al., 2023).



The exponential increase in space accessibility – via the commercialisation of space and proliferation of civilian usage and, looking further forward, predicted increases in the use of hypersonics and in-space propulsion technologies – will further congest the space environment. Furthermore, as space becomes more congested with commercial and other actors, the potential for miscalculation, mistakes, in-space collisions, and escalating tensions will only heighten in the coming years.

Cyber

The cyber domain is often cited as an equally important arena for near- and medium-term competition (ACT, 2024) as many international actors continue to favour and, due to continued technology advancements, have more options for below- threshold and non-kinetic aggressions. Although shifts in this domain tend to be difficult to track, in part due to attribution challenges, it is clear that the importance and impact of cyber conflict should not be underestimated. Even in scenarios that are largely defined as conventional warfare, cyber plays a crucial role for all sides. For example, the Russian Federation conducted a cyber-attack against Ukraine prior to its full-scale land invasion of Ukrainian territory in 2022, with the aim of disrupting command and control (C2) capabilities at a critical moment for the Ukrainian military (U.S. Department of State, 2022). Increasingly sophisticated cyber technologies will continue to fuel the hybridisation of warfare, which is likely to create more frequent disruptions caused by more precise targeting of critical and civilian infrastructure and financial systems.

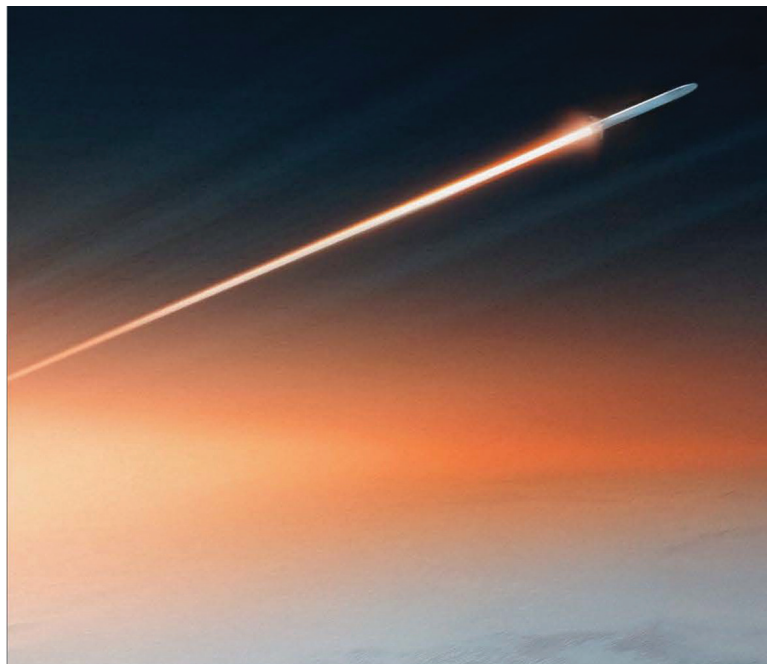
The hybridisation of warfare

The continued hybridisation of warfare extends beyond traditional military domains, and technological advancements are shaping these developments as well. For example, the combined use of AI with robotics and autonomous systems already enables militaries to choose from more diverse types of operations and effects, especially below-threshold activities. Advanced technologies not only enable more and more precise attacks, but also are increasingly difficult to detect and attribute (Mills, 2023). The challenges and opportunities posed by these developments are likely to increase in importance not only as a result of global competition, but also at the operational level, as MDO are more widely deployed. Military experts anticipate an increase in MDO in the near and medium term, due to a growing need for militaries to synchronise efforts and achieve real-time integration across numerous domains simultaneously (ACT, 2023).

Technological developments are also increasing opportunities for hybrid warfare tactics such as economic coercion and the spread of information threats (more on the latter in Macro Trend 5). Regarding



Technological developments are also increasing opportunities for hybrid warfare tactics.



economic coercion, it is recognised that technology is a major factor regarding nations using export controls to exert influence, as seen for example with recent US policy shifts on semiconductors (The Economist, 2023). More broadly, recent national, international, and intragovernmental initiatives (Höra, Weiss, 2024; Chatham House, 2023), focused on economic security and supply chain resilience have been fuelled by several factors, including increased great power competition, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these efforts also stem from the increased importance of technology and critical dependencies that offer opportunities for coercion, influence, and exploitation. As competition increases, there has also been an uptick in the weaponisation of economic dependencies or "*weaponised interdependence*" (European Journal of International Law, 2023).

Economic security will therefore require more than de-risking supply chains or safeguarding critical infrastructure. Consistent commitment to prioritise technology development and fostering innovation and investment is also necessary. Additionally, responses

to these challenges must involve cooperation among diverse international actors to align economic security priorities with shared strategic objectives (Searight, 2024; Heard, 2020).

Regional partnerships

Regional divides act as both an enabler of global competition and a result of it. Experts predict that, in addition to more frequent global shocks, growing strategic competition may also encourage further regionalisation. In addition to economic and technology-related factors such as the aim to decrease dependencies or de-risk, this trend will likely also be affected by climate change, migration, demographic changes, and rising authoritarianism. Smaller nations in particular are likely to be affected as more frequent economic, climate, security, and geopolitical disruptions will heighten the importance of having reliable and stable trade regimes.

Therefore, smaller economic actors may be forced to rely on partners who not only offer the cheapest solutions but those who appear to be most resilient against coming shocks. One possible result could be that the influence of economic blocs such as BRICS (originally composed of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, but has since expanded its membership) will grow. Developments like this would challenge the influence of institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank and likely contribute to further instability (Hill et al., 2020).

Growing discontent in the southern hemisphere or “Global South”, including parts of Africa and the Middle East, Central and East Asia, and Latin America, is also likely to impact global competition. Many nations in these regions hope to rebalance global power dynamics and encourage more equitable divisions of prosperity, security, and technology. These aims are made significantly more difficult by climate change, which disproportionately affects these same areas (Hogan, Patrick, 2024). Simultaneously, these are also the nations in which competition for global influence will likely intensify most as traditional global powers attempt to deepen existing ties or build new alliances (Parameswaran, 2024). In this context, the importance of existing international partnerships would increase exponentially.



The fundamental dependence of civilians and militaries on space assets represents a crucial vulnerability that is only increasing over time.

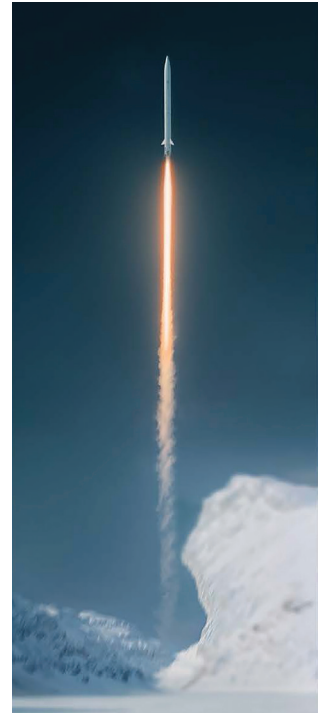


However, these relationships could also become less predictable if new alliances are potentially determined by ideological and political values or short-term economic security and technology needs rather than long-standing trade agreements or geography (Government of Canada, 2024).

1.4 Choices for leadership

As global strategic competition intensifies, unpredictability and uncertainty are also on the rise, making it difficult to anticipate which shocks to prepare for and when. Decision-makers will benefit from considering multiple future scenarios, possibly using advanced immersive simulation and modelling opportunities to better understand the choices available. However, no matter the future contest or conflict scenario, it is clear that traditional notions of deterrence and escalation must adapt to the increasingly technology-dependent defence environment.

Leadership will also need to address the growing importance of space. Although all military domains rely on technology, the fundamental dependence of civilians and militaries on space assets represents a crucial vulnerability that is only increasing over time. In the civilian realm alone, space-based systems are integral to more than 50% of critical infrastructure and services in members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (OECD, f.a.). As the importance of space resources and technologies grows, leaders should consider options for building resilience and responding to future tensions (Ziegler et al, 2024). Looking forward, serious efforts must also be dedicated to investigating how international legal frameworks can be leveraged to mitigate the growing risk of space conflict (University of Exeter, 2024).



(To be continued)

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EUROPEAN DEFENCE CAPABILITY BY 2030: FEASIBILITY, CONSTRAINTS AND OPTIONS FOR ACCELERATION

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.10

This study examines the evolution of European defence policy between 2022 and 2030 in the context of renewed high intensity conflict in Europe and increasing transatlantic expectations for a more balanced distribution of security responsibilities. It investigates three core dimensions: (1) the operational EU instruments supporting capability development and the defence industrial base, including PESCO, EDF, ASAP, and EDIRPA; (2) recently adopted strategic and legislative frameworks such as the White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030, EDIP, and the Defence Readiness Omnibus; and (3) the feasibility of establishing a credible European conventional defence capacity by 2030, alongside the structural constraints that limit progress towards full strategic autonomy.

Findings indicate that the European Union is positioned to deliver by 2030 a coherent package of measures enhancing conventional military resilience, including munitions production, mobility, joint procurement mechanisms, and industrial consolidation. Nonetheless, the analysis shows that the EU will remain dependent on NATO and the United States for nuclear deterrence and certain highend strategic capabilities, notably strategic ISR and advanced air power systems.

Keywords: defence acquisitions; European defence; strategic autonomy; defence industry; PESCO;

INTRODUCTION

Following 2022, the European security architecture encountered structural pressures, resulting in stock shortages, industrial fragmentation, and logistical disruptions becoming practical operational challenges rather than mere subjects for analysis. Concurrently, the United States' strategy for 2026 emphasises that Europe must markedly enhance its conventional defence capabilities and demonstrate the capacity to sustain the initial stages of a major conflict within its regional sphere. This context has prompted the European Union to shift from primarily declarative actions toward the adoption of instruments with financial, legislative, and industrial impact.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK: EU-NATO COMPLEMENTARITY AND CREDIBILITY CONDITIONS

From a doctrinal perspective, evaluating the credibility of European defence capacity involves assessing its ability to generate mass and resilience, integrate forces within a command-and-control infrastructure, and maintain industrial capability to sustain operations during prolonged conflict. Achieving strength and resilience necessitates stockpiling, repair, and rotation measures, which have been addressed through initiatives such as *military mobility under PESCO*, designed to facilitate the swift movement of personnel and equipment across EU member states. While Eastern European support requirements and solutions in Central and Western Europe have been identified, impediments remain, notably the absence of adequate infrastructure and harmonised regulations critical for rapid transport and integration into defensive structures. The European Union lacks an inherent assessment mechanism, relying instead on the *Strategic Plans of the North Atlantic Alliance* to inform efforts focused on enhancing *operational resilience*.

From a doctrinal perspective, evaluating the credibility of European defence capacity involves assessing its ability to generate mass and resilience, integrate forces within a command-and-control infrastructure, and maintain industrial capability to sustain operations during prolonged conflict.



Progress on integrating forces into a cohesive command-and-control architecture is underway through specific PESCO projects aimed at improving interoperability and connectivity. These initiatives seek to align national resources and European Battle Groups (EUBGs) in a manner distinct from, yet complementary to, NATO's existing command structure.

It is important to recognise that the term *resilience* may be misapplied in certain critical scenarios, where alternative strategies could prove more effective. To accurately determine the actual state of defence readiness, a comprehensive, objective audit utilizing real-time data and advanced war-gaming applications is essential – rather than depending on reports provided by individual states. Such a rigorous approach would enable the development of authentic and sustainable defence capabilities, as opposed to perpetuating hypothetical and inadequate ones.

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The Trump Administration's stance regarding the EU has prompted consideration of a more assertive strategy to develop an independent command structure for the EU, separate from NATO. While the US National Defense Strategy (US NDS 2026) supports the enhancement of the EU's conventional defence capabilities, including nuclear deterrence and specialized support in communications and intelligence, greater European participation in NATO's command structure would entail increased appointments of European officers in positions traditionally held by American personnel. Since most commands – aside from the land and sea components – are located within EU territory, creating additional command structures may be unnecessary. Replicating SHAPE and the two Joint Commands in Naples and Brunssum could be strategically unsound, as these entities play a crucial role in coordinating Europe's defence and are not easily duplicated.

Since 2024, the issue of industrial capacity to support ammunition and weapons consumption, as well as to sustain prolonged conflict, has been significantly addressed. This follows recognition of the vulnerabilities arising from the defence industry's limited ability to maintain military operations over medium and long-term periods. The introduction of the European Ammunition Joint Procurement Programme (ASAP and EDIRPA) highlights ongoing initiatives aimed

at increasing production capacity and adapting to contemporary technological requirements. The EU's *Strategic Compass* sets an objective for strengthening security and defence policy by 2030, with the intention to develop a shared strategic culture and enhanced capabilities that reinforce both the EU and its contribution to NATO, rather than replacing the Alliance. It is evident that revisions will be necessary following the release of the US National Security Strategy 2025 and National Defence Strategy 2026, though these documents have not yet been made public.

Simultaneously, the *NATO Strategic Concept 2022* reiterates the Alliance's commitment to collective defence and emphasises the importance of strengthening deterrence and defence postures (NATO, 2022). The integration of frameworks between the European Union – primarily focused on capability development and industry – and NATO – centred on planning, command, and deterrence – enables a practical division of responsibilities. Notably, the European Union's mechanisms are expected to produce measurable outcomes by 2030.

At the Ankara summit, it was anticipated that the Concept might be delineated further by assigning specific responsibilities to European actors, should the European Union be integrated into the Alliance's planning framework. Despite asserting that Europeans ought to take primary responsibility for the conventional defence of Europe, the current American administration refrains from supporting EU involvement, viewing the European Commission as a destabilizing influence in relations among European states.

The differences between the United States and the European Union stem largely from President Trump's reluctance toward EU institutions, particularly the European Commission, which threatens both the stability and continuity of NATO. This stance limits the Commission's participation in security and defence discussions, even though the Commission oversees the Common Defence and Security Policy. As a result, European NATO and EU members face the challenge of addressing their own defence across various forums and under differing circumstances. The principal vulnerability lies with Eastern European states, which are most susceptible to potential threats from the Russian Federation.



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Since its inception in 2017, PESCO has initiated 75 collaborative defence projects. In 2025, the Council of the EU launched the sixth wave of projects, targeting critical areas such as land and sea capabilities, sensors, connectivity, training, logistics, and emerging technologies like quantum technology and directed energy.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SO FAR: EU INSTRUMENTS ALREADY OPERATIONAL

PESCO: Structured Cooperation and Project Portfolio

PESCO serves as a mechanism to aggregate capability projects and facilitate cooperation among participating member states. Recognised as the *“backbone of military cooperation in the EU”*, PESCO was established to operationalise Article 42 (6) of the Treaty of Lisbon, which states, *“Member States whose military capabilities fulfil higher criteria and which have made more binding commitments to one another in this area with a view to the most demanding missions shall establish permanent structured cooperation within the Union framework”* (European Council, 2024). Although the maturity levels vary across initiatives, PESCO has developed a comprehensive portfolio of projects relevant to contemporary warfare, including military mobility, logistics, training, land and sea capabilities, connectivity, and emerging technologies.

Since its inception in 2017, PESCO has initiated 75 collaborative defence projects. In 2025, the Council of the EU launched the sixth wave of projects, targeting critical areas such as land and sea capabilities, sensors, connectivity, training, logistics, and emerging technologies like quantum technology and directed energy. In November 2024, defence ministers signed the *Letter of Intent* focusing on integrated air defence, electronic warfare, autonomous munitions, and next-generation warships (European Commission, 2024).

EDF: Financing Technological Development and Reducing Fragmentation

Regulation (EU) 2021/697 established the European Defence Fund (EDF) for the period 2021-2027, allocating a total budget of €8.8 billion to enhance competitiveness and innovation within the EU’s defence industrial base. The European Commission emphasises that EDF aims to reduce fragmentation, increase interoperability, and reinforces the EU’s role as a significant investor in defence research and development (European Council, 2021, European Commission, 2022).

In 2025, an EDF package exceeding one billion Euros was introduced for strategic technology projects. This fund supports joint research

and development efforts for advanced military technologies, interoperable projects, and fortifies the European defence industrial base.

ASAP and EDIRPA: Addressing Ammunition Shortages and Strengthening Joint Procurement

Regulation (EU) 2023/1525 (ASAP) is designed to rapidly augment industrial capacities for ammunition and missiles by implementing support mechanisms to expand production lines and alleviate supply chain bottlenecks. Additionally, Regulation (EU) 2023/2418 (EDIRPA) establishes an instrument to incentivize joint procurement focused on the urgent and critical needs of Member States (European Commission, 2022).

WHAT IS PLANNED AND APPROVED: READINESS 2030, EDIP, AND THE SIMPLIFICATION OMNIBUS

White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030 and the ReArm Europe Plan

The *White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030* outlines strategic pathways to enhance defence readiness and mobilize investments in order to achieve defined objectives by 2030. This initiative incorporates a “surge investment” approach, with the EEAS estimating that the proposed measures could potentially unlock up to €800 billion in the coming years, thereby expediting the fortification of European defence capabilities. The plan’s core strategic priorities include strengthening the European defence industry, facilitating joint procurement, increasing interoperability, and improving pan-European military mobility by 2027. Emphasis is placed on the production of ammunition, air defence systems, drones, and digital infrastructure (European External Action Service, 2025).

EDIP: Transitioning from Emergency Measures to a Permanent Industrial Programme

The introduction of the EDIP signifies a move from temporary instruments (such as ASAP and EDIRPA) toward a stable framework for the availability and supply of defence products. Regulation (EU)



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Regulation (EU) 2025/2643 establishes the European Defence Industry Programme, providing a comprehensive set of measures to ensure timely product availability, reinforce the industrial base, and promote cooperative initiatives, including support for Ukraine.



On 17 June 2025, the Commission introduced a simplification package designed to accelerate defence investments, emphasizing the need for harmonisation and reduction of administrative burdens to enable delivery “at scale and speed”.

2025/2643 establishes the European Defence Industry Programme, providing a comprehensive set of measures to ensure timely product availability, reinforce the industrial base, and promote cooperative initiatives, including support for Ukraine. Both the European Parliament and the Council have articulated clear objectives: reinforcing industry, advancing joint procurement, and increasing overall production capacity (EU Council, EU Parliament, 2025).

Currently, Romania has yet to develop an adequate policy that would enable the inclusion of its domestic industrial capacities within this European plan. Through legislative action – preferably through law, although an Emergency Ordinance may be suitable under current circumstances – the Romanian government could extend benefits to European or American companies investing in production facilities eligible for integration into this European initiative. Prioritizing the needs of the Romanian Armed Forces would allow for economically and operationally efficient solutions. Potential areas for new government-backed investments include equipment manufacturing and assembly, maintenance, production of complex products, ammunition and essential spare parts, access to sales markets, and integration into major Alliance logistics networks. While projects included in SAFE offer value, they do not sufficiently address the requirements.

Defence Readiness Omnibus: Facilitating Large-Scale Investment

On 17 June 2025, the Commission introduced a simplification package designed to accelerate defence investments, emphasizing the need for harmonisation and reduction of administrative burdens to enable delivery “at scale and speed”. The Communication and accompanying documents detail simplification measures that also apply to dual-use technologies, aiming to expedite project implementation and facilitate faster financing (European Commission, 2025).

Romania must act promptly to capitalise on these critical opportunities. Although rapid debureaucratisation is beneficial, there remains a risk of inefficient or potentially detrimental actions absent a thorough and realistic assessment of existing assets, requirements, and capabilities.

SAFE – Security Action for Europe

The European Commission has allocated investment funds to nineteen participating EU member states for equipment procurement, including air defence systems, artillery, and drones. Allocations are determined based on an initial assessment of urgency and potential requirements. SAFE is structured as a €150 billion financing mechanism, offering relatively low-interest, long-term loans for the acquisition of defence capabilities. The primary goal is to reinforce the European defence industry by promoting joint procurement efforts, which marks a significant step toward establishing Community-wide capacities with standardized equipment. Nations such as Romania, Poland, and France have signed investment agreements for this funding; Romania, specifically, has been allocated €16.7 billion.



SAFE also supports the modernisation of key infrastructure – such as motorways, railways, ports, and airports – to enable rapid deployment of military assets across the Union, thereby reducing transit times and strengthening logistical resilience during crises.

FEASIBILITY BY 2030: REALISTIC OBJECTIVES VERSUS UNLIKELY OUTCOMES

Realistic: Ammunition, Mobility, Inventory, and Joint Procurement

Areas with robust prospects for delivery by 2030 include those where the EU possesses budgetary and market influence: scaling up ammunition and missile production (ASAP), enhancing joint procurement initiatives (EDIRPA), advancing industrial consolidation (EDIP), and modernising dual-use infrastructure to support military mobility. Existing regulations in these domains provide stability and predictability for industry stakeholders (EU Regulation, 2021, 2023, 2025).

For ASAP, measures adopted in 2023 and 2024 focus on increasing production capacity, co-financing manufacturing facilities and test centres and supporting critical supply chains.

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At the Union level, there has not been a comprehensive Strategic Defence Review nor a periodic evaluation thereof; however, coordination occurs through the “*Coordination Annual Review on Defence (CARD)*”, which annually examines national capability plans



Continental-level air defence integration is likely to progress regionally (North, East, Black Sea), but achieving a fully integrated pan-European ballistic missile coverage is unlikely by 2030.

and identifies opportunities for Franco-European collaboration. It is important to note that aggregating individual national defence assets does not equate to a unified common defence capability, and equipment diversity does not accurately reflect overall readiness. Nonetheless, CARD plays a crucial role in identifying capability gaps and informing PESCO projects and other European defence initiatives.

The concentration of efforts and governmental support for projects financed through the SAFE instrument is not the sole focus of the Romanian state. Developing competitive and efficient industrial capacities should remain a government priority, irrespective of political affiliation. Divesting all state-owned enterprises that lack realistic prospects for recovery – by maximising the value of existing assets – should be prioritised over the next six months. The closure of non-viable companies will facilitate the development of new, modern capacities operating under market economy principles, equipped with advanced technological processes that are both energy-efficient and financially sustainable, and capable of competing internationally. Establishing access to foreign markets requires both sound policy measures and high-quality products.

Partially: Integrated Air Defence and European Command and Control

Continental-level air defence integration is likely to progress regionally (North, East, Black Sea), but achieving a fully integrated pan-European ballistic missile coverage is unlikely by 2030. Similarly, although consolidation of command and control at the EU level may advance in joint exercises and procedures, political factors – including consensus and sovereignty – limit the establishment of a unified European command chain during crises.

A more pragmatic approach could involve increased participation in the Rammstein Air Component Command, creating a dedicated ballistic missile defence system, establishing the European Strategic Airlift and Refueling Group (potentially utilizing Airbus aircraft), and developing a *European Surveillance and Early Warning Group* or partnering with existing NATO structures (in collaboration with the United Kingdom

and Norway). Further, integrating principal air forces into a Strike Air Force for specific missions using F-35, Rafale, and Eurofighter aircraft, and realising a *European Iron Dome* are feasible initiatives. The latter may be attainable by 2030 if the Strategic Air Defence Device (including Anti-drone capabilities) is implemented promptly, positioning equipment optimally, leveraging existing infrastructure, establishing multinational (potentially European) units, and operationalising each component. Full system operation would require integrated procedures and could benefit from NATO CAOCs' expertise.



Unlikely: Complete Strategic Autonomy and Substitution of Deterrence Shadows

Official documentation and statements from the Commissioner for Defence and Space indicate a pragmatic strategy: Europe must “*spend more, better, and European*”, while maintaining efforts that complement NATO. Achieving full strategic autonomy by 2030 is improbable without significant policy reforms and enhanced deterrence capabilities. Furthermore, NDS 2026 outlines that the United States will prioritise global objectives, beginning with safeguarding its own territory, the Western Hemisphere, and the Asia-Pacific region. Security in Europe will be promoted through the empowerment of allied nations, primarily supporting nuclear deterrence and advanced technological assets; however, this approach does not entail a complete replacement of US forces within NATO in Europe (US Department of War, 2026).

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Adopting a markedly anti-American stance would be detrimental in both the short and medium term, given substantial reliance on the United States that cannot be quickly substituted with equipment produced by French manufacturers. Nevertheless, it is imperative to accelerate the integration of European surveillance systems and missile technologies, as American production is insufficient to satisfy the demands of all current clients. Additionally, the disengagement signalled by the present American administration should prompt European states to pursue active collaboration within the Union.



Modernising or constructing competitive industries in countries like Romania requires commitment from European states with globally prominent companies and strategic clarity.

TWO-SPEED EUROPE: ACCELERATOR OR RISK OF FRAGMENTATION?

In defence, differentiation can serve as an accelerator when functionally defined – a core group of states embracing more ambitious goals (common stocks, joint procurement, interoperability, industrial integration) without being hindered by unanimity requirements. This model, already practiced via enhanced cooperation and voluntary joint procurement, could be formalised to avoid settling for minimum consensus and yield tangible outcomes by 2030.

The continued dependence on the industries of six leading states is evident; however, retaining concentrated industrial capacity while neglecting to modernize and integrate the industries of other European nations may foster dissatisfaction and mistrust. There exist considerable variances in budgetary priorities and approaches to defence policy, and these differences are not easily categorised by group. Thus, there is greater diversity in positions and perspectives, making alignment along two groups more ambitious than a five-tier grouping. Poland's shift from the Eastern European bloc and its acceptance into the Steel and Coal Community among founding states reflects recognition of its evolution as a state considered highly exposed to Russian threats. The development or reconstruction of most industries in these states has been supported by American initiatives, such as the Marshall Plan or more recent offsets, maintaining competitiveness through close ties with American industry.

Many countries in the second group possess modern and competitive industries comparable to those in the first group (Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic), yet they have historically been viewed as less significant (!) or challenging to include in decision-making circles. This dynamic carries a risk of pronounced negative response from these states.

Modernising or constructing competitive industries in countries like Romania requires commitment from European states with globally prominent companies and strategic clarity. Access to technology necessitates substantial investment, education, and coherent policies. At the community level, tools have been established to support existing industry and facilitate new infrastructure – especially for ammunition,

missiles, and drones. The urgency of these products requires decisive action, which will have lasting impacts. Efficient, modern, low-energy technology lines with high automation and adaptability to evolving market needs are essential for each listed product.

A principal risk arises from the perception of marginalization among states in the “outer circle”. To prevent fragmentation, transparent accession criteria for the core (including investment levels, industrial contributions, and operational readiness) should be employed, and projects kept open for gradual participation. NATO compatibility is preserved if the core aligns with Alliance planning, while the EU concentrates on industry, mobility, and procurement, avoiding duplication of NATO command structures.

A “sovereignist” inclination to distance the European Union from the United States and respond assertively to MAGA policies carries the risk of escalating tensions into confrontations that could have far-reaching effects not only politically, but also for European security and citizens’ well-being. Europe’s technological reliance on the US is evident: in today’s digital environment – including the UK, Norway, and Switzerland – Europe does not control any operating system, social networks are largely American or Chinese, and the online marketplace is dominated by giants from these countries. Cybersecurity solutions are predominantly sourced from American or Israeli providers, while hardware production relies extensively on Asia (China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, Singapore). Communications technology primarily originates from the USA, South Korea, China, or Taiwan, with some autonomy achieved through the Galileo satellite communications and navigation system. In the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Europe is still launching programs, remaining dependent on established American systems already dominant in the market. While European stakeholders emphasise AI regulation and ethical considerations, advances in the US and China enable these countries to prevent new entrants. Integrating European facilities into American AI development projects may help maintain a stable Trans-Atlantic relationship.

Peripheral states may choose to align with broader European initiatives centred around major European consortia, utilize technologies phased out by leading European nations to modernize



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In the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Europe is still launching programs, remaining dependent on established American systems already dominant in the market.



The conflict in Ukraine underscores the importance of securing resources, particularly energy, establishing backup systems, and optimizing domestic resource utilisation. Failure to harness and process local assets – such as minerals, energy sources, and agricultural products– results in dependencies that contribute to emigration of skilled workers and immigration of less-skilled personnel.

their own systems, or engage in strategic partnerships with non-EU states – including the USA, Canada, the United Kingdom, Norway, South Korea, Japan, Israel, Turkey, Taiwan, Australia, or New Zealand – while avoiding China to preserve relations with the US.

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Significant demographic shifts will have lasting impacts, producing social and cultural transformations. Exceeding critical thresholds required for integration leads to the formation of communities with diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, which may structurally alter populations across Europe.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR DEFENCE AND SPACE

The portfolio held by the Commissioner for Defence and Space, Andrius Kubilius, serves a coordinating function between Member States, the Commission, and the High Representative, with an emphasis on spending efficiency and prioritization of European products. The commissioner's mission letter highlights preparedness for *"the most extreme military contingencies"* and the Commission's official website emphasises the goal to spend *"more, better and European"* (European Commission, 2025).

The newly appointed commissioner established several key objectives, including securing the economic conditions necessary for the EU's armament through financial instruments; enhancing industrial capacity; and achieving a credible defence capability.

To address the first objective, the commissioner succeeded in securing financial mechanisms and obtaining consensus among member states to prioritize funding for arms production. An integrated plan for the European defence industry was formulated, encompassing capabilities across all member states. The framework for industrial cooperation and allocation of financial resources is now in place;

it is the responsibility of individual member states to manage these resources effectively, devise solutions to build and modernise their industries, leverage existing assets, and address shortfalls in national defence capacity.

The development of common defence capability centres on projects agreed under PESCO, complemented by national assets and the European Union Battle Groups (EUBG), which may be integrated as needed. Notably, the European Union has not conducted a Strategic Defence Review, having avoided the issue for years to prevent discord with the United States, which maintained that the EU did not require independent defence capabilities due to NATO's security guarantees. The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, took place at their request, reflecting concerns about threats from the Russian Federation and the perceived absence of sufficient protection from the EU.

The European Commissioner for Defence has suggested an urgent evaluation of those member states most vulnerable to potential aggression from Russia; however, this recommendation appears not to have been pursued further. From an analytical perspective, appointing an Eastern European official to this role presents certain challenges, particularly regarding limited experience in strategic defence at a broader scale. In contrast, the Union may benefit from leveraging the global perspectives and expertise of member states with extensive international engagement. A comparative review of the effectiveness of European foreign policy during the tenure of Lady Catherine Ashton as High Representative, relative to her successors, could offer valuable insights, all while acknowledging the contributions of Mrs. Federica Mogherini through a pragmatic lens. During this critical period for the future of the Union, it is noteworthy that both the High Representative and the European Commissioner for Defence are accomplished individuals, albeit representing nations with limited global influence.

The cautious approach to the primary subject – the establishment of Community or European Armed Forces – may be viewed as a prudent decision, given the divergent perspectives among certain states concerning the conflict in Ukraine. Neither the General Staff of the European Union nor its Director currently possesses the capacity



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to assume responsibility for Europe's conventional defence from SHAPE and SACEUR. The likelihood of this scenario materialising may increase should there be indications of a potential American withdrawal.

Exposed states should adopt a proactive stance, contributing viable solutions, realistic initiatives, and impactful measures to enhance their security. The continued US presence in Poland – affirmed by President Trump during the Polish president's visit – and increased German and British involvement in the Baltic States have reduced pressure on those countries to accelerate efforts in developing a European army. Romania and Bulgaria remain vulnerable to Russian aggression originating from the Black Sea, with Romania facing heightened risk due to the potential of direct contact with a hostile Ukraine, should Russia gain full control of the latter. The partial withdrawal of American forces from these states has conveyed a concerning signal, which has only been partly mitigated by France's commitment to sustaining its nation-frame state role and expanding the Romanian battle group to brigade level.

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS SHOULD AN EFFECTIVE EUROPEAN COMBAT CAPABILITY POSSESS BEYOND THEORETICAL PLANS AND EXERCISES?

At present, Europe's military structure comprises *national forces* that demonstrate heterogeneous and incompletely assessed operational and response capabilities. While these forces exist in sufficient numbers, they lack concrete operational effectiveness.

❖ Land Forces

- A robust framework should comprise 2-3 permanent multinational army corps, designed for rapid deployment with the capacity to execute missions within ten days.
- The positioning of heavy, mechanised, and armoured brigades in Eastern Europe is fundamental for effective deterrence against identified threats such as the Russian Federation and its allies.

Adequate reserves are crucial, including substantial artillery ammunition (notably 155 mm and GMLRS), spare parts, fuel sufficient

for over ninety days, blood supplies, food reserves, and resilient communications infrastructure. Lessons from ongoing conflicts indicate that sustainable resistance demands sufficient personnel, operational depth, and robust reserves.



❖ **Air Power** must achieve regional air superiority, advancing beyond routine air policing tasks.

- Core capabilities should encompass suppression and destruction of enemy air defences (SEAD/DEAD), comprehensive surveillance and reconnaissance (inclusive of Air ISR – AWACS, drones for intelligence, and systems for drone detection and neutralisation).
- A unified, interoperable European Air Command would enhance strategic coordination, replacing the current model of 27 separate national centres.
- Fighter jets – such as F-16, F-35, Rafale, Eurofighter, and Gripen – should be organised into operational groups according to performance and mission requirements. NATO planning could be enhanced through dedicated European strike air groups operating in complementarity with US support.

To comply with international agreements such as Montreux, riparian states may collaborate to assemble European naval groups under both national and EU flags.

❖ **Air and Missile Defence**

- Europe remains critically exposed in this domain; achieving full stratification is necessary to prevent concentrations of forces from becoming vulnerable targets.
- This requires continental sensor integration and an anti-ballistic missile system incorporating platforms like Patriot, Arrow, and SAMP/T NG, alongside MRAD, SHORAD, and V-SHORAD solutions.

Assuming expanded roles within C.C. Air Rammstein command, strengthening CAOC, and developing dual-use CAOC functions would support greater autonomy in European air and missile defence.

❖ **European Naval Forces**

Naval development should prioritise security needs in the Baltic and Black Seas, with growth towards the Mediterranean and North Sea.

To comply with international agreements such as Montreux, riparian states may collaborate to assemble European naval groups under both national and EU flags.



Enhanced communications, surveillance, and weapons systems on existing vessels, or joint procurement initiatives, can address current deficiencies.

❖ **Industrial Autonomy and Logistics (Key Element in NDS 2026)**

NDS 2026 highlights that industrial capability outweighs doctrinal considerations in modern conflict; Europe requires a proactive defence industry with multi-year contractual guarantees, standardised equipment, and fewer variants in major systems.

Presently, Europe fields 17 tank models compared to the United States' single variant; grouping capabilities and forming tactical subgroups by equipment type – such as “Abrams”, “Leopard” and “Leclerc” groups – would provide mission-specific operational flexibility.

Europe requires a proactive defence industry with multi-year contractual guarantees, standardised equipment, and fewer variants in major systems.

❖ **Strategic Logistics**

Logistics must sustain frontline operations and contribute to societal resilience.

Heavy military transport via air and rail must be rapidly deployable, enabled by a comprehensive network of highways and railways for swift movement and supply.

Secure logistics centres in Eastern regions (Poland, Romania, Baltics) for pre-positioning and distribution are urgently needed. At-risk states should develop advanced repair and intervention capacities, as well as engineering expertise for defensive land structures.

❖ **Command, Control, and Decision-Making**

Streamlining command protocols is essential to overcome Europe's traditional weaknesses. Utilising existing NATO commands under a clear authority transfer protocol could yield efficiencies.

Transfer of command to NATO solely upon Alliance involvement ensures alignment with Europe's defence mandates while respecting potential reservations among non-EU participants.

Procedures governing the timing, composition, and scale of military response should be standardised to enable unified action during crises. Avoidance of unanimous parliamentary approval across 27 nations is critical to prevent delays and mitigate risks.

❖ The Nuclear Dimension

Although often avoided in discussions, nuclear deterrence remains a necessary consideration as indicated within NDS 2026.

Current capabilities in France and the United Kingdom are insufficient for comprehensive deterrence against major threats, necessitating continued reliance on US nuclear assurance and advanced technologies in cyber defence, space, communications, and satellite operations.

Establishing a European Cyber Defence Command and enhancing anti-satellite capabilities represent realistic steps toward autonomous defence.

Safeguarding critical infrastructure at the EU level – including energy, transport, communications (submarine cables), financial systems, strategic communication, and counter-disinformation efforts – requires integrated national contributions and a cohesive strategy.

WHAT A EUROPEAN DEFENCE CAPABILITY WOULD MEAN FOR ROMANIA

From Romania's standpoint, the development of European defence capabilities would establish credible security guarantees. The deterrence of military threats originating from the Russian Federation and its potential allies cannot rely solely on national defence mechanisms. Given Romania's geographical proximity to the Black Sea – a region closely associated with potential threats – coordination of European defence activities could be managed at a Fleet (Division) command level, as previously announced by Romania. Additionally, this command structure (HUB) could facilitate multimodal transportation coordination.

Romania should consider initiating the establishment of at least two major European military bases to enable the pre-positioning of equipment and personnel training within operational environments. Logistics and transfer centres situated along the front lines would ensure preparedness and rapid response. Romania's defensive infrastructure ought to be integrated with Bulgaria's, as outlined in Strategic Defence Plans, to secure Europe's southern flank and address



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its unique requirements. As Romania is vulnerable and potentially a primary target in any conflict scenario, a permanent European rapid reaction capability within the country is essential to support readiness and effective deterrence.

Should Europe advance its independent defence capacity, Romania would transition from being considered peripheral to occupying a pivotal frontline position.

CONCLUSIONS

By 2030, the European Union can achieve robust conventional defence capabilities, encompassing industrial assets and mechanisms that foster resilience, rapid force generation, and sustainment. Key deliverables include ammunition production, joint procurement, industrial consolidation, and enhanced military mobility, all supported by established legal frameworks and budgetary provisions. Nonetheless, attaining full strategic autonomy remains improbable; nuclear deterrence and certain strategic assets are expected to continue under NATO and the transatlantic alliance. Embracing a two-speed Europe may expedite progress by 2030, provided it alleviates decision-making bottlenecks and bolsters standardisation through coordinated procurement (European External Action Service, 2025).

The formation of a comprehensive community defence capability – integrated with the North Atlantic Alliance – should be pursued via revision of Allied Planning after the EU defines its requirements, ensuring sufficient capacity to deter the Russian Federation.

The United States will remain committed to providing nuclear defence and advanced military technology, areas where European states currently lack sufficient manufacturing capacity. European nations are responsible for maintaining operational readiness and ensuring sustainability through the provision of ammunition, spare parts, and logistical support. Enhanced cooperation at the Community level can facilitate shared costs and collective security across Europe.

The formation of a comprehensive community defence capability – integrated with the North Atlantic Alliance – should be pursued via revision of Allied Planning after the EU defines its requirements, ensuring sufficient capacity to deter the Russian Federation.

Romania must conduct a thorough defence capability audit prioritising operational effectiveness, ideally with guidance from experienced partners. Addressing gaps and integrating support structures should be paramount, with requests grounded in strengthened bilateral agreements, treaties, and joint economic initiatives. Political parties in Romania should prioritise supporting Moldova's integration into the EU and developing a unified defence capability, recognising these objectives as essential to national security.



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ROMANIA 2025-2030: FROM STRATEGIC VISION TO ACTION – INTEGRATING THE NEW NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY INTO THE NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURE –

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.11

The article analyses the conceptual foundations of national security and defence strategies, discussing the distinction and overlaps between the national security strategy and the defence strategy. A brief history of Romania's post-1989 strategic documents is provided, highlighting the gradual transition from a predominantly military approach to security to an extended, multidimensional model focused on resilience, interinstitutional coordination and societal involvement. The paper then places these documents in an ever-changing international context, marked by geopolitical reconfigurations, hybrid conflicts and transnational threats, as well as the doctrinal adjustments of NATO and the EU. In this framework, the article examines the National Defence Strategy of Romania for the period 2025-2030, in a context marked by the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine, the intensification of global geopolitical competition and the proliferation of hybrid threats. The elements of continuity and novelty of the strategic document are identified, such as the explicit integration of societal resilience as a pillar of security, preparedness for multiple simultaneous crises, the correlation of national security with industrial development and technological innovation, as well as openness to public consultation and transparency. The conclusion of the article argues that, although formally called a defence strategy, the 2025-2030 Strategy goes beyond the strictly military framework and functions, in essence, as a national security strategy adapted to contemporary realities. This evolution reflects the need for an integrated approach to security, in which military deterrence, resilience and the capacity of society to manage complex crises become interdependent elements of Romania's national security in the period 2025-2030.

Keywords: national security strategy; national defence strategy; White Defence Paper; defence policy; Ukraine;



THE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CONTEXT AND REGIONAL PARTICULARITIES

The international security landscape in 2025 continues to be marked by heightened geopolitical rivalry, the erosion of multilateral norms, and a rise in hybrid threats that blur the line between war and peace. Great power competition continues to reshape global alliances and security priorities. Conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific reflect not only military tensions but also systemic disputes over political models, technology control, and economic influence. Climate-related instability, cyberwarfare, and disinformation further complicate crisis management and deterrence. Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, launched in February 2022, still represents the most significant violation of European security norms since the Second World War. Beyond its direct consequences, the war has triggered a geopolitical realignment: NATO has expanded, EU defence coordination has intensified, and Western states have imposed unprecedented economic sanctions on Russia. Ukraine's resistance, bolstered by Western military and financial aid, continues to be a defining test of the West's unity, credibility, and commitment to a rules-based international order.

Conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific reflect not only military tensions but also systemic disputes over political models, technology control, and economic influence.

The Trump administration's approach to security and defence has also had a profound impact on Europe since 2025, reshaping transatlantic relations and prompting European nations to reconsider their strategic posture. By urging NATO allies to significantly increase defence spending – advocating a target of up to 5 percent of GDP – the approach has sparked debates about burden-sharing and Alliance cohesion. Collectively, these developments are moving Europe towards a more independent defence posture, reshaping the balance within the transatlantic Alliance.



The Black Sea region has become a key arena of geopolitical competition. To complement allied measures in the region, regional cooperation efforts have intensified. For example, in 2024 a Romanian-Bulgarian-Turkish initiative – the MCM Black Sea Task Group – was established to counter drifting mines in the Black Sea resulting from the Russo-Ukrainian war.

In this global context, South-Eastern Europe remains a volatile but strategically vital region. It faces a convergence of internal and external security challenges: Russian hybrid operations along NATO's south-eastern flank, growing authoritarianism and democratic regression, economic vulnerabilities linked to foreign influence (especially from Russia and China), and underdeveloped cyber resilience. Large-scale protests in countries such as Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia reflect public discontent with corruption, democratic regression, and authoritarian tendencies. These internal pressures are compounded by economic dependencies on authoritarian regimes, particularly through investments from Russia and China, which undermine transparency and encourage corruption. Thus, the stability of the region appears to depend, to a large extent, on resolving internal governance crises and strengthening its integration into European and transatlantic security frameworks. As South-Eastern Europe navigates these complex security dynamics, the interplay between external pressures and internal reforms will be essential in shaping the region's stability and its role within the broader European and transatlantic security frameworks.

In the landscape described above, the Black Sea region has become a key arena of geopolitical competition. To complement allied measures in the region, regional cooperation efforts have intensified. For example, in 2024 a Romanian-Bulgarian-Turkish initiative – the MCM Black Sea Task Group¹ – was established to counter drifting mines in the Black Sea resulting from the Russo-Ukrainian war. From a European perspective, in May 2025 the European Union launched the *Strategic Approach to Security in the Black Sea* (Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, 2025), proposing initiatives such as a Black Sea Maritime Security Hub and integrating economic resilience and environmental protection. Together, these

¹ *Signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of the Black Sea Mine Countermeasures Task Group (Semnarea Memorandumului de Înțelegere privind constituirea grupului operativ pentru combaterea minelor marine în Marea Neagră)*, Ministry of National Defence of Romania, Bucharest, 11 January 2024, https://www.mapn.ro/cpresa/18251_semnarea-memorandumului-de-intelegere-privind-constituirea-grupului-operativ-pentru-combaterea-minelor-marine-in-marea-neagra, retrieved on 30 May 2025.

developments reflect a concerted effort by NATO, the EU and regional actors to counter Russian aggression, strengthen security and stabilise a region essential to broader European and transatlantic security interests.

In the turmoil generated by the dynamics of geopolitical developments, the importance of a political vision becomes all the more essential. Its reflection in clear national strategic documents becomes a fundamental instrument of coherence, orientation and legitimacy for state action. Strategic documents do not only identify risks and threats; they also translate major political options choices into a predictable framework for action, capable of guiding institutional decisions over the medium and long term. In the absence of such an articulated vision, the state's reactions risk remaining fragmented, reactive and insufficiently aligned with national objectives and international commitments.

In this sense, national strategies function as a link between the international security environment, domestic constraints and the political aspirations of the state, providing a common point of reference for decision-makers, institutions and society. They provide not only strategic direction, but also a framework for public accountability, in which priorities, resources and instruments of action are transparently articulated. Thus, in a context marked by uncertainty, strategic competition and overlapping crises, a state's capacity to coherently formulate and update its strategic vision becomes an essential indicator of its political and institutional maturity.

NATIONAL DEFENCE STRATEGY OR NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY?

In a state context, the terms *National Security Strategy* (NSS) and *National Defence Strategy* (NDS) are often used interchangeably. However, the two types of documents serve distinct purposes and play different roles in shaping a state's approach to protecting its interests. Understanding the difference between these two strategic documents is essential to understanding how nations assess threats and organise their resources to counter them.



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The National Security Strategy usually addresses geopolitical and domestic threats, vulnerabilities, international partnerships and membership in international organisations, strategic priorities and global position, economic and energy security etc., with objectives such as: prevention of hybrid and non-military threats; protection of critical infrastructure; combating terrorism, organised crime, illegal migration; energy, food, health security; societal resilience.

Thus, the NSS is a broad, comprehensive policy document that outlines a nation's core interests, perceived threats, and the overall strategic approach to maintaining national security, encompassing all dimensions of national power – military, diplomatic, economic, informational, and, more recently, national resilience. Its purpose is to define what *national security* means to a given country and to provide a unified vision of how the various elements of government and society will contribute to protecting it. The *National Security Strategy* usually addresses geopolitical and domestic threats, vulnerabilities, international partnerships and membership in international organisations, strategic priorities and global position, economic and energy security etc., with objectives such as: prevention of hybrid and non-military threats; protection of critical infrastructure; combating terrorism, organised crime, illegal migration; energy, food, health security; societal resilience.

In this case, the document represents the vision of the President of the state, and the audience is the general public, including decision-makers, legislators, citizens and, sometimes, even adversaries, to signal the strategic intent and position. Being developed at a high level and being conceptual, the document is often written in broad strategic language, setting long-term objectives and providing a national vision for security across multiple domains.

In turn, the NDS is derived from the NSS, focusing specifically on the political-military aspect of national security, providing guidance on how the armed forces should prepare to support broader national security objectives. The document typically includes: military threat assessments; force structure and modernisation plans; training and readiness priorities; doctrinal and operational concepts; strategic deterrence and combat capabilities. Developed by the national defence establishment, its primary audience consists of the military leadership, defence planners, and relevant government stakeholders responsible for defence policy and budgeting. More operationally and specifically, the NDS translates the strategic objectives of the NSS into concrete military objectives, including specific capabilities and the alignment of military resources with strategic threats.



A key aspect in comparing the two documents is that they must be complementary, given that a solid national security architecture requires coherence and alignment between both strategies. If the NSS outlines what the state aims to protect and why, the NDS explains the ways in which the armed forces will contribute to achieving the objectives.

A relevant example is provided by the strategic documents of the United States of America. In 2022, the US National Security Strategy² focused on integrated deterrence, alliances, climate change and economic resilience, while the US National Defense Strategy³ prioritised deterring China and Russia, promoting force modernisation and jointly addressing global security challenges – as direct military responses to the threats identified in the National Security Strategy.

In other states, the names of these two programmatic documents vary, but their purpose and structure correspond to those of the NSS and NDS. Thus, the United Kingdom has both a national security strategy and a Defence Command Paper, and a strategic defence review; while Germany, Canada and Australia have national security strategies and defence white papers.

Thus, although both the national security strategy and the national defence strategy aim to protect a nation's interests, they differ in scope, focus, and audience. The NSS provides a broad vision of national priorities and the strategic environment, while the NDS is limited to how military power will be organised and used to support that vision. Understanding both is essential for anyone interested in defence policy, international relations, or national governance.

A key role in the development of either document is played by the field of defence policy. *“Strategy deals with the difficult problems of national policy, the areas where political, economic, psychological, and military factors overlap. There is no such thing as purely military*

Although both the national security strategy and the national defence strategy aim to protect a nation's interests, they differ in scope, focus, and audience. The NSS provides a broad vision of national priorities and the strategic environment, while the NDS is limited to how military power will be organised and used to support that vision.

² National Security Strategy of the United States of America, October 2022, White House, Washington, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>, retrieved on 30 May 2025.

³ National Defense Strategy of the United States of America, October 2022, Defense Department, Washington, <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.pdf>, retrieved on 30 May 2025.



Romania officially has a National Defence Strategy that also functions as a National Security Strategy, issued approximately every five years, beginning in 2001. By 2025, six such strategies had been adopted, reflecting the evolution of the geopolitical context, security threats and Romania's position within international alliances.

advice when it comes to issues of strategy” (Baylis, Wirtz, Gray, 2016, p. 3). The renowned political scientist Henry Kissinger, who held senior positions in successive US administrations, believed that “the separation of strategy and policy can only be achieved to the detriment of both” (Kissinger, 1957, p. 422).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ROMANIA'S SECURITY AND DEFENCE STRATEGIES

Romania began developing national security and defence strategies after 1989, following the transition from the communist regime to a democratic system and its gradual integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. These strategies became important official documents adopted at the highest level of the state, especially after Romania's accession to NATO (2004) and the European Union (2007).

Romania officially has a National Defence Strategy that also functions as a National Security Strategy, issued approximately every five years, beginning in 2001. By 2025, six such strategies had been adopted, reflecting the evolution of the geopolitical context, security threats and Romania's position within international alliances: 2001⁴ – National Security Strategy, the first strategy following Romania's accession to NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), in a context of military reform and preparation for NATO membership (during the presidency of Ion Iliescu); 2006⁵ – National Security Strategy, the first adopted after Romania's accession to NATO (2004), focused on the modernisation of the Armed Forces (during the presidency of Traian Băsescu); 2010⁶ – National Defence Strategy, developed during the global economic crisis, with an emphasis on asymmetric threats (during the presidency

⁴ *Romania's National Security Strategy (Strategia de Securitate Națională a României) “Guaranteeing Democracy and Fundamental Freedoms, Sustainable Economic and Social Development, NATO Accession and European Union Integration*, Bucharest, 2001, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/59479>, retrieved on 31 May 2025.

⁵ *Romania's National Security Strategy (Strategia de Securitate Națională a României) “European Romania, Euro-Atlantic Romania: For a Better Life in a Democratic, Safer and More Prosperous Country”*, Bucharest, 2007, <https://www.juridice.ro/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/SSNR1.pdf>, retrieved on 31 May 2025.

⁶ *National Defence Strategy (Strategia Națională de Apărare) “For a Romania that Guarantees the Security and Prosperity of Future Generations”*, Bucharest, 2010, https://www.cdep.ro/caseta/2010/08/31/hp100622_CSAT.pdf, retrieved on 31 May 2025.



of Traian Băsescu); 2015⁷ – National Defence Strategy (during the presidency of Klaus Iohannis); 2020⁸ – National Defence Strategy (during the presidency of Klaus Iohannis); 2025⁹ – National Defence Strategy of the Country.

The provisions governing the National Defence Strategy are set out in Defence Planning Law no. 203/2015, which defines the purpose of the document, its content and the procedure for its approval at national level. Thus, the NDS *“is the fundamental document underlying defence planning at national level. Within no more than six months from taking the oath of office, the President of Romania shall submit the National Defence Strategy to Parliament, where it shall be debated and approved by decision in a joint sitting of the two Chambers”*¹⁰. It includes *“the national security values, interests and objectives; the assessment of the international security environment; the identified potential risks, threats and vulnerabilities; the strategic objectives and priorities in the field of defence; the courses of action and the main means of ensuring Romania’s national security in the field of defence”*.

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Table 1: Evolution of Romania’s national security/defence strategies

2001-2005	International context: growing role of NATO; the terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001, which led to a change in the approach to the concept of national security for several states, but especially for the USA; preparation for accession to NATO and the EU of some European states
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⁷ Romania’s National Defence Strategy (Strategia Națională de Apărare a Țării) “A Strong Romania in Europe and the World”, Bucharest, 2015, https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/Strategia_Nationala_de_Aparare_a_Tarii_1.pdf, retrieved on 31 May 2025.

⁸ Romania’s National Defence Strategy (Strategia Națională de Apărare a Țării) “Together, for a Safe and Prosperous Romania in a World Marked by New Challenges”, Bucharest, 2020, https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/Documente/Strategia_Nationala_de_Aparare_a_Tarii_2020_2024.pdf, retrieved on 31 May 2025.

⁹ Romania’s National Defence Strategy 2025-2030 (Strategia Națională de Apărare a Țării 2025-2030) “Independence and Solidarity – Romania’s Vision for a Changing World”, Bucharest, 2025, <https://www.presidency.ro/ro/media/csat/strategia-nationala-de-aparare-a-tarii-pentru-perioada-2025-2030>, retrieved on 4 December 2025.

¹⁰ Law on Defence Planning No. 203 of 16 July 2015, Romanian Parliament, published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, No. 555 of 27 July 2015, <https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocumentAfis/170048>, retrieved on 2 June 2025.



	Domestic context: NATO accession Risks and threats to national security: classic (regional conflicts, terrorism) and predominantly of a non-military nature (possible regional negative developments in the field of democratisation; proliferation of transnational organised crime; incitement to extremism, intolerance, separatism or xenophobia) Vulnerabilities: of an economic, financial and social nature; corruption; poor management of public resources Strategic orientation: traditional defence, accompanied by military reform
2006-2010	International context: accelerating globalisation and regional integration processes; high-intensity military engagements by the US and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan; Russia's withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (2008); Russia's war against Georgia (2008); the 2008 global economic crisis; nuclear proliferation (Iran); recognition of non-traditional threats (energy security, pandemics etc.) Domestic context: EU accession Risks and threats to national security: regional conflicts; gas crisis (Russia-Ukraine); predominantly extremist-religious terrorism; proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; transnational organised crime Vulnerabilities: inefficient governance; increasing social differences; fragility of civic spirit and civic solidarity; underdeveloped infrastructure; difficulties in adapting the education system to the demands of society; insufficient involvement of civil society in debating and addressing security issues

	Strategic orientation: building Romania's new European and Euro-Atlantic identity; transformation of institutions with national security responsibilities
2010-2014	International context: the rise of ISIS; post-9/11 strategic fatigue (the transition from ISAF to Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan); the Arab Spring (2010-2012); Russia's renewed assertiveness through the illegal annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula (2014); China's growing assertiveness in the South and East China Seas; the first signs of the transition towards multipolarity Domestic context: strengthening the bilateral relationship with the USA; economic crisis Risks and threats to national security: hybrid and cyber threats; weapons proliferation; state fragility and civil conflicts (Syria, Libya, African countries); post-2008 economic instability; the persistence of a high level of instability in the Black Sea region; drug trafficking Vulnerabilities: excessive politicisation of state institutions; reduced administrative capacity; corruption Strategic orientation: focused on defence against conventional threats, while simultaneously opening towards emerging risks; targeted institutional reform
2015-2019	International context: the return of great-power competition; consolidation of hybrid warfare (foreign interference in electoral processes, disinformation, fake news, the use of proxies and economic coercion); the erosion of multilateralism; challenges to NATO and EU unity; climate change Domestic context: government instability; civil protests



	Risks and threats to national security: the persistence of frozen conflicts in South-Eastern Europe; hybrid and cyber threats; the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic Vulnerabilities: limited capacity to absorb European funds; underdeveloped infrastructure; vulnerabilities in the justice and education systems; corruption Strategic orientation: systemic and interinstitutional reform; international cooperation; citizen participation regarded as essential (societal resilience)
2020-2024	International context: the convergence of global crises; the acceleration of great-power competition; the expansion of hybrid threats across almost all areas; the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022); the return of large-scale war to Europe (following the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine in 2022) Domestic context: the public health crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic; political polarisation; modernisation initiatives and adaptation to new European and global realities Risks and threats to national security: Russia's military build-up; the economic crisis generated by the health crisis; pandemics; the stagnation of EU enlargement; volatility in the Western Balkans; hybrid threats; cyber attacks Vulnerabilities: political fragmentation; lack of interinstitutional coordination during the pandemic; underdeveloped infrastructure; low level of security culture



	Strategic orientation: paradigm shift – transition to the concept of comprehensive security (multidimensional approach: military, economic, health, energy, cyber, educational and environmental dimensions); the triad of Romania’s membership in NATO, membership in the EU and the Strategic Partnership with the USA; societal resilience
2025-2030	International context: the continuation of Russian Federation’s war of aggression against Ukraine, redefining the European security architecture and NATO’s deterrence posture; the strengthening of global strategic competition (USA-China-Russia), the acceleration of the transition towards a fragmented international order; the increased pressure on transatlantic unity, intensifying debates on European strategic autonomy; the expansion and sophistication of hybrid threats (cyber, informational, economic, energy-related); the increasing importance of the Black Sea as a space of geopolitical, military and economic competition Domestic context: political polarisation and declining public trust in state institutions; the need to accelerate the modernisation of critical infrastructure, including dual-use infrastructure (civilian and military); budgetary pressures and the need for multiannual predictability in defence; the increasing relevance of the national defence industry and public-private cooperation; the gradual recognition of the importance of societal resilience and security culture



In November 2025, the Supreme Council of National Defence approved, and the Romanian Parliament subsequently adopted in a joint sitting, the National Defence Strategy for the 2025-2030 period. It is the first strategic document of this level to undergo a public consultation process and to incorporate observations from civil society and relevant institutions.

	Risks and threats to national security: the direct or indirect military threat posed by the Russian Federation; hybrid warfare: disinformation, foreign interference in democratic processes and cyber attacks; the vulnerability of critical infrastructure (energy, transport, communications and healthcare); regional instability in the extended neighbourhood (Ukraine, the Western Balkans, the Middle East); systemic crises (energy, climate, health, economic) Vulnerabilities: fragmentation and institutional overlap within the national defence and security system; limited administrative capacity to manage complex crises; low levels of media literacy and security culture among the population; social polarisation and weakening of internal cohesion Strategic orientation: consolidated defence and credible deterrence within NATO, with emphasis on the Eastern Flank; an integrated approach to security, which goes beyond the military dimension to include societal, economic and informational resilience; increased defence investment and the development of the national defence industry as a strategic security asset; solidarity independence: strengthening national capabilities while deepening Euro-Atlantic cooperation; modernisation of the national defence and security system through digitalisation, interinstitutional coordination and multiannual planning.
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and relevant institutions. The strategy is built around the concept of solidarity independence – a formulation that combines Romania’s decision-making autonomy with close cooperation within NATO and the European Union, while further strengthening the Strategic Partnership with the United States. The 2025-2030 Strategy reaffirms and expands the list of threats: Russia’s aggression and the potential for a large-scale conflict along Romania’s eastern borders, hybrid and cyber attacks, institutional vulnerabilities, information manipulation and risks to critical infrastructure – including energy and telecommunications in the Black Sea region.

A first distinguishing feature of the National Defence Strategy 2025-2030 is the explicit integration of societal resilience as a central pillar of national security. While previous strategic documents treated resilience rather as a subsidiary objective or as a result of sectoral policies, the new Strategy places it at the very core of the national security architecture. Security is no longer defined exclusively by the state’s capacity to deter or repel external aggression, but also by society’s capacity to absorb shocks, maintain the functioning of institutions and prevent hostile actors from exploiting internal vulnerabilities. This approach reflects the lessons learned from recent crises – pandemic, energy and information ones – which have demonstrated that social and institutional weaknesses can quickly evolve into security risks.

Closely linked to this paradigm shift, the Strategy places a clear emphasis on preparedness for managing multiple simultaneous crises, whether military or non-military in nature. Unlike previous approaches, which were predominantly sequential and sectoral, the document explicitly recognises the cumulative and interdependent nature of contemporary crises. A military conflict in Romania’s neighbourhood may coincide with cyber attacks against critical infrastructure, disinformation campaigns, economic pressures or energy and public health crises. Recognising this reality requires a shift in strategic thinking towards interinstitutional coordination, integrated planning and rapid response capabilities, instead of fragmented and reactive responses.



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The National Defence Strategy 2025-2030 marks a more pronounced openness to public consultation and transparency. The development process included, to a more visible extent, contributions from civil society and academia, and the document explicitly recognises the role of the citizen in strengthening national security.

Another important innovation is the explicit linkage between national security and industrial development, economic growth and technological innovation, especially in the defence sector. The Strategy goes beyond the traditional view of the defence industry as merely a supplier of military equipment and redefines it as a driver of strategic security, economic competitiveness and operational autonomy. Investments in industrial capacities, research and development and emerging technologies are presented not only as measures to modernise the armed forces, but also as instruments for reducing external dependencies and strengthening the state's economic resilience in a context where economic interdependencies itself can be used as a strategic weapon.

Last but not least, the National Defence Strategy 2025-2030 marks a more pronounced openness to public consultation and transparency. The development process included, to a more visible extent, contributions from civil society and academia, and the document explicitly recognises the role of the citizen in strengthening national security. This approach reflects the understanding that legitimacy, public trust and civic participation are essential components of national resilience and that security cannot be built exclusively from the top down, without the involvement of society as a whole.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD? DIRECTIONS OF ACTION FOR ROMANIA

In relation to the current security environment, the strategic directions adopted by Romania reflect the need for an integrated, adaptable approach aimed at strengthening national resilience. A first essential strategic direction is to counter hybrid and information threats, considered vulnerability multipliers in a society characterised by polarisation and low levels of trust in public institutions. Disinformation campaigns, cyber attacks against critical infrastructure can no longer be treated as peripheral risks, but as systemic threats to national security. Addressing them requires not only strengthening institutional capacities, but also the involvement of civil society,

academia and the media, as well as the development of a security culture and media literacy across society.

In parallel, strengthening the defence posture and deterrence on NATO's eastern flank remains a central pillar of Romania's security. The country's geostrategic position, in the proximity of a high-intensity conflict, requires maintaining a credible, interoperable and well-integrated military capability within allied structures. Increasing defence investments, modernising military capabilities and strengthening host nation support for allied forces deployed on national territory are indispensable elements for ensuring territorial security and reinforcing Romania's role as a regional security provider.

A third strategic direction aims to strengthen economic, energy and cyber resilience, at a time when interdependencies are increasingly becoming instruments of strategic pressure. Energy security, the protection of critical infrastructure and the development of cyber capabilities are treated as areas with a direct impact on the state's ability to function in crisis situations. In this regard, aligning security policies with economic and industrial ones becomes essential.

Last but not least, another strategic direction requires the modernisation of the national security system from both an institutional and a decision-making perspective. Fragmented responsibilities, institutional overlaps and insufficient digitalisation affect the ability to respond effectively to complex crises.

In a complementary vein, national security for the period 2025-2030 is inseparable from its social and civic dimension. Political polarisation, social fragmentation and a deficit in security culture reduce society's capacity to respond coherently to external and internal threats. Therefore, strengthening social cohesion, improving public communication of state institutions and investing in civic and media education should be regarded as strategic investments in national security rather than secondary policy measures. In addition to the directions already set out in the Strategy, this dimension could also include measures such as: reforming public communication of state institutions in order to enhance transparency and accountability,



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Strengthening the defence posture and deterrence on NATO's eastern flank remains a central pillar of Romania's security. The country's geostrategic position, in the proximity of a high-intensity conflict, requires maintaining a credible, interoperable and well-integrated military capability within allied structures.



Romania's NATO and EU membership requires a broader understanding of national security, aligned with allied and European priorities (the Green Deal, digital security, border protection etc.), while society itself is vulnerable to multiple types of crisis: cyber attacks (e.g. against hospitals and public institutions), public health crises (e.g. pandemics), large-scale disinformation and energy and climate-related challenges.

promoting social cohesion through local projects and state-civil society partnerships or developing a national programme for civic and media education in schools and local communities.

Given the multidimensional nature of the challenges that have already characterised the national environment for at least the past five years, as well as the content of the Strategy itself, it is obvious that the document follows the pattern of a national security strategy. Why? Because current threats are hybrid – they are no longer generated exclusively by a state's armed forces, but also originate in cyberspace, information manipulation, economic sabotage, energy coercion, forced migration and climate change. In addition, Romania's NATO and EU membership requires a broader understanding of national security, aligned with allied and European priorities (the Green Deal, digital security, border protection etc.), while society itself is vulnerable to multiple types of crisis: cyber attacks (e.g. against hospitals and public institutions), public health crises (e.g. pandemics), large-scale disinformation and energy and climate-related challenges.

Thus, in light of the comparisons presented above, the particularities of the current security environment and the need to adapt to the evolving strategic context, a national security strategy appears to be the option better suited to present-day realities. Additionally, the concept of a defence strategy could continue to be reflected through the existing Defence White Paper, which already possesses all the characteristics of such a programmatic document. In this regard, there is a need to further consolidate the field of defence policy, which will be of critical importance in the long term given the pace of geopolitical developments and the prospect of their increasing complexity. Looking ahead to the next strategic cycle, it may be useful for political decision-makers to ask themselves a fundamental question: “*Defence or national security strategy?*”, given that opting for the latter would require legislative amendments.

In conclusion, regardless of the type of strategic document adopted, Romania is facing a profound transformation of the security environment – a reality that must be fully acknowledged both

by the state and by society. Romania's security in the period 2025-2030 can no longer be ensured exclusively through military means, but also through democratic cohesion, information resilience and institutional adaptability. Romania should build on its geographical position as a regional pivot in the Black Sea while integrating a stronger economic and energy pillar into its strategic vision, in a context in which interdependencies are increasingly becoming strategic weapons. Domestically, special attention paid to countering polarisation and disinformation through security education and strategic communication can ensure the inclusive adaptation of society to current and emerging security challenges. Among the instruments for implementation should be effective sectoral public policies, a politically supported multiannual defence budget genuinely aligned with NATO requirements, consolidated international cooperation at both the bilateral and regional levels and a proactive role within NATO and the European Union.



Romania's security in the period 2025-2030 can no longer be ensured exclusively through military means, but also through democratic cohesion, information resilience and institutional adaptability. Romania should build on its geographical position as a regional pivot in the Black Sea while integrating a stronger economic and energy pillar into its strategic vision, in a context in which interdependencies are increasingly becoming strategic weapons.

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THE FUNDAMENTALS AND IMPACT OF THE TRUMP DOCTRINE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.12

The election of Donald Trump as president represents a shift in the US's global stance and has accelerated geopolitical competition and interactions between great and middle powers. Trump's isolationist orientations, combined with his view of ineffective international cooperation, are in contradiction to the American approach to world affairs over the past 70 years. President Trump's "vision" can be interpreted as a focus on domestic issues and a return to global leadership, approaches that are connected and mutually reinforcing. Exploring the variation in the Trump administration's security policies compared to previous administrations, it emerges that the correct label applied to the Trump doctrine is that of isolationism doctrinally propelled by conservative nationalism. The Monroe Doctrine – the guiding star of US diplomacy towards the Western Hemisphere – under the Trump administration is back in vogue and is being invoked to implement America's vital and fundamental national interests.

The research methods used, in order to highlight the essence, content, features, change, continuity, coherence and variations of the Trump 1.0 and Trump 2.0 security doctrines, as well as in relation to other major national security doctrines, starting with the first "George Washington's Farewell Address – 1796", are comparative research and case study.

Keywords: security doctrine; security strategy, competition; threats; interests;

INTRODUCTION

The US's centre of strategic interest or action has increasingly stabilized in the area of *competition between great powers* with peer rivals – in terms of economic, military and geopolitical dimensions – China and Russia, realizing that success in this competition depends, to a large extent, on preserving its economic and technological power. President Trump's National Security Strategies and subsequent documents – the National Defense Strategies, have created the foundation for this process, with reference mainly to the following dimensions: the general context of competition, national power and competitiveness, international position and influence, and the form and status of bilateral competitions (Mazarr, 2022, pp. 1-2). The great powers, part of the competition, creatively approach and try to capitalize on opportunities related to the inadequacies and risks of the existing order, to promote their own interests (Laqua, 2026, pp. 1-3).

The United States of America is going through a period in which the structure of international relations, which is largely based on international rules and norms, alliances, and the preeminence of American military power, is being challenged (Bishop, 2015, p. 1). In 1946, speaking at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivered his famous *"Iron Curtain"* speech, declaring the end of the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union and the beginning of the *Cold War*. Eighty years later, speaking on 22 January 2026 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney declared the end of the *"rules-based international order"* that had won the Cold War but lost the resulting peace. It is hard to recall a similar speech by any national leader in the past century (Kilian, 2026, pp. 1-3). Many analysts say that the edifice of the liberal world order is in danger of collapsing. Among the main events that have contributed to the deterioration of the pillars of this order, with geopolitical consequences, the following

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A country's national security policy is determined by many factors, including: external threats, geography, political culture, military capabilities, economic needs, elite opinion, popular opinion (in democracies), and the perceptions of leaders regarding the country's interests.

can be mentioned: the sending of Russian forces to South Ossetia, Georgia and its invasion in 2008, the 5-day war, associated with the *indifference and lack of reaction* of the West and the USA in favour of better relations with Moscow, in order to avoid future confrontations. The Russo-Georgian war established a *modus operandi* that Putin would use against Ukraine almost exactly six years later in 2014 and later in 2022, the real goal being to *restore Russian hegemony over the former Soviet republics* (Kagan, 2018, p. 1).

In terms of time, the Modern World System has existed for about 500 years, first emerging when certain European states developed the capacity for global options. Since 1494, the global political system has displayed a recurring or cyclical pattern, *5 full systemic cycles*, entered a *sixth* since the end of the Cold War, the late 1980s and early 1990s, being now in a period characterized by specific *transitional actions* towards the *seventh cycle* for the succession to world leadership. It is not possible to predict exactly when this transition will occur, whether it will be the result of a hegemonic war waged for succession to world leadership, and the resulting new hegemonic structure (which satisfies essential global needs, public goods for global governance, order, security, stability, innovation, trade) – as has happened in the past, or other events. Since 1914 the USA has been the *dominant world power*, the entity that dominates the *global political system*.

A country's national security policy is determined by many factors, including: external threats, geography, political culture, military capabilities, economic needs, elite opinion, popular opinion (in democracies), and the perceptions of leaders regarding the country's interests. The latter factor is frequently translated into what has been called a *national security or foreign policy "doctrine"*. A *national security doctrine* serves as a *guide* by which leaders conduct a country's foreign policy. Most effectively, *a national security doctrine is the organizing principle that helps statesmen identify and prioritize their country's geopolitical interests* (Sempa, 2004, p. 1). Given that *external factors* – rather than *internal* concerns – are the most decisive in selecting the *grand strategy* that established the *objectives and means* of security policy, in the post-1945 period, *four* major ideas have competed for dominance in the American grand strategy: *defensive realism, offensive realism, defensive liberalism, and offensive liberalism*. Whether the USA

pursues a *realist or liberal* foreign policy, and whether it does so *offensively or defensively*, this ideological competition has been mediated in the international system (by *two systemic factors*), namely by *variations in the global balance of power* and the *level of threats* faced by the USA. These various strategies are, in effect, *competing ideas* about how to best maximize the state's *national security*. While domestic politics and leaders' perceptions always play an important role in shaping the debate over strategy selection, *variations* in the international system play a key role (Miller, 2020, pp. 9-10).

There are long debates among foreign policy specialists, strategists and policymakers, which lead to the conclusion that we are in a "*multi-order*" world, rather than a *multipolar* world, a more unpredictable, fragmented and continuously diversifying world, generated by the complexity, significance and scale of recent changes. The concept of a "*multi-order*" world *adds theoretical space* to observe new actors of global significance, the new global structure of relations, and *changing power patterns* that are different from the international system that existed a century ago. Now the architecture of global ordering – fundamentally different and evolving – will be neither bipolar nor multipolar, but "*multi-order*" (Flockhart, 2026, pp. 1-2).

An analysis of the significant doctrines of the United States of America reveals that, while each was conceived and adopted by *US presidents in response to immediate foreign policy interests*, each doctrine also addressed certain *fundamental issues* for US national security that guided future presidents in achieving their overall policy objectives and directions. Moreover, each successive *national security doctrine* built on *the foundations* of the preceding doctrines, results in a *continuity* of policy that has served America better (Sempa, 2004, pp. 1-5). In the 250 years since the *Declaration of Independence* of the United States of America, on 4 July 1776, US national security doctrines have evolved from a reserved and detached armed neutrality expressed in George Washington's "*Washington's Farewell Address*" of 1796, to George W. Bush's national security doctrine, popularly called "*Preemption*" 2002, a doctrine that allows for *preventive and unilateral military action anywhere in the world*. Certain analysts, including Francis P. Sempa, believe that throughout its existence the USA has had several *major national security doctrines*, including: "*Washington's*



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The role of the USA in the world is undergoing a transformational phase with potentially historic consequences, affecting in some way the world order. These changes will significantly influence US policy, the alliance system, the economy, defence capabilities, and the rights and freedoms of citizens.

Farewell Address” 1796; *“Monroe Doctrine*” 1823; *“Manifest Destiny*” 1839-1898; *“Open Door*” 1898; *“Off-shore Balancer*” 1917-1945; *“Containment*” 1945-1980; *“Liberation*” 1953-1956; *“Preemption*” 2002; and *“America First*” 2017, 2025 (Sempa, 2004, pp. 1-9).

In recent times – as many analysts and observers suggest and perceive – after being generally constant for about 70 years, since the end of the Second World War in 1945, *the role of the USA in the world* is undergoing a *transformational phase* with potentially historic consequences, affecting in some way the world order. These changes will significantly influence US policy, the alliance system, the economy, defence capabilities, and the rights and freedoms of citizens. The role of the USA in the world since the end of the Second World War in 1945 has generally been outlined as a **global leader** (*superpower, global hegemon*) and *significant involvement in international affairs* with the following *key elements*: first, *the creation and defence of the liberal international order*; second, *the defence and promotion of freedom, democracy, and human rights*, while criticizing and resisting authoritarian and illiberal forms of government; and, a third element of the role was to *oppose the emergence of regional hegemons in Eurasia* or a world with spheres of influence (O’Rourke, 2019, pp. 1-3, 33). During the second half of the 20th century, American policy crystallized around *three basic objectives*: *preserving Western hegemony* during the Cold War over the region, considering the strategic importance for the defence of Europe had been recognized since the time of Napoleon; *ensuring inexpensive access to Middle Eastern oil*; and, *ensuring the security of the State of Israel*. In recent times, US policy has also assumed the *suppression of anti-American terrorism* as a fundamental objective (Curtis, 2001, p. 1).

The Trump Doctrine was strongly influenced by American *isolationism*. Charles Kupchan argues that the grand strategy of the United States of America has known *three distinct periods*. *The first* of them was more than a century long. It is the period from 1789 to 1898, a deeply *isolationist* one, in line with the strategic vision of the founding fathers of the United States of America. *The second* period, between 1898 and 1941, was one marked by episodes of *realism and idealism*. After the *attack on Pearl Harbor* in December 1941, the American grand strategy entered the era of *liberal internationalism*.



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An internationalism that was materialized in the *international institutions built after the Second World War* that constituted the foundation of *Pax Americana* (Dumitrescu, 2021, p. 244). In the foreign policy debate over the most effective way to defend and advance America's national security interests in the 21st century, *four general approaches* to the world can be mentioned: (1) *"retrenchment"*; (2) *maintaining the regional and global balance of power*; (3) *liberal internationalism*; and (4) *conservative internationalism*. *"Retrenchment"* – temporary, limited, or extended – (a strategic, often voluntary, *reduction* in global commitments, military presence, foreign aid, and spending to *avoid* the costs of managing an overly expanded international role, *transferring responsibilities* to allies, and *prioritizing* domestic needs) and *maintaining the regional and global balance of power* (using power only when necessary to correct a global imbalance of power that threatens core US interests) involve a more *restrained use of US power*, often criticizing *"excessive imperial expansion"* and favouring a more nuanced and multilateral approach to international disputes. Supporters of liberal internationalism tend to be more interventionist abroad, believing that American power should be used to promote democracy, freedom, and human rights (Sempa, 2014, pp. 1-15).

After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the American grand strategy entered the era of liberal internationalism. An internationalism that was materialized in the international institutions built after the Second World War that constituted the foundation of *Pax Americana*.

The confrontation of great powers in geopolitical competitions is a constant of the global political system. The analysis of historical cases and theoretical literature on great power rivalries *highlights the main characteristic areas of competition* – areas of confrontation for power and influence, goals, objectives – to the present day: *relative power* (economic and military); internal security; *status*, reputation and prestige; *resources*; *territorial claims*; values and ideology; and, the power to shape the *character of the system* and paradigm (norms, values, rules, institutions). Competitions, more often than not, are the result of conflicting interests and objectives of great powers – which locate the core or essence of the emerging competition. It includes the *struggle for leadership of the international system* and its institutions, rules, norms, processes and informal coalitions; the *orientation* towards certain *values* and the practical alignment based on *interests* of the main geopolitical actors; and *leadership* in key emerging technological areas (Mazarr, 2022, pp. 6, 7, 26). Threats and risks have a relevant



European powers, according to Monroe, were obligated to respect the Western Hemisphere as the exclusive sphere of interest of the United States of America, warning European nations that the USA would not tolerate further colonization or puppet monarchs.

influence on security doctrines. Among the greatest *global risks* that the world has been facing in recent times and increasingly undermine global stability can be mentioned: geopolitical risk, reflecting the impact of global instability, trade tensions and regulatory uncertainty; cybersecurity risk; raw material shortages and large-scale warfare. Supply chains are the backbone of any organization's ecosystem, they are global, interconnected and inherently complex. Persistent tensions and conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, and more recently, the US pressure on Greenland, Canada, Cuba, the capture of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela, together with US and Israeli actions against Iran have added further tension. This context could favour China for "*reunification*" with Taiwan (Sølvsten, 2025, p. 1). China is seeking to undermine existing international institutions, norms, and US global leadership, while simultaneously taking steps to assert its own authoritarian hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region and around the world. China continues its efforts to build an alternative world order in which it occupies a central position, supported by Russia, North Korea, Iran, and other largely authoritarian countries (Price, 2025, pp. 10, 19).

The Monroe Doctrine – the guiding star of American diplomacy – was presented in President James Monroe's Seventh Annual Message to Congress on 2 December 1823. *European powers, according to Monroe, were obligated to respect the Western Hemisphere as the exclusive sphere of interest of the United States of America*, warning European nations that the USA would not tolerate further colonization or puppet monarchs, and "*it soon became a watchword of US policy in the Western Hemisphere*". The Monroe Doctrine – *the best-known US policy toward the Western Hemisphere* – was invoked and used to justify American interventions in Latin America. (Milestone Documents, 2022, pp. 1-3). The doctrine's *three main concepts: separate spheres of influence* for America and Europe, *non-colonization, and non-intervention*; were designed to express a *clear break between the New World and the autocratic sphere of Europe*, the Old World (Office of the Historian, 2020, p. 1). President Ulysses S. Grant helped expand the *Monroe Doctrine* during his second term (1873-1877), by promoting *a policy of European non-intervention* and strengthening *US influence* in the Western Hemisphere, supporting the self-determination of the peoples of Latin America. President *Theodore Roosevelt* announced

the *Corollary* in response to a German-led naval attack on Venezuela in 1902-1903, immediately proclaiming the right of the United States of America to exercise an *“international police power”* in the Americas, *as elsewhere, to combat such “chronic lawlessness”* for flagrant cases of such misconduct, in the so-called *Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine*.

In the second half of the 20th century, the Monroe Doctrine was not invoked, but under the Trump administration, it is back in vogue (Barrett, 2026, pp. 5-7). President Donald J. Trump in the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (NSS 2025), in chapter II, point II.2. lists *America’s vital and fundamental national interests* in foreign policy, and for the implementation of the first interest, the application of the *“Trump Corollary”* is mentioned. The provisions of the *“Trump Corollary”* are as follows: 1) *ensuring that the Western Hemisphere remains reasonably stable* and sufficiently *well-governed* to prevent and deter mass migration to the United States of America; 2) *building a hemisphere whose governments cooperate* with the United States of America against *narco-terrorists, cartels, and other transnational criminal organizations*; 3) *denying competitors* from outside the hemisphere the ability to *position forces or other threatening capabilities* or to *possess or control strategically vital assets* in the Western Hemisphere, thereby supporting *critical supply chains*; and 4) *ensuring continued access to key strategic locations* (Trump, 2025, pp. 5-15).

“Si vis pacem, para bellum” is a Latin phrase that is associated with the 4th century, meaning *“If you want peace, prepare for war”*. The origin of the concept is even more distant, in the 2nd century, and the authorship belongs to the Roman emperor Hadrian, to whom the axiom is attributed, *“Peace through strength – or, failing that, peace by threat”*. US President George Washington capitalized on this concept: *“If we wish to secure peace, one of the most powerful instruments of our growing prosperity, it must be known that we are constantly prepared for war”*, he told Congress in 1793. The idea was echoed in President Theodore Roosevelt’s famous dictum: *“Speak softly, be cautious, and carry a big stick”*. Ronald Reagan, a presidential candidate in 1980, borrowed the idea directly from Hadrian when he pledged to achieve *“peace through strength”*, and later fulfilled that promise.



In 2017, President Donald Trump brought this ethos back to the White House, introducing it in his September 2020 speech to the UN General Assembly, stating that the United States of America is *“fulfilling its destiny as a peacemaker, but it is peace through strength”* (O’Brien, 2024, pp. 1-15).

TRUMP 1.0 – CONTENTS, CHARACTERISTICS, KEY ASPECTS, IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The global policy of the Trump 1.0 administration oscillates between the “America first” approach, focused on its own territory, and the “Make America Great Again” approach by restoring the US’s superpower status and leadership position in the world.

The interests and political, economic, and military influence of the USA and American popular culture still have a global footprint. The United States of America is still the *only full-fledged world power* in the international system, but the *influence* that status provides is *no longer as extensive* as it was immediately after the Cold War. The election has raised *questions* about: *rejection of multilateralism; involvement in the creation and interpretation of the rules* that govern the world’s political, economic, and military interactions; *pursuit of unilateral advantages* through fragmentary bilateral agreements; *retreat* from US preeminence and the creation of a geopolitical and geo-economic power vacuum; whether responsibility for maintaining the global political, economic, and military order *will be transferred* to the regional level; and whether *global military supremacy* guarantees dominance in the world’s regions and is equivalent to *political leadership* at global or regional level (Freeman, 2017, pp. 1-12).

After a century of American world order established by US President Woodrow Wilson at the end of the First World War – which all US presidents have followed in one way or another – we are facing a change in the global attitude of the USA. The global policy of the *Trump 1.0* administration oscillates between the *“America first”* approach, focused on its own territory, and the *“Make America Great Again”* approach by restoring the US’s superpower status and leadership position in the world. President *Trump’s “vision”* can be interpreted as a focus on domestic issues and a *return to global leadership*, approaches that *are connected and mutually supportive*, according to the theory that prioritizing domestic issues results in American prosperity and, implicitly, the US’s return to its historic status as a *superpower and global leader* (Israeli, 2019, pp. 4-20). President Trump’s

statements have triggered extensive debates on: 1. *the role of the USA*, namely whether it will continue to play the *active internationalist* role it has played for the last 70 years or adopt a *more limited role*, which would reduce US involvement in world affairs; 2. *how to harmonize the promotion of strictly defined American interests with the objective of defending and promoting American values* (democracy, freedom and human rights); 3. *achieving a balance between the use of so-called hard power* (primarily, but not exclusively, military combat power) and *soft power* (diplomacy, development assistance, support for international organizations, education and cultural exchanges, as well as the international popularity of elements of American culture) in *US foreign policy* (O'Rourke, 2019, p. 1).

Exploring the variation in the security policies of the Trump administration compared to previous administrations, which correctly captures the “essence” of the Trump doctrine, it results that the correct label applied to the Trump doctrine is that of *isolationism* (Dumitrescu, 2021, p. 241), doctrinally propelled by *conservative nationalism* (it is the oldest democratic tradition in US foreign relations). Nationalist populism is the most relevant trend of the recent period. *Conservative American nationalism* is the oldest existing political tradition in the USA. However, the accumulated frustration with US foreign policy in the 21st century, not only military, but also political and economic, has led to the reemergence of a distinct form of *right-wing American nationalism*, emphasizing the need for *burden-sharing with allies, defence of US sovereignty, and the advancement of American material interests*. *Conservative nationalism* is a form of civic *patriotism oriented toward democracy*: attachment to national territory, holding that the world is best governed by *independent nation-states*, and that only within the context of such states can a free population experience constitutional forms of self-government. In terms of foreign policy, conservative nationalists focus on preserving and promoting one's own country's interests, rights, values, security, traditions, and way of life, believing it is entirely legitimate to do so (Kupchan, 2019, pp. 1-15). We can say that the Trump doctrine also has accents of future-oriented realism, supported by the reality that the USA has entered a prolonged period of geopolitical competition with other major powers (Colin, 2019, pp. 1-5). *“Isolationism is a grand strategy*



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“Isolationism is a grand strategy that aims to lack alliances with foreign powers and avoid lasting strategic involvement beyond the North American space”.

that aims to lack alliances with foreign powers and avoid lasting strategic involvement beyond the North American space” (Dumitrescu, 2021, p. 245). Donald Trump’s victory in the presidential election reflects an unsurprising loss of domestic support for an *internationalist* foreign policy. In short, Trump represents the beginning of the *third era* in America’s journey toward isolationism – a turn toward *neo-isolationism*. But it is not the cause, but a symptom of underlying conditions. The United States of America is not the only country affected by this phenomenon (West, 2024, pp. 1-5). It is possible that Trump can also be interpreted as a realist because Trump’s policies, at times, respect the dictates of the balance of power and offer a goal to foster attachment, solidarity towards the nation and maintain America’s global hegemony. He supports the *state-centred assumption*, states are the most important actors, the assumption of the *unitary rational actor* – rational pursuit of *self-interest*, and promoting its *own values*, being the one who sets the agenda, forms rules of behaviour, changes images, acts to *hold a preponderance of power* in the system of international relations, uses power to promote its interests.

Realists agree that power *drives* international politics, but they disagree about *when and where* it should be exercised or controlled. There is no unified view of which international distribution of power best preserves peace and stability – *multipolarity* (favoured by most traditional realists), *bipolarity* (Kenneth Waltz and John J. Mearsheimer), or *unipolarity* (Geoffrey Blainey, Robert Gilpin, William Wohlforth). *Balance of power*: ideals or *interests* are what drive conflict; in a world without a world government, power is the ultimate arbiter of whose claim prevails; and, consequently, what forces should be developed and prepared in peacetime to *deter* adversaries (Taub, 2015, pp. 1-5). Historians who have assessed Trump’s “*America First*” vision, 20 January 2017 – a protectionist doctrine of national economic security – have stated that it is clearly both a *break with the past* and a *continuation* of it. Trump has boldly defied the norms of American foreign policy, expressing his hostility to international agreements and diplomacy in general. Trump’s *isolationist orientations*, combined with his view of *international cooperation as ineffective*, are at odds with the *American approach to world affairs* of the past 70 years (Murnane, 2017, pp. 2-7).



Like any security doctrine, the Trump doctrine is *a response* to an event, a context, a major change at a regional or global level and has a *theoretical and practical body* that includes: 1. the explicit or tacit definition of the *object to be secured*; 2. the *relevant external/internal context* (security environment) related to the object to be secured and its characterization (*definition, risks, vulnerabilities, identification of the enemy etc.*); 3. the *principles of action* – justified/explicit or not; and, 4. the *objectives* pursued through its implementation (Dungaciu, 2021, pp. 12-14). *Trump 1.0 Security Doctrine* changed the role of the US President. Trump's first term was marked by the "*America First*" foreign policy in action – a *strategic vision* to protect the American people and preserve the American way of life, promote prosperity, *defend peace through strength*, and develop American influence in the world. It promoted a balance of power that favoured the United States of America, its allies, and partners (Trump, 2017, p. 1) – the US network of alliances and partnerships remaining the backbone of global security (Pompeo, 2018, p. 1).

The "*America First*" security doctrine is consistent with American principles and interests adapted to the challenges it faces. It is a strategy of principled realism, guided by *results*, not *ideology*. The United States of America will respond to the growing political, economic, and military competitions it faces around the world. It considers that China and Russia are challenging American power, influence, and interests. It defines *four vital national interests*: 1. *defending the American people, homeland, and way of life*; 2. *promoting American prosperity*; 3. *maintaining peace through strength*; and, 4. *promoting American influence in the world*. The theoretical and practical body of the Security Doctrine explicitly details actions to fulfil *the four national interests*; each interest being considered a pillar of the doctrine. Priority activities are mentioned for each action (Trump, *ib.*, pp. 1-2). *Pillar I: Defending the American People, the Homeland, and the American Way of Life* is supported by the following actions: *securing US borders and territory*; defending against weapons of mass destruction; combating biological threats and pandemics; strengthening border control and immigration policy; pursuing threats at their source; defeating jihadist terrorists; disrupting transnational criminal organizations; keeping America safe in the cyber age; and, promoting American resilience.

The "America First" security doctrine is consistent with American principles and interests adapted to the challenges it faces. It is a strategy of principled realism, guided by results, not ideology.



Promoting American Prosperity – “Economic Security is National Security” is supported by the following actions: rejuvenate the domestic economy; promote free, fair, and reciprocal economic relations; lead in research, technology, invention, and innovation; promote and protect the US national security innovation base; and, embrace energy dominance.

(Ib., pp. 7-14). *Pillar II: Promoting American Prosperity – “Economic Security is National Security”* is supported by the following actions: rejuvenate the domestic economy; promote free, fair, and reciprocal economic relations; lead in research, technology, invention, and innovation; promote and protect the US national security innovation base; and, embrace energy dominance (Ib., pp. 17-22). *Pillar III: Defending Peace Through Strength* is supported by the following actions: renew America’s competitive advantages; renew capabilities: military, defence industrial base, nuclear forces, space, cyberspace, intelligence; diplomacy and effective statecraft: competitive diplomacy, tools of economic diplomacy, information statecraft. A key continuity in history is *the contest for power*. The current time period is no different. There are three main sets of *competitors*: the revisionist powers *China and Russia*; the states that threaten global stability, *Iran and North Korea*; and the *organizations* that pose *transnational threats*, especially jihadist terrorist groups. Although different in nature and scope, these rivals are engaged in a general competition in the *political, economic, and military* spheres, and they use technology and information to accelerate these *competitions* with the aim of shifting regional balances of power in their favour. These fundamentally political competitions are between those who favour *repressive systems* and those who favour *free society* (Ib., pp. 25-34). *Pillar IV: Promoting American Influence* is supported by the following actions: *encouraging aspiring partners; achieving better results in multilateral forums; and, defending American values* (Ib., pp. 37-41).

Strategy in a Regional Context: The United States of America will act to maintain the regional balance of power so that it does not shift to the detriment of its interests and to defend them anywhere in the world to maintain its security. Markets, raw materials, supply lines, and human capital are located in or are shifting their location, position or condition between key regions of the world: the Indo-Pacific; Europe; the Middle East; South and Central Asia; the Western Hemisphere and Africa (Ib., pp. 45-55).

Trump has avoided new wars and endless costly counterinsurgency operations, and his presidency was the first since Jimmy Carter in which the United States of America did not enter a new war or expand an existing conflict, but he did carry out a limited but effective

airstrike on Syria in 2017 in response to the use of chemical weapons against its own people by the Bashar al-Assad regime. Trump also ended a war with a rare US victory, destroying the Islamic State. In contrast to Carter's tenure, during Trump's tenure, US adversaries *have not exploited the US predilection for peace*. Under Trump, Russia did not continue its 2014 invasion of Ukraine, Iran did not directly attack Israel, and North Korea stopped testing nuclear weapons as a result of diplomatic actions combined with military deterrence. China maintained an aggressive posture during Trump's tenure, but its leadership has understood that it cannot cross certain red lines without unacceptable costs. *"America first is not America alone"* is a slogan often used by the Trump administration. Trump recognizes the effectiveness of alliances, coalitions, and partnerships for a successful foreign policy. Trump's foreign and trade policy can be understood as a reaction to the ineffectiveness of *neoliberal internationalism*, or *globalism*, as implemented or used from the early 1990s to 2017. It is possible that a second term for Trump would constitute a return to *realism with a Jacksonian flavour* (O'Brien, 2024, p. 1).

The 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS 2018) presents the *security environment and its features* that has influenced security doctrine. America has faced increased global disorder, characterized by the *decline* of the long-standing rules-based, free and open international order – creating a security environment more complex and volatile than any it has experienced in recent memory, *defined by*: 1. *overt challenges to the free international order* by adversaries seeking to shape it according to their authoritarian model; 2. *reemergence of long-term strategic competition among revisionist powers*. *Interstate strategic competition*, not terrorism, is *now the primary concern for US national security*. Other changes in the security environment include: a) *a resilient but weakened post-war international order*. Regimes such as those in North Korea and Iran – *"rogue regimes"* – are trying to destabilize regions, supported by revisionist powers using all dimensions of power; b) *challenges to US military advantage*; c) rapid *technological changes* and developments and regarding the nature of war; d) threats posed by *non-state actors* and the increasingly sophisticated capabilities they have access to; e) *national territory is no longer a sanctuary*; f) *"rogue regimes"* in authoritarian states



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Other changes in the security environment include: a resilient but weakened post-war international order; challenges to US military advantage; rapid technological changes and developments; threats posed by non-state actors and the increasingly sophisticated capabilities they have access to; national territory is no longer a sanctuary; "rogue regimes" in authoritarian states seek to develop weapons of mass destruction – nuclear, chemical and biological.



The international environment has rarely seemed so dangerous, and the need for a strong and resolute American foreign policy has never been greater.

seek to develop weapons of mass destruction – nuclear, chemical and biological. *Strategic Approach to NDS 2018*. A long-term strategic competition requires the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power – diplomacy, intelligence, economy, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, military and involves: 1. *developing a more lethal force*; 2. *strengthening alliances and attracting new partners, sustainable coalitions and long-term security partnerships*; 3. *reforming the Department of Defense* (Pompeo, 2018, pp. 1-4).

The Trump administration left a legacy of *economic nationalism*, *rejection of multilateralism*, and questioning of allies. The incoming administration will operate in a completely different context: *the definitive emergence of a multipolar world, the emergence of more powerful adversaries*, deepening domestic polarization, and withdrawal from many international organizations.

TRUMP 2.0 – CONTENTS, CHARACTERISTICS, KEY ASPECTS, IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The first signs of Trump's re-election as president suggested that he would prioritize a protectionist trade agenda, immigration, withdrawal from the agenda specific to multilateralism and involvement in resolving international conflicts, and American foreign policy would be increasingly nationalistic. Trump's second presidency marks a turning point: geopolitical considerations have become major determinants of international trade. In a world of global economic interdependence, acceptance of globalization as an irreversible dynamic, and transatlantic military alliances, Trump is determined to rewrite the rules of the game (Gomart, 2025, p. 28). Trump's second National Security Strategy (NSS 2025) represents a radical departure – both in substance and tone – from previous strategies – including NSS 2017. That document, along with its accompanying National Defense Strategy (NDS 2026), set a new course for US foreign policy, bringing to the forefront the concept of great power competition with China and Russia (Lissner, 2025, pp. 1-10).

The international environment has rarely seemed so dangerous, and the need for a strong and resolute American foreign policy has never been greater. *The possibility of a Third World War has never*

been greater. For this reason, a second term for Trump, built on the principle of “*peace through strength*”, will be welcome not only for American public opinion, but also for the free world at large. Trump’s former national security adviser, Robert O’Brien, presents *seven key principles* that will guide the new Trump administration: 1) there will be no argument and justification for *promoting American strength and national purpose* (the greatest sources of peace and stability around the world); 2) *rejection of the globalist agenda* that has had negative consequences for the USA – it has favoured China’s ambitions for global hegemony, immigration and has been to the benefit of the American establishment; 3) *China – the most dangerous threat to US interests* since the USSR. Trump will oppose China on everything from trade and Taiwan to revitalizing and expanding alliances in the Indo-Pacific region; 4) *returning to maximum pressure on Iran* to stop its support for *terrorist groups* in the Middle East (Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthi), limit its influence, and neutralize its nuclear program while supporting Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates; 5) a *dichotomous policy for Europe* to pressure Putin to end the war in Ukraine and strengthen NATO; 6) *rebuilding the US military*, including investing in high-tech weaponry and reforming government procurement; 7) *developing stronger ties with free-market democracies* around the world (Herman, 2024, pp. 1-7).

The long-awaited new National Security Strategy 2025 presents a vision that seeks to reconcile US global dominance but also includes some US *withdrawals* from some actions specific to America’s *global leadership role* for decades. The strategy’s single line – which at different times promotes and, at the same time, criticizes interventionism – promotes US ambitions. Trump’s new national security strategy, like the one from his first term, promotes the “*America first*” vision (Iyengar, 2024, pp. 1-3). NSS 2025, like NSS 2017, follows the general structure of a security doctrine. NSS 2025 together with NDS 2026 define the characteristics of a significant strategic effort, establish priorities, identify the most serious threats and allocate resources accordingly, correlating goals, ways and means in a realistic manner (Bowman, 2026, pp. 1-3). *The preamble to the National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, 25 November 2025 (NSS 2025), presents a balance sheet of *Admiration*, highlighting the emblematic achievements



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*NSS 2025
together with
NDS 2026
define the
characteristics
of a significant
strategic effort,
establish
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identify the most
serious threats
and allocate
resources
accordingly,
correlating
goals, ways
and means in a
realistic manner.*



of the “America First” vision. It calls the Strategy “a roadmap to ensure that America remains the greatest and most successful nation in human history and the home of freedom on earth” (Trump, 2025, pp. i-ii). The theoretical and practical body of the Trump 2.0 Security Doctrine has the following content:

I. Introduction – what is American strategy? I.1. How American “Strategy” Went Astray, explaining “what we are trying to do and why”. For the first time, the Strategy is defined “a strategy is a concrete, realistic plan that explains the essential connection between ends and means: it begins from an accurate assessment of what is desired and what tools are available, or can realistically be created, to achieve the desired outcomes” and the purpose is specified “The purpose of foreign policy is the protection of core national interests ...”. It makes a brief x-ray of the doctrines of his predecessors, highlighting certain weaknesses in contrast to the viability of his administration’s doctrine. I.2. President Trump’s Necessary, Welcome Correction. It stipulates that the United States of America will *continue* on the path of the *Trump Doctrine 1.0*, which is the *main goal of the second administration*. Finally, he names the *questions* that the current National Security Strategy must answer: 1) What should the United States of America want? 2) What are our available means to get it? and 3) How can we connect ends and means into a viable National Security Strategy? Each of these questions is the title of a chapter (Trump, 2025, pp. 1-3).

II. What should the United States of America want? II.1. What Do We Want Overall? Here, the following *needs* are listed for the promotion of *interests: survival and safety; protect* this country, its people, its territory; *control* over the borders; *resilient infrastructure*; creation of *the most powerful, lethal and technologically advanced armed forces* in the world; maintenance of *the most robust, credible and modern nuclear deterrent* and missile defence in the world; *economy* – the strongest, most dynamic, innovative and most advanced in the world; *industrial base* – the absolute priority of national economic policy; *energy sector* – robust, productive and innovative; maintenance of primacy in the field of *scientific and technological research*; maintenance of the primacy of “*soft power*”; and, *restoration and reinvigoration* of American spiritual and cultural health. *II.2. What Do We Want In and From the World?* Foreign policy is the focus

of the strategy, and the *Monroe Doctrine* is reaffirmed. America's *vital and fundamental national interests* in foreign policy are: *a) a stable, well-governed, cooperative Western Hemisphere free from hostile foreign incursions or seizure of key assets, and supporting critical supply chains and continued access to key strategic locations.* In conclusion, the *"Trump Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine will be affirmed and applied; b) halting and reversing the damage to the American economy; c) supporting allies in preserving the freedom and security of Europe; d) preventing an adversary from dominating the Middle East; and, e) ensuring that American technology and standards – particularly in the areas of artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and quantum computing – drive the world forward* (Trump, 2025, pp. 3-6).

III. What Are America's Available Means to Achieve What It Wants? America has the following *world-leading assets, resources, and advantages* at its disposal to *consolidate American power and preeminence: an agile political system; the world's largest and most innovative economy; the world's most important financial system and capital markets; the world's most advanced, innovative, and profitable technology sector; the world's most powerful and capable military; a broad network of alliances in key regions; an enviable geography; unparalleled "soft power" and cultural influence; and the courage, will, and patriotism of the American people* (Trump, 2025, pp. 6-8).

IV. Strategy. IV. 1. Principles. President Trump's foreign policy is *pragmatic* without being *"pragmatist"*, *realistic* without being *"realist"*, *principled* without being *"idealistic,"* *muscular* without being *"hawkish"* and *restrained* without being *"dovish"*. It is not anchored in *traditional political ideology. It is motivated* above all by what works for America – or, in two words, *"America First"*. *Stopping regional conflicts* before they escalate into global wars is a priority for this administration. President Trump has demonstrated, through evidence or argument, that *US foreign, defence, and intelligence policies* must be guided by the following *core principles*: focused definition of the national interest; peace through strength – strength is the best deterrent; predisposition to non-interventionism; flexible realism; the primacy of nations – the world's fundamental political unit is and will remain the nation-state; sovereignty and respect – the United States of America will unapologetically protect its own sovereignty; balance



The Strategy establishes the following priorities: the inalienable right of any country to develop and implement its own immigration policy; the protection of fundamental rights; the burden-sharing and burden-shifting of tasks and the distribution of responsibilities for collective defence; realignment through peace; economic security; reindustrialization, reviving of the defence industrial base, energy dominance, and preserving and growing America's financial sector dominance.

of power – the United States of America cannot allow any nation to become so dominant as to threaten its interests; pro-American workers; fairness; and, competence and merit. In subchapter IV.2. *Priorities, the Strategy* establishes the following *priorities*: the inalienable right of any country to develop and implement its own *immigration policy*; the protection of *fundamental rights and freedoms* that must never be violated; the *burden-sharing and burden-shifting* of tasks and the distribution of responsibilities for collective defence among allies in each region; realignment through peace; economic security – fundamental to national security, through: balanced trade, securing access to critical supply chains and materials; reindustrialization, reviving of the defence industrial base, energy dominance, and preserving and growing America's financial sector dominance (Ib., pp. 6-15). In subchapter IV.3. *Regions, the Strategy* selects regions that are relevant to *protecting America's fundamental national interests*. *The first region* that draws sustained US attention is "*The Western Hemisphere: The "Trump Corollary" to the Monroe Doctrine*", a common-sense and robust restoration of American power and priorities, consistent with American security interests. Objectives for the Western Hemisphere can be summarized as "*Enlist and Expand*". *Enlist* – by recruiting regional champions (aligned with American principles and strategy) that can contribute to *building tolerable stability in the region*; and *Expand* – *strengthening partnerships* with countries with which America currently has strong relations while *expanding the network in the region*. The United States of America must be *preeminent* in the Western Hemisphere as a condition of security and prosperity – a condition that allows it to *act confidently and firmly where and when need to in the region*. It describes the determination to ensure that the Western Hemisphere is not manipulated and dominated by China. The content of the "*Trump Corollary*" was presented in Chapter 1 (Ib., pp. 15-19). *The second region* presented is "*Asia: win the economic future, prevent military confrontation*", which highlights the inadequate approaches of previous administrations towards China. America, capitalizing on its extraordinary assets, will *build and strengthen alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region – the cornerstone of security and prosperity*. *The main directions* of action will be: *Leading from a position of strength*;

Economy: The ultimate stake. The United States of America must protect and defend its economy and people from any danger from any country or source and collaborate with allies and partners – India, Australia, Japan, South Korea – to maintain its privileged position in the world economy; and, *Deterring Military Threats.* “America First” diplomacy seeks to *rebalance* global trade relations and *deter military threats*. In the long term, *maintaining American economic and technological supremacy is the surest way to deter and prevent a large-scale military conflict*. Taiwan provides direct access to the Second Island Chain (Japan, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Indonesia) and divides Northeast and Southeast Asia into two distinct theatres. *Deterring conflict over Taiwan, preferably by maintaining military superiority, is a priority – firm and direct language. The USA will build a military capable of deterring aggression anywhere in the First Island Chain (Japan, Taiwan, Philippines, Brunei) or control of the South China Sea – a related security challenge. Strong cooperation with India, Japan, South Korea to protect the First Island Chain.* It will also strengthen military presence in the Western Pacific by cooperating with Taiwan and Australia. (Ib., pp. 19-25). *The third region that matters – Europe – is mentioned in the Strategy “Promoting European Greatness” where the main problems facing Europe are highlighted: insufficient military spending and economic stagnation (political freedom and sovereignty, migration policies, freedom of expression and political opposition, birth rates and national identity and self-confidence). Managing European relations with Russia will require significant diplomatic engagement by the USA, both to restore the conditions of strategic stability throughout the Eurasian territory and to mitigate the risk of conflict between Russia and European states. The war in Ukraine had the perverse effect of increasing Europe’s external dependencies, especially Germany’s. The US goal should be to support Europe in correcting its current trajectory* (Ib., pp. 25-27). *The fourth region covered in the Strategy – The Middle East: Shift Burdens, Build Peace – begins by presenting the reasons why it was prioritized in the past (energy supplier, main theatre of superpower competition, and site of many conflicts that threatened to spread).* Today, at least two of these dynamics no longer apply: energy supply and superpower competition. *Conflict* remains the most problematic



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“Continuity” is not the same as “inertia”. Inertia resists and delays change. Continuity of principles, however, strengthens any transition.

dynamic in the Middle East, although the region no longer represents, to the same extent as in the past, a source of permanent tensions and a potential imminent trigger for events with catastrophic global consequences. *The last region* mentioned is Africa. The region is important for developing *partnerships, ameliorating conflicts, capitalizing on natural resources, and promoting mutually beneficial trade relations* (Ib., pp. 27-29).

In its first year, it achieved remarkable results in the following areas: securing America’s borders and putting Americans first; keeping communities safe; rebuilding an economy for Americans and supporting American industry; boosting American innovation, research, and technology; reaffirming American leadership on the world stage; building a modern military; governing at the service of the people; and energy dominance (The White House, 2026, pp. 1-30).

TRUMP 1.0, TRUMP 2.0 – RADICAL CHANGES, MODERATE CHANGES, CONTINUITIES AND OMISSIONS

“Continuity” is not the same as *“inertia”*. Inertia resists and delays change. Continuity of principles, however, strengthens any transition (Bishop, 2015, p. 1). The Trump administration presented its new strategic documents NSS 2025 (*Trump II*), NDS 2026 (the second policy document) as a *break* from those of the first term. Russia, Europe and climate change are no longer found as elements requiring a precise assessment or a relevant response from the USA, but hemispheric security and the transfer of tasks to allies are included. Many changes are indeed substantial, even *radical*, and others are more *moderate*, with some *continuity* with previous strategic documents (Cancian, 2026, pp. 1-10). NSS 2025 along NDS 2026, establish the second Trump administration *vision of the world*, political goals and hypothetical ways to meet them.

Radical changes: Homeland Security and the Western Hemisphere are elevated to the rank of absolute priority. The focus on the Western Hemisphere is perhaps the biggest change in the document, as was the case in 1987, 1990, and 2006, the increased presence in the Caribbean is not a *temporary* increase but a *permanent* feature, and the forces will come from lower-priority theatres of operations, such as Europe and the Middle East (Lissner, 2025, pp. 8-10). Europe is handed

over to the Europeans to defend, with the support of the United States of America. The strategy does not see *China, Russia, or North Korea* as relevant factors that would determine their placement at the centre of American strategy (Cancian, 2026, p. 1). In Trump 1.0, China was the *main focus* for both the national security and trade goals of the administration, adopting a more competitive and tough policy towards China. In Trump 2.0 he has adopted a softer line and it is no longer given the same importance due to the effects of the first term and the security environment that is very different. The language about the Indo-Pacific region, China, Asia and Taiwan is not about isolation or withdrawal. China's threats to Taiwan are also *a threat* to US interests and an affront to whoever is in the Oval Office. The US attack on the Iranian nuclear program and the action in Venezuela are generally very useful for the credibility of US commitments around the world. Robert O'Brien, considers Trump to be a *"reverse Kissinger"* – trying to separate Russia from China and detach Xi from Putin (Feith, 2026, pp. 1,11, 21, 22).

NSS 2025 makes no explicit reference to *great power competition*. It adopts a considerably more conciliatory tone toward competitors, framing the challenge as *"managing Europe's relations with Russia"* and working to *"rebalance America's economic relationship with China"*. The implication is that the United States of America is less focused on *strategic competition* and more open to *spheres of influence*. NSS 2025 focuses overwhelmingly on the Western Hemisphere, trade, immigration, and other issues close to home (Anderson, 2025, pp. 1-2). *"Trump Corollary"* to *Monroe Doctrine* will be affirmed and applied. NDS 2026 criticizes allies for cutting defence spending, investing instead in public welfare and other domestic programs, and shifting the burden of defence to the United States of America. NDS 2026 offers a dual assessment of Russia: *a continuing but weakened threat* to NATO's eastern front, and a country *whose nuclear arsenal poses a threat to US territory*. Russia is no longer considered a *major geopolitical rival* as it was under the first administration – it has moved from the status of a *"revisionist power"* in 2018 to the status of *"a persistent but manageable threat to NATO's eastern members"* in 2026 (Hegseth, 2026, pp. 1-15). The era of great power competition with China and Russia, from the NSS 2017 (*Trump I*), ended in the NSS



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2025 to benefit domestic priorities. The NSS 2025 makes it clear that the economy is the *“ultimate stake”*, with geopolitics relegated to a secondary role with regard to China – which is no longer framed as a *systemic challenge*, with a vision of the world order incompatible with US interests, and is considered primarily an *economic competitor*. The NSS 2017 highlighted Iran and North Korea as *second-tier* threats, the NSS 2025 does not mention North Korea at all and downplays the danger posed by Iran. The NSS 2025 states that US foreign policy will focus largely on limiting *three threats: mass migration, organized crime* and *“hostile foreign incursion”*. NSS 2025 suggests a *“civilizational”* approach as the main *lens* through which it analyses its relationship with Europe (Lissner, 2025, pp. 2-8, 10).

Moderate changes: Missile defence expands with new *“Golden Dome”* concept. North Korea is seen as a threat, but mainly for South Korea and Japan, USA only assesses missile capabilities that can strike US territory. Shift from *“compete, deter, and win”* approach, prioritizing *“great power competition”* to *“America First”* approach prioritizing *“national and hemispheric security”*. The second Trump administration is less confrontational, focusing on deterrence and *“peace through strength”*. Global terrorism, in NDS 2018 (*Trump I*), is a *“persistent condition”* but no longer a *“primary concern”* and in NDS 2026 (*Trump II*) terrorist organizations *“severely degraded... continue to adapt and pose a credible threat”* (Park, 2026, pp. 2, 5, 11-13). NSS 2025 places a greater emphasis on Taiwan than NSS 2017, and on deterring Chinese aggression against the island, while maintaining the ability to defeat aggression anywhere in the *First Island Chain* – a priority, and uses some fairly harsh language (Lissner, 2025, p. 10).

Among the actions leading to *a change* in the sense of those presented above, we can also mention: reconsidering the value of certain allies, especially those in Europe, and the *“transactionalization”* of these relationships; diminishing support for regional or multilateral trade agreements and the World Trade Organization; selective indifference to the promotion of universal values; preference for *hard power*, especially military power, to the detriment of *soft power*. Trump emphasized the *“America First”* vision and the concept of *national sovereignty*, reduced funding for US *foreign assistance* programs, and ordered the US withdrawal from several agreements: trade, climate,



Iran, migration, cooperation with the International Criminal Court, or the Optional Protocol on the Compulsory Settlement of Disputes to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations. He had critical assessments of the value of allies, of the NATO Alliance; he demonstrated an apparent reluctance to criticize Russia and an apparent determination to improve relations with Russia, despite some of its controversial actions; he achieved a US disengagement from the conflict in Syria and the acceptance of Russia as a major intermediary in the Syrian situation and in the Middle East in general; the absence from certain human rights forums associated with *inconsistent statements* in support of democracy and human rights or against the practices of authoritarian and illiberal governments; the US withdrawal from the United Nations Human Rights Council (O'Rourke, 2019, pp. 1-5).

Continuity – consistency: The second Trump administration maintains the position that China – mentioned in the strategy 21 times – is a formidable military and economic power, “*the second most powerful country in the world*” and in the 2018 NDS China is a “*revisionist power*” and “*strategic competitor*” (Cancian, 2026, pp. 1, 11). Among the actions leading to less change and *more continuity* can be mentioned: NSS 2017 highlights competition with China and Russia and strong support for US alliances; NDS 2018 includes a perspective on the US role in the world, generally consistent with the US role over the past 70 years; The October 2018 Counterterrorism Strategy can be considered largely consistent with the counterterrorism strategies of previous administrations; the continuation of US military operations in Afghanistan and the Middle East; statements by senior US officials reaffirming US support for NATO; improving US military capabilities in Europe to deter potential Russian aggression in Europe; encouraging NATO allies to spend more on defence; implementing additional sanctions against Russia in response to its actions; more aggressive, hostile policy toward China and assistance programs to counter its influence in Africa, Asia, and the Americas; promoting the concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific region (O'Rourke, 2019, pp. 8-10).

NSS 2025 sees China as a serious and ongoing problem – one that is striving to dominate the Indo-Pacific region, and one that poses a technological challenge. The USA wants to maintain room for negotiation with China, even though China is an obstacle to achieving

The second Trump administration maintains the position that China – mentioned in the strategy 21 times – is a formidable military and economic power, “the second most powerful country in the world” and in the 2018 NDS China is a “revisionist power” and “strategic competitor”.



NDS 2026 considers modernization of the industrial base, improvement of nuclear capabilities, and missile defence to be essential, citing a “changing global nuclear landscape” marked by a massive Russian arsenal, Chinese expansion, Iranian ambitions, and North Korea’s growing capability.

most of its goals. A theme that runs throughout the document is the desire for stability and keeping the lines of communication open, but not at the cost of undermining American interests (Schadlow, 2025, pp. 1-2). NSS 2025 calls for maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region. It firmly continues its long-standing and consistent support for Taiwan and *deterrence of conflict over Taiwan* and countering China, meaning that the *USA does not support any unilateral change* to the status quo in the Taiwan Strait (Cancian, 2026, p. 1). NSS 2025 does not see the Middle East as a focal point of US policy – a position supported by Trump during his three presidential campaigns – but as a theatre of operations with reduced potential, but with Iran and terrorism continuing to attract attention. NDS 2026 maintains the concept of *two conflicts* of recent decades – a lasting reference for decision-makers – but *transfers* the second conflict to the responsibility of allies and does not see a conventional conflict with Russia or North Korea. The 1993 “*Bottom-Up Review*” report introduced the “*two-war*” concept, sizing the armed forces to “*fight and win two major regional conflicts ... simultaneously*” (Cancian, 2026, pp. 17- 18).

NDS 2026, in terms of *simultaneous conflicts*, recognizes the “*problem of simultaneity*” and the need “*to be prepared for the possibility that one or more potential adversaries may act together in a coordinated or opportunistic manner in multiple theatres of operations*”. NDS 2026 continues the “*one plus*” approach to conflict, but with one adaptation: responsibility for the second conflict will be transferred to US allies. Thus, if the United States of America is involved in a conflict with China, defending Europe against any Russian aggression will be the responsibility of Europeans. Preventing Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons has been a foreign policy goal for several administrations since the 1979 revolution. Similarly, administrations have considered North Korea a threat since the beginning of the Korean War in 1950. NDS 2026 considers modernization of the industrial base, improvement of nuclear capabilities, and missile defence to be essential, citing a “*changing global nuclear landscape*” marked by a massive Russian arsenal, Chinese expansion, Iranian ambitions, and North Korea’s growing capability. *Force Structure and Posture*: The priority given to national defence and the Western Hemisphere

in NDS 2026 will result in changes to the location of US military forces – for example, establishing a long-term presence in the Caribbean, expanding bases in Greenland, and eventually a permanent presence in Panama (Cancian, 2026, pp. 13-17).

Omissions: The absence of diversity, equity, inclusion, and climate change were expected. Surprising are the omission of any mention of the all-volunteer force or the Department for Government Efficiency (Ib., p. 2).

CONCLUSIONS

The intensification and diversification of US competition with China and the Russian Federation over the last decade, frequently referred to as *great power competition* or *strategic competition*, has generated profound changes or emphasis in the Trump administration's security doctrines with implications for foreign policy, grand strategy, geopolitics, diplomacy, trade and finance, energy and foreign assistance, and ultimately the global order.

President Trump's approach to *US involvement* in world affairs and *the American world order* established by President Woodrow Wilson at the end of the First World War – which American presidents have followed in one way or another – is different, highlighting a much more drastic acceleration of withdrawal from the USA's historical position as a key global superpower, although the NDS 2026 mentions *America's preeminence*. Donald Trump's trade protectionism – he has overturned the global order – is distinctive and different from what has been done so far in multilateral economic diplomacy or in the previous trade policies of other countries.

In the post-Cold War period, America, as *the sole superpower*, had two options to maintain its status as a global leader: either *directly confronting* the rising power or *avoiding adversaries*, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Donald Trump does not intend to confront China, but the history of his actions argues that if the situation evolves and reaches a certain point that does not allow the development of options without the use of force and at the same time advantageous for US interests, he will *not hesitate to act militarily* against China.



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THE POLITICAL PORTRAIT OF MILORAD DODIK: A HERO FOR BOSNIAN SERBS, A THREAT FOR OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.13

Over the past year, the Bosnian political scene has been dominated by the leader of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), Milorad Dodik. Known for his secessionist actions and for protecting the rights and freedoms of the Bosnian Serb people, Milorad Dodik has undertaken the most concrete steps toward the secession of Republika Srpska (RS) from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). In this context, following his first-instance conviction to one year of imprisonment and a six-year ban on holding public office, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska (NARS) adopted a series of legislative measures aimed at increasing the RS autonomy and challenging the authority of the central institutions in Sarajevo on RS territory, with the entity moving toward secession. For the RS leader, Milorad Dodik, this was followed by a stressful period in which he faced the possibility of arrest at any moment by state law enforcement authorities. In response, he adopted enhanced security measures, including traveling by helicopter to avoid being blocked and arrested on land. Eventually, he resigned from the office of President of Republika Srpska, and early elections were organised, but the ban on holding public office for six years remained in force. The presidential elections in RS were initially won by the SNSD candidate, Siniša Karan, but voting will be repeated in several polling stations due to allegations of electoral fraud. Nevertheless, a reversal of the results is unlikely; at most, the margin between the SNSD candidate and the opposition candidate, Branko Blanuša, may be reduced. In such a scenario, this question arose: "Will SNSD leader Milorad Dodik remain at the forefront of the Bosnian political life after the general elections scheduled for the autumn of 2025?". Through logical deduction, this article aims to identify the main arguments that may help answer the question regarding Milorad Dodik's political future.

Keywords: Bosnia and Herzegovina; political leader; Milorad Dodik; political portrait; Republika Srpska;

INTRODUCTION

Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia and Herzegovina) continues to be a state marked by political instability, posing security risks for the Western Balkans (WB) region and, implicitly, for Romania. Its state architecture (three levels of local administration), the decision-making system based on the three constituent peoples, excessive bureaucracy, interethnic tensions, and the lack of a common vision for state reform are just some of the reasons why the country requires ongoing international monitoring.

Throughout the past year (2025), the Bosnian political scene has been dominated by the actions of the president of the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD, a Bosnian Serb party), Milorad Dodik (a Bosnian Serb). He came to power with international support in 1998, but gradually aligned himself with the ideas of illiberal democracies, particularly those promoted by the Russian Federation. His authoritarian rule has been marked by nationalist rhetoric¹, promoting the idea that Bosnia and Herzegovina is a dysfunctional state. Under these circumstances, Milorad Dodik is perceived, on the one hand, by the Bosnian Serb population as a “hero” who defends the rights and interests of Bosnian Serbs, and, on the other hand, by the Bosniak population as a threat (Huskić-1, 2025).

The political actions of the SNSD leader have been widely covered by the media, yet this coverage has reflected the interests of the actors controlling the major media outlets. On the one hand, pro-Western media portrayed Milorad Dodik in a negative light, highlighting the danger he poses to the stability of the Bosnian state. On the other hand, anti-Western media depicted the SNSD leader as a defender of the rights and freedoms of the Serbian people in the Western Balkans region and as an important vector for promoting Pan-Slavism in Europe. The year 2025 culminated in his removal from the position

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¹ Among them, the denial of the Srebrenica genocide, the promotion of anti-Western narratives, and challenges to the legitimacy of the Bosnian state (author’s note).



The article examines Milorad Dodik's political actions over the course of the past year, as well as the decisions taken by the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina that contributed to the removal of the RS president and the organisation of early elections.

of President of Republika Srpska (RS) and a six-year ban on holding public office. Following the early elections, a close associate of Milorad Dodik, Siniša Karan – former Minister of Development and Technology in the government led by Dodik – was elected to lead RS, with the SNSD retaining political control over the entity. The final election results have not yet been implemented, as, following complaints filed by opposition parties, the Electoral Commission decided to repeat the elections in several electoral districts where suspicions of electoral fraud had been raised (N1, 2025).

Under these circumstances, considering both the media portrayal and the actions of Milorad Dodik, the question arises as to whether the Bosnian Serb leader will leave the political scene in Republika Srpska (RS) after the general elections scheduled for 4 October 2026. This topic has not been addressed in Romanian-language media, while at the international level only related issues have been discussed, mainly through reports on events and various brief analyses published after the early elections in RS.

Through this article, based on scientific research and focusing in particular on Milorad Dodik's political actions over the past year, and by employing a logical deduction approach, we aim to identify an answer to the aforementioned research question. By providing such an answer, the article contributes to the development of knowledge in the field by constructing the political portrait of the RS leader and anticipating potential changes that may emerge on the Bosnian political scene following the general elections in the autumn of this year.

The paper is useful for scholars and practitioners in academia, as well as for those interested in geopolitics and geostrategy, as it helps complete the regional security “puzzle” of the Western Balkans by advancing new perspectives on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY

For the drafting of this article, we exclusively employed qualitative research methods in order to identify arguments on the basis of which to construct an answer to the research question: “Will Milorad Dodik leave the political scene in Republika Srpska after the elections of October 2026?”. As a research instrument, we used process

tracing (Wiesner, 2014) in order to identify the causes that led to the removal of the SNSD leader from the presidency of Republika Srpska. The article examines Milorad Dodik's political actions over the course of the past year, as well as the decisions taken by the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina that contributed to the removal of the RS president and the organisation of early elections. To this end, we analysed articles published by both pro-Western and anti-Western media outlets in Republika Srpska, observing differences in perception and in the portrayal of Milorad Dodik – on the one hand as a “hero” of the Serbs, and on the other hand as a “threat” to the other two constituent peoples of the Bosnian state. We constructed a case study centred on the personality of Milorad Dodik, after which, through logical deduction, we sought to identify arguments on which to base our answer to the stated research question, using as evidence the causes that led to the current situation of the Serbian leader.

By tracking the political events in which Milorad Dodik was involved and his reactions to them (including the monitoring the judicial proceedings), it was possible to establish cause-and-effect relationships and uncover causal mechanisms, thereby contributing to the clarification of how the final result – namely, the answer to the research question – would be obtained. A causal mechanism is understood as a link or connection within a causal process. In the relationship between a given independent variable (in this case, the Bosnian judiciary, represented by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and a given dependent variable (the political leader Milorad Dodik), a causal mechanism implies the presence of additional variables (such as the positioning of foreign actors, other political leaders, and the reaction patterns of Bosnian law enforcement institutions). These variables provide insights into how the independent variable effectively produces the outcome, including the sequence through which this outcome materialises (Wiesner, 2014).

The research also faces a number of limitations resulting from the fact that the study relies exclusively on open-source materials in English and Serbian. For a more comprehensive approach and a more accurate assessment of the political leader of Republika Srpska, it would have been necessary to include open-source materials in Russian as well,



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which could have illustrated how the Serbian leader is perceived in the Russian Federation – an external state actor with divergent interests in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, only qualitative methods were employed due to financial, time, and space constraints, as a public opinion survey regarding the political standing of the SNSD leader, Milorad Dodik, would normally have complemented this type of research.

THE POLITICAL RISE OF SNSD PRESIDENT MILORAD DODIK

SNSD President Milorad Dodik was born in Banja Luka in 1959. He attended Laktaši Primary School (1966-1974), the Agricultural High School in Banja Luka (1974-1977) and graduated from the Faculty of Political Science in Belgrade (1983). He is married to Snježana, with whom he has a son, Igor, and a daughter, Gorica. In 1996, Milorad Dodik founded the Party of Independent Social Democrats, which later changed its name to the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD). He has led this political party since 2002. Milorad Dodik began his political career in 1986 as Chairman of the Executive Council of Laktaši Municipality (a town near Banja Luka, where he still resides today). Before Bosnia and Herzegovina's first multi-party elections in 1990, he became a member of Ante Marković's Alliance of Reform Forces. Between 1991 and 2000, he was a member of the NARS (National Assembly of Republika Srpska), and between 1998 and 2001 he served as Prime Minister of Republika Srpska (RS), as SNSD candidate. He was again a member of NARS (2002-2006), Prime Minister of RS (2006-2010), President of RS for two terms (2010-2018) and Bosnian Serb member of the Tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (2018-2022) (CIN, 2025). Between 2022 and 2025, Milorad Dodik served as President of RS until the Central Electoral Commission annulled his mandate (6 August 2025). He was found guilty and sentenced to one year of imprisonment and a six-year ban on holding the office of President of RS for failing to comply with decisions issued by the High Representative of the International Community (OHR) (Central Election Commission Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2025).



In the research process, SNSD President Milorad Dodik constitutes an additional variable because his actions are a function of the independent variable represented by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, it was observed that after each decision of the Constitutional Court, Milorad Dodik reacted either through secessionist statements or through concrete actions, such as proposing laws aimed at the independence of the judiciary in RS and limiting the activities of state law enforcement institutions on the territory of RS.

Next, through the analysis of the open sources that appeared in the international press, we present the main events that led to Milorad Dodik's removal from the leadership of the entity. Particular attention has been paid to both articles (especially those published in the Serbian language-media of RS) that portray him favourably and to articles that present him as a negative figure on the Bosnian political scene.

SNSD PRESIDENT MILORAD DODIK: A HERO FOR THE ETHNIC SERB POPULATION

By following the trial, this chapter highlights the causal mechanism between the Bosnian justice system (the independent variable) and Milorad Dodik (the additional variable) by identifying the cause-effect relationships that led to the perception of Milorad Dodik as a hero among the ethnic Serb population. We presented the causal relationship between the Bosnian judiciary, Milorad Dodik and international actors, such as Serbia and the Russian Federation on the one hand, and the United Kingdom and the United States on the other, identified as dependent variables within the research methodology.

Milorad Dodik moved away from liberal Western values and gradually became a supporter of the Russian Federation, using the positions he held to increase his influence and political control in RS. By promoting secessionist ideas, denying the Srebrenica genocide and attacking Bosnian politicians in the media, Milorad Dodik shaped a political portrait of a "hero" of the B-Serb population. At the same time, he became the target of sanctions by the United Kingdom and the United States (additional variables).

As the leader of the largest Bosnian Serb nationalist political party, Milorad Dodik won (2010) the presidency of the RS with the support

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of Serbian politicians (additional variable). During the election campaign, he attracted voters by promoting the slogan “RS first, Bosnia only as long as it must exist”, emphasising the existing fears and interethnic tensions at that time. By denying the Srebrenica genocide, he strengthened his cultural and religious ties with Serbia, and presented himself as a politician and protector of the Bosnian Serb population who puts “Srpska first”. Thus, he managed to secure the electorate and remain in leading positions within Republika Srpska for more than 25 years (he first served as Prime Minister of RS between 1998 and 2001) (Mack, 2021). Therefore, Milorad Dodik’s actions (additional variable) contributed to consolidating support among the B-Serb electorate and maintaining his influence over the Bosnian political decision-making process for a long time.

In all the leadership positions, he held in RS or within the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina Milorad Dodik promoted Serbian nationalism and transformed it into a source of political power. He permanently portrayed himself as a victim, claiming to be the target of an anti-Serb conspiracy. In all corruption cases in which criminal proceedings were initiated against him, Milorad Dodik rejected the legitimacy of investigations and trials conducted by Bosnian institutions, arguing that these institutions could not act objectively and that their actions were, in fact, directed against the B-Serb people. In his political speech, Milorad Dodik pleaded for the independence of RS and took secessionist actions to separate state-level institutions from those of RS (Ibid.). Milorad Dodik’s lawyers (additional variable) also used arguments related to his ethnic identity in legal disputes involving the Bosnian judiciary system (independent variable). In the period between 2018 and 2022, while serving as the Bosnian Serb member of the Tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, he refused to participate in official activities held at the Presidency headquarters whenever the flag of RS was not displayed alongside the flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a position strongly contested by the other two members of the Tripartite Presidency (additional variables) (Kovacevic, 2018).

As President of RS, the SNSD leader established an auxiliary police structure exclusively for RS and used it to suppress the “Justice



for David” protest movement in 2018 claiming that the demonstrations were politically motivated. In his efforts to consolidate political power, on the Russian model, allegations also emerged linking his political environment to acts of intimidation and violence. In this context, Slaviša Krunić, a prominent businessman and critic of the political regime led by Milorad Dodik, was assassinated (22 April 2019) in Banja Luka, without those responsible even being conclusively identified (Niksic, 2019).

So, Milorad Dodik used his Serbian identity and fuelled interethnic tensions in his region to gain more and more political power. The Bosnian state, with less and less oversight and low involvement from the international community, seemed to be increasingly divided. Against the background of these developments, RS gained increased independence, and Milorad Dodik positioned himself as the leading political figure in RS and as a defender of the rights, interests and freedoms of B-Serbs (Mack, Ibid.). Serbian nationalism has been further supported by SNSD President Milorad Dodik through his participating in major events in Serbia, together with President Aleksandar Vučić. In this regard, in the last two years, the close ties between Milorad Dodik, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Russian President Vladimir Putin have become increasingly evident, contributing to the emergence of a Banja Luka-Belgrade-Budapest axis that promotes Pan-Slavic ideas in Europe with political support from Moscow (additional variables). Milorad Dodik has increasingly expressed his desire to separate the institutions of RS from those of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and has continued to act as a disruptive factor within the Bosnian state. During 2024, ties among Serb representatives across the Western Balkans region were strengthened through the organisation of the All-Serb Assembly at the Church of Saint Sava in Belgrade. In this context, with the involvement of leaders of the Serbian Orthodox Church, a declaration was adopted by presenting the Serbian nation as a cross-border community with protected rights. The declaration states that RS should retain full autonomy within Bosnia and Herzegovina and that, as an autonomous entity, could cooperate with Serbia in a number of policy areas, including security and information sharing. Even though the declaration had only symbolic

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In the context of the tense political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and following his first-instance conviction, Milorad Dodik made several visits to Moscow, where he met with Russian officials, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

significance and did not encourage actions beyond the limits set by the Dayton Peace Agreement, it paved the way for the narratives of more radical groups. The document promoted the agenda of a nation treated unfairly and in need of a reassessment of its status and values within the Western Balkans (Nyemann, 2025).

In the context of the tense political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and following his first-instance conviction (26 February 2025), Milorad Dodik made several visits to Moscow, where he met with Russian officials, including Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. The most relevant meeting between the SNSD leader and Sergey Lavrov took place behind closed doors (09 September 2025) during a session of the United Nations Security Council in New York, following which the Russian Foreign Ministry condemned what it described as the *“neo-colonial interference of the West in the internal affairs of the Republika Srpska”* and strongly condemned the dishonest attempts to remove the legitimately elected President of RS (Mišeljić, 2025).

Therefore, in the context of these developments, the secessionist tendencies of RS reached their highest level in the last year, while Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced its most severe political crisis in the last thirty years. Milorad Dodik emphasised his rhetoric about RS autonomy, while promoting the ideas of the entity’s independence. In his speeches, he appealed to Serbian identity and collective memory, increasing his electoral popularity and his influence over the media.

SNSD PRESIDENT MILORAD DODIK: A “DANGER” TO OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

This chapter presents the cause-effect relationships from a Western perspective in which the Bosnian justice system (the independent variable) is a trigger for the additional variables represented, on the one hand, by Milorad Dodik and, on the other hand, by international actors such as the United States, the United Kingdom and the law enforcement institutions of the Bosnian state.

Milorad Dodik’s behaviour and the secessionist actions undertaken by him and members of his political entourage have long attracted the attention of the international community. Thus, the UK became



the first state to impose (2022) sanctions on Milorad Dodik (the Bosnian Serb member of the Tripartite Presidency at the time) and Željka Cvijanović (the President of RS at the time) on the grounds that the two Bosnian Serb leaders were destabilising the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They have been banned from travelling to the United Kingdom and have had all their financial assets frozen because, in coordination with the Kremlin authorities, they promote secessionist ideas in Bosnia and Herzegovina and destabilise the Bosnian state (GOV UK, 2022). In the process presented above, the cause-effect relationship between the additional variables is highlighted (Milorad Dodik and Great Britain).

During 2025, Bosnia and Herzegovina experienced its most acute political crisis since the creation of the Bosnian state, generated by the secessionist actions of SNSD President Milorad Dodik and the long-term blocking of the functioning of central state institutions. The political scene was dominated by developments in Milorad Dodik's trial. His case began in 2023, when he was prosecuted for failing to comply with decisions of the High Representative of the International Community (HRIC) and for obstructing the implementation of decisions of the Constitutional Court (CC) of Bosnia and Herzegovina in RS by adopting laws rejecting such a procedure in RS. Thus, Milorad Dodik refused to recognise the authority of the HRIC and the CC on the territory of the RS (Brezar, 2025). The independent variable thus generated a series of "domino" effects within RS with Milorad Dodik (the additional variable) as the main pawn.

The political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has become additionally tense following Dodik's first-instance conviction (26 February 2025) to one year of imprisonment and banned from holding public office for six years. Immediately, after the verdict was announced, the SNSD leader organised a peaceful protest in Banja Luka. In his speech, he mentioned the support he enjoyed from the Kremlin leader, Vladimir Putin, but also from Budapest, referring to the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. In the same context, he continued to promote messages of Serbian unity, reinforcing his image as a political protector of the Serbian people (Delauney, 2025). Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić insisted that Serbia

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did not recognise the verdict, while calling for a *“peaceful, rational and non-escalatory response”*. Predictably, Budapest and Moscow (additional variables) quickly aligned themselves with Belgrade’s position. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán denounced the decision as a *“dictate from Brussels”*, praising Dodik for opposing the *“globalist agenda of EU-appointed supervisors”*. Moscow has called the verdict against Milorad Dodik an *“illegal criminal prosecution”*, warning that the ruling endangers the unity of the Bosnian state. The reflexive solidarity between Belgrade, Budapest and Moscow illustrates how illiberal actors are instrumentalise the rhetoric of sovereignty in order to weaken Brussels’ normative influence, transforming Bosnia and Herzegovina into a proxy battleground in a wider struggle over Europe’s future political order (Ermina Muzaferija, 2025).

Against the background of these developments, Milorad Dodik (additional variable) submitted to parliamentary procedure a series of laws annulling the authority of state courts and law enforcement agencies in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the territory of RS. The Bosnia and Herzegovina Public Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation into these actions, considering them an attack on Bosnia and Herzegovina’s constitutional order and summoned Milorad Dodik for questioning together with NARS President Nenad Stevandić and RS Prime Minister Radovan Višković. A *“stress test”* for the entire state apparatus ensued when all three accused politicians rejected the CC’s subpoena and surrounded themselves with armed police officers and bodyguards, openly challenging the CC (independent variable) and the State Information and Protection Agency (SIPA) to arrest them (the additional variable). Moreover, they issued an ultimatum to Serbs employed by the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina and SIPA, urging them to transfer to the courts and police structures of RS (additional variables). Milorad Dodik threatened to remove those who refused, but never took concrete measures in this regard. He launched an international media campaign seeking support from the new US administration, which never received him, and later travelled to Israel (26-27 March 2025), where he was asked to leave a conference he was attending. On the other hand, his visit to Hungary (05 August 2025)



and Russia (31 March 2025) where marked by a warm reception and expressions of political support (Huskić-2). This process illustrates the positioning of additional variables (the United States, Israel, law enforcement institutions) in relation to the independent variable (the Bosnian justice represented by the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

Milorad Dodik appeared (on 04 July 2025) before the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, after which the arrest warrant issued against him was cancelled, subject to the obligation to report to the local police station every 15 days. The same arrangement was later extended to the other two “fugitives”. Their decision to cease challenging the authority of the state court was likely due to the lack of international support for their actions. Milorad Dodik received harsh warnings from European capitals, and in the absence of support in the European Council due to the Hungarian veto, some states imposed bilateral sanctions against Milorad Dodik, notably Germany and Austria (Ibid.). Dodik’s team of lawyers succeeding in converting his one-year prison sentence (12 August 2025) into a fine of 18,660 EUR, while the six-year ban on holding public office was maintained. At that time, the Central Election Commission (CEC) annulled his mandate as President of the RS. He dismissed the decision as “another nonsense from Sarajevo” and declared that “surrender is not an option”. Despite this decision, he continued to pursue his secessionist agenda by obstructing the functioning of state-level institutions (Melez, 2025). These developments illustrate the cause-and-effect relationships shaping the Bosnian political landscape.

Against this background, Milorad Dodik was preparing his son, Igor Dodik, to assume a leadership role within the party, while also considering Željka Cvijanović, the current Bosnian Serb member of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a potential successor. Ironically, Milorad Dodik announced that he would continue the “legal battle” by appealing to the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina and to the European Court of Human Rights. Remaining consistent with his destructive nature, he also proposed organising a referendum to seek public support in RS and hinted at the possibility of future referendum on the independence of RS (effects of the independent variable, generated by the decision to condemn the Serbian leader).

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The United States Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) lifted (29 September 2025) sanctions imposed on former RS President, Milorad Dodik and 47 individuals and companies associated with him. Sanctions were also lifted for Zeljka Cvijanović, the Serbian member of the tripartite presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, NARS President Nenad Stevandić, Dodik's children Igor and Gorica and several companies owned by them.

Previously (2024), Milorad Dodik had promoted amendments to the RS Referendum Law, making any referendum valid, regardless of voter turnout. In its initial form, this law stipulated that at least 50% of registered voters had to participate for a referendum to be considered valid (Huskić-2). Therefore, NARS voted (23 August 2025) in favour of organising a referendum in support of Milorad Dodik. Citizens were expected to answer the following questions: *“Do you accept the decisions of the unelected foreigner Christian Schmidt and the unconstitutional decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the decision of the Central Election Commission to strip RS President Milorad Dodik of his mandate?”*. The referendum was initially scheduled (25 August 2025) a few days before the early presidential elections, but it was ultimately cancelled (Kurtic-1, 2025).

The United States Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) lifted (29 September 2025) sanctions imposed on former RS President, Milorad Dodik and 47 individuals and companies associated with him. Sanctions were also lifted for Zeljka Cvijanović, the Serbian member of the tripartite presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, NARS President Nenad Stevandić, Dodik's children Igor and Gorica and several companies owned by them. After that, NARS appointed Ana Trišić-Babić as interim President of RS until the election (23 November 2025) of a new president. Dodik's presidential mandate had been revoked in August following a court ruling that sentenced him to one year in prison or the payment of a fine of €18,660 and imposed a six-year ban on holding public office for defying decisions of the HRIC. In reaction, NARS parliamentarians voted to repeal six entity-level laws previously annulled by the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the law governing state property, which RS used to transfer state assets to the entity's authorities. Milorad Dodik had previously described this issue as an *“insurmountable red line”* (Kurtic-2, 2025).

Next, the early presidential elections in RS demonstrated (23.11.2025) a narrow and contested victory for Milorad Dodik's political party. Although he ultimately complied with the CC's decision, the Bosnian Serb leader clearly stated his continued influence by declaring: *“I remain the most important man and I will be the president of all presidents of Republika Srpska. Is that enough?”*. With a low

voter turnout of approximately 35%, SNSD candidate Siniša Karan, close associate to Milorad Dodik, won slightly more than 50% of the vote (50.39%), while the main opposition candidate, Branko Blanuša (Serbian Democratic Party, SDS), trailed by only a few thousand votes (approximately 8,000 – 48.22%). In political terms, the election result can be interpreted more as a wake-up call rather than as a triumph for the ruling party. For a political leader who has long relied on administrative control, institutional pressure, and the mobilisation of the party apparatus, such a narrow victory is considered politically costly. It signals a decrease in political support for SNSD ahead of the presidential elections scheduled for autumn 2026. The elections were not just a regular competition between the government and the opposition, but were part of a struggle over the rule of law, the authority of state judicial institutions and the willingness of political elites in RS to comply with court decisions. The elections have once again highlighted the structural weaknesses of electoral integrity in RS, with a very low voter turnout, raising questions about political disengagement, disillusionment with the options available, and the credibility of the process itself. The extreme results at certain polling stations, especially in Dobož and Zvornik, where Siniša Karan allegedly received up to 98% of the vote in some locations, suggest organised manipulation rather than normal electoral variation. In addition, the transportation of voters from Serbia by bus also appears to have played a decisive tool. This practice is not new and has functioned as a two-way instrument of political support, with RS structures mobilising voters for Aleksandar Vučić in Serbia, while Serbian electorate assisted Milorad Dodik during RS elections. Such cross-border electoral mobilisation may have helped SNSD secure a narrow victory, but at the cost of further undermining trust in democratic procedures and damaging its political credibility. At the same time, Dodik's party shows signs of clear weakness and can no longer mobilise voters as effectively as it did in previous years. Based on complaints submitted by opposition parties, the CEC decided to repeat (08 February 2026) the elections in 136 polling stations across 17 municipalities (N1, 2025). However, given that the repeated vote concerns only selected polling stations, any reversal of the overall result would almost certainly be rejected by the leadership of the ruling party.



The organisation of early presidential elections in Republika Srpska is an effect of the decisions of the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina (independent variable) seen in relation to the actions of SNSD leader Milorad Dodik, the positions adopted by foreign actors and the responses of Bosnian law enforcement institutions (additional variables).

CONCLUSIONS

The presentation of the events on the Bosnian political scene over the past year has made it possible to identify cause-and-effect relationships between the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina, identified as an independent variable, and Bosnian political leaders, foreign actors and Bosnian law enforcement institutions, identified as additional variables. The discovery of the causal mechanisms linking the independent variable to these additional variables has enabled the construction of Milorad Dodik's political profile, as perceived both by Western states and by countries such as the Russian Federation and Serbia. The effects of these causal relationships provide the basis for answering the research question established at the onset of this scientific research.

The president of the SNSD party, Milorad Dodik, has been and remains, for the time being, an emblematic figure of RS. He has dominated the political scene in RS for the past 25 years and remains the most influential politician in the entity. Through his actions, he has developed a political profile perceived by the ethnic Serb population as that of a protector of their interests, rights and freedoms, while, at the same time, being viewed by much of the ethnic Bosnian population as a danger to the Bosnian state, acting exclusively in the interest of the Serb community rather than those of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. Milorad Dodik has always been oriented towards consolidating Serbian political power and reducing the authority of state institutions based in Sarajevo. He constantly maintains that central institutions should exercise fewer powers and has maintained close ties with the Russian Federation, amplifying messages about autonomy and sovereignty among his RS electorate. Thus, he has become the principle political vehicle (proxy) through which secessionist ideas have been

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promoted, reaching the gradual implementation of such policies over the past year. However, the approach was stopped for the moment, when the CC of Bosnia and Herzegovina ruled that his actions violated the constitutional order of the Bosnian state.

The first-instance conviction of Milorad Dodik on 26 February 2025 to one year of imprisonment and a six-year ban from holding public office led to political and security tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At that time, Milorad Dodik adopted increased security measures and sometimes travelled by helicopter in order to reduce the risk of arrest by SIPA representatives (Serbian Times, 2025). Finally, his removal from office revealed the capacity of the Bosnian state's institutional framework, in which the JRIC, the judiciary and the CEC acted together overcome obstruction at the entity level and enforce compliance with the Dayton constitutional order (Ermina Muzaferija, Ibid.). However, Dodik's removal from the presidency of the RS has not brought the political crisis to an end, rather it has prolonged it, especially if opposition parties were to prevail following the repeated elections in the 17 municipalities. Although unlikely, such an outcome would certainly be contested by SNSD representatives.

Recent political events, such as the celebration (09 January 2026) of the National Day of RS, featured Milorad Dodik alongside leading Serbian political figures in Banja Luka (TV, 2026). This suggests that, although no longer serving as President of RS, he remains one of the influential leaders within the SNSD. Considering his political actions and especially the fact that he relinquished the presidency under both domestic and international pressure, while the NARS repealed the controversial laws that had expanded RS powers and limited state oversight, it can reasonably be inferred that Dodik has merely “stepped back” and continues to exert influence “from behind the scenes”. He secured his party's stay in power by promoting S. Karan, a close friend of his, to the leadership of RS. Under these conditions, at least until the general elections scheduled for October this year, Milorad Dodik is likely to remain actively involved in the electoral campaign as SNSD president, but will not appear in the forefront of Bosnian politics. However, the lifting of US sanctions on Dodik and his close associates will allow them to rebuild the financial resources necessary for future

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elections. Currently, the SNSD seems to be a party in need of internal renewal and the development of a new generation of candidates capable of competing in the upcoming elections. The relatively short time until the October elections, combined with continuing controversies with opposition political parties, leaves little time for the emergence of entirely new political figures capable of securing a decisive electoral victory. Therefore, it is unlikely that Milorad Dodik himself will seek a return as a candidate, as such a move would directly contradict the judicial ruling against him and could trigger further legal proceedings. Moreover, the low voter turnout in the recent early elections (35% of the electorate) and the narrow margin separating the SNSD candidate from the SDS candidate (the main opposition party) demonstrate the apathy of the Serbian electorate that seems to be *"fed up"* with the SNSD governance and wants a change in RS. At the same time, Milorad Dodik's age (67 years old) and reported health problems, exacerbated by the pressures experienced over the past year, reduce the likelihood of his return to frontline politics (SRNA, 2024). Considering all the arguments presented above, we can appreciate that there are low chances that Milorad Dodik will reappear as a candidate for public office in the general elections of RS is relatively low.

In this scenario, Milorad Dodik will most likely not reappear on the RS political scene, but will seek to identify political candidates capable of winning future elections. Željka Cvijanović, the current Bosnian Serb member of the Tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, could emerge as a strong candidate for the RS Presidency. If Željka Cvijanović decides to run for the RS Presidency, Milorad Dodik will likely support a lower-profile SNSD candidate for the position of Serb member of the Tripartite Presidency. The SNSD's strategic priority will be maximise electoral support within RS and secure key positions within the entity, rather than necessarily winning the position of Serb member of the Tripartite Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In conclusion, regardless of the specific electoral scenario, Milorad Dodik is likely to remain an influential political figure in the Republika Srpska, even if he is compelled to comply with the Constitutional Court's decision prohibiting him from holding public office in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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MILITARY MOBILITY: STRATEGIC RELEVANCE, STRUCTURAL OBSTACLES AND DIRECTIONS FOR ACTION FOR ROMANIA

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.14

NATO and the European Union have once again considered military mobility as a fundamental strategic priority over the past decade. The war of aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2022, the pressure on NATO's eastern flank and the need to be able to deploy troops and equipment quickly from Western Europe to the Eastern Flank have highlighted a simple truth: without military mobility, there is no credible deterrence.

Romania's strategic location in the Black Sea means that this capacity is crucial for both interoperability and national resilience. This article analyses the logistical and legal obstacles of military mobility, EU and NATO initiatives, as well as Romania's responsibilities in implementing the National Military Mobility Plan.

Keywords: military mobility; connectivity; Eastern Flank; NATO; European Union;



MILITARY MOBILITY – FROM CONCEPT TO STRATEGIC NECESSITY

Military mobility refers to the ability of armed forces to move rapidly: through adapted infrastructure, harmonised legal procedures and modern logistical capabilities. It is a concept with military and civilian implications, as critical infrastructure – roads, bridges, railways, ports, airports – must serve both defence and economic needs. The concept of *military mobility* – although not a new one – was first raised in 2017¹ by General (r.) Ben Hodges, during his tenure as commander of the EUCOM land component (US Army Europe), speaking of the necessity for a *military Schengen* and thus expressing the need for mobility of allied forces comparable to the free movement of goods and people within the Schengen area. The need for military mobility – being emphasized by a commander who had the overall picture of all Allied forces in Europe and who drew attention to the excessive length of time it took to obtain transit permits, including in states like Germany – thus became all the more valid.

It is useful to emphasize from the outset that *military mobility* as a concept is managed from a national, allied and European perspective – and the success of the concept's implementation is deeply determined by the synergy between the three approaches.

Thus, the European Union (EU) views military mobility through two major lenses: financing *dual-use infrastructure* capable of supporting heavy military vehicles; and *harmonizing legal procedures*, through the Military Mobility Package, aimed at reducing approval times for the transit of troops and equipment across borders. The EU's ambitions are, however, limited by the funding available.

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¹ NATO in Europe needs 'military Schengen' to rival Russia (12 September 2017), Deutsche Welle, <https://www.dw.com/en/nato-in-europe-needs-military-schengen-to-rival-russian-mobility/a-40470302>.



Military mobility in the EU context is conceived within the general framework provided by the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) – a Union policy and infrastructure framework that aims to create a coherent network of transport infrastructure (roads, railways, ports, airports etc.) connecting all EU regions; eliminate bottlenecks and cross-border gaps; provide accessibility and efficiency for people and goods throughout the EU.

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The latest *Military Mobility Package* – issued in November 2025 by the European Commission – includes a proposed EU-wide regulation that sets clear rules for the movement of troops and equipment between states, reiterates the limitation of the approval time to a maximum of 3 days – in line with the *Military Mobility Pledge* of 2024² – and simplifies customs and border formalities. As a main objective, the Package establishes the creation, by the end of 2027, of an *EU-Wide Military Mobility Area* as a first step towards achieving a “*Military Schengen*” in terms of legal, infrastructure and capabilities. The document also proposes the creation of a European

² Council Conclusions on EU Security and Defence, Council of the European Union, 27 May 2024, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9225-2024-INIT/en/pdf>.



Military Mobility Enhanced Response System/EMERS as an emergency tool for cross-border military transport and draws attention to the fact that, at Union level, national contact points in this field are not yet very clearly known. In this context, an important role is played by the *PESCO projects on military mobility*³, which aimed, among other things, to complete a list of national contact points in the field, as well as by the project on the network of *logistics hubs in Europe and support for operations* (NetLogHubs), which aims to improve infrastructure planning and coordination.

Thus, for the EU and its Member States, the *TEN-T is the physical backbone of cross-border mobility* – civil and military, and the *Military Mobility Package and the Military Mobility Pledge provide the legal and procedural framework* that allows for the rapid and efficient use of this infrastructure for defence purposes. In essence, *these initiatives work synergistically*: the TEN-T corridors provide the routes, and the Mobility Package and Pledge make them rapidly and legally accessible for military operations throughout the EU.

On the other hand, *NATO's role is strategic, operational, standardisation and coordination*, with no responsibilities for financing the infrastructure of its Member States. The main instrument is the Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC), responsible for planning troop movements, assessing the Allied logistical route, standardising military infrastructure requirements and managing logistical flows in crisis scenarios.

Thus, while the EU provides the funding and the common legal framework, NATO sets the standards and operational requirements. The two organizations converge, in practice, towards a common mobility architecture, but responsibilities remain distinct.

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³ Coordinated by the Netherlands, which also has a National Mobility Plan with responsibilities clearly established, <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/blg-965640.pdf>.



ROMANIA IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT: FROM STRATEGIC DEPENDENCY TO KEY ACTOR

The Strategic Relevance of Military Mobility for Romania

Romania's geostrategic positioning – a NATO and EU border state, in the Black Sea region and on the border with Ukraine – makes military mobility a national security priority. Even without imposing itself as a strategic objective, Romania is a critical logistical node, and military mobility thus becomes a test of strategic credibility for Romania both within NATO and within the European Union.

Given that, in crisis or conflict scenarios on the eastern flank, the flows of troops, equipment, ammunition and heavy equipment must quickly cross the national territory, military mobility brings multiple benefits: it increases the credibility of NATO deterrence, by ensuring the capacity to rapidly reinforce the eastern flank; it contributes to Romania's security, reducing logistical vulnerability; it supports logistical aid for Ukraine; and it supports NATO-EU interoperability, a major strategic objective of the European security and defence policy. Thus, from a political point of view, military mobility becomes an indicator of Romania's administrative and logistical capacity to act as a responsible host state in an alliance.

At the national level, Romania has as its instrument the *National Military Mobility Plan* – the most recent version being approved in 2025 – a key document that identifies priority infrastructure projects (strategic roads, bridges, railway routes), integration into EU and NATO networks and proposes the interconnection of national transport networks with European strategic corridors. Significant projects include bridge reinforcements, the modernization of logistics hubs and plans for transnational corridors connecting the Black Sea to Central Europe.

In a regional context, Romania took political steps in 2024 to join a series of military mobility corridors – trilateral initiatives with Bulgaria and Turkey, with Bulgaria and Greece, joining the Pan-European Military Mobility Corridor VIII, alongside Albania, Bulgaria, Italy and the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as projects to connect Black Sea ports with Central Europe. Additionally, there is a need to strengthen the role of the port of Constanța and the military bases in Cincu and Mihail Kogălniceanu.

At the national level, Romania has as its instrument the National Military Mobility Plan – the most recent version being approved in 2025 – a key document that identifies priority infrastructure projects (strategic roads, bridges, railway routes), integration into EU and NATO networks and proposes the interconnection of national transport networks with European strategic corridors.

Logistical, Legal and Procedural Limitations

Romania's military mobility is primarily affected by the *limitations of the road and rail infrastructure*, which is not yet fully adapted for heavy military transport. Numerous road sections and railway lines have restrictions on carrying capacity, gauge or speed, which makes it difficult to move convoys and bulky equipment quickly.

Added to this is the *inter-ministerial bureaucracy* associated with the process of approving military movements and transits. The procedures involve multiple institutions – defence, internal affairs, transport, foreign affairs – with different, sometimes divergent administrative flows, which generates delays in issuing permits for special transports, dangerous materials or classified equipment.

Another obstacle is the *lack of a single civil-military coordination mechanism*. In the absence of a central structure to manage requests, logistical flows, authorization procedures and the relationship with NATO and EU partners in an integrated manner, the process may remain fragmented and dependent on bilateral initiatives between institutions, which limits efficiency and predictability.

Last but not least, the *logistical capacity of ports and airports* is still under the level required by NATO. Both the heavy load handling facilities and the spaces dedicated to the reception and processing of large flows of personnel and equipment may be insufficient for rapid mobilization scenarios. This gap affects Romania's potential to function as a regional logistics hub for allied operations. Thus, at the national level, there is a lack of modern logistics hubs, developed according to NATO standards, which would allow the storage, sorting, maintenance and distribution of military equipment in an interoperable manner. Without these logistical centres of gravity, supply flows remain dispersed, resulting in difficulties in operational coordination and reducing the efficiency of the logistics chain in high-intensity situations.

Financing Military Mobility: Between National Responsibility and External Support

Military mobility is an area where financial responsibility is shared. Thus, *national responsibility is key*. Romania must mainly finance its own infrastructure (roads, bridges, railways), the digitalization of transit procedures and all structures associated with the concept.



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The EU's responsibility is complementary, ensuring co-financing for projects to adapt TEN-T corridors for dual use (bridges, roads, railways, ports, airports) through the Connecting Europe Facility/CEF; support for the harmonisation of procedures and standards; or structural funds for strategic regions. Thus, EU funds cover only part of the total costs.

Recommendations

Reducing procedural barriers is an essential condition for increasing military mobility in Romania. A first step is the *implementation of a single digital system for approving military transit*, which would allow for real-time management of requests and reduce administrative delays. This system should consolidate all authorization flows into a single platform, facilitating the coordination of the institutions involved and ensuring transparency in the decision-making process. Also, according to the EU Military Mobility Package, *Form 302, used within the EU and NATO*, generates numerous bottlenecks in practice, mainly due to different interpretations applied at the level of customs structures. The lack of a unified understanding of the regulations leads to situations where the same document is accepted at one border crossing point and rejected at another, without a clear or coherent justification. Although the documents have similar purposes, they are based on different legal frameworks, and their selective application, depending on local interpretations or context, affects the predictability of the procedures. Thus, in order to remedy these dysfunctions, concrete action can be taken at the national level by creating a single procedure for the use of Form 302. This national procedure must be the result of an inter-institutional approval and be mandatory for all customs and border structures.

In addition, it is necessary to create a *National Centre for Military Mobility*, coordinated by the Government, which would function as an integrated operational and strategic management structure. Such a centre could ensure permanent monitoring of transits, analysis of logistical capacities and communication with NATO and EU partners and *would respond to the requirement* in the EU Military Mobility Package regarding the establishment of a *National Coordinator*

According to the EU Military Mobility Package, Form 302, used within the EU and NATO, generates numerous bottlenecks in practice, mainly due to different interpretations applied at the level of customs structures. The lack of a unified understanding of the regulations leads to situations where the same document is accepted at one border crossing point and rejected at another, without a clear or coherent justification.



for Military Transport⁴. In parallel, it is necessary to establish a formal civil-military coordination mechanism between the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior, by harmonizing procedures and adopting a clear framework of responsibilities, in order to eliminate overlaps and inter-institutional blockages.

Infrastructure modernization remains a critical pillar for military mobility. Romania must prioritize, if necessary, including through dedicated government decisions, infrastructure projects with direct relevance for NATO and the EU. They include *the strengthening of critical bridges, located on the directions of operational interest, and the modernization of strategic railway lines on the south-east and north-south axes*, indispensable for the transport of heavy equipment. At the same time, *expanding the capacity of the Constanta port is essential*, given its central role in regional logistics flows and the potential to become a major entry node for allied forces. To ensure the sustainability of these investments, dual-use criteria should be introduced in all new infrastructure projects, so that they can serve both civilian and military needs. Also, the development of logistics hubs compatible with NATO standards, in locations such as Constanța and Cincu would provide the capacity to quickly and efficiently integrate extensive flows of troops and equipment.

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In terms of financing and governance, it is necessary *to increase the share of dual-use projects in the national budget*, so that the modernization of critical infrastructure can be sustainable and predictable. This approach can be complemented by the development of public-private co-financing models, which would accelerate the implementation of essential projects and attract additional technical expertise, as well as by capitalizing on the Security Action for Europe/SAFE financial instrument, through which Romania was allocated 16.68 billion euros. A robust monitoring mechanism is also indispensable: the annual assessment of progress would provide a clear picture of the stage of implementation and would contribute to maintaining positive institutional pressure to comply with the established objectives.

⁴ Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on Military Mobility, 19 November 2025, European Commission, <https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-11/Action%20plan%20on%20military%20mobility%202.0.pdf>, p. 13.



Military mobility is one of the essential components of modern defence. For Romania, it is not only an obligation generated by NATO and EU membership, but also a strategic necessity for its own security.

Overall, these measures would strengthen the strategic governance of military mobility and position Romania as a credible and efficient actor in the Euro-Atlantic logistics architecture.

CONCLUSION

Military mobility is one of the essential components of modern defence. For Romania, it is not only an obligation generated by NATO and EU membership, but also a *strategic necessity for its own security*. Thus, in the context of the security situation in the Black Sea region, Romania is facing a logistical and institutional transformation essential for its credibility as an allied state.

The implementation of the National Military Mobility Plan, integration into the EU package of documents and collaboration with NATO are necessary and essential steps – but the speed and consistency of investments will determine whether Romania can truly become a military mobility hub in the region or will remain a vulnerable point in an increasingly tense geopolitical context. Progress depends on rapid measures: a single coordination structure, priority investments in dual-use infrastructure and full integration into NATO and EU mechanisms.

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THE PREPAREDNESS OF CIVIL SOCIETY – A CORE COMPONENT OF THE EUROPEAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE –

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.15

The concept of “Total Defence” emerged in the second half of the 20th century, particularly within the context of the Cold War, as a strategic response by small or neutral states to the limitations of traditional military deterrence. It promotes an integrated, multi-sectoral approach that mobilizes the entire society – military, civil, economic and psychological – in support of national defence. The expansion of the security sphere beyond the strictly military domain reflects the hybrid nature of contemporary threats, which increasingly target critical infrastructure, social cohesion, and democratic order. Within this framework, “Total Defence” becomes the foundation of a robust model of societal resilience, understood as the collective ability of society to anticipate, manage and recover from a range of crises – whether military, economic, environmental, or informational in nature. This article analyses the strategic role of civil society preparedness within the European security architecture, emphasizing the importance of fostering societal resilience through civil-military cooperation, civic education for security, and the strengthening of inter-institutional capacities in an era marked by instability, uncertainty and hybrid threats.

Keywords: society; resilience; national security; civil-military cooperation; civic education;



INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the European security architecture has undergone profound transformations, generated by a succession of major crises that have disrupted the international order and tested the capacity of states and societies to respond coherently and efficiently to them. The COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine, the intensification of cyberattacks, as well as the proliferation of disinformation campaigns have demonstrated that security can no longer be conceived exclusively from a military perspective. At the heart of the new security paradigm, we now find the idea of societal resilience.

Societal resilience refers to the collective capacity of a society to resist, adapt and reconfigure itself rapidly in the face of political, economic, cyber, military or informational disruptions. This capacity entails not only the soundness of institutions, but also the active involvement of citizens, the cohesion of communities and their ability to react intelligently and in an organised manner in crisis situations. From this perspective, security is no longer the exclusive prerogative of governments and armed forces, but becomes a collective responsibility, shared between state institutions and citizens. According to the Stockholm Resilience Centre, this concept represents “*the capacity of a system, be it an individual, a forest, a city or an economy, to deal with change and continue to develop. The system will experience shocks and disturbances over time, but these also can spur renewal and innovative thinking*” (Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2014).

The main objective of this article is to analyse the strategic role of civil society training in strengthening the European security architecture, emphasizing the dimensions of resilience, civil-military cooperation and civic education for security. The aim is to demonstrate that civil society can no longer be seen as a passive beneficiary of security measures, but rather as an active and indispensable actor

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The Global Strategy of the European Union for the Common Foreign and Security Policy explicitly introduces the idea of “societal resilience” as a defining element of modern security, while also emphasizing the essential role of civic participation in defending democratic values.

in protecting the democratic order in the face of contemporary threats. Furthermore, the level of civil society training directly influences the state’s capacity to manage complex crises and to participate effectively within the collective defence system of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The methodology used in this article is qualitative in nature, based on the analysis of public policy documents developed by the European Union, NATO and member states with a tradition of integrating civil society into security systems. The sources used include academic publications, case studies and reports developed by international organizations such as the Stockholm Resilience Centre and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, as well as materials provided by European think tanks specialized in the field of security. We have used a comparative and analytical approach, aiming to highlight examples of both good practices and structural dysfunctions that affect the effective integration of civil society into resilience strategies.

RECONFIGURING THE CONCEPT OF SECURITY: FROM MILITARY DEFENCE TO SOCIETAL RESILIENCE

After the end of the Cold War, the concept of security in Europe has undergone a broad process of reconfiguration, moving from a strictly military approach to an integrative one, in which the social, economic, digital and informational dimensions are treated as fundamental elements of national and regional security (Biscop, 2019). The Global Strategy of the European Union for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (European Union, 2016) explicitly introduces the idea of “societal resilience” as a defining element of modern security, while also emphasizing the essential role of civic participation in defending democratic values.

In parallel, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization revised its interpretation of Article 3 of the Washington Treaty, reaffirming the obligation of member states to develop their domestic resilience capacities. They include actions in areas such as civic education, the protection of critical infrastructure and the strengthening of strategic communication (NATO, 2023). These updates reflect a growing recognition that new forms of conflict – hybrid, asymmetric

or informational – directly affect civilians by transforming citizens into both targets and strategic resources for crisis response.

In this new context, the civilian population can no longer be considered a simple observer of conflicts, becoming a vulnerable, yet indispensable actor in the process of collective defence. The lack of minimal civic preparation and active participation in public life makes European societies vulnerable to propaganda, manipulation, collective panic or institutional collapse (Kloubert, 2018). Therefore, the contemporary approach to security involves not only strengthening military capabilities, but also developing a societal ecosystem capable of actively contributing to national and European resilience.

This integrative perspective is organically correlated with the notion of societal resilience, understood as the ability of a society to resist, adapt and recover from crises of a military, economic, ecological or informational nature. Under these circumstances, *“Total Defence”* (Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection/DSB, 2025) provides the structural and strategic framework necessary for strengthening resilience, by institutionalizing mechanisms for preparation, prevention and adaptability at an intersectoral level. By promoting collective responsibility, civic education and inter-institutional cooperation, this paradigm ensures not only the protection of society from external aggressions, but also its fortification against internal risks, such as disinformation, polarization or systemic shocks. In this light, *“Total Defence”* should not be understood exclusively as a security strategy, but rather as an essential conceptual framework for the sustainable development of societal resilience in an era defined by hybrid threats and highly complex emergencies.



ROMANIAN
MILITARY
THINKING

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TOTAL DEFENCE AND SOCIETAL RESILIENCE

The concept of *“Total Defence”* has gained traction in recent years in response to the complexity of new threats and forms of conflict. It involves the mobilization of all resources and actors of society, not just the armed forces, to ensure national security. Total defence transcends the traditional limits of conventional warfare, encompassing civilian, economic, social, informational and digital dimensions.



National security strategies have begun to include detailed civic education and public information plans, to counter the destructive influences of disinformation and to strengthen trust in institutions.

The concept of “*Total Defence*” has evolved into a comprehensive strategy, involving all sectors of society – military, civilian, economic and psychological – to respond to a wide range of threats. Originating in the Nordic countries during the Cold War, this model has been adapted to current challenges, such as hybrid warfare, disinformation and attacks on critical infrastructure (Berzina, 2020, 2022).

EU and NATO member states are beginning to recognize the importance of developing robust societal resilience, including civil preparedness, protection of critical infrastructure, and increased responsiveness to hybrid or cyber attacks. Resilience is not just a defensive measure, but also a dynamic process, involving education, public awareness, and close collaboration between authorities and citizens.

Thus, “*Total Defence*” is no longer the responsibility of only the military, but a shared mission, requiring the active and conscious involvement of the entire population. In this regard, national security strategies have begun to include detailed civic education and public information plans, to counter the destructive influences of disinformation and to strengthen trust in institutions.

The model is based on the principle of “*whole-of-society*”, where all components – from government and military to the private sector and citizens – collaborate within a coherent framework. “*Total Defence*” becomes a combination of aspects of a security doctrine with those of a societal philosophy based on shared responsibility and active participation (Burrell, Collison, 2025), as can be seen from the following list containing the key elements of total defence:

- *Military defence*: armed forces prepared for conventional defence;
- *Civil defence*: protection of the population and maintenance of essential services;
- *Societal preparedness*: civic education, crisis training, community resilience;
- *Integrated coordination*: partnerships between the state, civil society and the private sector;
- *Hybrid risk management*: countering disinformation, cyberattacks etc.

As an example, we can mention Finland and Sweden, which promote citizen training and participation in national exercises; also, educational campaigns are integrated into the education system and defence strategies, and intersectoral cooperation is systematized to ensure continuity of governance in crisis.

The European Union's "Preparedness Union" strategy approved on 26 March 2025 aims to strengthen resilience to new threats and adopt a "whole-of-society" approach to EU security, preparedness becoming part of the "basic logic" of all EU actions – that is not just reactions to the crisis, but prevention, anticipation, integration of preparedness into public policies (Lazarou, 2025).

Finland and Sweden have laws and policies that require citizens to actively participate in defence preparation, including civilian volunteering, emergency training, and national exercises. Educational campaigns and school programs introduce knowledge about security and each person's role in maintaining it. There are cooperation structures between ministries, energy companies, transport, healthcare entities and the armed forces to ensure the continuity of the state in a crisis.

Why is it important? The concept of "Total Defence" reflects the new reality of modern security, where threats no longer come only from direct military confrontations, but from a complex mix of factors – political, economic, technological and social. Thus, a strongly prepared and mobilized society is essential for protecting democracy and fundamental values. At the heart of the concept of "Total Defence" is societal resilience – the capacity of communities to withstand, adapt and recover from crises, while preserving essential social functions and values.

In conclusion, we can say that "Total Defence" and societal resilience are interdependent and essential to ensure an effective response to new challenges, being a pillar of the 21st century European security.



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In NATO's view, resilience involves the ability of societies to maintain essential functions and recover rapidly from shocks, while maintaining cohesion and trust. Discussions at the NATO Warsaw Summit led to the development of seven core requirements for assessing resilience.

SOCIETAL RESILIENCE – THE PIVOT OF THE NEW SECURITY PARADIGM

NATO defines societal resilience as the ability to withstand and recover from major shocks while maintaining the continuity of essential public services (Christie, Berzina, 2023). Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty contains the beginning of the idea of resilience: *“In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack”* (NATO, 1949). Resilience is therefore both technical and societal – including trust in institutions, civic engagement, and social solidarity (Christie, Berzina, ib.).

In NATO's view, resilience involves the ability of societies to maintain essential functions and recover rapidly from shocks, while maintaining cohesion and trust. Discussions at the NATO Warsaw Summit led to the development of seven core requirements for assessing resilience (NATO, 2016). The resilience model is based on three stages: preparation, response and recovery. Similarly, the development of psychological and community capacities is essential for the effectiveness of decentralized and participatory defence. Examples from Finland, Estonia, Taiwan and Singapore show that the collective perception of a legitimate threat strengthens trust in government and civic participation (Burrell, Collison, 2025).

The seven basic requirements to be used for states to measure their level of resilience include not only technical readiness, but also intangible capacities such as mutual trust, social cohesion and civic engagement structured as follows:

- Continuity of governance and authority – including the ability of leadership and essential institutions to function in crisis situations.
- The ability to manage energy crises – securing energy supply and protecting critical energy infrastructure.
- The ability to manage uncontrolled population movements – including receiving and supporting refugees or other categories of people on the move.

- The ability to treat the affected population – ensuring essential medical services in case of emergencies or attacks.
- The ability to secure water and food supplies – protecting essential supply chains for the population.
- The ability to ensure mass communications – including the functioning of telecommunications networks and the internet in crisis situations.
- The ability to transport armed forces and equipment within the national territory – and to support military mobility (CIMIC-COE, n.d.)

A RAND report on the United Kingdom highlights that resilience operates in three phases: preparation, response, and recovery – with psychological resilience becoming an increasingly important, albeit underexplored, component (Caves, Lucas, Dewaele, Muravska, Wragg, Spence, Hernandez, Knack, Black, 2021). By developing these adaptive capacities, societies can better cope with complex disruptions and reduce reliance on centralized intervention, thereby strengthening the effectiveness of “Total Defence” as a decentralized, community-oriented strategy. In addition, effective implementation of “Total Defence” requires sustained coordination, transparency, and inclusive governance. Case studies from Finland, Estonia, Sweden, Taiwan, and Singapore show that when citizens perceive threats as common and the response as legitimate, trust in government increases and democratic engagement is strengthened (Burrell, Collison, 2025).

Indicators such as the Fragile States Index or the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators show that progress is uneven and that the success of total defence depends on investments in education, communication and infrastructure. It suggests that while “Total Defence” can strengthen societal cohesion, it is not a universal solution and must be complemented by long-term investments in education, crisis communication, and health infrastructure. Ultimately, total defence is not just about strengthening the state against external threats, but also about cultivating a resilient, participatory, and adaptable civic culture, capable of responding to uncertainty with confidence and cohesion.



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For civil society to become a pillar of the European security architecture, a coherent and integrated strategy is needed at national and European level.

Preparing civil society as a security tool involves developing the population's capacity to react responsibly and in an organized manner to threats. This includes security education, volunteer training, civil-military simulation exercises and the development of a public culture of responsibility.

In Finland and Sweden, the “Total Defence” (Totalförsvar) model involves all citizens, public institutions and the private sector in a national network of protection and crisis response (Wrangé, Bengtsson, Brommesson, 2024). In these countries, civil society training is integrated into school curricula, media campaigns and national defence policy.

For civil society to become a pillar of the European security architecture, a coherent and integrated strategy is needed at national and European level. It should include:

- 1 – integrating security education into the education systems;
- 2 – promoting partnerships between governments, NGOs and academia;
- 3 – strengthening strategic communication and combating disinformation;
- 4 – financial support for civic preparedness and resilience initiatives (Biscop, 2019; Wrangé, Bengtsson, Brommesson, 2024).

In Eastern Europe, where the memory of authoritarianism is still alive, the promotion of a culture of civic security is met with scepticism, passivity and sometimes even institutional resistance. However, initiatives such as those of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung have demonstrated not only that, through civic education, community engagement and dialogue with authorities, civil society can become a valuable partner of the state in strengthening resilience (KAS, 2023), but also that, in Central and Eastern Europe, challenges related to democratic resilience persist, including the vulnerability of institutions and the decline of civic trust (Casimir Pulaski Foundation, 2023).

KEY STRENGTHS AND GOOD PRACTICES IN EUROPE, AS WELL AS THE CHALLENGES OF CIVIL SOCIETY INTEGRATION INTO SECURITY STRUCTURES



Following the analysis of the documents and reports cited above, we have been able to identify the advances that have been made in this field, as well as the shortcomings that still exist, information that has been structured into two categories: *European strengths and good practices* and *challenges in integrating civil society into the security system*.

1. European strengths and good practices

1.1. Integrating security education into the education system.

In Lithuania and Estonia, defence and security education is part of the high school curriculum, with courses on civil protection, disinformation detection and hybrid risk awareness. This approach leads to the formation of active and resilient citizens from adolescence onwards (Rogulis, 2023). The focus is on young people, teenagers and young adults, considered a key group in developing a culture of democratic participation. At the same time, there are efforts to extend security education to other broad groups in society, such as adults, teachers, vulnerable groups. Involving young people helps to develop a culture of democratic participation (Šešelgytė, Bladaitė, 2021; Estonian Rescue Board, 2025).

The Nordic countries frequently organize crisis simulations in which the civilian population is actively involved. In Finland, for example, information warfare, cyberattack or power outage scenarios are tested annually, in which members of local communities also participate.

1.2. *Civil-military simulation exercises.* The Nordic countries frequently organize crisis simulations in which the civilian population is actively involved (Yle, 2019). In Finland, for example, information warfare, cyberattack or power outage scenarios are tested annually, in which members of local communities also participate.

1.3. *Collaboration between the state, NGOs and the private sector.* In Sweden, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) works together with local organizations to create volunteer networks, develop media campaigns and action guides for the population. This type of collaboration creates a culture of co-responsibility between the state and society (Slavkova, Sichtermann, Mužina, Goldstein, Hahn-Madole, Hansen, Jacobetty, Kolleck, 2025). The role of non-formal civil society actors (non-formal civic educators) that are NGOs



In many European countries, including Romania, civil society training is not integrated into a coherent national security vision. Measures are often fragmented, reactive and poorly funded. Security education is rarely included in the school curriculum and does not benefit from consistent national programs.

and various local initiatives fill the gaps that formal education does not address – for example, the training of teachers who are essential in the process of integrating education for security and active citizenship into school curricula (Ib.).

1.4. Innovation in the methods and tools used

Using various methods: workshops, trainings, public events, digital tools, training of trainers, active participation, hybrid formats etc. It helps to adapt to local needs and increase civic engagement.

2. Challenges in integrating civil society into the security system

2.1. Lack of a coherent strategic vision. In many European countries, including Romania, civil society training is not integrated into a coherent national security vision. Measures are often fragmented, reactive and poorly funded. Security education is rarely included in the school curriculum and does not benefit from consistent national programs. The lack of consensus on what “*civic education*” means has consequences: different objectives, variable terminology, divergent historical and ideological interpretations between countries (Ciolan, Stancu, 2021).

2.2. Low level of trust in institutions. In the absence of effective communication, citizens remain passive and distance themselves from decision-making processes. This distrust affects civic participation and reduces the effectiveness of any collective preparedness or resilience initiative (Slavkova, Sichtermann, Mužina, Goldstein, Hahn-Madole, Hansen, Jacobetty, Kolleck, 2025). It generates passivity, cynicism, and reluctance to engage in any security-related processes. In many cases, citizens perceive security as an exclusively military or state responsibility, ignoring the participatory dimension of democratic resilience.

2.3. Lack of dedicated institutional infrastructure. As noted in the EU policy document *How the EU Responds to Crises and Builds Resilience* (Consilium, n.d.), the Union recognizes that improvements are needed in cross-sectoral and cross-border crisis management, crisis communication, and disinformation countermeasures, indicating gaps in unified institutional responsibility and coherent vision across domains.

2.4. Disinformation and social polarization. External interference through disinformation campaigns, emotional manipulation, and narrative fragmentation affects society's ability to react in a unified manner. In the absence of a minimum level of media and digital literacy, the population is easily exposed to messages designed to undermine trust in institutions, create panic, or encourage passivity (Wardle, Derakhshan, 2017; NATO StratCom COE, 2021; European Commission, 2020).

2.5. Underfunding and lack of continuity of civic initiatives. NGOs and civic education projects for security are often dependent on external grants, which leads to discontinuity and the impossibility of building sustainable programs. In the absence of real financial and political commitment from the state, these initiatives remain local and isolated, without systemic impact.

EUROPEAN FUNCTIONAL MODELS AND ACTION PLANS

To strengthen societal resilience, several European countries have developed policies and practices that can serve as models to replicate:

1. The Nordic model of Total Defence. Finland and Sweden have been implementing a form of “Total Defence” for decades, in which every citizen, organization, and institution plays a role. In Finland, civil self-defence manuals are distributed to the population, and the authorities organize annual crisis exercises involving both the public sector and civil society. These practices increase the ability of society to respond effectively to complex crises, including cyberattacks or disinformation campaigns (Ålander, 2024; Government Offices of Sweden, 2024).

2. Security education in school curricula (Baltic countries). In Lithuania and Estonia, content related to defence and security education is introduced as early as high school (Wrange, Bengtsson, Brommesson, 2024). Students learn about the functioning of democratic institutions, information manipulation, behaviour in emergency situations, and the importance of social cohesion in the face of external threats.

3. Structured civil-military collaboration (Sweden, Norway). In Sweden, the Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) cooperates directly



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with NGOs, local authorities and academia to develop emergency plans, organize training and manage strategic communication. The Norwegian model includes a national civil cooperation platform that enlists experts from all relevant sectors: education, healthcare, media, transport, energy etc.

4. *International initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe.* In regions where the culture of civic security is less developed, international organizations such as the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung or the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats support the development of civic resilience networks. They provide training courses, educational materials and support for local partnerships between administration and civil society.

Perspectives and Directions for Action

In order for the civil society to become a pillar of the European security architecture, a coherent and integrated strategy is needed at national and European level. It should include:

1. *Integrating security education into education systems – with a focus on digital literacy, critical thinking and knowledge about the functioning of democratic institutions.*

2. *Promoting sustainable partnerships between public authorities, NGOs and academia, with a view to building a common culture of participatory security.*

3. *Combating disinformation through strategic communication campaigns, accompanied by transparent public platforms for informing citizens.*

4. *Stable and predictable financing of civic resilience projects, including through European funds dedicated to strengthening democracy and social cohesion.*

5. *Creating national societal resilience coordination structures, which include civil society representatives in security-related decision-making processes.*

CONCLUSIONS

The analysed European examples demonstrate that societal resilience cannot be built in the absence of coherent national and European strategies, real cooperation between institutions and civil society and education oriented towards democratic participation and collective responsibility. The Nordic and Baltic models demonstrate that involving citizens in security education, crisis exercises and civic initiatives significantly contributes to strengthening social cohesion and the capacity to react to complex threats.

At the same time, the identified challenges – from lack of trust in institutions and chronic underfunding, to the absence of a dedicated institutional infrastructure – highlight how fragile this construction can be in the absence of clear political commitment and a functional strategic framework. It is necessary for security education to become an integrated component of public policies, supported by sustainable partnerships and predictable funding.

In a period marked by instability and disinformation, transforming citizens from spectators into active participants in democratic life becomes an essential condition for protecting European values. Resilience is not based solely on formal structures or state intervention, but on the capacity of communities to cooperate, learn and act together. Only by assuming this shared role between state and society can Europe build sustainable security, centred on education, solidarity and shared responsibility.

Romania has significant potential in developing societal resilience, primarily based on its young and receptive human capital, who is increasingly active and informed in the digital environment. This young generation can become a key driver in promoting a culture of resilience through involvement in security education programs, crisis simulation exercises, and civic volunteer networks. Moreover, the country benefits from an active network of non-governmental organizations and local initiatives, which – through their experience and expertise in civic education and democratic participation – can be mobilized in partnership with public and military institutions to develop and implement sustainable civil-military training and collaboration projects. Such integrated cooperation represents



The Nordic and Baltic models demonstrate that involving citizens in security education, crisis exercises and civic initiatives significantly contributes to strengthening social cohesion and the capacity to react to complex threats.



an essential component for consolidating a modern security system, in which civil society becomes an active and responsible partner within the national security architecture.

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MODERN OCEANOGRAPHY – FROM CLIMATE CHALLENGES TO STRATEGIC AND PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS –

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.16

The Black Sea is considered one of the most affected areas in Europe, with a pollution level of almost 98%, which is a major public health alert. This study examines the profound transformations of modern oceanography, highlighting how marine environmental degradation reconfigures global security and public health. The research examines the weaknesses of the Romanian Black Sea sector and the way they affect navy activities under the circumstances of climate change and intense anthropological pollution.

Pollution is not only an ecological problem, but also an operational obstacle. The presence of contaminated macro-waste and sediments in Romanian ports and coastal areas increases the risk of damage to propulsion systems and may distort acoustic (sonar) sensor signals essential for national security missions in the western Black Sea basin.

Through comparative analysis methods, the results of the study underline the need to implement advanced filtration systems on board ships to ensure the resilience of Romanian naval forces in an increasingly degraded marine environment.

Keywords: oceanography; marine pollution; naval actions; microplastics; public policies;

INTRODUCTION

Modern oceanography faces unprecedented pressures, ranging from climate change and massive pollution to the intensive exploitation of marine resources. These challenges generate a ripple effect, disrupting the balance of fragile ecosystems, global geopolitical security, and, by extension, public health, through the degradation of vital resources. Oceanography is the science that studies the oceans and their ecosystems, having a crucial impact on the global environment and natural resources. The strategic implications of oceanography are significant, influencing national security, maritime trade, and the management of marine resources. In the context of climate change, understanding the oceans becomes essential for developing sustainable and effective policies.

Although oceanography, as an integrative science, has made remarkable progress in recent decades, its field of study has nevertheless faced a series of persistent and interconnected challenges, such as: insufficient exploration of the ocean depths, the impact of climate change on marine ecosystems, and the alarming increase in microplastic pollution (Boşneagu, 2019). Contemporary oceanography analyses the impact of these challenges on public health and maritime security, paying particular attention to the effects of microplastics on the human body. In this regard, the present study evaluates public policies in the European Union and Romania in this field, rounding out the picture with an analysis of how marine pollution affects the success of naval surface and submarine operations.

Contemporary oceanography analyses the impact of these challenges on public health and maritime security, paying particular attention to the effects of microplastics on the human body.

TYPES AND SOURCES OF MARINE POLLUTION: FROM MICROPLASTICS TO CHEMICAL CONTAMINANTS

Despite significant advances in oceanographic research and technology, the field continues to face major challenges that limit our full understanding and sustainable management of the oceans. These challenges primarily concern ocean exploration, climate change,



Marine pollution remains an ever-present and worsening threat to the health of the oceans. Among the most visible and pressing forms of pollutants are plastics and microplastics, which are present in nearly all marine habitats, from the water's surface to the deepest ocean canyons.

and marine pollution, each presenting complex scientific, logistical, geopolitical, and military issues.

The global ocean, which covers over 70% of the Earth's surface, plays an essential role in regulating the climate, conserving biodiversity and sustaining human life. However, its vast depths remain largely unexplored and poorly understood. Currently, less than 25% of the global ocean floor has been mapped at high resolution (Wölfl et al., 2019; NOAA, 2021). The global ocean absorbs approximately 90% of the excess heat generated by the greenhouse effect and 25-30% of anthropogenic carbon dioxide (IPCC, 2023). However, this particularly important protective function comes at a cost. Increased heat absorption leads to the warming of ocean waters; a fact that affects stratification, current systems, and the distribution of marine species (Pörtner et al., 2022). Simultaneously, CO₂ absorption causes ocean acidification, a chemical process that reduces the availability of carbonate ions needed by calcifying organisms, such as corals and molluscs (Doney et al., 2009).

Another phenomenon, which is currently very pronounced, is ocean deoxygenation, the decrease in oxygen levels in the marine environment due to increased stratification and reduced upwelling. This process, exacerbated by warming, can lead to the expansion of hypoxic zones, also known as "dead zones", where marine life cannot be sustained (Breitburg et al., 2018). Together, these processes threaten the integrity of marine ecosystems and their products, such as fish, as well as the maintenance of biodiversity, because of carbon sequestration and retainment.

Marine pollution remains an ever-present and worsening threat to the health of the oceans. Among the most visible and pressing forms of pollutants are plastics and microplastics, which are present in nearly all marine habitats, from the water's surface to the deepest ocean canyons (Jambeck et al., 2015). These pollutants cause physical, physiological, and health damage to marine organisms and also act as vectors for chemical contaminants and invasive species (Rochman et al., 2016). Microplastics, defined as plastic fragments smaller than five millimetres, originate from the degradation of large plastic waste or are produced directly in the form of granules or fibres used in cosmetics, textiles, and industrial processes. They have been detected in all areas of the ocean,



from the surface to the abyssal sediments, and in marine organisms at all trophic levels (Andrady, 2011). The presence of microplastics in the marine food chain raises serious concerns regarding the transfer of these particles and associated toxic substances (e.g., phthalates, polychlorinated biphenyls/PCBs, heavy metals) to the final consumer: humans (Galloway et al., 2017). Numerous studies have demonstrated the accumulation of microplastics in the tissues of certain species of fish, crustaceans, and marine molluscs that constitute the human diet. In particular, bivalve molluscs, such as mussels and oysters, are considered relevant bioindicators of microplastic pollution, as they are consumed whole, including the digestive tract where these particles accumulate (Li et al., 2015).

According to a study conducted in Europe, frequent consumers of seafood may ingest up to 11,000 microplastic particles annually (Van Cauwenberghe, Janssen, 2014). Although the size of the particles often prevents them from being absorbed into the systemic circulation, the smallest ones (<1 μm) can enter the bloodstream, lymph, or even tissues. The toxicological impact of microplastics on humans is still being investigated, but there is preliminary evidence of inflammation, endocrine disruption, and oxidative stress. Microplastics can act as carriers for toxic substances (e.g., bisphenol A, organochlorine pesticides), which can disrupt endocrine functions and affect fertility, neurological development, or increase cancer risk (Wright, Kelly, 2017). A relatively recent study (Vethaak, Legler, 2021) identified plastic fragments in human blood, confirming the possibility of systemic transport. Additionally, researchers have discovered microplastics in human placentas, raising concerns regarding prenatal exposure and the potential impact on foetal development (Ragusa et al., 2021). In addition to plastics, chemical pollutants such as heavy metals, persistent organic pollutants (POPs), and pharmaceutical residues accumulate in marine food chains, with potential toxic effects on marine organisms and human consumers. Furthermore, runoff from agriculture and nutrient-rich urban areas promote eutrophication, leading to harmful algal blooms and oxygen depletion.

In addition to plastics, chemical pollutants such as heavy metals, persistent organic pollutants, and pharmaceutical residues accumulate in marine food chains, with potential toxic effects on marine organisms and human consumers.

Public exposure to microplastics is not limited to the consumption of seafood. It also includes drinking water, sea salt, the air we breathe, and plastic packaging. Thus, addressing this emerging risk requires



Manned submersibles, autonomous underwater vehicles, and remotely operated vehicles have significantly improved the ability to investigate abyssal zones, but their operation and maintenance are costly.

an integrated “One Health” approach, which links environmental, animal, and human health. It is recommended to strengthen regulations regarding the use of single-use plastics, develop efficient wastewater filtration technologies, and support research on the toxic effects of microplastics on human health.

Bathymetric mapping is essential not only for understanding tectonic processes and the morphology of the ocean floor, but also for identifying biodiversity-rich habitats, such as hydrothermal and cold seeps (Jakobsson et al., 2020).

Technological and financial barriers continue to limit exploration of the deep ocean. Manned submersibles, autonomous underwater vehicles, and remotely operated vehicles have significantly improved the ability to investigate abyssal zones, but their operation and maintenance are costly (Levin et al., 2019). Thus, although the potential for scientific discoveries in the oceans is vast, including the identification of unknown species, ecosystems, and resources, human capacity to explore the hydrosphere remains limited (Boșneagu, 2022).

PUBLIC POLICIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION ON COMBATING MICROPLASTIC POLLUTION

The European Union has adopted an integrated approach to combating microplastic pollution, as part of the EU Strategy on Plastics in a Circular Economy (European Commission, 2018). The strategy includes specific measures, such as: banning single-use plastics (Directive (EU) 2019/904); regulating the content of intentionally added microplastics in cosmetics, detergents, and paints (European Chemicals Agency-ECHA, 2023); promoting technologies for capturing microplastics in waste water treatment plants; and investing in research through the Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe programs to better understand microplastics and their effects on health and the environment. In addition, the EU has set recycling and energy recovery targets for plastic packaging and has strengthened the monitoring and reporting regime regarding marine litter under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC).

In Romania, policies on microplastics are still in their infancy, but are in the process of being aligned with EU legislation. To date, the measures include: the transposition of Directive (EU) 2019/904

on single-use plastics through Government Emergency Ordinance No. 6/2021, which bans the sale of certain plastic products; local initiatives regarding waste collection on the coast and in aquatic ecosystems, in collaboration with NGOs and local public administrations; the adoption of the National Strategy on the Circular Economy (2022), which provides for measures to prevent the generation of microplastics from industrial and textile processes. However, the lack of national standards for monitoring microplastics in water, sediments, and organisms, as well as the absence of advanced filtration systems in wastewater treatment plants, limits the effectiveness of the measures implemented. It is recommended that the issue of combating microplastics should be integrated into the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) as a priority for public health and environmental protection.

MARINE POLLUTION AND ITS IMPACT ON SURFACE AND SUBMARINE NAVAL OPERATIONS

Marine pollution transforms the ocean from a predictable environment into a technically hostile one, forcing naval forces to infiltration technologies and next-generation sensors capable of penetrating the contaminated environment. In this context, pollution, including that caused by microplastics, has an increasingly visible impact on the conduct of naval operations, affecting both surface ships and submarines.

Notable consequences include:

a) *interference with detection and monitoring equipment:* accumulations of microplastics and macro-debris can affect the accuracy of passive and active sonar systems used in the detection of submarines and sea mines; plastic materials in suspension alter the propagation of acoustic waves in water, contributing to increased background noise and reduced sonar detection resolution (Zhao et al., 2020);

b) *risk to intake systems and the cooling of ship propulsion systems:* plastic fragments and associated hull vegetation (biofouling) associated with them can block the intake systems of ship engine cooling systems, leading to an increased risk of overheating or unplanned shutdown of critical systems (Kühn et al., 2015);



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The lack of national standards for monitoring microplastics in water, sediments, and organisms, as well as the absence of advanced filtration systems in wastewater treatment plants, limits the effectiveness of the measures implemented.



Marine pollution, particularly that caused by microplastics and chemical residues, extends beyond the biological sphere and becomes a factor of operational constraint. Thus, both surface ships and submarines face new technical challenges, ranging from sonar signal interference to risks of mechanical damage, forcing the adaptation of defence technologies to an increasingly polluted environment.

c) *increased biofouling of ship hulls*: microplastics facilitate the formation of hull fouling, which acts as a substrate for the colonization of marine organisms, sometimes to an excessive degree, thereby increasing hydrodynamic drag and energy consumption in ships. For submarines, this phenomenon affects the acoustic signature and stealth capability (Lobelle, Cunliffe, 2011);

d) *strategic implications*: from a military perspective, pollution of the marine environment reduces the predictability and safety of operations in coastal zones or restricted maritime areas, where acoustic and environmental conditions become essential. Thus, the management of microplastic pollution is no longer just an ecological problem, but one with direct implications for maritime security and naval operational capability.

CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary oceanography demonstrates that the health of marine ecosystems is not merely an ecological issue, but rather a pillar of global security. Environmental degradation through pollution and climate change is redefining trade routes and response capabilities, transforming the ocean into a space for managing multiple risks.

Marine pollution, particularly that caused by microplastics and chemical residues, extends beyond the biological sphere and becomes a factor of operational constraint. Thus, both surface ships and submarines face new technical challenges, ranging from sonar signal interference to risks of mechanical damage, forcing the adaptation of defence technologies to an increasingly polluted environment. In this context, we believe that it is imperative to equip ships and submarines with high-performance cooling water filtration systems, thereby preventing damage caused by microplastics. As such, we believe that the protection of the oceans is inextricably linked to sustainable public health and effective strategic stability. In this regard, addressing current challenges requires close international cooperation that combines advanced scientific research with naval security policies to ensure the long-term sustainability of resources and the safety of navigation.

There is a need for protected and monitored maritime routes, which would ensure tactical predictability for naval security operations and commercial shipping. We also believe it is necessary to implement

surveillance networks that combine real-time oceanographic data (temperature, salinity, oil slicks) with traffic monitoring systems. It allows naval forces to avoid areas with a high risk of collision with floating debris or areas where sonar performance is degraded chemically. Last but not least, given the risks to public health and crew safety, it is recommended to implement rigorous protocols for testing water and air quality on board ships, to detect the presence of microplastics and volatile chemical compounds that can accumulate in enclosed spaces during long-duration missions.

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INSTITUTIONAL REFORM OF THE ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN WARFARE (1912-1918) – BETWEEN NECESSITY AND CONSTRAINT –

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.17

The study analyses the process of institutional reform of the Romanian Armed Forces during the period 1912-1918, from the perspective of adapting to the requirements of modern warfare. The main directions of the reform are examined – the organization of the forces, the mobilization system, logistics and the armament industry, as well as the formation of the command corps – and the structural limits that hindered their implementation are identified.

The article argues that, although the Romanian state was aware of the need for military modernization, economic, administrative and political constraints determined a fragmented and incomplete process, with direct effects on the operational capacity in the early years of the First World War.

Keywords: military reform; doctrine; mobilization; military institutions; Romanian Armed Forces;

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Romanian state faced a dual challenge: internal consolidation and integration into an increasingly unstable international system. In this context, the Romanian Armed Forces could no longer function solely as an instrument of traditional territorial defence; instead, it had to evolve into a structure capable of sustaining a large-scale, prolonged, and high-intensity conflict.

The Romanian Armed Forces were undergoing a period of profound transition, situated between the legacy of a classical military model and the growing pressure of the transformations brought about by modern warfare. The experience of the Balkan conflicts of 1912–1913, followed by the outbreak of the First World War, revealed the structural limitations of the Romanian military institution and placed the issue of armed forces reform at the centre of political debates.

The Romanian state harboured considerable strategic ambitions, driven by national objectives and by an international context favourable to the revision of the regional status quo. However, these aspirations were not matched by a corresponding institutional capacity. The armed forces, the principal instrument for the implementation of foreign policy, were affected by dysfunctions in organization, mobilization, logistics, and the training of the command corps – shortcomings that became evident during the direct confrontation with the realities of industrialized warfare.

In this context, the institutional reform of the Romanian Armed Forces between 1912 and 1918 was neither a linear nor a coherent process planned in advance. On the contrary, it unfolded in a fragmented manner, under the pressure of events and the constraints imposed by the state's limited resources. War acted primarily as an accelerating factor, forcing rapid and often incomplete adaptations, without establishing a favourable framework for systematic modernization.

The institutional reform of the Romanian Armed Forces between 1912 and 1918 was neither a linear nor a coherent process planned in advance. On the contrary, it unfolded in a fragmented manner, under the pressure of events and the constraints imposed by the state's limited resources. War acted primarily as an accelerating factor, forcing rapid and often incomplete adaptations, without establishing a favourable framework for systematic modernization.



Romania's entry into the First World War was preceded by a relatively long period of neutrality (1914-1916), which was used to prepare the armed forces and adapt military doctrines to the requirements of modern warfare. This period highlighted the discrepancy between doctrine, the experience of the Balkan Wars, and the logistical and industrial realities of the Romanian state.

Romania's entry into the First World War in August 1916 represented the decisive test for a military structure still undergoing reform. The initial failures of the 1916 campaign revealed the gap between pre-existing doctrinal concepts and the realities of a global-scale conflict. At the same time, the withdrawal to Moldavia and the reorganization of the armed forces during 1917-1918 demonstrated the existence of an institutional capacity for adaptation, although one that was harnessed under extreme conditions.

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The main areas targeted by the reform were:

- the reorganization of command-and-control structures;
- the modernization of military training and military educational institutions;
- the adaptation of logistics and mobilization to the requirements of industrial warfare (Torrey, 1998, pp. 25-40).

This article examines the institutional reforms of the Romanian Armed Forces between 1912 and 1918, a period marked by doctrinal, logistical, and organizational transformations generated by the Balkan Wars and the First World War. The study highlights the tension between the necessity of modernization and the economic, logistical, and political constraints faced by the Romanian state. Primary sources from military archives, together with contemporary and modern historical works, allow for a clear assessment of both the progress achieved and the limitations of Romanian military reform.

The purpose of this article is to analyse the institutional reforms initiated during the period 1912-1918, evaluating the extent to which they succeeded in responding to the demands of modern warfare. The central hypothesis is that these reforms were conceived within a modern strategic framework, but implemented in an administrative and economic environment insufficiently prepared for rapid and profound transformation.



The present study aims to analyse the process of institutional reform from an integrated perspective that goes beyond a strictly operational or narrative approach. The emphasis is placed on the internal mechanisms of military transformation, on the relationship between the state and the military institution, and on the manner in which political, economic, and social constraints influenced the capacity for adaptation to modern warfare.

The issue of the institutional reform of the Romanian Armed Forces in the context of modern warfare (1912-1918) falls within the field of contemporary military history, at the intersection of political history, institutional history, and security studies. The period under analysis corresponds to a phase of accelerated transition, during which the Romanian Armed Forces were compelled to adapt to the profound transformations in the European military phenomenon, generated by the industrialization of warfare, the expansion of mass mobilization, and the redefinition of the relationship between the state, society, and armed forces.

The relevance of this research lies in the need to move beyond a strictly narrative perspective on Romania's participation in the First World War. Although the military campaigns of 1916-1918 have received considerable historiographical attention, the reform of the armed forces has often been treated as an implicit or derivative process, rather than being systematically analysed as a distinct subject of study.

The issue of the institutional reform of the Romanian Armed Forces in the context of modern warfare (1912-1918) falls within the field of contemporary military history, at the intersection of political history, institutional history, and security studies.

THE ARMED FORCES ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

The 1912–1918 period was crucial for the institutional modernization of the Romanian Armed Forces, shaped by the transformations of modern warfare and by the experiences of the Balkan Wars and the First World War (Strachan, 2001, pp. 50-75). The reforms were primarily aimed at adaptation to industrialized conflict, but they were constrained by limited resources, insufficiently developed infrastructure, and complex political circumstances (Howard, 2009, pp. 110-135).

The analysis of the organization of the Romanian Armed Forces during the 1912-1918 period must be situated within the conceptual framework of the classical theory of war and contemporary studies



The Great General Staff, led in 1913 by General Alexandru Averescu, played the central role in operational planning, the establishment of strategic directions, and the coordination of major military units. Although its responsibilities were clearly defined, its operational command capacity was limited by the absence of a modern command-and-control system, as well as by dependence on bureaucratic procedures that slowed the decision-making process.

concerning the transition from manoeuvre warfare to industrialized warfare. In the Clausewitzian sense, the Romanian Armed Forces represented an instrument of state policy, whose institutional structure reflected the relationship between political objectives, available means, and contextual constraints (Clausewitz, 1982, pp. 37-41).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the organization of the Romanian Armed Forces reflected the structural tension between the 19th-century model of a national army and the emerging demands of modern warfare. The institutional framework adhered to the principles of general mobilization, mass armed forces organization, and centralized command; however, the capacity to adapt to the new operational realities – namely the increased density of firepower, the industrialization of conflict, and the decisive role of logistics and command structures – remained limited. In this context, the reforms initiated after 1912 sought a gradual adjustment of existing structures to the political, financial, and geopolitical constraints of the Romanian state rather than a radical doctrinal transformation.

The political and military leadership of operations during the Second Balkan War (June-July 1913) was exercised by the Council of Ministers and the Great General Staff, under the direct authority of King Carol I, who served as supreme commander. This structure reflected the classical model of military subordination to political authority, characteristic of European states at the beginning of the 20th century (Kirițescu, 1922, pp. 45-47).

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For the 1913 campaign, the Romanian Armed Forces mobilized approximately 330,000 men, organized into several army corps, each composed of infantry divisions and support units. The chain of command was structured along relatively rigid hierarchical levels: Great

General Headquarters – army corps – divisions – brigades – regiments (Brătianu, 1938, pp. 102-105). This organization reflected a predominantly hierarchical model, designed for manoeuvre operations over large areas, but less suited to flexible inter-arms coordination and rapid responses to unforeseen situations. The commanders of army corps and divisions had limited autonomy, with major decisions being taken at higher levels (Torrey, pp. 14–16).

The Great General Headquarters, organized for the duration of military operations, functioned as the supreme body of operational command. It exercised both planning and executive responsibilities, which led to an overlap of functions and an excessive burden placed upon the central level of command (AMR, Marele Cartier General Collection, file 1913, pp. 3-9). Despite these limitations, the 1913 campaign demonstrated the Romanian Armed Forces capacity to achieve rapid concentration and strategic advance, in the absence of major resistance from the adversary. Nevertheless, the relative operational success concealed structural deficiencies that would become critical in the context of the First World War (Kirițescu, pp. 58-62).

The experience of the Second Balkan War, together with broader technological developments in Europe, highlighted the gap between the doctrines adopted and the Romanian Armed Forces actual combat capabilities (Hall, 2000, pp. 130-150). Romania came to recognize the necessity of adapting to the new form of industrial warfare, characterized by mass mobilization, the extensive use of artillery and heavy automatic weapons, inter-arms coordination, and complex logistical systems (Murray et al., 1994, pp. 201-230).

The institutional reforms targeted the armed forces structure, particularly through the reorganization of divisions and army corps, the creation of specialized support structures, and the modernization of military education by updating curricula in military schools and sending officers abroad for training, primarily to France and Germany (Murgescu, 2010, pp. 146-160).

During the 1912-1916 period, the Romanian Armed Forces were organized on the basis of a territorial system designed to facilitate rapid mobilization and the reinforcement of units through reserves.



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Romania came to recognize the necessity of adapting to the new form of industrial warfare, characterized by mass mobilization, the extensive use of artillery and heavy automatic weapons, inter-arms coordination, and complex logistical systems.



The division of responsibilities between the political and military levels often remained ambiguous, a fact highlighted in the correspondence between the Ministry of War and the Great General Staff during the years 1914-1916. The decision-making process was further affected by external interventions and by the absence of an institutional culture of long-term planning.

The army corps represented the fundamental operational level, each being responsible for a specific geographical area and for the associated recruitment, training, and mobilization infrastructure. Although effective within the framework of territorial defence, this organization proved rigid in relation to the requirements of operational manoeuvre and the rapid concentration of forces.

The infantry division represented the basic tactical unit, generally structured into two brigades, each composed of two regiments. Although numerically comparable to European standards, Romanian divisions revealed deficiencies in terms of heavy artillery, communications equipment, and organic logistical services. Cavalry, organized into separate brigades and divisions, continued to be conceived primarily as a manoeuvre and strategic reconnaissance branch; however, its role was progressively undermined by technological developments and the emergence of trench warfare.

The Great General Staff constituted the conceptual and organizational core of the armed forces, being responsible for strategic planning, the drafting of regulations, and the coordination of mobilization. Between 1912 and 1916, it attempted to harmonize command structures with Western models, particularly those inspired by France, a tendency reflected in military laws and regulations, as well as in the operational instructions issued (AMR, Marele Stat Major Collection, file 3/1912, pp. 1-18). Nevertheless, the division of responsibilities between the political and military levels often remained ambiguous, a fact highlighted in the correspondence between the Ministry of War and the Great General Staff during the years 1914-1916. The decision-making process was further affected by external interventions and by the absence of an institutional culture of long-term planning (AMR, Ministerul de Război Collection, file 88/1914, pp. 4-11).

A constant concern for institutional adaptation can be identified through the studies, reports, and regulations drafted after the Balkan Wars, which included assessments regarding the need to increase the flexibility of command structures and to develop auxiliary services considered essential in a prolonged conflict (AMR, Marele Stat Major Collection, file 12/1912, pp. 3-9; file 47/1913, pp. 15-22).

In order to highlight the concern of military decision-makers with regard to the legal regulation of the Romanian state's military organization, it is important to mention several normative acts issued prior to the Great War: the *"Law on the Organization of the Armed Forces"*, promulgated in 1908 and amended in 1910, 1911, and 1913; the *"Law on the Staff Service"* of 1909, which established the responsibilities of the offices within the Great General Staff; the *"Gendarmerie Law"* of 1908, through which the Gendarmerie became an integral part of the Romanian Armed Forces; the *"Regulation on the Organization and Functioning of the Ministry of War"* of 1912, which regulated the division into services and directorates; the *"Regulation of the Staff Service"* of 1912, which defined the structure and responsibilities of the Great General Staff within the Ministry of War and reinforced the separation between the Great General Staff (strategic level) and the staff services of major commands (army corps and divisions); and the *"Regulation on Civil Obligations during Mobilization"* of 1913, which ensured coordination between the military and civilian institutions in the context of Romania's intervention in the Second Balkan War by defining the responsibilities of local authorities and the procedures for requisitions, thereby marking the transition toward total mobilization.

From the perspective of military theory, the organization of Romanian military structures can be situated within the paradigm identified by the German historian Hans Delbrück, who distinguished between the strategy of annihilation and the strategy of attrition. The Romanian command structure was conceived, at least at the national level, for rapid and decisive operations of annihilation; however, the actual resources of the state in fact imposed an attritional approach, for which the institutional structure was insufficiently prepared (Delbrück, 1920, pp. 3-15).

From an organizational standpoint, the Romanian Armed Forces entered the First World War with a command structure that broadly reflected the classical early 20th-century model, inadequately adapted to the requirements of industrialized and coalition warfare (Torrey, pp. 45-48).



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The Great General Staff, headed at the time of Romania's entry into the war by General Vasile Zottu, was responsible for planning, coordination, and overall operational command. Its internal structure, however, was overburdened by the accumulation of responsibilities and by the absence of an efficient command-and-control system adapted to simultaneous operations on multiple fronts.

The supreme command of the armed forces was exercised, in accordance with the Constitution and the military legislation in force, by King Ferdinand I of Romania in his capacity as commander-in-chief. The political decision regarding Romania's entry into the war and the establishment of the general strategic direction belonged to the Crown Council and to the Liberal government led by Ion I.C. Brătianu, thereby introducing a dual dimension – political and military – into the process of strategic command (Kirițescu, pp. 211-215). The Great General Staff, headed at the time of Romania's entry into the war by General Vasile Zottu, was responsible for planning, coordination, and overall operational command. Its internal structure, however, was overburdened by the accumulation of responsibilities and by the absence of an efficient command-and-control system adapted to simultaneous operations on multiple fronts (AMR, Marele Stat Major Collection, file 1916, pp. 7-15).

For the direct conduct of military operations, the Great General Headquarters was established as the central organ of operational command, coordinating the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Armies, as well as the Northern Army, which operated on distinct fronts. The overlap of responsibilities between the Great General Staff and the Great General Headquarters generated ambiguities within the chain of command and delays in the transmission of orders (AMR, Marele Cartier General Collection, file 1916, pp. 22-29). Although the structure based on armies and army corps was, in theory, adequate, the absence of a common operational practice and of high-level command exercises reduced the coherence of military actions during the critical phases of the 1916 campaign (Brătianu, 1938, pp. 187-190).

The Romanian Armed Forces were organized into structures consisting of armies, army corps, divisions, and brigades, in accordance with an established hierarchy. Army and corps commanders had limited autonomy, being required to seek approval from the central command level for major decisions. This excessive centralization negatively affected the armed forces capacity for rapid response to enemy manoeuvres, particularly during the counteroffensive of the Central Powers in the autumn of 1916 (Kirițescu, pp. 256-260).



The staff structures at the level of large units were insufficiently prepared for inter-arms coordination and for managing a large volume of operational information, a situation that intensified confusion and contributed to the fragmentation of the military effort (AMR, Corpuri de Armată Collection, file 1916, pp. 41-46).

From an institutional perspective, the Romanian command structures of 1916 may be characterized as inadequate for the complexity of modern warfare. The centralized command model, the absence of a coherent operational doctrine, and the insufficient professionalization of staff structures contributed decisively to the initial strategic failure. Nevertheless, these deficiencies must be interpreted within the context of the structural constraints of the Romanian state and the limited time available for adaptation. The 1916 campaign emphasized more the problems rather than their causes, representing the moment in which they became fully evident, thus serving as the starting point for the extensive reorganization undertaken during 1917-1918.

The experience of the 1916 campaign led to the accelerated restructuring of the higher command system. The support provided by Allied military missions and the integration of foreign advisers contributed to the professionalization of the staff system, simultaneously revealing the Romanian Armed Forces dependence on external expertise. Under the influence of the French Military Mission, led by General Henri Mathias Berthelot, the Great General Staff underwent a process of professionalization accompanied by the adoption of modern principles of operational planning and command, closely aligned with the concepts of Ferdinand Foch regarding unity of command and inter-arms coordination (Foch, 1911, pp. 56-63).

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The organization of the combat branches and services reflected a structural imbalance between combat forces and support elements. Infantry concentrated the majority of personnel, while artillery, engineering units, medical services, transport, and supply structures remained insufficiently developed, a deficiency repeatedly highlighted in the reports of branch inspectors during the period 1913-1915 (AMR, Inspectorate de armă Collection, Inspectoratul Infanteriei,



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file 19/1913, pp. 10-18; Inspectoratul Artileriei, file 27/1915, pp. 5-14). This configuration was suitable for a limited war of manoeuvre, but entirely inadequate for a war of attrition, characterized by high material consumption and the necessity of inter-arms coordination.

The Great General Staff developed plans for doctrinal reform based on Western experiences and the lessons of the Balkan Wars. The key principles included inter-arms coordination, centralized planning, and preparation for mass mobilization within the framework of industrial warfare (Doughty, 2005, pp. 20-35). Preparing the armed forces for such a conflict involved not only structural reforms, but also numerous challenges regarding the allocation of material and industrial resources (Murgescu, pp. 123-140), emphasising significant shortcomings in the use of logistics and communication networks.

The reforms undertaken in the period preceding Romania's entry into the Great War focused primarily on the reorganization of large units, the adaptation of command structures, and the clarification of relations between hierarchical levels. The objective was to create large units capable of manoeuvre and inter-arms cooperation; however, reality demonstrated that these formations were often understaffed or insufficiently trained. The persistence of rigid structures, inherited from the 19th century, limited operational flexibility, while the reform process itself was frequently slowed by institutional inertia.

The reforms implemented between 1916 and 1918, including the expansion of the role of artillery and the reorganization of engineering units and logistical services, represented reactive responses to the constraints of attritional warfare rather than the outcome of anticipatory institutional planning (AMR, Marele Cartier General Collection, Ordine și jurnale de operații, file 56/1916, pp. 20-33; file 14/1917, pp. 2-9). These measures were implemented under the immediate pressure of the front, in a context of limited resources and significant human losses.

THE MOBILIZATION SYSTEM AND THE RESERVE ISSUE

In the military thinking of the early 20th century, mobilization did not represent a mere administrative act, but rather a fundamental strategic instrument situated at the intersection of political decision-making and the state's actual military capacity. In the Clausewitzian sense, mobilization constituted the moment in which latent military potential was transformed into armed forces capable of action, being profoundly conditioned by the institutional structure, the economic infrastructure, and the social cohesion (Clausewitz, pp. 31-36).

For Romania, the mobilization system was conceived as an expression of the mass national army model, based on universal conscription and the integration of reserves into the wartime structure. It demonstrated the awareness of the decisive role of rapid mobilization in modern conflict, while also revealing the objective limitations imposed by the transport network, the reduced industrial capacity, and the uneven level of training among reservists (AMR, Marele Stat Major Collection, file 41/1912, pp. 2-11; file 66/1913, pp. 7-18).

Mobilization represented one of the most sensitive components of the modern military system. Romania developed a relatively extensive reserve system; however, it was unevenly distributed and poorly integrated from a logistical perspective. Mobilization plans envisaged the rapid transformation of the peacetime structure into a wartime one through the activation of reserves and the creation of additional units. In practice, the mobilization of 1916 revealed systemic deficiencies that hindered the integration of reservists into military units, including the lack of trained personnel, shortages of wartime equipment, and difficulties in coordinating transportation (AMR, Marele Cartier General Collection, *Jurnale de operații*, file 73/1916, pp. 12-35; *Correspondență operativă*, file 81/1916, pp. 4-19). These problems were not exclusively military in nature, but also reflected the infrastructural and administrative limitations of the Romanian state.

The mobilization system of the Romanian Armed Forces was founded upon the military legislation adopted at the end of the 19th century and subsequently adapted through regulations and instructions issued



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by the Ministry of War. The Law on the Organization of the Armed Forces and the mobilization regulations established the principles for bringing peacetime units to wartime strength through the use of trained reserves and annual conscription contingents. Detailed mobilization plans were drawn up, structured according to army corps and military districts, highlighting the rigid and territorial character of the system (AMR, Marele Stat Major Collection, file 9/1914, pp. 1-24). This rigidity proved functional within the framework of territorial defence, but it limited the capacity for rapid operational concentration, as became evident during the military campaign of 1916. The issue of reserves constituted one of the major structural vulnerabilities of the Romanian Armed Forces during the Great War. Although, numerically, the reserve system made possible the mobilization of a considerable force, the level of training, cohesion, and equipment remained uneven. Reports issued by branch inspectors and commanders of large units frequently highlighted deficiencies in the preparation of reservists, particularly regarding the use of modern weaponry and integration into complex tactical structures (AMR, Inspectorate de armă Collection, Inspectoratul Infanteriei, file 22/1914, pp. 5-17; Inspectoratul Artileriei, file 31/1915, pp. 9-21). In addition, internal political tensions and external pressures influenced decisions concerning the armed forces structure and mobilization (Buzatu, 2003, pp. 290-310).

From the perspective of military theory, this discrepancy may be interpreted through the analysis proposed by Hans Delbrück, who emphasized the dependence of mobilization efficiency on the state's capacity to sustain a prolonged war. Romanian reserves were conceived for a short and decisive conflict rather than for a war of attrition, a factor that intensified the negative consequences of Romania's late and incomplete entry into the logic of industrialized warfare (Delbrück, pp. 41-52). Numerical mobilization was not accompanied by a corresponding logistical and industrial mobilization, which reduced the armed forces capacity to sustain the war effort over the medium term (Liddell Hart, 1929, pp. 144-151).

The dramatic experience of the 1916 military campaign led to a profound revision of the mobilization system and the management of reserves. Under the coordination of the French Military Mission

and the reorganized Great General Headquarters, measures were adopted for the selection, reassignment, and intensive training of reservists, with emphasis placed on the homogenization of units and the strengthening of tactical cohesion (AMR, Marele Cartier General Collection, file 18/1917, pp. 1-26). This reorganization confirms the observations of the British historian John Keegan regarding the transformation of modern warfare into a total phenomenon, in which military success depended upon the state's ability to integrate human resources into a coherent and adaptable institutional system (Keegan, 1998, pp. 203-210).

LOGISTICS AND THE ARMAMENT INDUSTRY

In the context of modern warfare, logistics ceased to represent merely an auxiliary field of military art and became a decisive structural component of combat capability. The evolution of conflicts at the beginning of the 20th century confirmed the Clausewitzian observation that armed forces cannot be separated from the material base that sustains them. In this sense, logistics became the concrete expression of the relationship between the state, the economy, and war (Clausewitz, pp. 43-47).

For Romania, this transformation generated acute challenges, as the predominantly agrarian economic structure, the insufficiently developed transport infrastructure, and the limited industrial capacity profoundly conditioned the organization and functioning of the military logistical system. The documents produced and the measures undertaken during the period 1912-1914 indicate only a partial awareness of these limitations, without their being overcome through a coherent anticipatory strategy (AMR, Marele Stat Major Collection, file 58/1912, pp. 6-19; file 71/1913, pp. 11-27).

The logistical services of the Romanian Armed Forces were organized into distinct functional branches: quartermaster services, transportation, military medicine, veterinary services, and technical services (AMR, Ministerul de Război Collection, Regulamente ale serviciilor logistice, file 12/1911, pp. 1-22). This organization reflected an administrative model inspired by the 19th century, suitable for a short-term conflict but insufficient for sustaining an industrialized



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At the outbreak of the First World War, the Romanian armament industry was still in an incipient stage of development. Domestic production capacities were limited primarily to infantry ammunition, weapons repair, and certain engineering materials, while heavy weaponry, artillery ammunition, and modern equipment were obtained almost exclusively through imports.

war of attrition. The experience of 1913 made it possible to identify several logistical shortcomings, including problems related to field supply and the underestimation of the difficulties associated with the theatre of operations (Hall, 2000, pp. 135-170).

Reports frequently highlighted the lack of specialized personnel, the insufficiency of motorized transport resources, and the excessive dependence on the railway network (AMR, Inspectorate de servicii Collection, Inspectoratul Intendenței, file 33/1914, pp. 4-18). From the perspective of modern military theory, such deficiencies contradicted the principles formulated by the British military historian J.F.C. Fuller, who emphasized the decisive role of logistical continuity in maintaining operational freedom of action (Fuller, 1926, pp. 102-110).

At the outbreak of the First World War, the Romanian armament industry was still in an incipient stage of development. Domestic production capacities were limited primarily to infantry ammunition, weapons repair, and certain engineering materials, while heavy weaponry, artillery ammunition, and modern equipment were obtained almost exclusively through imports (AMR, Ministerul de Război Collection, Situația industriei de armament, file 94/1915, pp. 2-15). This external dependence is documented in the correspondence between the Ministry of War and foreign suppliers, as well as in the reports concerning war stockpiles prepared prior to 1916 (AMR, Ministerul de Război Collection, file 17/1916, pp. 5-28). From the analytical perspective proposed by Hans Delbrück, the Romanian state's inability to sustain an autonomous military production capacity limited its real strategic options, pushing the armed forces toward a logic of rapid engagement incompatible with a war of attrition (Delbrück, pp. 88-96).

The 1916 campaign unequivocally revealed the limitations of the Romanian logistical system. Rapid mobilization exhausted existing reserves, while the disruption of external commercial links generated an acute crisis in ammunition, equipment, and medical supplies. Operational journals and reports of the Great General Headquarters describe major difficulties in supplying the units engaged with the enemy, with direct consequences for their capacity for resistance and manoeuvre (AMR, Marele Cartier General Collection, file 64/1916, pp. 10-36).



In the analytical terms employed by the British military historian B. H. Liddell Hart, the Romanian Armed Forces entered a “battle of resources” that it was unable to sustain, as the absence of a robust logistical infrastructure transformed tactical failures into strategic crises (Liddell Hart, pp. 158-165).

After the withdrawal to Moldavia, military logistics became one of the priority areas in the armed forces reorganization. Under the coordination of the Great General Headquarters and with the support of the French Military Mission, measures were adopted for the rationalization of consumption, the centralization of depots, and the reorganization of military transportation (AMR, Marele Cartier General Collection, file 21/1917, pp. 1-24).

At the same time, the Romanian state undertook sustained efforts to develop a minimal war industry adapted to existing conditions. A slight increase in the domestic production of ammunition and auxiliary materials was recorded during the period 1917-1918, although it remained insufficient to eliminate external dependence (ANR, Ministerul Industriei și Comerțului Collection, file 42/1917, pp. 7-29). Institutional reform also targeted logistics and mobilization through the development of depots, railway transportation, and communication networks (Murgescu, pp. 125-145).

The modernization of the Romanian Armed Forces was strongly affected by the economic constraints of the state and by political priorities. Military budgets were insufficient to sustain reforms across all sectors, leading to significant disparities between planned doctrine and the troops’ actual support capabilities (Hitchins, 1994, pp. 210-230). Efforts to develop domestic production capacities were both delayed and inadequate, while logistics remained one of the principal weaknesses of the Romanian military system.

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TRAINING OF THE COMMAND BODY

In modern armed forces, the command corps represented the link between military doctrine, institutional organization, and the reality of the battlefield. The quality of officers’ training determined not only the effectiveness of tactical and operational leadership, but also the armed forces capacity to assimilate the changes imposed by the evolution of warfare. In Clausewitzian terms, the officer embodied “military



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judgment”, being required to act under conditions of uncertainty, friction, and political pressure (Clausewitz, pp. 49-55).

For the Romanian Armed Forces, the period 1912-1918 represented a critical interval during which the traditional system of training the command corps – designed for a short war of manoeuvre – was confronted with the demands of industrialized warfare and inter-arms command. Military leaders became aware of this discrepancy, yet institutional solutions were neither coherently anticipated nor implemented prior to Romania’s entry into the war (AMR, Marele Stat Major Collection, file 63/1913, pp. 2-14).

The initial training of the command corps was carried out within the officer candidate schools and the Superior War School, institutions that reflected the French model of military education. The curricula of these institutions emphasized the study of tactics, military regulations, and military history, to the detriment of subjects related to logistics, war economy, and the command of large units under conditions of attritional warfare (AMR, Școala Superioară de Război Collection, file 7/1912, pp. 1-18). The selection of officers was based on formal criteria of education and seniority, while the mechanisms for evaluating practical competence remained limited. Certain dysfunctions also existed within the promotion system, favouring institutional conformism at the expense of initiative and adaptability (AMR, Ministerul de Război Collection, file 29/1914, pp. 6-21).

The professional culture of the Romanian command corps was marked by a strong attachment to existing regulations and by a rigid interpretation of official doctrine. In the terms proposed by Hans Delbrück, this orientation reflected the persistence of a conception of decisive, annihilator warfare that was insufficiently adapted to the realities of a prolonged conflict (Delbrück, pp. 60-68).

The experience of the Balkan Wars and of the military manoeuvres conducted prior to 1916 was not sufficiently exploited for the thorough reform of command thinking. Campaign journals and subsequent evaluations reveal significant difficulties in inter-arms coordination and in the conduct of operations at the army corps level (AMR, Marele Cartier General Collection, *Jurnale de campanie*, file 48/1916, pp. 9-27).



The military campaign of 1916 revealed the structural limitations of the Romanian command corps. The lack of experience in conducting large-scale operations, deficiencies in communication, and insufficient cooperation between levels of command contributed to major operational failures.

From the perspective of modern military theory, the observations of the British military historian B. H. Liddell Hart regarding the necessity of intellectual flexibility among commanders are particularly relevant for interpreting the failure (Liddell Hart, pp. 171-178). The Romanian command corps was constrained by a rigid doctrinal framework that limited its capacity for rapid adaptation to unforeseen situations.

Following the disastrous outcome of the 1916 campaign, the reform of the command corps became a strategic priority. Under the influence of the French Military Mission and through the reorganization of the Superior War School, intensive staff courses, practical exercises, and rigorous evaluations of officers' competence were introduced (AMR, Marele Cartier General Collection, file 26/1917, pp. 3-22). Institutional reform also targeted the professionalization of the command corps through the modernization of military schools and the sending of officers abroad for specialized training. Nevertheless, this process remained uneven and failed to ensure a homogeneous level of competence throughout the entire officer corps.

Romanian military thought continued to be influenced by the French, German, and British military schools:

- France: the concept of the decisive offensive and the emphasis on high troop morale;
- Germany: rigorous planning, organization, and discipline;
- United Kingdom: inter-arms cooperation, logistics, and modern communication techniques (Doughty, pp. 3-28).

The institutional transformation under analysis broadly confirms the observations formulated by the British military historian John Keegan regarding the central role of military leadership under the conditions of total war, in which the effectiveness of military action depends upon the commanders' capacity to coherently integrate the human, material, and moral resources of the state into a unified strategic effort (Keegan, pp. 231-238). At the same time, the process of doctrinal modernization

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was hindered by the resistance displayed by certain segments of the officer corps, which remained attached to operational and cultural models that were characteristic of classical warfare. This tendency confirms the analysis advanced by Samuel P. Huntington concerning the institutional inertia of the military profession (Huntington, 1957, pp. 59-85). This structural tension between the necessity of innovation and the persistence of tradition constituted a major limiting factor in the rapid and coherent implementation of new doctrinal concepts.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the institutional reform of the Romanian Armed Forces during the period 1912-1918 highlights the profoundly constrained and predominantly reactive character of the process of military modernization. Far from being the result of a coherent anticipatory strategy, this reform was driven by the cumulative pressure of the transformations associated with modern warfare and by the structural limitations of the Romanian state, manifested at the political, economic, and administrative levels. Under these conditions, the armed forces modernization proceeded in a fragmented, uneven, and often incoherent manner, failing to decisively reduce the gap between the strategic objectives assumed by the state and the actual institutional capabilities.

The evolution of the forces organization, the mobilization system, logistics, the armaments industry, and the training of the command corps all reflect this structural imbalance. The uneven pace of reforms and the absence of systemic coordination intensified the vulnerabilities of the military institution, while the failures of the 1916 military campaign cannot be interpreted solely through the lens of command or execution deficiencies, but rather as the expression of an accumulation of institutional dysfunctions developed during the period preceding Romania's entry into the war.

The situation of the Romanian Armed Forces thus confirms the observations of both classical and modern military theory regarding the relationship between the state and war. In the Clausewitzian sense, the armed forces functioned as an instrument of policy; however, the effectiveness of this instrument was strictly conditioned by the material and institutional resources of the state. Economic constraints,

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dependence on imported weapons and ammunition, and the weak development of transport infrastructure significantly reduced the Romanian Armed Forces strategic room for manoeuvre and limited their capacity to sustain a prolonged military effort.

From the analytical perspective proposed by Hans Delbrück, the choice of a strategy of rapid annihilation proved incompatible with the realities of a war of attrition characteristic of the global conflict. This incompatibility explains why the armed forces genuine adaptation occurred only under the extreme conditions of 1917-1918, when institutional reform became a necessity for survival.

The direct experience of war thus acted as the principal catalyst of institutional change. The armed forces reorganization in Moldavia, under the coordination of the Great General Headquarters and with the support of the French Military Mission, demonstrated the existence of a genuine capacity for adaptation. The professionalization of the command corps, the improvement of training, the reorganization of logistics, and the increased efficiency of the mobilization system and reserve management all contributed to the restoration of the Romanian Armed Forces combat capability.

Nevertheless, the reforms implemented during the period 1917-1918 were accelerated and incomplete in character, being constrained by the duration of the conflict and by the unstable geopolitical context of 1918. They should not be interpreted as the completion of a modernization process, but rather as the foundation for a subsequent institutional evolution developed during the interwar period.

This reality explains why, despite the existence of a formally modern military doctrine and a declared political will, the Romanian Armed Forces encountered major difficulties during the initial phases of the war and were compelled to undergo an accelerated process of adaptation based on direct operational experience. The period 1914-1916 was decisive in this regard: doctrinal modernization was genuine, but insufficiently supported by adequate resources, infrastructure, and administrative capacities.

The armed forces organization and structure during the 1912-1918 period illustrate, overall, a process of forced reform, marked by compromise solutions and partial adaptations. The mobilization system functioned effectively as a quantitative mechanism, but initially

The armed forces reorganization in Moldavia, under the coordination of the Great General Headquarters and with the support of the French Military Mission, demonstrated the existence of a genuine capacity for adaptation. The professionalization of the command corps, the improvement of training, the reorganization of logistics, and the increased efficiency of the mobilization system and reserve management all contributed to the restoration of the Romanian Armed Forces combat capability.



The institutional reform of the Romanian Armed Forces between 1912 and 1918 unfolded at the intersection between the objective necessity of adapting to modern warfare and the structural constraints of the state.

failed as a qualitative and integrative instrument, while logistics and the armament industry constituted critical points of institutional vulnerability, with direct effects on operational capability during the 1916 campaign.

The training of the command corps likewise reflects the structural tension between tradition and modernity, between institutional continuity and the necessity of rapid adaptation to the demands of modern warfare. The partial correction of these limitations during the years 1917-1918 demonstrates that the transformation of military leadership was not the result of a deliberate doctrinal choice, but rather of a historical necessity imposed by the strategic context.

In conclusion, the institutional reform of the Romanian Armed Forces between 1912 and 1918 unfolded at the intersection between the objective necessity of adapting to modern warfare and the structural constraints of the state. Incomplete and often delayed, this reform nevertheless demonstrated the military institution's capacity for transformation under conditions of existential crisis, confirming that military modernization is not a linear process, but one profoundly dependent upon context, resources, and political will.

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THE DYNAMICS OF ROMANIAN-BULGARIAN RELATIONS AND THE INCIDENCE OF DISPUTES ALONG ROMANIA'S SOUTHERN BORDER

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.18

The terms of the Peace Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine, signed on 27 November 1919 between the Allied Powers and Bulgaria, imposed economic and military restrictions and territorial cessions on Bulgaria, resulting in a leftward shift among political parties that was also felt throughout Bulgarian society. This pro-communist and socialist current was influenced by Bolshevik propaganda which, amid general dissatisfaction with the treaty's sanctions, requiring Bulgaria to pay reparations amounting to 2,250 million gold francs and significantly reducing its military capabilities, contributed to the promotion of a revisionist policy characterised by irredentism. This policy materialised through support for terrorist and extremist organisations led by the comitadjis, who could no longer be identified with the fighters for national liberation from the abusive rule of the Ottoman Empire during the period known in Bulgarian history as the National Revival. In this international context, Bulgaria joined the revisionist states directly affected by the new world order established after the end of World War I. Among this group, consisting of Germany, Italy and Hungary, the USSR had the greatest interest in bringing Bulgaria into its sphere of influence in order to promote its ideology and political projection throughout the Balkan Peninsula. However, beginning in 1938, Bulgarian politicians showed a strong tendency to integrate into the German sphere of influence, which shaped their political conduct in relations with neighbouring states. However, as early as 1933, negotiations on disputed issues with Romania were proposed at the initiative of the Bulgarian government. In the summer of 1938, in the lead-up to the signing of the Thessaloniki Agreement of 31 July 1938, Romanian-Bulgarian bilateral relations were characterised by a constructive rapprochement, but along the southern border, incidents, often caused by Bulgarian border guards, did not reflect this positive political trend.

Keywords: Reconciliation; border incidents; Border Guard Corps; comitadjis; Thessaloniki Agreement of 31 July 1938;

ROMANIAN POLICY OF BILATERAL RECONCILIATION IN THE FACE OF BULGARIAN NATIONALISM, CHARACTERISED BY THE MAINTENANCE OF TENSIONS AT THE ROMANIAN-BULGARIAN BORDER

At the beginning of 1938, a Romanian-Bulgarian rapprochement was perceived by the international community as a harmonisation of bilateral relations beneficial to the entire region of Southeastern Europe. Both Romanian and Bulgarian diplomacy made serious efforts to negotiate and resolve the pending problems between the two countries. In addition to Romania's signing of the Thessaloniki Agreement on 31 July 1938, by which it recognising and implicitly accepting Bulgaria's right to rearm, an important step towards bilateral political rapprochement by the Romanian government was the concessions granted to the Bulgarian minority through the adoption of the Regulation on Minorities, under which more consistent rights were granted than those requested by the Bulgarian side during the negotiations. This demonstrated Romania's willingness to resolve the existing disputes on the bilateral agenda. Compensation payments to Bulgarians expropriated in Southern Dobrogea followed. Declaratively, King Boris of Bulgaria expressed his desire to develop economic and cultural exchanges, but after the settlement of the minority issue, the government in Sofia changed its position in the context of Romania's efforts to bring Bulgaria closer to the principles of the Balkan Entente. In order to advance such a diplomatic initiative, Bulgaria placed the issue of the restitution of Southern Dobrogea back on the agenda, a proposal that Romania did not accept (Costea, 2002, p. 39).

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The spring of 1939 began in Bulgaria with revisionist demonstrations in the streets and in Parliament, supported by a fierce irredentist campaign against Romania in the Bulgarian press. Following the signing of the Thessaloniki Agreement on 31 July 1938, Bulgaria



On 12 February 1932, following several rounds of bilateral discussions, Protocol no. 5 was agreed upon and signed. This reference document was subsequently supplemented by Explanatory Instructions concerning the Procedure for the Settlement of Border Incidents, the latest amendments to which were adopted by the Romanian-Bulgarian Mixed Commission at its meeting of 26 November 1932.

allocated substantial funds to military purposes: 1,923,673,000 leva to the Ministry of War, an increase of 103,073,000 compared to 1938; 266,575,000 leva to the Directorate of Aeronautics, an increase of 91,575,000 leva; 42,720,000 leva to the Maritime and River Defence (the Black Sea Fleet and Danube Fleet), an increase of 7,860,000 leva; and 127,280,000 leva to the Directorate of Compulsory Labour, an increase of 19,220,000 leva. Altogether, these expenditures represented 30.9 % of the 1939 state budget (ANIC, 1938, f. 89). It should be noted that, following the signing of the Thessaloniki Agreement on 31 July 1938 between Bulgaria and the signatories of the Balkan Pact, the military clauses of the Treaty of Neuilly-sur-Seine were abolished, and the Directorate of Aeronautics, the Fleet and the Directorate of Compulsory Labour were placed under the authority of the Bulgarian Ministry of War (Ibid., f. 90).

A particular significant manifestation of this irredentist and revisionist policy was reflected in the numerous incidents that occurred along the Romanian-Bulgarian border. The military authorities of the two neighbouring countries agreed to conclude protocols regulating the procedures for investigating such incidents, taking into account the specific nature of the activities carried out in the immediate vicinity of the border, as well as the rights and obligations of the parties involved. Therefore, on 12 February 1932, following several rounds of bilateral discussions, Protocol no. 5 was agreed upon and signed. This reference document was subsequently supplemented by Explanatory Instructions concerning the Procedure for the Settlement of Border Incidents, the latest amendments to which were adopted by the Romanian-Bulgarian Mixed Commission at its meeting of 26 November 1932. However, incidents continued to be reported by the Romanian military and civilian authorities. In the context of the political developments that took place on the international stage between 1938 and 1939, the attacks and incursions carried out by Bulgarian comitadjis on Romanian territory, allegedly supported by the Bulgarian military authorities responsible for border security, reinforced the suspicions of Romanian political and military decision-makers that Bulgaria was maintaining a provocative and potentially conflictual situation along

the border. Such actions were perceived as possible preparations for future developments involving territorial claims that could jeopardise the political and military balance in the region.

At the beginning of 1939, in January, the Ministry of Air and Navy, through the Commercial Navy Department, requested that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs take steps with the Bulgarian government to ease some restrictions affecting the navigation of light yachting or rowing boats on the Danube. According to the document, there was a risk that such vessels could be ordered by Bulgarian border guards to dock simply because it was left to their discretion to determine whether or not the boats had crossed the river or not. In this context, the recreational and fishing vessels largely abandoned navigation on the river and were forced to remain only a few metres from the Romanian bank in order to avoid both the risk of being fired upon by Bulgarian border guards and the possibility of being subjected to administrative penalties imposed by them (AMAE, f.n.).

On 6 February 1939, the Border Guard Service forwarded to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs a copy of the Protocol concluded in Giurgiu on 28 January 1939 by the Romanian-Bulgarian Mixed Commission, consisting of Colonel Pretorian Septimiu of the 1st Border Guard Regiment and Bulgarian Colonel Nediu Velcov, Chief of Staff of the Ruse Division on behalf of the 7th Bulgarian Border Guard Regiment. Drawn up in accordance with international practice, the Giurgiu Protocol contained provisions intended, on the one hand, to improve neighbourly relations between Romania and Bulgaria and, on the other hand, to prevent future navigation incidents on the Danube (Ibid.). On this occasion, the Romanian-Bulgarian Mixed Commission analysed and discussed the incidents that had occurred between 1 January 1938 and 28 January 1939, the date on which the Protocol was drafted (Ibid.).

According to the Protocol, under the section concerning the *Navigation of military vessels flying their national flag and equipped with mechanical means of propulsion*, the members of the mixed commission agreed that such vessels were free to navigate along the navigable channel of the Danube, regardless of whether the channel



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Drawn up in accordance with international practice, the Giurgiu Protocol contained provisions intended, on the one hand, to improve neighbourly relations between Romania and Bulgaria and, on the other hand, to prevent future navigation incidents on the Danube.



Under the section Navigation rules applicable to privately owned rowing or sailing boats, the protocol provided that such vessels were prohibited from crossing the demarcation line. Failure to comply subjected their captains to the legal provisions of the state whose waters had been entered. The agreements reached by the Mixed Commission were valid only during daylight hours, from sunrise to sunset.

approached the banks of the neighbouring state. These vessels were permitted to stop in the territorial waters of the neighbouring state only in cases of force majeure. In this situation, the vessel was required to notify the nearest border guard post, either in writing or by acoustic or visual signals, and to receive confirmation that its presence had been observed. The crew could not be compelled by border guards to disembark, except in the event of the vessel sinking, in which case assistance was to be provided in accordance with international regulations governing such emergencies. The Protocol further stipulated that military vessels, whether stationary or underway, could not be challenged by warning shots or other forms of gunfire (Ibid.).

Under the section concerning *The navigation regime applicable to rowing or sail craft belonging to the navy or to border guard units*, it was stipulated that such vessels could use the Danube navigation route provided that they did not cross the demarcation line between the two states. If that line was crossed as a result of unforeseen events, these vessels could be hailed by border authorities for identification purposes. The identification procedure required the vessel to approach the bank sufficiently closely to allow border guards to verify, through direct observation, its status as a military craft. The disembarkation of personnel, detention of the vessel, or the use of warning shots was prohibited. The use of weapons was forbidden even if the vessel failed to respond to repeated signals. Command authorities operating within the sector were required to notify the corresponding authorities of the other state in writing without delay so that appropriate measures could be taken in cases of non-compliance with these provisions (Ibid.).

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Both parties undertook to address any future unforeseen incidents through direct cooperation and mutual understanding between the Romanian and Bulgarian commands (Ibid.)



INCIDENTS AND NEGLIGENCE ALONG ROMANIA'S SOUTHERN BORDER

Although efforts were being made to prevent incidents that might damage bilateral relations, on the night of 25 March 1939, at around midnight, the patrol of Border Post no. 25 *Dobrogea* was attacked by three individuals who opened fire on the Romanian border guards. The Romanian soldiers returned fire, but after the first shot, their weapons malfunctioned, preventing them from pursuing the attackers, who managed to cross the border into Bulgaria.

The first investigation of this incident began on 27 March 1939 and was conducted by Lieutenant Gheorghe Săndulescu, commander of the 1st Ahmatlar Border Squadron, and Lieutenant Totiu Baiev, commander of Bulgarian 1/19 Veseleț subsection. The Romanian officer showed his Bulgarian counterpart the spent the cartridge cases, an unfired cartridge, a knife blade and footprints leading from and back to Bulgarian territory. The Bulgarian officer acknowledged these findings, but when an attempt was made to record them in an official protocol, he refused to do so and requested that the investigation be postponed for the next day. In this context, the commander of the 1st Border Squadron Asfatchioi decided to invite Major Ivan Nichiforov, commander of Bulgarian Section no. 19 Kubrat, to participate in the investigation on the following day, together with Captain Gheorghe Ilie, commander of the Asfatchioi Border Guard Company. Lieutenant Săndulescu remained overnight at Border Post no. 25 *Dobrogea*, in anticipation of the meeting with the Bulgarian officers scheduled for the next day. Before parting that evening, the Bulgarian officer asked him where he intended to spend the night. Lieutenant Săndulescu replied that he would remain at Border Post no. 25 *Dobrogea*. At approximately 04.30 the following morning, the sentry on duty, accompanied by a patrol dog, was alerted when the dog suddenly



Amid the exchange of fire, cries of pain were heard, suggesting that at least one of the attackers may have been wounded. From the very beginning of the incident, Romanian authorities suspected that the attack had been premeditated in order to recover the evidence collected by the Romanian side – the spent cartridge cases, cartridge, and knife blade mentioned above –, which constituted the principal incriminating evidence.

rushed barking towards the thicket in front of the post. Alarmed by noises coming from that direction, the sentry issued a verbal challenge, but received a gunshot in response, which missed its target. While returning fire, the sentry observed several figures moving parallel to the border in the direction of Border Post no. 24 *Coasta de pădure*. As he attempted to aim at the fleeing silhouettes, his weapon jammed. Lieutenant Săndulescu immediately raised the alarm and initiated the measures provided for in the Border Post Action Plan. During their escape, the intruders encountered Romanian border guards not far from the post. The guards challenged them to halt, but the individuals failed to comply, forcing the Romanian soldiers to open fire. The fugitives then changed direction. At one point, they stopped, returned fire, and threw a grenade behind them. Amid the exchange of fire, cries of pain were heard, suggesting that at least one of the attackers may have been wounded. From the very beginning of the incident, Romanian authorities suspected that the attack had been premeditated in order to recover the evidence collected by the Romanian side – the spent cartridge cases, cartridge, and knife blade mentioned above –, which constituted the principal incriminating evidence. It was further suspected that the operation had been planned by Lieutenant Totiu Baiev and carried out by Petcu Decev, a Bulgarian non-commissioned officer. This hypothesis appeared plausible given the Bulgarian officer's unusual interest in learning where Lieutenant Săndulescu intended to spend the night. Additional suspicions surrounded Petcu Decev, who was reputed to be an expert in organising operations conducted by the comitadjis (Ibid.).

On 28 March 1939, at 14.00, Captain Gheorghe Ilie, commander of the Asfatchioi border guard company, and Lieutenant Totiu Baiev, commander of the 1/19 Bulgarian Subsection Veseleți, met at Border Marker no. 177 to discuss the attack carried out against the Romanian patrol between Border posts no 24 and no. 25 on the night of 25 March 1939, the wounding of the service dog belonging to Romanian Border Post no. 20 *Deșișul* by the two Bulgarian border guards from the Bulgarian Post no. 5, while the dog was on Romanian territory, and the incident occurred at 04.30 on 28 March 1939 at Romanian Border post

no 25 *Dobrogea*. According to the minutes drawn up on that occasion, the Romanian side, represented by Captain Gheorghe Ilie, requested that Lieutenant Totiu Baiev confirm that on 27 March 1939, at 09.00, Lieutenant Gheorghe Săndulescu had shown him three or four sets of footprints made by opanci and military boots on Romanian territory, leading from Bulgarian territory and returning to it. He was also asked to confirm that, following these tracks, material evidence of Bulgarian origin had been discovered approximately 400 metres from the border on Romanian territory, near the thicket surrounding Romanian Border Post no. 24. On Romanian territory, approximately 20 paces from the border guards' patrol route, thirty spent Lebel cartridge cases and ten knife blades were found. The Bulgarian side refused to acknowledge the Bulgarian origin of these items, but confirmed the existence, at 300 metres from Border post no. 25 *Dobrogea* and 50 metres from the patrol route towards Bulgaria, of a crater caused by a grenade explosion. Fragments of the grenade handle bearing the inscription "5, ½ C.E.K. 22 VI 1934" as well as shrapnel from the explosion were discovered within a radius of 100 metres. Regarding the footprints, the Bulgarian delegation stated that it could not determine their origin. Consequently, it expressed reservations both about recording the observed facts in the protocol, as well as about accepting that the material evidence was of Bulgarian origin, despite the apparent fact that the items belonged to the standard equipment of the Bulgarian army. Finally, Lieutenant Totiu Baiev acknowledged that at 04.30 on 28 March 1939, he had been informed by the commander of the Bulgarian Border Post no. 2 about gunfire and a grenade explosion on Romanian territory. According to his statement, he immediately ordered the reinforcement of border security measures but did not observe any suspicious individuals on Bulgarian territory (Ibid.).

As a result of the investigation, which revealed a contradictory attitude on the part of the Bulgarian authorities, the Romanian-Bulgarian Mixed Commission concluded that the Romanian border guard patrol had been attacked by individuals who had entered from the Bulgarian territory and subsequently retreated back across the border into Bulgaria. The Bulgarian border guards stationed at Bulgarian



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On 3 March 1939, General Ion Negulescu, commander of the Border Guard Corps, was informed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of a note submitted by the Bulgarian Legation in Bucharest concerning an incident that occurred on the evening of 27 August 1938. On that occasion, Romanian Border Post no. 33 "General Radu Jeinescu", guarded by the 3rd Platoon of the 2nd Border Guard Company, fired seven shots in the direction of Bulgarian Border Post no. 12, subordinate to Bulgarian Border Guards Subsection 3/18.

Post no. 2 failed to take any action, claiming that the strong wind that morning had muffled the sound of the gunfire. The Bulgarian border posts merely strengthened their security measures without attempting to determine the cause of the shooting or the grenade explosion. Major Nichiforov declined to participate in the investigation, stating that he was occupied with other duties. In May 1939, two additional attacks were reported in the vicinity of Border Post no. 25 *Dobrogea* (Ibid.).

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He further pointed out that, in the spirit of good neighbourliness, the Romanian border authorities should have complied with the provisions of Protocol no. 5 of 12 February 1932 and its implementing instructions rather than avoiding the meetings proposed by the Bulgarian side (Ibid.).

Regarding this matter, on 4 April 1939, the Border Guard Corps, Border Surveillance Service, informed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that responsibility for the failure to comply with Protocol no. 5 rested with both the Bulgarian officer Lieutenant Assen Rusev and the Romanian non-commissioned officer Chief Sergeant Șerban Bucur, since neither had complied with the implementing instructions attached to of Protocol no. 5. According to paragraph 5 of those instructions, the Romanian sectors where platoons were commanded by non-commissioned officers, the settlement of border incidents fell within the competence of the neighbouring platoon commander, provided he was an officer, or of the company commander. Romanian non-commissioned officers commanding platoons were authorised only to provide or request information. Chief Sergeant Șerban Bucur, commander of the 3rd Doccilar Border Guard Platoon of the 2nd Afatkioi Border Guard Company, disregarded these instructions and, following Letter no. 74 of 1 September 1938 sent by Lieutenant Assen Rusev, commander of Bulgarian Subsection no.3/18, attended the meeting scheduled for 2 September 1938 at Border Marker no. 243. During that meeting, and under persistent pressure from the Bulgarian officer, the Romanian non-commissioned officer agreed to sign a protocol stating that Romanian border guards at Border Post no. 33 Afatkioi (formerly General Șeinescu Radu) rather than Border Post no. 24, as indicated in Letter no. 74/1938, had fired seven shots during the night of 27-28 August 1938 at four individuals attempting to cross the border illegally. Subsequent investigations failed to identify any traces left by the four individuals. The Bulgarian officer sought to take advantage of this circumstance and recorded in the protocol that the existence of the alleged intruders had not been confirmed and that the shots had been fired by Romanian border guards in the direction of Bulgarian Border Post no. 12. The Romanian side rejected this interpretation,

The Bulgarian Legation stated that the attitude of the Romanian officer had surprised his Bulgarian counterparts, who had consistently sought to maintain relations based on mutual respect. He further pointed out that, in the spirit of good neighbourliness, the Romanian border authorities should have complied with the provisions of Protocol no. 5 of 12 February 1932 and its implementing instructions rather than avoiding the meetings proposed by the Bulgarian side.



On 20 April 1939, the "S" Service transmitted to the General Staff, Section 2, a intelligence report concerning defensive preparations in the Dobrogean border region. According to the report, units of trudovacs were observed in the area between the Varna-Bazargic and Varna-Razgrad railway lines which were engaged in constructing trenches for infantry formations, positions for machine-gun nests, mortar emplacements and artillery positions.

considering it a deliberate attempt by the Bulgarian officer to suggest that the deterioration of good neighbourly relations was attributable to Romania. However, it was widely acknowledged that, in incidents occurring along the border of Southern Dobrogea (the Cadrilater), the provocateurs had invariably proved to be Bulgarian comitadjis, often supported by Bulgarian border guards, whereas no case had ever demonstrated Romanian involvement in such provocations. When asked what evidence supported his claim that the seven shots had been fired towards Bulgarian Border Post no. 12, the Bulgarian officer replied that no traces had been discovered on either side of the border during the investigation and that, consequently, the existence of the alleged intruders could not be confirmed. Ultimately, it was established that the Romanian soldiers had not fired the seven shots at the Bulgarian post but had discharged their weapons while pursuing a group of comitadjis. Furthermore, contrary to the provisions of Protocol no. 5, the Bulgarian officer had discussed the matter directly with a non-commissioned officer and had drafted the protocol accordingly. The Romanian battalion commander had received the Bulgarian officer's letter on the very day the meeting was scheduled and did not have enough time to travel to the designated location on the border (Ibid.).

In this context, on 20 April 1939, the "S" Service transmitted to the General Staff, Section 2, a intelligence report concerning defensive preparations in the Dobrogean border region. According to the report, units of trudovacs were observed in the area between the Varna-Bazargic and Varna-Razgrad railway lines (Compulsory labour service was had been introduced in 1923. By 1938, it comprised three categories: a) temporary labour service; b) permanent labour service; and c) unemployed labour teams. From that year onward, the Directorate of the Compulsory Labour Service came under the authority of the Bulgarian Ministry of War), which were engaged in constructing trenches for infantry formations, positions for machine-gun nests, mortar emplacements and artillery positions. In some areas, the trenches were deep enough to allow firing from a standing position, while in others firing could only be conducted from a kneeling



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position. No concrete fortifications were observed. Groups of trudovacs were also seen at railway stations unloading construction materials, timber and barbed wire (ANIC, f. 102).

On the night of 5 May 1939, at 02:00, the sentries of Border Post no. 74 *Valea Șerpilor* belonging to the Bazargic Border Guard Company, were attacked with fire by three individuals emerging from the Cadieva Forest. The sentries, together with the personnel of the post, returned fire, forcing the attackers to retreat into the forest, where they disappeared. No casualties were reported (AMAE, *Ibid.*).

On 9 May 1939, the "S" Service informed the General Staff, Section 2, about defensive works towards the Dobrogean border by Bulgaria. According to this information, the trenches were camouflaged with branches and brushwood. In some locations, light field fortifications, including wolf pits, positions for light mortars, machine-guns nests, anti-tank weapons and artillery platforms had been constructed. Many of these fortifications were situated along the former defensive line during World War I (ANIC, *Ibid.*, f. 103).

On 15 July 1939, while Captain Periețeanu of the 5th Border Guard Company, guarding Turnu Măgurele, was conducting an inspection at Border Post no. 90 Ostrovul in Dolj county, Bulgarian border guards fired four shots at the Romanian border post as the officer was greeting the sentries. One of the bullets struck the wall of the post (AMAE, *Ibid.*).

A few days later, on 21 July 1939, Engineer Dumitru Fâghenea of the Hydraulic Service was carrying out measurements related to Danube navigation when, after crossing the demarcation line, he came under gunfire from the Bulgarian bank. The incident was attributed to a newly assigned second lieutenant at the Rahova Border Guard Post, who was unfamiliar with the personnel of the Romanian Hydraulic Service and with the nature of their activities. As a result of this negligent conduct, the commander of the Rahova Border Guard Post formally warned the officer and instructed him to avoid similar mistakes in the future (*Ibid.*).

On 12 August 1939, at 20.20, a shot was fired from Svishtov towards the port of Zimnicea, from the direction of the Bulgarian

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The Bulgarian officer pretended to be unaware of the letter accompanying the request for the meeting, which informed him that Bulgarian soldiers had fired upon the Romanian patrol.

barracks towards the tugboat N.F.R. *Dorna*, which had just moored at the pontoon with barge N.F.R. no. 6123. The bullet passed over the tugboat and struck an N.F.R. warehouse, leaving a visible mark. The projectile was subsequently recovered approximately six to seven metres from the point of impact (Ibid.). Two days later, at around 19.45, another shot was fired from the vicinity of the Bulgarian border post at Svishtov. On the following day, 15 August 1939, at 10.45, another shot was fired from the same location, the bullet passing between the border post and the administrative buildings in the port of Zimnicea (Ibid.).

On the evening of 25 September 1939, the patrol of Romanian Border Post no. 87 *Podoaba* came under gunfire attacked from Bulgarian territory. The next day, 26 September 1939, at 10:00, a meeting took place between Captain Dumitru Mălăescu, commander of the 6th Balchik Border Guard Company, and Captain Iancu Popov, commander of Bulgarian Subsection 1/16 Klimentovo. The Bulgarian officer pretended to be unaware of the letter accompanying the request for the meeting, which informed him that Bulgarian soldiers had fired upon the Romanian patrol. In response, Captain Popov questioned the reasons why Romanian border guards had allegedly opened fire on a Bulgarian patrol. Captain Mălăescu replied that the events had occurred in exactly the opposite manner: Bulgarian border guards had fired upon Romanian personnel and this was the reason for the requested meeting. When invited to participate in a reconstruction of the events and to draw up the official report in accordance with Protocol no. 5, the Bulgarian officer refused, arguing that the incident could not be classified as a border incident. Captain Mălăescu reminded him that he himself had previously referred to it as such. Captain Popov replied that he was willing to discuss the matter but would not sign any official documents. When shown the bullets embedded in the wall of Border Post no. 87 *Podoaba*, identified as having been fired from a Steyr-patter rifle, the Bulgarian officer refused to accept this evidence, claiming that the shots might have been fired by guards employed in Bulgarian vineyards who were



equipped with similar weapons. Finally, he promised to investigate the matter and communicate the results to the Romanian side. The meeting without the preparation of the protocol required under the bilateral agreement. Faced with the situation, Captain Dumitru Mălăescu, Commander of the 6th Balchik Border Guard Company, Lieutenant Paul Popescu, commander of the 2nd Ekrene Border Guard Platoon, and Chief Sergeant Vasile Candea, commander of the 1st Gheiceler Border Guard Platoon, drafted an official report recording the matters discussed. Dissatisfied with the outcome of the meeting between Captains Mălăescu and Captain Popov, the commander of the 2nd Bazargic Border Guard Battalion requested a meeting with Lieutenant Colonel Magiarov, commander of Bulgarian Section no. 16 Varna, to be held on 29 September at 10:00, at Border Post no. 87 *Podoaba*. Lieutenant Colonel Magiarov accepted the invitation but proposed that the meeting take place later that day at 15:00, and at Border Post no. 86 *Pietrosul*. He justified the change by claiming that he was unfamiliar with the location of Border Post no. 87 *Podoaba*, despite the fact that Captain Popov had already met Captain Mălăescu there. The Romanian battalion commander confirmed the new time, but insisted that the meeting be held at the originally designated location (Ibid.).

On 29 September 1939, at 15.00, a meeting took place at Border Post no. 87 *Podoaba*, between Major Alexandru Ionescu, commander of the 2nd Bazargic Border Guard Battalion, and Lieutenant Colonel Vasile Jecu Magiarov, commander of the Bulgarian Section no. 16 Varna. They were assisted by Captain Dumitru Mălăescu, commander of the 6th Balchik Border Guard Company, and Captain Iancu Popov, commander of Bulgarian Subsection 1/16 Klimentovo. Despite the evidence presented by the Romanian officers, which indicated that Bulgarian soldiers had fired upon Romanian Border Post no. 87 *Podoaba* on the evening of 25 September 1939, while escorting Pavel Nazarievici Cudinov across the border, the Bulgarian officers refused to acknowledge the facts, so the meeting ended without any positive result (Ibid.)

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Following the end of World War I, Romania shared borders with three revisionist states – the USSR, Hungary and Bulgaria –, a circumstance that prompted Romanian diplomacy to conclude a series of treaties and conventions designed to protect the country's territorial integrity against external claims.

CONCLUSIONS

After 1918, the year of the Great Union, Romania's principal national and foreign policy objective was the consolidation of its state unity. This objective was reflected both in domestic policy and in the network of international alliances and agreements through which Romania sought to safeguard its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Following the end of World War I, Romania shared borders with three revisionist states – the USSR, Hungary and Bulgaria –, a circumstance that prompted Romanian diplomacy to conclude a series of treaties and conventions designed to protect the country's territorial integrity against external claims.

Bulgaria's duplicitous diplomacy, which on the one hand professed a desire to resolve its complex and often tense disputes with Romania, while on the other hand tolerated the provocative conduct of Bulgarian border guards and the activities of Bulgarian comitadjis, who endangered the lives of Romanian civilians and military personnel serving along the southern frontier, made genuine political rapprochement between the two governments impossible despite the traditionally good neighbourly relationship between the two peoples. This chronic instability along the border, combined with the collapse of the European alliance system, contributed to the progressive total isolation of Bucharest. The result was the territorial dismemberment of Romania in the fateful year 1940, marked in the south by the loss of Southern Dobrogea, known as the Cadrilater.

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FUNDAMENTAL PRECEPTS DERIVED FROM THE WORKS OF CARL VON CLAUSEWITZ

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DOI: 10.55535/RMT.2026.1-2.19

The analysis of Carl von Clausewitz's personality and contribution in literature has highlighted their complexity and impact in the field of military science. As a war theorist, he developed a practical military philosophy that was adapted to the real needs and experiences of the military. The pragmatic nature and immediate usefulness of these ideas, as well as their relevance to military leadership and strategy in concrete conflict situations, are highlighted in this interpretation.

Despite the fact that some authors and researchers have proposed the Polish origin of his name, historical and genealogical documents prove that his family had German roots and a strong Prussian patriotism. The national and cultural identity had a major impact on how it perceived and conceptualized war, as it considered conflict to be an essential element of the Prussian state's identity and sovereignty.

Furthermore, the family and social environment in which he was brought up helped him to develop a rigorous and analytical perspective on military phenomena. His academic training, combined with his practical experience gained in military service, was the foundation for the theories and principles he later expressed in his landmark work, "Vom Kriege", still considered a core work in military science.

Keywords: military science; lessons learned; Prussia; "Vom Kriege"; policy;



INTRODUCTION

The idea of analysing the lessons learned from Clausewitz's work lies in the unique capacity of this corpus of texts to function not as a rigid dogma, but as a tool for critical reflection applicable to contemporary strategic challenges. In an era marked by uncertainty and accelerated technological transformations, the rediscovery of its fundamental concepts, such as friction, trinity and the supremacy of politics, provides the necessary benchmarks to distinguish between the immutable nature of war and its ever-changing forms, thus ensuring a solid intellectual basis for any complex decision-making process.

In the current security context, marked by instability in the proximity of national borders and the need to modernize strategic thinking within international partnerships, the reassessment of these lessons gains increased relevance for the Romanian space. Adopting a Clausewitzian perspective allows local decision-makers and specialists not only to better integrate into the conceptual language of the allies, but also to gain a deep understanding of the interdependence between political objectives and military action, essential for strengthening national resilience.

Carl von Clausewitz's treatise *"On War"* (*"Vom Kriege"*) represents, without a doubt, the most profound and influential attempt to codify the complex nature of armed conflict, offering a dialectical synthesis between theoretical rigor and the unpredictable reality of the battlefield. Although written in a specific historical context, his work transcends the Napoleonic era, remaining an indispensable analytical *"lens"* for understanding how politics, hazard, and human will interact in defining modern strategy.

The personality of Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) has been approached from numerous perspectives and in various ways. For the British military historian Michael Howard, translator of Clausewitz's work, he was a *"soldier's soldier"*, who developed a military philosophy

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that was applicable and oriented towards soldiers. Peter Paret, a central figure in contemporary military historiography, portrays Clausewitz as an intellectual of exceptional rigour, albeit marked by an austere temperament (2007; 2015). In contrast, Clausewitz's critics have portrayed him as a military dilettante with rather aggressive tendencies, while, in military academic circles in Germany, Britain and America, his work has often been received as a sterile and excessively dogmatic work, reserved exclusively for theoretical study (Bassford, 1994).

Carl Philippe Gottfried von Clausewitz was born in Burg, near Magdeburg, on 1 July 1780. Although his name has been claimed by some writers to have had Polish origins, the family was German and patriotically Prussian. However, despite their claims to nobility, the Clausewitz family (who were certainly members of the local Burg elite) probably had their origins in the middle class. The elder Clausewitz had obtained a commission in Frederick the Great's army, but it was withdrawn during Frederick's purge of non-noble officers after the Seven Years' War (1756–1763). Carl was able to enter the army as a cadet through the influence of his noble step-grandfather. Based on the military achievements of Carl and his brothers, the family's nobility was confirmed without hesitation by King Friedrich Wilhelm III in 1827. Clausewitz entered the Prussian army at the age of twelve; He first encountered combat at the age of thirteen, in a guerrilla campaign against revolutionaries in France. After Prussia withdrew from the wars of the French Revolution in 1795, he spent five years performing garrison duties. There, he focused on his own education. Beyond strictly military subjects, Clausewitz would develop a wide range of interests in art, science, and education. All of these interests would have an impact on his military-philosophical work. His efforts were so successful that, in 1801, he was admitted to the Institute for Young Officers in Berlin, which would eventually evolve into the famous Kriegsakademie. He quickly came to the attention of the new director, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, a key figure in the Prussian state during the upheavals of the Napoleonic Wars and Chief of the General Staff in 1806.

Impressed by Clausewitz's ability, Scharnhorst would become his sponsor, mentor, and close friend. Clausewitz graduated at the top

of his class in 1803 and was rewarded with the position of military adjutant to the young Prince August. It brought him into close contact with the royal family.

Alarmed by France's devastating victories over Austria and Russia in 1805, Prussia mobilized for war in 1806. Confident in the legacy of Frederick the Great, Captain Clausewitz and most of the other Prussian officers eagerly awaited a fight with France. The planning and implementation of the

Prussian mobilization, however, were deficient, and the nation was psychologically unprepared. The Prussian forces were shattered in humiliating defeats at the battles of Jena and Auerstedt. Two weeks later, covering the retreat of what remained of the Prussian army, Clausewitz and Prince August were captured on the battlefield. In the peace settlement, Prussia lost half of its population and territory and became an occupied French satellite.

When he returned from educational exile in France in 1807 (Scheipers, 2019, pp. 1-25), he energetically joined Scharnhorst and other members of the reformist movement, helping to restructure both Prussian society and the army, preparing for what he felt was an inevitable new battle with the French. His duties included planning a national insurrection against the French occupation, an undertaking that would involve a "people's war" (along the lines of the brutal guerrilla warfare then taking place in Spain) in conjunction with the greatly reduced operations of the Prussian army. His enthusiasm for active resistance to the French was not, however, shared by the king, who was more concerned with maintaining his position in the Prussian state. Major Clausewitz's disillusionment reached a peak when occupied Prussia agreed to provide an army corps to Napoleon to aid him in his invasion of Russia in 1812. Along with about thirty other officers and with the king's reluctant permission, he resigned from Prussian service. He then accepted a role in the Russian army



Carl von Clausewitz



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Clausewitz also participated in many key events of the War of Liberation (1813–1814), but was overburdened with duties that, while important, were not at the centre of the most dramatic events. In a sort of subterfuge, Scharnhorst arranged for him to serve as a Russian liaison officer in the Prussian army.

to continue the resistance against Napoleon. However, before leaving for Russia, together with the Prussian Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, whose military tutor he had become in 1810, he prepared an essay on war. The essay was called *“The Most Important Principles of the Art of War to Complete My Course of Instruction for the Crown Prince”*. It represented Clausewitz’s theoretical development up to that point, but it was only a rather primitive precursor to his later work – *“Vom Kriege”* (*“On War”*). Its subject matter was largely tactical. While some of the work’s most important theoretical concepts were fairly well developed (e.g. *“friction”*), many were embryonic, and others were completely absent. Notably, and in great contrast to the later work, *“The Principles of War”* is not particularly sophisticated from a historical perspective. It is based almost entirely on the experience of Frederick the Great and the early wars with revolutionary France and Napoleon. Unfortunately, it has often been treated as a summary of Clausewitz’s mature theory (Clausewitz, 1984; Paddy, Dennis, 2007).

In the Russian service, Clausewitz was somewhat hampered by his ignorance of the Russian language. However, he spoke French (as well as English), as did many Russian aristocrats and the Russian imperial family, and there were many ethnic Germans in Russia and in the army. He participated in the long Russian retreat, fought in the Battle of Borodino, and witnessed the disastrous French retreat from Moscow, including the catastrophic crossing of the Berezina River. By boldly infiltrating behind French lines, he played a key role in negotiating the Convention of Tauroggen, which led to the desertion of General York von Wartenburg’s Prussian troops from the French army. That risky venture angered the king, but ultimately forced Prussia into the anti-French coalition, leading directly to Napoleon’s defeat and abdication in 1814, and the revival of Prussia itself (Leggiere, vol. I).

Clausewitz also participated in many key events of the War of Liberation (1813-1814) (Leggiere, vol. II), but was overburdened with duties that, while important, were not at the centre of the most dramatic events. In a sort of subterfuge, Scharnhorst arranged for him to serve as a Russian liaison officer in the Prussian army. In reality, he was an influential advisor to General August von Gneisenau, chief of staff to Field Marshal von Blücher (1813-1815)

and one of the main leaders of Prussia's military revival. He often found himself in the thick of battle, as at Lützen/Grossgörschen in 1813, where he led several cavalry charges and was wounded. Scharnhorst died of wounds received in the same battle. However, having done so much to challenge the subjugation of Prussia by France, Clausewitz was now considered by many to be a national hero. Thus, the change of Prussian sides finally led to his reinstatement into the Prussian army as a full colonel in April 1814.

During the 1815 campaign, Clausewitz served as chief of staff of the Prussian 3rd Corps, commanded by General von Thielmann. In 1818, the king promoted Clausewitz to Major General and appointed him the administrative head of the General War College in Berlin. Despite the conservative reaction in Prussia after 1819, during which many of the liberal reforms of the war years were weakened or reversed, he and his wife, Marie, led a very active life among the highest social, intellectual, and political circles in Berlin. Having little to do with actual school instruction, Clausewitz spent his abundant free time writing studies of various campaigns and preparing the theoretical works that eventually became *"Vom Kriege"* (Kirkpatrick, 2015; Schuurman, 2017, pp. 1-23).

General Clausewitz returned to active service in 1830, when he was appointed commander of a group of artillery brigades stationed in East Prussia. When the revolutions in Paris and Poland seemed to portend a new general European war, he was appointed chief of staff to Field Marshal Gneisenau, and the Army of Observation was sent to the Polish border.

Before leaving, he sealed his unfinished manuscripts. He would never open them again. In any case, Clausewitz's intention was clearly never to publish them during his lifetime, his decision being a strategy of intellectual integrity. Clausewitz feared that if he had published while he was still an active general, he would be tempted to conceal the truth, so as not to upset his superiors or to protect his reputation. Writing only for the future, he allowed himself to be frank and critical in his analyses.

Although war was averted, Clausewitz remained in the East, organizing a cordon sanitaire to try to stop the spread of the cholera epidemic in Poland. His friend Gneisenau soon died of the disease,



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and in August 1831 Clausewitz took command of the army. Although a young general, he was outranked in the hierarchy by some of his subordinates; however, none dared to challenge his position or usurp his authority. Once the danger of serious fighting had passed, he was replaced by the inexperienced but politically acceptable Field Marshal Karl Friedrich von dem Knesebeck. Clausewitz returned home to Breslau, but soon after fell ill with cholera and died on 16 November 1831, aged 51.

ANALYTICAL POINTS OF CLAUSEWITZ'S WORK

The most rigorous reconstruction of the work, based on the manuscripts that survived the destruction of 1945, was carried out by the German scholar Werner Hahlweg between the 1950s and 1960s. His editions served as the basis for the 1976 English version, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, mentioned at the beginning of this study.

After the premature death of the Prussian general, his wife, Marie von Clausewitz, together with his brother, undertook the laborious task of ordering and revising the manuscripts that remained unfinished. The result of the editing work was the publication of an impressive collection in ten volumes, which crystallized his theoretical legacy and gave the world the fundamental treatise *“On War”*. The first three of them appeared between 1832 and 1834. In subsequent editions, his ideas sometimes fell prey to the revisionist impulses of his various editors. The most rigorous reconstruction of the work, based on the manuscripts that survived the destruction of 1945, was carried out by the German scholar Werner Hahlweg between the 1950s and 1960s. His editions served as the basis for the 1976 English version, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, mentioned at the beginning of this study. Recently, an older text, probably written around 1817, was rediscovered, which prefigures the first four books of *“Vom Kriege”*. Entitled *“Aphorismen über den Krieg und die Kriegführung”* (*“Aphorisms on War and the Conduct of War”*), this manuscript is remarkable for its brevity and concentrated aphoristic style (Eftimova, 2015, pp. 345-367). Marie von Clausewitz published this text in the form of a serial, simultaneously with the rest of her husband's posthumous writings, but it was immediately eclipsed by the scope of the fundamental treatise. In the Anglo-Saxon space, the pillars of the analysis of Clausewitz's work remain the seminal work *“On War”*, its precursor, *“The Principles of War”*, as well as the two classic campaign studies, recently completed, in the period 2018-2021, by two more critical volumes. The first of these studies was *“The Campaign*

of 1812 in Russia”, translated and published anonymously by a close friend of the Duke of Wellington, in 1843 (Kirchubel, 2024, pp. 106-109). The second work, “The Campaign of 1815 in France”, remained inaccessible to the English-speaking public until 2010, when two separate editions were published. Previously, there had only been an abridged translation, made privately for the Duke of Wellington, who reacted with a memorandum that later became famous and influential in 19th-century Britain. This document (recently integrated, together with an extensive documentary analysis, in one of the 2010 editions) was essential in shaping Clausewitz’s modern reputation. However, the memoir fell into relative oblivion after 1914, being systematically ignored by British historians, who avoided highlighting the decisive contribution of Prussia to the victory at Waterloo (Paret, Moran, 1992; Schuurman, 2017, pp. 1-23; van Beurden, 2015).

The studies of 1812 and 1815 were about the campaigns of the Napoleonic era, in which he himself participated, although this aspect is not sufficiently addressed. They represent different stages in the evolution of Clausewitz’s ideas and reflect a number of elements of his mature theories. The findings of the 1812 study were, for the most part, incorporated into “Vom Kriege”. However, the 1815 study, one of the last (probably completed in 1827), was never incorporated into the larger work.

The work “Der Feldzug von 1796”, dedicated to the campaign in Italy, was completed in 1828, after the study of 1815. Although this campaign is mentioned more frequently than that of Waterloo in “Vom Kriege”, its influence on the fundamental treatise seems equally limited. At the same time, various other fragments of his work were translated in the Anglo-Saxon space, but they had a minor impact on strategic thinking in this area.

The treatise “Vom Kriege” benefited from several translations into English, the most relevant being the versions made by J.J. Graham (1873), O.M. Jolles (1943) and the reference edition by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (1976, revised in 1984). The work is a dense and demanding read, not because of any stylistic deficiency or lack of rigor on the part of the author – his campaign studies are, by contrast, remarkably accessible – but because of the intrinsic complexity



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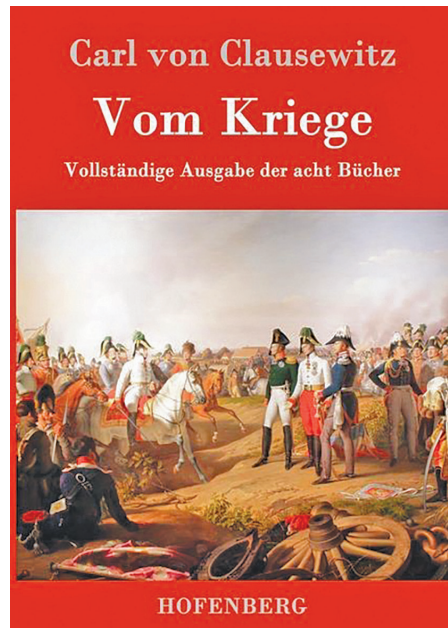
To be fully understood, "Vom Kriege" must be approached as a whole, the informed reader needing to recognize that the various sections reflect distinct stages in Clausewitz's intellectual development.

of the subject and the unfinished nature of the manuscripts. Although it has frequently been published as three separate volumes, the most recent compact English edition runs to about 580 pages, excluding the critical apparatus.

To be fully understood, "Vom Kriege" must be approached as a whole, the informed reader needing to recognize that the various sections reflect distinct stages in Clausewitz's intellectual development. The first book,

the second, and the second half of Book VIII are generally considered the most relevant and finished parts of the work; by contrast, the early segments fail to always resonate with the author's mature concepts. In the abbreviated editions, Books V, VI, and VII are often omitted, on the pretext of their tactical nature, which is considered outdated. This practice, however, generates serious errors of interpretation, since it is in these sections that Clausewitz elaborates the practical implications of his theory. For example, for those who portray him as an "apostle of the offensive", the omission of Book VI, "Defense", is particularly convenient, although it substantiates his controversial thesis that defence is, intrinsically, the strongest form of war.

One of the main sources of confusion about Clausewitz's approach lies in his dialectical method of exposition. For example, Clausewitz's famous quote that "War is only a continuation of politics", although correct in itself, was not intended as a simple factual statement. It is the antithesis of a dialectical argument whose thesis – formulated earlier in the analysis – claims that "war is nothing more than a duel (or hand-to-hand combat, a more faithful translation of the German term "Zweikampf") on a large scale". Its synthesis is represented by the concept of a "fascinating trinity" ("wunderliche Dreifaltigkeit").



This synthesis goes beyond the limits of the two previous statements, demonstrating that war is neither exclusively an act of brute force nor merely a purely rational instrument of politics (Herberg-Rothe, 2022, pp. 1-12; Villacres, Baasford, 1995, pp. 9-19). Rather, it is a dynamic, inherently unstable interplay of the forces of violent emotion, chance, and rational calculation on all sides. Identifying exactly who would benefit from reading *“On War”* and exactly how – are somewhat perplexing questions. Clausewitz’s pragmatic goal was to provide military analysts with a rigorous conceptual framework for understanding the phenomenon of war, in the hope of optimizing both the actual conduct of operations and the specialized literature (Clemmensen Hesselholt, 2011, pp. 61-85; Waldman, 2009). He anticipated that such theoretical rigor would refine the judgment of commanders, although he remained convinced that *“military genius”* derives from character, personality, and temperament rather than pure intellect. Perhaps due to his own introspection, he believed that intellectuals are generally less effective military leaders. However, he argued that only a reflective and self-aware mind has the capacity to assimilate the depth of a treatise such as *“On War”* (Hughes, 2020, pp. 773-805).

STRATEGIC LANDMARKS IN CLAUSEWITZ’S WORK

Clausewitz perceived history in relative terms, rejecting absolute categories, standards, and values. The past must be accepted on its own terms. The historian must try to penetrate the mentalities and attitudes of any period studied, the *“spirit of the age”*. History is a dynamic process of change, driven by forces beyond the control and often beyond the comprehension or even detection of any individual or group. This attitude is particularly evident in two key themes in *“Vom Kriege”* that are absent from *“Principles”*. These are the famous assertion that *“War is a continuation of politics with an admixture of other means”* (i.e., organized violence) and the recognition that war can vary in its forms, depending on the changing nature of politics and the society in which it is waged.

A considerable part of *“Vom Kriege”* is devoted to examining the role of war in history, the practical utility of military history



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In order to penetrate the essence of Clausewitz's mature theories, an appropriate starting point lies in examining the most frequent misinterpretations of his argumentation. As a rule, these conceptual errors are the result of approaches by authors who either did not fully read the treatise "On War" (limiting themselves to introductory fragments or simplified versions), or deliberately aimed to distort its theses. In reality, the specific arguments of the work are formulated with remarkable clarity, being rarely difficult to assimilate.

for the active frame, and the inherent difficulties in its reception and writing. Clausewitz's most relevant technical contribution to military historiography is his discourse on *"critical analysis"*. The author rigorously delimited the attributions of the historian from those of the military critic, although he recognized the complementarity of the two roles. He argued that pure historical research is independent of theory or criticism, its purpose being the identification, interpretation, and ordering of *"equivocal"* facts (those data susceptible to multiple interpretations). In contrast, critical analysis involves the identification of causality, while *"criticism"* aims at evaluating actions taken and the *"means used"*, exploring tactical alternatives, and formulating value judgments. In such an assessment, actions must be analysed not only individually (at the tactical, operational, strategic or political level), but also in terms of their interdependence, the theory providing the necessary framework for the process of analysis and judgment (Bassford, 1994, p. 36).

Von Clausewitz's name is associated with a complex series of categories, such as ideal war, real war, *"war to render our adversary militarily or politically powerless"*, limited war, total war and absolute war. Of these six terms, the first three belong exclusively to the mature stage of his thinking. The fourth is a phrase that Clausewitz never used; his emphasis on *"limited objectives"* reflects the conviction that an exhaustive typology of war, which would include all the actors involved, is impossible to achieve. As for the fifth term, *"total war"*, although it is frequently attributed to him, it does not belong to him and is completely absent from the treatise *"Vom Kriege"* (Keegan, 1994). Its origin remains uncertain, but, in its common meaning, the concept is fundamentally antithetical to the Clausewitzian approach. Finally, absolute war marks an early stage of his reflection (being the precursor of the abstraction of *"ideal war"*), and is nevertheless found, with various nuances, in the older sections of the text, especially in the first half of Book VIII (Ib.).

In order to penetrate the essence of Clausewitz's mature theories, an appropriate starting point lies in examining the most frequent misinterpretations of his argumentation. As a rule, these conceptual errors are the result of approaches by authors who either did not fully

read the treatise *“On War”* (limiting themselves to introductory fragments or simplified versions), or deliberately aimed to distort its theses. In reality, the specific arguments of the work are formulated with remarkable clarity, being rarely difficult to assimilate. The first of these erroneous interpretations resides in the idea that von Clausewitz considered war a *“science”*. A second misconception, correlated with the first, claims that he viewed war exclusively as a rational instrument of state policy. If the first assertion is fundamentally erroneous, the second represents only one facet of a much more complex issue. In Clausewitz’s view, war, unlike strategy or tactics, belongs neither to the realm of art nor to that of science. These two terms often define the parameters of theoretical debate, and its most vehement critics (such as Jomini, Liddell Hart, or Fuller, at first) tended to treat the military phenomenon as an exact science. As Clausewitz argued, the goal of science is knowledge and certainty, while the finality of art is the creative capacity. Of course, any form of art integrates scientific elements (such as the mathematical foundations of harmony), and any rigorous scientific approach inherently involves creativity (Brands, 2023; Hew, 2022, pp. 143-160).

Clausewitz perceived tactics as having an essentially scientific nature, while strategy was assimilated to an art form; however, he emphasized that the conscious and purely rational exercise of *“military strategy”* – a favourite concept among theorists and historians – is a relatively rare phenomenon in objective reality. The author expressed his belief that, in the context of armed conflict, ideas are usually so easy and obvious that their mere application can rarely be invoked as indisputable proof of a commander’s talent or genius: *“It has become our general belief that ideas in war are generally so simple and lie so close to the surface that the merit of their invention can rarely prove the talent of the commander who adopts them”*. (Daase, Davis, 2015).

Most real events are determined by forces such as chance, emotion, bureaucratic inertia, and intra-organizational political dynamics, and many *“strategic”* decisions are made unconsciously, often long before hostilities break out. If he had been forced to choose, Clausewitz would have positioned war closer to the realm of the arts; however, no terminological classification seemed entirely satisfactory to him (Bruce, Dickie, Kiley, Pavkovic, Schneid, 2008).



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War, on the other hand, is a form of social interaction. The Prussian theorist occasionally compared it to commercial activities or legal disputes, but most frequently associated it with the sphere of politics. This distinction is fundamental: unlike art or science, where the subject acts on inanimate matter, in business, politics, and war, the will is exerted on an animate object.

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When Clausewitz wrote that war may have its own grammar, but not its own logic, he meant that the logic of war, like politics, is the logic of social relations, not that of art or science. The first pages of “*Vom Kriege*” have created a dialectical model of the “*ideal war*” war, which many readers find confusing, but ultimately this knowledge is quite necessary. Ideal war, the intellectual descendant of his earlier term “*absolute war*” (which appears in an earlier part of the book, exclusively in the first half of Book VIII), is an exploration of Clausewitz’s original thesis that “*war is nothing but a combat match on a larger scale*”. Ideal war is a philosophical abstraction, a “*logical fantasy*” impossible to translate into reality. It represents war in its “*pure*” form, a manifestation of extreme violence, unfettered by the intervention of reason or the frictional effects generated by time, space, and human nature. In such a theoretical model, conflict would be triggered without a specific political motive, through a maximum and simultaneous effort of both sides, in perfect symmetrical opposition. Its ultimate objective is the total overthrow of the adversary by the complete annihilation of his physical capacities for resistance. After exploring this notion of war as an act of pure force, Clausewitz demonstrates the weaknesses of that not at all unusual notion. While it is true that war is an act of force to compel our enemies to do our will, it is clearly much more than that. Its violence alone cannot explain our actual experience of war (Garard, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS

Clausewitz's fundamental goal was to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Unfortunately, his work has often remained trapped in the very gap it sought to bridge, being perceived as too pragmatic for intellectuals, too complex and ambiguous for the political factors, and far too abstract for the military. As a result, many on both sides of this conceptual divide have failed to grasp the depth of the ideas contained in his treatise *"On War"*.

Moreover, this gap reflects a genuine dichotomy between the values and perceptions of scholars and those of the military, marked by mutual suspicions, sometimes well-founded. Whether as an inevitable phenomenon or as a result of remediable deficiencies in their training, practicing soldiers often lack the historiographical depth necessary to internalize Clausewitz's historicist argument, to decipher his dialectical approach, and to discern the pragmatic applicability of his concepts.

The reader's personal experience profoundly conditions the reception of the treatise *"On War"*. Although the claim that readers internalize only those ideas that confirm their own opinions or experiences might seem an exaggeration, it is not far from the truth. The work often functions less as a window onto reality and more as a mirror of the one who reads it, which is probably inevitable. During my military career, the passages on friction, hazard, and moral factors had the strongest impact on me. With each reading, the volume revealed itself differently to me, although the only variable that changed was myself. It is therefore not surprising that survivors of the trench warfare of 1914-1918 found their own experiences in its pages, just as Vietnam veterans tend to see in this text an analysis of the failures of their own conflict. This subjectivity of reception would not have surprised Clausewitz, who constantly insisted that individual experience (or the absence thereof) is essential to any authentic understanding of the phenomenon of war. These conclusions do not justify, in any case, the assertion of many scholars and military personnel that Clausewitz's theories are worthless because of their unlimited flexibility.

Clausewitzian theory represents, like any precision instrument, a valuable resource for theorists, scientists, and practitioners alike.



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The quality of the result obtained, however, depends fundamentally on the rigor and depth of the intellect that uses it. Regardless of how personal biases may influence one's perception of the conflict, the perspective offered by Clausewitz provides superior analytical rigor. The relevance of this theoretical "*lens*" derives not only from its intrinsic value, but also from the fundamental role that Clausewitzian theories, including their misinterpretations, have acquired within the United States of America national security community. Thus, the treatise "*Vom Kriege*" substantiated the most significant "*lessons learned*" from the Vietnam experience, finding its essence in the work of Harry Summers and in the premises of the Weinberger Doctrine, as a direct response to the failure of the Vietnam War. The connection of this doctrine with Clausewitz is especially evident in point 5, which reflects its "*trinity*": the army cannot win a war unless there is a solid connection between the government (objectives), the people (support/passion), and the army (execution). The intervention must have the support of the American people and Congress (Skold, 2014).

The remarkable efficiency of the "*community*" of action through which the US armed forces and related agencies managed the Persian Gulf War (1990-1991) and subsequent conflicts is due, to a significant, although difficult to quantify, measure, to the common conceptual foundation generated by the study of Clausewitz's work. It provided the intellectual basis that formal doctrines have constantly sought but have failed to provide because of their inevitably restrictive approaches, often oriented towards a single military service and marked by an excessively prescriptive character.

The value of this common ground lies precisely in the flexibility of Clausewitzian theory, a feature that many find frustrating: it provides a unified set of concepts and intellectual tools that facilitate analysis and debate, while leaving conclusions open to creativity and diversity of strategic objectives. However, invoking the authority of Clausewitz's name has also contributed to the crystallization of an increasingly dysfunctional American strategic culture that, at least in my opinion, has come in the post-9/11 era to accept war as a simple way to continue a deficient policy by other means.

Clausewitz's dominance in the American intellectual-military landscape over the past four decades has generated monotony or rejection among many thinkers reluctant to explore its complexity. It has triggered reactions from critics such as Martin van Creveld and John Keegan, ideologues such as Mary Kaldor, and adherents of the "new wars" paradigm, as well as from military personnel disillusioned with unproductive forms of conflict, erroneously labelled "Clausewitzian". However, if Clausewitz's work is ever relegated to the dusty shelves of history, it will likely be because his fundamental ideas have been completely assimilated, rendering his own formulation redundant through total integration.

In conclusion, the work of Carl von Clausewitz remains a fundamental pillar of modern strategic thinking, not by offering universal recipes, but by providing a rigorous conceptual framework for understanding the complexity of war. Although often misinterpreted or reduced to political slogans, the treatise "On War" proves its value precisely through its dialectical flexibility, which allows the adaptation of its principles to contemporary technological and political realities. Whether his ideas will continue to be studied directly or will be fully assimilated into future doctrines, Clausewitz's legacy lies in the recognition that war is, in essence, a social and political phenomenon, dominated by chance, friction and the interaction of human wills. Thus, the survival of his theory depends not on literary rigor, but on its capacity to remain an indispensable "lens" for any critical mind trying to decipher the unchanging nature of armed conflict and the lessons more or less learned.

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