



PERSPECTIVE ON THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF THE NAVAL FORCES

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Although over time each service has developed specific doctrines aimed at achieving decisive victory against the adversary, using only their own capabilities, this approach now seems no longer viable in the context of new technologies and the dependency of military forces on elements that are not entirely under their control, such as the cyber domain. Nonetheless, the military have demonstrated that they possess some advantages in terms of the strategic impact they have, not only within a conflict but also as a state policy. This is also the case for Naval Forces, which have proven over time to be an important means of advancing the interests of nations that have developed a strong maritime consciousness. In the article, one can find illustrated the strategic role of each service, subsequently being detailed the strategic missions of Naval Forces and how the Romanian Naval Forces can address this challenge.

Keywords: *military services; maritime environment; Naval Forces; strategic missions; maritime consciousness.*

Introduction

In the current security environment, each military service plays a distinct and strategic role in ensuring national and international security. Driven by historical events that left a significant imprint on collective memory, nations tend to develop a maritime or continental identity, reflecting the experiences that led to success.

The article explores how naval, land, air, and special operations forces have contributed uniquely to the global security strategy, and how strategic awareness and leadership influence the orientation towards each service.

In a continuously changing geopolitical landscape, military forces must adapt and evolve, integrating new technologies to enhance their capabilities.

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This transformative process is evident in the efforts of major powers, such as the development of the US fleet, which marked a crucial moment in forming a national maritime consciousness.

Although independent actions of different services have led to historical victories, the current context calls for an integrated and coordinated approach between land, naval, and air forces.

As we analyse in detail the missions and strategic roles of Naval Forces and subsequently, the Romanian Naval Forces, we will highlight how they align with contemporary challenges and the necessary re-evaluation in national and international defence strategies.

The research hypothesis to be validated in the article is that Naval forces play an essential role in integrating national and international defence strategies, constantly adapting to respond to modern technological challenges and the unpredictable global security environment.

The research objectives that we set out to analyse refer to how the Romanian Naval Forces adapt to new technologies and influence the security environment in the Black Sea region, thus contributing to regional and international stability, and to comparison between the strategies for utilizing naval forces among nations with maritime traditions and those with continental traditions, examining their historical and strategic impact on contemporary defence policies.

Regarding the limitations of the research, it can be mentioned that not always the missions of Naval Forces belonging to nations that have developed a strong maritime consciousness, operating in large seas and oceans, can adapt to Naval Forces operating in small, semi-enclosed seas, as they have their specific characteristics.

The methodology of the article consists of conducting a comparative analysis – comparing the ways different nations develop and utilize their services by presenting the differences in strategies between nations with maritime traditions and those with continental traditions, as well as a case study on the Romanian Naval Forces and the US Naval Forces, to illustrate the different historical and strategic impacts of the two approaches.

In the end of the paper, we have formulated recommendations for future defence policies and strategies, based on the findings of the analysis, and we have also suggested areas of future research that could complement and reinforce the understanding of the strategic role of the military in general, and of the Naval Forces in particular.

1. Considerations Regarding the Strategic Role of Military Services

Some historical events remain in the collective consciousness of a people. Thus, they are inclined to manage current issues through the lens of the traditional way of handling situations.



Consequently, the services that have brought glory to a nation gain favour in the eyes of the public, distinguishing maritime nations from continental ones. That is also the case of the US Naval Forces, which, with the construction of the Great White Fleet, ingrained a strong maritime consciousness in US citizens.

We believe this is also the reason why, although other services have experienced a decline in recruits, the Naval Forces have managed to maintain a constant level over time (Figure no. 1).

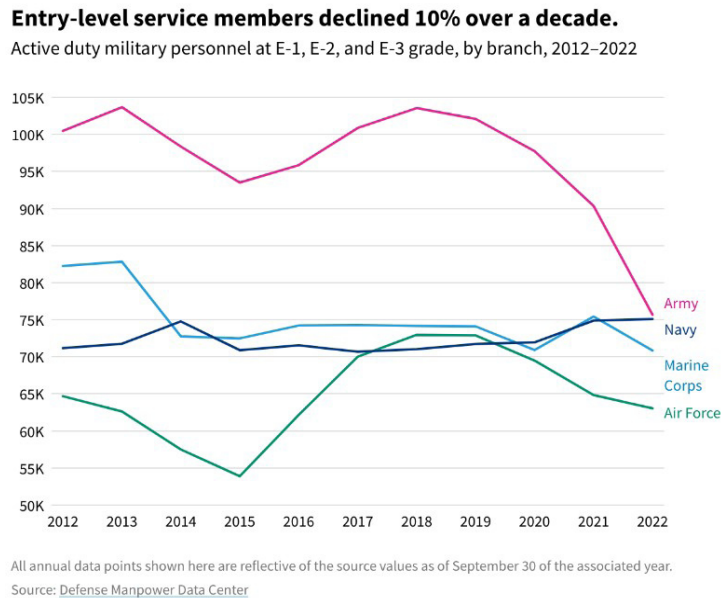


Figure no. 1: Active duty military personnel at E-1, E-2, and E-3 grade, by branch, 2012-2022 (USAFacts Team, 2023)

The construction of the Great White Fleet by the United States was based on the country’s dependence on maritime trade, following the rapid pace of industrialization after the Civil War, which generated significant resources, as well as the lack of a military and commercial fleet to support this trade (McMahon, 2018).

Leadership is also a very important aspect regarding a nation’s orientation towards a particular type of consciousness (maritime or continental). As General Petraeus states with regard to the four important steps of strategic leadership, one must initially be able to clearly understand the main idea, meaning appropriately addressing the strategic situation (Petraeus & Roberts, 2023, p. 4), which in some cases involves focusing the actions of the armed forces on a specific service.

This aspect can be represented by the implementation of a concept that is actually an idea that synthesizes very well reality. For example, a concept that emphasized



Naval Forces is the Air-Sea Battle, implemented between 2013-2015 (LaGrone, 2015), but it was based on a recent threat (A2AD¹), developed on the model of the air-land battle of the '80s.

It should be also mentioned that the Air-Sea Battle did not reach the implementation stage (capability development) because the actions of the Land Forces were not included in this concept and the effect of the Naval and Air Forces on land was considered insufficient.

Therefore, we believe it can be stated that each service has a specialized strategic role, which contributes to the success of military operations and national security. Coordination among these forces is crucial to ensuring effective defence and responding to global security challenges in an integrated manner. Each branch brings a unique set of capabilities and advantages, and their interaction determines long-term strategic success.

Land Forces represent the backbone of many armies, being the ones that ensure direct control over the terrain. They are crucial for ensuring security and maintaining order in conflict regions. For example, in conventional conflicts, infantry and tanks can conduct decisive operations to capture or defend territories. In peacekeeping operations, Land Forces are responsible for patrolling areas and maintaining stability. A clear example of their importance is the deployment of NATO forces in Eastern Europe to deter potential Russian aggression.

Although it is known that, in the past, Land Forces have achieved victories without the support of other services, it is our belief that today, without gaining a degree of control over the air and maritime space, a decisive victory for the Land Forces is difficult to imagine. A historical example in which the Land Forces prevailed without consistent naval support is the war waged by Alexander the Great against the Persians. Thus, understanding the advantages of gaining access to the sea and how these can be denied. "This Macedonian conquest, which made the Aegean Sea an "enclosed sea" – depriving Greeks and Phoenicians of their previous bases – allowed Alexander the Great, or Macedon, the luxury of attempting to conquer the extended Middle East by land" (Kaplan, 2020, p. 157).

Air forces offer a strategic advantage through their ability to project power over vast regions, rapidly and efficiently. They are essential for air superiority, reconnaissance, strategic transport, and support on ground operations. Fighter aircraft, such as F-35, provide advanced offensive and defensive capabilities, ensuring air supremacy. Additionally, reconnaissance and surveillance missions, carried out by drones or surveillance aircraft, are vital for intelligence gathering and the strategic coordination of operations.

However, there have been historical periods when Air Forces aimed to win the war solely through their own capabilities. This was the case of the British Air Force at the beginning of World War II (Werrell, 1986), but without experiencing success.

¹ Anti Access Area Denial.



Special Operations Forces (SOF), which were included relatively recently among the services, play a strategic role within the military due to their ability to conduct complex missions that require a high level of training and precision. These units are extremely flexible and can operate in a variety of environments and situations, often in collaboration with other services.

SOF are often involved in targeted strike missions, such as capturing or eliminating high-value targets, such as terrorist leaders or enemy critical infrastructure. A notable example is the mission to eliminate Osama bin Laden.

Next, we will analyse the strategic missions of naval forces and the extent to which they align with current challenges in the international security environment. We will also provide some considerations regarding the capabilities of the Romanian Naval Forces to execute strategic-level missions.

2. Strategic Level Missions for the Naval Forces

Naval Forces play a critical role in securing maritime lines of communication, ensuring freedom of navigation, and projecting power in distant regions. In conflict situations, they can block enemy access to resources and provide logistical support to land and air forces. Aircraft carriers, as centres of mobile power, allow for rapid and flexible deployment of air forces close to conflict zones, extending operational range and capabilities. In cases of humanitarian crises, military ships can offer rapid assistance and logistical support.

As mentioned, Naval Forces are essential for several missions, each having a significant impact on global security and international stability. Further, we propose a description of these missions and a perspective on their future:

Protecting Maritime Lines of Communication:

Current Mission: Naval forces ensure the security of maritime trade routes, which are vital to the global economy. They patrol and monitor key areas such as the Strait of Hormuz or the Suez Canal, preventing piracy and ensuring the free flow of commerce.

Future: There is expected to be an increase in the use of naval drones and autonomous technologies with the purpose of a more efficient surveillance of maritime routes. With advances in artificial intelligence, Naval Forces will be able to better predict and prevent threats.

Ensuring Freedom of Navigation:

Current Mission: This involves patrolling international waters and ensuring compliance with international maritime treaties, preventing unilateral actions by states that could block free access to navigation routes.



Future: Disputes related to maritime territories (such as the South China Sea) will require more sophisticated diplomatic approaches and the presence of a deterrent Naval Force, supported by international alliances and maritime cooperation.

Force Projection and Logistical Support:

Current Mission: Naval Forces project military power in distant regions, supporting land and air operations by ensuring secure supply lines.

Future: With technological modernization and the development of new naval platforms (e.g., advanced destroyers and attack submarines), force projection will become more efficient. Future aircraft carriers will include unmanned combat aircraft, such as those being constructed at the Damen Shipyard in Galați, which has begun building a drone carrier (DefenseRomania Team, 2024).

Humanitarian Assistance:

Current Mission: Military ships are used to rapidly respond to natural disasters or humanitarian crises, providing assistance and logistical support in hard-to-reach areas.

Future: Closer international cooperation and a greater emphasis on humanitarian aid will lead to expanded roles in peacekeeping operations and crisis response. The assistance capabilities of ships could include mobile hospitals and supply aircraft with advanced resource distribution capacities.

Looking ahead, the technological development and diversification of Naval Forces, along with international collaboration, will be essential for adapting to new global and regional challenges. These strategic missions of Naval Forces will continue to evolve in order to better respond to multidimensional threats and complex crisis scenarios.

3. Strategic Missions of the Romanian Naval Forces

The Romanian Naval Forces have a history and context different from those of the United States Naval Forces, as presented at the beginning of the article. Through its 245 km coastline on the Black Sea, Romania gained access to the coast in 1878, much later compared to other maritime nations. This means that maritime tradition and consciousness are not as developed as in countries with a long history of sea and ocean exploration.

Although the Romanian Naval Forces played a crucial role in certain operations, such as the evacuation of Romanian and German troops from Crimea in April-May 1944 (Iancu, 2018), or the air-naval action on June 26, 1941, against a Soviet naval force targeting Constanța, in which the Romanian Navy sank the Russian destroyer Moskva and damaged a second destroyer, alongside the losses suffered by the Soviets



among their bomber aircraft (15 out of 24 Soviet planes were shot down, some by ships) (Mara, 2000, p. 55), these moments are not as widely known or recognized by the Romanian public.

Thus, we believe it should be mentioned that, due to its geopolitical position and security challenges, Romania has often placed greater emphasis on land and air forces. In contrast, the US, having oceans on both its east and west coasts, has developed a strong culture and perception regarding maritime importance, reflected in the substantial resources allocated to Naval Forces.

Therefore, it is our belief that developing a stronger maritime consciousness in Romania can be achieved through education and public awareness regarding the strategic role of the navy, the importance of the maritime economy, and promoting naval history.

Increased investments in naval infrastructure and participation in international exercises can also contribute to raising the profile and perception of Naval Forces among citizens. Moreover, the fact that, starting with February 2022, the Black Sea has become a theatre of conflict and maritime challenges are becoming increasingly complex, should lead to the development of Naval Forces as the main actor in this new strategic situation. Currently, the Romanian Naval Forces contribute to the security of the Black Sea, which is an important trade route for countries in the region. Romanian ships participate in patrol missions and international exercises, such as those organized by NATO, to ensure a safe and stable maritime environment.

Additionally, the Romanian Naval Forces are prepared to intervene in the event of natural disasters or crises in the Black Sea basin, providing necessary assistance and logistical support.

Therefore, we believe that, although the Romanian Naval Forces do not have the same level of visibility and recognition as those of other states with a long maritime tradition, they play an important role in national and regional security. Increasing promotion and education regarding the importance of the maritime environment could contribute to changing public perception.

4. Comparative Analysis

To conduct a comparative analysis of the information previously presented, we can consider several criteria: firstly, the historical context and background in analysing how historical events and traditional military practices have shaped current strategies and compare these influences between different countries' military services.

Technological Integration: examine the role of new technologies in military strategies, particularly how naval forces have adapted to these technologies.

Strategic Mission and Role: compare the strategic missions and roles of the naval forces discussed in the article. Evaluate how these missions align with contemporary global security challenges.



Maritime vs. Continental Identity: evaluate how maritime or continental identities influence military policies and the strategic role of naval forces. Compare this influence on military focus in nations with maritime traditions against those with continental traditions.

Public Perception and Support: analyze how public perception and national consciousness affect support and development of naval forces, and compare these factors between nations highlighted in the article.

Based on these criteria, we can draw the following comparative insights from the article:

Historical Influence and Traditions: nations with a strong maritime tradition like the US have developed more robust naval capabilities and consciousness compared to countries like Romania, where historical maritime engagement is more recent.

Technological Adaptation: the article discusses the ongoing modernization efforts, such as the construction in Romania of a drone carrier, which, even though it is not destined for the Romanian Naval Forces, can be considered a know-how gained for the employees of the Damen Shipyard.

Strategic Roles: the Romanian Naval Forces focus on regional security in the Black Sea, contributing to international missions and ensuring local stability, whereas the US Naval Forces have a global force projection capability.

Maritime Identity Influence: the US's maritime consciousness has significantly influenced its defence priorities, while Romania is encouraged to strengthen its maritime awareness to better integrate regional defence strategies.

Public Support and Investment: increased investments and public awareness in Romania are necessary to elevate the perception and effectiveness of its naval forces, aligning with the strategic importance of maritime security highlighted in the article.

Conclusions

The hypothesis that naval forces play an essential role in integrating national and international defence strategies has been confirmed through the analysis of how these forces adapt and expand their capabilities to respond to global technological and security challenges. The article details how naval forces contribute to maritime security, protect communication lines, and ensure freedom of navigation, demonstrating their importance in global defence strategies.

The first objective, which examines the adaptation of the Romanian Naval Forces to new technologies and their influence on security in the Black Sea, is achieved through a detailed analysis of the current role of these forces in the region.

The second objective, concerning the comparison of strategies between nations with maritime traditions and those with continental traditions, is achieved through a



comparative approach to how naval forces are utilized by Romania and the US. The study highlights historical and strategic differences, as well as the impact of these differences on current defence policies, emphasizing how historical experiences and maritime consciousness influence current strategic decisions.

Therefore, nations are influenced by historical events and significant victories of different branches of the military, which contribute to the formation of national defence identity and priorities. Maritime nations, such as the USA, have developed a strong maritime consciousness due to their reliance on sea trade and the development of their naval fleet.

Leadership influences the strategic direction of a nation. Leaders are responsible for understanding strategic situations and adapting force capabilities to meet contemporary challenges. It is our belief that the fact that a certain service is less developed can be considered a strategic decision and should be assumed both in the case of success and, especially, in the case of failure of that strategy.

Moreover, the fact that each service brings a unique set of capabilities should lead to an integrated approach, combining Land, Air, and Naval Forces, which is crucial for success in modern military operations.

In addition, Naval Forces play a vital role in global security by protecting maritime lines of communication, ensuring freedom of navigation, and projecting power. Investments in advanced technologies such as drones and artificial intelligence will enhance the effectiveness of naval missions.

It should also be noted that due to different geopolitical challenges and the relatively underdeveloped maritime consciousness, the Romanian Naval Forces do not have the same visibility as other maritime nations, yet they play a critical role at the regional level. Strengthening maritime consciousness in Romania and increasing investments in Naval Forces are necessary to meet current challenges.

Furthermore, we believe it is important to remember that a single service cannot win a modern conflict without the support of other services. Technological advances require closer integration among all branches to effectively address contemporary security challenges.

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