

ANALYSING RESERVE FORCES AS AN ENABLER FACTOR FOR ACTIVE MILITARY

Adriana BRUMARU, PhD. candidate,

"Alexandru cel Bun" Moldavian Military Academy, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova.
E-mail: brumaru_adriana@yahoo.com

BG (ret.) Crăişor-Constantin IONIȚĂ, PhD.,

Researcher, Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies,
"Carol I" National Defence University, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: ionita.constantin@unap.ro

Abstract: *The continuum degradation of the international security environment represents a negative effect of the unbalanced power that followed the end of the Cold War. With only one superpower controlling the international order it is almost impossible to prevent and manage numerous crisis and conflicts which happened all around the world at any time. Therefore, the idea of changing the current world order acquires greater and greater valences in the mind of regional powers. At the same time, the military conflict evolves and is highly influenced by the new risks and threats that appeared at national, regional and international security environments. Recent events demonstrate that we have to fight today wars and be prepared for the tomorrow ones at the same time. Preparing the population for defense and, implicitly, developing a culture of security within civil society, alongside the revitalization of the voluntary reserve, are vital and the only elements that can contribute to harnessing the society's volunteerism and accessing the potential available at this moment in Romanian society for achieving resilience and acceptable internal security. This is essential for fulfilling the objective of a possible regeneration of the active military force. Therefore, the role of reserve forces and reservists, including volunteer ones, in this new operating environment is continuing increasing and their importance inside national military forces acquires a new connotation for more and more missions. Apart for being just a human resource to replace lost active-duty personnel, reservists can enhance the resilience at national and military levels and fill up gaps or niche positions. This material will analyse how reserve forces were used in the current wars in line with new security environment paradigm and will propose some real ways ahead for the Romanian Armed Forces to develop such enabling operational resources.*

Keywords: *Reserve Forces; Voluntary Reserve; reservists; niche capabilities; resilience; human resource.*

Introduction

Revitalising the reserve forces is essential for the implementation of Romania's three strategic, and operational concepts in the defense field, as defined in the Romania's Military Strategy, 2021 – *the Concept of Consolidated National Defense, the Integrated Operation Concept in an extended inter-institutional format, and the Concept of the Integrated Joint Force - Multi-domain*. In these concepts, the relationship between active forces and reserve ones must be one that allows military actions to be carried out in the new type of conflict. Therefore, the reserve forces should be seen as an enabling factor of the military power of a nation.

In Romania significant steps have been taken to establish the Voluntary Reserve Corps and ensure an efficient operational reserve through mobilisation and force generation, but a general assessment is that we are still at the beginning of the road.

By suspension of compulsory military service and natural ageing process of the current operational reserve - those who have performed military service and have basic military training -, it is obvious that the Voluntary Reserve is an element that can contribute to capitalising on society's willingness to volunteer and accessing the force potential currently available at this moment in the Romanian society to achieve resilience and acceptable internal security, as well as to meet the objective for a possible regeneration of the active military force. This regeneration process can be regarded an element of the military resilience.

Although the Armed Forces' trust rating is consistently exceeding 70% in Romanian society, the attractiveness of the military career has decreased, primarily due to concentrated attacks from politicians, opinion leaders and the media who deny its importance. (AORR 2024) Moreover, compared to other reserve forces within the Alliance and considering the current international and geopolitical situation, Romania's reserve forces are insufficient and represent a part too small of the overall national military capabilities and the total number of population capable to fight. (Army 2023)

We consider that by revitalising and re-adapting the reserve forces, the result would be a more robust force structure with an exceptionally cost-effective balance of human potential within the Romanian Armed Forces by recruiting from civil society specialists with expertise in various fields. At the same time, this readjustment contributes to establishing a vital link between the military and society, beneficial for changing the civilian perception of the military, a perception that has been eroding lately.

The upcoming Strategic Defence Review for the next generation of national security and defence strategic documents, as described by the Law no 203/2015 regarding the national defence planning, will represent an outstanding vehicle to reconsider the role and importance of reserve forces for future conflicts.

1. The International Security Environment

As of today, we are witnessing a continuous degradation of the international security situation. Among one of the causes of this situation, there is the continuous and pronounced degradation of the state of mind, attitude, and perceptions regarding the world order. This cause is exacerbated by the erosion of the authority of international organisations that have supported the current world order – the UN Security Council, as a decision-making level, is increasingly weakened and sometimes blocked –, the selective and partial application of international law, norms, and conventions with an impact on ensuring international security order, and often only rhetorical, the erosion of international politics and diplomacy, their relegation to a secondary level. Other causes refer to the application of force and coercion as the first measures, the emergence of conflict hotspots and ongoing conflicts, as well as the reconfiguration of the security architecture in Europe (Ukraine, Balkans), the Middle East (Israel), Africa (Sahel), the Far East (China, Japan, South Korea, India, South China Sea). In addition, there is a perception of permissiveness in international relations, bloc discipline has decreased and is relative, freedom has turned into libertinism, and if you have the courage, you can obtain advantages and bypass international law. (Orzeată 2023)

Regarding the causes that have contributed to the degradation of the international security environment, we can add the decrease in the appetite for cooperation, replaced by a sense of fear of cooperation and collaboration, fear of partners, and last but not least, rifts in security structures due to partisan positions and local national interests – see the positions of Slovakia, Hungary, Austria, and Turkey – EU and NATO member countries.

The balance of power from the Cold War period no longer exists, and the statement by realist theorists that "*world order is ensured by the balance of power and resources*" tends to

become correct. We are witnessing an increase in the appetite for armament, the performance of military technology, and the development of military capabilities, new nuclear weapons, and new weapon stockpiles.

It is almost clear that the positions of the United States and China will determine in the near future the lines of force, confrontation, or understanding, cooperation, given that there are new players with resources, intelligence, and strategic maturity, neglected for a certain period, who demand their rights in the new security structure (BRICS, Japan, Germany, Egypt), and their position is decisive in shaping the world of tomorrow.

2. Possible Threats Arising from Romania's Internal Vulnerabilities

Among the main threats and risks to the security of Romania arising from internal vulnerabilities, we can note one very challenging – the continuous demographic decline of the country ageing process, and the migration of the Romanian civilians capable of military efforts. This became also an internal vulnerability for the Romanian Armed Forces, because of the lack of military personnel available for positions in units, formations and headquarters, as well as in the operational reserve.

According to the National Defence Strategy of 2020, other risks and threats refer to the very low level of security culture among Romanian society; the precariousness of resources (material, technical, financial, and human allocated to the defense sector); the loss of national control over strategic material resources; the destruction and non-existence of the national defense industry, and last but not least, the misguided concepts of a part of the political class regarding the need to optimize resources allocated to defense, the defense industry to strengthen Romania's military power. (Administratia Prezidentiala 2020, 24-29)

The inefficiency of international cooperation mechanisms, components of the national defense system, public order and national security, together with the wrong political approach that claims that NATO membership provides an infallible security umbrella, led to the imperfect, sometimes even defective, functioning of the decision-making processes at the governmental level as state director. (Treaty 2023)

Major delays in the development and modernisation of critical infrastructure, with a direct impact on national and transnational military mobility in Europe, as well as the fragility of civic spirit, civic solidarity, and the demystification of patriotic sentiment among young people, have led to the limited engagement of civil society in the debate and formulation of issues regarding defense and national security.

3. Transformations in the way of conducting the armed conflict

In recent decades, the physiognomy of conflicts has changed tremendously. The complex factors that characterise it now includes new political-economic and strategic situations of insecurity, new political and strategic goals, new objectives, forces and specific means of action, a different conception and intensity of actions, a different attitude towards the adversary, different deployment spaces, a wide variety of dominant types of actions, as well as increasingly sophisticated and unexpected manifestations of violence/aggression.

The recent geopolitical developments among actors with global or regional interests aiming to implement a new world order, as well as the ways of conduct in the Russian-Ukrainian War with possible regional and global effects, and the Israel-Hamas War, demonstrate the transformations in the physiognomy of conflicts, especially in the way of understanding the role and importance of reservists and resilience. Without the use of reserve forces, the situations in Ukraine and Israel would have been completely different.

In this continuous change and diversification of the physiognomy of conflicts, we also observed the most pronounced tendency to carry out traditional military actions of conventional conflict simultaneously with the unfolding of actions related to Hybrid Warfare, elements primarily characterised by: replacing the interest in occupying territory with the interest in influencing events; abandoning the idea of the need to be physically present in favor of the requirement to control populations, to influence, and eventually intervene; simultaneously conducting traditional military actions with those falling under the concept of Hybrid Warfare. (Radu 2016, 11-33)

Analysing the major changes in the physiognomy of conflicts, especially those related to the approach to conflict, the strategy used to achieve desired effects, as well as the source of violence, which has shifted from state organizations to individuals, with populations being primarily involved, we see that this new approach has shifted the center of gravity from a fixed posture, based on exclusively military planning, threats, to a broad, flexible, and reactive civil-military planning, based especially on deployable, modular capabilities configured to achieve specific objectives at each stage of the conflict. Moreover, we observe that, overall, we are no longer facing a well-defined enemy, but a series of non-traditional and unpredictable threats, challenging to manage, grouped under the strategies and tactics of the Hybrid Warfare concept.

In these conditions, it becomes necessary to reevaluate the conceptual and functional capabilities available to address these new risks and threats, and consequently, adopt new approaches, starting from adapting doctrines and reshaping defense planning processes to organizational and structural transformation, including the establishment of Reserve Forces and their preparation to face the new types of conflict. The approach to the new conflict must be integrated, comprehensive, civil-military one, engaging all basic elements of national power – diplomatic, informational, military, and economic, and the use of reserve forces becomes essential.

4. The Use of Reserve Forces in the Ongoing Military Conflicts

The role of Reserve Forces within the national defence has highly increasing in the past years because of the continuous changes in the regional and international security environment and the appearance of new risks and threats. The new posture of NATO in deterrence and resilience also highlighted the importance of developing Reserve Forces at the allies' national level. This new posture is translated at the Reserve Forces' level not only as a precious human resource, but also as filling up gap capabilities or ensuring niche ones. It is obvious that Reserve Forces have the necessary capability to support both civilian institutions and military facilities in maintaining or increasing their resilience, especially in a supporting role.

Every NATO nation needs a good resilience to withstand and recover following a major shock, such as the unavailability of critical infrastructure, an armed or hybrid attack or after a natural disaster. Resilience is the ability of a society to withstand and recover from some such shocks and combines both military capability and civilian training. The principle of resilience is anchored in Article 3 of the founding Treaty of the Alliance: *"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 Official Text 1949)

The military efforts to defend the territory and the population of the Alliance must be complemented by a robust civilian training as possible reservists to reduce potential vulnerabilities and the risk of attack in peacetime, in situations of crisis and military conflict. Military forces, especially those deployed in times of crisis and conflict, depend on the sea capabilities of the civil and commercial sectors for transport, communications, energy, and supply of base, to fulfill their missions. A part of these responsibilities could be fulfilled by national reservists or by other national institutions in a Comprehensive Approach (inter-institutional).

Therefore, the resilience is both a national responsibility and a collective commitment rooted in art 3 from the North Atlantic Treaty. The individual commitment of each allied state

to maintain and strengthen its capacity to resilience reduces NATO and national vulnerability. Each NATO state must be sufficiently robust and adaptable to cope and address the entire spectrum of crises and military operations envisaged in the Alliance Strategic Concept.

It is well known from history that countries with shorter/short duration military service rely on the mobilisation of the reserve when they come under attack.

This was the case of Ukrainian Armed Forces, which used a Scandinavian system of smaller reserve, tailored at 11,000 men by 2011. The mentioned Scandinavian system was adopted after the Cold War, when all Nordic countries downsized their Armed Forces, dropped their defence budgets and abandoned the traditional doctrine for territorial defence. They kept a small reserve force of up to 21,000 men and women in the so-called volunteer home guard. This was because an armed invasion was no longer viewed as a credible threat. (Hedlund 2019)

The 2014 crisis changed the military leadership view on reserve and Kiev created the National Guard of up to 60,000 men to incorporate both the ‘volunteers’ battalions and the Territorial Defence Forces (25-28 brigades). (Lemercier and Regnier 2023, 3-5) After the Russian invasion of its territory, Ukraine declared the Martial Law and called up reservists to deal with direct aggression of a larger and heavily equipped enemy. The Ukrainian reservists’ motivation was very clear – to defend their homes, the lives of their families, their property and hopes for the future. This is why, the successful mobilisation of the Ukrainian Reserve Forces has provided a valuable military lesson from at least two perspectives. Firstly, having a strategic reserve force is useful in the context of a defensive and prolonged war. Secondly, its motivation is high and its warfighting capability should not be underestimated. (Velasco 2022)

On the other hand, Russian reservists were in a different situation. At the beginning of the invasion, Kremlin had no intent to mobilise its reservists. This is why President Vladimir Putin called the invasion not a war, but a “*Special Military Operation*”. Seven months later, as the operation did not fulfil its expectations, the Russian President was obliged to declare the partial mobilisation in the Russian Federation through the Decree no 647 from 21 September 2022, calling under arms 300,000 young citizens, representing 4% of the Russian labor force. (Cancian 2022) The little interest in fighting in this war, combined with the lack of real information on the situation in the field, the idea of engaging in combat with outdated weaponry, inherited from the Soviet era, and the poor bureaucracy unready to handle the demands of a complex mobilisation effort, had two peculiar consequences.

The first consisted of a massive line of people trying to flee the country to avoid being drafted into military service. The second one was represented by a series of demonstrations in some Russian big cities against the idea of calling young people at arms and sending them in an unwilling war. In addition to bureaucratic problems, security forces seemed to be threatening demonstrators with mobilization, contrary to the announced policy.

This is why, the Russian case is considered a bad example, because mounting an invasion on the back of Reserve Forces sends a message of weakness and improvisation to the outside world and provokes confusion at home. This can be highly counterproductive to sustaining the war and dangerous for Kremlin’s political stability. (Velasco 2022)

A second relevant example is represented by the current Israel – Hamas War, from October 2023. Following the Hamas “AL-AQSA FLOOD” terrorist attack, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) immediately launched the “SWORDS OF IRON” Counterterrorist Campaign in the Gaza Strip.

The IDF campaign comprised two distinct operations – a shaping one to counter the Hamas strategic surprise and the “failure of information” through airstrikes, artillery fire and limited ground attacks on the northern Gaza Strip, while defending against Hamas rockets and cutting off the enclave's supply of electricity, food and fuel, and a land operation, which can be considered decisive operation, launched on 26 October 2023 towards Gaza City and the Northern Gaza Strip, with the declared operational objective of destroying the vast network of

Hamas tunnels – "Gaza Metro" (over 500 km of tunnels dug under the Gaza Strip). To achieve this operational objective and rescue hostages suspected of being held in the tunnels, the IDF has mobilised some 350,000 reservists (4% of total population) and used special "Oletz" trained dog units and "Yahalom" tunnel locating and destruction units. (Hassan and Taylor 2023)

This largest mobilisation since the Yom Kippur War of 1973 showed, as lesson identified, the importance of time and speed in bringing so many reservists at once. Israel's army relies on an enormous reserve contingent, made up of citizens who have completed their compulsory national service which can be mobilised for duty until the age of 40. (Gunter 2023) In terms of nation's "civilian military", the IDF remains unique in the world and succeeded to conduct such a complex mobilisation process within 48 hours during a crisis situation at home. A second identified lesson consists of delivering the proper training for reserve to be prepared to conduct a very specific land offensive operation against Hamas tunnels, whilst succeeding to protect and rescue Israeli hostages believed to be kept in those tunnels.

All these examples of the current use of reserve forces in combat highlight the increasing role and importance of reserve both as resources and enablers for active forces. It is mandatory for NATO member states to develop adequate reserve forces to contribute to the national and military resilience, as stipulated by art 3 from the North Atlantic Treaty.

5. Ways Ahead for the Development of Reserve Forces in the Romanian Armed Forces

Even if in the past 10-20 years the Romanian mobilisation system and the reserve were not in the forefront of military leadership attention, the 2014 Ukrainian crisis, followed by the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine forced them to understand very quickly how important is to have a well prepared and calibrated reserve force to ensure an adequate deterrence and defence of the country. This concept represents more than just mobilising reservists and filling up gaps in the human resources. It enables active forces to build an efficient military resilience and help Romanian Armed Forces to actively participate in supporting the national one.

In the "2040 Romanian Armed Forces" transformation, modernisation and endowment programme, there is mentioned the development of a new strategic concept – the Consolidated National Defence (ApNC). This new concept incorporates three main components – defence of the nation, multilayered resilience and societal preparedness. Inside the first component there is, among other actions, one specific dedicated to reservists – the mobilisation and exceptional situations. The multilayered resilience comprises the civilian resilience, the civil-military resilience, the military resilience and the military support to civil resilience, all of them necessitating some reserve forces to act. In the last one, there is also a possibility for reserve forces to support the civil protection and the critical infrastructure protection, when active forces focus on military activities for the national defence or conduct some deterrent actions. (Vinturis 2022)

According to this new strategic concept, reserve forces could act alone or as an enabler for active forces against the majority of risks and threats. For example, against a conventional threat they could replace neutralized/destroyed active units or enhance some military units on secondary defensive directions. For unconventional risks and threats, the specialised reserve forces might be very efficient as niche capabilities for countering hybrid actions, cyber and spatial defence, PSYOPS, INFOOPS and STRATCOM.

The list of reservists with military training for the Romanian Armed Forces' mobilisation system becomes shorter and shorter. According to the provisions of Law no 395/2005, starting with 1 January 2007 the mandatory military conscript service was suspended and Romania adopted the full professional military one. What were the consequences of that action?

First of all, the lack of military training for young citizens in case of mobilization and, in turn, this will have as an effect a prolonged time for training them for combat.

Secondly, there is no legal stipulation for former active-duty personnel, actual reservists, to be trained prior to being mobilised.

Last, but not the least, from 2007 until now, the military human resource has got old and did not receive proper training and there is very little information at the military centers about the job/work migration of the Romanian population abroad.

More than that, even if there is a legal stipulation in the Law no 446/2006 about the pre-military training of students in high schools, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of National Defence did not find financial solutions to put it in place.

After the Russian invasion in Ukraine, the society attention was straightened up towards the military, repeatedly asking who will defend Romania in the case of a Russian attack. Even though the political answer was permanently about NATO defending us, the Romanian military leadership started to reconsider what should be done in order to achieve the full operational capability of all units and formations and increase the military resilience, as well.

Therefore, some positive measures have been undertaken since then. One measure consisted in the creation of the Volunteer Reserve Corps through the revision of Law no 270/2015 and the new Ministerial Order no M.238/2023.

The Voluntary Reserve is part of the operational reserve of the Romanian Armed Forces, which is organised and trained to be immediately activated when necessary – during mobilisation or special-states situations, like the state of emergency or the stage of besiege. Its volunteer reservists are the first one to augment the units and formations where they are assigned.

The second important measure was related to the establishment of Reserve Infantry Battalions as the first step of creating the Reserve Force as a whole. These reserve units will experiment how to organize, equip and train the future Reserve Force.

At the same time, for addressing the current situation in the short term, the following measures could be considered:

- assessment and update of equipment stock: review and update the equipment stock to ensure that reserve forces have the necessary resources for rapid mobilization;
- promotion of volunteering interest: launch informational and promotional campaigns to stimulate volunteering interest within society and recruit members into the reserve forces;
- reform of recruitment process: review and streamline the recruitment process for reserve forces, making it more accessible and efficient;
- regular training and exercises: organize regular training sessions and exercises for reserve forces to keep them prepared and adaptable to new challenges;
- development of rapid mobilization protocols: create and implement clear and efficient protocols for the rapid mobilization of reserve forces in emergency or conflict situations;
- enhanced collaboration with the private sector: collaborates with the private sector to leverage skills and resources available in areas relevant to the reserve forces.

What else should be done at the Ministry of National Defence’s level? First of all, it is mandatory to reconstitute the entire national military reserve system. As General Gheorghita Vlad mentioned in a recent press interview, getting off the conscription system and the military compulsory service brought it a deficit for the Romanian Armed Forces. Therefore, it is useful to find something else to replace it, like the voluntary conscript service, for those young people from 18 to 35 years old, regardless gender, nationality or religion who wants to serve their country. (Scarlat 2024)

There have been multiple tendencies to change the current mobilisation system so far, but no one was finalised or was implemented with a kind of success. This is why, we propose a phased approach by developing first the Voluntary Reserve Corps, followed by putting in practice the military pre-training in high schools and universities, as it is stipulated in the Law no 446/2006 regarding the preparedness of population for war. One attempt is made in the

Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, with a project regarding a military training module prepared by Maj.Gen. (Ret.) Ioan Mancu. A second project is implemented in the Naval Academy, using the American system of Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), a leadership training and development programme that prepares full-time, college-enrolled students for service opportunities in the Navy.

The third phase represents the implementation of a policy to prepare the entire population in case of war, which, in turn will constitute a real general reserve for the Romanian Armed Forces. (Scarlat 2024) The last phase should be the decision to reconsider the development of Territorial Troops. This is a project which was discussed several year ago in the Chamber of Deputies and not approved, because of some Constitutional restraints.

It is worthwhile mentioning the important role of awareness, education, and promotion of both – the military career and the defence of the country. All of them should be included in the revision of the Law no 45/1994 regarding the national defence, which is in debate in the Parliament.

The opportunity of the percentage of 2% of GDP allocated to defense is a favorable premise for the distribution of financial resources necessary for the establishment of reserve forces, and on the other hand, the restart of the process of endowment of the land forces creates favorable conditions for the availability of certain categories of military equipment with which they can be endowed national reserve forces. One possible way to achieve this aim is by revising the Defence Planning Directive and the Romanian Armed Forces Endowment Plan to add a special mention for reserves. (Balaceanu and Stefanescu 2017)

It is very difficult to change the political decision-makers and military leaders' mindset on splitting the defence budget between active and reserve forces. Or to convince politicians to add additional money for reserve. Therefore, in order to address the current situation and further the process of revitalizing the reserve forces, as a first step, we consider it imperative to develop a Strategic Vision for the Reserve Forces of the Romanian Armed Forces. This document should establish the role and missions of the reserve forces, the size of the reserve forces, and the ratio of active forces to reserve forces, with a perspective towards the year 2040. An appropriate opportunity to develop such visionary document is the near future Strategic Defence Review (SDR).

Conclusions

The importance of the mobilisation system and reserve forces in the Romanian Armed Forces have been underestimated for almost two decades. Therefore, we can mention here that both currently face a series of issues, including consistent decline, neglect from both political and military institutions, and an under sizing compared to other Alliance members. There are challenges in harnessing the reserve force potential for defense, and the society's volunteering interest is not efficiently utilised. These difficulties may impact the capacity to ensure internal security and achieve objectives related to the regeneration of the active military force. Urgent measures and strategies for revitalizing and enhancing these reserve forces may be necessary.

Among the main requirements of the vision, there are some considerations that could be taken into account, starting with the provision of real solutions to enhance the general capacity and operational capabilities of the Romanian Armed Forces. This means to establish methods for consolidating national military and civilian capabilities to standards that allow for the prevention, deterrence, and defense of the country against any potential aggressor.

Next, it is important to establish methods for better harnessing the potential and volunteering interest of citizens for the defense of the country and one possible way is by identifying available and efficient solutions to strengthen the military-society relationship

through the integration of the military personnel into the social life and the understanding of the defence system by the society;

It is also worth wise, to create a mathematical model to measure the cost-effectiveness of the military system (cost-benefit, active/reserve forces, civilian/military), as well as to increase Romania's strategic credibility within the Alliance/NATO.

Within the analysis of SDR requirements could be included: identification and development of ways to form and cultivate a "security culture" within the Romanian society, as well as finding methods to implement military training for young individuals in primary schools, high schools, and at the university level, based on voluntary participation, as a priority to ensure human resources for defense.

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