

## **PROMOTING STRATEGIC THINKING AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO STRENGTHENING REGIONAL SECURITY**

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***Abstract:*** *The paper draws the attention of military leaders to their role in contributing to the strengthening of regional security. The authors identify the need to develop the strategic thinking of future military leaders in the context of the geopolitical, technological, and social transformations shaping the regional security environment, with the aim of fostering a school of thought adapted to these changes. Against the backdrop of an increasingly unstable security environment and emerging challenges, such as security risks and hybrid threats, the necessity of shaping resilient military leader profiles becomes evident, capable of thinking and acting strategically from the earliest levels of command. The study includes an analysis of the regional security environment and examines ways to promote critical thinking based on leadership models advanced by the Black Sea littoral actors, in order to formulate recommendations for the effective integration of strategic thinking into the military system of continuing education, thereby contributing to the development of future military leaders.*

***Keywords:*** *regional security; strategic thinking; soft capability; leadership; resilience.*

### **Introduction**

Over the past decade, the security environment in the Black Sea region has undergone profound transformations, driven by the overlap of the strategic interests of littoral states, regional actors, and great powers, as well as by the intensification of geopolitical competition in proximity to the Eastern flank of the Euro-Atlantic area. The events initiated by the Russian Federation, culminating in the war of aggression against Ukraine beginning on 24 February 2022, have produced a major rupture in the European security architecture and have amplified vulnerabilities related to maritime, energy, commercial, and food security. In this context, the Black Sea can no longer be analysed exclusively as a regional space, but rather as a strategic node with direct relevance for global stability and security, where risks and threats manifest simultaneously across multiple domains.

Against this backdrop, the response of Euro-Atlantic actors has been characterised by cohesion, adaptability, and the expansion of the politico-military toolkit designed for deterrence and collective defence. Beyond structural and operational measures, such as the deployment of multinational capabilities, the strengthening of interoperability, and the maintenance of a credible naval presence, the determining role of the conceptual dimension of security has become increasingly evident. Strategies, doctrines, operational concepts, as well as the use of soft instruments, including naval diplomacy, reflect the outcomes of strategic thinking processes aimed at integrating available means with long-term political objectives and with the specific features of the Black Sea operational environment.

Within this framework, the paper seeks to analyse the relationship between the regional security environment, the leadership models promoted by the principal littoral actors, and the role of

strategic thinking as the foundation of the politico-military decision-making process. The approach is structured around three main directions: defining the regional security environment and its associated risks, identifying the dominant leadership models manifested in the Black Sea region, and examining strategic thinking as an essential cognitive and organisational capability for managing contemporary conflicts. Through this integrated approach, the study aims to highlight the necessity of the deliberate development of strategic thinking among future military leaders, as an adaptive response to the complexity and unpredictability of the regional security environment.

## **1. Defining the Regional Security Environment**

The Black Sea region, by virtue of its geographical configuration and strategic relevance, constitutes a complex security space characterised by the overlapping interests of littoral states, regional partners, and international actors (Popa and Chiorcea 2024). This region goes beyond the status of a sensitive Eastern frontier, functioning instead as an essential strategic hub for the European Union's energy security, trade routes, and food supply chains.

The regional security environment prior to the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine could not be considered stable, primarily as a result of Moscow's policy aimed at exploiting and amplifying the effects of frozen conflicts in the Wider Black Sea Region. In this context fall the conflict for the defence of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova (1992), the war in Georgia (2008), as well as the invasion and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Following the annexation of Crimea, the regional security situation deteriorated significantly, against the backdrop of hostile actions conducted in the maritime domain, manifested through the restriction of maritime communications along the Istanbul – Crimea axis and in the Sea of Azov. The construction of the bridge across the Kerch Strait contributed to this strategic imbalance, constituting an additional manifestation of the unilateral alteration of the regional status quo.

Regional security dynamics were further intensified with the unanimous condemnation of the invasion of Ukraine launched by the Russian Federation on 24 February 2022. In this regard, it is relevant to note that as early as the 2021 OSCE Annual Security Conference, the European Union's statement delivered during the session dedicated to ensuring regional security and stability identified a series of threats attributed to the actions of the Russian Federation vis-à-vis Ukraine (EU 2021). These included restrictions on access for commercial vessels, and in particular military vessels, in certain areas of the Black Sea; the extensive militarisation of the Crimean Peninsula; the construction of the bridge over the Kerch Strait without Ukraine's consent; limitations on freedom of navigation to Ukrainian ports; and the significant concentration of military capabilities in proximity to Ukraine's borders.

Following 24 February 2022, these threats materialised as a series of concrete effects, ranging from the westward expansion of the conflict through the occupation of additional territories in Ukraine to its major impact on global food security. This situation led to the launch of the United Nations Initiative on the Export of Grain through the Black Sea, using the maritime solidarity corridors established in 2022 (UNO 2022). The fact that the initiative was guaranteed by the signatory parties, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Türkiye, under the auspices of the United Nations, acting as a guarantor of food security, constitutes further evidence of the role and strategic importance of the Black Sea region within the regional and global security architecture.

The position of the allied states has been, and continues to be, characterised by a high degree of cohesion and resolve, reflected within Euro-Atlantic institutions through the activation of a broad spectrum of instruments designed to manage and counter emerging risks and threats. These instruments include both diplomatic measures, such as political dialogue, consultation, and conciliation mechanisms, and military measures, materialised through enhanced cooperation, interoperability, and the maintenance of a credible collective defence capability.

Countering risks requires, in addition to adapting existing instruments enshrined in the Alliance's foundational documents (NATO 1999), the integration of measures appropriate to the current security

environment, which has been profoundly influenced by the conflict in Ukraine. In this context, relevant risks include the expansion of territories occupied by force, the possibility of other geographical areas being targeted, restrictions on access to strategic resources, control over the mouths of rivers flowing into the Black Sea, the establishment of naval blockades and the disruption of maritime commercial flows, as well as other forms of strategic pressure with regional and global impact.

With regard to threats, the collective defence posture is articulated through a coherent set of structural and procedural measures. Structural-organisational measures are reflected in flexible command-and-control arrangements, the deployment of multinational capabilities, and the enhanced forward presence of allied forces on the Eastern flank of the Euro-Atlantic area. Complementarily, procedural measures are implemented through mechanisms of joint operational planning, crisis management, permanent political consultation, standardisation, training through multinational exercises, as well as through ensuring access to infrastructure, the provision of military capabilities, and integrated logistical support.

To reduce the identified risks and to deter or neutralise existing or potential threats, it has become necessary to adapt and expand the spectrum of maritime missions and operations with defensive and deterrent roles. In this regard, a set of measures complementary to the collective effort aims at developing counter-unmanned aerial system capabilities, adapting and integrating short and medium-range missile defence systems, protecting critical infrastructure, ensuring freedom of navigation, securing maritime lines of communication, maintaining energy security, protecting subsea infrastructure, and exercising control over maritime spaces of strategic interest.

Based on recent developments, the Russian Federation can be identified as a direct and significant threat to regional security and stability, through both the strategic objectives it pursues and the means employed to achieve them. Among the most relevant objectives are attempts to establish regional and global spheres of influence, to exercise control over occupied territories, and to maintain coercive influence in areas affected by frozen or active conflicts in the Wider Black Sea Region. Through its aggressive military posture, violations of international law, including maritime law, its coercive rhetoric, and its demonstrated willingness to resort to force in order to achieve political and military objectives, the Russian Federation is perceived as the principal risk factor to individual freedoms, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, as well as to peace and stability on the Eastern flank of the Euro-Atlantic area, with direct implications for global security.

Without doubt, it can be stated that the regional security environment is currently defined by the war of aggression launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, an event that has produced a major rupture in the European security architecture. This action constitutes a serious violation of established norms and practices of international diplomacy, of maritime law, as well as of the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of the values underpinning the North Atlantic Alliance.

In this context, the strengthening of regional security requires the adoption and implementation of measures adapted to the specific characteristics of the Black Sea operational environment, namely politico-military measures. Among these are initiatives undertaken by Romania, aimed at reinforcing NATO's deterrence and defence posture, contributing to the establishment of a Recognized Maritime Picture (RMP), developing real-time situational awareness capabilities, and maintaining the rule of law and freedom of navigation. These actions reflect Romania's active role within the regional security architecture and in the collective Euro-Atlantic effort to manage emerging risks.

The authors argue that, alongside measures taken at the strategic and operational levels, action-oriented measures aimed at strengthening the deterrence and defence posture, conceptual measures can also be identified. These include strategies, doctrines, concepts, national resilience, multi-domain integration, interoperability, and diplomacy, among others. Conceptual measures represent the essence and product of the strategic thinking promoted by the authors. Within this approach, strategic thinking defines how modern conflict is addressed and how doctrinal instruments are integrated into the mechanisms of the allied response to threats within the regional security environment. In the authors' view, the driving force behind conceptual measures is the ability of leaders to promote and develop strategic thinking.

## 2. The dominant leadership model promoted in the Black Sea region

Taking into account the main characteristics of the regional security environment and the manner in which strategic thinking is manifested in the region, the following section analyses the leadership models promoted by the Black Sea littoral actors. Depending on these models, the paper proposes the identification of those components of strategic thinking, such as systems thinking, foresight, ethical reasoning, creativity, and synthesis, that can be demonstrated by future military leaders in order to contribute to the strengthening of regional security through the decisions they will make. This analytical endeavor starts with the statement of the Romanian Chief of the Navy: “*Regional political leaders are the first to perceive threats to the security of the region*” (Panait 2024, 139).

In the authors perspective, the diplomatic instrument is the domain of the strategic thinker and represents the primary means through which regional leadership is asserted in the context of the predominantly maritime profile of the Black Sea region. The conceptual link between strategic thinking and naval diplomacy manifests itself through a dual, complementary approach.

Naval diplomacy represents an applied expression of strategic thinking in the maritime domain, as it entails the alignment of political objectives with the deliberate use of naval means, the coherent integration of the instruments of power – diplomatic, informational, military, and economic – and the anticipation of the behavior of other international actors in order to shape the security environment without resorting to lethal force. Decisions regarding the deployment of naval forces in presence or cooperative missions thus reflect a strategic assessment of the geopolitical context and national interests, aimed at generating long-term political and security effects.

Moreover, naval diplomacy can be understood as a strategic instrument integrated into states’ maritime policy, forming part of a broader maritime strategy toolkit. In this regard, Kevin Rowlands (2019) argues that naval diplomacy transcends the traditional dimensions of coercion or mere presence, functioning instead as a strategic activity oriented toward the construction and influence of international relationship networks during peacetime. In a convergent manner, Christian Le Mière (2014) highlights the flexible nature of naval diplomacy as an instrument that combines elements of hard and soft power within contemporary foreign policy, thereby requiring robust strategic thinking for mission planning, risk management, and the integration of other instruments of power. Naval diplomacy “encompasses actions of national representation, as well as a component of diplomacy also referred to as a naval strategy of influence (...) today, naval diplomacy is understood as the use of naval power, a core component of maritime power, to support a state’s position in negotiations” (Scipanov 2024, 30). This perspective is further reinforced by Geoffrey Till’s (2013) analysis, which emphasises that naval forces should be examined not exclusively as instruments of warfare, but as strategic entities operating at the intersection of diplomacy, security, and influence.

Under these conditions, the authors emphasise that naval diplomacy assumes a central role in the ability of Black Sea littoral actors to manage regional security, while also becoming a key area of focus for future leaders in the development of this strategic skill set. Accordingly, it can be argued that military leadership can contribute to the promotion of security through the effective use of naval diplomacy.

The promotion of leadership among decision-makers and within the professional training of future leaders involves solutions aimed at shaping the profile of future decision-makers, such as multidisciplinary education, personal development, professional training, and the development of emotional intelligence. In this context, regional leadership and naval diplomacy represent “soft” solutions contributing to regional security, alongside defence diplomacy, security culture, and maritime awareness. All of these represent, in the authors’ view, means of fostering critical thinking (Scipanov 2024), a fundamental component of strategic thinking.

With regard to the allied approach to regional security, it can be noted that NATO constitutes a pillar of stability in the region and is expected to remain so by responding to challenges related to collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security (Panait 2024, 149). The type of leadership manifested under these conditions is Collaborative Leadership, or Collective Security

Leadership. The main characteristics of collaborative leadership include shared responsibility (decisions are taken by consensus), interdependence (the success of the Alliance depends on the contributions of its members), and mutual trust (the harmonisation of common interests).

From the perspective of the European Union, the core reference points of security are democracy, the standard of living, and the freedom of the European population and of those living in proximity to the EU's borders. Within the balance of regional security, the European Union remains a guarantor of security in the Black Sea. Under these conditions, the leadership model promoted by the European Union through its policies and community principles is democratic (or participatory) leadership; however, due to its social orientation, influences of transformational leadership can also be identified. The characteristics of democratic leadership are grounded in the will of the people and respect for human rights, participation in the decision-making process, equality before the law, the guarantee of fundamental freedoms, consensus-based cooperation, and open dialogue.

Türkiye has prompted the Euro-Atlantic community to reconsider its security strategies in the Black Sea, particularly from the perspective of the application of the Montreux Convention. In response, the Alliance and the European Union seek to identify appropriate diplomatic, political, and military responses to the real threats posed by the Russian Federation to regional security. Nevertheless, Türkiye remains an important contributor to strengthening the Alliance's position in the region.

The Russian Federation demonstrates through its behavior that it is an unpredictable and irrational actor in the Black Sea region. The mindset of Russian leadership perceives the Black Sea as an area of paramount interest in which its will should be imposed without regard for the positions of the Black Sea littoral actors. An intolerant attitude can be observed toward all littoral actors that seek to defend their interests in the Black Sea region, particularly through the minimisation of the political and military influence of the Euro-Atlantic bloc.

Considering the main models through which leadership is asserted in the context of regional security strategies, the authors propose several leadership models expressed at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels:

- *Integrated Security Leadership* – the leadership of international organisations and major regional actors;

- *Normative–Strategic Leadership* – strategic leadership at the politico-military level;

- *Situational Leadership* – the leadership of commanders at the tactical-operational level.

At the political level, the leadership of international organisations and major regional actors must capitalise on economic opportunities in the Black Sea by identifying mechanisms for exploiting economic resources (hydrocarbons), renewable energy, maritime trade, biological resources, and tourism, within the framework of restoring the balance of regional security. The authors define this type of leadership as *Integrated Security Leadership*, characterised by geostrategic vision, a comprehensive approach, strategic resilience, and regional cooperation.

At the strategic (politico-military) level, regional leadership must leverage and promote European values and, when opportunities arise, facilitate the transformation and adaptation of the European Union's command-and-control structure to the regional security situation in relation to imminent threats and risks. Equally important is the adaptation of existing European capabilities and the development of new capabilities capable of responding to the threats of the regional security environment. The authors consider this model to be transformational in nature and refer to it as *Normative–Strategic Leadership*.

At the tactical-operational level, leadership specific to senior commanders must be manifested in understanding security risks and in making decisions that support the politico-military decisions taken at the strategic level, as well as the intent of commanders at the operational level. The authors draw on research findings indicating that “in the military system, leaders predominantly adopt behaviors and attitudes specific to transformational leadership, with some presence of those related to transactional and laissez-faire leadership, but to a lesser extent” (Cioranu, Cucinschi and Scipanov 2024, 509-541). Considering the transformational nature of leadership with transactional influences,

the authors argue that the promotion of strategic thinking among future leaders should be grounded in these dominant forms of leadership. The symbiosis between the two leadership models (transformational and transactional) is situational in nature and represents the ideal balance between vision and execution. At the tactical level, the effect of this symbiosis is increased tactical flexibility, whereby the leader employs the transformational dimension to strengthen group culture under conditions of resilience, while also engaging the transactional dimension to manage resources and comply with constraints under conditions of efficiency. The analysis concludes with a proposed introspection into strategic thinking in relation to the promoted regional leadership models and the regional security framework.

### **3. Promoting Strategic Thinking**

Strategic thinking is distinct from, yet interconnected with, strategic, operational, and tactical reasoning. Tactics address immediate actions, while operations focus on campaigns and combat actions at the level of the theatre of operations. These are the elements that put strategy into motion. Strategy represents a long-term plan of action designed to achieve the purpose of an undertaking, for which specific objectives are established at the operational and tactical levels.

Starting from the premise that strategic thinking refers to the alignment of military activity with national security policy and long-term objectives (Gray 2010), and taking into account the intrinsic link between the strategic, operational, and tactical levels, it can be stated that strategic thinking may also be applied at the operational and tactical levels. In this sense, it represents the alignment of military actions with the objectives and tasks specific to an operation or action.

The core components of strategic thinking include systems thinking, foresight, ethical reasoning, creativity, and the ability to synthesise complex information across diverse domains (Freedman 2013). Carl von Clausewitz emphasised the importance of “genius” in war, referring to an intellectual quality that enables commanders to grasp simultaneously both the whole and the particular. Contemporary theorists such as Colin Gray and Lawrence Freedman extend this idea into the realm of strategic culture and institutional pedagogy. Thus, strategic thinking is both an individual and an organisational competence. Also within the field of strategic management, Kenichi Ohmae (1982) describes strategic thinking as an intuitive understanding of strategy, emphasising abilities such as creativity, intuition, and an inclination toward innovative methods. Henry Mintzberg (1994) confirms the same approach, suggesting that strategic thinking combines intuition, creativity, and foresight in order to synthesise the analysis indispensable to the development of an integrated perspective on an organisation’s future direction. Ken Haycock, Anne Cheadle, and Karla Bluestone (2012) view strategic thinking as a tool that enables organisations to move, innovate, and achieve significant improvements in productivity. From another perspective, strategic thinking is described as a process of innovation and creative reasoning that leads to solutions for addressing challenges. Particularly noteworthy is the analysis of the evolution of the concept between 1978 and 2015 conducted by Major Leon Young of the Australian Army, using a cluster analysis of the literature. This approach delineates strategic thinking as a mode of reasoning oriented toward the means-ways-ends relationship, with an emphasis on the future and on the creation of value or advantage for the system (Young 2016). This perspective aligns with the defence and national security-centered paradigm, as it simultaneously highlights the existence of a distinct cognitive process and an anticipatory outcome, expressed through the generation of strategic value.

Organisational leaders have continuously sought ways to develop strategic thinking skills both in themselves, and in others as well (Adzeh 2017, Bajkar 2020). An analysis of the specialised literature reveals that most works dedicated to strategic thinking include, in their recommendations or concluding sections, explicit calls for the development of this competence, indicating the topicality and relevance of the subject.

The ability to quantify strategic thinking represents an essential undertaking; however, the fundamental objective remains the development of this competence at both the individual and organisational levels. Achieving this objective requires the simultaneous fulfillment of two essential conditions:

- the possibility of individual development of each constitutive characteristic of strategic thinking;
- the capacity to identify and shape the factors that influence strategic thinking.

The possibility of individually developing each constitutive characteristic of strategic thinking is extensively addressed in the specialised literature. A solid theoretical and practical foundation can be identified that supports individual development (Sadowski and Connolly 2009, Waldman 2007, Sinclair and Ashkanasy 2005). Moreover, John Pisapia and his collaborators, based on a robust theoretical framework, identified and described three essential metacognitive skills—systems thinking, reframing, and reflection—as well as a dedicated assessment instrument, the *Strategic Thinking Questionnaire* (Pisapia, et al. 2011). Similarly, other characteristics of strategic thinking, such as creativity (Shah, et al. 2012), critical thinking (Watson and Glaser. 2010), and systems thinking (Dolansky, et al. 2010, Pisapia, et al. 2011), have been extensively studied, with numerous validated indicators available for use in research.

The capacity to identify and shape the factors that influence strategic thinking has been addressed by a number of scholars who argue that it is strongly conditioned by external events and contexts (Dragoni, et al. 2011, Dagher and Zaydie 2005, Boyett and Currie 2004). The mapping of domains with the potential to influence strategic thinking highlights factors such as general cognitive ability, organisational culture, and personality (Dragoni, et al. 2011), which may function both as predictors and as influencing variables of strategic performance. The relevance of these factors lies in the possibility of deliberate intervention in each of them, as all are susceptible to development and systematic training. While general cognitive ability, associated with initial individual predispositions and personality can be influenced primarily through processes of selection and shaping, culture, through its constitutive components, namely education, experience, and doctrine, represents a fundamentally trainable dimension with significant potential for long-term institutional shaping. By fulfilling these conditions, namely, the existence of opportunities for the development of the constitutive and generative abilities of strategic thinking, as well as the capacity to influence its determining factors, the trainable nature of strategic thinking can be theoretically supported, understood as a cognitive capability susceptible to systematic formation and consolidation.

Considering the security situation in the Black Sea region and the leadership models promoted by the main regional actors, in relation to the three leadership models identified at the political, politico-military, and tactical-operational levels, proposals can be formulated for leveraging the characteristics of strategic thinking manifested by emerging leadership:

- Integrated Security Leadership – within this model, military institutions and organisations must capitalize on the practical experience of strategists (strategic leaders) in complementarity with the conceptualisation provided by theorists (theoretical leaders);
- Normative-Strategic Leadership – within this model, politico-military strategic leadership must acknowledge that strategic thinking is not an activity reserved exclusively for the highest levels of command. Normative aspects, doctrines, and identified lessons constitute the foundations for the development of knowledge and the formation of the philosophical profile of the strategic thinker;
- Situational Leadership – within this model, leadership is oriented toward long-term results through the development of cognitive abilities and behaviors. Because there is no perfect leadership model, this model is an adaptive one based on direction, coaching, support and delegation. This model is based on the capacity for diagnosis, evaluation, flexibility and participation. (Paul Hersey 1969).

When related to the domain of regional security, transforming strategic thinking into an organisational capability presupposes the existence of a functional aptitude to exist, to act, and to

produce effects relevant to the field. Given the previous definition of strategic thinking as a mode of reasoning oriented toward the means–ways–ends relationship, projected toward the future and focused on generating value or systemic advantage, the outcome of this capability-building process materialises in the production of future value.

Strategic thinking is thus identified by the authors as a soft capability, characterised by intangibility and by direct dependence on the human factor. Strategic thinking capacity falls within this category of soft capabilities (Young 2015); however, despite its abstract nature, it can be created and developed through a structured approach. The main conclusion advanced in this endeavor concerns the *integration of strategic thinking into the military system of continuing education*. Despite the progress achieved over recent decades, the full integration of strategic thinking into military education systems continues to be constrained by a number of structural and cultural challenges.

A study published in 2015 in the *Strategic Direction* journal identifies several major obstacles affecting the coherent development of this capability within professional military education programs (Goldman, Scott and Follman 2015). The study notes the fragmented and uncoordinated nature of educational initiatives dedicated to this field, as well as the absence of rigorous mechanisms for assessing the development of strategic thinking, reflecting the difficulty of correlating the educational methods employed with the effectiveness of the outcomes achieved. At the same time, there is a confirmed tendency toward the persistence of a traditional form of anti-intellectualism, specific to certain military organisational cultures (Brown 2013).

Under these conditions, the authors argue that the military education system represents the primary institutional frontier for promoting strategic thinking. The manner in which the strategic thinker is developed must be aligned with the complexity of the regional operational environment and designed to support the progressive development of officers' decision-making capabilities at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels, each of these levels involving distinct cognitive requirements.

## Conclusions

The need to develop strategic thinking is evident in both the public and private sectors, being driven, on the one hand, by organisations' requirement to formulate and sustain viable strategies and, on the other hand, by the perception of insufficient depth in strategic processes at the organisational level. This situation is further amplified by the lack of theoretical consensus regarding the delimitation of the concept and the identification of the defining traits of the strategic thinker. In this context, the paper has identified the role of strategic thinking – approached as a mode of cognitive processing by future military leaders – in relation to the operational environment of the Black Sea region, as a function of prevailing schools of thought and regional leadership models.

The analysis has shown that the profile of the strategic thinker is characterised by a set of essential cognitive traits, namely systems perspective, creativity, and visionary capacity. A systems perspective facilitates an understanding of the effects of change over time and of the interdependencies among the elements of a system, aspects that are indispensable to strategic construction. Creativity supports the identification of original solutions in ambiguous contexts, while the visionary dimension provides direction, coherence, and meaning to the strategic endeavor. These characteristics are not only identifiable and measurable, but also susceptible to deliberate development, thereby opening the possibility of intentionally building an organisational capability for strategic thinking.

From the perspective of capability theory, strategic thinking is more appropriately situated within the category of non-technical capabilities, whose defining features are intangibility and dependence on the human factor as the primary source of value. The use of a conceptual framework specific to “soft” capabilities allows strategic thinking to be modeled as an organisational phenomenon, highlighting both its enabling components and the rationale for configuring dedicated institutional structures.

At the same time, the analysis reveals a clear need to strengthen strategic thinking among future military commanders and decision-makers, strategists and strategic planners, a need that is not yet addressed in a coherent and systematic manner by current military education systems. In response to this gap, the paper proposes the identification of a generalised model for the development of strategic thinking, grounded in deliberate pedagogy and supported by a coherent set of educational activities adapted to the stages of officers' careers. This approach provides both a conceptual and practical framework for the progressive integration of strategic thinking into professional military education and for the consolidation of an organisational culture oriented toward anticipation, adaptation, and long-term competitive advantage.

Given the extended relevance of strategic thinking at the operational-tactical level, it is treated as one of the fundamental characteristics that must be cultivated from the early stages of a military career. Complementarily, the ability to generate original solutions to highly unique problems confers upon strategic thinking both a creative and a critical role.

With regard to the strategic level, visionary thinking, highly applicable at the operational level but more limited at the tactical level, becomes essential, as it enables leaders and organisations to act in the absence of explicit guidance.

Finally, the manner of approaching problems, whether holistic or inferential, is formed predominantly through experience. Although tactical decision-making relies primarily on well-founded professional judgment, future military leaders at the beginning of their careers must simultaneously build as diverse a range of experiences as possible, necessary for consolidating a holistic perspective on the operational environment.

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