"CAROL I" NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY
Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies
&
Interdisciplinary Doctoral School

PROCEEDINGS

STRATEGIES XXI
INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE

THE COMPLEX AND DYNAMIC NATURE OF THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

21st Edition

EDITORS:
Florian CÎRCIUMARU, PhD
Daniela LICĂ, PhD

Sponsor:

Central and Eastern European Online Library

ProQuest

EBSCO

"CAROL I" NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITRY PUBLISHING HOUSE
BUCHAREST, ROMANIA
FEBRUARY, 27th, 2025

INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE:

Eugen MAVRIȘ, PhD, Commandant and Rector, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Dan-Lucian PETRESCU, PhD, Acting Deputy Commandant, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Valentin DRAGOMIRESCU, PhD, Prof., Vice-Rector for Education, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Ștefan-Antonio DAN-ȘUTEU, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Vice-Rector for Scientific Research and Interinstitutional Relations, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Cristian STANCIU, PhD, Prof., President of the Senate, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Adi MUSTAȚĂ, PhD, Prof., Director of Interdisciplinary Doctoral School, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Florian CÎRCIUMARU, PhD, Director, Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies (CDSSS), "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Niculai-Tudorel LEHACI, PhD, Prof., Dean, Command and Staff Faculty, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Cristian ICHIMESCU, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Dean, Security and Defence Faculty, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Ghiță BÂRSAN, PhD, Prof. Eng., Commandant and Rector, "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy, Romania
Marius ȘERBESZKI, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Commandant and Rector, "Henri Coandă" Air Forces Academy, Romania
Toma ALECU, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Commandant and Rector, "Mircea cel Bătrân" Navy Academy, Romania
Constantin VIZITIU, PhD, Prof. Eng., Commandant and Rector, "Ferdinand I" Military Technical Academy, Romania
Alan STOLBERG, PhD, RAND Corporation, USA
Timothy DREIFKE, PhD, PfP Consortium, USA
John F. TROXELL, PhD, Visiting Researcher, Army War College, USA
Robert ANTIS, PhD, Prof. Emeritus, Joint Forces Staff College, National Defence University, USA
Pavel ANASTASOV, Operations Division, NATO IS, Belgium
Mariusz SOLIS, Operations Division, NATO HQ, Belgium
Gábor BOLDIZSÁR, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Ludovika University of Public Service, Hungary
Péter TÁLAS, PhD, Assoc. Prof., John Lukacs Institute for Strategy and Politics, Ludovika University of Public Service, Hungary
Tamás CSIKI VARGA, PhD, Senior Research Fellow, John Lukacs Institute for Strategy and Politics, Ludovika University of Public Service, Hungary
János BESENYŐ, PhD, Prof., African Research Institute, Óbuda University, Hungary
Stanislaw ZAJAS, PhD, Prof., National Defence University, Poland
Piotr GAWLICZEK, PhD, dr. h.c., NATO DEEP eAcademy, University of Warmia and Mazury, Poland
Pavel NECAS, PhD, Prof. Dipl. Eng., Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik, Slovakia
Josef PROCHÁZKA, PhD, Assoc. Prof., National Defence University, Czech Republic
Daniel FIOTT, PhD, Institute for European Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
Igor SOFRONESCU, PhD, Assoc.Prof., "Alexandru cel Bun" Armed Forces Military Academy, Republic of Moldova
Teodor FRUNZETI, PhD, Prof., "Titu Maiorescu" University, Romania
Sorin IVAN, PhD, Prof., "Titu Maiorescu" University, Romania
Florian RĂPAN, PhD, Prof., "Ferdinand I" Military Tehnical Academy, Romania
Dan GRECU, PhD, President, Association of Reserve Officers from Romania
Ștefan CANTARAGIU, PhD, Eng., Senior Researcher, Vice-President, Association of Reserve Officers from Romania
Virgil BĂLĂCEANU, PhD, Association of Reserve Officers from Romania
Constantin POSTOLACHE, PhD, Association of Reserve Officers from Romania
Alin BODESCU, PhD, Lect., "Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy, Romania
Stan ANTON, PhD, Visiting Lecturer, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Răzvan BUZATU, PhD, Security Expert, Romania
Ioan DEAC, PhD, Prof., "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy, Romania
Ruxandra BULUC, PhD, Senior Researcher, "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence A
Cristina BOGZEANU, PhD, As
Viteazul" National Intelligence A
Elena MATEESCU, PhD, National Meteorological Administration, Romania
Roxana BOJARIU, PhD, National Meteorological Administration, Romania
Maria-Emanuela MIHAILOV, PhD, Development and Innovation Center, Maritime Hydrographic Directorate, Romania

Alexandru MUNTEANU-LUCINESCU-CASELLA, PhD, Senior Researcher, Ministry of Defence, Romania
Maria CONSTANTINESCU, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Regional Department of Defense Resources Management Studies, Brașov, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Dănuț TURCU, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Security and Defence Faculty, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Elena ȘUȘNEA, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Security and Defence Faculty, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Alba Iulia Catrinel POPESCU, PhD, Assoc. Prof., National Defence College, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Veronica PĂSTAE, PhD, Assoc. Prof., Security and Defence Faculty, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Mirela ATANASIU, PhD, Senior Researcher, CDSSS, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Cristian BĂHNĂREANU, PhD, Senior Researcher, CDSSS,"Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Alexandra SARCINSCHI, PhD, Senior Researcher, CDSSS, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Crăișor-Constantin IONIȚĂ, PhD, Researcher, CDSSS, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Daniela LICĂ, PhD, Researcher, CDSSS, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Mihai ZODIAN, PhD, Researcher, CDSSS, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania
Adrian MIREA, PhD, Advanced Instructor, Command and Staff Faculty, "Carol I" National Defence University, Romania

SCIENTIFIC SECRETARY: Daniela LICĂ, PhD, Researcher

CDSSS ORGANISING COMMITTEE:
Florian CÎRCIUMARU, PhD
Dan-Lucian PETRESCU, PhD
Raluca STAN, PhD
Otilia LEHACI, PhD
Iulia COJOCARU, PhD
Andreea TUDOR
Doina MIHAI

LAYOUT EDITORS:
Iulia COJOCARU, PhD
Catherine PĂVĂLOIU, PhD
Carmen IRIMIA, PhD
Valentina ILINCA

COVER DESIGNER:
Andreea GÎRTONEA

© 2025 This work is openly licensed via CC BY 4.0. This license requires that reusers give credit to the creator. It allows reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format, even for commercial purposes. To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

ISSN print: 2668-6511; ISSN on-line: 3045-2309; ISSN L: 3045-2309

CONTENTS

SECTION I

SECURITY AND DEFENCE IN A SHIFTING STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT. FROM CONCEPTS, STRATEGIES AND POLICIES TO PRACTICE

SECTION II

TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN AREAS OF STRATEGIC INTEREST

SECTION III

INSTRUMENTS OF CURRENT WARFARE

SECTION I

SECURITY AND DEFENCE IN A SHIFTING STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT. FROM CONCEPTS, STRATEGIES AND POLICIES TO PRACTICE

Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies &
Interdisciplinary Doctoral School,
"Carol I" National Defence University

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-01

STRATEGIES AND STRATEGIC PLANNING IN BULGARIA

Grudi ANGELOV, PhD,
Major General (Ret.), Assoc. Professor, National Security Cathedra,
Faculty of Information Technologies, University of Library Studies and
Information Technologies, Sofia, Bulgaria.
E-mail: g.angelov@unibit.bg

Abstract: *This report examines the importance of national strategy and strategic planning in Bulgaria, as well as the lack of a unified understanding of the terminology used by political leaders and the state administration regarding strategic planning in the Republic of Bulgaria. On the one hand, it highlights the absence of a national strategy for the Republic of Bulgaria, which could serve as a foundation for developing all other strategic documents: strategies, doctrines, concepts, and plans. On the other hand, it justifies the need for creating a unified model for the development of strategies and for the creation of a National Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria, which would serve as the cornerstone for the development of sectoral policies and strategies.*

In relation to identifying the necessity of creating a national strategy for the Republic of Bulgaria and designing an effective model for its formulation, the systems approach has been employed utilizing a cyclically reversed application of analysis and synthesis methods, grounded in systematic decomposition and aggregation, which together constitute the methodology of this article.

Keywords: *national strategy; strategic planning; goals; national power; policy.*

Introduction

In recent decades, Bulgarian political elites have been attempting, through copying various state-building models and experimenting with numerous political projects, to find the right formula to "lead" the country out of the perpetual crisis (mainly political) it finds itself in. Various strategies and projects have been created despite the lack of quality analysis and identification of the origin for this disunion of the Bulgarian nation. Separation caused by the inability of Bulgarian politicians to unite themselves around fundamental ideas, ideals, goals, and interests that could serve as the foundation for the so-called "grand strategy" of the state, or simply a "national strategy" and the ways in which these goals and interests can be realized through the achievement of national ideas and ideals. Doctrine and strategy or perhaps more accurately put, strategy first, with doctrine coming in second, as the core elements for the development and prosperity of the Bulgarian society. Moreover, in order to create and shape a unified understanding of the essence of strategy and doctrine, it is entirely reasonable to ask the question: who needs to form a unified understanding of the essence of strategy and doctrine? The answer is that it is necessary to build and apply a unified conceptual apparatus that would provide an accurate formulation of the meanings of the words *doctrine* and *strategy*. Therefore, as a precondition for forming working groups to develop a National (Grand) strategy, and in accordance with the term's underlying definition, which as per Encyclopaedia Britannica is "a country's most complex form of planning toward the fulfillment of a long-term objective" (Britannica n.d.), creating and executing a grand strategy involves the clear definition of a national objective, careful evaluation of the country's available resources, and efficient organisation of such resources to achieve that goal. Whilst grand strategy applies to both wartime and peacetime, it has traditionally been shaped by the presence of an adversary that must be overcome. In response, policymakers work to craft an integrated national approach that combines, coordinates and

consolidates “military prowess, political leverage, diplomatic ability, and economic might within a cohesive national strategy” (Britannica n.d.). That is why it is more necessary than ever to examine and standardize the basic conceptual apparatus to help form a unified understanding of the following basic concepts: state, statehood, ethnicity, nationality, nation, people, national ideal, national interests, national goals, national power, strategy, doctrine, and more.

National (Grand) strategies have existed in the past and are particularly dominant in the history of the United States of America, with the Monroe Doctrine being a prime historical example of such a long-term and overarching strategy. Even today, the concept of the National (Grand) strategy is a consistent concept in both domestic and foreign US policy making and an active component of theoretical and practical debates in US policy, academic, expert and military circles. Although, there is no tangible and singular document expressing a US National (Grand) strategy, the policy directions, subservient to and encompassing what constitutes a Grand strategy, are present in all other strategic documents, policies and doctrines (Hooker 2014, 1-4, 21-27). Other examples, although incomplete in their final form, can also be found, such as the 2022 European Union Strategic Compass for Security and Defence and the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept, which definitively provide for a set of overarching grand objectives, but fall short in providing a long-term scope of implementation and strategic direction.

The effectiveness of any state, in comparison to other nation states in the international community, largely depends on its ability to understand how other countries develop and implement their internal and external policies. This involves more than just evaluating human and material resources. It also includes the capacity to influence or generate national power through strategic interactions with other nations-going beyond basic assessments of natural resources, technological skills, and industrial capabilities. Therefore, it concerns the understanding of the system and process through which these assets are utilized, and the resources that lead to stability or change in the national structure. Understanding the current effect of these factors is important, but determining their future impact with some degree of certainty is even more necessary.

The need for forming a unified understanding of the used terminology is driven by the fact that every individual citizen of modern society has its own understanding of his/her essence. For many, the strategy is reduced to personal survival, something that will happen in the near future. Every new government, new leader, etc., elaborates “new” strategies, copying various foreign models, claiming they have created the “perfect” strategy that would lead the country out of crisis, the company out of bankruptcy, improve the production process in a factory, etc. A confirmation of the misunderstanding of the meaning of the word *strategy* is provided by the explanation given by Prof. Todor Tanev, who stated that “when discussing the creation of a specific strategy, the area and spheres for which it is developed are considered, and the time period during which it will be implemented is fixed. Strategy shapes its behaviour now, in the present, with regard to the future vision you wish to achieve” (Tanev 2016, 8). Moreover, proof of this misunderstanding comes from all the proverbially named, yet not definitive in their goals, strategic documents published on the website of the Bulgarian Council of Ministers (Bulgarian Council of Ministers 2025). These serve as evidence of the stagnation in which Bulgarian society finds itself in its attempts to respond to the challenges it faces. As seen in the website, strategies are written much more frequently than during the “Cold War” because the total number of adopted and published strategic documents has reached two hundred and seventy-six. A significant portion of them were created to meet certain requirements provoked by the country’s membership in NATO, the EU, and the demands imposed by that membership. Many of these documents were developed to provide comfort or to create conditions for the imposition of corporate interests. Consequently, more and more attempts are being made to create strategies that are developed without the necessary knowledge and qualifications of their authors regarding strategic theory, and without conducting a thorough analysis and evaluation of the necessity to create a particular strategy.

Over the past thirty-plus years, despite numerous attempts to develop valuable strategies, they have failed to achieve the expected contribution and have provoked growing disappointment among citizens. The misunderstanding of what constitutes strategy turns almost all of them into overstretched non-binding plans. As mentioned earlier in the article, strategy is often developed by one person or a small group of people who do not necessarily possess required "competencies". For instance, within the Defence Staff, there is an identifiable deficiency gap in knowledge about the framework strategies, such as National (Grand) strategy, when the fact that the Bulgarian National Security strategy is out of date was not taken into account when drafting the new Bulgarian National defence strategy (publicly released recently). Even more so, the absence of qualified expert opinion, objective knowledge and practical skills among strategy authors, has led to assessments of the internal and external security environment in an inappropriate way, which led to wrongful conclusions and forecasts about the development of global security. More precisely, such working collectives have persistently demonstrated an overarching lack of necessary education, knowledge, qualifications, and experience for developing strategies and doctrines brought. Furthermore, a lack of understanding of "strategic theory" and the absence of a fundamental (National) strategy are also obstacles to creating quality and effective supporting strategies or implementation plans.

The *object* of this study can be defined as the lack of a unified understanding of strategic theory and the absence of a fundamental (National) strategy that would enable the formulation of supporting strategies at the national level and the development of plans for their implementation. The *subject* of the study is the process of developing these strategies.

The main goal of the research is to reveal the necessity of creating a national strategy and a qualified expert team with the necessary knowledge and experience to develop strategies.

The *working hypothesis* of the scientific research reveals the need for the creation of a national strategy and the requirements toward the political elite of the Republic of Bulgaria to be provoked to unite around the development of such a strategy in laying the foundations for pulling the country out of the permanent perpetual political crisis, which is leading to economic, demographic, and other crises.

In relation to identifying the necessity of creating a national strategy for the Republic of Bulgaria and formulating an effective model for its formulation, the systems approach has been employed, utilizing a cyclically reversed application of analysis and synthesis methods, grounded in systematic decomposition and aggregation, which constitute the *methodology of this article*.

1. The Need for Creating Strategies

The logical next question follows: is it necessary to write National (Grand) strategy and National doctrine?

The answer to this question is clearly affirmative: yes, it is necessary to create them, but only those that represent a long-term vision, spanning at least twenty to thirty years into the future. The reasons for this thought are as follows:

- ✓ The assumption that strategies represent a "long-term plan for achieving an important goal, as well as the science and art of using the political, economic, psychological, and military forces of a nation or group of nations in order to ensure maximum support for adopted policies during peace or war" (Merriam Webster Dictionary n.d.).
- ✓ The development of strategies is often assigned to lower-level managers: tactical and/or operational, who do not possess (as mentioned above) the necessary knowledge and experience to work at a strategic level and are primarily experts in human resource management. The expertise these specialists have is the opposite of the expertise required to create strategies.
- ✓ The creation of strategies is handled by so-called "narrow specialists" (Tanev 2016, 9) in a particular area of state management for which the equivalent strategy is being developed. They do not have the necessary preparedness regarding the strategic architecture and compensate for this lack with

improvisations based on their general managerial culture. An example of such behaviour is the development of the "Updated National Security Strategy" in 2018 (Bulgarian Council of Ministers 2010).

- ✓ The use of power tools to exert influence and control over the process of developing and the content of strategies.
- ✓ The lack of a model for developing strategies. All strategies adopted in the Republic of Bulgaria follow their own logic and structure without a unified model for creating such documents.
- ✓ The lack of research into the connections between strategic ideas and strategic habits, which is confirmed by Bernard Brodie in his "War and Politics", where he states, "Strategy is nothing if it is not pragmatic" (Brodie 1973, 452). Therefore, strategic theory is primarily a theory of action.
- ✓ Political interests guiding strategic management in the public sector or the excessive politicization of the strategic leadership of the state.
- ✓ The unwillingness of public sector experts to collaborate with scholars who are the true experts in developing strategies and doctrines.
- ✓ The lack of political consensus regarding the development of strategies and/or doctrines. To reach the creation of a functioning strategy, an important but not sufficient condition for success is achieving consensus among parliamentary political parties. Unfortunately, the usual practice is different, and the strategies created are not for everyone and do not serve the members of society.
- ✓ The lack of public awareness about the development of strategic documents. The most important documents related to the development of the state remain without the necessary approval and support both at the inter-institutional level and "between the governed and those governing, between politicians and experts, national and international institutions" (Tanev 2016, 12). Without obtaining approval from all participants in the social contract, the strategy cannot have a long life and will remain merely a plan that will be executed with great difficulty, if at all.

Therefore, the elaboration of a National Strategy would help the Bulgarian political elite to find the right path out of the permanent crisis (especially the political one). Moreover, it would contribute to uniting the nation and society in restoring the functions of the state and statehood, thereby supporting the building of an informed and consolidated society, united around clearly defined national ideals, goals, interests, and tasks for achieving them.

2. Dimensions of Strategies

The dimensions of strategies refer to the various aspects and factors that shape and influence the development, implementation, and effectiveness of strategic decisions. These dimensions can be viewed from different angles, each offering a unique perspective on the understanding of strategy. In order to achieve a common understanding by the politicians, we shall bring forward some of the main dimensions of strategies.

- ✓ *Political Dimension*: The political environment, in which the strategy develops and is executed. It considers political ideologies, governance structures, diplomatic relations, and political stability, all of which can affect the choices of action made by a country or organization.
- ✓ *Economic Dimension*: Refers to the financial and resource-related aspects that influence strategy. It includes economic opportunities, trade relations, resource distribution, and the financial stability of the state or organization. Economic power plays a crucial role in determining the feasibility and sustainability of strategic objectives.
- ✓ *Military Dimension*: In both national and international contexts, the military dimension refers to defence capabilities, armed forces, and security strategies employed by a country. This includes military resources, technological innovations, and the role of military power in achieving strategic goals.
- ✓ *Technological Dimension*: This dimension focuses on the role of technology in shaping strategy. It includes technological innovations, cyber capabilities, digital warfare, and technological advancements that can provide strategic advantages in both peacetime and conflict.

- ✓ *Social Dimension*: Refers to the social structure and cultural context in which the strategy operates. It includes public opinion, social movements, cultural factors, and social norms that may either support or challenge the strategic direction. Understanding social dynamics is critical to creating strategies that resonate with society.
- ✓ *Ecological Dimension*: This dimension examines environmental factors, including natural resources, climate change, and geographical location of a nation or organization. It also considers the sustainability of strategic decisions and their potential impact on the environment.
- ✓ *Psychological Dimension*: Relates to the human factors of strategy, such as motivation, morale, and decision-making psychology, of both leaders and the population. It includes how perceptions, ideologies, and emotions influence the formulation and execution of strategy.
- ✓ *Historical Dimension*: Involves the historical context in which the strategy is formulated. Experiences, lessons learned from history, and previous strategic failures or successes shape the approach to the current strategy.
- ✓ *International Dimension*: This dimension examines the global stage and how the strategy of a given country or organization interacts with other international actors. It includes alliances, rivalries, international organizations, treaties, and the broader geopolitical environment.

Together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and analysing strategy in both national and organizational contexts. Each dimension contributes to the complexity of strategic decision-making, and the balance between them can determine the success or failure of a strategy.

In Bulgarian state governance, numerous operational strategies have been developed as is stated on the page of Bulgarian Council of Ministers (Bulgarian Council of Ministers 2010). Instead of specifying national interests, goals, and tasks, these strategies rely on more general political programs, which have been developed by either the EU or NATO. This established practice represents a fundamental problem in the partial development of strategies, especially without the development of national strategies. Furthermore, no allied document, or document from a community, to which Bulgaria is a member, can replace the absent national documents.

From everything presented so far, it can be concluded that there is a serious problem in the development of strategies in our country, whose essence is not the people engaged in this activity, but primarily:

- ✓ The way of thinking;
- ✓ The management of the strategic planning process;
- ✓ The lack of desire and consensus from the political "elites" to develop a national strategy or what is known as a "Grand Strategy".

Other factors contributing to the current unsatisfactory governance of the state and its statehood can also be identified. However, the main problem lies, above all, in the established and inherited thinking stereotypes from the time of socialism, when Bulgaria, represented by the Bulgarian Communist Party (BKP), partially renounced the sovereignty of the country, implementing decisions dictated by the USSR and the CPSU for over forty-five years.

In April 2010, the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, acknowledging that there were no established criteria for developing strategies in practice, and that their names did not adhere to clear logic based on their content and scope, and thus adopted the "Methodology for Strategic Planning in the Republic of Bulgaria" (Bulgarian Council of Ministers 2010). The main goal of the methodology is to propose an algorithm that structures and ties strategic planning in the state to the adherence to standards and principles. The specific goals of the methodology are:

- ✓ To create a standard for strategic planning in the administration;
- ✓ To clarify the meaning of the key principles for developing and implementing strategic documents, among which the principle of public partnership between state institutions and citizens and their organizations is primary;

✓ To introduce the main types of strategic documents, fixing their names depending on their place in the hierarchy of strategic documents;

✓ To present the mandatory elements of the content of strategic documents.

The methodology declares that "the main types of strategic documents are strategy, policy, program, plan, and concept, with a clarification that policy and concept are not strategic documents" (Bulgarian Council of Ministers 2010). However, there is not clear indication of the status of such documents, raising the logical question of their gravity and legal standing. Furthermore, it openly "recommends that each strategy have the following structure: analysis of the sector's state, vision for the sector's development, leading principles for strategy implementation, strategic goals of sectoral policy, activities to achieve the goals, and expected results from the execution of the planned activities" (Bulgarian Council of Ministers 2010). These guidelines do not correspond with the true essence and purpose of a strategy and, therefore, are not correct. The focus of the strategy is placed on the "state" rather than the intent; the "vision" follows unexpectedly, as a happy idea, and the leading principles are presented in third place in the sequence indicated in the methodology". The model presented for strategy development prioritizes only the "execution" principles, but not the formation of the strategic vision. The goals defined are limited to determining public policies, which are not strategic. In the model for strategy presented in the methodology, the activities and expected results are included as if it were just an ordinary plan.

Professor Tanev in "How Strategists Think" points out the origin of the methodology, stating: "The structure of this document bears the signature of his French consultants, raised in the spirit of French statism – a philosophy that hardly fits our dramatic transition from a single-party monopoly over the state and economy to political pluralism and a free market economy" (Tanev 2016, 15). This was also discussed earlier in the present paper, namely that instead of developing a national strategy that meets the needs of Bulgarian society, foreign models are copied and imposed for implementation. Furthermore, the experts brought in to create a national strategic document use documents from other countries as a foundation. These do not align with Bulgarian national interests, goals, and tasks, but were created to achieve the objectives of their origin countries.

3. Measuring National-Level Strategies

When approaching the evaluation of strategies at the national level, after analysing and assessing the security environment, the process moves toward goal-setting and defining Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

✓ *The nature of the national strategy* should be focused on achieving long-term goals that can be measured through specific indicators.

✓ *Main approaches to measuring strategy effectiveness* are proposed by authors such as Mintzberg (Mintberg 1994) (strategic planning), and Kaplan & Norton (Balanced Scorecard) (Kaplan 1996), who offer methods for tracking strategic objectives through KPIs.

To ensure *National Security*, indicators that can be used include:

✓ *National security index*: the number of terrorist attacks, crime rates, instances of external threats.

✓ *Military capacity*: the size of the military, defence spending, weapons modernization.

Evaluating the resources that the country must allocate to specific strategic goals involves not only financial and human resources but also diplomatic, technological, and natural resources. Some well-known models that can be used include:

✓ *Porter's value chain model* (Porter, Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance 1985) and *Barney's resource-based view*, which emphasize the importance of resources in executing strategies (Barney 1991, 102).

✓ An example could be the *economic development strategy*, where effectiveness can be measured through:

- ✓ *Investment index*: the volume of foreign and domestic investments.
- ✓ *GDP growth*: the annual growth of Gross Domestic Product.
- ✓ *Export revenue*: the value of exports of goods and services.

A primary goal of the strategy is the evaluation of the impact of external and internal factors. This evaluation includes international relations, economic conditions, and internal socio-political aspects. Furthermore, these issues are addressed in the works of Porter, who examines how nations can create a competitive advantage in the global economy by applying theories of competitiveness at the national level (competitive strategies) (Porter, Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance 1985, 67). Additionally, Hamel and Prahalad (Hamel 1994) offer a new perspective on strategic management, emphasizing the importance of strategic skills and capabilities in the context of dynamic competition (strategic skills and capabilities).

The extent to which national strategies are measured requires an integrated approach that combines both theoretical principles and practical models for evaluating performance and results. The applied indicators and methodologies, including KPIs, Balanced Scorecard, risk analyses, and performance assessments, are essential tools for ensuring the most effective execution and adaptation of national strategies.

4. Challenges to the Strategic Planning in Bulgaria

The "Methodology for Strategic Planning in the Republic of Bulgaria" is a clear example that it is yet another document developed merely because it was required, rather than because it was necessary to standardize the development of strategies. The intention behind the creation of the methodology was to establish uniform procedures, understanding, and structure, which would aid the strategic planning process.

The existing mistakes, already being made particularly the widespread nature of these mistakes, further amplify the question of the misunderstanding of what exactly a strategy is. Regardless of various "experts" claiming that a strategy is whatever they have created, there are still those who firmly believe that strategies are long-term plans for achieving significant goals.

In the field of strategic planning, there are both assumptions and already manifesting practical indicators, suggesting that scientists should not be involved in crafting strategies, and that the entire process should be left solely to practical experts. This viewpoint implies that those with hands-on experience best handle strategy creation, rather than by those focused on theoretical or scientific approaches. However, this perspective overlooks the potential value that scientific analysis and research can bring to strategic planning, such as data-driven insights, long-term forecasting, and a broader understanding of complex systems. This, in turn, fosters and encourages amateurism in the activity. The confidential position of those drafting the strategy further nurtures their self-confidence, reinforced by the protection they receive from the higher echelons of power who commission the strategy. This protection creates a sense of comfort for the governing authorities at any given moment. Considering all these details, the person responsible for drafting a strategy inevitably begins to think of themselves as an "elite", despite being kept in the shadows and not receiving public acclaim. Feelings of self-importance, or that one is irreplaceable and infallible then dominate and lead to behaviour that assumes impunity. There is no evaluation of the execution of strategies, so their application will not be assessed, which means that no sanctions will be imposed if mistakes are made, or at the very least, if missed opportunities are discovered due to ignorance.

When creating strategies, what dominates is the so-called managerial routine, which has long been the focus of criticism from numerous *scholars and experts* in strategic sciences such as Prof. Mitko Stoykov, Prof. Todor Tanev, Prof. Dimitar Dimitrov, and etc. This criticism somehow escapes a large portion of experts, especially those who neglect these critical arguments, but regardless of this, continue to write strategies, implementation plans, white papers, and concepts solely based on the political support received, instructions from superiors, and the authority granted to them to carry

out these tasks. Despite the use of such experts, the scientifically grounded understanding of strategy has evolved over the last few decades, often causing suffering to its "client" (the people of the Republic of Bulgaria).

Despite the current state of strategic documents, good strategic practices do exist in Bulgaria as well. They exist alongside poor ones. The issue that needs to be addressed as soon as possible is the rapid increase in the overall number of strategies, resulting from the upsurge of poor, rather than good practices. The imbalance between the two groups is growing constructively.

On the other hand, the "Methodology for Strategic Planning in the Republic of Bulgaria", issued in 2010, identified the need to create rules for the development of strategic documents, and has provided the necessary regulations while defining the principles for creating these documents. However, despite the good intentions behind the creation of the methodology, many issues remain unaddressed, primarily concerning:

- ✓ On what basis these strategic documents were created?
- ✓ What is the classification of these documents?
- ✓ What period should they cover? (The methodology specifies that long-term documents have an implementation period of over 10 years, but does not mention the validity period for strategies.)
- ✓ What criteria should sectoral policies meet?
- ✓ Is there any normative framework for creating strategic documents?
- ✓ Who or which organization/university is responsible for the education, training, and qualification of experts in strategic planning?
- ✓ Is there a model for formulating strategies, especially national ones, that would serve as the foundation for developing supporting strategies and policies?

Despite the widespread conservatism and nihilism that have enveloped Bulgaria, there are efforts and attempts to develop "good strategies" promising strategic visions for the development of specific regions in the country, as well as for commercial and industrial enterprises (Tanev 2016, 16). What begins as a large-scale idea for the development of a given organization in the minds of forward-thinking leaders is constantly evolving and attracting more active internal support. A successful strategy does not stem from an initial plan created by an unknown author on political instructions, but rather from an open vision that resonates across all levels of the organization. This vision evolves through continuous adaptation to shifting circumstances (Tanev 2016, 17).

Bulgaria, throughout its history, has never had a national (state) strategy or doctrine. Moreover, as an active member of the European Union, the country could determine its development path using long-term ideas similar to those of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. The inability of political parties to reach a national consensus, and, as a result, to consider ways to pull the country out of the managerial, moral, and economic chaos it has fallen into, is the leading issue today. At this stage, this seems like an impossible task for the so-called political elites who are governing the state and promoting ideas foreign to our country, while mapping out imaginary paths to tackle the permanent crisis in which Bulgaria finds itself.

Conclusion

From everything outlined so far, it is clear that more than ever there is an urgent need to develop a national (Grand) strategy, which will subsequently be used as a basis for developing all reviews and/or new supporting strategies at the national level (Bulgaria). The focus when shaping future strategies must be on: the process for assessing the security environment (global, regional, and internal to the country), the analysis and formulation of a national ideal, national interests, goals, and the means and methods for achieving them. Special attention must be given to the sequence for developing the strategy and the time frame for its implementation. For the successful formulation of

such a strategy, the involvement of all parliamentary political forces and ensuring political consensus is of utmost importance.

To overcome all negative aspects related to the development (formulation) of strategies, special attention must be paid to strategic thinking, which, by its nature, differs significantly from any other type of thinking related to the management of individual state structures. Therefore, to be understood, it is necessary to realize and comprehend that strategic thinking is a specific type of thinking that is distinct from the thinking of experts at the technological, tactical, and operational levels, and not merely their repetition at a higher level. Strategic thinking often resorts to logic opposite to that used for managing lower societal levels. Many experts and scholars from various fields try to decipher the essence of strategies, strategic planning, and management, separating them from ordinary rationality, daily experience, and routine. There is still the often made claim by involved experts that "strategy is not a plan" and provoke thoughts on what is "obvious", and for this reason, it is unconditionally accepted as true. Thus, the development of strategies merely because they are required by law, or because they are recorded in one legal document or another, is insufficient.

Institutional-level experts are tasked with creating this crucial document for society, which citizens rely on to improve their conditions-both economically and socially, among others. These same experts, intoxicated by their "greatness", fail to account for specific facts, among which stands out the lack of a fundamental basis for developing a strategy-namely a national strategy-that defines the desired final state of the country and directs the focus of sectoral strategies to implement national goals and interests. Such long-term national goals are currently absent from the democratic development of the Republic of Bulgaria. After Bulgaria's accession to NATO in 2004 and the European Union in 2007-when our membership in both organizations was a long-term goal for the state and society-today, extremely short-term goals are being set, with a time horizon of no more than one or two years. The accession of Bulgaria to the Schengen Area and the country's potential entry into the Eurozone, although strategic goals by their nature, have very short deadlines for implementation, placing them on the borderline between operational and strategic objectives.

Acknowledgement and financing: *This work was supported by the NSP SD program, which has received funding from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria under the grant agreement no. Д01-74/19.05.2022.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

—. 2010. "Методология за стратегическо планиране в Република България" ("Metodologia za strategichesko planirane v Republika Bulgaria"), available at: https://strategy.bg/Publications/View.aspx?Id=90, c.2, Accessed February 22, 2025.

—. 1985. *Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance.* New York: Free Press. ISBN: 978-0684841465.

Barney, J. 1991. *Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage.* New York: Southern Management Association. ISBN: 978-0804725261.

Britannica. n.d. *grand strategy.* Accessed January 13, 2025. https://www.britannica.com/topic/grand-strategy.

Brodie, Bernard. 1973. *War and politics.* New York, USA: Free Press.

Bulgarian Council of Ministers. 2025. "Strategy.bg." *https://strategy.bg/Default.aspx?lang=bg-BG.* Feb. Accessed Feb 7, 2025. https://strategy.bg/StrategicDocuments/List.aspx?lang=bg-BG&categoryId= 1&typeConsultation= 1&typeCategory=0&docType=1.

Hamel, G., & Prahalad, C. 1994. *Competing for the Future.* New York: Harvard Business Press. ISBN: 978-0875847631.

Hooker, R.D. 2014. *The Grand Strategy of the United States.* Washington D.C.: National Defence University Press.

Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. 1996. *The Balanced Scorecard: Translating Strategy into Action*. New York: Harvard Business Press. ISBN: 978-0875846514.

Merriam Webster Dictionary. n.d. "Strategy." Accessed February 21, 2025. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/strategy.

Mintberg, N. 1994. *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*. New York: Free-Press. ISBN: 978-0684835060.

Porter, M. 1985. *Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*. New York: Free Press. ISBN: 978-0684841465.

Tanev, T. 2016. *Kak Misljat Stratezite*. Sofia, Bulgaria: Bulgarian Academy of Scinces Proff. Marin Drinov. Accessed Feb 6, 2025. doi:978-954-322-862-1.

Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies &
Interdisciplinary Doctoral School,
"Carol I" National Defence University

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-02

STRATEGIC COORDINATION, INSTITUTIONAL FRAGMENTATION AND POLICY CHALLENGES IN GOVERNING ROMANIA'S NATIONAL SECURITY

Niculae IANCU, PhD,
Vice-President of Maritime Cybersecurity Centre of Excellence,
Constanta Maritime University, Romania.
E-mail: nicu.iancu@marcyscoe.org

Abstract: *Romania's national security governance operates within a complex institutional framework, where strategic coordination must balance national priorities and resource constraints with international commitments. The interaction between institutional mandates, jurisdictional boundaries, and decision-making processes influences governance effectiveness, yet persistent fragmentation affects policy coherence and strategic consistency. This paper examines how these dynamics impact decision-making within the Supreme Council of National Defence (CSAT), particularly in relation to the President's strategic leadership and the Government's executive role. Applying Neoclassical Realism to examine the interplay between external pressures and domestic political constraints, alongside New Institutionalism to account for the influence of both formal structures and informal practices on the national security apparatus within the Security Studies domain, this paper evaluates the extent to which national security governance fosters institutional effectiveness.*
The findings suggest that Romania's national security governance exhibits both cooperative fragmentation, where institutions collaborate while maintaining autonomy, and conflictive fragmentation, which stems from executive competition and jurisdictional overlaps. They contribute to broader academic discussions on institutional fragmentation, governance efficiency, and executive power dynamics within national security frameworks, particularly in post-communist and NATO-aligned states.

Keywords: *Institutional Fragmentation in National Security; Executive Power Dynamics in Security Governance; Neoclassical Realism and National Security Policy; Semi-Presidentialism and Security Decision-Making.*

Introduction

As the 21st century progresses, national security remains a fundamental priority for all states, requiring robust institutional frameworks to safeguard sovereignty, territorial integrity, internal stability, and the well-being of citizens. Situated at the geopolitical intersection of Western and Eastern Europe, on NATO's eastern flank and the EU's eastern border, Romania confronts a complex security environment that necessitates institutional adaptability and resilience. This paper examines Romania's national security governance through the analytical lens of Institutional Fragmentation Theory, employing Neoclassical Realism and New Institutionalism to provide a broader methodological context. Specifically, it assesses how external systemic pressures, domestic political constraints, and institutional structures influence security policymaking within the theoretical framework of Security Studies. This approach is particularly relevant for understanding Romania's national security policy evolution in the post-Cold War era, characterised by adaptation to geopolitical shifts, NATO and EU expansion, and significant institutional reforms.

During this period, Romania's political and institutional landscape has undergone considerable transformation influenced by systemic geopolitical imperatives such as NATO enlargement and EU integration, alongside internal political dynamics. Neoclassical Realism

provides analytical clarity on how Romania's alignment with international security frameworks has shaped strategic priorities, while domestic institutions and political leadership mediate the implementation of these external imperatives (Rose, 1998; Lobell, 2009). Concurrently, New Institutionalism highlights how institutional design, bureaucratic structures, and inter-agency coordination shape the practical execution and effectiveness of these security policies (March & Olsen, 2006; Peters, 2012).

Drawing on Institutional Fragmentation Theory, this paper evaluates the implications of institutional arrangements within Romania's security governance framework, distinguishing between cooperative and conflictive fragmentation. Cooperative fragmentation enables institutions to maintain autonomy while collaborating effectively, whereas conflictive fragmentation involves competition, overlapping responsibilities, and jurisdictional ambiguities that hinder strategic coherence and policy implementation. Central to this discussion is Romania's Supreme Council of National Defence (CSAT), whose broad mandate and coordinating role are crucial in managing these institutional dynamics. This analysis explores whether CSAT successfully navigates fragmentation, fostering strategic coherence and effective policy outcomes, or whether structural ambiguities limit its capability to mediate institutional tensions, complicating Romania's responses to its increasingly complex security environment.

Despite an extensive body of literature on security policy and strategy, research examining the interaction between geopolitical, technological, and economic contexts and the effectiveness of institutional frameworks remains limited (e.g., Gray, 2010). Existing studies tend to focus on the legal dimensions of institutional design (e.g., Michaels, 2015), particularly within security sector governance and the democratic oversight of security institutions (e.g., van Eekelen, 2010). However, such legalistic approaches provide an incomplete understanding of national security governance, as they frequently overlook the institutional mechanisms that structure strategic coordination and high-level decision-making.

To bridge this gap, the perspective of this paper extends beyond legal compliance, incorporating political and societal factors that influence national security effectiveness in post-Cold War security contexts (e.g., Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). This approach facilitates a more nuanced understanding of strategic-level national security governance by considering institutional structures, inter-agency coordination, and bureaucratic processes. In the Romanian case, the presence of structural ambiguities and fragmented decision-making suggests that these mechanisms may not function optimally, raising the question of whether fragmentation contributes to strategic flexibility or instead exacerbates governance inefficiencies.

Building on this institutional perspective, the effectiveness of Romania's national security governance is closely linked to both institutional structure and strategic leadership capacity. Effective leadership must coordinate policies, foster inter-agency cooperation, and proactively anticipate and respond to emerging security threats. As Romania's highest decision-making body for national security governance, CSAT is central to setting strategic direction and ensuring policy cohesion (Romanian Parliament, Law 415, 2002). Its authority extends across security, foreign affairs, defence, intelligence, and law enforcement institutions, aligning national security policies with national interests and broader strategic objectives. In fulfilling this role, CSAT reinforces institutional mechanisms that promote public policy coherence and continuity, which typically function within the broader executive framework of the Government.

These overlaps can at times create tensions between the President, in their capacity as CSAT chairperson, and the Government's priorities, particularly in moments of crisis. Such tensions may delay inter-agency coordination, disrupt institutional coherence, and complicate efforts to reconcile external strategic pressures with national security imperatives. Given the increasing complexity of Romania's security environment, a well-functioning CSAT is crucial for maintaining policy cohesion, balancing national and international security commitments, and strengthening institutional resilience. Therefore, this paper examines how the current institutional framework influences Romania's capacity to

govern national security effectively, contributing to broader debates on institutional fragmentation, strategic coordination, and executive power dynamics in national security governance.

1. Institutional Fragmentation Theory and Governance Challenges in Romania's National Security Framework

CSAT serves as Romania's supreme security coordination body, with a mandate encompassing the management of inter-agency dynamics, the mitigation of institutional fragmentation, and the maintenance of coherence across the national security landscape. As the highest authority responsible for aligning national and international security commitments, its effectiveness in fostering inter-agency cooperation and efficiently allocating security resources is fundamental to Romania's national security governance framework.

While traditionally hierarchical and rules-driven, security institutions must function as dynamic assemblages of norms and practices embedded within broader socio-political contexts (Nasu & Rubenstein, 2015). Within this framework, CSAT should serve not merely as an extension of executive power but as a structured governance mechanism that mediates institutional relationships, bureaucratic processes, and security coordination. Unlike traditional approaches that focus solely on rational state action, this institutional perspective, as explained by Powell and DiMaggio (1991), highlights how historical, political, and cultural factors influence the conceptualisation and implementation of national security policies. Institutional behaviour is shaped by formal mandates, historical precedents, bureaucratic norms, and political culture. This perspective underscores how Romania's security institutions have evolved under external pressures, such as NATO and EU integration, while facing internal constraints like institutional inertia, executive-legislative tensions, and bureaucratic rivalries, shaping both cooperation and fragmentation.

Moreover, in democratic societies, security institutions must balance operational effectiveness with democratic principles, including human rights, the rule of law, and societal oversight (Bruneau & Matei, 2008). While CSAT provides the highest level of strategic leadership, its effectiveness hinges on its capacity to integrate security institutions into a unified democratic governance framework. The extent to which CSAT can align security policies with democratic values while maintaining an effective response to external threats remains a critical factor in assessing its role in national security governance, particularly when this balance challenges the fragile equilibrium between security and freedom.

An additional key challenge in national security governance is the degree of institutional fragmentation. The extent to which security institutions within CSAT operate in an integrated, cooperative, or conflictual manner directly impacts the overall effectiveness of Romania's national security framework. While institutional fragmentation is inherent in all governance systems, the critical question is how it can be measured and assessed in the national security context, particularly given constraints such as secrecy, bureaucratic opacity, and the restrictive nature of the 'need-to-know' principle.

Institutional fragmentation theory categorises these relationships into synergistic, cooperative, or conflictive typologies based on the level of institutional integration and coordination (Biermann et al., 2009). Synergistic fragmentation represents the ideal model, as described by Thompson (1967), in which security institutions are effectively integrated, ensuring clear mandates, operational coherence, and efficient inter-agency coordination. This occurs when strategic leadership successfully unifies decision-making, creating a cohesive framework for national security governance. In this model, institutions function within a well-structured system, where roles are clearly defined, redundancies are minimised, and coordination mechanisms operate efficiently.

Cooperative fragmentation arises when security institutions maintain a degree of autonomy while still engaging in structured coordination within a broader security framework. Although this arrangement allows for institutional specialisation, inconsistencies in norms and principles may lead to ambiguities in inter-institutional relationships, potentially undermining strategic cohesion

(Krahmann, 2003). While cooperation remains a key element, divergent institutional priorities may cause operational misalignment and inefficiencies.

Conflictive fragmentation represents the most problematic form of fragmentation, occurring when institutional rivalries, bureaucratic inertia, and competing mandates obstruct effective security coordination (Biermann et al., 2009). This fragmentation frequently leads to policy incoherence, resource inefficiencies, and operational gaps, weakening security governance structures and their ability to function as unified decision-making bodies (Young, 1999). The lack of streamlined protocols can lead to duplication of efforts, operational delays, and gaps in intelligence-sharing, weakening national security responsiveness. When security institutions operate under conflicting principles and procedural inconsistencies, coordination failures impede national security governance, reducing the state's capacity to respond effectively to complex and evolving security threats.

Institutional fragmentation is not purely an operational challenge but also a reflection of bureaucratic politics. Internal competition among security institutions can thwart their ability to deliver a unified response to emerging threats. Moreover, fragmentation often results in inefficient resource allocation, as agencies prioritise their own institutional interests over strategic cohesion. Structural inefficiencies must also be examined through the lens of historical evolution, as Romania's national security governance remains shaped by post-Cold War transformations. Analysing the impact of institutional legacies, strategic adaptations, and geopolitical realignments is essential for addressing contemporary governance challenges and strengthening national security effectiveness.

2. Institutional Dynamics and Strategic Challenges in the Evolution of Romania's National Security Governance in the Post-Cold War Era

A nation's security governance is largely defined by the capacity and effectiveness of its institutions. In Romania, the structure of national security institutions within CSAT plays a central role in shaping strategic leadership and ensuring policy implementation. CSAT is responsible for harmonising institutional efforts, mitigating fragmentation, and aligning security strategies with broader geopolitical imperatives. However, institutional development has been influenced by a combination of structural, historical, and external factors. The post-communist transition has left enduring institutional legacies, while NATO and EU integration have significantly redefined security priorities (Tismaneanu, 2014; Iancu, 2011). Since the fall of the communist regime in December 1989, Romania has undertaken substantial institutional reforms aimed at aligning with democratic principles and integrating into Euro-Atlantic security structures (Papadimitriou & Phinnemore, 2008).

This transition has been predominantly structural rather than ideational, focusing on capability modernisation, functional interoperability, and security sector reforms. However, the adoption of Western security models has sometimes come at the expense of national perspectives and context-specific solutions. The persistence of a communist-era security mindset continues to influence institutional decision-making, reinforcing hierarchical structures and limiting operational flexibility (Young, 2017, pp. 35-37). Romania's security culture remains partially shaped by these historical practices, which prioritised secrecy, centralised control, and rigid decision-making. As a result, the full adoption of Western principles such as transparency, flexibility, delegation of command authority, and civilian oversight in security governance remains constrained.

Beyond historical influences, external security imperatives have been pivotal in shaping Romania's national security institutions. The necessity of aligning with NATO's collective defence priorities and EU security frameworks has often taken precedence over national and regional security considerations (Gheciu, 2005; Cornish & Edwards, 2001). Within CSAT, defence planning and capability development have been primarily driven by NATO integration, with a strong emphasis on interoperability, adherence to Western military doctrines, and standardised procurement strategies (Fluri & Born, 2003). As a result, Romania's force structure and operational planning have been shaped more by NATO's strategic outlook than by an independent national threat assessment tailored

to Romania's specific security environment. For instance, Romania has invested in strategic air transport capabilities and procured equipment designed for desert warfare, despite its geographical and strategic realities not necessitating such assets. These acquisitions reflected a broader trend of aligning with NATO-led missions and coalition operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, rather than addressing the country's immediate defence needs, especially given Romania's largely obsolete and insufficient defence capability level.

This structural dependency underscores a broader issue: the prioritisation of external alignments at the expense of internal strategic imperatives. While Euro-Atlantic integration has strengthened Romania's overall security posture, it has also limited strategic flexibility in addressing regional threats, particularly in the Black Sea region, where Romania-specific concerns have remained underdeveloped. However, the shortcomings of Romania's strategic initiatives in the Black Sea region stem not only from systemic constraints but also from a subsystemic deficit in strategic expertise, exposing broader limitations in state institutional capacity (Dungaciu & Dumitrescu, 2019).

The ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia's hybrid warfare strategies, including disinformation campaigns and cyber operations, and intensifying global economic and technological competition have further strained Romania's security decision-making processes (Bojin, 2022; Galeotti, 2019). These challenges have exposed institutional inefficiencies, limiting CSAT's capacity to coordinate a comprehensive national response to emerging security threats, as evidenced by the unprecedented cancellation of the presidential election in November 2024.

Additionally, although Romania has substantially increased defence spending in recent years, inefficiencies in budget allocation and procurement processes continue to slow capability development. Institutional rigidity and bureaucratic inertia further complicate reform efforts, impeding military structures from fully modernising and adapting to evolving security challenges. From a broader national security perspective, despite efforts to revitalise Romania's defence industry, enhance domestic production, and integrate into NATO and EU defence supply chains, the sector remains underdeveloped and technologically outdated (Halem, 2024; Iancu, 2024). Persistent structural limitations, outdated infrastructure, and insufficient research and development investment continue to hinder progress. Many state-owned defence companies operate with ageing equipment and inefficient production processes, restricting their ability to support Romania's evolving defence needs. Romania's reliance on foreign procurement for advanced military capabilities has deepened strategic dependence on external suppliers, constraining defence innovation and self-sufficiency. This dependency may not only limit CSAT's ability to develop a more robust national defence posture but could also amplify vulnerabilities to geopolitical shifts and economic disruptions.

In addition to structural and strategic challenges, democratic oversight and public engagement remain fundamental to ensuring a resilient national security framework. As Romania continues to consolidate democratic governance, civic engagement and transparency are essential for legitimising security policies, ensuring accountability, and aligning national security measures with public interests (Howard, 2013; Smith, 2017). However, despite formal commitments to democratic oversight, security institutions often operate with limited transparency, restricting meaningful public scrutiny. While legislative frameworks provide for civilian oversight mechanisms, their effectiveness is often undermined by limited public access to budget execution processes and a reluctance to engage in open dialogue with civil society (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2010).

Consequently, the evolution of Romania's national security governance reflects a complex interplay between historical legacies, external strategic imperatives, and institutional dynamics. While Euro-Atlantic integration has strengthened Romania's security posture and facilitated military modernisation, it has also contributed to structural dependencies that limit strategic autonomy and flexibility in addressing national and regional security priorities. Institutional rigidity, inefficient defence procurement, and an underdeveloped domestic defence industry further constrain Romania's ability to fully modernise its security sector. Additionally, while democratic oversight mechanisms exist, limited transparency and public engagement continue to hinder meaningful civilian

participation in security governance. Moving forward, Romania must balance its commitments to NATO and the EU with a more independent and context-specific security strategy, prioritising institutional resilience, capability development, and regional security initiatives, particularly in the Black Sea. Strengthening institutional capacity, fostering strategic expertise, and enhancing defence innovation will be crucial in ensuring Romania's ability to navigate evolving security threats while maintaining a robust and adaptive national security framework.

However, the evolution of Romania's security governance cannot be understood without closely examining the role of CSAT, the institution at the core of national security decision-making. As the principal strategic body responsible for security coordination, CSAT operates within the broader context of Romania's constitutional framework, aligning national security policies with both domestic priorities and international commitments. An examination of CSAT's role, evolution, and structural significance provides insight into how its mandate and decision-making processes influence Romania's national security governance and its capacity to address contemporary security challenges.

3. The Role and Evolution of Romania's Supreme Council of National Defence

As Romania's highest political authority on national security, CSAT supports the President in fulfilling constitutional responsibilities and ensuring a coordinated, unified approach to defence and security. Mandated by the Constitution, CSAT oversees national security policies in both peacetime and wartime, including Romania's participation in international military operations, collective defence commitments within military alliances, and peacekeeping missions (The Constitution of Romania, Art. 119, 2003).

In this context, CSAT can be understood as Romania's equivalent of a National Security Council (NSC), fitting within the broader theoretical framework outlined in the strategic studies literature. NSCs are generally recognised as essential entities within a state's power structure, responsible for coordinating national security strategies across various sectors and agencies. Their structure and function vary depending on a country's constitutional framework, operating either as advisory or decision-making bodies (Jordan et al., 2009). Typically chaired by the head of state, NSCs integrate key cabinet members and security officials, ensuring a unified response to both national and international security challenges.

The primary role of NSCs is to synthesise inputs from governmental bodies recognised as national security institutions, ensuring a coherent strategy to address complex security challenges. They are instrumental in policy formulation, responding to immediate threats, and enhancing the long-term preparedness of the national security apparatus (Betts, 2015).

Beyond crisis management, NSCs play a pivotal role in shaping national security policies that reflect state interests and strategic priorities, ensuring a balanced allocation of security resources (Daalder & Lindsay, 2013). Their strategic planning processes typically involve threat assessment, security risk management, resource distribution, and priority setting, all of which are essential for providing national security in a rapidly evolving global environment (Murray & Brown, 2012).

Additionally, NSCs must ensure that national security strategies remain flexible and responsive to geopolitical shifts while maintaining alignment with international law and alliance commitments. Their effectiveness is crucial in shaping a nation's diplomatic and intelligence standing, influencing its bilateral and multilateral security policies, and determining its ability to project influence on the global stage (Yarger, 2008). The decisions taken by NSCs not only impact national security but also have far-reaching socio-economic implications, affecting political stability, economic resilience, and institutional credibility.

While these theoretical considerations frame the role of NSCs broadly, Romania's experience with CSAT illustrates how these dynamics have evolved in practice. Established in December 1990,

CSAT was designed *'to coordinate and oversee activities critical to the country's defence and national safety'*. The initial legislative framework deliberately avoided the term "security", as it remained strongly associated with the former *Securitate*, the oppressive secret service of Ceaușescu's regime, which had left a deeply negative imprint on collective memory, as acknowledged by many politicians involved in the drafting process. The 1991 Constitution adopted the term "national safety", a narrower concept that was misapplied in high-level political discourse to refer to major state affairs, failing to capture the broader dimensions of national security. However, this wording has contributed to ongoing scholarly and professional debates I have attended on whether national security, conceptually, encompasses the country's defence or if defence constitutes a distinct concept rooted in fundamental concerns such as sovereignty and territorial integrity, thereby implying that all other matters fall outside the realm of high politics and instead belong to ordinary public policy-making.

Over a decade later, legislative updates reintroduced the term 'security' into the revised Constitution and CSAT's official documents, broadening the conceptual framework to include both the 'National Security Strategy' and the 'National Defence Strategy' as fundamental components of national security policy (Law No. 415/2002, Art. 1 & Art. 2). These amendments clarified CSAT's status as an autonomous administrative authority subject to parliamentary scrutiny, granting it expanded executive powers in national security matters, including the 'approval of draft normative acts initiated or issued by the Government' (Law No. 415/2002, Art. 2). The revision also expanded CSAT's membership to include senior policymakers and officials from key national security institutions, as well as representatives from other governmental branches responsible for managing critical national security resources.

Following these legislative revisions, CSAT's responsibilities expanded, covering the development and coordination of national security and defence policies, threat assessment, strategic response identification, and management of inter-institutional mechanisms in national security, particularly during crisis and wartime. It oversees the armed forces' organisation, national security plans and programmes, cooperation of national security institutions, aligns national security policies with alliance system policies, manages crises, and coordinates emergency responses. (Law No. 415/2002) This comprehensive mandate consolidates CSAT's central role in shaping and implementing Romania's national security imperatives within domestic and international frameworks.

As illustrated in Figure no. 1, the President of Romania chairs the CSAT, with the Prime Minister serving as its vice-chairperson. The members of the CSAT include the Minister of National Defence, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Economy, the Minister of Public Finance, the Director of the Romanian Intelligence Service, the Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, the Chief of the Defence Staff, and the Presidential Adviser for National Security. CSAT activities are subject to scrutiny and oversight by Parliament (Law No. 415/2002)

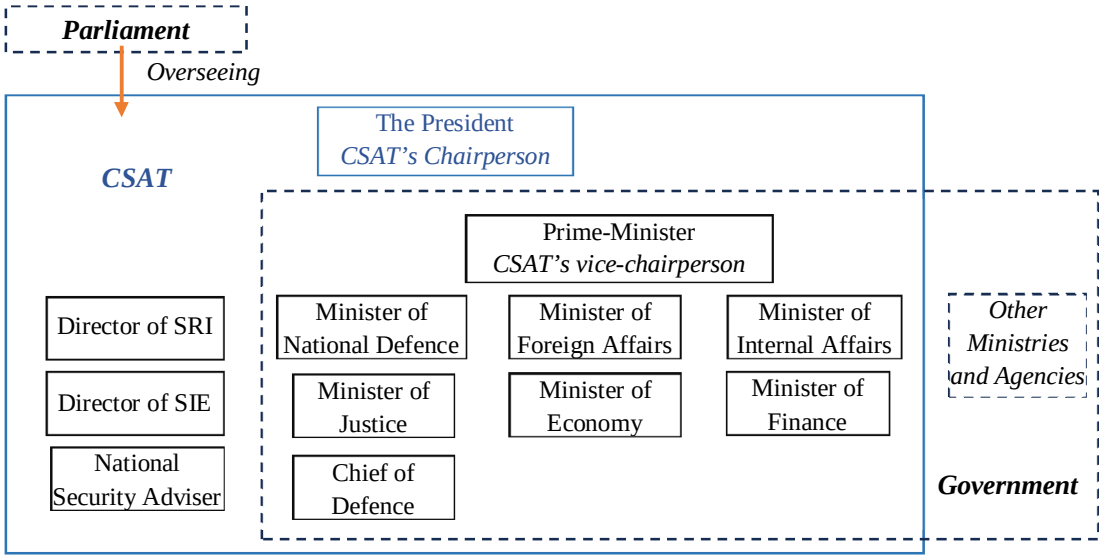


Figure no. 1: Romania's CSAT Institutional Organisation

Apart from certain ministers who hold a CSAT chair with direct responsibilities for national security execution, as well as security resource development and allocation, the Government, as a whole, is responsible for implementing broader national security objectives. As the executive authority, the Government operates based on a vote of confidence from Parliament, ensuring the execution of both internal and external policies and the overall management of public administration (The Constitution of Romania, Art. 102). The Prime Minister, who also serves as CSAT's vice-chairperson, plays a central role in coordinating these efforts.

The executive branch's national security objectives are outlined in the Government Programme and are implemented through various governmental bodies, both within and outside the CSAT framework. Additionally, the President of Romania may participate in government meetings concerning matters of national interest – including foreign policy, defence, and public order—at the request of the Prime Minister. In such cases, the President presides over the meetings (The Constitution of Romania, Art. 87).

While the President and the Government share responsibilities in national security governance, their overlapping mandates within the CSAT framework introduce additional institutional complexities. The interplay between executive authority and CSAT's strategic coordination role often creates ambiguities in decision-making and policy implementation. These challenges become particularly evident when addressing foreign and domestic security concerns, where the distinction between CSAT's strategic oversight and the Government's executive functions remains unclear.

These institutional ambiguities not only complicate national security governance but also raise broader questions about the distribution of power, jurisdiction, and coordination among Romania's key security actors. Understanding how authority is exercised within this fragmented landscape is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of Romania's national security framework.

4. Power, Jurisdiction, and Fragmentation in Romania's National Security Governance

Romania's national security governance is shaped by constitutional provisions that affirm the President's authority in security matters. This authority derives from their roles as CSAT's chairperson, supreme commander-in-chief of the Armed Forces, and chairperson of the government's national security meetings (The Constitution of Romania, Art. 80, 87). Consequently, the President is widely recognised as *Head of State*, despite the absence of an explicit legal provision and

occasional contestation from political opponents. The multi-layered nature of Romania's security governance requires close coordination between the President and the Prime Minister to ensure coherent security strategies.

However, this institutional structure is complicated by Romania's semi-presidential system, which creates a dual legitimacy framework. The President and the Government share executive responsibilities while deriving legitimacy from different electoral mechanisms, a tension analysed by Schleiter & Morgan-Jones (2010). The President is directly elected by popular vote, whereas the Prime Minister is appointed by the President and requires parliamentary approval (The Constitution of Romania, Art. 81, 103). This dual legitimacy structure often fuels competition for authority, particularly in national security policy-making.

Beyond formal constitutional provisions, informal political factors also play a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of national security governance. The symbolic power of the directly elected President, along with their personality and prior political experience, can influence security decision-making (Verheijen, 1999). This is particularly relevant in democratic systems, where political leaders' influence and public perception notably affect their authority. Public support, as a critical determinant of governance effectiveness, aligns with constructivist revisions of Security Studies theory, which emphasise the role of perception, identity, and discourse in shaping security policies and leadership legitimacy (Weber, 1947; Blondel, 1987; Wæver et al., 1993; Wæver, 1995).

The expansion of CSAT's mandate has intensified institutional complexity, leading to overlaps with the Government's responsibilities, particularly in managing emerging threats. A key challenge lies in defining what constitutes a national security matter, as the concept has expanded beyond military concerns to encompass economic, environmental, and social dimensions (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). While a broader interpretation allows for a more comprehensive response to security threats, it also introduces strategic ambiguities and institutional overlaps. Expanding the scope of national security too widely risks diluting focus, overextending resources, and undermining policy implementation.

These institutional overlaps are further compounded by the financial and operational constraints of national security governance. Given the substantial investments required to sustain defence, intelligence, and security operations, prioritisation becomes essential to balance diverse security concerns with long-term sustainability. Moreover, an expansive scope of authority can foster power struggles and inter-agency conflicts, as institutions compete to shape security policy in alignment with their strategic priorities. Historical and bureaucratic rivalries further exacerbate tensions, particularly in institutional leadership appointments and the prioritisation of specific threats.

A notable example of this executive tension occurred on 6 May 2010, when President Traian Băsescu – rather than Prime Minister Emil Boc – announced drastic austerity measures in response to Romania's economic crisis. His unilateral declaration of a 25% reduction in public sector salaries and a 15% cut in pensions, unemployment benefits, and other welfare payments underscored the ambiguous power dynamics between the President and Government (Ciutacu, 2010). This moment not only blurred the lines of institutional responsibility but also highlighted the President's influence over fiscal and economic decision-making, areas typically under the Government's jurisdiction.

Further illustrating the extent of executive competition, in 2012, the Financial Times' Brussels correspondent, Joshua Chaffin, wryly remarked on the EU Summit's political landscape: "Forget about Merkel versus Hollande, North versus South, or Barroso versus Van Rompuy. The real drama at this Summit is the dispute between the Romanian President, Traian Băsescu, and his Prime Minister, Victor Ponta" (Matis & Enache, 2012). This comment reflected the international visibility of Romania's domestic power struggles, particularly the dispute over which leader should represent Romania at the European Council. The rivalry not only complicated Romania's diplomatic engagements but also had direct implications for the country's national security and foreign policy stance.

More recently, President Klaus Iohannis (2014-2025) has also drawn scrutiny for his active role in national security matters, particularly his commitment to increasing defence spending in response to escalating security concerns in the Black Sea region. While Iohannis has been a strong advocate for military modernisation, his assertiveness in pushing defence budget increases has at times appeared to overshadow the Government's role in budgetary decision-making. However, I contend that his interventions risk overstepping constitutional boundaries, as Parliament retains the ultimate authority over national security spending and major defence acquisitions.

A key moment that fuelled these concerns occurred in 2023 when Iohannis publicly addressed the Government's failure to meet its defence spending commitments. Citing inflation, "budgetary difficulties," and the global arms crisis, he explained Romania's inability to allocate the full 2.5% of GDP to defence as initially pledged (Necsutu, 2024). While his statements underscored the importance of national defence, they also revealed the limitations of presidential influence in enforcing budgetary execution. This gap between presidential rhetoric and governmental action highlights the structural constraints of Romania's semi-presidential system, where the President's authority over national security policy remains contingent on governmental cooperation (Lonean, 2009).

Institutional fragmentation is not limited to high-level political actors but extends to inter-agency coordination. Figure 2 illustrates the overlapping responsibilities, areas of cooperation, and competition among security institutions within CSAT, highlighting the complexity of inter-agency coordination. In foreign and defence policy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defence, and the Foreign Intelligence Service (SIE) are responsible for shaping Romania's international security posture, particularly within NATO and EU frameworks. These organisations manage defence, diplomacy, intelligence-sharing, and strategic partnerships, ensuring Romania's alignment with collective security arrangements, according to their institutional mandates.

At the operational level, the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs play a crucial role in cross-border security and intelligence cooperation. Their involvement is particularly sizable in counterterrorism, migration control, cybersecurity, and hybrid threats, where challenges extend beyond national borders. However, overlapping mandates can create bureaucratic inefficiencies, competition for policy influence, and coordination difficulties, ultimately hindering Romania's ability to project a unified security strategy in international negotiations. Similarly, in European and internal affairs, responsibilities are distributed across multiple institutions, reinforcing the broader issue of institutional fragmentation. While inter-agency cooperation is essential for an integrated security approach, rivalries over jurisdiction, resources, and strategic priorities can undermine decision-making efficiency.

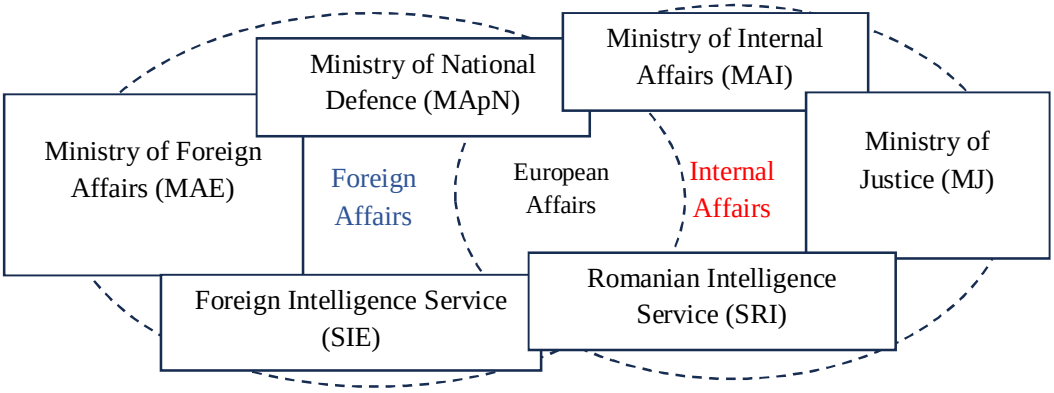


Figure no. 2: Areas of Cooperation and Competition Among the 'National Security Institutions' within the CSAT

These overlappings underscore the need for enhanced strategic coordination within CSAT, ensuring that cooperation takes precedence over competition. Strengthening CSAT's role as a

unifying body is essential for minimising institutional redundancies, fostering coherence in security policymaking, and ensuring Romania's security governance operates as an integrated system rather than a fragmented bureaucratic network.

Conclusions

Romania's national security governance reflects a dynamic and evolving institutional framework shaped by historical legacies, legal provisions, and broader political dynamics. CSAT plays a pivotal role in ensuring strategic coordination and guiding national security policies within a complex governance structure. However, as Romania continues to adapt to emerging security challenges, the evolving security environment necessitates the continuous refinement of institutional roles and responsibilities.

A key challenge arises from the expansion of the security agenda, which has led to the creation of new institutional responsibilities without adequately streamlining or adjusting existing ones. This has resulted in an inflated national security framework marked by overlapping mandates, bureaucratic redundancies, and institutional competition, factors that risk undermining policy coherence and decision-making efficiency. While this framework has strengthened Romania's ability to address both internal and external security threats, it has also introduced jurisdictional ambiguities, inefficiencies in inter-agency coordination, and challenges in strategic prioritisation.

The semi-presidential system further complicates governance by fostering power struggles between the President and the Prime Minister, particularly in periods of cohabitation. The President, as CSAT's chairperson and commander-in-chief of the armed forces, holds significant influence over national security, yet their role remains constitutionally defined as mediatory rather than executive. This structural ambiguity has led to jurisdictional conflicts, especially when the President's security agenda diverges from the Government's broader policy priorities. In such cases, the absence of clearly demarcated executive competencies results in institutional fragmentation, affecting the effectiveness of security governance.

Additionally, Romania's national security institutions exhibit elements of both cooperative and conflictive fragmentation. While inter-agency collaboration is necessary for maintaining an integrated security framework, bureaucratic rivalries and institutional silos often hinder effective coordination. The competition among security institutions over jurisdiction, resources, and strategic priorities risks generating inefficiencies and weakening the coherence of national security policies. Functional overlaps in defence planning, intelligence coordination, and security resource allocation further highlight the need for a more structured governance mechanism to reduce redundancies and enhance institutional alignment.

To improve national security governance, Romania must pursue institutional streamlining and enhanced inter-agency coordination. Strengthening CSAT's role as a unifying body is essential for reducing fragmentation and fostering more effective strategic decision-making. While Euro-Atlantic integration remains central to Romania's security strategy, national security leadership must also prioritise the development of robust defence capabilities to address both conventional and emerging threats. As outlined in Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty, collective security begins with national resilience, requiring each member state to develop and maintain the capacity to resist security challenges independently. Enhancing Romania's self-defence capabilities will not only reinforce national security but also strengthen its contribution to collective defence efforts within NATO and the EU.

Finally, these findings contribute to broader theoretical and policy debates on security governance, yet their practical applicability at both sectoral and cross-sectoral levels requires further

validation. Given the evolving nature of security threats, future research should explore the impact of institutional fragmentation on security policy effectiveness, strategic resilience, and Romania's ability to respond to hybrid threats and geopolitical shifts. A comparative analysis of governance models in other semi-presidential states could further clarify how structural inefficiencies may be addressed to enhance Romania's national security governance.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Baylis, T. A. (1996). *Presidents versus prime ministers: Shaping executive authority in Eastern Europe*. *World Politics, 48*(3), 297–323. https://doi.org/10.1353/wp.1996.0029

Betts, R. K. (2015). *American force: Dangers, delusions, and dilemmas in national security*. Columbia University Press.

Biermann, F., Pattberg, P., van Asselt, H., & Zelli, F. (2009). The fragmentation of global governance architectures: A framework for analysis. *Global Environmental Politics, 9*(4), 14–40. https://doi.org/10.1162/glep.2009.9.4.14

Blondel, J. (1987). *Political leadership: Towards a general analysis.* Sage Publications.

Boin, A., & 't Hart, P. (2003). Public leadership in times of crisis: Mission impossible? *Public Administration Review, 63*(5), 544–553. https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6210.00318

Bruneau, T. C., & Matei, F. C. (2008). *Towards a New Conceptualization of Democratization and Civil-Military Relations.* Democratization, 15(5), 909–929.

Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Ciutacu, C., 22 September 2010, Government's shock tactics for recession, Eurofound, accessed on 12 March 2024.

David, R., Tolbert, P., & Boghossian, J. (2019, December 23). Institutional theory in organization studies. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management.* https://doi.org/ 10.1093/acrefore/9780190224851.001.0001/acrefore-9780190224851-e-158

Daalder, I. H., & Lindsay, J. M. (2013). *America unbound: The Bush revolution in foreign policy*. Brookings Institution Press.

Dungaciu, D., & Dumitrescu, L. (2019). Romania's strategic initiatives in the Black Sea area: from subregionalism to peripheral regionalism. *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies, 19*(2), 333-351.

Elgie, R. (2011). *Semi-presidentialism: Sub-types and democratic performance.* Oxford University Press.

Gray, C. S. (2016). *Strategy and politics.* Routledge.

Halem, H. (2024, September 5). The Romanian defense industry and US policy. *Middle East Institute.* Iancu, N. (2024). *Strategia națională pentru industria de apărare 2024-2030: O nouă strategie pentru trecut.*

Iancu, N. (2011). A decade from 9/11. *Revista Română de Studii de Intelligence*, 5, 2011, 124–136.

Iancu, N. (2024, January 15). *Strategia Națională pentru Industria de Apărare 2024-2030*. LinkedIn.

Jervis, R. (1997). Complexity and the analysis of political and social life. *Political Science Quarterly, 112*(4), 569–593. https://doi.org/10.2307/2657566

Lobell, S. E. (2009). Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: A neoclassical realist model. In S. E. Lobell, N. M. Ripsman, & J. W. Taliaferro (Eds.), *Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy* (pp. 42–74). Cambridge University Press.

Lonean, I. (2009) Construirea formei de guvernare prin discurs în 2003 şi 2009. Republica semiprezidenţială în Constituţia României, accessed on 14.05.2024.

March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (2006). The new institutionalism. *American Political Science Review, 78*, 741.

Matis, A. and Enache, I. (2012) Financial Times râde de România: Războiul Băsescu-Ponta, „Adevărata dramă" de la Consiliul European, Gandul, accessed on 12 March 2024.

Michaels, J. D. (2015). Separation of powers and centripetal forces: Implications for the institutional design and constitutionality of our national-security state. *University of Chicago Law Review, 83*(1), 267-314.

Mungiu-Pippidi, A. (2010). The Experience of Civil Society as an Anti-Corruption Actor in East Central Europe. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 24(1-2), 73-83.

Murray, D. J., & Brown, P. R. (2012). *The global war on terrorism: Assessing the American response*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Nasu, H., & Rubenstein, K. (2015). Introduction: The expanded conception of security and institutions. In H. Nasu & K. Rubenstein (Eds.), *Legal perspectives on security institutions* (pp. 1–24). Cambridge University Press.

Necsutu, M. Romania President Blames Missed Defence Spending Target on 'Budget Issues', 12 April 2024, Balkan Insight, accessed on 15 April 2024.

Papadimitriou, D., & Phinnemore, D. (2008). *Romania and The European Union: From Marginalisation to Membership?* Routledge.

Peters, B. (2012) Institutional Theory in Political Science: The New Institutionalism. 3rd edn. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group.

Romanian Parliament. (2002). *Legea nr. 415 din 27 iunie 2002 privind organizarea și funcționarea Consiliului Suprem de Apărare a Țării.* Monitorul Oficial al României, Partea I, Nr. 494.

Rose, G. (1998). Neoclassical realism and theories of foreign policy. *World Politics, 51*(1), 144–172. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887100007814

Schleiter, P., & Morgan-Jones, E. (2010). Who's in charge? Presidents, assemblies, and the political control of semi-presidential cabinets. *Comparative Political Studies, 43*(11), 1415–1441. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414010371904

Smith, J. (2017). Enhancing democratic systems: The role of citizen participation and transparency in national security. *Journal of Democracy and Security, 12*(3), 154–171.

Tismaneanu, V. (2014). The legacies of 1989: The moving ruins. *Journal of Democracy, 25*(1), 59-70.

van Eekelen, W. F. (2010). The legal framework of security sector governance. *Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)*.

Verheijen, T. (1999). *Civil service systems in Central and Eastern Europe*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Waever O; Buzan B; Kelstrup M and Lemaitre P. (1993). Identity Migration, and the New Security Agenda in Europe. London: Pinter Publishers.

Wæver, Ole. 1995. Securitization and Desecuritization. In On Security, ed. Ronnie Lipschutz. NY: Columbia University Press

Wæver, O. (2011). Politics, security, theory. *Security Dialogue, 42*(4–5), 465–480. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010611418718

Weber, M. (1947). *The theory of social and economic organization*. Free Press.

Yarger, H. R. (2008). *Strategy and the national security professional: Strategic thinking and strategy formulation in the 21st century*. Praeger.

Young, T. D. (2018). *Anatomy of post-communist European defense institutions: The mirage of military modernisation.* Bloomsbury Academic.

STRATEGIES XXI International Scientific Conference
The Complex and Dynamic Nature of the Security Environment,
Bucharest, Romania - February, 27th, 2025

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-03

HUNGARY'S EVOLVING DEFENCE POLICY: FROM SECURITY CONSUMER TO STRATEGIC AUTONOMY WITHIN NATO

Bence FARAGO, PhD Candidate,
Ludovika University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary.
E-mail: faragomail2@gmail.com

Abstract*: Hungary's post-Cold War security trajectory has undergone a profound transformation, shifting from a security consumer dependent on NATO guarantees to an increasingly autonomous actor within the Alliance. This paper examines the strategic recalibration of Hungarian defence policy, focusing on military modernisation directives, preparation for hybrid security threats, and the underlying geopolitical balancing. Through an analysis of Hungary's National Security and Military Strategies, its updated legal framework about the operational principles of the armed forces and semi-governmental documents, this study explores how Budapest has pursued a dual-track approach – strengthening its NATO commitments while simultaneously enhancing national defence capabilities, especially in the face of non-conventional threats and engaging in strategic hedging. Key drivers of this shift include geopolitical instability, energy security concerns, and the securitisation of migration. The findings highlight Hungary's attempt to navigate the constraints and opportunities of middle-power status in an era of growing strategic competition, offering insights into the challenges of balancing Alliance commitments with national strategic autonomy.*

Keywords: *Hungary in NATO; military modernisation; strategic autonomy; defence policy; regional security.*

Introduction

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the United States' growing focus on emerging Asian threats force European society to rethink its approach to its security frameworks. The paper explores the shifts in Hungary's policy documents amidst its aim to change from a security consumer to a security provider with an increasing level of strategic autonomy. Within this study, a security consumer refers to a state or entity that primarily relies on external actors for its security rather than independently providing for its defence. In contrast, security producers contribute to regional or international security through military capabilities and strategic commitments. Strategic autonomy is defined as the capacity of the state to independently make decisions and act in matters of defence and security, without being dependent on external actors. This concept encompasses both the ability to set priorities independently and the means to implement these decisions, whether alone or in cooperation with partners. The study identifies the sections in recent updates in the Hungarian security, defence and foreign policy documents that mark this definitive shift.

1. Historical Background

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 fundamentally reshaped Hungary's strategic orientation, transforming the Central European state from a Warsaw Pact satellite into a prototypical "security consumer" within the Western liberal order. Joining NATO's Partnership for Peace program in 1994 and among the earliest Warsaw Pact members admitted to full NATO membership in 1999,

Hungary's trajectory offers critical insights into the opportunities and constraints facing mid-sized states navigating post-bipolar security architectures. The nation's experience exemplifies how the historical memory of repeated foreign domination – from Ottoman incursions to Soviet tank treads on Budapest streets in 1956 – continues to inform contemporary security calculations.

Hungary's security consumer status emerged from the ashes of the Soviet collapse as policymakers in Budapest confronted the dual challenge of institutional decolonisation and strategic realignment. The 1990 National Assembly declaration terminating Hungary's Warsaw Pact membership marked not merely a legal separation but a psychological break from four decades of Soviet-dominated security policy. This radical shift required building entirely new institutional relationships while managing residual economic dependencies on Russian energy supplies – a balancing act that continues to shape Hungarian foreign policy.

The "Europe Agreement" with the European Union about economic cooperation and membership aspiration, signed in 1991 and coming into full effect in 1994 (Batory 2002) and subsequent accession negotiations into the North Atlantic Alliance revealed Budapest's strategic calculus: embedding the nation within Western multilateral structures would both guarantee security against potential Russian revanchism and accelerate economic modernisation as a treatment of the failing Soviet economic model, neglect in research and development and general technological lagging behind the Western world. However, this approach carried inherent contradictions. One way to put it is that Hungarian leaders pursued NATO membership not primarily to enhance national defence capabilities but to obtain security guarantees against external threats. This free-rider mentality became institutionalised, as defence spending steadily decreased from 1988 until 2014 to 0.9%, with a value of 1.3% in 1995 (World Bank 2025).

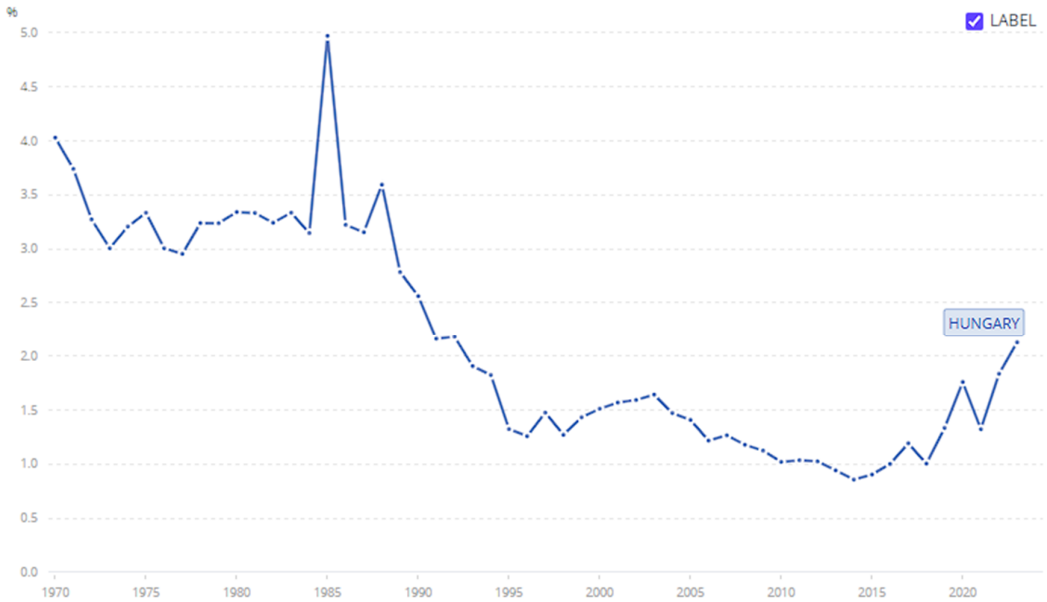


Figure no. 1: Hungary's defence spending as % of GDP (World Bank 2025)

1.1. The Psychology of Security Consumption

Hungary's historical experiences created a security consciousness much like that of the rest of the countries of the post-Soviet space; these continue to influence policy decisions even today. The trauma of the 1956 Soviet invasion, crushing the short-lived attempt at creating a social democracy, or in other words a type of socialism with a human face left deep psychological scars, manifesting as

a permanent sense of geopolitical precariousness – something worthy to mention here is that the idea of potential Western betrayal also appears in later discussions regarding the ’56 events, as despite strong American rhetorical support at the time, military help at any capacity was never provided, as the US did not consider confrontation with the USSR desirable at the time (Landa 2017). Hungary's Cold War-era vulnerabilities resurfaced during the 1990s Yugoslav Wars, exposing its ongoing regional security challenges. However, it has also shown Hungarian policymakers that successfully navigating the emerging challenges can potentially solidify Hungary’s place in the post-Cold War world order and even draw benefits.

The security consumer paradigm allowed Hungarian leaders to externalise defence responsibilities while focusing resources on economic transformation. Minister of Foreign Affairs Geza Jeszensky declared in 1991 that: Hungary’s contribution to European security lies in maintaining political stability through successful democratic transition (Pinter 2008). This framing positioned Hungary not as a frontline state but as the newest member of the circle of winners of the unipolar world order – a narrative justifying limited military investments during the 1990s that could have been critical for significant reforms.

1.2. NATO Membership: Asymmetric Benefits

Hungary's 1999 NATO accession marked the culmination of its Western reorientation but also institutionalised dependency patterns. The Alliance's Article V guarantee became the cornerstone of Hungarian security policy, enabling successive governments to prioritise fiscal austerity over military modernisation. Between 1990 and 2010, Hungary reduced its active-duty military personnel from 130,000 to 30,000 while decommissioning entire armoured divisions. (Berzsenyi and Csiki 2014).

Paradoxically, NATO membership increased Hungary's strategic value as a logistical hub while decreasing its combat capabilities. The establishment of NATO's Heavy Airlift Wing at Papa Air Base in 2009 exemplified this dynamic – Hungary provided infrastructure and airspace access while allies supplied strategic airlift capacity. This symbiotic relationship was highlighted at its apogee during NATO's 1999 Kosovo intervention when Hungarian bases supported the Alliance operations despite Budapest participating only in peacekeeping under KFOR rather than engaging as a direct combat force.

1.3. EU Accession: Comprehensive Security Redefined

The 2004 EU membership expanded Hungary's security concept beyond military defence to encompass economic stability and institutional resilience. Brussels' Acquis Communautaire provided a legal-administrative framework for combating corruption, reforming judiciary systems, and securing energy infrastructure – all classified as soft security priorities in Hungarian accession documents. EU structural funds, totalling €35 billion between 2004 and 2020, underwrote critical infrastructure projects with security dimensions, including cross-border energy interconnectors and transportation networks.

However, EU integration introduced new dependencies. The 2008 global financial crisis exposed Hungary's vulnerability to capital flight and currency volatility, forcing an IMF-EU bailout that constrained national policymaking. This economic shock and mounting migration pressures after 2015 fuelled a political backlash against perceived EU overreach. This dynamic would later complicate Hungary's security consumer status under Viktor Orbán's consecutive leadership cycles.

1.4. Security Consumption in Hybrid Regimes

A hybrid regime is a political system that combines elements of both democratic and authoritarian governance, existing in a grey zone between full democracy and complete authoritarianism. These regimes maintain the formal institutions of democracy, such as elections and parliaments, while simultaneously undermining democratic principles through various informal mechanisms. The Hungarian case, which is often cited as having transformed into a hybrid regime

after 2010 (when the Orbán government secured a 2/3 majority of seats in the Parliament), challenges conventional assumptions about security consumers as passive policy-takers (András Bozóki 2021). Since 2010, PM Viktor Orbán's illiberal democracy project (explained in detail in Chapter 3) has demonstrated how mid-sized states can attempt to leverage institutional memberships while resisting normative convergence. Hungary's continued NATO and EU membership coexists with an increasing strategic partnership with Russia and China, who are seen as challengers to the very same institutionalised memberships of which Hungary is a part. These partnerships include but are not limited to the controversial Paks II nuclear plant expansion, the (since then forcibly cancelled) presence of the sanctioned Russian International Investment Bank and Budapest's role as a hub for Chinese investment in Central Europe.

This dual-track approach could be described as *calculated free-riding* – exploiting collective security guarantees while cultivating alternative patrons. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine tested this strategy, forcing Hungary to walk a tightrope between solidarity with the rest of the members of the Alliance and energy dependence on Moscow. Prime Minister Orbán's resistance to EU energy sanctions and refusal to permit weapons transfers through Hungarian territory revealed the limits of security consumption in crisis conditions. However, the PM's political course is more and more shaped by path dependency.

2. Methodology and Chapter Overview

This study employs a qualitative analysis, focusing on policy documents. Updated policy documents are contrasted to old ones to highlight changes and are put into the framework of contemporary domestic and foreign policy orientation. The research paper differentiates three distinct periods of post-Cold War Hungarian defence policy phases, ranging from 1991 to 2022:

- Transitional Dependency (1991 - 2004): post-communist institution-building and NATO/EU accession negotiations;
- Consolidated Consumption (2004 - 2010): mature membership in Western structures with a growing economic security focus;
- Illiberal Reconfiguration (2010 - present): strategic diversification under Orbán's Eastern Opening policy.

From this, the Illiberal Reconfiguration phase forms the primary base of investigation in this paper.

2.1. Research Questions & Objectives

The research aims to answer the following questions: How has Hungary's defence policy evolved from a security consumer model to a more strategically autonomous position within NATO, and what geopolitical, economic, and military factors have driven this transformation? What is the political context of such a shift? Which shift in policies and strategies underpins this change? The objective is to explain the identified behaviours and build a theoretical framework that provides a contextual understanding of the policies taken.

2.2. Methodology & Structure

This study employs a qualitative research design, primarily utilising document analysis to assess the evolution of Hungarian defence policy. In Chapter 3, Hungary's internal political landscape is described, highlighting the primary political narratives that have shaped the country's defence and foreign policy environment. In Chapter 4, the main sources of information include Hungary's National Military Strategies (2012, 2021) and National Security Strategies (2012, 2020). These documents are supplemented by an analysis of Hungary's updated legal framework, government resolutions, and defence policy decisions, as well as semi-governmental publications that provide insights into strategic thinking within policymaking circles. The study follows a structured

comparative analysis method, systematically contrasting policy documents to identify key shifts. Special attention is given to doctrinal changes, shifts in threat perception, and the incorporation of hybrid security concerns, such as energy security, migration, and cyber threats. Furthermore, the research integrates process tracing to examine causal mechanisms driving Hungary's evolving defence policy. By mapping changes in strategic documents against geopolitical developments – such as the annexation of Crimea (2014), the migration crisis (2015), the war in Ukraine (2022 – present), and growing tensions within the EU and NATO – this study contextualises Hungary's defence policy shifts as a response to external and internal pressures.

The concluding chapter assesses whether Hungary's model remains sustainable amid renewed great power competition and the erosion of liberal international norms. By examining Hungary's complex navigation of recent security architectures, this study contributes to broader debates about middle power agencies in an era of institutional fragmentation and authoritarian resurgence. The findings carry implications for NATO and EU policymakers grappling with member states that simultaneously benefit from and challenge the liberal security order they helped create.

3. Hungary's Strategic Security Environment. Geopolitical Position & Security Challenges

Hungary's geographical landscape, characterised by wide, open plains make it, from a geopolitical point of view, an ideal staging ground for potential challengers or a setting that would (and does) easily allow potential instabilities to flow from across borders. Hungary shares borders with Austria, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia. Its geopolitical strategies have often involved leveraging its position within the Visegrád Group, a regional alliance with Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, to exert influence within the EU and promote regional cooperation (Varga 2023). Relatively unique to Hungarian politics is the large Hungarian minority in the neighbouring countries, which is a testament to the troubled history of the region. How to handle the Hungarian minority has been an ambivalent political issue for consecutive elected governments. Starting from 2010, with the second overall term of PM Viktor Orbán and with the start of his first 2/3 parliament majority, voting rights have been extended to ethnic Hungarians in neighbouring countries, a move which has heightened tensions, particularly with Romania and Slovakia, where the most significant Hungarian minority population resides (Lendvai 2012). Normalising these relationships to boost regional cooperation ended up being a vital interest of the consecutive cabinets of Viktor Orbán, as this was seen as a pivotal step towards forming such a coalition of like-minded countries that can actively shape and form Central and Eastern Europe's geopolitical landscape.

The Orbán governments have capitalised on nationalist rhetoric, positioning the ruling party as a defender of Christian (or conservative) Europe against perceived threats from liberalism, globalism and migration. Since 2010, Hungary has experienced a shift towards illiberal democracy, characterised by centralisation of power, restrictions on media freedom, and erosion of judicial independence. While this has most likely emerged initially as a political or rhetorical trick to keep party popularity high, path dependency gradually seems to have reinforced internal divisions and thus shaped Hungary's geopolitical identity (Varga 2023). These changes have sparked tensions with the EU, which has criticised Hungary's democratic backsliding and thus created an exponential downward spiral of increasingly anti-West and anti-EU rhetoric (Müller and Slominski 2024).

This focus is evident in Hungary's stringent migration policies and its resistance to EU-wide refugee relocation programs. The government's fear of migration is largely driven by a combination of populist rhetoric and a desire to maintain cultural homogeneity. These elements have been instrumental in shaping Hungary's security policy, emphasising the protection of national borders and the exclusion of migrants. The Hungarian Government has securitised migration by portraying it as an existential threat to national identity and culture, with governmental speeches and policies reflecting this securitisation, legitimising strict measures like border fences and anti-migrant

legislation (Kerner 2025). The framing of migration as a security threat resonates with populist ideologies, creating a dichotomy between "us" and "them" (Yukaruç 2024). There is a lively discussion among Hungarian scholars about whether migration as a security issue first emerged only as a Machiavellian tool that synergises well with pre-existing right-wing populist panels to garner political support or whether the fears articulated by policymakers were sincere. It is an especially interesting question when we contrast the topic of Middle-Eastern and African migration as a security threat and migration from South-East Asia as an economic advantage (Pálos 2023). Nevertheless, migration being treated as the main security challenge determines both the main geographical axis and the modus operandi of Hungarian security policy.

The Balkans, especially the Western Balkans, is an area of special interest to the Hungarian defence policy. It is seen as the primary staging ground or "entry point" for harmful (uncontrolled) migration, which therefore should be monitored and controlled by all means. Interestingly enough, countries that are seen as challengers to the institutional allies of Hungary (NATO and the EU) and yet with whom Budapest pursues closer economic bonds – Russia and China – also aim to increase their influence among unaligned Balkan states. Therefore, even NATO and the EU consider the region's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures crucial for regional and European security – something that Hungarian policymakers can easily get behind (Tahirović 2024).

The other primary source of regional instability for Budapest is, of course, the Ukrainian border. With Kyiv-Budapest relations entering a downward spiral since around 2014 over minority rights, the diplomatic situation has been steadily declining. For Ukraine, issues with the significant Russian (or Russian-speaking) minority have extensively shaped overall minority policy, and the treatment of ethnic Hungarians is most likely largely a side effect of the comprehensive approach. While this serves as an explanation for the diplomatic interplay at hand, it did not and does not negate the negative effects on the relations (Sadecki and Iwański 2018). Further complications include the question of energy transport. Hungary has relied on Russian energy imports for a long while, with some of it being delivered through Ukraine, although since the full-scale invasion, it has been importing much less than before (Arató 2024). Since the escalation of the conflict, Hungary has been exposed to an elevated level of both conventional threats and security issues such as smuggling, weapons influx, human trafficking and migration. This creates a secondary axis for security operations, although the securitisation on the Ukrainian border has not hit the expected levels. One prominent case was when a Tu-141 drone, modified into an ad hoc missile cruiser, could fly through Romania's, Hungary's, and Croatia's airspace while not undetected, but also not interrupted (Rogoway 2022). This would underline either the fear of further escalation or overflowing of the war into the EU and NATO, or the inability or unwillingness to engage in the interception of direct military threats originating from the active fights.

Another open security issue characterising the Hungarian geopolitical sphere is the matter of Russian hybrid warfare. Russia employs hybrid and sub-threshold operations against NATO countries, including Hungary, by leveraging a combination of military, information, and economic tactics that remain below the threshold of conventional warfare. These operations are designed to create ambiguity, destabilise target nations, and exploit vulnerabilities without provoking a full-scale military response from NATO. The strategic use of hybrid warfare allows Russia to achieve its geopolitical objectives while maintaining plausible deniability and avoiding open confrontation. Below are the key elements of Russia's hybrid warfare strategy against NATO countries, with a focus on Hungary.

- Information Warfare and Disinformation: Russia uses disinformation campaigns and misinformation (when internet users themselves start spreading false narratives that they sincerely believe to be true, originating from the aforementioned disinformation operations) to create confusion and undermine trust in NATO institutions. This involves spreading false narratives and manipulating public opinion to weaken the cohesion among Member States. Polls have shown that Hungary has been especially affected by such influence (Németh 2024).

- Cyber Operations: Cyberattacks are a critical component of Russia's hybrid warfare strategy, targeting critical infrastructure, government institutions, and private sectors in NATO countries. These attacks aim to disrupt operations, steal sensitive information, and sow discord. For example, the servers of Hungary's Ministry of Foreign Affairs are known to have been exploited by Russian hackers (Panyi 2022) and threats of terror bombing in the first part of the year 2025 also seem to have originated from Russian servers (Zubor 2025).
- Political Subversion and Influence: Moscow engages in political subversion by supporting pro-Russian political parties and movements within NATO countries. This includes funding political campaigns, influencing elections, and fostering divisions within societies. In Hungary, Russia has been accused of supporting political actors who are sympathetic to its interests (Patrick Müller 2023).
- Economic Leverage: Economic tactics, such as energy dependency, are used by Russia to exert influence over target countries. By controlling energy supplies (or posing as controlling), Russia can pressure countries like Hungary to align with its geopolitical interests. Hungary's reliance on Russian energy resources makes it susceptible to economic coercion, which Moscow can exploit to achieve its strategic objectives
- Military Posturing and Covert Operations: The Kremlin employs military posturing, such as deploying troops near borders. While Hungary is not directly threatened by Russian military forces, the presence of Russian troops in neighbouring regions serves as a constant reminder of its military capabilities and intentions.

The abovementioned concerns mark significant modern challenges for European nations antagonistic to Russia's intentions of creating an international security environment where it can interact vis-à-vis smaller nations. The handling of these cannot be left to chance.

Now that the main geographical axes of the challenges, the reasons for the securitisation of certain issues and the nature of the threats have been described, we will commence to analyse how the defence and military policies attempt to react to them.

4. Hungary's Strategic Shift – Doctrinal and Policy Foundations

Hungary's primary defence documents are National Security Strategy and the National Military Strategy. There have been two of each mentioned documents during the examined period set out in this paper. The National Security Strategies, which outline a general moral approach to security matters of the Republic of Hungary, were issued in 2012 and 2020, updating the previous document from 2004.

Focusing especially on military matters and issues of the Armed Forces, the governments of Hungary issued the National Military Strategies in 2012 and 2021. Previously, the basic principles of security policy and homeland defence were adopted in 1993, therefore, an update was long due. Moreover, the legal changes concerning the usage of the armed forces of Hungary will be analysed, as they also reflect a key shift in the strategic thinking of the Hungarian government.

Besides official government documents, additional non-scientific texts created by and for party hardliners will also be showcased. These are important because as a result of the hybridisation of the regime described in Chapter 3, the lines between state apparatus and party functionaries become more and more blurred, and party policy documents may have a much higher influence on government policy than before.

4.1. Hungary's 2012 National Security Strategy

Hungary's 2012 National Security Strategy (NSS) was formulated in a period of relative geopolitical stability, with a strong Euro-Atlantic orientation, but it still recognises significant changes in Hungary's security environment due to globalisation and uneven development, leading to new power centres and the emergence of weak or failing states (The Government of Hungary 2012). It emphasises that these factors have made certain regions' security situations more unpredictable.

The strategy embraced a comprehensive security approach, acknowledging that modern security challenges extend beyond military threats and include economic, social, environmental, and human rights concerns. While traditional military conflicts were considered unlikely, the document emphasised the importance of responding to transnational risks such as financial crises, weak states, and emerging global power shifts.

As such, a key aspect of the 2012 strategy was its commitment to multilateralism, with NATO and the EU identified as the fundamental pillars of Hungary's security policy. The document reaffirmed Hungary's dedication to the Alliance's collective defence (Article 5) and emphasised the importance of European integration for stability. This alone testifies to how Hungary viewed itself as primarily a security consumer. Additionally, the OSCE and the UN were regarded as essential platforms for international conflict resolution, and regional cooperation, particularly within the Visegrád Group (V4), was highlighted as a means to strengthen Hungary's position in Central Europe. This can be regarded as a hint or a precursor to the later desired focus for heavier local regional cooperation to deter threats and shape the multilateral organisations' security direction by amplifying Hungary's voice using regional cooperative platforms.

The strategy also addressed terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and organised crime, viewing them as growing threats in an interconnected world. Recognising the impact of globalisation, the document stressed that Hungary's security does not begin at its borders, as crises in distant regions could have swift and unpredictable repercussions at home. Additionally, energy security was identified as a key concern, focusing on reducing dependency on external energy sources and diversifying supply routes to enhance national resilience.

In terms of global actors, Russia and China were not explicitly mentioned. The 2012 NBS ultimately reflected Hungary's strong reliance on its NATO and EU alliances, positioning the country as a cooperative but largely dependent member of the Euro-Atlantic security framework.

4.2. Hungary's 2020 National Security Strategy

By 2020, Hungary's security landscape had evolved considerably, leading to a more assertive and strategically autonomous approach. The 2020 National Security Strategy reflected a world where geopolitical competition, hybrid warfare, and regional instability had become dominant, overarching concerns (The Government of Hungary 2020). Compared to 2012, when security was framed through a broad multilateral lens, the 2020 document placed greater emphasis on Hungary's independent security interests, signalling a shift from pure reliance on NATO and the EU toward a more pragmatic and flexible security policy. A key addition to the 2020 Strategy was the recognition of hybrid threats, cyberattacks, and foreign interference as pressing security risks. While cybersecurity and disinformation had been minor concerns in 2012, the new strategy explicitly acknowledged them as major challenges, aligning with broader global trends of state-sponsored cyber operations and digital warfare. Similarly, strategic autonomy was a recurring theme, reflecting Hungary's increasing willingness to pursue bilateral partnerships outside of NATO and the EU, including with non-Western powers. This is most likely an expression of the desire for the preservation of national sovereignty and the wish not to just consume security, but to actively shape it.

Another major shift was the explicit recognition of China as a strategic partner. Unlike 2012, when China was only implied as part of ongoing global transformations, the 2020 strategy acknowledged China's growing economic influence in Hungary, particularly through infrastructure investments and trade agreements linked to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, while China was viewed as an important economic player, it was not categorised as a security concern, demonstrating Hungary's increasing engagement with Beijing. In contrast, Russia's role was reassessed, with the 2020 NSS taking a more cautious stance, yet still not openly hostile. This is a stark contrast to other regional players, like Poland or the Baltic states, who have been wary of Russian revanchism since 2008. This difference in the strategic perception would eventually return

to haunt as it facilitated the disintegration of the V4 cooperative platform (Boyse 2023). Although the document did not label Russia an outright threat, it recognised Moscow's influence in regional instability, particularly through energy dependence, hybrid tactics, and military power projection.

In domestic security matters, migration and border security emerged as top priorities. Whereas the 2012 strategy had framed migration in a human security context, emphasising integration and international cooperation, the 2020 document explicitly defined migration as a security risk, linking it to organised crime, terrorism, and social instability. This shift mirrored the broader political changes in Hungary's security discourse, as described in Chapter 3 and placed border protection at the centre of national defence. Another significant addition was the inclusion of pandemics and climate change as security concerns. While environmental security had been acknowledged in 2012, the 2020 strategy significantly expanded its scope, incorporating pandemics, resource scarcity, and the impact of climate change on global stability. This change was largely influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the vulnerabilities of national health and crisis management systems.

Finally, the 2020 strategy placed greater emphasis on military modernisation and self-reliance. While Hungary was largely dependent on NATO's collective defence framework in 2012, unofficially labelling it as a security consumer, the new strategy promoted domestic arms production, increased defence spending, and the development of independent military capabilities. This reflected Hungary's broader effort to strengthen its national security posture while maintaining its commitments to the Alliance and even ramping them up.

Overall, the 2020 National Security Strategy marked a considerable departure from the 2012 document, signalling a move toward a more self-reliant, geopolitically flexible, and security-conscious Hungary. While NATO and the EU remained key players, the strategy de-emphasized multilateralism, prioritised hybrid threats and border security, embraced China as an economic partner, and adopted a more cautious stance on Russia while still promoting economic cooperation and partnership. In Table no. 1, a synthetic comparison of the key aspects is given.

Table no. 1: Comparison between 2012 and 2020 National Security Strategies of Hungary. (Concatenated by the author)

Aspect	2012 National Security Strategy	2020 National Security Strategy	Key Changes
Security Approach	Comprehensive security (political, military, economic)	More focus on hybrid threats, cyber, and strategic autonomy	Shift from broad security to targeted emerging threats
NATO & EU Role	NATO (collective defence) and EU (multilateralism) as cornerstones	NATO remains central, but greater emphasis on national defence and bilateral partnerships	Less dependence on EU frameworks
Hybrid Warfare (including cyber)	Minor concern in the 2012 strategy	A major priority in 2020, with a focus on foreign interference	Acknowledges Russia and China's cyber influence
China's Role	Implicitly mentioned in terms of global shifts, but not a key actor	Strategic economic partner, especially in infrastructure & trade	Increased economic alignment with China

Aspect	2012 National Security Strategy	2020 National Security Strategy	Key Changes
Russia's Role	Only implicitly mentioned, as in terms of geopolitical shifts, not independently	Recognised as a geopolitical actor with hybrid capabilities, but not explicitly outlined as an immediate direct threat	More caution on Russian influence
Migration & Border Security	The human security aspect is emphasised	Treated as a direct security threat linked to crime and terrorism	Hardened stance on migration
Energy Security	Focused on diversification and alternative sources	A geopolitical aspect is added, emphasising energy independence	More explicit mention of Russia's role
Climate Change & Pandemics	Environmental concerns are secondary	Expanded to include pandemics and resource conflicts	COVID-19 impact reflected
Defence & Military	NATO-dependent, limited domestic capabilities	Stronger push for military modernisation & strategic autonomy	Commitment to higher defence spending

4.3. Hungary's National Military Strategy in 2012

The 2012 National Military Strategy was developed in a security environment that, while not devoid of challenges, remained relatively stable in a regional and global sense (The Government of Hungary 2012). It reflected Hungary's commitment to NATO and EU security structures while acknowledging the need for a more self-sufficient and modernised national defence force. A key theme was the redefinition of military self-reliance, as the strategy explicitly rejected the passive approach of relying solely on solidarity of the members of the Alliance for national defence. Instead, it stressed the importance of maintaining credible military capabilities while reinforcing regional cooperation, particularly through the Visegrád Group (V4) and NATO partnerships. The document emphasised that Hungary's military security is now deeply embedded in the transatlantic alliance. Article 5 remained the cornerstone of national defence, and Hungary's participation in missions of the Alliance were seen as both a duty and a necessity. However, it was also noted that Hungary's military had suffered from years of underinvestment, and a key objective was stabilising and enhancing defence capabilities within a limited budgetary framework. The strategy acknowledged that Hungary's military was still transitioning from a post-Cold War downsized force into a more professional and flexible army, capable of contributing to collective defence and international crisis management.

Hungary's military outlook in 2012 was threat-agnostic, meaning it did not define any state as an enemy. It recognised that while traditional interstate conflicts were unlikely, threats such as regional instability, terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and organised crime posed increasingly complex security challenges. In line with the 2012 National Security Strategy, the military document also emphasised energy security, particularly concerning Hungary's dependence on foreign energy supplies. The limited diversification of energy sources was

considered a vulnerability that could be exploited geopolitically, highlighting the need for increased defence preparedness in protecting critical infrastructure.

A final key aspect of the 2012 strategy was the importance of military-civilian cooperation. It stressed that Hungarian society must be more engaged in national defence, both through the volunteer reserve system and a wider defence awareness campaign. The goal was to strengthen the link between the military and civilians, ensuring greater societal support for defence initiatives.

4.4. Hungary's National Military Strategy in 2021

By 2021, Hungary's security environment had significantly changed, leading to a more assertive and comprehensive military strategy. The 2021 National Military Strategy was strongly shaped by the National Security Strategy from 2020, and it emphasised a major military transformation through the Zrínyi 2026 Modernisation Program (The Government of Hungary 2021). The goal was to create a modern, self-reliant, and technologically advanced military force that could act as a regional security provider while continuing to meet the obligations of both NATO and the EU. A central theme of the 2021 strategy was Hungary's ambition to become a regional military power by 2030. While the Alliance remained the foundation of national defence, the document redefined military self-sufficiency as an essential component of security. The strategy declared that Hungary must not only rely solely on the collective defence mechanism of the Alliance but also be capable of independent deterrence. This self-reliant defence approach manifested in increased defence spending, military-industrial development, and the expansion of Hungary's domestic arms production.

Compared to 2012, the 2021 strategy identified hybrid warfare, cyber threats, and disinformation campaigns as primary security risks. These asymmetric threats were recognised as a direct challenge to Hungarian national security, which represented a major shift from the previous strategy, which had been relatively neutral on foreign interference. The new document stressed the need for greater cyber capabilities, counterintelligence operations, and strategic resilience against external manipulation and influence operations. Another significant change was the explicit military role in border security. While the 2012 strategy had discussed migration within a human security framework, the 2021 version framed migration as a military challenge. The strategy linked mass migration to national security risks, stating that the Hungarian military must be prepared to support law enforcement in border protection and crisis response. This shift aligned with the 2020 National Security Strategy, which redefined migration as a primary security concern.

The 2021 strategy also introduced climate change and pandemics as security challenges, integrating lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. The document stated that the military must be prepared to assist in national emergency responses, particularly in cases of public health crises, environmental disasters, and infrastructure collapses. This demonstrated broadening the military's role in domestic security affairs, which was still absent from the 2012 version.

Finally, the 2021 strategy placed unprecedented emphasis on modern military technologies, including autonomous weapons, drone warfare, space-based systems, and artificial intelligence (AI) in defence. The document noted that future conflicts would likely involve automated and high-precision warfare, requiring Hungary to adapt its military doctrine accordingly. The focus on technological innovation aligned with the broader NATO and EU defence modernisation efforts, but it also highlighted Hungary's desire to reduce dependence on foreign suppliers by developing its military-industrial base. This is underlined by the overall governmental desire to invite foreign weapons manufacturers and co-develop weapons systems with them for both domestic and international production. As per our evaluation, this also underlines the desire for strategic autonomy. Per the view presented in Table 1, a similar comparison table was also assembled in Table 2 to highlight the key shifts.

Table no. 2: Comparison of 2012 and 2021 National Military Strategies of Hungary. (Concatenated by the author)

Aspect	2012 National Military Strategy	2021 National Military Strategy	Key Changes
Security Approach	NATO and EU as primary pillars, limited self-reliance	NATO remains central, but there is a strong focus on national defence autonomy	Greater emphasis on self-reliance and independent deterrence capabilities
Hybrid Warfare (including cyber)	Minor concern	Major priority: addressing foreign interference and cyber threats	Recognition of Russian and Chinese cyber influence
Migration & Border Security	The human security aspect emphasised	Military role in border defence expanded	Hardened stance on migration as a security issue
Defence Modernization	Limited budget	slow modernisation	Major rearmament and military-industrial development
Pandemics & Climate Change	Not a focus	Explicit recognition of pandemics and climate risks	COVID-19 impact integrated
Energy Security	Dependence on foreign supplies is seen as a vulnerability	Linked to geopolitical risks and military strategy	More explicit concern over Russian influence

4.5. Legal Framework and Updates to the Operational Model of the Hungarian Army

The legal changes affecting the Hungarian army stem from modifications to the Fundamental Law of Hungary (Constitution of Hungary – Alaptörvény) and the 2021 Defence Acts. These legislative amendments aim to enhance the country's defence administration, ensuring a more structured and centralised approach to military and national security matters. The Fundamental Law of Hungary, particularly through its ninth amendment, reorganised the legal framework for states of emergency and special legal orders. It distinguishes between three states of emergency: state of war, state of emergency, and state of danger. This change was designed to streamline governmental responses in crises and to clarify the distribution of authority among state institutions. The legal modifications also emphasise that national defence is not solely the responsibility of the military but a collective duty of all Hungarian citizens.

The 2021 Defence and Security Coordination Act (The Government of Hungary 2021) was introduced to modernise and synchronise Hungary's defence and security measures. This act defines the scope of defence administration as an integrated system that involves not only military and law enforcement agencies but also various governmental institutions and civil sectors. The law establishes a centralised defence administration body, ensuring that crisis response measures are executed efficiently and proportionately to the threat level. It also integrates Hungary's defence strategy with its international commitments, particularly within NATO.

The 2021 Act on national defence and the Hungarian Armed Forces (The Government of Hungary 2021), which governs the Hungarian Defence Forces, underwent significant changes. One of the most notable reforms is that operational control of the military was transferred from Parliament to the Government, effectively placing the Hungarian Defence Forces under direct executive control.

The act specifies the role of the President of Hungary as the Supreme Commander of the military, while the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Defence hold operational authority. This shift reflects a broader effort to centralise military decision-making within the government, enabling a more rapid and coordinated response to crises.

In addition to restructuring command authority, the legal changes introduced a more comprehensive mobilisation framework. The legislation defines the responsibilities of civilian organisations, local governments, and private entities in supporting defence efforts during emergencies. It mandates national defence education programs, the development of cybersecurity capabilities, and the establishment of military-related research initiatives. A particularly significant amendment is the enhancement of Hungary's military preparedness. The new legal framework allows for the expansion of military forces, including the recruitment of volunteer and reserve units. It also introduces clearer procedures for emergency military deployments, both domestically and abroad. In the case of unexpected attacks or security threats, the government now has greater flexibility to deploy military assets without requiring prior parliamentary approval. Further provisions address Hungary's international defence obligations, reaffirming the country's participation in NATO operations, international peacekeeping missions, and joint defence initiatives. The legal basis for foreign troop movements within Hungarian territory has also been clarified, granting the government broader discretion in approving allied military operations on Hungarian soil. Finally, the legislation incorporates measures for protecting national security infrastructure, including critical energy resources, communication networks, and transportation hubs. It reinforces the military's role in safeguarding Hungary's borders in the event of mass migration or other security threats.

In summary, the legal changes affecting the Hungarian Armed Forces are characterised by a shift toward stronger central control over military operations, enhanced emergency preparedness, greater civilian involvement in defence efforts, and a streamlined legal framework for crisis management. These reforms reflect Hungary's strategic focus on rapid response, cybersecurity, and alignment with NATO's defence objectives while simultaneously reinforcing the military's role in safeguarding national sovereignty. The legal changes pave the way for the military to be involved in handling non-conventional threats as well and make sure that the military has the legal capability to react to the threats outlined in the National Security Strategy of 2020. This can be regarded as a360-degree approach to security.

4.6. Semi-Governmental Documents

In addition, as outlined at the beginning of Chapter 4, besides the official government documents, we can observe the trickling down of alternative policy directives onto the governmental policy level. We can sometimes even witness these non-official sources overwriting the main government policy recommendations on the practical level of foreign and security policy. Balázs Orbán, advisor to PM Viktor Orbán is an important figure in Hungarian politics, who has written such books about the general direction of Hungarian foreign policy and Hungary's strategic interests. Balázs Orbán's primary position is Political Director to the Prime Minister. In this capacity, he advises Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on political, social, economic, and public policy matters, and he coordinates the work of the Prime Minister's advisers and assists in decision-making processes. Since April 25, 2023, he has been appointed to oversee the Institute of International Affairs, which supports strategic decision-making in Hungarian foreign policy, additionally he is chairman of the Advisory Board of the National University of Public Service since 2018, and he is also chairman of the Board of Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) since July 2020, which is Hungary's biggest think tank and an unofficial education centre for replenishing the Fidesz party's elite. These roles collectively position Balázs Orbán as a key figure in shaping Hungarian government strategy, foreign policy, and public administration education, and as such, his impact should not be underestimated.

He has released two books about the modern Hungarian national strategy: *The Hungarian Way of Strategy (2021)* (Orbán, A magyar stratégiai gondolkodás egyszeregye 2020) and *Hussar Cut:*

The Hungarian Strategy for Connectivity (2023) (Orbán, Huszárvágás: A konnektivitás magyar stratégiája 2023). Both books, while not being written from a scientific perspective, provide insight into Hungarian politics, geopolitical strategy, and the government's vision for the country's role in the international arena. They offer a perspective on Hungary's approach to navigating global challenges while maintaining its national identity and interests. The first book, *The Hungarian Way of Strategy* tries to explain how the country's unique geography and history shape national policy and advocates for governance based on national history and values. One of those values is, of course, sovereignty, and the biggest threat is migration. The book states that the mission of the modern Hungarian state is to find the balance between concepts described as *Western modernisation* and the so-called *Eastern nomadic desire for freedom.* The book essentially suggests that Hungary's role is to connect the political and economic blocks of East and West, thus re-discovering the *bridge* concept that determined the foreign policy ambitions of Slovakia's Mečiar government in the 1990s and that of Belarus under the early presidencies of Lukashenka. The second book, *The Hungarian Strategy for Connectivity*, explores Hungary's role and place in the new global landscape and amid a changing geopolitical world order, where the concept of a *hussar cut* – a swift, well-executed, professional strike – is a metaphor for Hungary's strategic approach. This book outlines Hungary's strategy of connectivity to mitigate the effects of geopolitical confrontations. The goal is described as avoiding to become a periphery of one singular geopolitical superblock; instead, the author proposes simultaneously retaining economic and political manoeuvrability with multiple forming or solidified geopolitical spheres. In IR terms, the hussar cut practically means hedging – a strategic approach that involves balancing between competitive and cooperative policies to manage uncertainties in global power distribution. It is considered an intermediate strategy, neither fully aligning with nor opposing major powers, allowing states to maintain strategic autonomy. Unlike strict bandwagoning (aligning with a dominant power) or balancing (actively countering a threat), hedging keeps options open. States engage diplomatically, economically, and militarily with multiple great powers to avoid overdependence on one. Governments may engage in security cooperation with one power while simultaneously strengthening ties with their rivals. The eventual goal is to reduce vulnerabilities by preparing for multiple future scenarios (Pujol 2024). The strategic cooperation with a rival power is underlined by Hungary's Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó, having participated and also held a presentation at the Minsk Conference on Eurasian Security in Belarus. The event is seen as a rival to the Munich Security Conference, according to the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) (Körömi 2024). Mostly, Southeast Asian States (e.g., Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia) adopted the doctrine of hedging, maintaining economic ties with China while also deepening security relations with the United States to prevent over-reliance on either, but India's foreign policy and Turkey's under Erdoğan also have elements of hedging. The practical behaviour of Hungarian diplomacy seems to indicate that the general principles outlined in the two books aforementioned are more characteristic of the Hungarian foreign policy than those expressed in the National Security Strategy.

Conclusions

Hungary's transition from a security consumer to a more strategically autonomous defence actor reflects broader geopolitical shifts and domestic recalibrations in its national security outlook. Initially content with the Alliance's collective security guarantees, Hungary has since recognised the need to enhance its own military capabilities, navigate hybrid threats, and assert greater strategic flexibility. This shift, while aligning with broader NATO objectives, also demonstrates Hungary's ambition to balance its alliance commitments with national sovereignty. Key policy documents – such as the National Security Strategies of 2012 and 2020 and the National Military Strategies of 2012 and 2021 – illustrate a gradual but significant departure from an overreliance on multilateral security structures towards a more self-reliant, proactive defence posture. The Zrínyi 2026 modernisation program has played a central role in this evolution, continuously equipping Hungary's armed forces

with more advanced capabilities, expanding domestic arms production, and reinforcing deterrence measures. Hungary's strategic autonomy can be interpreted as a general increase of available modern, versatile military equipment, departure from the Alliance's general outlines for strategic objectives and the nurturing of the expansion of domestic military-industrial complexes. However, Hungary's defence policy remains shaped by complex geopolitical realities. While reinforcing its role within the Alliance through troop contributions, military modernisation, and strategic partnerships, Hungary has simultaneously sought to maintain strong economic and political engagements with Russia and China. This dual-track approach highlights the balancing act Budapest is pursuing – leveraging institutional membership in NATO and the EU, while cultivating alternative security and economic relationships outside the Western bloc. However, this transactional hedging behaviour is increasingly seen as a betrayal of the primary, already established Western order, thus undermining the very concept of *hedging*, which lies in maintaining balanced relations with all influential actors, not just the challengers to the primary one. While the overall increase in the defence budget and the nature of the evolving capabilities align with the overall strategic objectives of the Alliance in Central and Eastern Europe, Hungary's dual-track game can undermine overall credibility of the Alliance and can alienate Hungary from the other members of the Alliance, damaging its reputation along the way. Overall, this uncertainty, generally inherent in Hungary's divergent behaviour disrupts a synchronised Alliance response in the region, posing an acute challenge.

Moving forward, Hungary's ability to sustain this evolving defence posture will depend on several factors: its capacity to maintain military investment, its ability to navigate internal and external political pressures, and its management of strategic relationships with both allies and competitors. As the Alliance faces mounting global security challenges, Hungary's defence trajectory will serve as a case study in how mid-sized states seek to reconcile alliance obligations with national strategic autonomy in an increasingly multipolar world.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

—. 2012. *Government Resolution 1035/2012 (21st February) on Hungary's National Security Strategy*. https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/f/49/70000/1035_2012_korm_hatarozat.pdf.

—. 2012. *Government Resolution 1656/2012*. https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2012-1656-30-22.

—. 2020. *Government Resolution 1163/2020. (IV. 21.) on Hungary's National Security Strategy*. https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=A20H1163.KOR&txtreferer=00000001.

—. 2021. *2021. évi XCIII. törvény a védelmi és biztonsági tevékenységek összehangolásáról.* https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2100093.tv.

—. 2021. *Government Resolution 1393/2021. (VI. 24.)*. https://njt.hu/jogszabaly/2021-1393-30-22.

—. 2023. *Huszárvágás: A konnektivitás magyar stratégiája*. Budapest: MCC Press Kft.

2019. *FM: Hungary Will Increase Number of Troops Serving in NATO Missions by a Third*. 11 21. https://abouthungary.hu/news-in-brief/fm-hungary-will-increase-number-of-troops-serving-in-nato-missions-by-a-third.

2023. *Hungary Participated in NATO's Largest International Cyber Defence Exercise in This Year as Well*. 05 08. https://defence.hu/news/hungary-participated-in-nato-s-largest-international-cyber-defence-exercise-in-this-year-as-well.html.

András Bozóki, Dániel Hegedűs. 2021. „The Rise of Authoritarianism in the European Union : A Hybrid Regime in Hungary." In *The Condition of Democracy*, szerző: Hannah Wolf, Bryan S. Turner Jürgen Mackert, 143-165. Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge.

Arató, László. 2024. *Az EU Igen, Magyarország nem tud szabadulni az orosz energiától.* 05 17. https://hang.hu/eu/az-eu-igen-magyarorszag-nem-tud-szabadulni-az-orosz-energiatol-164159.

Balogh, Olivér. 2019. „The Importance of the Zrínyi 2026 Defence and Military Development Program." *Vojenské rozhledy* 55-70.

Batory, Agnes. 2002. *The Political Context of EU Accession in Hungary*. November. https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Europe/hungarian.pdf.

Berzsenyi, Dániel, and Tamás [editors] Csiki. 2014. *15 év – 15 hang: Vélemények Magyarország 15 éves NATO-tagságának eredményeiről.* https://www.nemzetesbiztonsag.hu/cikkek/nb_ 2014_6_03_15_ev_15_hang.pdf.

Boyse, Matthew. 2023. *Visegrad 4 Is Limping Along*. August 1. https://www.hudson.org/foreign-policy/visegrad-4-limping-along-matthew-boyse.

Cazalet, Mark. 2023. *Hungary's Modernisation Plans*. May 26. https://euro-sd.com/2023/05/ articles/31349/hungarys-modernisation-plans.

Embassy of Hungary in Washington. 2025. *Hungarian-American Defence and Security Cooperation*. February 1. https://washington.mfa.gov.hu/eng/page/security-relations#:~:text=Hungarian% 20and %20American%20servicemen%20fight,projects%20in%20cooperation%20with%20USAID.

Gönczi, Róbert. 2021. *Hungary in Command – the Importance of the KFOR Mission From Hungarian Perspective*. April 27. https://warsawinstitute.org/hungary-command-importance-kfor-miss ion-hungarian-perspective.

Kerner, Zsolt. 2025. *24.hu*. 02 08. Hozzáférés dátuma: 2025. 05 17. https://24.hu/kulfold/ 2025/02/08/orban-viktor-madrid-patriota-beszed/.

Körömi, Csongor. 2024. *Hungarian FM to Join Russia, Syria and Belarus at Security Summit.* October 29. https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-peter-szijjarto-join-russia-syria-belarus-security-summit/.

Landa, Ronald D. 2017. *Hungary 1956: Reviving the Debate over US (In)action during the Revolution*. May 10. https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/openness-russia-eastern-euro pe/2017-05-10/hungary-1956-reviving-debate-over-us.

Lendvai, Paul. 2012. *Hungary: Between Democracy and Authoritarianism.* Columbia: Columbia University Press.

Müller, Patrick, and Peter Slominski. 2024. *Hungary, the EU and Russia's War Against Ukraine: The Changing Dynamics of EU Foreign Policymaking*. 30 April. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35040-5_6.

Nagy, Dávid. 2023. *Hungarian Defence Forces to Extend Contribution to NATO's Iraqi Mission*. November 23. https://www.hungarianconservative.com/articles/current/hungarian-defence-forces_iraqi-mission_extemsion_proposal.

NATO. 2020. *Hungary Is a Major Contributor to NATO's Collective Security, Says the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee*. July 15. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/ news_ 177222.htm.

Németh, Márton Sándor. 2024. *Az Index Birtokába Jutott a Kutatás, Amely Megmutatja, Mit Gondolnak a Magyarok a Háborúról.* October 18. https://index.hu/belfold/2024/10/17/ kozvelemeny-kutatas-zavecz-research-haboru-oroszorszag-ukrajna-honvedseg-nato-europai-unio.

Office, Hungarian Telegraphic. 2022. *Befejeződött a magyar légierő balti légtérellenőrzési missziója.* December 1. https://www.origo.hu/itthon/2022/12/befejezodott-a-magyar-legiero-balti-leg terellenorzesi-misszioja.

Orbán, Balázs. 2020. *A magyar stratégiai gondolkodás egyszeregye*. Budapest: MCC Press Kft.

Pálos, Máté. 2023. *Egyre Több Az Ázsiai Vendégmunkás Magyarországon, a Kormány Szándékával Egyezően.* May 14. https://g7.hu/adat/20230514/egyre-tobb-az-azsiai-vendegmunkas-magyar orszagon-a-kormany-szandekaval-egyezoen/.

Panyi, Szabolcs. 2022. *Nyugati Szövetségesek Furcsállják Az Orbán-kormány Enyhe Reakcióját a Külügy Orosz Hekkelésére*. July 14. https://www.direkt36.hu/nyugati-szovetsegesek-furcsalljak-az-orban-kormany-enyhe-reakciojat-a-kulugy-orosz-hekkelesere.

Patrick Müller, Peter Slominski. 2023. „Ungarn, Der EU-Rechtstaatlichkeitsmechanismus Und Russlands Krieg Gegen Die Ukraine: Die Politische Geiselnahme Außenpolitischer Entscheidungen." *Integration 46* 259–273.

Pinter, Joseph. 2008. "Democratic Transition in Hungary." *IU South Bend Undergraduate Research Journal 8*, 55-62.

Pujol, Ivan Gonzalez. 2024. *Theorising the Hedging Strategy: National Interests, Objectives, and Mixed Foreign Policy Instruments.* March 5. https://doi.org/10.20991/allazimuth.1480020.

Rogoway, Tyler. 2022. *Tu-141 "Strizh" Missile-Like Drone From the War in Ukraine Looks to Have Crashed in Croatia (Updated).* March 11. https://www.twz.com/44697/ukrainian-tu-141-strizh-missile-like-drone-appears-to-have-crashed-in-croatia.

Sadecki, Andrzej, and Tadeusz Iwański. 2018. *Ukraine–Hungary: The Intensifying Dispute over the Hungarian Minority's Rights.* 1 August. http://aei.pitt.edu/94360/.

Security, Transparency International Defence &. 2021. *Hungary: Government Defence Integrity Index 2020.* November. https://ti-defence.org/gdi/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2021/11/Hungary_GDI-2020-Brief.pdf.

Tahirović, Mehmedin. 2024. *The Main Security Challenges and Threats in the Western Balkans and Possible Model for Solving Them in the Process of European Integration.* September 20. https://doi.org/10.33067/se.3.2024.2.

The Government of Hungary. dátum nélk. *2021. évi CXL. törvény a honvédelemről és a Magyar Honvédségről.* https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a2100140.tv.

Varga, Renáta. 2023. *Hungary's Ambivalent Discourse Around Its Geopolitical Positioning.* November 11. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-42253-9_7.

World Bank. 2025. *Military expenditure (% of GDP) – Hungary.* February 11. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?locations=HU.

Yukaruç, Umut. 2024. *The Securitization of Migration in Hungary through Conspiracy Theories.* June 28. https://doi.org/10.25294/auiibfd.1476663.

Zubor, Zalán. 2025. *Orosz Nyelvű Fiókhoz Kapcsolódik Az E-mail Cím, Amelyről Az Iskolai Bombafenyegetéseket Küldték.* January 23. https://atlatszo.hu/kozugy/2025/01/23/orosz-nyelvu-fiokhoz-kapcsolodik-az-az-email-cim-amelyrol-az-iskolai-bombafenyegeteseket-kuldtek.

Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies &
Interdisciplinary Doctoral School,
"Carol I" National Defence University

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-04

THE NEW NATO POLICY ON RESERVES. A ROMANIAN PROJECT TO IMPLEMENT IT

Crăișor-Constantin IONIȚĂ, Brig. Gen. (Ret.), PhD,
Researcher, Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies,
"Carol I" National Defence University, Bucharest, Romania.
E-mail: ionita.constantin@unap.ro

Elena-Adriana BRUMARU, PhD Candidate,
"Alexandru cel Bun" Moldavian Military Academy,
Chișinău, Republic of Moldova. E-mail: brumaru_adriana@yahoo.com

"The reservist is twice the citizen"
Sir Winston Churchill

Abstract: *Being under the influence and lessons identified from the existing conventional war in Ukraine, NATO came back to Collective Defense operations, bringing them into a new era of Article 5 that makes the Alliance to become ready today to face tomorrow's challenges.*

The new focus on deterrence and defense to safeguard the freedom and security of Allies within 360-degre approach, as it is described in the respective concept for the Euro-Atlantic area (DDA), approved in 2020, necessitates two very important aspects. The first one concerns an adjusted balance between robust in-place forces and reinforcements to strengthen deterrence and the Alliance's ability to defend. The second is related to build national and Alliance-wide resilience as a national responsibility and a collective commitment. Both aspects involve the existence of robust reserves and reserve forces with vital role played in NATO's defense and deterrence, as well as in the whole spectrum of national and NATO's defense structures.

This is why NATO has revised its policy on reserves (MC 0441/3 FINAL) at the end of 2024 to highlight their societal, operational and transformative value. Even being considered as a national responsibility and prerogative, the Alliance is keen to support the development of reserves through a whole-of-society perspective and to enhance their utilization in contributing to NATO's core tasks, operations and missions. By following this new policy, all Allies, including Romania, should take all necessary measures to increase the level and importance of reserves and reserve forces inside their Armed Forces.

Keywords: *Reserve policy; reserve forces; Voluntary Reserve; whole-of-society; resilience; human resource.*

Introduction

Understanding the importance of reserves[1] and reserve forces[2] as one of the lessons identified from the Russia – Ukraine War regarding the human factor, at mid-2024 the Alliance started to revitalize their role and missions in being utilized in NATO-led operations. In this respect, it was created a *'Tiger Team'* at the International Military Staff (IMS) level, under the lead of IMS Policy and Capabilities Division (IMS P&C), involving Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) from the Military Committee, the two Strategic Commands, the National Reserve Forces Committee (NRFC) and the

[1] A.N.: Reserves or reservists are "individuals who have undergone military training and can be called into active service for a set period of time in peace, crisis or conflict. Reservists may join with a background as an ex-regular, an ex-conscript or volunteer" (NATO Military Committee 2024, 2).
[2] A.N.: Reserve Forces are "formed units that are entirely or predominantly staffed by Reservists" (NATO Military Committee 2024, 2).

three Advocacy Reserve Organizations (ARO) - the Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers (CIOR), the Interallied Confederation of Medical Reserve Officers (CIOMR), and the Interallied Confederation of Reserve Non-Commissioned Officers (CISOR).

The idea of reserves' revitalization incorporates also their reorientation to become a part of a more robust force structure with an exceptionally cost-effective balance of human potential, incorporating the whole-of-society approach for NATO and Allies' operations, missions and all type of military activities. This also applies for the Romanian Armed Forces, where the involvement of reservists and the development of reserve forces are in an incipient phase. The whole-of-society approach represents the vital link between the society and military, beneficial for changing the civilian perception of the military, a perception that has been eroding lately.

Therefore, the Romanian Armed Forces should take all necessary measures to catch up with the most evolved Allies in the reserve forces field, including the use of reservists' civilian expertise and their training to become real warriors. There should be no limitations or less efficiency between active forces standards and reserve forces preparedness, because, at the end of their training, reservists would augment/complete some active units to make them fully operational. One such efficient measure is represented by the Guide for Voluntary Reservists, elaborated by the Romanian Reserve Officers Association (ROU AORR).

As a result, this paper highlights what bright ideas bring out the new NATO policy on reserves and how they start to be implemented inside the Alliance. There are some limitations in doing so more effectively, because the responsibility and prerogative of establishing, developing and training those reserves/reserve forces are at each member state level. The scientific method which will be used is the evaluation of available database and information, followed by a multidimensional analysis of the importance and influence of the policy in changing the political and military mentality on utilizing reserves to conduct operations and strengthen the national resilience. In the third section of the paper, an example on how ROU AORR could contribute to reservists' preparedness is presented in a form of a quite new tool that can be used by the Romanian Armed Forces to develop such enabling operational resources.

1. NATO's New Policy on Reserves

The thorough analysis of the Russia – Ukraine War regarding its long duration, as well as the rapid changes of its conduct and the situation in the operating environment, provided the Allied military leaders with several identified lessons. One of them refers to the human factor and the use of human resources, including reserve forces.

By considering this lesson identified on the importance and the use of human resources in the war, the NATO Military Committee decided to revitalize the way in which reserves and reserve forces are involved in NATO-led operations in the near future. It was also important to revise all existing MC documents related to the framework policy on reserves (MC 0441/2 from 13 March 2012) and its linked organizations with advisory roles in NATO (MC 0392/1 from 27 July 2012 for NRFC and MC 0248/2 from 27 July 2012 for CIOR).

The entire work to review the above mentioned documents and establish a new Allied policy for reserves took almost half a year and involved SMEs and civil – military experts from almost all IMS divisions, the two Strategic Commands, NRFC, CIOR[3] and its member associations. In this respect, the Association for Reserve Officers from Romania (AORR) was directly involved in the process by providing data and information regarding the mobilization process and the use of reservists in the Romanian Armed Forces in coordination with the Defense Staff.

The Aim of the new NATO policy on reserve, as it is mentioned in the MC 0441/3 FINAL from 11 October 2024, was to provide a collective vision on the future use of reserves/reserve forces (R/RF) for the Alliance's core tasks, operations, missions and activities with an enhanced efficiency

[3] CIOR was the representative and advocate of the other two specialised Confederations of reservists agreed by NATO – the Interallied Confederation of Medical Reserve Officers (CIOMR) and the Interallied Confederation of Non-Commissioned Officers (CISOR).

and a declared focus on the collective defense[4] (NATO Military Committee 2024, 2). In this respect, the NATO Secretary General, Mr. Mark Rutte, highlights the huge role played by the reserve forces as part of NATO's defense and deterrence, considering the fact that they represent a vital pillar of the collective defense because they comprise over half of the military strength of the Allies' wartime forces (NATO Press Release 2025 1).

At the same time, the Chair of the Military Committee, Admiral Cavo Dragone, mentions the important specialist roles of reserve forces in enhancing the national and collective resilience, because they play an important role in the whole spectrum of national and NATO's defense structures (NATO Press Release 2025 2).

Another important aspect of the new Policy concerns NATO Vision on reserves, which implies suitably trained and qualified reserves that enhance Allies' and the Alliance's ability to deliver the three core tasks through contributing to the workforce requirements of a Multi-Domain enabled Alliance. This vision was influenced by the CIOR vision of the interaction between MC and entities dealing with reserve matters (see Figure no. 1) and reflects the 'Whole-of-Society' approach. According to this Vision, "reserves can act as an important resource to foster innovation, enhance partnerships, attract and retain specialized talent and improve decision-making. Allies and the Alliance may, with the increased utilization of reserves, be able to mitigate shortfalls and bridge strategic and qualitative requirements such as capability gaps, navigating normally lengthy development and procurement processes, allowing for faster adaptation and thus maintaining a competitive edge. In addition, Reserves contribute to a whole-of-society approach by strengthening the civilian – military links and enhancing societal resilience" (NATO Military Committee 2024, 4).

It is well-known and truly recognized that NATO does not have or control its own reserve forces. Therefore, in this domain the Military Committee relays on active military's expertise as members of the new established NATO Committee on Reserves (NCR)[5], which focuses on military policy and concepts. It also collaborates with CIOR, CIOMR and CISOR, known as Advocacy Reserve Organizations (ARO). The whole idea behind this collaborative team work includes advising the Military Committee as well as training and educating interallied reservists. In conjunction these entities cooperate to harmonize their respective programs and projects to further NATO's mission of deterrence and defense.

[4] The Policy is "reflective of and aligned with the NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO Military Strategy and key concepts such as the Alliance Concept on Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA), NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC), and the Alliance Concept for Multi-Domain Operations (MDO)" (NATO Military Committee 2024, 3).

[5] Former National Reserve Forces Committee (NRFC)

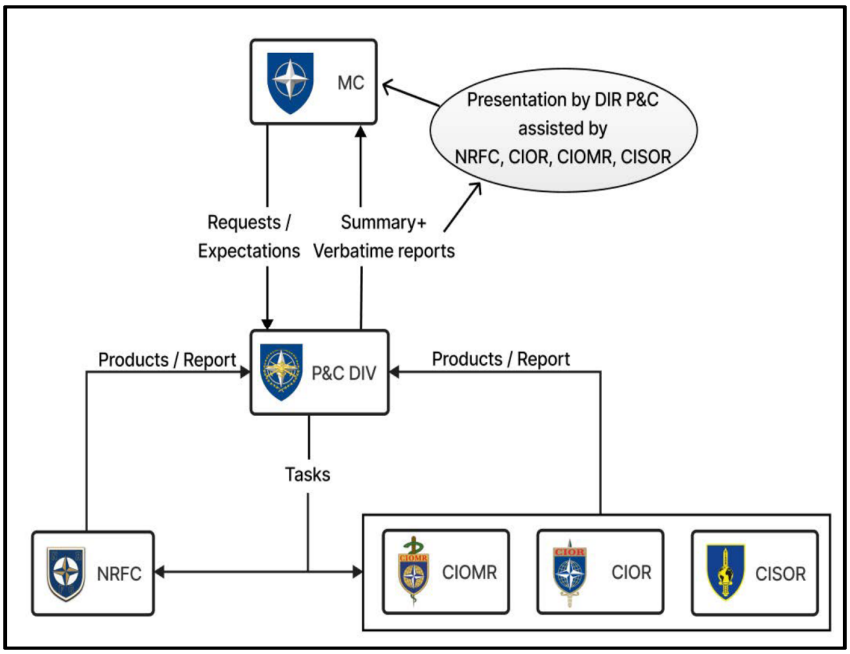


Figure no. 1: NATO Vision for Reserves (Luman 2024)

2. The Implementation of the Reserve Policy at the Alliance Level

As threats to global security evolved, so did the role of reserve forces in the Alliance. This is why the implementation of the new approved Policy is considered a major challenge for the Alliance and a 'must immediately do' thing, as soon as possible. In this respect, NATO and Allies already conducted some actions and planed additional activities in the near future to achieve the desired effects.

One important action was represented by the *'2025 Plenary Meeting for Reserves'* that was conducted at the HQ NATO in Brussels, on 29 January 2025. This meeting was supported by a Science and Technology Organization's activity called *'Research Workshop on Reserves (STO HFM-390)'*[6], which was concluded also in Brussels, between 27-29 January 2025. Both events emphasized the importance of sharing best practices and adapting priorities to align with NATO's evolving needs, particularly in areas such as Multi Domain Operations and Civil-Military engagement. With reservists comprising a significant portion of national forces in some NATO countries, the exchange of ideas and lessons learned becomes increasingly valuable, highlighting the crucial role of the Policy in fostering collaboration and innovation within the Alliance to implement its framework.

There are several important takeaways that emerged from the two combined events. The first one is about the idea that reservists combine a civilian career with a military function and therefore play a crucial role in building bridges between military and non-military personnel across the Alliance, at a time when NATO must adopt a wartime mindset, as it was recently mentioned by Mr. Mark Rutte (NATO Press Release 2025 1).

If in the past the reserves' main role was to be available to fight as soon as there is the need to mobilize forces, making them an indispensable part of the Alliance's security, the new Allied approach becomes more demanding, combining their essential role for ensuring NATO and Allies' capability to deter and defend with the one of consolidating individual and collective resilience and the technological advantage. As per many historical examples (including COVID-19 and the Los Angeles wildfires), reservists demonstrate they are critical in aiding society in times of great needs

[6] The Research Workshop on Reserve event with the subject *"Reserve Forces: Challenges and Relevance to NATO and National Security"* is part of a larger project of the NATO Science and Technology Organization (STO), which started on 1 September 2024 and should be finished towards the end of 2025 (NATO STO Team 2025).

and have a dual role of citizens and soldiers, acting as conduit between the military and the private sector (NATO Press Release 2025 2).

The organization, composition, mission, and training levels of reserve forces vary widely across the Alliance. However, the Allies' reserve forces have a lot of things in common. This commonality was highlighted by the Chair of the NATO Committee on Reserves (NCR), Brigadier General Charlotte Wetche, during the Plenary Meeting, when he mentioned two very important aspects of this commonality. The first one was about the important role they play in the whole spectrum of national and NATO defense structures, because during a crisis situation they would be required to take up positions and carry out tasks alongside regular forces. Therefore, reserves are no longer considered to be the forces of the last resort; rather, they are now recognized as indispensable. Another significant commonality most reserve forces throughout NATO share is the challenge to recruit and retain talent. "Further, the general change in the global security environment has sparked a renewed focus on reserve forces and how they can be governed" (ACT Team 2024).

The Plenary Meeting brought together four groups: NCR, CIOR, CIOMR and CISOR. The multifaceted plenary meeting included briefings, topical discussions, and syndicate work. A major focus of this year's meeting was NATO's new Reserves policy, which was adopted in November 2024. The new policy is aimed at cementing the promotion of Reserves in contribution to NATO's core tasks, operations, missions and activities.

At the same time, the Scientific Research Workshop on Reserves brought into attention another important aspect of future conflicts – the idea of NATO having enough forces to respond to the renewed threat of mass conventional warfighting.[7] But NATO does not have enough troops to fight Russia and this has been a cruel truth since the end of the Second World War. This is the reason for which the Alliance plans to train NATO's new 300,000-troop, as part of its NFM, including the Allied Response Force (ARF), which rely also on reserve forces, as a key component of any NATO large scale response. This is quite true because there is evidence about an already participation of reserves with 30-40 percent at some NATO exercises and operations, which is in line with NATO's attempting to make its formations increasingly interoperable and multinational by integrating reserve capabilities (Dalzell and Cormarie 2024).

Not of a lesser importance is the attempt of CIOR to establish its Strategic Concept following the new NATO Policy on Reserve and what are the main responsibilities of the organization and nations in increasing the dual use of reserves and reserve forces and development of professional capabilities of Military-Civil nature that could be deployed in a military or civil context. With the intent to become a NATO-integrated partner, this document is to reflect the CIOR Vision 2028 and is under development.

3. Case Study – The Proposed Guide for Volunteer Reservists

Due to recent changes in the physiognomy of conflicts, there are multiple and complex factors that characterize it now, including new political-economic and strategic insecurity situations, 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 and aggression (Brumaru și Ionita 2024, 30). For mitigating those challenges and understanding the importance of reserves and reserve forces as one of the lessons identified from the Russia–Ukraine War, NATO started to revitalize their role and missions within NATO-led operations in mid-2024 and succeed to propose robust reserves in accordance with its five principles[8] that set out their benefits in terms of military capabilities and civilian skillset in a 'Whole-of-Society' approach.

[7] The renewed idea of NATO facing mass conventional warfighting was sustained by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, where reserve forces were used on large scale by the two belligerents, as well as the rapid mass mobilization of the Israeli reserve forces after 10 October 2023.

[8] According to the new NATO Policy on Reserve, nations are encouraged to build and maintain national reserve systems based on five principles: augment deterrence and defense; enhance interoperability; enable strategic depth; support crisis response; and enhance societal resilience and Alliance cohesion (NATO Military Committee 2024, 7).

The Romanian Armed Forces are in the early stages of integrating reservists into national defense strategies. The whole-of-society approach is key to bridging the gap between civilians and the military, improving the public perception of the Armed Forces, and ensuring the operational readiness of reservists. One of the effective measures in this regard is the '*Guide for Voluntary Reservists'*, developed by the Association of Reserve Officers from Romania (AORR) with the aim to enhance the preparedness and efficiency of reserve forces (Brumaru și Ionita 2024).

In the current geopolitical context, being characterized by rapid and unpredictable dynamics, strengthening reserve forces becomes a strategic necessity and remains a national responsibility and prerogative. In this regard, the 'Voluntary Reservist's Guide' serves as an essential tool for those who wish to actively contribute to national defense. Developed by the Romanian Reserve Officers Association (ROU AORR), as part of CIOR, this guide reflects contemporary requirements for training and integrating voluntary reservists, in accordance with MC 0441/3 and the Defense Staff's regulations *SMAp 76/2019* and *SMAp 40/2023*.

The training of voluntary reservists is a fundamental element of societal resilience and national security and it is well established by the new NATO Policy on Reserves. According to recent studies, the effective integration of civilians into defense structures significantly enhances a nation's responsiveness to emerging threats (Smith 2020). In this sense, the guide is structured into two fundamental modules (see Figure no. 2):

- *Module 1: Basic Military Knowledge* – provides information on the organization of armed forces, military discipline, rights and obligations, psychological and physical training, survival techniques, and the use of essential equipment.
- *Module 2: Training and Conduct of Military Actions* – focuses on the application of acquired knowledge, including weaponry, military tactics, hybrid warfare, and operational strategies.

The guide is designed to allow the progressive accumulation of knowledge and optimize centralized training time. On the first day of the 15-day training period, reservists will take theoretical knowledge verification tests, thus facilitating an objective assessment of progress (Jones 2018).

Additionally, the guide contains self-assessment questionnaires designed to support the continuous development of individual competencies.

Figure no. 2: The Voluntary Reservists' Guide (ROU AORR 2024)

The structure of this very practical military guide comprises the followings:

1. *Module 1: Basic Military Knowledge:*
   - Organization of the Romanian Armed Forces and NATO;
   - Military discipline rules;
   - Psychological and physical preparedness;
   - Survival and orientation techniques;

- First aid and CBRN protection elements;
- Mobile applications and useful resources.

2. *Module 2: Training and Conduct of Military Actions:*
   - Familiarization with weaponry and equipment;
   - Operational strategies and tactical scenarios;
   - Defense against drones and cyber threats;
   - Application of hybrid warfare concepts;
   - Standardized document models and procedures.

In order to facilitate the learning and training process, the Guide will be available in both printed and online formats, on a dedicated platform for voluntary reservists. Flexible access to training materials allows for the deepening of knowledge outside the official training period (Brown 2017). At the end of the Guide, reservists will have the opportunity to complete a satisfaction and improvement questionnaire, thus contributing to the continuous enhancement of the content.

Conclusions

Despite the fact that all issues related to reserves are a national responsibility and prerogative, the revitalization of reserves and reserve forces is vital for the Alliance's deterrence and defense to face all new threats and risks of the 21st Century and beyond 360-degrees. Therefore, its new policy on reserves, approved in October 2024, is a reflection of all Allied strategic documents elaborated after 2022 and represents a major tool in ensuring the implementation of the new elaborated and agreed DDA Family of Plans (FoP), as well as the new NATO Force Model (NFM). In this idea, the reserves can help mitigating the potential luck of suitable trained and readily available military workforce for the full range of NATO operations, missions and activities.

In the last years, the significance of reservists within Allied Armed Forces started to increase considerably. They not only help bridge workforce gaps, but also foster stronger connections between civil society and the military. Additionally, they bring invaluable expertise in niche areas, such as Information Technology, Cyber, Logistics, Human Resources, Finance, and Medical, in order to enhance military capabilities.

Unfortunately, there are some difficult limitations in the 'Whole-of-Society' approach for the Alliance's deterrence and defense task, as well as for many Allies' 'Whole Force' model of their Armed Forces (an integrated blend of active, including conscripts, reserve, defense civilian and contracted personnel). These limitations refer to the demographic crisis and the falling unemployment rates in the Western world (especially in Europe and the US) that hinder the recruitment and retaining process and make it more difficult, both for active duty and reserves. Both limitations are amplified by the shrinking pool of recruits and volunteers who meet the military recruitment standards because of fitness, mental illness, or past criminal activity. The difficulty of hitting recruiting number of Armed Forces, including reservists, could be transformed into a real vulnerability in the near future.

At present, the Romanian Armed Forces' reserve forces face several challenges, including consistent decline, political and military neglect, and an undersized structure compared to other NATO members. The difficulty in leveraging the reserve force for defense, combined with the inefficient use of volunteer participation, poses a risk to internal security and national defense objectives. Urgent measures are needed to revitalize and enhance these reserve forces to ensure sustainable military capabilities. The implementation of structured guides, such as the 'Guide for Voluntary Reservists', represents an essential step toward addressing these issues and fostering a robust reserve force. Another AORR project is to develop a platform to support the recruitment, training and preparedness process of the Minister of National Defense for volunteer reservists.

The two above mentioned projects represent the deep implication of ROU AORR to support the Romanian Armed Forces in implementing the new NATO Policy on Reserve, especially by preparing the Voluntary Reserve Corps to understand and be used to actively participate in the national and collective defense. Their increasing role as both warriors and supporters of the societal

resilience should be well introduced in the future military strategies and doctrines in order to bring to bear the whole-of-society approach for national defense.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

ACT Team. 2024. "Reserve Forces Unite: Key Takeaways from NATO's Winter Meeting in Washington, D.C." *https://www.act.nato.int.* 02 08. Accessed 02 06, 2025. https://www.act.nato.int/article/nato-reserve-forces-winter-meeting-dc/.

Brown, Michael. 2017. "Modern Military Training Strategies." New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Dalzell, Stephen, and Paul Cormarie. 2024. "Better Than the Sum of Its Parts: Making NATO Reserves an Alliance Resource." *RAND*, 06 24. Accessed 02 06, 2025. https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/06/better-than-the-sum-of-its-parts-making-nato-reserves.html.

Brumaru, Adriana, and Craisor-Constantin Ionita. 2024. "Analysing Reserve Forces as an Enabler Factor for Active Military." The Complex and Dynamic Nature of the Security Environment. Bucharest: 'Carol I' National Defence University. 27-36.

Jones, Richard, and Taylor, Susan. 2018. "The Role of Reserve Forces in National Defense." *London: Cambridge University Press.*

Luman, Toomas, LTC. 2024. "Memo no 22." Reserve Forces in NATO countries and the renewal on NATO Reserve Forces Policy. Interallied Confederation of Reserve Officers, 05 26.

NATO Military Committee. 2024. *Final Decision on MC 0441/3 NATO Policy on Reserves.* Brussels: North Atlantic Military Committee.

NATO Press Release. 2025 2. "NATO Reserves are "Indispensable" says Chair of NATO Military Committee." *www.nato.int.* 01 29. Accessed 02 05, 2025. https://www.nato.int/ cps/en/ natohq/news_232613.htm.

NATO Press Release. 2025 1. "NATO Secretary General commends reservists: "People can sleep easy knowing you stand ready"." *www.nato.int.* 01 29. Accessed 02 05, 2025. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_232660.htm?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=NATO%20Update%20-%20week%205&utm_content=NATO%20Update%20-%20week%205+CID_604b514327f4f5cf27ec5b957d64ce47&utm_source=Email%20marketing%20software&utm_term=NATO%20Secretary%2.

NATO STO Team. 2025. *www.sto.nato.int.* 02 05. Accessed 02 06, 2025. https://www.sto.nato.int/search/Pages/activities_results.aspx?k=Reserach Workshop o Reserves&s=Search Activities.

ROU AORR. 2024. Voluntary Reserve's Guide. Bucharest: ROU AORR.

Smith, Andrew. 2020. "Resilience and National Security: The Role of Civilian Integration." *Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.*

Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies &
Interdisciplinary Doctoral School,
"Carol I" National Defence University

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-05

CHALLENGES OF ILLEGAL MIGRATION IN THE CONTEXT OF ROMANIA'S ACCESSION TO THE SCHENGEN AREA

Emanuel Sebastian GEORGESCU, PhD Candidate,
"Carol I" National Defence University, Bucharest, Romania.
E-mail: sebastian.georgescu13@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Romania's accession to the Schengen Area presents significant opportunities and challenges, particularly regarding the management of illegal migration. The elimination of internal border controls within the EU could increase migration flows and facilitate the operations of smuggling networks. Secondary migration, involving migrants relocating to other Schengen countries through illicit means, emerges as a critical concern. Romania's borders with Serbia, Ukraine, and Moldova are highlighted as vulnerable points requiring advanced security measures, including UAVs, thermal imaging, and motion sensors. Enhanced cooperation with neighboring countries and European agencies like FRONTEX, Europol, and Eurojust is essential to address these challenges. Romania's strategic role in safeguarding the EU's external borders is underscored, emphasizing the need for modern technologies, international collaboration, and integrated policies. Effective management of migration flows will strengthen both national and EU security, positioning Romania as a model in addressing illegal migration and regional stability.*

Keywords*: Romania; illegal migration; Schengen Area; border security; smuggling network; European Cooperation.*

Introduction

The accession of Romania to the Schengen Area marks a significant milestone, concluding a prolonged process characterized by numerous delays and postponements over the course of nearly 17 years. The end of this process addresses longstanding challenges related to border control procedures, particularly the queues experienced by Romanian citizens during entry and exit, especially during peak travel periods. According to a Eurobarometer survey, 79% of Romanians were in favor of joining the Schengen Area, reflecting high public expectations of a smoother travel experience (European Commission 2018).

As Romania joins Schengen, it is important to note that the country will also be part of a broader network with shared responsibilities for border management, including challenges related to illegal migration. Similar to previous Schengen entrants such as Slovenia and Croatia, Romania may face an increase in migration flows due to its new role as part of the external border of the Schengen Area.

Slovenia recorded a significant increase in illegal migration, after Croatia's accession to the Schengen Area. In 2023, the Slovenian police managed 58,193 cases of illegal entries from Croatia, which represents an 84% increase compared to 2022. Among the most intercepted migrants were Afghans and Moroccans, with the number of Afghan nationals increasing threefold, reaching nearly 18,000, and the number of Moroccans rising from 300 to over 8,800 (ETIAS, 2023).

In Croatia, during the first 10 months of 2023, approximately 63,000 people entered illegally, with the majority coming from Bosnia. This figure represents an increase of more than 70% compared to the same period in the previous year (ETIAS, 2023). Most intercepted migrants in Croatia came from conflict zones or regions of instability, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Morocco. Migrants arriving in Croatia primarily follow routes connecting Bosnia and Croatia, often crossing unsecured

borders or passing through mountainous terrain and forests. These routes have become more frequently used due to the less strict controls in place before Croatia joined Schengen.

According also to FRONTEX's *Risk Analysis for 2023*, countries like Slovenia and Croatia saw an increase in migration flows after their accession to Schengen, with irregular crossings observed at borders with non-Schengen countries (FRONTEX, 2023).

The following hypothesis will be evaluated in this paper: Romania's accession to the Schengen Area will likely result in an initial increase in illegal migration pressures at its external borders, akin to the experiences of Croatia and Slovenia. However, through the implementation of advanced surveillance technologies, enhanced border cooperation, and efficient migration management policies, Romania can mitigate security risks and strengthen the overall resilience of Schengen's external frontiers.

To test this hypothesis, this study will analyze several key reports and documents, including FRONTEX's Annual Risk Analysis for 2023, the European Commission's Migration and Asylum Report 2021, and other relevant materials from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Romanian border authorities. This analysis will focus on trends in illegal migration, Romania's role in managing migration flows, and the effectiveness of its border control measures, particularly in light of Romania's accession to Schengen. The analysis will be qualitative in nature, using a comparative approach to assess Romania's position relative to previous Schengen entrants such as Slovenia and Croatia. Furthermore, this study will examine the extent to which Romania has implemented advanced surveillance technologies and cooperated with neighboring countries to enhance border security.

This research method has several limitations. Firstly, while the reports used are authoritative, they rely on data provided by national authorities and may not fully capture the complexities of illegal migration, especially in terms of unreported crossings or hidden migration routes. Additionally, as Romania has yet to experience full integration into Schengen as of the time of writing, the data available reflects projections and historical trends rather than a comprehensive post-accession analysis. Consequently, the study may be limited by the lack of direct post-accession migration data. Lastly, the comparative analysis with Slovenia and Croatia may not fully account for unique factors affecting Romania, such as its geopolitical situation and specific migration trends.

In Romania's case, reports from FRONTEX and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) show that migration flows have been increasing in recent years, with significant numbers of migrants attempting to transit through the country toward other EU states (FRONTEX, 2023). This indicates that while Romania's accession will bring practical benefits for its citizens, it will also require further enhancement of border management and security measures.

Romania began the accession process immediately after joining the European Union on January 1, 2007. Until December 12, 2024, when Romania received final approval for accession, at least nine JAI sessions took place, during which Romania received negative votes or delays for accession. Although Romania met most of the technical criteria, its accession was postponed multiple times due to concerns about border security and illegal migration. Despite these obstacles, Romania received support from most EU member states but faced resistance from countries such as the Netherlands, Finland, and Austria, which expressed concerns regarding border security and the management of illegal migration.

Finally, on December 12, 2024, the JAI Council in Brussels decided to admit Romania into the Schengen Area, with its land borders joining the Schengen Area on January 1, 2025, while its maritime and air borders were integrated earlier on March 31, 2024.

Certainly, this ambitious project has had and continues to have a significant impact on the mobility of European citizens and the economy. However, it also carries serious security risks, especially after January 1, 2025, when Romania ceases to function as a "buffer state"[1] against illegal

[1] A buffer state in the context of migration refers to a country or region that acts as an intermediary between two or more areas with differing migration patterns, policies, or levels of control. It is typically located between a source of migration

migration. Since 2007, when Romania became a member of the EU, it has played a crucial role in managing migratory flows from the East (particularly from Asia and the Middle East) and the South (North Africa) heading towards Schengen countries. According to the *FRONTEX Annual Risk Analysis 2023*, Romania has been an important transit country for irregular migrants, especially from regions such as Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. In 2022, Romania reported a significant increase in the number of irregular migrants trying to cross its border, with many coming from countries like Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. In 2022, Romanian border authorities detected over 14,500 irregular migrants attempting to cross its borders, representing a 27% increase compared to the previous year (FRONTEX, 2023). Among these migrants, the largest groups originated from Afghanistan (4,200 individuals), Syria (3,800 individuals), and Iraq (2,500 individuals), reflecting the ongoing impact of conflicts in these regions.

The European Commission's 2021 Migration and Asylum Report highlights Romania's significant role in the management of migratory flows from third countries toward the Schengen Area. Romania serves as a strategic crossroads in Eastern Europe, acting as a key intersection for illegal migration routes into the EU. Its strategic position includes both a maritime border along the Black Sea (shared with Bulgaria, 631 km, including the maritime frontier) and extensive land borders with Moldova (681 km), Ukraine (605 km), and Serbia (546 km), making it a vital entry point for migration flows. While migration corridors through the Western Balkans remain active, Romania plays a particularly significant role in routes originating from the Black Sea and Eastern Europe, reinforcing its position as a central hub in the region's migration dynamics. Recent reports highlight the resurgence of illegal migration across the Black Sea, after a period of decline, with Romanian authorities regularly intercepting vessels attempting to reach EU territory. At the same time, its border with Serbia remains a critical checkpoint for secondary movements along the Western Balkans route. This underscores Romania's growing role in managing migration flows and securing the EU's external borders (Euronews România, 2022).

Romania has seen a substantial increase in migratory pressure. In particular, between 2015 and 2022, Romania reported an over 45% rise in migrant arrivals compared to earlier years, with notable spikes during periods of political instability in neighboring countries such as Ukraine and Turkey (European Commission, 2021).

Furthermore, Romania's strategic position along the EU's external border has made it a critical point for secondary migration. The 2023 FRONTEX Annual Report estimates that over 6,000 individuals who initially entered Romania legally under temporary protection were later involved in attempts to continue their journey further into Western Europe, often exploiting gaps in border security (FRONTEX, 2023). This phenomenon of secondary migration is becoming increasingly concerning as it creates additional pressure on Romania's border management systems.

These figures underscore the challenges Romania faces in controlling illegal migration flows, particularly as the country becomes a more attractive transit route following the reintroduction of internal border checks by other Schengen states. As observed in Germany, France, and the Netherlands, the trend of reintroducing internal border controls has been linked to growing concerns about irregular migration and terrorism, which are driving up migration-related risks across the region (Radio Free Europe, 2023; Euronews, 2023).

The *European Commission's 2021 Migration and Asylum Report* notes that Romania has been a key player in the management of migratory flows from third countries towards the Schengen Area. The report highlights Romania's efforts in border control and cooperation with neighboring non-EU

(such as regions experiencing conflict, poverty, or instability) and a destination country or region (often wealthier, more stable, or offering better opportunities). To better illustrate the concept Turkey: Positioned between Europe and conflict zones in the Middle East (e.g., Syria), Turkey serves as a significant buffer state for migrants seeking to enter the European Union. It has been at the center of many EU-Turkey agreements aimed at managing the flow of migrants and refugees. In academic discourse, the role of buffer states is often discussed in terms of migration management, regional security, and human rights. The dynamics of migration flows through buffer states raise important questions about sovereignty, international cooperation, and the ethics of migration control.

countries such as Moldova, Ukraine, and Serbia to combat irregular migration, including the smuggling of migrants. Romania's role has been vital in protecting the EU's external borders. Although it was not yet part of the Schengen Area, Romania implemented stringent measures to secure the EU's external borders and demonstrated strong commitment in combating illegal migration. It efficiently managed its borders with non-EU and non-Schengen countries, including Ukraine and Moldova, and contributed to securing its southern border with Bulgaria and Serbia. These efforts were supported by European agencies like FRONTEX[2] and Europol[3], which cooperated with Romanian authorities to prevent illegal migration routes.

1. Analysis of Risks and Impact on Security

Romania's accession to the Schengen Area, formalized on January 1, 2025, marks a historic moment but brings significant challenges, especially regarding the risks associated with illegal migration. Over the 17 years of delays and negotiations, Romania demonstrated a solid commitment to securing the EU's external borders, managing migratory flows from the East (Asia and the Middle East) and South (North Africa). This commitment has been reflected in several key areas: Romania has invested in advanced technologies for border monitoring, including surveillance systems with drones, thermal cameras, and motion sensors, to prevent illegal migration. Moreover, Romania has actively cooperated with FRONTEX in implementing these measures. Additionally, Romania has strengthened regional and international cooperation, coordinating efforts with neighboring non-EU countries like Ukraine, Moldova, and Serbia to enhance border security and prevent illegal migration. Romania has also contributed to the training and assistance of border forces in these neighboring countries, further strengthening security capacities. Furthermore, Romania's robust internal and legislative policies, aligned with EU regulations, including strict asylum and international protection laws, have played a key role in preventing the entry of illegal migrants into the EU through Romania's borders. However, the removal of internal border controls will transform Romania from a buffer zone state into a direct entry point into the Schengen Area, thus increasing its vulnerability to illegal migration and associated criminal activities.

The major risks include intensified illegal migration routes through Romania, increased pressure on security infrastructure, and difficulties in combating human trafficking and smuggling. There is also the possibility that criminal groups will exploit gaps in the surveillance and control systems at the EU's external borders. In this context, cooperation with European agencies such as

[2] Collaboration on Information Exchange: Through EUROSUR (the European Border Surveillance System), Romania transmitted relevant data to Frontex regarding migration flows at its borders. Frontex used this information to issue alerts about potential increases in migrant traffic at Romania's borders. Surveillance and Control Operations at the Serbia and Ukraine Borders: Frontex provided support by deploying mobile teams that assisted Romanian authorities in monitoring the borders with Serbia and Ukraine. These areas represented potential transit points for migrants following the Western Balkans route. Advanced technical equipment, such as drones and thermal cameras, was made available to detect attempts to illegally cross the border. Assistance in Identifying Forged Documents: At air border crossing points, including airports such as Otopeni, Frontex collaborated with the Border Police to identify migrants using false or forged travel documents. Frontex's Main Focus in 2015: The primary focus of Frontex in 2015 was managing the migration crisis in the Mediterranean. Romania contributed equipment and personnel to the Triton Operation (Mediterranean Sea), which aimed to manage migration flows along the Central Mediterranean route. Romania provided ships and patrol teams to support rescue and migrant identification operations. Likewise, Romanian authorities actively participated in the Poseidon Operation (Aegean Sea), which aimed to monitor maritime routes from Turkey to Greece, a hotspot in the migration crisis.

[3] Support in Investigating Migrant Smuggling Networks: Europol and Romania collaborated to identify and dismantle human trafficking networks using the Western Balkans routes. Joint investigation teams targeted criminal groups organizing the illegal transportation of migrants to Western Europe, with Romania serving as a transit country. Information Exchange: Romania provided crucial data to Europol's European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC), established in 2016, though its activities began in 2015. The data included details about migrant routes and the methods employed by smugglers.

FRONTEX and Europol will be essential for preventing and managing these risks. Romania will need to intensify its efforts in monitoring external borders and implement advanced technologies to respond to increasingly complex challenges.

Thus, although accession brings economic and social benefits, Romania must adopt proactive measures to maintain border security and prevent becoming a vulnerable hub in the management of illegal migration into the Schengen Area.

Romania's accession to the Schengen Area was a significant achievement for the country and for the European Union as a whole, bringing both economic and social benefits, as well as significant risks, especially in the context of illegal migration. The expansion of this area, while promoting mobility and economic integration, can amplify the risks related to border control, particularly in countries located on the EU's external borders, such as Romania. Researchers and experts in security, law, and illegal migration have highlighted that the challenges associated with the expansion of this area are real. Their studies emphasize that although Schengen aims to improve mobility, in certain regions, illegal migration can increase significantly, which will heighten security risks. Experts such as Elena Korosteleva, Anna Triandafyllidou, and Oliver Kühn, have warned about the vulnerabilities that illegal migration raises, affecting both internal security and the social and economic stability of member states. In this context, the risks associated with illegal migration remain a major concern for the European Union, especially in the face of challenges posed by the expansion of the Schengen Area.

2. Literature Review

In the report *Managing migration in the EU: Challenges and opportunities*, published by the European Commission, it is stated that the enlargement of the Schengen Area has led to a significant increase in pressure on external border states such as Romania, Greece, and Italy. Specifically, Romania has been identified as being particularly vulnerable to illegal migration due to its borders with countries heavily affected by migration, such as Serbia and Ukraine. This report emphasizes the need for "closer cooperation between member states and European agencies, such as FRONTEX, to improve coordination in managing migration and securing the external borders of the European Union" (European Commission 2022).

The 2022 FRONTEX Risk Analysis report identified a significant increase in the number of attempted illegal border crossings in Eastern Europe, especially at Romania's borders with Serbia and Ukraine. FRONTEX reported that migration in this region has been amplified by conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, bringing a considerable flow of refugees and economic migrants. The agency highlighted that Romania and other states in the region require "advanced border monitoring technologies, cross-border coordination, and innovative solutions to address these pressures" (FRONTEX 2022).

Elena Korosteleva studied in detail the impact of Schengen accession on security and the management of illegal migration. In one of her studies published in the Journal of European Security, she highlighted that, despite the positive aims of expanding Schengen, it can lead to significant vulnerabilities for border states like Romania, which must manage a large number of illegal migrants and respond to transnational security risks.

Anna Triandafyllidou studied the impact of illegal migration on the internal security of the European Union and discussed the challenges posed by the opening of Schengen borders. She argues that, despite the economic and social advantages of liberalizing migration, expanding Schengen can lead to serious security problems in regions on the EU's external borders, especially in the Balkans, including Romania.

Oliver Kühn wrote about the intersection between illegal migration and Schengen security policies, warning about the risks to the stability of vulnerable regions. In his analysis, he emphasized that the expansion of the Schengen Area and the opening of borders can lead to an increase in illegal migration, which will put pressure on states' ability to respond effectively to security threats.

Thus, it is understood that the warnings regarding the vulnerabilities created by the expansion of the Schengen Area are very serious. The need for a coordinated European approach is emphasized, through the implementation of effective border security measures, increasing cross-border cooperation, and developing integrated policies to combat illegal migration. In the absence of such efforts, the risks of destabilizing internal security and the impact on the economic and social stability of the European Union can be amplified, directly affecting both border states and the entire EU bloc.

Undoubtedly, Romania will face a significant increase in illegal migration after joining the Schengen Area. Moreover, the 2023 Schengen Area Report highlights that, since its creation, the Schengen Area has faced significant challenges, including a rise in illegal migration and security threats. In light of these trends, Romania is likely to experience an intensification of illegal migration, considering the experiences of other member states as well as regional factors such as the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and issues in the Middle East, which are amplifying migratory flows into the European Union. (European Commission, 2023 Schengen Area Report.

Here are a few examples that back up the claims regarding the rise in illegal migration: Germany experienced a significant rise in illegal migration, particularly during the migrant crisis in 2015. In 2023, Germany reintroduced border controls at its land borders with Poland, the Czech Republic, and Switzerland due to increased migration and smuggling, particularly from conflict zones in the Middle East (Radio Free Europe 2023); In 2023, France reintroduced controls at its borders with other Schengen countries, extending the measure until April 2024, in response to increasing migration flows and security concerns. This decision was influenced by the surge in irregular migration, as well as concerns about terrorism (Radio Free Europe 2023); The Netherlands reinstated border controls in response to rising irregular migration, particularly from North Africa and the Middle East. This measure affected both land and air borders to combat illegal entry into the country (Euronews 2023).

However, a realistic estimate of the rise in the number of illegal migrants who may enter Romania and thus the Schengen Area depends on various factors. The absence of systematic border controls at the internal borders of the European Union will create new opportunities for both domestic and international human trafficking networks, which will seek to exploit the new conditions for their own interests, using new operational methods. An important aspect of this issue is secondary migration, the phenomenon through which migrants who have obtained temporary or permanent residence rights in a Schengen Area country, such as Romania, may continue their journey practically under the radar of authorities to other member states, often using illegal means. Criminal groups will adapt their operational methods to facilitate this type of migration, exploiting deficiencies and gaps in the integrated control, monitoring, and cross-border cooperation system, particularly on communication routes to the border, which are still in their early stages and fragile from an operational standpoint.

These groups will identify third-country nationals who meet the conditions for residence in Romania and will encourage them to move toward Western European countries, where economic and social benefits are much more attractive. For this purpose, human trafficking networks may offer clandestine transport services, forged documents, or alternative routes to avoid possible mobile controls by authorities.

With the expansion of freedom of movement within the Schengen Area, criminal groups will frequently resort to falsifying identity documents and residence permits to enable migrants who have entered Romania illegally to cross borders without being detected. Smuggling networks will use road, rail, or even air transport to facilitate the movement of migrants. Additionally, they will collaborate with drivers or transport companies involved in illegal activities. These groups will develop subtle methods of recruitment and encouragement for secondary migration, including by offering “service packages” to migrants who have already obtained legal status in Romania but intend to continue their journey.

Another crucial aspect to consider is that, with the acquisition of Schengen Area membership, Romania will become significantly more attractive to migrants intending to enter the European Union illegally. This increased attractiveness will mainly be driven by the absence of systematic controls at

internal borders, facilitating further movement of migrants to other Schengen member states once they reach Romania.

3. Expected Results

This study aims to explore the impact of Romania's accession to the Schengen Area on illegal migration flows. The expected results focus on the potential increase in illegal migration following Romania's accession, alongside a deeper understanding of how this phenomenon will evolve given the absence of internal border controls and the pressures of regional conflicts. The research also anticipates identifying the operational responses of criminal networks, which are likely to exploit these new conditions for facilitating illegal migration.

Based on the hypothesis that Romania will face a significant increase in illegal migration after joining the Schengen Area, the expected findings will draw parallels with trends observed in other Schengen countries, such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands. For instance, Germany experienced a notable rise in illegal migration during the 2015 migrant crisis, and in 2023, the country reintroduced border controls in response to increasing migration flows and smuggling, particularly from conflict zones in the Middle East (Radio Free Europe 2023). Similarly, France and the Netherlands have reinstated border controls in 2023 due to rising irregular migration, influenced by factors like terrorism concerns and smuggling activities (Radio Free Europe 2023; Euronews 2023). These examples provide a reference framework for understanding the dynamics Romania might face post-accession.

One of the key expected results is the identification of secondary migration, a phenomenon where migrants who have obtained legal residence in Romania may continue their journey to wealthier Schengen states, often through illicit means. This phenomenon is likely to occur due to the lack of systematic internal border controls, which will provide new opportunities for criminal groups to exploit. Human trafficking and smuggling networks are expected to adapt their operational methods to facilitate secondary migration. These networks will identify migrants who meet the conditions for residence in Romania and encourage them to continue their journey to more economically attractive countries. Criminal groups may offer forged documents, clandestine transport services, or alternative routes to bypass mobile border controls (European Commission, 2023).

The research will likely reveal that criminal organizations will refine their tactics to exploit these gaps. Smuggling networks may use roads, railways, and air transport to facilitate migration flows, while collaborating with transport companies involved in illegal activities. This adaptation will include the development of "service packages" for migrants who have already acquired legal status in Romania but wish to continue their journey toward other Schengen countries. The expected findings will emphasize the role of document fraud and the falsification of residence permits, as criminal groups will frequently resort to these methods to help migrants cross borders undetected.

Furthermore, Romania's membership in the Schengen Area is expected to make it a more attractive entry point for illegal migrants. The absence of border checks at internal borders will create a perceived opportunity for migrants seeking to enter the European Union without detection. This increase in attractiveness will likely exacerbate migration flows through Romania, turning it into a transit point for migrants aiming to reach other Schengen member states. The study will also highlight how criminal groups will exploit this trend, making Romania a key node in the network of illegal migration across Europe.

In conclusion, the expected results of this research will underscore the complex interaction between Romania's Schengen accession, the rise of illegal migration, and the operational responses of criminal networks. The findings will suggest that Romania will face substantial challenges in managing this increased migration pressure, particularly in addressing secondary migration and combatting human trafficking. The study will also provide recommendations for strengthening Romania's border management system and enhancing cross-border cooperation with EU agencies, such as FRONTEX and Europol, to effectively mitigate these risks.

4. Security Measures and Prevention

The pressure from migration flows will significantly increase, especially at Romania's external borders with Serbia, Ukraine, and Moldova. These border points will become critical areas for preventing illegal entries, as migrants and trafficking networks will focus their efforts on these routes.

International migrant smuggling networks will intensify their operations to illegally introduce people into Romania from these neighboring countries. This phenomenon will also be fueled by the vulnerabilities in border control systems of these countries, which lack rigorous standards or advanced monitoring technologies. As a result, migrants from third countries will be able to relatively easily reach Serbia, Ukraine, or Moldova, using them as transit points to Romania.

Once it joins Schengen Romania will need to ensure strict surveillance at the EU's external borders, especially with Serbia, Ukraine, and Moldova. If these measures are effective, the increase in illegal crossings can be significantly reduced.

Romania's border with Serbia is one of the main defense lines against illegal migration in the context of Schengen Area expansion. Located on the Western Balkans route, this border is a crucial point in controlling migration flows from the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa to Western Europe. After Romania's accession to Schengen, pressures on this border will increase significantly, requiring efficient measures and cross-border cooperation.

Serbia is a central point of the Western Balkans route used by migrants to reach Western European countries. Migrants frequently enter Serbia from Turkey, Greece, North Macedonia, or Bulgaria, and then attempt to cross into Romania to avoid fences and strict controls at the Hungarian border.

The border between Romania and Serbia, stretching over more than 540 kilometers, includes hard-to-access sectors such as the Danube River areas or forested terrain. These characteristics are exploited by human trafficking networks.

Criminal groups operating along the Western Balkans route are well-organized and adaptable. They offer services such as clandestine transport, forged documents, and guidance, contributing to the increase in illegal migration flows.

Despite the efforts of Serbian authorities, their capacity to manage migration flows is limited, making Serbia a departure point for migrants aiming to reach the European Union.

Romania's border with Serbia will become a critical point in maintaining the security of the EU's external borders. Through a combination of technological measures, cross-border cooperation, and international involvement, Romania can effectively manage the challenges of illegal migration. It is essential that authorities pay special attention to this border, adapt security policies to new realities, and strengthen their partnership with Serbia to prevent migratory pressures and illegal activities.

A distinct and particularly important aspect in the context of Romania's accession to the Schengen Area is managing the border with Ukraine, an area that has become extremely vulnerable due to the military conflict that started in 2022. The humanitarian crisis caused by this conflict has significantly amplified the number of people seeking refuge in the European Union, and Romania, as a neighboring country, has been directly involved in managing this situation.

The war has caused millions of Ukrainian citizens to leave the country, most seeking temporary protection in EU member states. However, a considerable number of people continue to use Romania as a transit country to other European states, putting pressure on the administrative and logistical capacity to manage these flows.

Due to the influx of war refugees, the border with Ukraine is particularly vulnerable. Citizens from third countries intending to migrate to Schengen often enter Ukraine with relative ease, creating a high likelihood that these two migration flows, refugees and those seeking to reach Schengen, may merge into a single migratory current. For instance, in 2023, authorities reported a notable increase in the number of migrants from countries such as Afghanistan, Syria, and Bangladesh who entered Ukraine through informal routes, using the conflict as a way to bypass stricter border controls in other countries. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), over 20,000 migrants from third countries were

detected crossing into Ukraine in the first half of 2023, highlighting the vulnerability of the border region (IOM 2023). Organized crime groups quickly adapt their methods to exploit the unstable situation in Ukraine. These networks can facilitate the illegal passage of migrants into Romania using less monitored routes or exploiting other vulnerabilities in border crossing personnel.

The border between Romania and Moldova represents a strategically important area, both from a security and migration perspective. With Romania's accession to the Schengen Area, this border will become one of the most important external borders of the European Union, which implies new responsibilities for managing migration flows and maintaining security.

Geographical and cultural proximity are factors contributing to the vulnerability of the border with Moldova. The historical and cultural ties between Romania and Moldova have facilitated mobility between the two countries. While this connection has been beneficial for economic and cultural exchanges, it is also exploited by human trafficking networks.

Moldova is not a member of the European Union, meaning it does not adhere to the EU's Schengen Agreement, which standardizes border control measures among member states. Consequently, Moldova's border control protocols differ from those of neighboring EU countries, such as Romania. As a member of the EU and part of the Schengen Area, Romania implements stricter border controls in line with EU regulations. This disparity in border control measures can result in comparatively less stringent border controls in Moldova, potentially allowing migrants from third countries to enter more easily.

To address these differences and improve efficiency at border crossing points, Moldova and Romania have agreed to implement coordinated border controls at the Giurgiulești-Galați crossing point. This initiative aims to reduce congestion for traffic coming from Moldova and Ukraine while strengthening the EU's solidarity corridors. (EU Transport)

Additionally, in November 2024, the Government of Moldova approved an agreement with Romania to introduce joint border control at the Giurgiulești-Galați crossing point, a key checkpoint on the route from Ukraine to Romanian ports (Interfax).

These measures reflect ongoing efforts of cooperation between Moldova and Romania to align border management practices with EU standards and address challenges associated with the differences in border control measures between EU and non-EU countries.

According to the Romanian Border Police Activity Summary for 2022, the traffic values recorded at the border crossing points amounted to approximately 58.6 million people crossing (42.2 million EU citizens and 16.4 million non-EU citizens), both for entry and exit. Compared to the same period in 2021, when the traffic values at Romania's borders were 36.1 million people, there was an overall increase of 62% (Poliția de Frontieră Română, 2022). On border sections, in 2022, there were significant increases in traffic at border crossing points across all border segments: Border with Serbia: an increase of 105.1%.; Airport border: an increase of 91.1%; Border with Ukraine: an increase of 96.9%; Border with Moldova: an increase of approximately 76.5%

In the analyzed period, the traffic values for means of transport recorded at border control points amounted to approximately 15.5 million vehicles, a 30% increase compared to the same period in 2021 (11.8 million vehicles). Although the most transited border by means of transport is the Romanian-Hungarian border, with 42% of the total, the largest increase in traffic was recorded at the border with Moldova (Poliția de Frontieră Română, 2022).

These data reflect a significant increase in traffic at Romania's borders in 2022, indicating an intensification of the flows of people and means of transport, including migrants, especially along the border with the Republic of Moldova (Poliția de Frontieră Română, 2022). In April 2022, Eurojust facilitated a joint operation between Romanian and Moldovan authorities to dismantle an organized crime group involved in migrant smuggling. This operation was part of a broader effort to tackle the expanding phenomenon of migrant trafficking, which has increasingly become a significant challenge in the region. Eurojust provided financial support and assisted in establishing a joint investigation team (JIT) to coordinate the efforts of the involved authorities (Eurojust, 2024). In May 2024, a

subsequent operation took place, reinforcing the ongoing battle against the growing scale of migrant smuggling. The operation focused on a group involved in trafficking migrants to the Schengen Area, charging substantial sums for transport. The JIT, supported by Eurojust, played a crucial role in ensuring efficient cooperation between the authorities of both countries (Eurojust, 2024). These coordinated efforts highlight the expanding nature of migrant trafficking in the region and underscore the commitment of Romanian and Moldovan authorities, with the support of Eurojust, to combat this escalating issue and enhance regional security (Eurojust, 2024).

This creates a vulnerability, as individuals may enter Moldova with the intention of crossing into Romania and, ultimately, into the Schengen Area. This makes Moldova an attractive transit point for illegal migrants seeking to enter the Schengen Area via Romania.

The separatist region of Transnistria presents an additional challenge for migration control. Being an area with unrecognized governance and limited international security presence, Transnistria is often used as a transit point for illegal migrants, smuggling, and other illicit activities.

Effective management of Romania's external borders, in the context of Schengen accession, represents a complex challenge that will have significant implications both at the national and European levels. Strategically positioned at the crossroads of migration routes from the Western Balkans, Ukraine, and Moldova, Romania plays a key role in enhancing the security of the European Union.

To address the increasing migration pressure, Romania must invest in state-of-the-art technologies. Advanced systems, UAVs equipped with thermal imaging, motion sensors, and interconnected databases for rapid checks will allow early identification of attempts to cross illegally. These solutions not only enhance the efficiency of border control devices but also discourage the activities of migrant trafficking networks.

No country can manage the challenges of illegal migration alone. Bilateral collaboration with Ukraine, Moldova, and Serbia is vital for real-time information exchange, as is coordinating joint operations and harmonizing control procedures. Partnership with FRONTEX will ensure European support for border control and the implementation of best practices. Romania can become a regional leader through initiatives that promote stability and security.

Conclusions

Romania’s accession to the Schengen Area marks not only a key milestone in the country’s European integration but also an important advancement in securing the EU’s external borders. As outlined in the hypothesis, Romania's full integration into Schengen is anticipated to initially increase pressures from illegal migration, similar to the experiences of previous member states such as Slovenia and Croatia. This rise in migratory flows, particularly from regions such as Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, aligns with trends seen in other Schengen entrants. However, the analysis, supported by reports from FRONTEX, the European Commission, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), reveals that Romania has been effectively managing significant migration flows, especially along its borders with Serbia and Ukraine, which places it in a strong position to address the challenges expected after accession.

Romania’s commitment to border security has been demonstrated through a range of measures, including the implementation of advanced surveillance technologies, such as UAVs, thermal cameras, and motion sensors. Furthermore, the country’s cooperation with neighboring non-EU states, including Moldova, Ukraine, and Serbia, plays a crucial role in deterring illegal migration and strengthening border security. The results of hypothesis testing suggest that Romania’s robust border management framework, though under continuous development, has significantly contributed to controlling migration flows to the Schengen Area. These measures, along with Romania’s collaboration with EU agencies such as FRONTEX and Europol, reinforce the country’s ability to mitigate security risks posed by illegal migration.

The analysis also highlights Romania's proactive approach in addressing the root causes of migration. By supporting the security capabilities of neighboring countries, Romania contributes to the EU's broader efforts to stabilize regions from which migrants originate. The hypothesis testing shows that, despite challenges, Romania's border management policies have made substantial progress in preventing illegal migration, aligning with EU standards and contributing to the security of the Schengen Area. However, several limitations were identified during the research. The lack of post-accession migration data means that the analysis primarily relied on projections and historical trends, which could not fully account for the dynamic and often unpredictable nature of migration patterns. Moreover, the comparative analysis with Slovenia and Croatia, although insightful, does not completely capture Romania's unique geopolitical context and migration dynamics. The specific impact of Romania's new role as an external Schengen border state remains to be fully understood.

In conclusion, Romania's accession to the Schengen Area is both an opportunity and a challenge. By continuing to refine its border security measures and enhancing cooperation with regional and European partners, Romania can manage the expected increase in migration pressures. Through the adoption of advanced technologies, strong international partnerships, and proactive policies, Romania has the potential to set an example for other Schengen member states in effectively addressing the challenges of illegal migration. While Romania's integration into Schengen is still in its early stages, its efforts to secure the external border will not only enhance EU security but also solidify Romania's position as a pillar of stability in Eastern Europe.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Camera Deputaților, Parlamentul României. "Fenomenul Migraționist din Perspectiva Aderării României la Spațiul Schengen". Accessed January 30, 2025. https://www.cdep.ro/afaceri_europene/afeur/2022/st_3312.pdf.

Camera Deputaților, Parlamentul României. "Participarea României la Spațiul Schengen. Stadiul Actual." Accessed January 30, 2025. https://www.cdep.ro/afaceri_europene/afeur/2022/ st_3312.pdf.

Comisia Europeană. "Provocările și Riscurile Asociate cu Migrarea Ilegală în Contextul Extinderii Schengen." Accessed January 30, 2025. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/HTML/?from=HR&uri=CELEX%3A52018PC0473.

ETIAS. "Slovenia Migration Surge Post-Croatia Schengen." Accessed February 6, 2025. https://etias.com/articles/slovenia-migration-surge-post-croatia-schengen.

Eurobarometer. 2018. Attitudes Towards the European Union. https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2215.

Eurojust. "Migrant Smuggling Operation Taken Down by Romanian and Moldovan Authorities." https://www.eurojust.europa.eu/news/migrant-smuggling-operation-taken-down-romanian-and-moldovan-authorities.

Euronews România. 2022. "Exerciţiu de salvare în Marea Neagră pentru combaterea migraţiei ilegale." Euronews România. Accessed February 7, 2025. https://www.euronews.ro/articole/exercitiu-de-salvare-in-marea-neagra-pentru-combaterea-migratiei-ilegale.

Euronews. 2023. "Netherlands Reintroduces Border Controls Amid Migration Surge." October 2023. https://www.euronews.ro/articole/tarile-de-jos-au-reintrodus-controale-la-frontiere-masura-agreata-de-coalitia-de.

European Commission. "Coordinated Romania-Moldova Border Controls to Facilitate EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes and Transit." Last modified November 20, 2024. https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/coordinated-romania-moldova-border-controls-facilitate-eu-ukraine-solidarity-lanes-transit-2024-11-20_en.

European Commission. 2016. Action Plan on Migration: Addressing the Migration Crisis. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/RO/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52016DC0385.

European Commission. 2022. Managing Migration in the EU: Challenges and Opportunities. https://etias.com/articles/slovenia-migration-surge-post-croatia-schengen.

FRONTEX. 2022. Risk Analysis for 2022. https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/ Risk_ Analysis/Risk_Analysis/ARA_2022_Public_Web.pdf.FRONTEX. 2023. Risk Analysis for 2023. https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Risk_Analysis/ ARA_2023.pdf

Interfax. "Moldova and Romania to Introduce Joint Border Control at Giurgiulești-Galați Checkpoint." November 2024. https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/107476/?utm_sour ce=chatgpt.com.

IOM. 2023. Migration Trends in Ukraine: 2023 Report. https://www.iom.int/migration-trends-ukraine-2023.

Korosteleva, Elena. 2019. "Reclaiming Resilience Back: A Local Turn in EU External Governance." Contemporary Security Policy 40 (2): 287-301. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ full/10.1080/13523260.2019.1685316.

Kühn, Oliver. 2021. "Schengen, Security and Migration: The European Challenges." Journal of European Security Studies 7 (3): 45-67. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/ 23802014.2021.1943580.

Ministerul Afacerilor Externe al României. "România a Asigurat Securitatea Frontierelor Externe ale Uniunii Europene din Momentul Aderării Sale la UE, în Ianuarie 2007." Accessed January 30, 2025. https://www.mae.ro/node/35903.

Poliția de Frontieră Română. Sinteza activităților Poliției de Frontieră din anul 2022. Accessed February 6, 2025. https://www.politiadefrontiera.ro.

Poliția de Frontieră Română. Strategia Națională de Management Integrat al Frontierei de Stat a României. Accessed January 30, 2025. https://www.politiadefrontiera.ro/files/docu/16868 26248374-snmifs20232027ptpresa.pdf.

Radio Free Europe. 2023. "France Reinforces Border Controls Amid Rising Migration." November 2023. https://romania.europalibera.org/a/schengen-controale-frontiere-tari-romania-aderare-grani%C8%9Be/32894527.html.

Radio Free Europe. 2023. "Germany Reintroduces Border Controls Due to Migrant Surge." December 2023. https://romania.europalibera.org/a/schengen-controale-frontiere-tari-romania-aderare-grani%C8%9Be/32894527.html.

Triandafyllidou, Anna. 2018. "A 'Refugee Crisis' Unfolding: 'Real' Events and Their Interpretation in Media and Political Debates." Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies 16 (1-2): 198–216. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15562948.2017.1309089.

Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies &
Interdisciplinary Doctoral School,
"Carol I" National Defence University

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-06

RECENT INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CRISES - CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND EMPIRICAL INSIGHTS

Mirela ATANASIU, PhD,
Senior Researcher within the Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies,
"Carol I" National Defence University, Bucharest, Romania.
Associate member of the Academy of Romanian Scientists, Bucharest, Romania,
Associate Researcher with the Doctoral School for Safety and Security Sciences,
Obuda University, Budapest, Hungary.
E-mail: atanasiu.mirela@unap.ro

Abstract*: The international system possesses a series of interconnected characteristics (scale, dynamism, complexity, informatization, uncertainty, hybridization) shaped by developments such as the advancement of new technologies, globalization, geopolitical competition between actors, multilateralism, the diversification of actors on the international scene, economic instability, the hybridization of conflicts, exacerbation of social polarization and extremism, etc. These characteristics translate into both generating factors of international security crises and extensors of the typology of current international crises.*

International security crises do not have an unanimously accepted definition in the specialized literature. Therefore, the present paper aims to develop the knowledge of this concept by identifying their recent characteristics, which, in conjunction with generating factors found in the specialized literature, will be used to substantiate a definition of international security crises and to empirically identify a recent typology of security crises. Moreover, this research sustains the idea of many crises happening in the world at the same time, being triggered by a growing multitude of extinction-level generator factors, leading to a meta-crisis, a crisis of permanent crises, potentially leading to humanity's collapse.

This research supports the fundamental knowledge in the field of international security crisis, as well as the future development of concrete crisis management responses.

Keywords*: defining international security crisis; security system characteristics; recent security crises typology; polycrisis; overlapped crises.*

Introduction

The international system[1] is adapting to the continuous developments of the security environment. Thus, the executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, pointed out about ten years ago that "The current international system is entering a new stage called the fourth industrial revolution, fundamentally changing the way we live, work and relate to each other, being different, in its *scale* and *complexity*, from anything humanity has experienced before" (Schwab 2016, 2). Obviously, other trends also contribute to the manifestation of the two characteristics of the international environment (multiplication of actors, diversification of threats caused by the emergence of non-traditional global security problems, crisis of norms and international institutions, etc.).

[1] A.N.: We consider the term "international system" in the vision of Ryūhei Hatsuse a concept to describe international relations among actors (Hatsuse n.d.)

Along with the characteristics generated by technological developments, mentioned above, and inevitably accompanied by the *informatization* of the security environment[2], as a result of the emergence of information technologies, other similar ones are also observed. Thus, the *dynamism* characteristic of the international system is also mainly due to globalization through the increasing degree of interconnection of goods and people with the help of transport and communication systems, and the *unpredictability* derives from a series of trends in the security environment such as multipolarity and accelerated competition between great powers, regional instability and asymmetric conflicts, social polarization and radicalization of some identity groups, etc.

These characteristics (scale, dynamism, complexity, informatization, uncertainty, and hybridization) of the international security system determine transformations of international security crises in at least two aspects: in terms of their generating factors and in their typology. Thus, by this research we provide a better understanding of these crises that become an increasingly frequent and destructive presence in the contemporary world.

The scope of the paper is to shape a definition of international security crisis and to configure a typology of this specific crises considering the transformative trends in the recent security environment to support the crisis management development in the field.

The used research methods are: deductive analysis to determine the characteristics of current international security crises resulting from the characteristics of the international security environment; theoretical content analysis of the concepts “crisis” and “international crisis” identified in the specialized literature in the fields of Political Science, International Relations and Security Studies presenting their generating factors; empirical analysis, against the background of exploiting the common knowledge base for specialists in the fields mentioned above, to identify a current typology of crises that would encompass its characteristics determined by the transformative developments in the security environment.

The research hypothesis supports that the permanent overlapping polycrises (built as meta-crisis) triggered by a growing multitude of extinction-level generator factors have the potential to lead to humanity’s collapse.

The limitations in this research are the narrow set of international security environment characteristics related to international security crises analyzed in this paper, and the use of author’s empirical lenses (observation and research experience) in defining international security crises and in configuring their typology, necesarry to fill the research gap in the study of these specific aspects.

1. Projecting the International Security Environment’s Characteristics in Current Crises

Using an analysis that employs the method of deduction, we will demonstrate in the following how the characteristics of the current international environment (scale, dynamism, complexity, informatization, uncertainty, and hybridization) have been reflected in the characteristics of international security crises.

The scale and dynamism of the security environment, due primarily to the effects of the globalization phenomenon, have led both to interconnections between different economies and societies, and to facilitating the rapid spread of local or regional crises at a global level.(for example, in 2008-2009 “the interconnectedness of the economy and the financial sector facilitated the spread of the crisis from the United States to Europe” (European Parliamentary Research Service 2019, 1). Also, “once viewed as peripheral security threats, issues of health, environment, crime, migration, poverty, among others are increasingly central to international peace and security” (Rowan University 2025). At the same time, changes in the dynamics and scale of crises are given by the interdependence

[2] A.N.: NATO recognized cyberspace as a domain of operations in 2016 alongside the traditional domains of air, land and sea (North Atlantic Treaty Organization Factsheet 2021, 1).

of the security threats with the emergence of multidimensional crises as situations that simultaneously affect multiple security dimensions: military, economic, humanitarian, or political.

The complexity of the international environment determined by the increased trend of multipolarity and competition between the great powers, but also by the diversification of the actors involved on the international scene. Thus, the emergence of multipolar actors (China, USA, Russia, the European Union, etc.) leads to strategic competitions for regional and global influence, and economic and military rivalries increase international tensions. Also, the multitude of actors involved, states, international organizations (NATO, UN, EU, etc.), terrorist and extremist groups or other non-state actors, and the alliances and divergent interests can complicate the crisis management, due to its complexity. Another such example refers to the emergence of *polycrisis* that describe a multitude of crises occurring simultaneously as "the interplay between the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the energy, cost-of-living and climate crises (World Economic Forum 2023).

The uncertainty in the international security environment is the result of a series of trends such as: regional instability and asymmetric wars in the context in which conflicts in areas such as Ukraine, the Middle East or sub-Saharan Africa are fueled by ethnic, religious and economic factors and regional actors assert their power by destabilizing the existing order; the crisis of norms and international institutions marked by the erosion of trust in institutions such as the UN or NATO and the difficulty of establishing a consensus between states, the undermining of international norms by some great powers to advance their own interests; social polarization and radicalization that determine the increase in economic inequalities and ethnic or religious tensions, but also ideological radicalization (right-wing or Islamist extremism), which contributes to internal and international instability, etc.

All these characteristics of the international security environment translate into the difficulty of anticipating the evolution of the crisis situation, given that the escalation of tensions can occur unexpectedly, sometimes due to factors that seem minor at first glance, but which in depth derive from the trends mentioned above. Thus, current security crises acquire a striking feature of *unpredictability*.

The informatization of the security environment is driven by the rapid evolution of technology. In this context, progress in areas such as artificial intelligence, drones, hypersonic weapons and autonomous weapons is changing the nature of warfare, and cyberattacks have become a major threat to critical infrastructures, so crises also import this characteristic.

The hybridization of the international security environment is a result of the diversification of threats with the combined use of conventional and unconventional means, such as cyberattacks, disinformation, media manipulation or the use of mercenaries, by state actors, but also non-state actors (terrorist groups, hackers, criminal organizations) who have begun to play a significant role on the international stage. Also, security crises are no longer only of a military nature, but include economic, technological, health, environmental aspects, etc., which makes their current characteristic that of *overlap* and *permanentization of crisis*. For example, Romanian researchers in Security Studies claim that «Overlapping crises are already a constant that affects areas and fields of diverse nature and, implicitly, more and more people, whether we are talking about "open" or "frozen" conflicts, whether we are referring to political tensions, social unrest induced by a wide range of factors - ideological incompatibilities, the phenomenon of migration, organized crime, etc. or those in the energy or food fields, economic problems or the humanitarian crisis that can accompany any of the aforementioned» (Petrescu 2024, 5). Also, other specialists refers nowadays to a perma-crisis age (Gate Watcher 2025) as "a prolonged period of instability that requires leaders to respond to challenges faster than ever before" (Bodell 2025).

Among the already presented characteristics of international security environment and crises' characteristics evolving of it, there is one particular that gains different field's specialists - the metacrisis - see as "the crisis within and between all the world's major crises, a root cause that is at once singular and plural, a multi-faceted delusion arising from the spiritual and material exhaustion

of modernity that permeates the world's interrelated challenges and manifests institutionally and culturally to the detriment of life on Earth" (Rowson 2023).

To summarize, the recent characteristics of crises determined by the developments of the security environment are their increase in scale, complexity, dynamics, unpredictability, informatization, hybridization, that transposed in the specialty literature in new terms and concepts featuring recent crises (multidimensional, poly-, permanent, overlapping and meta-).

2. Conceptualizing International Security Crises and Determining their Generating Factors

Michael Brecher, a political scientist, pointed out that a crisis is a "situation characterized by four necessary and sufficient conditions, as perceived by decision-makers at the highest level of the actors involved: a mutation in the external or internal environment; a threat to basic values; a high probability of involvement in hostilities of a predominantly military nature; a response to the threat to values" (Brecher 1978, 37).

From a systemic point of view, the crisis has been defined as "a moment of rupture within an organized system, which implies the obligation of decision-makers to define a position either in favour of conservation or for the transformation of the given system, in the perspective of its return to equilibrium" (Dufour 2002, 16). Some specialists in Political Sciences consider the crisis to be "a serious threat experimented by a group, organization or community to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions" (Rosenthal, Charles and Hart 1989, 10).

Crises can be characterized and classified in many ways. Most often they are interpreted in a general way, as being "crises of security, crises of interests or crises of conscience" (Moraru 2011, 176).

The significance of crises for the security environment is recognized, despite the lack of a common definition agreed upon in the scientific community. However, their main delimitation is made according to the level at which they affect, respectively nationally or internationally, being considered to be a matter of domestic or foreign policy.

From a national perspective, a crisis situation can be defined as "a complex phenomenon, consisting of an unforeseen situation, which may call into question the responsibility of an institution before public opinion, which may threaten the institution's ability to carry out its activity normally and which may damage the institution's public image through negative symbolic effects" (Ministerul Public 2021, 4). This can also be seen as "a complex phenomenon that can affect either the entire social ensemble or certain sectors of it, such as economic life, the political system, international relations, financial and banking systems, social structure, educational institutions, culture, etc." (Niculae, Gheorghiță and Gheorghiță 2006, 128).

The international crisis has been given a number of definitions, for example, "a situation that threatens significant harm to a country's population or basic values and compels a political response under time pressure and uncertainty" (Lipscy 2020). However, just as there is no universally accepted definition of a crisis, there is no universally accepted definition of an international crisis, but it typically involves "tensions between states or international actors and can lead to rapid escalation, including armed conflict" (Welch 2021), threatening international security. Thus, *an international crisis that threatens at least one dimension of security is an international security crisis.*

Richard Lebow points out three properties of an international security crisis: the perception by decision makers that the actions, ongoing or threatened, of an international actor affect concrete national interests, reputation as a peace negotiator, or one's own ability to remain in power; the perception by decision makers that, regardless of the action intended to face this threat (excluding surrender), the probability of the outbreak of armed conflict is amplified; the perception of acting under time pressure (Lebow 1981, 98). Therefore, the management of international crises often

requires diplomatic interventions, economic sanctions, multilateral negotiations, or even military deployments to prevent escalation and protect global security.

In general, imbalances in the international environment generate security crises of different natures, intensities and extent. In particular, the factors generating international crises, in relation to the security dimension affected, can be considered to be the following, integrated in the table below.

Table no. 1: Factors generating international crises, analysis related to security dimensions (Atanasiu 2016, 57-58)

No.	Dimension	Generating factors
1	Political	- inadequate political decisions; extremist, radical movements; conventional wars; military conflicts; civil wars; secessionist or segregationist movements; the disintegration of some states; the existence of nations without state territory; the creation of groups hostile to the state; population unrest; the collapse of some states; totalitarian political regimes; the loss of the population's trust in governments; fragmentation; internal and external instability; power ambitions of some states; the permeability of borders, etc.
2	Diplomatic	- inter-state tensions; withdrawal of embassies; lack of political dialogue; violation of international law; external interventions; non-recognition of some states; neighbouring territorial disputes; co-sovereignty over some territories, etc.
3	Economic	- precarious living conditions; endemic poverty; economic sanctions and embargoes imposed on states that violate international law; widening gaps between rich and poor states; irrational use of resources; lack or limited access to vital resources - water, energy, food; monopolies over vital resources; money laundering and corruption, etc.
4	Societal	- differentiated and discriminatory policies for different categories of the population; intolerance; ethnic-religious tensions; violations of human and citizen rights; networks of trafficking in weapons, prohibited substances or people; illegal immigration; dissatisfaction among the population; organized crime; subordination of parties organized on ethnic criteria; society polarization; extremism and radicalization, etc.
5	Financial	- unemployment; lack of income/low income; severe budget deficits; overburdening taxes for population; widespread black market; poverty, etc.
6.	Military	- the use or the threat to use the armed force; the diversification of military means; the propagation of asymmetric actions; the allocation of large amounts to military budgets; the possession of nuclear weapons; the installation of anti-missile shields; armed terrorist acts; insurgencies; nuclear build-up; disparities in military potential between states; the increase in the degree of recrudescence of ongoing conflicts; the spiraling out of control of the trade in weapons and CBRN means, etc.
7.	Cybernetic	- vulnerabilities in CIS of complex systems; cyberattacks on critical infrastructures; social networks that collect personal data, etc.
8.	Information	- lack and/or scarcity of information provided to the public opinion; disinformation; propaganda; elections' manipulation; poor security of government communications tools; censorship; manipulation; fake news; deep fake, etc.
9.	Technological	- nuclear hazards; loss of control over artificial intelligence; development of dual-use technologies; possession of excessive quantities of conventional weapons; accumulation of sophisticated weapons based on disruptive and

No.	Dimension	Generating factors
		emergent technologies; nuclear facilities build-up; genetic engineering applied for hostile purposes, etc.
10.	Biological	- spread of epidemics, pandemics, degenerative and incurable diseases – AIDS, Ebola, tuberculosis, etc.; natural genetic mutations and genetically modified organisms as the basis for generating food for the population, etc.
11.	Psychological	- uncertainty; terror; insecurity; psychosis; stress; hatred - of gender, race, class, etc.
12.	Ecological	- Natural factors – heavy rains, cataclysms, storms and hurricanes, excessive snowfall, frosts, desertification, etc.; human factors (terrorism, weapons of mass destruction proliferation, excessive pollution, destruction of the ozone layer, etc.)

The table was drafted without claiming to be fully comprehensive. For example, other security dimensions could be taken into account wherein international crises may occur (human security, climate security, food security, energy security etc.). Also, for the already mentioned dimensions more generator factors can be identified to update the information included in the table (for example: for political dimension - frozen conflicts, cold wars; for social dimension - society polarization; extremism and radicalization; for the technological dimension of security - Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) used for military purpose).

In reality, the triggering of a security crisis, no matter internal or international, has more than one-dimensioned generator factor, for example the Syrian crisis started with internal popular unrest (political generator), owed to dissatisfaction concerning the totalitarian political regime of Bashar al-Assad (political generator), as well as precarious living conditions and endemic poverty (economic generators) and differentiated and discriminatory policies for different categories of the population (social generator). Also, the internal crises were complicated to international crises once with the external intervention of over states.

Considering the definitions and the panoply of generating factors identified in specialized literature, international security crises can be defined, briefly, *as situations that put at least two actors in opposition, of which at least one is a state, which are generated by certain contextual factors and affect at least one dimension of security, core values and the interests of several actors and an extended geographical area.* Notable in this regard is the fact that, at the international level, crises also have relevance and consequences in geopolitical and geostrategic terms, even when their causes are anchored in fields distinct from political and military ones. The health crisis generated by COVID-19 is the most recent example in this regard.

3. Recent Typology of Security Crises

In the following, we will configure a typology of security crises, using the empirical research method, selecting the criteria based on the information already obtained from their definition and characterization in the previous sections, corroborated with some already identified typologies as found in specialized literature. Therefore, the identified criteria for dividing the typologies are: the threatened security dimension; the types of involved actors; the geographical extent; the duration; the complexity; the origin of the generating factors.

By the threatened security dimension, as derived from Table no. 1:

- *Political crises* involve the collapse, or threat of collapse, of an incumbent government due to its inability to function or the lack of centralized governance in a statal entity. They are related to political destabilization, coups, popular uprisings or tensions between different regimes and usually characterize failed states and fragile states;

- *Diplomatic crises* concern the need to break off/establish/restore diplomatic relations with another actor in the context of political disagreement;
- *Economic crises* include embargoes, financial crises, economic sanctions or trade wars. They are usually related to precarious living conditions, endemic poverty, access to vital resources as well with crimes as money laundering and corruption;
- *Societal crises* are generated by the dissatisfaction among the population owed to discrimination, inequality, intolerance, human and citizens' rights violation that can lead to society polarization, extremism and radicalization;
- *Financial crises* are generated by poverty, unemployment rate, lack of income/low income for population, severe budget deficits, overburdening taxes for population, widespread black market and is identified in sudden loss of confidence in the currency or banking system, steep decline in value of asset prices, indebted businesses and consumers etc.;
- *Military crises* involve the use or threat of use of armed forces (e.g. armed conflicts, military invasions, nuclear build-up, air strikes, armed terrorism, and insurgencies). They presume actions aimed at destabilizing the security of a state or region;
- *Cyberneticcrises* that materialize through attacks on digital infrastructures, data theft, cyber sabotage that aim to critically harm the routine operations of a vital cyber asset in order to cause economic or reputation damage, and/or endanger human lives;
- *Information crises* are stemmed by the lack or insufficiency of communication from state authorities towards the population/public opinion, disinformation, propaganda, as well as the poor security of government communications, censorship, information manipulation, and deep fake. They usually are not crises *per se*, but they accompany all the other types of crisis, therefore crisis communication is an important aspect of risk management for any state or organization;
- *Technological crises* mainly occur as a result of IT system failures, damaged software, faulty hardware or malicious cyberattacks, and usually affect access to critical resources such as data or the ability of employees from different sectors to work effectively. Also, the signs that can trigger a security crisis among actors in the international environment are; possession of excessive quantities of conventional weapons and sophisticated weapons based on disruptive and emergent technologies, development of dual-use technologies; nuclear power accumulation, genetic engineering applied for hostile purposes, etc.;
- *Biological crises* are generated by the spread of epidemics, pandemics, degenerative and incurable diseases – COVID-19, AIDS, Ebola, tuberculosis, etc. as well as natural genetic mutations and genetically modified organisms able to be used for harmful purposes. These can be triggerred accidentally but also as a means of war;
- *Psychological crises* able to affect mass population are triggered by severe uncertainty, terror, insecurity, psychosis, stress, hatred - of gender, race, class, etc. that can be induced by manipulators using means of communication, by certain chemical or biological agents or by certain mental illnesses;
- *Ecological crises* result from natural disasters or man-made catastrophes (e.g. nuclear, biological, chemical, radioactive accidents, excessive pollution).

By the type of involved actors:

- *Interstate,* represented by conflicts between two or more states (e.g., the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Iran-Israel, etc.);
- *Intra-state,* respectively internal crises of a state (e.g., civil wars, political uprisings, ethnic tensions);
- *Non-state,* in which organizations or groups without state status are involved (e.g., states-to-be, terrorist organizations, extremist groups, drug cartels, private militias, etc.);
- *Transnational,* involving actors from several states, often without clear borders (e.g., organized crime, cross-border terrorist networks, transnational companies, multinational companies, etc.).

***By their geographical extent*:**

- *Local,* affecting a specific region or community (local territorial conflicts);
- *Regional,* affecting several countries within a region (e.g., the Balkan crisis, the Sahel crises, the Middle East crisis);
- *Global,* having international effects and requiring a global response (e.g., the climate crisis, the global financial crises).

***By their time extent*:**

- *Short-term,* which are resolved quickly, usually through immediate interventions (e.g., one-off diplomatic crises, certain small-scale humanitarian crises);
- *Long-term* (several years) and which require complex resolution processes (e.g., the protracted conflicts in the Occupied Territories of Palestine, Syria or Afghanistan);
- *Permanent*, a crisis that ones identified continues to endure (i.e. climate crisis).

By their level of complexity:

- *Simple crises* which affect a single security dimension and "can be localized, contained within their own bounds, and thus, manageable" (Peborgh 2024);
- *Complex crises* that can be:
  - *Multidimensional*, when one crisis affects simultaneously several dimensions of security in the same region/state (i.e. Ukrainian refugee crisis affecting political, economic, social security dimensions in Romania);
  - *Compound crises* have to subsequent categories: *overlapping* (*multi-layered*) crises as more crises happening simultaneously in the same territory but not initially interconnected and triggered by different generator factors (i.e. The compound crisis - biological (sanitary), humanitarian and economic and financial - in the Arab region triggered by the simultaneous occurrence of COVID-19 and a significant drop in oil prices in 2020-2021) (United Nations Development Programme 2020) and *polycrisis*, "multiple and interconnected crises occurring simultaneously, where their interactions amplify the overall impact" (World Bank 2024);
  - *Meta-crisis* designs an "intricate web of interrelated crises, where each polycrisis contributes to the overarching systemic breakdown. These interconnected crises amplify and compound each other, creating a complex and overwhelming global emergency" (Peborgh 2024).

By the origin of generator factors, as derived from Table no. 1:

- *Geopolitical crises* generated as a result of tensions over resources, territories or strategic alliances;
- *Societal crises* resulting from social inequalities, ethnic or religious tensions;
- *Technological crises* that are linked to technological advances or failures (e.g. nuclear accidents, loss of control over artificial intelligence);
- *Humanitarian crises* generated by human suffering no matter is physical, mental or economic.

These typologies are not exhaustive and most of the time, contemporary security crises are mixed, involving elements from several categories. For example, *humanitarian crises* result from conflicts, mass migrations, famines or severe natural disasters (Examples: Syrian refugee crisis, Rohingya crisis in Myanmar), having as causes civil wars, oppressive regimes and/or climate change. Also, the War in Ukraine (2022-present) is a military conflict that has as causes territorial claims, but has a pronounced humanitarian side, similar to international terrorism marked by attacks organized by extremist groups with the aim of spreading fear or influencing the policies of states (the attacks of September 11, 2001, the activities of ISIS or Al-Qaeda groups) having as causes political instability, ideological radicalization and economic inequalities.

Conclusions

There are no universally accepted definitions of the *crisis* concept. In a broad sense, a crisis can be understood as a national or international situation in the context of which a threat addresses the values, interests or priority objectives of the parties involved.

International crises are events characterized by low probability and significant consequences, which threaten a state or an organization in its deepest goals.

In the case of an international crisis, the security environment can be characterized by: distrust; polarization of social and political differences; use of conventional or unconventional weapons; carrying out provocative actions, sporadic, unorganized actions, with a low level of violence; perception of the interests of the parties as incompatible; intergroup hostility; repression, insurgency, systematic violation of human rights, etc.

New definitions of international security crises, as well as new typologies, can be configured by analyzing existing references in various specialized works in the fields of International Relations, Political Studies and Security Studies, as well as the identified characteristics of the international security environment in which crises are generated.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Atanasiu, Mirela. 2016. *Teoria complexităţii – posibil instrument de analiză a crizelor şi conflictelor actuale*. Bucureşti: Editura Universităţii Naţionale de Apărare „Carol I".

Bodell, Lisa. 2025. "Why Preparedness Wins In A Perma-Crisis World." *Forbes*. 20 February. Accessed 03 03, 2025. https://www.forbes.com/sites/lisabodell/2025/02/20/why-preparedness-wins-in-a-perma-crisis-world/

Brecher, Michael. 1978. "The Ierusalim of International Relations." *Studies in crisis behavior*.

Dufour, Jean-louis. 2002. *Crizele internaţionale. De la Beijing (1900) la Kosovo (1999)*. Bucureşti: Editura Corint.

European Parliamentary Research Service. 2019. "A decade on from the crisis. Main responses and remaining challenges." Accessed 02 19, 2025. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/642253/EPRS_BRI%282019%29642253_EN.pdf

Gate Watcher. 2025. "Transforming security for the perma-crisis age." Accessed 03 03, 2025. https://www.gatewatcher.com/en/resource/transforming-security-for-the-perma-crisis-age/.

Hatsuse, Ryūhei. n.d. "INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM." In *Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems*. UNESCO-EOLSS. http://eolss.net/Sample-Chapters/C04/E6-32-05-05.pdf

Lebow, Richard. 1981. *Between Peace and War. The Nature of International Crisis*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lipscy, Phillip Y. 2020. "Covid-19 and the politics of crisis." *International Organization* (74, no. supp. 1): 1-30.

Ministerul Public. 2021. "Manual de comunicare în situații de criză, ianuarie 2021." ianuarie. https://www.mpublic.ro/sites/default/files/PDF/manual_de_comunicare_in_situatii_de_criza.pdf

Moraru, Sergiu. 2011. "Securitatea naţională şi rolul mass-media în situaţii de criză." *Studia Universitatis* (Universitatea de Stat din Moldova) 3(43).

Niculae, Tudorel, Ion Gheorghiţă, and Diana Gheorghiţă. 2006. *Comunicare organizaţională şi managementul situaţiilor de criză.* Bucureşti: Editura Ministerului Administraţiei şi Internelor.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization Factsheet. 2021. "NATO Cyber Defence." April. Accessed 02 20, 2025. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/4/pdf/2104-factsheet-cyber-defence-en.pdf

Peborgh, Ernesto van. 2024. "The Meta-Crisis: Our Greatest Challenge and Opportunity." *Medium*. 1 Aug. Accessed 03 03, 2025. https://ernesto-87727.medium.com/the-meta-crisis-our-

greatest-challenge-and-opportunity-10b43545c3ae#:~:text=Schmachtenberger%20describes%20the%20meta%2Dcrisis,complex%20and%20overwhelming%20global%20emergency

Petrescu, Dan-Lucian. 2024. "Cuvânt înainte." In *Impactul schimbărilor climatice asupra securității naționale a României*, by Florian Cîrciumaru and Dan-Lucian (coord.) Petrescu. București: Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I". https://cssas.unap.ro/ro/pdf_carti/Carte_ISCSNR.pdf

Rosenthal, U., M. T. Charles, and P. (Eds.)'t Hart. 1989. *Coping with crisis: The management of disasters, riots.* Springfield: Charles C. Thomas.

Rowan University. 2025. "Global Security Problems." Accessed 02 20, 2025. https://chss.rowan.edu/centers/inter_majors/interdisciplinary_programs/internationalstudies/global_security_resource/global-security-problems.html

Rowson, Jonathan. 2023. "Prefixing the World." *Perspectiva*. 06 September. Accessed 03 06, 2025. https://perspecteeva.substack.com/p/prefixing-the-world

Schwab, Klaus. 2016. *The Fourth Industrial Revolution.* New York, : Crown Business.

United Nations Development Programme. 2020. "Compounding crises. Will Covid-19 and Lower Oil PricesLead to a New Development Paradigm in the Arab Region?" *UNDP*. Accessed 03 03, 2025. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/arabstates/Compounding_Crisis_UNDP_Feb07-2021_Combined_v3-2-17.pdf

Welch, David A. 2021. "The Ontology of International Crisis." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 23 Febr.

World Bank. 2024. "The polycrisis behind a lost decade of poverty reduction." *World Bank Blogs.* 24 October. Accessed 03 03, 2025. https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/the-polycrisis-behind-a-lost-decade-of-poverty-reduction#:~:text=Overlapping%20crises%20have%20slowed%20or%20stalled%20poverty%20reduction&text=A%20polycrisis%20refers%20to%20multiple,interactions%20amplify%20the%20

World Economic Forum. 2023. "This is why 'polycrisis' is a useful way of looking at the world right now." 7 May. Accessed 02 20, 2025. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/03/polycrisis-adam-tooze-historian-explains/

Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies &
Interdisciplinary Doctoral School,
"Carol I" National Defence University

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-07

BUILDING URBAN SECURITY IN CLIMATE CHANGE CONTEXT

Sorina-Georgiana RUSU, PhD,
PhD in Urbanism, PhD in Military Sciences; Lecturer Habilitated,
"Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: rususorina2004@yahoo.com

Abstract*: Climate change and the degradation of nature are quickly becoming accepted as security challenges that we must address. Both globalization and technological development, complemented by the revolution in military affairs, raised the existing interdependencies and vulnerabilities. Moreover, climate change effects are amplified as urban populations become ever larger.*

In this context, the planet is like a "patient" with multiple chronic conditions that needs to be treated both globally and locally. The applied treatment has to be effective, fast and safe to return the patient to a state of homeostasis that will secure our future.

Cities are interconnected complex systems with extensive and unpredictable feedback processes that operate at multiple scales and time frames. At urban level, there is the crucial necessity in anticipating and coping with climate challenges and also with war. Thus, in this paper we will also address cities as part of the cause and part of the solution for recent security challenges.

Keywords: *climate change; security; city; urban planning; civil-military cooperation; resilience.*

Introduction

Climate change and nature degradation are current security concerns in the context of accelerated urbanization, along with other particularly important trends, such as the increase in armed conflicts at the international level. These challenges of contemporary societies are increased by global interdependencies, as well as by disparities between states in a technological world. Still, these concerns compete for attention and funding with more established threats, such as cyber-attacks or Russia-Ukraine war and other "hot spots" on global agenda.

In this context, cities play a key role in addressing climate and natural environmental crisis and also anticipating new challenges. Forced by the dynamics of the involved challenges, urban settlements will be able to improve their preparedness for natural and man-made disasters, improve response strategies and adopt more effective measures, thus strengthening their resilience to rapid change, if decision-makers manage to rethink the way we live and develop with existing resources at their disposal, by constantly innovating.

How can we build safer cities in this fragile context? Of course, the answer lies precisely in how we approach these challenges of a society in constant change stemmed by globalization and technological advancement. A common feature of these changes is the increasing speed of manifestation, as well as their spatial impact. Under pressure, transforming these global challenges into opportunities for cooperation, not conflict, can lead to building relationships based on a deep understanding of what binds us in our unity of human existence.

The changes that societies living in cities are experiencing today relate to rapid and visible evolution triggered by climate change effects in urban and inhabited spaces. It would therefore be important to understand, identify and know their impact on the transformations of different urban fabrics.

1. Understanding Climate Change and Security Interdependencies from the Global to the National Scale

International crises often involve rethinking security from the global to the local. In this regard, the 2025 World Economic Forum, held in Davos earlier this year, discussed the evidence indicating that climate change will lead to increased risks of interpersonal and group violence. Thus, "it was found that a 1°C increase in temperature increases interpersonal violence by about 2%, while the risk of intergroup conflict increases by 2.5% to 5%. This relationship is evident at different scales – local, national and even global" (Ruhweza and White 2025).

It was also noted that the loss of natural elements is likely to have the same type of effect. Climate and nature crises should be seen as linked, reinforcing each other. Climate change is acidifying the oceans, driving species migrations, and altering rainfall patterns in ways that threaten all aspects of nature degradation. Nature degradation, in turn, is depleting carbon pools and creating additional CO2 emissions, through mechanisms such as wildfires and increased deforestation, accelerating warming.

Also the military operations in urban terrain are transforming the cities around the world while reshaping the global influences of the biggest countries. Center for Naval Analyses Military Advisory Board coined in 2007 climate change as a "threat multiplier" meaning it exacerbates existing threats (e.g., terrorism, civil unrest, civil wars) (Goodman and Baudu 2023). Armed forces may need to adapt their strategies to address emerging climate-related challenges, such as humanitarian assistance after disasters or responses to increased resource competition.

1.1. The Challenges of Governance in a Rapidly Changing World

As climate and natural environment crises accelerate, new threats are emerging that challenge elements of the status quo at both national and global levels. Now, we need robust, multi-stakeholder political processes to identify and address these concerns that must be prioritized.

Current intense political discussions focus on issues such as the sovereignty of states threatened by armed conflict and global interdependencies, the management of areas threatened by rising sea levels, the looming economic crisis, the governance of areas such as the Arctic and its resources, and climate-driven migration.

On this political background, the initiative of incorporating environmental threats into national security strategies is essential for preparing for the cascading risks that climate change and nature degradation will bring. Concomitantly, military and defence organizations are increasingly on the front lines of managing climate disruption, from responding to natural disasters to stabilizing regions affected by resource scarcity. All these initiatives are taken as the decision-maker became aware of the fact that ecosystems restoration to stabilize the climate and mitigate risks is a difficult task in a context where the international situation is doubled by ongoing armed conflicts and uncertainties on the international political scene.

As climate and natural environment crises accelerate, current political discussions focus on issues such as: the sovereignty of states, armed conflict and global interdependencies, the management of areas threatened by rising sea levels, the looming economic crisis, the governance of resources and climate-driven migration.

Concomitantly, military and defence organizations are increasingly on the front lines of managing climate disruption, from responding to natural disasters to stabilizing regions affected by resource scarcity.

From social, to economic and ecological perspective the existing disparities of the world's cities should be diminished because they cause harmful cascading effects on human communities and their existence, leading to the irreparable deterioration of environment. Thus, contemporary cities will

have to reconfigure their operating laws in new flexible, adaptive urban systems and to increase their capacity for managing unpredictable situations.

Cooperation for integrated resource management, such as water-sharing agreements in drought-prone regions, would not only preserve the benefits of nature, but also reduce the risk of conflict arising from resource scarcity. Such cooperation is essential given the need to transform global food systems. Also, when carefully planned, early warning and adaptation saves both lives and resources in the long term. But to truly make a difference, we need action at every level—local, national, regional, international.

1.2. Decision-making consensus and the speeds of change from national to local level

Urban climate resilience planning involves multiple participants. Therefore, planning, implementation, and maintenance of ecosystem-based adaptation measures require civil-military cooperation, each dimension with the need to adapt their policies, procedures, regulations, and practices in new integrated systems.

In order to support cities in climate resilience planning and design, there are science-based tools available for hazard exposure and vulnerability analysis. Policymakers, government authorities, planners, designers, and practitioners can work together to determine the requirements of the priority areas and set the adaptation targets.

Achieving consensus in decision-making regarding climate change and security at various scales — from national to local — requires coordinated efforts, inclusive dialogue, and adaptive strategies. Below is a structured analysis of decision-making processes, the challenges of consensus-building, and the implications for managing climate-related changes.

National governments often develop climate policies within existing frameworks that may not explicitly integrate security considerations. Hence, there's a need for comprehensive legislation that acknowledges the interplay between climate risks and national security.

International agreements (e.g., Paris Agreement (United Nations Climate Change 2015)) serve as platforms for countries to align their climate goals but often face challenges in implementation at the national level due to differing priorities. Multidisciplinary approaches that merge environmental science with social sciences can enhance understanding of the complexities involved in decision-making.

Thus, taking into consideration urban climate resilience planning, we underline four layers of awareness in decision-making process.

Information Gaps and Planning:

- A lack of accessible data on specific vulnerabilities exacerbates uncertainty in decision-making processes at both national and local levels.
- Encouraging transparency around climate data collection fosters better understanding among stakeholders regarding risks associated with inadequate action.

Competing Interests and Adaptive Governance:

- The urgency imposed by escalating climatic events often outpaces existing institutional capacities for response; thus, highlighting gaps necessitating rapid innovation within governance structures at all levels.
- Incremental adaptations might occur faster due to lower resource requirements than large-scale transformational shifts which demand extensive rethinking across multiple sectors — and securing multi-stakeholder buy-in could slow progress significantly if misaligned interests emerge during discussions.
- Building nimble institutions capable of responding quickly while ensuring stakeholder alignment is critical amid this dynamic environment.

- Decision-making structures must be flexible enough to adapt as new information becomes available or conditions change (e.g., new scientific data on climate impacts).
- Creating feedback loops where community-level observations inform national policies can enhance responsiveness.
- Different sectors may have conflicting priorities (e.g., economy vs environment), making it difficult to reach an agreement on shared goals.
- Industrial lobby groups may resist regulations they perceive as threatening profitability; thus requiring careful negotiation strategies that identify win-win scenarios.

Technological Integration:

- Leveraging technology (such as AI or GIS mapping) enables rapid assessment enabling faster deployment towards localized responses ─ but adapting human systems alongside technological advances remains essential given socio-political complexities involved.
- Navigating decision-making surrounding the interdependencies between climate change and security necessitates concerted efforts spanning from global frameworks down through national policies into localized actions based upon participatory governance principles characterized by engagement transparency adaptability inclusiveness guidance & collaborative networks across diverse actors operating within multi-layered contexts ultimately ensuring timely effective responses toward achieving resilient sustainable futures against ever-present challenges posed by climate change.

Cultural Differences, Education and Awareness:

- Raising awareness about climate realities among local populations–and enhancing education about adaptation measures–can foster grassroots support for necessary policy changes.
- Community-based programs focused on resilience-building not only address immediate threats but also empower citizens through knowledge sharing.
- Diverse cultural perspectives can influence how communities perceive risks associated with climate change; building consensus requires acknowledging these differences respectfully.
- Tailoring communication effectively across cultural contexts is crucial for fostering collaboration toward shared objectives related to resilience-building initiatives.

2. What Can Cities Do to Be More Resilient to Climate and Security Challenges?

Facing the previous stated serious challenges requires innovations in governance systems and planning. At the moment, the international system is set up to act on a state-to-state basis. Therefore, city leaders are forging networks within and across international boundaries to address shared problems, including climate change. National governments and multilateral organizations are not organized to work with city-level governance mechanisms, but around working with nation states, which limits the purpose for devolved decision making and consultative engagement at the city level. A common challenge for sustainable growth and climate resilience of cities is to achieve a de-coupling of economic growth from environmental degradation

We therefore need a sustained push in the promotion of transnational climate change governance. In this context local authorities and stakeholders could build their capacities for sustainable economic and ecologic planning of more resilient cities by using technological tools that facilitate cooperation and interoperability.

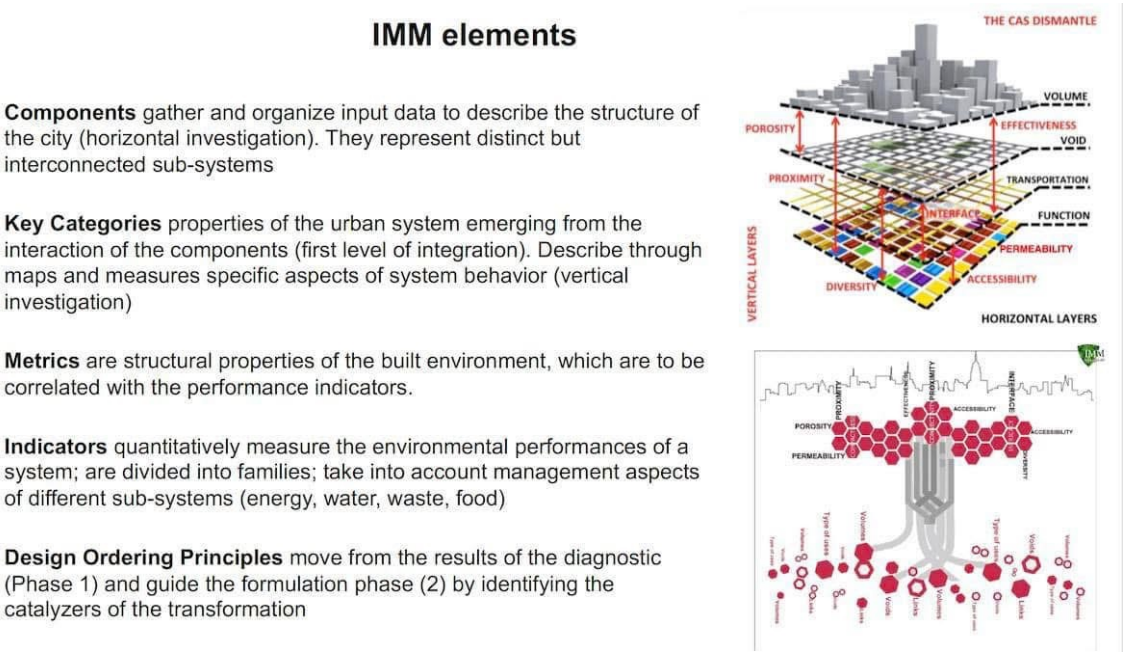


Figure no. 1: Integrated Modification Methodology (Politecnico di Milano 2012)

At city level approach, Integrated Modification Methodology (IMM) is a methodological interpretation of the Sustainable Development Goal (United Nations 2023), serving as a tool to apply Goal 11[1] principles in urban projects. Essentially, it is a scientific procedure designed to investigate the built environment on various scales, providing strategic planning and design scenarios. This could be an example to comprises four iterative phases planning at urban level:

- Investigation: study of morphological components and functioning mechanisms, leading to systemic problem diagnosis.
- Formulation: identification of the weakest structural attribute and definition of a local strategic plan based on sustainable design principles.
- Modification: translation of the strategic plan into tangible design steps through the IMM action wheel, resulting in one or a group of modification scenarios.
- Retrofitting: evaluation of scenarios using the same procedure as the actual context, refining the modifications.
- In already fragile contexts, this dynamic and scope for engagement to address climate risks is hindered by weak capacity, lack of political will and the perception that climate change is not a priority.

2.1. Cities as Part of the Cause and Part of the Solution for Climate Change

Cities are interconnected complex systems with extensive and unpredictable feedback processes that operate at multiple scales and time frames.

"The climate of the earth is changing and as a result cities are bracing themselves to cope with threats from a more hostile environment, including flooding and extreme storms, as well as rising temperatures and water shortages. They must also deal with profound social problems. For thousands of years, cities have proved highly effective at lifting people out of poverty. But today there is a growing divide between rich and poor. While globalisation and the opening-up of markets around the world has generated great wealth, it is unevenly distributed. The gated communities of the affluent stand next to shanty towns in which households have no clean running water. A third of all city dwellers now live in slums. In many cities of the developed world there is also rising income

[1] A.N.: Goal 11 - *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.*

inequality, resulting in increasingly polarised societies" (P. D. Smith 2012). This polarisation of societies leads to conflicts, instead of unity. Thus in this context, the optimal action is *Anticipatory Adaptation* (McCarthy, Canziani and Leary 2001).

In 2018, in the book *Planning and Designing Defence Objectives in the Smart City*, we highlighted some current and particularly important things: "A smart city is not only a more efficient human settlement but also a paradoxically vulnerable space, due to its high complexity and physical and cyber interdependencies. Therefore, in a world where the security of citizens is increasingly difficult to ensure, the benefits of living in a smart city should be greater compared to its vulnerabilities. We believe that in the future there will be no sustainable urbanization and safer cities without a new form of spatial planning. This should take into account phenomena such as: degradation of the natural environment and climate change, the increase in terrorist attacks taking place in cities and the increase in urban violence, the increase in disparities between different cities around the world, poverty, migration, the emergence and development of new technologies, etc." (Rusu 2018).

Cities are vulnerable to all kinds of stresses and shocks. "Through our practice and research across multiple contexts in the developed and developing world, we see that there are a number of generalizable characteristics observable in resilient cities. These relate to the behaviours and capacities of multiple sets of actors within cities who can shape resilience outcomes — from different parts of city government, to the business sector, civil society, and communities themselves" (Uennatornwaranggoon 2015). In short, they are dynamic places where resilience is critical to avoiding prolonged or irrecoverable outcomes when bad things happen.

While cities contribute significantly to global challenges such as climate change and inequality, they also possess immense potential to lead as proactive solutions. Therefore, through intentional policies, innovative practices, and community engagement, cities can transform themselves into resilient and sustainable environments that benefit both their residents and the planet. Balancing these dual roles is essential for a sustainable urban future.

2.2. Critical Urban Climate Change Resilience Recommendations

Building urban security in the context of climate change is a multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive approach. As climate change exacerbates natural disasters, sea-level rise, and other environmental stresses, cities must adapt to safeguard their residents, infrastructure, and economies.

In this context it is necessary to prioritise climate resilience by taking a consistent and holistic approach to urban planning and investment decisions. An accessible framework that can help decision-makers to embrace collaboration is the City Resilience Framework (CRF) launched for the first time in 2014 (ARUP 2024). Since then it significantly shaped city resilience, influencing urban practice globally.

The new version of CRF (2024) reframes the 12 goals and 56 indicators of CRF'14 by redirecting indicators towards 22 updated goals that align more closely with city departments.
The updated version of framework emphasis:

- Foster engagement with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure inclusive planning, supporting this challenging task that city practitioners regularly face.
- Collaborate with regional and national authorities to align strategies and share resources.
- Create a consistent narrative that supports cities to mobilize investment.
- Review interventions and initiatives to ensure resilience is embedded.

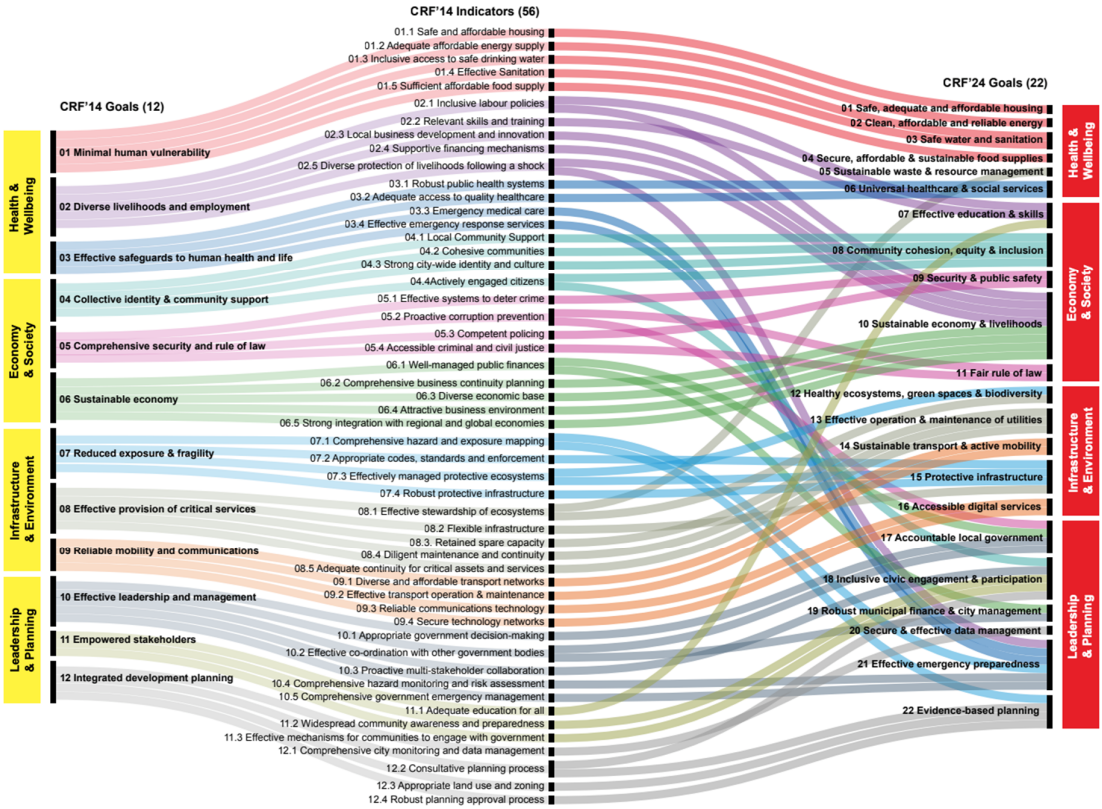


Figure no. 2: City Resilience Framework 2024 Edition (ARUP 2024)

Previous figure shows how CRF'24 reframes the 12 goals and 56 indicators of CRF'14 by redirecting indicators towards 22 updated goals that align more closely with city departments. This way cities can clearly identify priority areas for actions, making the framework more accessible, action-oriented and able to attract investment. The extended 22 goals are more effective and better grouped by dimensions: Health & Wellbeing, Economy & Society, Infrastructure & Environment, Landscape & Planning.

The path forward to more resilient and secure cities is through knowledge, collaboration, coordination and synergy across sectors. These factors should be reinforced by human values as trust, power and control, mutual respect and recognition of those involved in cities planning and development.

To effectively leverage their potential as solutions, cities have to rely on four main pillars:

a) Integrate Sustainability into Core Planning by:

- Embedding sustainability and resilience into the fabric of urban policy, planning, and governance;
- Ensuring that urban security policies incorporate climate considerations across all vital sectors, such as housing, transportation, and health;
- Implementing regulations that discourage construction in high-risk areas and promote the development of green spaces;
- Encouraging mixed-use neighbourhoods that foster local economies and reduce reliance on long-distance travel, minimizing carbon footprints;
- Mapping climate risks by utilizing geographic information systems (GIS) to pin the areas that are at risk of flooding, heatwaves, wildfires, and other climate impacts;

- Identifying vulnerable populations, such as low-income communities, the elderly, and those without adequate housing or healthcare;
- Adapting strategies and planning of the armed forces in order to address emerging climate-related challenges, such as humanitarian assistance after disasters or responses to increased resource competition;
- Planners and designers of future virtual realities who should take into consideration that the city have both a defensive and an offensive role by its activities and function.

In all these, *human discernment and creativity* will play an important role in planning by using *artificial intelligence algorithms* to generate the most accurate situation and possible future cities development scenarios. Also, the use of green defence concept as the development and implementation of ecological processes which are undertaken by military in order to increase energy efficiency and mitigate negative influence on the environment without negatively influencing operability is also an aspect of this pillar.

b) Collaborate Across Sectors by:

- Fostering collaboration among government, civil-military, private sector, non-profits, and communities, including environmental organizations, businesses, and academic institutions, to pool resources and expertise for urban security initiatives and to develop integrated approaches to urban challenges;
- Working with neighbouring municipalities to address shared climate risks and pool resources for regional resilience strategies;
- Developing and regularly updating disaster preparedness plans that take climate risks into account, ensuring that all stakeholders are aware of their roles during a crisis;
- Smart city solutions by utilizing technology such as Internet of Things sensors for real-time monitoring of environmental conditions, enabling timely responses to climate-related threats;
- Data-driven decision making by leveraging big data analytics to improve forecasting, manage resources efficiently, and support evidence-based policy-making.

c) Invest in Green Infrastructure and Technologies by:

- Prioritizing investments in green technologies, renewable energy, and sustainable transportation systems;
- Establishing and securing funding for climate adaptation projects, leveraging public-private partnerships and international climate financing;
- Focusing on context related nature-based solutions;
- Retrofitting buildings in terms of upgrading buildings to be more resilient to extreme weather events, ensuring that they can withstand floods, hurricanes, and heatwaves;
- Configuring sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) by implementing green infrastructure solutions like parks, green roofs, and permeable pavements to manage stormwater and reduce flooding;
- Energy resilience: diversify and enhance the energy supply, incorporating renewable energy sources and ensuring access to backup power during emergencies.

d) Address Social Equity by:

- Ensuring that measures taken also address social inequalities, providing opportunities and resources for all community members;
- Conducting regular training and simulations for residents and local authorities to enhance community readiness for climate-related emergencies;
- Developing programs that address climate-related health risks, including heat-related illnesses and vector-borne diseases;
- Ensuring that healthcare facilities are resilient to climate impacts, maintaining essential services during disasters;

- Involving community members in urban planning processes to ensure their needs and insights shape climate adaptation strategies;
- Launching campaigns to educate residents about climate risks, emergency procedures, and ways to strengthen community resilience.
- Providing equitable access by ensuring that all community members, particularly marginalized groups, have access to resources and support during climate crises.
- Tailoring strategies to fit the cultural contexts of different neighbourhoods to enhance trust and cooperation among residents, ensuring that climate adaptation measures resonate with community values and practices.

Conclusion

Building urban security in the context of climate change necessitates a proactive, inclusive, and multi-layered approach. By incorporating risk assessments, enhancing infrastructure, fostering community engagement, and promoting innovative solutions, cities can become more resilient to the myriad challenges posed by a changing climate. Investing in these strategies not only protects urban populations but also enhances the overall quality of life and supports sustainable development in the long run.

As we understand that besides raw materials and energy as essential resources for human settlement development, the most important resource nowadays is knowledge. Over time, through knowledge and innovation we could find solutions to challenges that occur. Nowadays applied knowledge needs to take into consideration moral values that govern human beings in a society where technological tools and artificial algorithms occur. It also emphasizes the critical importance of conducting climate risk assessments to adapt to the dynamic changes in climate and anthropogenic development. It outlines the necessity of developing climate projections as "threat multiplier" focusing on extreme temperatures, sea level rise, and extreme precipitation.

To effectively map future climate challenges, the establishment of a comprehensive climate risk database and the enhancement of numerical modelling skills are essential. In addition to hazard assessments, vulnerability assessments should focus on properties, people, and services, as these are the most impacted. Creating a detailed building inventory and formulating vulnerability curves using historical data and expert judgment are recommended steps.

Furthermore, civil-military spatial planning should align with urban climate adaptation efforts. Based on the results of climate risk assessment, developing regulations and building codes, as well as rational land use planning for new development areas, are effective measures for spatial adaptation to climate change. Planning, implementation, and maintenance of ecosystem-based solutions require the civil-military cooperation, each with the need to adapt their policies, procedures, regulations, and practices. The lack of coordination between developing speeds of cities creates an operative void that leaves the city at the expense of other forces outside the discipline.

In summary, while cities contribute significantly to global challenges such as climate change and inequality, they also possess immense potential to lead as proactive solutions. Through intentional policies, innovative practices, and community engagement, cities can transform themselves into resilient and sustainable environments that benefit both their residents and the planet. Balancing these dual roles is essential for a sustainable urban future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

ARUP. 2024. *City Resilience Framework 2024 Edition – Preparing for the next decade.* The Rockefeller Foundation.

Goodman, Sherri, and Pauline Baudu. 2023. "BRIEFER: Climate Change as a "Threat Multiplier": History, Uses and Future of the Concept." 3 January. Accessed 03 05, 2025.

https://climateandsecurity.org/2023/01/briefer-climate-change-as-a-threat-multiplier-history-uses-and-future-of-the-concept/#:~:text=The%20term%20was%20coined%20in,to%20contribute%20to%20security%20risks.

McCarthy, James J., Osvaldo F. Canziani, and Neil A. Leary. 2001. *CLIMATE CHANGE 2001: IMPACTS, ADAPTATION, AND VULNERABILITY.* Contribution of Working Group II to the Third Assessment Report, Cambridge: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

P. D. Smith. 2012. *City. A guidebook for future urban age.* . London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Politecnico di Milano. 2012. *Integrated Modification Methodology (IMM).* Accessed February 2, 2025. https://www.immdesignlab.com/methodology.

—. 2012. *Integrated Modification Methodology" (IMM).* Accessed February 2, 2025. https://www.immdesignlab.com/methodology.

Ruhweza, Alice, and Eric White. 2025. "Why we need to start talking about the relationship between climate change and security." *World Economic Forum Annual Meeting.* Davos: https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/01/climate-change-security-relationship/. Accessed February 2, 2025. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/01/climate-change-security-relationship/.

Rusu, Sorina-Georgiana. 2018. *Planificarea și proiectarea obiectivelor destinate apărării în orașul inteligent.* București: Ed. Paralela 45.

Uennatornwaranggoon, Fern. 2015. *INSIGHTS FROM THE ASIAN CITIES CLIMATE CHANGE RESILIENCE NETWORK. Urban Climate Change Resilience in Action: Lessons from Projects in 10 ACCCRN Cities.* The Rockefeller Foundation.

2015. "United Nations Climate Change." *https://unfccc.int/.* December. Accessed February 2, 2025. https://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf.

United Nations. 2023. *The Sustainable Development Goals Report. Special edition.* New York, NY, 10017, United States of America: United Nations Publications.

SECTION II

TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS IN AREAS OF STRATEGIC INTEREST

Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies &
Interdisciplinary Doctoral School,
"Carol I" National Defence University

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-08

MOTIVES, MECHANISMS AND MAP OF FAR-RIGHT RADICALISATION IN EUROPE. MYTHS AND SOCIOLOGICAL CONFIRMATIONS

Iulian CHIFU, PhD,
Professor, "Carol I" National Defence University,
President, Conflict Prevention and Early Warning Center, Bucharest, Romania.
E-mail: keafuyul@gmail.com

Cosmin GRIGORE, PhD Candidate,
National School of Political and Administrative Studies (SNSPA),
Junior Researcher at Center for Conflict Prevention and Early Warning, Bucharest, Romania.
E-mail: grigore.cosmin@yahoo.com

Abstract: *There is a full resurgence of populist, nationalist, right-wing extremist parties at the forefront of European and world politics. These are not mere labels, and the differences between the various approaches within this political family are crucial. We have reviewed the different components of ideologies in the radical right space and the links with populism, conservatism, nationalism, anti-system or anti-elite, globalist, neo-liberalism approaches, including parliamentary representation and democratic governance, making a mirror of radicalization. We have also delved into the causes of the historical emergence and proliferation of these trends, and have looked at sociological studies that reveal the qualitative content and characteristics of the favourite targets of these trends. The study shows that the dominant criteria are technology, algorithms and message amplifiers as well as the lack of responsibility, and frustration that bring these trends to the fore, and not necessarily the obvious quantitative indicators such as investment in and level of education, economic development, or qualitative ones such as indiscriminate access to opinions in the guise of information and lack of critical thinking.*

Keywords: *populism; political extremism; radicalisation; anti-system; illiberalism.*

Introduction and Methodologies

This paper aims to identify the mapping of far-right populist movements in the current political spectrum and to determine the mechanisms that have led to the amplification of their support in the contemporary world. We are then interested, on the basis of extensive sociological studies at the European Union level, particularly in France, Italy, Austria, Hungary - chosen for the specific characteristics of the relevant governments and parties in the spectrum under study - in the economic and educational component characteristic of the regions that predominantly support these systems, together with the individual features of the politics of these states and the impact of European policies considered neo-progressive on them.

The methodology used is that of an encyclopaedic and comparative study of the concepts and nuances of the partisan options of different ideologies, as well as the identification of the criteria that create the nuances of the approaches and the affinities with the classical conservative, nationalist or anti-system movements. Comparative study of the policies and failures of the individual states concerned together with sociological studies of the impact and support for the European policies in question are also integrated into the qualitative analysis we conduct.

The findings imply that support for far-right parties is stronger in areas with lower education spending and poorer educational outcomes (PISA tests) but also dependence on government policies that have sparked backlash and protest voting, including recourse to irrationality in elections. Naturally, here again we find the impact of social media and technological tools to target every citizen of any country connected to social media networks and the (excessive, not infrequently abusive) use of personal data that allows for targeted selection and empowerment.

1. Populism, Extremism, Radicalism, Conservatism Nationalism. A Conundrum of Concepts on the Right Wing of the Political Spectrum

Populism - populisms

The political space that is alternatively labelled (possibly radical) right-wing populism, neo-conservatism, right-wing extremism, illiberalism/liberal democracy, radical right-wing nationalism, authoritarian, anti-system, right-wing, authoritarian parties, is in fact a highly heterogeneous family of political movements. Populism is the characteristic of all these movements, announcing that they are anti-system (in the sense of being against the power scaffolding, not necessarily the democratic system they use, primarily the elective democracy component), claiming to represent the People, whom they understand and better bring their preferences into political decision-making (Colantone and Stanig 2019). However, the movements are heterogeneous, from left to right, and the economic component ranges from egalitarianism and fighting inequalities to redistribution, economic nationalism and libertarianism.

Thus, Betz divides right-wing radicalism, obviously populist, into libertarianism and national-authoritarianism (Betz 1993), while van Beyme introduces the characteristics of right-wing populism as volatility, unpredictability, anti-elitism, institutional contestation, politicization and the creation of multiple “Us” versus “Them” rifts, as well as a high degree of opportunism (Beyme 2019) (especially adaptation to current developments in the state and the concrete policies that are adopted and applied), with the risk of inconsistency and incoherence.

Betz also makes the matrix of the distinctions between right-wing populism and conservatism, noting that the latter is, on the contrary, stable, with firm values, elitist, with respect for institutions - it even strengthens, reinforces, centralizes them, is concerned with the integration and solidity of society and the state, and has a solid spiritual foundation as well (Beyme 2019). It is no coincidence that today’s populist-conservative movements claim to be neo-conservative and to be bearers of a form of “true democracy” (Crook, Pakulski and Waters 1992), claiming to save classical, traditional, established conservatism.

For Mudde, populism is not a focused and decanted ideology, but merely a method based on the opposition between the “pure people”, superior, endowed with absolutely positive elements, and the “corrupt elites”, without a coherent agenda or programme (Mudde 2004). Three elements would be defining: the anti-system stance, challenging the structures of representative democracy; authoritarianism, which challenges the principles of liberalism, especially the protection of minority rights, and prefers representation by charismatic leaders, respectively government by referendum and plebiscite; and nationalism/nativism which is anti-cosmopolitan, against internationalism and multilateralism, with autarchic tendencies (Inglehart, Ronald and Norris 2016). Bonikowski also sees populism as more of a discursive framework, in which multiple ideologies fit (Bonikowski 2016).

Populism questions the model of parliamentary representation, based on a lack of representativeness and the failure of traditional governmental action, while the struggle with the elite or the powerful (but for right-wing populism not the rich) introduces the crisis of parliamentarism (Tribe 1987) and introduces the theme of the crisis of parliamentary democracy, i.e. it challenges the independence and mutual control of the powers in the state, opting for the absolute pre-eminence of the untrammelled executive power, on the basis of the vote which would give it absolute legitimacy.

This is where the theme of the liberal democrats' encroachment on the sovereignty of the people through the institutional mechanisms of liberal democracy emerges (Gandesha 2018) and the idea and labelling of sovereigntist parties. Which believe, at the extreme, that they do not even need democratic institutions that mediate the relationship with the people, and that the charismatic leader voted in can only govern directly with the people - the model of inter-war authoritarianism, fascism and Stalinism alike. Moreover, populism has two distinct directions of action, economic - with components of economic nationalism and autarchic isolationism, with centralised economic etatism; and cultural - the battle between so-called conservative and progressive values. Populism arises from the economic insecurity of large classes and the erosion of traditional cultural values in the context of globalization (Anderson 2016).

Neo-conservatism, anti-system positions, break with rationality

Populism is therefore the most widespread and common feature of this category of parties, but, as we have seen, not all populist parties are right-wing, and not all right-wing populism is radical, let alone extremist. Added to this is the neo-conservative characteristic, which means that the main attack and dispute is precisely with the classic conservative parties, in the mould of the Christian Democratic International and the European People's Party or the European Conservative Parties, which retain their liberal-democratic characteristics.

Nationalism is inherently part of the economic dimension and traditionalist approaches in the economic and cultural dimension. The anti-system approach challenges the institutions and the elite, favouring the assumption of representation of the people and the promotion of a so-called "true democracy", which replaces professional, reasoned and rational choices with numbers, voting, majorities (Jörke and Selk 2015) (Laclau 2006). That is why rational discussions with the political representatives of extreme forms or with their voters and supporters are not possible.

2. Radical Right, Far Right, Illiberalism

The radical right is seen as criticizing the established order, especially liberal democracy, and the system of checks and balances between the different powers in the state, which is seen as a defiance of the will of the majority. Here again we find extreme formulations of nationalisms and nativisms that are fundamentally anti-immigration, anti-integration and xenophobic, exclusivist and primordialist towards the natives, while radical right-wing populism challenges liberal pluralism, promotes authoritarianism and the model of the strong, charismatic (and absolute) leader and rejects elitism (Golder 2016). Even within the radical right there are divergences on the elements of categorization and separation of the extreme right from the radical right, where this distinction is made (Rydgren 2007), with very fine lines or even confusion at the borders between the various concepts.

Thus, the radical right would be market-based economically but relatively economically conservative, if not embracing even economic nationalism and traditionalism domestically, isolationist and protectionist in international trade; globalization must be fought by compensating the losers or, alternatively, returning to the status quo; the technological polarization of jobs is leading to new splits in right-wing approaches - from libertarianism disinterested in the consequences, to nationalist-authoritarianism imposing rules and bottlenecks on the labour market along nationalist autochthonist lines; automation and robotization have different impacts and create different reactions (Acemoglu and Restrepo 2018); Economic crises, not the number or arrival of new immigrants, characterize the migration frontline (Dustmann, Vasiljeva and Damm 2019), which is, however, as much a subject as the associated criminality (sometimes even terrorism).

One particular theme in the space of right-wing radicalism concerns illiberal democracy. The novelty in the sub-typology of right-wing populist authoritarian populist approaches is the introduction of the concept which assumes universal suffrage, free elections, but not independent

judiciary and rule of law, but a subordination of the judiciary to the political and executive component. Neo-conservatism is part of the concept, as is nationalism and autochthonism, including economic nationalism and de facto protectionism, even though, formally, these currents may accept the free market economy. Voting and not law has primacy, the number and not the quality of arguments. The formulas, to be found especially in Hungary, where it has been publicly assumed, have over time, in Russia or China, turned into forms of state capitalism, political authoritarianism and pseudo-market economics and ordoliberalism (Zakaria 2008).

As far as the far-right is concerned, only a minority of populists can be identified as right-wing extremists, the immediate visible characteristics being fascist slogans - even the Nazi salute in public - extreme approaches from the radical right space, ignoring or even rejecting constitutional rules, rejecting the rules of democratic representation to the point of anarchism or totalitarianism (depending on the branch towards libertarianism versus authoritarian nationalism) (Colantone and Stanig 2019). Right-wing extremism, however, generally rejects the terrorist method, unlike the populist extreme left, which may use it, as it characteristically addresses “anti-American”, “anti-Semitic” and “anti-Islamic” positions as part of its challenge to minorities and external, “globalist” and “imposed” elements. Representative democracy and parliaments are completely rejected, as are the so-called 'democratic methods' (Backes 2007).

Another theme of the debate is the relationship of the radical right, especially the extreme right, with the idea of revolution. Thus, radical right-wing movements are rarely revolutionary (Beyme 2019), but they insist on promoting the criticism of elites and exclusion from the decision-making area, including through ritualistic struggle with formulas of “parallel states”/ deep states, made up of professional civil servants, which would block the radical changes they want, operating by counterposing visible professional influences and scientific explanations, along the lines of the battle of the “people” with the elites. It cultivates discontent with the discontent at the bottom of society for life chances and marginal socio-political posturing versus the liberal theory of the role of the individual in the economy (Betz 1993) and wants to bring about profound socio-economic and socio-cultural changes through revolutionary formulas that mostly stop at the climate of anxiety and resentment, or revenge, created in cyberspace, but also through actions to accelerate social fragmentation.

We also need to discuss here the relationship between the radical and extremist right and the European Union. Here the approaches are in the sphere of the relationship of ideologies with anti-European versus Eurosceptic approaches. The approach touches NATO as well (Biscop 2018). For the most part, right-wing extremists have firmly rejected the idea of the European Union and the associated construct, operating under the slogan “Europe Yes, EU No”, but right-wing radicals have preferred to situate themselves in the space of Euroscepticism and the Europe of Nations model, without rejecting the advantages and positive elements of the European Union for their own states. Especially when they are net EU-funded states, but rejecting the “progressive policies” imposed by Brussels, which accompany the implementation funds, especially those related to the environment, global warming, equal opportunities and integration of minorities of all kinds, immigration or the independence of justice. And the post-communist left-wing parties in Central and Eastern Europe also identify themselves as Eurosceptic.

3. Categorization of the European Radical Populist Right

We considered all the elements introduced by the different classifications of populism, right-wing radicalism and extreme right, with reference to the subtypes of democratic illiberalism and neo-conservatism or political and economic nationalism/autochthonism, in order to make our own separation of the integrated criteria that could represent a system of radicalization thresholds, namely the move towards the populist extreme right (Rydgren 2007).

We have thus introduced and propose a model with nine radicalization thresholds that define the radical right and the far right. First, we have placed extremism within the radical right at the threshold of the capacity for rational dialogue, respect for the democratic system as a basic rule, respect for the Constitution in force and non-damage to national security, respectively tolerance versus violence as the major threshold of transition from radicalism to extremism. Under these conditions, right-wing extremism is virtually illegal and sanctioned or punishable in established liberal democracies, while right-wing radicalism is legal, included in the current political system and allows for rational dialogue and the use of arguments in the debate on public policies.

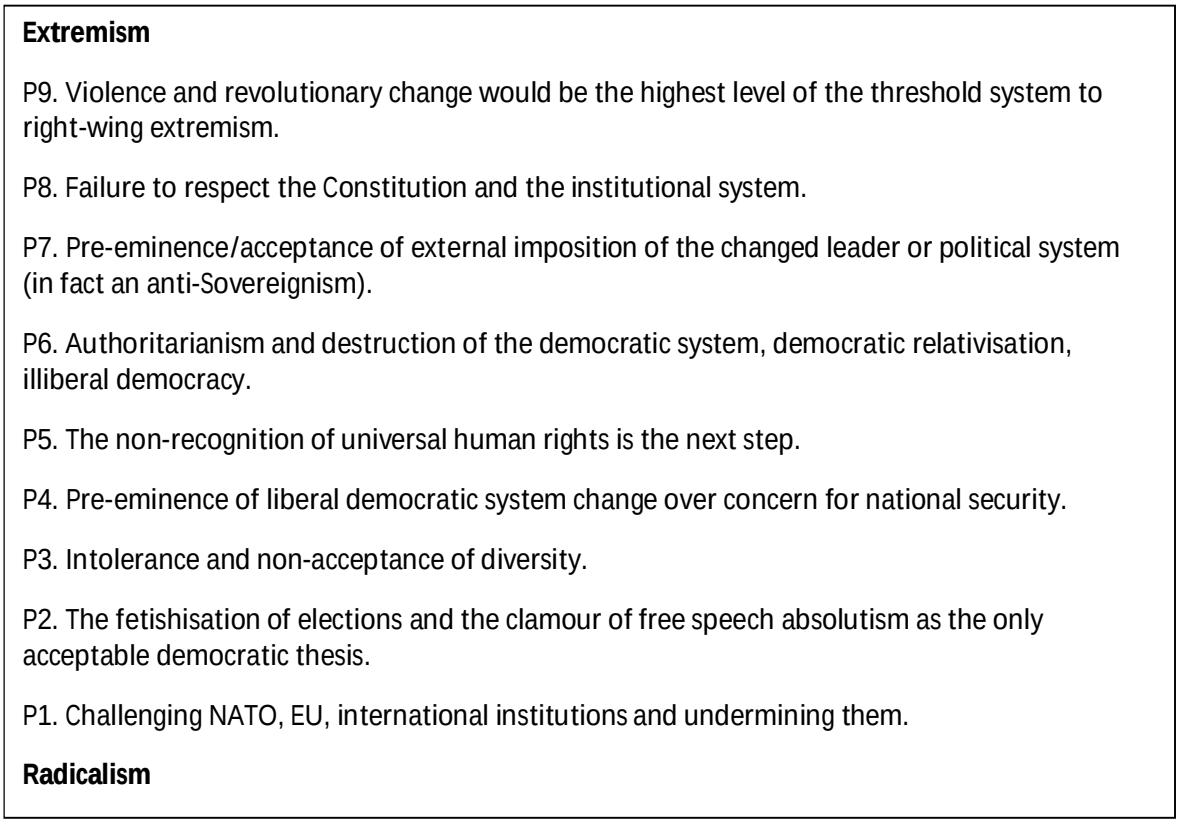


Figure no. 1: Radicalization thresholds from radical right to extremism.
(C) Copyright Iulian Chifu

4. Motivations and Causes of the Far-Right Vote

We also looked into the causes of this political radicalization and the mechanisms, but also the vulnerable individuals targeted by these ideologies. Thus, fundamentally, the flight to the extreme is driven by deep dissatisfaction with one's own fate, catalysed protest voting, the rejection of any moderate conventional political options, voting against all and challenging the democratic system as a whole, as a result of its effects on the individual fate of the dissatisfied (Chifu and Simons 2023).

If contestation is always legitimate and in any concrete policy, there are supporters and opponents, bringing together of all losers under the fold of the contestation of the liberal-democratic system is the novelty of the radical right movements. The protest vote (Betz 1993) is also mostly justified, against the background of interpreting one's own fate at the expense of some of the European policies considered extreme, ideologized and neo-progressive left-wing, leaving many people behind through social and economic marginalisation. The same approach is also aimed at

failed national policies, the lack of justice and the status of apparent impunity of those at the centre of power, as well as the ostentatious accumulation of wealth in public office.

Subsidiarily, there is a relativization of good and evil, a blurring of boundaries and axiological relativization between tolerance/violence; humanism/cynicism; decency/histrionics (scandal, visibility); moderation/extremism, isolationism and power politics versus multilateralism (Beyme 2019). This is how the moderate centre of the political spectrum and the established, traditional parties are attacked from the positions of radicalism and extremism on the left and the right alike.

The main reason identified is the shift from the welfare state and the neo-liberal social contract to a post-industrial individualised capitalism (Betz 1993), according to Betz. The global economic crisis of 2008 and the sovereign debt crisis in Europe in 2009 were another trigger and amplifier of protest and contestation options for traditional parties (Greenspan 2008). Pandemic and containment policies, seen as infringements of individual rights and forced vaccination versus free choice continued the trend (Chifu and Șaranuță 2020), and, subsequently, costly policies to combat global warming on energy prices and economic efficiency, seen as the effect of an ideologized neo-progressive, left-wing political approach. And this has amplified the flight to the extremes, predominantly to the far right.

The processes generated by new technologies, such as digitisation, social media and global internet access, have reinforced the context in which these choices have spread and amplified (Chifu and Savu, The impact of Technology on Human Being, Society and Politics 2020). Add to this increased access to higher education, information over-abundance, the disintegration of political subcultures and traditional loyalties (Beyme 2019). Dissatisfaction with politics in general, growing cynicism towards traditional parties and declining confidence in the ability of the political class to solve the most pressing problems have added to this trend.

The degree of dissatisfaction has been further aggravated by the division of job space into low-paid, entry-level jobs and more flexible ones, in terms of hours and higher specialisation, sometimes unique (Esping-Andersen 1990), towards the expansion of services, especially technical, social and management services. The welfare state has also shifted, in the social chapter, from the distribution of resources to specialised public services (Coupland 1991), and the bifurcation of the labour market between attractive and in-demand jobs and low-level jobs has led to McDonaldization (Ritzer 1993) of the dissatisfied majority.

The advantages gained through better education and higher qualifications - salaries, status, autonomy in work - have unfortunately not favoured the free market, lower taxes and reduced state intervention (Crook, Pakulski and Waters 1992) that it has produced, because it has created a class of losers who have become fattened and who challenge the very system that has led to this situation of unequal access to opportunities (Hage and Powers 1992). And on top of it all, there was the confrontation with a certain feeling and system of “moralising” (Jan-Werner Müller 2015), whereby the market and social life are considered altered through excessive references to moderate political approaches and the sanctioning of radical ones, which bring together the discontented, another form of blaming, labelling and demeaning, this time in imagological terms, the losers of the post-capitalist liberal democratic system.

5. Sociological Study: The Sources of the Far-Right in France, Italy, Hungary, Austria

In the following, we have used statistical data from Eurostat and various qualitative and regional studies for the four countries concerned - France, Italy, Hungary and Austria. The results at the level of Europe's regions emphasize both the qualitative elements of the duration and solidity of democracy in support of the populist parties' area, and the state of the economies and development, i.e. the status of states net payers or net recipients of European funds (Figure no. 1). Along the same lines we find the correlation of investment in education with voting in the populist spectrum (Figure no. 2) as well as with PISA tests (Figure no. 3); a relevant indicator for adaptability to the highly skilled and well-paid job category with flexible and highly demanded programmes.

A dissonance is seen in the last place in tertiary attainment in Eastern Europe even though investment in education is not the lowest, possibly explained by the absorption of high school graduates from here by better ranked universities in the West and the retention of high school graduates from here in better paid jobs in the West, a result of brain-drain. Just as the aberrations between the danger of social exclusion and per capita income and the inclination to vote to the extreme appear in Figures 4 and 5, which do not explain the inclination more in the rich West and Eastern Europe on this basis and correlation. This is where the weight of history, but also the speed of technological change in the West, plays the most important role, as does, we estimate, the habit of a very good living in the West, which has comparatively faded over the last 15-20 years.

At a granular level, the investment in *social media*, especially to consolidate and promote nationalist and populist discourse, in areas of the virtual public identifiable as losers, dissatisfied, frustrated, is obvious. All the more so when the exploitation of algorithms is coupled with an external intention to interfere and create exploitable societal divisions. From misinformation and amplification of societal divides through online platforms, to financial or strategic support for particular parties and political leaders, election meddling and altering the integrity of elections, the examples are manifold since 2016 and the individual reports conclusive.

The country-by-country analysis highlights the qualitative dimension and the elements of exploitation of vulnerabilities in European and national policies, which are of interest to stimulate anti-system sentiment and distrust of democratic institutions. Although the impact of these factors is difficult to quantify, integrating them into future research could provide a broader perspective on the interplay between internal and external factors in the process of political radicalization.

These results demonstrate the value of education as a preventive measure against political radicalization, as well as technological literacy and an understanding of the mechanisms of information warfare, including the increasingly common psychological operations required to correctly receive the aggression of these currents in cyberspace. The need for public policies that give high priority to education spending as a long-term tactic are convergent with the direct separation of the aggressive and violent components, the currents that assume revolutionary and profoundly anti-democratic views from the broad mass of voters who are disaffected on various issues and the need to engage, dialogue and understand them, avoiding the vindictive and hateful policies that are polarizing, divisive and self-destructive.

Situation at EU Level. The Populist Wave is Getting Stronger

In recent years, the populist wave has been gaining more and more traction in the domestic politics of European countries. While countries such as Hungary and Poland already had a history of populism and nationalism through Fidesz and PiS parties respectively, recently more and more countries have seen an increase in support for anti-EU, anti-system and sometimes even anti-NATO parties. For a better understanding of the whole situation we preferred to divide the EU Member States into regions: South (yellow), West (green), North (blue) and East (orange).

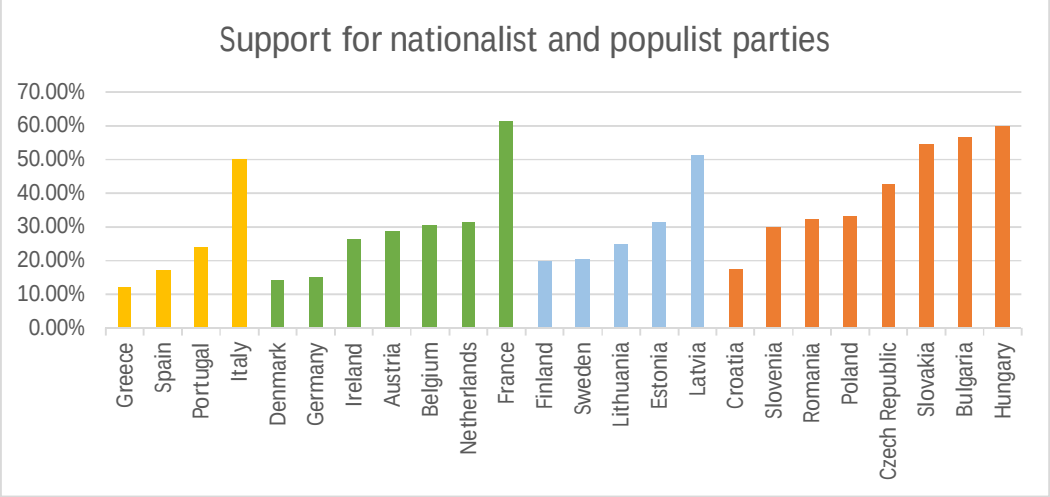


Figure no. 2: Percentage obtained by nationalist and populist parties in the last parliamentary elections (Politico 2025)

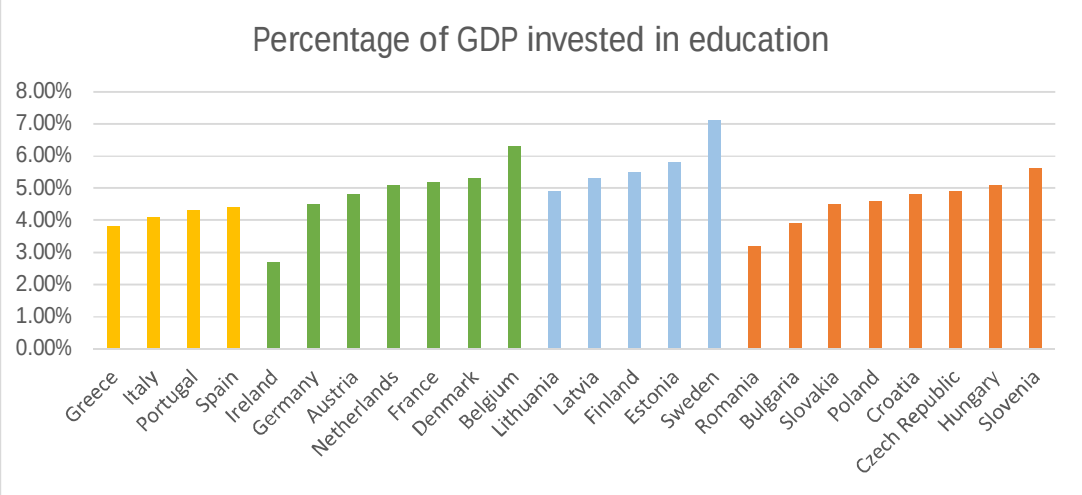


Figure no. 3: Percentage of GDP invested in education in EU countries (Eurostat 2024)

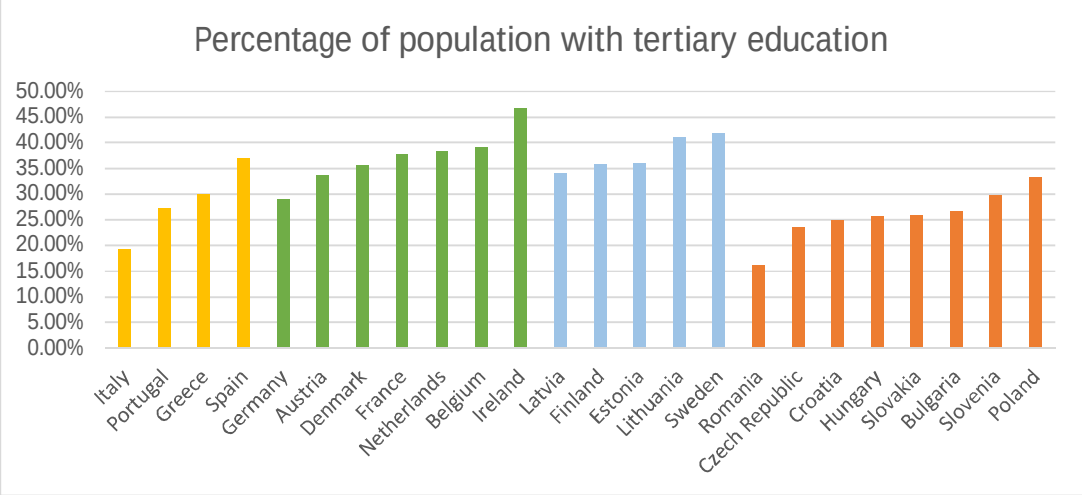


Figure no. 4: Percentage of population with tertiary education (Statista 2024)

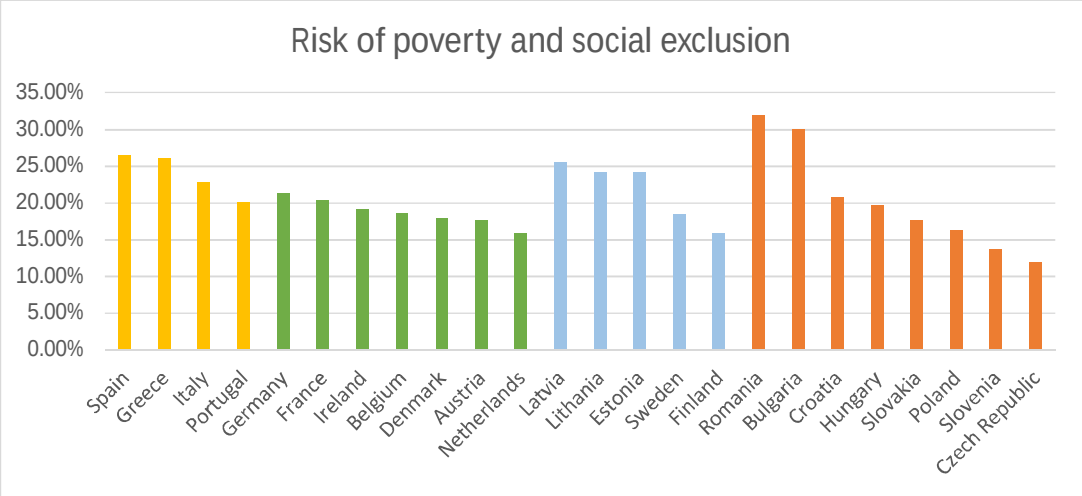


Figure no. 5: Risk of poverty and social exclusion (Eurostat 2024)

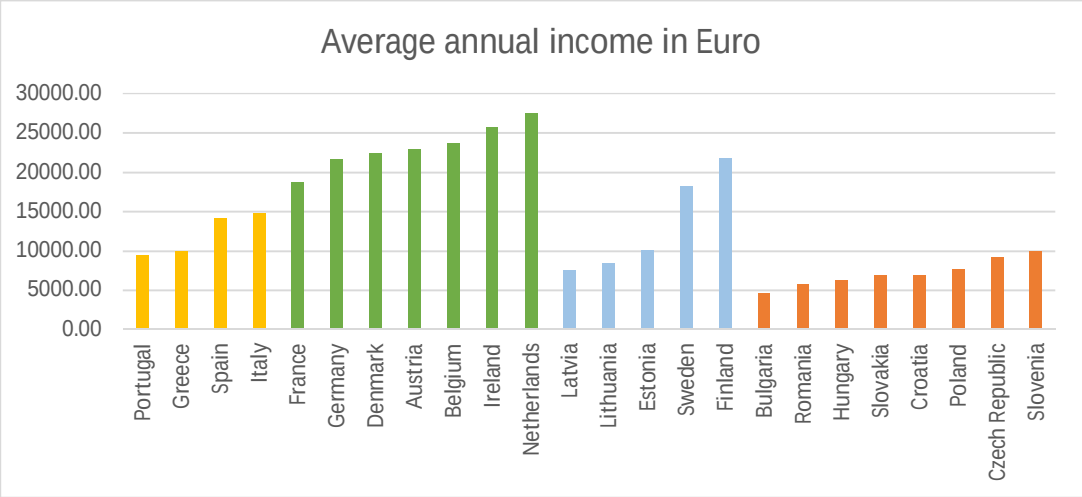


Figure no. 6: Average annual income of citizens in EU Member States *(Eurostat 2025)*

Case of France

In the 2024 Parliamentary elections, the RN (Rassemblement National) party, co-founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen and which had in its incipient membership former members of the SS (Chrisafis 2024), obtained 32,05% of the total votes in the French parliamentary elections (Ministère de l'Intérieur 2024). The fundamental anti-elitist, people-centred characteristics of populism serve as the foundation for today's FN. The party's long-time leader and more radical supporters have been toppled as part of this "normalisation", which has also seen a shift from anti-Semitism to an anti-immigration and Islamophobic stance and from economic liberalism to a policy of protecting the French people against globalisation. The FN programme is based on anti-EU nationalism and anti-elitism (Greven 2016).

Voter dissatisfaction with traditional politics and economic volatility have been the main drivers behind the rise of populist parties over the past decade. France experienced its worst economic recession since the end of the Second World War as a result of the 2008 global financial crisis. In order to reduce the state deficit, both the right and the left have implemented highly unpopular austerity measures. Concerns about immigration caused by Islamic terrorism have been exacerbated since 2015 by the evolving refugee crisis in the EU. More generally, populist mobilization against the political establishment and the European Union has benefited from public dissatisfaction with the EU's crisis management (Ivaldi 2018).

Case of Italy

In 2022 parliamentary elections were held in Italy. They were won by Fratelli d'Italia, a right-wing populist party, with 28,8% of the total votes cast (Politico 2025). An unprecedented number of refugees and migrants have arrived in Europe as a result of the "2015 refugee crisis". Most of these people were fleeing social instability in North Africa and the Middle East, as well as war and terror in Syria. Around 3.5 million people sought asylum in EU-28 countries between 2014 and 2017, an important share in Italy, left alone to deal with migrants. Pressure is still present in several important entry points such as Italy and Greece. Between 2014 and 2017, there was minimal variation in the number of arrivals in Italy, but in 2018, there was a significant decrease. An average of 150,000 people were rescued annually at sea after being smuggled by traffickers from North Africa to Italian shores between 2014 and 2017. (Campo, Giunti and Mendola 2024)

Case of Hungary

In the 2022 parliamentary elections in Hungary, the Fidesz party won 54,1% of the total vote, defeating and shocking the opposition parties that had allied themselves against Viktor Orbán. Fidesz has used the social unrest and economic inequality generated by Hungary's post-communist economy's transition to a free-market economy to strengthen its main support base (Adam 2024).

Case of Austria

In the 2024 parliamentary elections, the FPÖ (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*) party won 28.8% of the vote (Politico 2025), winning the election and giving European politics a shock. According to the FPÖ's election manifesto, entitled "Fortress Austria", the party advocates strict border controls, the suspension of asylum rights through emergency laws and the "remigration of uninvited foreigners" to create a more "homogenous" society (Yahyai 2025).

In 2015, what was to become known as the refugee crisis began, when unprecedented numbers of refugees fled wars in their home countries and entered Europe. Austria tried to limit the entry of refugees, while Germany allowed asylum seekers into the country. Although the European Union has considerable authority over asylum policy, both Germany and Austria have taken measures that contravene EU rules. Instead of requiring migrants to return to their original point of entry, Germany has delayed implementation of the Dublin agreement, allowing them to apply for asylum in Germany. On the other hand, Austria has used the discretionary power of the agreement to reinstate border restrictions in times of crisis, a unique measure among Schengen governments (Hayes and Dudek 2019).

At the same time, one very important fact in Austrian history should not be overlooked. After the end of the Second World War, Austria was confronted with what was called the "victim myth". Due to significant variations in denazification, Austria and Germany developed quite different national identities. Instead of taking responsibility for the Nazi regime in Austria, the Allied-backed government focused on the idea that Austrians suffered under the Nazi regime and were not as complicit in the regime's crimes as German citizens. (Hayes and Dudek 2019)

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

—. 2024. *Government expenditure on education.* 29 February. https://ec.europa.eu/ eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Government_expenditure_on_education

—. 2024. *People at risk of poverty or social exclusion in 2023.* 12 June. https:// ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240612-1

—. 2025. *Poll of Polls.* https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/italy/

—. 2025. *Poll of Polls.* https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/austria/

Acemoglu, Daron and Pascual Restrepo. 2018. "The Race between Man and Machine: Implications of Technology for Growth, Factor Shares, and Employment." *American Economic Review* 1488-1542.

Adam, Konstantia. 2024. *The Rise of Right-Wing Populist Political Parties: The Cases of the Lega Nord in Italy and the Fidesz in Hungary.* University of Macedonia.

Anderson, Terry. 2016. "Theories for Learning with Emerging Technologies." *Athabasca University Press* 35-64.

Backes, Uwe. 2007. "Meaning and Forms of Political Extremism in Past and Present." *ResearchGate.* https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241782159_Meaning_and_For ms_of_Political_Extremism_in_Past_and_Present.

Betz, Hans-Georg. 1993. "The Two Faces of Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe." *Review of Politics* 663-685.

Beyme, Klaus von. 2019. "Populism, Right-Wing Extremism and Neo-Nationalism. Differences Between Populism und Right-Wing Extremism." In *New Authoritarianism. Challenges to Democracy in the 21st century*, by Jerzy J. Wiatr (ed.). Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Biscop, Sven. 2018. "The Dangerous Geopolitics of Populism, and What NATO and the EU Can Do About It." *Jstor.* https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep21404?seq=1.

Bonikowski, Bart. 2016. „Nationalism in Settled Times." *Annual Review of Sociology*. 42:427-449.

Campo, Francesco, Sara Giunti, and Mariapia Mendola. 2024. „Refugee crisis and right-wing populism: Evidence from the Italian Dispersal Policy." *European Economic Review.*

Chifu, Iulian and Dumitru Șaranuță. 2020. *Coronavirus pandemic and the changes of the world.* Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale Ion I C Brătianu al Academiei Române.

Chifu, Iulian and Greg Simons. 2023. *Rethinking warfare in the 21-st Century. The influence and effects of the Politics, Information and Communication Mix.* Cambridge University Press.

Chifu, Iulian and Lavinia Savu. 2020. *The impact of Technology on Human Being, Society and Politics.* Bucharest: Editura Institutului de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale Ion I C Brătianu al Academiei Române.

Chrisafis, Angelique. 2024. *On the brink of power: how France's National Rally reinvented itself.* 25 June. https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/jun/25/france-far-right-natio nal-rally-history-1972-marine-le-pen.

Colantone, Italo and Piero Stanig. 2019. "The Surge of Economic Nationalism in Western Europe." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 128-151.

Coupland, Douglas. 1991. *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture.* St. Martin's Press.

Crook, Pakulski, and Waters. 1992. "Postmodernization. Change in advanced societies." *Sage Publications* 176.

Dustmann, Christian, Kristine Vasiljeva, and Anna Piil Damm. 2019. "Refugee migration and electoral outcome." *Review of Economic Studies* 2035-2091.

Esping-Andersen, Gosta. 1990. *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism.* Princeton University Press.

Eurostat. 2025. *Annual net earnings.* 8 January. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/ view/earn_nt_net/default/table?lang=en.

Gandesha, Samir. 2018. "Understanding Right and Left Populism." *Critical Theory and Authoritarian Populism* 49-70. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv9hvtcf.7?seq=1

Golder, Matt. 2016. "Far Right Parties in Europe." *Annual Review of Political Science* 477-497.

Greenspan, Allan. 2008. *The Age of Turbulence*. Penguin Books.

Greven, Thomas. 2016. "The Rise of Right-wing Populism in Europe and the United States. A Comparative Perspective." *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.* May. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/12892.pdf

Hage and Powers. 1992. "Roles and relationships in the 21st Century." *Sage Publications* 65.

Hayes, Alexander Rossell, Dudek Carolyn Marie. 2019. "How Radical Right-Wing Populism Has Shaped Recent Migration Policy in Austria and Germany." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 133-150.

Inglehart, Ronald, and Norris. 2016. "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash". *Harvard Kennedy School.* August. https://www.hks.harvard.edu/publications/trump-brexit-and-rise-populism-economic-have-nots-and-cultural-backlash

Ivaldi, Gilles. 2018. "Contesting the EU in times of crisis: The Front National and politics of Euroscepticism in France." *Politics* 278-294.

Jan-Werner Müller, 2015. "Should the EU Protect Democracy and the Rule of Law inside Member States?" *European Law Journal* 141-160.

Jörke, Dirk, Veith Selk. 2015. "Der hilflose Antipopulismus." *Leviathan* 484-500.

Laclau, Ernesto. 2006. *On Populist Reason.* London: Verso.

Ministère de l'Intérieur. 2024. *Publication des candidatures et des résultats aux élections.* https://www.archives-resultats-elections.interieur.gouv.fr/resultats/legislatives2024/ensemble_geographique/index.php.

Mudde, C. 2004. "The Populist Zeitgeist." *Government and Opposition* 541-563.

Politico. 2025. *Poll of Polls.* https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/

Ritzer, George. 1993. *The McDonaldization of Society.* London/New Delhi: Pine Forge Press.

Rydgren, Jens. 2007. "The Sociology of Radical Right." *Annual Review of Sociology* 242.

Statista. 2024. *Share of those aged between 15 and 64 with tertiary educational attainment in Europe in 2023, by country.* June. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1084737/eu-27-adults-with-tertiary-education-attainment/?__sso_cookie_checker=failed

Tribe, Keith. 1987. "The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy by Carl Schmitt, Ellen Kennedy; Political Theology by Carl Schmitt, G. Schwab." *Jstor.* https://www. jstor.org/stable/ 26213303

Yahyai, Oman Al. 2025. *Austria's president tasks far-right FPÖ leader Herbert Kickl with forming new government.* 6 January. https://www.euronews.com/2025/01/06/austrias-president-tasks-far-right-fpo-leader-herbert-kickl-with-forming-new-government

Zakaria, Fareed. 2008. *The Post-American World*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies &
Interdisciplinary Doctoral School,
"Carol I" National Defence University

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-09

TRUMP'S SECOND TERM AND U.S. – CHINA RIVALRY: GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Mădălin ENESCU, PhD,
National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest, Romania.
E-mail: enescumadalin89@yahoo.com

Ana Maria FLOREA, PhD Candidate,
National School of Political and Administrative Studies, Bucharest, Romania.
E-mail: ana.m.florea8@gmail.com

Abstract*: In the current context, Thucydides Trap could become a significant factor in the U.S. diplomacy toward China. Moreover, trade tensions and the technological war may escalate into a new form of geopolitical competition, particularly in light of Donald Trump's announcement concerning the possible annexation of Greenland and control over the Panama Canal.*

The purpose of this paper is to explore how the annexation of Greenland and the Panama Canal could shape a new geopolitical competition between the U.S. and China. This evolving dynamic heightens the risk of conflict between the two countries, potentially surpassing the tensions witnessed during the final years of Trump's previous administration. The analysis is conducted in a descriptive manner, making use of various qualitative research methods.

Keywords*: economic decoupling; Thucydides Trap; U.S.-China strategic rivalry; Arctic governance; transatlantic relationship.*

1. Preliminary Considerations

The re-election of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States has the potential to reshape the trajectory of U.S.-China competition. In this context, Graham Allison's concept – Thucydides Trap, provides a useful framework for understanding the evolving dynamics between the U.S. and China (Graham Allison, 2015). Furthermore, a new form of economic conflict may emerge in the coming years, distinct from the previous Trade War by taking on a more explicitly geopolitical dimension rather than remaining strictly economic. Within this framework, the potential annexation of Greenland and control over the Panama Canal could be viewed as part of a regional strategy for the Pacific Ocean's trade routes and also for the North Pole's future trading route. Such actions could heighten the risk of conflict between the two nations beyond the levels observed during the final years of Trump's previous administration (White House, 2025).

Given these developments, this paper seeks to analyse the geopolitical, economic, and technological implications of Trump's re-election on U.S.-China competition, with particular attention to its effect on Arctic dialogue and the Panama Chanel. Future U.S.-China relations could be influenced by Donald Trump's statements regarding the annexation of Greenland and the Panama Channel, which may be interpreted as attempts to contain China's trading routes. This study argues that a second Trump administration would likely intensify the militarization of economic competition, as the U.S. seeks to dominate strategic chokepoints (e.g., Panama Canal) and resource-rich regions (e.g., the Arctic) thereby directly challenging China's global connectivity ambitions.

This paper seeks to deepen understanding to how renewed U.S.-China tensions under Trump could fracture international consensus, strain transatlantic relations, and exacerbate vulnerabilities in Arctic dialogue.

This paper employs a qualitative analysis utilising historical analogies (Thucydides Trap) and case studies (e.g., Greenland, Panama Canal) to contextualize strategic shifts. Policy analysis – drawing on Trump-era policy documents, online news sources, speeches, and bipartisan legislative trends – helps project potential second-term priorities and Arctic resource competition amid escalating U.S.-China tensions.

This trajectory poses a risk of fragmenting the EU's stance, compelling member states to balance between U.S. security guarantees and economic interdependence with China. Moreover, Arctic governance, reliant on U.S.-Russia-China cooperation, could further erode as geopolitical rivalry overshadows climate priorities. Ultimately, the paper underscores the necessity for adaptive multilateral frameworks to manage systemic instability in an era of intensified great-power competition.

2. Destined for Conflict? The Challenge of Power Transitions

Graham Allison likened the relationship between the U.S. and China to that of Athens and Sparta during the Peloponnesian Wars and used the concept of the "Thucydides Trap". According to Allison, any power system tends to include two main actors: a rising power that challenges the existing order, and a dominant hegemon that seeks to preserve the status-quo. In this context, structural tensions create systemic pressure that can drive the two powers towards conflict, as the rising power aspires to replace the current hegemon (Allison 2017, 29).

This was the case during Peloponnesian Wars between Sparta and Athens, when the two regional powers went to war to protect their regional alliances and maintain their prestige. In their case, the conflict was triggered by a war between two of their respective regional allies - Corinth and Corcyra. Both Athens and Sparta recognized that supporting their ally could shift the regional balance of power in their favour. Ultimately, in order to maintain their power and prestige, both powers chose to engage in direct conflict. This situation made the regional system very fragile in front of an external power, and so, the system of the city states in the Ancient Greece was conquered by the Macedonian Kingdom from the north (Allison, 2017, 35-37).

To support his concept, Graham Allison analysed 15 historical cases in which the Thucydides Trap appeared to be at play. In four of these cases, the conflict between the two powers managed to maintain peaceful relations, in the remaining cases, conflict ultimately broke out between them (Allison, 2017, 41, 244). Based on this analysis, Graham Allison frames the U.S.-China relationship as a modern example of the Thucydides Trap, where China resembles pre-World War I Germany and the United States playing a role similar to that of the United Kingdom (Allison, 2017, 72, 76-78).

The contemporary relationship between the United States and China is defined by strategic rivalry, which could quickly escalate into broader geopolitical competition, particularly if the U.S. were to gain control of the Greenland and the Panama Chanel. While not yet direct military adversaries, tensions continue to rise as China challenges the U.S.-led global order.

Historically, power transitions have often led to conflict, as rising states seek to reshape the international system and established hegemons strive to preserve their dominance. In the U.S.-China, economic competition has been central, particularly in areas such as trade, technological innovation, and global supply chains. The trade war initiated during Donald Trump's first term marked a turning point in bilateral relations, introducing a more confrontational approach. While the Biden administration maintained several of these economic policies, a second Trump presidency is expected to further intensify the economic conflict, through additional tariffs and policies aimed at curbing China's technological and industrial growth (China Briefing, 2025).

Beyond trade, geopolitical considerations are also becoming more prominent in the U.S.-China competition. Strategic regions such as the Indo-Pacific, the Arctic, and critical maritime chokepoints, including the Panama Canal, have become key areas where both Washington and Beijing seek to assert their influence. Additionally, discussions surrounding Greenland's strategic

significance reflect broader U.S. concerns about China's expanding global presence (Jiajia, Haiyang, 2024).

While competition remains the dominant dynamic, the risk of escalation is a persistent concern. Historical precedents suggest that, without careful management, power transitions of this kind can lead to open conflict. The evolving direction policies of U.S.-policy - particularly under the second Trump administration - may shift the nature of the rivalry from one focused on economic and technological competition to a more overt geopolitical confrontation.

3. The U.S. – China Trade War

The trade war between the United States and China begun in 2018 when the U.S. imposed its first tariffs on Chinese imports, specifically targeting solar panels and washing machines under President Donald Trump's administration. This measure was implemented to safeguard the American solar panel industry and support Whirlpool, a leading domestic appliance manufacturer in the United States (Reuters, 2018). In response, China introduced retaliatory tariffs ranging from 15% to 25% on a range of American goods, including aluminium, automobiles, aircraft, fruits, soybeans, and pipelines (Buckley, 2018). These actions marked the beginning of what became known as the U.S.-China Trade War.

This type of economic conflict is not unprecedented, as a similar dynamic emerged between the United Kingdom and Ireland following the latter's independence (Murgescu, 2010, 288-289). Similarly, the United States and China have engaged in this conflict primarily because their rivalry is not rooted in military or political competition, unlike the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR).

Unlike the USSR, China does not position itself as a political competitor, as its primary focus is not exporting its political system abroad (Xuetong, 2019, 203-204). This distinction presents China with significant challenges in building a global political alliance system, unlike the Soviet Union during the Cold War (Enescu, 2023). Moreover, economic competition escalated into a technological rivalry in 2019 when the Trump administration imposed restrictions on the use of Huawei's 5G technology. Consequently, countries such as Romania and Poland implemented national legislation to prevent Chinese companies from investing in or developing their domestic 5G networks (CNBC 2019).

In analysing this situation, Chris Miller argued that the Trump administration was more focused on the trade war than on technological competition (Miller, 2024). However, for China, semiconductors remain the most critical foreign technology. Miller further suggests that Beijing refrained from directly supporting Huawei against U.S. sanctions to preserve its future access to American technologies (Carolus, 2020).

The trade war and technological rivalry temporarily paused in 2020 when the two powers reached an economic protocol. Under this agreement, China committed to respecting intellectual property rights, technology transfer regulations, financial services, exchange rate policies, and transparency, while also expanding trade (Covington & Burling LLP, 2020).

This agreement was part of the United States strategy to curb China's economic rise, which, in recent years, had relied on unethical practices to acquire foreign technologies developed in Europe and the U.S. However, in 2020, the Trump administration was replaced by the Biden administration, which initially continued the trade war with China. As part of this ongoing strategy, in 2022, the new administration added two Chinese semiconductor companies to the Entity List, aiming to restrict China's access to U.S. technologies needed for developing its own semiconductor industry (Alep & Freifeld, 2022).

These sanctions prompted China to accelerate the acquisition of Western technologies to advance its next generation of semiconductors in the months leading up to the ban (Bloomberg, 2024).

In response, China also increased domestic investments in the development of next-generation semiconductors by establishing the National Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund (Tianlei, 2019), commonly known as Big Fund, alongside regional technological funds such as the Shanghai

Integrated Circuit Industry Fund (Bei, Ang & Jia, 2023). Meanwhile, the ongoing conflict between China and Taiwan has posed significant challenges to the United States in developing a new generation of semiconductors. This is primarily due to Taiwan's status as a region claimed by mainland China, and in 2022, China conducted one of its largest military exercises around Taiwan in response to the visit of former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi (Zhen, 2022). This heightened military tension raised concerns in Washington about the growing strategic vulnerability of relying heavily on semiconductors produced by Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), particularly in light of the escalating tensions between China and Taiwan. To mitigate this risk and enhance greater technological self-sufficiency, the United States took steps to establish semiconductor manufacturing capabilities, including the construction of a new semiconductor factory aimed at reducing dependence on foreign supply chains and bolstering national security by securing a more reliable domestic production of critical technologies (Shepardson, 2025).

In a similar vein, the competition for access to rare-earth elements between the two powers has introduced a new dimension to the technological rivalry. China has focused on securing these critical resources from Africa, offering infrastructure investments in exchange, while the United States has turned to Ukraine, providing military support against Russian aggression in return for access to these vital materials (Harmash, 2025).

This competition is as significant as the race for semiconductors, particularly for China, as control over rare-earth elements will play a crucial role in the development of the next 6G technological revolution. Currently, China holds an advantage, primarily due to the rapid expansion of its electric vehicle industry, which surpasses the development of the Western electric vehicle sector. Nevertheless, the Trump administration expressed a strong interest in blocking China's progress in this area, aiming to preserve U.S. dominance in emerging technologies.

The Trump administration's declarations regarding the annexation of Greenland and control over the Panama Chanel will likely transform this rivalry from an economic and technological competition into a more geoeconomic one, as part of a future geopolitical competition. As a result, U.S.-China competition will evolve into a more geopolitically driven contest. In this new phase, the race for resources and economic alliances will become more important than the ideological battle between democracy and communism that defined the Cold War. Both the U.S. and China will focus on expanding their economic and technological influence to secure a larger share of the global market.

4. Towards a New Thucydides Trap

The emerging competition between the United States and China is increasingly shifting from an economic and technological rivalry to a more pronounced geopolitical competition. This transformation is largely driven by President Donald Trump's statements regarding Greenland and the Panama Canal, which could block two critical trade routes for China - the Northern Sea Route and the most direct passage between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans (Aikman, 2025). The Northern Sea Route is especially important for China, as it would reduce transport time between China and Europe from 21000 km via the Suez Canal route to 13000 km. Even though this route is often blocked by ice and much of it is used by Russia, Moscow has shown interest in using icebreakers in order to transform it into a viable trading route (Singh, 2023). This would also help Russia develop its northern regions by creating a network of ports around the North Pole. Whereas the Panama Channel provides the shortest route connecting the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, compared to the historical route around Cape Horn.

By potentially restricting these vital trade routes, Washington signals a more assertive approach in the ongoing U.S.-China competition, indicating that Trump is prepared to instigate a new form of conflict with China.

China's current position is reminiscent of Japan in the 1980s, when Japan became the world's second-largest economic power, and U.S. debt to Japan began to grow (Paul Kennedy, 2011, 412-

413). The United States is determined not to repeat this historical scenario and is focused on halting China's rise. In this context, control over Greenland would provide the U.S. with significant strategic leverage over trade in the Arctic and the access to regional resources. Furthermore, control of the Panama Canal would grant U.S. ships free passage between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, unlike the current situation where they must pay tolls (Lilieholm, Oppmann, Ordonez, Lemos, Danaher & Hansler, 2025).

On the other hand, China would be forced to pay tolls for passage through the Canal, potentially diminishing its influence over this key trade route. This would increase the cost of Chinese goods and already led Panama authorities to withdraw from the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Sarah Camacho, 2025). Meanwhile, the imposition of higher tariffs on Chinese goods has caused U.S. consumers to reconsider their purchasing habits on platforms such as Shein and Temu, further undermining China's trade advantage (Soo, 2025).

At the same time, the Trump administration appears eager to bring the war in Ukraine to a resolution, with the goal of aiming to reallocate resources from Europe to Asia and reposition Russia in a way that could exert more pressure on China. In this scenario, Russia could paradoxically become one of the unexpected beneficiaries of the current international system, despite the severe economic and technological setbacks it has suffered following its invasion of Ukraine. Should Russia manage to secure its occupied territories in Ukraine and reintegrate into the international financial and trade systems - after its expulsion from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) in 2022 – it might potentially attract the return of Western companies. This shift comes as the United States increasingly perceives China, rather than Russia, as the primary challenger to the existing international order.

Unlike Russia, China has not initiated a military campaign to seize Taiwan. However, the likelihood of such an action could rise if China's economic power declines and domestic living standards deteriorate. Despite this, this scenario remains improbable for now, particularly if China continues prioritising economic and technological competition and strives to preserve its global economic influence rather than engaging in direct conflict. As such, while the possibility of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan cannot be dismissed, it remains low under current conditions.

In parallel, the United States has shown increasing interest in weakening the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South-Africa), largely due to its expanding membership and the prospect of it becoming a significant economic and technological rival to the U.S. Currently, BRICS accounts for 37.3% of global GDP (Gross Domestic Product) based on purchasing power parity (PPP) and includes three major oil producers - Russia, Iran, and Indonesia (World Economic Forum, 2024).

The expansion of BRICS from five to eleven members may lead Washington to increasingly perceive it as a distinct economic bloc independent of U.S. influence, despite continued reliance on the U.S. dollar in trade. In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Moscow has advocated for the use of national currencies in BRICS trade, primarily because it can no longer make payments in U.S. dollars (Soldatkin & Bryanski, 2024). Similarly, BRICS has suggested the creation of a new international currency that would reduce dependence on the U.S. dollar (Sullivan, 2023).

This trend could place the U.S. in a situation reminiscent of the Cold War, when the USSR sought to create an alternative economic system by exporting the communist revolution globally. However, unlike the ideological unity of the Cold War era, today's BRICS members encompass a diverse range of political regimes, from democratic nations such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, and South Africa to authoritarian regimes like Russia, Iran, and China. Nevertheless, the greatest threat to U.S. economic interests may come BRICS 's potential to evolve into an autonomous economic bloc capable of operating outside the U.S. dollar-dominated global financial world.

5. The Arctic

The Arctic is rapidly emerging as a key geopolitical hotspot of the 21st century. Climate change and melting of Arctic ice have opened new opportunities, intensifying competition among major global powers over the region's governance and resources (Brimmer, 2023).

Historically, the Arctic has been a strategic focal point, especially during the Cold War. Its location offers critical advantages for military positioning and surveillance. With ice coverage now in significant decline, the Arctic has become increasingly accessible, prompting nations to reassess its strategic value. New maritime routes such as the Northern Sea Route promise to reduce shipping times between major markets, thereby boosting global trade efficiency (Werffeli, 2024).

Often viewed as one of the last unclaimed frontiers, the Arctic has gained substantial geopolitical and economic relevance due to its vast untapped natural resources, emerging trade routes, and environmental changes.

As global interest in the region intensifies this analysis explores how both powers navigate Arctic governance, economic opportunities, and security concerns, shaping the broader geopolitical landscape of the region.

The Arctic region has emerged as a key area of geopolitical, economic, and environmental significance in international relations (EEAS, 2021). The accelerated melting of Arctic ice due to climate change presents both opportunities and challenges, ranging from resource exploitation to military security and indigenous rights. This chapter examines the Arctic Dialogue through the lens of international relations theories, exploring the roles of key actors, institutional mechanisms, and future trajectories.

The Arctic is a zone of strategic competition among major powers, particularly Russia, the United States, and China (Pechko, 2025). The region's vast natural resources and newly accessible maritime routes make it a target for both military and economic expansion. Russia has significantly enhanced its Arctic military capabilities, while the United States and NATO have stepped up their strategic engagement in response (Boulègue&Co, 2024). China, though a non-Arctic state, is seeking influence through economic and scientific investments as part of its "Polar Silk Road" initiative (Lamazhapov, Stensdal & Heggelund, 2023).

Several key states have sovereign territories in the Arctic region – Russia, the U.S., Canada, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland – and play leading roles in the region's governance. Russia claims the largest share of the Arctic and has heavily invested in infrastructure and military capabilities. Although the U.S. has traditionally lagged in Arctic engagement, it has recently increased its presence due to strategic concerns (Brimmer, 2023).

In addition to Arctic states, non-Arctic States such as China, the European Union member states, Japan, and South Korea have expressed strong interest in Arctic affairs, primarily through scientific research, economic investment, and diplomatic engagement. China, self-declared a "near-Arctic state", seeks access to Arctic resources and shipping routes while advocating for a multilateral governance approach (Bouffard & Co, 2024).

The study *Arctic Narratives and Political Values: Arctic States, China, NATO, and the EU* (2024) offers a comprehensive analysis of how key geopolitical actors frame their identities, interests, and governance strategies in the Arctic. The research builds on prior studies from 2018 and 2020 and expands its focus to include the European Union alongside Arctic Council member states, China, and NATO.

The European Union's (EU) Role: the EU has played an increasing role in Arctic governance (Degeorges, 2013), advocating for environmental protection, sustainable development, and scientific cooperation. As an observer in the Arctic Council, the EU advocates for stronger regulations on Arctic resource exploitation. Through initiatives such as the EU Arctic Policy, the bloc supports indigenous rights and climate action while promoting economic interests in the region. Strategically, the EU's

engagement is also shaped by its ties to Denmark and Greenland, and by broader concerns over Russian and Chinese influence in the Arctic (Durkee, 2018, Graceffo, 2024).

What is Arctic Governance?

Arctic governance refers to a complex and evolving system that balances the rights and responsibilities of Arctic nations with the interests of the global community. It aims to promote sustainable development, environmental stewardship, and peaceful cooperation in a region undergoing rapid environmental and geopolitical changes (Long, 2018).

It refers to the framework of international agreements, institutions, and legal mechanisms that regulate activities and address challenges in the Arctic region. This governance structure is primarily based on the sovereign rights and jurisdictions of the eight Arctic nations: Canada, Denmark (via Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. It also considers the interests of non-Arctic states and non-state actors, all in accordance with relevant international treaties and laws (Long, 2018).

A central institution in this framework is the Arctic Council, established in 1996. The Council focuses on promoting sustainable development and environmental protection but explicitly excludes military and security issues from its mandate. The council operates by consensus and includes not only the eight Arctic states but also six Permanent Participants representing Arctic Indigenous Peoples, ensuring their voices are integral to decision-making processes (The Arctic Council 2025).

In addition to the Arctic Council, several international agreements play significant roles in shaping Arctic governance. One of the most important is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which provides a legal framework for maritime activities, it covers issues such as the division of maritime resources, navigation rights, and pollution regulation. UNCLOS is crucial for managing the Arctic's maritime spaces and resolving disputes that may arise over territorial claims and resource exploitation (Long, 2018).

Arctic governance is a complex and dynamic system that seeks to balance the rights and responsibilities of Arctic nations with the broader interests of the global community. Its overarching goals are to promote sustainable development, environmental stewardship, and foster peaceful cooperation in a region undergoing rapid environmental and geopolitical changes (Long, 2018).

Why an Arctic Dialogue?

Dialogue remains a critical pillar of Arctic stability, providing a channel for cooperation even amid rising geopolitical tensions. Multilateral forums such as the Arctic Council, and the EU-Russia initiatives, help balance economic, security, and environmental interests. These platforms support policy coordination and conflict prevention, ensuring governance remains inclusive and effective. However, diverging strategic priorities among Arctic and non-Arctic states continue to shape the region's competitive landscape. Future research should examine how Arctic dialogue can mitigate tensions, and advance long-term sustainable development (Pauls, Deutsches Arktisbüro, 2023, Marinova & Gricius, 2024).

Key Themes in Arctic Dialogue that pose a Threat under the Thucydides Trap:

- *Geopolitical Competition*

The Arctic has become an arena for geopolitical manoeuvring, particularly between Russia and NATO. Russia has reopened Soviet-era military bases and developed Arctic-capable military forces. In response, the U.S. and its NATO allies have responded with increased naval patrols and military exercises in the region. The EU aligns closely with NATO in countering Russian influence, while it also seeks to regulate economic activity in the Arctic through legal frameworks (Evers, 2021).

- *Economic and Environmental Stakes*

The Arctic contains vast untapped reserves of oil, gas, and rare earth minerals, attracting investment from energy corporations and states. However, climate change and environmental degradation pose significant challenges. Striking a balance between economic development and environmental sustainability remains a contentious issue in Arctic governance (Long, 2018).

- *The United States and Greenland*

Greenland has attracted renewed interest from the U.S. due to its strategic location and resource potential. In 2019, the Trump administration proposed purchasing Greenland from Denmark, highlighting concerns over Chinese and Russian activities in the Arctic. Although Denmark rejected the proposal, the U.S. has since increased its diplomatic and economic engagement with Greenland, including investments in infrastructure and natural resources exploration. Meanwhile, the EU opposes any unilateral actions that could destabilize Arctic governance and prefers a multilateral approach that includes Greenland's autonomy and indigenous representation (The Arctic Council, 2025, EEAS, 2021).

- *Legal and Institutional Challenges*

Despite the growing importance of the Arctic, the region lacks a comprehensive governance framework. While UNCLOS provides guidelines for territorial claims, disputes persist, such as the Lomonosov Ridge contention between Russia and Canada. The Arctic Council promotes dialogue but lacks enforcement mechanisms, leading to concerns about the effectiveness of current international legal frameworks (Bergmann & Co, 2023).

In order to prevent a possible Thucydides Trap in the Arctic region there has been identified the future trends in Arctic governance. The Arctic's evolving geopolitical landscape reflects the dynamics of Thucydides' Trap, with the U.S. as the dominant power facing challenges from a rising China and a resurgent Russia. The region's vast resources, new trade routes, and growing military importance are intensifying this strategic competition, increasing the risk of conflict (Bergmann & Co, 2023).

The United States' relatively limited strategic response to these developments has created a vacuum that both China and Russia have sought to fill (Fouche, 2024). Their increasing presence and strategic manoeuvre could further erode U.S. influence, increasing the risk of confrontation. According to the Thucydides Trap framework, such dynamics, where emerging powers threaten the status-quo, heighten the potential for conflict (Fouche, 2024).

Therefore, the Arctic presents a potential strategic threat under the Thucydides Trap framework. The competing interests and military posturing of China and Russia, combined with the United States' strategic hesitation, create a precarious balance that could lead to increased tensions or conflict. The Arctic's emerging significance as a geopolitical and economic frontier further amplifies these risks, making it a potential flashpoint in great power competition.

Conclusions

The current changes in the global geopolitical order are among the most dramatic in the past three decades. Trump's second term as president of the U.S. is expected to be filled with controversial decisions, a more assertive foreign policy, and a significant reshaping of the international arena.

The U.S. appears to be turning a new page in its strategic approach, pursuing territorial expansion, as evidenced by its claims in the Panama Canal and Greenland, while also forging new strategic alliances and interests.

Trump's engagement with Greenland and Panama signals a return to classical geopolitics, shifting the focus from predominantly technological and economic considerations toward direct geopolitical competition. This approach is intended to counter China's global expansion. This dynamic brings Thucydides' Trap back into focus, drawing it closer to the U.S. sphere of influence, intensifying competition, and paving the way for new strategic developments and outcomes.

As Thucydides' Trap is redefined in the current political environment, it highlights the U.S.-China rivalry. Given China's ambitions to control Arctic trade routes and its willingness to partner with the Russian Federation to achieve this, the U.S. must adopt a more proactive stance in the region and redefine its existing partnerships.

The Arctic region holds great potential, both in terms of resources and strategic importance. While it has a well-defined governance structure, it lacks mechanisms to protect it from unforeseeable future challenges.

Owning territories is one way to secure control over trade routes, or being part of an alliance with member states in the region. Based on Thucydides' Trap, China's growing presence in the Arctic poses a significant threat to U.S. hegemony in the region.

Therefore, it is expected that the U.S. will increase its presenceand engagement in the Arctic region in the near future. At the same time, China is likely to adopt a more assertive posture, heightening competition and further challenging the U.S. strategic position in the region.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Aikman, Ian. 2025. "Trump Says He Believes US Will 'Get Greenland'." *BBC.com*, January 26. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/crkezj07rzro

Allison, Graham. 2015. "The Thucydides Trap: Are the US and China Headed for War?", *The Atlantic*, September 24. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/09/united-states-china-war-thucydides-trap/406756/

Allison, Graham. 2017. *Destined to War*. Boston: Mariner Books.

Alper, Alexandra and Freifeld, Karen. 2022. "Exclusive: Samsung, SK Hynix to Be Spared Brunt of China Chip Crackdown by US" *Reuters.com*, October 7. https://www.reuters.com/technology/exclusive-samsung-sk-hynix-be-spared-brunt-china-memory-chip-crackdown-sources-2022-10-06/

Bei, Yifan, Yuen Yuen Ang, and Nan Jia. 2023. "The Promise and Pitfalls of Government Guidance Funds in China." *The China Quarterly* 256: 939–59. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741023000280

Bergmann, Max, Otto Svendsen, Marc Jacobsen, Rebekka Åsnes Sagild, Eskil Jakobsen, and Øystein Solvang. 2025 "Defending the North amid Rising Geopolitical Tensions." *CSIS*, January 14. https://www.csis.org/analysis/defending-north-amid-rising-geopolitical-tensions.

Bloomberg News. 2024. "China Buys Near-Record $40 Billion of Chip Gear to Beat US Curbs." *Bloomberg.com*, January 22. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-01-22/china-buys-near-record-40-billion-of-chip-gear-to-beat-us-curbs

Bouffard, Troy, Whitney P. Lackenbauer, Bonnie Golbeck, Sanda Swetoka, Sara Sorensen, Jon Sunderland, and Johannes Wiedemann. 2024. *Arctic Narratives and Political Values: Arctic States, China, NATO and the EU*. Riga, Latvia: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.

Boulègue, Mathieu, Minna Ålander, Charlotta Collén, Edward Lucas, Catherine Sendak, and Krista Viksnins. 2024. "Up North: Confronting Arctic Insecurity Implications for the United States and NATO." *CEPA*, December 5. https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/up-north-confronting-arctic-insecurity-implications-for-the-united-states-and-nato/

Brimmer, Esther D. 2023 "Changing Geopolitics in the Arctic." *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 18. https://www.cfr.org/report/changing-geopolitics-arctic-0

Buckley, Chris. 2018. "China Slaps Tariffs on 128 US Products, Including Wine, Pork, and Pipes." *The New York Times*, April 1. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/01/world/asia/china-tariffs-united-states.html

Camacho, Sarah 2025. "The Crisis Trump Is Causing in Panama Will Reach Far Into Latin America", carnegieendowment.org, February 19.

Cerulus, Laurens. 2020. "Huawei Challenges Legality of 5G Bans in Poland, Romania." *Politico.eu*, November 2. https://www.politico.eu/article/huawei-hints-at-legal-action-against-5g-bans-in-poland-romania/

China Briefing. 2025. "US-China Relations in the Trump 2.0 Era: A Timeline", *China Briefing.com*, February, 28. https://www.china-briefing.com/news/us-china-relations-in-the-trump-2-0-implications/

Chris, Buckley. 2018. “China Slaps Tariffs on 128 US Products, Including Wine, Pork and Pipes”, *The New York Times*, 1 April. https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/01/world/asia/china-tariffs-united-states.html

CNBC. 2019. “Trump Signs Executive Order Targeting Huawei.” *CNBC.com*, May 15. https://www.cnbc.com/video/2019/05/15/trump-signs-executive-order-targeting-huawei.html.

Covington & Burling LLP. 2020. “US-China 'Phase One' Trade Deal.” *Cov.com*, January 17. https://www.cov.com/-/media/files/corporate/publications/2020/01/us-china-phase-one-trade-deal.pdf

Degeorges, Damien. 2013. “The Arctic - A Region of the Future for the European Union and the World Economy.” *La Fondation Robert Schuman*, January 7. https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0263-the-arctic-a-region-of-the-future-for-the-european-union-and-the-world-economy

Deutsches Arktisbüro. 2023. “Arctic Dialogue.” May 22. https://www.arctic-office.de/en/policy-advice/arctic-dialogue/

Durkee, Jack. 2018. “China: The New ‘Near-Arctic State.’” *Wilson Center*, February 6. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/china-the-new-near-arctic-state

EEAS. 2021. “Arctic: Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the EU Arctic Forum + Indigenous Peoples’ Dialogue.” November 10. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/arctic-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-eu-arctic-forum-indigenous-peoples%E2%80%99_en

EEAS. 2021. “The Arctic, a Key Region for the EU and Global Security.” February 3. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/arctic-key-region-eu-and-global-security-0_en

Enescu, Madalin Ciprian. 2023. “US Historical Challenges: A Comparison Between the Cold War and the US-China Competition.” *Annalele Universității din Oradea, Seria Relații Internaționale și Studii Europene* XV: 83–96.

Fouche, Gwladys. 2024. "US Envoy Sees Some 'Concerning Signals' in Russia-China Military Cooperation in Arctic." *Reuters*, November 1. https://www.reuters.com/world/us-envoy-sees-some-concerning-signals-russia-china-military-cooperation-arctic-2024-11-01

Graceffo, Antonio. 2024. “China and Russia Arctic Policy Convergence? Shifting Geopolitics in the North.” *Geopolitical Monitor*, October 14. https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/china-and-russia-arctic-policy-convergence-shifting-geopolitics-in-the-north/

Harmash, Olena. 2025. “Why Trump Wants Ukraine’s Rare Earths.” *Independent.co.uk*, February 15. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/trump-ukraine-rare-earth-minerals-b2698796.html

Howard, Roger. 2010. *The Arctic Gold Rush: The New Race for Tomorrow’s Natural Resources*. London: Continuum.

https://carnegieendowment.org/emissary/2025/02/panama-canal-trump-china-crisis?lang=en

Huang, Tianlei. 2019. “Government-Guided Funds in China: Financing Vehicles for State Industrial Policy.” *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, June 17. https://www.piie.com/blogs/china-economic-watch/government-guided-funds-china-financing-vehicles-state-industrial-policy

Kennedy, Paul. 2011. *Ascensiunea si Decaderea Marilor Puteri*. Iasi: Polirom.

Lamazhapov, Erdem, Iselin Stensdal, and Gørild Heggelund. 2023. “China’s Polar Silk Road: Long Game or Failed Strategy?” *The Arctic Institute - Center for Circumpolar Security Studies*, November 14. https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/china-polar-silk-road-long-game-failed-strategy/

Lilieholm, Lucas, Oppmann, Patrick, Ordonez, Valeria, Lemos, Gerardo, Danaher, Caitlin and Hansler, Jennifer. 2025. “Rubio Walks Back State Department’s Claim of Free Panama Canal

Transit for US Government Vessels." *CNN.com*, February 6. https://edition.cnn.com/2025/02/06/americas/panama-canal-state-department-hnk-intl/index.html

Liu, Zhen. 2022. "China Vows Military Operations Around Taiwan in Response to US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Visit." *South China Morning Post*, August 3. https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3187506/china-vows-military-operations-around-taiwan-response-us-house

Long, Zhao. 2018 "Arctic Governance: Challenges and Opportunities." Council on Foreign Relations, November. https://www.cfr.org/report/arctic-governance

Marinova, Iren, and Gabriella Gricius. 2024 "A Path to Dialogue: The Arctic for EU-Russia Relations." *The Arctic Institute - Center for Circumpolar Security Studies*, October 15. https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/path-dialogue-arctic-eu-russia-relations/

Miller, Chris. 2023. *Razboiul Cipurilor.* Bucharest: Humanitas.

Murgescu, Bogdan. 2010. *România și Europa - Accumulate decalajele economice 1500-2010.* Iasi: Polirom.

Pauls, Magarete. "Arctic Dialogue: Science Meets Politics." *ESKP.* https://www.eskp.de/en/climate-change/arctic-dialogue-science-meets-politics-935258/

Pechko, Kiel. 2025 "Rising Tensions and Shifting Strategies: The Evolving Dynamics of US Grand Strategy in the Arctic." *The Arctic Institute - Center for Circumpolar Security Studies*, January 7. https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/rising-tensions-shifting-strategies-evolving-dynamics-us-grand-strategy-arctic/

Reuters. 2018. "Trump imposes steep tariffs on imported solar panels and washing machines", *TheGuardian.com*, January 23. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jan/23/trump-imposes-steep-tariffs-on-imported-solar-panels-and-washing-machines

Shepardson, David. 2025. "TSMC Begins Producing 4-Nanometer Chips in Arizona, Raimondo Says." *Reuters.com*, January 11. https://www.reuters.com/technology/tsmc-begins-producing-4-nanometer-chips-arizona-raimondo-says-2025-01-10/

Sinderpal Singh. 2023. "India, Russia, and the Northern Sea Route: Navigating a Shifting Strategic Environment", *rsis.edu.sg*. September 05.https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/india-russia-and-the-northern-sea-route-navigating-a-shifting-strategic-environment/

Soo, Zen. 2025. "What New US Policies on Imports From China Mean for Shein and Temu." *Time.com*, February 5. https://time.com/7212903/shein-temu-usps-china-hong-kong-tariffs-trump/

Sullivan, Joe. 2023. "A BRICS Currency Could Shake the Dollar's Dominance." *ForeignPolicy.com*, April 24. https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/24/brics-currency-end-dollar-dominance-united-states-russia-china/

The Artic Council. 2025. "About the Arctic Council." February 4. https://arctic-council.org/about/

Toft, Monica Duffy. 2025. "Trump's Threats on Greenland, Gaza, Ukraine, and Panama Revive Old-School US Imperialism." *The Conversation*, February 20. https://theconversation.com/trumps-threats-on-greenland-gaza-ukraine-and-panama-revive-old-school-us-imperialism-of-dominating-other-nations-by-force-after-decades-of-nuclear-deterrence-249327

Werfelli, Wissal. 2024 "The Arctic: A Risk of Escalating Conflicts." *TRENDS Research & Advisory*, October 14. https://trendsresearch.org/insight/the-arctic-a-risk-of-escalating-conflicts/

World Economic Forum. 2024. "BRICS: Here's What to Know About the International Bloc." *World Economic Forum*, November 20. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/11/brics-summit-geopolitics-bloc-international/

Xuetong, Yan. 2019. *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zhang Jiajia, Lyu Haiyang. Containment and hedging: the US strategic perspective on China's Polar Silk Road Initiative. *Mar Dev* 2, 31 (2024). https://doi.org/10.1007/s44312-024-00044-z

STRATEGIES XXI International Scientific Conference
The Complex and Dynamic Nature of the Security Environment,
Bucharest, Romania - February, 27th, 2025

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-10

RUSSIA: A TERRORIST STATE AND SPONSOR OF TERRORISM

Iulian-Constantin MĂNĂILESCU, PhD Candidate,
Public Order and National Security, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" Police Academy, Bucharest, Romania.
E-mail: driulianmanailescu@yahoo.com

Abstract: *This paper explores Russia's role in international terrorism, highlighting its involvement in political terrorism through the calculated elimination of political adversaries and former intelligence agents. The Kremlin has employed tactics such as planned assassinations, using highly toxic substances like polonium-210 and Novichok, while leveraging its intelligence agencies to carry out these covert operations. This analysis shows how these actions align with Russia's broader strategy of transnational repression, which the Russian government justifies as part of its "political warfare" against perceived enemies.*

The paper also delves into Russia's relations with extremist groups in the Middle East, specifically Hezbollah and Hamas. These relationships reflect a calculated strategy of fostering indirect support for terrorism, thus contributing to the perpetuation of violence and instability in the region. By supporting these organizations, Russia enhances its geopolitical influence, particularly in opposition to Western powers, while promoting violent ideologies and fostering conflicts that destabilize the Middle East.

In addition, Russia's dual approach of maintaining ties with both Israel and groups like Hamas reveals the contradictory nature of its foreign policy. While aiming to expand its influence in the region, Russia's actions indirectly support extremist groups, posing a significant risk to regional peace and exacerbating global security challenges. Ultimately, this paper argues that Russia's actions are consistent with the characteristics of a terrorist state, as they perpetuate terrorism, political violence, and instability.

Keywords: *terrorism; security; Hezbollah; Hamas, crime; terrorist groups; Russia*.

Introduction

In November 2022, the European Parliament declared Russia a "state sponsor of terrorism" (Official Journal of the European Union 2023), stating that Russian atrocities against Ukrainians and the destruction of civilian infrastructure violate international humanitarian law. However, the label given to Russia by the European Parliament is not legally binding. This allegation is supported by Sajjan M. Gohel, a counterterrorism expert and visiting lecturer at the London School of Economics (LSE), in a report to Al Jazeera "The EU does not have a centralized list of state sponsors of terrorism and no equivalent mechanism. Therefore, there will be no immediate legal consequences. The European Parliament has limited influence in decision-making on foreign policy, which falls within the competence of the 27 EU member states" (Shankar 2022).

This paper argues for Russia's inclusion in the list of state sponsors of terrorism based on its actions in multiple countries, which can be considered forms of international terrorism. This list includes, according to the U.S. Department of State, Syria, Iran, North Korea, and Cuba (Plenary 2022). This argument is supported by several countries, including the United States, which have often considered such actions as acts of terrorism, even if the perpetrators are state agents and not members of an organized terrorist group. Such actions fall within the broad definition of terrorism, which includes the use of violence or intimidation to achieve political or ideological goals. Therefore, considering its history of violent actions against dissidents and critics in other countries, Russia meets

the criteria to be considered a state sponsor of terrorism and should be included in the corresponding list of states with such activities (Byman 2018).

Over the years, Russia has been involved in the assassination of its dissidents outside its borders, actions that involve violence and have an evident political motive. These actions are not just individual crimes but also serve a broader purpose: intimidating and deterring other critics of the Russian regime. For example, when a Russian dissident is killed in another country, it sends a clear message to other critics that nowhere in the world are they safe and that the Russian regime can exert its power even beyond its own borders.

Such assassinations could be seen as a form of internal violent politics that simply spills beyond a country's borders – intimidating and condemnable, but not a threat to other nations and different from the familiar image of terrorism. However, Russia also backs violent groups on the ground that employ terrorism tactics. In Syria, Russian military forces have closely collaborated with Lebanese Hezbollah, long described by the United States as one of the world's primary terrorist groups, to fight against enemies of the Assad regime. In Ukraine, Russia has supported anti-regime separatist militias with funding, training, weapons, and direct military assistance, and some of these groups have used violence against civilians. The commander of U.S. forces stated in March that Russia is arming the Taliban in Afghanistan, leading to the deaths of American soldiers as a result (Byman 2018).

A particular case is the 2014 crash of a Malaysian commercial flight that killed all 298 people on board. Kiev requested the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for Russia to compensate all civilians involved in the conflict, as well as the victims of Malaysia Airlines flight MH17, which was shot down over eastern Ukraine. However, the ICJ rejected most of Ukraine's requests, only concluding that Russia "fails to take measures to investigate the facts [...] regarding persons who allegedly committed offenses" (France 24 2024).

1. Assassinations and Assassination Attempts of Political Opponents

The Kremlin has orchestrated transnational reprisals, justifying them as "political warfare" (Bokinskie 2024). Among such reprisals are individual assassinations, thus qualifying Russia to be considered a state sponsor of terrorism (Byman 2018). When selecting individual targets, the Kremlin focuses its efforts on persons who may be deemed traitorous, meaning cooperating with intelligence agencies from NATO countries and/or those considered to have previously engaged in armed conflicts against Russia or those who have clashed with Russian security services due to their political or business activities (Shekhovtsov 2020).

One such assassination is that of former intelligence officer Alexander Litvinenko, who during the instability in Russia in the 1990s worked for security services, investigating organized crime and its links to the KGB and FSB, with Vladimir Putin among those accused. After fleeing to the UK, where he was granted political asylum, he continued to expose these connections in his writings.

He was killed by radiation poisoning in 2006. His background and manner of death are detailed in the "Report into the death of Alexander Litvinenko" (Owen 2016). On November 1, 2006, Litvinenko suddenly fell ill and was admitted to Barnet Hospital. After two weeks, he was transferred to University College Hospital (UCH), where his condition gradually worsened until he passed away on November 23. Extensive examinations and scientific analyses were conducted on Litvinenko's body, as well as samples taken from it. This investigative process began prior to and revealed elevated levels of polonium in his body. He suffered a fatal cardiac arrest at 20:51 on November 23 and was pronounced dead at 21:21, due to multiple organ failure, including progressive heart failure (Owen 2016).

Another well-known case is the use of a neurotoxic agent in the attempted assassination of former intelligence officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in 2018. On March 4, they were found critically ill on a bench in Salisbury. Later, it was discovered that they had been poisoned with a nerve agent, in an attack that was supported by the Russian state. This was followed by an

extraordinary series of accusations and denials from the highest levels of governments in the months that followed, culminating in diplomatic expulsions and international sanctions. Police linked the attack to another poisoning in June, in which Dawn Sturgess and her partner, Charlie Rowley, were exposed to Novichok in nearby Amesbury, after handling a contaminated perfume dispenser. Sturgess died in hospital in July of the same year. Experts from the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) tested samples of the chemical substance, and Russia accused the UK of blocking access to the OPCW investigation, but its proposal for a new joint investigation was rejected by the international chemical weapons watchdog in The Hague on April 4. The final conclusion was that Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were indeed poisoned with a nerve agent in an attack that was attributed to Russia, despite its objections and attempts to block the investigation. (BBC 2018).

The most well-known case of assassination attempt is that of Alexei Navalny in 2020 when he was poisoned with Novichok, a Soviet-made neurotoxic agent, during a trip to Siberia. He was later airlifted to Germany where he received treatment and spent his recovery period. Following this incident, Navalny accused Vladimir Putin of being behind the attack and upon his return to Russia, Navalny was sentenced to over 10 years in prison and claimed to endure "hellish" conditions in isolation (Hot News 2023). On February 16, 2024, he died in a high-security penal colony named "Arctic Wolf" (DW 2024).

In December 2022, Russian tycoon Pavel Antov, known as the "sausage king", fell from the window of a hotel in Rayagada, India, shortly after celebrating his 65th birthday. His friend Vladimir Bidanov, who was with him, died in the same hotel. According to Indian authorities, the two had travelled through the jungle and consumed excessive alcohol, with Bidanov dying from a heart attack. Shortly after his friend's death, Antov was found dead, having fallen from the hotel roof (Smerea 2024).

Dan Rapoport, a businessman and investor, was found dead outside his home in Washington in August 2022. He was known as a supporter of Alexei Navalny and a critic of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. His wife rejected the suicide hypothesis, denying the existence of a farewell note. Rapoport, 52, was the founder of a technology consulting firm and had business ties with Ivanka Trump. Alongside him, Mikhail Lesin, former Russian Press Minister and founder of Russia Today (RT), was found dead in a Washington hotel in November 2015, with a "head injury". It was speculated that he intended to strike a deal with the FBI to protect himself from corruption charges (Smerea 2024)

The list of assassinations of Putin's opponents is longer, as they met their end in Russia. Boris Nemtsov, a critic of Putin, was fatally shot in 2015 on a bridge in Moscow. The assassination sparked international condemnation. Lawyer and tax expert Magnitsky died in prison in 2009 after revealing a €230 million fraud. Natalia Estemirova, a journalist specialized in exposing human rights abuses in Chechnya, was kidnapped and killed in 2009. Lawyer Stanislav Markelov, known for defending journalists critical of Putin, was shot near the Kremlin, along with journalist Anastasia Baburova, who tried to help him (Smerea 2024).

From the presented cases, it is obvious that the Kremlin has demonstrated a willingness to kill perceived enemies. These attacks come amidst several unexplained deaths of former security services employees, contesters of Russian government, prominent Russians in exile, their business partners, and other potential targets of the Russian state inside or outside the country. Even in cases where evidence is clear – such as the use of rare radioactive isotopes and neurotoxic agents available only to the Russian government, or the identification of Russian intelligence agents – the government continues to deny its role (BBC 2020). More importantly, it continues to use assassination as a tactic in the face of vocal international condemnation. In addition to eliminating the targeted individual, this overt campaign sends a message to those involved in political, intelligence, or business activities related to the Russian state. The impact of each assassination extends beyond the individual in question.

2. Russia's Relationship with Hezbollah

The collaboration between Hezbollah, the Shiite militant organization from Lebanon, and Russian Intelligence Agencies (RIA) has emerged as a complex and intriguing aspect of the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East. Hezbollah, founded in the early 1980s, has evolved into a powerful regional actor with a dual identity as both a political party and a militant group. Its historical ties to Iran and Syria have significantly shaped its regional presence and influence. RIA, particularly the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), have expanded their activities in the Middle East, positioning Russia as a key player in regional affairs. The collaboration between Hezbollah and RIA reflects a convergence of common interests, officially declared in efforts to combat terrorism and stabilize the region (Haddad 2005).

Hezbollah, the Shiite Islamist organization, has evolved from a militant group into a dominant political force in Lebanon. Founded during the Israeli occupation of Lebanon, Hezbollah engaged in resistance against Israel and became a significant presence in Lebanese politics in the 1990s. In 2000, it succeeded in compelling Israel to withdraw its troops from southern Lebanon, consolidating its regional reputation. A key moment was the 2006 war with Israel, during which Hezbollah achieved a propaganda victory. In the 2010s, it militarily intervened in the Syrian conflict in support of the Assad regime, attracting criticism and strengthening its alliance with Iran. Despite providing social services to the Shiite population in Lebanon, Hezbollah has faced increasing pressure to address the country's political and economic crises (Haddad 2005).

Although, as stated, in its relationship with Russia, the organization's purpose is to combat terrorism, Hezbollah is considered a terrorist organization due to its history of violence and radical ideology. Founded on the ideological principles of Ayatollah Khomeini, Hezbollah promotes the destruction of Israel and employs terror to achieve its political objectives. Over the decades, Hezbollah has carried out violent actions against civilians, including kidnappings, suicide attacks, and assassinations, both in Lebanon and abroad. Hezbollah has expanded its operations globally, using terrorist infrastructure to carry out attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets worldwide. Additionally, Hezbollah has been involved in conflicts in the Middle East, supporting authoritarian regimes and participating in armed struggles. Despite its attempts to present itself as a legitimate political force, Hezbollah has continued to resort to violence to maintain and consolidate power in Lebanon and the region. Thus, its violent actions and influence in regional conflicts have led many countries and international organizations to consider it a terrorist organization (Azani 2013).

Hezbollah aims to fight against Israel for the liberation of occupied Lebanese territory. It also seeks to expand its political influence in Lebanon and support regional allies, such as Assad's regime in Syria. The organization also provides social services to the Shiite community in Lebanon. Its organizational structure is complex, with a strong military wing and a well-developed political and social presence. This structure allows it to influence both domestic and regional politics and establish foreign relations, including with Russia. The Russian Federation has a complex array of intelligence agencies, including the Federal Security Service (FSB), Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), and Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). The FSB focuses on internal security, the GRU on military intelligence, and the SVR on foreign espionage. These agencies collaborate to promote Russia's interests and are involved in various operations, including cyber and disinformation campaigns (Adamsky 2018).

The collaboration between Hezbollah, the Shiite militant organization based in Lebanon, and RIA represents a complex and multifaceted relationship that has developed over several decades. Understanding this collaboration requires exploring the historical context that has influenced their interactions. Originating in the tumultuous landscape of Lebanon in the 1980s, Hezbollah emerged during a civil war, Israeli occupation, and various sectarian factions vying for control. In this context, Hezbollah became a Shiite resistance movement deeply tied to the theocratic regime of Iran. Iran,

seeking to establish a Shiite stronghold against Israel and promote its revolutionary ideals, became a significant supporter of Hezbollah, providing financial, military, and ideological support (Daher 2019).

Following the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the emergence of the Russian Federation under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin. During this period, RIA, including the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, underwent significant transformations. They sought to adapt to a new global order characterized by multipolarity and an evolving security landscape. The historical context of the collaboration between Hezbollah and RIA begins to take shape in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This period was marked by a series of events that laid the groundwork for their interaction. Firstly, Hezbollah consolidated its position in Lebanon, transitioning from a guerrilla group to a political and military force with significant influence in Lebanese politics. Secondly, under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, Russia adopted a more assertive foreign policy agenda, seeking to regain its status as a major global player. As part of this strategy, Russia sought to consolidate its presence in the Middle East, a region with historical ties dating back to the Soviet era (Nizameddin 2008).

Amid greater common interests, Hezbollah's closer relationship began in 2015, when Russia intervened militarily to support Assad, creating a common strategic interest between Moscow and the terrorist group: preserving the Syrian regime and containing Islamist extremist groups, including ISIS. This laid the foundation for deeper collaboration (Adamsky 2018). The Federal Intelligence Service (FSB) and the Main Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces (GRU), in particular, have been involved in collaborating with Hezbollah in Syria. While their immediate objectives aligned in Syria, collaboration also extended to information sharing and coordination. Hezbollah's expertise in the region, including its knowledge of local actors and the terrain, complemented Russia's military operations. RIA has benefited from Hezbollah's human intelligence assets and local networks, which have provided valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of the Syrian conflict (Azani 2013).

Another dimension of their collaboration has emerged in the field of counter-terrorism. Both Hezbollah and Russia faced threats from Islamist extremist groups operating in Syria and the Middle East in general. Hezbollah had extensive experience fighting groups such as al-Qaeda and its affiliates. RIA has sought to leverage this expertise in their efforts to neutralize terrorist threats, both regionally and globally. Their cooperation included sharing information about extremist networks, intelligence analysis, and joint operations. In addition, collaboration between Hezbollah and RIA has acquired a clandestine dimension, especially in the field of arms transfers and logistics. Reports suggest Hezbollah may have received weapons and support from Russian sources, facilitated through secret channels. While the exact extent and nature of this secret collaboration remain shrouded in mystery, this underscores the complex nature of their relationship (Adamsky 2018).

In conclusion, the analysis of potential collaboration between Hezbollah and the RIA reveals a complex and multifaceted relationship within a rapidly changing global landscape. Although there is no definitive evidence to confirm a direct and formal alliance between these two entities, various factors suggest that their interests may converge in strategically important regions such as the Middle East.

Hezbollah's extensive global presence, its expertise in asymmetric warfare, and its ties to Iran provide it with a unique set of capabilities and interests, while Russia, under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, seeks to expand its influence and counterbalance Western dominance on the international stage. In a period marked by growing uncertainty, shifting alliances, and emerging security challenges, it is crucial to understand and address the potential collaboration between non-state actors like Hezbollah and state actors such as Russia.

This complex nexus underscores the continuously evolving nature of international relations, where both traditional and non-traditional actors pursue their interests in an interconnected and rapidly changing world. It is the responsibility of the global community to adapt and effectively respond to these dynamics, prioritizing diplomacy, conflict prevention, and the protection of international norms and values to maintain global stability and security.

After the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia shifted its focus towards the Middle East, aiming to counter U.S. influence. This led to the development of ties with Hamas, a radical group that rejects Israel's right to exist. Although many countries classified Hamas as a terrorist organization, Russia refrained from doing so and engaged diplomatically with the group. This support allowed Hamas to strengthen its position in the region. While Russia claimed it sought peace and balance, its actions indirectly contributed to regional instability, aligning with its broader goal of expanding influence in the Middle East.

3. The Relationship between Russia and Hamas

Hamas, established in 1987 as a branch of the international Muslim Brotherhood, severed ties with the organization in 2017. During the Soviet era, the USSR supported militant groups with similar goals, particularly the destruction of Israel. The Soviet Union, before perestroika, consistently backed the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) led by Yasser Arafat, as Israel's occupation of Palestine was viewed as an adversary to Soviet interests (Кузнец 2021).

Hamas is recognized as a radical Islamist group that consistently advocates for armed resistance against Israel and denies Israel's right to exist. Its stance remains supported by a significant portion of the Palestinian population. In 2005, Hamas formed a political party, "Change and Reform", which won the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections, surpassing Fatah by 4%. Afterward, Fatah leaders refused to form a coalition with Hamas, leading to Ismail Haniyeh's appointment as Prime Minister. This resulted in international sanctions against the new government. Violent clashes broke out between Fatah and Hamas, culminating in a brief civil war in 2007. Hamas gained control of Gaza (Кузнец 2021).

Russia's relationship with Hamas can be better understood through its foreign policy, which incorporates a blend of Realism and pragmatism. Russia's foreign policy has evolved, particularly since Vladimir Putin's rise to power. One of the key factors influencing Russia's relations with the Middle East is its unique stance on religion, often using "faith-based diplomacy" to promote peace through cooperation between religious leaders. Russia positions itself as a Eurasian civilization, distinct from both the Western and Eastern blocs, emphasizing its unique role in global geopolitics (Ahmadian și Barari 2021).

In the post-Soviet era, Russia shifted its focus toward the East, seeking to expand relations with Muslim-majority countries, including the Middle East. The Soviet Union's ideological opposition to Islam led to limited engagement with Muslim states, but following the USSR's collapse, Russia moved to establish more substantial ties with the region, marking a key shift in its foreign policy. The expansion of these relationships reflects Russia's broader geopolitical interests and its desire to strengthen its influence in the Middle East (Albright 2006) (Ahmadian și Barari 2021).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia shifted away from Westerns, particularly after observing NATO's eastward expansion and the U.S. military's growth. Under Putin, Russia focused on the "near-abroad" states, which became critical for its influence and security. These countries are of significant importance due to their geographical proximity and economic ties with Russia. At the same time, Russia distanced itself from the West, aiming to reduce Western influence in these regions (Chaadaev and Kamenskii 1991).

Russia's worldview includes three major threats: The West, China, and the Muslim world. The West's threat stems from Russia's attempts to expand influence in neighbouring countries, while China's growing power presents an increasing challenge. The Muslim world is seen as a multi-dimensional threat, especially due to the instability in regions like Afghanistan and Iraq. To address these concerns, Russia has strengthened ties with Islamic countries, notably through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Additionally, the Middle East remains a key area of focus for Russia's foreign policy, with the region serving as a platform for both increasing global influence and engaging in negotiations with the West (Chaadaev and Kamenskii 1991).

Russia's involvement in the Middle East has evolved significantly from the Soviet era to Putin's leadership. During the Soviet Union, the region was seen as a battleground against imperialism, with Israel viewed as an ally of the West. After the Soviet collapse, Russia initially focused on relations with the West, but failures in this approach led to a shift in policy (Chaadaev and Kamenskii 1991).

Under Putin, Russia aimed to restore its influence in the region, prioritizing economic interests, particularly in energy, and positioning itself as a mediator in Middle Eastern conflicts. Russia's policy was driven by the need to counter U.S. influence, protect internal stability, and prevent the spread of extremism. Additionally, Russia strengthened its presence by forgiving debts of Arab countries and reopening dialogue with Hamas in 2006 (Epstein 2007).

Russia has consistently aimed to play an active role in resolving the Middle East conflict, focusing on stabilizing Palestinian territories, fostering Palestinian unity, and resuming Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. After Hamas won the 2006 elections, Moscow seized this opportunity to enhance its diplomatic influence by maintaining relations with both sides, in contrast to the U.S., which only engaged with Israel (Epstein 2007).

Russia does not classify Hamas as a terrorist organization, noting the absence of violence in Russia and viewing Chechnya as an internal matter. Its relations with Hamas have helped Russia balance its strong ties with Israel and strengthen its influence in the Islamic world. Following the 2008 war with Georgia, Russia further solidified its relationship with Hamas to counter Israel's activities in neighbouring states, employing a strategy aimed at balancing and expanding its regional influence (Katz 2010).

Russia has taken an ambiguous stance in its foreign policy, particularly regarding its relations with groups labelled as terrorist organizations by many countries, such as Hamas. Following Hamas' victory in the 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections, Russia viewed this success as an opportunity to counteract U.S. influence in the Middle East and began engaging with the political movement. Although Hamas was not officially classified as a terrorist organization by Russia, Moscow continued to interact with Hamas leaders and facilitated high-level meetings, actions that some perceived as direct support for a group known for resorting to violence and terrorism (Katz 2010).

For the past two decades, Russia has maintained a working relationship with Hamas, raising concerns about potential indirect support through its ties with Iran and the use of private military networks like the Wagner Group (Winer 2023).

The Wagner Group, a paramilitary organization operating under the Kremlin's de facto control, has played a key role in advancing Russia's geopolitical interests through covert operations. Wagner mercenaries have been active in conflicts across Ukraine, Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic, and Mali, where they have been accused of war crimes and atrocities against civilians. In Africa, the group has provided military training and protection for pro-Russian governments, while in Syria, it has cooperated closely with Iranian forces and Hezbollah. Some Ukrainian sources claim that former Wagner operatives, after leaving Belarus for Africa, participated in training Hamas militants, particularly in the use of drones for attacks. While these claims have not been independently verified, Wagner has a history of supporting extremist groups to destabilize regions of strategic interest to Moscow (Karelska 2023).

Another significant player in this network is Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the ideological and military backbone of the Iranian regime, which has been designated as a terrorist organization by the United States and other Western countries. The IRGC has been instrumental in backing Iran's proxy groups across the Middle East, including Hamas, Hezbollah, and Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria. Russia's ties with the IRGC have strengthened since its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, with Iran supplying Moscow with attack drones and other military equipment. This partnership extends to Hamas, as Russia and Iran coordinate efforts to counter Western influence in the region (Winer 2023).

The close cooperation between Russia, the Wagner Group, and the IRGC points to a calculated strategy of supporting extremist and terrorist organizations to destabilize Russia's geopolitical adversaries. By maintaining ties with Hamas and refusing to classify it as a terrorist organization, Russia not only strengthens its foothold in the Middle East but also leverages terrorism as a tool to expand its influence and undermine Western interests in the region (Winer 2023).

Through these actions, Russia indirectly financed and supported regimes and organizations involved in terrorist activities. While the Kremlin claimed that its primary goal was to maintain a balanced role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and contribute to regional peace, its support for groups like Hamas had contradictory effects, contributing to instability in the region. Continued meetings and collaborations with Hamas leaders, who oppose Israel's recognition and advocate for violence in the name of Palestinian independence, indirectly enhanced the group's ability to attract financial and logistical support from Russia.

This policy can be seen as a form of financing and encouraging regimes that use terrorism as a tactic against their adversaries. In this way, Russia was perceived not just as a diplomatic player but as an actor actively contributing to fuelling conflicts by supporting extremist and terrorist groups to extend its influence in the Middle East and counter the U.S. strategy in the region.

Conclusions

Analyzing the provided information, it is clear that the Kremlin has employed a strategy of eliminating political opponents and former security agents it deems traitors, through well-planned assassinations. These actions fit into a broader model of transnational repression, which Russian authorities justify as part of a "political war". The use of rare and toxic substances like polonium-210 and Novichok, along with the direct involvement of Russian intelligence services, indicates a systematic approach to intimidating and eliminating adversaries, regardless of their location.

Additionally, the relationship between Russia and Hezbollah reflects a strategic alliance based on shared interests in the Middle East. Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict, alongside the Assad regime and with Russian support, has solidified this cooperation, offering benefits to both parties. While Russia strengthens its regional influence, Hezbollah receives military and logistical backing, helping to maintain its operational capabilities.

Russia's relations with Hamas are also complex and part of its broader strategy to extend its influence in the Middle East, amidst rivalries with the West and the balancing of geopolitical forces. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia adopted a more flexible and pragmatic policy toward Islamic regions, and its interactions with groups like Hamas are consistent with this approach. Although Russia does not categorize Hamas as a terrorist organization, its ties with groups like Iran and Wagner suggest indirect support for extremist movements, which significantly impacts regional stability.

Russia's role in the Middle East is ambiguous, particularly regarding its policy toward Hamas. By not designating the group as a terrorist organization but continuing engagement, Russia highlights its desire to counter U.S. influence in the region. However, this policy fosters instability and prolongs conflicts, as Hamas is known for its advocacy of violence and refusal to recognize Israel. Russia's support for extremist groups, especially through connections with Iran and Wagner, risks further destabilizing the region and strengthening regimes that promote violence, undermining peace efforts.

Moreover, Russia's dual approach in the Middle East, maintaining ties both with Israel and extremist groups like Hamas, creates a fragile balance that could easily escalate conflicts. Despite Putin's pragmatic and realpolitik-driven strategy, support for Hamas and other extremist groups risks intensifying regional tensions and could lead to greater international isolation for Russia, given the global condemnation of terrorism.

In conclusion, Russia's policy toward Hamas and other extremist organizations reflects a strategic choice aimed at countering Western influence in the Middle East, but it also contributes to

regional instability and perpetuates violence. This approach has contradictory effects, undermining peace efforts while enhancing Russia's geopolitical position.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Adamsky, D. D. 2018. "The impact of the Russian operation in Syria on Hezbollah's operational art: A hypothes." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43 (5): 14–430. Accessed February 16, 2024. doi:10.1080/1057610x.2018.1471971.

Ahmadian, Hassan, and Khodayar Barari. 2021. "Russia and Hamas after 2006: Realities of a Questionable Relationship." *Journal of World Sociopolitical Studies.* Accessed January 18, 2025. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/359865785_Russia_and_Hamas_after_2006_Realities_of_a_Questionable_Relationship

Albright, M. 2006. "Faith and Diplomacy." *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 3-9. Accessed January 19, 2025. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2006.9523244.

Analysis, SOVA Center for Information and. 2010. "The Structure of Russian Anti-Extremist Legislation." Accessed November 12, 2022. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/droi/dv/201/201011/20101129_3_10sova_en.pdf

Azani, Eitan. 2013. *Is Hezbollah a Terrorist Organization?* Brussels: International Institute for Counter Terrorsim. Accessed February 16, 2024. https://ict.org.il/UserFiles/Is%20Hezbollah%20a%20Terrorist%20Organization%20.pdf

BBC. 2020. "Navalny 'poisoned': What are Novichok agents and what do they do?" Accessed April 20, 2024. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43377698

BBC. 2022. "Putin Spoke on Sending 'Volunteers' from the Middle East to Ukraine." *BBC News*. Accessed December 2, 2022. https://www.bbc.com/russian/news-60707686

—. 2018. "Russian spy poisoning: What we know so far." 8 October. Accessed February 18, 2024. https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-43315636

BBC. 2022. "Ukraine war: Wagner chief Prigozhin defends brutal killing video." *BBC News*. Accessed December 4, 2022. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-63623285

Blackmore, Erin. 2020. "How the Red Terror set a macabre course for the Soviet Union." *National Geographic*. Accessed November 4, 2022. https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/red-terror-set-macabre-course-soviet-union

Bokinskie, Lance. 2024. "Russian Political Warfare: What It Is What It's Not, and Why It Isn't Working." *Global Insight* 4: 23-28. Accessed March 3, 2024. doi:10.32855/globalinsight.2024.003.

Borshchevskaya, Anna. n.d. *The Russian war of war*. Edited by Washington Institute. Accessed November 3, 2022. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/352

Brylov, Denis. 2022. "Muslim Legions" of the Russian Army – English version." *Observatoire International du Religieux* Bulletin no. 7. Accessed November 18, 2022. https://obsreligion.cnrs.fr/bulletin/muslim-legions-of-the-russian-army-english-version/

Brylov, Denis. 2022. «"Muslim Legions" of the Russian Army.» *Observatoire International du Religeux.* Accessed December 2, 2022. https://obsreligion.cnrs.fr/bulletin/muslim-legions-of-the-russian-army-english-version/

Byman, Daniel L. 2018. "Russia is a state sponsor of terrorism—But don't treat it that way." *Brooking*. Accessed February 24, 2024. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/russia-is-a-state-sponsor-of-terrorism-but-dont-treat-it-that-way/

C. Walters, Robert J. Fischer Edward P. Halibozek David. 2019. "Terrorism: A Global Perspective." *Introduction to Security* 401-412. Accessed November 6, 2022. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-805310-2.00016-0.

Chaadaev, P, and Zakhar Abramovich Kamenskii. 1991. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii i izbrannye pis'ma*. Moscow: Nauka.

2022. "Cum schimbă relațiile internaționale declararea Rusiei ca „regim terorist"." *Europa Liberă.* Accessed November 12, 2022. https://romania.europalibera.org/a/rusia-regim-terorist/32112541.html

Daher, A. 2019. "On the origins of Hezbollah." *Hezbollah, London: Hurst & Company* 7–38. Accessed February 15, 2024. Doi:10.1093/oso/9780190495893.003.0002.

Dinu, Clarice. 2022. "Ce este Grupul Wagner, armata privată a lui Putin, care l-ar avea ca țintă pe Volodimir Zelenski." *Hot News*. Accessed November 17, 2022. https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-razboi_ucraina-25397673-este-grupul-wagner-armata-privata-lui-putin-care-avea-tinta-volodimir-zelenski.htm

DW. 2024. "Alexei Navalnîi a murit în închisoare." Accessed February 20, 2024. https://www.dw.com/ro/alexei-navaln%C3%AEi-a-murit-%C3%AEn-%C3%AEnchisoare/a-68276386

Epstein, A. D. 2007. "Russia and Israel: A Romance Aborted?" *Russia in Global Affairs.* Accessed January 18, 2025. https://eng. globalaffairs.ru/articles/russia-and-israel-a-romance-aborted/

Filipov, David. 2017. "Here are 10 critics of Vladimir Putin who died violently or in suspicious ways." *Washington Post.* Accessed October 18, 2022. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/03/23/here-are-ten-critics-of-vladimir-putin-who-died-violently-or-in-suspicious-ways/

France 24. 2024. "UN top court rejects most of Ukraine's 'terror financing' case against Russia." 31 01. Accessed January 30, 2025. https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20240131-un-top-court-rejects-most-of-ukraine-s-terror-financing-case-against-russia

Getty, J. Arch. 2002. "Excesses Are Not Permitted": Mass Terror and Stalinist Governance in the Late 1930s." *The Russian Review* 113-115.

Haddad, S. 2005. "A survey of Lebanese Shi'i attitudes towards Hezbollah." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 16 (3). Accessed February 18, 2024. Doi:10.1080/09592310500221286.

Holroyd, Matthew. 2021. "Was Russia behind the killing of Zelimkhan Khangoshvili? A Berlin court says yes." *Euronews.* Accessed December 2, 2022. https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2021/12/15/zelimkhan-khangoshvili-russian-man-convicted-of-2019-berlin-murder-of-georgian-chechen

Hot News. 2023. «Alexei Navalnîi, în stare „critică" după o posibilă otrăvire, spun aliații săi.» 14 April. Accessed February 18, 2024. https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-international-26206017-alexei-navalnii-stare-critica-dupa-posibila-otravire-spun-aliatii-sai.htm

HotNews.ro. 2022. "Rusia, declarată stat care sponsorizează terorismul - rezoluție a Parlamentului European." *HotNews.ro*. Accessed November 23, 2022. https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-razboi_ucraina-25921076-rusia-declarata-stat-care-sponsorizeaza-terorismul-rezolutie-parlamentului-european.htm

2022. "În est, Forțele Armate au distrus un detașament de libieni și sirieni - Danilov." *Platformă multimedia de limbi străine a Ucrainei.* Accessed December 3, 2022. https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-ato/3463326-na-shodi-zsu-znisili-zagin-livijciv-ta-sirijciv-danilov.html

Karelska, Christine. 2023. "The Mystery Behind the Wagner Group. The far-reaching influences of Moscow's band of mercenaries." *Visegrad/Inside*. Accessed January 21, 2025. https://visegradinsight.eu/the-mystery-behind-the-wagner-group

Katz, M. N. 2010. "Russia's Greater Middle East Policy: Securing Economic Interests, Courting Islam." *Russie.Nei.Visions* (4). Accessed January 10, 2025. http://mars.gmu.edu/bitstream/handle/1920/5849/IFRI_ifrirussiamiddleeastkatzengapril2010.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

Kuczyński, Grzegorz. 2022. "Why Ukraine War Matters For Chechnya's Kadyrov." *Ukraine Monitor*. Accessed November 14, 2022. https://warsawinstitute.org/ukraine-war-matters-chechnyas-kadyrov/

Laskowska, Katarzyna. n.d. *TERRORISM IN RUSSIA – MECHANISMS*. BSP_Book.indb. Accessed November 5, 2022. https://repozytorium.uwb.edu.pl/jspui/bitstream/11320/2026/1/BSP_10_2011_Laskowska.pdf

McBride, Julian. 2022. "Wagner Group: The Case for a Terrorist Designation." *Geopolitical Monitor*. Accessed November 16, 2022. https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/author/julianmcbride/

Mroue, Bassem. 2022. "Syrian fighters ready to join next phase of Ukraine war." *AP News*. Accessed December 4, 2022. https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-islamic-state-group-syria-europe-4ede428219450a58b0439912bc43cc15

Newman, Scot. 2021. "Russia Fatally Poisoned A Prominent Defector In London, A Court Concludes." *NPR*. Accessed December 3, 2022. doi:https://www.npr.org/2021/09/21/1039224996/russia-alexander-litvinenko-european-court-human-rights-putin

Nizameddin, T. 2008. "Squaring the middle east triangle in Lebanon: Russia and the Iran-syria-hezbollah nexus." *Slavonic and East European Review* 86 (3): 445–500. Accessed February 16, 2024. doi:10.1353/see.2008.0125.

Official Journal of the European Union. 2023. "Recognising the Russian Federation as a state sponsor of terrorism." *EUR-LEX*. 11 05. Accessed 01 29, 2025. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52022IP0405

Orenstein, Mitchell A. 2019. "Russia's Hybrid War on the West." *Oxford Academy* C2–C2.P73. Accessed October 16, 2022. Doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190936143.003.0002.

Owen, Chairman: Sir Robert. 2016. *Report into the death of Alexander Litvinenko*. Anchetă, House of Commons, OGL. Accessed February 18, 2024. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/493860/The-Litvinenko-Inquiry-H-C-695-web.pdf

Peace, The Institute for Economics &. 2022. *Ukraine Russia Crisis: Terrorism Briefing*. IEP. Accessed July 12, 2022. https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Ukraine-Russia-Terrorism-Briefing-web.pdf

Plenary, AT A GLANCE. 2022. *Russia's war on Ukraine: Designating a state as a sponsor of terrorism*. Comp. European Parliament. Accessed November 12, 2024. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/738218/EPRS_ATA(2022)738218_EN.pdf

Rahman-Jones, Imran. 2017. "Why does Russia support Syria and President Assad?" *BBC News*. Accessed November 2, 2022. https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-39554171.

Ray, Michael. 2022. "Paris attacks of 2015." *Britannica*. Accessed November 16, 2022. https://www.britannica.com/event/Paris-attacks-of-2015

Rupar, Terri. 2014. "Remember when a Ukrainian presidential candidate fell mysteriously ill?" *Washington Post*. Accessed October 18, 2022. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/03/12/remember-when-an-ukrainian-presidential-candidate-fell-mysteriously-ill/

Serban, Teodor. 2022. "Măcelarul din Alep" a ordonat bombardamentele care au distrus Harkovul. Cine este generalul rus care preferă muniția interzisă". *ziare.com*. Accessed November 18, 2022. https://ziare.com/general-rus/general-rus-macel-alep-siria-ordin-bombardamente-harkov-1740891

Shankar, Priyanka. 2022. "Europe has labelled Russia a state sponsor of terror. What next?" *Aljazeera*. Accessed February 22, 2024. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/24/will-the-eu-parliaments-stance-towards-russia-have-consequences

Shekhovtsov, Anton. 2020. "Conceptualising Malign Influence of Putin's Russia in Europe." *Free Russia Foundation*. 01 April. Accessed January 30, 2025. https://thinktank.4freerussia.org/reports/conceptualizing-malign-influence-of-putin-s-russia-in-europe/

Smerea, Andreea. 2024. "Lunga listă a victimelor lui Putin. Cine sunt oamenii despre care se crede că au fost asasinați la comanda liderului de la Kremlin." *Digi24*. Accessed February 21, 2024.

https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/lista-lunga-a-victimelor-lui-putin-cine-sunt-oamenii-despre-care-se-crede-ca-au-fost-asasinati-la-comanda-liderului-de-kremlin-2690101

Toader, Alexandru. 2022. "SUA nu consideră necesar să declare Rusia drept „stat terorist". Motivul invocat de americani." *Ştirile ProTV*. Accessed December 2, 2022. https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/international/sua-nu-considera-necesar-sa-declare-rusia-drept-zstat-terorist-motivul-invocat-de-americani.html

Winer, Jonathan M. 2023. "Essential questions about the Russia-Hamas link: The evidence and its implications." *Midle Est Institute*. Accessed January 21, 2025. https://www.mei.edu/publications/essential-questions-about-russia-hamas-link-evidence-and-its-implications

Кузнец, Алексей Ковалев и Дмитрий. 2021. "Рассказываем об истории отношений России с ХАМАС — главным врагом Израиля в эти дни Почему в Москве считают эту организацию не террористической, а чуть ли не «благотворительной»?" [Smith, Alexei Kovalev and Dimitri. 2021. 'We tell you about the history of Russia's relations with Hamas - the main Israel's enemy these days Why does Moscow consider this organisation not a terrorist, but almost 'charitable'?'] 21 May. Accessed February 6, 2024. https://meduza.io/feature/2021/05/21/rasskazyvaem-ob-istorii-otnosheniy-rossii-s-hamas-glavnym-vragom-izrailya-v-poslednie-nedeli

STRATEGIES XXI International Scientific Conference
The Complex and Dynamic Nature of the Security Environment,
Bucharest, Romania - February, 27th, 2025

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-11

THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR AND ITS GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS

Colonel (Ret.) Prof. Eng. Eugen SITEANU, PhD,
Corresponding Member of the Academy of Romanian Scientists, Bucharest, Romania.
E-mail: esiteanu@yahoo.com

Eng. Iulian TOADER, PhD Candidate,
"Carol I" National Defence University, Bucharest, Romania.
E-mail: iuliantoader@yahoo.com

Abstract*: In order to correctly perceive the causes and determinations of the Russian-Ukrainian war, we will make a brief presentation of the current geopolitical phenomenon. This will help us understand how the Russian Federation, as an actor in the system of international relations, has imposed its interests in its geographical area ofinterest. The place of an actor such as Russia in the power equation and especially its position in relations with other actors such as Ukraine, the USA, NATO, the EU, China, Iran, North Korea, etc. defines its geopolitical place and role. In the international security environment, there have been transformations in various political, economic and diplomatic fields, in political-military systems and in the very nature of wars that also require a change in the content of the object of geopolitical studies. However, the object of geopolitics' study is understood as that area of international relations established between actors (state and non-state) of the international environment characterized by the competition of power and dispute of interests. The Russian Federation is trying to establish itself as a regional or even global power towards its neighbors and towards the EU, the USA, China, etc.*

Keywords: *war; geopolitical phenomenon; Russian Federation; Ukraine; international relations; international environment.*

Introduction

Geopolitics helps us decipher the trends of evolution and the state that the system of international relations will have in the future. In this regard, the main purpose of geopolitical theory is to highlight some of the ways used by the international actors to impose their interests in a geographical area, as the Russian Federation does.

Russia is trying to manifest itself as a regional and even global power towards its neighbors and especially with the EU, the USA, China, India, Iran, etc. Thus, the geopolitical situation of Russia can be defined by the power rivalry between it and the actors who dispute their interests in the area ofinterest of the Russian Federation. Therefore, for a good understanding of the causes of the Russian-Ukrainian war, it is beneficial to study the contemporary geopolitical phenomenon, in order to find solutions that help us understand the events and transformations taking place in the international security environment.

1. Russia's Preparation for War

In the Report of International Experts: "16 Myths and Prejudices about Russia", from issue number 124 of the Policy Brief Magazine, published in August 2021, several renowned historians and political analysts assessed the Western prejudices regarding the Russian acts of aggression. This

analysis exposes Russian policy in Europe and around the world towards Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania and the Baltic States. The 16 myths/prejudices are debunked, and it is explained how the West should critically analyze its position in order to react more rationally and effectively against Russian intentions.

Vladimir Putin has a hidden agenda of aggressive military, economic, financial, etc. policies and actions against his neighbors and member states of NATO and the European Union. The geopolitical objectives of the Russian Federation have been and continue to be directed against NATO and the EU. The Report "16 Myths and Prejudices about Russia" shows that the policy of EU states towards the Russian Federation has failed to build a functional relationship with the Russian state because it was unrealistic. Misconceptions and visions about Russia have spread rapidly among Western leaders. All erroneous myths about Russia reflect a lack of knowledge of the geopolitical intentions of the Russian Federation. For example, the belief that what will come after Vladimir Putin will definitely be better than his governance demonstrates ignorance of the realities and history of Russia. Next, we briefly present the 16 erroneous myths:

1. Russia and the West are equally bad;
2. Russia and the West are pursuing the same thing;
3. Russia was promised that the North Atlantic Alliance would not expand;
4. Russia is not in conflict with the West;
5. A new pan-European security architecture is needed that includes the Russian Federation;
6. It is necessary to improve the relationship with the Russian Federation, although it does not make any concessions because it is very important;
7. The Russian Federation is entitled to have a defensive perimeter and privileged interests that include the territory of other states;
8. It is necessary to create a fault line between the Russian Federation and China to prevent a joint action against the interests of the EU and NATO;
9. The EU's relationship with the Russian Federation must be normalized in order to combat China's rise;
10. The Eurasian Economic Union is the equivalent of the European Union;
11. The peoples of Belarus, Ukraine and the Russian Federation form one nation;
12. Crimea has always been Russian;
13. All reforms aimed at liberalizing the Russian Federation's market since 1990 have been a failure;
14. Sanctions against Russia are the wrong approach;
15. It all comes down to Putin: The Russian Federation is a strong-handed autocracy;
16. Something better will come after Putin.

All these myths/preconceptions are debunked in the aforementioned Report so that EU and NATO political leaders can reassess their opinions/beliefs towards the Russian Federation and the wrong decisions that have resulted from those erroneous opinions. All 16 myths have been preserved in the political rhetoric of EU and NATO leaders and as a result of Moscow's disinformation. Some of them contain older aspirations of the Russian Federation such as the establishment of a pan-European security system centered on a Russian project from the 1950s, or the idea that the Russian Federation could legitimately claim a sphere/area of interest; or, the idea that Belarusians and Ukrainians together with Russians constitute a single Slavic people without their own identities and separate states.

All 16 erroneous myths have had a negative influence on the decisions of the EU and NATO leaders, which have been distorted in the sense of decisions that are desirable/convenient for the Russian Federation and undesirable for the West. The conclusion of the aforementioned Report explains quite clearly that the Russian Federation continues to disregard international principles of conduct and to commit acts of aggression in the future using the 16 myths as justification. American and allied leaders should have separated myths from the harsh reality as early as 2021 (a year before

the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war) and taken measures against Russia's intentions to attack Ukraine. It follows that Vladimir Putin and his clique have pursued and continue to pursue the old principles of Russian policy, and their aggressive behavior should never be considered a "historical anomaly" (Mincu 2021, 22).

Putin prepared the aggression in 2000, immediately after he was elected president of Russia. Despite clear signals that the Russian Federation was preparing "for the restoration of the Russian Empire in the form of USSR 2.0, Western decision-makers treated superficially, even with indifference, the analyses of political-military analysts from several countries of the world. There are hundreds of materials published on various news sites, books and reports which, with solid arguments, demonstrated that we are approaching a major aggression against Ukraine and then, against other states located, by historical-geographical misfortune, in the so-called close neighborhood of the Russian Federation" (Mincu 2023, 6). The Romanian people have a saying: "Russia neighbors whoever it wants". Russia has pursued and continues to pursue the policy of "spheres of influence anywhere on the globe where possible, of political, economic and military subordination of the so-called near abroad, which Russian leaders see, in a first phase, as far as Berlin..." (Mincu 2024, 38) .

In order to achieve geopolitical goals, Russia led by Putin uses various means and procedures (political, military, diplomatic, economic, financial, etc.), the same as USSR took over from the experience of the Tsarist Empire and developed concepts and actions in order to destabilize each country considered an enemy. Thus, our country suffered greatly due to the actions of the USSR and then of Russia - a country with an iron dictatorship that seeks to gradually restore the USSR 2.0.

The Russian Federation has always wanted to have the status of a great power, but it understood that it "alone cannot cope with this status and only the Russian World as a formula for restoring the post-Soviet Empire can help it reach the imperial heights it desires, for this it must conquer Ukraine" (Udrescu and Siteanu 2024, 38). In 2008, at the summit of the leaders of the member countries of the North Atlantic Alliance, the possibility of Ukraine's accession to NATO was discussed. The Russian Federation opposed and declared that it would act against this decision of NATO. After this, a fierce and continuous confrontation began between the Russian Federation and the other side: the USA, NATO and the EU. The United States influenced the elections in Ukraine and helped pro-Western forces take political power. Then the Russians, through a hybrid war, conquered Crimea, which they incorporated into Russia. The Kremlin also declared the separation of several regions with a predominantly Russian (Russophile) population from Ukraine. Ukrainian military forces attacked these regions with artillery against pro-Russian separatist forces.

On March 24, 2021, Zelensky ordered the re-occupation of Crimea. During this time, NATO exercises with reconnaissance flights were conducted in Ukraine along the border with the Russian Federation. In response, Russian troops conducted some applications along its border with Ukraine. In November 2021, Vladimir Putin requested to the United States that: Ukraine be a neutral country; nuclear missiles not be deployed in Ukraine; and Ukraine not be a member of NATO. The United States did not respond to Russian requests. In this tense situation, the Russian Federation launched military maneuvers with tens of thousands of soldiers on the border with Ukraine, while the EU media sounded the alarm about a possible invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops. On February 17, 2022, Ukrainian troops bombed the Donbas daily, non-stop (Udrescu and Siteanu 2024).

2. Russian Federation's War of Aggression against Ukraine

Shortly before the launch of the "special military operation" against Ukraine, Vladimir Putin declared that he had the following political objectives in mind: "demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine and protection of the ethnic Russian population of Ukraine" (Treisman 2022). He later added as objectives: neutrality of Ukraine and independence of Crimea, as well as recognition of the annexation of this peninsula. In addition, Putin also stated that he was aiming to liberate four regions

of Ukraine: Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhia. In return, Ukraine is fighting to defend its independence and sovereignty and to join the EU and NATO.

According to the Resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations No. 3314/1974, the "special military operation" of Russia is considered armed aggression (as in the provisions of International Humanitarian Law).

Unlike the numerically superior Russian forces, the Ukrainian ones are fewer, but better trained, motivated and equipped. At the beginning of the war, the Russians went on the offensive with 200,000 soldiers: in the north and north-east of Ukraine to conquer Kiev and in the south and east of Ukraine to link up with the forces in the north. The Ukrainians divided their forces and means in order to be able to defend themselves in the four zones of operations. Therefore, the offensive of the Russian troops was carried out simultaneously in four main directions, targeting the four aforementioned regions. The Russians planned the offensive as something similar to a blitzkrieg, that is, at a fast pace, but they failed due to the tenacity of the Ukrainian defenders, strongly supported by advanced military equipment and intelligence provided by Western states, especially the USA. As a result, the Russian offensive in the north and northeast was thwarted by Ukrainian troops who managed to prevent the encirclement of Kiev. Therefore, in early April 2022, the Russians withdrew their troops from the northern operations area and part of the forces that operated in the northeastern operations area, concentrating their efforts in the other operations areas: southern and eastern.

Due to the failure in the northern operations area, the Russians changed their strategic and political objectives in the sense that they decided to completely conquer the four regions: Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporozhe in order to incorporate them into Russian territory. This was the Russian objective for the second phase that began on April 15, 2022 and in which the actions of the Russian troops were concentrated in the two areas of operations, southern and eastern, in which the Russians continued offensive actions, and the Ukrainians carried out numerous counterattacks using the few Western HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems). Afterwards, by joining forces (southern and eastern) at the end of May 2022, the Russians created a corridor between Donbass and the Crimean Peninsula, and also managed to capture the ports on the Sea of Azov. Moreover, the Russians also managed to capture the Donbass region.

In September, the Ukrainians launched a counteroffensive in the northeastern area of operations, liberating the Kharkov region. In the south, they liberated the cities of Kherson and Nikolayev. But Russia carried out partial mobilization in September 2022 and annexed the four regions (Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhia). In the following months, the front line in the southern and eastern areas of operations was maintained, just like in World War I.

The Russians used outdated military equipment, while the Ukrainians benefited from high-quality Western equipment. Many countries around the world supported the Ukrainian war effort, considering the Russian aggression illegal and unjustified, despite the increase in the price of hydrocarbons worldwide. The Russians have failed to weaken and isolate Ukraine, which is a failure for Moscow.

In the second year of the war, Russia aimed to conquer the position of regional hegemon, in the ex-Soviet area, and perhaps global hegemon in the conditions of maintaining the war on the borders of the EU and NATO and of Russian diplomatic efforts, having dramatic effects in the economic sphere. Here we mention the use of Russian energy resources as a weapon of pressure against the European Union states and initiating propaganda campaigns including cyber aggressions to destabilize the targeted states. Also, by developing relations with important states such as China, India, Iran and North Korea, and by taking over the presidency of BRICS+, Russia gains possibilities to support the war effort and fuel a perspective of a bipolar world. At the same time, Russia aims to maintain pressure on Western states that are forced to seek other energy resources (hydrocarbons) in order to maintain the development of their economies that are seriously affected by the crisis. Consequently, Western states are making great efforts to provide aid to Ukraine and develop their defense capabilities, as well as to support the sanctions imposed on Russia.

Of great geostrategic importance for Russia is maintaining control over the annexed Ukrainian regions, including Crimea. In the second year of war, the fighting alternated between the stationary front lines, in a war of attrition, as it did in World War I. In addition to its army troops, Russia also used mercenaries (Wagner, Chechen fighters, the Hispaniola group, etc.), some from the Cuba, Nepal, Syria, Serbia, Afghanistan, Somalia and Malaysia (Bartosiewicz and Żochowski 2024). As a result, the Russians had a mix of mercenaries, paramilitary forces, and the Russian army. This resulted in the Wagner Group uprising of June 2023, action which was suppressed by the Kremlin.

In June-November 2023, the Ukrainian counteroffensive took place, which did not achieve its objectives. Later, in October, the Battle of Avdiivka began, when Russian troops went on the offensive. Ukrainian troops left the city on February 16, 2024 with heavy losses on both sides. After this episode, Russian troops took the initiative and conducted a slow-paced offensive in the southern and eastern areas of operations.

A new stage in this war began in August 2024, when Ukrainian forces launched an offensive on Russian territory in the Kursk region. This is a classic offensive with units and brigades, unlike some raids carried out by the Free Russian Legion and the Russian Volunteer Corps with semi-regular subunits (they have Russian citizens who fought on the Ukrainian side). The first days and weeks of the Ukrainian offensive in Kursk were a resounding success as the Ukrainians occupied about one thousand square kilometers of Russian territory and the city of Sudzha – a logistics center of the Russian army, which is the administrative center of the Sudzha district and has a Gazprom metering station intended for the distribution and transportation of Russian natural gas to the European Union[1].

The Ukrainian invasion of the Kursk region meant the fastest and most significant change of the front in favor of Ukraine. With this Ukrainian incursion into Russian territory, the war became one of movement and not attrition that week. If the war was fought only on Ukrainian territory, now it is being waged on the territories of both states, which has become a shame for Moscow, especially if this episode will not be just a short episode but will become a prolonged action. Unfortunately, the Russians went on the counteroffensive and asked North Korea, based on the Treaty concluded with this country, to send about 10,000 soldiers who are now fighting in Kursk (U.S. Department of Defense 2024) against the retreating Ukrainians who have already lost half of the 1,200 square kilometers (BEL SAT 2025).

The new military strategy of Ukraine modifies the plan for waging war by Russia against Ukraine, due to the Ukrainian offensive that began on August 6, 2024. Thus, the Russian Federation was forced to bring more forces to its territory. Repelling the Kursk counterattack, as well as other probable Ukrainian counterattacks, is an important strategic problem for the Russian army. Until August 6, 2024, Russian forces fought battles and wars only on foreign territories, such as in Georgia, Syria, Ukraine and other states. But after August, the Russian Federation is forced, in addition to aggressive actions carried out in various countries, to also conduct defensive operations on Russian territory. Through the Kursk offensive, Ukraine managed to block Russian troops in that region so that they could no longer attack and terrorize the Ukrainian population. Thus, Ukraine influenced not only the internal affairs but also the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, undermining Moscow's propaganda and information policy not only among the mass of Russians but also in the international community.

The Ukrainian incursion into Russian territory created an image of Russia as a loser towards Ukraine and a cognitive dissonance among the Russian population and the international community. This unexpected attack by Kiev demonstrated the strategic incapacity and technical-material weakness of the Russian Federation that had been evident since 2022, during the failure of the offensive on Kiev and the Ukrainian counterattack in Kharkov and Kherson. The Ukrainian counterattack in Kursk strongly undermines the propaganda of the invincibility and superiority of the Russian Federation. If Serbia's irredentism was defeated by the actions of NATO and especially those

[1] The gas from Sudzha is pumped to Slovakia and further to Central Europe. Both Russia and Ukraine have an interest in maintaining gas transportation to the EU.

of the USA, Western support for Ukraine has been weak and sporadic over the past ten years. However, some EU economic and financial sanctions against the Russian Federation and support for Ukrainian military actions have been increasing since 2022, but they are insufficient for Ukraine's defense. At the same time, some states in the Global South are helping Russia economically. On the other hand, support for Ukraine by the West is slow, hesitant and insufficient. And with all these shortcomings, Ukraine continues to show the world that both the evolution and the end of the war are unpredictable and that Russia does not have an undeniable superiority.

3. Geopolitical Future of Russian-Ukrainian War

The broader geopolitical context of the Ukrainian strategy is closely connected with the likely negotiations with the Russian Federation on territorial issues, which could constitute a preparation for multilateral discussions such as, for example, another international conference on the war after the Peace Summit held in Switzerland in July 2024. If Ukraine were to manage to keep the territories near Kursk, it could hold transactional talks for the exchange of Russian lands, which it captured, for Ukrainian territories annexed by Russia.

Regarding the future of the war, we predict that it will continue for an unknown amount of time. The two belligerent parties do not want to negotiate, and the subject of peace negotiations has a low level of acceptability on both sides. Ukraine cannot accept an unconditional surrender, a change of political leadership, demilitarization and annexation by Russia of all the territories it has conquered. The Ukrainian side demands that Russia return the territories it has illegally occupied, but the Russian Federation rejects this demand. Russia's conditions determine the possibility of continuing the war in 2025, when Donald Trump proposes a peace plan through which Ukraine would give up the territories occupied by the Russian Federation and join NATO.

Russia is aware that Ukraine can resist as long as the West supports it. If this support diminishes, the defence capacity of Ukrainian troops will decrease. The decrease in Western support could be due to the political, social, economic-financial fatigue of EU states, etc. If the Russians manage to continue the offensive in Ukraine to the north and northeast and restore the front line from the first phase of the war and open the way to Kiev again, this would produce dramatic consequences for Ukrainians and would mean the defeat of Ukraine. At the same time, the conquest of Odessa would represent great losses for Ukraine on several levels (economic, military, social, moral, etc.).

After the installation of Donald Trump in the new mandate of President of the USA, according to Euronews, Vladimir Putin declared that he would be willing to sit down at the negotiating table with the American President, regarding the war in Ukraine but also the current interests of the USA and the Russian Federation (Bellamy 2025). Putin also stated that if Trump had been re-elected in 2020, the crisis in Ukraine could have been avoided.

In November 2024, close associates of the new US President Donald Trump said that Trump would work to conclude peace between Russia and Ukraine and would not help Ukraine regain the territories occupied by Russia. Trump administration will ask Zelensky for a realistic vision for peace. If President Zelensky claims that he will conclude peace only if he gets Crimea back, it means that he is not realistic, since Crimea was taken by Russia.

Democrats accused Trump of getting closer to President Putin and claimed that President Trump's approach to the Russian-Ukrainian war would amount to a real capitulation for Ukraine, which would endanger Europe. Also, the Prime Minister of Estonia told the BBC that if Ukraine backed out of the war, Russia's appetite would increase.

The truth is that Western countries and US President Biden have not given Ukraine enough weapons and ammunition for Ukraine to win the war. In early 2024, the US House of Representatives approved providing $61 billion in military aid to Ukraine (The Kyiv Independent 2025). In fact, the United States has provided the most weapons to Ukraine; from February 2022 to the end of June 2024, it has delivered weapons and ammunition worth about $55 billion (Le Monde 2024).

Vice-presidential candidate J.D. Vance said in August 2024 that Ukraine needs more military equipment than the US can deliver (Politico 2024). Half of Republican voters, and 27% of Americans believe that the United States is providing too much aid to Ukraine (Pew Research Center 2024). Without the help of the United States of America, Ukraine would no longer be able to resist and would be forced to make peace. Moreover, the new US President declared in late November 2024 that he wants to stop the war and stop the flow of US resources to Ukraine as war aid. Trump also said that regaining Crimea by Ukraine is not realistic and is not a US goal. Trump added that the United States did not send American soldiers to fight in Ukraine, and that Ukraine did not ask for American troops to fight for Ukraine, but only asked for American help to arm Ukrainian soldiers.

Beside the US involvement, there is the need to assess the international factors that threaten the security of the European Union, such as, for example, the wars in the Middle East and Africa that can influence the aid given to Ukraine. For example, the greatest danger was the war between Israel and Hamas, but now the ceasefire has ended and the release of hostages has begun.

In addition, there are a number of world crises that were triggered or amplified by the Russian-Ukrainian war (of migrants, food and energy) and affect the entire world (especially the Middle East and Africa, but also Western actors). For example, the energy crisis led to the energy destabilization of Western states and the explosion of hydrocarbon prices. Added to this is the fierce competition between the USA and China prompted even by the possibility that in the future the USA will lose world hegemony to China. Therefore, China, Russia, Iran and North Korea threaten world peace.

A Romanian researcher presents three possible scenarios of the Russian-Ukrainian war: 1) Russian troops can conduct the offensive in directions in order to extend control over the entire territory of the Donbass, Kherson and Zaporozhe regions and include them in their entirety in the Russian Federation; 2) the Russians will change the offensive in the Donbass region with a strategic operation in the Hortitia direction to recapture the Kharkov region, threatening to conquer Kiev, continuing to strengthen the defensive positions; 3) the Russians will abandon the offensive in the Zaporozhe and Kherson regions and attack from the Odessa strategic direction to recapture the Odessa region and then to make the junction with the forces in Transnistria, continuing to maintain the current defensive positions. Then they could attack the Republic of Moldova (Ioniță 2024, 17).

No matter the possible scenarios, the Russian Federation has the possibility to sustain the offensive campaign because it has mobilized several hundred thousand people to reinforce forces in Ukraine and replaced tank losses, while also securing sufficient missiles and drones from Iran and North Korea. Meanwhile, Ukraine strongly depends on aid from the European Union and the USA. Of course, an important aspect of geopolitical future of the Russian-Ukraine war in the event of a ceasefire agreement and/or an armistice is given by the possible election scenarios this year. Thus, if Zelensky remains in power or another pro-Western president is elected, Ukraine continues on its current path. But, the election of a pro-Russian president, or of an ultranationalist president are wildcards that can lead Ukraine to new political direction, and concomitantly change the whole course of the war.

It gets common sense that “the continuation of the Russian Federations war against … Ukraine remains a major threat not only to Eastern Europe, but also of the entire diplomatic effort made worldwide to build a global peace by implementing the rule of law” (C.-C. Ioniță 2024a). As for Romania, a reliable partner for Ukraine since the beginning the war, all along, it had to face “complex challenges ranging from geopolitical tensions to economic concerns and issues of national sovereignty” (Plate and Marc 2023). All of these challenges were fueled by the intensification of Russian hybrid actions aimed to weaken Romanian support for our illegitimate attacked neighbor. Moreover, once the Agreement on security cooperation between Romania and Ukraine was signed in 2024, and Romanian engagement to “facilitate full-fledged integration of Ukraine into the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)” (President of Romania 2024), Russian actions amplified and this was proved by the interference in the Romanian elections in

December 2024. Thus, as long as the Romanian support for Ukraine will continue, the Russian Federation will strive to weaken the Romanian state by all means.

Conclusions

The evolution of the Russian-Ukrainian war is difficult to predict for the year 2025 because the events are particularly complex, changing and fluid and include the actions of the belligerents, as well as the interests and involvement of the other parties – state and non-state actors.

Many military analysts believe that it is difficult to predict how the Russian-Ukrainian war will evolve on the short or long run. Shortages in weapons and ammunition and the delay in US aid to Ukraine raise numerous signs of concern and doubt about Ukraine's defence capacity against the Russian offensive.

Russia can continue to maintain pressure on Ukrainian air defences and strike Ukrainian defence industry targets, as well as undermine the morale of Ukrainian civilians and military personnel. Given that Russia is substantially increasing its defence budget, it will be able to continue the war for several more years, but Ukraine is dependent on Western foreign support.

The Russian-Ukrainian war future development, when it comes to Western support, must not only be analyzed in terms of political will, but also in terms of available resources to put at disposal to support the Ukrainians. Also, it should be analyzed from a geopolitical perspective, taking into account other aspects as the conflictual situation in the Middle East, Russian-Ukrainian war effects, the new American presidency and the tensions in the Sino-American relationship that also preoccupy and modify the Europeans and the American security agendas. Moreover, the prolongation of the war and its escalation create the danger of the outbreak of World War III because this period is similar to the one that preceded World War II.

The results of election in Ukraine plays significant role in the course of war, as a pro-European president means the continuation in the same direction, but a pro-Russian or ultranationalist President could challenge more the geopolitical trends.

As long as Romania will support Ukraine, Russia will intensify its hybrid actions (particularly, by using cyber and informational instruments, as was the case with the presidential elections) to weaken the Romanian state.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Bartosiewicz, Miłosz, and Piotr Żochowski. 2024. "Putin's foreign legion. Foreigners fighting in the war with Ukraine." *Centre for Eastern Studies.* 20 02. Accessed 01 27, 2025. https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2024-02-20/putins-foreign-legion-foreigners-fighting-war-ukraine

BEL SAT. 2025. „Bargaining chip in Ukrainian hands." 09 01. Accessed 01 27, 2025. Ukrainians who have already lost half of the 1,200 square kilometers.

Bellamy, Daniel. 2025. „Vladimir Putin calls Donald Trump 'clever' and suggests talks, including over Ukraine." *Euronews.* 25 01. Accessed 01 27, 2025. https://www.euronews.com/2025/01/25/putin-calls-for-a-meeting-with-trump-calling-him-clever-and-pragmatic

CNN. 2024. „Russia has recruited as many as 15,000 Nepalis to fight its war. Many returned traumatized. Some never came back." 11 February. Accessed 01 27, 2025. https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/10/asia/nepal-fighters-russia-ukraine-families-intl-cmd/index.html

Ioniță, Constantin. 2024. „Entering the third year of the Russia-Ukraine war: what might happen in the near future." *Strategic Impact*, Vol. 90, Issue 1.

Ioniță, Crăișor-Constantin. 2024a. „Evoluția situației din Estul Europei în al doilea an de război ruso-ucrainean.” În *Evaluare Strategică 2023. Riscuri, incertitudine, război,* Florian Cîrciumaru (coord.), 12-52. București: Editura Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”.

Le Monde. 2024. „Biden talks with Zelensky, announces new military aid for Kyiv.” 24 August. Accessed 01 27, 2025. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/08/24/biden-talks-with-zelensky-announces-new-military-aid-for-kyiv_6720731_4.html

Mincu, Constantin. 2023. „Concluzii și învățăminte desprinse după un an de război în Ucraina.” *Revista de Științe Militare* 6.

Mincu, Constantin. 2024. „Maskirovka – o activitate complexă a Kremlinului și a propagandiștilor săi, perfecționată din 1917 și până astăzi.” *Revista de Științe Militare* 38.

Mincu, Constantin. 2021. „Politica actuală a Federației Ruse – un mister ascuns într-o enigmă.” *Revista de Științe Militare* 22.

Pew Research Center. 2024. „Wide partisan divisions remain in Americans’ views of the war in Ukraine.” Novermber. Accessed 01 27, 2025. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/11/25/wide-partisan-divisions-remain-in-americans-views-of-the-war-in-ukraine/

Plate, Katja Christina, și Mihai Marc. 2023. „Romania: Political and Social Impact One Year After the Start of Russia's War of Aggression against Ukraine.” *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.* 18 February. Accessed 02 10, 2025. https://www.kas.de/en/country-reports/detail/-/content/rumaenien-politische-und-gesellschaftliche-auswirkungen-ein-jahr-nach-kriegsbeginn-in-der-ukraine-1

Politico. 2024. „Fact-checking J.D. Vance’s statements on Ukraine.” 16 July. Accessed 01 27, 2025. https://www.politico.eu/article/jd-vance-europe-russia-ukraine-donald-trump-kyiv-vp-pick-policy-us-elections-ohio-aid-war/

President of Romania. 2024. „Agreement on security cooperation between Romania and Ukraine.” 11 July. Accessed 02 10, 2025. https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/press-releases/agreement-on-security-cooperation-between-romania-and-ukraine1720707048

The Kyiv Independent. 2025. „US House passes $61 billion in aid to Ukraine.” 27 January. Accessed 01 27, 2025. https://kyivindependent.com/breaking-u-s-house-passes-61-billion-ukraine-aid-bill/.

Treisman, Rachel. 2022. „Putin's claim of fighting against Ukraine 'neo-Nazis' distorts history, scholars say.” 1 March. Accessed 01 27, 2025. https://www.npr.org/2022/03/01/1083677765/putin-denazify-ukraine-russia-history.

U.S. Department of Defense. 2024. „entagon Says 10K North Korean Troops in Kursk Oblast.” 4 November. Accessed 01 27, 2025. https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3955757/pentagon-says-10k-north-korean-troops-in-kursk-oblast/.

Udrescu, Mircea, and Eugen Siteanu. 2024. “Războiul din Ucraina: fapte-percepții-perspective.” *Revista de Științe Militare* 38.

Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies &
Interdisciplinary Doctoral School,
"Carol I" National Defence University

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-12

NARRATIVES IN CZECH SOCIETY ON THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Libor FRANK, PhD,
Assistant Professor, Department of Defence Analyses,
Centre for Security and Military Strategic Studies,University of Defence, Brno, Czech Republic
E-mail: libor.frank@unob.cz

Abstract: *The war in Ukraine, escalating into a full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022, profoundly affects European and global security and shapes public opinion in affected countries, including the Czech Republic. This paper examines the impact of Russian disinformation campaigns on public perception in Czech society, where various narratives influencing attitudes have been circulating since the beginning of the conflict. Some originate domestically; others reflect externally driven disinformation aimed at eroding trust in official institutions and weakening national support for Ukraine. The paper presents evaluations based on quoted references concerning the impact of disinformation narratives on public discourse and the national security of the Czech Republic. The findings highlight risks posed by foreign information influence, underscore the role of media and civil society in countering disinformation, and emphasise the necessity of coherent and effective strategic communication. Building societal resilience through media literacy and critical thinking is essential for mitigating the impact of disinformation and sustaining democratic stability in the face of ongoing geopolitical challenges, particularly by reinforcing public trust in both national and Euro-Atlantic democratic institutions.*

Keywords**:** *Pro-Russian narratives in the Czech Republic; public perception of the war in Ukraine; hybrid threats to national and societal security.*

Introduction

The Russian invasion in Ukraine in 2022, which escalated into a full-scale war, significantly impacts European and global security, profoundly shaping attitudes and public opinion in countries directly or indirectly affected by it. In the Czech Republic, public reaction to the invasion was overwhelmingly negative. According to available data, 95% of citizens condemned the invasion, with 89 % expressing strong disapproval and an additional 6 % indicating partial disagreement (Glaserová 2022). In the aftermath, various narratives began to circulate that have influenced public attitudes. Some of these narratives originate from domestic political and societal institutions and actors (Hübscherová 2022), while others are directly influenced by hostile disinformation campaigns primarily aimed at undermining public trust in official institutions and state authorities and reducing support for Ukraine.

Russian influence is confirmed by the National Centre Against Organized Crime (NCOZ - Národní centrála proti organizovanému zločinu), reporting regular Russian-led or supported information operations in the Czech Republic designed to spread fear, uncertainty, and sway public opinion towards pro-Russian narratives (Chodil 2024). These disinformation campaigns notably impact Czech public opinion regarding foreign and security policy. Russia's war against Ukraine has influenced Czech public views on geopolitical issues, creating a risk of increased societal polarisation. Systematic pro-Russian information operations divide society, emphasising the necessity of

continuous awareness-building about threats, the active promotion of critical thinking, and the development of skills to recognise and reject disinformation.

In the Czech Republic, the core supporters of conspiracy and disinformation narratives remain stable, accounting for less than 10% of the population (Pika and Cibulka 2023). Wider public opinion strongly resists these pro-Kremlin narratives, preventing their dominance in public discourse. However, direct belief in conspiracies plays only a partial role; more critical is trust in political systems and state institutions, which conspiracy theories and disinformation seek to undermine.

Building resilience against hybrid threats and combating disinformation is crucial not only for state institutions, which must engage in effective strategic communication (Divišová 2022) but also for civil society and media. Strengthening social, institutional, and national resilience (Bízik et al. 2022, 77-78) is essential for ensuring state and societal security.

Therefore, the war in Ukraine presents the Czech Republic with complex challenges affecting security policy and public opinion formation. Systematic monitoring and proactive countermeasures are key to maintaining stability, security, and democratic principles during ongoing geopolitical shifts (MO ČR 2021).

1. Narratives as Instruments of Societal Influence

The term *narrative* does not have a universally established definition, and there are differences in how its meaning and scope are understood across national contexts and at the international level (Divišová 2014, 109-110). This also presents a challenge for the development of effective strategic communication (StratCom), for example within NATO (Bolt and Haiden 2019, 9-12). The Cambridge Dictionary offers several definitions of how the term can be interpreted, such as: "a story or a description of a series of events," "a particular way of explaining or understanding events," "telling a story or describing a series of events," and "a story or a description of events" (“Meaning of narrative in English” 2025). A narrative can be understood as the way in which information is interpreted and how it influences collective perceptions of reality and societal discourse (Táborský 2019, 8-10). Narratives provide frameworks for interpreting complex events and phenomena, thereby creating a shared reference base that shapes individuals’ and groups’ understanding of their environment. They significantly impact political and social dynamics by shaping attitudes and establishing norms and rules of public discourse, which can either strengthen social cohesion or contribute to polarisation and the deepening of internal societal conflicts. Narratives play a crucial role in legitimising political decisions or delegitimising specific actors, directly affecting the form and outcomes of political processes in a country (Vinš 2022, 1).

In recent years, Czech public discourse has witnessed the strengthening of narratives related to the situation in Ukraine, identifiable as pro-Russian. These narratives often rely on interpretations aligned with or directly echo Russian state propaganda. Their influence is evident not only in the Czech Republic but also in other Central and Eastern European countries, reflecting a broader geopolitical strategy by the Russian Federation aimed at influencing public opinion in countries historically complicated in their relations with Russia (Vinš 2022, 3-10). Pro-Russian narratives frequently question the credibility of Western institutions, democratic values, and allied commitments to NATO and the EU, justify Russian actions in Ukraine, relativise the current international order, and emphasise negative impacts on the Czech state and society. Fortunately, this influence is not always sufficiently successful (Žabka 2023).

These narratives exploit historical resentments, economic hardships, and fears of an uncertain future within segments of society, attempting to influence public attitudes emotionally. Through targeted campaigns primarily on social media (Pačková, Hanzelka, and Šenkýřová 2024) and alternative media platforms, these narratives can quickly penetrate broader segments of the population

(Pásztor 2024a), leading to a gradual erosion of trust in state institutions, democratic processes, and media, potentially weakening political stability and societal cohesion.

2. Main pro-Russian narratives

The following section presents the most significant pro-Russian narratives identified in Czech public discourse, illustrating their core claims and argumentative structure.

2.1. The West provoked the war

One of the most prominent pro-Russian narratives asserts that the West provoked the war (Vinš 2022, 7). This narrative claim that Western geopolitical actions, particularly those of the United States, the European Union, and NATO, allegedly forced Russia into military action. Central to this argument is the perceived threat to Russia posed by NATO expansion and the intention to geopolitically weaken Moscow. This narrative portrays Russia as a defender of its national interests forced into action by aggressive moves from the so-called collective West (Kirby 2025). However, available facts refute this narrative. NATO expansion was based exclusively on democratic decisions by countries seeking security guarantees from historical experiences with Russian dominance or aggression.

This narrative occasionally invokes long-standing, although marginal, pro-Russian and pan-Slavic sentiments, portraying the war as a Western attack on the Slavic world led naturally by Putin's Russia (Holub 2014). Such arguments ignore the fact that Ukraine is also a Slavic nation whose population chose European integration. The exploitation of Slavic sentiment serves Russian propaganda by targeting Slavic populations in Central Europe to gain support for Russian geopolitical objectives.

2.2. Ukraine started the war

Another widespread pro-Russian narrative claims that Ukraine itself started the war. This narrative is frequently propagated through information channels systematically utilized for the dissemination of Russian state-sponsored propaganda and disinformation. These include, for example, RT (formerly Russia Today), Sputnik, Aeronet, and Voice of Europe, as well as a wide array of Telegram channels and Facebook profiles affiliated with or supportive of Russian interests. The narrative typically draws on selective interpretations of the 2013 and 2014 events collectively referred to as the Euromaidan. The core assertion of this narrative is that following these events, a supposedly fascist and nationalist government seized power in Ukraine, systematically oppressing Russian-speaking populations in the eastern regions (Mateo 2018). However, this narrative ignores the fact that Ukrainian governments post-Euromaidan emerged from democratic elections, and no credible evidence supports claims of widespread oppression of the Russian minority.

A critical component of this narrative alleges that eastern Ukraine was forced to defend itself due to supposed oppression, prompting Russian intervention solely to protect this minority. In reality, the conflict in Donbas was initiated by Russian military and intelligence structures supporting separatist movements and destabilising the region since 2014. Available reports have confirmed a substantial Russian military presence in eastern Ukraine long before Moscow officially admitted its involvement (Amnesty International 2014).

Additionally, this narrative often links Ukraine's current leadership to historical figures like Stepan Bandera, attempting to create negative associations and portray Ukraine as extremist. In reality, the glorification of Bandera and Ukrainian nationalism is marginal and does not reflect the official policy of the Ukrainian government (Hudec 2025). Such disinformation aligns with a broader

Russian strategy aimed at weakening international support for Ukraine and discrediting its political leadership.

2.3. Ukraine Has No Right to Independent Existence

The pro-Russian narrative denying Ukraine's right to independent existence is based on claims that Ukraine has always historically been part of the Russian state or under its control and that its territory belongs to the so-called Russian world (*Russkiy mir*). This narrative disregards historical facts demonstrating Ukraine's independent statehood and identity development. Ukraine has a long history of independent political evolution, from the *Kyivan Rus* era through medieval and modern periods to turbulent struggles for national emancipation in the 20th century and today (Lebduška 2022, 10-11).

Another frequent element of this narrative is the claim that Ukraine is an unviable state plagued by pervasive corruption, unable to provide favourable living conditions for its citizens, especially the Russian-speaking minority. Although Ukraine faces corruption-related challenges, since 2014, its government has implemented comprehensive reforms targeting the judicial system, strengthening anti-corruption efforts, combating money laundering, limiting oligarchic influence, regulating the media market, and enhancing minority protection (Movchan 2023). In 2022, Ukraine was recognised as one of the most actively reforming countries in the region, confirmed notably by the European Commission in evaluating Ukraine's application for EU membership (EC 2022).

2.4. Ukraine Cannot Win the War

This narrative emerged in Russian propaganda already in the initial days of the invasion of February 2022, predicting Ukraine's defeat within days or weeks (ABC News 2022). The fact that the planned "special military operation" (Putin, 2022) extended into a prolonged conflict lasting over three years has not diminished the persistence of this narrative. Its purpose is to undermine Ukrainian morale and weaken Western support for further military and economic assistance towards it.

This narrative also claims that the war must be ended at any cost, even if it means territorial concessions and significant limitations on Ukraine's sovereignty (Sezemský 2024). This interpretation ignores the reality of international law, which stipulates that territorial integrity cannot be changed by force. Ukraine has demonstrated its ability to effectively defend its territory, gaining substantial military experience and crucial Allied support, enabling continued resistance against Russian aggression. Proponents of this narrative also assert that providing military and economic aid to Ukraine prolongs the conflict and increases civilian suffering (Palata 2022). However, without this support, Ukraine's defence capabilities would likely be significantly weakened, potentially leading to further Russian territorial advances and additional human and material losses.

2.5. Ukraine's Current Leadership is Illegitimate

The narrative questioning the legitimacy of the Ukrainian president and Ukraine's leadership was initiated by Russian President Vladimir Putin in his statement on May 24, 2024, referring to the expiration of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's presidential term (Reuters, 2024). This narrative was later repeated and amplified by the current U.S. President Donald Trump, who referred to Zelenskyy as a "dictator without elections" (Trump 2025a) and claimed that he had a negligible 4% support among Ukrainians (Trump 2025b). This claim lacks evidence, ignoring the fact that President Zelenskyy was elected democratically in 2019 with 73% of the vote, one of the strongest electoral mandates in modern Ukrainian history (OSCE 2019, 42).

Furthermore, this narrative emphasises that no elections have been held during the ongoing war in Ukraine, allegedly undermining the legitimacy of the current government. This is justified by the fact that Ukrainian constitutional provisions prohibit holding elections during martial law, a

standard practice observed by other democratic states facing crises. Conducting elections during the occupation and active combat would result in significant portions of the population being unable to vote, thereby compromising the legitimacy of any elected officials under such conditions (Hosenseidlová 2024).

Additionally, since May 2024, when President Zelenskyy's mandate was supposed to expire, Russian propaganda has intensified claims that Ukraine's leadership lacks democratic legitimacy and popular mandate (Sukhov 2024). However, this assertion is part of a broader information operation aiming to weaken international support for Ukraine and cast doubt on governmental stability. Such claims come from a Russian authoritarian regime led by Vladimir Putin since 1999, with a long-standing absence of genuinely free, just, transparent and internationally monitored elections.

Despite these disinformation efforts, Ukraine's current leadership continues to receive strong support from both the domestic population (Burdyga 2025) and the international community. The European Union, the United States, and NATO have repeatedly affirmed that Ukraine remains a democratic country with legitimate political leadership. Questioning the legitimacy of Ukraine's government thus serves primarily as a tool in Russia's broader informational warfare strategy rather than reflecting an accurate assessment of Ukraine's political reality.

2.6. Support for Ukraine Comes at the Expense of Czech Citizens, Their Prosperity, and Security

This narrative has multiple layers emphasising the alleged negative consequences of supporting Ukraine for the social, economic, and security situation of Czech citizens (Pásztor 2024b, 4-9). The most prominent claim is that Czech taxpayers' money is directed to Ukraine instead of being invested in addressing domestic issues, particularly social agendas.

For example, according to the 2023 annual report by the Czech civilian intelligence service, Security Information Service (Bezpečnostní informační služba - BIS), Russian information activities targeting the Czech public largely focused on the topic of assistance provided to Ukraine. Specifically, a Russian-directed influence operation was uncovered, coordinated by Viktor Medvedchuk, a Ukrainian oligarch closely linked to the Kremlin regime. Artem Marchevsky managed this operation locally, directing the well-known online medium "Voice of Europe" in Prague (BIS 2024, 11-15).

Another widespread claim asserts that sanctions against Russia are ineffective and damage only the Czech economy (EC 2023). However, economic impact studies indicate that sanctions have significantly weakened the Russian war machinery in the long term, and the diversification of energy supplies has successfully reduced dependency on Russian fuels. In 2024, nuclear fuel imports from Russia ended, and from January 1, 2025, the Czech Republic no longer imports any gas from Russia, with all Russian oil imports ceasing by mid-2025 at the latest.

Claims have also emerged stating that the Czech Republic is overwhelmed by Ukrainian refugees, who allegedly exploit the social welfare system and increase crime rates. Currently, nearly 600,000 Ukrainian citizens reside in the Czech Republic, including 400,000 refugees under temporary protection, predominantly women and children (75%). In 2024, Czech police prosecuted approximately 3,800 Ukrainians, representing just 0.7% of the Ukrainian population residing in the Czech Republic, approximately three times fewer than Slovak citizens, for example (Svoboda and Švihel 2025). Data from the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs also show that Ukrainian refugees are effectively integrating into the labour market, contributing more in taxes to the state budget than they receive in social support. For instance, during the three years of the Russian-initiated war in Ukraine, the Czech state budget's income from people under temporary protection doubled the total costs of humanitarian aid (MPSV ČR 2025).

Pro-Russian disinformation narratives portray the transfer of military equipment to Ukraine as weakening Czech defence capabilities. In reality, international agreements have enabled the Czech

military to acquire more modern equipment and financial resources to enhance its defence capacities. Supporting Ukraine also positively impacts the Czech economy through the defence industry's growth, foreign investment and Czech companies' involvement in reconstruction projects in Ukraine. According to Czech National Security Advisor Tomáš Pojar, the expenses related to assisting Ukraine have already been recovered, and military aid and support for Ukraine are now economically beneficial (Cieslar 2024).

Conclusion

The analysis of the aforementioned narratives within the Czech society demonstrates that manipulation of facts and disinformation significantly shape public attitudes and perceptions of the conflict in Ukraine. These narratives distort reality and contribute to societal polarisation, weaken public support for assistance to Ukraine, and potentially influence political decisions. Although the vast majority of Czech citizens initially condemned Russia's 2022 invasion, support for Ukraine has gradually declined. An increasing number of people express war fatigue, deepening societal polarisation, a trend particularly noticeable as parliamentary elections approach in the fall of 2025, with the radicalisation of public discourse and a surge in populist narratives becoming more pronounced.

Another critical factor influencing public perception is that key measures in support of Ukraine are implemented by an unpopular government, directly impacting how the public views this assistance. Additionally, Russian-backed information operations contribute to spreading these narratives through disinformation networks, so-called alternative media, and social media platforms. Public scepticism towards official state communication heightens vulnerability to disinformation, further eroding trust in both national and Euro-Atlantic democratic institutions.

The data and arguments presented suggest that supporting Ukraine transcends moral and security dimensions, offering tangible economic and geopolitical benefits for the Czech Republic. Hence, it is essential to continue monitoring and analysing these disinformation patterns and actively strengthen citizens' media literacy and critical thinking skills. Strategic, transparent, and proactive governmental communication, complemented by robust civic education initiatives, is crucial for countering disinformation, reducing polarisation, and sustaining democratic stability and resilience in the Czech Republic amidst ongoing geopolitical challenges.

Author's Note: *AI (ChatGPT and Grammarly) was used to translate the text into English.*

Acknowledgements: *This conference proceeding resulted from research supported by the Ministry of Defence of the Czech Republic under the project: Long-term Development of Organization - Armed Conflict (DZRO OZKON), which has been conducted by the University of Defence, Brno, Czech Republic.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

ABC News. 2022. "Russian President Putin announces military operation in Ukraine." YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mf6cWinJz9k.

Amnesty International. 2014. "Ukrajina: Důkazy o válečných zločinech a účasti Ruska: Satelitní snímky dokazují přítomnost Rusů na východě Ukrajiny." Amnesty International. 7.9.2014. https://www.amnesty.cz/zprava/358/ukrajina-dukazy-o-valecnych-zlocinech-a-ucasti-ruska.

BIS. 2024. "Bezpečnostní informační služba: Výroční zpráva 2023." Bezpečnostní informační služba. https://www.bis.cz/public/site/bis.cz/content/vyrocni-zpravy/2023-vz-cj.pdf.

Bízik, Vladimír, Dominika Kosárová, Adam Potočňák, and Richard Stojar. 2022. "Hybrid Interference: From the Particular to a Continuum: Empirical Test of the Multi-Dimensional Concept of "Hybrid"." *Obrana a strategie* 22 (1): 75-88. https://doi.org/ https://doi.org/10.3849/1802-7199.22.2022.01.075-088.

Bolt, Neville, and Leonie Haiden. 2019. Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/improving-nato-strategic-communications-terminology/80.

Burdyga, Igor. 2025. "What Ukrainian opinion polls say about Volodymyr Zelenskyy." Deutsche Welle. 28.2.2025. https://www.dw.com/en/what-ukrainian-opinion-polls-say-about-volodymyr-zelenskyy/a-71774172.

Chodil, Jakub. 2024. "Cílem Ruska je vyvolat strach a podkopat důvěru, říkají odborníci ke zprávě NCOZ." ČT24. 3.7.2024. https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/clanek/domaci/cilem-ruska-je-vyvolat-strach-a-podkopat-duveru-rikaji-odbornici-ke-zprave-ncoz-350831.

Cieslar, Jiří Š. 2024. "Tomáš Pojar: Vojenská, ale i ekonomická pomoc Ukrajině je v našem zájmu a bohatě se nám vyplácí jak bezpečnostně, tak ekonomicky." *CZ Defence - Czech Army and Defence Magazine*. 26.3.2024. https://www.czdefence.cz/clanek/tomas-pojar-vojenska-ale-i-ekonomicka-pomoc-ukrajine-je-v-nasem-zajmu-a-bohate-se-nam-vyplaci-jak-bezpecnostne-tak-ekonomicky.

Divišová, Vendula. 2014. "Strategická komunikace v protipovstaleckých operacích NATO: Strategic Communications in NATO Counterinsurgency Operations." *Obrana a strategie* 14 (2): 105-118. https://doi.org/10.3849/1802-7199.14.2014.02.105-118.

Divišová, Vendula. 2022. "Strategic Communications: From a Reactive Fight Against Disinformation Towards Comprehensive Use in Support of National Security and Defence." *Czech Military Review* 31 (2): 34-53. https://tinyurl.com/23yz3ts4.

EC. 2022. "Opinion on the EU membership application by Ukraine." European Commission. June 17, 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_22_3802.

EC. 2023. "Dvanáct mýtů o ruské válce na Ukrajině." Evropská komise - zastoupení v Česku. 24.2.2023. https://czechia.representation.ec.europa.eu/dvanact-mytu-o-ruske-valce-na-ukrajine-2023-02-24_cs.

Glaserová, Dominika. 2022. "Neobhajitelná agrese, hodnotí bezmála devadesát procent Čechů ruskou invazi: Pokračují protesty." ČT24. 25.2.2022. https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/clanek/domaci/neobhajitelna-agrese-hodnoti-bezmala-devadesat-procent-cechu-ruskou-invazi-pokracuji-protesty-23114.

Holub, Petr. 2014. "Za Putinem ve jménu slovanské jednoty: Riziko pro slavjanofily." Echo24. https://www.echo24.cz/a/wBB9P/za-putinem-ve-jmenu-slovanske-jednoty.

Hosenseidlová, Petra. 2024. "Zelenskyj zůstává kvůli válečnému stavu prezidentem: Jeho legitimitu zpochybňuje jen Rusko." ČT24. 21.5.2024. https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/clanek/svet/zelenskyj-zustava-kvuli-valecnemu-stavu-prezidentem-jeho-legitimitu-zpochybnuje-jen-rusko-349447.

Hübscherová, Tereza. 2022. "Ruskou propagandu u nás šíří nejvíce sami Češi: Je třeba hledat příčinu dezinformací, varuje expert." Forum24. https://www.forum24.cz/ruskou-propagandu-u-nas-siri-nejvice-cesi-je-treba-hledat-pricinu-dezinformaci-tvrdi-expert.

Hudec, Ondřej. 2025. "Zkorumpovaná země fašistů i páchání genocidy: Jaké dezinformace panují o Ukrajině." Extra.cz. 1.3.2025. https://www.extra.cz/zpravy-extra-vyvraci-fake-news-zkorumpovana-zeme-fasistu-i-pachani-genocidy-jake-dezinformace-panuji-o-ukrajine-8e5fd.

Kirby, Paul. 2025. "Why did Putin's Russia invade Ukraine?" BBC. 11.3.2025. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj0q964851po.

Lebduška, Michal. 2022. “Musíme se přestat dívat na Ukrajinu ruskýma očima. O formování a vývoji ukrajinské národní identity.” *Mezinárodní politika* 2022 (2): 10-11. https://www.iir.cz/priloha?page=musime-se-prestat-divat-na-ukrajinu-ruskyma-ocima-o-formovani-a-vyvoji-ukrajinske-narodni-identity&p=1&type=news_cs.

Mateo, Emma. 2018. “The Ukraine Crisis: A Clash of Narratives?” University Consortium. https://uc.web.ox.ac.uk/article/the-ukraine-crisis-a-clash-of-narratives.

“Meaning of narrative in English.” 2025. Cambridge Dictionary. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/narrative.

MO ČR. 2021. “Národní strategie pro čelení hybridnímu působení.” Ministerstvo obrany ČR. https://mocr.mo.gov.cz/assets/informacni-servis/tiskove-zpravy/narodni-strategie-pro-celeni-hybridnimu-pusobeni.pdf.

Movchan, Veronika. 2023. “Ukraine: Preparation for the EU Accession Process: SCEEUS Report Series on Ukrainian Domestic Affairs, No. 6.” The Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS). https://sceeus.se/en/publications/ukraine-preparation-for-the-eu-accession-process/.

MPSV ČR. 2025. “Pomoc Ukrajině v unikátních datech MPSV: za tři roky uprchlíci do rozpočtu přispěli dvojnásobek toho, kolik stála humanitární dávka: Tisková zpráva.” Ministerstvo práce a sociálních věcí ČR. 24. února 2025. https://www.mpsv.cz/cms/documents/960141c9-77fe-a2a0-08eb-0935789a6a7e/TZ_bilance_UA_24022025.pdf.

OSCE. 2019. “Ukraine - Presidential Elections 31 March and 21 April 2019: ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report.” OSCE - Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/3/439631_0.pdf.

Pačková, Miroslava, Jan Hanzelka, and Barbora Šenkýřová. 2024. “Analyzing the Pro-Kremlin Media on the Czech Twitter through Social Bot Probability.” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 32 (3): 837-49. doi:10.1080/14782804.2024.2308112.

Palata, Luboš. 2022. “Orbán ve službě ruské propagandy a na cestě mimo demokratickou Evropu.” *IRozhlas.* 28.7.2022. https://www.irozhlas.cz/komentare/madarsko-ruska-propaganda-sleva-rusky-plyn_2207281615_gen.

Pásztor, Dávid. 2024a. “Dezinformace a válka: V šíření proruských narativů vyhrává bývalý řidič MHD.” *Euractiv*. 6.6.2024. https://euractiv.cz/section/eurovolby-2019/news/dezinformace-a-valka-v-sireni-proruskych-narativu-vyhrava-byvaly-ridic-mhd/.

Pásztor, Dávid. 2024b. *Válka na Ukrajině a dezinformace: Jaké nesmysly se šíří na sítích?* European Media and Information Fund. *Euractiv*. https://euractiv.cz/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2024/06/EMIF_Ukraine.pdf.

Pika, Tomáš, and Jan Cibulka. 2023. “Společnost nedůvěry: Ruským dezinformacím věří v Česku jen tvrdé konspirační jádro.” 14.6.2023. https://www.irozhlas.cz/zpravy-domov/spolecnost-neduvery-serial-rusko-dezinformace-konspirace-vyzkum-weby-telegram_2306140500_pik.

Putin, Vladimir. 2022. “Address by the President of the Russian Federation.” 2022. President of Russia. February 24, 2022. http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843.

Reuters. 2024. “Putin says Ukraine's Zelenskiy lacks legitimacy after term expired.” 2024. *Reuters*. May 25, 2024. https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-says-legitimacy-ukraines-zelenskiy-is-over-2024-05-24/.

Sezemský, Jiří. 2024. “ANO a komunisté v ráži. Konečná chce mír na Ukrajině za každou cenu: Ským ho dojedná, s Medveděvem?” *Reflex*. 18.3.2024. https://www.reflex.cz/clanek/komentare/123742/ano-a-komuniste-v-razi-konecna-chce-mir-na-ukrajine-za-kazdou-cenu-s-kym-ho-dojedna-s-medvedevem.html.

Sukhov, Oleg. 2024. “Zelensky’s term has expired, but he’s staying. Russia wants to use it.” *Kyiv Independent*. May 6, 2024. https://kyivindependent.com/zelensky-legitimacy/.

Svoboda, Tomáš, and Petr Švihel. 2025. "Ukrajinci jsou méně problémoví než Slováci, ukazují data o kriminalitě." *Seznam Zprávy*. 28.2.2025. https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-zivot-v-cesku-ukrajinci-jsou-mene-problemovi-nez-slovaci-ukazuji-data-o-kriminalite-270703.

Táborský, Adam. 2019. „Narativ." Bakalářská práce, Masarykova univerzita, Filozofická fakulta. https://is.muni.cz/th/dz0i2/Bakalarska_prace_Adam_Taborsky.pdf.

Trump, Donald J. 2025a. "Think of it, a modestly successful comedian, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, talked the United States of America into spending $350 Billion Dollars..." *Truth Social*. February 18, 2025. https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/114031332924234939.

Trump, Donald J. 2025b. *President Trump Delivers Remarks on Executive Orders*. YouTube video, 35:19. Published February 18, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAqFHLBDWrM.

Vinš, Petr Jan. 2022. "Dezinformační narativy o válce na Ukrajině v ČR a ve střední a východní Evropě: Analýza za období červen-říjen 2022." The Prague Security Studies Institute. https://www.pssi.cz/download/docs/10104_dezinformace-valka-na-ukrajine-2022-v2.pdf.

Žabka, Jan. 2023. "Kremelské propagandě se v Česku loni nedařilo: Směřovat na východ chce jen pět procent lidí." *HlídacíPes.org*. 28.2.2023. https://hlidacipes.org/kremelske-propagande-se-v-cesku-loni-nedarilo-smerovat-na-vychod-chce-jen-pet-procent-lidi/.

SECTION III

INSTRUMENTS OF CURRENT WARFARE

Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies &
Interdisciplinary Doctoral School,
"Carol I" National Defence University

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-13

THE THIRD AND THE FOURTH DEPARTMENTS OF THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY AND CYBER THREATS

Alida Monica Doriana BARBU, PhD,
PhD Candidate in International Relations and Security Studies,
Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.
E-mail: alida.barbu7@gmail.com

Abstract: *The Chinese Communist Party and the People's Liberation Army have been interested in war and electronic espionage since the third decade of the last century, when Deng Xiaoping was establishing technical units in military bases in southern China. The purpose of this study is to determine which strategies are being used by The People's Republic of China to gain advantage over other states and how effective they are, as well as the manner in which they are perceived by the USA, EU and Romania. The current paper aims to provide an understanding of the way in which the People's Liberation Army conducts information, psychological, electronic, cyber and meta warfare to help a competing China to access and preserve power. The development of specialized literature on China's hostile capabilities has the effect of increasing security culture among the Euro-Atlantic and Romanian public and possibly deterring China. In order to achieve its purpose, the following methodology was used: reviewing specialized literature, qualitative research, and testing Charles Tilly's theory - war made the state and the state made war − because state institutions and war preparation are mutually reinforced (bellum est pater omnium).*

Keywords*: Chinese military espionage; Chinese cyber warfare; 3rd and 4th Departments of People's Liberation Army; INEW (Integrated Network Electronic Warfare); Meta War; China-Romania relations.*

Introduction

The cyber domain is recognized by the PRC as a critical area for national security, hence the intention to develop cyber warfare capabilities. The PLA admits that the components of IO (Information Operations) - EW (Electronic Warfare), cyber, psychological and space warfare - are necessary to achieve military superiority (Office of the Secretary of Defense 2023, 181-182). The PRC can launch cyber attacks that, at the very least, can cause localized, temporary disruptions to critical infrastructures, and the PRC believes these capabilities are even more effective against militarily superior adversaries that depend on information technologies. As a result, the PRC is advancing its cyber attack capabilities and has the ability to launch cyber attacks, evolving from the INEW to the Meta Warfare.

Since the 1950s, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was responsible for military intelligence sectors: PLA-2 (2nd Department of the People's Liberation Army) - *Er Bu* or *Qingbaobu*, which dealt with military espionage and PLA-3 (3rd Department of the People's Liberation Army – 1950-2016) - *San Bu*, which was in charge of military SIGINT. The system perpetuated its structure without much change, with General Chen Xiaogong, the son of a friend of Zhou Enlai, acquiring in July 2007 the position of Deputy Chief of Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). In the late 1980s, Department 4 (*Si Bu* or PLA-4) was established to deal with the newly emerging electronic warfare and shared with PLA-3 the conduct of cyber warfare (Faligot 2019, 512).

In 2016, the General Staff Department was abolished following the People Liberation Army Reform. The PLA-4 functions were taken over by the Network Systems Department of the Strategic Support Force (SSF) of the PLA. The division of cyber espionage and offensive cyber forces between PLA-3 and PLA-4 did not achieve an integrated fighting force. SSF was established for a more comprehensive, integrated approach to information operations that brought the concepts of PLA doctrine and strategy up to date. SSF resembled U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), responsible for combatant, cyber operations, space and strategic C4ISR support command, but differed by being a military service rather than a Joint Force Command. Also, the nuclear component was not among its concerns (Kania, Costello 2018, 107).

The Strategic Support Force was disbanded on 19 April 2024 and split into three independent arms: the People's Liberation Army Aerospace Force, the People's Liberation Army Cyberspace Force, and the People's Liberation Army Information Support Force (Chen 2024).

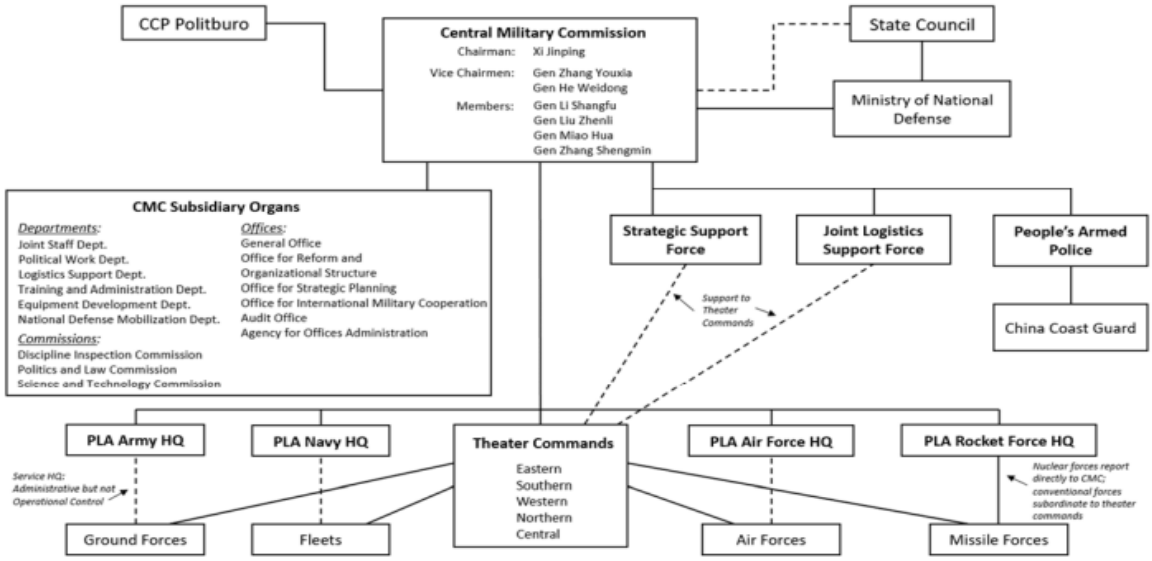


Figure no. 1: China Military Leadership Organizational Chart in 2023
(Office of the Secretary of Defense 2023, 46)

1. Chinese Military Bases all Over the World

1.1. Chinese Military Bases in the People's Republic of China

Deng Xiaoping's friend Nie Rongzhen set up a secret radio station in Hong Kong to communicate with the Comintern in Vladivostok and Harbin, while Zhou Enlai in Shanghai monitored the Kuomintang's movements. Li Kenong, who would be appointed in 1950 head of the Department of Social Affairs (DSA), the party's secret service, and at the same time hold the position of Deputy Chief of Staff of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), came to Zhou Enlai's aid by infiltrating the radio systems of the Kuomintang nationalists (Faligot 2019, 512).

The first communication school dates back to the period of the Red Army of the Chinese Workers and Peasants, with the headquarters chosen by Deng Xiaoping in Ruijin Province, Pingshangang City, in March 1933. The People's Liberation Army, the current name of the Red Army of the Chinese Workers and Peasants, celebrated in November 2006 this first school of communications, special by the impressive number (2100) of connections systems that covered the entire China, to which the Chinese Communist Party owes its long march to power (Faligot 2019, 512).

In 1950, PLA-3 numbered 20,000 technicians, intercepting the communications of foreign armies. Of the dozens of bases picking up and decoding signals from the US, Japan, Taiwan, former Soviet Muslim republics, Russia, South and North Korea, India, the most developed PLA-3 station was located in Xibeiwang District. Tibet, XinJiang and India were monitored from the Bureau of Technical Reconnaissance (BRT3) at the Chengdu station, Japan and Korea at the Shenyang station. The stations near Kunming were assigned the surveillance of Myanmar and Vietnam. New stations have been established on the Paracel Islands since the 1980s, and the Lingshui base in Hainan Island was tasked in 1995 with expanding its coverage from the Philippines and Vietnam to the entire South China Sea. The Lop Nor and Kashi stations, along with the Dingyanchen base in Xinjiang province intercepted the communications of the former Muslim Soviet republics and Russia, and the Changli base intercepted satellite communications. The Canton and Fujian military districts constantly monitored Taiwan. Each military region, be it Beijing, Canton, Lanzhou, Nanjing, Shenyang, Jinan, Chengdu, had its station (Faligot 2019, 513).

Figure no. 2: Major SIGINT stations in China (Faligot 2019, Appendix IX)

Research of academic databases and Chinese government websites by James T. Areddy and Paul Mozur of the Wall Street Journal in 2014 revealed that the organizational structure of the PLA-3 Department was almost identical to that of the NSA, with operational units throughout China. (The Wall Street Journal 2014) In 2014, more than 100,000 analysts, officers, hackers, linguists recruited from top universities, coordinated operations from military intelligence offices according to various geographical areas, including US surveillance from the Shanghai facility located in the vicinity of the transoceanic communications cables connecting the United States to China.

1.2. Chinese Military Bases Abroad

PLA-3 undertook SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) and CNO (Computer Network Operations) operations not only domestically but also abroad through its stations in North Korea, Pakistan, Djibouti, Cuba (The Economist 2023), etc. In June 2023, the Biden administration said the People's Republic of China had espionage facilities in Cuba. Wall Street Journal investigations identified four Chinese interception bases at Bejucal near Havana, Calabazar, Wajay and El Salao, east of Santiago de Cuba. The Bejucal station, built between 2010 and 2019, has the ability not only to intercept communications and track US satellites, but also to gather data on launches of SpaceX's Falcon 9 and Falcon Heavy rockets from Florida's Cape Canaveral Space Force Station and the Kennedy Space

Center, of interest to China, which wants to overtake US space launch technology. The El Salao base, still under construction, will be able to monitor the nearby US Naval Base Guantánamo Bay, the US Navy and allies operating in the South Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean. Even though modern military communications are encrypted, data on the origin, frequency, rate, and direction of communications traffic, obtained by collecting data from high-frequency radio transmissions, is very valuable. About 10 kilometers north of Bejucal is the Wajay station, expanded over the past twenty years with 12 antennas of different orientations and sizes and a solar farm, insurance against Cuba's unreliable electricity grid. Calabazar, the SIGINT base located on the outskirts of Havana, along with Bejucal and Wajay, served as a communications facility in the 1960s, according to declassified CIA documents. Among the improvements made is the solar farm, installed since 2012, larger than the one in Wajay (The Economist 2023).

As early as 1995, China had the most extensive SIGINT network in the entire Asia-Pacific region (Stokes 1999), joining the UK, the Russian Federation and of course the US as one of the world's leading SIGINT players. Jason Pan, who worked for the Taipei Times as an intelligence investigative specialist, identified in PLA-3 in March 2015 more than 12 new bureaus dealing with online warfare (Lo, Pan 2015, 3), of which the Sixth Bureau, located on the campus of Wuhan University in Wuhan, Hubei Province, was tasked with cyber warfare against Taiwan. Interception of telecommunications signals, technical surveillance and intelligence gathering of important agencies in Taiwan, reconnaissance of satellite images against Taiwan, hacking of computers and mobile phone service networks have been identified by Taiwan's Military Intelligence Bureau (MIB) and Ministry of National Defense (MND) as Chinese espionage activities, all under the guise of non-profit foundations, academic research centers or private sector companies. PLA-3's Sixth Bureau had units of network specialists, analysts, computer technicians, and hackers working in Wuhan University offices under the guise of telecommunications labs and research centers (Lo Pan 2015, 3).

And other nations that have suffered theft of digital information from cyber attacks have reported that Chinese cyber army units operate on university campuses under the guise of academic research. In Shanghai's Pudong District, PLA Unit 61398, which was found to be hacking commercial intelligence and planning malicious attacks against the US and other Western countries, was part of PLA-3's Office 2. The unit came under the scrutiny of the US Department of Justice after on May 19, 2014, five PLA officers were indicted for economic cyber espionage against US companies, such as Alcoa, US Steel, Westinghouse Electric, Allegheny Technologies, United Steel, Service Workers International Union, Paper and Forestry, Manufacturing, Allied Industrial, Rubber, Energy. Taiwan's National Security Bureau found 7.22 million Chinese cyber attacks in 2013. The Ministry of Justice's Bureau of Investigation (MJIB) was under siege by 1.56 million cyber attacks and the Ministry of Defense 1.01 million attacks (Lo, Pan 2015, 3).

2. PLA-3 and PLA-4, Two Swords in the Same Sheath

Network-Centric Warfare (NCW) is a military doctrine that seeks to gain an advantage over the enemy by connecting all forces through information technology, using a secure communications network to integrate command and control elements, sensors and information transmission. General Deepak Sharma of the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses from New Delhi described in the April 2010 issue of the Journal of Defense Studies (Sharma 2010, 37-38) China’s INEW Strategy (Integrated Network Electronic Warfare), the name for the offensive mission consisting of electronic warfare (EW) and computer network attacks (CNA) under the umbrella of PLA-4 (Electronic Countermeasures) of the General Staff of the People's Liberation Army. Intelligence gathering and computer network defense (The Computer Network Defense - CND) was undertaken by PLA-3 (Signals Intelligence) and militia units specialized in IW (Information Warfare) (Sharma 2010, 37-38).

The INEW concept was formulated by Major General Dai Qingmin, former head of PLA-4, who envisioned future intelligence operations to “destroy and control the enemy’s information

infrastructure and strategic vitality by selecting key enemy targets and launching electronic attacks on networks; this integration of electronic and cyber warfare was to be superior to the US military's approach" (Sharma 2010, 37-38).

China's espionage and surveillance activities against Taiwan are divided into HUMINT and SIGINT. The Ministry of State Security (Guoanbu), together with the United Workers' Front Department, which is part of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, conducts human intelligence programs against Taiwan, seeking to recruit Taiwanese officials and agents, while the PLA-3 monitors radar, telecommunications, radio and other signals. Between 2009-2012, as the era of Hu Jintao was waning, he was replaced by XI Jinping in 2013, the intelligence services of the PLA went through an era of technological development: submarines, drones, satellites, intelligence gathering by oceanographic ships. Didier Huguenin wrote in his Master's dissertation *Manouevres et pratiques d'Intelligence autour d'une stratégie Sud-Sud* (Faligot 2019, 545) from Université de Marne-La-Valée about Chinese espionage in the African countries of Zimbabwe, Mali, Djibouti, the Democratic Republic of Congo. ELINT (electromagnetic intelligence) and SIGINT operations were conducted under the guise of telephone service assistance. In addition to the PLA-2, PLA-3 and PLA-4 reporting to the General Staff, the Department of International Relations and military security were added which answered to the General Political Department. In the group of organizations dealing with communications and military interception, the PLA Communications Department liaised between the Central Military Commission, the units that protected the most sensitive government lines and the Army General Staff, since 2011 it was renamed the Informatization Department (Faligot 2019, 514).

In the summer of 2007, General Chen Xiaogong was appointed deputy chief of staff due to his experience in Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as his specialization in relations with the US. PLA-3, PLA-4, but also the Department of Communications came under his supervision at a time when the suspicions of Taiwanese, Indian, Western, Korean, Japanese agencies hovered over them regarding cyber attacks targeting websites around the world. In 2009, General Yang Hui, the former deputy director of PLA-3, was appointed chief of PLA-2, promoted because of his strong knowledge of cyber warfare. It was speculated that the appointment was part of the cyberwarfare interest group's strategy to take over the military entirely (Faligot 2019, 545-546).

The cyber war took off in 2008, when the databases and websites of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs were attacked by Chinese hackers, identified by the Indian counterintelligence service through IP addresses. China's breach of India's National Security Council computer systems demonstrated the need for a cyber counter-strike force consisting of the Bureau of Economic Intelligence, the Army's CyberSecurity Establishment, the National Technology Research Organization (NTRO - the equivalent of the NSA), working with RAW. The Chinese attacks had also targeted the computer system of the Dalai Lama, who is in exile in India. It was not just Asia that had to feel threatened, but Europe and North America as well (Faligot 2019, 546).

In 2009, Chinese hackers penetrated the Gmail messaging system as a result of the trade war between Internet provider Baidu and Google. The PLA-3 was suspected of this large-scale operation, which would have been too difficult for hacker groups or civilian agencies. The Bureau of Technical Reconnaissance (BRT3) in Chengdu, which handled operations against India, Tibet and the Xinjiang region, was commended for gathering intelligence from hostile environments. The US was no less, and in 2009 carried out no less than 230 million attacks on the website of the Chinese Ministry of Defense. The FBI, with the support of the NSA arm of the US consulate in Hong Kong and Britain's GCHQ, dismantled a Chinese network in Louisiana by intercepting Hotmail, Bellsouth.net, Gmail and FedEX emails and the conversations of Kuo Tai Shen, a Chinese-American from Taiwan with Gregg Bergersen, an arms dealer to Taiwan and a US agent recruited from the Defense and Security Cooperation Agency in Arlington, Virginia, and Kang Yuxin, a Chinese national and liaison of Kuo Tai Shen. In 2009, the Northrop Grumman Corporation released its analysis of the cyber warfare techniques of the PLA-2, PLA-3, PLA-4, marking the first time that links between Chinese security

services and hacker groups were officially identified. The Hack4.com group attacked in 2008 Canada, the USA, but also the French embassy in China for the "mistake" of President Nicolas Sarkozy to shake hands in Poland with Dalai Lama during the previous month. The French secret services managed to link Guoanbu (Ministry of State Security), Gonganbu 1st Research Bureau (Ministry of Public Security) and Hack4.com, while PLA-3 was using the know-how of technical university graduates (Faligot 2019, 546-549).

3. The Meta War

Shi Zhan, Director of the World Politics Research Center at the China Foreign Affairs University, argues in his paper *The First War in the Metaverse* (Shi 2024) that a beta version of the meta-war could be considered the Russian-Ukrainian War. It is also called the first full-scale drone war, the first commercial space war, and the first AI war (Baughman 2024, 34). With network communication, such as social networks, the war has become a more personal experience field, because images from the battle can be transmitted directly to people's smartphones without the need for Without government mediation or the media, civilians become part of the war through social networks on which we shared opinions. The chatbot eVorog (eEnemy) was made available to citizens in March 2022 by the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine for reporting Russian troop movements, with the reward coming in the form of a folded arm emoji. Another option in the menu, in the form of a drop of blood, allows Ukrainians to upload images of war crimes in the area such as Bucha, Irpin, Gostomel (Bergengruen 2022).

The chatbot, accessible via smartphone, is found on the Telegram platform, and the interface uses the government app Diia to verify the identity of those uploading images and information and the location via the phone's GPS. This networked gamification for Ukrainian civilians makes them part of the war by intersecting the digital (smartphone app) and physical (perceiving Russian military operations) (Baughman 2024, 34).

PLA aims for the intelligentization of war, technological dominance can be achieved through the dual-use metaverse, both civilian, economic and military growth on the battlefield. The military term Metaverse, first appeared in November 2021 in the PLA Daily article Discovery of the Metaverse, was intended to deter conflict by describing the hours of war. Allowing civilians to experience, in real time, the traumas of war through the re-creation of war scenes by media authorities, was supposed to inoculate societies' appetite for peace. Within months, the dialogue around the metaverse in AEP has evolved towards a military metaverse or battleverse, aimed at winning the future intelligent war. The PLA articles developed ways to achieve a military metaverse and possibilities to disrupt the use of one's own metaverse by enemies (Baughman 2024, 34).

In the PLA article on the metaverse, titled *Meta-War: An Alternative*, authors Zhang Yuantao, Luo Yanxia, and You Xiaotong conceptualize future wars, highlighting how smart warfare leads to meta-war. Meta-war is defined as "a new type of military activity that uses armed confrontation to conquer the will of the adversary and achieve objectives using politics, economics, and social interaction supported by the technology of the metaverse". The combat super system integrates smart and virtual devices, brain-computer interfaces, augmented and mixed reality with the military force on the real battlefield, in a triumvirate the physical battlefield, the virtual battlefield and *the brain battlefield* - the perceptions of officers (Baughman 2024, 34).

4. Romania-China Bilateral Relations during the Presidency of Xi Jinping

Romania and China share values and cultural, diplomatic and last, but not least, economic ties. The vulnerabilities of Chinese Dahua and Hikvision cameras, bought by the Romanian institutions, as well as the cyber attacks that Romanian Members of Parliament were subjected to from APT31, a Chinese hacker group, are challenges, but not cracks in the bilateral relations.

4.1. Romania-China Bilateral Relations During the Presidency of Xi Jinping

Chinese Press highlights friendly relations between China and Romania. The article published on the 24th of January 2025 in China Briefing (Sgueglia 2025) marks the commemoration in 2024 of the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Romania and the People's Republic of China. The 2013 Joint Declaration of the Governments of Romania and China on Deepening Bilateral Cooperation in New Circumstances, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the 14+1 Cooperation Format (the collaboration between China and Central and Eastern European countries - CEEC - focused on infrastructure, trade and cultural exchanges) acknowledge the economic, historical and cultural ties between the two countries. In July 2024, a memorandum of cooperation between the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Romania and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) was signed at the The Romania-China Economic Forum (Sgueglia 2025).

Over the years, delegations of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) have met with high-ranking Romanian officials from the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, local officials and public institutions, with cultural or economic agendas. In terms of media cooperation, there are three main sources of Chinese information in Romania, in Romanian and English: China Radio International Romania (CRI Romania), the state-owned Xinhua news agency and the Chinese Embassy in Bucharest (Expert Forum 2022). Out of the 500 Confucius Institutes present in 190 countries, in Romania there are institutes in Bucharest, Cluj-Napoca, Brașov and Sibiu (Institutul Confucius 2025). Former chairman of the Defense, Public Order and National Security Committee, PNL deputy Pavel Popescu, has submitted a bill to the Romanian Parliament to block access to state budget funds for scientific research by Romanian universities collaborating with Confucius Institutes, accused of espionage for the Chinese Communist Party (Roman 2022).

Bilateral economic relations in the fields of infrastructure, technology and energy have led to renewable energy projects (solar power plants), collaboration on nuclear power plants at Cernavodă (collaboration with the Chinese company China General Nuclear Power Corporation – CGNPC – started in 2015, was suspended in 2020 following US recommendations; the US Justice Department accused CGNPC and Energy Technology International of nuclear espionage in April 2016 (Necșuțu 2020)) and conventional power plants at Turceni-Rovinari and Tarnița. China has also been involved in Romania's telecommunications infrastructure through the companies Huawei and ZT (Telekom). Romania later rejected Huawei's authorization for 5G equipment (Bicheno 2024), under the influence of Western countries' concerns about Huawei that led to the Prague Proposal on 5G infrastructure in 2019-2020, signed by 30 NATO and EU member countries (Benea 2024a). The 2017 law of the Communist Party of China, which requires Chinese companies to respond positively to requests for collaboration from Chinese intelligence agencies, as well as the arrest of a company employee for espionage, have fueled reluctance towards Huawei (Benea 2024a).

As of March 2024, China had registered over 13,697 companies in Romania, operating in the telecommunications, manufacturing, renewable energy and automotive sectors. Factories established in Brașov by Chinese companies NBHX and Ningbo Joyson Electronic Corp have created thousands of jobs in the automotive sector. The largest solar power plant in Romania is being developed by Chinese companies Intec Energy Solutions and Chint Group. The intermodal rail-sea transport to reach Constanța used by China Railway Express (Wuhan) connects and facilitates trade between China and Romania and the EU. The Green House program by the Romanian Government to subsidize solar panels in the households of Romanian citizens used components from Chinese manufacturers. By August 2024, trade between China and Romania increased by 26.4% compared to 2023, with China ranked 20th as the largest investor in Romania (Sgueglia 2025).

4.2. Hikvison and Dahua Under the Radar

Challenges for the China-Romania relations reside in the implementation of stricter foreign investment screening, which could hinder Chinese projects, in geopolitical factors, in Romania's

alignment with EU standards that could influence investment flows and in Chinese espionage and cyber attacks.

The RFE/RL (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty) investigation revealed that Hikvision and Dahua surveillance equipment, created by Chinese companies partially owned by the state, is used in at least 28 military units in Romania; also, the military base at Deveselu, where the NATO Aegis Ashore land-based missile defense system is operated together with the US military, uses Hikvision surveillance cameras, along with the coast guard and sites operated by the Romanian Intelligence Service (Standish 2024), Senate, prefectures, gendarmerie, police and customs (Mihai 2024), General Inspectorate for Emergency Situations, courts, city halls and universities in Romania (Benea Standish 2024).

Although the two companies have been banned in the US, UK and Australia over suspicions of possible links to the Chinese military, data storage methods and vulnerability to hacking, the Romanian Ministry of Defense says the use of cameras is legal and secure, as they are disconnected from the internet. Conor Healy, a surveillance industry expert at IPVM, believes that Hikvision and Dahua equipment can be hacked, even when not connected to the internet (Standish 2024). Although Hikvision has said there have been no security threats to its products, Marian Ghenescu, a video systems specialist, claims that these cameras can have both unintentional and intentional vulnerabilities. (Mihai 2024)

The Lithuanian Ministry of Defense discovered nearly 100 Hikvision vulnerabilities in 2021 that could expose it to malicious code injection or cyberattacks. No direct cybersecurity vulnerabilities were found at Dahua, but the company's cameras were shown to periodically send packets to servers in five countries, including China. Jens Stoltenberg, former NATO Secretary General, spoke out against the use of Chinese technology in critical infrastructure in September 2023 (Benea Standish 2024).

National security and sensitive information are at risk as firmware vulnerabilities could allow camera control, remote access, network attacks, and data interception by hostile governments, organized crime groups, and non-state actors. An FBI report from January 2024 shows how cameras disconnected from the internet can be accessed. The Chinese-backed hacking group *Volt Typhoon*, which targeted critical infrastructure, managed to hack a computer's operating system and then gain access to closed-circuit camera systems. Hikvision has been placed on a sanctions list in the US due to security concerns and human rights violations through the development of surveillance and tracking technology for Uyghurs and other minorities in the Chinese province of Xinjiang (Benea Standish 2024).

4.3. Romanian Members of Parliament under Chinese (Cyber) Attacks

The Chinese government follows *the Policy of Peaceful Reunification with Taiwan* without considering giving up, if necessary, the use of force. The Chinese commitment to *One country, two systems* requests the same point of view from other countries. In 2012, China thanked Romania for its support regarding Taiwan and Tibet, when the Romanian Delegation in China, led by the Romanian Secretary of State for Defense Policy Ion Mircea Plangu, was received by Chi Haotian, Minister of Defense, Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission and State Counselor. Chi Haotian declared that the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) is willing to strengthen the existing ties between the two armies. Plangu admitted the long-standing friendship between Romania and China and his belief that the mutual support will continue in the future (People's Daily Online 2012).

The relation between Taiwan and Romania is a current case study in the geopolitical context involving the European Union and China. The participation of Romanian MP Cătălin Teniță at the end of July 2024 at the fourth annual IPAC summit held in Taiwan, provoked a prompt reaction from China. While Beijing tried to discourage the participation of several IPAC members at the summit, the Chinese Embassy in Romania requested measures to control the behavior of certain members in relation to Taiwan in a letter sent to the headquarters of REPER, Cătălin Teniță's political party (Leonte 2024).

The Romanian political party REPER publicly responded to the Chinese Embassy that as long as the actions of its members comply with party rules and the law, it does not impose control over its members. The party aligns itself with the EU position of recognizing the One China policy, but also with

the European Parliament Resolution on the situation in the Taiwan Strait of September 2022, sharing with Taiwan common values such as the rule of law, democracy and human rights. In his public response to the letter, MP Cătălin Teniță also stated that, as an elected representative, he intends to explore opportunities for collaboration in sustainable urban development and in public services provision with the Taiwanese authorities. Although MP Cătălin Teniță visited Taipei in 2023, meeting with former President Tsai Ing-wen, the Chinese Embassy did not react. The political significance and visibility of the IPAC summit in Taiwan in 2024 probably contributed to China taking a position (Leonte 2024).

Some Romanian members of Parliament (MPs) wanted stricter rules on the use of Chinese technology in Romanian institutions of national security importance and sought to amend the legislation in parliament. For their critical attitude towards the Chinese government, three Romanian MPs, Alexandru Muraru (PNL), Cătălin Teniță (REPER) and former MP Pavel Popescu (PNL) were victims of espionage by APT31, a hacker group formed against *IPAC (Inter-Parliamentary Alliance for China)*, made up of parliamentarians from several countries who have accused the communist regime in China of human rights violations (Benea 2024b).

IPAC was established in 2020 to develop a strategy for democratic states to engage with China. In January 2021, hackers sent over 1,000 emails to over 400 accounts associated with IPAC. Those who opened the emails provided data about their location, the IP addresses of their devices and the type of browsers or operating systems used. The hackers also targeted institutions, politicians, businessmen and companies in the US and 43 MPs in the UK, not just IPAC officials within the EU. The FBI's investigation began in 2010, with a reward of $10 million for information leading to the capture of the seven men of Chinese origin (Benea 2024b).

Romania, like most EU countries, officially adheres to *the One China Policy*, with even more restrictive treatment of Taiwan than other European nations (Hungary has had a Taipei representative office in Budapest since the 1990s, a kind of de facto, not de jure, embassy of Taiwan). Romania hosts only a *TAITRA (Taiwan External Trade Development Council) Economic Office*, a non-profit organization that promotes trade between Taiwan and other countries. The Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared the lack of any official or inter-institutional relations with Taiwan. Romania prioritizes its political alignment and engagement with NATO, EU and USA, while restraining from provoking China (Leonte 2024).

Conclusions

The PRC poses a sophisticated and persistent cyber-espionage and attack threat to military and critical infrastructure systems, seeking to create destructive effects − from denial-of-service attacks to physical attacks on critical infrastructure in order to shape decision-making and disrupt military operations from the initial stages and throughout the course of a conflict.

Research becomes increasingly difficult as Western scholars will have to discern whether the people who can provide them with information or the sites they access are of good faith or want to disinform or recruit them. Like an acrobat, the Western researcher will be forced to resolve the tension between freedom of knowledge and his own security.

We appeal to the consideration encapsulated in the book *Power and Interdependence* by Robert Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, according to which the world is described by a complex interdependence (Keohane and Nye 1997). Our opinion goes in line with the two authors, because, as in the *chaos theory*, the flapping of a butterfly's wings in China risks triggering a tornado in Europe or America. The butterfly effect proves that the slightest change in the initial conditions leads to completely different results. States are not closed systems, they are in a continuous interaction, hence we need to pay attention and react properly to every change, to every new direction and especially to the tricky state of *status quo*, which is never everlasting, but tends to bend in one way or another. The Trio between China, USA and Russia always permitted during the decades the shift between the China-Russia friendship – the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance entered into

force on April 11, 1950 – to China-America friendlier relations during the Nixon Administration. The USA-Russia defrozen relations at the end of the Cold War were followed by the New Cold War between them, with China being on the Russian side and especially on its own side. The relational changes between the three powers affect the entire globe, and mostly the smaller countries.

Consequently, Romania must demonstrate great ability to take advantage of the economic and technological opportunities of the Asian area, while remaining loyal to Euro-Atlantic commitments. Also, it is desirable that young Romanians who have studied in China be attracted to work in and for Romania, their knowledge in Chinese culture and mentality contributing to the preservation of bilateral relations.

Spying is at the same time an ally and foe activity. Cyber intrusions could be considered interest coming from friends and too much attention coming from adversaries. Countries are interconnected, *no country is an island, so friendly or adversarial countries spying happens on a daily basis*, but when cyber security is at stake, its preservation is decisive for the countries' development and survival.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Baughman, Josh. 2024 "The Path to China's Intelligentized Warfare: Converging on the Metaverse Battlefield. The Cyber Defense Review, Fall 2024, https://cyberdefensereview.army.mil/Portals/6/Documents/2024-Fall/Baughman_CDRV9N3-Fall-2024.pdf

Benea, Ionuț. 2024. "Ce înseamnă și de ce Bucureștiul a decis abia acum interzicerea Huawei în rețelele 5G din România". Europa Liberă România. 02 March, 2024. https://romania.europalibera.org/a/huawei-5g-romania/32844090.html

Benea, Ionuț. 2024. "Exclusiv | Parlamentari români vizați de o grupare globală de spionaj a Chinei. Cum au ajuns trei deputați ținte APT31". Europa Liberă România. 26 March, 2024. https://romania.europalibera.org/a/parlamentari-romani-spiotani-china/32878322.html

Benea Ionut, Reid Standish. 2024. "Chinese-Made Surveillance Cameras at Romanian Military Sites Raise Security Concerns". Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. March 07, 2024, 21:43. https://www.rferl.org/a/romania-china-cameras-security-concerns/32853039.html

Bergengruen, Vera. 2022."How Ukraine Is Crowdsourcing Digital Evidence of War Crimes", The Time, April 18, 2022 6:00 AM EDT, https://time.com/6166781/ukraine-crowdsourcing-war-crimes/

Bicheno, Scott. 2024. "Romania rejects Huawei appeal against 5G ban". Telecoms.com. March 4, 2024. https://www.telecoms.com/5g-6g/romania-rejects-huawei-appeal-against-5g-ban

Chen, Zhuo. 2024. "Chinese PLA embraces a new system of services and arms: Defense spokesperson." China Military Online, 2024-04-19. http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/CHINA_209163/TopStories_209189/16302105.html

Expert Forum. 2022. "China's presence in Romania: The hundred flowers that never bloomed." China Watch. 7 October 2022. https://expertforum.ro/en/china-presence-in-romania/

Faligot, Roger. 2019. Serviciile secrete chineze de la Mao la Xi Jinping. Bucharest. Meteor Publishing.

Faligot, Roger. 2019. Chinese Spies. From Chairman Mao to Xi Jinping. United Kingdom C. Hurst & Co. (Publishers) Ltd.

Institutul Confucius. 2025. Universitatea Babes-Bolyai. https://confucius.institute.ubbcluj.ro/despre-noi/istoric_confucius/

Kania, Elsa B., John K. Costello. 2018. "The Strategic Support Force and the Future of Chinese Information Operations." Cyber Defense Review, Spring. https://cyberdefensereview.army.mil/Portals/6/Documents/CDR%20Journal%20Articles/The%20Strategic%20Support%20Force_Kania_Costello.pdf

Keohane, Robert O., Nye, Joseph S. *Power and interdependence*. 1997.

Leonte, Andreea. 2024. "Romania's Strategic Puzzle: Navigating Taiwan Relations Amid Chinese Pressure". China Observers. 13 August 2024. https://chinaobservers.eu/romanias-strategic-puzzle-navigating-taiwan-relations-amid-chinese-pressure/

Lo Tien-Pin, Jason Pan. 2015. "PLA cyberunit targeting Taiwan named CYBERWAR SCHOOL? MND and MIB sources say the PLA's General Staff Department's Third Department has units in the guise of research centers and telecommunication labs. Taiwan News. Tue, March 10, 2015. https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2015/03/10/2003613206

Mihai, Cătălina. 2024. "Romanian Army uses Chinese surveillance systems". EURACTIV.ro. February 20, 2024, 07:03. https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/romanian-army-uses-chinese-surveillance-systems/?fbclid=IwY2xjawI8TodleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHUUHnkSYfw8ZKJOX3L10kkORrHbTi1lS2mOHIjSzuubgnar7vhHdUzFxFA_aem_hDOxU51SuV4rXDQ4qUD0qw

Necsutu, Madalin. 2020. "Romania Cancels Deal With China to Build Nuclear Reactors". Balkan Insight. Bucharest. May 27, 2020. https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/27/romania-cancels-deal-with-china-to-build-nuclear-reactors/

Office of the Secretary of Defense. 2023. "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China. https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/19/2003323409/-1/-1/1/2023-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF

People's Daily Online. "Defense Minister Meets Romanian Delegation". http://www.peopledaily.com.cn/english/http://en.people.cn/english/200007/26/print20000726_46484.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawI8TsFleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHWjl-BOM9QYtAqrlqugyqJNerNTfrrKBWZHJCloRH7lfKLOgwVxz-qA6XA_aem_lq7JWFRXAJBqCKxlwj7shg

Roman, Mihai. 2022. "Universitățile din România care colaborează cu Institutele Confucius din China vor pierde finanțarea pentru cercetare – proiect de lege". G4 Media, 24 November 2022. https://www.g4media.ro/universitatile-din-romania-care-colaboreaza-cu-institutele-confucius-din-china-vor-pierde-finantarea-pentru-cercetare-proiect-de-lege.html 24 Noi 2022.

Sgueglia, Giorgia. 2025. "China-Romania Economic Ties and 2025 Outlook." *China Briefing*. January 24, 2025. https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-romania-economic-ties-and-2025-outlook/

Sharma, Deepak. 2010. "Integrated Network Electronic Warfare: China's New Concept of Information Warfare" (PDF). Journal of Defense Studies. April 4 (2): 37–38, https://idsa.in/system/files/jds_4_2_dsharma.pdf.

Shi, Zhan 2024. "The First Metaverse War". Reading the China Dream. September 15, 2024. https://www.readingthechinadream.com/shi-zhan-the-first-metaverse-war.html

Standish, Reid. 2024. "China In Eurasia Briefing: Chinese-Made Surveillance Equipment Used At Romanian Military Sites". Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. March 13, 2024 11:38. https://www.rferl.org/a/china-romania-surveillance-technology-security-concerns/32859794.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawI8TvlleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHWjl-BOM9QYtAqrlqugyqJNerNTfrrKBWZHJCloRH7lfKLOgwVxz-qA6XA_aem_lq7JWFRXAJBqCKxlwj7shg

Stokes, Mark A.. 1999. "CHINA'S QUEST FOR INFORMATION DOMINANCE." CHINA'S STRATEGIC MODERNIZATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES. Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 1999.

The Economist. 2023. "America and China try to move past a new bump in relations." 9th of June 2023. https://www.economist.com/china/2023/06/09/america-and-china-try-to-move-past-a-new-bump-in-relations

The Wall Street Journal. 2014. "Meet 3PLA, China's Version of the NSA." July 8, 2014, 3:45 am, https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-CJB-23046

STRATEGIES XXI International Scientific Conference
The Complex and Dynamic Nature of the Security Environment,
Bucharest, Romania - February, 27th, 2025

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-14

CHALLENGES AT NATIONAL LEVEL REGARDING ENHANCED MILITARY MOBILITY CAPACITY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF IMPLEMENTING THE MULTI-DOMAIN OPERATIONS CONCEPT

Ionela Cătălina MANOLACHE, PhD Candidate,
"Carol I" National Defense University
Captain, Headquarters Multinational Division South-East, Bucharest, Romania
E-mail: catalinagrigore2694@gmail.com

Abstract: *The way conflicts are handled has changed significantly today compared to the image we have of them from a century ago, for example. We can already state that some concepts, such as "joint", have been replaced, and multi-domain operations seem to be a more effective alternative and a much better adapted response to current threats. However, the combat force continues to play an essential role in military actions, and their deployment in key locations in the area of operations remains a challenge that requires quick responses from both military and civilian leaders. Considering the current security situation, this paper aims to address the topic of military mobility from the perspective of multi-domain operations' implementation at the NATO level and to identify support needs at the national level for optimizing the force deployment process.*

Keywords: *military mobility; multi-domain operations; civil-military cooperation; operational domains; intergovernmental approach.*

Introduction

Multi-domain operations (MDO) represent NATO's current approach to future military action. The Alliance quickly recognized the need to replace joint operations with the modern dynamics of multi-domain actions to maintain security and predictability in the transatlantic region. By adopting this new concept, NATO directs its efforts across all fields, operating domains, and environments.

Given the speed with which new doctrine and regulations regarding multi-domain operations are being applied, we see a need to adapt some processes so they meet current and future dimensions of war-fighting. One such process is the deployment, which takes into account all aspects regarding the efficiency of military mobility.

The operational maneuver, the level at which the MDO is most productive and best organized, refers to the organization, deployment, and the use of forces within the joint area of operations to create complex situations from which the enemy cannot escape, thus affecting the rhythm of its operation and destroying its cohesion (Mayer 2023).

By analyzing this last phrase, we can understand the importance of military mobility in the evolution of multi-domain operations. Although it is a long-term project that requires an initial approach at the NATO level so that it can then be integrated and embraced at the level of each member state, increasing the military mobility capacity in the context of the MDO development is a necessary action.

The deployment of troops in the transatlantic region presents challenges not only at the NATO level but also at the national level, owing to the lack of standardization among member states regarding transport networks, insufficient cross-border connections, bureaucratic obstacles that result in lengthy waiting times for military convoys, and restrictions on certain types of transport on European roads. Nevertheless, given the increasing number of troops stationed in the European area,

especially on the Eastern flank, the urgent need for measures to remedy these problems and allow the rapid involvement of troops in multi-domain operations is evident.

This paper aims to identify the main issues that NATO member states, particularly Romania, face when developing two relatively new concepts: military mobility and multi-domain operations. Considering that time poses another significant challenge in a war being fought on NATO's borders, member states must work individually and collectively to find the most effective solutions to the identified problem.

The research will have the following structure: a first chapter in which the author aims to highlight the main reasons for ensuring mobility in military operations; a second chapter that presents the potential effects that the implementation of MDO can have on military mobility; the third chapter describes how military mobility materializes within each of the five domains of the MDO; and a final chapter intends to identify the national challenges that impact military mobility in the context of developing multi-domain operations. At the end of the paper, there shall be outlined some relevant conclusions regarding the researched topic.

The primary research method is documentary analysis, through which it will be examined numerous scientific sources, including articles, books, regulations, doctrines, online publications, and official documents, to identify relevant solutions for the proposed subject.

Although there is currently a relatively vast bibliography on the two key points of the research, namely military mobility and multi-domain operations, we believe that we might face certain constraints in advancing these subjects from a national perspective, as both issues have been intensely debated and analyzed at the NATO level and less from the viewpoint of individual states.

1. The Critical Importance of Ensuring Mobility in Military Operations

The military mobility is a concept that evolved significantly after Russia's initial aggressive actions on Ukraine, which concluded with the annexation of Crimea. The primary organizations that have recognized the importance of ensuring mobility during military operations were the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

In general, the military mobility refers to the capacity to transport personnel and military equipment over various distances, including across national borders, while considering logistical and infrastructural factors.

In its official documents, the EU defines military mobility as "the movement of military personnel and assets from one location to another, including across national borders, using various modes of transport" (European Defence Agency 2019). On the other hand, NATO refers to this term as "the quality or ability of military forces to move from one place to another while maintaining their ability to carry out their primary mission" (NATO 2013).

After analyzing the two definitions, we can see that both emphasize the movement of forces within or across borders to achieve a predetermined objective. The difference is that while the EU is a non-military organization, NATO focuses on the rapid and safe transport of military forces and equipment for military purposes.

Overall, the EU's efforts and funds to develop an efficient transport infrastructure network are proving effective. NATO can swiftly deploy its troops almost anywhere in the transatlantic region and organize military operations without facing obstacles in the deployment process.

Broadly speaking, military mobility entails a collaborative effort from NATO's own or joint military structures and practical inter-agency and civil-military cooperation to ensure the efficient transport of oversized loads over bridges and across varying road conditions, whether by air or sea.

After the launch of the Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, NATO forces significantly increased their presence in the states along the eastern border of the organization. To enhance its deterrence and defense posture, the Alliance has expanded its troop presence through multinational battle groups in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and

Slovakia. In addition to the equipment and military personnel deployed on land, NATO has also sent military ships and aircraft to the region (NATO 2024). According to this idea, it was decided to upgrade its multinational battle groups to brigade-level, which require greater efforts to transport all types of equipment and vehicles to the Eastern states. For example, Germany will send, starting with 2025, a brigade of 4,000 soldiers to Lithuania (Hartmann 2024), and France has already begun advertizing its own brigade stationed in Romania at the National Joint Training Center in Cincu (Chapleau 2025). These deployments imply significant actions from a logistical perspective, immense pressure on transport capacity, and additional measures from cross-border structures, national entities that monitor military transports, or inter-institutional organizations involved in this process.

Military mobility is essential for military operations and requires significant attention from a logistical standpoint. Currently, the timing for military actions is extremely short. Meanwhile, the operational environment extends beyond internal borders. Present confrontations mainly occur in the economic, media, informational, or spatial fields. This is precisely why logistical support must be enhanced and adapted for modern warfare. This ensures that force mobility is effective in this operating space where time stretches, distances expand, and the pace is rapid (Mazilu 2022).

The importance of military mobility in NATO operations and missions also arises from the link between this term and others that are illustrative for the deployment process, such as Reception, Staging and Onward Movement (RSOM), Host Nation Support (HNS) and NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs). To facilitate access to its own transport capabilities, including specific actions related to transporting personnel, equipment, and military materials during the RSOM process, each NATO member state must provide HNS to the respective military structures executing the deployment based on agreements or memoranda.

RSOM is a complex process aiming for foreign troops transiting or stationing in the national territory. It involves specialized forces and means to facilitate the transport of those troops so that they are integrated in the final phase and can execute joint or multi-domain operations (Angiu 2022). Depending on the situation, RSOM is carried out on the host nation's territory through its own civil or military structures. At the Romanian level, the established movement control structures within the units intended for RSOM, together with those of the National Support Element (NSE), ensure the necessary support and facilitate the fulfillment of customs formalities for the military forces who want to transit or to place in Romania (Guvernul României 2014).

Theoretically, HNS constitutes "the totality of logistical, financial, legislative and procedural support actions, which define the civil or military assistance provided by the host nation to foreign armed forces stationed, entering/exiting, operating or in transit on the national territory of HN" (Ministerul Apărării 2008).

The tasks of the logistic capabilities that ensure the support of the host nation at the time when the foreign forces executed the deployment in their own territory consist of warranting:

- an optimal legislative framework for the conduct of military operations;
- HNS specialty assistance in support domains;
- CIMIC coordination and cooperation;
- access to resources;
- expert assistance in the fields of finance and procurement;
- HNS liaison personnel;
- Collaboration with NATO headquarters and sending nations during HNS planning process (Ministerul Apărării 2008).

NATO Force Integration Units are structures within NATO designed to coordinate military transports on the territory of the host nations in which they are located to facilitate the movement of allied forces within national borders. The main tasks are to facilitate the RSOM process and provide assistance in the planning of the deployment (NATO 2022). These units are also engaged in other specific activities, such as the identification of infrastructure, logistic support, the road network and other necessary and available means that would improve the NATO deployment process (Botik and

Mazal 2022). There are eight Force Integration Units in NATO, positioned on the Eastern flank, as follows: in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. They were created following the decision taken at the Wales Summit in 2014 as part of NATO's Rapid Reaction Plan (NATO 2024)

Other essential elements for facilitating the movement and transport of troops according to a well-organized plan include cooperation among member states to harmonize military mobility at the international level and collaboration among all national institutions at both the political and institutional levels through representatives from transport structures(Van Heoymissen 2023). When collaboration between all involved actors is effective, the transfer of information is achieved more efficiently, significantly reducing waiting times and providing an overview of the position, composition, mission, and role of troops executing the deployment.

The legal framework for military forces crossing European borders includes numerous agreements and memoranda signed between the states in the trans-Atlantic space or at the NATO or EU level, through which their military forces can enter, transit or station anywhere in the territory of the signatory state. At the moment, a standardization of this framework is being attempted, such as the implementation of the 302 Form in digital format, the creation of Military Requirements according to the EU directives provided for in the Action Plan 2.0 or the optimization and collective monitoring of customs activity, by all European states.

Although the current period is challenging on an international level, with security threats constantly evolving and increasing and the funds and resources of each state being limited, investments are necessary for military mobility and the efficiency of logistical support. Even at the political level, decisions regarding establishing new ammunition or fuel depots and transport networks that are particularly important to the military actor are crucial for ensuring the forces' successful fulfillment of military missions. Military mobility is not an issue that can be resolved solely by allocating resources or investing in dual-use infrastructure. The logistical approach, encompassing both military and civilian aspects, is equally essential to protect transport infrastructures, replenish stocks, and establish anti-missile defenses. In turn, civil authorities can improve the efficiency of military transports and facilitate the movement of equipment on the same routes used by commercial transports so that deployments no longer take months. Still, they can be completed in just a few hours (Fiott 2024).

The transport network in the Eastern states is underdeveloped compared to other European states. Road and rail transport create challenges during deployment. While investments in enhancing military mobility are made, they occur over very long timelines in a context where time is virtually an adversary for military forces. The European TEN-T network covers almost all of Europe, facilitating the movement of troops from one location to another despite delays in the inauguration of numerous highways, express roads, railways, and more. In other words, having adequate transport infrastructure is essential for supporting military operations, and failing to adhere to established schedules for troop deployment can even lead to mission failure.

2. The Impact of Implementing the Multi-Domain Operations Concept on Deployment and Military Mobility

The ‘multi-domain’ concept has recently emerged in literature and military doctrine, beginning with NATO and subsequently at the level of each member state. Through multi-domain operations, NATO can strategically influence the evolution of events and ensure the synchronization of the Allies’ collective efforts to surprise the adversary. These operations equip the Alliance to operate across all domains and environments (ACT 2023).

According to the common understanding offered by C. Ioniță, the term MDO refers to “the approach of the future war (2025-2050 period) beyond the joint level, represented by joint operations

(land, air and naval), incorporating two new recognized operational domains (space and cyberspace" (Ioniță 2022).

Multi-domain operations represent a modern alternative to military action. The US took the initiative and developed a doctrine of MDO - Field *Manual 3-0*, which emerged in October 2022. According to it, multi-domain operations are "the combined use of assembled forces to create and exploit relative advantages to achieve objectives, defeat enemy forces and consolidate gains, in favor of the commanders of the joint forces" (Department of the Army 2022).

In NATO, the concept of MDO refers to "the orchestration of military activities, in all environments and domains, synchronized with other non-military activities, to enable the Alliance to create convergent effects so that they are relevant" (NATO ACT 2022). This relatively new initiative will significantly enhance NATO's ability to deliver defense and deterrence in the medium and long term since the regional plans approved at the Alliance level are grounded in concepts from this area. By integrating air, land, maritime, cyber, and space capabilities, NATO enhances its ability to operate as a multinational coalition. A crucial aspect that the Alliance is considering while evolving the MDO involves the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to ensure logistical efficiency and expedite the development of dual-use transport infrastructure in the event of high-intensity conflicts.

In the upcoming period, NATO's plans and directives emphasize the need to expand the MDO concept through experiments, training, exercises, war-gaming, and capability development to establish a similar mindset and resources among all military and non-military entities, ensuring synchronization and efficiency across all domains. For all these activities to occur, we must emphasize the importance of military mobility and its role in ensuring the rapid movement of forces. The time available for allied troops is limited, and the deployment process, regardless of how it is carried out, must be adapted to current requirements based on the capabilities of each member state. For example, the French troops planned and executed the 'Orion' exercise in May 2023 to adopt and understand this term. It was conducted in several phases and culminated in an operation to synchronize capabilities such as tactical vehicles, unmanned aerial systems (UAS), and space sensors in response to a multi-domain conflict simulation scenario (Machi 2023). Another exercise, organized much earlier by the US in 2021, was conducted by the US troops in Wiesbaden, Germany. This exercise tested the functionality of the 'United States European Command Multi-Domain Task Force' and the 'Theater Fires Command', evaluating how control and coordination of these structures are conducted during artillery strikes (Minculete 2023).

Multi-domain operations bring numerous changes to deployment and military mobility. Firstly, in the event of a conflict, the defense of all types of infrastructure will be achieved through a partnership between the government and the private sector, where the latter will assume some operational activities. The public-private sector will support NATO's military operations, particularly from a logistical perspective.

Secondly, deployed forces will benefit from dynamic support. Logistics planners are considering deploying a resilient, dispersed logistics infrastructure to avoid targeting by adversary satellites and withstand long-range strikes. There are ongoing discussions about the logistics capacity to compensate for transport efficiency if civil infrastructure such as railways, bridges, pipelines, or roads is damaged. One solution could be to utilize AI capabilities to ensure the reorganization of transport on alternative routes when the main lines of communication are no longer usable.

Thirdly, the MDO planning considers the number of forces deployed on the Eastern flank in the event of a confrontation with Russia and those that should be rapidly deployed within the NATO Force Model. While multinational brigades are in a process to be established on the Eastern flank, NATO may face challenges deploying around 100,000 forces in 10 days within echelon 1, as their mobility could present difficulties. Given this situation, the forces within the MDO are equipped with modern weaponry featuring superior capabilities, which provide anti-aircraft protection against the enemy's missiles and ammunition (Kramer, Dailey and Brodfuehrer 2023).

While technology has advanced significantly and artificial intelligence appears to be transforming the development of military weaponry, vehicles, and devices, multi-domain operations still encounter challenges ensuring swift troop movement, particularly on land. This issue significantly impacts NATO's European forces, which face difficulties related to their deployment capabilities (Ellison and Sweijs 2024).

Multi-domain operations specifically integrate an inter-governmental approach, essential for advancing military mobility. This perspective is crucial because a potential conflict on NATO territory would encompass various aspects of governance and society, not just the military sector. For instance, civil defense, law enforcement, emergency services, critical infrastructure, media, and the commercial industry could all play significant roles in achieving victory. This same approach is applied to the growth of military mobility, suggesting that both concepts may evolve simultaneously (Withington 2024).

Given that multi-domain operations co-occur across the strategic, operational, and tactical frameworks, cover nearly all activities within a state - from bureaucracy to governmental or civil-military measures - and exploit every opportunity at the highest level, their implementation provides NATO with a solution to more effectively address potential conflicts in all operating domains and environments.

Future operational concepts must ensure the Alliance's ability to execute multiple complex tasks, whether in peacetime or conflict, regardless of the circumstances or conditions. Consequently, NATO must understand the ever-changing environment and develop strategies that provide an operational advantage, such as in multi-domain operations.

3. Analysis of Military Mobility Through the Five Operational Domains Lens

The interconnected approach within NATO across the five domains is significant because it enables each structure to prepare, plan, organize, and execute activities in a synchronized manner, whether individually or collaboratively, to achieve the intended effect. Military mobility is crucial in orchestrating military and non-military activities, and coordinating measures across all five operational domains of MDO is vital for the mission success. Next, we will examine how military mobility is realized within each of the five domains of MDO.

3.1. Military Mobility and the Land Domain

This is the most prolific environment for advancing military mobility, where most crises, conflicts, or rivalries emerge. The land transport infrastructure development, mainly through the strengthening and expansion of the trans-European TEN-T network, ensures the efficiency of military transport in Europe and facilitates the rapid deployment of forces (NATO Standardization Office n.d.). However, military mobility by land is not solely the responsibility of military organizations. Instead, it encompasses the involvement of various stakeholders: states in the transatlantic area, national authorities, and institutions playing a role in transport developments at the national level, civil entities, and private companies. Military mobility has long surpassed national borders and necessitates collaborative efforts to enhance transportation and establish a unified network that enables the deployment of military vehicles and equipment by road or rail throughout Europe, from west to east and from north to south.

3.2. Military Mobility and the Maritime Domain

Within the Alliance, the interconnection of maritime waters emerged through economic, social, and political relations among all member states, regardless of their direct access to these waters. Preserving freedom of navigation, sea lines of communication, essential infrastructure, energy flow, and protecting marine resources and environmental safety holds significance on both national and international levels. From a military mobility perspective, several sea routes are established for strategic military transports between states in the transatlantic area. These transports are conducted

using either military ships or vessels operated by civilian companies. Additionally, there is growing interest in engaging with non-military actors who can facilitate a wide range of activities at sea, including security cooperation, maritime security, warfare, and combat. Through Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS) and the Allied Worldwide Navigational Information System (AWNIS), a NATO force will effectively interact with merchant shipping by coordinating the operations plan with non-military activities, ensuring that the commander's mission can be accomplished with minimal disruption to merchant shipping (NATO Standardization Office n.d.). Although it is an area that facilitates the deployment of a large number of materiel and military equipment, it limits transportation due to natural barriers, such as the fact that not all NATO states are landlocked. Although all the states on the Eastern flank of NATO have access to the sea, those in the center of Europe cannot ensure the continuity of this connection, which leads to longer times for military transports.

3.3. Military Mobility and the Air Domain

Currently, military mobility in airspace seems more manageable than on land or at sea, as it possesses three essential power attributes: speed, reach, and altitude. Given the extensive distances between NATO member states that must be covered quickly, this air transport option proves effective, primarily due to each state's capacity to provide the necessary support infrastructure (air bases and their surroundings) (NATO Standardization Office n.d.).

This deployment method is preferred because it is accessible to everyone, given that:

- The entire surface of the Earth is covered by air, allowing aircraft unique reach;
- There is coordination among national and international agencies, as well as non-military actors, to establish and maintain air bases at critical strategic locations in the transatlantic area;
- Several passive air defense measures are already in place to protect personnel, installations, and vital equipment from missile attacks.

Despite the advantages offered, air transport limits the movement of a large amount of equipment from one place to another. Aircraft capacity is limited and most military equipment is oversized. That is precisely why, for heavy equipment, maritime or especially land transport is preferred.

3.4. Military Mobility and the Space Domain

Space support for operations encompasses all activities that deliver capabilities through space to assist NATO-led operations. 'Space-based capabilities' consist of services like positioning, navigation and timing, imagery, communications, environmental monitoring satellites or providing Earth-Law Orbit (ELO) transportation of ammunition and missiles. The military, civil, and commercial sectors increasingly rely on these capabilities. Commanders must recognize that some space-based capabilities supporting NATO-led operations may be under military, governmental, or commercial control. These capabilities are susceptible to both man-made threats and natural hazards. Adversaries may attempt to exploit this reliance on space capabilities. Consequently, attacks on or from space systems are becoming more probable. Commanders must anticipate efforts by adversaries or third parties to interfere with, disrupt, or deny access to space-based capabilities for friendly forces or partners (NATO Standardization Office n.d.). Space systems are widely used to monitor and coordinate military transport, simultaneously enhancing military mobility. Given the continuous advancements in artificial intelligence and the development of autonomous vehicles utilizing space capabilities, we can observe the implications of this field on the evolution of military mobility.

3.5. Military Mobility and the Cyber Domain

Cyberspace includes capabilities and activities primarily related to functioning within the interdependent networks of information, technological infrastructures, and resident data, encompassing the internet, telecommunications, networks, computer systems, and embedded processors. There exists a wide

variety of users and uses of cyberspace: military (friendly and adversary), governmental, and non-governmental (commercial and non-commercial). Certain parts of cyberspace constitute key infrastructure. Therefore, managing and coordinating joint task force activities in cyberspace with various non-military actors is necessary to avoid or minimize unintended consequences (NATO Standardization Office n.d.). Military mobility encompasses not only the transportation infrastructure network but also the coordination and control of military equipment and material convoys moving from one point to another. The future of the military landscape appears to be shaped by the evolution of the cyber and space environment. To adapt to these changes, military mobility must keep pace and enable monitoring, coordination, and synchronization of transports through cyberspace capabilities.

In today's security environment, MDO has become both a reality and a necessity, representing a solution for NATO to plan and organize its future activities. Since it encompasses the entire spectrum of operations, understanding how military mobility manifests in each of these areas serves as a starting point for grasping how the transport and movement of military troops will be affected in the future within NATO.

4. National Challenges on Military Mobility Imposed by the MDO Concept Implementation

Regardless of which NATO member state we consider, each of the 32 Allies faces its own set of challenges in facilitating military mobility, especially within the context of expanding multi-domain operations in this unpredictable and insecure environment. First of all, the issues stem from the current status of the existing transport infrastructure in each country. Then, there are other impediments, as the financial resources each country can allocate for various projects, including human, logistical, and infrastructural support, as well as the lack of civil-military cooperation resources and insufficient involvement from competent structures in developing clear, concise regulations regarding these new types of operations.

In Romania, the primary issues addressed concerning the analyzed concepts pertain to a fist attempt of developing and implementing the MDO concept at the national level, evolving public-private collaboration, enhancing and ongoing development of transport infrastructure, and applying artificial intelligence in these areas.

The first challenge, that of implementing the notion of multi-domain operation, refers to the need to establish a legal framework by creating doctrines, strategies, regulations, or orders that conceptualize this type of operation for a common and integrated understanding across all national military structures. Considering that in 2022, Romania’s strategic partner, the US, adopted a doctrine specifically for understanding and appropriating the concept, and a year later, in 2023, NATO followed suit, Romania also has the obligation to align with these requirements. Currently, the intentions of Romanian leaders are partially aligned, and the results can be observed in the adopted national documents (National Defense Strategy, own defense policies). From a scientific perspective, several researchers are making efforts to develop valuable ideas in this field that military specialists can apply. One notable contributor is Al. Cucinschi, with his paper “The impact of multi-domain operation on the military strategy” (Cucinschi 2021). However, due to a lack of resources, this process will take longer than in other Western countries.

Now, Romania can synchronize a wide range of actions related to MDO, particularly concerning military mobility, but only from the perspectives of land, air, maritime, and cyber domains. The Romanian state currently lacks space capabilities despite ongoing efforts to develop this area, primarily through the Romanian Space Agency, which oversees the country's space activities. The issue lies in the insufficient funding allocated by the government for space research and the absence of platforms or sensors necessary for free access to space.

Under these circumstances, while the intention to broaden the MDO concept is outlined in the official national documents, Romania lacks the full capabilities to align its activities with those of

other NATO member states, which can expand military operations across all five domains of the MDO. Consequently, the Romanian government will adopt a concept that addresses the needs of the MDO only within its capabilities, that is, without incorporating the space domain. This decision, however, comes with certain limitations since Romania will not be able to ensure military mobility efficiency from a spatial perspective, which hinders the deployment process within a standardized NATO framework. On the other hand, other allied nations also struggle to maintain effectiveness in military operations across all five domains of the MDO either. This situation creates a challenge that must be addressed promptly, nationally, and particularly within the North Atlantic Alliance. As NATO continues to develop and expand its space and cyberspace capabilities, its role and ambitions must be clearly defined. In the short term, collaboration with national and commercial entities operating in these two domains must be regulated to align with engagement in other areas. In the longer term, the Alliance may develop core-funded space systems or offensive cyberspace capabilities that would enable more direct NATO orchestration of MDO (NATO 2022).

The second challenge, the development of civil-military collaboration, involves the need for a unified and synchronized understanding of the specific MDO requirements by both military structures and civilian organizations responsible for supporting the deployment of forces by national governments that authorize the budget for infrastructure development, non-governmental organizations that can impact military activities conducted during the deployment, or private companies that can assist with infrastructure projects or enhance systems and technologies to minimize the travel times of military convoys.

MDO contributes to both the political and military strategy of each NATO member state, influencing state capabilities at all levels of power. MDO is focused on achieving military objectives across all domains and environments while recognizing that there are many actors that can collectively contribute to the military's success (NATO 2022).

An intergovernmental approach, while respecting the *need-to-know* principle, can better coordinate specialists in both fields, fill existing gaps, and facilitate the movement of troops conducting multi-domain operations throughout the territory of the Alliance. The relationship within the Romanian structures is quite cumbersome, as some military information cannot be publicly disclosed, preventing all entities from accessing the complete data necessary for efficient activity planning. An equally important aspect arising from the aforementioned principle relates to another specific NATO principle: *need-to-share*. This principle indicates that information concerning military mobility must be shared not only with civil institutions and structures but also with other NATO member states. This sharing is crucial for creating a clear and comprehensive picture of the transport situation at the Alliance level at any given time.

The third challenge, transport infrastructure development, is a primary need for planning and conducting any NATO operation, not just those related to MDO. Forces deploying in the area of operations must have access to roads, rail, air, sea, space, and cyber capabilities that are safe, meet specific needs, and allow for rapid transport. In particular, states on NATO's Eastern flank are experiencing transport infrastructure difficulties, as this is a region where troop movement and transport are slowed, and mission turnaround times are increasing. In Romania, the year 2025 will be the year in which the number of troops pre-positioned in its own territory will be the highest so far (Ciobanu 2024), which will imply greater attention of the national authorities to speed up the terms of commissioning of the dual-use infrastructure segments under construction. Simultaneously, the integration of forces and the provision of logistical support will put pressure on the HNS in the current situation, especially with regard to MDO, as the resources available to the Romanian state are currently quite limited.

A fourth challenge to the execution of multi-domain operations, from the perspective of military mobility, concerns artificial intelligence. Considering the rapid evolution of emerging and disruptive technologies and the increase in the fields in which AI is used, military structures must constantly adapt to new systems, technologies, and devices that are sometimes dual-use. The use of

artificial intelligence generally enhances military mobility by helping to develop devices for monitoring traffic, streamlining transportation routes, facilitating the construction of unmanned vehicles, and supporting the creation of safer, faster vehicles. Under these circumstances, if military mobility improves, so does multi-domain operations. However, for this to happen, states must be willing to allocate funds to acquire systems that utilize artificial intelligence.

Although there are many unresolved issues concerning the analyzed concepts, they can be mitigated or reduced in intensity through measures such as:

- increasing the funds allocated for projects aimed at transport infrastructure, whether they originate from the national budget, private sources, or non-reimbursable European funding. These projects must facilitate the easy movement of military equipment and materials within Romania while also enabling connection to the existing TEN-T network at the European level;
- increasing the GDP percentage allocated for defense so that Romania, along with other NATO member states in similar positions, can support the presence of foreign forces on their territory or procure the latest generation technology necessary for conducting multi-domain operations;
- developing initiatives for military activities on national territory and the logistical efforts to support them, involving all relevant authorities with roles in these areas and sharing information in a unified manner;
- implementing national doctrines and regulations regarding the development of MDO based on individual states' capabilities while synchronized with those of other NATO members. The goal is to maintain coordination among the Alliance's efforts to allow for the implementation of MDO, considering each state's capabilities to ensure that military mobility is managed efficiently and concurrently within NATO.

The evolution of the security situation in the coming years is crucial for understanding the direction NATO is heading. Multi-domain operations are already replacing the well-known joint operations within the Alliance. Troops are beginning to train in multi-domain combat conditions. In this context, military mobility appears to be a factor that could hinder the smooth execution of exercises and training for the forces under the stipulated terms. Therefore, the identified issues must be addressed as quickly as possible, although the pressure on NATO states with a lower GDP contribution to the defense budget will increase.

Conclusions

Developing multi-domain operations is crucial, considering the likelihood of a conflict between NATO and opposing forces is higher today than ever. While such operations encompass the full range of military actions, they cannot be executed if the deployment of troops is not achieved quickly and safely, whether by land, air, sea, or other means. In these circumstances, ensuring the mobility of the military forces is vital, as a situation where they remain immobile could lead to losing the conflict.

The MDO concept's performance is important within NATO and requires greater attention from each member state at both the military and intergovernmental levels. Romania, as a NATO member and due to its geographical location on the Eastern border of the Alliance, which is close to the conflict zone in Ukraine, has a direct interest in allocating resources to research, adopt, and adapt this innovative concept.

On the other hand, military mobility is a critical factor for the success of multi-domain operations. Everything can be replaced in combat except for the combat force and the vehicles and weaponry employed to execute the operations. If these are not deployed promptly to the area of operations, mission success may be compromised. Both are new concepts that, in addition to a solid understanding and insight from military and civilian leaders, require funding, logistics, and specialists to ensure their development.

In the future, the Romanian Armed Forces must apply a series of measures in order to enhance military mobility. The pressure to ensure the rapid transport of NATO troops is very high, and logical, realistic and

timely decisions taken at the national level can make this process more efficient. For example, the Romanian Armed Forces can intervene by providing liaison officers within the working groups aimed at military mobility, national or at the level of the alliances of which Romania is part, improving cooperation, at the intergovernmental level, but also with civil companies, in order to had the exact situation on all aspects related to military transports or the support of initiatives that allow the development of the dual-use transport infrastructure both on the national territory and in the European space.

Eventually, the national challenges faced by both Romania and other NATO member states regarding military mobility amidst the transition from joint operations to multi-domain operations are neither few nor simple to solve, especially with limited human and financial resources. The threat from the Alliance's eastern border appears to persist in the future. However, through collective effort and synchronization of member states' activities, a consensus can be reached to ensure that NATO territory remains a safe space where citizens are protected and feel secure.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

ACT. 2023. *Multi-Domain Operations in NATO explained*. 10 05. https://www. act.nato.int/ article/mdo-in-nato-explained/.

Allied Command Transformation. 2023. *Multi-Domain Operations in NATO-Explained*. 10 05. https://www.act.nato.int/article/mdo-in-nato-explained/

Angiu, Ilie. 2022. "Aspects regarding RSOM. The involvement of the romanian air force." *Buletinul UNAp „Carol I"* 49-53. https://www.semanticscholar.org/reader/ce9c4d42 001c00d1a1 f8eff1b9d9f821687958e.

Botik, Martin, and Jan Mazal. 2022. "NATO Force Integration Units: Are NFIUs a valuable element of NATO deterrence and defense posture?" *Vojenske rozheldy, no.4* 71-80.

Chapleau, Philippe. 2025. *Les premiers matériels de la 7e brigade blindée bientôt en route pour l'exercice Dacian Spring 2025*. 31 01. https://lignesdedefense.ouest-france.fr/les-premiers-materiels-de-la-7e-brigade-blindee-bientot-en-route-pour-lexercice-dacian-spring-2025/

Ciobanu, Ramona. 2024. *Prezența NATO în România va crește în 2025. Franța trimite încă 3.000 de soldați la baza de luptă de la Cincu*. 02 29. https://www.libertatea.ro/stiri/prezenta-nato-in-romania-va-creste-din-2025-franta-trimite-inca-3-000-de-soldati-la-baza-de-lupta-de-la-cincu-4816037

Cucinschi, Alexandru Lucian. 2021. "The impact of multi-domain operation on the military strategy." *Romanian Military Thinking* (no. 1): 140-151. https://en-gmr.mapn.ro/webroot/fileslib/ upload/files/arhiva%20reviste/RMT/2021/1/CUCINSCHI.pdf

Department of the Army. 2022. *Field Manual 3-0, Operations*. Washington: Headquarters, Department of the Army.

Ellison, Davis, and Tim Sweijs. 2024. "Empty promises? A year inside the world of multi-domain operations." *The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies* 1-7. https://hcss.nl/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Position-paper-Multi-Domain-Operations-HCSS-2024.pdf

European Defence Agency. 2019. "Military Mobility." *European Defence Agency* 1-2. https://eda. europa.eu/docs/default-source/eda-factsheets/2019-05-14-factsheet_military-mobility.pdf

Fiott, Daniel. 2024. "Keep it moving: From mobility to logistics in European Defence." *Centre for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy*. https://csds.vub.be/publication/keep-it-moving-from-mobility-to-logistics-in-european-defence/

Guvernul României. 2014. "Instrucțiuni privind operațiunile de mișcare și transport ale marilor unități și unităților militare." *Monitorul Oficial, nr. 218 bis*. https://legislatie.just.ro/ Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/261196.

Hartmann, Jannik. 2024. "Military Mobility-Getting Germany's transportation infrastructure up to speed." *German Council on Foreign Relations* 1-12. https://dgap.org/en/research/ publications/military-mobility

Ioniță, Crăișor Constantin. 2022. "Multi-Domain Operations versus “Mosaic” Warfare: the Latest Technological Developments to Operationalise These Concepts." *Strategic Impact* (3-4): 7-27. https://cssas.unap.ro/en/pdf_periodicals/si84-85.pdf

Jalabert, Quentin. 2022. *France's Security Policy in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean*. Bucharest: New Strategy Center. https://newstrategycenter.ro/project/frances-security-policy-in-the-black-sea-and-the-mediterranean-2/

Kramer, Franklin D., Ann M. Dailey, and Joslyn A. Brodfuehrer. 2023. *NATO multi-domain operations: near and medium-term priority initiatives*. Washington: Atlantic Council-Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/NATO-multidomain-operations-Near-and-medium-term-priority-initiatives.pdf

Machi, Viviene. 2023. *French forces prep for final phase of major multi-domain exercise*. 04 14. https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2023/04/14/french-forces-prep-for-final-phase-of-major-multi-domain-exercise/

Mayer, Michael. 2023. “Multi-Domain Operations, emerging military technology and the future of manoeuvre warfare.” *Science and Technology Organization* 1-8. www.sto.nato.int/publications/STO%20Meeting%20Proceedings/STO-MP-SAS-OCS

Mazilu, Marian. 2022. “21st Century Military Actions Logistical Support (editorial).” *Romanian Military Thinking* (2): 6-13. https://en-gmr.mapn.ro/webroot/fileslib/upload/files/arhiva%20reviste/RMT/2022/2/MAZILU.pdf

Minculete, Gheorghe. 2023. "Conceptual, organizational and relational approaches to multi-domain operations." *Romanian Military Thinking* (1): 146-167. https://en-gmr.mapn.ro/webroot/fileslib/upload/files/arhiva%20reviste/RMT/2023/1/MINCULETE.pdf

Ministerul Apărării. 2008. *Regulamentul logisticii operațiilor întrunite*. București: Monitorul Oficial, Partea I nr. 353. https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/215269.

NATO ACT. 2022. "Multi-Domain Operations: Enabling NATO to out-pace and out-think its adversaries." *NATO ACT*. https://www.act.nato.int/article/multi-domain-operations-enabling-nato-to-out-pace-and-out-think-its-adversaries/

NATO. 2022. *Initial Alliance Concept for Multi-Domain Operations*. Brussels: NATO.

NATO. 2013. *NATO Glossary of terms and definitions - AAP-06*. Bruxelles: NATO Standardization Agency.

—. 2024. *NATO' military presence in the east of the Alliance*. 11 29. https://www.nato.int/cps/de/natohq/topics_136388.htm

NATO Standardization Office. n.d. *Allied Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Cooperation AJP 3-19 - ratificated draft 1*. Brussels: NATO Standardization Office.

Van Heoymissen, Simon. 2023. "Interinstitutional cooperation as a driver of improved military mobility in Europe." *Centre for Security and Defence Studies* 1-10. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/375090463_Interinstitutional_cooperation_as_a_driver_of_improved_military_mobility_in_Europe

Withington, Thomas. 2024. *MDO for NATO*. 10 17. https://www.armadainternational.com/2024/10/nato-multi-domain-operations-milcom/

STRATEGIES XXI International Scientific Conference
The Complex and Dynamic Nature of the Security Environment,
Bucharest, Romania - February, 27th, 2025

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-15

EVOLUTION OF THE STRATEGIC ROCKET FORCES OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

Mario MARINOV, PhD,
Researcher, University of Library Studies and Information Technologies,
Sofia, Bulgaria. E-mail: m.marinov@unibit.bg

Abstract: *Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian Federation has placed great effort and resources in maintaining the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of its strategic nuclear forces. The land-based component in particular, the RVSN, encompasses the larger part of Russia's strategic nuclear arsenal and as such warrants examination and assessment against the backdrop of dynamic and adversarial relations in the international system of security relations, particularly between the major nuclear powers. The following paper will examine the transformative processes within Russia's Strategic Rocket Forces over the past three decades, with the principal objective to deconstruct the main policy directions, vectors of technical development and present state and structure of formations. Principal political decisions in the examined time-frame are tied with set goals encompassing Russian modernisation efforts of the land-based strategic nuclear arm, with the historical processes in turn tied to an evaluation of present-day capabilities in both technical terms and observations on the organisational structure of the RVSN as the main strategic nuclear deterrent within Russia's broader nuclear capabilities.*

Keywords: *Russia; RVSN; nuclear deterrence; intercontinental missiles.*

"After us - silence" ("После нас - тишина")
Motto of the Strategic Rocket Forces of the Russian Federation

Introduction

Strategic nuclear stability and credible deterrence have long served as pillars of global security, underpinned by the delicate interplay of capability, doctrine, and arms control — particularly between the United States and the Russian Federation, the Soviet Union's principal successor state. Within this framework, the Strategic Rocket Forces (Ракетные войска стратегического назначения, RVSN) of the Russian Federation constitute the backbone of Russia's strategic nuclear deterrent and assured second-strike capability. As a distinct branch of the Russian Armed Forces, the RVSN operates alongside the air- and sea-based legs of Russia's nuclear triad, controlled by the Russian Air and Space Forces (VKS) and the Russian Navy (ВМФ), respectively. Tasked with the supervision of the country's land-based strategic nuclear arsenal, the RVSN oversees both silo-based and mobile intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) systems, as well as newer land-based strategic and sub-strategic nuclear platforms designed to bolster Russia's deterrence posture (Bukharin, Kadyshev, et al. 2001, 36-37).

Since the end of the Cold War, the evolution of Russia's nuclear posture has been shaped by a confluence of geopolitical upheavals: the Soviet collapse, economic instability, the erosion of the nuclear arms control regime, and the progressive deterioration of relations with the United States and NATO. These pressures have driven shifts in strategic priorities, structural reconfigurations, doctrinal adjustments, and ambitious modernisation efforts aimed at enhancing the RVSN's capabilities. Over the past three decades, this transformation has encompassed a transition from aging Soviet-era systems to a force structure incorporating modern mobile launch systems, modernised silo-based

missile complexes, the widespread incorporation of multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs), and initial introduction of hypersonic glide vehicles (HGVs) - all designed to improve survivability - increase strike flexibility, and penetrate advanced missile defence umbrellas. Far from a perceived Cold War relic, the RVSN has evolved into a dynamic instrument of Russian 21st-century statecraft, playing a central role in shaping contemporary assessments of strategic stability amid a renewed arms race and the breakdown of global security architectures (Congressional Research Service 2025, 1).

As of available data in 2024, the RVSN ICBM component of Russia's strategic nuclear deterrent encompasses 1,244 total operational strategic warheads spread across 329 road-mobile and silo-based launchers, making it the most significant in Russia's nuclear triad of 1,822 total operational strategic offensive nuclear warheads (992 within the VMF and 586 within the VKS) (Hans M. Kristensen 2024). As such, the RVSN is of objective interest in understanding the overall military capabilities of Russia.

The following paper will examine the *Strategic Rocket Forces of the Russian Federation, as the main object of analysis*. More specifically, *the principal vectors in the evolution of the RVSN in the period from 1991 until present (2025) will be explored, expressed in the political priorities, doctrinal changes, technical direction of development, and current state of RVSN capabilities*. Consequently the paper is divided into three main sections – the first dealing with the dynamics of the post-Soviet centralisation of nuclear deterrence capabilities in Russia, dealing with economic and financial constraints, treaty stipulations and the maintaining of nuclear parity with the United States; the second dealing with the vectors of technical development, expressed in a greater focus on road-mobile ICBMs and the introduction of newer generation systems with superior capabilities; and the third serving as a general case study and demonstration of the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the traditional components of the RVSN through the examination of the organisational structure and capabilities. The following paper has *as its principal objective to provide an updated and objective assessment of the Russian Strategic Rocket* Forces through an overall understanding of the overarching processes of the evolution of the RVSN.

In fulfillment of the principal objective, the paper first undertakes a deconstructive analysis of political decisions undertaken by the Russian Federation in relation to its strategic nuclear assets within the framework of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic decisions. Thus, the conduct of Russia as an actor within the international system is taken as the first point of reference in understanding the defined scope of the paper. Based on this analysis and through the process of extrapolation, certain technical vectors in the development of the RVSN are derived and the specific qualitative aspects listed in the chronological order of their inclusion as part of the broader strategic deterrence capabilities of Russia. Concurrently and based upon a data-set of biannual changes in both the qualitative and quantitative ratios of the RVSN arsenal within the set time-frame of examination, conclusions are drawn as to the achievement of set technical and policy objectives, as well as the overall fluctuations in deterrence capability. Finally, and based upon a process of image intelligence analysis of several known Russian RVSN sites, conclusions are drawn as to the manifestations of changes within the organisational and technical levels of the two main types of RVSN formations.

The objective assessment of the RVSN requires a multi-dimensional framework integrating quantitative, qualitative, and policy-oriented criteria. In quantitative terms, the evaluation centres on measurable factors such as the size of the arsenal (deployed warheads, delivery systems), readiness rates, and geographic distribution of assets. Qualitatively, the focus shifts to the technological characteristics (e.g., types of systems, warhead capacity, system survivability). Policy criteria examine Russia's declaratory nuclear posture, compliance within bilateral treaties, and strategic signalling. These layers collectively determine the RVSN's operational credibility, deterrent value, and adaptability to evolving geopolitical or technological constraints. Crucially, the interplay between these criteria informs debates on strategic stability, arms race dynamics, and Russia's capacity to effectively project power.

A structured evaluation procedure encompasses open-source intelligence aggregation (e.g., SIPRI, FAS, Russian MOD releases) to establish baseline quantitative metrics in a data-set of RVSN capabilities from 1991 until present. Consequentially, a qualitative analysis employs technical assessments of missile systems (e.g., range, payload, countermeasure efficacy) juxtaposed against define vectors in systems development. Policy alignment is scrutinized through treaty compliance records and patterns in force modernization vis-à-vis stated strategic goals and retrospective analysis of the RVSN's quantitative and qualitative characteristics. Cross-referencing these datasets with third-party analyses mitigates biases inherent in Russian disclosures. This procedure ensures a holistic understanding of the RVSN's role in shaping Russia's strategic calculus and its implications for global security architectures.

A notice of importance and consideration in the further discussions on the topic of the following paper is the measure of accuracy of the information provided and discussed, which pertains to the what can be considered as the most vital information for the security of any nuclear-armed state, especially in consideration of the dynamic and evolving international environment of extreme adversarial relations and narratives. Thus, the following paper makes no effort to ascertain or inform upon the reader exact technical or other qualitative characteristics of past or contemporary systems, outside of what has been officially communicated by state parties publicly and through the (now mostly defunct) framework of bilateral treaties between the United States and Russia, which as the basis of effective deterrence requires the communication of accurate and mutually verifiable data on nuclear arsenals, at least in quantitative terms and launch platforms. Regardless, and in reflection upon the set topic, which encompasses specific systems fielded recently, or not as of yet adopted into service, the provided information and the deliberations upon it will be based on publicly available information and logical extrapolations, as well as the chief understanding that for effective deterrence to exist between nuclear armed states, each must be made aware of the other's capabilities and thus information communicated by state parties and declared capabilities should bear a degree of truthfulness, even as an instrument of intimidation.

1. The Strategic Rocket Forces in Transition. Political Direction and the Treaty Regime

In understanding the evolution of contemporary Russian strategic nuclear capabilities, and specifically those of the RVSN, the first consideration of note is the period of transition in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Soviet Union. In this period, the Russian Federation first sought to consolidate the Soviet nuclear arsenal under its sole authority, whilst eliminating the possibility of other former Soviet states retaining their own nuclear capabilities. At the same time, Russia examined its future relationship with the United States of America and envisioned its future security considerations revolving around a state of continued deterrence through maintaining and expanding upon treaty obligations, ensuring quantitative and qualitative parity, particularly in strategic nuclear arms. In the period from 1991 to 2019, both of these aspects in Russian policy, formed the basis for the future evolution and present state of Russian land-based strategic nuclear capabilities, and will be the focus of the following chapter.

The most nascent priority for the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, at the late stages of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the period 1990-1991, was ensuring the future security of the state through the predominance of Russia in the power vacuum of the post-Soviet space. A consideration of extreme importance was the vast Soviet nuclear arsenal of both strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons, spread across the former territory of the Union, as well as the associated infrastructure for the production, storage, maintenance, research and delivery of such weapons. The subdivision of Soviet strategic nuclear assets, 10,271 installed strategic warheads, presented a general challenge for Russian political and security considerations – 1,408 in Ukraine, 1,360 in Kazakhstan and 54 in Belarus (Walker 1992, 258, Norris 1992, 49). Additionally, non-strategic nuclear weapons across former Soviet states outside Russia, encompassed 2,605 in Ukraine, 1,120 in Belarus, 650 in

Kazakhstan, and 1,280 across the territories of Moldova, the Baltic states, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (Walker 1992). Opposed to these numbers, Russia, retained on its territory 7,450 strategic and 8,550 non-strategic warheads, along with the major production and most research and development facilities, nestled deep into the territory of the former Soviet Union (Bukharin 2002). Moreover, the administration of the Soviet nuclear arsenal was vital in consideration of the future status of Russia, particularly in its future relations with the United States of America. Thus, two major goals can be outlined, and observed upon in retrospect as having manifested in Russia's policy and goals in the immediate period after the fall of the Soviet Union:

- The retention of sole control over the vast Soviet nuclear arsenal and the "de-nuclearisation" of all other constituent Soviet republics, chiefly the Belarusian, Ukrainian and Kazakh SSRs.
- The maintaining of a quantitative and qualitative nuclear balance with the United States in the post-Soviet era, as a measure of effective future deterrence (Podvig, Russia's Nuclear Forces: Between Disarmament and Modernization 2011, 2).

In the first instance, the Russian Federation achieved its goals through a multi-vectored approach directed towards both the immediate post-Soviet space and the larger international arena. Within the framework of agreements on the dissolution of the Soviet Union and with the establishment of the organisation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as a basis of future cooperation between post-Soviet states, the Russian Federation secured major recognitions, which facilitated the key goal of retention of all soviet nuclear arms. Within the Alma-Ata protocol of December 21st, 1991, "[Russia's] continued permanent membership on the U.N. Security Council" (text of decision by the council of heads of states of the Commonwealth of Independent States - I.L.M. pg. 151) was recognised, thus facilitating the position as sole successor state of the Soviet Union within the international system of relations, when concerned with the UN's most powerful body and all underlying binding international agreements. Within the establishing framework of the CIS and the Agreement on Joint Measures with Respect to Nuclear Weapons, "Belarus and Ukraine [acceded] to the 1968 Non- Proliferation Treaty as non-nuclear states and conclude an IAEA safeguards agreement; non-transfer of nuclear weapons, except to Russia" (Art. 5), establishing prior that all nuclear weapons on the territory of the two states will be up to "the President of Russia [to] decide their use" (Art. 4) (Commonwealth of Independent States 1991, 152). Thus, Russia ensured that other post-Soviet states will undergo nuclear disarmament, managed by Russian leadership, and would also forego aspirations to nuclear arms through both binding international agreements such as the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, but also through political agreements within the closed framework of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), with the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, which further underlined the non-nuclear status of Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan (Memorandum on security assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons 1994, Memorandum of Security Assurances in connection with the Republic of Belarus Accession to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons 1994, Instruments deposited with the Government of the Russian Federation on: 20 May 1994 Kazakhstan 1994, 354).

In the second instance, the Russian Federation pursued the continued establishment and maintenance of qualitative and quantitative control mechanisms for nuclear armaments between itself and the United States, with the due consideration that the Russian resource potential could no longer sustainably maintain an arsenal of competitive parity. Within the established status of the direct successor state of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation was also the responsible party in all preceding multilateral or bilateral nuclear arms control treaties – the Outer Space Treaty, Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM Treaty), Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), amongst others, which together made the "nuclear treaty regime" between the United States and Soviet Union (Marinov, The Strategic Nuclear Treaty Regime at a Crossroads. The (Im)Possible Search for a New Point of Balance? 2022, 100). Russia particularly pursued the further implementation of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I Treaty), signed between the

United Stated and the Soviet Union on July 31st, 1991, months before the collapse of the latter, as the first effective treaty to lead to concrete steps in general reductions to the strategic and non-strategic nuclear arsenals of the two "nuclear superpowers" (START I 1991). The START I Treaty facilitated for Russia the position of equal nuclear power with the United States in the post-Cold War era, binding both states to continue massive reductions of their corresponding nuclear arsenals and allowing for Russia to begin an internal process where only the most capable and modern systems would be left in operation (START I 1991). The subsequent 1993 START II Treaty would be ratified by Russia, but by the treaty's entry into force in 2000, the chief goal of eliminating multiple warheads on armaments would face hostility from Russia and lead to the abandonment of the START II in 2002 (Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START II) 1993), with the official reason being the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. However, the concurrent 2002 Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) (Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation On Strategic Offensive Reductions 2002) and subsequent 2010 New START Treaty (New START) would be adopted by Russia and thus facilitate further overall reductions in both warhead and launcher numbers (U.S. Department of State 2022). Through the maintenance of *treaty regime*, Russia pursued continued parity with the United States, whilst simultaneously limiting the economic and financial burden that the strategic nuclear forces would place on the country. Yet, qualitative treaty stipulations, such as the attempts at elimination of MIRVs and the INF Treaty's constraints on intermediate missile development would be viewed with hostility in the face of Russia's objective to maintain an offensive strategic nuclear arm, which is a threat to the United States and specifically against sophisticated US ABM capabilities. As the treaty regime progressively collapsed after the termination of the INF Treaty in 2019 (Lopez 2019), Russia froze its participation in mechanisms concerned under New START in 2023 (Diaz-Maurin 2023), whilst at least superficially maintaining the set quantitative limitations. Overall, a chief objective of Russia in the treaty regime over the preceding decades can be found in successful attempts to lower nuclear arsenals for the sake of the effective, more efficient and more economic completion of Russia's nuclear rearmament efforts, whilst maintain that the US would not begin an arms race in the field.

Through the political processes of the 1990s, the Russian Federation successfully maintained its sole status as a nuclear power in the post-Soviet space. Moreover, through engagement in bilateral agreements with the United States, Russia maintained a status of qualitative and quantitative parity. The set treaty conditions would allow the Russian Federation to vastly optimise its arsenal and set the stage for future modernisation efforts and replacement of systems going into the 2000s.

2. Vectors of Strategic Weapons Development

With the establishment of Russia as the sole nuclear power of the post-Soviet space and the reinforcing of the nuclear treaty regime between itself and the United States, the next observable phase in the evolution of the Russian strategic nuclear forces, and specifically within the RVSN, was the vector of future strategic weapons development.

At the initial stage of the 1990s, Russia and the RVSN found themselves as the inheritors of a vast and diversified strategic nuclear arsenal, which encapsulated the doctrinal approaches and vision of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. A lesser portion of the total arsenal were modernised legacy ICBM systems introduced in the mid-1970s, such as the UR-100 (SS-11), RT-2P (SS-13) and MR-UR-100 (SS-17). The majority of ICBM capabilities were made up of then current generation missile complexes, such as the R-36M (SS-18), RS-18A (SS-19), RT-23 (SS-24) and RT-2PM (SS-25) (Stockholm International Pece Research Institute 1991, 18-20). Soviet silo-based ICBM development at this stage had focused on the mass deployment of multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRV) in the ICBM fleet, as well as the development of super-heavy ICBMs, such as the R-36 with up to 10 MIRVs, as a departure from the 1960s-era focus on massive monobloc warheads.

Concurrently, and as a continuation of successful efforts in the development of operational and operational-tactical missile launch systems, a separate focus was placed on the development of the road-mobile RT-2PM "Topol" ICBM, with a singular warhead, as a potential "countervalue" system in the Soviet arsenal. The specific technical direction of development in the Russian Federation would follow the later-stages Soviet doctrine into the 2000s, albeit with the nuances of the implementation of the nuclear treaties and a turnover in system generations.

In the conditions of the START I Treaty and the quantitative limitations set therein, as well as the factor of severe financial constraints, Russian land-based strategic nuclear power was formalised around retaining only the R-36M, RS-18A, RT-23 and RT-2PM, where the MIRV-capable R-36M and RS-18A would be the main strategic nuclear deterrent, supplemented to a much lesser extend by the rail-mobile or silo-based RT-23 (Table 2). The road- and silo-based monobloc RT-2PM "Topol" would continue to be introduced into the strategic missile forces as an additional pillar of enhanced survivability and assured-second strike capability in the period from 1991 to 1997. Throughout the 1990s and even as the Topol was still entering service, development would continue on its successor, the RT-2PM2 "Topol-M" (SS-27), which would fulfil much the same role, albeit with improved technical characteristics (Podvig, Russia's Nuclear Forces: Between Disarmament and Modernization 2011, 10). The RT-2PM2 Topol-M would enter service in 1999, but would not replace the older RT-2PM, with only 78 combat-ready launchers (excluding tests and replacements) and itself would in the 2000s be superseded by a more advanced design, the RS-24 "Yars" (Podvig, Russia's Nuclear Forces: Between Disarmament and Modernization 2011, 10).

By 2000 the future vector of technical development would begin to be shaped by evolving geopolitical factors and changing pace of modernisation and replacement programs. On one hand, the preconditions of the START II Treaty elimination of multiple warheads from launch platforms, was seen as overtly critical in undermining Russian deterrence capabilities due to the over-reliance of MIRV-capable platforms, such as the R-36M. On the other hand, and in consideration of the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002, MIRV-capable systems were declared by Russia as vital to their own offensive strategic nuclear arsenal and against potential US ABM development (Fedorov 2005, 15). As such, technical development was directed towards all elements of the RVSN in order to increase future capabilities through replacement programs. The first such program was the development of a MIRV-capable replacement for both the Topol and Topol-M in both their mobile- and silo-based configurations – the RS-24 "Yars" (SS-27 mod 2). The Yars would finish development and testing by 2010, and would see initial deployment by 2010 (Kristensen 2014). Essentially a further evolution of the Topol-M (given the NATO designation SS-27 mod 2 to reflect this), the Yars possesses a missile bus with 4, or potentially more, re-entry vehicles in addition to superior accuracy and missile velocity. Full deployment of the RS-24 would take from 2010 to 2025, when it would replace all Topol and Topol-M systems (Интерфакс 2024), thus precipitating a significant change in the overall balance of nuclear strike power within the RVSN – the mobile element would reduce the number of launchers; however, the number of total deployed warheads on mobile launchers would be significantly increased and would thus constitute a larger share of the RVSN's total assets, allowing for the retirement of more R-36 and particularly RS-18 systems (Hans M. Kristensen 2024).

During the same period, development began on the replacement of the R-36M and RS-18-series missile complexes, which would require the development of a new superheavy ICBM – the RS-28 "Sarmat" (SS-29). As a successor to the R-36, the Sarmat strives to achieve and surpass the characteristics of its predecessor. The missile bus payload is projected at 10 or more re-entry vehicles in addition to numerous defensive mechanisms, such as penetration aids, due to the missile's projected large throw weight (Persico 2017). A stated goal by Russian political and military speakers, for the RS-28, is to further enhance ABM penetration capabilities through a return to the fractional-orbital bombardment system (FOBS), wherein an ICBM would achieve a fractional polar orbit to approach intended targets from unplanned for non-ballistic trajectories. In principle, increased delta-v for a fractional orbit at the expense of missile bus payload reduction can allow for an already proven

Cold War-era concept with newer generation missile technology. The scale to which this is a practicable concept against a sophisticated missile defence umbrella, is beyond the scope of the present paper (Listner 2022). Regardless, the RS-28 would have a problematic development, which would make the missile ready for deployment only by 2024, after a series of failed tests, delays and the general accumulating costs of the programme (Kaushal 2024).

As an addition to the development of new generation offensive missile systems, Russia had set forth to further refine missile defence penetration capabilities through a drastic increase in the singular capabilities of warheads after missile release (Congressional Research Service 2024, 2, Каракаев 2019, 36). Such development within the RVSN were focused on the incorporation of hypersonic glide vehicles (HGVs), which would go beyond the technical capabilities of previous generation manoeuvrable re-entry vehicles (MaRVs). The "Avangard" HGV missile system (Object 4202) continued as a further development of preceding Soviet HGV programmes (Podvig, Russian hypersonic vehicle - more dots added to Project 4202 2014) and was flight tested in 2018 (Минобороны России 2018). Demonstrated compatibility has been shown with both the R-36 and RS-18 ICBMs, with the RS-18 becoming the main operational carrier in 2019 (CSIS 2024) and by 2025, with at least 10 operational systems and an unknown number fitted to R-36s (Hans M. Kristensen 2024).

The 2024 approximation of RVSN capabilities, as defined by the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) and their corresponding methodology of force projection, can be examined below:

Table no. 1: RVSN number of launchers and warheads. Of note is that the FAS methodology assumes maximum possible warhead deployment, whereas this is not certain to be the case (Hans M. Kristensen 2024).

Type	No. of launchers deployed	Warheads per missile and assumed yield	Deployed Warheads
R-36M	34	10 x 500/800 kt	340
RS-18 "Avangard"	10	1 x Avangard HGV (unknown yield)	10
RT-2PM2 (mobile)	18	1 x 800 kt	18
RT-2PM2 (silo)	60	1 x 800 kt	60
RS-24 (mobile)	180	4 x 100 kt	720
RS-24 (silo)	24	4 x 100 kt	96
	Total: 329		**Total:** 1,244

The overall vector of missile development, deployment and replacement within the RVSN throughout the examined period can be visualised and surmised in the below set of tables, which contain a biannual assessment of the types, number and warheads within the RVSN based on data from the START agreements, FAS and SIPRI:

Table no. 2: Biannual review of Russian land-based strategic nuclear assets since 1991. NATO identification used for system type. SS-27* denotes SS-27 mod 2 (RS-24 Yars). Data compiled based on SIPRI, FAS and START numbers.

Year	Type	No. deployed	Deployed Warheads	Year	Type	No. deployed	Deployed Warheads
1991	SS-11	310	310	**1993**			
	SS-13	30	30				
	SS-17	50	200		SS-17	40	160

Year	Type	No. deployed	Deployed Warheads	Year	Type	No. deployed	Deployed Warheads
	SS-18	308	3,080		SS-18	308	3,080
	SS-19	250	1,500		SS-19	300	1,800
	SS-24	86	860		SS-24	92	920
	SS-25	300	300		SS-25	378	378
		Total: 1,334	**Total:** 6,280			**Total:** 1,118	**Total:** 6,338
1995	SS-18	248	2,480	**1997**	SS-18	180	1,800
	SS-19	260	1,560		SS-19	160	960
	SS-24	46	460		SS-24	46	460
	SS-25	333	333		SS-25	369	369
		Total: 887	**Total:** 4,833			**Total:** 755	**Total:** 3,589
1999	SS-18	180	1,800	**2001**	SS-18	180	1,800
	SS-19	160	960		SS-19	150	900
	SS-24	46	460		SS-24	46	460
	SS-25	360	360		SS-25	360	360
	SS-27	10	10		SS-27	24	24
		Total: 756	**Total:** 3,590			**Total:** 755	**Total:** 3,589
2003	SS-18	138	1,380	**2005**	SS-18	110	1,000
	SS-19	134	804		SS-19	130	780
	SS-24	36	360		SS-24	15	150
	SS-25	342	342		SS-25	300	300
	SS-27	30	30		SS-27	40	40
		Total: 680	**Total:** 2,916			**Total:** 585	**Total:** 2,270
2007	SS-18	80	800	**2009**	SS-18	68	680
	SS-19	126	756		SS-19	72	432
	SS-25	242	242		SS-25	180	180
	SS-27	45	45		SS-27	63	63
		Total: 493	**Total:** 1,843			**Total:** 383	**Total:** 1,355
2011	SS-18	50	500	**2013**	SS-18	55	550
	SS-19	50	300		SS-19	35	210
	SS-25	120	120		SS-25	140	140
	SS-27	69	69		SS-27	78	78
	SS-27*	6	18		SS-27*	18	18
		Total: 295	**Total:** 1,007			**Total:** 326	**Total:** 1,050
2015	SS-18	46	460	**2017**	SS-18	46	460
	SS-19	30	180		SS-19	20	120
	SS-25	99	99		SS-25	90	90
	SS-27	78	78		SS-27	78	78
	SS-27*	58	236		SS-27*	82	328
		Total: 311	**Total:** 1,049			**Total:** 316	**Total:** 1,076
2019	SS-18	46	460	**2021**	SS-18	46	460
	SS-19	20	120		SS-19	Unknown	Unknown
					SS-19 M4	4	4?
	SS-25	63	63		SS-25	27	27
	SS-27	78	78		SS-27	78	78
	SS-27*	111	444		SS-27*	155	620
		Total: 318	**Total:** 1,165			**Total:** 310	**Total:** 1,189

Russian nuclear systems development within those systems subordinated to the RVSN has gone beyond the treaty recognised elements of the strategic nuclear triad. Since 2010, the development of an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) complex, the RS-26 “Rubezh” (SS-31), perhaps based on the RS-24, has been known to have been ongoing, but with uncertainty as to its eventual deployment leading into the first half of the 2020s. The technical characteristics of such a missile complex place it in the same doctrinal role of employment as the Cold War-era RSD-10 “Pioneer” in relation to striking targets on the European continent with the potential capability to be MIRV-equipped. Whilst the RS-26 project remains of unknown operational status, in November 2024, Russia operationally employed an intermediate-range

ballistic missile system "Oreshnik" in Ukraine, which showcased unique and unprecedented characteristics, namely a cluster-type MIRV warhead – 6 MIRV warheads dispensing up to six further conventional submunitions (The Telegraph 2024) (logical extrapolation dictates that such submunitions can also be nuclear). Furthermore, and based on Cold War-era projects, the development of the nuclear-powered 9M730 "Burevestnik" (SSC-X-9 Skyfall) intercontinental cruise missile (ICCM) has been ongoing since at least 2016 (Marinov, Redefining the Strategic Nuclear Balance. Novel Strategic Offensive Weapons Systems 2022, Wright 2023). Little discernible and accurate technical characteristics can be derived about the specific weapons system, but if successfully introduced in the future, can be considered as an additional element of offensive strategic nuclear capabilities within the Russian arsenal and the prerogatives of the RVSN.

Overall, the RVSN can be witnessed to have transformed significantly in terms of technical capabilities over the preceding three decades by the incorporation of new generation missile systems focused on expanded MIRV capabilities and more recently the incorporation of HGVs. This is reflected in the 2025 US Congressional report on "Russia's Nuclear Weapons", which states that "Russia remains the U.S. rival with the most capable and diverse nuclear forces. Today it is unique in the combination of strategic and non-strategic nuclear forces it fields that enables nuclear employment ranging from large-scale attacks on the [U.S.] homeland to limited strikes in support of a regional military campaign [in the Euro-Atlantic region]" (Congressional Research Service 2025, 1).

3. Current RVSN Force Structure, Composition, and Characteristics

With the examination of both the political and technical direction of development of the RVSN, having been provided, the final segment will deal with the present state, structure, composition and force capabilities of the RVSN on both the macro- and micro-organisational levels.

As of 2024, the Russian Strategic Rocket Forces are organised into three principal operational missile groupings (ракетное оперативное объединение), or "rocket armies": the 27th Guards (Vladimir), the 31st (Orenburg), and the 33rd Guards (Omsk), which together encompass 12 missile divisions (4 silo-based and 8 TEL-based divisions) (Каракаев 2019, 34), each subdivided into 3 to 4 missile regiments, with mobile-based regiments traditionally operating 9 launchers and silo-based regiments operating 6 to 10 launchers (Podvig 2021, Kristensen, et al. 2024). The divisions themselves are widely dispersed in both the European and Asian parts of Russia. Mobile formations are distributed across Russia from its European regions to Trans-Baikal, primarily in densely forested areas that enable potential dispersal of units to locations difficult to detect and track. Silo-based systems are concentrated in the Asian part of Russia near its southern borders, with silo fields grouped into regiments of up to ten silos (Settle 2025).

Based on available data as of 2024, the process of incorporating the RS-24 Yars into the mobile forces has neared completion with 180 launchers, with 18 (two regiments) remaining with the older RS-12M1. By 2025, it is expected that this process will have been completed (Интерфакс 2024). Silo-based launchers currently stand at a mix of 34 RS-20V, 60 RS-12M2, 24 RS-24, and an approximation of 10 modified RS-18 with the Avangard missile complex. In total, the RVSN maintains 326 launchers, plus additional reserve, test, and as part of the Sirena-M command missile system (3 launchers). Overall, if the consideration is made that Russia maintains near New START treaty limitations of deployed warheads, 872 warheads are maintained combat-ready within the RVSN of Russia's total 1,822. The possible number in the upper threshold can range up to 1,244 warheads (Hans M. Kristensen 2024).

Strategic missile formations of the RVSN follow specific structural and organisational characteristics, which define further their operation and effectiveness, with mobile and stationary formations, differing from one another due to the specific technical and doctrinal role of the missile platforms in operation.

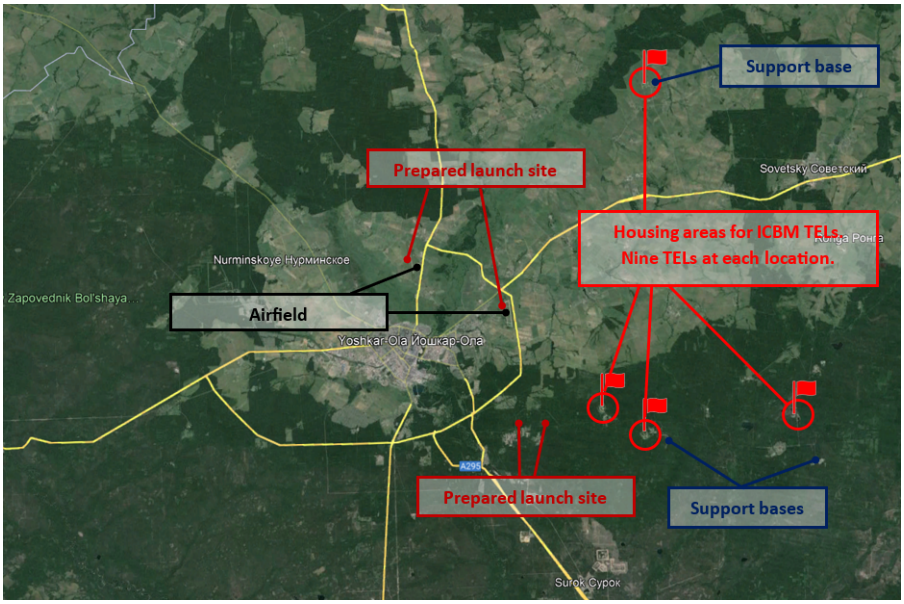


Figure no. 1: Layout of the 14th Kiev-Zhitomir Rocket Division, representing the typical structure of Russian mobile ICBM formations. Area: 80 km x 50 km (Hans M. Kristensen 2024, Settle 2025). Satellite imagery from USGS at https://earthexplorer.usgs.gov/

Mobile strategic missile formations, such as the one showcased in Figure no. 1, the 14th Rocket Division at Yoshkar-Ola, encompass several missile regiments, usually three to four regiments. Each regiment contains a closed complex of supporting installations and the regimental Launch Control Center (LCC), with the TELs and warhead storage situated in an adjacent perimeter complex (Figure no. 2). The TELs, 9 in number per regiment, are housed separately in groups of three in soft covered storage facilities. Each of the storage areas is constructed and situated vis-à-vis the others to allow for the rapid movement of each TEL outside of storage and further onward movement outside the regimental base. The general layout of these complexes has undergone iterations, and the latest ones has switched from a circular dispersion of launchers to a parallel one (Figure no. 2) (H. Kristensen 2014).

Additionally, to the TEL bases and adjoining infrastructure, several separate support and logistics bases are contained in each missile division, usually in close proximity to the main regimental bases. Such support bases contain auxiliary vehicle storage facilities for the purposes of security, maintenance, refuelling and communications. At least one of the support bases contains Transporter-Loader Vehicles (TLV) and training TELs for the corresponding mobile launcher type, based upon satellite imagery. Almost universally, this is now the MZKT-79221 and its subvariants for the RS-24.

At a specific distance, to ensure both adequate reaction and effective dispersion, from the regimental bases, there are usually at least several prepared launch sites. However, TELs can hypothetically use other points for missile launch and for this reason, regiments are located along multiple dispersing road arteries, to ensure that TELs can disperse in multiple directions.

Figure no. 2: 697th Regiment of the 14th Rocket Division. Area: 1,7 km x 1 km (Hans M. Kristensen 2024, Settle 2025). Satellite imagery from USGS at https://earthexplorer.usgs.gov/

Of note, is that the 14th Division has had an additional missile regiment formed and corresponding structures constructed since 2019.

Stationary formations, such as the 62nd Division at Uzhur (Figure no. 3), have a central divisional complex, which houses the divisional LCC, administration, communication, command and control, as well as other support infrastructure and storage facilities. The missile regiments are dispersed around the main complex in silo clusters, with each cluster containing 6 to 10 singular silos. Each regiment has one larger silo installation, which includes a regimental LCC.

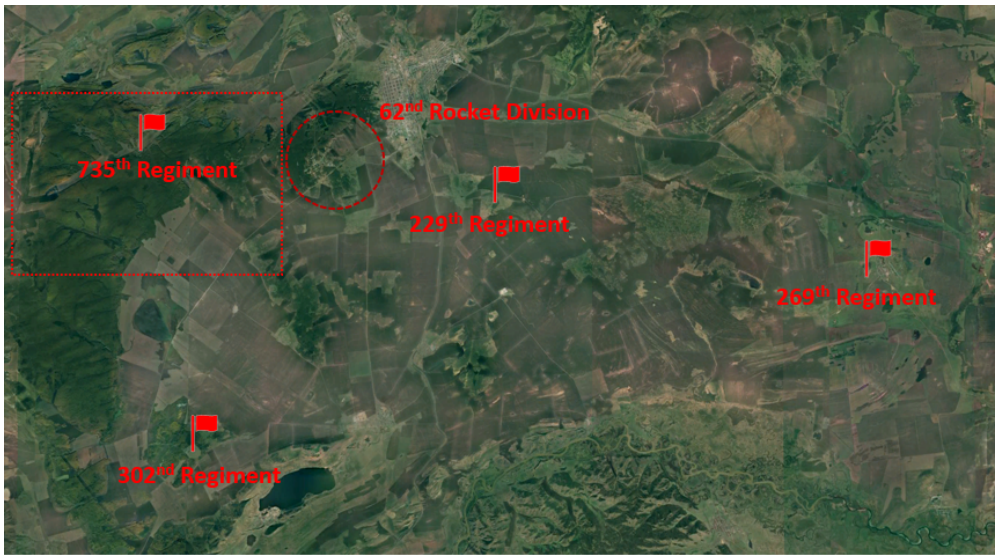


Figure no. 3: 62nd Red Banner Rocket Division structure. Area marked with dotted square expanded in next figure. Area 60 km x 30 km (Kristensen, et al. 2024, Settle 2025). Satellite imagery from USGS at https://earthexplorer.usgs.gov/

Figure no. 4: 735th Regiment of the 62nd Rocket Division. Additional four silos are located further north making the 735th one of the few with this many subordinated launchers. Area: 20 km x 12 km (Hans M. Kristensen 2024, Settle 2025). Satellite imagery from USGS at https://earthexplorer.usgs.gov/

Over the past several years, extensive excavation work can be witnessed at most silo installations. At least in part, this can be considered connected with the future adoption of the RS-28 Sarmat missile complex, but also with the general objective of improving site survivability against both symmetric and asymmetric threats.

Conclusions

The Russian strategic rocket forces have undergone a dynamic process of transformation since the end of the Cold War based on the principal priorities of maintaining quantitative parity with the United States, whilst also simultaneously seeking to achieve a qualitative edge through the adoption of successive generations of new land-based strategic offensive nuclear systems. The Russian ICBM fleet since has become centred on a combination of silo-based and mobile launchers, with one side of the spectrum focused on modernised super-heavy MIRVed missiles of legacy design, whilst the mobile branch has transitioned from older monobloc designs to a steady process of MIRV incorporation in systems of the latest generation. Additionally, great effort has been placed in producing advanced solutions to missile defence penetration with the adoption of HGVs and the process of introducing a new generation superheavy ICBM, albeit with limited progress, which does not yet translate in substantial changes in overall nuclear force capabilities. Going into the future the transformative processes are set to continue and will depend on the extent of future adoption of new technologies, as well as the potential for either the preservation of treaty arsenals or renewed expansion. The RVSN thus remains a force of current and future consideration as the main nuclear deterrent of Russia.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

—. 2014. *Russian hypersonic vehicle - more dots added to Project 4202*. August 26. Accessed February 22, 2025. https://russianforces.org/blog/2014/08/russian_hypersonic_vehicle_-_m.shtml

—. 2021. *Ракетные войска стратегического назначения (*Raketnye vojska strategicheskogo naznachenija). August 7. Accessed February 22, 2025. https://russianforces.org/rus/missiles/.

—. 1991. "Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Reduction and Limitations of Strategic Offensive Arms." Moscow: U.S. Department of State.1972. "Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems." Moscow, May 26.

1987. "Treaty Between the United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on The Elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles." Washington D.C., December 8.

1991. "Agreements establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States." Minsk and Alma Ata: Venice Commission, December 21.

1991. "Treaty Between the United States of America and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics on Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms." *Treaty.* Moscow, July 31.

1994. "Memorandum of Security Assurances in connection with the Republic of Belarus Accession to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons." Budapest: Secretariat of the United Nations, December 5.

1993. "Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START II)." Moscow: Bureau of Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance, January 3. https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/trty/102887.htm

1994. "Instruments deposited with the Government of the Russian Federation on: 20 May 1994 Kazakhstan." *United Nations - Treaty Series*. United Nations, May 20. 354.

1994. "Memorandum on security assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons." Budapest: Secretariat of the United Nations, December 5.

2002. "Treaty Between the United States of America and the Russian Federation On Strategic Offensive Reductions." Moscow: Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, May 24. https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/isn/10527.htm

Bukharin, Oleg. 2002. *A Breakdown of Breakout: U.S. and Russian Warhead Production Capabilities*. October. Accessed February 2, 2024. https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2002-10/features/breakdown-breakout-us-russian-warhead-production-capabilities

Bukharin, Oleg, Timur Kadyshev, Eugene Miasnikov, Pavel Podvig, Igor Sutyagin, Maxim Tarasenko, and Boris Zhelezov. 2001. *Russian Strategic Nuclear Forces*. Edited by Pavel Podvig. Cambridge: The MIT Press.

Bureau of Arms Control, Verification and Compliance. 1972. "Treaty Between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on The Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM Treaty)." Moscow: U.S. Department of State.

Congressional Research Service. 2024. *Defense Primer: Hypersonic Boost-Glide Weapons.* Washington: US Congress.

Congressional Research Service. 2025. *Russia's Nuclear Weapons*. Washington: US Congress.

CSIS. 2024. *Avangard.* April 23. Accessed January 22, 2025. https://missilethreat. csis.org/missile/avangard/

Diaz-Maurin, François. 2023. *Russia suspends New START and is ready to resume nuclear testing.* Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. February 21. Accessed February 20, 2025. https://thebulletin.org/2023/02/russia-suspends-new-start-and-is-ready-to-resume-nuclear-testing/#:~:text=On%20Tuesday%2C% 20in% 20his%20long-delayed%20state-of-the-nation%20address%2C%20Russian,nuclear%20arms%20treaty%2C%20but%20not%20withdraw%20from%20it

Fedorov, Y.E. 2005. *Russia's strategic forces: policy, evolution and prospects*. Paris: Institut Francais des Relations Internationales.

Hans M. Kristensen, Matt Korda, Eliana Johns, Mackenzie Knight. 2024. *Russian nuclear weapons, 2024.* Washington: Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. Accessed January 20, 2025. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2024.2314437.

Интерфакс (Interfax). 2024. *Мобильная группировка РВСН полностью оснащена новыми ракетными комплексами (Mobil'naja gruppirovka RVSN polnost'ju osnashhena novymi raketnymi kompleksami)*. December 30. Accessed February 22, 2025. https://www.interfax.ru/russia/1001257

Каракаев, С.В. (Karakaev, S.V.) 2019. "Ракетные войска стратегического назначения современной России." ("Raketnye vojska strategicheskogo naznachenija sovremennoj *Военная мысль* (*Voennaja mysl'*) 12: 33-38.

Kaushal, Sidharth. 2024. *Russia's Sarmat Test Failure: Implications for the Strategic Balance*. Royal United Services Institute. October 22. Accessed Jan 23, 2025. https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/russias-sarmat-test-failure-implications-strategic-balance

Kristensen, Hans M., Matt Korda, Eliana Johns, and Mackenzie Knight. 2024. *Russian nuclear weapons, 2024*. Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. March 7. Accessed January 20, 2025. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2024.2314437.

Kristensen, Hans. 2014. *Russian ICBM Force Modernization: Arms Control Please!* Federation of American Scientists. August 5. Accessed January 22, 2025. https://fas.org/publication/russianmodernization/

Listner, Michael. 2022. *FOBS, MOBS, and the reality of the Article IV nuclear weapons prohibition*. October 17. Accessed February 20, 2025. https://www.thespacereview.com/article/4466/1.

Lopez, Todd. 2019. *U.S. Withdraws From Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty*. August 2. Accessed September 8, 2022. https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/1924779/us-withdraws-from-intermediate-range-nuclear-forces-treaty/

Marinov, Mario. 2022. "Redefining the Strategic Nuclear Balance. Novel Strategic Offensive Weapons Systems." Знание, наука, иновации, технологии (Институт за знание, наука и технологии).

Marinov, Mario. 2022. "The Strategic Nuclear Treaty Regime at a Crossroads. The (Im)Possible Search for a New Point of Balance?" Romanian Military Thinking (Centrul tehnic-editorial al armatei) 94-111.

Norris, Robert S. 1992. "C.I.S. (Soviet) Strategic Nuclear Forces, End of 1991." Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, March: 49.

Persico, Anthony. 2017. *RS-28 Sarmat (Satan 2)*. Missile Defence Advocacy Alliance. January. Accessed February 20, 2025. https://missiledefenseadvocacy.org/missile-threat-and-proliferation/todays-missile-threat/russia/rs-28-sarmat-satan-2/#_ednref4

Podvig, Pavel. 2011. *Russia's Nuclear Forces: Between Disarmament and Modernization*. Paris: Security Studies Cente.

Russian Ministry of Defence. 2018. *Avangard missile launched from Dombarovsky area*. December 26. Accessed February 20, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgzeS7-jgSY&t=5s

Settle, Frank. 2025. *Russian Nuclear Complex*. Washington and Lee University. February 10. Accessed February 20, 2025. https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1VrJmDuHVIskxtX_0eVjTWw2swNhL9tIo&ll=61.45918312096067%2C92.69004266818932&z=4

Stockholm International Pece Research Institute. 1991. *SIPRI Yearbook 1991: World Aramaments and Disarmament*. Solna: Oxford University Press.

The Telegraph. 2024. *Putin: Russia tested new hypersonic missile in Ukraine strike*. November 21. Accessed February 18, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFNa-7e5Z7o

U.S. Department of State. 2022. *New START Treaty*. September 12. Accessed September 13, 2022. https://www.state.gov/new-start/

Walker, William. 1992. "Nuclear Weapons and the Former Soviet Republics." *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs) 68 (2): 255-277.

Wright, Timothy. 2023. *Russia claims to have tested nuclear-powered cruise missile*. IISS. October 13. Accessed February 20, 2025. https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/missile-dialogue-initiative/2023/10/russia-claims-to-have-tested-nuclear-powered-cruise-missile/

STRATEGIES XXI International Scientific Conference
The Complex and Dynamic Nature of the Security Environment,
Bucharest, Romania - February, 27th, 2025

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-16

PRECISION GLIDE MUNITIONS. METHODS FOR EFFECTIVE COUNTERACTION BASED ON THE CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

Mario MARINOV, PhD,
Researcher, University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, Sofia, Bulgaria.
E-mail: m.marinov@unibit.bg

Abstract: *The evolution of the modern battlefield is defined by the rapid manifestation of transformative processes in weapons systems deployment, which alter past warfighting capabilities and concepts. One such weapons system, massively deployed in the conflict in Ukraine, is that of the precision glide munitions in its most modern iterations, which has had a profound impact on conventional military operation. The following paper examines the role of precision glide munitions in modern warfare, with a focus on their tactical and operational impact during the conflict in Ukraine. Through an analysis of their capabilities, operational deployment, and effectiveness, the study identifies counteraction methods, including electronic warfare, air defence adaptations, and emerging technologies. The paper centres on a mixed-methods approach, structured around collection, analysis and deconstruction of open-source intelligence, technical analysis of munition characteristics, and synthesis of third-party expert assessments. The focus on open-source intelligence and third-party analyses, alongside the rapid evolutionary patterns within the examined weapons system type, predispose potential biases, whose mitigation is sought through a robust, multifaceted and objective examination of source materials. The overarching findings underscore the necessity for conventional forces to adapt to evolving threats through integrated defensive systems and doctrinal innovation.*

Keywords: *glide munitions; glide bombs; counteraction; countermeasures; air defence; Ukraine.*

Preliminary Considerations

The contemporary dynamic era in the international system of security relations predisposes the processes of accelerated armaments development and weapons deployment on the battlefield. The conflict in Ukraine has served to further elevate the process, introducing both novel systems, as well as serving to reevaluate the role, characteristics and battlefield application of numerous existing weapons categories. The "glide munition" has been a persistent element in weapons arsenals for decades, as it has proven itself as a sound and effective concept for providing a military force with limited stand-off capabilities. However, the conflict in Ukraine has witnessed the employment of this weapons category to an unprecedented extent, in a variety of conditions and in evolving roles on the modern field of battle. The overall results of the use of modern precision glide munitions have proven effective, if not pivotal, in certain stages of the conflict, garnering increasing future interest in the glide munition concept, both air- and ground-launched, as a fundamental element of modern military arsenals.

Concurrently, a practical question: specifically, how to effectively counteract glide munitions, given their effectiveness? The extent of the problem to the effective operation of ground forces is such, that it has been placed as a principal focus of NATO's Allied Command Transformation Innovation initiative, as efforts are made to identify solutions in detecting, intercepting and neutralising glide munition types (Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander Transformation 2025). The following paper will seek to provide avenues of approaching this specific problem through the

lens of the observable work of precision glide munitions within the Ukrainian conflict and based upon known or proposed method for their effective counteraction.

The *object of analysis herein is that of the modern precision glide munition*, as defined by its technical characteristics and application on the battlefield. The *subject of analysis is focused on the methods for effective counteraction of glide munitions* based on the observable characteristics of the weapons systems currently employed and the case study of the conflict in Ukraine. The principal objective within the paper is to *derive and list the possible methods of counteraction* and provide for their known or presumed effectiveness based on observable and known results from military operations in Ukraine. Ultimately, the paper serves to bridges a gap in existing literature by synthesizing observable data from Ukraine to propose actionable countermeasures, which should further the necessary discussions and efforts in improving conventional deterrence capabilities within armed forces structures and to eliminate critical shortcomings against potential threats.

In order to achieve set objectives, the paper is subdivided into two main sections, where in the first the capabilities, operation and effectiveness of modern glide munitions are discussed, followed by in the second section, through the methodological approach of logical extrapolation, with the definition and listing of specific methods of counteraction, based on the previously described overarching characteristics of glide munitions and their usage. This study employs a mixed-methods approach to analyse the role of precision glide munitions in the Ukraine conflict and propose actionable countermeasures. The methodology is structured around three primary pillars: open-source intelligence (OSINT) collection, technical analysis of munition characteristics, and synthesis of third-party expert assessments.

The first pillar involving OSINT collection, forms the foundation of the study. Publicly available materials, including geolocated strike footage, satellite imagery, and media reports from a diverse range of sources, were gathered and cross-referenced with verified news outlets and military blogs to ensure accuracy. To mitigate bias, OSINT data was subjected to a multi-step verification process. Geolocated strikes were confirmed using multiple independent sources, while strike patterns were analysed against frontline movements and operational timelines. However, the reliance on OSINT introduces potential gaps due to incomplete datasets, disinformation, and the fog of war. These limitations were acknowledged and addressed by triangulating data with technical analyses and expert opinions.

The second pillar, technical analysis, focuses on the characteristics and operational performance of glide munitions. Key technical parameters, such as range, guidance systems, and warhead types, were analysed using manufacturer specifications and defence industry publications. Comparative tables were developed to highlight differences between systems. The effectiveness of glide munitions was further assessed through case studies within the conflict in Ukraine, which examined strike density, target types, and tactical outcomes. This analysis was supplemented by video evidence and after-action reports. Additionally, the study explored emerging trends, including the integration of glide munitions with unmanned aerial vehicles and the use of boost-glide techniques to enhance range and survivability.

The third pillar, synthesis of expert assessments, contextualises the findings within the broader discourse. Insights from defence analysts, think tanks, and military journals were integrated to provide a nuanced understanding of glide munition deployment and counteraction efforts. The study also extrapolated future trends based on current trajectories.

Despite its comprehensive approach, the study has limitations. The reliance on OSINT and third-party analyses introduces potential biases, particularly in a conflict marked by information warfare. The rapid evolution of glide munition technology and countermeasures necessitate that some findings may become outdated as new systems are deployed. By combining OSINT, technical analysis, and expert synthesis, this study provides a robust framework for understanding the role of precision glide munitions in modern warfare. The methodology ensures a balanced, evidence-based

approach, while acknowledging the inherent limitations of open-source research in a dynamic conflict environment.

1. Precision Glide Munitions. Capabilities, Operational Deployment and Effectiveness

In order to ascertain the possible methods of effective counteraction, first some general characteristics of modern precision glide munitions must be discussed and taken into account. Based upon known technical characteristics and observable performance in Ukraine, the capabilities, operations and effectiveness of precision glide munitions can be summarised, which would provide the basis for the further discussion on the topic of their effective counteraction.

1.1. Capabilities

Contemporary precision glide munitions follow the general historical role of this type of weapons system, albeit with modern technological developments, which have exponentially increased overall performance. The principal goal of glide munition development has been to provide for a cost-effective stand-off munition with some degree of precision targeting. Whilst during the Cold War, glide munitions, such as the US GBU-8 and AGM-62, as well as Soviet KAB series, were operationally employed, the proverbial revolution in glide munitions development and capabilities came only with the mass integration into weapons systems of satellite guidance technologies. Satellite guidance provides for increased mission flexibility and autonomy of munitions, whilst simultaneously increasing targeting precision in a cost-effective manner compared to more sophisticated yet expensive methods. In modern designs, satellite guidance is usually the primary guidance method, coupled with said other guidance methods for increased effectiveness, such as electro-optical (television guidance - TGM) or laser guidance (semi-active laser homing - SALH), with inertial navigation systems (INS) serving as a secondary guidance method (Table no. 1).

Modern glide munitions similarly follow the historical process of exploiting existing stockpiles of gravity munitions, with the process of transforming a “dumb” projectile (either an aerial gravity bomb or standard artillery shell) into the broader weapons system category of a precision guided munition – defined separately as either an aerial “glide bomb” or other type of guided glide munition, depending on the launch platform and final characteristics of the system. The process encompasses the retrofitting of a guidance, glide and control components in a unified module/kit to the existing munition through rudimentary procedures. Thus, the production of glide munitions is expedited by using existing stockpiles and constrained only by the ability to manufacture the guidance/glide kits. When cheap solutions are utilised, such as the case of the Russian Unified Gliding and Correction Module (Унифицированный модуль планирования и коррекции - UMPK), which can cost as low as 20,000 USD, the end result can be a weapons system capable of mass employment (Watling and Reynolds 2025, 7) – this is a principal vector of understanding modern glide munitions and specifically in the case of the conflict in Ukraine, where glide bombs in particular have had an extensive role, in addition to other glide munitions types.

The range of such munitions can vary, but is usually between 40-150+km (Table no. 1), thus placing the launch platform (if airborne) outside the range of short and medium range air defence assets. Moreover, the capabilities and role of glide munitions has been further expanded through the use of a boost-glide approach in delivery, as in the French AASM Hammer and Russian D-30SN, where an initial booster stage is utilised to either increase range, or more importantly to allow the launch platform to deploy the munition at lower flight altitudes, avoiding detection and potential engagement (Figure no. 1) (SAFRAN n.d., Commission des affaires étrangères, de la défense et des forces armées 2012). Furthermore, precision glide munitions have been integrated into ground-launch platforms, wherein the glide munition is retrofitted to existing booster-stage bodies for large-calibre multiple launch rocket systems (such as the US HIMARS (Raytheon 2010) or Russian Tornado-S (Redacción Aviacionline 2024)), with such munitions including the US GLSDB and Russian UMPK

D-30SN, and possessing superior ranges of over 100km, 150km in the case of the GLSDB (US Air Force n.d., Raytheon 2010).

Table no. 1: Modern Guided Glide Munitions (Marinov 2024)

System	Range	Warhead Weight	Guidance	Cost
JDAM/ Mark 82	24km	89kg	GPS, INS, SALH	21,000 USD (Air and Space Forces Magazine n.d.)
JDAM ER/ Mark 82	72km	89kg	GPS, INS	36,000 USD (Air Force Technology 2023)
AGM-154 JSOW	110km	225kg	GPS, INS, IR	540,000 USD (US Navy 2019, US Navy 2021)
GBU-53/B	110km	48kg	ARH, SALH, IR, GPS, INS	220,000 USD (Raytheon 2010, Roblin 2023)
GBU-39/B SDB GLSDB	110km (air-launched) 150km (ground-launched/ GLSDB)	62kg	GPS, INS, SALH	40,000 USD (US Air Force n.d.)
AASM Hammer	70+km	89kg	GPS, INS, IR, SALH	163-320,000 USD (Commission des affaires étrangères, de la défense et des forces armées 2012, SAFRAN n.d.)
UMPK/ FAB500	≈70km *depending on source and observations	200kg	GLONASS, GPS, INS	≈20,000 USD (Reisner 2025)
UMPK D-30SN	90-165km *depending on source and observations	100kg	GLONASS, GPS, INS	Unknown (Redacción Aviacionline 2024, Reisner 2025)

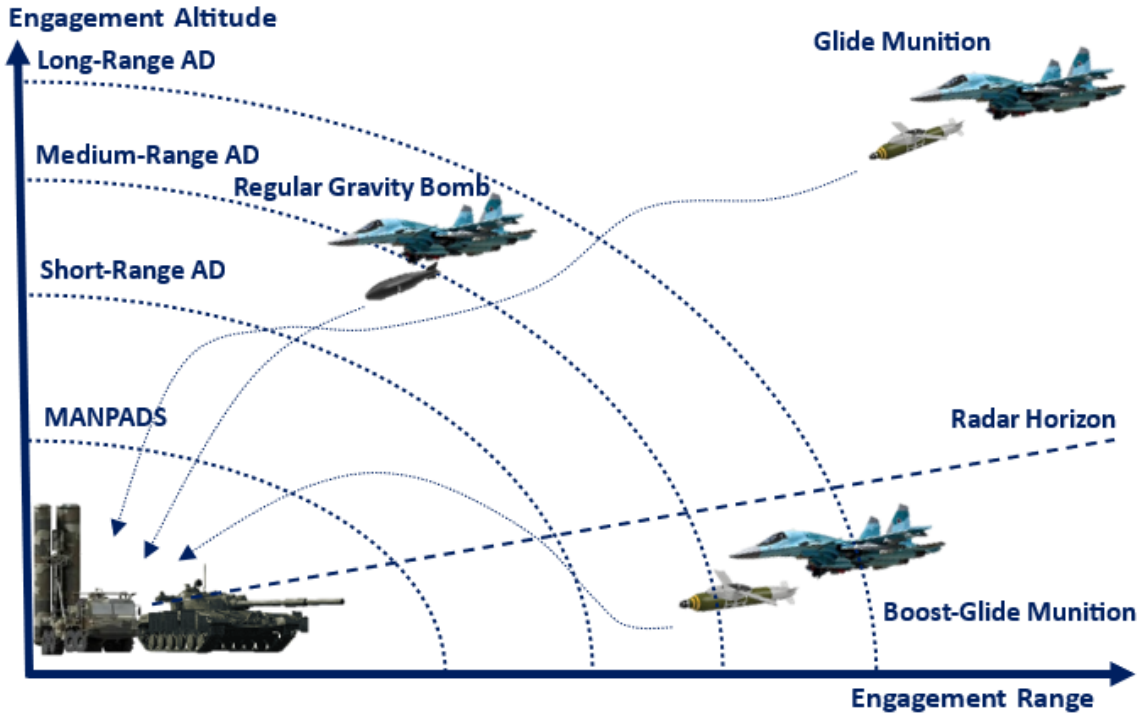


Figure no. 1: Engagement profile comparison of gravity, glide, and boost-glide munitions (Marinov 2024)

The capabilities of glide munitions on the modern battlefield are further enhanced by their ability to utilise multiple compatible warhead types, which greatly expands effectiveness against engaged targets. In the context of the characteristics of the modern battlefield, which favour defensive operations and a static-centric type of warfare, glide munitions can prove particularly effective in engaging an entrenched adversary in both open and urban positions (Kharchenko and Inwood 2024). In consideration of the firepower requirements to inflict the required effect on target in such conditions, precision glide munitions offer a tenable alternative to other methods, such as tube and rocket artillery, which has become both increasingly vulnerable to counter-battery fire and unable to concentrate and maintain fire for the necessary periods of time. Glide munitions offer the ability to deliver multiple times more firepower compared to artillery munitions and in a precise manner, whilst also affording the ability to feature specialised warhead types, such as cluster, thermobaric, concrete-penetrating or high-explosive fragmentation, thus increasing effectiveness against targets from singular strikes (Marinov 2024).

1.2. Operational Deployment

Since early 2024 precision glide munitions, of both air- and ground-launched variants have extensively proliferated in deployment by both sides of the conflict in Ukraine. Ukraine received examples of Western air-launched munitions such as the JDAM-ER (72km range, 89kg warhead) (Air Force Technology 2023) and AASM Hammer (70+km range, 89kg warhead), as well as the ground-launched GLSDB (150km range, 62kg warhead) (Air Force Technology 2023). Russia has made extensive use of the UMPK glide module (45-70km range) (Reisner 2025), which has been demonstrated in use on the FAB-250, FAB-500 FAB-1500 and FAB-3000 general-purpose high explosive bombs, the ODAB-500 and ODAB-1500 thermobaric bomb and the RBK-500 cluster sub-

munition bomb, with also the more recent introduction of the D-30SN (up to 165km range, 100kg warhead) in both air and ground-launched versions (Nikolov 2024, Reisner 2025).

Russian operations are of particular importance in understanding the modern role of precision glide munitions due to their intensity of use and overall effect on the battlefield. In terms of intensity, bombardments by glide munition types have reached upwards of one hundred strikes per day along the entirety of the frontline, whilst during specific set-piece engagements, such as the case of the Battle of Avdeevka, witnessed up to one hundred strikes in a 24-hour timespan against a singular section of the frontline (Figure no. 2) (Marinov 2024). The main method of operational deployment in Ukraine has been based on aerial delivery platforms, such the Russian Su-34 fighter-bomber and includes the salvo-launch of two to four munitions based on the FAB-250 or FAB-500. Larger munitions, FAB-1500 and FAB-3000 have also been demonstrated in more singular episodes of usage.

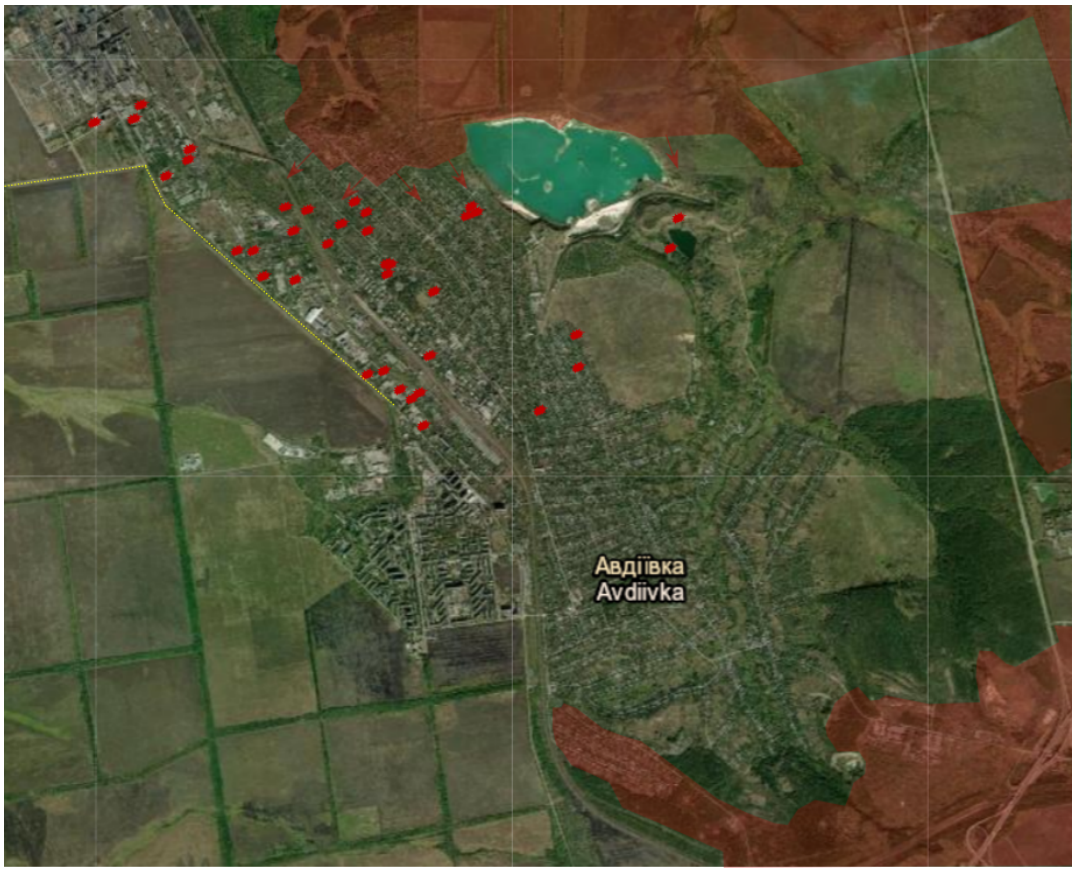


Figure no. 2: FAB strikes on Avdeevka around February 2nd, 2024.
Legend: FAB strikes geolocated as per red icons. Russian control and movement in red. Ukrainian forces main supply route (MSR) in yellow (Marinov 2024).

On the other hand, Ukraine has made particular use of the AASM Hammer, which has allowed a substantial boost to the operational effectiveness of the Ukrainian Air Force in utilising the munition's boost-glide functionality to conduct airstrikes from low altitudes in conditions of contested air space (Army Recognition 2025).

The use of precision glide munitions in Ukraine, due to their increased availability, has been noted in several operational roles. In the role of a breakthrough weapon against specific frontline positions, different munitions with the UMPK module have been used to bombard positions at a given section of the frontline, as a substitute or complementary to artillery fire. Against hardened positions,

such as trench bastions or build-up residential areas, the high explosive mass of even singular munitions has been noted to deliver effective destruction. In the interdiction role, UMPK equipped munitions have been recorded used in the operational depth in undermining bridge infrastructure, temporary points of unit concentration, munitions storage facilities and against positions of fire assets, such as artillery and air-defence systems. In particular, by the latter half of 2024, the use of the FAB-3000 with the UMPK module has been noted against troop concentration areas close to the frontline.

1.3. Effectiveness

In the conditions of the Ukrainian conflict, precision glide munitions have demonstrated their effectiveness in complex battlefield conditions, where counter-battery fire has become increasingly effective and where neither side enjoys aerial superiority. Glide munitions have thus allowed both sides to utilise aerial platforms at stand-off ranges to support frontline operations. Similarly, the ground-launched variants have allowed MLRS systems, such as the HIMARS to inflict fire damage from extended ranges and with greater precision.

The ease of manufacture of glide modules further reinforces an effectiveness of employment through quantity. In 2024, estimations of Russian production of UMPK kits places output at 40,000, whilst for 2025, production is set to reach 70,000 (Watling and Reynolds 2025, 7). Thus, effectiveness on the battlefield becomes limited by the number of launch systems available to the user. If the consideration is made for the proliferation of use with unmanned aerial vehicles, then the volume of precision glide munitions will further increase and become less dependent on traditional aerial platforms. An October 2024 incident followed by the examination of the wreckage of a fallen Russian S-70 “Okhotnik” stealth unmanned aerial vehicle, demonstrated that the particular platform was armed and possibly being tested with the D-30SN glide munition (Newdick 2024).

In the aforementioned Battle of Avdeevka, precision glide munitions, employed *en masse* were critical in facilitating a final breakthrough of Ukrainian defences in the north of the city (Peck 2024). Russian forces bombarded both frontline positions, facilitating the advance by its own units, as well as the Ukrainian main supply route into the city, thus starving the principal defence areas of supplies and making the concentration of forces for potential counterattacks impossible, leading to the main defensive nodes in the city centre and coking plant being gradually separated and cut off, precipitating the eventual fall of the city (Figure 2) (Marinov 2024).

The analysis of precision glide munitions in the context of the Ukraine conflict reveals their profound impact on modern warfare. Examined systems, leveraging advancements in satellite guidance, modular design, and cost-effective production, have emerged as a cornerstone of precision glide munition effectiveness on the modern battlefield. Their ability to deliver precision strikes at stand-off ranges, coupled with diverse warhead types, has rendered them indispensable in both offensive and defensive operations. The conflict in Ukraine has demonstrated their versatility, from breaking through entrenched defences to interdicting supply lines and neutralizing high-value targets. However, their effectiveness is not without limitations. The reliance on GPS and other guidance systems makes them vulnerable to electronic warfare, while their low heat signature complicates interception efforts. The mass production of glide kits, exemplified by Russia’s UMPK modules, underscores the challenge of countering saturation tactics. As the battlefield evolves, so too must the strategies to mitigate these threats. The lessons from Ukraine highlight the need for integrated defensive systems, doctrinal innovation, and investment in emerging technologies. Precision glide munitions are not merely a tactical tool, but a strategic enabler, reshaping the dynamics of modern conflict and demanding a proactive response.

2. Methods for Effective Counteraction

Having examined the core characteristics of precision glide munitions expressed in their capabilities, methods of deployment and effectiveness on the modern battlefield, the argument has

been placed forward that this specific weapons class has an expanding and vital role on the battlefield, thus precipitating further deliberation as to the methods of its effective counteraction. Throughout the conflict in Ukraine and since the beginning of mass deployment of precision glide munitions, no effective universal method of counteraction has been demonstrated, but vital observable lessons and more importantly, vectors of future development can be derived, allowing to draw conclusions and discuss a range of methods from the operationally proven to the hypothetical. The methods examined can be based on the approach towards engaging (neutralising) specific elements within the overall weapons complex. The complex incudes both the launch platform (air- or ground-based), the glide munition itself, as well as the corresponding characteristics, such as the range to the target it is engaging. The overall engagement zone for glide munitions can thus be stated to range from the basing site of carrier platform itself (several hundred kilometres) to the active phase of deploying the glide munition (up to 150-165 kilometres) against a specific target. Based on the specific target itself, whether it is on the line of contact or within the operational depth, methods of counteraction with varying engagement ranges can be utilised.

Based upon the conflict in Ukraine, the first and most effective method of counteraction has been demonstrated to be the engagement of either the launch platform or storage sites for the glide munitions themselves (Hoehn and Courtney 2024). Long range fire assets have been operationally utilised to engage the launch platforms either in the process of firing or when parked at either permanent or temporary deployment positions. Launch platforms have further proven to be vulnerable when in the process of deploying glide munitions. Aerial platforms, in particular due to the range of glide munitions and the required flight altitude for munitions release, can fall victim to long-range air defence assets. Similarly, ground-launch platforms can fall victim to detection and neutralisation when *enroute* or immediately after conducting fire missions close to the frontline. However, in all cases, bringing assets within sufficient range to engage launch platforms can have effect of exposing them to detection and neutralisation by the adversary – the example of neutralised long-range air defence assets from both sides (Patriot and S-300V batteries) close to the line of combat contact (Military Watch Magazine 2024).

After munitions release from the carrier platform, interception becomes a much more difficult, but not impossible task. Throughout the conflict, the most efficient method of degrading the performance of glide munitions has been demonstrated to be through the employment of electronic warfare (EW) methods, which can degrade the precision of the weapon (Hoehn and Courtney 2024) – specifically jamming and spoofing of the satellite navigation signals. Russian EW systems have been noted to be particularly effective against numerous types of GPS-reliant munitions, including the discussed JDAM and GLSDB (Gall and Golovin 2024), with known performance decreases in other munitions such as the 155mm “Excalibur” guided-shell facing a degradation in accuracy from 70% to 6% (Patt 2024, 3). EW means offer advantages compared to other methods of counteraction to be discussed in their ability to offer spherical coverage of a large area and effectiveness against numerous munitions types. However, certain disadvantages also manifest – such system offer degradation in performance, either through decreased accuracy (jamming) or through a redirection of the projectile from its original coordinates (spoofing), yet the projectile remains live and will inevitably produce an impact. Moreover, such systems are expensive and can be lost when providing coverage close to the frontline, especially in modern battlefield conditions and the existence of radiation homing missiles, including specialised jamming homing kits for glide munitions (such as for the JDAM-ER) (Trevithick 2024, Defence Express 2024).

Alternatively, neutralisation of glide munitions must rely on direct interception through air-defence assets. In order to ensure interception, such assets must necessarily provide adequate coverage of protected areas, which as the conflict in Ukraine has demonstrated, includes coverage of frontline positions. The requirement for such an air-defence umbrella, raises the question as to which specific sets of systems can be utilised in such a role and which can effectively engage glide munitions in a cost-effective manner. The lack of a significant infra-red (IR) heat signature predisposes problems of

employing systems relying on IR tracking (such as MANPADS and certain short-range air defence assets) (Hambling 2025), and no discernible episode of the use of such systems has been recorded in Ukraine. Instead tracking and engagement must rely on either radar-guidance, or other forms of direct line-of-sight tracking. The scale of deployment of glide munitions in Ukraine has demonstrated the requirement for mass interception in order to provide effective coverage of areas. In terms of sophisticated radar-guided long-range air defence assets, such a prospect is unfeasible due to both cost of individual missile interceptors and inherent vulnerability of the missile defence complex close to the line of combat contact. Thus, the role of interception must be relegated to other air-defence means.

With the increased requirements for saturating frontline areas with effective means to counter aerial threats, such as small aerial attack munitions (FPV drones and loitering munitions), a potential solution for countering glide munitions can also be sought after in short-range air defence platforms (SHORAD). One solution to future SHORAD capabilities, which are severely lacking within NATO, is through the introduction of mobile barrel-type systems, such as the Rheinmetall Oerlikon "Skynex", which utilises a 35 mm radar-guided revolver-type cannon with air-burst munitions to inflict a kinetic kill on targets (Rheinmetall 2024). Such systems, are sought in mobile configurations, such as the Rheinmetall Boxer Skyranger 30, which can be brought close to the combat line and be equally capable to exfiltrate to avoid detection and destruction by enemy fire assets. Another solution in SHORAD capabilities presented to Ukraine relies on the use of smaller guided interceptor missiles. The "Vampire" system, which utilises the Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System II (APKWS) rockets through optical tracking is modular enough to be fitted on a variety of platforms, including light vehicles. The specific system has been operationally deployed against both aerial drones and loitering munitions. However, the cost of interceptor missiles, at 27,000 USD still favours glide bombs in the cost-benefit ratio (Smith 2024, Helfrich and Rogoway 2022). Regardless, none of the above systems have been demonstrated in Ukraine to effectively provide coverage against glide munitions. If the consideration is made that radar or optical tracking of mentioned and other such SHORAD systems, as well as the method of the effector being viable against glide munitions, the efficient saturation of the operational space with enough assets and the economy of interception in the face of massive use of glide munitions could make even such methods ineffective, thus requiring a shift in discussion to other methods (Hambling 2025).

Aside from existing air defence systems, perspective methods have also been put forward as a solution. One possibility is to utilise cheap interceptors in the forms of unmanned aerial platforms of the quad-copter type, which have demonstrated a sufficient economy of scale in Ukraine. The concept relies on methods utilised to engage aerial drones and loitering munitions, in a similar role, but against glide munitions (Hambling 2025). Small drones deployed in the tactical and operational spaces, could engage incoming glide munitions through direct interception. This method of counteraction would require sufficient detection, tracking and guidance of drone effectors, as well as sufficient technical capabilities in terms of speed and tracking of the drone platforms itself, which considering the size limitations and requirements for a cost-effective platform, can be considered to constitute a challenge. The overarching conceptualisation, as defined in research and development tenders (Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander Transformation 2025), would place a future emphasis on resource efficiency, portability, scalability and greater integration of advanced solutions, such as artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), internet of things (IoT) or other unconventional techniques that enhance performance. A greater reliance on solutions, which incorporate artificial intelligence (such as in the role of target recognition, identification and direction) in a decentralised networked and autonomous weapons system, which utilises mass drone effectors, provides an avenue towards effective counteraction of glide munitions in the wider combat space and beyond the capabilities of other discussed systems.

A more passive approach in the absence of near-term effective solutions could rely on doctrinal changes, which should strive to lessen the effectiveness of glide munition bombardment. As the conflict in Ukraine has demonstrated, glide bomb effectiveness particularly excels in cases where

the engaged targets include fortifications, urban areas and large concentrations of forces. As such, an effort to decrease vulnerability of targets through a change in the deployment of conventional forces on or near the combat line would decrease the impact of glide munitions on the warfighting potential.

Regardless of the individual solutions proposed, a compressive answer to precision glide munitions must utilise a systemic approach where multiple components form the proposed solutions are networked together into a system of response with a multilayered approach to negating the threat posed. A resilient system of counteraction is required, which includes multiple networked systems, which include countermeasures against both glide munitions and other types of projectiles can be seen as the most cohesive approach towards future enhancement of military capabilities.

The counteraction of precision glide munitions demands a multifaceted strategy that addresses vulnerabilities across their operational lifecycle. Neutralising launch platforms and degrading guidance systems through electronic warfare remain the most proven methods, yet limitations—such as interceptor cost and incomplete interception — highlight the need for complementary solutions. Short-range air defence systems, like mobile gun-based or missile-based platforms and networked drone interceptors, show promise, but require further development to achieve cost parity with mass-produced glide bombs. Passive measures, including force dispersion and hardened logistics, can reduce targeting efficacy, while emerging technologies like AI-augmented detection systems offer transformative potential. However, no single solution suffices; success hinges on integrating these methods into a cohesive, adaptive framework. The Ukrainian experience demonstrates that resilience lies not in isolated systems, but in systemic redundancy – layering interception, deception, and doctrinal agility to counter saturation tactics. As military personnel worldwide confront this escalating threat, investment in interoperable defences and international collaboration will be pivotal to maintaining strategic parity.

Conclusions

The proliferation of precision glide munitions in the conflict in Ukraine underscores their transformative role in modern warfare. These systems, combining cost-effectiveness, stand-off capabilities, and modular adaptability, have redefined the dynamics of firepower delivery in high-intensity conflicts. Their ability to degrade entrenched positions, disrupt supply lines, and overwhelm traditional air defences highlights a critical vulnerability in conventional military doctrines and force capability. While electronic warfare and interception efforts offer partial mitigation, the absence of a universal countermeasure necessitates a paradigm shift in defensive strategies. A holistic approach - integrating layered air defence networks, decentralized force deployments, and emerging technologies like AI-driven interception systems - is essential to neutralize the threat. Furthermore, the lessons from Ukraine emphasise the urgency for NATO and allied forces to prioritize innovation in both materiel and doctrine, ensuring resilience against adversaries leveraging mass-produced precision munitions. Future research must focus on scalable, cost-effective solutions, such as drone swarms and efficient SHORAD, to bridge the gap between evolving threats and defensive capabilities. Ultimately, the glide munition’s ascendancy is not merely a tactical challenge, but a strategic imperative, demanding collaboration across industry, academia, and defence institutions to safeguard the integrity of modern battlefields.

Acknowledgement and financing: This work was supported by the NSP SD program, which has received funding from the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria under the grant agreement no. Д01-74/19.05.2022

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Air and Space Forces Magazine. n.d. *GBU-31/32/38 JDAM*. Air and Space Forces Magazine. Accessed May 1, 2024. https://www.airandspaceforces.com/weapons-platforms/gbu-31-32-38-jdam/

Air Force Technology. 2023. *Joint Direct Attack Munition-Extended Range (JDAM-ER) Precision-Guided Bombs, USA*. Air Force Technology. March 3. Accessed May 1, 2024. https://www.airforce-technology.com/projects/joint-direct-attack-munition-extended-range-jdam-usa/?cf-view

Army Recognition. 2025. *First Recorded Combat Use of French AASM-250 Hammer Bombs by Ukrainian Su-25 Aircraft*. January 2. Accessed January 21, 2025. https://www.armyrecognition.com/focus-analysis-conflicts/army/conflicts-in-the-world/russia-ukraine-war-2022/first-recorded-combat-use-of-french-aasm-250-hammer-bombs-by-ukrainian-su-25-aircraft

Commission des affaires étrangères, de la défense et des forces armées. 2012. *Projet de loi de finances pour 2013: Défense : équipement des forces*. November 22. Accessed May 1, 2024. https://www.senat.fr/rap/a12-150-8/a12-150-815.html#toc290

Defence Express. 2024. *Special JDAM-ER with Anti-EW Homing Head are Prepared to Transfer from U.S. to Ukraine*. May 4. Accessed February 11, 2025. https://en.defence-ua.com/weapon_and_tech/special_jdam_er_with_anti_ew_homing_head_are_prepared_to_transfer_from_us_to_ukraine-10394.html

Gall, Carlotta, and Vladyslav Golovin. 2024. *Some U.S. Weapons Stymied by Russian Jamming in Ukraine*. May 25. Accessed February 10, 2025. https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/25/world/europe/us-weapons-russia-jamming-ukraine.html

Hambling, David. 2025. *A Ukrainian Mystery Weapon Is Shooting Down Russian Glide Bombs*. Forbes. February 13. Accessed February 15, 2025. https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidhambling/2025/02/13/a-ukrainian-mystery-weapon-is-shooting-down-russian-glide-bombs/

Headquarters Supreme Allied Commander Transformation. 2025. "REQUEST FOR INNOVATIVE PARTICIPATION (RFIP) RFIP-ACT-SACT-25-16." *Request for Innovative Participation (RFIP) Call for Industry and Academia*. NATO, January

Helfrich, Emma, and Tyler Rogoway. 2022. *What The VAMPIRE Weapon System The U.S. Is Sending To Ukraine Can Actually Do*. The War Zone. August 26. Accessed February 20, 2025. https://www.twz.com/what-the-vampire-weapon-system-the-u-s-is-sending-to-ukraine-can-actually-do

Hoehn, John, and William Courtney. 2024. *How Ukraine Can Defeat Russian Glide Bombs*. RAND. June 27. Accessed February 10, 2025. https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/06/how-ukraine-can-defeat-russian-glide-bombs.html

Kharchenko, Tania, and Joe Inwood. 2024. *Russia's glide bombs devastating Ukraine's cities on the cheap*. BBC. May 19. Accessed February 21, 2025. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cz5drkr8l1ko

Marinov, Mario. 2024. "Modern Guided Glide Munitions. Use and Lessons from the Conflict in Ukraine." *Conference Proceedings: Scientific research, innovation and industrial cooperation – a paradigm for adequate defence* (Defence Institute "Tzvetan Lazarov").

Military Watch Magazine. 2024. *Ukrainian Patriot Missile Unit Takes Heavy Losses in Iskander Precision Strike: Replenishments Unlikely*. March 11. Accessed February 10, 2025. https://militarywatchmagazine.com/article/ukrainian-patriot-losses-iskander

Newdick, Thomas. 2024. *Russia's S-70 Hunter Drone Was Armed When Shot Down By Friendly Fighter Over Ukraine*. The War Zone. October 7. Accessed February 20, 2025. https://www.twz.com/air/russias-s-70-hunter-drone-was-armed-when-shot-down-by-friendly-fighter-over-ukraine

Nikolov, Boiko. 2024. *Su-34HBO light bomber appeared with 120km-range D-30SN glide bomb*. September 5. Accessed February 10, 2025. https://bulgarianmilitary.com/2024/09/05/su-34hbo-light-bomber-appeared-with-120km-range-d-30sn-glide-bomb/

Patt, Daniel. 2024. "Too Critical to Fail: Getting Software Right in an Age of Rapid Innovation." Washington DC: House Committee on Armed Services Subcommittee on Cyber, Information Technologies, and Innovation, March 13.

Peck, Michael. 2024. *Glide Bombs: The Russian Wonder Weapon?* CEPA. April 9. Accessed February 20, 2025. https://cepa.org/article/glide-bombs-the-russian-wonder-weapon/

Raytheon. 2010. *GBU-53/B SDB II Small Diameter Bomb Increment II*. Air and Space Forces Magazine.

Redacción Aviacionline. 2024. *Russian UMPB D-30SN bomb, similar to the US GBU-39 SDB, makes its appearance in Ukraine*. March 30. Accessed February 21, 2025. https://www.aviacionline.com/russian-umpb-d-30sn-bomb-similar-to-the-us-gbu-39-sdb-makes-its-appearance-in-ukraine

Reisner, Markus. 2025. *The Ukrainian Purgatory*. Österreichs Bundesheer. February 21. Accessed February 21, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDRjughhXMg

Rheinmetall. 2024. *Networked Air Defence: Oerlikon Skynex® air defence system*. Rheinmetall. Accessed February 20, 2025. https://www.rheinmetall.com/en/products/air-defence/air-defence-systems/networked-air-defence-skynex#anchor-revolver-gun-mk3

Roblin, Sebastien. 2023. *The Air Force Is Making a Big Bet on StormBreaker Bombs*. Popular Mechanics. April 3. Accessed May 1, 2024. https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/aviation/a43483654/air-force-buying-stormbreaker-smart-bombs/

SAFRAN. n.d. *AASM HAMMER™: Smart tactical air-to-surface weapon family*. SAFRAN.

Smith, Jordan. 2024. *VAMPIREs in Ukraine: L3's New Rocket System*. Grey Dynamics. July 12. Accessed February 20, 2025. https://greydynamics.com/vampires-in-ukraine-l3s-new-rocket-system/

Trevithick, Joseph. 2024. *JDAM-ER Winged Bombs With Seekers That Home In On GPS Jammers Headed To Ukraine*. May 4. Accessed February 10, 2025. https://www.twz.com/air/jdam-er-winged-bombs-with-seekers-that-home-in-on-gps-jammers-headed-to-ukraine

US Air Force. n.d. *GBU-39B Small Diameter Bomb Weapon System*. US Air Force. Accessed May 1, 2024. https://www.af.mil/About-Us/Fact-Sheets/Display/Article/104573/gbu-39b-small-diameter-bomb-weapon-system/

US Navy. 2021. *AGM-154 Joint Standoff Weapon (JSOW)*. US Navy. September 27. Accessed May 2, 2024. https://www.navy.mil/Resources/Fact-Files/Display-FactFiles/Article/2166748/agm-154-joint-standoff-weapon-jsow/

US Navy. 2019. *LI 2230 - JT Standoff Weapon (JSOW)*. Washington: US Government.

Watling, Jack, and Nick Reynolds. 2025. *Tactical Developments During the Third Year of the Russo–Ukrainian War*. London: Royal United Services Institute.

STRATEGIES XXI International Scientific Conference
The Complex and Dynamic Nature of the Security Environment,
Bucharest, Romania - February, 27th, 2025

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-17

PAGER EXPLOSIONS IN LEBANON – IMPACT ON REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Lyubosvet STOEV, PhD,
Associate Professor, "Georgi Stoykov Rakovski"
National Defense College, Sofia, Bulgaria.
E-mail: l.stoev@rndc.bg

Zhivo PETROV, PhD,
Colonel, Associate Professor, "Georgi Stoykov Rakovski"
National Defense College, Sofia, Bulgaria.
E-mail: zh.petrov@rndc.bg

Abstract: *The article relates to the interlude of 2024 Israel-Hezbollah war, and focuses onto the cyberattack against pagers and other electronic devices in Lebanon and Syria on September 17 and 18, 2024. A brief chronology of events is presented, followed by a review of pager technology for one-way communication. Features of the explosive substance used were examined and a hypothesis was developed for the method of attack. Finally, the consequences of the attack are analyzed as the both sides marched towards a full-scale war.*

Keywords: *Israel–Hezbollah conflict; supply chain infiltration; supply chain security; international reactions; Electronic Warfare; Psychological Operations; Cybersecurity; Middle East conflict.*

Introduction

The 2024 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon marked a significant escalation in the long-standing tensions between the two entities, with far-reaching implications for the region and beyond. The war unfolded against the backdrop of persistent geopolitical rivalries, ideological divides, and a history of confrontations that have periodically erupted into violence.

The roots of the 2024 war can be traced to decades of unresolved disputes and hostility between Israel and Hezbollah, the Lebanese Shiite militant and political organization. Since its establishment in the 1980s, Hezbollah has positioned itself as a resistance force against Israeli actions in Lebanon and the broader region. Israel, in turn, has regarded Hezbollah as a major security threat due to its extensive arsenal of rockets and its close ties to Iran.

The immediate catalyst for the 2024 war was a series of border skirmishes in late 2023, which saw an increase in rocket fire from southern Lebanon into northern Israel. These attacks, attributed to Hezbollah, prompted Israeli retaliatory airstrikes. The situation was further inflamed by political developments in Lebanon, including economic instability and internal divisions, which Hezbollah exploited to consolidate its power. Meanwhile, Israel faced its own domestic challenges, including political polarization and debates over security policies, which shaped its response to the escalating tensions.

The war officially began in February 2024, following a large-scale rocket barrage launched by Hezbollah into northern Israel, targeting both military and civilian infrastructure. Israel responded with a massive aerial campaign aimed at degrading Hezbollah's capabilities, focusing on weapons depots, command centers, and launch sites embedded in civilian areas.

One of the defining features of the conflict was its intensity and scope. Hezbollah's arsenal, reportedly bolstered by advanced Iranian-made precision-guided munitions, allowed it to strike deep into Israeli territory, including major cities such as Haifa and Tel Aviv. This marked a significant escalation compared to previous conflicts, such as the 2006 war.

On the Israeli side, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) employed advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence and drone swarms, to counter Hezbollah's tactics. Ground incursions into southern Lebanon were launched to dismantle tunnel networks and secure border areas. However, these operations faced stiff resistance from well-entrenched Hezbollah fighters, resulting in high casualties on both sides.

The war also saw significant civilian suffering. In Lebanon, Israeli airstrikes caused widespread destruction in Hezbollah-controlled areas, displacing tens of thousands of people. In Israel, rocket attacks forced millions into shelters and disrupted daily life. International humanitarian organizations reported a severe crisis in both countries, with urgent calls for ceasefires to address the plight of civilians. One of these events that caused mass civilian suffering was the exploding pagers attack, which unfold as follows.

1. Exploding Pagers Cyberattack

On September 17, 2024, hundreds of pagers were detonated in Beirut, in the Bekaa Valley, in the southern regions of Lebanon, as well as in the Syrian capital Damascus (where a Hezbollah delegation was located at that time). The first explosions started at 15:45 local time (UTC+3) and lasted for about an hour. The next day, digital radios, electric scooters, solar panels and laptops explode. More than 4,000 people were injured, and more than 30 were killed, including children. According to eyewitnesses, the pagers emitted an audible signal, which provoked the victims to bring the device to their face.

Initially, the media spread the notion that the pagers were infected with the virus, or were subjected to a DDOS attack that caused their batteries to overheat. Subsequently, it turned out that the explosions were due to an explosive substance - pentaerythritol tetranitrate (PETN).

1.1. Brief description of pagers

A pager, also known as a beeper is shown in Figure no. 1. It is a one-way communication device designed to receive short messages. Such messages are usually called alphanumeric for containing both digits and alphabet letters. A single radio relay station is capable of providing one-way text service coverage over a significant radius and to multiple users. Pagers are used by fire services, in emergency medicine, but also in logistics and in the restaurant and hotel business. The passive principle of one-way communication makes the pager a secure tool that does not reveal the location of its carrier and the fact of receiving the message.

Figure no. 1: A typical pager (Clipground.com)

The ill-fated pagers were supplied to Lebanon as part of a large order through frontmen and companies in a number of countries, while the pagers themselves were modeled after Gold Apollo Co., Ltd. is a Taiwanese manufacturer specializing in wireless paging systems. Founded in October

1995 by Hsu Ching-Kuang, the company initially produced numeric pagers for the domestic market. However, following the decline of pager services in Taiwan in 1999, Gold Apollo shifted its focus to international markets. By 2011, it had become a leading pager supplier, ranking first in the North American market and second in Europe.

In September 2024, Gold Apollo became embroiled in controversy when pagers bearing its trademark were linked to explosions in Lebanon targeting Hezbollah members. The company's founder, Hsu Ching-Kuang, denied involvement, stating that Gold Apollo had licensed its trademark to BAC Consulting, a Hungarian company responsible for the design and manufacturing of the implicated pagers. He stressed that the devices were not marked "Made in Taiwan" and that Gold Apollo played no role in their manufacture.

Gold Apollo's product line includes POCSAG/FLEX pagers and other short-range radio devices, such as restaurant paging systems. Despite the decline in pager usage due to the rise of smartphones, the company has maintained a presence in niche markets where pagers remain a reliable communication method.

The incident in Lebanon has led to investigations by Taiwanese authorities into Gold Apollo's business dealings and its relationship with BAC Consulting. The situation underscores the complexities of global manufacturing and brand licensing agreements.

1.2. Explosive substance - PETN

According to Sky News Arabia, the explosive substance used is penta-erythritol-tetranitrate PETN (or PENTA in Russian-language sources). In Figure no. 2 are shown Structural formula and powder of PENT. The explosive[6] was developed at the end of the 19th century in Germany and was used for military purposes during both world wars. High explosive with high detonation velocity (> 8000 m/s) and energy release (in pure form) about 1.5 times that of TNT (Childs, 1994). The substance is insoluble in water, but dissolves in some specific organic solvents, such as acetone and dimethylformamide. In turn, acetone is used in the production of lithium-polymer batteries. The electrolyte of the LiPo battery is a polymer gel in which lithium salts are dissolved.

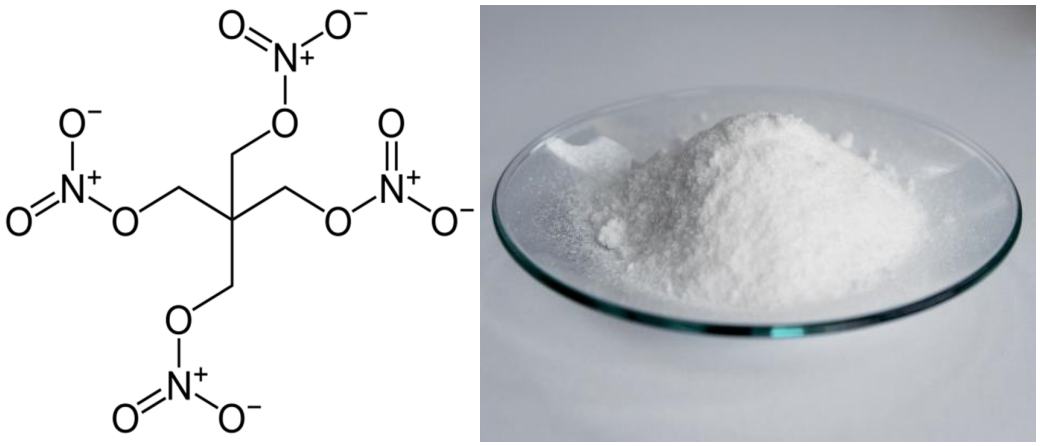


Figure no. 2: Structural formula and powder form of the explosive after laboratory synthesis (Wikimedia Commons)

In the case of exploding pagers (and subsequent radios, etc.), the world is witnessing the first exploding batteries. In figure 3 is shown internal structure of a lithium polymer cell, the author assumes that the explosive is dissolved in the electrolyte itself.

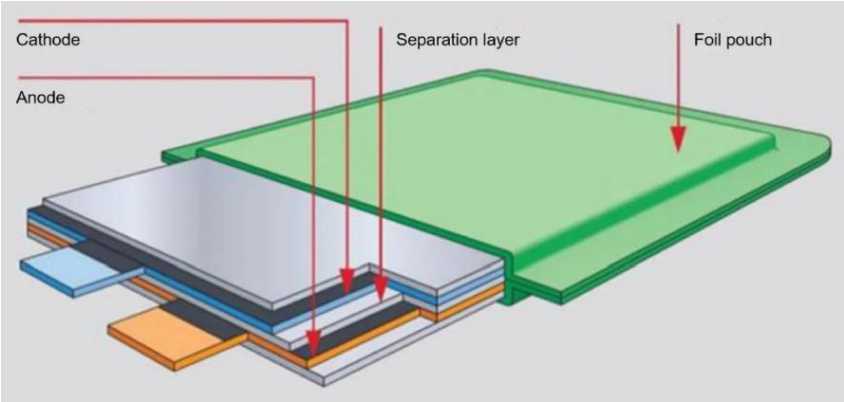


Figure no. 3: Internal structure of a lithium polymer cell.
(Mohammad Ghanaatpishe, 2014, "The lithium-ion battery modeling challenge:
A dynamic systems and control perspective")

1.3. Initiating the Explosions

According to eyewitness accounts, the blasts occurred an hour after 3:00 PM on September 17, 2024. They were preceded by a beep and a message prompting the victims to bring the device to their face. The media claim that the initiation takes place after a message is sent. However, this does not explain the large time interval in which the explosions occur. Expert assessment indicates that this is a cyberattack on the supply chain. This means that the malicious code that detonates the pagers is embedded as an alarm in the pager for the specific time (3:00 PM local time), the delay being either programmed or related to the accuracy of the clocks. The use of digital clocks allows a clockwork explosive to bet days, months and years ahead.

2. Consequences of the Explosions

The pager explosions on September 17, 2024, and the subsequent explosions of communications and other electronics the next day, had a large media coverage because of the many casualties, but, in practice, less than 0.3% of the victims of the attacks were linked to Hezbollah. Against this background, the escalation of the conflict on Israel's northern border continued with an increase in the intensity of airstrikes by the Israeli Air Force against Hezbollah targets in Lebanon and Syria. The ground operation of the Israeli army began with a long delay, and it was only talked about on October 1 of the same year. The significance of the September 17 and 18 blasts against the background of the airstrikes and the killing of Hezbollah's spiritual leader on September 27 is minimal.

Rather, the goal of the Israeli military and political leadership was to provoke a more serious conflict, broadly involving Hezbollah and the government of Syria. Exactly this happened two weeks later, when the larger war between Hezbollah and Israel started and Israeli troops invaded Lebanon.

The attack in Lebanon can be characterized as an act of terrorism, which violates Protocol 2 of the Geneva Convention, which prohibits the uncontrolled mining of everyday objects for civilian use. Unfortunately, this is an act that "opens Pandora's box" and may be implemented on a smaller or larger scale in the future, given the mass and universal use of "smart" electronics. Therefore, vigilance and careful evaluation of the process of acquisition, implementation and use of electronic devices is necessary.

As for the Lebanon itself, the 2024 war had profound regional implications. Iran, as Hezbollah's primary backer, played a crucial role by providing material and logistical support, further entrenching its influence in Lebanon. This drew condemnation from Israel's allies, particularly the United States, which provided military and diplomatic support to Israel during the conflict.

Other regional actors, including Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, condemned Hezbollah's actions but were cautious about openly aligning with Israel due to domestic sensitivities. Meanwhile,

Syria's role as a conduit for Iranian weapons to Hezbollah became a focal point of Israeli airstrikes, raising concerns about a broader regional war.

The international community was deeply divided in its response to the war. Western nations generally supported Israel's right to self-defense but urged restraint to minimize civilian casualties. In contrast, many in the Global South criticized Israel's actions, viewing them as disproportionate and highlighting the humanitarian toll in Lebanon.

The United Nations later attempted to broker a ceasefire, but negotiations were hampered by mutual distrust and conflicting demands. A temporary truce was eventually reached in late April 2024, mediated by France and Qatar, but it left many underlying issues unresolved.

3. Aftermath and Consequences

The 2024 war had a devastating impact on Lebanon, exacerbating its already dire economic crisis and further weakening state institutions. Hezbollah emerged from the conflict battered but still intact, claiming a symbolic victory by surviving the Israeli onslaught. However, its reputation among some Lebanese communities suffered due to the immense destruction and loss of life.

In Israel, the war reignited debates about the country's security policies and the effectiveness of its deterrence strategy. While the IDF inflicted significant damage on Hezbollah, the group's ability to sustain its operations underscored the limitations of military solutions to such conflicts.

The war also highlighted broader geopolitical dynamics, including the deepening divide between Iran and its regional adversaries, as well as the shifting role of global powers in the Middle East. The conflict underscored the urgent need for comprehensive diplomatic efforts to address the root causes of instability in the region, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the role of non-state actors, and the influence of external powers.

The full scope of the security consequences of the Lebanon pager attacks are hard to fully comprehend. First of all, it is a clear example of a so-called supply chain attack on a large scale and involving both hardware and software components. Up to now, the Cybersecurity establishment has dealt only with software supply chain attacks using network repositories. The Lebanon attack shows that such threat exists also in the domain of global trade with consumer and civilian electronics and also the trade with various smart devices with implications for the Internet-of-Things security. In this regard the trust among the Middle East onto both Taiwanese makers and European vendors of such electronics has severely deteriorated.

In order to cope with such multi-domain supply chain threats there are a few approaches to be adopted:

First of all, the end users should not rely onto the vendor certification and previous records. All new devices should be extensively and thoroughly analyzed and checked. It is not enough to them to be disassembled and visually inspected. All internal components of sample items should be inspected and subjected to destructive analysis – both chemical and functional. The electronics should be scanned, remodeled and analyzed. Finally, the device firmware should be copied, inspected and separately ran to check for all possible internal states and signals. If the software is scrambled and obfuscated, or anything else does not pass the security and safety, all the purchase should be rejected. A good policy would be to share all information for attempted smuggling of harmful device publicly, in the same time taking action against the possible perpetrator.

Second, the supply chain should be diversified not only with regards to the devices, but to the components of the system. Thus, the batteries should come from one provider, even better, the devices should work with batteries common on the market.

Third, the software should be created by independent developers, trusted and employed by the very purchasing organization. A good practice is the adoption of open source software and also open design of the purchased devices. As such the open source devices are tested by the public and all their deficiencies are dealt with. Any deviation from the standard would be easily detected.

All the above measures should prevent future attacks of such scale and scope.

Conclusion

The whole 2024 war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon was a stark reminder of the fragility of peace in the Middle East and the complex interplay of local, regional, and international factors driving conflict. While the immediate fighting may have subsided, the deep-seated issues that fueled the war remain unresolved, posing significant challenges for the region's future stability and security. The lessons of this conflict underscore the importance of dialogue, restraint, and sustained efforts to address the underlying causes of violence and build a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East.

From the point of view of the Cybersecurity and the security of physical electronic devices the attack showed an example to potential attackers all over the world. Such an attack requires a number of resources and most of all consistent financial resources, but otherwise it is not by anyway limited to state actors. That is why there are needed security policies which will not only help to increase trust in the vendors of equipment, but will also conduct screening tests for offensive and harmful items. Such security policies along with sharing incident info among at least the stakeholders will reduce the risk of repeating such events to acceptable levels.

BIBLIORAPHY:

AGGARWAL, Mithil et al. 2024. "Who made the exploding pagers? A messy global trail emerges behind deadly Lebanon blasts.", NBC News, Hong Kong, September 18, 2024.
https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/taiwan-firm-denies-making-pagers-used-lebanon-explosions-rcna171594

CHILDS, John.1994. "Explosives: A dictionary of military history and the art of war". ISBN 978-0-631-16848-5.

GRANTHAM-PHILIPS, Wyatte et al. 2024. "What to know about the two waves of deadly explosions that hit Lebanon and Syria", Associate Press, New York, September 19, 2024.
https://apnews.com/article/lebanon-israel-hezbollah-pager-explosion-e9493409a0648b846fdcadffdb02d71e

JEREMY BOB, Yonah and LAZNIK, Jakob. 2024. "Pager detonations wound thousands, majority Hezbollah members, in suspected cyberattack", Jerusalem Post, September 18, 2024.https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-820536

KATZ, Yaakov and HENDEL, Yoaz (2012) "Israel vs. Iran: The Shadow War", ISBN 13 978-1597976688.

MARX, Willem. 2024. "Did exploding pagers attack on Hezbollah in Lebanon violate international law?", National Public Radio, Washington DC, September 20, 2024. https://www.npr.org/2024/09/20/g-s1-23812/lebanon-israel-exploding-pagers-hezbollah-international-law

OHCHR. 2024. Press release, UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, September 19, 2024. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/exploding-pagers-and-radios-terrifying-violation-international-law-say-un

SALHANI, Justin. 2024. "Exploding pagers, psychological warfare: Israel's attack on Hezbollah". September 18, 2024. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/9/18/chk_exploding-pagers-psychological-warfare-israels-attack-on-hezbollah

Science Madness. 2023. "Pentaerythritol tetranitrate". Science Madness, July 31 2023.
https://www.sciencemadness.org/smwiki/index.php/Pentaerythritol_tetranitrate

Sky News Arabia. 2024. "Sources uncover that Mossad is behind the pager attacks. What happened?", Sky News Arabia, Abu Dhabi, September 17, 2024 (in Arabic).
https://www.skynewsarabia.com/middle-east/1742443

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-18

DRONES – A THREAT TO SECURITY?

Ana-Raluca STAN, PhD,
Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies,
"Carol I" National Defence University, Bucharest, Romania.
E-mail: stanraluca12@gmail.com

Abstract*: Drones present both opportunities and challenges, offering significant benefits in various sectors (military, law enforcement and public safety, surveillance, media, agriculture, delivery and logistics services, etc.), and also posing threats that need to be addressed. Harnessing their benefits while minimising their potential threats can present an international security issue. It is important to focus our attention on the potential security risks they pose and implement regulations and countermeasures to mitigate these threats. Their overall impact on international security will depend on how they are managed, regulated, and controlled in the coming years.*

This paper addresses the contentious issue of employing drones and examine their potential negative effects on international security using a qualitative research method, mainly focusing on UAVs.

Keywords*: drones impact on security; drones as weapons; current security challenges; technology development; modern warfare; military innovation; SWOT analysis on drones.*

1. Overview of Drone Technology

Unmanned aerial vehicle (UAVs), "also known as drones, are aircraft that operate without a human pilot onboard, vary in size and weight and, due to their cost effectiveness and efficiency, are being deployed across industry for a myriad of purposes. They can be controlled by a human or operate autonomously, using pre-programming and automation" (Cooperative Research Centres, 2024). "As UAV technology continues to evolve, they are becoming increasingly sophisticated, fitted with state-of-the-art sensors, cameras, and image processing software to provide more efficient and accurate data" (Cooperative Research Centres, 2024).

These devices could be misused in ways that threaten human security and may serve as tools for illegal activities or weapons that could impact global security.

There are several types of unmanned systems categorized based on the domain they operate in:

- *UAVs (Air),* already mentioned, are autonomous aerial systems used for surveillance, delivery, agriculture, and military applications. Regarding a possible confusion between the term UAV and UAS (unmanned Aircraft Systems), in essence UAV is the vehicle while UAS refers to the complete system required to operate a UAV;
- *UGVs (Unmanned Ground Vehicles),* vehicles designed for ground-based operations, including military robotics, disaster response, and agricultural automation;
- *USVs (Unmanned Surface Vehicles),* autonomous or remotely controlled vessels that operate on water surfaces, often used for surveying, monitoring, and naval operations;
- *UUVs (Unmanned Underwater Vehicles),* subdivided into: AUVs (Autonomous Underwater Vehicles), operate independently for exploration, mapping, and data collection; ROVs (Remotely Operated Vehicles), tethered and controlled by operators for underwater tasks such as repairs and inspections;
- *Unmanned Space Systems, include satellites and robotic space exploration vehicles like* rovers.

The impact of drones has its origins in military innovation, technological advancement, and the development of civilian applications. The concept of drones can be traced back to 1849, even before the advent of modern aviation. During the Austro-Italian War of 1866, Austria deployed unmanned balloons filled with explosives against Venice, marking one of the earliest recorded uses of remotely delivered weaponry. This early usage inspired further exploration of automated aerial systems.

Nikola Tesla contributed foundational ideas that influenced the development of remote-controlled devices, including UAVs. In 1898 he demonstrated a remote-controlled boat during an electrical exhibition at Madison Square Garden in New York, called "*teleautomaton*" (Photo no. 1: *1898 – Telautomaton – Nikola Tesla*). By introducing the wireless control and envisioned their usage in warfare and other applications laid the groundwork for later innovations in remotely piloted vehicles. His work remains an inspiration for the broader field of robotics and remote-controlled systems.

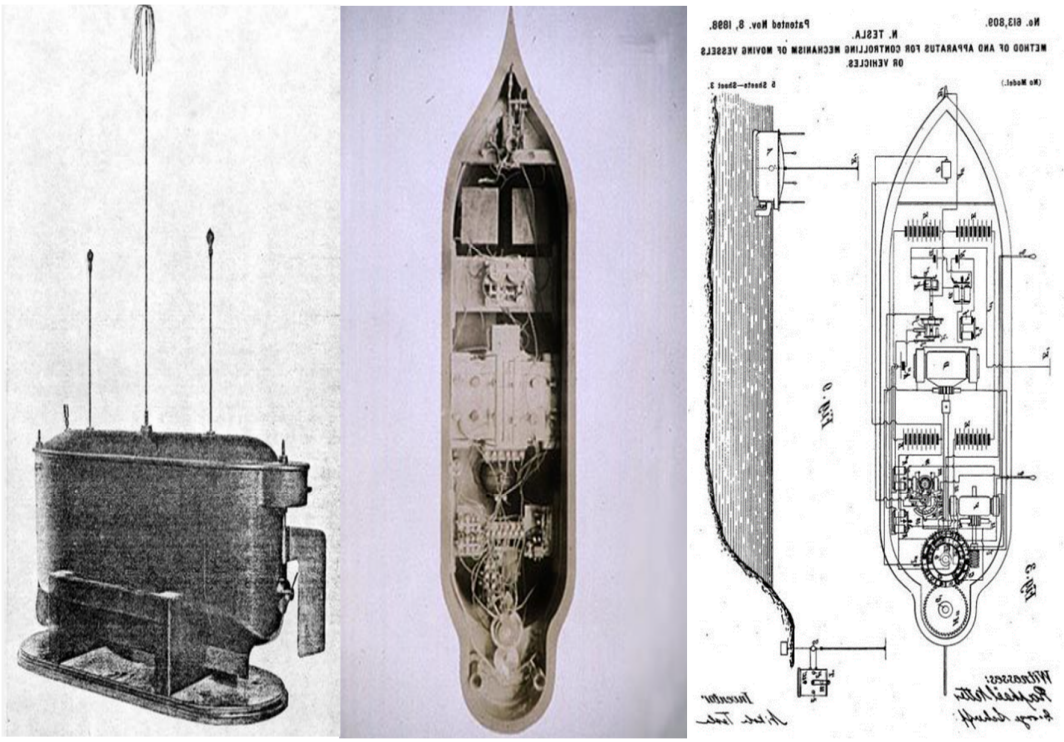


Figure no. 1: 1898 – Telautomaton – Nikola Tesla (Cyberneticzoo, 2010)

Thereafter, in 1916, during World War I, British engineer Archibald Montgomery Low[1], working under the Royal Flying Corps (RFC), created one of the first powered drone aircraft which was a prototype of a pilotless aircraft that utilised radio signals for control-*the Aerial Target*. Although it was never deployed in combat, its development marked the beginning of the journey toward modern drones.

[1] Archibald Montgomery Low (17 October 1888 – 13 September 1956) developed the first powered drone aircraft. He was an English consulting engineer, research physicist and inventor, and author of more than 40 books. He has been called "the father of radio guidance systems" due to his pioneering work on planes, torpedoes boats and guided rockets.

Figure no. 2: Aerial target –RFC in the First World War
(Imperial War Museums n.d.)

The pressures of World War II (1939-1945) significantly accelerated the development of drones. The Germans introduced the *V-1 flying bomb (also known as a "buzz bomb" or "doodlebug")*, a cruise missile capable of traveling hundreds of kilometres, making it one of the first widely used unmanned aerial systems in warfare. Meanwhile, the United States (US) developed drones such as *the Radioplane OQ-2*, manufactured by the Radioplane Company, which was primarily used for target practice to train gunners. This was followed by the updated version, the *OQ-3*, which became the most widely used target drone in US service (Newcome, 2004).

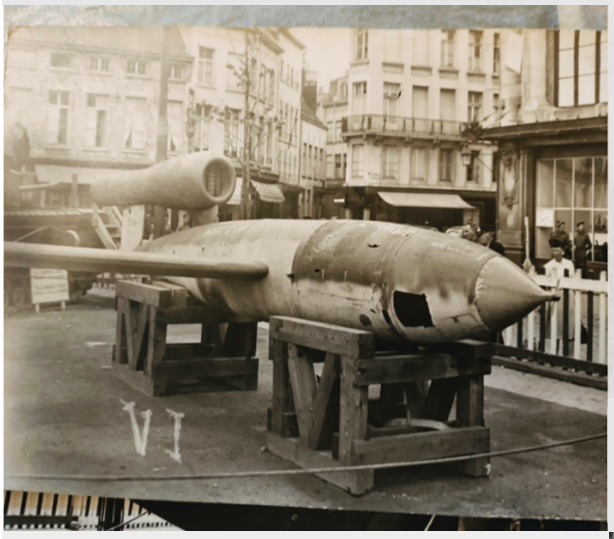
During the Cold War (1947-1991), drones evolved from basic technology into essential tools for surveillance and intelligence gathering. The US military's *Ryan Firebee (Ryan Model 124/BQM-34A Firebee)*, introduced in the 1950s, was one of the earliest jet-propelled unmanned aerial vehicles capable of collecting reconnaissance data. As tensions between global powers increased, drones became essential for conducting high-risk intelligence missions, particularly over enemy territory.

The advancements in drone technology during the 1960s and 1970s highlighted their significance in reducing risks faced by pilots, especially during the Vietnam War. *The Ryan Model 147 "Lightning Bug" (AQM-34)*, derived from the Firebee, conducted hundreds of surveillance missions over Vietnam and the surrounding regions, demonstrating the significant value of drones in providing real-time battlefield intelligence.

The emergence of modern drones became prominent during the period from the 1980s to the 2000s. The 1980s marked a turning point with the introduction of more autonomous and versatile drones. The *IAI Scout*, developed by Israel, was first used in combat missions by the South African Defence Force against Angola during Operation Protea[2]. IAI Scout was among the first UAVs to integrate video transmission for real-time surveillance, influencing US designs.

[2] Operation Protea was a military operation during the South African Border War and Angolan Civil War in which South African Defence Forces (SADF) destroyed several South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) bases in Angola. During the operation, which took place from 23 August to 4 September 1981, up to 5,000 SADF soldiers occupied Cunene province, Angola. Its objectives were to destroy the SWAPO command and training centre at Xangongo and its logistic bases at Xangongo and Ongiva.

3.1. V-1 flying bomb
(INTERGALACTIC n.d.)



3.2. Radioplane OQ-2
(Denny and Righter n.d.)

3.3. OQ-3
(Parsch 2003)

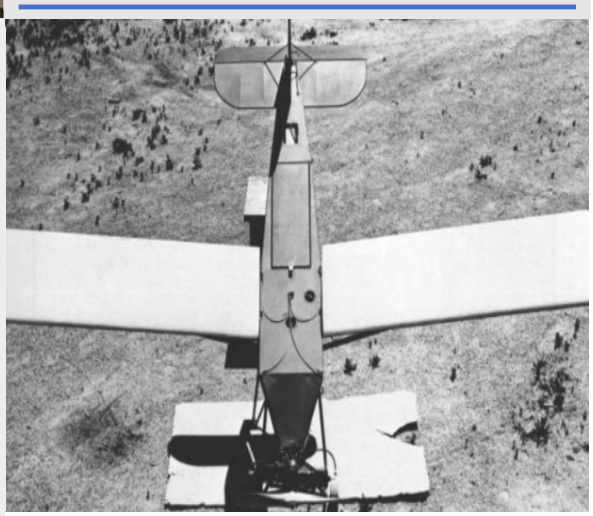


Figure no. 3*:* Advancements in drone technology (World War II)

During this period, drones designed for precision strikes were developed, with the *MQ-1 Predator* project emerging in the 1990s. The Predator[3] was extensively deployed in the Gulf War and subsequent conflicts. Equipped with cameras, sensors, and weapon systems, it played a significant role in redefining modern combat (Kaplan, 2018).

[3] Development of the Predator actually began in the 1980s. The decade that brought us big hair parachute pants, and Punky Brewster also brought us improved unmanned aerial technology. Aerospace engineer and Israeli immigrant Abraham E. Karem built the first Predator prototype, the "Albatross", in his garage. In 1996, the Department of Defense chose the US Air Force to operate the Predator, and the drone entered combat over the skies of Bosnia. By the late 1990s, the Predator was equipped with a live satellite video link and a laser designator to illuminate targets and guide weapons dropped from other aircraft.

The early 2000s presented the *MQ-9 Reaper*, an upgrade Predator, combined long flight endurance with advanced strike capabilities, solidifying their role in counter-terrorism operations (led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan)[4].

Initially, drones were primarily used for military purposes, but in the 2010s, they started to enter civilian markets due to advancements in miniaturization and affordability. They quickly became popular tools for photography, film-making, agriculture, and delivery services. Additionally, drones proved to be vital in disaster response, environmental monitoring, and medical deliveries.

4.1 Ryan Firebee
(Combat Air Museum n.d.)

4.2. The Ryan Model 147 "Lightning Bug" (AQM-34)
(National Museum of the United States Air Force n.d.)

4.3. IAI Scout
(IAI n.d.)

4.4. MQ-1 Predator
(Hill Aerospace Museum 2020)

4.5. MQ-9 Reaper
(United States Air Force 2025)

Figure no. 4: Advancements in drone technology

2. Drones – Impact on Security

As presented, mostly in the military domain, drones are a technological asset due to their capacity of "unique tactical advantages and enhanced the operational efficiency in various combat scenarios" (Allen, 2022) "In Ukraine drones have become an important weapon to gain an asymmetric edge over Russian forces. Their availability, rapid development, ease of deployment and use make

[4] The Predator's exceptional surveillance capabilities were immediately evident, but no real effort to equip it with targeting systems or weapons occurred until 2000. By summer 2001, successful trials with the AGM-114 Hellfire and an onboard targeting system were complete and the Predator had fired missiles against targets in Afghanistan before year-end.

them indispensable in the military operations on Ukrainian soil. While this technology has altered the character of modern warfare, the UAVs have not had a decisive effect on the adversary to date" (Allen, 2022). In the Russia-Ukraine war, as illustrated in Photo no. 5*: Drones attacks in the Russia-Ukraine war*, drones have played a transformative role marking one of the first large-scale conflicts to heavily integrate unmanned aerial systems (UAS) for both offensive and defensive purposes. Mention some of the type of UAVs used:

- *Shahed-136 (Iranian drone)*, the "kamikaze" drone used by Russia for long-range attacks;
- *Bayraktar TB2 (Turkish drone)*, a game-changer used by Ukraine for ISR and precision strikes, has played a significant role in targeting Russian artillery and supply lines;
- *Orlan-10*, a Russian reconnaissance drone providing battlefield intelligence and artillery targeting;
- *DJI Mavic Series*, used by both Russia and Ukraine, consumer drones, widely modified for combat, being employed in reconnaissance and grenade drops, facing the risks of detection and targeting when operating them;
- *FPV drones*[5], custom-built drones used by Ukraine, equipped with explosives are used for precision attacks on tanks and other targets, often controlled via first-person view cameras;
- *UJ-22*, this Ukrainian designed long-range drone can strike targets up to 800 km away, targeting deep within Russian territory;
- *Kronshtadt Orion*, managed by Russia, comparable to the US Reaper drone, it has been used for air-to-ground missile strikes (AGM)[6].

Also, the exploitation of drones, properly equipped, could increase criminal activities, smuggling contraband across borders (illegal drugs, tobacco, weapons, etc.), contraband into prisons, espionage, and targeted crimes, being very difficult for the authorities to detect or intercept their operations. Their accessibility, low cost, and ability to bypass traditional security measures is the reason why drones have increasingly become tools for criminal activities.

Even if we do not know the veracity of the press information, "it is said that drones have been detected in the UK as being used to monitor areas where criminal activity is taking place, serving as a lookout to alert criminals in the event of law enforcement intervention" (Weinstein, 2023). Another example is along the US-Mexico border drones are employed to deliver small quantities of narcotics while avoiding detection. These methods are cost-effective and limit human involvement, reducing the risks to traffickers if the drone is intercepted (Russo, Dulani Woods, Michael J. D. Vermeer, & Brian A. Jack, 2024).

As beneficial inputs, providing both efficiency and cost-effectiveness, drones have the ability to gather data, provide real-time surveillance, and carry out tasks with precision and safety has made them indispensable tools. One of the most significant advancements is the U.S. military's focus on AI-driven drones designed to operate with minimal human intervention, offering increased efficiency and enhanced operational effectiveness in high-risk environments. This development is part of a broader strategy by the Department of Defence (DoD) to modernise defence technologies, particularly in response to growing security challenges in regions like the Indo-Pacific (U.S. military prioritizes AI-powered drones in defense modernization, 2024).

[5] First Person View Drone (FPV).
[6] AGM is a missile designed to be launched from military aircraft at targets on land or sea.

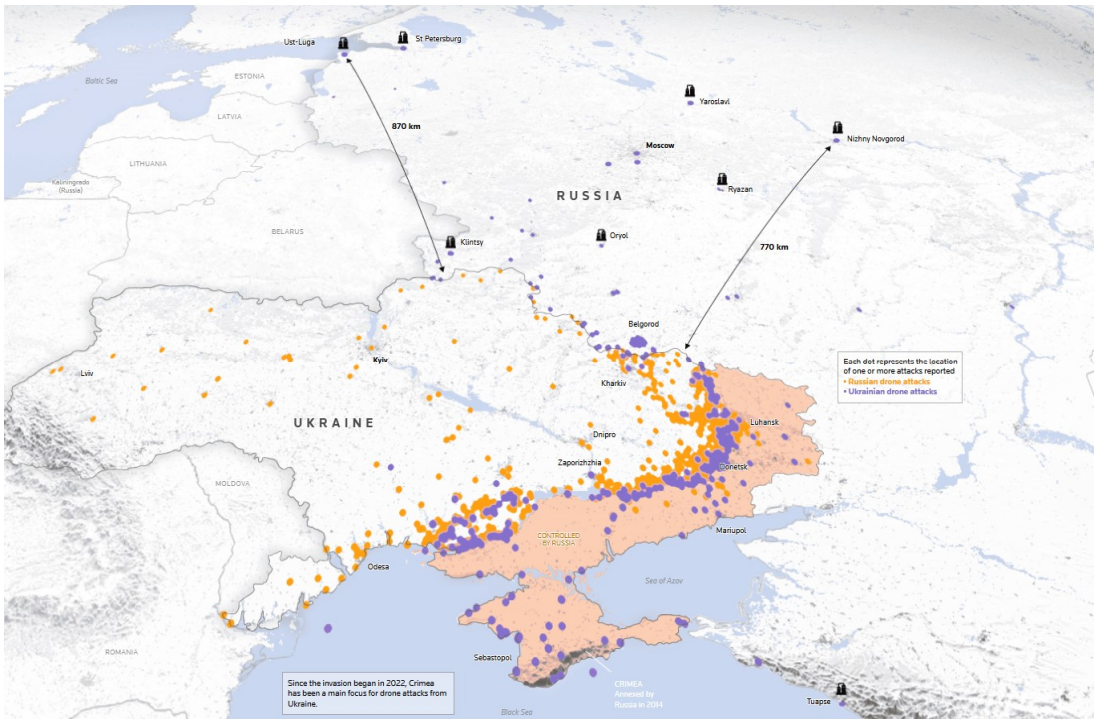


Figure no. 5: Drones attacks in the Russia-Ukraine war (Reuters 2024)

One of the most notable examples of a drone attack that posed a significant security threat occurred on September 14, 2019, when drones were used to attack two major oil facilities in Saudi Arabia. The attack exacerbated tensions in the Middle East, particularly between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and highlighted the risks posed by drones in regional conflicts. This incident provides a clear illustration of how drones can be weaponized to carry out large-scale attacks with substantial consequences.

Drones have become an increasingly important tool in global security operations, with both positive and negative implications for international security. Therefore, the SWOT analysis will present an overall picture of employing drones and their potential impact on security. Why SWOT? Because, from my point of view, the SWOT framework is a well-established method for analysing any system or technology, which makes the analysis easy to follow and provides a clear understanding of drones' multifaceted impact.

SWOT analysis on drones	
Strengths	***Weaknesses***
- used for surveillance and reconnaissance missions, allowing military and intelligence agencies to gather valuable information on potential threats and monitor conflict zones without putting personnel at risk.	- having the capacity to intrude upon personal privacy by clandestinely capturing images, videos, and various forms of confidential data from private properties and individuals without obtaining explicit consent (drones that are equipped with high-resolution cameras and other sensors).
- used in targeted airstrikes to eliminate targets that have a significant impact (terrorist leaders), in remote or difficult to	- raising important ethical, legal, and strategic inquiries that must be carefully considered to

reach areas; providing a more targeted approach to military engagement. - used in perilous environments, providing surveillance during protests, criminal incidents, or natural disasters, without compromising human lives.	ensure that they are used responsibly and in accordance with international law.
- having the potential to enhance global security by providing valuable intelligence and precision strike capabilities.	- leading to unintended civilian casualties, prompting criticism and the demand for increased transparency and accountability in drone operations.
	- posing a significant challenge for global security efforts being difficult to track and prevent the use of drones by non-state actors.
- more cost effective to purchase, operate, and maintain than traditional manned aircraft. - maritime drones are saving operational costs, such as crew and vessel maintenance.	- having limited battery life (most commercial drones) reducing their effectiveness for extended missions.
- adaptable and can be quickly deployed in various situations, from monitoring large events to inspecting infrastructure.	- the overall efficiency of the drone systems can be affected by harsh weather easily disrupting their operations.
	- drones are reliant on wireless communication, rendering them susceptible to potential threats: jamming, hacking, signal loss.
	- the usage of drones can interference with stringent laws and government regulations, especially in urban areas, limiting their deployment.
	- small drones with limited payload capacity have restricted ability to accommodate additional equipment (advanced sensors or heavier cameras, etc.).
	- lacking the capability to engage in direct communication with civilians for acquiring intricate intelligence.
Opportunities	***Threats***
- improvements in battery life, AI, and autonomous flight systems could enhance the capabilities of drones in security, along with the high level of technological advancement.	- violations of sovereignty, and the potential for misuse or abuse. In October 2024, two suspected drones breached Romanian airspace on consecutive days. These incidents raised concerns about violations of national sovereignty and the potential risks posed by unauthorized aerial vehicles (Donlevy, 2024).
- drones can be integrated into urban security systems, working alongside IoT and surveillance networks.	
- drones can play a crucial role in disaster management, providing real-time data for search and rescue missions or assessing damage in dangerous areas, boosting disaster response.	- proliferation of drones has made it easier for non-state actors, such as terrorist organisations, to acquire and use drones for malicious purposes, such as surveillance, reconnaissance, and attacks.

-beyond surveillance, drones can be used in law enforcement for mass control, crime scene documentation, and suspect tracking, enhancing security applications.	- terrorist groups can use drones to deliver explosives or other harmful payloads to specific targets; drones can be modified to carry and release dangerous substances, making them a potential tool for attacks in populated areas.
- partnering with police forces or military can further expand the use of drones for national security or defence applications, expanding and consolidating inter-institutional cooperation.	- their ability to fly at high altitudes and capture detailed imagery makes them a valuable tool for spying; can be used for espionage purposes by gathering intelligence on governmental, military, or corporate activities. In January 2025 German authorities are investigating suspected Russian espionage following drone sightings over several military sites including airfields in Bavaria. The drones described as having longer ranges than civilian models, are believed to be conducting surveillance operations (Crossland, 2025).
	- drones are increasingly being used to smuggle contraband, such as drugs, weapons, and other illicit items, across borders and into prisons; ability to bypass traditional security measures makes them an effective means for illegal transport. As an example, Spanish authorities dismantled a criminal network in Algeciras that used drones to traffic hashish from Morocco. These "narcodrones" were manufactured in Ukraine and transported to Spain for use in the Campo de Gibraltar and Costa del Sol regions. The operation resulted in ten arrests and the seizure of three drones, control devices, and large sums of money and drugs (Orellana, 2024).
	- unauthorized drones flying near airports or in restricted airspace can disrupt flights and potentially lead to accidents; drones can interfere with air traffic and pose a risk to aviation safety. At the begging of 2025 unauthorized drones interfered with firefighting operations in Los Angeles leading to collisions with firefighting aircraft and posing significant risks to emergency response efforts (Wise, 2025).
	- drones can be hacked and controlled remotely by unauthorized individuals; this could allow malicious actors to use drones for unauthorized surveillance, data collection, or even weaponization.

	- drones can be used to conduct surveillance on or attack critical infrastructure such as energy infrastructure (renewable energy infrastructure, natural gas production grids, power plants, etc.), communication networks, transportation systems, etc.; can disrupt services and cause significant damage. Mentioning notable incidents regarding the energy infrastructure: "Al-Houthi and Saudi Arabia Conflict **(**2019), Yemeni al-Houthi rebels attacked Saudi Arabian oil refineries and energy infrastructure using 10 long-range UAV-X drones. The strikes interrupted 5.7 million barrels per day of oil production, affecting Saudi Arabia's economy, regional security, and global energy markets; Russian-Ukraine Conflict (2022-present), the Ukrainian government has retaliated with a series of drone attacks targeting Russian power plants, gasoline distribution depots, and industrial refineries; Red Sea Conflict (2023-present), Al-Houthi forces in Yemen have increasingly used drones and ballistic missiles against civilian vessels, posing a new danger to the Red Sea's energy infrastructure and public transportation systems" (Ghenai, 2024).
	- in crowded public events, drones can cause injuries if they malfunction or are deliberately flown into crowds; the potential for panic and harm is considerable in such scenarios. An example is the drone show at Lake Eola Park in Orlando, Florida where multiple drones malfunctioned and fell into the audience. A young boy was struck by a falling drone resulting in serious injuries that required emergency open-heart surgery (Sawyer, 2024).

The SWOT analysis only covers potential scenarios and highlights possible threats. The analysis provides a solid foundation for understanding the strategic, ethical, and operational impact of drones on international security. The aspects determined in the analysis, legal challenges, cybersecurity, proliferation, and ethical considerations are highly relevant in today's geopolitical landscape, where drone technology is rapidly evolving.

Although, following the analysis, drones have the potential to transform the security environment, it is important to address their weaknesses and mitigate threats to successfully and sustainably integrate them. Their long-term impact will be determined by investments in technological innovation and careful navigation of regulatory and ethical issues. Regarding their strengths, such as enhanced surveillance capabilities, rapid response potential, and cost efficiency, position drones as a transformative tool in improving security systems. They are invaluable in areas like border control, disaster response, and urban safety, offering innovative ways to detect threats and protect critical infrastructure. However, their weaknesses, such as vulnerability to hacking, technical limitations, and dependency on weather conditions, underscore the need for robust design and

operational safeguards. The opportunities drones provide, including advancing technologies like AI integration and multi-domain collaboration, can help address emerging threats and create proactive security strategies.

Conversely, threats like misuse by malicious actors, regulatory gaps, and ethical concerns about privacy must be actively managed. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration among governments, industries, and communities to ensure drones are used responsibly, effectively, and with proper oversight.

Through the SWOT analysis, the question of whether *drones are a threat to security* becomes nuanced. While drones offer strategic advantages (precision, surveillance, cost-effectiveness), they also present significant risks (proliferation, vulnerabilities, and ethical dilemmas). Their threat potential largely depends on how they are used and regulated. In the hands of both state and non-state actors, drones can either enhance security or create new avenues for conflict and instability.

To address various threats posed by drones, several mitigation strategies can be implemented:

- governments can establish strict regulations on drone usage, which may include mandatory registration, licensing, and flight restrictions in sensitive areas;
- the development of drone detection and neutralization technologies (radar systems, jamming devices, and nets) can help safeguard against unauthorized drone activities;
- educating the public about the potential risks and promoting responsible drone usage can mitigate some of these threats;
- critical infrastructure and sensitive sites can adopt enhanced security measures, including physical barriers and advanced surveillance systems, to detect and deter drone incursions;
- collaboration among government agencies, the private sector, and international organisations can facilitate information sharing and the development of comprehensive strategies to combat drone threats.

Conclusions

Drones undeniably present significant security threats, particularly when used by malicious actors for espionage, smuggling, sabotage, or even terrorism. Their accessibility, low cost, and ability to bypass traditional security measures make them an attractive tool for nefarious purposes. Moreover, vulnerabilities such as hacking, GPS spoofing, and unauthorised surveillance amplify the risks they pose to privacy, infrastructure, and national security.

However, labelling drones solely as a threat overlooks their potential as security enablers when used responsibly and within a regulated framework. They can strengthen defence systems, aid in surveillance, and enhance emergency response capabilities. Thus, the threat they pose is highly dependent on the context of their use, the robustness of counter-drone technologies, and the effectiveness of regulatory measures in mitigating misuse.

In conclusion, the paper underlines that while drones present evolving threats to security, they also offer transformative opportunities for protection. Balancing these dual aspects requires proactive policies, technological innovation, and international cooperation to ensure their benefits outweigh the risks.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

***, “A Brief History of Drones”, *Imperial War Museums*. https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/a-brief-history-of-drones

Allen, G. C. 2022. *Across Drones, AI, and Space, Commercial Tech Is Flexing Military Muscle in Ukraine.* Retrieved from Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).:

https://www.csis.org/analysis/across-drones-ai-and-space-commercial-tech-flexing-military-muscle-ukraine

Cooperative Research Centres. 2024. *FLIGHT CRITICAL: DRONES, CYBER SECURITY AND CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE*. Retrieved from https://cybersecuritycrc.org.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/Flight%20Critical.pdf

Crossland, D. 2025. Drones spotted over German air bases prompt Russian spy fears. January 13. Retrieved from *THE TIMES & THE SUNDAY TIMES*: https://www.thetimes.com/world/europe/article/russia-spy-germany-drones-base-332v9sgfr

Donlevy, K. 2024. Two suspected drones breach Romanian airspace in as many days, violating NATO sovereignty. October 19. Retrieved from *NEW YORK POST*: https://nypost.com/2024/10/19/world-news/two-drones-breach-romanian-airspace-in-as-many-days/

Ghenai, C. 2024. Countering the Growing Threat of Drone Attacks on Energy Infrastructure. May 14. Retrieved from *NEW LINES INSTITUTE*: https://newlinesinstitute.org/environmental-challenges/countering-the-growing-threat-of-drone-attacks-on-energy-infrastructure/

Gregory Quarles. 2023. *The Security Implications of Drone Threats*. 22 May. ASIS International: https://www.asisonline.org/security-management-magazine/articles/2023/05/uncrewed-aerial-systems/security-implications-drones/

Kaplan, C. 2018. *Aerial Aftermaths: Wartime from Above* (Vol. Vol. 58). Press, Duke University. doi:10.1215/9780822372219

Newcome, L. R. 2004. *Unmanned Aviation: A Brief History of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles*. January 1. American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics. doi: https://doi.org/10.2514/4.868894

Orellana, J. S. 2024. *Dismantles a network of "narcodrones" that operated between Spain and Morocco*. November 28. Retrieved from Sociedad Española de Radiodimisión: https://cadenaser.com/andalucia/2024/11/28/desmantela-una-red-de-narcodrones-que-operaba-entre-espana-y-marruecos-ser-malaga//

Russo, J., Dulani Woods, Michael J. D. Vermeer, & Brian A. Jack. 2024. March. *Countering the Emerging Drone Threat to Correctional Security*. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA108-21.html

Sawyer, D. 2024. *At least 5 shows cancelled after drones fell from the sky at Orlando holiday event*. December 28. Retrieved from CNN: https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/28/us/drone-shows-canceled-after-orlando-injury/index.html

Shouthiri Partheepan, Farzad Sanati, Jahan Hassan. 2023. *Autonomous Unmanned Aerial Vehicles in Bushfire. Management: Challenges and Opportunities*. 10 January. URL: https://doi.org/10.3390/drones7010047

U.S. military prioritizes AI-powered drones in defense modernization. 2024. August. Retrieved from Global Defence News 2024: https://www.armyrecognition.com/news/army-news/army-news-2024/u-s-military-prioritizes-ai-powered-drones-in-defense-modernization?utm_content=cmp-true

Wise, J. 2025. *New York Magazine*. January 10. Retrieved from Intellingencer: https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/los-angeles-firefighters-drones.html

STRATEGIES XXI International Scientific Conference
The Complex and Dynamic Nature of the Security Environment,
Bucharest, Romania - February, 27th, 2025

DOI: 10.53477/3045-2309-25-19

WEAPONIZATION OF RELIGION AS ONE OF THE MAIN HYBRID INSTRUMENTS DIRECTED AGAINST ROMANIANS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, UKRAINE AND ROMANIA

Matei BLĂNARU, PhD Candidate,
Doctoral School of Sociology, University of Bucharest,
Romania. E-mail: matei.h.blanaru@gmail.com

Abstract: *Religion has long been one of the key hybrid instruments used in geopolitics across the globe, for both defensive and offensive purposes. Thus, failing to recognize the importance of religion in national defense strategies, as an important factor for the society, represents a serious mistake. Yet, unfortunately, decision makers in Romania have failed to acknowledge and properly address this issue for a long time. The scope of this paper is not to investigate the reasons behind this aspect, but to highlight the importance of religion for Romanians in Romania, in Ukraine and in the Republic of Moldova, and to highlight the fact that by not addressing properly and responsibly the expectations and concerns of Romanians by the Romanian decision makers regarding religious rights and identity paves the way for weaponization of religion mainly by the Russian Federation, but also by Ukraine.*

The weaponization of religion against the interests of the Romanian people has a long history, mainly coming from the USSR and the Russian Federation. This weaponization, together with recent internal political developments in Romania, should highlight the importance of properly and responsibly addressing and cultivating the religious rights and identity of Romanians in Romania, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. Failing to do so will mean that adverse narratives and policies will weaponize religion against the stability, the security and the interests of the Romanian state and people, just as it has happened throughout history.

Keywords: *weaponization of religion; hybrid threat; geopolitics; Romanians' identity; Ukraine; the Republic of Moldova.*

Introduction

In this paper we will investigate the importance of the religious dimension for the identity of the Romanian minorities in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, and also for the Romanians from within the country. To this end, we will use quantitative data provided by various surveys. We will also highlight how historically neighboring powers have been trying to gain geopolitical advantage by weaponizing the importance of the religious factor for the identity of the Romanians in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. To this end, we will review relevant scientific literature concerning the geopolitics of religion, and the history of the religious affiliation of Romanians in the today territories of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova.

The main point is that failing to properly acknowledge and address Romanian societal concerns and interests regarding religious freedom, religious rights and affiliation in Ukraine and in the Republic of Moldova will result (and this is already happening) in the proliferation of adverse narratives and hybrid threats primarily originating from the Russian Federation, which manifest both at home, in Romania, and abroad, in Ukraine and in the Republic of Moldova.

The Romanian minorities in Ukraine and the Romanians/Moldovans in the Republic of Moldova were forcibly separated from a religious and political point of view from their fellow citizens

in Romania after the Austrian Empire, the Russian Empire and later on the USSR annexed their homeland separating it from Romania. Their religious affiliation is still subject to manipulation for geopolitical objectives by both the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Unfortunately, as further elaborated in the paper, despite the fact that surveys show the Romanian minority in Ukraine and Romanians in the Republic of Moldova desire a rapprochement with their fellow countrymen in Romania, a reintegration with the religious structures of the Romanian Orthodox Church, neither the political structures from Romania, nor those from Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova seem to take notice of these concerns and desires. The failure to acknowledge and address these deep societal concerns, both at home and abroad, may result in proliferation of hybrid threats benefiting Russia, as it is already seen, both at home, and abroad.

1. Key Historical Note

In this paper, the majority of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova that self-describe as "Moldovans" shall be referred to as "Romanians", on the basis of a few decisive particular reasons.

One of them is that historically, the people of Moldova considered themselves as ethnic Romanians, the name "Moldovans/Moldavians" designating only a geographical denomination (much like the name Mancunians is for people from Manchester), and they have been aware they were speaking the Romanian language and named it as such. The Constitution of the Republic of Moldova clearly states that the official language in the Republic of Moldova is the Romanian language (Constituția Republicii Moldova 2024, 7). Moreover, this is explicitly pointed out historically even by one of Europe's leading scholars of the time, Dimitrie Cantemir, a Moldavian nobleman and ruler of the Moldavian Principality in the early 18th century (Cantemir 1717, 98-308)[1]. Ironically enough, Dimitrie Cantemir wrote his paper while he was in Sankt Petersburg, Russia, in exile, ousted by the Ottoman Turks, and he himself notes on the first page of one of his main papers that he had written his work in the *Romanian language* (Cantemir 1717, 1). All that began to change after the 1812 annexation by the Russian Empire of the area of Bessarabia (Eastern part of Moldavia/Moldova), where the Russian occupation tried to conduct an assimilation and Russification of the Romanian population by various means. One of these forms of assimilation was religion. Later on, Romania was founded in 1859 by what remained of the Principality of Moldavia and the Principality of Wallachia. Bessarabia (Eastern Moldavia) reunited on its own initiative with Romania in 1918, but was later on annexed by the USSR in 1940 and in 1944.

A second stage of the invention of the so-called "Moldovan" language and identity as being different from Romanian started in 1924 in the Soviet Union, when Russian, Ukrainian, Jewish and Romanian communists decided to invent a so-called *Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic* within the *Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine*, on the left bank of the Dniester river, comprising areas inhabited by Romanian ethnics. While this area had never actually been part of Moldavia (the ancient Romanian principality), naming it as such (author's note: Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic) would mean, as the initiators themselves pointed out in their Memo to Stalin that "The Moldovan Republic could play the same role of a political-propagandistic factor that the Republic of Belarus plays in relation to Poland, and the Republic of Karelia in relation to Finland. It would focus the attention and sympathy of the Bessarabian population, and it would create obvious pretexts regarding [our] claims to annex Bessarabia to the Moldovan Republic" (Negru 2003, 143-144). Concomitantly, "it would serve as the USSR's strategic breach to the Balkans (via Dobrogea) and to Central Europe (via Bukovina and Galicia), which the USSR could use as a bridgehead for

[1] „Niamul moldovénilor, munténilor, ardelénilor (carii cu toţii cu un nume de obşte români să chiamă)", which translates as "the Moldavian people, the Wallachian people, the Transylvanian people (which all of them are called Romanian as a people)", and „noi singuri şi astădzi români ne dzicem", which translates as "we call ourselves Romanians even today". Dimitrie Cantemir, *Hronicul Vechimei a Romano-Moldo-Vlahilor*, Sankt Petersburg, 1717, p. 98, 308, available at https://cantemir.asm.md/files/u1/hronicul_vechimei a_romano_ moldo_vlahilor_vol_I.pdf

military and political purposes" (Negru 2003, 143-144). These are obvious statements pointing to the artificial invention of this entity for geopolitical gains by the Soviet Union.

Nowadays, the Republic of Moldova is the remnant of an annexation by the Soviet Union in 1940 and 1944 that separated it from Romania. Thus, it is the remnant of this geopolitical pursuit by the Soviet Union/Russia and Ukraine trying to portray the ethnic Moldovans as being different from Romanians.

In summary, these are the reasons why in this paper we refer to the people of the Republic of Moldavia as, broadly speaking, Romanians, regardless of their self-denomination which occurred after an intense Soviet Russian and Soviet Ukrainian policy of occupation and assimilation, deportation, mass murder, manipulation and brainwashing. The identity of the occupied nations is one of the key problems left behind by the Soviet Union, and these days, Ukraine is unfortunately experiencing this firsthand, just as the citizens of the Republic of Moldova are.

2. The Geopolitics of Religion

One of the most important concepts in this work, and one of the first things we need to highlight, is the connection between geopolitics and religion, specifically the weaponization of religion in order to achieve geopolitical goals, to be more precise. This is one of the key issues addressed in this work. Recent specialized literature offers us certain perspectives on this matter.

In a volume published in 2017, Manlio Graziano explicitly argues that "the geopolitics of religions deserves to be a specific and separate discipline, devoted entirely to analyzing the interplay of politics and religious trends, using a geopolitical approach" (Graziano 2017, 2-3). In what the interplay between geopolitics and religion is concerned, Graziano argues that some of the factors impacting geopolitics and the will of political actors are quantifiable: geography, economics, demography, military power, alliances, institutions, and leadership. However, he argues that "other unmeasurable or 'immaterial' factors can play a consistent, even decisive, role: history, tradition, habits, ideologies, prejudices, and, of course, religions. Any shift in the weight of each of these factors can affect the relative strength of the political actors themselves, at a national or an international level" (Graziano 2017, 3). And this is where the importance of religion for geopolitics lies.

In a recent volume on the issue of geopolitics and religion, the editors Simone Raudino and Patricia Sohn argue that "religion remains important either directly in relation to political institutions or in the various forms of interaction among specific communities (religious or secular, or both), local, and national political issues" (Raudino and Sohn 2022, 22) and that "ignoring these trends due to normative proclivities - or, perhaps, only to habits of mind - that suggest modernizing is inherently tied to secularization makes opaque an empirical world that it is important to know. The notion advocated in some religious contexts that modernism and religion are not inherently oppositional bears in serious consideration, and deserves more attention than only the dismissive turn of the hand. Indeed, the continuing salience of religion in politics – even in the West – appears to bear out some parts of this basic idea simply on the empirical merits. That is, the reality of the place of religion in politics today is significant for hard geopolitical reasons of "failures of imagination", as well as for loftier reasons of pure science seeking to know the real world as it exists rather than as we wish to imagine it" (Raudino and Sohn 2022, 22-23). So they are speaking about "hard geopolitical reasons" related to the use of religion by political actors.

Another paper, named 'Islam as statecraft: How governments use religion in foreign policy' (2018), focuses the rivalry between Saudi and Iranian regimes. The authors claim that what they term as *the geopolitics of religious soft power* means "state support for transnational religious propagation, the promotion of religious interpretations that ensure regime survival, or competing visions of global religious leadership" (Mandaville and Hamid 2018, 1). They also provide a very concise definition of how geopolitical objectives and religion interplay, and of what we would call the geopolitics of religion: "efforts by the state to harness the power of religious symbols and authority in the service

of geopolitical objectives" (Mandaville and Hamid 2018, 2). Even though the authors made this assertion in relation to "Islam as statecraft" and the rivalries between Saudi Arabia and Iran, we argue that this very concise definition could be very well applied to all other international actors using religion for geopolitical gains. The authors also point out how states are using religion to engage and influence populations abroad, in other countries, and how "geopolitical actors are pushing ideological alternatives and forms of transnational cultural solidarity" (Mandaville and Hamid 2018, 7). Arguably, this is exactly what the Russian Federation is trying to do today in portraying itself as a "defender of Christianity" and of "Orthodoxy". For Russia, this is still not a new narrative. Starting from the 17th and 18th century, the Russian Empire tried to pose as a defender of Christians in the Ottoman Empire (and even managed to be formally recognized as such by the Ottoman officials), and often used and still uses this pretext to gain geopolitical objectives (Blitt 2022). In the same paper, it is also noticed this aspect of the Russian Federation narratives and policies and, besides the examples of Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry or other examples in the Muslim world. There are also provided some additional examples of how religion is being used for geopolitical objectives: "There are numerous examples today of governments pursuing geopolitical agendas through the prism of religion. The Kremlin has leveraged the transnational reach of the Russian Orthodox Church to build support for Moscow's policies in Ukraine. India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) mobilizes Hindutva, a form of Hindu nationalist ideology, in its outreach to Indian diaspora communities around the world. And Israel has cultivated ties with conservative evangelical Christians in the United States, seeking to portray the Jewish state as the natural guardian of a common Judeo-Christian heritage. There is no shortage of other similar examples" (Mandaville and Hamid 2018, 7-8).

In short, we have provided a few perspectives and definitions of the so-called *geopolitics of religion*, and a few examples as well. Perhaps the most concise definition for this concept was the one expressed by Peter Mandaville and Shadi Hamid, namely: "efforts by the state to harness the power of religious symbols and authority in the service of geopolitical objectives" (Mandaville and Hamid 2018, 2). Next, through the lens of this definition, we will attempt to analyze how Russia and Ukraine seek to politically instrumentalize this concept in relation to the Romanian minority in Ukraine and the Romanians in the Republic of Moldova, based both on historical events and present actions. We will also highlight the importance of religion for Romanians in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, in comparison with the general significance of religion in Ukraine and in the Russian Federation. *This is because religion, as a geopolitical instrument, can only be used by geopolitical actors if it is relevant for the target population – in this case, the Romanian minority in Ukraine and the Romanians in the Republic of Moldova*.

3. Historical Weaponization of Religion Against Romanians

3.1. Romanians in the Republic of Moldova (part of Bessarabia)

Russia attempted its first religious takeover of the Romanians in Moldova and Wallachia even before annexing Bessarabia (Eastern Moldavia) in 1812. In 1791, Empress Catherine the Great appointed Archbishop Serebrenikov of Ekaterinoslav and Poltava as Exarch over the Metropolis of Moldova. In 1792, the Russian Orthodox Church Synod, in an anti-canonical act (due to the fact that the Metropolis of Moldova did not belong to the Russian Church Synod - since Tsar Peter the Great had abolished the Russian Patriarchate in 1721 and established a "Governing Synod" to lead the Russian Church), appointed Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni as Metropolitan of Moldova. In 1808, Tsar Alexander I appointed the same Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni as Exarch of the Romanian churches in Moldova, Wallachia, and Bessarabia, which he considered subordinated to the Russian Orthodox Church in St. Petersburg. Through this move, he aimed to sever the ties of the Romanian churches with the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which was under the Ottoman Empire (Păcurariu 1993, 53). The geopolitical objectives are clearly evident here, as this period marked the fifth Russo-Turkish war for dominance in Eastern Europe. However, Metropolitan Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni was forced to

retreat from Iași to Russia in 1812, along with the Russian occupation troops. After annexing Bessarabia in 1812, Tsar Alexander I established the Diocese of Chișinău and Hotin in 1813 in the newly conquered territories, thus uncanonically separating these territories from the Metropolis of Moldova. Apart from the first Metropolitan of this diocese, who was the Romanian Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni, all of his successors were Ukrainians or Russians. They gradually marginalized services and church books in the Romanian language, promoted the Russian language, appointed Russian or Ukrainian clergy to leadership positions, and thus began the Russification and denationalization of the church and population in Bessarabia. The most famous of these was the Russian Bishop Pavel Lebedev, who, despite overseeing a majority of Romanian believers, officially banned the Romanian language in 1871 in the few schools where it had survived. He also ordered the collection and burning of all Romanian-language books in monasteries (Păcurariu 1993, 74).

For example, a student who distributed Romanian books was deported to Siberia along with his father (Păcurariu 1993, 80). Thus began the official geopolitical instrumentalization of the Romanian Church in Bessarabia (now part of the Republic of Moldova). In 1918, when Bessarabia united with Romania, the Orthodox Church in Bessarabia severed its ties with the Russian Patriarchate and returned to the Romanian Church. However, in 1940 and 1944, amid the annexation of Bessarabia by the Soviet Union, the church in Bessarabia was once again forcibly and uncanonically attached to the Russian Patriarchate, continuing its geopolitical manipulation by Moscow.

This instrumentalization continues even today. For example, before crucial elections for the future of the Republic of Moldova, priests belonging to the Russian Patriarchate in Moldova were sent in groups to various “conferences” in Russia (Păduraru 2024), where they were taught how to manipulate their parishioners to make them vote according to Russia’s geopolitical interests. The current Metropolitan of Moldova, who belongs to the Russian Patriarchate, is a well-known exponent of Russia’s geopolitical interests in the region.

Because the religious identity of the Romanians in these territories conquered by the USSR was strong, for a faster assimilation of the inhabitants, but also for ideological reasons, in the early years of the Soviet occupation in Bessarabia, about 500 Romanian churches out of the more than 1,000 that were functioning before the occupation were closed. After 1958-1959, over 300 more Orthodox churches were closed, leaving fewer than 200 open. Many priests and monks, among those who had not sought refuge in what remained of Romania, were deported, sometimes along with their parishioners, to Siberia or Kazakhstan (Păcurariu 1993, 125). For a faster Russification, all correspondence with the diocesan center in Chișinău was done only in Russian, the religious books were available only in Russian, the religious objects as well, and instead of Romanian priests, Ukrainian or Russian priests were brought in, who served in Church Slavonic and introduced in the church choirs and hymns specific to the Russian church, removing the Romanian ones (Păcurariu 1993, 126).

3.2. Romanians in Ukraine

Northern Bukovina, today part of Ukraine, was first annexed by the Soviet Union from Romania in 1940, as “reparation” for the 22 years (1918-1940) during which Bessarabia was part of Romania. In Northern Bukovina and southern Bessarabia, territories annexed by the USSR from Romania and given to Ukraine, the religious life of the Romanians there was also geopolitically instrumentalized, and immediately after the annexation to the USSR in 1944, all the Romanian church administration that existed until then was dissolved. Instead of the Bukovina Metropolitanate, which was under the Romanian Patriarchate, the Soviets established an Episcopate based in Chernivtsi, part of the Ukrainian Exarchate, dependent on Moscow. The Episcopate of Cetatea Albă - Ismail and Hotin (Bălți) - were dissolved by the Soviets. Thus, all Romanian believers were forcibly moved under the Ukrainian Exarchate of the Moscow Patriarchate. Russian or Ukrainian hierarchs were appointed to lead them (Păcurariu 1993, 124-25).

Romanian priests and believers were arrested and deported by the Soviet Russians and Ukrainians, dozens of Romanian churches were closed, including the cathedrals in Chernivtsi and Ismail, and the former palace of the Romanian Metropolitanate in Chernivtsi was given to the Ukrainian university. Romanian parishes in southern Bessarabia, ceded by the Soviets to Ukraine, were forcibly transferred to the Odessa Metropolitanate, which, of course, also belonged to the Moscow Patriarchate (Păcurariu 1993, 126-27).

Here, briefly, is how, everywhere they annexed Romanian territories, the Russians and Soviets broke these communities away from the Romanian Church and forcibly attached them directly to the Moscow Patriarchate or the Ukrainian Church, which also belonged to Moscow. These practices were always accompanied by the prohibition or burning of religious books in Romanian, the closure of Romanian churches, the deportation of Romanian priests, and the replacement of Romanian priests with Ukrainian or Russian ones, with the aim of assimilating the Romanian population. Furthermore, we witnessed the confiscation of goods from Romanian churches and their allocation to Ukrainians or Russians. The goals for the past 200 years have been, including geopolitical ones, the erasure of the Romanian population from these territories and the elimination of any Romanian religious or other traces, as well as the invention of a parallel "Moldovan" identity, which would be distinct from the Romanian identity. This "Moldovan" identity would serve the geopolitical interests of Moscow (and until recently, also Ukraine), as stated by the very initiators of this artificial project in 1924.

Furthermore, seeing how these practices have historically unfolded for over 200 years whenever Romanian territories were annexed, it is not hard to make a connection with what is happening today. Recently, the Ukrainian mayor of Chernivtsi confiscated from Romanian believers in Ukraine a Chapel of the Metropolitans of Bukovina in the Central Cemetery, which historically belonged to Romanian believers, had been renovated at their expense, and where a Romanian priest officiated services in the Romanian language. The Romanian community in Ukraine complained about this abuse and asked for help from the Romanian officials (Ionescu 2024). Unfortunately, the response from the authorities in Romania to this abuse by the Ukrainian authorities was disappointing, the representatives of the Romanian Government largely making only promises or reiterating the arguments of the Ukrainians justifying the confiscation of the place of worship (Benea 2024).

4. The Importance of the Religious Factor for the Identity of Romanians in Ukraine, in the Republic of Moldova and in Romania. Comparison with Ukraine and Russia

The religious dimension has historically been a particularly important factor for the identity of the Romanian society and continues to be so. For example, in a 2018 study by the Pew Research Center, Romania was considered the most religious country in Europe (Evans and Baronavski 2018). Romanians in the Republic of Moldova, despite being subjected to Russian assimilation and the anti-religious ideological propaganda of the Soviet Union, still ranked 5th in religiosity in Europe. Among the former Soviet republics, only Armenia and Georgia had slightly higher scores than the Republic of Moldova (47%) (Evans and Baronavski 2018).

In contrast, Ukraine ranked only 11th in religiosity, with a score just slightly above half that of Romania (31% for Ukraine compared to 55% for Romania), while Russia ranked 20th in religiosity in Europe (17%) (Evans and Baronavski 2018). Only 22% of Ukrainians stated that religion was very important in their lives, whereas the same was true for 50% of Romanians and 42% of Moldovan citizens (Evans and Baronavski 2018) - despite the latter having spent nearly 50 years under an occupation that either used religion as a tool of anti-Romanian assimilation or fought ideologically against it. This highlights a similarity in religious attitudes between Romanians in Romania and those in the Republic of Moldova, in contrast to the way Ukrainians and Russians perceive religion.

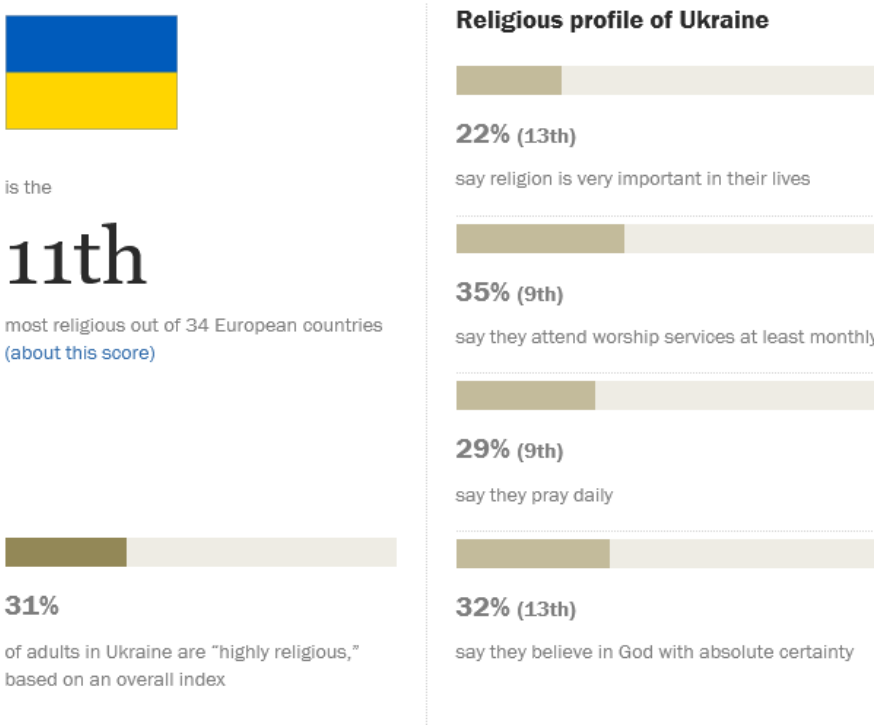


Figure no. 1: Religious profile of Ukraine (Evans and Baronavski 2018)

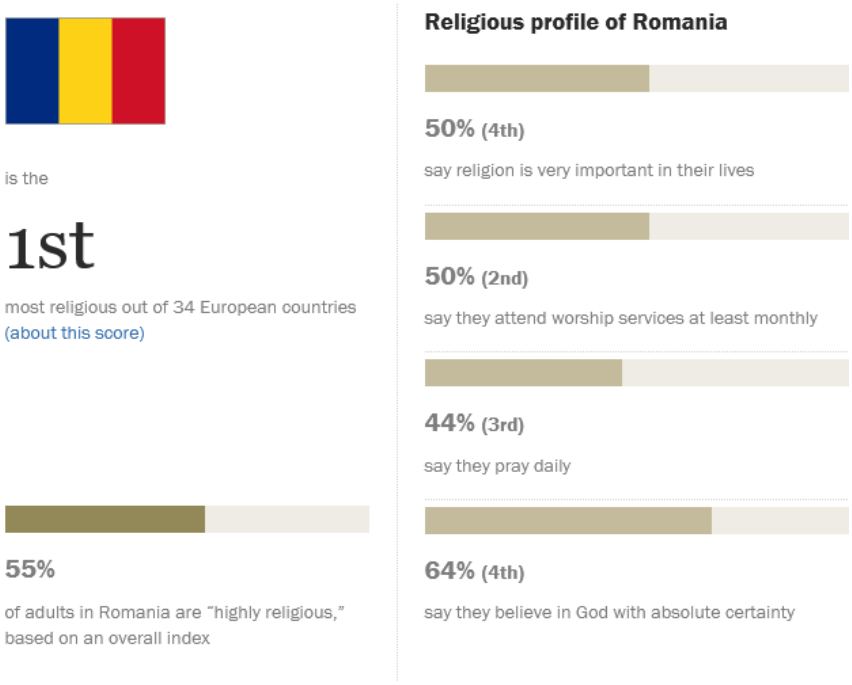


Figure no. 2: Religious profile of Romania (Evans and Baronavski 2018)

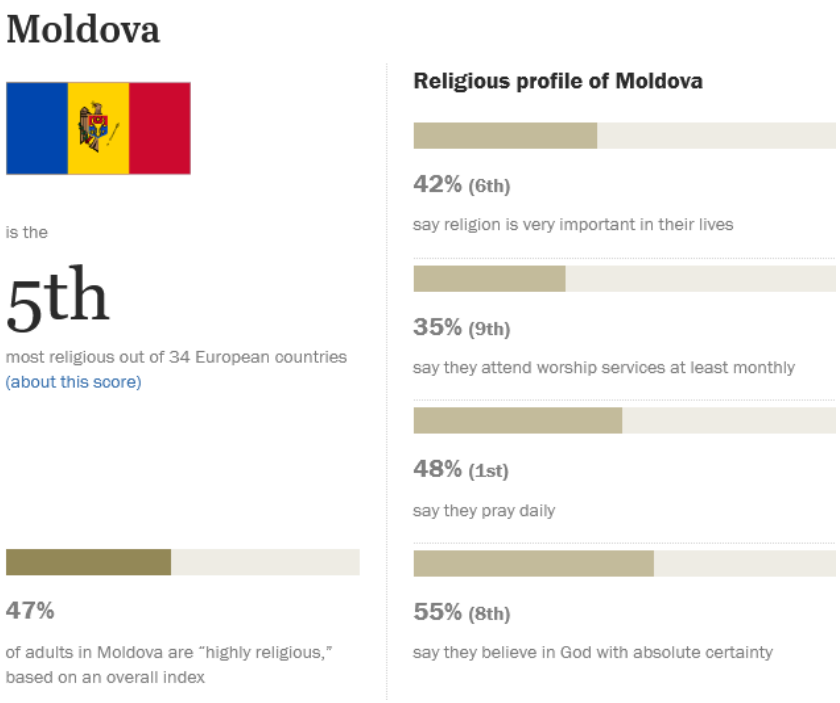


Figure no. 3: Religious profile of the Republic of Moldova (Evans and Baronavski 2018)

According to the 2022 Barometer of Religious Life in Romania, 83.1% of Romania's population considered themselves to be religious (ISPRI and CCSLARICS 2022, 6). Additionally, 66.3% of Romanian citizens had a high or very high level of trust in the church (ISPRI and CCSLARICS 2022, 3), making it the most trusted institution in the Romanian society. Regardless of denomination, 91.6% of Romanian citizens stated that they believe in God (ISPRI and CCSLARICS 2022, 8).

In the Republic of Moldova, very interestingly, two years before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, 74% of citizens trusted the church (Gațcan 2020). After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and considering both the implicit and explicit actions of the Metropolis of Chișinău in the Republic of Moldova - which is subordinate to the Russian Patriarchate and actively promotes Russia's interests in society - trust in the church dropped to 58% in 2023 (Institutul de Politici Publice and CBS Research 2023, 14). From a sociological perspective, assuming both surveys were accurately conducted, the only explanation that could account for such a significant decline in trust would be a dramatic internal or regional event. The most dramatic regional event was Russia's invasion of Ukraine, along with its frequent threats of invading the Republic of Moldova. Given that the largest church in the Republic of Moldova is affiliated with the Russian Patriarchate, it is easy to see how public distrust and fear of Russia's actions have also been directed toward its representatives on the ground - namely, the priests and churches under the Russian Patriarchate, which actively promote Russia's geopolitical interests in society.

All these surveys, on the one hand, highlight a significant difference between Russia and Ukraine compared to the two states, Romania and the Republic of Moldova, indicating a distinct approach to identity in relation to the religious dimension. On the other hand, data on religiosity among Romanians in Ukraine is harder to obtain. However, according to a survey conducted in 2022 by the Institute for Studies on Social Capital in Cernăuți, Ukraine, a relevant percentage of about 50% of Romanians in Ukraine participate in religious services, with an additional 29% declaring themselves Christians but not attending religious services (Gherman 2023, 10). This percentage of about 50% (or even more) among Romanians in Ukraine is significantly higher than the 35% of the

entire Ukrainian society that participates in church services, according to the Pew Research Center survey mentioned earlier.

Therefore, we have identified a significant difference in how Romanians in Ukraine relate to religion compared to the rest of the Ukrainian society. Furthermore, the percentage of Romanians in Ukraine who participate in religious services is identical to the 50% of Romanians in Romania who attend church services (Evans and Baronavski 2018).

According to a survey published in 2024, conducted by the same Institute for Studies on Social Capital in Cernăuți, Ukraine, 68.5% of the representatives of Romanians surveyed stated that they participate in religious services in churches led by the Metropolitan of Kyiv and All Ukraine (plus a few additional percentages for other denominations), while 23.3% declared that they are Christians but do not attend religious services (Gherman 2024, 13). Thus, we have a religiosity percentage even higher than that of 2023.

The impact of religiosity in Romanian society is not only reflected in the Romanian minority in Ukraine or the Romanians in the Republic of Moldova, but also affects the ethnic minorities within Romania. For example, the Hungarian minority in Romania is much more religious than Hungarians in Hungary, and in this regard, their perceptions are almost identical to those of the majority Romanians in Romania: "The study shows that 34 percent of Hungarians from Transylvania attend a religious service once a week, and 83 percent of them pray outside of mass at least once a week or even more often – compared to 81 percent of Romanians or 34 percent of Hungarians in Hungary" (Sarány 2020).

Thus, we have shown through several relevant surveys that Romanians in Romania, in Ukraine, and those in the Republic of Moldova have very similar religiosity scores and relate to the religious dimension in a similar, almost identical manner. Additionally, we observe a significant difference between how Romanians relate to religion, on the one hand, and how Ukrainians or Russians relate to religion, on the other hand.

5. Current Perspectives and Expectations of Romanians in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova Regarding the Romanian Orthodox Church

There is another aspect that is almost identical among Romanians in Ukraine and those in the Republic of Moldova: their desire to reconnect with the Romanian Orthodox Church, from which they were forcibly and uncanonically separated by the USSR in 1944. We have already given details regarding the uncanonical circumstances in which these Romanians were cut off from the Romanian Church, and here we will focus on their current aspirations. Today, they do not wish to belong to either the Moscow Patriarchate or the Ukrainian Church, as they were forced to do in the past.

5.1. Romanians in Ukraine

According to the 2023 survey mentioned earlier, 61% of Romanians in Ukraine would like the Romanian Orthodox Church to open churches in Ukraine for Romanian believers, while a huge percentage of 35% chose not to answer this question (Gherman 2023, 10). This 35% non-response rate is significant for a survey and can be explained either by religious attachment to their current hierarchs or by fear of answering the question. Only 4% of Romanians in Ukraine would not want the Romanian Orthodox Church to open churches there, which is an insignificant percentage (Gherman 2023, 10). It should be noted again that the majority of Romanian believers in Ukraine were forcibly and uncanonically separated from the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1944 by the Soviet Union, following the annexation of Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia by the Soviets.

According to the 2024 survey conducted by the same Institute for Studies on Social Capital, on religious indicators, we observe the same results as in the 2023 survey: a huge percentage of Romanians in Ukraine, 72.6% (more than 10% higher compared to 2023), support the Romanian Orthodox Church having access in Ukraine. Only 6% oppose it (compared to 4% in 2023), and 16% had not heard of the initiative (Gherman 2024, 13). Although they desire this, 71.2% of the Romanian

respondents fear that Ukrainian authorities might create certain obstacles to the establishment of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine (Gherman 2024, 14). They were right as, in late 2024, even though Romanian leaders in Ukraine met all regulations and requirements according to the Ukrainian law, they were denied the founding of a Romanian Church in Ukraine which would later be free to adhere to the Romanian Orthodox Church, thus denying them basic religious freedom. Even more, Eugen Pătraș, one of the leaders of the Romanian community in Ukraine and one of the founders of the initiative to re-open a Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine was consequently persecuted by the Ukrainian authorities and banned from entering Ukraine (Anton 2024).

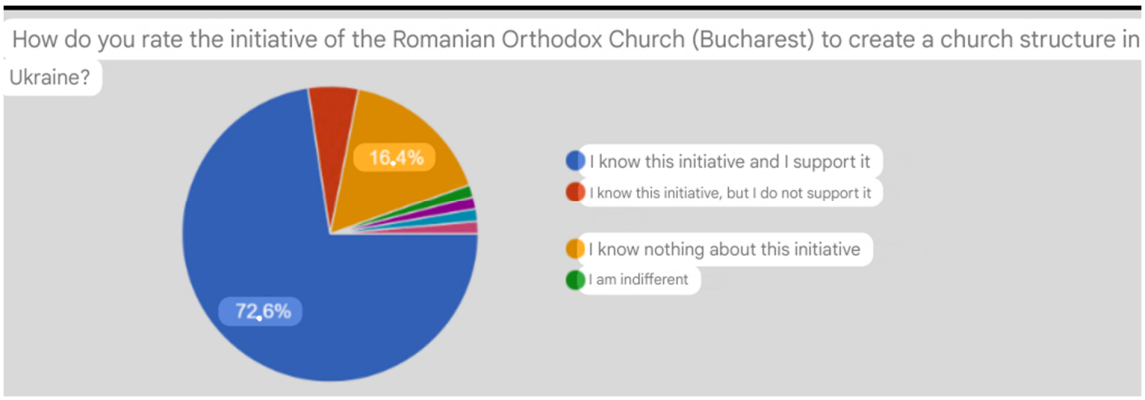


Figure no. 4: How Romanians in Ukraine feel about the initiative of the Romanian Orthodox Church to create a structure organization in Ukraine. (Gherman 2014, 13)

In 2024, when asked if the church in their city would decide to come under the authority of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, 80.8% of Romanian respondents in Ukraine stated that they would support this initiative, while 6.8% said they would oppose it (Gherman 2024, 14).

On April 30, 2024, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church announced its support for the establishment of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, subordinated to the Romanian Patriarchate, for believers who desire it. The Romanian Orthodox Church stated that it would "bless, encourage, and support the initiatives of Romanian Orthodox communities in Ukraine to restore communion with the Mother Church, the Romanian Patriarchate, by organizing themselves legally within the religious structure called the Romanian Orthodox Church in Ukraine" (Ursulean 2024). This was later denied by the Ukrainian institutions, without providing any valid explanation, and, as previously pointed out, one of the leaders of the Romanian minority in Ukraine was persecuted by the Ukrainian officials and banned from entering Ukraine.

5.2. Romanians in the Republic of Moldova

Romanians in the Republic of Moldova were also forcibly and uncanonically separated from the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1944, coinciding with the annexation of Bessarabia by the Soviets, and were forcibly attached to the Russian Patriarchate. Today, in the Republic of Moldova, according to a survey from early 2024, 63.9% of citizens would like that Patriarch Daniel, the leader of the Romanian Orthodox Church, visit the Republic of Moldova (Jigău 2024, 35). Similar to the survey in Ukraine, quite a large percentage, 20.7%, did not answer the question (Jigău 2024, 35). Only 15.4% responded that they would not want Patriarch Daniel of the Romanian Orthodox Church to visit the Republic of Moldova (Jigău 2024, 35).

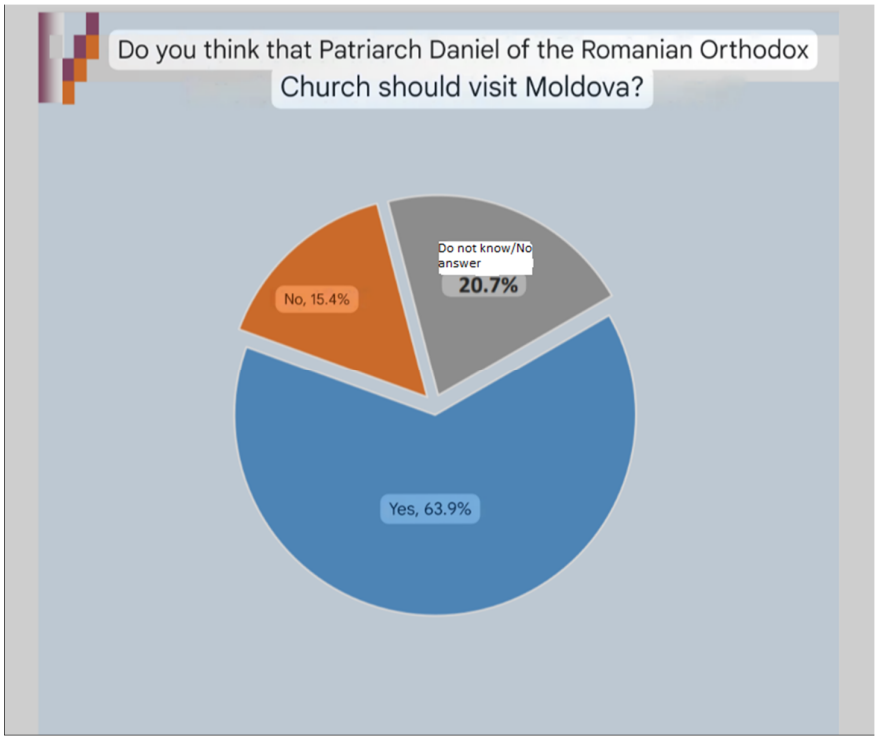


Figure no. 5: The opinion of the citizens of The Republic of Moldova regarding a potential visit of Daniel, Patriarch of The Romanian Orthodox Church (Jigău 2024, 35).

Interestingly, the 15.4% of those who do not wish for Romanian Patriarch Daniel to visit the Republic of Moldova is almost identical to the approximately 14.4% of national minorities in the Republic of Moldova, according to the 2024 census (Biroul Național de Statistică al Republicii Moldova 2025). These national minorities are largely the product of the deportation practices performed by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Empire, which deported Romanian population deep inside the Russian/Soviet Empire, and in exchange brought in population of different ethnic groups. These practices significantly altered the demographics of the Republic of Moldova.

We observe a real desire for rapprochement with the Romanian Orthodox Church from both Romanians in Ukraine and those in the Republic of Moldova, who were forcibly separated from the Romanian Church. While the Romanian Orthodox Church has acknowledged these realities and issued a statement expressing its willingness to accept Romanian communities in Ukraine, should they desire to join, as well as re-establishing the Metropolis of Bessarabia in the Republic of Moldova (which was abusively dissolved by the Soviets), the political representatives of the Romanian state have not shown signs of understanding this desire of the Romanians around the borders, the historical repair they seek, and the communion with the Romanian Church. Furthermore, the representatives of the Romanian state must understand the threats these Romanians face from the Ukrainian Church and the Moscow Patriarchate, which are playing geopolitically on this religious dimension and simultaneously instrumentalizing it for geopolitical purposes.

In short, Romanians in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova have been the subject of geopolitical instrumentalization on the religious dimension by the Tsarist Empire, the Soviet Empire, Russia, and Ukraine. Today, they are once again caught in the midst of such a geopolitical struggle over religion between Ukraine and the Russian Federation. The only way they can escape this instrumentalization is to return to the Romanian Orthodox Church, from which they were forcibly, abusively, and uncanonically separated by the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union through their annexations of Romanian territories. However, precisely against the backdrop of the geopolitical

instrumentalization of religion by Ukraine and the Russian Federation, this rapprochement with the Romanian Orthodox Church, which surveys show that the Romanians desire, *cannot happen without political support* from Romania. In other words, where geopolitical aggression and political pressure have been and continue to be exerted on Romanian believers and leaders of their community, the counteraction cannot happen without the political involvement on Romania's part. Ecclesiastical canonical arguments have never had any weight against Russian or Soviet aggression and will not have any weight today against Ukraine or Russia without Romania's political support. Romania should guarantee the reintegration of Romanians in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova into the Romanian Orthodox Church, if they wish so. And the surveys clearly show that they desire this.

6. Present Weaponization of Religion – Romanians in Ukraine and in The Republic of Moldova - between *Russification* and *Ukrainization*

Currently, the majority of Romanians in Ukraine belong to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which was under the Patriarchate of Moscow. The reason is very simple, highlighted even by Romanian analysts in Ukraine: Moscow allowed Romanians to participate in religious services held in the Romanian language (for Moscow's own geopolitical interests), while the Ukrainian Church did not allow that, being more "national" (Vălică 2022). Today, there are about 115 churches in Ukraine where services are held in the Romanian language.

In 2018, Ukraine made considerable efforts with the Patriarchate of Constantinople and obtained the right to have its own Patriarchy. This move created disturbances in the Orthodox world and deepened the crisis between the Patriarchate of Constantinople and the one in Moscow. It also caused divisions among the believers in Ukraine, split between three religious entities. Recently, the Parliament in Kiev has approved the outlawing of the Metropolis that belonged to the Patriarchate of Moscow. Perhaps the reason for doing so was because the Moscow Patriarchate has consistently supported the Russian invasion of Ukraine. All of these actions have clear geopolitical connotations.

The fact that currently, in Ukraine the Romanian minority is not allowed to freely associate religiously (being denied rights deriving from the Ukrainian law) is just another example of weaponization of religion against Romanian ethnics in Ukraine. Ukrainian politicians do not want Moscow to keep weaponizing religion in Ukraine − rightfully so −, yet they refuse the right of the Romanians to break free from the Russian Orthodox Church and adhere to the Romanian Orthodox Church. The Ukrainian political class wants to coerce Romanians in Ukraine to adhere to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which has "Ukrainization" and building a "Ukrainian World" as one of its key objectives (mirroring the Russian concept of the 'Russian World'): in 2024, "on February 10, the head of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Epiphanius Dumenko, while in Chernivtsi, launched a secular-political concept - a geopolitical concept, we might say - called the 'Ukrainian World'. He stated that from that moment on, his church would build a 'Ukrainian World', presenting it as a response and mirror image to the Moscow – imperial concept of the 'Russian World'" (Cubreacov 2024). "Ukrainization" also means confiscating churches where services are being held in the Romanian language and replacing the Romanian language with Ukrainian. Priorly, there was provided the example of the confiscation of the Chapel of the Metropolitans of Bukovina (Ionescu 2024), but very recently, in 2025, four more churches are in the process of being confiscated by Ukrainian officials from Romanian believers. The ethnic Romanians in Storojineț have complained about the attempt by Ukrainian officials to confiscate two of the churches where services are being held in the Romanian language (one of them hosts the tomb of one of the most beloved historical figures of the Romanian community in Ukraine, Iancu Flondor) (Gherman 2025). In Adâncata (Hliboca), another area with a significant Romanian minority, the Romanian community is complaining about another attempt by the Ukrainian church and officials to confiscate two more churches where services are being held in the Romanian language (but also in Ukrainian) (BucPress 2025). Needless to say that these practices are a stark reminder of the practices of the Soviet Union

against Romanian believers and churches, which were mentioned earlier, and raise concerns and fear among the Romanian minority in Ukraine.

"Ukrainization" is a geopolitical concept and a set of policies proudly implemented and exhibited by top Ukrainian politicians and it is not directed exclusively against Russian influence, as one may think. It is directed, covertly or openly, against all other ethnic groups in Ukraine. Statements such as "A new stage of Ukrainization has begun in Ukraine. The mild approach has been replaced with an offensive one" (Vaskovska 2024) coming from top Ukrainian officials have rightfully been particularly worrying for all ethnic minorities in Ukraine, including Romanians.

Let us also illustrate other examples of statements regarding Ukrainization: "I have no doubt that Ukrainian is the language of our victory, the language of our offensive, and the language of an unconquered nation"; "Now, I see nothing but offensive Ukrainization, which has replaced the mild one", "Offensive Ukrainization involves strict control over compliance with the language law in all spheres of public life throughout the territory of Ukraine without exception" (Khoroshchak and Krechetova 2024), and so on.

Romanians in Ukraine have been complaining about explicit Ukrainization of education policies, meant to extinguish ethnic minorities' languages starting from school, with projects including obligation of pupils to speak only the Ukrainian language in schools, even during breaks (Popescu 2024). It is hard to believe that such policies can be conceived and accepted in the democratic Europe of the 21st century, yet here they are.

Again, the geopolitical implications of such Ukrainization policies are evident. Both ironically and tragically enough, in the 20th century, in USSR, when Russian and Ukrainian officials were trying to assimilate Romanian ethnics in the so-called Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova, they had the same concern – *Ukrainization*. For example, on June 15, 1927, the Moldavian Regional Committee of the Ukrainian Communist Party (PCU) submitted a memorandum to the Commission for Ukrainianization under the Political Bureau of the Ukrainian Communist Party, saying that it had "to complete the Ukrainization" (Țîcu 2021 (8)) performed by the Ukrainian Communist Party in the Soviet republic. The same memo went on to boast that "Ukrainization in the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic hardly lags behind the general pace of Ukrainization in Ukraine" (Țîcu 2021 (8)).

Similarly, as mentioned, the actions of the Moscow Patriarchate in Ukraine and in the Republic of Moldova have been manifesting geopolitical connotations as well. For example, in 2024, numerous priests from the Metropolis of Chișinău and All Moldova, belonging to the Russian Patriarchate, went in turn to various training sessions in Moscow to be prepared to influence their parishioners back home to boycott a pro-European referendum and vote for pro-Russian parties in the 2024 elections (Păduraru 2024). The Metropolis of Chișinău and All Moldova, belonging to the Russian Patriarchate, has historically continuously supported the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as well as all Russian narratives and geopolitical initiatives, especially those directed against Romania. All of these recent actions, as well as previous ones, starting with the very establishment of this Metropolis under Russia, have had obvious geopolitical connotations.

In essence, the geopolitics of religions refers to political factors that try to instrumentalize religious elements in order to achieve geopolitical goals, just as we see in the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, but also in the actions of the Russian Federation in The Republic of Moldova, and in the actions of the Ukrainian officials directed against the Romanian minority in Ukraine.

Moreover, as it was shown, when the "Moldovan" identity and the so-called "Moldovan language" was created in the USSR in 1924, the initiators of this effort highlighted, even in their programmatic document, the geopolitical dimension of this cultural invention, which was supposed to create advantages and pave the way for the USSR's new conquests towards the center of Europe, the Balkans, and the dismantling of Romania by at least separating Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina. One of the Soviet promoters even strongly argued that "the Moldavian nation is not a question of geography, it is not a question of academic science, it is a question of politics, and a question of class struggle" (Țîcu 2021 (7)).

After Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina were occupied by the USSR, the establishment of the Metropolitanate of Chișinău and All Moldova under the Russian Patriarchy followed, which was meant to solidify the geopolitical conquest of these Romanian regions. The Russian Federation still uses the Moscow Patriarchy and its supporters geopolitically today, attempting to maintain or strengthen its influence in both the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and other regions.

Bessarabia had been previously occupied territorially and religiously by Russia between 1812 and 1918, a period during which the Russian Church again played a geopolitical role, attempting the denationalization and assimilation, the Russification of the Romanians in Bessarabia, today's Republic of Moldova, as well as Budjak, which is now part of Ukraine. As already illustrated, an emblematic episode is the account according to which a Russian bishop, appointed by Moscow in Bessarabia, in order to accelerate the denationalization and Russification of the Romanians, gathered all the religious books in the Romanian language and burnt them to heat his episcopal palace.

We must understand that the elimination through assimilation, Russification, Ukrainization, and denationalization of an entire population from a territory, to the advantage of another dominant population, clearly has a geopolitical dimension. Similarly, maintaining and defending the identity of a population against such aggressions has a geopolitical dimension. In other words, today, preserving the linguistic, religious, and cultural identity of Romanians in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova must also have geopolitical and strategic importance for Romania, besides its obvious humanitarian dimension.

7. Present and Future Consequences and Impact upon Regional Security

The religious dimension is essential for the Romanians in Romania, Ukraine, and in the Republic of Moldova. No strategy of any state can ignore such an important identity component for its own society and for its co-nationals in neighboring states. Moreover, the geopolitical component of religion in this region is significant, with Moscow and Kiev engaged in a war on the ground but also in a religious confrontation against each other. And this religious confrontation has geopolitical stakes just like the war waged in the trenches, with both Ukraine and Russia trying to expand or maintain their influence over Romanian believers.

The 2024 initiative of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church (Ursulean 2024) responded to the requests and needs of the Romanian believers in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova and promised to build a church in Ukraine, belonging to the Romanian Patriarchate, where Romanians that lived there could freely attend services in the Romanian language. The initiative is expected to be a complicated one, especially since representatives of the Romanian State do not seem at all capable or willing to exert pressure on the government in Kiev as they should. In September 2024, in response to petitions and requests from Romanians in Ukraine after a historic Romanian chapel in the Central Cemetery in Chernivtsi was confiscated by the local Ukrainian authorities, the representatives of the Romanian Government, aside from general promises, have merely reiterated the arguments of the Ukrainian side, not the Romanians' (Benea 2024). The Romanian Orthodox Church, although not an institution with such responsibilities, has played a more determined role on the external identity-geopolitical front than the representatives of the Romanian state.

That being said, for Romania to ignore the geopolitical importance of the Romanian believers in the neighboring countries and the significance of this dimension for their identity and the Romanian society alike would be an error that is impossible to justify. Regardless of the religious affiliation or the lack of any religious affiliation of any representative, analyst, or expert in Romania, realistically and pragmatically, no one can deny the significant importance of this religious dimension for the identity of Romanian society, for the Romanians in neighboring states, and for regional geopolitics.

This particular issue, if not resolved, will degrade relations between Romania and Ukraine, will create distrust between the two societies, but also between each of the two societies and their own respective state and institutions. And all of that may happen because Romanian and Ukrainian

officials did not want or were not able to responsibly and democratically resolve these sensitive issues. Russia, as a hostile actor, who is already implementing sustained narratives regarding these issues, stands to gain significant present and long-term influence if these issues are not properly addressed and if Romanian ethnics in Ukraine will not have religious freedom to adhere to the Romanian Orthodox Church, as the surveys have shown that they wish to do.

Conclusions

Throughout the paper, it was highlighted that, in order to counter Russian hybrid narratives and threats, decision makers in Romania need to properly and responsibly address the religious factor for Romanians in Ukraine, in the Republic of Moldova and in Romania. Basically, this would mean more institutional and political support for a dimension which is under hybrid attacks. These hybrid attacks benefit from political and institutional support from adverse entities, and ordinary citizens perceive that this religious dimension is not being defended - neither against Russian narratives and policies, neither against Ukrainian ones, nor against radical ideological narratives and policies at home, which disregard Romania's cultural and societal values.

It would also mean to politically support the religious initiatives of Romanians in Ukraine and in the Republic of Moldova who desire a rapprochement with the Romanian Orthodox Church that they were violently separated from by Russia and the USSR.

What is more, it would mean more political support for the Romanian Church in the Republic of Moldova (The Metropolis of Bessarabia) which has been facing and is continuously facing even violent persecutions and repercussions from institutions, politicians and the Russian Church which is still the main church over there.

On the home front, it would mean considering the interests and concerns of the Romanian society and decreasing the push for extreme ideological policies and narratives which have fractured our society and have allowed Russian narratives to spread.

Ultimately, both abroad and at home it would simply mean listening to what the real concerns of one's own society are, following adequate narratives and policies and denying Moscow the tools to further weaken and divide it.

Romania is a border nation, at the frontiers of NATO and Europe, and if we are to properly defend Europe and NATO, then we have to unite our own society, to consolidate it, we have to listen to its concerns and address the issues that our society holds to be most important. Whether some people like it or not, religion is one of these key-factors, as it was shown in this paper. Neglecting such a key-factor for our society has already weakened it and has allowed Russian hybrid threats to proliferate.

Failing to properly address these issues, concerns and interests of the Romanian society at home and abroad will further compromise local politicians and will alienate Romanian communities abroad, to the explicit benefit of Russia and other states. Not to mention the fact that failing to defend basic human rights, such as religious freedom, definitely compromises Romanian decision makers and institutions. This will have a double negative impact - *internally*, it will divide the society even more, and distrust in critical institutions will further increase, allowing hybrid threats to proliferate, while *externally* Romania's interests, prestige and security will dramatically suffer.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Anton, Cristian. 2024. "Ucraina atacă Biserica Ortodoxă Română. Decizie bizară a Serviciului de Securitate". https://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/ucraina-ataca-biserica-ortodoxa-romana-decizie-bizara-a-serviciului-de-securitate.html

Benea, Ionuț. 2024. "Cernăuți | Cum a ajuns Capela Mitropoliților români din Bucovina de Nord victimă colaterală a luptei dintre Kiev și Moscova". https://romania.europalibera.org/a/culisele-preluarii-de-catre-autoritatile-ucrainene-a-capelei-mitropolitane-din-cernauti-locul-de-rugaciune-al-romanilor/33105664.html

Biroul Național de Statistică al Republicii Moldova. 2025. "Rezultatele preliminare ale Recensământului Populației și Locuințelor 2024". https://statistica.gov.md/ro/rezultatele-preliminare-ale-recensamantului-populatiei-si-locuintelor-2024-10077_61626.html

Blitt, Robert C. 2022. Religious Soft Power in Russian Foreign Policy: Constitutional Change and the Russian Orthodox Church. Brookings Institution. The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4023702

BucPress. 2025. "Două biserici ortodoxe din Hliboca ar putea fi preluate de PȚU. Protopopul Ioan Gorda: „Forțele răului se dezlănțuie împotriva Bisericii"". https://bucpress.eu/doua-biserici-ortodoxe-din-hliboca-ar-putea-fi-preluate-de-ptu-protopopul-ioan-gorda-fortele-raului-se-dezlantuie-impotriva-bisericii/

Cantemir, Dimitrie. 1717. Hronicul Vechimei a Romano-Moldo-Vlahilor. Sankt Petersburg. https://cantemir.asm.md/files/u1/hronicul_vechimei_a_romano_moldo_vlahilor_vol_I.pdf.

Constituția Republicii Moldova (Constitution of The Republic of Moldova). 2024. https://presedinte.md/app/webroot/Constitutia_RM/Constitutia_2024_ro.pdf

Cubreacov, Vlad. 2024. "Cum încearcă "lumea ucraineană" să cuprindă comunitățile românești". Noua TV. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q20rrX5rX8o, min. 10:53.

Evans, Jonathan and Baronavski, Chris. 2018. "How do European countries differ in religious commitment? Use our interactive map to find out". Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/12/05/how-do-european-countries-differ-in-religious-commitment/

Gațcan, Diana. 2020. "În ce au încredere cetățenii R. Moldova: biserica și primăria, pe primele poziții". https://www.zdg.md/stiri/stiri-sociale/sondaj-in-ce-au-incredere-cetatenii-r-moldova-biserica-si-primaria-pe-primele-pozitii/

Gherman, Marin (coordinator). 2023. Research team: Vasile Barbuța, Mariana Belciuc, Sergiu Barbuța, "Comunitatea românească din Ucraina: necesități, așteptări și provocări în perioada războiului (barometru social)" ("The Romanian Community in Ukraine: Needs, Expectations, and Challenges during the War (Social Barometer)"). Brochure. Institute for Political Studies and Social Capital. Cernăuți. With the support of the Department for Relation with Romanians Abroad. https://bibliotecacernauti.com/images/carte_pdf/Copie-a-Copie-a-Analiza-presei-RO-din-UA.docx-1-min.pdf

Gherman, Marin (coordinator). 2024. Research team: Sergiu Barbuța, Mariana Belciuc. "Comunitatea românească din Cernăuți, Transcarpatia și Odesa. Barometru social – 2024". Institute for Political Studies and Social Capital. Cernăuți. https://bibliotecacernauti.com/images/carte_pdf/2024/2024-_BROSURA_compressed-2.pdf

Gherman, Marin. 2025. "Dispută bisericească la Storojineț. „Azi românii au fost uniți"". BucPress. https://bucpress.eu/disputa-bisericeasca-la-storojinet-care-pune-in-pericol-limba-romana-din-doua-lacase-de-cult/

Graziano, Manlio. 2017. Holy Wars & Holy Alliance. The Return of Religion to the Global Political Stage. New York: Columbia University Press.

Institutul de Politici Publice and CBS Research (Centrul de Studii Sociale și Marketing). 2023. Barometrul Opiniei Publice, septembrie 2023. https://ipp.md/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/BOP-2023-Prezentare.pdf

Ionescu, Ema. 2024. "Apel al românilor din Ucraina către Klaus Iohannis, Marcel Ciolacu și patriarhul Daniel: Să luați atitudine față de furtul de către autoritățile ucrainene a Capelei Mitropolitane". https://r3media.ro/apel-al-romanilor-din-ucraina-catre-klaus-iohannis-mar

cel-ciolacu-si-patriarhul-daniel-sa-luati-atitudine-fata-de-furtul-de-catre-autoritatile-ucrainene-a-capelei-mitropolitane/

ISPRI and CCSLARICS (Institutul de Științe Politice și Relații Internaționale al Academiei Române "Ion I. C. Brătianu" and Centrul de Cercetări Sociologice LARICS). 2022. Barometrul Vieții Religioase 3rd Edition. https://larics.ro/barometrul-vietii-religioase-editia-a-iii-a/

Jigău, Ion. 2024. "Sondaj socio-politic. CBX-AXA – performed at the request of IDIS „Viitorul" and The Universitary Foundation of The Black Sea". http://viitorul.org/files/library/Studiu%20Omnibus%20IDIS%202024.02.28%20final.pdf

Khoroshchak, Kateryna and Krechetova, Diana. 2024. "Чому двомовність – небезпечна, а лагідна українізація більше неактуальна? Інтерв'ю з мовним омбудсменом" ("Why is bilingualism dangerous, and why is mild Ukrainization no longer relevant? An interview with the Language Ombudsman."). https://life.pravda.com.ua/society/chi-ye-shche-misce-lagidniy-ukrajinizaciji-poyasnyuye-movniy-ombudsmen-interv-yu-304453/

Mandaville, Peter and Hamid, Shadi. 2018. Islam as Statecraft: How Governements Use Religion in Foreign Policy. Washington: Foreign Policy at Brookings, The Brookings Institution.

Negru, Elena. 2003. Politica etnoculturală în R.A.S.S. Moldovenească (1924-1940). Chișinău, Republic of Moldova: Prut Internațional Publishing House.

Păcurariu, Mircea. 1993. Basarabia. Aspecte din istoria bisericii și a neamului românesc. Iași: Trinitas, Editura Mitropoliei Moldovei și Bucovinei.

Păduraru, Pavel. 2024. "(DOC) Documentul prin care preoții moldoveni, pelerini în Moscova, s-au angajat la ANO „Evrazia" și s-au vândut lui Șor". https://www.jurnal.md/ro/news/b701a473f2e6aa4b/doc-documentul-prin-care-preotii-moldoveni-pelerini-in-moscova-s-au-angajat-la-ano-evrazia-si-s-au-vandut-lui-sor.html

Popescu, Anatol. 2024. "Elevii români din Ucraina: derusificare prin ucrainizare, inclusiv la pauzele între ore". https://bucpress.eu/elevii-romani-din-ucraina-derusificare-prin-ucrainizare-inclusiv-la-pauzele-intre-ore/?fbclid=IwY2xjawGcLIFleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHQewRVc8EVFZAoGwFLt14R9pzjyK1MJ65unwIb9XX2Q8C7uvpTNaeCHh6w_aem_XD8eBwA_bD6nuKmae6ByYw

Raudino, Simone and Sohn, Patricia (eds.). 2022. Beyond the Death of God. Religion in 21st Century International Politics. University of Michigan Press. Ann Arbor.

Sarány, Orsi. 2020. "The values of Transylvanian Hungarians and Romanians are sometimes similar". Tranylvania Now. https://transylvanianow.com/the-values-of-transylvanian-hungarians-and-romanians-are-sometimes-similar/

Țîcu, Octavian. 2021. "Istoria RASS Moldovenească (1924-1940) (IV): Inventarea limbii „moldovenești" sovietice (8)". Radio Free Europe Moldavia. https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/istoria-rass-moldoveneasc%C4%83-1924-1940-iv-inventarea-limbii-moldovene%C8%99ti-sovietice-8/31135117.html

Țîcu, Octavian. 2021. "Istoria RASS Moldovenească (1924-1940) (IV): Interferențele Kominternului (7)", Radio Free Europe Moldova. https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/istoria-rass-moldoveneasc%C4%83-1924-1940-iv-interferen%C8%9Bele-kominternului-7-/31123252.html

Ursulean, Andrei. 2024. "Comunicat: Noi hotărâri ale Sfântului Sinod al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române". Basilica. https://basilica.ro/comunicat-noi-hotarari-ale-sfantului-sinod-al-bisericii-ortodoxe-romane-2024/

Vaskovska, Viktoriya. 2024. "Мовний омбудсмен заявив про етап "наступальної українізації": що це означає" ("The Language Ombudsman announced a stage of 'offensive Ukrainization': what does this mean?"). https://fakty.com.ua/ua/ukraine/20241024-movnyj-ombudsmen-zayavyv-pro-etap-nastupalnoyi-ukrayinizacziyi-shho-cze-oznachaye/

Vălică, Carmen. 2022. “Serviciile de informații vs. clericii apropiați de Rusia. Ce urmează pentru Biserica Ortodoxă Ucraineană”. https://romania.europalibera.org/a/biserica-ortodoxa-ucraina-razii-servicii-informatii/32180326.html

INDEX OF AUTHORS

"CAROL I" NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING HOUSE

Director: Colonel Liviu Vasile STAN

The publications consists of 234 pages.

"Carol I" National Defence University Typography
Bucharest/Romania, sector 5, 68-72 Panduri Street
e-mail: editura@unap.ro
Phone: 00-40-021-319.48.80/0215; 0453

451/02545/2025 **C. 137/2025**