

## **MILITARY POWER AND ITS IMPORTANCE IN MAINTAINING MILITARY BALANCE IN EASTERN EUROPE**

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**Abstract:** *The frequent increasingly challenges, registered in the Eastern European security environment, require an unconventional approach due to the fact that classical typology of conflict has long become history, being replaced by the asymmetric type of conflict. Can European society overcome the new atypical security crises imposed by the military threat of Eastern European origin? Can the balance of military power be maintained so that Western society continues to enjoy security and democracy? These are just two legitimate questions that European states need to have a clear answer to, based on resource allocations in the military operational environment. Moreover, it is clear that security requires investments from a financial point of view and these must be continuous and at the minimum accepted level, like 2% of GDP, at the level of each NATO Member State.*

*In this article I will present some details regarding the vector of military power and its importance in maintaining the military balance in Eastern Europe, while the concerns of Russian actors to increase investment in research specific to the arms industry, especially in military intelligence capabilities and those with a long range, because, in their view, the use of military power as a tool of intimidation in foreign policy and the active involvement of forces in open conflicts, will succeed in partially regaining old areas of influence at regional or global level.*

**Keywords:** *military power; balance of power; political power; security.*

*„If you know your opponent, you can win many battles.  
You only win war when you know yourself.”*

### **Introduction**

The very wide range of dangers, risks and security threats very common at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (terrorism, organized crime, nuclear weapons, conflicts between states, international and humanitarian crises, natural disasters and more recently the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic), highlighting the diversity, asymmetry and multitude of existing security challenges. Although the political and peaceful approach to these crises is preferred by Western society, it is well known that the primary strategic goal of maintaining political balance in Eastern Europe is the military power of NATO's eastern flank states.

The size of the economy/military power ratio is directly proportional to the security of a state. It is a truism that economic power supports and creates military power, and military power provides security and supports political power in foreign policy. So, the economic dimension of military power is found in security, and it offers freedom of development to a country at all levels. Economic power is the main long-term support for military power, which needs constant financial support. You have economic power you have money; you have money you have a strong army; you have a strong army you have military power; you have military power you are a strong state.

Being a not accepted solution by the international community, however, military intervention can sometimes remain the most convenient solution in the case of divergent ideologies specific to crises without unanimously accepted political solutions. This amplifies the contradiction between the political and the military, which seems increasing obviously in approaching the security crises of contemporary European society. Analyzing the power of a state in an often-changing international environment, almost permanently tense, in which competition is increasingly fierce in all areas, but especially in the economic and military, with complicated and often unpredictable developments, is very clearly the fact that military power prevails in the political relationship between states. Moreover, military power provides security and social prosperity, without which democratic states could not evolve and freedoms and

stability at individual and family level would be endangered. The purpose of this article is to conduct an analysis of the importance of military power in maintaining military balance and security in Eastern Europe.

### **Military power and its importance in maintaining the Eastern European military balance**

The concept of military power in the current international context, in addition to the classic side of war, extends to unconventional actions, terrorism and cyberattacks and also in the fight against the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic that has spread globally to the armed forces. I believe that military power is represented by the armed forces and other forces that are part of the defense and intelligence system of a state or alliances, able to react in a timely and effective manner to external military or non-military stimuli of any adversary. Unlike other types of power, military power is quantifiable, so the balance of military power is constantly evolving measurable in terms of quantity and training of forces, as well as in terms of their endowment. The principle of action and reaction being perfectly valid in the case of the balance of a military power in most conflicts, but also in the case of competition between states or alliances from a military point of view, also applies in the military evolution of the two camps present in the military Eastern Europe, NATO and Russian Federation.

The balance of power is “*a state of affairs in which no power is in a preponderant position and can make the law for others*”<sup>1</sup>. The balance of power paradigm is a realistic tool for measuring power among other important areas, such as economics, politics and military. The concept of “balance” as synonymous with “balance”<sup>2</sup> is used by the same author, practical, it is considered that in the relationship between two systems, each system has the ability to react to external stimuli of the other. Hans Morgenthau claims in his book “Politics between Nations” that there is an organizing tool for relations between states and this is the “*balance of power, which ensures a relative order in the international arena, so that security in an anarchic world is ensured, from a realistic perspective, the balance of power, also called the balance of forces or equilibrium of forces*”<sup>3</sup>. The theory stated above by Morgenthau is perfectly applicable in the case of the balance of military power, because it is the instrument by which in case of a conflict the final balance between the belligerent camps is ensured.

*Hybrid warfare theory and practice* show that the changing nature of conflict and the emergence of new forms of armed struggle have generated concerns for study, both in the West and in Russia. American expert Richard Glenn defined the hybrid threat as “*an adversary who simultaneously and flexibly employs certain combinations of political, economic, social and informational tools and conventional, irregular/asymmetric, catastrophic, terrorist and criminal methods of conducting combat actions. It may include a combination of state and non-state actors*”<sup>4</sup>. The novelty brought by Glenn is that he considered the use of nonviolent tools in the political, economic, social and informational spectra. Thus, a striking resemblance can be seen between Glenn's definition and the events in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

In the Russian paradigm of managing the “*hybrid war*”, benefiting from the advantage of the Russian political system that can fully subordinate the capabilities of media, energy resources, security and intelligence systems and conventional military forces in achieving the established political goal, the main direction action is to obtain access, insertion or interference in the decision-making processes, both of the partner states, and especially of the opposing ones in order to influence and alter them. Knowing the decision-making processes and execution models, Russian

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<sup>1</sup> Hedley Bull, *Societatea anarhică. Un Studiu Asupra Ordinii în Politică Mondială*, Editura Știința, 1998, p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Morgenthau, *Politica între națiuni*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2013, pp. 362-366.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 367.

<sup>4</sup> R. Glenn, *Thoughts of Hybrid Conflict*, *Small Wars Journal*, 2 martie 2009, disponibil online la <http://smallwarsjournal.com/mag/docs-temp/188-glen.pdf>, accessed on 13.02.2020.

decision-makers are able to initiate the engagement of the opponent in an integrated manner, using: kinetic, informational, economic and energetic actions, political and influential.

### **Russian military power, a major threat to Eastern European states**

Political and military developments in Eastern Europe since the late 90s have significantly narrowed the area of influence of the Russian Federation, which is desperately trying, even by force, to maintain political, economic and military influence at least on the former Soviet republics. Subsequently, after regaining the status of a great military power worldwide, he tried to regain his areas of influence in both the Middle East and North Africa. Using military power as a tool of intimidation in foreign policy and sometimes even the active involvement of forces in open conflicts, he managed to partially regain old areas of global influence.

The erratic and fluent security environment in Eastern Europe requires a balance of military power, and fierce competition on NATO's eastern flank between the two competitors NATO and the Russian Federation is at a level not seen after the abolition of the Treaty of Warsaw. The military balance in Europe and in the world practically did not exist, at the end of the twentieth century there was a vacuum of military power, but after the coming to power of President Putin in 2000, the beginning of the military rebirth of the Russian Federation was observed.

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has found Russia eager to reappear on the short list of the world's great powers, aggressive and eager to continually engage in regaining its influence in international politics and old areas of interest. There is a massive financial investment in long-range military and intelligence capabilities, in response to deteriorating security around the world and increasing the number of open conflicts. Through massive investments in research in the field of long-range weapons systems, efforts are being made to maintain influence over the conflict zone, even if it is located thousands of kilometers away.

Analyzing the existing military powers in Eastern Europe, practically the eastern flank of NATO, and the armed forces structures of the Russian Federation deployed at its western border and in the Black Sea, it is observed that the military balance in the area is maintained, and that an attempt is also made to maintain some areas of influence by both parties in the terrestrial spectrum. The Russian Federation, considering NATO enlargement a threat to its own security, has largely tried and succeeded in creating an insecurity zone on its western border by creating outbreaks of insecurity that have erupted or can erupt at any moment and can transform into conflicts, with the help of which it keeps NATO's enlargement and its proximity to its borders at a distance and under control. The unconventional approach of President Putin's policy towards his Eastern European neighbors shows that all the crises between the Russian Federation and them have turned into military conflicts (especially the ethnic and political disputes that have turned into military conflicts: South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Georgia, Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk/Ukraine). The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was an important decision-making point in the further evolution of the security situation in Eastern Europe, Russia's power and desire to impose itself militarily and to expand its sphere of political and economic influence in the area has been reconfirmed. The Crimean Peninsula, after the abusive and illegal annexation, was considered an extremely important pole of military power from a strategic point of view, its gradual militarization led to the creation of a bridgehead for the armed forces of the Russian Federation, which can be used for the introduction of forces into operation in the event of deterioration of the existing security situation. The militarization of the Crimean Peninsula also supported the development of the Black Sea Fleet, which is a priority for the Russian Federation, investments in combat equipment being above the level of investments made in other structures of the Armed Forces.

Analyzing the evolution of the typology of conflicts, as well as the particularity of the Ukrainian environment for Russian armed forces, I appreciate that “*hybrid war*”, as an analytical concept, will be relatively ephemeral and should not be perceived as the “*winning*

*recipe*” for future conflicts. The idea that any “new” approach to war, including “*hybrid warfare*”, can lead to repeated victories is risky and reflects what analyst Hec Strachan<sup>5</sup> calls a “*strategic*” approach to war, whereby operational and doctrinal capabilities are overestimated within strategies. In other words, the presumption that a certain type of war or doctrinal approach will lead to victory, regardless of the circumstances, omits the fact that the success of a strategy always depends on the context. Thus, winning formulas, such as “*strategic bombing*”, “*asymmetric warfare*”, “*network warfare*”, “*full-spectrum warfare*” and “*hybrid warfare*”, should not be considered as strategies, but only as a means conducting to a desired end state or as the “*operational approach*” that contributes to the achievement of the strategic effect. These concepts can be effective only if they are molded to the specific circumstances of each particular conflict, and in most cases, they cannot anticipate the inevitable armed confrontations, chaos situations or even humanitarian disasters.

Indeed, such situations have been avoided in Crimea, but here we must take into account the circumstances of the environment, which favored the “*hybrid*” aspect of Russian intervention - the existence of an important pro-Russian community, the presence of Russian military units and related personnel which favored the infiltration of forces for special operations in Russia, the corrupt and inefficient Ukrainian political leadership, the almost complete absence of armed resistance of Ukrainian forces, the lack of reaction from the international community, surprised by the rapidity of Russian forces actions. Thus, I appreciate that the Russian strategy worked in Crimea, because the variety of military and non-military means used folded into the favorable context, characterized by the factors listed here, and not because the Russian Federation has developed a new complex approach to winning wars. Instead, the situation was different in eastern Ukraine, where Russian intervention did not receive the expected support of the Russian-speaking population and met with better organized resistance from the Ukrainian army, which led to a prolongation of the conflict and, inevitably, a change in its nature, in a predominantly conventional one, with high material and human damages that generated a humanitarian crisis of proportions in the region.

### **NATO military power, vector of maintaining the military balance in Eastern Europe**

The year 2014 brought a multitude of challenges from a geostrategic point of view in the extended neighborhood of Romania, from its perspective as a member state of the European Union and NATO, challenges that are particularly manifested on two strategic dimensions. Thus, their range extends from the aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine and the change of balance of power in the Black Sea region, through illegal occupation and militarization of Crimea in the East, to the rise of terrorism, increasing provocation of illegal migration, various crises and instability state, in the South.

According to US political and military officials, Russian neo-imperialism and its aggressive actions on the eastern border of NATO are key factors in Europe's instability and drastic changes in its strategic environment. As such, the United States considered its involvement in reconfiguring the confrontational environment in Eastern Europe to be vital, by developing and consolidating a security architecture based on a true projection of its military power, with the stated goal of gaining credible deterrence to existing threats.

The US commitment to Europe took place in June 2014 in Warsaw, where, on a visit to Europe, former US President Barack Obama announced the launch of the European Reinsurance Initiative/ERI, an action aimed at strengthening the defense of allies and partners in NATO's eastern flank, as well as increasing the US military presence in the region. Subsequently, in February 2015, President Obama proposed to the US Congress the approval of a budget of \$ 789 million for the implementation and expansion of a sustained US military

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<sup>5</sup> Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 13.

presence in Europe. Thus, the deployment of US military equipment/forces in Europe, which had been suspended after the end of the Cold War, became an active component of the ERI, being promoted by the Department of Defense. Thus, the set of equipment, called European Activity Set/EAS, materialized in equipment from company level to brigade level, deployed on the territory of several NATO allied countries, including Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania.

ERI provided funding for the mechanism for developing the American presence in Europe, which had the role of reassuring the allies on the continent of continuing the strategic partnership, but, more importantly, of stopping Russian aggression. The five main lines of action targeted by the ERI were: the increased presence of rotating land, air and sea forces in Europe; joint exercises and trainings with European allies; improved positioning (pre-positioning of heavy equipment and weapons at key points); strengthened infrastructure and, respectively, capacity building of NATO partners and allies.

The significant increase in the ERI budget in 2017 allowed the US military to deploy a third armored brigade in Eastern Europe, starting in February 2017. The numbers, estimated at 4,200 troops, were to be provided on a rotating basis, but with a presence continue in the region. Under current international law, the situation has the potential not to violate the NATO-Russia Agreement, signed in 1997, which banned the long-term deployment of NATO's "*significant forces*" in Eastern Europe. As a result, the United States Armed Forces of Europe (USAREUR) began, in 2017, to receive continuous rotations of troops of US-based armored combat brigades, with the ultimate intention of reaching the level of presence of the American force of three fully equipped brigades. Also, according to the budget proposals for the ERI in fiscal year 2017, the US military decided to start storing "*static*" equipment in Europe, known as "*stocks of pre-positioned equipment*" intended for emergency operations, in Europe that year.

The objectives of the US military for 2019 were that, by the end of the year, there should be the following on European territory: a continuous presence of three fully equipped combat brigade level structures (one armored, one air and one intervention); a pre-positioned set of combat-ready equipment, enough to support another armored combat brigade; division-level facilitators in Europe<sup>6</sup>. Thus, the presence of the US military in Europe has intensified since 2017, especially through the deployment of state-of-the-art military equipment, from modern helicopters equipped with anti-tank missiles to armored vehicles with high firepower. The combat equipment was to be pre-positioned so that it could be used in crisis situations, the US and NATO highlighting the determination to stop the hegemonic ambitions of President Vladimir Putin.

The US initiative to pre-position combat equipment included sending M1A2 Abrams tanks to Europe, as well as AH-64 Apache and UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters - three of the "*strong*" combat instruments owned by the US military. Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, the commander of US forces in Europe, said at the time that "*every day of 2017, 2018 and 2019 there will be a brigade in Europe, with all its equipment and all its soldiers, which will deploy military exercises*". In general, a regular brigade consists of about 87 tanks, 138 Bradley combat vehicles and 18 mobile howitzers. "*An important point of the plan is the presence of Apache helicopters*", said the commander of American troops in Europe. It should be noted that a standard combat aviation brigade contains 2,800 soldiers, 48 AH-64 Apache helicopters, 53 UH-60 Black Hawks helicopters and 24 Shadow and Gray Eagle drones.

In addition, the US military has begun to carefully study the "*lessons learned*" in Ukraine, in order to effectively counter Russian tactics used in the war in this state, including cyber warfare. The result was the studies developed on this topic at the Joint Multinational

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<sup>6</sup> <https://ro.usembassy.gov/ro/eucom-anunta-planul-de-implementare-initiativei-de-reasigurare-europeana/>, accessed on 15.07.2016.

Training Center in Hohenfels, Germany. In this regard, Lieutenant-General Ben Hodges stressed the importance of “*opposition forces*” gaining experience following exercises based on the latest Russian military initiatives – electronic warfare and the cyber-operational offensive. Following the US effort to deter Russian aggression and to target countries on NATO's eastern flank (Romania, Bulgaria, Poland and the Baltic States), the US Department of Defense sent a document to Congress calling for a 40% increase in the ERI budget in 2019, compared to 2018.

For the next few years, the United States plans to make new investments in Europe, focusing on modernizing several air bases. Thus, the US intends to spend \$214.2 million to build and modernize US military structures at air bases in Eastern Europe, but also in Northern Europe, as part of a new initiative aimed not only at European reinsurance, but also the continued deterrence of the Russian threat. For Romania, the ERI budget for 2018 meant the allocation of approximately 3 million USD to the air base from Câmpia Turzii, but also the increase of the role of the Mihail Kogălniceanu air base, for which 2.2 million USD will be spent.

According to the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2018, signed on December 12, 2017 by US President Donald Trump, the US Air Force Secretary received the necessary authorization to purchase land for the construction of US military facilities outside the national territory, respectively in Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, Luxembourg, Iceland and Norway<sup>7</sup>. Thus, investments of 2.95 million USD will be made at the air base from Câmpia Turzii/Romania, while the amount of 55.4 million USD is allocated for the Kecskemet base in Hungary. In the case of Slovakia, 22 million USD is earmarked for Sliac Airport and 24 million USD for Malacky Air Base. Some of these air bases in Europe would temporarily housing radar-invisible fighter jets, such as the F-22 Raptor and F-35 Strike Fighter, as well as other reconnaissance equipment that could be used to detect and monitor the activity of Russian submarines in the North Sea and the Baltic Sea.

Development of NATO command-control components on the eastern flank, respectively establishment of force integration units (NFIU), increase of the reaction level of the multinational corps in Poland and establishment/operation of a multinational division command (MND-SE HQ) in Romania blends harmoniously with the sustained military effort of the United States in Europe, in a congruence of interests/objectives whose ultimate intention is to obtain a credible and effective degree of military deterrence against the external threat posed by the aggression of the Russian Federation in the field of East-European insecurity. Like the United States, which does not want a war with Russia, NATO, as a politico-military structure with a defensive character, does not seek confrontation with Russia and considers that a new Cold War or another arms race is not in anyone's interest, but at the same time, he believes that the “*approach that combines force with dialogue*” is the best way to respond to Moscow's current actions.

The continuous increase in the military capabilities of the Russian Federation in the Crimea and the development and modernization of the Black Sea Fleet show that military interest in the Black Sea region is very high and that NATO's prompt response is not accidental. In order to eradicate the influence of the Russian Federation on NATO's eastern flank, “*NATO should remove any asymmetry from the current position of the eastern flank, enhancing its role in the broad Black Sea region in all areas; strengthen deterrence and defense capacities in the Baltic Sea region and to adopt a joint threat assessment to enable the swift political and military reactions needed to deter Moscow's direct aggression*”<sup>8</sup>. NATO's eastern flank has also been strengthened by anti-missile shields located in Poland and Romania, which provide ballistic protection and provide increased security in the event of a potential attack.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.airforcetimes.com/flashpoints/2017/12/17/us-plans-200-million-buildup-of-european-air-bases-flank-ing-russia/>, accessed on 06.01.2018.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, accessed on 26.01.2021.

## Conclusions

The physiognomy of post-Cold War military conflicts was marked by substantial transformations, highlighted mainly in the evolution from symmetrical to asymmetric and from linear to nonlinear. At the same time, amid the spread of globalization and technical-scientific progress, there has been an emergence of unconventional character over the whole range of conflicts. It has generated a widening of the confrontation space and a diversification of the types of threats to the global security environment;

The balance of military power in Eastern Europe, although it seems a fierce competition that can bring tensions and even lead to long-term conflict, in the short term it is only a competition that maintains balance and can cultivate the normalization of relations in Eastern Europe;

The development of hybrid conflicts is not the end of traditional or conventional warfare, but is a factor that complicates defense planning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these significant implications will make hybrid forms of conflict require innovative thinking (hybrid warfare), unanimously accepted as the “*new generation of war*”, a notion that emerged from the Gulf War (1991), the events of the Arab Spring (2011) and the interventions of the Russian Federation in Ukraine (2014), an analytical concept with a relatively ephemeral character that should not be perceived as the “*recipe for success*” of future conflicts;

The circumstances of the Crimean environment favored the “*hybrid*” aspect of the Russian intervention by: the existence of an important pro-Russian community, the presence of Russian military units and related personnel that favored the infiltration of Russian special operations forces, corrupt and inefficient Ukrainian political leadership, the almost complete absence of the armed resistance of the Ukrainian forces, the lack of reaction from the international community, surprised by the rapidity of the actions of the Russian forces;

The Russian strategy worked in Crimea, because the variety of military and non-military means used folded into the favorable context, characterized by the factors listed here, and not because the Russian Federation had developed a new complex approach to winning wars. Instead, the situation was different in eastern Ukraine, where Russian intervention did not receive the expected support of the Russian-speaking population and encountered better organized resistance by the Ukrainian army, which led to a prolongation of the conflict and, inevitably, a change in its nature in a predominantly conventional one, with high material and human damages that generated a humanitarian crisis of proportions in the region.

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