

# ASYMMETRIC THREATS

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**Abstract:** "Asymmetry is as old as war. There have always been differences between opponents, which placed them into advantageous or disadvantageous positions, deciding the outcome of the battles/war/conflict. At a strategic level, these differences led to what we call today "strategic asymmetry today"<sup>1</sup>. Present and future conflicts seem to be asymmetric.

**Keywords:** Asymmetric threats; terrorism; military conflicts; terrorist organizations.



Figure no. 1

Asymmetric threats can be defined as "the broad and unpredictable outlook of military, paramilitary and information operations led by nations, bodies, individuals or indigenous forces placed under their command, specifically targeting weaknesses and vulnerabilities in an enemy administration or armed force"<sup>2</sup>

Another definition of asymmetry was formulated in the "Military Observatory" newspaper, by General Dr. Vasile Paul, as follows: "Asymmetry in the field of military issues and national security represents the action, organization

<sup>1</sup> Vasile Paul, *Strategic Asymmetry*, Military Observatory, nr.18 (8 - 14 mai 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Michael L. Kolodzie, *Commentary The Asymmetric Threat*, <http://www.almc.army.mil/alog/issues/JulAug01/MS628.htm>, p. 1.

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and thought (conception), different from that of the adversary, in order to maximizing your own advantages, exploiting the weaknesses of your opponents, getting the initiative or gaining freedom of action. It may be: political-strategic, military-strategic, and operational or a combination of all of them."<sup>3</sup>

In the present, new threats to national, regional and global security are emerging. New threats to security represent the means used by states, groups or individuals to carry out attacks without a direct contact and they are based on terrorism, corruption, criminality and economic oligarch, affecting citizens' rights and freedom.

## Asymmetry is a contemporary problem

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 on the territory of the United States of America have made the prevention and fight against terrorism, one of the political priorities of democratic states, people realizing how much vulnerable they are in front of this danger. Terrorist acts become more sophisticated, free movement giving them the possibility to move from one place to another, a secure banking system and free access to information. The technology is accessible to all citizens, globalization representing, among other things, the phenomenon that facilitates access to technologies that can be used in terrorist acts or other criminal activities. The violence of terrorism and its dimensions affect political, cultural, economic relations between countries in accordance with the principles of international law.

"The war that we lead today against terrorism is one with many facets. We must use every instrument available in this war - diplomacy,

<sup>3</sup> *Idem.*

finance, information, law and, of course, military force - and develop new instruments as long as time passes "I, said Richard Armitage.

A growing threat is represented by the

attacks, distributed according to the map presented below.

The French state declared the state of emergency and reintroduced the border controls<sup>5</sup> and the



Figure no 2

development of Isis extremist Islamist organizations, the so-called conflict between Muslims and Christians. Also, an already permanent conflict that is often manifested through terrorist actions is that of the Middle East, in the Israeli-Palestinian space, being generated by the struggle of the Palestinian people for almost half a century to create their own state.

In the present, we are confronted with a series of armed attacks, bombings taking place all over the world. In this respect, we can remember about the capital of France which was affected by the attack on Charlie Hebdo magazine, which took place in Paris on January 7, 2015, and ended with 12 dead people and 11 injured people. When everybody thought things were quiet, another assault shook Paris on the evening of November 13, 2015, and in the early hours of the next day, an assault claimed by the Islamic State.<sup>4</sup>

There were three explosions and six armed

citizens were advised not to leave their homes.<sup>6</sup>

The official balance was at least of 140 deaths.

The National Day of France, celebrated in Nice also turned into a blood bath on the night of July 14 to July 15, when a truck at high speed, entered the crowd gathered to see the fireworks. The report of the tragedy amounted to more than 84 deaths and over 200 injured, according to the French authorities, who specified that this report could change, many of the victims being in a serious health condition. Experts warn that the number of terrorist organizations is rising, also the number of countries where they are working. Unfortunately for us, we can say that we live in an era of terrorism.

If we make a brief analysis of the terrorist attacks that took place all over the world between 2004 and 2018, we will find it stunning that the number of

<sup>5</sup> „Etat d'urgence, contrôle aux frontières, transports: les mesures en vigueur” (in French language), *Le Monde*, 14<sup>th</sup> November 2015.

<sup>6</sup> „Multiple terrorist attacks in Paris: At least 140 deaths. France decrees the state of emergency and closes the borders.”, *Gândul*, 13 november 2015, accessed at 14 november, 2015.



victims is steadily rising to more than 892 dead and thousands wounded today.

### The purpose and methods of asymmetric threats

The goal of terrorist attacks is to avoid direct confrontations between unequal forces, which would make the most important of these forces to win.

Liddell Hart stressed that "Because there is an essential difference between the goals pursued by aggressive and non-aggressive states, there must be a corresponding difference between the methods they use to promote their policies."<sup>7</sup>

The quote presented above is becoming more and more current, because the states that are subject to aggression feel the imbalances resulting from the highlighted quasi-permanent strategic asymmetry.

"The aggrieved states are preoccupied with their security, and when they are assaulted, they seek to frustrate all the methods of the aggressor's plans, causing him to give up attempts to conquer, in all ways and by all means, mainly the unconventional.

Those specified in the above assertion explicitly lead to the conclusion that states (nations) subjected to aggression, usually in a relationship of inferiority to the aggressor, will be the first to resort to the asymmetric battle/war, trying to exploit his virtues."<sup>8</sup>

The aggression is not only of military nature but also of political, ethnic, religious nature, etc. The motivations of those who use asymmetric threats are diverse. The most common in our days are the ethnic or religious ones.

The main areas of manifestation of asymmetric warfare Terrorism is the main concern of the present days, but also of the future world, increased by ethnic, religious, economic, nationalist and political reasons. Besides the terrorist acts manifested in various forms, mankind is confronted with local wars, insurgencies and counter-insurgencies, low intensity conflicts, guerrilla and street fighting, pro and vice versa, etc., requiring tactics, equipment and effective, different from conventional ones.

Future conflicts are aimed at combating groups

<sup>7</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy. Indirect actions*, Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 1973, p. 368.

<sup>8</sup> Asymmetric conflicts. Operational Requirements for the Structure of the Romanian Armed Forces.

of terrorists who, in order to achieve their goals, are capable of using weapons of mass destruction, state-of-the-art technologies, or prepared fighters willing to sacrifice their own lives.

One of the most worrying issues is that countries considered stable are facing instability, generated precisely by religious, ethnic or socio-economic conflicts.

It is worrying the fact that terrorist attacks are accompanied by computerized attacks that cause major damage to government, military, and security information systems.

In recent years, terrorism has adopted increasingly violent tactics, targeting both government representatives and civil society. Terrorist organizations do not assume the paternity of their actions, remaining anonymous, and the constant tension in various parts of the globe, amplified by the media, leaves the impression of a growing conflict situation that does not have a viable solution to be solved, even if it tries to find the appropriate ways to counteract these specific dangers and threats.

### CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the increasingly frequent asymmetric threats at the global or transnational level, the relationships among information agencies in different countries have increased. The benefits of information exchange are obvious: getting information in real time from other countries is an essential condition for taking a good decision. In addition, parallels are eliminated, which allows significant savings in resources.

"Bilateral co-operation usually means the exchange of information and analysis on issues of common interest. This type of cooperation works on a quid pro quo basis because any country is reluctant to share information that could reveal sources or methods without gaining a concrete benefit. Although countries with limited information resources can not always be compared to large countries, they can take revenge in another way, for example by providing access to regions and languages for which other services should develop separate capacities."<sup>9</sup>

Asymmetry is an expression of the real relationships existing in nature, in society, in

<sup>9</sup> Current challenges for intelligence services, [www.sri.ro](http://www.sri.ro)



human relationships. Modern science studies the asymmetric relationships by means of analysis, offering models and paradigms that are more and more closely related to the reality of things. Asymmetry has a place of existence and manifestation everywhere and every time. Asymmetric conflicts are nothing more than a real manifestation of asymmetry in the act of confrontation. All conflicts are, in fact, asymmetric. "Mankind is at the crossroads of its future: either we cooperate in the fight against terrorism, or the future will be gloomy, and this threat will continue throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century and perhaps after."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> [impolis.ro/arhiva/articol-terorismul-pretul-platit-de-civilizatia-occidentala-pentru-aeurohegemonia-aur-sa-in-lume-1429.html](http://impolis.ro/arhiva/articol-terorismul-pretul-platit-de-civilizatia-occidentala-pentru-aeurohegemonia-aur-sa-in-lume-1429.html)