



DOCTRINAL EVOLUTION OF THE NATO STRATEGIC CONCEPT

*Professor Dănuț Mircea CHIRIAC, PhD**

*Associate Professor Cosmin Florian OLARIU, PhD***

Abstract: *Analyzing the evolution of the North Atlantic Alliance's Strategic Concepts and highlighting the effects they have had on the international relations and on the security system allow the understanding of both the doctrinal approach that supported these concepts and the objective determination of their level of success, in terms of efficiency, and effectiveness. Such understanding ensures the identification of the possible historic repetition, namely the specific security context, and substantiates the relationship between the past experience and the current and the perspective actionable potential. The successful solution in overcoming state security risks through alliances lies not only in the cumulative effect of defense resources contributed by the Member States but also in the capacity to integrate defense planning and operational planning, when the consistent provision of the necessary resources is ensured.*

Keywords: *strategic concept; strategic capability; operational planning; efficiency; effectiveness.*

The efficiency and especially the effectiveness of a political-military alliance are determined to a great extent by how the ingenuity of the strategic concept compensates for the insufficiency of resources and capabilities by pragmatically understanding the evolutionary trends in the international security environment, by objectively covering the systemic vulnerabilities, by courageous risk management and by the harmonious use of operational and transformational processes.

The entire existential path of the North Atlantic Alliance, and implicitly that of the strategic concepts that ensured its functional success, were built on the power relationship between the Western Community and Russia, more precisely, on the need to coagulate efforts in the Western community in order to ensure the balance of power with Russia.

Even when, in 1990, the collapse of the Soviet Union generated the apparent disappearance of the security risk that led to the establishment of NATO, the persistence of the strategic planners

demonstrated that the decay was temporary, that the risk itself did not disappear, and the involvement of the Russian Federation in the recent events in Eastern Ukraine, especially the action forms this involvement took, clearly show the evidence of this risk for the Central and Eastern European Member States.

On January 6, 1950, the North Atlantic Council adopted the Strategic Concept for North Atlantic Defense - DC 6/1¹ and the North Atlantic Regional Planning Guide - MC 14². Based on these two documents, the Regional Planning Groups developed and consolidated the Regional Defense Plans that they integrated into the NATO-DC 13 Medium-Term Plan, endorsed by the Defense Committee one year after NATO's establishment, respectively April 1, 1950. Even not centralized, the three documents ensured, through the interdependence of their content, the key elements of NATO's strategy.

¹ *Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Area D.C. 6/1*, p. 2, Collection of documents declassified by NATO, Chapter II – *From Treaty to Organization*, published on the site of North Atlantic Treaty Organization, http://www.nato.int/ebookshop/video/declassified/doc_files/DC_006_1_ENG_PDP.pdf, accessed 13.05.2017.

² *Strategic Guidance for North Atlantic Regional Planning*, published on the site of North Atlantic Treaty Organization, <http://www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/a500328c.pdf>, accessed 13.05.2017.

* "Hyperion University"

e-mail: danutmirceachiriac@yahoo.com

** "Carol I" National Defence University

e-mail: cosmin_olariu1973@yahoo.com



The geopolitical analysis and the strategic capabilities of the enemy analysis showed that the USSR's intention to "*spread communism globally ...why Soviet leaders would not have hesitated to attack NATO states at the time considered appropriate*"³ would have been supported, if necessary, by both physical and non-physical resources needed to execute a set of operations⁴ involving subversive activities and global sabotage of NATO interests; maritime and air action against strategic maritime lines between the US and Europe; military campaigns in Western Europe, Scandinavia or Italy with transit through Yugoslavia, including a military campaign to occupy the Iberian Peninsula and secure the Gibraltar Strait; military campaigns in the Near East, the Middle East, and military campaigns with limited objective in the Far East.

Starting from this ratio of forces and intentions which was complicated and not at all favorable to the Western community, NATO's first strategic concept was aimed at the organization of territorial defense, simultaneously with improving the ratio of conventional forces to offset this severe vulnerability by the deterrence of any aggression against its members. The functional efficiency of this concept derives from its three directions of action, more precisely from their interdependence and complementariness.

In the sense of NATO's overall strategic objective, in case of Soviet aggression in Europe, the destruction "*through strategic counter-offensive in Western Eurasia, of the USSR and its allies capabilities and their will to lead the war*"⁵ would have been ensured complementarily by the five defense regions established on the General Defense Plan, as follows: the three defense zones in Europe (North, Central and Southern) would have taken over the main effort of the Soviet offensive, then fixed it on a steady strategic phase line, and the Canada-US Region would ensure deployment and commitment of resources for strategic counterattack and restoration of territorial integrity of the Area of Responsibility by exploiting the strategic maritime

Lines of Communication between the North American and the European continents under the responsibility of the North Atlantic Regional Planning Group.⁶

The concept decentralized the command of the actions at the regional level to compensate for the lack of a centralized command structure, exploiting the interoperability readiness level through direct cooperation on the basis of geographical proximity. The contribution of the Member States was proportional with their geographical position, industrial capacity, financial resources and already existent military capabilities.⁷

The improvement of the military power deficit in relation to the USSR was initiated immediately after the North Atlantic Treaty was signed, when Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Luxemburg, the United Kingdom, Norway and the Netherlands requested mutual assistance. Based on this, the US Congress adopted the Mutual Defense Assistance Act, in October 6, 1949, where by the US President "*was authorized to provide military assistance in the form of equipment, supplies and services to those nations which are parties to the Treaty and who have requested support in this sense*"⁸ in the amount of 1 billion US dollars⁹. Under this program, supplies of equipment to Europe began on March 8, 1950.¹⁰ The program's effects were quickly felt together with the reinvigoration of the European Allies' military forces and of the European weapons industry. Resources were allocated in accordance with the necessary minimum requirements set out in the Medium Term Plan NATO-DC 13 and the implementation deadline of this plan, July 1, 1954, when NATO would have a sufficient conventional

⁶ *Idem*, pp. 61-62.

⁷ *Idem*, p. 3.

⁸ *Mutual Defense Assistance Act of 1949 (Washington, 6 October 1955)*, Sec.101, published in *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 44, No.1, Supplement: Official Documents, American Society of International Law, 1950, <http://loveman.sdsu.edu/docs/1949mutualdefenseassistanceact.pdf>, accessed 13.05.2017.

⁹ *Idem*, Sec. 102 and 103.

¹⁰ *A boost from NATO*, p. 2, Collection of documents declassified by NATO, Chapter II - *From Treaty to Organization*, published on the site of North Atlantic Treaty Organization, http://www.nato.int/ebookshop/video/declassified/#/en/encyclopedia/from_treaty_to_organization/the_means_to_build_nato/a_boost_from_the_us/, accessed 13.05.2017.

³ *Medium Term Defense Plan D.C. 13*, p. 30, Collection of documents declassified by NATO, published on the site of North Atlantic Treaty Organization, http://www.nato.int/ebookshop/video/declassified/doc_files/DC_013_ENG_PDP.pdf, accessed 13.05.2017.

⁴ *Idem*, p. 34.

⁵ *Idem*, p. 10.



military force to balance the USSR¹¹, and when the Soviet Union could have counted on a sufficiently large radius of its long-range aviation, and implicitly on the ability to bomb targets, including nuclear nukes, on North American territory¹².

The Strategic Concept for North Atlantic Defense – DC 6/1 demonstrates not only the acute perception, at the level of NATO strategists, of a high degree of risk in terms of producing Soviet aggression on Allied territory or related to numerical inferiority in military resources to the USSR, but also related to the dependency of NATO's effectiveness on US nuclear capabilities¹³, in essence, the discouraging instrument by which the two aforementioned vulnerabilities could be overcome.

As a natural follow-up to the implementation needs of the strategic approach, the Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Area – DC 6/1 also included standardization and co-operation instructions between members on the organization of forces, intelligence exchange, arms construction and logistic support.

At practical level and in order to complement this strategy, in 1950, the decisional inefficiency of NATO's decentralized system over the super centralized and integrated command and control system (C2) of the USSR was overcome by: reorganizing the three European Regional planning groups under Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), Rocquencourt – FRANCE and of North Atlantic Regional Planning Group in the Supreme Allied Command Atlantic (SACLANT) – Norfolk, Va., USA; setting up the Military Standardization Agency and activating the Military Production and Supply Board and the establishment of the Financial and Economic Council.

Through the decisions adopted by the North Atlantic Council in Lisbon, in February 1952, transformational measures "*representing an essential and timely step in bringing the NATO*

mechanism closer to the form that would allow effective collective action to achieve the objectives of the North Atlantic Treaty"¹⁴ were adopted: the permanent Headquarters of the North Atlantic Council was moved from London to Paris, NATO Secretary General, supported by the International Staff and its own Secretariat, was generated, Permanent National Representatives of Member States or Permanent Missions to NATO leading national delegations were appointed, the augmentation of the International Military Staff was generated, with direct effects on the implementation of the North Atlantic Council decisions, on the consensus among NATO members, and on the consultation and decisional processes.

The simultaneous admittance of Turkey and Greece to NATO on February 18, 1952 directly contributed to the considerable mitigation of the unfavorable military forces ratio with the USSR and to the strengthening of the southern European flank by requiring the Soviet Union to dissipate its military effort on two Strategic directions along with the significant proximity of NATO capabilities to its vital space and, indirectly, to neutralizing the tensions between Turkey and Greece by converting a regional source of risk into a significant geopolitical advantage. Major discrepancies between Turkey and other Member States determined by the respect for cultural values, democratic principles and individual freedoms or those determined by the realistic needs and quotas from the amounts made available by the United States through the Mutual Defense Assistance Act allocated to Greece were overcome by the strategic advantage of controlling the Bosphorus and Dardanelle Straits or by the advanced positions for launching military actions in case of external aggression generated by Soviet Union.

The initiative act in the Revision of NATO Strategy, NATO Strategic Concept for Defense of the North Atlantic Area - MC 3/5, December 3, 1952, does not differ much from its predecessor but demonstrates that, from the perspective of the strategic concept, NATO is a pragmatic organization

¹¹ *Strategic Concepts*, published on the site of North Atlantic Treaty Organization, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_56626.htm, accessed 13.05.2017.

¹² *Medium Term Defense Plan D.C. 13*, p. 39, Collection of documents declassified by NATO, Chapter II - *From Treaty to Organization*, published on the site of North Atlantic Treaty Organization, http://www.nato.int/ebookshop/video/declassified/doc_files/DC_013_ENG_PDP.pdf, accessed 14.05.2017.

¹³ *Idem*, p. 5.

¹⁴ *Reorganisation of the North Treaty Organization, Note by Executive Secretary C9-D/4 din 17.03.1952*, p. 3, Collection of documents declassified by NATO, Chapter II – *From Treaty to Organization*, published on the site of North Atlantic Treaty Organization, http://www.nato.int/ebookshop/video/declassified/doc_files/C_9-D_4-FINAL.PDF, accessed 14.05.2017.



that is willing to learn from the identified lessons.

In the view of NATO strategists, the necessary and sufficient condition for Soviet Union to initiate an aggression was determined by the Russians' confidence in their ability to occupy the entire Western Europe, simultaneously with the drastic reduction of NATO's mobilization potential and strategic striking ability, which would have ensured access to European seaports in the Atlantic Ocean, air superiority and maintaining control over the occupied territory¹⁵. This hypothesis and the need to include the specific tasks generated by the expansion of the southern flank were reflected in the Strategic Guide – MC 14/1, December 18, 1952.

Complementary to the previous concept, the deterrence component included measures of diplomatic and informational engagement in order to neutralize the will of the USSR and its allies to bear the cost of a possible conflict with no chances of success¹⁶, and in order to balance the conventional force ratio according to a Development Plan to be implemented up to 1956.

In the case of the deterrence component's failure, the reactive level of the strategic concept referred to the splitting of the Soviet effort by engaging it in two directions and stopping the opponent as quickly as possible by executing some tactical delay actions on the main direction of the Soviet advance followed by strikes on the flank, concomitantly with the launch of the strategic air strike and the re-occupation of the lost territory. In comparison with the previous concept, the joint actions benefited from centralized Command and Control and from employing a superior quantitative and qualitative arsenal, as well as from the advanced positions designated for launching the strategic counteroffensive¹⁷.

This strategy was adopted under US nuclear monopoly conditions but under the pressure of the USSR successfully testing the nuclear weapon, which triggered the arms race between the two great powers and having a direct effect on the strategic concept and indirect effect on the security of the

Member States.

Exploiting the model already experienced by admitting Turkey and Greece, NATO continued the enlargement process by admitting West Germany on May 6, 1955, and thus replaced, from the terrestrial employment perspective, the advantage of engaging the enemy on neutral territory with the one of increasing the military potential by increasing the number of conventional troops, by preserving the territorial area, but also by increasing the economic support for the war effort.

The operationalization of the USSR's nuclear arsenal together with achieving the balance of conventional forces led to the paradoxical effect of concentrating the strategic approach on the nuclear effort beyond the intended effect of meeting the objectives set out in the 1952 NATO Strategic Concept. Practically, transferring the advantage from the USSR to NATO led to the adoption by the Soviet Union of compensatory measures to regain the initiative. By establishing, on the 15th May, 1955, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Soviet Union and Certain Eastern European Communist Governments¹⁸, as a replication of NATO, the USSR regained the numerical strength of forces and, implicitly, increased control over the resources of states inside the newly created alliance. Equally, the vulnerabilities resulting from the necessity to split the strategic effort on two directions and the deployment of NATO aviation in Greece and in Turkey led to the concentration of Soviet efforts on the numerical development of its nuclear capacity, especially of transport vectors by replacing airplanes with missiles, and by gaining control over the extra-atmospheric space. The success of these initiatives increased NATO's strategic dependence on the nuclear arsenal and led to a rapid advance of the Arms Race. In conjunction with Alexander de Seversky's assumption¹⁹ that "*the only feasible way to ban enemy atomic bombing (of the USSR) on some European targets was to destroy their*

¹⁵ *Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Area M.C. 3/5*, p. 9, *NATO Strategy Documents*, published on the site of North Atlantic Treaty Organization <http://www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/a521203a.pdf>, accessed 14.05.2017.

¹⁶ *Idem*, p. 6.

¹⁷ *Idem*, p. 10.

¹⁸ *Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance (Warsaw, 14 May 1955)*, published on the site of Virtual Center for Knowledge about Europe – Luxembourg, http://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1997/10/13/b1234dbc-f53b-4505-9d86-277e4f5c20d4/publishable_en.pdf, accessed 14.05.2017.

¹⁹ Alexander de Seversky, *Air Power: Key to Survival*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1950.



*design capabilities in their launching area*²⁰, an idea strongly supported by US General Dale O. Smith, this situation led to the focus of NATO's third strategic concept on the Massive Retaliation Strategy.

Adopted in March 23, 1957, the Enhanced Strategic Concept for North-Atlantic Area Defense – MC 14/2 was accompanied by the Measures for the Implementation of the Strategic Concept - MC 48/2, the two documents mentioning the resources needed for the technological development of the medium and long range vector, especially the nuclear nukes that could be launched and transported with this vector, but also the importance that early warning systems and rapid dissemination of Intelligence systems had in their effort to compensate the Soviet advantage generated by planetary space control over the Lower orbit via satellites.²¹

Given that the ability to launch the nuclear arsenal was accessible to both sides and that *"the destructive capacity of these weapons, especially of the nuclear weapons, but also the low defense capacity against them raise completely new problems compared to those in previous conflicts, not only military, but also political, economic and psychological issues"*²², the fundamental premises of the strategic vision would have led either to the total conflict, or to the continuation of the Cold War after the engagement in indirect military conflicts or limited military operations²³, such as the Berlin Crisis, 1958-1962. Since, without the immediate strategic and tactical engagement of the nuclear arsenal, the potential for preventing the rapid occupation of European territory was null, the Alliance's strategy provided for the initiative of nuclear armament use *"whether the Soviets use their nuclear weapons or not"*²⁴ and for the immediate capitalization of the advantage thus gained by conducting conventional defense reinforcement

operations in all environments²⁵. Although the engagement of a total confrontation would have generated a zero-sum nuclear conflict, time showed that the estimation of NATO strategists for concept success was one that proved to be not necessarily efficient, due to the very high costs of maintaining the arms race, but effective, once it discouraged a possible assault of USSR and ensured the territorial integrity of the Member States.

The consistent development of Soviet intercontinental ballistic capabilities, the very high cost of the strategy adopted by NATO for Berlin Crisis and, last but not least, the Cuban Nuclear Missile Crisis, October 22 - November 20, 1962, intensified the dilemma of accidentally triggering a nuclear conflict and determined discussions for a NATO strategy that included the nuclear arsenal but addressed conflict and crisis situations differently, depending on the particularities of each of them.

The official withdrawal of France from the Alliance's integrated Command Structure in 1966, the increase of nuclear arsenal states, the widening of the nuclear weapons spectrum, and the upgrading of the ballistic transport vectors led to a revision of the NATO strategy based on the doctrine of Massive Retaliation.

The move, after the adoption of the Wider Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization - MC 14/3, from the doctrine based on the massive retaliation to that of flexible response brought about a balance of power between NATO and Warsaw Treaty. The NATO security threat assessment was conducted on the basis of a scenario where the USSR would have attempted to exploit any vulnerability of the North Atlantic Alliance within and outside its Area of Responsibility to strengthen world power position, using military, economic, political, propaganda and subversion resources.²⁶

The development of submarine nuclear propulsion systems concluded a series of breakthroughs with a major impact on the strategy which led to the "horizontal" development of military capabilities for both NATO and Warsaw Treaty. Thus, if the strategic surprise was almost impossible, the effectiveness and efficiency of the NATO response would have come from the timely interpretation and public disapproval of

²⁰ *The most effective pattern of NATO Military Strength for the Next few Years M.C. 48*, p. 3, *NATO Strategy Documents*, published on the site of North Atlantic Treaty Organization <http://www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/a541122a.pdf>, accessed 14.05.2017.

²¹ *Overall Strategic Concept for the Defense of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Area M.C. 14/2*, pp.3-6, *NATO Strategy Documents*, published on the site of North Atlantic Treaty Organization <http://www.nato.int/docu/stratdoc/eng/a570523a.pdf>, accessed 14.05.2017.

²² *Idem*, p.8.

²³ *Idem*, p.7.

²⁴ *Idem*.

²⁵ *Idem*, p.10.

²⁶ *Idem*, p. 4.



the opponent's intentions, and from gaining the time needed to prepare and execute an adequate response simultaneously with the emergence of international political tensions. In essence, the strategy was based on two key elements: flexibility and progressive escalation, based on the ability to promptly and firmly respond to any kind of aggression against NATO states,²⁷ exploiting the advantage of the integrated decision-making system and the combined use of the nuclear arsenal and conventional forces.

As the Alliance members benefited from the sustainable economic development of the viability provided by the democracy-market tandem, NATO retained a slight technological advantage, under a equilibrated military power balance, which enabled its success in Arms Race and which, eventually, led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. The functional longevity for more than twenty-three years and a clear superiority to all other strategic concepts gave the concept based on the doctrine of flexible response an indisputable asset in ensuring success, under the conditions of the Cold War.

Overall, in terms of conceptual performance, it took more than eighteen years of searches and permutations to establish the so necessary power balance to successfully fulfil NATO's basic mission and to ensure the so desired security in Europe. Despite its inefficiency, NATO's strategic concept in 1949-1990 proved to be effective, justifying the huge consumption of Member States' resources.

Following the absence of a direct and sufficiently strong threat to the security of the Member States, the three NATO strategic concepts of 1991, 1999 and 2010, transferred the functional focus from the main activity that generated the establishment of the North Atlantic Alliance to the specific forms of response to asymmetric, dissymmetric or non-conventional threats. This approach led, in time, to the refinement of an integrated set of essential tasks that involves the complementarity between cooperative security, the specific and contextual management of crises and collective defense²⁸. But the same lack of a direct and sufficiently

strong threat to the security of the Member States stemming from the USSR's implosion was the one that opened the way for the reorientation of the Central and Eastern European states towards NATO and the use of NATO as a tool to protect the global security interests of Member States, including through crisis management or assistance operations to states outside its Area of Responsibility.

The period 1990-2014 brought the enlargement of NATO from 16 to 28 members, all of which were members of the peripheral sphere of USSR influence or even of former members of Soviet Union, as well as approaching some states from the vital security space of the Russian Federation, like Ukraine or Georgia, to NATO, with the declared intention of joining the North Atlantic Alliance. Such actions, despite the strictly defensive nature of NATO, seriously affected the security interests of the Russian Federation which, in the context of its economic revival and firm leadership provided by Vladimir Putin, reacted in 2008 through an offensive with limited objective in Georgia and in 2014 by launching a hybrid aggression against Ukraine, ensuring so far the control of the Crimea, its masked presence in Eastern Ukraine, and the opening of several strategic exploitation opportunities on several directions.

The adaptive measures package adopted by NATO through the Readiness Action Plan²⁹ at the Wales Summit, September 2014, their implementation, the establishment of new command and forces structures and the intensification of exercises and Air Policing missions in the Eastern flank of the Alliance provided more than the necessary but late response, the re-entry into the strategic context of the Cold War and implicitly in the descriptive scenario of the Security Dilemma defined by John J. Herz³⁰.

The relative advantage of NATO is surmounted now, slowly but surely, by the subversive actions of the Russian Federation, in the sense of a strategy aimed to destabilize the unity of decision and effort within the North Atlantic Alliance. Repeated

²⁷ *Idem*, pp. 10-11.

²⁸ *Lisbon Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Lisbon*, Para. 45, published on the site of North Atlantic Treaty Organization http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm, updated 31.07.2012, accessed 14.05.2017.

²⁹ *NATO's Readiness Action Plan*, published on the site of North Atlantic Treaty Organization, http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_05/20150508_1505-Factsheet-RAP-en.pdf, published 08.05.2015, accessed 15.05.2017.

³⁰ John H. Herz, *Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma*, article published in *World Politics*, vol. 2, nr. 2, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1950, p.157.



attempts to highlight the favorable conditions enjoyed by France or Germany in their bilateral relations with the Russian Federation, reducing the NATO capacity to respond by provoking the Air Police or Patrol Service, encouraging and amplifying disagreements between Turkey and the European Community, encouraging migrations from The Middle East to Europe by directly supporting Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria and extremist nationalist movements in Europe, the amplification of Information and Psychological Operations, or the destabilization of the Eastern flank, are only part of the subversive action register of the Russian Federation. The withdrawal of United Kingdom from the European Union, the implications this action will generate on the Euro-Atlantic community and the authoritarian attitude of the current American president, Donald Trump, to the North Atlantic Alliance as a whole or to some of its Member States are just other risk factors to NATO's unity of effort and to its ability to respond.

All these facts prove the functional limitations of the NATO Strategic Concept 2010 and constitute arguments that support and advocate for the harmonization of Member States' national interests, as well as the identification of a new strategic concept, in accordance with the current and future features of the international security environment.

CONCLUSIONS

We are at a time when history is intensely and boldly written, where the ability to predict time horizons according to systemic trends no longer ensures sufficiency for strategic planning.

The typology of security events faced by state actors is not, in itself, a problem, but the technological progress of the last years, and especially the synergistic effect generated by the inventive, sometimes innovative, association of existing technologies with large scale social processes or phenomena, sometimes even with the applicative limitations of international law, lead to obvious transient effects on power ratios from predominantly defensive states or groups of

states, the so called "status-quo" states towards the revisionist states³¹. In such context, the strategic level doctrine cannot appeal strictly to the previous model, but cannot ignore the precedent and the advantages of the strategic concept adopted under similar conditions, either.

If, in terms of the adopted doctrine, the answer could lead to a modernist type of flexible response focused on information and cybernetic domains, the specific capabilities of this concept should be developed, not necessarily in the sense of certain functional characteristics but in the sense of very high level of adaptability to the unexpected, and self-development, simultaneously with generation and rapid assumption of contextual functional procedures. Moreover, such development requires the subsequent elaboration of operative and tactical level doctrines.

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