MILITARY ACTIONS CHARACTERISTICS IN HYBRID OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract: *The theoretical approaches regarding the security/operational environment aimed at a multidimensional and integrative perspective, because its understanding requires not only analysis of the physical terrain, but also the perspective of the actors involved, and of the factors from the informational environment (including cyberspace) and those specific to the civilian population. The field of contemporary military confrontations is extremely difficult to analyze because of the dynamics of the phenomenon and internal processes, of the implemented technologies and, last but not least, as a result of the manifestation of VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) characteristics within them. But, the effort of scientific investigations was directed starting from the premise that the identification of the characteristics and of the factors specific to the future confrontational environment serves as a starting point in the approach of conceptual-doctrinal and operational adaptation/transformation of the military forces. An attempt was made to find the answer to the question: which are the conditions, circumstances and factors characteristic of the confrontational environment that influence the efficiency and coherence of the actions of the engaged capabilities?*

Keywords: hybrid warfare, types of operational environments, military actions spectrum, VUCA characteristics

1. Introductory and methodological aspects

The reason for a thorough study of the concepts and theories specific to the field of military sciences was a better understanding of the types of military conflicts and the specific legalities, so that military operations be better and successfully prepared, organized and conducted. The characteristics of the hybrid current operational environment, as well as the desire to learn about new aspects, have led, in particular, to the approach of non-conventional conflicts (asymmetric, irregular and hybrid) proposing the replacement in the Romanian approach of the concept of *asymmetric conflict* [1] with *irregular conflict* when referring to irregularities, a typicality, non-conventionalism in military confrontations.

In order to develop modern concepts regarding the use/employment of forces/capabilities in conflict and crisis management, a first essential requirement is *the analysis of complex environments (security/operational)*, the aim being to identify potential threats and risks (determining the severity, the imminence, the affected area, the impact) that the military structures will face, so that the necessary capabilities can then be developed to deal with them. Thus, the

basic characteristics of the operational environment were highlighted starting from fundamental elements, such as: potential adversaries/enemies, the civilian population [2] the physical environment (terrain, climate, infrastructure), technological factors [3], etc.

The uncertainty and complexity of the challenges in the security/operational environment will require new ways of thinking, planning and acting. More precisely, after the evaluation of the threats arising from the future operational environment, various programmatic documents are drawn up regarding the planning of defense capabilities and the way (scenarios and operating concepts) they will be used, through which essential elements that are the basis of capabilities development are defined, such as: the objectives, the level of ambition and the time span for obtaining the necessary capabilities, the responsibilities, the relationships with the already existing capabilities, etc.

2. Operational environments characteristics

Based on the research carried out on various recent military conflict contexts, such as those in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Ukraine, it can be stated that the operational environment, as an element included in the security environment, can be understood as a complex of conditions, circumstances and actions, created by the multitude of actors (strong or weak, local, national or international, governmental or non-governmental) that interact, in a certain area, pursuing their own interests and that, when it comes to the employment of military and non-military instruments, influence decisions and actions through which they try to achieve the desired stability and security. Specifically, referring to present and future military forces, they will most likely be professional/specialized, mobile, versatile, adequately equipped, with a high degree of self-sustainability, projection and protection, with flexible command-control processes [4] and structures, as well as with the ability to operate efficiently in the information environment, called to carry out effective and coherent operations in the entire spectrum of missions/actions, from peacetime ones to those specific to major armed conflict, as it can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Operational environments characteristics, from the perspective of military actions spectrum

Types of operational environments	Specific concepts	Characteristics
Hostile operational environment	– The area/battlefield specific to armed wars/conflicts. – The operational environment of conventional confrontations. – Fluid battlefield. – Joint and integrated battlefield.	– actors: military/armed forces (the civilian/non-belligerent population in the area of military operations is not of major interest); - purpose: the defeat of the opponent from a military point of view; – violence manifests openly with conventional military capabilities; - lethal actions (operations specific to armed combat carried out simultaneously and in concert, in an area that encompasses land, air, maritime, informational (electromagnetic, cybernetic) and cosmic environments; – the focus is destroying, annihilating or neutralizing the most important capabilities of an adversary;

Types of operational environments	Specific concepts	Characteristics
		- major armed conflict involves the involvement of great powers or alliances or coalitions; – trends: decisiveness, omnidirectionality, decentralization, digitalization and robotization;
Uncertain operational environment	– The operational environment specific to irregular conflicts. – The area for the development of some types of non-traditional confrontations: *guerrilla, insurgency, war of harassment, asymmetric war, terrorism.* – Theatre of operations.	– the actors can be state and non-state, conventional military structures (armed forces) and groups of non-conventional/transnational forces; – purpose: "control/defeat of the adversary by supporting or undermining the credibility and/or legitimacy of the government/power authorities in a state or region; – the focus is on influencing or controlling the civilian population, and not on destroying the opponent's forces or conquering some territories; – the neutral civilian population represents *the center of gravity* for both parties involved in the conflict" [5]; – the frequent use of propaganda through a variety of methods of manipulating the civilian population [6]; – the manifestation of a lower level of violence than in conventional military conflicts, but the constant aim is to create and maintain a state of uncertainty in the operational environment; – from the perspective of military art, violent clashes between opponents take place at a relatively low level; – non-conventional methods and non-conventional means will be predominately used with a preponderance (attempts to bypass the military/security forces and directly hit civilian, unprotected targets), appropriate and surprising attacks.
Permissive operational environment	– The operational environment of peacetime actions. – Military intervention. – Human security missions – Management of crisis situations	– peaceful interaction between the actors involved (military forces, security forces, governmental and non-governmental institutions, companies, agencies from various fields, civilian population, other entities); – the lowest level of risk during the employment of military force (military exercises, actions for the reform of the security sector and military support for reconstruction, humanitarian assistance, etc.); - the role of the military forces is to deter the emergence of conflicts, to consolidate peace and to prepare solutions for the peaceful resolution of the crisis or conflict (peace operations, peacetime operations);

Types of operational environments	Specific concepts	Characteristics
		- interventions in case of natural calamities, CBRN or ecological accidents, terrorist crises, humanitarian and other situations that endanger the normal course of activities of the civilian population; – specialized support and expertise in certain sectors: medical (through specialist medical personnel, field hospitals), road or railway infrastructure (engineer units, military police, etc.), communications and computer networks (through own specialists and communications systems), explosive and/or dangerous substances.

Consequently, the operational environment is characterized by numerous variables and subvariables, including the relationships between them, with multidimensional implications. Operational variables include not only military aspects, but also the influence of political, economic, social, informational, infrastructure, physical environment, time, etc. components.

3. Operational environments complexity

Given the proliferation of non-conventional, atypical, non-traditional risks and threats "(terrorist attacks, attacks with biological agents, with vectors carrying CBRN substances, informational, cyber or geophysical attacks, organized crime, illegal migration)" and their combination with conventional ones, the confrontation among a great diversity of actors (military and non-military) manifests itself in various fields, "military, social, economic, political, psychological" and, consequently, the *operational environment* obviously becomes a particularly complex one. The complexity also comes from irregularities and a mix of elements: diverse environments, multiple means and "traditional and non-traditional actors acting directly or indirectly, with their own forces or through intermediaries (Proxy Forces) that establish conventional military or paramilitary structures and carry out conventional actions simultaneously with terrorist activities, specific to insurgency or organized crime, from which we infer a *hybrid operational environment*" [7].

Observing the trend of hybridization of conflicts at the global level, hybridization meaning the known (conventional) characteristics of the conflict, those less known, and the development of new, unexpected, surprising (unconventional or irregular) ones, as well as starting from the scope and diversity of interests and goals of a political, economic, military, social, cultural and religious nature, the aim was to explain the concepts associated with the *hybrid conflict*, and, in particular, to identify and implement concrete measures to counter the effects of insecurity. In this approach, we had as a *hypothesis* the idea that formulating and understanding the specific nomological foundations of this type of conflict means, in fact, knowing the realities and requirements of the hybrid operational environment, which ensures the possibility of scientific anticipation regarding the way to organize, prepare and carry out hybrid actions. Knowing them constitutes the basis for the implementation of countermeasures, and also the foundation of the management of the process of training forces [8] (military and civil), of preparing resources and mechanisms, in order to manage the conflict situation. In the logic of the nomological issue of the

hybrid war phenomenon, based on the objective laws, we have formulated some *principles* by which hybrid conflicts can be conceived, prepared and carried out, and also prevented and discouraged [9], [10].

Along with this, the study of the events of the hybrid confrontations and specialized literature allowed to create "models", "suggestive pattern" with the main *stages and actions* [11] carried out by various types of hybrid forces to achieve specific goals.

In the hybrid context, the increase in volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity presupposes precisely the search and adoption of new orientations and approaches regarding conflict management.

Understanding and getting aware, through the VUCA model, of the characteristic elements (specific risks and threats, types of actors, situations and contexts, domains and relationships between them, etc.) of the hybrid operational environment, contributes to a more accurate description of the operational conditions, in the sense of guiding the development of effective and efficient strategies, programs and actions to mitigate potential damage to government structures, the civilian population, and security in general.

Much more concretely, we aimed at the in-depth understanding of the operational environment and the deduction of probable confrontation scenarios that can provide a rational and pragmatic assessment of how the military/integrated forces envision themselves to act in the medium and long term. I also took into account the changes/transformations in areas such as: emerging risks and threats, doctrine, action concepts, training, military leadership, technology, several areas in which, through the research carried out, we made our contribution in countering hybrids risks and threats (countering hybrid threats not being limited to these domains).

Based on the requirements of the operational environment, the scenarios and the operating concepts, there are started programs for the creation of the *package of capabilities -* which means structures of military forces (people, weapon systems, equipment, command - control, training, etc.) - which will be able to manage conflict in the entire spectrum of actions (in accordance with the designed scenarios), such as conventional, hybrid or in crisis situations.

From the studies carried out, it emerged that in the hybrid operational environment the competition is for legitimacy and influence, and the neutral civilian population from a certain area, as well as other non-state civilian actors, are of particular relevance. Also, in the practice of hybrid conflict, civilian targets are predominant and are the object of the confrontation.

As a consequence, we pursued as study objectives, the identification and analysis of "*actors involved in such types of conflicts in the sense of in-depth knowledge of the military phenomenon in accordance with the trend of hybridization of military operations*" [12].

Another representative element consists in highlighting the main particular characteristics of the hybrid operational environment, such as:

● the specificity of the actions focused on supporting and protecting the neutral civilian population and its strategic goal, that of gaining and maintaining control/influence over the relevant population in the area of interest/confrontation;

● "opponents can use conventional forces and actions unconventional forces and actions respectively" [13]; there are cases in which a single force can adopt, in a unitary manner, a combination of actions with conventional and non-conventional characteristics;

● "from the point of view of interests and initiatives/measures regarding the provision of security (local, regional, etc.), the actors involved can be state or non-state, conventional or non-conventional and can also be divided into security generating actors or actors generating insecurity, known, unknown and also neutral; to further emphasize the complexity of the

hybrid operational environment, we were able to identify the double posture in which an actor can be found, depending on the interests pursued, both as a generator of security and as a generator of insecurity;

● actors generating insecurity in hybrid type conflicts may have diverse interests and very diversified and atypical methods of achieving objectives, therefore conventional methods and tactics of combat prove, most of the time, ineffective" [14].

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, in the hybrid operational environment, the military forces are no longer the only instruments as in the conventional conflict, but a determining role is played by other actors such as: the civilian population, governmental and non-governmental agencies and organizations from various fields: political, economic, social, cultural , religious etc. and thus, by understanding the *action model* of the participating actors, answers can be provided to questions such as: Why is a transformation and a new operational vision of integrated military actions and military structures necessary? or What challenges must military structures respond to and how must they adapt (structurally, doctrinally, operationally, and from the point of view of training, etc.) from the perspective of the way military confrontations are conducted?

Considering these difficulties of integrating capabilities and all military actions and civilian agencies/organizations, it is necessary to identify a set of fundamental ideas such as the principles, which represent benchmarks, important milestones in the conceptual realization of comprehensive integration.

Also, the common perception of reality, the unity of vision and action, the permanent exchange of intelligence products (information sharing), the application of the same procedures and the renunciation to the arrogance characteristic to certain types of organizations is the way to apply the comprehensive and integrated concept. Since there are specific characteristics of each conflict, it is not possible to offer recipes for a comprehensive and integrated approach, but the communication and behavioral-action adaptation of organizations must be carried out in such a way that dissensions are diminished, and the common objective achieved with minimum efforts.

It can also be highlighted that a culture of comprehensive integration of instruments and civil and military capabilities is necessary, as it can ensure a holistic synergy of all mechanisms and structures, regardless of interests and subordinations.

A culture of comprehensive and integrated approach plays the role of an "ideology" aimed at eliminating the conceptual and action barriers between the vectors of the civil and military domains. Military and civilian instruments can become effective and coherent capabilities when the culture of comprehensive integration will create an actionable mobility, which could lead, in the end, to the blurring of the differences between the civilian and the military. Such an ideology implemented through an integrative strategy is necessary both at the level of conception/decision and at the level of execution.

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