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**ROMANIA’S MILITARY NECESSARY CHANGES  
THROUGH THE PRISM OF THE UKRAINIAN AFFAIR**

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**Abstract:**

The latest security trends assumed that conventional warfare between nation-states has been abolished and that the military roles have changed. Consequently the strategic planners somehow disregarded the importance of national defense heavily relying on NATO support as collective defense. But the events unfold in Ukraine point to some realities namely: the power of countries shifts; the status quo is unstable, and that Russia has hegemonic ambitions. Having admitted that Romania faces military vulnerabilities there are a series of necessary changes and the options identified are: evaluation of the current defense strategy, revisit forces’ structure, military technology and forces training improvement. News is that there is a unanimous political engagement to increase the defense budget during the following years. With lessons learned from years with short funding on defense this money should be spent wisely after a thorough capability assessment.

*Key words: Romanian military, Ukrainian crises, reform, force training, capabilities improvement, defense policy, military strategy, military technology, challenges.*

**1. Introduction**

Once the Cold War ended, there has been an assumption that conventional warfare between reasonably developed nation-states had been abolished. Ever since the peer-to-peer conflict seemed obsolete and it was expected that the new purpose of the military would be operations other than war such as peacekeeping, disaster relief or change of oppressive regimes, constabulary roles<sup>1</sup> notwithstanding. Moreover after 9/11, asymmetric warfare was rediscovered and many states military start a fight against terrorism for a very long time. Under these new circumstances Romania, reintegrated<sup>2</sup> militarily and economically, would engage in small scale conflicts arguably at her will, however not alone but in concert with its allies.

Once the world presumably entered a new era in which what had been previously dreaded would now be rare or nonexistent, strategic planners assumed we need a different military than the one we had, and the evolving Romanian Defense Policy that followed this reasoning was rarely seen as inappropriate.

There are two reasons in support of this development beside the economic crisis that in

***Our freedom isn’t free...  
We’ve got to be willing to pay for  
the assets, the personnel, the  
training that’s required to make  
sure that we have a credible  
NATO force and an effective  
deterrent force.***

**The US President Barack Obama,  
EU-US Summit, Brussels,  
March 26, 2014**

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fact emerged years later. The first reason is that military planners are always obsessed with the war they are fighting. It is only human to see the immediate task as a permanent task. It is well known that generals always fight the last war by using the strategies and tactics of the past to achieve victory in the present<sup>3</sup>. And an amendment to this is that generals believe the war they are fighting is an enduring war, the culmination of their careers. In these conditions it is hard for them to imagine that they will conduct other wars any time soon.

The second reason was that no nation or alliance was in a position to challenge NATO militarily, and Romania as part of it. After the Cold War ended, the Warsaw Pact dissolved and its counterpart remained in a singularly powerful position. The following conclusion of the political decision makers was there is no reason to waste money<sup>4</sup> maintaining the armed forces competitive, capable for defending the country. It was considered enough to limit the funding entirely for the forces goals assumed in accordance with NATO once this alliance assumed our defense.

### **2. Reality or illusion**

But the events unfold in Ukraine point to some realities. One is that the power is deceptive and moreover, shifts. NATO is in a prevailing position, but in time, other countries will enhance their power, will form alliances or coalitions and eventually will confront it. "No matter how benign a leading power is – and NATO is not uniquely benign – other nations will fear it, resent it or want to discredit it for its behavior"<sup>5</sup>. The idea that other nation or coalition would not challenge NATO appeared plausible for the past 10 years since we are partners, but the recent events point that nations can pursue interests that are opposed to NATO's interest and more clearly, pose a peer-to-peer challenge. In this regard, it is worthwhile to take into consideration the Russians that have substantially increased their military capabilities lately and that their national strategy still pledges for hegemonic dominance.

Another reality that draws attention is the volatility of the status quo. The divergent interests between dialogue partners, once looking for consensus and cooperation, can easily disband their relationship. Not so long time ago Russia was considered such a partner and with the notable exception of the anti-missiles system disagreement, the cooperation existed and was considered constructive. Now, unfortunately, the cooperation mechanisms with this country such as NATO – Russia Council and BLACKSEAFOR, are suspended and it is not foreseeable that they will ever be the same.

Not the least, this explosive situation will cause each country, especially those situated at the NATO eastern frontier, to reconsider their military strategy and capabilities. In the case of most European countries defense allocation budgets were continuously decreased for the last years and because of the scarce resources the military capabilities were diminishing. Under the constraints of the economic crisis the military was obviously not a priority. But if we are to use less defense, that would only mean an increased exposure to the risks and vulnerabilities characteristic of the contemporary insecure world. Ukraine situation reminds to all that peer-to-peer conflict is not inconceivable, and that a strategy and defense policy built on the assumptions has little basis in reality. It is more plausible now that future crises might well lead to conventional war, nuclear weapons notwithstanding.

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## **3. Challenges ahead**

Romania has to learn a lesson from the Ukrainian affair and consequently act promptly. There are a series of military necessary changes and the options available are: (re)assessment of the current defense policy, revisit forces' structure, military technology and forces training improvement<sup>6</sup>. They must be undertaken in the framework of active engagement and modern defense, the current NATO Strategic Concept adopted at the Lisbon Summit in 2010, which presents three essential core tasks for its members - collective defense, crisis management and collective security<sup>7</sup>.

Looking upon the first option a good reference is the 2013 Defense White Paper<sup>8</sup>, the latest analysis of the armed forces status. This document is a milestone for the Romanian Government in the endeavor for developing a coherent Defense Policy. The document integrates in a wholly vision the missions, courses of action, and the resources at the MoD level presenting the current status and the perspectives for the Romanian Armed Forces. In examining this project the Romanian Parliament Defense Committees noted that the armed forces are confronting a series of vulnerabilities that can substantially affect their capabilities. It was incriminated the legislation that governs military domain as being incoherent and improper for its future development<sup>9</sup>.

Other major documents that entangle the national defense policy are: Military Strategy (2000), Armed Forces Transformation Strategy (2007), the National Defense Strategy (2008) and the MoD Strategic Plan 2010-2013 (2009). Although institutions are reluctant to review fundamental documents, in the wake of events unfolded in Ukraine, the extended economical crises and not the least NATO's new strategic concept (2010), these documents and not only, need to be reappraised.

The military organization has the mission to put in practice the political guidance in terms of defense planning but with a legislation assessed as incoherent it is hard to believe that resulted products would be better. The Defense Planning is a complex activity with a great responsibility and the impact over the Armed Forces is significant<sup>10</sup>. It must reflect in a greater extent an agreement between the political forces and as a result it should be mandatory for any Government. Once agreed upon it should be followed and minorly adjusted in a time horizon of 10 to 15 years.

The second option is the **(re)evaluation of the force structure**. Arguably the era of massive armies is over and in the light of the modern warfare, lesser, better trained and equipped forces are best. It is best to have new capabilities, different from the soviet heritage, well trained, and visible especially abroad during exercises, than to have a great deal of forces, with outdated equipment, unable to cope the new battle field requirements.

The current force structure needs a review to meet the challenges related to the new security environment. Romania's NATO membership requires a continuous process of assimilation and adaptation to the trends of this organization<sup>11</sup>. To achieve structural interoperability an important source is the use of the available information regarding the similar structures in the armed forces of the other NATO member states as well as by creatively capitalizing on own military tradition. Further, such analysis would allow for identifying capabilities improvement and facilitates setting targets for co-operative use of forces in the framework of the ongoing defense initiatives<sup>12</sup>.

Another requisite change is about **military technology improvement**. The objective of this option is the transformation into a better equipped army capable of fulfilling national goals concurrently with NATO's interoperability requirements. The present over-reliance on obsolete military technology is misleading. This added to the rigid

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force structure creates an illusory sense of security that until now kept our awareness dormant.

Most of the NATO's countries have dramatically reduced their defense expenditures in the latest years. NATO's expectation is that every nation has to spend at least 2% of their GDP on defense; however most of the members are spending less than that. Romania has reduced its defense budgets from 1.84% (2006) to 1.26% of GDP in 2012 and slightly increased them to 1.38% in 2013<sup>13</sup>. The apparently already taken decision<sup>14</sup> to increase the defense budget in 2014 is promising. This could be like a breath of fresh air for Romanian defense industry, once very much appreciated but ignored and dismantled after years of short funding. Money spent for developing and producing all sort of military technology would be invested in the same economy and would have a multiplying effect.

Ranges of new technologies, from electronically and mechanically enhanced infantryman to state of the art destroyers and fighter aircrafts, are available. In order to have access to such capabilities it is important to increase defense budgets but is not enough. Money should be spent wisely on target capabilities<sup>15</sup> apportioned through NATO Defense Planning Process – NDPP. As part of the defense initiatives Romanian Armed Forces should improve their military technology that brings value to NATO.

**Force training** enhancement is also important. The military has always recognized the importance of training in accomplishing its missions and training is often seen as decisive in combat. Considerable attention is therefore needed to both collective and individual training.

Spending two thirds of defense budget covering the personnel expenses, as the execution was during the latest years, only permits bits and pieces for training and exercises. With short funding, year after year, the major exercises shrank interfering forces instruction.

Money is not enough and will never be. Yet it exists to some extent and it is important to be spent wisely. The best thing that could happen is the recent initiative for repositioning of some NATO forces to the Eastern Alliance's border<sup>16</sup>. The presumed result of this action will be more opportunities for multinational training very much an incentive for achieving the interoperability goals. There are already allied military forces deployed in Romania<sup>17</sup>, and consequently a multitude of exercises in what naval, air and land forces trained lately.

### **4. Conclusion**

The mindset that peer-to-peer conflict has been abolished and that small units' engagements in operations other than war are the new features of warfare prevent the political decision makers to consider necessary maintaining armed forces competitive. Following a NATO general trend of cutting defense expenditures, in the wake of the Ukrainian affair, Romania, facing admitted military vulnerabilities, has to undergo a series of actions to address them.

The military necessary changes presented are neither exhaustive nor in a priority order; however they are food for thought regarding challenges ahead if we choose to improve the situation. To perform any kind of organizational changes or improvements it involves costs and the good news is that for the moment there is a unanimous political engagement to increase the defense budget. Nevertheless the new amount won't be sufficient and for this money to come in handy requires a thorough capability assessment so that the desired end states would be judiciously prioritized.

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## **References and end notes:**

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