

VJENSKÉ

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52651/vr.j.2024.3>

REFLEXIE

AOS

military science journal

AOS



VOLUME XIX
ISSUE 3/2024

AKADÉMIA OZBROJENÝCH SÍL
GENERÁLA MILANA RASTISLAVA ŠTEFÁNKA



**Armed Forces Academy
of Gen. Milan Rastislav Štefánik**

VVOJENSKÉ REFLEXIE

MILITARY SCIENCE JOURNAL

**VOLUME XIX
ISSUE 3/2024**

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Journal is indexed in ERIHPLUS, DOAJ

ISSN 1336-9202

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Published papers did not undergo language correction.

The content, the professional, and language levels of the papers are in the full responsibility of the authors.

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The articles are published in Slovak, Czech and English language. The articles are peer-reviewed. The journal Vojenské reflexie is published in electronic format on its website: vr.aos.sk :

- **Twice a year in Slovak and Czech language**, always in June and December
- **Once a year in English**, always in December.

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MILITARY LEADERS AND THE MISSION COMMAND APPROACH

Andrea SZABÓ SZABÓNÉ

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 10.09.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

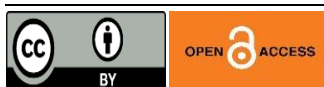
Published: 31.12.2024

ABSTRACT

Adequate responses – both from individuals and from organizations – to the increasingly complex challenges of the 21st century presuppose a combination of such leadership competencies that are essential for effective and successful mission accomplishment in the changing security and operational environment. Creating the network environment that characterizes today's operations (also at the tactical leadership level) increases the commander's responsibility. The increasingly complex operational environment demands that decentralization be emphasized in the decision-making process and in the conduct of operations. Furthermore, the fleeting opportunities in emerging tactical situations also require quick reactions and timely and correct decisions of small unit leaders. The paper provides a short, summary analysis of mission command and of those leadership competencies, capabilities and skills that are necessary for the mission command approach)

KEYWORDS

mission command, competency, leadership, changing security and operational environment



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INTRODUCTION

The new challenges arising from a comprehensive interpretation of security and the quick responses to be given to them, the transformation of warfare, the spread of multi-domain warfare, the rapid development of information technology and the all-encompassing digitalization require a specific approach to command and battle management, and so does the terrain, too, which has become a glass table due to the effectiveness of reconnaissance tools, thus it necessitates the dispersal and splitting of one's own forces before their deployment in order to protect them.

The challenges emerging in our world – which is characterized by increased speed, interdependence and the incredibly fast-paced and intensive change of technology occurring on an unimaginable scale – demand continuous adaptability of every organization, which naturally also entails the transformation of the approach to leadership. In the age of digital,

decentralized communication networks, cooperation and problem-solving must take place in real time with the highest possible efficiency, in an innovative way. In an environment characterized by accelerated operational tempo, the complexity of emerging situations, grey-zone hybrid conflicts, increased data volumes and the spread of artificial intelligence, military leaders are expected to be able to immediately adapt to the changed circumstances.

From the aspect of mission accomplishment based on allied multinational cooperation, it is also necessary to work out, deepen and continuously develop a mission command approach and mindset. Nowadays, the role of the time factor and the immediate adaptation to increasingly fast-paced changes have become important, so the usual methods and management schemes are no longer able to provide solutions in every case. The mission command approach can be an excellent tool for increasing efficiency, maximizing success and utilizing the full spectrum of abilities and skills.

From the point of view of this approach to command, too, the leader's person is of crucial importance. The selection of a leader with appropriate competencies is not only important for the individual professional development of a given person but is also an excellent tool for maintaining and increasing the efficiency of the human resource management process and organizational activity. This is especially true of the representatives of armed forces and law enforcement organizations, since the person wearing the uniform embodies the organization, the organizational attitude and values. This is particularly true in leadership positions, as in this case, beyond setting a personal example and the personal character traits, another important aspect is to preserve and deepen the motivation of one's colleagues.

1 THE MILITARY APPROACH TO THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP

There are several attempts at defining the concept of leadership in the literature, so the definition of this concept is not uniform. Due to length constraints, this study does not aim at analyzing each definition; however, it is by all means important to present some ideas related to the military interpretation.

We can consider as default the definition of command according to which it is "the responsibility assigned to a person for the purpose of controlling, leading, coordinating and supervising the armed forces". (Berkáné Danesch – M. Szabó – Mező, 2015, p. 699.) According to General Bernard Law Montgomery, "Leadership is the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose and the character which inspires confidence." (Montgomery, 1996) In connection with the definition of military leadership, János Csengeri also highlights the fact of influence exerted in the interest of mission accomplishment and the existence of changing circumstances: "Military leadership is a social activity with unique features, during which the head of a military organization, the commander, influences his

subordinates to perform organizational tasks assigned by the superior in order to achieve a goal, under the appropriate conditions, but, potentially, also in their absence, even in complicated (dangerous) circumstances.” (Csengeri, 2014, p. 84.)

This process of influencing can be implemented in several ways. “The commander solves the influencing process based on his own leadership skills: his faith, values, knowledge and morals, character, skills and professional competency”. (Pintér – Nagy, 1997, p.74.) Consequently, there is continuous interaction between leaders and their subordinates, which – in my opinion and experience – is subjective. Although military hierarchical dependencies (the chain of command) require objectivity, I think that if a commander is unable to view his subordinate with confidence, or if a subordinate does not accept the commander, this also affects the effectiveness of cooperation.

We should make a distinction between the terms “management leading” and “leadership” as well as between “manager” and “leader”. Leadership is actually an element of a leader’s activity that focuses primarily on the human factor, the personal relationships between leader and subordinate: it is how the members of an organization are influenced in the interest of achieving common goals. (Bakacsi, 2004) By contrast, management is a leader’s manifestation in connection with which the responsibility and authority of the given person are limited, and the focus is on the most effective realization of the goals. (Czuprák – Kovács, 2017) Consequently, the leaders’ personality and charisma play an outstanding role in leadership activities, which inspires their colleagues. Leaders seek and give responses to the challenges of the environment by focusing on new things and unconventional solutions to problems: they have a vision of the future; they are motivated by development. Leaders think in cooperation and empower their subordinates within pre-defined limits in order to achieve the goals as effectively as possible. By contrast, manager-stye leaders prefer stability, smooth operation of the organization, best practices and the single best solution; they lay down rules and control their colleagues. Unlike in the case of leaders, it is not their personality that dominates, but their authority).

2 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MISSION COMMAND

We can consider mission command as leadership based on the division of legal powers, which takes place between commanders and their subordinates for attaining a clearly defined objective, with a definite intent, within a defined framework of authority and with a defined area of responsibility, while at the same time by providing the conditions and resources necessary to achieve that objective.

According to Péter Lippai, “mission command can be interpreted as a human-centered leadership philosophy where, in addition to defining the goal to be achieved, the superior puts constraints on the method of execution only to the minimum extent necessary for coordination. This fact gives subordinates a great deal of autonomy previously

unimaginable in our armed forces, which, when coupled with the provision of conditions for execution, can greatly increase the success of mission accomplishment in the rapidly changing circumstances that are characteristic of modern warfare. (Lippai, 2009, p. 31.) A paper co-authored by Zoltán Bárány and Péter Lippai also confirms this definition: “The essence of mission command as a style of military leadership is that only a framework-like goal is defined for subordinates during the tasking, but not the path leading to it.” (Bárány – Lippai, 2009, p. 18.) However, the delegation of the right to make decisions presupposes maximum trust: “The unity of command depends on the commander. If he can bring subordinate commanders, chiefs and leaders to his side, then the command will be united.” (Takács, 2016, p. 79.) The approach and method that presupposes the existence of trust also presupposes freedom of action taken to achieve the goal, close cooperation as well as independent initiative and proactivity. (Jobbágy – Czeglédi, 2016)

In my view, mission command can be interpreted as a kind of approach. It is a complexity built on the unity of the leader’s mindset and leadership competencies, which also functions as ongoing interaction between the leader and the subordinates based on a common understanding, as well as an approach generating professional development that also influences the level of the individual and that of the organization, and at once as a warfighting function. An important feature of mission command is that the decisions are made by those who are best placed to make them at any given moment, having detailed information about the given situation and change. (MCDC, 2020)

In an environment defined by uncertain and unpredictable circumstances changing at an accelerated pace (VUCA¹) that is particularly characteristic of our time, an adaptive, cooperation-based, decentralized mode of command is much more capable of supporting the effective realization of the superior’s intent than a centralized command approach based on formalities that pushes individual motivation and initiative to the background while not giving immediate responses to quick changes.

The so-called OODA loop² can significantly support the success of the mission command approach. This method, which is also an approach, is “a kind of cyclical decision-making mechanism in which the decision-maker assesses and evaluates the situation, makes a decision quickly, and then acts accordingly. Its basic premise is that one should not fear uncertainty and should always make decisions and take action according to the current situation.” (Porkoláb, 2017)

¹ VUCA: volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous.

² OODA (Observe, Orient, Decide, Act): multi-step decision-making process or approach. The method was developed by Colonel John Boyd (1927-1997), a former pilot. The original name of the method was OODA loop, which refers to the continuous cycle of the mechanism.)

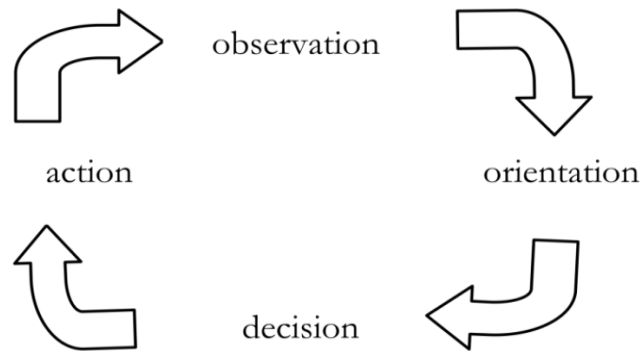


Figure 2: Flowchart of the OODA Loop method

Source: Boyd, 2021

The assessment and observation of the situation based on a continuous flow of systematized information and trend analysis are important in the course of the mechanism. This is followed by questioning and rebuilding current paradigms and models. All this allows one to assess the situation in a new light. This process of orientation does not focus on the final result, but rather on the given current, momentary state. This is followed by the most optimal decision made on the basis of information available at the given moment, which – due to the dynamically changing environment – naturally includes the possibility of mistakes and failures as well. The correctness of the decision can be tested in action: after the decision is made, immediate action is required. After taking action, we can get feedback on which (sub)elements work and which need to be changed. In this way, this mechanism results in a kind of learning process, which leads not only to the development of the individual's abilities and competencies, but also to the deepening of the adaptability, cohesion and professional knowledge base of the organization.

3 INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES TO MISSION COMMAND: AUFTRAGSTAKTIK, MISSION COMMAND

Many militaries around the world have raised the basic principles of mission command to a doctrinal level. At any rate, one thing is common to them: the basis of today's approach is Auftragstaktik, a leadership philosophy and warfighting function based on centuries of experience, continuous education and preparation, and systematic training.

This classic version of mission command dates back to the 19th-century Prussian army: its first written records can be traced back to General Scharnhorst³, who drew his conclusions from the lessons learned in the French Revolutionary Wars. (Lippai, 2009, p. 38.) Considering himself a follower of Clausewitz, General Moltke saw⁴ Auftragstaktik as the fundamental leadership philosophy of the German military: delegated independent

³ Gerhard Johann David von Scharnhorst (1756–1813) was a Prussian general, military writer and thinker.

⁴ Helmuth Karl Bernhard von Moltke (1800–1891) was a Prussian Field Marshal and Chief of Staff of the Royal Prussian Army from 1858 to 1871.

decisions and initiatives were encouraged at all levels of command. (Jobbágy – Czeglédi, 2016, p. 91.) Based on continuous practice, these principles completely permeated every segment of military education, training and preparation, supporting the consistent transmission of values and patterns of behavior.

In connection with the Bundeswehr, the German military which was reorganized after World War II, but which inherited the historical practice of Auftragstaktik and treated it as a priority, mention must be made of the concept of Innere Führung. On the one hand, Innere Führung, as a formal principle, clearly delimits the framework of the military leaders' activities and authority in detail, and on the other hand, as a kind of internal order and norm, it regulates the soldiers' (uniformed citizens') conduct and contact in all areas and systems of relationships.

It simultaneously strengthens the sense of responsibility and duty, emphasizes the importance of cooperation and the sense of belonging, deepens discipline and professionalism. As the main element of leadership, it fixes a positive attitude towards people (trust, transmission of values, communication), mission command towards subordinates (camaraderie, knowledge of subordinates, cooperation), as well as accurate knowledge of the subordinates' abilities (helping cohesion, setting an example, self-criticism). (Szabó, 1997)

With regard to the United States of America, one can find mission command to be primarily related to unified land operations. The first written traces of this philosophy of leadership and warfighting function go back more than a century: a Field Service Regulation issued in 1905 laid down the subordinates' freedom of decision and action insofar as it was justified by changed circumstances within the framework of the commander's intent. (Clinton, 2013, p. 42.) Having come a long way of development, mission command has eventually become a land forces doctrine by virtue of being included in an US Army Doctrine Publication in 2003. (Ancker, 2013) This document contains four important elements for the successful implementation of mission command, in addition to the fundamentally required mutual trust and common understanding between the commander and the subordinates: the commander's intent, the subordinates' initiative, the way of executing the mission order and the allocation of resources. It is no accident that in the latest 2019 edition of the doctrine, the chapter on the principles of mission command has General George Patton's words as its motto and explanation: "Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity." In this spirit, the document already expands on the core elements of mission command: "Build cohesive teams through mutual trust; create shared understanding; provide a clear commander's intent; exercise disciplined initiative; use mission orders; accept prudent risk".

Mission command is primarily a leadership philosophy, an approach to leadership that encourages the subordinates' initiative in order to achieve the leaders' intents, and at

the same time requires leaders to share only the essential information with subordinates about the methods needed to achieve the objective. (Finney-Klug, 2016) Concepts such as agility, initiative, intent, empowerment and adaptability all point to the condition of decentralization, but the most important keyword is trust: both in routine practice and on combat operations conducted in real-life situations, all of the desired effects are possible with trust. Trust can be developed over time both on the part of the commander and on the part of subordinates. (Guthrie, 2012, p. 26.)

The leadership philosophy of the Dutch armed forces is also based on the principle of mission command, which requires uniform leadership principles and a clear chain of command at all levels of command. The doctrine on the principles of command and control clearly states that the basic condition for this type of leadership is a clear definition of tasks, authorities and responsibilities. Military operations are increasingly taking place in an unstable, unpredictable, chaotically uncertain and particularly rapidly changing environment, so every situation is unique and requires immediate and adequate response and adaptation. Consequently, efficiency can be increased if the commanders at all levels of command are allowed to decide for themselves how they can best accomplish their mission under the given circumstances. The doctrine highlights the importance of decentralization, which is also important because it makes clear that, in the changed circumstances, decisions that are most appropriate for the objectives are best taken at the lower level of command directly involved in the operation. Thanks to the decentralized approach to command, subordinates feel engaged and thereby motivated. Another advantage is that there is only a limited amount of basic information flowing down and up along the chain of command: local commanders involved in the mission make decisions based on the most up-to-date information. As a general rule, the more uncertain the circumstances, the lower the level of decision-making. Another fundamental thesis is the indivisibility of responsibility: the delegation of authorities does not mean that the commander is absolved of all personal responsibility: he remains responsible for his own actions and those of his subordinates. Tempo plays an equally important role at all levels of command, as a high tempo will help disrupt the enemy's cycle of decision-making and action as well as his cohesion, and hinder his response; at the same time, the cohesion of one's own unit, the routine gained through continuous training and preparation, the mutual knowledge of the commander's and his subordinates' thinking and the mutual trust between them support successful mission accomplishment and the timely making of decisions to a great extent.

The Australian Army Land Warfare Doctrine defines mission command as "a philosophy of command and a system for conducting operations in which subordinates are given a clear indication by a superior of his intentions. The result required, the task, the resources and any constraints are clearly enunciated; however, subordinates are allowed the freedom to decide how to achieve the required result." One of the prerequisites for mission command success is a uniform, "relevant doctrine. The purpose of the doctrine is to provide guidance for intelligent application, not dogma for automatic response" in all

situations. Reliability also plays a key role: subordinate commanders “must regard their superior’s intentions as fundamental guidance and make the attainment of such guidance the underlying purpose of every action.” The “unbroken chain of mutual trust and respect between commanders at all levels” includes not only that “the superior must have the courage to foster their subordinates’ initiative”, but also the possibility of continuous improvement with regard to the errors made. Clear commander’s intent, the constant exchange of information and cooperation-based communication strengthen unit cohesion and the subordinates’ trust that are indispensable for making the necessary decisions independently. In a rapidly changing operational environment, “the consequences of delay through hesitation and indecision, or time wasting by seeking confirmation, may be more dangerous than a flawed but timely decision based on the best assessment of incomplete information.”

3 MILITARY LEADERS’ COMPETENCIES

The commanders, leaders at the helm of military organizations lead these organizations within a framework defined by the law and superiors, and their service authority covers all operational areas of the military organizations led by them: they bear full responsibility for the combat readiness of the military organizations, for the preparation and training of personnel, for ensuring the functioning, for the personnel’s discipline, for the effective activities and financial management of the military organizations subordinate to them, for carrying out the superiors’ orders and for compliance with legal norms.

Competency is a word of Latin origin: it means aptitude and skillfulness. David McClelland⁵, whose name is associated with the foundation of competency theories, in addition to defining the features connected with achievement, also assessed the mindsets and behaviors associated with successful performance that are in a causal relationship with it. (Bolgár, 2017, p. 128.). By competency we mean “those basic, defining personal qualities and traits that are causally related to performance rated as excellent or at least above average in relation to a given job, based on a predetermined level of criteria.” (Bolgár, 2014, p. 128.). Another definition states: “Competency is the ability and willingness of the individual to transform his knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudinal characteristics into successful problem-solving action”. (Bolgár, 2014, p. 129.) It is important to formulate competencies clearly and distinctly, since the desired pattern of behavior can only be achieved through unambiguous communication.

MoD Decree No. 10/2015 on medical, mental and physical fitness for military service and on the medical review procedure lays down the requirements for general psychological status according to three decisive criteria. The relevant regulations distinguish seven

⁵ David Clarence McClelland (1917-1998) was an American psychologist, his Human Motivation Theory is one of the best-known psychological models of human needs, especially in business life and in relation to organizations.

personality characteristics in terms of personality traits: balance of emotional and impulsive life, stress tolerance, frustration tolerance, self-control, adequate behavior, self-confidence and self-knowledge. When determining the intelligence level (IQ), the focus is on measuring general intelligence (logical, combinatoric, problem-solving skills), memory and communication skills. In terms of sensorimotor and perceptual performance, the measurement points are general attentional performance, perception, stimulus discrimination, reaction time and movement coordination. Based on the job map, the job requirements – beyond the aspects of general psychological fitness – fix the set of abilities, skills and personality traits required to perform the given job (e.g. tanker, artilleryman, field chaplain etc.). Personality traits are already discussed in more detail and nuance. The requirements include, among others, psychomotor tempo, adaptability, commitment, rule consciousness and initiative. In terms of the intelligence level, logic, information processing, creativity and flexibility are among the expectations. Requirements for sensorimotor performance and perceptual performance include, for example, spatial orientation, tolerance for monotony, concentration of attention and accuracy. The decree lays down specific requirements for those serving in areas of operations, taking into account the specific nature of their service. The requirements for firefighters and those performing general foreign service are set out separately in the job descriptions.

The relevant legislation also defines military leadership requirements. Beyond general psychological fitness, an effective military leader at a given level must possess the following skills, abilities and personality characteristics necessary for command:

Tab 1: Skills, abilities and personality characteristics required for command

Personality characteristics	Intelligence level	Leadership and organizational skills
Networking skills	Logic	Planning and organizational skills
Initiative	Creativity	Decision-making skills
Cooperative skills	Insight	Problem-solving skills
Reliability		Information management
Empathy		Strategic thinking
Morality		Team-building skills
Level of aspiration		Management skills
Flexibility		Motivating ability

Psychomotor tempo		Communication skills
Independence		Skill to endure criticism
Commitment		Intellectual efficiency
Rule consciousness		Mental load capacity

Source: table edited by the author

The creation of a network environment typical of today's military operations – including the tactical command level – increases the commanders' responsibility. Decentralization needs to receive greater focus in the context of an increasingly complex operational environment, in decision-making procedure and in operational command, and the right decision made at the right time depending on the small unit commanders' reaction is also important in consideration of the intensively increasing significance of emerging tactical situations. With regard to general competencies, it is important for military leaders to easily and quickly understand the context of the operational situation and the factors influencing it. It is indispensable that they have the initiative and act in the situation they familiarize themselves with in such a way that they can continuously influence events and constantly adapt to changing circumstances. By achieving tactical goals, they are able to support the implementation of objectives on the operational and strategic levels, while at the same time they are able to harmonize their own activities with continuous changes. In addition, they are able to build teams and team cohesion and to motivate their subordinates.

Highlighting the responses to be given to challenges generated by the rapidly changing security environment and focusing on the characteristics of today's operational environment, Gábor Boldizsár concludes that "the subordinate military organization or formation is usually at a great distance from the sending commander, so continuous guidance and decision support can be difficult or not provided at all. The commander must be able to make ad hoc decisions on the spot on the basis of well-developed, well-established orders, directives and guidelines." (Boldizsár, 2014, pp. 33-34.)

To ensure rapid and flexible responses to challenges that are adapted to changes in warfare, the ideal military leader:

- "Effectively applies the professional knowledge of its branch of service in practice;
- is open-minded across the full spectrum of operations, able to think outside the box and break with familiar stereotypes;
- adapts to new challenges, is able to act as both leader and cooperator during network operation;

- is able to track rapid changes individually and implement organizational adaptation at the institutional level as well;
- is able to perform the same role in an international environment as in the national position;
- courageous and determined: able to recognize and exploit opportunities in complex operational environments;
- is innovative and adaptive at both his/her own and lower levels of command;
- is a master of operational art even in multi-domain environments;
- is able to assert national interests at the strategic level;
- has a high level of cultural awareness and language proficiency.” (Takács – Szabóné Szabó – Töll, 2021, pp. 37–38.)

According to General Schwarzkopf,⁶ “Leadership is a potent combination [and coeffect] of strategy and character”, but the totality of personality traits, charisma, is much more important than strategy. We can learn more from negative leadership practice than from the positive one, as it shows us how not to lead people. In his view, the ability to control and the related competency are of paramount importance. (Kruse, 2012)

According to ⁷Gen. Stanley McChrystal, “leaders are empathetic”: they have the ability to understand, empathize and communicate effectively with those they lead. In his opinion, “they need not agree or share the same background or status in society as their followers, but they understand their hopes, fears”, plans, strengths and weaknesses. “Leadership is not popularity,” especially not in the military hierarchy: “For soldiers, the choice between popularity and effectiveness is ultimately no choice at all. Soldiers want to win; their survival depends upon it”. Military “leaders are genuine”. In his experience, subordinates would tolerate a commander’s being less of a leader than he hoped to be, but they would not forgive him being less than he claimed to be. “Simple honesty matters.” The general points out that intellect or charisma play a significant role in leadership, but “neither are required nor enough” for someone to become a good leader. “Physical appearance, poise, and outward self-confidence can be confused with leadership – for a time.” In his opinion and experience, the emphasis is much more on the extent a given leader can recognize his strengths and weaknesses, how well he can use them to his advantage, how effectively he can exploit and utilize them, to what extent he has a real self-image, self-esteem, self-confidence and determination.

⁶ Herbert Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr. (1934-2012) was an American general. From 1988 to 1991, he commanded the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), and then served as commander-in-chief of the coalition forces during the Gulf War.

⁷ General Stanley McChrystal (1954–) retired as commander of U.S. and NATO forces of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) fighting in Afghanistan

Genuineness and self-discipline are essential for a leader. “Leaders walk a fine line between self-confidence and humility.” In his view, “soldiers want leaders who are sure of their ability to lead the team to success but humble enough to recognize their limitations. [...] It [i]s better to admit ignorance or fear than to display false knowledge or bravado. And candidly admitting doubts or difficulties is key to building confidence. But expressing doubts and confidence is a delicate balance. When things look their worst, followers look to the leader for reassurance that they can and will succeed”, as well as for calm assessment of the situation and guidance. “Leaders are human.” They have their own emotions, no matter how much they strive for objectivity. However, really good military leaders constantly strive “to be the best humans they could be.” As well as to admit and take responsibility for their mistakes, because mistakes are part of the process and progress of learning.

3 MILITARY LEADERS AND THE MISSION COMMAND APPROACH

In my judgment and experience, the effectiveness of performing the tasks of an organizational unit depends to a significant extent on the leader’s person, personality, leadership competences and human qualities, thus on his/her leadership style and approach. If they do not have an internal need for a different approach to command, leaders socialized in an environment dominated by a “detailed command” approach find it more difficult to identify with and genuinely represent an entirely different approach. However, changed circumstances, hybrid warfare, the use of highly mobile forces in a rapidly changing environment, the availability of real-time information, and even the demographic specifics of the personnel should encourage leaders at all levels of command to face this challenge.

It is important to emphasize that mutual trust and respect, effective in both directions, are indispensable for success: superiors know the subordinates’ abilities, training level, their professional and human characteristics, strengths and limitations and energy reserves, while subordinates are able to think with their superiors’ heads and identify with their intentions in the interest of attaining a common objective.

Respect should in no way be based on coercion, because that would result in fear, low efficiency and loss of trust. The humanity of leadership must play a decisive role in this approach to command: commanders consider their subordinates as partners and involve them in decision-making by utilizing and exploiting their professional qualities and skills in the right sense, thereby strengthening the soundness of their own decisions and raising the likelihood of successful mission accomplishment and task execution. This also presupposes that commanders maintain a continuous dialogue with their subordinate colleagues; however, this communication can only be effective if it supports initiative, new and unconventional proposals for solutions formulated to achieve organizational goals, and does so without retaliation. As a result of this method, the subordinates’ motivation, their attachment to the organization and their identification with the organizational goals and

tasks continue to deepen, as do the team spirit, camaraderie and loyalty. All this exerts a fundamentally positive effect on the retaining power of the organization.

The flow of information, as part of communication and as a clear and unambiguous expression of the commander's intent, should be multidirectional as a means of achieving a common understanding of the task: all organizational elements involved in the implementation of the task, working in cooperation and continuously interacting with each other, must have the basic information necessary for the achievement of the set objectives.

Leaders with a mission command approach respect their subordinates' human rights and do not humiliate them, but rather inspires them, while representing and conveying values through personal example. In my opinion, genuineness is of key importance in all manifestations of a leader, including outwards appearance and conduct, external and internal communication, decision-making processes and the system of relationships with subordinates. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account an aspect of the human factor, namely the fact that leaders, too, are human: although they are the ones who obviously bear responsibility, in certain situations, by exercising self-criticism they do not undermine their authority, but may even increase their genuineness. The mission command approach requires awareness and deep self-knowledge of commanders: they must be clear on their strengths and weaknesses, but nevertheless must possess the ability of self-reflection.

I consider it important to experience the successes achieved together, as well as continuous feedback from leaders to subordinates, both in terms of confirmation and criticism. However, the possibility of mistakes should not be overrated: mistakes and conflicts should be part of organizational learning and training, and as such, they should serve as opportunities for development. It is the leader's responsibility to establish and operate an organization that is based on the lessons learned and is capable of continuously adopting new knowledge and methods.

CONCLUSION

With regard to the responses to increased risks and challenges related to the complex, comprehensive interpretation of security, the abilities to adapt and to react immediately to changing situations play a key role, which presupposes independence, creativity, proactivity, flexibility, initiative and an approach based on a decentralized decision-making process that is open to new methods and solutions at all levels of command.

Of course, just like the change of the entire organizational culture, the transformation of the command approach cannot take place overnight: change presupposes a conscious organizational learning process building from the foundations; the basic pillars of this complex process are quality education, preparation and professional training that are

provided in support of deepening value-based, healthy self-confidence, independent thinking and initiative, as well as the continuous development of leadership competencies and the objective implementation of leader selection based on real-world performance and evaluation.

In my view, mission command points beyond the successful execution of a given task: it provides commanders with a tool and thus an opportunity that, in addition to efficiency, is suitable for building coherent communities and teams that are deeply committed to common values and the common mission, are coherent, and prioritize cooperation and common principles as well as organizational identity.

Mission command can be the key to success, but it is important to emphasize that it is effective only if the conditions discussed earlier are simultaneously ensured, if the subordinates' freedom of thought and decision does not jeopardize the commander's intent, if autonomy does not mean a self-serving attitude and if freedom of initiative does not amount to its uncontrollability. The change of attitude, and thus mission command can be successful only if leaders can identify with it at all levels of command, and there is no inner resistance based on the fear of deviation from the usual, of leaving the comfort zone, or of one's own incompetence.

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SYNERGY BETWEEN PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND TRAINING IN CIVILIAN AND MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS IN ROMANIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 12.04.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

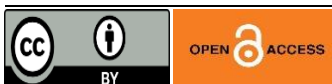
Published: 31.12.2024

ABSTRACT

The article analyses the synergy between performance management and vocational training in Romanian organizations, especially in the military and university context, highlighting the central role of the two dimensions in improving organizational efficiency and aligning them to modern labour market requirements. Problematising: (1) we summarized the current state of knowledge, (2) we explored the global trends and characteristics of the relationship between performance management and professional training, using the analysis of the results from the Cranet Reports (2017, 2023) covering the most relevant strategies related to performance appraisal and professional development, through continuous learning and (3) we reviewed possible perspectives for action to align the training process of military personnel in the context of military higher education institutions in Romania. Finally, we discussed the conclusions regarding the influence of the directions for cultivating the relationship between performance management and professional training on improving organizational and individual capabilities to respond to contemporary challenges, in flexible terms that reflect the limitations of this approach. The article stresses the importance of an integrated approach to performance management and training as determinants of long-term organizational success. At the same time, it recognizes the need to continuously adapt these practices to global trends.

KEYWORDS

performance management, training, military higher education, performance evaluation, CRANET report, continuous learning, continuous feedback, synergy, global trends, digital tools.



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1 INTRODUCTION

In a global context where the dynamics of socio-economic and technological changes are constantly redefining the demands and expectations from the workforce, performance management and staff training are at the heart of organizational strategies oriented towards

efficiency and adaptability. The justification for choosing this theme lies in our concerns about the need to understand how these two fields can be integrated and optimized to maximize human potential and respond to emerging challenges.

Although the literature recognizes the importance of performance management and personnel training, there are significant gaps in exploring the synergy between these two pillars of organizational success, especially in the specific context of military organizations, where performance and adaptability requirements are exceptional.

The article explores the synergy between performance management and training, focusing on how these two dimensions contribute to improving the effectiveness of organizations in Romania, especially in the military and academic context. The study is based on comparative data from the CRANET (Cranfield Network on International Human Resource Management) reports for the periods 2014-2015 and 2021-2022, providing an insight into the evolution of these practices at global and national level. It highlights the importance of moving from traditional annual appraisals to more agile systems based on continuous feedback and 360-degree appraisals, and the integration of digital technologies in performance management. It also highlights how organizations in Romania, including the military, have begun to adopt modern training methods to support employee development.

Another key point addressed is how performance systems can be integrated with training strategies to ensure that organizational goals are aligned with employee needs, thereby contributing to increased job satisfaction and overall performance. In particular, the article discusses the challenges faced by Romanian military organizations in personnel training and provides recommendations for adapting academic training programs to the emerging needs of the global security environment and international training trends.

In addition to analyzing the synergy between performance management and training, the article highlights the need for strategic collaboration between military educational institutions and civilian organizations to improve the efficiency and relevance of training processes. It also provides recommendations for improving the training process in military higher education institutions by enhancing the attractiveness of the teaching profession, promoting strategic partnerships and the use of advanced technologies for training and assessment.

2 THE STAGE OF KNOWLEDGE

Performance management (PM) is a crucial component in organizational change by emphasizing the importance of goals setting, feedback and continuous learning. Carl Deschamps and Jan Mattijs explored organizational learning processes in a large Belgian public organization, using the 4Is framework - Intuition, Interpretation, Integration, Institutionalization - to identify challenges and facilitators in the learning and adaptation process. This research points out that although performance management systems are

essential for improving motivation and productivity, the relationship between PM and employees' performance remains complex (Deschamps & Jan, 2018).

One of the key aspects to overcome this barrier is the integrative approach of PM to strategically align organizational goals and processes with stakeholder expectations and societal needs. In their study on the concept of strategic alignment, Jung Wook Lee and Seok Eun Kim, suggest the importance of managerial factors in identifying strategic direction and mobilizing resources and personnel to achieve organizational goals consistent with the demands of the external environment (Jung Wook & Seok, 2012). To empower executives to make the best strategic alignment decisions, Lize Van Hoek et al. suggest that managers should develop strategies paying attention to PM, to vigor and employees training process, which are important predictors for increasing job satisfaction and, implicitly, increasing organizational performance (Van Hoek, Paull Dachapalli, Schultz, Maleka, & Ragadu, 2020). On the one hand, PM is considered to include activities that guarantee the achievement of objectives consistently and efficiently (Mathur & Prasad, 2014). On the other hand, organizational strategies regarding investment in planned training programs to acquire the capabilities of exercising the duties of a specific function in a certain organization and their development materialize in capable employees, a lower attrition rate, high levels of satisfaction (Salas, Burke, & Wilson, 2001) and enhancing organizational success.

Another key aspect is understanding the maximization and satisfaction tendencies regarding PM, as it can provide essential details for designing and implementing strategies (Liang, 2014). For example, promoting competency-based self-assessment of performance can help to raise awareness of individual training needs, capitalize on employee strengths and implement measures to minimize deficiencies in training, collaboration, socialization, etc., through appropriate feedback and guidance, which are often associated with better outcomes in the public domain (Yovav & Itzhak, 2021).

At the level of higher education institutions, the diversity in the application of PM reflects a variable focus between teaching and research, suggesting a need to adapt PM to specific institutional goals (Taylor, 2014). In the context of British universities, Aboubichr and Conway highlight how performance management systems can be manipulated, highlighting the discrepancy between the stated objectives of these systems and the behaviors induced among teaching staff (Aboubichr & Conway, 2021). This research reveals the need to reconsider the application and effects of performance management systems in academia in order to avoid undesirable outcomes and to encourage an authentic and productive organizational culture. In the United States, Jacobsen and Saultz (2016) explore the impact of performance management on citizen trust in public education. The authors analyze whether the implementation of performance management strategies in schools can contribute to restoring and improving the public perception of the quality of education. Their study suggests that although performance management has the potential to improve transparency and accountability in the education sector, there are significant challenges to its effective

implementation. One of the findings indicates that the public acceptance and support of these initiatives depend to a large extent on the clear communication of goals, processes and results, as well as the involvement of stakeholders in the process of performance evaluation and improvement (Jacobsen & Saultz, 2016).

In addition, PM can significantly predict knowledge management capabilities and learning in higher education institutions. In their study of innovation performance in Ghanaian higher education institutions, Mercy Asaa Asiedu et al. show that management factors capable of projecting the university's vision through challenging, motivating and inspirational strategies encourage teaching staff, but also non-teaching staff to engage in educational programs and innovative activities, which can enhance institutional performance (Asaa Asiedu & Anyigba, 2020).

In Romania, aligning the educational offer with the requirements of the external environment is an important perspective in terms of improving the quality and development of higher education (Pavelescu, 2023). For example, studies show that employees' perceptions of the fairness and adequacy of rewards are essential in shaping their work behaviors and level of professional engagement (Tiron Tudor, Nistor, Fekete, & Alexandru, 2022).

In this context, this paper reviews the recent specialized literature on performance management and the training process being complemented by a comparative analysis of key trends in the field aimed at highlighting the characteristics of organizations in Romania in order to highlight possible perspectives for institutions of higher education.

As such, addressing current trends in performance management and professional training globally and in organizations can help identify the development directions needed to improve performance, and possible emerging perspectives for higher education institutions in general and the military in particular.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The general approach of the present scientific approach is governed by the fundamental research question: what is the essence of performance management and the training process at the level of organizations in Romania, related to global trends?

Naturally, the approach is an interpretive one with phenomenological and hermeneutic valences (David, 2015), in which the method of comparative analysis of performance management practices and staff training in Romanian organizations is used, based on data extracted from the related CRANET reports, periods 2014-2015 (CRANET, 2017) and 2021-2022 (CRANET, 2023), in order to identify significant developments and changes in these fields globally and in Romania.

The CRANET network is recognized worldwide for its human resource management (HRM) expertise. It is coordinated by the UK's prestigious Cranfield School of Management

and is a collaboration between over 40 universities and business schools on six continents that aims to provide relevant data on HRM practices and performance in employing organizations around the world.

The objective of this article is to identify major trends and significant changes regarding performance management and professional training, considered to be critical areas for organizational success. More precisely, the aim is to provide a portrait of the evolution of the Romanian organizational landscape from the perspective of performance management and human resources training, in the broader context of global dynamics. In particular, we want to use the major trends and significant changes in performance management and professional training identified to formulate perspectives for aligning military education with emerging global and national recommendations.

The process of thematic analysis will be used to extract and synthesize relevant information. This multidimensional approach allows an in-depth exploration of current and future dynamics in performance management and professional training, highlighting the particularities of the Romanian context compared to global trends, and implicitly possible action perspectives for the strategic alignment of higher military education institutions with international and national trends.

4 COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN ROMANIAN ORGANIZATIONS ACCORDING TO CRANET REPORTS 2017 AND 2023

Over the past decade, the landscape of performance management and professional training has been profoundly influenced by the acceleration of digital transformation, the globalization of the labor market and demographic changes. Global trends indicate a transition from traditional approaches centered on annual assessments and formal training to more agile strategies that are customized and integrated into the daily workflow.

The results of the partial analysis of the data provided in the CRANET reports published in 2017 and 2023 highlight the fact that, globally, an increase in the use of continuous feedback is observed. If in the period 2014-2015 (CRANET, 2017), the emphasis was on traditional performance evaluations, mentioned by approximately 95% of the responding employees, the data collected in the period 2021-2022, show an increase in the use of continuous evaluations based on objectives and 360-degree feedback of 10% percentage (from 50% in the 2017 report to 60% in the 2023 report). In addition, a greater degree of performance management orientation is associated with the frequency of trust given to remote work (CRANET, 2023, p.47) based on the use of computerized tools such as Zoom, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams (CRANET, 2023, p. 20).

We attribute this shift to the fact that digital tools and platforms facilitate this process, allowing organizations to collect and analyze data in real time, which supports evidence-based

decision-making and personalized employees' development. Furthermore, in contemporary times, increased investment in educational technologies and flexible instructional methods such as micro-learning, social learning and online learning platforms is indispensable to winning the "competitiveness" game. This orientation reflects the recognition of the need to support continuous learning and rapid adaptation to technological changes and labor market developments.

Moreover, it is observed globally that organizations are looking for ways to link rewards to results through performance-based reward schemes (CRANET, 2023, p.48), such as bonuses, profit sharing, stock awards and so on. Although the use of assessment results for awarding rewards is similar in both reports, in 2021-2022 respondents report a slight decrease in the share of fixed salary (from 80% in the pre-2017 period to 75%), while bonuses and sharing profit or the granting of shares remain important (70%, respectively 45%).

Regarding the performance management within the organizations in Romania, according to the analysis of data from CRANET reports, our findings indicate a progressive orientation towards more complex and development-centered performance systems.

The transition from traditional annual reviews to 360-degree evaluation and the emphasis on goal setting reflect a partial alignment with the global trends of personalization and continuous improvement of employee performance. Specifically, this change suggests a recognition of the importance of multidimensional feedback and the establishment of clear, measurable goals in the process of staff evaluation and development. However, the limited use of advanced evaluation techniques, such as return on investment (ROI) analysis in staff training (10%) and pre-post training comparison (20%), indicates a potential area for improvement in terms of training programs. We believe that this aspect underlines the need for the adoption of more sophisticated analysis and reporting tools that contribute to a better strategic management of the performance of training programs.

Taking into account these global trends, the portrait of organizations in Romania, outlined by the comparative analysis of CRANET data from 2017 and 2023, is defined by several essential characteristics that reflect trends, challenges and development directions in the field of performance management and human resources training. Considering that the CRANET data research methodology for the 2021-2022 period is based on the structured analysis by region, where the availability of the data allowed us, we included in the comparison with Romania the following categories:

- EU-13: the region of which Romania is a part, together with Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia;
- North America: represents a global pole of power, including the USA and Canada;
- China: also a global power pole, with significant economic influence;
- Germany and Belgium: western states with a higher level of development in Europe.

This approach offers a broader perspective on Romania's performance in a global, European and regional context.

Next, we detail these characteristics which highlight an evolution of organizational practices in line with the changes at the global level, as well as the contextual particularities that influence the way in which organizations in Romania respond to these trends.

- the transition to continuous performance management and the integration of computerized tools are reflected by the overall available data showing the more frequent use of dynamic and development-focused approaches, such as 360-degree feedback and goals setting, against traditional appraisals, as well as by the use of technologies for the accuracy and relevance of these practices. Also, the general data indicate that Romanian organizations are beginning to recognize the importance of competence-based assessment, which, along with multidimensional feedback, are key tools in performance management;
- the potential regarding the recognition of employees' efforts based on performance is reflected by the average positioning of Romania in the EU-13 context, with notable variabilities between states. By comparison, organizations in Romania use schemes related to financial participation in a percentage of 23.3%, similar to the average of the EU-13 states, such as Poland (25.0%) and Hungary (10.2%), but lower than that of countries such as Germany (66.2%), China (76.5%) and Israel (37.1%). Also, the Romanian organizations are around the average of the states in the region in which it is included in terms of granting performance-based bonuses (61.0%). A similar rate is reported by organizations in North America (64.7%) and Belgium (68.2%), while Chinese employees state a higher value (93.3%). This finding suggests the need to promote the practices of recognizing the efforts of employees based on performance to improve the valorization of human capital and achieve organizational success;
- the variable recognition of the importance of professional training programs for the fulfillment of organizational objectives is revealed by the decrease in the percentage of the budget allocated to it from 5.8% in 2017 to 4.5% in 2022, placing Romania below the global average. In comparison, Germany allocates over 15% of wage costs to training programs. This trend suggests challenges in prioritizing training investments, possibly influenced by budget constraints or a mismatch between the recognition of the value of Training and Development (T&D) and the actual allocation of resources. Moreover, similar to global trends, on-the-job training and coaching are the most common methods of professional development of human resources;
- the trend towards the adoption of modern methods of professional development is reflected by the higher overall percentages regarding the use of on-the-job training practices, coaching and mentoring. This reflects an awareness of the importance of continuous learning and adaptation to the individual development needs of employees, in line with global trends to personalize learning paths.

As a result, the defining characteristics of organizations in Romania reflect a landscape in transition, oriented towards the modernization of performance management practices and professional training, but faced with specific challenges in fully aligning with international standards and practices. This analysis underlines the importance of continuing adaptation and innovation efforts to respond effectively to the demands of the global market and to ensure the sustainable development of human capital in Romanian organizations.

However, the findings and foreshadowing in the following section are marked by limitations that derive from the methodology used in this analysis. First, the data from the CRANET reports, although extensive, come from a limited spectrum of organizations, predominantly from developed economies. This raises questions about the generalizability of the results to the entire global corpus of organizations. Second, the different methodology for analyzing the data at the state level (CRANET, 2017) compared to grouping the data at the region level (CRANET, 2023) limits the consistency of the findings in the Romanian context. Additionally, due to the available data format, we predominantly used traditional analysis methods, and less advanced techniques.

Taking these aspects into account, in the following, we will address the implications of these global trends and national characteristics in order to foreshadow, with the assumed limitations, prospects for improving the training processes carried out in military higher education institutions, which will become the subject of future approaches related to the integration of performance management in the training of military personnel, on a nationally representative sample and with a complex research methodology.

5 EMERGING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING THE PROCESS OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

Professional training and development of military personnel is considered a strategic objective at the level of the Romanian Ministry of National Defence, with implications on the ability of aligning the armed forces organizations to the challenges of the security environment. Thus, the need for "high quality" human resources of the Romanian Armed Forces reinforces the mechanisms of searching for best practices in training, continuous development and retention of military personnel, which implies the development of new perspectives on the military profession. In terms of personnel categories, the professionalization of the officer corps in the academic environment is the fundamental process. Complex in nature, it must provide the armed forces with the necessary human capabilities (leaders, experts, decision-makers) to meet the challenges associated with the higher-ranking tasks specific to the changing security environment.

Considering these aspects, we set out to identify some perspectives for development in military higher education institutions and to outline some emerging recommendations

leading to the improvement of the professional training of military personnel in a university context, based on the trends identified in the previous section.

Perspective no. 1: increasing teacher satisfaction, the attractiveness of the profession and individual and organizational performance, through a strategic vision that aims to:

- using the dimensions associated with performance management, such as frequent evaluations of established objectives and the 360-degree feedback, to provide appropriate guidance to teachers, administrative staff and students or trainees enrolled in various university training programs;
- recognizing the efforts of teachers and administrative staff based on performance, developing bonus schemes for increasing the quality of the teaching act, the availability of providing administrative support and the successful fulfillment of organizational missions.

Perspective no. 2: improving the alignment of programs to the needs of the beneficiaries:

- University training programs for military personnel: as mentioned above, the professional training of officers in a university environment has an effective and immediate influence on the acts of command-control, expertise and decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. These programs must be built by professionals who understand the need for congruence of the leadership profile sought at the level of military organizations with the strategic, operational and tactical objectives of the Romanian Armed Forces. Naturally, complex studies for the identification of the profile of the leader/expert in a specific field of activity should be the basis for the reconfiguration processes of the university training programs. Although these studies involve considerable financial, human and time resources, the proliferation of information technology tools provides opportunities for dissemination of research tools and data collection, leading to process optimization. In the absence of such rational approaches, there is a risk that training programmes will remain forms without substance and organizational relevance;
- providing training programs based on the combination of conventional learning methods with modern ones, through the use of technological, digital tools and those containing artificial intelligence; project-based learning and simulations to create a richer and more interactive learning experience;
- developing interdisciplinary training programs by integrating knowledge from various fields, such as military sciences, social sciences, technical sciences and economics, or different specializations such as: stewardship, financial management and informatics, preparing military personnel to face the complex challenges of the current security environment;
- promoting a culture of continuous learning by providing opportunities and recognition to motivate personnel to continuously improve their skills in order to adapt to the rapid changes in the military field.

Perspective no. 3: promoting partnerships and increasing visibility by:

- developing strategic partnerships with universities and other educational institutions to benefit from their expertise in the field of professional training;
- facilitating access to quality educational resources;
- increasing resources for professional training programs for military personnel;
- ensuring the necessary financial resources for the implementation of modern and efficient programs.

6 CONCLUSIONS – APPROACH IN CORRELATION WITH THE REST OF THE ARTICLE

Considering the evidence from the literature on the positive influence of performance management and staff professional development strategies on organizational success, and the findings on trends in the field, at the level of organizations (including military) in Romania, we can draw the following conclusions. According to the literature review, the quintessence of the connection between performance management and continuous professional training lies in the contributions to beneficiary-centered learning by the mechanisms of goal setting, progress monitoring, specific feedback and evaluation, which lead to the achievement of the proposed learning outcomes. Overall, the comparative analysis of the 2017 and 2023 CRANET reports provides a valuable insight into the evolution of financial participation and performance-based pay practices globally.

The analyzed data reflect a complex evolution in the fields of performance management and professional training in Romania, highlighting both adaptations to new organizational paradigms and specific challenges in maintaining optimal levels of investment in human capital development. This analysis underlines the need for an integrated approach to performance management and professional development, which ensures alignment with global trends and supports the competitive sustainability of Romanian organizations.

This change suggests an orientation towards participative methods, centered on the continuous development of employees, highlighting an adaptation to the emerging paradigms in performance evaluation.

The presented study can contribute to the existing literature by clarifying the current trends regarding performance management and human resources training processes, providing a solid basis for further research aimed at understanding the determinants of the alignment of strategic objectives with the requirements of the external environment.

The results of the study can provide organizations with valuable insights for developing or optimizing performance management programs by aligning objectives, providing feedback, continuous or 360-degree evaluations, performance-based compensation, and active learning in line with societal changes. They can also guide policy decisions in promoting effective

human resource management practices, thereby aligning employee interests with organizational goals.

The perspectives proposed as courses of action for improving the professional training of military personnel at university level are intended to highlight how a change based on knowledge and management of training objectives could contribute to meeting the needs of qualitative human resources and fulfilling organizational missions in a globalized world.

From the point of view of using the mechanisms associated with performance management as a fundamental tool to support policies for attracting, training and retaining teaching staff at the level of military higher education institutions, we aimed to emphasize the importance of the teacher-institution partnership in providing opportunities for continuous devolution on the job, with immediate effects on the successful teaching-learning-assessment process. In this regard, we believe that placing teaching at the center of the multiple activities that military university teachers have to perform, and recognizing efforts based on the performance of the educational process (the teaching-learning-assessment process) can be key factors in expressing intellectual and creative potential.

With regard to the rethinking of training programs, we believe that it is necessary to have a perspective on the orientation of the training mode centered on organizational and individual needs identified by scientific methods. Probably the simplest start is to identify the profile of the Romanian Armed Forces and synchronize it with modern civilian and military organizations, in a Western-inspired approach that promotes the "flexible military" typology. In this sense, our option for the performance management of the training process may lead to more functional military organizations by avoiding the waste of resources (human, material, financial, and informational) and of the potential of the personnel.

Finally we note again the inherent limitations of the paper in the data source and methodology used. The interpretation of the results must be seen within the limits of the data sources (CRANET Reports) and the methodological approach based on traditional analysis with phenomenological and hermeneutical valences.

Although Romania has started to adopt some of the global trends, there is still significant potential for improvement in the use of modern technologies and integrated approaches to human resources development. The above conclusions, perspectives and proposals will hopefully trigger interest in applying and conducting further research, by a research team, with improved methodologies and more representative samples, to increase the reliability and applicability of the results.

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NAVIGATING WATER TENSIONS: UNRAVELING THE DESECURITIZATION DISCOURSE IN CENTRAL ASIA

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 23.05.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

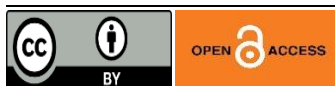
Published: 31.12.2024

ABSTRACT

This article explores the technical and practical nature of the "desecuritization" of transnational water disputes in Central Asia, shedding light on alternative approaches to foster cooperation and mitigate regional tensions. The article delves into potential desecuritization strategies, offering practical perspectives for managing transboundary water conflicts. The central question guiding this research is: how do discourses on water security contribute to regional tensions in Central Asia, and to what extent can desecuritization efforts provide alternative pathways for transboundary water governance? By examining specific cases, including major dam projects, the study aims to uncover securitization mechanisms and explore plausible strategies for desecuritization. Utilizing a critical discourse analysis methodology of the Copenhagen School, the article deconstructs narratives shaping water security in Central Asia.

KEYWORDS

water security, Copenhagen School, desecuritization, Central Asia, international relations, transboundary water conflicts



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INTRODUCTION

In the dynamic landscape of the 21st century, traditional notions of security have undergone significant transformations, necessitating a reevaluation of frameworks applied to global challenges. Particularly within the realm of environmental concerns, the intersection of security and resource management has become a focal point for scholarly inquiry. This article explores the intricate dynamics of transnational water disputes, examining the concept of desecuritization as a potential paradigm shift in addressing these challenges.

Barry Buzan's seminal work on security provides a foundational perspective for understanding the evolution of security concepts in the post-Cold War era, including the necessary redefinition of security beyond its military nature. Buzan's concept of extending

security to diverse realms, including economic, political, and societal aspects, serves as a theoretical underpinning for this study (Buzan, 1991). Moreover, Richard Ullmann's contribution to the discourse on security redefinition prompts an exploration of how perceptions of security influence the framing of issues and subsequent policy responses (Ullman, 1983; Wæver, 1995; Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde, 1998; Barnett, 2001; Futter, 2014; Girard, 2019). These works provide the opportunity for this article to analyze security problems in a broader context, such as considering access to water as one of the major security problems in the world.

The focal point of this article is the context of water security and scarcity, which are critical dimensions that intertwine environmental sustainability, human well-being, and geopolitical considerations. As populations grow and climate change intensifies, water resources become increasingly scarce, emphasizing the importance of water security on the global agenda. Understanding the nuances of water security is essential to appreciate the complexities inherent in transnational water management systems.

Transnational water management systems, which involve shared water resources across borders, present unique challenges that can escalate into disputes, tensions, and conflicts. As water becomes a strategic resource, the potential for these issues to be framed within a security discourse raises questions about the effectiveness of such securitization. This article aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding water diplomacy by exploring the potential benefits of desecuritization in transnational water disputes.

Through an examination of real-world case studies and theoretical scenarios, this research aims to shed light on the consequences of framing water issues as security concerns. By critically evaluating the intersections of Buzan's extended security concept (Buzan, 1991), Ullmann's security redefinition (Ullman, 1983), and the specificities of water security in transnational contexts, the article strives to offer insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners grappling with the complexities of managing water resources on a global scale through desecuritization's mechanism on the example of dams in Central Asia.

1 METHODOLOGY

I will utilize the following research approaches, techniques, and methods: the theory of securitization, case study analysis, comparative analysis of transnational water disputes data in Central Asia. The primary conceptual lens for analyzing transnational water disputes will be the theory of securitization. This entails examining how water issues are presented as security threats, the consequences of such securitization, and potential frames for desecuritization in Central Asia. The research will involve a thorough review of literature, policy documents, and media reports to identify instances where water disputes are still securitized or desecuritized. This approach will aid in understanding the discourse

surrounding water security and its influence on policy decisions. The article will use case studies of real-world transnational water disputes to provide empirical evidence and contextualize the theoretical discussions. Case selection will consider the diversity of dam projects in Central Asia, the severity of conflicts, and the outcomes of different approaches to dispute resolution, including those related to dams. Through detailed analyses of specific cases, the research will explore the various examples of desecuritization in mitigating tensions. To enhance the generalizability of findings, a comparative analysis will be conducted across multiple dam projects as transnational water disputes. By using these research approaches, techniques, and methods, the article aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the desecuritization of transnational water disputes in the context of evolving security paradigms. The combination of theoretical frameworks, empirical case studies, and comparative analyses will contribute to a thorough exploration of the research questions and facilitate well-informed policy recommendations.

Drawing on regional case studies, policy documents, and diplomatic discourses, the research identifies instances of desecuritization, enriching the understanding of this complex phenomenon. While the research is ongoing, preliminary findings suggest that the securitization of water issues exacerbates regional tensions, necessitating a shift towards desecuritization for sustainable transboundary water governance. Initial case analyses indicate the potential of diplomatic efforts and collaborative projects as desecuritization strategies.

The primary research question focuses on examining how water security discourses influence regional tensions in Central Asia and to what degree desecuritization strategies may offer alternative approaches to transboundary water governance.

This article makes a vital contribution to the academic discourse on water diplomacy by offering a nuanced analysis of desecuritization efforts in Central Asia. Scholars, policymakers, and water resource managers will benefit from insights into alternative approaches to managing transnational water conflicts, fostering cooperation, and ensuring regional stability. As the region grapples with the intersection of geopolitics and water resources, this article aims to provide a concise yet impactful contribution to ongoing discussions surrounding water security in Central Asia.

While there may not be an extensive body of literature specifically focused on the desecuritization of water problems as a singular topic, scholars often address aspects of desecuritization within broader discussions on water governance, diplomacy, and conflict resolution. Here are few references that touch upon desecuritization of water issues:

- Climate change, securitisation and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (article), (Mason, 2013);
- Desecuritisation of water and the technocratic turn in peacebuilding (article), (Aggestam, 2015);
- The Securitization and Desecuritization of Water (book chapter), (Aryaeinejad, Brinkley, Budak, Chalphin, Hickel, Neusner, Obi, Pecorella, 2015).

In these articles, the authors discuss efforts to desecuritize the Middle East region. They provide insights into attempts to move away from framing water issues as security concerns and instead emphasize cooperation. Hence, my article critically examines the securitization of transnational water disputes in the countries of Central Asia and explores the potential for desecuritization as a transformative approach to address shared water challenges. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of securitization, particularly drawing from the Copenhagen School, and concepts of extending security, the study investigates the narratives and practices that frame water-related issues as security threats in the region. Focusing on key cases such as the Rogun and Nurek dams in Tajikistan, the Kambarata dams in Kyrgyzstan, and others, as well as the implications for downstream countries, the research analyzes the securitization processes that contribute to regional tensions.

In parallel, the article explores instances of desecuritization, examining diplomatic efforts, regional cooperation initiatives, and international mediation as strategies to move beyond the securitized discourse. Drawing on case studies, including multilateral projects and environmental impact assessments, the research assesses the effectiveness of desecuritization measures in promoting collaborative water management practices. Furthermore, the study considers the role of scientific cooperation, stakeholder engagement, and inclusive dialogue in reshaping the narrative around transnational water disputes.

2 DESECURITIZATION AND ITS IMPORTANCE FOR HYDROPOLITICAL STRATEGIES

Critical Security Studies challenges traditional notions of security and questions power dynamics in security practices. It examines how security issues are constructed, the impact of securitization, and the role of identity and discourse in shaping security policies. In this context, the Theory of Securitization studies the process by which issues are framed as security threats and how these framing influences policy decisions. It includes the analysis of both securitization and desecuritization processes. Desecuritization refers to the process by which problems that were previously securitized are de-escalated and transferred back to the realm of normal political reality. In this context, they can be addressed through the standard rules and regulations of (democratic) politics. It's crucial to note that achieving security is not the ultimate goal; rather, the endpoint is the removal of the problem from the broader security discourse. A classic example of desecuritization is the post-World War II relationship between France and Germany.

Their interactions evolved from security-based to normal political relations. An illustrative case of desecuritization in the Central Asian region is the handling of the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Here, the issue has shifted from being primarily a security concern to one addressed through conventional political means. Desecuritization, then, is the process by which a political community downplays or ceases to treat something as an existential threat to a significant point of reference. This involves

limiting or discontinuing the call for urgent and extraordinary measures to address the perceived threat (Buzan, Wæver, 2003, p. 56). The desecuritization process may encounter certain constraints stemming from political culture, external factors, and evolving national circumstances (Aras, Polat, 2008, p. 497).

Representatives of the Copenhagen School argue that securitizations are not morally correct, while desecuritizations are considered morally justifiable (Buzan, Wæver, de Wilde, 1998). B. Buzan even expresses a normative preference for desecuritization over securitization. It is important to note that these conclusions were reached through an analysis of the consequences of both processes. In this context, we can assume that the processes of securitization and desecuritization are closely linked to patterns of friendship and hostility. These patterns range from conflict formations, where the source of security interdependence is rooted in fears and rivalries, to security regimes, and finally, to security communities. These classifications also highlight how system members perceive each other (as enemy, rival, or friend). Therefore, the moral character of securitization and desecuritization processes arises from the course, nature, and—above all—the consequences of these processes.

B. Buzan points out that beyond the security community, there exists regional integration, signifying the end of anarchy and the transfer of security issues to the internal sphere (Buzan, 1991). The classic approach defines a security community as a group of states that, through integration, have established a sense of community. This expression is manifested through the creation of effective and common institutions and practices, ensuring peaceful coexistence and the resolution of issues without resorting to the threat or use of force (Konopacki, 1998, p. 38). The development of a security community is characterized by processes of desecuritization. Actors cease to perceive each other as enemies and security threats, shifting to a framework where they treat each other as friends. While they may still compete and face challenges, they approach these issues as ordinary political, economic, ecological, or social problems rather than security threats requiring extraordinary countermeasures (Buzan, Wæver, 2003, p. 56).

As Vuori explains, *the desired outcome is desecuritization, which brings back a sense of security or, conversely, an absence of threat, eliminating the need for restrictive measures* (Vuori, 2011). According to T. Balzacq, a securitizing actor can obtain two types of support from recipients: formal and moral. In many cases, actors securitize issues without the moral support of the audience, and formal support is often a prerequisite for successful securitization. As outlined by O. Wæver, in the progression of a problem into a security threat, the state may invoke the special right to be the final authority. Under this right, the ultimate definition of the threat can only be approved by the state or its elites (Wæver, 1995), which has moral consequences for the actions taken by decision-makers.

Moreover, according to J. Czaputowicz, *the question of why a particular issue qualifies as a security issue inherently carries an ethical dimension. The consequentialist*

position assumes that security is linked to the prevailing value system. It serves a positive function when it aligns with the political interests of the majority, resolving a given problem more swiftly, efficiently, and effectively than ordinary political means. Otherwise, it has a negative impact (Czaputowicz, 2012).

Considering the relationship between politicization and securitization, *politicization, from the standpoint of democratic normative theory, is seen as a positive phenomenon, while securitization is viewed as a negative one. Securitization is a one-time act; conversely, desecuritization is a process. Therefore, it is easier to securitize something than to desecuritize it and return to the state of 'normal' politics (Czaputowicz, 2012).* Securitization represents a radical form of depoliticization with elements of security and war rhetoric, which excludes certain issues from political debate.

Securitization is a radical form of depoliticization that incorporates elements of security and war rhetoric, effectively excluding certain issues from political debate. In the process of desecuritization, there is no need to resort to decisions involving the use of force in order to protect a reference object that is existentially threatened. Desecuritizations also avoid morally questionable decisions that would require disrupting public order and often sacrificing individuals for the sake of state security. In the context of desecuritization, it becomes much easier to gain acceptance and moral support from audience because a given problem is transferred from the realm of security to the realm of politics.

The establishment of a nuclear-free zone by the countries in the region is an example of a voluntarily and consciously created security regime, indicating the shift of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction from security policy to ordinary politics. Therefore, it serves as a case study of successful desecuritization in Central Asia and the achievement of non-proliferation goals since the end of the Cold War. Therefore, considering the experience of Central Asian countries in this area, it is valuable to present the effects of desecuritization in other domains, using the example of transboundary water disputes in Central Asia.

3 EFFORTS OF DESECURITIZATION OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATER DISPUTES IN CENTRAL ASIA

In this substantive section of my article, I present the most significant instances of desecuritization efforts in Central Asia, specifically transboundary and regional disputes related to existing or planned dams in the region. The Rogun Dam in Central Asia has been a source of contention and debate among the countries in the region, particularly Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Located on the Vakhsh River in Tajikistan, the Rogun Dam is one of the largest hydropower projects in the region. Disputes have arisen regarding water management, environmental impacts, and concerns about the potential effects on downstream countries, especially Uzbekistan. While the Rogun Dam has caused tension,

there have also been instances of desecuritization observed in regional dialogues. Regional actors, including Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, have engaged in diplomatic dialogues and negotiations to address concerns related to the Rogun Dam (Musioł, 2024, p. 191-205; *Tashkent Time*, 2022). These discussions aim to find cooperative solutions and move away from framing the issue solely as a security threat. Furthermore, efforts from international organizations and third-party mediators to facilitate discussions have contributed to desecuritization. By involving neutral actors, the focus can shift from a securitized discourse to a more cooperative and solution-oriented approach. Conducting comprehensive environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs) can be seen as a desecuritization effort. By engaging in transparent assessments and involving relevant stakeholders, countries can address concerns about the dam's impact on the environment and local communities. Encouraging scientific cooperation and sharing data on water resources can also contribute to desecuritization. Collaborative efforts to monitor and manage water resources foster trust and move away from a strictly security-oriented perspective. The involvement of regional and international organizations, such as the United Nations, World Bank, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program - CAREC, and other relevant entities, can provide platforms for multilateral cooperation. By framing the Rogun Dam issue within a broader development context, the narrative can shift away from strict security concerns. It is important to note that the situation may have evolved, and there may have been new developments or changes in regional dynamics.

The Nurek Dam, located on the Vakhsh River in Tajikistan, has been a significant hydropower project in Central Asia. Like other large dam projects in the region, it has been a subject of discussion and potential tension among countries in Central Asia, particularly Tajikistan and downstream countries such as Uzbekistan. Disputes have centered around water management, energy production, and concerns about downstream impacts. While the Nurek Dam has been associated with security-related concerns, examples of desecuritization—efforts to move away from framing the issue solely in security terms—can be identified in various aspects. Efforts towards regional cooperation and collaboration among Central Asian countries have been observed. Dialogue platforms, such as the Central Asian Energy Water Development Program and the United Nations Development Programme - UNDP, provide spaces for discussions on shared water resources, including those related to the Nurek Dam (UNDP, 2022). Conducting thorough environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and sharing the results with downstream countries can be considered a desecuritization effort. By addressing concerns about the environmental impacts of the Nurek Dam, countries can work towards cooperative solutions. Promoting scientific and technical cooperation in monitoring and managing water resources can contribute to desecuritization. Shared data, research collaborations, and joint projects in the field of water management foster trust and move away from a strictly security-oriented perspective. Involvement of international organizations and donors in projects related to the Nurek Dam can contribute to desecuritization. International actors can provide technical expertise,

facilitate dialogue, and promote cooperative approaches. Framing discussions around the Nurek Dam within the broader context of regional energy cooperation can be a desecuritization strategy. Emphasizing the potential benefits of energy sharing and joint infrastructure projects may help alleviate security concerns. The World Bank plays a significant role in providing financial and technical assistance. It supports projects like Kambarata-1 and Kambarata-2 by helping to frame them within a cooperative and economically beneficial context. The World Bank also helps facilitate agreements that ensure equitable water and energy distribution. The governments of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are actively involved in negotiating and implementing agreements related to water management (*Diplomat Magazine*, 2023). With regard to Toktogul’s Dam, regional institutions such as the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) and the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC) have been established to create and enforce agreements on water usage and management. The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), provide technical and financial support for the maintenance and improvement of water infrastructure. For instance, the ADB is funding rehabilitation projects at Toktogul and other hydropower plants to enhance efficiency and sustainability (Asian Development Bank, 2023). United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) has played a significant role in assessing hazards and implementing risk reduction strategies for Sarez Lake (Asian Disaster Reduction Center, 2023). They have been involved in setting up early warning systems and conducting community training programs.

Dams and tensions in Central Asia have been a longstanding issue primarily related to water resource management, energy production, and the downstream impacts of large hydropower projects. The countries in the region, including Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, have been involved in disputes over the construction and operation of dams. Here are some examples in the summarized Table 1 and Table 2:

Table 1 Major dams oriented transboundary water disputes – level of desecuritization

Dams /states affected	Factors leading to securitization	Effective desecuritization measures
<p>Rogun</p> <p>Tajikistan Uzbekistan Turkmenistan</p>	<p>The Rogun Dam on the Vakhsh River in Tajikistan has been a major source of tension in the region. The construction of the dam, which is one of the tallest in the world, has raised concerns in downstream Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. The issues include potential disruptions in water flow, agriculture, and energy production downstream.</p>	<p>Conducting comprehensive environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs)</p> <p>The involvement of regional and international organizations, such as the United Nations, World Bank, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program - CAREC, and other relevant entities, can provide platforms for multilateral cooperation.</p>

<p>Nurek</p> <p>Tajikistan Uzbekistan</p>	<p>The Nurek Dam in Tajikistan is one of the largest dams in the world. Its operation has implications for downstream countries, particularly Uzbekistan. Disputes have arisen regarding water management practices, energy production, and concerns about the environmental and social impacts on the Aral Sea basin.</p>	<p>Dialogue platforms, such as the Central Asian Energy Water Development Program and the United Nations Development Programme - UNDP, provide spaces for discussions on shared water resources, including those related to the Nurek Dam.</p> <p>Conducting thorough environmental impact assessments (EIAs) and sharing the results with downstream countries</p> <p>The World Bank and its role.</p>
<p>Kambarata-1 Kambarata-2</p> <p>Kyrgyzstan Uzbekistan</p>	<p>Kyrgyzstan's plans to construct hydropower dams on the Naryn River, known as Kambarata-1 and Kambarata-2, have caused tensions with downstream Uzbekistan. Concerns include the potential reduction of water flow, which would impact agricultural activities in the Fergana Valley.</p>	<p>Financial and technical assistance of the World Bank.</p> <p>The World Bank's role of facilitating agreements that ensure equitable water and energy distribution.</p>
<p>Toktogul</p> <p>Kyrgyzstan Kazakhstan Uzbekistan</p>	<p>The Toktogul Dam on the Naryn River is a significant reservoir that plays a crucial role in distributing water among Central Asian countries. Disputes over water allocation and reservoir management have led to tensions between Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan.</p>	<p>The involvement of regional institutions such as the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) and the Interstate Commission for Water Coordination (ICWC).</p> <p>Financial and technical assistance of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.</p> <p>The ADB's role in rehabilitation projects to enhance efficiency and sustainability.</p>
<p>Sarez Lake</p> <p>Tajikistan Uzbekistan Afghanistan</p>	<p>While not a traditional dam, the potential threat of a dam breach induced by a landslide in 1911 at Lake Sarez in Tajikistan has raised concerns in downstream countries. An outburst flood could affect the Panj River,</p>	<p>UNDRR and its role in assessing hazards and implementing risk reduction strategies and setting up early warning systems and conducting community training programs.</p>

	thereby impacting Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.	
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Source: author based on his research in Kazakhstan.

Table 2 Desecuritizing actors and level of transboundary water desecuritization

Dams	Level of transboundary water desecuritization	
Sample desecuritizing actors		Low/medium/high
Rogun	IGOs: ADB, UN, EU, CAREC, ISAF; states: USA, Japan	Low
Nurek		High
Kambarata-1 Kambarata-2		Medium
Toktogul		Low
Sarez Lake		Medium

Source: author based on his research in Central Asia.

The competition for water resources in the Amu Darya and Syr Darya river basins has led to ongoing tensions. Downstream countries, particularly Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, heavily rely on water from these rivers for agriculture, and any upstream developments can affect their water availability. These examples highlight the complex interplay of geopolitics, energy needs, and environmental concerns in the context of dam construction and water management in Central Asia. The potential for disputes over water resources remains a significant challenge in the region, necessitating ongoing diplomatic efforts and cooperative solutions that still integrate both political dialogue and security discourse.

As shown in Table 2, the actors involved in desecuritization encompass various entities with direct or indirect influence, including states and international organizations both within and outside the region. In the context of states outside Central Asia (the table is not exhaustive and only provides a few examples of entities with the highest levels of activity and influence), their engagement is not exclusively determined by threats. Nonetheless, their role in the desecuritization process is of considerable importance due to their investment, economic involvement, and, fundamentally, pro-environmental considerations. These actors are motivated by the desire to foster a conducive political and social environment. Conversely, the mitigation of existing disputes surrounding dams is essential, not only symbolically but also practically, in halting the escalation of such threats and preventing the spillover of conflicts. Owing to the legacy of the Soviet Union, water-related conflicts have evolved into both a symbolic and tangible issue of regional and international significance in recent decades. Thus, the involvement of extra-regional actors may result in both positive and negative consequences for desecuritization. Paradoxically, their engagement could prompt securitization tendencies when the interests of only one side of regional security complexes are prioritized, as seen in the role of the USA, the EU, and the World Bank in the Aral Sea Basin (the case of the Kokaral dam in 2005) — specifically, Kazakhstan versus Uzbekistan during the rule of Islam Karimov. The European Union's involvement in the region, particularly regarding disputes over hydroelectric dams,

stems from its broader role in global environmental protection policies. This focus, coupled with an emphasis on human rights and the rule of law, often acts as an impediment to the advancement of economic and energy cooperation with regional countries. Consequently, the EU is not perceived as an effective agent of desecuritization in this context.

CONCLUSION

The desecuritization of transnational water disputes in Central Asia emerges as a critical focal point for fostering cooperation and mitigating regional tensions. This article has shed light on alternative pathways for transboundary water governance by exploring the nature of desecuritization and their importance in hydropolitical strategies.

The central question guiding this research is how discourses on water security contribute to regional tensions in Central Asia and to what extent desecuritization efforts can provide alternative pathways for transboundary water governance. This question has been approached through a critical discourse analysis methodology. By deconstructing narratives that shape water security in the region and drawing on regional case studies, policy documents, and diplomatic discourses, this study has identified instances of desecuritization and enriched our understanding of this complex phenomenon.

While the research is ongoing, preliminary findings highlight the exacerbating effect of securitization mechanisms on regional tensions. This emphasizes the need for a shift towards desecuritization to achieve sustainable transboundary water governance. Initial case analyses suggest that diplomatic efforts and collaborative projects have the potential to serve as desecuritization strategies. These strategies offer hope for enhanced cooperation and stability in the region. This article contributes to the academic discourse on water diplomacy by providing a nuanced analysis of desecuritization efforts in Central Asia. Scholars, policymakers, and water resource managers can benefit from the insights into alternative approaches for managing transnational water conflicts and ensuring regional stability. As the region grapples with the intersection of geopolitics and water resources, this article serves as a concise yet impactful addition to ongoing discussions surrounding water security in Central Asia.

In conclusion, addressing water tensions in Central Asia requires a collective effort to promote desecuritization, foster dialogue, encourage cooperation, and ensure equitable resource allocation for the benefit of all stakeholders in the region.

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PLANNING – BASIC FUNCTION OF LEADING

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 28.10.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

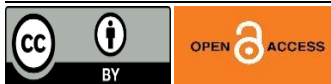
Published: 31.12.2024

ABSTRACT

The role, place, and necessity of planning are unequivocally extremely important in the context of today's operational environment. Analyzing and transforming information gathered and lessons learned into realistic, workable, concrete planning products leads military managers and commanders to make unquestionable decisions. Sometimes the limits of planning can be determined by the insufficiency of technologies or the incompatibility of planners, a fact that can be corrected by finding very simple strategies and directions for improvement. The success of an action, or military activity is not the merit of a military or civilian leader but the sum of creations, of comprehensive approaches, of the interpretation of information gathered, and last but not least, the capacity of those who value the prepared plans.

KEYWORDS

Planning, planning process, decision, courses of action, strategies.



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INTRODUCTION

Approaching a topic based on the impact of planning on decision-making process as the main attribute of the exercise of leadership is extremely sensitive due to the complexity of the activities performed within the process of forecasting, analysis, dissemination, and the effect produced by the decision, whether it is in the civil environment or the military field. Action planning has been intensively debated since ancient times, becoming today a collection of vital activities for the accomplishment of successful actions.

Considering the analysis of some fundamental concepts, I will present aspects related to the role and necessity of planning as a basic function of management by analyzing the activity of civil organizations oriented towards economic and social activities as well as that of military structures. It is very important to know the objectives of planning because it quickly places us in the general context of finding strategies focused on efficiency, to ensure the right conditions for decision-making.

Planning, regardless of the sphere of manifestation, civil or military, has become a process as a result of the need to ensure legality, proper functionality, surprising technological evolution, and the increase in threats in the current operational environment. Comparing how planning is done in these two areas is a subject that seizes attention in its complexity, although the stages of achievement are relatively identical.

Planning processes have limits and constraints due to the technologies used, the adaptability of specialists, the material resources and equipment used, which determines an analysis regarding the impact of the changes we wish to implement upon the efficiency of the resulting products.

In the military system, expertise in planning is intrinsically linked to modeling and simulation. However, this expertise is arduously acquired by specialists through the execution of exercises grounded in simulated realities and modeled resources, which determines the realization of the most daring plans to achieve the objectives, according to the needs.

In the private sector, organizational leadership has the capability to verify, plan, organize, and manage subordinates, as well as to utilize resources, through the results achieved in pursuit of the proposed objectives.

Therefore, the current concerns of leaders in this complex field of planning are focused on the introduction of emerging and disruptive technologies, with the goal of increasing labor productivity and reducing the time allocated to activities.

Recognizing the importance of the goals set by the leadership of various structures, it is time to establish directions and strategies for improving planning, in line with present needs. Initially, it is necessary to analyze lessons learned, and study both past and present, so that civilian and military leaders, become aware that power lies in the structure they lead, and the results of the entire personnel's work brings benefits to both planners and executors.

The management of military or civilian structures involves specific activities that must be carried out according to certain characteristics regarding the location, specificity, and context in which they are employed. It heavily depends on the leaders' capabilities, the personnel's motivation, and the experience of each individual. There are some differences in leadership execution between those two domains. Thus, starting from these scientific premises, the article aims to spark an interest in understanding these essential aspects of the planning process and decision-making.

1 THE ROLE AND NECESSITY OF PLANNING IN THE EXERCISE OF LEADERSHIP

To understand the role of planning in military activities and beyond, it is necessary to go through a cyclical and continuous process, as well as to analyze it as a component of leadership, which stands as the means of functioning for military structures, civilian

companies, or any type of currently existing organization. Why might civilian leaders' conception of planning differ from that of military leaders?

Why is civilian leaders' conception of planning different from that of military commanders? When analyzing planning from the perspective of socio-economic activities, it can be seen as an action that ensures the understanding of the future, through forecasts based on social or individual needs and the desire to know or understand. In addition, due to the rapid evolution of technology and techniques of all kinds, military planning is conducted based on very well-founded prognosis. These forecasts are made through extremely meticulous documentation, addressing lessons learned from the past, contemporary strategy and tactics adapted to modern needs, and, most importantly, the evolution of scientific research developed rationally and consciously towards goals that serve the interests of society.

Another analyze of differences can be made based on the writings of Henry Fayol – an author of exceptional thesis about planning -, who tried to scientifically determine the functions of management, and he managed to lead private companies in difficult times of recession and world crisis (VAN VLIET, 2010). So, Henry Fayol defined planning as: the first function of management, very necessary for evaluating the future and predicting trends in the evolution of actions and when he assumed the responsibility for the restoration of Decazeville Company, he declared that *"I did not rely on my technical superiority...I relied on my ability as an organizer and my skill in handling men"* (MindTools, 2024).

In the context of planning, decision-making is an action that managers utilize for the future of organizations, ensuring that the resulting profit sustains the successful functioning of activities. In addition, planning is the primary tool through which managers address ongoing challenges and ensure the efficient coordination of individuals and groups, being the ones who *"decide what must be done, when it must done, how it must be done and who must do it"* (STEINER, 2017).

In the domain of defense, planning occurs within a broad process, executed according to a schedule specific to NATO member countries, involving complex phases and stages, designed to develop military options in response to any kind of crises or threats. Activities are conducted in accordance with the planning practices of the armed forces of the United States, the United Kingdom, or France, countries with proven combat experience throughout history.

The military aim of the planning process is to provide information to the decision-structures and *"is carried out in order to develop detailed operational plans that incorporate all the relevant factors necessary for the efficient and successful conduct of a military operation"* (Defense, 2016). It is carried out as a result of a threat to the integrity and sovereignty of the state or as a necessity to take an important decision that affects the fulfillment of organizational objectives. Defense planning is *"an attribute of defense system*

leadership, which is an essential component of defense and national security policy” (CHIŞ, 2023).

Usually, in the planning process, there are military employees with extensive professional experience, well trained in the art of planning, who can manage information about the enemy and his possibilities of engaging military technique in battle, as well as issue their own operational plans that include measures of rhythmic, integral fulfillment and demanding control over the achieving of the established tasks.

Based on the definitions provided, I believe that - for a planning process to be valued, whether in a civilian or military environment - it must avail analytical and forecasting methods, computer based/IT means of calculating the possible alternatives, and specialists who can effectively leverage this information to develop actions that ensure decision-making with minimal risk of losing human, material, or financial resources. Therefore, the role and necessity of the planning process requires the use of straightforward methods, together with contemporary computational algorithms, so that planners can transform information into actionable plans, based on effective decisions, whether they are national laws with an impact on a state's social, political or military systems, or simple choices without significant impact.

2 TRANSFORMING PLANNING INTO DECISIONS

As I have shown in the first part of the article, planning, regardless of the field in which it manifests itself, is necessary and sufficient to cause civil or military leaders to make important decisions.

In a private company, leadership is always a decision-making process, and the means through assure the organization and integration of the staff in order to accomplish the objectives is the decision function. A decision is an action chosen from a multitude of possibilities, aimed at fulfilling one's vision or perspective. In order for the decision to be appreciated, it must meet certain requirements: it must be scientifically well-founded, effectively taken by the appointed leader must be precise, taken in time, and it must be characterized by clarity, simplicity, logical sequence of ideas, and conciseness. So, in order to make a proper decision, a planning process is needed that issues long, medium or short term plans.

Planning entails, among other things - what needs to be done, which are the deadlines for completion, where it should be done, who should do it, how it should be done, and what resources are necessary? Having answers to these questions, the decision becomes a matter of intuition, experience, and even luck. In an organization, making the decision involves selecting a course of action that is adequate for achieving the desired objectives. Also, *“planning is nothing but thinking before the action takes place. It helps us take a peek into the future and decide in advance the way in which we are going to deal with*

possible situations, which we are going to encounter in future. It involves logical thinking and rational decision making". (Jargons, 2024).

For military science, the components of planning, such as: prognosis, computer modeling, simulation, and programming, have created the possibility that, artificially, various stages of combat and military operations can be studied under different conditions of use. Having a well-defined picture of military planning, we can assume that- at the strategic level- it is carried out to harmonize the activities at the political level with those at the operative and tactical level. In the army, the planning process was divided into phases, stages, and steps, so as to respond to the needs of knowledge and analysis of the specific security environment in the area of operations and to find proper solutions in achieving actual plans of action.

The military hierarchical levels are very important in carrying out planning for the correct establishment of tasks, so that the commanders of structures do not assume duties that belong to other entities or to avoid task overlap. The hierarchical pyramid of the army is made so that at the tactical level, there is the largest number of fighters, but at the same time the smallest number of planners, while at the strategic level, it is exactly the opposite.

The organizational structure of the military units is made in such a way as to allow promptness and speed in the decision-making process, with low costs and the maximum use of every available resource. Depending on the endowment with modern equipment, techniques, and technologies, military structures are adjusted in order to eliminate the problems determined by excessive load on personnel.

Considering that planning represents for military structures a third of the given time for the achievement of combat objectives, most subunits and units have been modeled so that the officers have the possibility of displaying knowledge for making high-quality decisions, creating compartments and management positions with great responsibility, which can only be occupied based on the completion of certain stages and mandatory criteria to be followed in the military career.

Therefore, the complex organization of the military structures of the NATO member countries, has determined, through the lens of the size of the current conflicts, the reshaping of the planning and decision-making process, depending on the new weapons systems introduced in the endowment, as well as the requirements permanently imposed by the operational environment in a continuous change. Also, *"the deepening of the general framework for the conduct of recent wars, the way of planning and execution, determines the necessary conditions for finding and using in practice the lessons learned, which, in the end, ensure the development of the training level of the forces"* (STANCIU, 2016). Thus, planning has become a process that is developing based on previous experiences and also upgraded whenever necessary, depending on the level of threats and considering the past events.

By analyzing both civilian and military domains, we observe a series of similarities in the planning and decision-making processes, despite different objectives. Effective planning ensures the future of private companies by enhancing and achieving substantial financial revenues, while for military institutions, assuring the proper human and material resources for conducting military operations stand for winning the war.

The plans resulting from planning help define performance standards, because they provide the decider the time needed to focus on specific goals and actions. The time horizons of the plans, regardless of their purpose, are defined as follows: long-term plans—those applicable for more than 5 years; medium-term plans—up to 3 years; and short-term plans—up to 1 year (SECARĂ, 2019).

Transforming decisions into real activities is, also, a crucial part of planning and requires managers and military leaders, to evaluate scenarios that lead to the achievement of objectives and identify solutions to mitigate risks. The effectiveness and limitations of planning are essential when the objectives are significant, and the need for experienced planners makes the difference in any situation.

3 EFFICIENCY AND LIMITS OF PLANNING

Planning is a necessity in private companies and is an indispensable activity, in peace or war, in the domain of defense. Whatever the aim of the activity, none of them can be carried out without following well-established steps. The success of planning consists in making brilliant decisions that lead to the fulfillment of the proposed objectives.

Many times, planning can be wrong for various reasons, such as: the lack of communication and IT technologies or their maladjustment to the needs of the present, the insufficiency of specialists in the fields of planning, the wrong choice of developing strategies or courses of action, establishing some unrealistic goals that cannot be achieved through predictable actions, the mistake of not being pragmatic, rational, or trusting the real possibilities, not knowing the field or area of action or the competence of the leaders who put the plans into practice, following predetermined patterns, and others.

Today, the challenges determined by the accelerated emergence of technologies and fierce competition for any type of resource carry military and civilian leaders to size organizations and structures to ensure survival and performance. In order to achieve a proper environment for planning, it is essential to ensure an adequate organizational climate that provides modern working conditions, new technologies to exploit, and people who know how to expand these opportunities.

Another direction to pursue regarding judicious planning is *"to establish real, identical goals at all levels of decision-making process, taking into account political, military, economic, social, infrastructure, and information tools"* (KOTT, 2016). Reviewing plans from the bottom up, and especially the other way around, is necessary and increases everyone's

interest to ensure ongoing rigor and foresight. Also, perhaps one of the most important characteristics necessary for the favorable development of planning is the creation of an organizational structure that, through the specific roles of each department, ensures performance.

A clear and precise plan is achieved by objectively establishing the human, material, and financial resources for each stage of action. Assessment of needs is difficult to achieve considering that most of the time expectations are higher than possibilities. However, reality determines predictable actions and gives leaders a real picture of the quality of operations.

Additionally, the appointment of key leaders at all levels of commercial companies and military structures is extremely important, in order to ensure the rapid understanding of strategies, tactics, and objectives and, at the same time, the hierarchical uprise of the decisions made.

Planning must adapt to current challenges by accepting new technologies, taking conscious attitudes towards inherent change and the need for progressive development, and forecasting skills.

Many courses of action can be established to achieve exceptional planning. Civilian and military leaders are the ones who can achieve these requirements, depending on the specifics of the structures they command. Thus, creating an environment adapted to understanding the information collected, creating a climate of stability that ensures the prosperity of subordinates and leaders, establishing a set of rules to be respected during planning, including lessons learned, ensuring the predictability of actions by creating a synchronization matrix, enabling the integrity of new, young people among those with experience, and ensuring leniency in the case of inherent failures or the action of external laws on the interests of organizations are some ideas that can lead to the success of modern management.

4 DIRECTIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING CIVILIAN OR MILITARY LEADERSHIP PLANNING

Achieving performance is realized by perfecting the planning, starting with the particularities of the environment in which it is used. In the civilian domain, management functions are similar to those specific to the military domain and consist of organization, coordination, planning, motivation, control, and evaluation. The particularities of the performance of the functions are based on the knowledge of the leaders, the experience of the planners, and the objectives to be achieved.

Planning is the main tool that ensures the strategic approach of the actions carried out to gain a favorable position and identify the ways to reach an advantage. Improving the planning process aims at developing viable strategies, respecting the sequence of planning phases, stages, and steps, using planning methods to ensure clarity, visibility, and

applicability, as well as providing an evaluation of the effectiveness of the resulting plans. The failure to fulfill the tasks resulting from the plans can show us that the leaders did not organize the planning process well, did not constitute a team of capable planners, or did not take into account external factors such as the communication network, IT, or the time allocated for each activity. Thus, once this process has failed, it must always be restarted to mend deficiencies and ensure the fulfillment of the planned objectives. It is clear that in all organizations, planning adapts to the specifics of the activities carried out and follows the requirements and steps necessary to perfect it so that the resulting action plans are viable and easy to implement.

One of the important requirements of effective planning is *"ensuring that the strategies developed over a period of time are appropriate to each other"* (PURCĂREA A., NICULESCU C., CONSTANTINESCU D., 2015). To fulfill this requirement, it is necessary to realistically review the policies and strategies for products or services, for marketing, for production, for finance, and for personnel. Also, establishing measurable and precise objectives, allocating a reasonable amount of time, and orienting planning towards the result, can represent the directions of action for improving the management of some organizations. On the other hand, the ability of planners to draw up action plans that ensure the understanding of the established activities as well as the realization of logical prognosis that are easy to understand for subordinates is the key to the success of any operation to be executed.

One course of action for improving planning is to allow employees to contribute with suggestions and actively participate in setting harder-to-achieve goals. Usually, the reasons why organizations fail are precisely due to a misunderstanding of the proposed goals. Thus, scientists such as Ringbakk K. have defined the factors that slow down the planning process, highlighting that managers are mainly, those who do not fit the position because they do not understand the process, do not have a vision, did not give the necessary guidance, or failed to look at the problems to be solved as a whole.

On the other hand, in an organization, *"the manager is that person who is directly responsible for the work performance of employees and specific enterprises"* (NICOLESCU O., VERBONCU I., 2007), therefore, it is essential that choosing the leader must be done with great responsibility. An interesting interpretation of the qualities necessary for a manager is that of Tânjeleu I., who states that he must be like a sun *"that supports the efficient exercise of management functions and the use of management methods compatible with the field managed"* (TÂNJELEU, 2016).

Another possibility to improve the management of organizations is by conducting complex market studies and having advanced discussions with producers, consumers, and financiers to help improve the planning stages. The steps that must be followed to ensure success are simple to define but extremely complex to achieve and are aiming for correctly establishing the goals, analyzing the current situation, predicting future situations, finding

alternative options, establishing practical directions for implementing plans, and performing control of results. Although there are a number of studies regarding performance assurance in planning, it is observed that managers have a surprising resistance to stimulating creativity, which will always decrease the quality of the decision-making process.

In the sphere of defense, a series of laws, rulings, and provisions provide the legal framework for the planning process, which leads us to realize that there can be no syncope unless the predetermined phases and stages are respected. It is difficult to establish other directions for improvement because the documents for planning, organizing, and carrying out activities of any kind, including military or civilian scientific research, are developed at the level of each structure in accordance with the specific regulations in force. Still, objective-based operational planning is a traditional planning method provided in the doctrines and strategies of modern armies.

Management for the military field, in general, is defined a little differently than in the civilian field, being considered a set of principles, methods, and techniques used by military commanders in order to fulfill the missions assigned to a specific structure (a military unit, for example) with minimal loss of human resources, materials, and equipment. Military management has several forms of manifestation, classified according to the hierarchical level at which it is exercised, as follows:

- a) strategic management, exercised at the level of the General Staff of the Defense and/or at the level of the General Staff of the Armed Forces Categories;
- b) operational management, at the level of operational and territorial commands;
- c) tactical management, at the level of units and large units that actually act, more precisely at the level of actual execution (CORNEȘCU V., MIHĂILEȘCU I., STANCIU S., 2003).

In an army, as an institution of the rule of law with broad attributions in the field of defense and national security, and not only that, the specificity of military management consists in the organization and carrying out of activities strictly oriented towards ensuring the freedom of the country. These attributes are imprinted on the characteristics of military management and implicitly on the planning and decision-making process.

Within the military system, *"command encompasses the authority and responsibility of a commander and aims at the effective use of available resources for the planning, organization, direction, coordination, and control of forces in order to accomplish assigned missions"*. (STANCIU, 2017). When military structures participate in the execution of missions outside the national territory, the management will take into account the specifics of these activities, the context in which they take place, the duration of the mission, and the fact that only professional soldiers should participate in them. Therefore, planning adapts to this purpose at this level by acting, as a rule, coherently and concertedly in the direction of developing the leadership qualities of any military commander, because he must behave as such on the future battlefield and in the theaters of operations where the structure it

commands executes missions to maintain or impose peace or missions to fight against international terrorism.

The process of training, maintaining, developing, and perfecting the leadership qualities of any military commander, is achieved by taking courses in educational institutions, through the experience gained in leading military structures, and through self-development. On the other hand, the professional and civic training of the military personnel is done in accordance with the nature and content of the future missions that the army will carry out, considering Romania's dual status as a member of NATO and the European Union.

The improvement of the planning depends on the ways in which the army personnel are motivated for active and responsible involvement in the execution of the assigned tasks and missions, both individually and collectively. In an army made up of professionals, military management motivates by appealing to the status and freely assumed commitment of army personnel, by educating and empowering each one within the structure of which he is part of, and by attracting them in making decisions that directly concerns them. Modern military planning involves combining and correcting the proposals resulting from this process, both at the tactical level of execution and the strategic level of analysis. Thus, elite planners from the upper echelons have the opportunity to identify solutions to accomplish missions based on the objectives established at all hierarchical levels.

The current operational environment is characterized by constant and unprecedented uncertainty, which requires a careful analysis of the situation to determine the centers of gravity of the enemy and its own forces. Hence, perfecting the way of decision making is particularly complex, and most of the time it creates critical moments that are difficult to manage and sometimes cause practice errors. Planning, as a distinct function of leading, can create forecasts as they lead to new analysis processes. It is the management of the unit that analyzes reality and sets objectives regarding resources, time, and space. To be comprehensive, planning involves a process that establishes the optimal way to accomplish the mission by going through an on time algorithm of analysis of the actions, as well as those carried out during the conduct of the battle, and also for those to come.

In order to improve the planning process, we have identified the fundamental elements that must be established with priority, namely: the centers of gravity of the forces, the decisive points, the directions of effort, and the critical points. Responsibly establishing this data is strictly necessary to determine the *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why* of the planned mission.

Also, for a comprehensive approach to planning, both in the civil and defense domains, SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis is used, which involves consideration of strengths, weaknesses, and inherent dangers. It is vital that these are carefully analyzed in order to have the expected results.

Another course of action to improve the planning process is to create possible courses of action that lead to mission accomplishment and cover possible developments in the situation. Analyzing each course, comparing the advantages and disadvantages of each, and discovering the critical moments of the forecasted actions, can put one's own strengths to advantage, this after all representing the art of the attack. Comparing courses of action is basically an action that leads to the completion of a plan of action that answers to the received order.

The decision to choose the best course is part of the decision-making process that highlights management operations. Thus, analyzing the entire situation will lead to the removal of surprises and will contribute to choosing and applying the best solution.

By carefully comparing the courses of action to improve planning in both civilian and military organizations, we can see certain similarities that lead to predictive analytics that are extremely useful for decision-making of any kind.

The planning process, regardless of the place or institution for which it is carried out, remains one of the key elements necessary for leadership.

CONCLUSION

The planning and decision-making process described in this article, is analyzed in its own way, being considered a mechanism that can be improved based on one's own experience and the in-depth study of the available bibliography, both from the online environment and from various books and theses found in libraries.

Planning, organizing, and ensuring human, material, and financial resources are the keys to the success of an organizational activity and the success of a military operation. This fact can only be achieved by assuring a high degree of development of the planning staff and decision-making by leaders. Perhaps the most important quality step would be to implement a performance evaluation system at all levels of planning structures.

For the time being, it is difficult to establish a set of performance criteria based on which the entire staff involved should be controlled and appreciated. However, through this approach and by studying the documents that are the subject of management and leadership, it will be possible to change the mentality of managers, rethink structures, and approach planning from other directions.

Likewise, as it emerged from the analysis of planning, regardless of the field in which it is manifested, it is necessary to stimulate creative thinking and permanent collaboration between bosses and subordinates so that the decision is optimal for the fulfillment of the established objectives. The similarities observed in the organization of civil and military structures, as well as in the stages and steps followed in the planning process, stimulate creative behavior and a high capacity to manage these unique situations. Establishing priorities related to the activities to be carried out in the future is one of the most important

events that must be taken into account in crisis situations. In a civilian organization, the level of relational development is determined by the leader of the organization through all sorts of welfare activities, benefits granted outside the program, keeping a close relationship with the employees by knowing some personal problems or issues that they might encounter, and even extra monetary benefits associated with a climate of calmness and tranquility within the organization.

The technological progress due to the emergence of technologies is rapidly leading human intelligence to the idea that it is time to establish clear rules for the use of artificial intelligence algorithms. Nevertheless, without availing the benefits given by it, we cannot face the new challenges of the operational environment. Planning is depending on knowing all the information that appears on the market and the characteristics of the existing equipment in the world, which does not excuse anyone from using them in the best conditions.

In conclusion, the strategies and directions for improving planning that can be carried out by military managers and commanders are unlimited and can be relevant in leading to the achievement of objectives. In my opinion, giving partial decision-making power to subordinates to decrease the inherent absenteeism, empathy and curiosity of leaders will determine the success of planned operations. Also, it is time to realize that power consists in maintaining a balance, a verticality that ensures the personal development of employees who can absolutely overcome fundamental barriers to advance in their careers. The ideas of subordinates should be accepted, motivated, and verified so that any type of organization must reflect trust and mutual respect.

More often, managers who consult with subordinates are highly valued and spread a state of affairs that benefits the institutions, leads to lifesaving solutions, unexpected material and financial resources, or reduces risks. From the thorough study of the documents related to management or leadership, it follows that empathy with is the most valued quality of a leader, and the proof of clear, safe, studied or self-experienced based on decisions attracts the subordinates and encourages them to work in the best interest of the organization.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND DISINFORMATION: OPPORTUNITY OR THREAT?

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 11.06.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

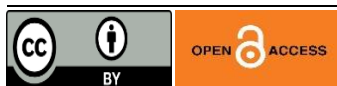
Published: 31.12.2024

ABSTRACT

In recent years, we have witnessed the rapid onset of the use of artificial intelligence in almost all spheres of human society. This technology, based on machine learning and deep neural networks, brings - among many others - new possibilities in searching, receiving, creating, changing and spreading information via the Internet and social networks. But with this progress comes serious concerns about the potential misuse of artificial intelligence to spread disinformation. For this reason, in his article, using several analytical-synthetic approaches and methods (primarily literary synthesis, content analysis, relational analysis, comparative analysis, algorithmic analysis, linguistic analysis and forensic analysis), the author deals with the positives and negatives of artificial intelligence in the context of the spread of disinformation. Without regulating its use, artificial intelligence can further exacerbate existing problems in the area. This is also why research in this area is highly topical and very necessary.

KEYWORDS

Artificial intelligence, disinformation, propaganda, hybrid threats, information war



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, thanks to global advancements in computerization and digitalization of society, the process of searching for, receiving, and transmitting information has significantly accelerated. Modern technologies, information and communication systems, devices and media are widely available, leading to their extensive use for various purposes. However, this progress, in addition to many positives, has also brought about the misuse of new media and devices for spreading fake news, hoaxes, disinformation, and propaganda (Yar, 2019; Ivančík, 2023; Aïmeur et al., 2023). Social networks, internet portals, and online platforms have therefore become effective means for disseminating misleading, deceptive, distorted, or completely fabricated information (Zachar Kuchtová, 2022; Ivančík – Müllerová, 2022; Hilary – Dumebi, 2021). Social and political polarization, along with the anonymity and

lack of regulation of the internet and social networks, have created an environment where fake news, hoaxes, and disinformation can easily spread. These facts have a fundamental impact on individuals as well as on society as a whole, with the spreaders of disinformation facing minimal risks (Zachar, 2022; Ivančík, 2022; Amoruso – Anello, 2020). Particularly dangerous is the use of disinformation within information operations in the form of hybrid threats aimed at democratic societies (both states and supranational entities), such as the European Union (hereinafter "EU") or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (hereinafter "NATO") (Ivančík, 2023).

The rapid rise in the use of artificial intelligence (hereinafter "AI") has significantly impacted social networks and the internet. This technology, based on machine learning and deep neural networks, offers new possibilities for creating and disseminating content. However, along with these advancements come serious concerns about the potential misuse of AI tools for spreading disinformation. AI can analyse vast amounts of data at unprecedented speed, identifying patterns and trends that might be overlooked by humans. This capability can be utilized to detect and counteract disinformation campaigns in real-time, potentially mitigating their impact before they spread rapidly. Additionally, algorithms can be configured to recognize common features of fake news, such as sensationalist language or a lack of consistency in information sources. Furthermore, AI tools can help informing the public about the nature and dangers of disinformation, promoting media literacy and critical thinking. By providing personalized alerts about disinformation content and verifying the credibility of sources, these technologies can enable individuals to make more informed decisions about the information they receive and share (Marcus, 2022; Bontcheva, 2024).

The same characteristics that make artificial intelligence a powerful tool for regulating the spread of disinformation also make it a potent weapon for those who wish to disseminate false information. Advanced AI techniques, such as *deepfake* technology, can create highly convincing but entirely fake audio and visual content, making it increasingly difficult to distinguish reality from fiction. Moreover, the use of automated bots can quantitatively increase the spread of disinformation to a level that is not achievable manually (Europol, 2024).

In relation to the above information, the author in his article – utilizing appropriate analytical, synthetic, and comparative approaches (primarily analytical-synthetic method, literary synthesis, content analysis, relational analysis, comparative analysis, algorithmic analysis, linguistic analysis and forensic analysis), as well as the scientific method of literary research from domestic and foreign literary sources and the scientific method of generalizing the findings – addresses the positives and negatives of using artificial intelligence in the context of spreading disinformation. The first part of the article defines basic concepts and the theoretical framework in the field of AI to clarify the fundamental premises of the addressed issue. The second part identifies the positives and negatives of using artificial intelligence in the context of spreading disinformation. In conclusion, based on the analysis,

synthesis, and comparison of the obtained information, he presents findings regarding the question of whether the use of AI in the context of spreading disinformation is an opportunity or a threat.

1 TRADITIONAL AND GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI refers to systems that are capable of performing tasks typically carried out by humans using their intelligence. Generative artificial intelligence (hereinafter "GAI") is defined as an artificial intelligence system that, in interaction with humans, can produce high-quality texts, images, videos, and audio recordings. GAI can generate new content that did not previously exist. It can also learn from data and generate new instances of data. This means that it not only analyzes existing data but also creates something entirely new (Transborg, 2023).

In the past, computer applications could not perform a task unless humans first provided them with explicit instructions in the form of programming. Although sophisticated programming can achieve impressive results, traditional computer applications cannot do anything that humans have not included in their code. Common examples include voice assistants like *Siri* or *Alexa* and customer service *chatbots* (IBM, 2024).

In contrast to traditional artificial intelligence (hereinafter "Traditional AI"), GAI systems are more flexible because they operate based on machine learning, which does not require explicit programming. This is a process where a computer system can independently adapt to and learn from new data. Instead of programming, users provide algorithms with access to vast amounts of data. These algorithms are trained to recognize patterns in the data and, most importantly, to draw conclusions from what they have learned (TechTarget, 2024). Among experts, there is no unanimous agreement on how many types of machine learning exist. The total number can vary from 3 to 14, depending on various sources. For the purposes of this article, we have therefore decided to select those whose explanation is considered important in the context of the addressed issue (Archarjee, 2024; Coursera, 2024).

The first type is supervised learning, which uses labelled data for training so that the algorithm can subsequently evaluate unlabelled data. The opposite of this type of machine learning is unsupervised learning, which uses unlabelled data, allowing the algorithm to uncover hidden connections between them. A kind of intermediate between the mentioned types of machine learning is semi-supervised learning, which combines the properties of the above models to maximize the positive outputs of both types of machine learning. Besides the mentioned types of machine learning, there are others as well. As an example, we mention reinforcement learning, which is based on the principles of the natural learning process among animals and humans. Positive outputs in this model are reinforced, and negative ones are penalized (Simplilearn, 2024).

Within the mentioned types of machine learning, it is possible to create further categories that fall under these types. However, two specific kinds of machine learning hold a special position in the context of this hierarchy. Currently, the most known kinds of machine learning are generative adversarial networks (hereinafter "GAN") and generative pre-trained transformers (hereinafter "GPT"). GAN consists of two components that work against each other to improve the algorithm itself. These are the generative and discriminative component. The generative component creates content, which the discriminative component then tries to detect. The result is a continuously improving quality of generated data. The generated content can take the form of images, art, text, music, or videos. GPT is particularly known for its efficient handling of text, especially in text generation, translation, summarization, question answering, and text classification. It uses a large volume of data, allowing it to learn to understand complex relationships between words and produce high-quality text. GPT is used in modern *chatbots* that can engage in conversation, answer questions, give recommendations, or perform various tasks based on dialogue. The most popular GPT *chatbots* include *ChatGPT* by *OpenAI* and *Gemini* by *Google* (Hu, 2022).

Despite the fact that GAI's results are associated with both awe and fear, GAI only creates the illusion of intelligence. Although some GAI outputs may appear indistinguishable from human outputs, these algorithms do not understand the meaning of words and cannot independently reason logically or distinguish facts. However, their functions improve with the increasing volume of data they analyse. Users and developers play an irreplaceable role in their development as well (Smith, 2022; Marcus, 2022).

2 GENERATION AND SPREADING OF DISINFORMATION THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

GAI, in conjunction with the dissemination of disinformation, creates a new challenge in the information environment. These algorithms do not distinguish or investigate the purpose of the content they generate, nor the user's motivation. As the user interface is simplified to textual commands, which replaced complex command lines in programming languages, the scope of users with the ability to use the aforementioned programs has expanded to include all internet users, estimated at 66.2% of the world's population (Pelchen, 2024).

Generated texts, images, sounds, or videos are currently highly realistic and continue to evolve. The very realism poses a high risk in the context of disseminating disinformation. Content created in this way can be exploited to polarize society, influence public opinion, undermine the credibility of institutions, discredit individuals, or engage in fraudulent activities.

GAI enables entities spreading disinformation in the digital environment to access tools that minimize costs and are highly effective. Various narratives can subsequently be supported not only by persuasive text but also by images, sounds, or videos. In the past, so-called "troll

farms" were mentioned in the context of disinformation. GAI can significantly reduce the use of personal resources for this activity and thus streamline the dissemination of disinformation. A significant risk compared to disinformation created by humans is that GAI can produce text in various languages. This limits errors in translations into other languages compared to the imperfections of the regular programs used for translating texts. A drawback of GAI, which contributes to the spread of disinformation, is that it lacks sufficient mechanisms to verify the truthfulness and regulate its outputs. Therefore, it can be easily exploited for automated generation of disinformation (Bontcheva, 2024).

Despite the regulatory mechanisms implemented within GAI, its potential for generating disinformation can be utilized in various ways. There are several options for users.

The first option is to modify the original text through GAI to change its meaning. The machine learning model GPT, which can work with text by using *chatbots*, is used for this purpose. In practice, it is possible to input text into the program along with a command for GAI to change the meaning, context, or purpose of the article. This way, original texts such as scientific publications can be used to modify some facts in the text, resulting in the generated text being completely contradictory to the original. In addition to working with existing text and modifying it, GAI can also create completely new narratives. These can be specified and modified as needed with further commands (Huang, 2024).

As an example, we present the output from *ChatGPT 3.5*, to which we entered the text command: *"Write an example of a short disinformation article about COVID-19 vaccination."*

ChatGPT 3.5 Response:

"Title: COVID-19 Vaccines Cause Irreversible DNA Damage!"

Introduction: New studies published in prestigious scientific journals have revealed shocking information about COVID-19 vaccines. Those who have been vaccinated may now be at risk of irreversible damage to their genetic material.

Body of the article:

New research reveals that mRNA vaccines used for COVID-19 vaccination may lead to dangerous mutations in the human genome. Experts warn that these vaccines can enter cells and disrupt DNA, which can lead to irreversible genetic damage and health problems.

Some patients report alarming symptoms after vaccination, such as uncontrollable seizures, unusual allergic reactions, and chronic fatigue. According to studies, these cases are related to the intervention of vaccines in the human body's genetic code.

Conclusion: Refrain from vaccination and protect your health and the integrity of your DNA. It is time to reconsider whether the risk of genetic material damage outweighs the potential benefits of vaccination. Your health is at stake!"

At the end, the program states: *"This fictional article spreads disinformation about COVID-19 vaccination and presents unsupported claims about its alleged negative effects on DNA. It is important to verify information from reliable sources and not to spread disinformation that may harm public health."*

Despite the program warning against unsupported claims and emphasizing the importance of verifying information from credible sources, it demonstrates the potential to generate false content within seconds. In conjunction with human analytical thinking, this tool can significantly accelerate and streamline the dissemination of disinformation. It only requires finding creative ways to bypass some protective mechanisms.

The outputs of GAI can be further disseminated with the coordination of humans through fake accounts on social networks and online platforms that are robotically controlled (referred to as "bots"). They are characterized by profiles without profile pictures and content. They are mostly used for watching videos, sharing, increasing popularity, or other activities controlled by a program, such as adding content. Bots are an economical way to generate reach for posts to real users, mainly because they create the illusion of social verification and trust for sharing content by artificially increasing the number of views, comments, or shares. Accounts controlled by bots are cheap (one costs only a few cents) and are expected to be relatively quickly blocked. In this case, it is a combination of traditional AI and GAI, which appears to be highly effective (Montoro et al., 2023).

There are several risks associated with content generated by GAI. In addition to speed and saving financial and personnel resources, the complexity of detecting false content also increases. It has been found that generated false images are harder to distinguish from manually edited originals. The main reason is the absence of external intervention in the image metadata, so from this perspective, it appears as original. Conventional methods for detecting interventions in image metadata are therefore ineffective (Liu & Chen, 2020).

Artificially created or edited videos are referred to as *deepfakes*. These videos are created based on inserted images and voice samples, where, depending on the quality of the provided data and the sophistication of the program, they create relatively credible videos in which it appears that a certain person is performing a certain activity or presenting a suggested opinion. Some of these videos already gained 72 million shares in 2019 and influenced a significant number of social media users. The same principle applies to detecting false images, namely, it is easier to detect edited videos than to create a *deepfake* without tampered metadata through manual intervention. However, these videos can easily cause significant problems in the meantime, especially if they are used in favour of disseminating disinformation and propaganda (Kietzmann et al., 2019).

Videos and images labelled as *deepfakes* are generated using the type of machine learning called GAN. This algorithm can, for example, create or edit human faces. As mentioned earlier, the algorithm consists of two parts, with one part creating content and the other trying to evaluate whether it is possible to identify that it is artificially generated

content. Both parts of the algorithm learn by comparing them to a sample database, which can be almost inexhaustible thanks to the internet. With each cycle of content creation and analysis, the algorithm as a whole becomes more successful because one part tries to create the most credible content by comparing it with the database, and the other part tries to reveal that it is artificially generated content. Both parts of the algorithm develop in this way (Pirani, 2019).

The use of GAN in creating *deepfakes* can include functions such as *face swap* (replacing the original face of a person with another), *attribute editing* (changing personality characteristics, such as hair color), *face re-enactment* (altering facial expressions), or even generating fully synthetic content (depicting people who do not exist) (Europol, 2024).

The most common victims of *deepfakes* are usually public figures whose photos and videos are publicly available. The quality of the generated *deepfake* is directly proportional to the amount of photos and videos capturing the individual from various angles, capturing their changing facial expressions and tone of voice. The quality of the generated content is also influenced by the number of places and different situations in which the person is captured in photos or videos.

Sound generation, similarly, has undergone significant changes with the development of GAI. Currently, there are GAI programs capable of using the audio track from videos and dubbing spoken words into selected languages, transcribing them into text, or inserting subtitles into videos. There are also programs capable of generating music or producing an audio recording of a given text using the specified voice based on voice analysis. Therefore, it is evident that generating and spreading disinformation has never been easier. In addition to the already existing tools used by disseminators of disinformation, another tool is emerging, whose full potential is yet to be explored. However, it is clear that the regulation of this tool in relation to its potential for spreading disinformation is inadequate.

Based on a study by Amazon Web Services, it is estimated that 57.1% of the textual content on the internet is generated using GAI, and this number is expected to continue growing (Thompson et al., 2024). In the context of rapid development in the field of AI, the EU has been taking legislative steps towards its effective regulation since 2021. In April 2021, the European Commission (hereinafter "EC") proposed the first legislative framework for AI. Within it, it classifies the use of AI according to the risk it poses to users. According to the level of risk identified, it further appropriately determines the level of regulation of individual programs and applications. In March 2024, the *AI Act* was adopted by the European Parliament (hereinafter "EP"). However, the EU is not alone in this initiative. Similar regulations have been implemented by countries such as the USA and China. This fact reflects that the regulation of AI is an international issue that will require a global approach (Harrington et al., 2024).

3 TACKLING DISINFORMATION USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TOOLS

In the previous chapter, some of the serious risks associated with the commercial use of GAI in spreading disinformation were mentioned. Apart from the threats posed by GAI in this area, scientists worldwide are exploring the potential of using artificial intelligence tools to detect and reduce the spread of disinformation. These tools can be divided into programs facilitating the detection of disinformation in the form of text, images, video, sound, and more. There are also programs that help uncover bot activity.

One of the main methods used against the spread of disinformation is *fact-checking*. Several AI-supported programs have been developed to verify the authenticity and truthfulness of information on the internet. Some tools evaluate multiple criteria simultaneously, such as the author, sources, or the emotion of the article (Shah, 2023).

One of the methods that information verification using AI employs is text processing and evaluating its emotional aspect. This system primarily utilizes insights from the scientific field, where there is a consensus that disinformation often aims to evoke a strong emotional response from its recipients. Therefore, disinformation content often contains more negative emotions such as disgust, anger, or fear. Furthermore, AI can analyse the text, compare it with available information from relevant sources, and identify inconsistencies between the provided information (Santos, 2023).

The problem with automated processing and evaluation of information lies primarily in the complexity of language, the use of sarcasm, irony, or indirect implications that AI does not understand. It also involves a language barrier, specific cultural and political environments to which the system must learn to respond. Therefore, involving the human factor in text evaluation is important, as it helps the algorithm continue learning. Currently, a model is being used that involves humans in tasks that AI cannot yet evaluate correctly. AI is primarily used in this model for processing large amounts of data and their initial filtration based on specified characteristics.

AI can support *fact-checking* at various stages of this process. Its usage primarily lies in searching for and sorting content that can be further verified by humans. The advantage lies mainly in the quick processing of large volumes of data, while the risk of this approach is the success rate of its evaluation. However, it is an effective tool for initial information sorting. It is important to be aware of potential inaccuracies and to adequately adjust the algorithm. Although GAI is not always able to successfully determine that something is disinformation, it can be used, for example, to verify if information is verifiable from other sources. Similarly, GAI can be used to search for arguments and evidence sources demonstrating the falsehood or misleading nature of disinformation. GAI can expedite the strategic communication process or the debunking of disinformation by generating textual, image, audio, or video content (Montoro et al., 2023).

In the context of detecting *deepfakes*, new technologies utilizing various detection approaches have been employed in recent years. One of them is the analysis of biological signs in *deepfakes*, which depict the human face. This approach focuses on imperfections in the human body, such as natural changes in skin tone in the facial area caused by blood flow. Furthermore, the analysis of facial expressions and gestures according to the context of the communicated content is utilized. Another sign of false content is the absence of blinking or eye movement. The sequence of individual frames, created by the accelerated projection of the video, is also thoroughly analysed. However, in recent years, GAN has also made significant progress in this area, based on the machine learning model set to continuously improve (Agarwal et al., 2020a; Agarwal et al., 2020b).

Just as GAI can be used to produce disinformation, it can also be used for their detection through a reverse process of their production. Its usage can be seen primarily in restoring the original image, sound, or video. It can also be used to determine the origin of disinformation (especially the author and location) by searching for similar or original content in the digital space. Among the most known tools that utilize AI for verifying information are *Quillbot*, which can identify text generated by GAI, and *TinEye*, which can identify the origin of images in the digital environment (Shah, 2023).

The need for human cognition in analysing text is evidenced by research in which the truthfulness of over 21 thousand claims was verified through *ChatGPT*. The success rate of this tool was 69% (Hoes et al., 2023). In a study with a smaller sample, the abilities of *ChatGPT* to correctly evaluate and label text as true, false, or ambiguous were examined. In this study, *ChatGPT* had a success rate of up to 72.5% with a sample of 40 articles. The success rate of humans in detecting disinformation generated using *ChatGPT* was only 54.8% (Huang, 2024).

Even from the stated above, it can be concluded that currently, the threat of AI misuse is higher than its potential for use in detecting and regulating disinformation. Simultaneously, the potential of GAI is demonstrated primarily in the initial analysis, selection, and labelling of suspicious content, which can be examined in high volume quickly. It can be also used as a supportive tool for operators of digital platforms alongside a system for labelling suspicious content by its users. The function of content generation and facilitating previously complex tasks can be used in various ways, and therefore diligent regulation is necessary to systemically prevent the misuse of these tools for spreading disinformation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be stated that the rapid development and increasing use of AI has inevitably left an indelible mark on social networks, online platforms, and the internet. The unparalleled ability of GAI to produce and process extensive data at unprecedented speed and ease of user interface allows for the identification of subtle patterns and trends that are imperceptible to human perception. This analytical power presents an opportunity for real-

time detection and suppression of disinformation campaigns, potentially halting their further dissemination and promptly responding to their content.

AI algorithms can be configured to detect characteristic signs of fake news, such as emotionally charged communication styles or inconsistencies in information sources. Furthermore, GAI can be particularly useful in raising public awareness of the dangers of disinformation, promoting media literacy, and critical thinking. Its significant importance also lies in streamlining strategic communication and accelerating the operational readiness of government institutions. Additionally, some programs can identify *deepfakes* based on reverse engineering or analysis of predetermined phenomena. However, the development of AI in this field currently does not allow for its functioning without human control and supervision.

On the other hand, GAI is equally a potent tool for disseminating disinformation. Sophisticated GAI programs can quickly and effectively generate original content according to user input. Currently, high-risk *deepfakes* are highly convincing despite producing entirely false or altered audio-visual content. Distinguishing between reality and fiction is becoming increasingly challenging over time, primarily due to advanced mechanisms of GAN machine learning. Regulation of fake content generation using GAI is currently left to user recommendations from the program itself and appears inadequate. Moreover, automated bots can quantitatively amplify the spread of disinformation to a level that is not manually achievable.

Based on the above, it is evident that the potentially adverse consequences of AI misuse in disseminating disinformation currently outweigh its effectiveness in regulating the spread of false content. This conclusion aligns with the generally prevailing view that regulatory mechanisms are often one step behind negative phenomena because they typically respond only to urgent dangerous challenges. Therefore, a systematic approach to addressing the issue involving collaboration between international technology firms, expert communities, international organizations, and government institutions is essential. The *AI Act* adopted by the European Parliament serves as an example. The EU is not alone in this initiative. Similar regulations have been implemented by countries such as the USA or China. This fact reflects that AI regulation is a global issue that necessarily requires a global approach.

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THOUGHTS ON 21st-CENTURY COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE IN HUNGARY

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 12.09.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

Published: 31.12.2024

ABSTRACT

Due to the rapid changes in the global and European security environment and the threats they mean to EU citizens, the idea of introducing compulsory military service has been put on the agenda in several European countries, for which many arguments for and against can be listed. Which is the right response to the change of the security environment? Introduction of compulsory military service or prevention? That is extremely important for the countries of the Central European region, including Hungary, to find a suitable solution to deal with the situation. Analysing the courses of actions in the Central Europe region countries can help us to find the best solution. The topic is socially divisive and politically sensitive, but we need to talk about it. The essay summarizes the antecedents that could lead to the reintroduction of compulsory military service in one or more European countries. It also examining the Hungarian aspect of this issue and presents one of many possible training-based alternatives to compulsory military service in Hungary.

KEYWORDS

security environment, compulsory military service, force, Hungarian Defence Forces, Central European region



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INTRODUCTION

After the end of the Cold War by the vanish of the bipolar world order, the risk of a global war decreased. During a rather peaceful period of the millennium, the NATO¹ member countries focused on peace support operations and did not develop their national defence capabilities. The armed forces in numbers were significantly reduced, the conscription-based model of military augmentation was replaced by the professional forms of military service in most of the allied countries. In terms of efficiency, the volunteer-based armies were more capable conducting peace support operations (PSO) rather than fighting conventional wars.

¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

A similar trend was observed in Hungary in the period following the regime change. After the Warsaw Pact ended, Hungary, as a Partnership for Peace (PfP) nation, declared its intention to join NATO. The Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) began to participate in different NATO PSOs. Subsequently, in 2004, the conscript-based army was replaced by professional forces. In fact, this new force was able to adapt to the challenges posed by peacekeeping missions but not fully capable of conducting conventional warfare. Due to the new type of peacekeeping needs, the military equipment and weapons of the HDF became obsolete. On the other hand, the organizational structure was also transformed, the skills of traditional military domains reduced.

In the mid 2010's, the security environment of Europe significantly changed. Mass migration caused by local wars and environmental effects as well as the Russian-Ukrainian war put an end to a peaceful period. This new situation sets Hungary and the other countries of the Northern and Central European region with a new challenge. The forces mainly specialized in peacekeeping operations must once again be open up to the territorial defence and rebuild their traditional military capabilities that effects all areas of expertise in all domains.

Some states in the region are looking for solutions to the challenge of changed security environment. The main challenge is the ensure adequate strength of the armed forces, which has been a problem in all Central-European countries. One possible reason behind this problem could be globalization, that not just caused economic boost for the countries. Globalization brought the so-called interstate freedom of movement for the young population by interconnecting the mid- and high-level education. It also gives the possibility for an achievable inter states way of living, a kind of a labour migration for people at their conscription age, too. In this new educational and labour environment, a so called "limited" domestic or homeland occupation, like being a soldier and serving the country, is not as tempting any more as studying or working abroad.

Due to wars taking place in our region, for topics that have not been valid for decades, such as the volunteerism or the conscription, a possible hybrid system can be one solution. Should the military pre-training start for the people at the age of conscripts already in peacetime? In the spirit of gender equality can conscription be limited to men only or should women also take share in the compulsory military service?

1 EUROPEAN STEPS FOR THE SOLUTION OF CHALLENGES CAUSED BY THE CHANGED SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Moving from north to south on NATO's eastern flank, in the new NATO member Finland, the institution of conscripted military service is traditionally held in high esteem by its citizens. The service period lasts from 6 to 12 months depending on the type of service, where the unarmed service time is longer than the armed military service period. During their duty period, the soldiers get salary which meets the average of the society wages. Despite the

fact that no strict sanctions are against the defaulter, large majority of the citizens of the country between the age of 18 and 28 complete their military or civil service. (KOSONEN ET AL. 2022) However, the defaulters or who do not complete their military or alternative service time can not receive passport until the age of 28. The question arises whether military service, having high prestige of conscription, will change soon in Finland due to its NATO membership or the possibility of war escalation?

Following the break out of the 2014 Russian-Ukrainian war, the other new NATO member Sweden reviewed its military augmentation system, which had been organized on a voluntary basis since 2010. Due to the threat of war in the region, a modernized type of conscription service (the Swedish model) was brought back in 2018, that has been analysed in many European countries. According to the Swedish conscription model, all the citizens (both men and women), upon finishing their high school studies, must take part in an aptitude test, where their suitability for the military service is being determined. After the determination process the Army discuss the details of military service with the qualified military candidates, so the recruits can tell their intent about their chosen branches, the starting date of their duty time and the garrison of the military service. (BARNDOLLAR 2024)

In Denmark the existing 4-month long compulsory military service period will be increased to 11 months in 2026. As per planned, the compulsory military service will comprise of a 5-month long preparation phase and a 6-month long operational period, where the conscripts will participate in additional trainings (DISS 2024). Also from that year, in the spirit of gender equality, the compulsory service will be expanded to qualified women too, which gives greater and more complex military strength to Denmark. (NÉMETH 2024/2).

The next Scandinavian country, Norway, also feels threatened by the proximity of the Russian-Ukrainian war, so conscription and compulsory military service was introduced for both sexes in 2013. (BRAW 2024)

It is clearly visible that in one of the rising countries of Central Europe, in Poland, people feel jeopardized the most by the Russian aggression, which can be lead back to the proximity of the battlefield, the historical experiences and their famous anti-Russian attitude. Despite the threat, the Polish society is being divided by the reintroduction of conscription.(BESCH ET AL. 2024) On the other hand, the majority of the Polish people believe that the development of territorial defence system could be the solution for the changed security environment.

According to the current Czech president, who is a former military general, compulsory military service will not be reintroduced in the Czech Republic, however the conscription itself is being supported by the majority of its citizens. He said that there should be more reservists than active-duty personnel so that the society could be more prepared for countering enemy attacks (ORTMANN 2024).

There is no social support for the reintroduction of conscription in Slovakia neither. At the end of the 2010s, due to the changes of the security environment, some political leaders raised the possibility of a short, training-based compulsory military service, that could be one of the solutions for any war threats. The idea was not supported neither by the political parties nor the society, so they introduced the training-oriented voluntary reserve service for the Slovakian citizens between the ages of 19 and 55, who meet the required pre-requisites (DOBROVOL'NÁ VOJENSKÁ PRÍPRAVA). During the 11-week long basic training, the volunteers receive a monthly based regular allowance and full care until the end of their military training. After the preparation phase, the soldiers are placed in the active reserve force, which can be activated in times of crises.

In the Central European region, Austria's historical past was shared at several points with Hungary until the end of World War 1 (WW1). After the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise, the two countries formed a federal state establishment and introduced the general compulsory military service in 1868. After WW1 the Monarchy was dissolved and Austria became an independent state until the Anschluss, when Austria was occupied by the German Empire. Austria, as part of Germany, participated in the warfare so after the capitulation it became an occupied state. In 1955, Austria declared eternal neutrality and the Soviet troops withdrew from the Austrian area. Due to eternal neutrality, Austria has retained conscription-based compulsory military service, which is confirmed on a referendum in 2013. (CORA 2013)

In Germany, the reintroduction of the compulsory military service, that was suspended in 2011, has been on agenda in 2024. Due to the proximity of the Ukrainian combat area and the relatively high level of the lack of military personnel, the German government developed a plan, based on the Swedish military augmentation model. Handling of this challenge in Germany, as one of the leading countries of the European Union and NATO, could be a guide to other allied countries in the question of voluntary-based or conscription-based force. (HÖPPNER 2024)

In the NATO member Croatia, from 2025, a short-term compulsory military service will also be reintroduced, that will be strictly a basic training for the men only (NÉMETH 2024/1). The initial intent of the service time is 3 months, and it will be extended for all adult male citizens who are qualified for the military service. During this basic training, the recruits are going to get the bases of weapon handling and combat basic procedures. (HORVAT 2024)

In Serbia, as a NATO membership candidate country, there is an agreement between the political and military leaders. If the financial and logistics conditions are provided, as one of the counter measures for the changed security environment, the reintroduction of the compulsory military service could be expanded to all adult male citizens. The Serbian model is also a training-based military service that would last for 4 months. (JONES 2024)

We must keep our eyes opened for the actions and reactions of the so called Balkan countries, as this is the region where people are still having their combat experiences from

the Balkan Wars of the 90's. Their system of military preparations and training, tactical procedures and military experiences can provide a good base for other countries in their current challenges. Could this be the reason why a gender-neutral approach² is not a priority in the compulsory military service in these Balkan countries?

Romania, as being the direct southern neighbour of Ukraine, is also looking for solutions for the current and longer term security challenges. Due to the proximity of the battlefield, in addition to the reintroduction of the compulsory military service, Romanians are more open to host NATO troops in their territory. (DUMITRESCU 2024)

In some European countries that are located further from the Ukrainian battlefield, and they are not in direct threat by the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the political leaders make numerous irresponsible offers. France, which is located in the distance of 3000 km from the battlefield, is planning to deploy a French training mission in Ukraine, and the British also do not reject the idea of sending military troops to the war zone. A question can arise whether they would have the same promises if they located nearer to the war zone? Haven't these offers been generated only due to the relatively more safe distance of these countries from the battlefield?

2 THE HUNGARIAN EFFECTS

During the time of the change of regime in Hungary, the Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) was a compulsory military service-based mass army, where the crew ranks were provided by the conscripts. After the Warsaw Pact broke off, Hungary quickly declared its intention to join NATO, and therefore joined the NATO Partnership for Peace Program in 1994. It became a full member of the NATO in 1999. In the mid 90's the HDF operated a mixed-based military augmentation system³ and then the last conscripts were demobilized in November 2004 (BODÓ 2022). The compulsory military service ended and the peacetime conscription was suspended, disregard to the Hungarian Basic Law⁴ declares, that the defence of the Hungarian homeland is the duty of all Hungarian citizens. (THE HUNGARIAN BASIC LAW ARTICLE XXXI.)

The voluntary-based Hungarian armed⁵ forces were able to meet its alliance obligation until the mid-2010's, as it successfully participated in several PSOs in various areas of the world. Hungary established a Voluntary Reserve System (VRS) in 2010 and since then Voluntary Reservists (VR) have been taking part in military trainings, exercises and support the

² Involving female conscripts in the army

³ A combination of the compulsory and voluntary based models

⁴ The Hungarian Constitution has been called Hungarian Basic Law, which includes the national defence obligations in wartime

⁵ A volunteer military system or all-volunteer military system is a military service system that maintains the military only with applicants without conscription. A country may offer attractive pay and benefits through military recruitment to attract potential recruits

HDF regular elements, mainly in different crisis management operations. Besides carrying out its peace mission tasks the HDF did not develop its national defence capabilities, so the situations of the illegal migration wave and the Russian-Ukrainian war caught it unprepared. The Hungarian military equipment and weapons had been obsolete, the troop registries were not up to date, and the training system did not focus on the classic military tasks. The Hungarian government decided to introduce a military development program for the replacement of the obsolete former Soviet military equipment and it started replacing them with modern pieces of military equipment and weapons. The military training system was upgraded and developed to meet the requirements of the current times, so simulation systems and technological innovations became part of the training events. Due to the lack of military personnel, the HDF developed different strategies, such as motivation elements for the retention of active-duty personnel and the development of the reserve system. The structure of the Territorial Defence Forces' (TDF) was established immediately after the NATO Warsaw Summit in 2017, in line with the adopted Strengthened Resilience Commitment,⁶ in order to develop Hungary's self-defence military capabilities according to the North Atlantic Treaty Article 3.⁷ The first strategic document that determined precisely the role and tasks of the TDF was the National Military Strategy 2021. However, the effects of this did not bring the expected results, so the HDF continues to struggle with staff shortages.

On 24th February, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. The initial period of the war was characterized by the success of Russia, but later the frontlines were stuck due to the arms support provided by Western countries to Ukraine. In order to deal with the risk of war escalation, European countries are examining various scenarios, starting with the support of armaments, sending training forces to Ukraine and the possible reintroduction of compulsory military service and preparation for war. Since the beginning of the war Hungary has been providing humanitarian aid to tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees fleeing from Ukraine to Hungary. Besides, the Hungarian government negotiating the transfer of Ukrainian prisoners of war to Hungary from Russia. The Hungarian government firmly rejects either the arms and ammunition support for the warring parties, and the sending of training or fighting forces to Ukraine, as it could lead to a possible prolonged war. Hungary also rejects the reintroduction of compulsory military service and instead of it there is an intend to strengthen the volunteer-based armed force with the allocated number of 30.000 active troops and 20.000 volunteer reserve duty personnel in peacetime. The Hungarian government sees the

⁶ *Allies made a commitment to continue to enhance NATO's resilience and to develop individual and collective capacity to resist any form of armed attack. Civil preparedness is a central pillar of Allies' resilience and a critical enabler for Alliance collective defence. NATO can support Allies in assessing and, upon request, enhancing their civil preparedness. Allies will improve civil preparedness by achieving the NATO Baseline Requirements for National Resilience, which focus on continuity of government, continuity of essential services, security of critical civilian infrastructure, and support to military forces with civilian means. (Fact Sheet – Warsaw Summit Key Decisions, February 2017)*

⁷ *„In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack“*

provision of this number as a peacetime guarantee of its territorial integrity, hence, serious efforts are being made to achieve these goals. In periods other than peace, however, it still wishes to supplement its peacetime strength to a higher number, based on conscription. Due to the presumably rapid transition time between peace and war, military pre-training of potential conscripts is necessary.

3 A POSSIBLE VERSION OF MILITARY PRE-TRAINING FOR POTENTIAL CONSCRIPTS IN HUNGARY

Is conscription or the voluntary based military service could be a better solution in peacetime to protect the sovereignty of a country, in order to more effectively being able to the respond for the rapid changes in the security environment?

In the last 1,100-year-old history of Hungary, the obligation to serve in the military and fight for the country was constantly present, but in a legal sense, this could not be called generally conscription until the mid-19th century. In the decades following the Napoleonic wars, there was a need for the creation of a mass army in Hungary for the first time. In 1868, general conscription was introduced, obliging men fit for military service to undergo on military trainings and serve the country in peacetime too. This institution ensured the military augmentation of the armed forces during the first and second World Wars, as well as during the Cold War. Following the end of the Cold War, after a short transition period, in 2004, the institution of compulsory peacetime military service was abolished in Hungary, which was replaced by a voluntary based military service. (BODÓ 2022)

However, in the mid-2010s and early 2020s, the rapid change in the European security environment created a sort of a new "Cold War" situation. Under these circumstances, the subject matter experts responsible for defence politics and army organizational concepts need to re-think each of the military service forms.

To eliminate the challenges caused by the Russian-Ukrainian war, we saw in the previous chapters a number of scenarios. The Hungarian government can not ignore the risk of the escalation of the war. In case of the Russian-Ukrainian war were to spread to other countries, Hungary would be forced to declare a state of war, when conscripts are called-up for military service. In that case, men between the ages of 18 and 55, who are conscripted on legal obligations, owning a Hungarian citizenship and qualified for military service, should start their military training. This preparation comprises of basic training, individual vocational training and unit-level preparations. In such an unsettling situation, where the society accustomed to military service, such as the HDF itself, too. Under these circumstances a new military augmentation system should be introduced and implemented, that is not fortunate at all. Unlike the wars of the last century, I assume that the transition between peace and a legal order other than peace will be rapid and every step of it will take place very quickly. The war success of each state will decisively be influenced by the reaction time in preparing

their forces for deployment by ensuring conscription. In this regard, whether the conscripts already have military pre-training will play a crucial role.

Military service can basically be divided into two major elements: the training element and the military socialization. Given the fact what the Hungarian government stated, for the time being, it does not intend to bring back compulsory military service in peacetime, but as an alternative solution the military pre-training of the potential conscript-aged men could be a must. Since the government does not count on the restoration of the classic military service, I do not count on the peacetime acquisition of military socialization.

Currently, Hungary has 7 Territorial Defence Regiments (TDR) with each having 3 subordinated Territorial Defence Battalions (TDB). The structure of the TDR's and TDB's are based on a territorial principle, which means that the areas of responsibility (AoR) of the units and subunits are the same as the administration area of their recruitment districts. The 7 TDRs consist of 19 TDBs at county level and 2 additional TDBs in Budapest. The Hungarian Defence Forces Territorial Defence Forces Command (HDF TDFC) was established in April 2023 and its headquarter is located in Budapest.

In September 2022 the HDF launched its Standard Basic Military Training Program (SBMTP). The goal of the new training system was to standardize the conditions and requirements of the training of all the Hungarian soldiers, since the basic training of the active and reservist soldiers were different previously. This approach is also considered as a step forward to strengthening the interoperability between our regular and reservist soldiers.

The current 1-pillar Hungarian Territorial Defence Reserve training system is illustrated on the next picture:

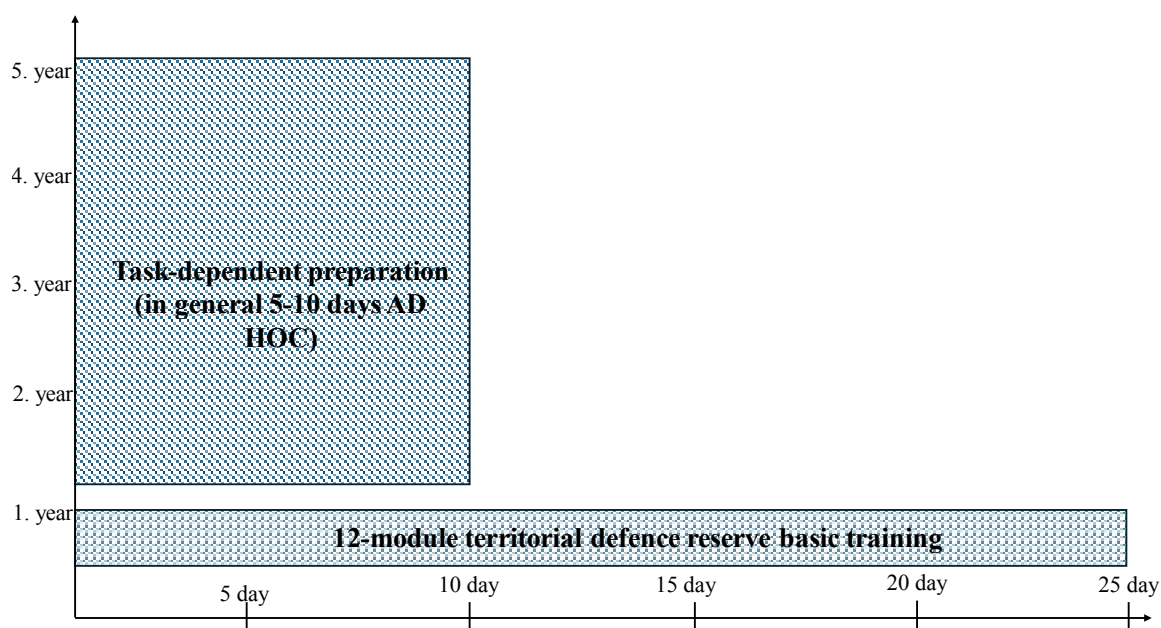


Figure 1.: The current 1-pillar territorial defence reserve system.

Source: by the author

The solution I propose here is a mandatory reserve training, that provides trainees basic- and individual infantry training. The training must be adapted to their civilian life, so the training time must be planned for the weekends and can not exceed 8 hours a day. When the daily training events concluded, the trainees can go home and stay there until the next training day.

My suggested 3-pillar based Hungarian Territorial Reserve training system is illustrated on the next picture:

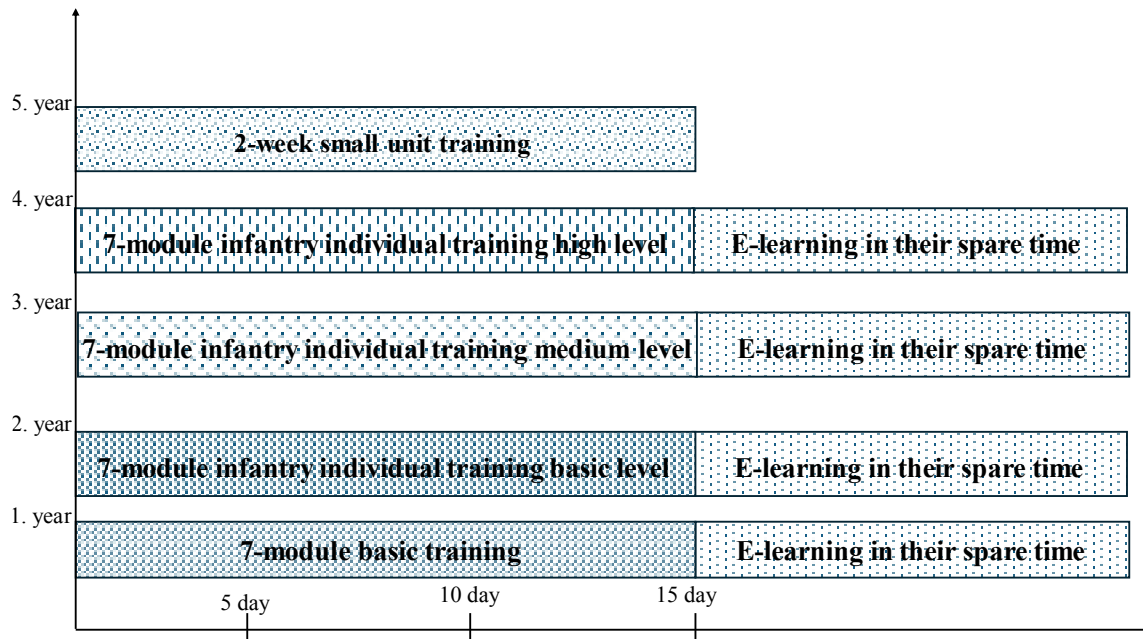


Figure 2.: My suggested territorial defence reserve training system.

Source: by the author

The territorial defence reserve training system includes individual basic training, basic infantry individual training, and training at small unit levels such as fire pairs, fire group, squad and platoon trainings.

In the first year of the reservists' service time the basic training consists of 12 thematic modules at the first level of the training (1st pillar). In the future, with the transformation of this system, it will be more adjusted to the reservists' civilian lifestyle. The 12-thematic modules will be reduced to a more practice-oriented 7-thematic modul system by supplementing the training system with distance learning. In this way, the trainees would learn the theoretical subjects via the distance education-based system with the online support of a designated instructors. The participants prepare themselves for the physical part of the training by developing their stamina in their free time at home, as a matter of fact, in the physical training (PT), we need a completely new training approach. Both the procession of the theoretical course material and the physical preparation could be monitored by the regiments' designated instructors, as the distance learning system records detailed statistical data, such as the total time used for studying the course material. In addition the system

capable of registering the results of the written tests at the end of each learning section. part. A special mobile phone application will support to monitor the physical preparation of each trainee, in which, like other applications, you can follow the details of their PT status and the current training achievements.

In the 2-4th of the reservists' service time, the next level of the training structure consist of the individual special infantry training (2nd pillar), that can be further divided into basic, intermediate and advanced level of trainings. Each of these three levels consist of 7 thematic modules, which prepare the reserve forces for the basic tasks of territorial defence, and in addition, for host nation support tasks. According to the principle of gradation, the modules of the special infantry training are in a two-day continuous 48 hours program.

Like in real operations, during the implementation of the modules, the instructors strive continuously occupying the reservists' time with no downtimes. In between two modules, the reservists must learn the theoretical part of the forthcoming module via a distance learning course.

In their 5th year of service time, the reservists complete the small unit training (SUT), where they learn to operate in unit formations. During the SUT, military tasks are carried out at the level of fire pairs, fire groups, squad and platoon. The unit preparation is a continuous, 2-week military exercise, where reservists perform their duties in camp conditions.

As I mentioned earlier, the voluntary reserve system would be able to provide an alternative compulsory military service form, both in its dislocation, training procedures, and processes. The training centres are located in every county, which can be expanded to serve a possible preparation facility to all service forms in peace and in a legal order other than peace. The effectiveness of the training may significantly depends on the extent to which potential military candidates understand the importance of military pre-training. The implementation of these trainings would not only provide a solid base for compulsory military service, but would also significantly increase the survival capabilities of the conscripts. In accordance with the layered resilience concept (NATO WARFIGHTING CAPSTONE CONCEPT – LAYERED RESILIENCE WARFARE DEVELOPMENT IMPERATIVE) protecting the homeland is the responsibility of the entire Hungarian society.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the changes in the European security environment, in the last decade, European countries have been developing different scenarios to put their resilience on new foundations or to strengthen their existing defence management systems. The illegal migration and the Russian-Ukrainian war forced Europe to review its post-Cold War security and defence policy and more over the system of military augmentation. There is not a collective European solution, however there are lots of national courses of actions that try to handle the arisen security challenges. On one hand, some European countries support the

Ukrainian side with weapons and ammunition, on the other hand, some countries are even thinking of sending troops to the theatre. Finally, there are countries that are preparing for the envisioned European war by bringing back compulsory military service. Hungary has already developed its position, according to which it sees the solution in the provision of humanitarian aid and in diplomatic negotiations between the warring parties. Despite the official Hungarian position in terms of reintroducing compulsory military service, the risk of the escalation of the war should not be ignored. It is necessary to prepare the Hungarian armed forces for a possible European war, that Hungary, due to its territorial location, most likely can not avoid. I therefore propose in the study an alternative military pre-training option for potential conscripts, which is similar to the current training system of the Hungarian territorial reserve elements. In order to ensure an efficient defense capability of the HDF in case of war, the survival potential of the conscripts should be increased. The infrastructure and training system of the current Voluntary Reserve system, after minor transformation, could serve as the preparation and training phase of the potential soldiers. Like Hungary itself, other states in the Central European region would not be able to avoid a possible war should the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian war happens. Hence, the solution I propose can serve as an example for those countries in preparing for war.

According to the viewpoint of the Hungarian government, „the peace requires strengths,”⁸ a successful peacetime military preparation and rapid reaction in the future could be the key of the success in a fight. In Hungary this question is politically sensitive, socially dividing, however, I am convinced that in this rapidly changing security environment we need to introduce some preventive procedures for national defense. As far as I am concerned, bringing back compulsory military service would be an unpopular political decision for the majority of the Hungarians, but only the peacetime preparation of the potential military persons could lead to an effective national defence. In the near future, the risk of an escalated war may increase, so it is high time to act for being prepared and win it.

In my essay, I mentioned 2 different types of the modern compulsory military service. The first one is the gender equality-based Swedish military augmentation model, where the compulsory military service is for women as well, not only for men. In this model, the gender equality is as important as the complement of the army. In general, the northern and western European countries prefer the Swedish model, because the gender-neutral ideology is one of the most important social aspects for them. The other augmentation form is the Balkan-type model, where the military service is compulsory for men only. In most of these countries the male population has combat experiences from the mid-90's Balkan wars. Hence, the current leadership may have a viewpoint that fighting in conventional warfare is unfit for women, so no compulsory military service is planned for the female population in these countries. In my opinion, the Balkan model is more suitable for the countries of the Visegrad Group (V4),⁹

⁸ *The motto of the Hungarian Defense and Force Development Programme*

⁹ *V4 countries includes the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, which is a political and cultural alliance, with the aims of advance co-operation in military, economic, cultural and energie affairs.*

because our societies and the way of thinking are more similar to the Balkani way of thinking. Either way, my suggested solution for the preparation of an escalated war could be valid for the V4 countries, too.

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SOCIAL WORKER IN THE FIELD OF MILITARY SOCIAL WORK IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 30.09.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

Published: 31.12.2024

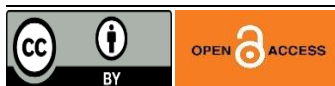
ABSTRACT

The present study is devoted to a specific area of social work, which in the conditions of the Slovak Republic does not have sufficient theoretical definition and practical representation. It is military social work, the primary purpose of which is to assist war veterans and their families.

For academic purposes, we present the elaboration of the theoretical issues of military social work in general terms, as well as the work of the military social workers themselves with the clients of military social work - veterans and their families.

KEYWORDS

Military social work, Social work in the army, Military veterans, Military family



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INTRODUCTION

As a helping profession, social work is used to assist people in situations where social intervention is required. Between wide spectrum areas in which social work acts, we also include military social work which on the territory Slovak of the Republic is not theoretically sufficient and professionally developed, but also not practically developed. For the general public, this phrase is relatively unknown despite the fact that military social work according to NASW (National Association of Social Workers) was practiced already in World War I and World War II when social workers they helped The American Red Cross. According to Schavel and Goliáš (2003), the United States serves as an example of military social work across the board which contributes to and enriches the functioning of military social work in other countries.

Wooten (2015) discusses that military social work represents a specific area of practice which distinguishes it from the ordinary practice with civilians because military staff, veterans and their families live, work and have access to health care and social advantages in hierarchical, socio-political context within structured military organizations.

However, military social work can be carried out with the family of an individual serving in the military as well as with the individual. On this basis, several terminological notions emerge that we are familiar with in the performance of social work in the army, which we will explore and clarify to gain a better understanding of the subject of military social work and the military social worker's role.

1 MILITARY SOCIAL WORK

Social work as a profession that involves working with people also finds its utilization in the army. Schavel and Goliáš (2003) claim that in this sphere it can develop and apply a wide spectrum of their own methods, theories and procedures. For some people, the term military may immediately evoke concepts such as politics, political influence, political ambition or war, but over time social work has adapted and is constantly adapting to different realities. Social work has reacted to and still addresses contemporary issues related to globalization, economics, politics, and civilization.

"Basically what it does military social work specialized area practice, are high performance expectations, personal requirements, standards order and discipline, work risks and organizational culture and climate, which they differentiate military service from civilians professions. In addition, it has ministry defense several contradictory roles in life members services and their families, between which ones belongs to also employer, provider medical care, housing and livelihood. In addition, military on business risks in voluntary or military service in own the country they can lead to conscious victims of life for the love of country or comrades." (Wooten, 2015, p. 8)

Military service and deployments present different risks for the military staff and their families that differ from those encountered by civilians. Those different risks include transfers, prioritizing professions above family responsibilities, hard business conditions, and potential traumatic occurrences, such as training accidents or military sexual trauma. Deployment may cause disputes, risk of drug abuse, mental and physical impairments and disruption of family ties and responsibilities.

According to Schavel and Goliáš (2003), some may consider the connection between social work and the army as incompatible. However, this synergy is beneficial and important for both parties - both for the army and also for social work. A historical perspective on this connection indicates its meaningfulness and usefulness. The incompatibility of those two areas may stem from the so-called grey areas - ignorance in given field and overall unexplored, possibly terminological absences. This also occurs in Slovak conditions.

Valigurská and Levická (2021) point at the absence of domestic literature and thus also on the absence of terminological background. During the analysis of professional and scientific literature written in English, we encounter different terms and concepts associated with this discipline. Considering the lack of literature dealing with the challenges in social

work in the context of the army we consider it relevant to devote attention also to the use of exact professional terminology..

In Slovak terminology, we encounter concepts such as military social work, social work in the army and social work with veterans. All of these terms fall under the umbrella of military social work. However, they differ from specific of social work groups.

- **Military social work** : Military social work represents an area of specialized practice that differs from the general social work with civilians in that it operates with military staff, veterans and their families they live, work, and receive health care and social benefits in the hierarchical socio-political context within a structured military organizations. (Wooten, 2015)

Military and social workers that work in this field focus on providing social assistance to military personnel and their families. This statement is also supported by Valigurská and Levická (2021, p. 4), "*Military social worki includes not only social work with troops and civilian employees of the army, but also assistance in resolving difficult issues in their families.*"

When a military social worker works with the family of a military member, we talk about the military family. Thus, in a strict definition, a social worker works with civilians within a military family. Matis (2016, p. 120) defines military family from a broader perspective as a "*group of people consisting of relatives living in the given family, while at least one of them is a professional soldier. Because the family includes several generations (parents, grandparents parents, uncles, aunts and cousins), we may define it as a multigenerational military family.*" From a narrower perspective, a military family consists of a man, woman and their children, with one of the parents working as a professional soldier (Matis, 2016). It is widely acknowledged that the family is the foundation unit of society and that full-fledged functioning is required to meet the demands and functions that can disrupt a professional's or soldier's career.

- **Social work in the army**: The most significant difference between military social work and social work in the military lies in the target group. Army social work groups under one umbrella the overall work of the social worker with members of the military and their families, as well as with veterans. Social work in the military is already more narrowly specified. The social worker works primarily with members of the military. Schavel and Goliáš (2003) discuss Army social workers in frameworks whose scope includes military combat units, mental health departments, Army mental health programs, hospitals, community agencies, research institutes, and command components in most military camps. Their role is to implement programs, including those focused on child and family well-being, mental health and abuse treatment, research, government programs, and policy formulation programs. Social workers in the army provide emotional support, advice and coordination services to help members of military units and formations to manage challenges associated with the military life. Their work also includes prevention of alcoholism, drug addiction, domestic violence

and more. The mutually beneficial connection between social work and the military promotes the overall well-being and performance of the military.

- **Social work with veterans:** As the name implies, this area of social work is primarily dedicated to war veterans and provides social counselling and other services to war pensioners. The purpose of social work with veterans is to provide them with the necessary support and resources in order to successfully adapt to their new life after the end of service in the army and to achieve overall comfort and quality of life they deserve.

"Service members who have returned from deployment often face numerous challenges in the field of physical and mental health when incorporating back into the family life. Social workers who provide assistance to service members and veterans must be competent and knowledgeable about military culture and informed about best practices." (Dick, 2014, p. 6)

An important role fulfilled by social workers is to provide counselling and support to veterans who are facing challenges associated with reintegrating into society or dealing with mental, emotional and family issues they may be experiencing as a result of their past work experiences. (Rubin, Weis, Coll, 2012)

"When working with service members, veterans, and their families in any capacity, social workers must function by the ethical principles and standards of the profession as outlined in the NASW. Social workers who work with this population must recognize the complexity of this work and be vigilant and prepared to address potential ethical dilemmas and value conflicts when they arise. Social workers must demonstrate recognition of basic human rights, including the right of service members, veterans, and their families to an optimal level of social work services." (NASW, 2012)

National Association of Social Workers highlights the importance of the ethical code for social workers and compliance and care of these principles. Of particular importance is the ethical treatment and adherence to ethical principles in military social work. This sphere of social work is a specific area in which value conflicts, but also dilemmas within the psyche and the contradictions of ethics, can very often arise.

1.1 Micro-military social work

"At work with the military population must social workers understand how they can physical symptoms and psychiatric diagnosis to affect military career, security background checks, military medical reviews, evaluations capabilities on the power services, disability and compensation assessments, and military separation services. Necessary They are also knowledge and training in interventions established on the evidence for individuals diagnosed with Post-Traumatic stress disorder, mood, and others anxious malfunctions." (Wooten, 2015, p. 9)

Micromilitary social work deals with providing individual support and services to military members and their families on the personal level. This type of social work seeks to address the specific needs and obstacles that troops and their families encounter. This may include the provision of emotional support, advice and solutions for personal and family problems, management of stress and anxiety associated with military life, and help in navigating the medical care system and social services.

1.2 Mezzo-military social work

Mezzo-military social work seeks to provide support and services to military members and their families at the group or community levels. This work focuses on providing support for military families, improving communication skills, and collaborating with local organizations to offer specialized services to the military and community.

Wooten (2015) defines mezzo-level military practice as understanding individual members' services, family systems, and military units, as well as relationships with these systems. Military missions prioritize family requirements, distinguishing them from work-family conflicts in civilian houses and jobs.

1.3 Macro-military social work

Macro-military social work is concerned with broader systemic changes and policies that affect the military community as a whole. This type of work focuses on identifying structural problems and injustices that affect soldiers and their families, and on creating and implementing programs and policies that improve their situation and quality of life.

On the macro level social workers, who work in the military context, must effectively evaluate, defend and intervene in favour of military staff and their families within high structured hierarchical organization which employs, provides stability (e.g. housing, health care) and trains military professionals.

2 ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKER IN MILITARY SOCIAL WORK

As we have already mentioned, this kind of social work is not fully developed in Slovakia. Therefore, it is necessary that tasks that fall under social work are covered by other workers from related helping professions, which can be e.g. psychologists or clergymen. A Social worker in their complexity should be able to use their skills in military social work, in which they can perform, for example, social work with the soldier/veteran themselves but also with their family, provide social counselling and other forms of assistance. What is important is the experience and knowledge that the social worker has. The acquired knowledge can then be further reflected on another target group, which in our case can be

military family, war veterans and soldiers. However, social work worldwide has only one goal, which every social worker tries to achieve, which is to solve, help or improve the client's situation or the situation in the client's surroundings. Forgey and Green-Hurdle (2023, p. 1) argue that *"although the mission of each state's military may vary, in general, key functions include the protection and defence of the state and its interests through the use of controllable force, the provision of support to the security activities of other states, and the response to humanitarian crises or natural disasters."* Military social work has a wide range of areas that can be covered. Social Work License Map (2020) defines the following fields:

- medical mental care,
- family and individual counseling,
- support access to finances and other resources,
- crisis intervention,
- integrated support for veterans,
- veteran defense.

Depending on these areas, Social Work License Map (2020) distinguishes the following types of military social workers:

- **Military social workers in active services:** These social workers live with other personnel on the base, and there is a possibility that they may be ordered to undergo military training. Their job may include providing medical care, counselling services including emotional support. Active-duty social workers sometimes accompany units on their missions or work in medical facilities that serve multiple units. Their primary goal is to help military personnel maintain optimal health so they can function effectively in their profession.
- **Civilian military social workers:** They can be defined as social workers working in military support centres that provide assistance to military personnel in their transition to civilian life. Military social workers provide various forms of counselling, e.g. family counselling, individual counselling, career counselling, etc., taking into account the interests of their clients.
- **Military social workers for the war veterans:** This field conveys a large number of military social workers. Their main task is to provide support and counselling to veterans and their families.
- **Private military social workers:** This field includes social workers who work separately. They work with veterans, active duty military personnel as well as those who have returned from deployments.

The division of social workers within military social work finds its relevance in various dimensions. One of the dimensions is the knowledge orientation of the social worker and their hands-on experience with the target group since each of these target groups needs specific care and is in a different situation that requires a different kind of assistance.

Military social workers play a key role in working with military personnel, but also their families.

According to Goliáš and Schavel (2003, p. 114) the work tasks and their meaning are different. *"Social workers in the military address the problems of military conscripts, work as mental health counselors, work in rehabilitation centers and military hospitals, and conduct group programs to correct psychopathological phenomena caused by the military environment and war. They are also tasked with mental health care and other services to residents, staff and family members. They are also involved in social programs for military veterans, the legislative and legal processes of adopting children, and dealing with children who have become orphans because their parents were in the military."*

According to the Social Work License Map (2020), social workers are an integral part of social work in the military. They contribute their work in the following sectors:

- **Services for veterans and their families:** Social workers provide assistance with resources that can be used to support them e.g. access to treatment.
- **Transition from military to civilian life:** Social workers assist with the transition from the military environment to the home environment - civilian life. Assistance may be in the form of discharge planning, for example.
- **Community environment:** social workers support veterans in communities who suffer from mental disorders and provide services to prevent homelessness and more.
- **Therapy:** Therapy includes therapeutic support for veterans who may be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, or substance use.
- **Programs for veterans:** Assistance with suicide prevention programs, injury rehabilitation and more.

According to Garber and McNelis (1995, In Goliáš and Schavel, 2003) social workers in the military encounter the following clients:

- hostages in the process repatriation,
- people who are members of humanitarian military actions,
- individuals who have been affected by a natural disaster or other misfortune,
- clients undergoing treatment in treatment facilities or hospitals,
- mentally or emotionally disturbed individuals,
- clients whose treatment process requires cooperation with others experts,
- soldiers or their family members who need help or prevention against post-traumatic stressful disorders and others.

To provide comprehensive assistance to soldiers, veterans and their families, the collaboration of multiple professionals is essential. A multi-disciplinary team can provide more comprehensive care on multiple levels - social, psychological, legal, educational, economic and other assistance.

Based on our assertions, in this article we present data from research conducted in Slovakia by the Department of Psychological and Sociological Activities of the Personnel Office, which focused on the social, financial and health security of professional soldiers. According to the surveys conducted, soldiers have long experienced the least tension in terms of income and job security. In contrast, in recent years we have seen an increase in tensions in the areas of social security and opportunities for up-skilling. Respondents chose from a menu of 31 elements of social security aspects, including a mix of existing and non-existent measures for soldiers. Respondents' answers were ranked in order of priority - from highest (1) to lowest (5) for each measure. (Czirák, 2010)

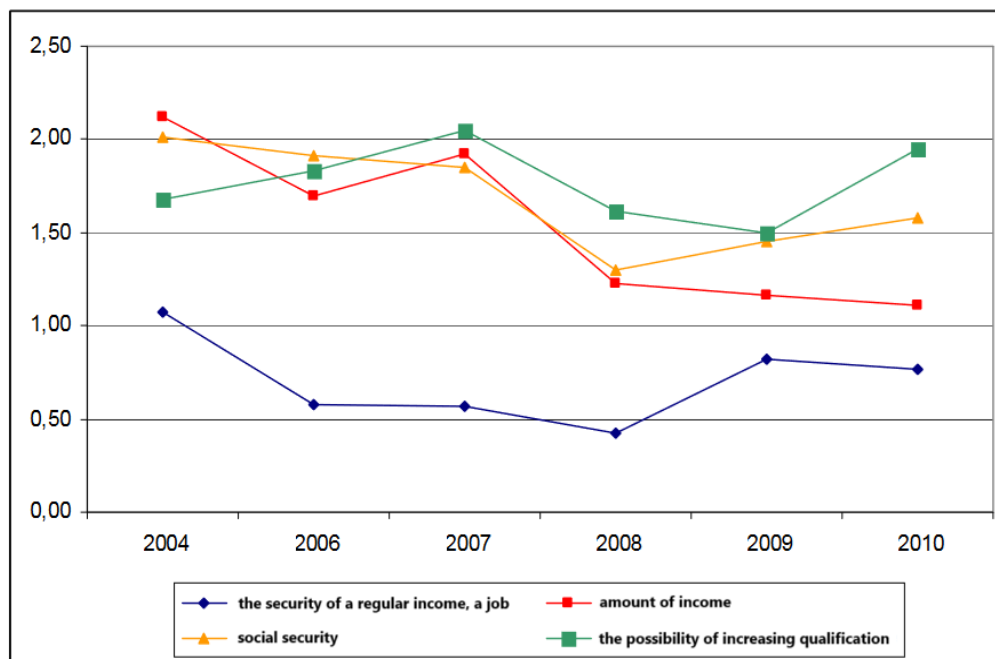


Figure 1 Voltage evolution of selected elements of job satisfaction

Source: Czirák, 2010, 43

Of the measures not currently included in the soldiers' welfare scheme, employer-sponsored super-standard health care was the most popular. Another appealing alternative was to provide specific vocational training, as well as preferential treatment for former professional soldiers when applying for jobs in the police, fire department, jail and judicial guard, or public and civil service. These measures primarily concern leaving the armed forces and preparing for the civilian labour market. The possibility of transferring to other armed forces is most attractive for soldiers with up to 6 years' service and its attractiveness gradually decreases with increasing length of service. Therefore, this measure is particularly interesting for those who are at the end of their first contract in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic. The measures are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Selecting the most attractive elements of social security

	Elements of social security - Compensatory measures the psychological and physical demands of the military occupation	Average	High priority (%)	Standard deviation
1.	Entitlement to a retirement pension after 15 years	1,58	84,05	1,04
2.	Housing allowance	1,69	81,02	1,11
3.	Entitlement to retirement allowance after 5 years	2,26	65,00	1,39
4.	Entitlement to severance pay after 5 years	2,33	63,05	1,36
5.	Extra health services that will be covered by the employer	2,41	60,01	1,36
6.	Reimbursement of travel expenses to visit family	2,43	58,00	1,41
7.	Anti-risk security (invalidity, widow's/widower's, orphan's pension)	2,56	55,7	1,33
8.	Support for vocational training of your choice (courses, conferences,...)	2,68	46,6	1,30
9.	6 weeks annual leave / 7 weeks RD after 20 years' service (i.e. 1 more week of annual leave compared to the Labour Code)	2,69	49,00	1,32
10.	Contributions to accident, life insurance, supplementary pension savings	2,69	49,04	1,31
11.	Allowances for holidays in military recreational establishments	2,75	44,07	1,19
12.	Prioritisation of former professional soldiers in their interest to join the service to police, firefighters, prison and judicial guards, public and civil service posts	2,76	48,03	1,34

Source: Czirák, 2010, 44

As Czirák (2010, p. 47) said, “the soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic of all categories place high demands on their health, physical or mental fitness, specific training and training. Professional soldiers of our armed forces must be mobile not only within Slovakia and the European Union (the whole of Europe) but also within the world and according to current national interests, to be able to implement and enforce them. As a rule, the armed forces carry out their mission (function) in difficult conditions threatening the life and health of soldiers.”

Therefore, in this context, social policy in the MOD is not understood as a system in which soldiers receive high salaries and pensions without effort or responsibility. On the contrary, it is about fair compensation for the demands and hardships of military service. This compensation is not self-serving; rather, its primary goal is to remove the obstacles and challenges that affect the actions of the armed forces, thereby contributing to their quality and effectiveness.

As we can see from the conducted research and the results, there is an increasing tendency in the Slovak military system within the social work in terms of financial, social, health and psychological dissatisfaction. In this particular case, theoretical and actual study overlap, emphasizing the importance of practical reflection on reflection. Table 1 below links directly to the results achieved, reflecting the most valued and desired benefits.

A survey conducted within the army during the period under study (2004-2010) showed that satisfaction with social security among professional soldiers has a decreasing

tendency. Since the need for social security - as we can see from Table 1 - is very important in the means of satisfaction of professional soldiers, it was necessary to draw attention to this issue. For this reason, the Ministry of Defense of the Slovak Republic has reflected the needs of professional soldiers also in the form of an amendment to Act No. 328/2008 Coll. On the matter of Social Security of Police Officers and Soldiers and Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts - the last amendment was made on 1 July 2024.

The changes of the 2024 amendment are contained in the publication Termination of State Service of Professional Soldiers, which was issued by the Ministry of Defence of the Slovak Republic. Specific elements of social security for professional soldiers are, for example:

- retirement security,
- transport and equipment allowances,
- benefit for retired military personnel,
- a benefit for war veterans,
- post-employment benefits.

One of the 4 factors examined that influence the satisfaction of professional soldiers was the Opportunity to Upskill (see Figure.1). Of the total number of professional soldiers involved in the research, just under half - namely 46.6% - identified the possibility of upgrading their qualifications as one of their priorities. This requirement was addressed by the Ministry of Defense and the following options were provided. "In order to improve the possibility of employment in the civilian labour market, it is advisable to follow the offer of training activities of the office of Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. Training activities can be attended not only by jobseekers (registered at the Labour Office) but also by unregistered jobseekers." (Termination of State Service of Professional Soldiers, 2024, p. 17) In the event of retirement to civilian life, professional soldiers were provided with the possibility of taking advantage of professional psychological counselling. "Members of the psychological service in the Slovak Armed Forces provide professional soldiers whose dismissal has been finally decided with preparation for further employment. The educational activity is aimed at developing skills for finding a new job. Interested parties may contact the unit psychologist." (Termination of State Service of Professional Soldiers, 2024, p. 18)

Another element of social security is Spa Care - this element was also identified as a priority. The publication Termination of State Service of Professional Soldiers (2024, p. 12) states that "A retired serviceman who has reached the age of 55 years or whose service has lasted at least 30 years may, upon the suggestion of the attending physician, be provided with gratuitous spa care at natural health spas and health resorts designated by the Military Social Security Office."

Social security for professional soldiers is one of the aspects that influences and motivates future soldiers when deciding to join the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic.

This aspect may constitute a certain motivation to join the professional soldier's profession. In the context of social security in the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, military social work is an essential component. Military social workers are qualified assisting professionals who can provide assistance and expert advice to professional soldiers in the field of social security.

We conclude that the need for military social work in the conditions of the Slovak Republic is urgent, as empirical research also points to this need in practice. In the particular case presented by us, there is a direct empirical confirmation of the theoretical summaries, while the synergy of different helping professions within the military and the adoption of social work in the army for this purpose is necessary to meet individual needs.

CONCLUSION

Industry military social work is relatively new, but it is inseparable to traditional social work, which was gradually integrated into the social systems of all countries. As much as the necessary help for veterans and soldiers is forgotten, these individuals, too, under the weight of experiences and adverse life situations, need to be assured of help and support from the state. This assistance can be mainly in the form of social and psychological - therapeutic, but also economic, medical and rehabilitation. There are a number of alternatives to provide assistance to military personnel and their family members.

The military social worker works at the micro-military, meso-military, and macro-military social levels. In the field of military social work, the social worker plays an integral role that enables the social worker to achieve the set goals with the help of intervention.

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SOCIAL SCIENCES AND LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT OF THE MILAN RASTISLAV ŠTEFÁNIK ARMED FORCES ACADEMY AND UNITED STATES ARMY CIVIL AFFAIRS: THE IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE IN RELATIONSHIP BUILDING AND MILITARY CAPACITY

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 16.07.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

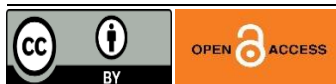
Published: 31.12.2024

ABSTRACT

The complex environment of military operations revolves around an intricate interplay where forces conduct activities in concert to achieve desired end states. Training exercises provide opportunities to rehearse tactics and develop systems to improve interoperability. U.S. Army Civil Affairs placement in Slovakia in support of Operation European Assure, Deter, and Reinforce developed relationships across the country to enhance resilience, build cooperative partnerships, and strengthen the NATO alliance. Language is the foundational requirement of interoperability and determines the efficacy of multinational cooperation. The existing relationship at the Milan Rastislav Štefánik Armed Forces Academy can be expanded to ensure training exercise frameworks are postured for success with participants capable of communicating effectively.

KEYWORDS

language support, cooperation, communication, interoperability



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INTRODUCTION

An authentic relationship is one in which both parties work in partnership with shared values in pursuit of mutually beneficial goals. This type of substantive relationship results in mutually beneficial end states as their shared purpose unites the parties in their journey. The relationship between United States Army Civil Affairs and the Social Sciences and Language Department of the Milan Rastislav Štefánik Armed Forces Academy demonstrates this type of dynamic relationship and manifestation of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) principles working in concert. With senior leader support, this relationship can be expanded and set conditions for the military concept of interoperability in the context of multinational exercises. An existing framework exists that can be broadened in advance of multinational training events to ensure Slovak and United States military participants maximize their

operational exchanges. As cadets at the academy are the future leaders of Ozbrojené sily Slovenskej Republiky (OSSR), senior leader support for future Civil Affairs teams contributing English language support to the Social Sciences and Language Department serves a strategic purpose for effective bilateral exchanges and military training with a force that is competent in English language proficiency.

1 U.S. ARMY CIVIL AFFAIRS IN SLOVAKIA

I have had the fortune as a United States Army Reserve Civil Affairs Team Chief to participate in an enduring relationship with the Milan Rastislav Štefánik Armed Forces Academy and contribute to the example of a dynamic and substantive working relationship. World events have created proximity under the auspices of the NATO to enhance collective defence and demonstrate to the world the strength of our alliance. This unifying purpose is in fact written into the fabric of the Slovak Republic in the preamble to the Constitution stating that the Slovak nation is focused on *“the interest of continuous peaceful cooperation with other democratic countries”* (Constitution of the Slovak Republic, 1992, p. 2). It is also encouraged within the Slovak Republic National Defense Strategy in the guidance to celebrate the benefits of Slovakia’s participation in the NATO alliance.

NATO’s vision includes pursuit of a “world where sovereignty, territorial integrity, human rights and international law are respected and where each country can choose its own path, free from aggression, coercion or subversion” (NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, 2022, p. 2). These sacred goals are the reason the government of the Slovak Republic has invited U.S. Army Civil Affairs to work by, with, and through the Slovak Armed Forces to build relationships, share insights, and increase the readiness of both the United States and Slovak Armed Forces military in the context of collective security. The mandate to provide “training and advice” stipulated by the Slovak Republic for U.S. Army Civil Affairs in Slovakia provides the avenue for Civil Affairs to interact with civilian staff at the Academy while also participating in military engagements (Official Statement of the National Council, 2020).

2 MULTINATIONAL COOPERATION: INTEROPERABILITY

Our command guidance has been succinct, direct, and clear from the start in that our placement in Slovakia is to reinforce collective security on NATO’s eastern flank by establishing partnerships, building relationships, and sharing resources across a variety of civil and military actors to strengthen the unifying nature of NATO in Slovakia. It is the solidarity of collective defense and the associated anticipatory relationship building that increases each participant’s capacity to thrive in advance of crisis, conflict, or natural disaster. The Academy invitation shows a connection between NATO and the underlying mechanisms that strengthen a military within collective defense. The English language support provides a venue to engage in interpersonal interactions while also remaining steadfast in building technical skillsets that

shape future relationships in the multinational operational environment. U.S. Army literature announces that interoperability *“is the ability of alliance forces and, when appropriate, forces of partner and other countries to train, exercise, and operate effectively together in the execution of assigned missions”* (Multinational Interoperability: Reference Guide, 2016, p. 72).

This literature boldly states that interoperability *“clearly involves more than communications”* and is exemplified in *“synergy among members”* (Multinational Interoperability: Reference Guide, 2016, p. 72). Therefore, communication establishes itself as the initial, foundational, and driving prerequisite of working in partnership in the multinational environment. It cannot be inappropriately viewed as a luxury but reinforces itself as of primary importance. In fact, General Chris Cavoli discussed the importance of language to the United State’s Senate when discussing the technical requirements of military materiel and the ability to read manuals in English (US Military Leaders Testify About EUCOM, 2024). U.S. Army literature alludes to the human dimension as it states that the *“need for interoperability at the tactical level continues to go lower and lower”* referring to the interpersonal realities of working in multinational partnership (Multinational Interoperability: Reference Guide, 2016, p. 1).

The cooperation between the Armed Forces Academy and Civil Affairs is important considering the baseline requirement of partnership including the ability to communicate. Interoperability becomes increasingly complex once standard operating procedures, doctrine, and tactics, techniques, and procedure frameworks are incorporated. All these concepts reinforce the importance of supporting the language development and work done by the Social Sciences and Language Department.

3 U.S. ARMY CIVIL AFFAIRS

As members of the United States Army Reserve, we each arrived in Slovakia with civilian skillsets. As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker at Veterans Affairs with experience in therapeutic settings, I am familiar with the shared journey of therapist and client. Elvins and Green (2008) speak at length about the importance of the therapeutic alliance, where both parties work in unison towards an agreed upon goal. The therapeutic alliance views the interaction as one between equals, where each actor stands to learn from the other’s insight and experience. While I am not intending to apply this analogy rigidly in the current context of our placement in Slovakia; the comparison has apt variables. We are guests in Slovakia and consistently are privileged to enjoy Slovak hospitality. Our invitation to Slovakia is to function as the interface between civil society and the military. We work in partnership sharing insights, skills, and grow in unison through the equitable power dynamic. As a result, we have admired the resilience of Slovak institutions, the strength of its democratic processes, the might of its military, and the friendship that is the output of our interactions at the academy. This access is an ideal venue to leverage in advance of multinational exercises to enhance its efficacy by ensuring Slovak participants are competent in English.

4 INTEROPERABILITY: THE HUMAN DIMENSION

Senior leaders appreciate the importance of partnerships as multinational exercises are designed to strengthen the alliance and develop the shared understanding of military tactics that collective defense relies on. The U.S. Army Combined Arms Center discusses the focus of multinational force interoperability and the priority of training for collective defense as a cohesive unit with allies and partners. This involves not only technical and tactical requirements within military formations; but reaches into the familiarity required within interpersonal interactions. U.S. Army literature on interoperability, or the requirements for how to work alongside NATO allies, discusses how *“the human dimension builds the basis of mutual understanding and respect that is fundamental to unity of effort and operational success”* (Multinational Interoperability: Reference Guide, 2016, p. iii).

Our role in Slovakia involves interacting within human dimensions to build working relationships with our partners. Specifically, this involves partnership with Civil Military Cooperation at the 57th Detachment. As both of our military’s primary civil component focused force, we typically identify opportunities within civil society to strengthen civil resilience and increase societal capacities in advance of times of need. This adheres to our fundamental roles within the civil component to address NATO Article III baseline requirements for resiliency. However, it is our extended relationship with the Armed Forces Academy where we are addressing the human dimension that is vital to interoperability. It is here where we understand the gravity of our work alongside our Slovak friends, allies, and partners in Slovakia. The Milan Rastislav Štefánik Academy graciously extended an invitation for increasing partnership between our countries through direct engagement. This invitation demonstrated supreme insight in foreseeing novel avenues to celebrate the NATO partnership through interactions at the academy. This is the pathway for senior leaders to leverage an existing relationship to ensure that multinational exercises take place between military forces that can effectively communicate with each other.

5 MILAN RASTISLAV ŠTEFÁNIK ARMED FORCES ACADEMY AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The Social Sciences and Language Department has the monumental task of ensuring the cadets at the academy can communicate in multiple languages. This important task prepares cadets for their honorable service in the Slovak Armed Forces in support of the Slovak Republic and potential missions as part of the United Nations and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Their creative problem solving resulted in extending an invitation for a relationship with U.S. Army Civil Affairs in providing English language support.

The halls of the Academy display a profound quote by Ludwig Wittgenstein that reads *“the limits of my language mean the limits of my world.”* Philosophical paradoxes abound when considering the possibility or inability to describe something that doesn’t necessarily exist. In the emotional realm this relates to fleeting sensations that are therefore difficult to

articulate. In the military context, this challenge is limited by one's own command of doctrine and the subsequent ability to relate this in another language. This is to say nothing of the future difficulty in high stress situations. Regardless, the practical application of expanding one's world through developing language to minimize those concepts that escape expression remains the focus of the Social Sciences and Language Department. This expansion of vocabulary and support to the development of cadet lexicon is where our Civil Affairs team enjoys conversations and direct engagement. Our demonstration of native English discourse provides an innovative addition to the language instruction at the academy.

From my experience as a Licensed Social Worker, the expansion of one's world relies on increasing awareness which fundamentally requires accurate assessment and ascribing of the correct term to one's experience. This refers back to the Ludwig Wittgenstein quote that inherently encourages expansion of vocabulary to make the abstract tangible, to give name to the immaterial, to ultimately tame the nebulous realities of existence that cause strife. In fact, within the therapeutic world, the heart of recovery is in "*naming the unnamable*" or the ability to ascribe terminology which enables understanding (Maddick, 2011). Cadets face the pending trial of leadership that is further intensified by multinational environments reinforcing the importance of strengthening their English skills. Leaders must be able to issue orders and clearly explain direction to subordinates to accomplish the mission. They must have English skills to cross language barriers that exist when working with multinational NATO partners. In multinational exercises, partner forces must be able to communicate directly and across a variety of mediums communicating their placement in the field and their plans for future movement. In the context of training, language is therefore the foundational determinant of a worthwhile exercise. Forces that cannot talk to each other create chaos in an exercise and in a time of crisis will fail to provide security or retain stability.

Way Forward

The conversations Civil Affairs has had with cadets include topics of military tactics, leadership, and general cultural exchange. The existing invitation for Civil Affairs can be expanded in advance of exercises to set conditions for effective training events. Military tactics, described as "the employment, ordered arrangement, and directed actions of forces in relation to each other" relies on military units understanding of doctrine and subsequent ability to communicate (Tactics, 2023, 3-3). In pressured environments, the chance for error greatly increases. Combined arms maneuver creates endless complexity with its (widespread application of highly accurate and lethal weapons, the high degree of tactical mobility, ever-present sensors, and a complex operational environment) (Tactics, 2023, Glossary-22). The existing relationship at the academy shapes the language capability of the next generation of Slovak leaders which explains the interest from academy leadership. While this relationship is oriented towards long term effects in the language development of cadets, it could also be oriented towards short term goals in advance of exercises.

Future Civil Affairs Teams could focus exclusively on military terms, concepts, and tactical vocabulary to increase the effectiveness of Slovak personnel participating in an exercise. Senior leaders could ensure that deliberate engagements take place on a routine basis to ensure language development is geared towards a training exercise increasing the likelihood of success and utility for increasing interoperability. Cadets could work in tandem with Civil Affairs to welcome units participating in pending exercises to shape the language capability of the training audience.

Cadets would interact with members of the OS SR resulting in further inspiration as they embark on their leadership trajectory. While ambitious in nature, a focus on language development creates desired end states for a multitude of actors. This expansion would retain the utility of U.S. Army Civil Affairs in assisting language development at the academy. The new dimension would create novel avenues for cadets to grow in their language skillset while creating proximity to experienced members of the OSSR. Encouraging participation from OSSR soldiers who would take part in multinational exercises completes the utility in expanding language development at the academy.

CONCLUSION

The cooperation between Civil Affairs and the Armed Forces Academy reflects commitments to NATO's strategic concept, namely, the military and non-military tools that create a robust deterrence capability. The unifying principles of the NATO alliance and the desire to build substantive partnership are critical in the current age. The ability to express oneself in English is an intuitive requirement of working within the multinational environment and one that expands one's inward and professional experience as encouraged by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The U.S. Army Civil Affairs presence in Slovakia also demonstrates bilateral commitment to partner cooperation across various actors in Slovakia. The gravity of the partnership isn't observed in any isolated extraordinary event but adheres to the simple accumulation of a steadfast commitment.

Allen (1902) encourages the commitment to *"when one understands that the great things of the world and of life consists of a combination of small things, and that without this aggregation, of small things the great things would be nonexistent"* (Allen, 1902, p. 45). The partnership investment with the academy and dedicated time to this accumulation of small things benefits the future leaders of Slovakia and can ensure successful training events. With a small but substantive change incorporating the OSSR in advance of exercises, language development could set future conditions for an effective force capable of communicating in English. We have been fortunate to contribute, through our enduring presence and interactions revolving around language support, to the strength of the NATO alliance in Slovakia through our partnership at the Armed Forces Academy.

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ON CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND DISINFORMATION AS THREATS FOR THE SECURITY OF THE STATE¹

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: 28.06.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

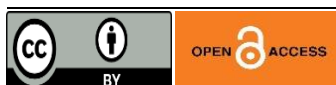
Published: 31.12.2024

ABSTRACT

The issue of conspiracy theories and disinformation is today not only the subject of numerous lay and professional discussions, but also the subject of security scientific research, as their dissemination is an inseparable part of information and psychological operations conducted by state and non-state actors to influence social discourse in an attacked society. Conspiracy theories and disinformation therefore represent one of the serious security threats for every democratic state, because their spread significantly disrupts the functioning of a democratic society, threatens ongoing democratic processes and undermines the principles on which democratic states are built. State and non-state actors abuse the current information and communication ecosystem and, to achieve their political, ideological, economic and other goals, they use various Internet portals and a wide range of social networks to spread conspiracy theories and disinformation. Their mass use makes their spread easier than ever before. This is also why the author's goal, using relevant methods of scientific research, is to contribute to the developing academic debate and to the deepening of theoretical knowledge about conspiracy theories and disinformation as threats to security of the state.

KEYWORDS

Conspiracy theories, disinformation, security, state, threats



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INTRODUCTION

Dynamic development in the field of information and communication technologies, the emergence and development of various digital platforms, web portals, applications and modern communication devices, together with the mass expansion and use of the Internet and social networks, have led to the creation of an information and communication ecosystem that is constantly developing very progressively.

¹ This work was supported by the Research and Development Support Agency based on Contract no. APVV-20-0334 "It's not true, but it can be: Conspiracy theories and hoaxes in the modern development of Slovakia in the European context"

On the one hand, this development brings a new range of possibilities to improve, speed up and improve the quality of communication and searching, receiving, creating and spreading information, but on the other hand it also brings a wide range of possibilities to abuse new, modern technologies, systems, devices, media and social networks for spreading various false, misleading, altered, distorted, untrue and/or completely fabricated information, news and stories in the form of various conspiracy theories and disinformation (Cíchová – Šišulák, 2019; Hajdúková et al., 2023; Ivančík, 2024; Zachar Kuchtová; 2022; Andrassy – Grega, 2015; Ivančík – Müllerová, 2022). Although their spread in some cases is just ill-conceived entertainment with the aim of making a joke at someone's expense or political satire, or is the result of ordinary human mistrust and doubt, in the vast majority of cases it is a carefully thought-out activity of state and/or non-state actors for the purpose of achieving predetermined political, ideological, economic and other goals (Ivančík, 2022; Hajdúková – Šišulák, 2022; Dušek – Kavan, 2024; Ivančík, 2023; Andrassy, 2022; Zachar Kuchtová, 2024).

Such activities and developments threaten the security of individuals, social groups and society. Many people - especially those who primarily use the Internet and social networks for communication and searching, receiving and sharing information - are strongly influenced by the misleading, distorted, altered, false or completely fabricated information, news and stories spread on them. These people are – in addition to several dangers and risks consisting, for example, in the theft and misuse of personal data and sensitive information, in the possibility of exposure to cyberbullying, harassment, insults, intimidation or blackmail, the development of addiction and depression, in the threat of mental health, in the reduction of the quality of interpersonal relationships, etc. – much more exposed to manipulation and influence through widespread conspiracy theories and disinformation. Under their influence, they gradually experience increased polarization and radicalization of opinions, support for manifestations of extremism, populism or xenophobia and/or growth of political, racial, ethnic or religious intolerance.

In order to contribute to the developing academic discourse and to the deepening of theoretical knowledge about conspiracy theories and disinformation as widely and often discussed phenomena of contemporary modern human society, and at the same time to point out the increasing risks and threats of their spread (especially through a wide network of various internet portals and social networks) on the security of a democratic society, respectively a democratic state, the author of the presented study deals with the issue in question. As part of the interdisciplinary research carried out, he uses relevant scientific theories, methods and concepts, mainly the analytical-synthetic method, theoretical, content, qualitative and comparative analysis, the theory of group polarization, the scientific method of studying documents, the method of theoretical generalization of knowledge, as well as other suitable methods and approaches. He is also based on published research and works of several domestic and foreign authors and current information from verified sources.

1 THE EFFECT OF ECHO CHAMBERS AND FILTER BUBBLES ON THE SPREAD OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND DISINFORMATION THROUGH THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

Echo chambers and filter bubbles, which are two concepts very closely related to the way people interact and seek, receive and share information on the Internet and social networks, play – in line with group polarization theory² – a significantly negative role in the spread of conspiracy theories and misinformation and their impact on people.

Echo chambers represent an environment in which individuals' beliefs and opinions are reinforced through repeated interactions with other people who hold similar opinions or attitudes. This phenomenon usually occurs in groups or communities, where their members assure each other of the correctness of their opinions and confirm their positions. Echo chambers are characterized by:

- a) homogeneity of opinions – members of the echo chamber share similar beliefs and opinions, which leads to the strengthening of these opinions and attitudes,
- b) strengthening of beliefs – members of the echo chamber listen to the same opinions repeatedly, making their beliefs stronger and less prone to change,
- c) social interaction – echo chambers are formed through social interactions, such as discussions on social networks, various online forums or group chats.

Echo chambers thus serve as mechanisms that reinforce prevailing group views and subsequently push the ideology of the entire group to more extreme and radical positions (Cinelli et al., 2021; McDonald, 2022; Gao et al., 2023).

Filter bubbles represent an environment in which algorithms and personalized services on the Internet and social networks filter and modify the content that is displayed to the user, based on his previous behaviour, preferences and interests. This process can gradually lead to the fact that the user is shown only those information and opinions that confirm his existing beliefs. Filter bubbles are characterized by:

- a) personalization of content – algorithms use data on previous user behaviour to customize content, which may lead to the display of only that information that is consistent with the user's previous interests, opinions or purchases,
- b) limiting the diversity of opinions – due to the personalization of the content, the user may see less diverse opinions and information, which may ultimately significantly limit his ability to see things from different points of view and form an objective opinion,
- c) automated process – filter bubbles are the result of algorithmic decisions, not the users' own active choice.

² The theory of group polarization is a concept used mainly in social psychology, which describes the tendency of groups to make decisions that are more extreme than the opinions of individual members of the group before starting the discussion. In other words, when people gather and discuss a certain opinion or position, their final shared opinion or position tends to be much more radical or extreme than the original opinions of individual group members (Nickerson, 2023).

On the basis of the above, it can be concluded that practically any opinion or attitude can be reinforced in the user by means of filter bubbles in such a way that only the information that supports his opinion or attitude is continuously presented to him. All contradictory information is systematically hidden from him using algorithms. When making any decision or forming an opinion, the user is relatively effectively manipulated by the fact that only part of the information is provided to him. This gives him the illusion of free choice or his own decision, but in reality, this is not the case (Hrčková, 2021; TechTarget, 2023; Bhalearo, 2023).

The key differences between echo chambers and filter bubbles, in terms of the mechanism of their creation, are that while echo chambers are created primarily through social interaction and active search for like-minded people, filter bubbles are created automatically through the algorithms used, which adapt content based on previous user behaviour and preferences. From the point of view of sources of information restriction, the basic difference is based on the fact that while in the case of echo chambers the restrictions are caused by the selection of people with whom the users themselves decide to interact, in the case of filter bubbles the restrictions are caused by preset algorithms that decide what content is displayed to the user. In terms of the level of control, the basal difference is based on the fact that while with echo chambers users have more control over who they interact with and what content they consume, this is not the case with filter bubbles. Their users have much less control over what is shown to them because the content is selected by the algorithms used (Flaxman et al., 2016; Brest, 2020; Chinyanganya, 2022).

In addition to the above, although echo chambers and filter bubbles are different concepts, they can overlap and reinforce each other. For example, algorithms can create a filter bubble by only showing content from like-minded people, which can in turn create or reinforce an echo chamber. Unfortunately, both of these concepts have serious adverse consequences not only for how people acquire, process, and share information, but also for forming their own opinions, their actions, behaviours, reactions, decision-making, and overall ability to think critically (Arguedas et al., 2022; Talamanca – Arfini, 2022).

The primary problem is that communication within different social groups is often one-way within a group of like-minded people. Social media users often respond exclusively to content that is consistent with the views and attitudes presented within a given group or community. On online social networking platforms, a user's personal inclination towards a particular topic can then be recognized in several ways, for example by the content they follow or by the range of recommendations presented by other users. Reliable sources of information are thus very often buried by fake clickbait³ content.

³ Clickbait is a term used to describe online content that is designed to attract as many clicks as possible. This type of content often uses sensational or misleading headlines and images to pique curiosity and get users to click on a link. Although clickbaits usually attract a lot of attention, they often have very little informational value and can be considered unethical or misleading. The hallmarks of clickbait include: (a) sensational headlines that are often exaggerated, dramatic or shocking to arouse curiosity; (b) misleading information where the headline or introductory text suggests something that is not true or misrepresents the fact in order to attract as many

All of this makes it easier to connect people who believe the conspiracy theories and disinformation being spread. In addition, their dissemination today is greatly facilitated by the fact that such content is no longer spread orally in secret closed meetings or in the form of illegally printed literature, but these old ways have been replaced by modern communication tools on social networks (Enders et al., 2023).

2 THEORETICAL DEFINITION OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND DISINFORMATION

Since the issue of conspiracy theories and disinformation is today the subject not only of professional but also of numerous social discussions, in which many times there is a wrong definition, understanding or differentiation of individual terms, in the interest of successful implementation of scientific research and achievement of set research goals, it is necessary to have accurate definition of basic terms. The following subsections therefore define both key terms of this study – conspiracy theories and disinformation.

2.1 Conspiracy theories

Conspiracy theories have become one of the phenomena of contemporary modern human society in recent years. It would be difficult to find someone who has not met at least two or three of them in the past few years, but usually more. Conspiracy theories naturally existed in the past, but due to technical possibilities, they were not as widespread and popular as they are today. However, with the dynamic development of our civilization and technical/technological progress, primarily in the context of the x-fold expansion of the availability and possibilities of Internet connection and the massive use of a wide range of social networks and their interactive platforms, their mass dissemination, sharing, and better "visibility" gradually became much easier. faster circulation and increased popularity. The aforementioned - together with the growing number and expanding scope of topics that conspiracy theories relate to - has led to the fact that researchers' efforts to understand them have increased significantly, especially in the last decade, and conspiracy theories have become the subject of scientific research within several scientific disciplines.

In terms of defining them, the minimalist definition states that *"a conspiracy theory is a theory that involves a conspiracy"* (Pauly, 2022, p. 4). A somewhat broader definition refers to a conspiracy theory as *"a theory or explanation whose main component is a conspiracy among a group of actors"* (Pauly, 2022, p. 1). A slightly more extensive, but still rather weak, understanding of conspiracy theory is Keely's (1999, p. 116), according to which *"a conspiracy theory is an explanation of an event by the causal action of a group of people acting in secret"*.

clicks as possible; (c) emotional manipulation, using emotionally charged themes such as fear, anger, shock or curiosity to elicit a response and get people to click; (d) incomplete information, where headings may be incomplete or intentionally vague, forcing the reader to click on a link to obtain complete information; (e) engaging images and graphics that arouse curiosity or shock (Hughes, 2022).

Keely later added to this definition that the group is small and powerful and has nefarious intentions. Although these additions create a better picture and a stronger definition of a conspiracy theory, they remain epistemically neutral, that is, they do not state that such an explanation of an event is implausible or otherwise problematic.

Similar definitions can be found in dictionaries and encyclopaedias. For example, the Oxford Dictionary (2023) characterizes a conspiracy theory as *"the belief that a secret but powerful organization is responsible for an event"*. The Cambridge Dictionary defines it as *"the belief that an event or situation is the result of a secret plan created by powerful people."* In the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the phrase conspiracy theory is defined as *"a theory that explains an event or situation as the result of a secret plan, usually by powerful people or groups."* Byford (2011, p. 21) similarly defines conspiracy theories, according to which they are *"attempts to explain the main causes of significant social and political events and circumstances by claims of secret plans by two or more powerful actors."*

As part of the research of conspiracy theories, definitions from other authors can also be found in the scientific literature. For example, Swami and Furnham (2014, p. 220) define them as *"a set of unfounded beliefs that lead a person to believe that the root cause of a certain event is a conspiracy of several cooperating actors, with a clear goal, often illegal and covert"*. Brotherton et al. (2013, pp. 12-13) characterize them as *"unverified and remarkable conspiracy claims that: a) defy a more plausible account; b) presuppose, in terms of their content, extraordinary malice and skill on the part of the conspirators; and c) are, in the sense of epistemic reasoning, based on evidence that is considered by legitimate epistemic authorities to be of poor quality and resistant to questioning or correction"*.

The above definitions of conspiracy theories differ only in certain small details. All of them uniformly aim to explain significant events with serious impacts on society, which are supposed to be behind a small, secretive and powerful group of people, to which Douglas et al. (2019, p. 5) also include the possibility that such a powerful actor is the country's government. Uscinski (2019, p. 48) goes even further when he states that scientists, non-governmental or religious organizations, or even foreign governments can be considered actors of the conspiracy. In addition to this clarification, he adds that *"conspiracy theories can explain events that have already happened, are happening now, or are yet to happen."*

Barkun (2013, pp. 3-4) adds three key characteristics of conspiracy theories in the context of the above definitions:

- a) Nothing happens by chance: This perspective claims that the world works on purpose, rejecting the notion of accidents or coincidences. According to this view, all events are carefully planned and executed.
- b) Nothing is as it seems: Conspiracy theorists believe that malevolent forces are constantly trying to deceive society. As a result, what may seem harmless is seen as a looming threat to world order.

- c) Everything is connected: Based on the first two characteristics, this aspect assumes that seemingly disparate events and phenomena throughout history are interconnected and form a coherent pattern that can only be discerned by diligent investigation.

Since conspiracy theories include all kinds of false, inaccurate, misleading, altered, distorted and/or fabricated information created, presented and disseminated with the intention of causing harm to the public or some social group, or for the purpose of obtaining political, financial or other profit, among conspiracy theories and disinformation there is a significant correlation. Both use false content, and both can harm an individual, a group, a community or in some cases an entire society. In addition, conspiracy theories can serve as a form of "legalization" of disinformation. With the method of telling conspiracy stories, disinformation becomes more interesting, more attractive, more receptive, more accessible and more viral compared to simple fake content. They support false claims, arouse emotions and shape experiences in relation to various significant political and social processes, phenomena or events.

2.2 Disinformation

From the point of view of definition, even in the case of disinformation, there is currently no single, unified and generally accepted definition of it, and therefore we can come across a relatively large number of definitions in the literature, differing primarily in the industry or area of society in which the disinformation occurs, or they apply. Despite their greater or lesser difference, the common feature of all used definitions is the fact that it is a deliberate modification of the provided information with the intention of influencing, deceiving or misleading the addressees of this information.

According to the Short Dictionary of Hybrid Threats (2023): *"Disinformation is verifiably false, misleading, or manipulatively presented information that is intentionally created, presented, and disseminated with the clear intent to deceive or mislead, cause harm, or secure some gain (for example, political or economic). Disinformation often contains an element that is obviously true, which gives it credibility and can make it more difficult to detect. Disinformation does not include inadvertent reporting errors, satire and parody, or biased reporting and commentary that is clearly marked as such."*

In the Encyclopaedia of Sociology (2017), disinformation is defined as *"any distorted, false information, used with the aim of influencing an individual or a certain group of people in a certain desirable way. Most of the time, it is mainly about creating a good or bad impression about a person, event, work, phenomenon, negotiation, etc. in the interest of political, ideological or even purely private interests. It is often aimed at influencing public opinion, while it may have already been created with such an intention, but it may also arise accidentally or for another purpose, which may not be explicitly disinformation (e.g. when*

it is caused by tearing a certain announcement out of its original context or placing it in other context)".

According to the Action Plan for Combating Disinformation, which was prepared jointly by the European Commission and the European External Action Service at the level of the European Union (hereinafter referred to as "EU") and which was subsequently adopted by the European Parliament, *"disinformation is provably false or misleading information created, presented and disseminated for the purpose of economic gain or deliberate deception of the public and may cause public harm"* (European Commission, 2018). The key element that is emphasized in this context in the document in question is intention. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (hereinafter referred to as "NATO") views disinformation as *"the deliberate creation and dissemination of false and/or manipulated information with the intent to deceive and/or mislead, with disinformation actors seeking to deepen divisions within and between allied countries and undermine public confidence in elected govern-ments"* (NATO, 2020).

In the scientific and professional literature, one can come across several other definitions of the term disinformation, especially from authors who deal with the issue in their research or works. Based on the content analysis of several works, it can be generally concluded that individual authors generally characterize disinformation as *"false, inaccurate or misleading information that is deliberately disseminated in order to achieve mainly political, economic or other goals"* (Freelon - Wells, 2020; Wardle - Derakhsham, 2017).

From the point of view of the spread of disinformation, the expansion of the availability of the Internet and the mass use of social networks have given modern propagandists a very effective tool for the spread of disinformation. Information, and therefore also disinformation, can be spread by basically anyone at any time, while their truth or credibility of the spreader is not subjected to more or less any opposition or control. Disinformation spread in this way reaches any corner of the world practically at the same time and can spread like a global virus. In addition, they are quite often and deliberately created in such a way that this dissemination is even more supported, for example by using various sensational claims or extreme feelings, which are intended to arouse interest in such information in the reader (Shu et al. 2020, p. 4).

3 USE OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES AS DISINFORMATION MEDIA

Conspiracy theories and disinformation can have different uses and focuses depending on the target audience. In this context, it is true that they have a much greater destructive potential in those societies that are deeply polarized than in societies that are not so divided. A particularly suitable additive for the spread of conspiracy theories and disinformation in such communities is precisely the ambiguity that occurs in each of the groups or communities in a polarized society.

For this reason, actors who spread conspiracy theories and disinformation work very intensively to prolong such a state in society in order to ensure the longest possible duration of their effect. At the same time, they realize that the more support the conspiracy theories and disinformation spread by them get from the population of the affected society, the sooner they will achieve their predetermined political, ideological, economic or other goals.

In addition to disinformation, the so-called "information laundering". This is the process of legitimizing false, misleading or deceptive information through a network of intermediaries who gradually apply a set of techniques aimed at distorting it and hiding the original source (Rodríguez, 2020). Such information is gradually enriched and over time it becomes a conspiracy theory. That is why Kelly et al. (2024) refer to them as "deliberately false information that has been created to resemble legitimate news and gain maximum audience attention". The method of "laundering information" is used by several "formers of public opinion" who operate on Internet platforms and social networks. These "opinion makers" can be real people or hidden identities behind an account on Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, Twitter (now X), TikTok or another social network.

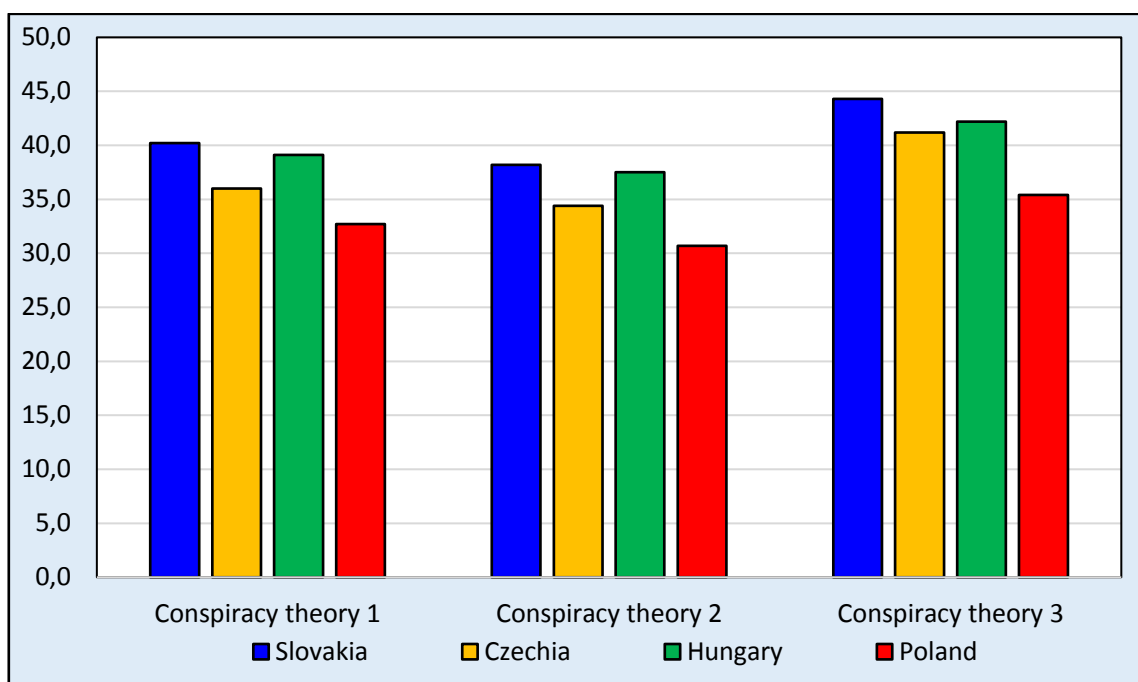
In the literature, such individuals are referred to as trolls. Authoritarian regimes such as Russia, Iran, China or Saudi Arabia have become the main troll powers in the social media sphere. They operate the so-called troll farms providing jobs to local residents whose role is to manipulate ongoing discourse and abuse freedom of expression (Rainie - Anderson, 2017). What puts them in the category of so-called "opinion makers", is their availability and influence on the audience (Rodríguez, 2020). Their opinion forming methods are very effective because different "opinion makers" focus on different topics in order to achieve the same goal. It is relatively easy to identify especially those trolls who talk about traditional values, children's rights, the danger of migrants, LGBTI persons, the "expansion" of NATO and similar narratives. However, when all these narratives are combined in the matrix of narrative analysis, they all evoke deep anti-European sentiments in society (Bateman - Jackson, 2024).

In conducted influence operations⁴ using disinformation to support the spread of conspiracy theories, the primary goal is to clearly identify the "bad guys", or "those who are responsible". For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, there were claims in China suggesting that the virus may have originated in the United States, when on March 12, 2020, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said on Twitter: "It could also have been the US military that brought the epidemic to Wuhan", thus directly influencing the formation of the conspiracy theory (Westcott - Jiang, 2020). Subsequently, Covid-19 began to be talked

⁴ An influence operation is a coordinated, integrated and synchronized activity with the aim of influencing the attitudes, behaviour or decisions of a target group of people so that they are in line with the interests and goals of the actor (SIS, 2023). Influence operations are the coordinated, integrated, and synchronized application of national diplomatic, information, military, economic, and other capabilities that are used in peacetime, crisis, conflict, and post-conflict situations to support an actor's interests and objectives and to influence attitudes, behaviour, and decisions. target audience (Brangetto – Veenendaal, 2016).

about as a biological weapon, and this narrative later developed into anti-vaccination campaigns involving both traditional and modern conspiracy stories (Saiful et al., 2021).

Conspiracy theories and disinformation regarding the coronavirus spread rapidly, fuelled by government-backed campaigns from Russia, Iran, and China that blamed and attacked the United States as the source of the pandemic (Tucker, 2020). It is noteworthy that these campaigns only targeted vaccines from Western manufacturers such as Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca or Janssen, and not Russian and Chinese vaccines from Moscow's Gamalev Institute or Chinese companies Sinopharm and Sinovac. Anti-vaccination campaigns and stories about biological weapons were other aspects of information operations aimed at undermining trust in European democratic societies. As a result, many citizens of Central and Eastern European countries believed conspiracy theories and disinformation about the origin and spread of the coronavirus (for example, how the number of deaths from the coronavirus is artificially overestimated, how information about serious adverse effects of vaccination is deliberately withheld, or how nanoparticles get into our bodies with vaccines, through which governments will monitor us and control society, etc.) (graph 1). The spread of such conspiracy theories subsequently stimulated numerous protest demonstrations in several European countries against vaccination, but especially against the measures taken to protect public health. Conspiracy theories can thus be considered as a certain form of disinformation carrier whose purpose is to influence the target audience and induce the desired behaviour and reactions in them (European Commission, 2020; Aïmeur et al., 2023, Enders et al., 2023).



Graph 1 Trust of the residents of the V4 countries in conspiracy theories regarding Covid-19 (in %)

Source: Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2024

Note:

Conspiracy Theory 1: The Covid-19 pandemic was part of a larger plan to control society.

Conspiracy Theory 2: During the coronavirus pandemic, reports of the death toll from Covid-19 were artificially overestimated.

Conspiracy Theory 3: During the pandemic, information about the serious harmful consequences of vaccination against the Covid-19 disease was deliberately withheld.

To supplement the information regarding the data from graph 1, it can be stated that 56% of respondents in Slovakia consider at least one of these conspiracy theories to be true (28.9% of respondents consider all three theories to be true), in the Czech Republic 54% (all three theories is considered true by 23.7% of respondents), in Hungary as well as in Slovakia 56% (25.8% of respondents consider all three theories to be true), and in Poland 48% (all three theories are considered true by 20.6% of respondents). At the same time, it is true that young people under the age of 30 and university-educated respondents believe the least in conspiracy theories about the pandemic, while those research respondents who subjectively describe their household income situation as bad believe the said conspiracy theories the most. In terms of political preferences in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, agreement with conspiracy theories about the pandemic is significantly related to the declared electoral support of individual political camps. While in Slovakia the voters of the current coalition believe significantly more in the conspiracy theories in question, in the Czech Republic and Poland the voters of the current opposition. In Hungary, voters of the government movement do not differ significantly from voters of other political parties and movements (SAV, 2024).

4 CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND DISINFORMATION AND THEIR IMPACT ON SECURITY OF THE STATE

Although traditional security threats still exist, hybrid threats are currently more prevalent (Lisoň – Fidler, 2022), which also includes the spread of conspiracy theories and disinformation within the framework of conducting cyber, information and psychological operations against the attacked society (Ivančík, 2023). For example, in the context of the illegal Russian military aggression against Ukraine, it can be observed that the Russian Federation makes full use of disinformation and conspiracy theories to influence the public discourse about Ukraine (Türk – Loewen, 2022). An example can be the fact that in several European countries – due to the presence of Russian propaganda – a full social consensus was not reached regarding the introduction of sanctions packages against the aggressor regime in the Kremlin (EU, 2024). This only confirms that "public opinion" - influenced by the spread of various conspiracy theories and disinformation - "can really be a weapon and at the same time ammunition for this weapon" (Vilmer et al., 2018).

The responsibility for making political decisions is – or at least should be – fully in the hands of those who make decisions (government, parliament, etc.), but in no case should we underestimate the social environment influenced by widespread conspiracy theories and disinformation (Colomina, 2022).

If the ability to make competent decisions by responsible state bodies and institutions is impaired, the security of the state is also impaired (Belan – Uchal', 2018). It is defined precisely by the ability to implement decisions and measures in the field of state security in accordance with national interests and values. If we look at the provisions of the Treaty of Westphalia from 1648, which presents the state as a dominant representative in international relations and practically limits its existence only by the power of other states, we come to the conclusion that states exist only as long as they can guarantee their existence and autonomy by their own power (Mann, 1984; Barker, 1990; Paterson, 1992). It is this postulate about the existence of the state that is undermined by the spread of disinformation and conspiracy theories and directly affects the loss of state autonomy and the overall security of the state⁵ (Colomina, 2022).

CONCLUSION

Conspiracy theories and disinformation currently represent one of the biggest security threats for every democratic state, because their spread significantly disrupts the functioning of a democratic society, threatens democratic processes, undermines the principles and principles on which a democratic society is built, leads to a decrease in trust in democratic institutions, causes uncertainty, mistrust, fear and chaos among people, increases the polarization of society, supports populism, radicalism, extremism, xenophobia and political, racial, religious and ethnic hatred, thereby directly undermining the security of the state and making the state vulnerable to external influences. Over time, the attacked state loses its decision-making sovereignty and gradually becomes a puppet in the hands of the aggressor state.

State actors, as well as non-state actors, to achieve their stated political, ideological, economic and other goals through spread of conspiracy theories and disinformation, currently primarily use various Internet portals and a wide range of social networks.

⁵ In the professional literature, several existing definitions of security of the state refer to it as the ability to preserve its sovereignty, decision-making autonomy and physical integrity, to maintain its economic relations with the rest of the world under reasonable conditions, to protect its nature, institutions and establishment from outside interference, on the ability to control borders; or as the state's ability to protect the vital values and interests of society alone or together with other states or organizations from external and internal threats and to create conditions for the political, economic, social and cultural development of society. Or they define the security of the state as a state when the state does not have to sacrifice its legitimate interests to avoid war and is able, if attacked, to maintain them by war. And they also define it as the absence of threats to acquired values and the subjective absence of fear that these values will be attacked. (Romm, 1993; Watson, 2008; Stuart, 2009; Koudelka, 2016; Hofreiter – Šimko, 2024)

These, especially in recent years, represent one of the most dynamically developing segments within the communication and information technology sector. Over the course of a few years, they have undergone many significant changes. From small, scattered local community websites, several have evolved into consolidated companies with global reach and influence. Due to their mass use, they have a huge impact on human behaviour, actions, thinking and reactions.

With the development of interactivity and functions of individual social network platforms, the motivations of users to engage in discussions on social networks have also changed over time. The original, purely "social" motivation has been replaced by other motivations, such as the search for information, the provision of which has brought these platforms much closer to traditional media. In this information and communication ecosystem, a dramatic change has gradually occurred, which can be called the weaponization⁶ of social networks, which means the transformation of social networks into a battlefield where hostile hybrid activities aimed at target audiences and carried out in the gray zone between peace and war take place.

Due to their exceptional properties, such as global reach, high availability, low costs, huge volume and speed of information exchange, and to some extent still relatively high anonymity of information spreaders and their users, social networks are attractive to a wide range of state and non-state actors with hostile agendas, which also include the spread of various conspiracy theories and disinformation. Paradoxically, what was initially a great advantage has become a visible weakness. Platforms that were born as "social" have become the site of a large number of activities, many of which are clearly anti-social in nature.

Based on the above, social networks can be called, from a certain point of view, a battlefield where there is an intense battle for the hearts and minds of people. It is a battlefield where various military, but above all non-military strategies and tactics can be observed and the use of tools such as – in addition to conspiracy theories and disinformation – also propaganda, hoaxes and/or fake news, threatening opponents, mobilizing supporters, coordinating actions and activities etc. The dynamic development of modern information and communication technologies, systems and devices play an extremely important role, thanks to which all these activities are easier, faster and more efficient.

In this context, the question arises as to what a democratic state can do, what measures it can take to be able to effectively and efficiently counter hostile activities on the Internet and social networks and, in general, hybrid threats directed against it, since adversaries do not follow the same legal rules and ethical principles as democratic societies and do not even share the same democratic values.

⁶ Weaponization is a term denoting the use of non-military means as weapons to achieve power goals. When a social network or information space is weaponized, it involves attacking the target group with hostile information, mobilizing members of the target group, as well as conducting information operations with the aim of influencing the behaviour, attitudes, moods and opinions of the target group. (NBÚ, 2024)

Moreover, while adversaries in the form of various state and non-state actors are cunning, fast, flexible and adaptable due to the special nature of their organization, establishment and functioning, democratic states and institutions are obliged to follow legal procedures, usually with lengthy decision-making processes.

Social networks, as it turns out, today represent a very effective and efficient tool for manipulating the population on a mass scale. Their current mass use makes it easier than ever for state and non-state actors to spread conspiracy theories and disinformation in order to reach their political, ideological, economic and other goals. This is also why it is very important not only to continue research in this area, but to deepen it even more. The achieved research results should contribute to making it impossible to use or abuse social networks as a hybrid weapon to influence people's thinking, actions, behaviour and reactions and to disrupt and threaten the democratic processes taking place in a democratic society.

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Information for authors:

Submission deadline

- for papers to be published in **issue 1** in Slovak / Czech language
- for papers to be published in **issue 2** in Slovak / Czech language
- for papers to be published in **issue 3** in English language

30thApril

30thOctober

30thOctober

Template - <http://vr.aos.sk/index.php/en/for-authors-vr.html>

VOJENSKÉ REFLEXIE

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VOJENSKÉ REFLEXIE

Military science journal

Publisher:

Akadémia ozbrojených síl
generála Milana Rastislava Štefánika
Demänová 393
031 01 Liptovský Mikuláš

Electronical journal published on internet with free access

<http://vr.aos.sk/index.php/sk/>

Published twice a year in Slovak/Czech and once a year in English

Number of pages: 127

Published:

December 2024, Volume XIX, Issue 3/2024

Photocover: Peter POLDRUHÁK

Cover: Dušan SALAK

ISSN 1336-9202

DOI <https://doi.org/10.52651/vr.j.2024.3>

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