NON-STATE THREATS 
AND THE NEW SECURITY PARADIGM 
- Armed Groups in Romania’s National Security Strategy -

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The article reviews the new threats to security after the Cold War and prefigures a dialogue about the new paradigm developed in the latest decades in the field of security. The emergence of armed groups, the nature of the terrorist threat and the increasing number of weak or failed states that are incapable of controlling or enforcing the laws within their territories bring about new circumstances and dangers that cannot be explained by the old security paradigm. These changes pose questions about the validity of our defence system, undermine the legitimacy of states, widen the horizon of security issues and alter the traditional relations between states and citizens. The final part of the article analyses the way in which these changes are mirrored in Romania’s security strategy and advocates the need for adopting a proper strategy regarding the non-state armed groups.

Keywords: security paradigm; armed groups; terrorism; irregular conflict; Romania’s National Security Strategy

Clausewitz considered war to be a “social activity [...] ... a continuation of politics by other means” and his views have embodied the way we understand war and security. For the last years though, scholars and academicians alike have tried to analyse the impact technology, globalisation, recent events have had on military affairs, and the way war is carried out. The rise of armed groups, the nature of terrorism, and the increasing number of weak and failing states, unable to control and enforce the rule of law on their territory, develop new conditions and perils that the old paradigm cannot explain. War is no longer fought between armies for a known political objective and for a short period of time. Protracted conflicts are fought in the name of vague notions, to kill leaders or ideas, to replace regimes, to serve the economic purposes of criminal organisations or to project both terror and power and they increasingly involve the direct or indirect
participation of civilians. These developments induce new questions about the validity of our security system, challenge state legitimacy, broaden the spectrum of security-related issues and alter the traditional relations between states and citizens.

**Etymology and Historic Considerations**

Like other philosophical notions, the term “peace” can only be discussed in correlation with its antonym – “war”. Is then safe to assume that peace means the absence of war? Is security a mere absence of threat? And if so, how do we define war and how do we define security? The most common image that comes to one’s mind when thinking of war and conflict is that of two armies marching on a field facing each other, getting ready for impact. However, a mere reading of the “World” section in any national newspaper will prove that this mental image does not match the reality of the world. Why? Because in the aftermath of the Cold War, the security paradigm has been slowly shifting to unexplored directions that change the way we perceive peace and perform at war. The days of Napoleon marching his armies across Europe are over; so are the days of the blitzkrieg and large military manoeuvres. The definition of peace as the absence of war “belongs to a few centuries ago”.

Mary Kaldor, Director of the Centre for the Study of Global Governance at London School of Economics, identifies five key distinctions that are noticeable in the “old wars”: the distinction between the public and private sphere, between internal and external activities, between the economic and the political, between the civil and the military and between the legitimate bearer of arms and the non-combatant. However, the reality today has changed. Present conflicts are no longer taking place between state actors that, when in combat, perform using regular warfare and adhere to international norms and standards. Today’s security challenges come from armed groups, insurgents, terrorists, and transnational organised crime groups, threatening the world in complex ways, not seen before. The key distinctions identified by Kaldor are no longer as clear as they were in the previous centuries. With the increasing involvement of public opinion in foreign policy, state leaders carefully plan their actions as to match the electoral expectations at home. The quest for primary commodities and resources

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clashes under both economic and political policies, and terrorist threats undermine the traditional distinctions and rules between combat forces and civilians.

Historically, "our ideas about war – its sources, nature and solutions, come from the European and Cold War experiences". The 1815 Vienna Congress established a key component of the stability of the international system: the balance of power. By and large, the great powers of the time were interested in making sure that there would be no other Napoleon among them. However, they restrained themselves from punishing France (in sharp contrast with the 1919 winners in World War I and Germany) and together managed to create a system that brought unprecedented peace and stability in Europe. The Industrial Revolution and the two world wars that followed changed the way war was fought: technological improvements, mass regimentation and genocide are just several key distinctions. The Cold War divided the world according to Churchill's famous "iron curtain" and nuclear weapons became the main point in how peace and war were understood. Through concepts such as deterrence and the theory of mutual self-destruction (the supposition that, because of high level of casualties and civil destructions, no power would start a nuclear war), both powers refrained themselves from using force directly one against the other and instead challenged each other in other regional theatres of operations.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union unleashed a worldwide feeling of euphoria and triumphalism. Fukuyama announced the "end of history", military budgets were cut down with the speed of light and only very few realised the challenges that the system was about to face: unstable states in transition, bloody ethnic and nationalist conflicts, weapons of mass destruction, poverty, local warlords, to name just a few. Since the end of the Cold War, the security paradigm has slowly changed and Clausewitz's theories have become increasingly distant from the realities. Holsti argues whether we can really "understand the Somalis, Rwandans, Myanmars and Azerbaijannis of the world in classical European terms". There has not been a single war among democratic nations, but the escalation of conflict between states and groups within states challenging its legitimacy has increased dramatically. And so have organised crime, transnational criminal networks and, since 9/11, the far worse threat: terrorist groups. Thus, security issues seem to rise and develop from the nature of internal politics in the new formed states. Hanlon considers that "the transformation of armed groups is a key

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aspect of a newly emerging security paradigm for the 21st century. Empowered by economic and technological consequences of globalisation, armed groups have now acquired means and weapons available until recently only to state actors and national armies. Taking advantage of the revolution in communications, of the weak nature of failing states, which are capable of inflicting damage that far exceeds national borders, armed groups are one of the biggest threats to the international system. The Cold War doctrines such as deterrence and mutual self-destruction no longer apply to armed groups. Armed groups do not have an address to locate them, they do not have a territory nor a population to protect. Moreover, as Hanlon points out, armed groups are decentralised, operating in networks in various areas of the globe and have a significant degree of freedom in choosing their “programmes” and the amount of damage they inflict increases proportionately. Armed groups operate among civilians, not in a large terrain where national armies have overwhelming advantage.

In addition, terrorist cells and criminal organisations have arranged in what Hanlon refers to as “marriages of conveniences”. In exchange for a small part of the profits, armed groups offer protection to organised crime units, thus getting their hands on enormous amounts of resources, weapons and soldiers: al-Qaeda transferred $30 to $300 million in commodities working with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. Jeremy Weinstein, a professor at Stanford, has researched RUF and one of his most important results resides in the progressive erosion of the initial motivations among a rebel group, “when the organisation is held together by material incentives or by force”, as it is the case for RUF. His main idea is that when a rebel group gains access to natural resources, the incentive for getting rich becomes the main motivation that keeps its members united throughout time: “Resource-rich groups attract opportunistic joiners and must maintain their organisations through a consistent flow of material payoffs or through the use of force”. Weak states, due to their administrative incapacities, are unable to protect their monopoly of force across their territory, leaving huge portions ungoverned that become safe havens for armed groups. Paul Collier calls this

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7 Ibid, p. 140.
9 Ibid.
“the conflict trap,” as states are caught both in a continuous war and an increase in poverty due to it, giving the advantage to the armed groups. Breaking out of the conflict trap is almost impossible.

The International Impact of Local Conflicts

One of the biggest challenges in dealing with local conflicts is the failure of the international community to realise the regional and global dimensions these conflicts have. Many local conflicts have “spillover” effects in neighbouring countries: the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – FARC expanding from Colombia to Ecuador and Venezuela; al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan and Kosovo Liberation Army – KLA in Albania and Macedonia are just a few examples. The explanation is simple: the conflict extends and generates the territory that is outside the authority of a legitimate recognised government. The importance of such territories increases especially when illegal activities are carried out on them.

A project done by the Research and Development – RAND Corporation has identified the policies needed to handle these areas. First of all, governments should re-evaluate the role of development agencies and donor’s aid. Unfortunately, much of these resources can be targeting ungoverned territories and their overall impact is to make them more attractive to armed groups. For example, infrastructure building in areas where the government has given up its control is aiding armed groups, not the government or local population. A second policy change aims to promote competent government practices and strengthen the presence of local authorities. For example, in Colombia, under the Democratic Security and Defence Policy, by 2004, the government had established police headquarters in all 1,099 municipalities compared to 1995, when 25% of municipalities had no police presence. A good indication of the perceived security measures is the fact that “the highway traffic between major cities increased by 64% between 2003 and 2006.”

The difficult challenges that arise from these new developments range from revising the relevance and rethinking military training to the increasing involvement of non-combatants and civilians in the international arena. Should the world, including Romania, rely on the new US grand strategy that seems to have formed in Washington during the Bush Administration and that Ikenberry

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10 Paul Collier, The Bottom Billion – Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What Can be Done about It, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, p. 32.
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defines as “America’s imperial ambition”\(^{13}\)? Is pre-emption the doctrine that should replace the Cold War doctrine of deterrence? If terrorists have no territory to protect, does this mean we have to be ready to interfere wherever, regardless of the sovereignty principle? Are our military forces trained and equipped to deal with increased combat in civilian areas? When we aim at decreasing the number of members in armed groups, are we ready to prevent having them replaced with child soldiers? And finally, should these questions be answered unilaterally or in international institutions where actions can be vetoed?

Obviously, situations are almost never easy to interpret and judged the same way by different actors. In the report released to the public on 21 September 2009, General McCrystal, top US and NATO commander in Afghanistan, is very clear when he states that it is not resources that are going to win the war, but “an urgent change of strategy” on how the war is conducted. The US needs to coordinate better with the Allies in NATO and to connect more with the Afghan people. Although he never mentions it directly in the article, McCrystal seems to be advocating for a nation-building role of the military. A common practice is that of politicians often connecting military operations with stability and support tasks. One such example in Afghanistan is the provision of security, understood in military terms, and democratic elections\(^ {14}\), implying that the latter determines the former and, afterwards, elections bring about security. Elections are, some might argue, easy to organise but will that bring an end to the conflict and a lower level of violence? Collier thinks the opposite when he states that “electoral competition can make things worse, because patronage will often win out honest politics in the struggle for votes”\(^ {15}\). Thus, the main lesson for military forces, but most importantly for political leaders is that the work is not done once you have held elections. In a conflict area, security is the sine qua non condition for any hope towards peace and conflict resolution\(^ {16}\).

**Armed Groups in Romania’s National Security Strategy**

Romania has undergone major effort in implementing policies and adapting to the new security realities and its National Security Strategy reflects these transformations. In addition to strategic concepts and responsibilities assumed

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\(^ {15}\) Paul Collier, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

\(^ {16}\) Wadir Safi, *op. cit.*
as an EU and NATO member, the Strategy highlights Romania’s interests and role at the Black Sea, its relations with the Republic of Moldova and its options regarding regional security. Without doubt, the document approaches security from the larger perspective of human security understood as economic security and prosperity.

Despite all these achievements, the Strategy has several major drawbacks. It is worth noticing that the Strategy has not identified the necessary conditions that would engage Romania in a war, nor has it changed the traditional way we look at war. A lot of studies have focused on the limitations and inconsistencies in the Strategy. The “Ovidiu Şincai” Institute has conducted an analysis on the strategy’s content, form and style and has also compared it to other national security strategies (USA, Russia and Poland)\(^{17}\). Adrian Pop’s comments\(^{18}\), especially about The Black Sea Forum, are very revealing and add substantial value to the way Romania has to understand its security priorities.

One aspect neglected in both the Strategy and the consequent debates is represented by the security threats posed by non-state armed groups. The Security Strategy indeed identifies terrorist groups as a primordial threat and has one mention of criminal organisations, but in addition to the vague definition and usage of the concept, the Strategy continues to refer to the conflict between traditional armies and terrorist groups using the traditional concept of asymmetric warfare.

Asymmetric warfare is “a means through which one inferior side (an army) seeks to obtain advantages towards a stronger opponent, or one through which a superior army seeks to obtain a rapid victory with no or minimal losses”\(^{19}\). The problem with this perspective resides in the focus it puts on the military dimension of the conflict, shaping the idea that military means can bring security. However, in a conflict between state and non-state actors, the military force is not the dominant factor that can “win” a war. For example, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are a common factor in asymmetric warfare, where insurgents and terrorist groups rely on such devices to challenge regular armed forces. The war, however, is not going to be won by finding a “silver bullet” for IEDs. Even if military technological developments will make IEDs harmless, the “war on terror” will not be over. This argument can be extended to any other asymmetric warfare components. Instead, these conflicts should be defined as irregular warfare, highly emphasising the interplay between political means and military strategies.

\(^{17}\) Institutul Ovidiu Şincai, Raport de analiză politică, analiza Strategiei de Securitate Națională a României, http://www.fisd.ro/PDF/mater_noi/Raport_SSNR.pdf


Just as Rupert Smith argues\textsuperscript{20}, military force has lost its utility in winning a decisive military victory. This happens mostly due to the fact that the theatres of operations have moved among the people, the ends for which we fight have changed, and conflicts tend to be protracted. The political level has to identify the political objectives and then corroborate them with the adequate military strategy. Together, both military and political levels have to cooperate in choosing the most adequate function of force: amelioration, constraint, deterrence or destruction. On the field, military forces have to use force to achieve new objectives: when you fight among the people, you have to win over the people, and not necessarily to occupy or destroy traditional targets.

\textit{Romania’s National Security Strategy} has significant deficiencies in understanding the situation and describing the nexus of connections between the political and the military factor. With its largest number of effectives in Afghanistan, where the daily situation involves direct involvement in such type of irregular warfare, these deficiencies could have serious repercussions.

In order to play an active and responsible part in the collective security structure it belongs to, Romania has to understand the evolving nature of armed groups and the complexity of the security problems such groups pose. These issues need to be addressed in a strategic and efficient manner. The pre-emption and prevention doctrines that the \textit{Strategy} postulates are, in addition to the ideological criticism brought to them, inoperable from a practical point of view, as they tell nothing about an adversary. In wars among the peoples, fought among civilians, anyone can be, or shortly become, an enemy. An adequate strategy includes an integrated nexus of diplomatic pressure, counterintelligence and counterterrorist actions, strategic communications enhancing legitimacy, adequate choice in the theatres of actions and usage of the right function of force.