

PERSPECTIVES IN THE MILITARY DIMENSIONS OF CONFLICTS

*Colonel Gheorghe CALOPĂREANU, PhD**

***Abstract:** The near future could show that the changes in the geostrategic level will be marked by increasing instability caused by the appearance of new emerging powers, by a transfer of the strategic gravity center to the Asian region, along with a decrease in the hegemony of the West, especially of the western European states, while the U.S.A. will dominate military during the following decades. This article aims to highlight, briefly, the principal mutations that these changes could bring in the predictable future in defining the military dimension of conflicts.*

***Keywords:** conflict, resources, globalization, geopolitics, crisis.*

Introduction

Next two or three decades will be probably characterized by an increase of the *conflict level*, whose causes are continuous changes in the geopolitical sphere, but also a number of factors which on medium and long terms will cause crises of different types. We enumerate here, without wasting them, access to resources, economic and / or demographic imbalances, climate changes effects, continuing the manifestations of the terrorism.

It is assumed that, for these reasons, some changes will occur in the armed conflict field, in terms of their causes, the development and the resolution or their extension. From this perspective, it is unlikely that the future ones will have the sense that characterized the conflicts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but rather, they will incorporate all types of disputes, regardless of their intensity, in a set of conflicts where the asymmetry of the action courses is predominant.

* „Carol I” National Defense University

Geopolitics and conflict forms

Globalization and geopolitical restructuring mentioned will also be accompanied by the tensions increasing at global level, as a result of the occurrence or continuing influence of factors such as increasing difficulties of the access to natural resources, particularly in the energetic ones, imbalances between countries whose natality is decreasing and the ones where the birthrate is increasing, especially in Africa, the effects of climate changes, increasing the inequities in the distribution of global wealth, possible repeating or appearance of a new type of crisis, especially in the economic sphere, increasing the military expenditure and, not least, the proliferation of the crises of all kinds.

The use of collective violence could also become hard to predict, as well as the reasons for new conflicts, but it is also likely that they will include components which are not of a military nature, such as media or cyber-space.

Frictions or even the conflict as a concept will be difficult to define mainly because of the overlapping interests and actions of some state and non-state actors who will develop and conduct action courses which are becoming more and more diverse and difficult to identify.

The action strategy preferred by most players, including some states, will be *asymmetry*, which will test the ability of opponents to increase their strategies, tactics and economic effort involved by the acquisition of new and sophisticated technologies, leading ultimately to the decreasing capacity of reaction and of its wear. The presence of this type of threat is, however, difficult to predict the existence and location of the particular centers of gravity and hide their own vulnerabilities.

Internal conflicts within nations that depend on cultural, religious and ethnic differences arising on the problems of resource sharing, increased and will continue to grow, but the international conflicts have related to territorial aspects decreased since the end of the Cold War. However, the obvious differences between rich and poor states and the difficulties of access to resources could favor the emergence of "wars of needs" or "wars of the poverty" between nations. Equally, territorial and extra-territorial claims, such as control of material and non-material flows, will increase the risk of triggering disputes between states and may lead to disputes about the boundaries inherited from the days of the Second World War. Although the

risk of a major conventional conflict between liberal democracies seems to be nonexistent, the risks of a major conflict between the powers will continue to exist, especially in Asia. Nuclear deterrence, however, will continue to mitigate this risk. The competition between powers could be developed in new fields, and, in particular, for those which have the necessary technological level in space. In a multipolar context, the confrontation between the powers could take place by proxy through third countries belonging to their respective spheres of influence.

Other states involved, but of smaller international importance can disrupt the regional balances for reasons of their leaders' ideology or the desire to rectify the colonialist or Cold War legacy, and can request the international recognition of their power (this is available for Iran or North Korea, etc). Once they are out of the international community, these "pariah" are united by temporary alliances and cooperate between them in secret (in particular, through front companies). They continue to mobilize state and non-state players, linking in order to organise a radical protest against western globalization and an international order centered on the West. Their potential to cause harm could be increased by the possession of national sanctuaries and "anti- access strategies". Some others may appear, and the list of regional "disruptors" who are potential sources of regional conflict will probably increase in the following decades.

The limit between the international and intra-national conflicts, between the ordinary and unusual wars and between the conflicts of low intensity and those of high intensity, will be more and more indefinite. This evolution of the threatening will lead to proper adaptation of the military capabilities.

Breaking the taboo on using the nuclear weapons can not be excluded. Without necessarily causing a generalized confrontation, this situation would lead to a considerable loss of credibility of the non-proliferation system, whose consequences must be anticipated and which may lead either to nuclear rearmament or, on the contrary, to the general nuclear disarmament.

Areas of possible conflict

Sensitive areas of the international system could be established, first of all, where certain spheres of influence meet, especially when the access

to resources is at stake. In some cases, the access to rare raw materials that are essential for the development of certain key technologies could end crisis in areas that are currently protected such as Siberia or the Arctic.

Maritime area, especially areas where the major trade flows take place, will remain a favorite channel for the criminal activity (piracy, robbery) and illicit traffic (human beings, weapons, drugs, etc.). Asymmetric threat at sea, especially piracy, which was hitherto restricted to coastal areas, could expand. Because the strategic areas require some regulation, the number of disputes regarding the energy resources or the ones related to fishing could have an upward trend.

Since *urban areas* are both centers of power and symbolic places, they might remain favorite conflict areas, if we consider the growing factor of urbanization. With the development of mega-cities and taking into account the growing role of city-states, urban areas could be much more than just a tactical or operational area and could become a perfectly mature strategic area, characterized by tactics and ways of specific asymmetric confrontation.

Aero-space sector remains an area for competition between powers (technological, military, industrial, economic, etc.) and an important political instrument to achieve the essential components of a state or an organization that ensures global strategic coverage. For countries with high technological capabilities, space control will be more and more a strategic stake and a potential conflict area. Activity in space will become increasingly subject to risks such as vulnerability of segments in space, free circulation of information, increasing economic interests and development of some activities in potentially hostile purposes.

Cybernetic space will continue to be a confrontations area of high risk. The modern society's dependence of new communication and information technologies creates a new type of vulnerability, which will be taken as advantage by more and more people. Cybernetic attacks are easy to perform. They provide a discrete, direct and non-lethal method, which is not expensive and highly divisive for planning an attack. They already represent a real threat and they are sometimes used in combination with other methods of action. This trend is likely to increase and promote the "small" countries' dependence of "large" or "very large" countries, these being probably the only elements able to develop a comprehensive capability in

this field. In other words, cybernetic defense could become a more and more important factor, since the great powers compete to be the most influential and could favor thus their hegemony.

Problems on missiles defense, especially the struggle for ballistic potential growth in Iran and North Korea, could favor these dependencies, as is the case with cybernetic defense. At this stage and in the absence of a complete European offer, only the U.S.A. have a coherent and export capacity in terms of missile defense based on territory and population. This is also demonstrated by the current regional architecture of missile defense in Europe, Asia and Persian Gulf. If there is no solution for the crises in Iran and North Korea, taking into consideration that those countries give up their arsenal, based missile defense capabilities would not be only an additional constraint on the future national defense budgets, but also to reveal the determination level of European nations that still have credible capabilities in the field of control systems, command and early warning or interceptions, in order to provide additional or alternative options to the American schemes .

At the same time, the prospects of a technological response to the growing threat such as the prospect of a growing role for guided cruise missiles should not provide more than a supplementary protection capability, keeping intact the central role of nuclear attack prevention for future.

Implications for defence

Adapting the military systems in a rapidly developing world requires the ability to think of multi-polarity in operational terms. This requirement involves the consideration of two courses of action; understanding the conflict with all its components, which determines probable range of threats, on the one hand, and control of future options in the operational field, on the other hand.

Talking about this second option, the primary need is to increase the capacity to adapt to a new field of armed conflict, creating a broad spectrum of threats on which could be exposed their own capabilities and those of allies. This requirement directs the discussion to three key issues, namely the balance between security and defense in front of some asymmetric

threats, the forces adaptability to changing situations and armed forces contribution to the strength of the nation in front of some diffuse threats.

The changing nature of conflict, outlined above, regardless of the circumstances, leads to the definition of a sufficient reactivity threshold and of a vigilance level in order to deal with any stage of strategic change. This issue leads again to the notion of critical military mass on which the forces operational reliability is based.

To ensure this credibility, it will be essential to define a threshold for the balance between maintaining a strong national base ensuring the expression of national sovereignty and the strategic role of the state and also the development of new mechanisms for partnerships in the power poles.

In this area, the first problem could be that of *priority*, which can improve the interoperability of the armed forces, using the resources of other actors involved in the conflict area. This option requires improvement of certain command and organization principles of the military organism, encouraging a more interactive approach for each stage of the discussions and actions of various actors involved in a maneuver which is conducted as much as possible in a global way.

The second requirement leads the discussion to a doctrinal, sociological, psychological and *material adaptation* of the military instrument with reference to threats of lighter completion, a tougher opponent, and military commitments strengthening. Given this, the complexity management, the situations understanding, the ability to understand specific local features, the imagination, judgment, adaptability and initiative will be more than ever a source of operational added value.

Finally, the third problem could be the *forces adaptation* to new legal realities that shape the operational field. This evolution requires an adjustment of the operations legal framework regarding the new types of threat, a deeper cultural integration of the legal aspect in practicing the military profession and a greater attention to the army particularities, at every level of national and international law.

Conclusions

Developing high standards of *environmental protection legislation*, particularly in Western countries, will limit the use of force and thus will bring changes to the operational environment, fact that might require the

creation of some specific strategies applied to the armed forces of these countries in order to conduct military operations and direct them towards expanding operations in multinational framework.

Conceptual level changes imposed by these considerations are obvious. Concepts such as “deterrence”, “taxation”, “influence”, but mostly “preventive influence” will probably be more often used in the military operations planning.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Philippe le Billon, *The political ecology of war; natural resources and armed conflicts*, <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/ept/eprints/ecowar.pdf>
- Andrea Bianchi, *Terrorism and Armed Conflict: Insights from a Law & Literature Perspective*, 2011, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1760882
- Nils Petter Gleditsch, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 35, No. 3, Special Issue on Environmental Conflict, May, 1998
<http://acd.iiss.org/>, *Armed Conflict*, International Institute for Strategic Studies
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC28193/>

