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## **THE NECESSITY OF LAND FORCES BATTLEGROUPS TO DIVERSIFY THEIR STRUCTURE AND ACTION**

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***Abstract:*** Given, on the one hand, the trends of military conflicts in the proximity of our country, and on the other hand the features the operating mode of the Land Forces brigades with the highest operational level, we consider it necessary to develop the principles envisaging the use of these large units in combat.

The Romanian Land Forces brigades have gathered knowledge and experience on the unfolding of operations by participating, on various occasions, in international missions in operation theatres such as Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq, through a close study of the allied doctrines and of the NATO representative armies, by updating their document base and, last but not least, by intensifying combined arms and combined forces training both on a national and on a multinational level.

Regarding the involvement of the operational units and large units in combat, in terms of taskorganising, we believe that they are able to act both in the classic format based on the current organization pattern and in the battlegroup format, especially set up for missions (Battlegroups - BGs).

***Keywords:*** power, organization, battlegroups, action, mission.

We are taking further our scientific endeavour regarding the involvement of the mechanized brigade in combat and we wish to emphasize the necessity of the ongoing development of the doctrine principles applying to the involvement of Land Forces units in operations. A brief analysis of the current conflicts both in the proximity of Romania and in other areas can unbiasedly evince the dynamics of

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technology development, of the security environment and implicitly of military actions and of the battlefield.

We are, first of all, witnessing the conflict in Ukraine, the intensity of which most of us felt, at least inasmuch as it could be grasped by observers and by the representatives of the mass media who were sent there, a conflict the solution of which is not easy to predict. The sure thing about this military action of Russia is that it has proven once more that the manner of approaching and of unfolding military conflicts is everchanging. Even though the universal principles of succeeding, such as tactical surprise, action concealment, misleading the enemy etc. remain unchanged, the means or methods of applying such principles do change.

The point of focus is Romania's current status based on its quality of member of the two European main international organizations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), a quality that may compel us anytime to make firm commitments to participate in operations undertaken by such organizations.

Given the probability for the Romanian Armed Forces to become involved in future military actions which rely mainly on the contribution of the Land Forces, we believe that it is of the utmost importance to make unrelenting efforts, on every level, with the purpose of updating the core content underlying military actions, the battle organizing and the training process, as decisive factors in attaining high readiness capacity.

The importance of this process for the Romanian Army is currently emphasized, as it joins both the efforts to re-organize the general structure and those aimed at attaining and of maintaining a high level of response capacity.

It is also undisputable that the changes and reforms of the Romanian military system are concurrent with the corresponding EU and especially NATO actions, as the member states have reasserted their determination to "reform the Alliance in order to improve its response to any possible threats and its ability to foresee future risks." [1] This is a premise that requires us to consider the options and the projects of such structures when we make future decisions for the Romanian Army.

The current complexity of the security environment confirms more than ever the assertion that "states can cope with (common) threats to their security by finding satisfactory solutions to the conflicts in which they are

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involved only by having the members of the organizations to which they belong (for Romania, UE and NATO) undertake concerted (diplomatic, political, economic and military) actions”[2]. History teaches us, in light of both the great wars and of the smaller regional conflicts, that states can achieve and consolidate their security for the future through common actions.

The main premise of our endeavour is the constant need for the Romanian Land Forces structures to be able to accomplish battle missions, especially within the national borders, in order to provide our own security, but also abroad, as part of multinational combined arms structures, in order to act upon their commitment regarding the collective security. This and the above reiterate the importance of putting together the necessary forces with as a diverse as possible range of capabilities, both concept and action wise, such as to allow their involvement both in warfighting and in stability and support operations.

Understanding this state of facts and knowing which of the Land Forces structures are more likely to be used in future operations, we advocate an in-depth study of the manner of using the mechanized brigade structures and their units in combat.

### **Evolution of the ”battlegroup” concept**

We believe that this concept should be subject to permanent study, if the battle organizing and mode of action of our forces are still viable for a real conflict situation characterized especially by complexity and asymmetry.

The knowledge and experience acquired by participating in international missions and in multinational exercices represents a strong database for research and development of the mode of action and of the battle organizing principles of the basic land forces structures. Similar action taken in this respect by the other allied armies is also a valuable source in this endeavour.

In our case, we analyse the evolution of the land forces maneuver structures over the past decade, both structure and actionwise, with the purpose of finding arguments and realities that may help shape the forces for the future according to the threats that they are to face. We are referring

mainly to battlegroups (engl. *Battlegroups - BGs*), maneuver formations assigned to a specific mission.

Even though we cannot plan a thorough transformation of the doctrine and of the tactical principles, we must emphasize that it is important for tactical commanders and staff officers to know and perform a more in-depth study of such issues. Choosing an organizing and action mode must follow a most comprehensive analysis of the confrontation environment and ensure task accomplishment in as positive circumstances as possible (within the timeframe assigned, saving strength and means, with as few losses as possible etc.).

As an example and starting point for researching this subject, we are pointing out the approach to battlegroups of the Great Britain and USA armies.

Among the Alliance armies we believe the aforementioned to be the representative ones, first of all because of their level of participation in the management of the present military conflicts and secondly because of the constant preoccupation of their dedicated structures for updating and developing the doctrine and especially the military art.

Of course, a great part of the elements developed in the theory and practices of the aforementioned armies constitutes a point of reference in the continuation of our study of the organization and action of the land forces tactical units in future military conflicts.

A first definition of the British doctrine describes a battlegroup/BG as „a combined arms group formed around the headquarters of a maneuver unit, the organization of which is based on the requirements for accomplishing the mission it is to be assigned”[3].

There is wide range of possibilities regarding battlegroup organization at brigade level; the number of such possibilities has become larger in the period following World War II and triggered the need for specific tactics, techniques and procedures to evolve. Moreover, it also became necessary to establish the doctrine and the tactical principles that the commanders and the headquarters of these structures needed.

The principle of using the combined arms and combined forces available underlies the doctrine of the British army and also that of the other allied armies, as most of them agree that acting concertedly instead of separately enhances efficiency.

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Thus, the British provide us with a second definition of the battlegroup/BG: the maneuver unit formed by regrouping maneuver, combat support and combat service support subunits. Perhaps these tactical structures may be deemed essentially identical to the already known ones, the battalions, but we should not ignore the aspect that differentiates the two, that is the regrouping of battlegroups applied to the mission that is to be assigned in the immediate future, intended for achieving operational readiness.

In the case of battalions, as we know them, their main activity is to maintain a constant level of training so as to ensure their involvement in the range of missions provided by the mission essential task list; to enhance the readiness for involvement in specific military actions, the efforts of commanders and of staffs are channelled towards training constantly in order to achieve abilities of integrating arms received as support under various degrees of subordination. [4.]

In the case of battlegroups however, things are different from this point of view, perhaps mainly because arms and specialities, whether manoeuvre, combat support or combat service support, are put under the same command from the beginning of the regrouping for the mission, thus accelerating the training and involvement efforts aimed at achieving the goals they set out to reach.

We must add that in both combat organization cases, the attributions and functions of the arms remain unchanged (i.e., armoured tanks and the infantry perform maneuvers, artillery and air support consolidate the maneuver and render it more efficient, engineering supports mobility and counter-mobility, air defence protects etc.).

The same is done in building the concept of operation, both the BG commander and the battalion commander strive to synchronize the combat power of the structure they are in charge of. The BG situation may be somewhat more complex given the variable number of subunits of different arms/specialities (infantry, tanks, mountain rangers), some of them stemming from other "parent" units, as compared to an organic battalion, within which it is a lot easier to synchronize three of four subunits of the same arm.

Even though each element of the BG has a different primary purpose, all commanders are always intent to achieve a synergy of the capabilities

acquired by regrouping and of the complementary means or methods, to the obvious purpose of defeating the enemy.

We appreciate the experience of the British Land Forces from at least two perspectives: the first is demonstrated by the efficiency of ensuring the British military presence in the period following World War II and until the present day, and the second is mirrored suggestively in the military bibliography underlying the process of training and development of the commanding and staff officers.[5.]

From the first perspective we looked into the combat organization and the modular training of the British Land Forces and came up with organizing BGs as manoeuvre groups consisting of subunits of different arms, regrouped around the headquarters of the fighting units[6.]. In our opinion, the requirements for BGs to start accomplishing missions shortly (operativeness, interoperability, coherence, ability to adapt, survivability and self-sufficiency etc.) are met from the start.

As far as command and control are concerned, BGs are under the command of a brigade; only in particular situations BGs can be transferred under the command of a higher echelon (division or joint task force) for accomplishing a specific mission.

Starting from the subordination levels that are known and provided for in the orders concerning the regrouping of structures within the BG, any BG commander may find the answers to the following questions helpful in clarifying the status of the forces under their command:

- can they use such forces in any operation, do they assign the missions?
- are they authorized to assign tasks within the BG mission?
- do they have the right to operate separations or re-subordinations within the structures received?
- which are (if any) the caveats regarding the use of subordinate structures?

An approach of the British literature to BG combat organization, which we can also find in the Romanian literature, rests on the "principle of the 4" [7.] and is based on the assertion that the fundamental role in achieving the capability of the BG lies not with the command nor with the gear, but with the creation of the BG through regrouping and organizing for the mission. Thus, based on estimates and on preliminary plans, the

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commander of the brigade (or of the echelon, as the case may be), shall resort to grouping into BGs according to missions/tasks, by attaching the subunits (companies, platoons) of the large unit and by assigning, after careful consideration, of those received from outside.

A BG that is organized for a specific mission will fundamentally nominate the elements that are responsible for obtaining the main effects as follows: [8.]

1. Covering force – Find/Fix;
2. Manoeuvre force – Strike;
3. Second echelon – Exploit;
4. Reserve – To deal with the unexpected.

By applying the knowledge of the British doctrine and that acquired by the Romanian structures by participating in the NATO and EU regional initiatives and wide scope multinational exercises, we get an outline of what a land forces BG usually includes: [9.]

- command posts – main, reserve and tactical;
- 3 - 5 manoeuvre subunits (infantry – mechanized, mountain rangers, paratroopers and of armoured);
  - research platoon, adequately endowed with specific armoured equipment, engineering or airborne;
  - fire support group consisting of the fire support cell, the battery commander and forward observers;
  - combat support subunit with mortars, antitank rockets, machine guns and assault pioneers;
  - air defence subunit;
  - tactical air control party;
  - chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear/CBRN defence squad/platoon;
  - engineering platoon/company (-);
  - logistics subunit (medical, transport, supplies, maintenance).

In order to succeed in applying the concept of operation, both BG commanders and their staff have to be very well-acquainted with the characteristics and capabilities of the subunits of the combat organization. We should also mention that the BG staff shall necessarily integrate into modules specialists in using the forces that make up the BG.

Thus, if the headquarters of the unit organizing the mission does not have any specialists who have the knowledge required to efficiently use the capabilities of the fighting or support structures of the BG, then it is necessary to expand it. Usually, specialists are brought in from the "parent" unit of the regrouped subunits or from similar structures, as the case may be.

Another aspect worth mentioning is collective training, a requirement for reaching the highest potential of the BG after regrouping. Collective training is important for taking the unit command to the highest level and for attaining the readiness status required by the entire structure.[10.] We are referring to the training that is planned immediately after the organization of the BG, with all the components, with the purpose of creating the synergy and of reaching the specified standards in adopting the tactics and the techniques that are necessary to accomplish the mission.

At the same time, the US Army has developed a new approach of the „organisational design” [11.] regarding the „brigade” as a large reference unit in involving forces in all types of operations. The references of the American bibliography indicate the introduction of the new types of brigades (*brigade combat teams – BCTs*), which, although smaller, have already proven to be more efficient in armed combat and in stability operations.

The new brigades provide an enhanced interoperability also with the other tactical elements of the combined and joint system used for most of the wide scope operations in which the American army involves its forces.

The mathematical aspect of such restructuring is mirrored in the expansion of the geographical covering area according to the asserted interests and in a deeper involvement in solving conflicts by military means. This is possible because the new BCTs are smaller but their number has increased. Another aspect of the organization of the BCTs envisaged the enhancement of their capabilities in the close land operation.

The three types of USA army brigades are: the Mechanized Brigade (*Heavy Brigade Combat Team - HBCT*), The Infantry Brigade (*Infantry Brigade Combat Team - IBCT*) and the Stryker Brigade (*Stryker Brigade Combat Team - SBCT*).[12.]

We wish to emphasize the first of the three, The Mechanized Brigade (*Heavy Brigade Combat Team - HBCT*), which can help defend the solution of organizing and of using BGs in the Romanian land forces.

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The structure of HBCTs includes manoeuvre battalions of combined arms, each of which includes tank and mechanized infantry subunits, can be made up of up to 4,000 military men and can act in a combined arms system from team level.

This type of brigade has in its organic structure units of the BG type, which are called combined arms battalions (*CABs*) and constitute the manoeuvre force. *CABs* are organized into a 2-2 formula each, that is into two tank companies and two infantry companies. Another essential aspect for each *CAB* is including an engineering company with three combat engineering platoons and a support platoon.

It is obvious that this combat organization supports the declared mission of *CABs* to seek the contact and to destroy/defeat the enemy in the entire current operation spectrum.

Another specific characteristic of HBCTs is the innovating organization of the logistic support battalion, which follows the modular pattern as well and greatly supports our effort to account for the means of providing logistic support for the organization of BGs in the Romanian Land Forces. This logistic support unit is made up of four logistic support companies, each assigned to support a battalion (two for the *CABs*, one for the artillery battalion and one for the reconnaissance battalion). The organic structure of this logistic battalion holds the maintenance, transport/supply, medical and support subunits as well, elements that add consistency to the capability of the brigades of taking uninterrupted action for up to 72 hours.

Looking at the determinations and tendencies that are specific of the two allied armies, we wish to identify solutions for similar approaches by the Romanian Land Forces. Giving due consideration to the acceleration of reforms and to the essential transformations required by the major changes that took place in the security environment of the Alliance borders as well, we infer the need for future tactical structures to be able to identify and annihilate the conventional and the unconventional enemy forces, using concentrated and high-precision strikes.

The forces assembled in the immediate future should be able to cause the enemy greater losses with fewer resources, given their greater possibilities to find and influence the enemy's center of gravity. It is decisive that such structures have the capabilities required to pursue the enemy and to hinder any strength-restoring activities. Both the brigades and

the battalions or the BGs they hold should be able to identify the opportunities to achieve that.

Military leaders permanently adapt tactics to the characteristics of each conflict: the nature and value of the adversary, the presence of civilians on the battlefield, the desired final state and the effects achieved within the joint and allied context. The model of the last military conflict in the proximity of our country, the one in Ukraine, engenders new perspectives for approaching the state and alliance security. A series of tactics and procedures, well-known but seemingly left unused on handbook pages, were applied again, although combined with a new series, especially conceived for the area or country involved.

The analysis of the organization of the rebel forces in the East of Ukraine emphasized first of all the "combined arms" aspect; creating their pre-planned design was undoubtedly possible due to the contribution of the experience of the Russian forces. Thus, we noticed apparently non-homogenous groups, endowed with various categories of armament and armoured technique, which, through initiative, precise strikes and a sustained combat pace, have managed to take control over cities and over entire regions of the Ukrainian territory.

The success obtained by these groups in a very short timespan is suggestive of the fact that also the Eastern army, that was behind these military achievements, has developed and possesses a series of principles of combat organization that are in accordance with the envisaged mission. Moreover, such principles are accompanied by a wide range of tactics that were developed both based on the experiences of the conflicts of the ex-Soviet space and on the informative and innovative capabilities required to meet at least two requirements that are necessary to achieve success: surprising the enemy and adapting the existing plans to the real situation in the operation theatres.

In this respect, we have all witnessed the discovery of „hiding places and even armament and ammunition stocks, where they found portable air defence systems, antitank armament and mines in Slovyansk, Kramatorsk and other locations. Moreover, even ammunition elements of multiple Smerch rocket launchers were discovered in the Lysychansk” area.[13.]

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Also, the Russian forces have been accused of running a campaign of destabilization of the areas controlled by the Ukrainian government by not only prepositioning armament stocks in strategic places but also by infiltrating undercover agents in the same places. Thus, „the unseen or unofficial side of the military conflict can be felt constantly in Ukraine, where the materials, personnel and support coming from Russia are being provided to the conflict areas, even though the Minsk agreement has stipulated the withdrawal of the armament. Harassing attacks against the Ukrainian positions continued in the period following the agreement, with a frequency of 30 attacks every day.”[14.]

The development of the command and control systems, of the specific sensors and of the weapon precision has helped greatly enhance the efficiency of the new modular fighting structures. General Peter J. Schoomaker, chief of staff of the land component of the American army, said that „war is equally a physical reality and a state of mind; it is unfair, unsafe and ambiguous. In times of war, both the way of thinking and the way of acting vary. The well-trained forces of an army become more adaptable, more flexible and they must anticipate combat as a last reality-check. These forces must equally win war and peace.”[15.]

### **Conclusions**

We can speak of the organization and involvement in combat of BGs at the level of the maneuver brigades of the Romanian Land Forces in the context of their involvement both in article 5 and non-article 5 missions, either in the national territory or abroad.

An experience of modular participation of the Romanian Land Forces, under the form of various structures, in the previous missions in operation theatres, employed to a great extent the battlegroup formula, but in this case the term *maneuvre battalions* was preferred.

This manner of using in combat brigade forces and the forces that support brigades ensures „efficiency in task and mission accomplishment, which means maneuver promptness and accuracy, saving forces and means, cutting losses”[16.] and even taking on various attributions/tasks during combat.

We may consider this desideratum still under way, as during the past few years there has been significant progress in the practice of tactical

exercises, which unbiasedly prompts the development of doctrine provisions; we should nevertheless add that achieving such desideratum must be considered only a basis for future research. We are referring to the recent multinational exercises performed both in Romania - MĂLINA 14, DANUBE EXPRESS 14, WIND SPRING 15 and SARMIS 15 - and on the territories of other allied states - COMBINED RESOLVE 14, COMBINED RESOLVE 15 and SABER JUNCTION 15, during which the participating Romanian units acted to a great extent in the combined arms BG format, with both national and multinational composition.

Another aspect worth mentioning is the need for a constant development of the capabilities of the combined arms BGs of the land forces to act both in combined arms and JOINT operations, together with structures belonging to the other categories of forces such Air or Naval Forces, furthermore in cooperation with other structures having convergent roles in the accomplishment of missions (other structures having attributions in the field of security, governmental or non-governmental organizations).

In this respect, we have also taken into consideration the point of view according to which „a realistic analysis performed by our military specialists, while considering any and all national defence war circumstances and conditions, yielded the opinion that defeating and chasing away any aggressor is done preponderantly through land military actions, which may be preceded by or concurrent with, either simultaneously or consecutively, actions of the air force and of the air defence and, as the case may be, of the military marine incorporated into air-land and naval operations or into independent operations.[17.]

The usefulness of acquiring the principles regarding the organization and involvement of battlegroups in combat will be undoubtedly proven through the participation of such structures or of elements of such structures of the Romanian Land Forces in multinational battlegroups and in creating an interim fast response force, approved by the ministers of foreign affairs of the NATO member states in the meeting that took place in Brussels on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014.

We should add that the Readiness Action Plan (*RAP*) was announced in the NATO Summit that took place in Wales on September 4-5, 2014 and that it requires the set-up of a very-high-readiness or spearhead joint task force, consisting of battalion-level structures the number of which has

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already been established and that will be ready for action by the end of 2016.

At the same time, there was a notification of the decision of the aforementioned ministers to expedite the calendar of achievement of the reaction readiness, given the increased aggressiveness of Russia's air, sea and land tactical actions along the NATO border after the Summit in Wales. A first measure in this respect is the one taken within the NATO response force (NRF) in 2015, by which the three rotating forces, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway have agreed to extract the fast reaction land elements from the NRF in order to create a small brigade of 3,000-4,000 de military men. This force was already created during the first months of the current year and is able to dislocate in a few days. Regarding these efforts, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg declared in the meeting in Brussels, on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014, that: „there is a lot to do between now and then. We don't have everything ready, but at least what we will see in 2015 is the force established as test stand for a greater spearhead in 2016”. [18.]



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