

## MILITARY'S MENTAL ARMAMENTRIUM IN NATIONAL AND ALLIANCE DEFENSE

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**Abstract:** Romania is increasing its national and alliance defense capabilities. This is a key element of the "turning point" proclaimed by the Romanian Minister of Defense Angel Tilvar in response to Russia's war against Ukraine: "We are interested in the Romanian Army having the best capabilities that allow exercising its duties and carry-out the entrusted duties" (Tudor, 2023). The most recent resolutions in NATO and the EU point in the same direction: a free Europe should become more defensive. This aspect not only requires more financial resources, material and personnel, but also the appropriate mentality in politics, society and armed forces. As war mentality has no longer been the focus of the Army since the second world war ceased, this calls for rethink of the Romanian armed forces. It is important to internalize a strategic defense mindset so that troops can effectively fulfill their mission to protect democracy and freedom.

**Keywords:** mindset; capabilities, Romania; army; troops

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Mindset: the hardest to teach and understand. It calls for effort and self-control. It needs to be accepted by the person and integrated into daily life. It is really challenging to teach someone to have a proper mindset. Is it even possible to do such a thing? Finding a solid foundation is the first component of a right attitude. The second component is to consistently practice the right form. A third component is applicability. Everything lays in its foundations.

### 2. WAR, MILITANCY AND COMBAT READINESS

Ukraine's defensive struggle against Russia's attack is bringing a new world of thought back to Romania: Romanian society had grown weary of terms and concepts such as "war," "militancy" and "combat readiness"; they were considered antiquated and outdated. In the self-image of soldiers in the army, this world of thought has a special emotional presence: in their oath of service, they have pledged to serve Romania faithfully and to bravely defend the law and the freedom of the Romanian people.

Romania is currently drawing conclusions for its own defense and that of its allies. It became clear early on that, in addition to financial and material

efforts, a mental tour de force is also required in order to adapt to the world as it has presented itself since the Russian invasion of Ukraine - collectively, institutionally and individually. Foreign Minister Bogdan Aurescu also advocated such a change in thinking when he announced back in 2015 that a national security strategy would be drawn up and spoke of the ability to defend oneself in the alliance.

Romania is the external border of the EU and NATO and we have all the capacity to defend the community of values of which we are part.(...) In view of the major risks in our neighborhood, in the east and in the south of the EU, Romania believes that it is useful to develop a new EU security strategy, because the current strategy, no longer corresponds to the evolving security situation around the EU. (Aurescu, 2023)

Romania's President Klaus Iohannis made a similar statement while presenting the new National Defense Strategy for the period 2020-2024, adopted by the Supreme National Defense Council (CSAT) on May 27, 2020: "Romania is a state that must defend its citizens wherever they are, a state that ensures their security, respects their rights, and puts public institutions at their service." Furthermore, according to the President, the National Security Strategy for the next four years implies a new approach and proposes a management of national security issues with a focus on integrated

management of risks, threats and vulnerabilities. It is an approach driven by the global paradigm shift and takes into account developments in the region, deteriorating relations between NATO and the Russian Federation, the proliferation of terrorism, hybrid and cyber threats and other types of challenges. Also, as a novelty, the Strategy refers to a multi-dimensional concept of security, based on the relationship between security - prosperity - rule of law - democracy - identity, the balance between the state and the individual as beneficiaries of national security (*Romania Insider*, 2020).

It gives a sense of a change in thinking - at all levels in the defense strategy, coupled with confidence and a willingness to take risks.

The future development of NATO, in particular the enlargement of the Alliance, will have an important influence on regional stability in the Balkans and in particular on the whole of south-eastern Europe (Iohannis, *apud* DIGI24, 2020.)

### **3. FOREIGN MISSIONS: INTERNATIONAL CRISIS MANAGEMENT**

The 2020-2024 National Defense Strategy (SNap, 2020) already reaffirmed national and alliance defense as a central task of the army and placed it on an equal footing with foreign missions in the context of international crisis management. However, the majority of today's army soldiers have been socialized in foreign deployments (CSSAA, 2002; MAE, 2023), for example in Afghanistan, in Mali, in the Balkans or in the Horn of Africa. In contrast, deployments to NATO's eastern flank, such as enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Lithuania since 2015, have not been given high priority in the force's informal 'deployment ranking' so far. Although the presence of the army represents a real contribution to the defense of their homeland for the Eastern European allies, the mission participation was mostly perceived by Romania as having little prestige. At the same time, the threat situation existing on the ground and arising in particular in the cyber and information space was mostly ignored.

While many consider Mali and Afghanistan to be combat missions, the mission in Lithuania sometimes has the reputation of being a training exercise. However, this perception is deceptive. It runs the risk of underestimating the suffering, deprivation, and hardship to be expected in an emergency, and of making the mental as well as manual skills required for the job seem of little relevance. However, the picture of war revealed in Ukraine shows a reality that the army's combat experience in Afghanistan -

irrespective of the personal performance of the soldiers - does not come close to.

Overall, the military lessons learned from foreign deployments can only be transferred to the war picture of the army to a limited extent. Especially in past deployments, the ability to use military force often took a back seat to a parallel range of tasks to be accomplished. Soldiers of the army protect, fight, mediate, and help. Accordingly, the structure, equipment, and training of the Romanian armed forces in the past were oriented toward stabilization missions - often at the expense of the capability for army. Also, even in the most formative foreign deployment, the well-secured field camps provided relative security and a variety of amenities. These included regular meals, care facilities, and opportunities to contact home, while only up to a quarter of deployed army forces regularly left the protective camp walls. For most soldiers, their participation in the mission could be planned precisely, with a deployment duration of four to six months in most cases. In addition, despite the army's influence on foreign deployments, the stories of deployment that still resonate today, often shaped by the Army, are not collective troop experiences that would be equally effective or tradition-building for all parts of the armed forces.

### **4. THE MENTAL ARMAMENTRIUM FOR THE TROOPS**

In contrast to the experience of foreign deployments, almost all soldiers in an emergency situation would have to expect to live in spartan conditions in the field for an unforeseeable period of time. Even behind the front lines, they would be exposed to a constant threat and terror of war. At the same time, they would be under the permanent strain of not having a secure knowledge of the situation of their dependents. Many of these factors would already come into play in a tension scenario without the outbreak of hostilities. A change in mindset is therefore indispensable if soldiers from all branches and organizational areas of the army are to be mentally equipped to defend themselves against an opponent on a military par. An important first step in this direction is to remember a constitutive principle of the armed forces: without exception, all soldiers must always be capable and willing to fight and to endure extraordinary hardships. This applies irrespective of the specific tasks involved and is a standard that has retained its validity in foreign deployments as well.

The ability to meet this essential basic requirement requires not only appropriate training

and equipment, but also the development and permanent anchoring of a robust and resilient mentality. The mental readiness to fight and the will to serve bravely are mental parameters that contribute significantly to the operational capability of an army. This is currently impressively demonstrated in the defense struggle of the Ukrainian armed forces.

The creation of such a mindset in the army requires continuous commitment at several levels. On the part of the political and military leadership, clarity in communication is needed in order to convey a type of democratic-values-based soldier in the role of determined defender. In contrast, the image of an "enterprise army" has emerged in recent decades; there has been no concern with the potential fighting, killing and dying of one's fellow human beings in uniform. However, it is precisely these central aspects of being a soldier that should be honestly brought into the public eye and into the center of the soldier's self-image. In the course of this, a „soldier employee" who is set up in his own comfortable self-image would also be reminded of the possible consequences of his choice of profession.

Even apart from existential questions of life and death, such a mindset, in drastic contradiction to the everyday service in the Romanian armed forces, which is perceived as bureaucratized and often overregulated, requires a very personal cold start ability from all military personnel - in case of doubt, in spite of all private challenges. This requires, on the one hand, appropriate preparations, support services and a clear information and expectations policy. On the other hand, the soldiers must also be professionally and mentally prepared for this.

The focus must be on imparting the necessary mindset in the social and comradely close environment of the troops. This responsibility lies in particular with military leaders at all levels. The means of choice here should be: realistic training and a stringent imparting of values for all military personnel without exception. The point is to defend freedom, democracy and human rights - in other words, to understand that these values require defense and are worthy of it. It also fits in with this that the political and military leadership deliberately uses images of Romanian soldiers ready for battle.

## **5. ACTIVELY SHAPED TROOP CULTURE AS A FOUNDATION**

A soldier image aligned with army image could give the force the opportunity to shake off the Afghan desert dust of a mission often perceived as a failure in the missions in support of the Eastern European allies. In the long run and in parallel to other foreign

missions, it is precisely the mission-related obligations for alliance defense that qualify as potential sources of tradition, meaning and motivation for the self-image and external image of Romanian soldiers. Army members of all ranks should therefore upgrade the recognized NATO missions in Eastern Europe in their respective spheres of influence by recognizing them as proper missions. In this way, they could be incorporated into the various troop cultures and passed on there in a tradition-building manner. The multinational NATO battlegroup in Lithuania is already showing the beginnings of this, demonstrating a clear focus on alliance defense, credible deterrence and multinationality in practice. The fact that currently the Romanian contingent has already started its six-month rotation in Lithuania (NATO, 2023) may favor such a tradition. The same applies, for example, to the regular assumption of airspace protection in the Baltic states by the air force and the increased presence of the navy in the Baltic Sea.

If these opportunities for the formation of the Romania's army own tradition are not seized, this can lead to a military cultural vacuum of meaning and tradition. During the Afghanistan mission, such a vacuum was often lamented and filled by the soldiers themselves with an often wild and subcultural mission culture (Fritz, 2017).

This should definitely be prevented in the current missions enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) and enhanced Vigilance Activities (eVA). This is especially true since the points of contact to the darkest chapters of Romanian military history, which individual soldiers already made in Afghanistan, have moved closer in regional and historical terms with the areas of operations in Eastern Europe. Particularly in the current situation, the Romanian armed forces cannot afford to fill the headlines with scandals about anti-constitutional attitudes and degrading lapses, and thus provide fodder for the enemy's disinformation campaigns. In the army mindset, this is contrasted by the image of soldiers as vigilant defenders of the Basic Law, freedom and democracy.

A. Since foreign missions in the context of crisis management are likely to remain an important mission of the Romanian army, a further challenge is not to lose sight of the complexity of soldiering in international stabilization missions. Likewise, the military culture's focus on national and alliance defense must not lead to an apolitical, purely functional self-image as combatants among army members. In contrast, the narrative of the closed lines of defense of a Europe bound by values offers itself - a narrative that is actively supported by the multinational and lived operational comradeship in

the current missions on the eastern borders of the alliance. Moreover, the idea of defending a free and democratic Europe is expected to have a higher motivational force among younger, more pan-European generations..

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Mindset: the hardest to teach and understand. It calls for effort and self-control. It needs to be accepted by the person and integrated into daily life. It is really challenging to teach someone to have a proper mindset. Is it even possible to do such a thing? Finding a solid foundation is the first component of a right attitude. The second component is to consistently practice the right form. A third component is applicability. Everything lays in its foundations. Consequently, the conclusion must be: With the beginning of the "turn of the times," the troop cultures necessary for the soldierly mindset as well as an operational culture of national and alliance defense that will emerge in the foreseeable future must also be actively shaped from the outset. In a positive sense, specific and, to a certain extent, distinct cultures and customs of individual branches of the armed forces can be conceded. Common elements of the soldier's self-image must be conviction, robustness and readiness for multinational cooperation in order to contribute to the operational and combat value of the entire Romanian army.

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