

## PSYCHOLOGICAL PROTECTION OF TROOPS WITHIN THE NEW CONTEXT OF THE MILITARY NORMATIVITY

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**Abstract:** *This study deals with the issue of psychological protection, in a comparative way, in terms of operational doctrines of forces categories, fighting manuals and doctrines of force protection, highlighting a number of discrepancies and inconsistencies in the analyzed subject treatment, and concluding, by useful proposals to structures responsible in this field.*

**Keywords:** *psychological warfare, psychological protection, counteracting psychological influences, mental stability, moral*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, we speak more and more about a new kind of war, characterized by asymmetries in the areas of objectives, methods and means used by the opponents, about the hybrid warfare, a compilation of classic and unconventional at all levels of military action. Moreover, the vast majority of armed conflicts in the past 50 years revealed a mixture of conventional and unconventional symmetry and asymmetry, the end of confrontations usually resulting in producing significant changes politically, economically and socially, but also in a record of deaths and awfully injured people, physically and mentally.

On the other hand, the contemporary military conflict, the modern military action involves engaging in specific confrontations of a new type of soldier, intelligent, physically and mentally strong, balanced, mobile, flexible in thinking, able to make decisions in a short time and in extreme situations, good manager of cyberspace, of database and of modern systems of decisions expertise, able to act in isolation, under any circumstances, in a hostile, disproportionate and hybrid environment.

The Romanian military specialists in the areas of doctrine and instruction consider that, in order to be fit to combat and to test the ability to combat, the individual / soldier must have at least three qualities, as the result of carrying out the educational process:

- ***the technical and tactical training***, as the consequence of knowledge specific skills training and development and of the use of the provided equipment, in accordance with technical and tactical military operation norms, established by the military normatively;

- ***physical training***, defined as education and physical and sports culture, based on a biological, anatomical and physiological structure, intended to provide the psychophysical training support to the fighter, necessary to his development and improving his general motor and fighting capacity;

- ***psychological training***, based on a clinically normal mental, enabling the individual, from the psycho-moral and behavioral perspective, to act effectively in the tactical field; it is expressed self-confidence, confidence in commanders, in the armament and combat equipment, in the degree of the sub-unit cohesion, by the actional motivation level and by his personal satisfaction.

The three dimensions, related synergistically, confer, par excellence to the military, the fighter status. Fluctuations concerning the power and the prevailing trend of one or of another within the synergistic model, will be determined by the reality of the battlefield, but it is important that the result of their dynamics to provide to the fighter, the psycho-behavioral and actional harmony, necessary to perform his mission.

A closer research, based on experience gained in studying the phenomenon "war", demonstrates with the power of evidence, that the psychophysical dyad still is the most vulnerable and it presents amplitude oscillations of a high dramatism. Exactly this aspect determines with necessity the general military training orientation, in a significant part, in shaping and developing specific psychological and physical characteristics, allowing the military to face the current danger on the battlefield.

Studying the phenomenon of "war", Clausewitz noted that there were "*four components that constitute the atmosphere in which the war moves - danger, physical exertion, uncertainty and chance*" [1], and the General Marshall in his book entitled suggestively "Soldiers in fire" noted that "*We do not want to admit that war means essentially dead, although it is the simplest possible truth.*"

## 2. PREMISES OF THE MILITARY PSYCHOLOGICAL PROTECTION

Considering some "surprise" aspects occurred in recent wars (Arab-Israeli wars, in the Malvinas / Falkland wars, the conflicts in the Persian Gulf, armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, the war in Afghanistan, Syria, etc.) as well as the polymorphic manifestations of the international terrorism, the military experts in psycho-sociological orientation approached more carefully the deconstructed factors of the individuals psycho-moral stability, taking into account, however, a number of findings such as:

The first is that "front line" has faded, that "*the confrontation environment has grown dramatically*" [2], that the war has been "widespread" and has taken in its mechanism not only armies but also civilians of the countries in conflict.

The second finding points out the technology used, the sophisticated weaponry, the ammunition destructive power, the accuracy of shots based on laser and infrared equipment, the graphite and unfortified uranium bombs etc., which have a non-discriminatory effect upon the combatants and non-combatants or civilians.

A final finding presented could be that in perspective, a new war is prefigured, generically called the "special war". This would include all forms of non-classical, non-typical (atypical) training and warfare in which, without considering this presentation as an exhaustive one, there can be listed the following: the psychological warfare, the information warfare, the holotropic war etc. Their general feature is the "humanism", based on "non-lethal" (soft-kill) component, which would reduce the aberrant "consumption" of people, equipment, weapons and materials, while facilitating political and military objectives through "*economical*" logistics [3].

These assessments have raised new problems to the military specialists, who most of them, advocate for the implementation of a national psychological preparation of the population against any aggression, but without falling into the trap of so-called "nationalist hysteria". A negative presentation of our future war could give us a terrific image, presented not without some truth, only by the science-fiction literature. Thus, after the first days of battle, it may be noticed that the military would wander erratically, would be overwhelmed by the massive traffic jams, by destructions and fires on a large scale, would be dehumanized by the suffering and troubles that would partake;

few people would be able to withstand such an intense stress; physical casualties, but mainly mental casualties, especially where there are no specialized services for medical, psychological and social assistance, can reach very high levels.

Such a possible hallucinating array has generated the idea of establishing, since peacetime, a troops' psychological preparation system for combat, starting from the principle that the army is a tool designed exclusively to wage war and preparing fighters must be made during those periods and under those conditions when the "war" takes place by other means, less violent physically and / or more subtle.

The military's psycho-moral preparation must take into account that fighting will be in a permanent dynamic, continuous and of a high-intensity, with high-index mobility and fluidity that will involve massive destructions and a very high mortality rate. In the above-mentioned context, the overestimation by the new "hi-tech", which are growing rapidly and asymptotically toward the "artificial intelligence" expected by cybernetics, genetic engineering and cognitive psychology adds to the existential anguish new barriers that the man must overcome in his perpetual adaptation. Trying to approach the concept of psychological protection, it is necessary to start from the motives (premises) that require protection, from the causes circumscribed within the psychological aggression area, with the two elements of its functional components:

- **stimuli** (physical and mental stress, stress factors, operational stress), specific to the action environment / confrontation;
- **messages** prepared and submitted by the opponent, usually through the media and other dissemination channels (internet, social networking, correspondence).

### 3. MILITARY'S PSYCHOLOGICAL PROTECTION UNDER THE NEW REGULATORY CONTEXT

The transition to the new century and millennium has brought profound changes in the Romanian Army, not only in terms of achieving the political-military objectives of Romania but also with regard to developing doctrines specific to the military system, changes required by the adhering process to NATO, as well as the further participation of Romanian military detachments to the actions of the Multinational Forces in the operation theaters.

This is the period that takes shape and the concept of psychological operations / actions (PSYOPS) gets increased amplitude, almost eclipsing it, in terms of their promotion, over the psychological protection, even if their field of expression should intersect in a very little manner.

Remaining in the same period and studying the three operational doctrines of the categories of force, we find that only two of them insert psychological protection among the types of actions insurance schemes and of forces protection, while the Operational Doctrine of the Army (FT-1) substitutes it by "*counteracting the effects of psychological actions of the enemy*". And, in order to apprehend how much commonality of thinking and, at the same time, how much diversity of approaches there are in this area, I will try to get your attention to a few details of the previously mentioned doctrines, conducted by responsible operations structures, within the period of 2004-2016.

The theorist specialists of the Navy argue that **psychological protection** is represented by a set of measures and actions of real complexity, which are organized and conducted in a unitary to "*develop mental strength and stability of troops; maintaining a high moral thereof; identifying and countering psychological pressures that affect combat capability; recovering and restoring forces; reducing potential psychological , weakening the willingness to combat and the enemy's capacity of resistance* . "[4].

In other words, it is the goal of the troops' protection process, psychically speaking, aiming the own military, fighters / combatants, a process which should be implemented within the military structures according to the commander's *concept*, in accordance with that one specified by the upper echelon, with support of the staff of the unit, under psychological and medical *counseling, regardless* of the period in which action is taken or the military activities.

To achieve timely and efficiently the psychological protection of the military, the Navy recommended consistently, both in 2006 and also in 2012, a rather wide range of actionable approaches to be taken by commanders and responsible structures in the domain, among which we can mention :

- increasing the psycho-physical strength and the process and mental products stability of fighters, in order to mitigate and defeat the adverse effects of stressful factors;
- developing and building confidence of the troops in their own ability to fight successfully against any opponent;
- developing the military capacity to overcome various forms of physical and mental stress, to make correct decisions under pressure, to adapt to the military actions that follow;
- training and developing to the combatants their capability to apprehend and to resist to the hostile psychological and propaganda influence, deliberately carried out, and also to unmask them appropriately and counteract them;
- developing to the commanders the skills to lead men in battle, to strengthen their morale and to achieve combat teams cohesion.

The military Air Force theorists have approached the *psychological protection* both in 2007 and later in 2016 in the context of the reaction against the enemy's non-lethal actions, quite briefly, in a phrase where there are no essential deviations from the definition addressed by the Navy. They stated that it "*represents a set of measures and actions undertaken within the Air Force into a unified concept, for the development of the troops' moral resistance and stability, maintaining their high morale, identifying and counteracting the mental pressure that affect the combat capability, the forces' recovery and restoration, reducing the psychological potential, weakening their will to struggle and the enemy's capacity of resilience*".[5]

Within the same categories of forces, the concept is approached broader, fairer and more realistic way, in textbooks for use in the combat of various military structures, particularly fire / combative structures, where the psychological protection is defined as a set of measures and actions "*carried out in order to develop the troops' psychological resistance, to bring up their moral, to identify and to counteract the psychological pressures and to eliminate the stress effects*" [6].

The psychological protection is governed directly by the commandant of the big unit / units with the psychologist's support and general staff's support, usually during the warfare preparations, between the enemy's attacks and it insures: consolidation of the fighters' trust in their own forces, in commanders and in the fighting technique; learning and obeying the military values and norms in order to maintain vigilance, the spirit of order and discipline; preventing and combating state of fear, insecurity and panic; development of military strength and mental stability to cope with the modern battle space and with the psychological influence from the opponent.

Analyzing the concept of "**Counteraction of the enemy's psychological action effects**" approached by the Operational Doctrine of the Army (FT-1) – edition of 2004, compared to the *psychological protection* previously described, we can make more precisions and speculations, at the same.

Starting from the definition given to the **counteracting** as representing "*the entire set of measures and activities meant to maintain or alter perceptions, attitudes and behaviors of individuals or human groups in order to achieve the intended goals as well as to prevent the use of this kind of actions by the enemy. This involves measures, techniques and procedures initiated and applied in a unitary conception to protect their own forces and population in the area of the operation against hostile messages or to reduce their impact*, it can be noticed some conceptual slippage toward the problem of psychological actions / operations, but also their expansion to multiple recipients, such as "population in the areas of the military actions".

The same aspect is also maintained when formulating the missions of counteracting the effects of enemy's psychological operations, respectively "*maintaining the stability of opinions, feelings, attitudes and behavior of the military personnel and civilians, so that the accomplishment of the objectives should not be affected; the rejection and neutralization of enemy's propaganda and maintaining a predominantly offensive-preventive character of the own counter-propaganda activity; strengthening the morale, the confidence of the military personnel and the public opinion in the ability of our forces capability to defeat; undermining the favorable image, real or fictitious, promoted by the enemy's propaganda about their own potential*" [7].

The missions established are fulfilled by preparatory and preventive actions and counteractions and the process of counteraction the effects of the enemy's psychological actions is expected to be achieved through: mental training of staff; protection against the enemy's psychological actions influences; its psychological influence; to ensure psychological support to the stability and assistance operations.

Otherwise, these are part of the forms of achieving troops' psychological protection, and the wording "**counteract the opponent's psychological influence**" [8], identified in several specialty papers, appears to be the result of the conceptual mixing between **counteracting the effects of the enemy's psychological actions and the protection against the enemy's psychological actions influences**.

The creators / authors of the combat textbooks of various military structures within the Army Forces, published after 2012, provoked even more violent controversy in the thinking of those destined to achieve the actions insurance and the troops' protection, whereas even if they took the doctrine provisions concerning the definition, the purpose and the mission of the counteracting of the enemy's effects of psychological actions, they also supplement the theoretical-action approach with objectives of psychological protection of the military, namely: "*the development of psychical resistance of the military at the action of disturbing factors in struggle, strengthen their confidence in their own forces, in commanders and weaponry; preventing and fighting, among their own forces, against psycho-moral deterrence, states of fear... and panic; limitation and annihilation of the effects of influencing actions, taken by the enemy; psychological recovery and rebuilding troops' morale, affected psychically; reducing the psychological potential, undermining the will of struggle and resilience of the enemy*" [9].

In a closer context, studying the provisions of the Manual for Combat of the Mixed Artillery Regiment, the nebula becomes greater, on one hand as a result of considering "psychological operations" as a form of actions insurance and of troops' protection, not as a force multiplier in operation and, on the other hand, that they have the same goals and missions as counteracting the effects of enemy's psychological actions influence, stipulated in other use of forces manuals.

This type of inconsistency within the theoretical approaches extends also in treating the general area of operations insurance and force protection, especially after the emergence of the doctrinal provisions on "force protection", taken, nearly identically, from to regulations with the same topic of the American army. But, as always, we forget that we are not Americans and that we cannot compare the Romanian army to the US army.

And thus, in the draft of the Doctrine for operations of the Army, Chapter concerning the field that we mentioned above does not appear anymore and the concept of "force protection" is, in a great measure, an approach in a new vision regarding the operational efficiency issues, in order to achieve in an optimum way, the combat missions, taking into account the threats and risks generated by enemy's actions.

We also notice that, even if the psychological protection is not listed as embodiment of the force protection, within the fields and the fundamental elements of passive nature, we rediscover those proactive measures that are intended to identify the risks and to protect the military forces of all operational and psychological consequences resulting from the use of various types of weapons with high lethality, and within the recovery, those necessary to restore the essential operational capabilities which permit further task achievement.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

At the end, we consider that the psychological protection should constitute, for all forces, one of the forms of operations insurance and of troops' protection, whose definition shall be in conformity with the Operational Doctrines of the Air Force and the Navy, and the action measures for its achievement, taken into consideration by the commanders, shall be in conformity with the specificity of each category of forces/big units/units. At the same time, it should be considered as one of the embodiments of achieving the force protection, as a dimension / component of medical protection.

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