

THE PROCESS OF CONTINUOUS TRAINING OF MILITARY PERSONNEL IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Taking into consideration the implications of Romania’s accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, participation in conflicts and strategic missions alongside the Member States, the need to accelerate the process of adapting the forces to the new strategic, operational and tactical realities can be noticed. Considering the central role of the human component in the defense system, the concerns of the decision-makers nowadays focus on the strategic importance of the process of continuous training of military personnel. Thus, we examine in this work the evolution and relevance of the training process of military personnel, the challenges of the 21st century, trends in the field and future implications for military personnel, military education institutions and the army as an organization.

Key words: *continuous training; military personnel, challenges; implications; military education institutions.*

1. INTRODUCTION

At global level, countries are facing economic, political, social and health challenges, which are marked by the rapid changes in technology and information that characterize the evolution of the 21st century. Naturally, Romania’s accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and integration into the European Union were the starting point of the change process of our country, in order to adapt to the new global realities of the security environment

and to the policies of economic, social and political cohesion adopted at the level of the Community.

Keeping these aspects in mind, as the hybrid war is deeply influenced by the integration of the new technologies, such as drones, cyber means and artificial intelligence – changing the approach to the training of military personnel in the Romanian army is a necessity in the face of the emerging threats. Ultimately, this necessity is related to the fundamental objective of the training process: training the

personnel so that when declaring the state of war or engaging in military operations carried out jointly with strategic allies, the Romanian armed forces will meet their tactical, operational and strategic objectives.

In this respect, the first section of the paper examines the evolution of the training process of military personnel. The second and third sections outline some specific aspects of the continuous training of military personnel and the implications of new approaches to military training institutions and missions of the army as an organization. An analysis and a few thematic assumptions as regards the relevance of the specific challenges of the 21st century for the continuous training process are addressed in the conclusions.

2. BENCHMARKS ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONTINUOUS TRAINING PROCESS

Taking stock of the main benchmarks on the evolution of the continuous training process of military personnel is relevant to the topic of this paper due to the continuous concerns for the development of education institutions in line with the defining trends of force and becoming an army. In this respect, the military specialist Ovidiu Stănică claims that the training of military personnel has followed the changes and challenges of the present

and even of the future, which he later integrated into explanations and theories concerning its adaptation to the new requirements as regards the organization as a whole. (Stănică: 2017, p. 35)

The training process is currently oriented towards transformation, as it is open to influences from all backgrounds, from the national one to the European and Euro-Atlantic ones, thanks to the reforms it has undergone over time. In accordance with the evolution of Romanian education, the training of military personnel was initially based on acquiring the experience of generations, based on methods such as: imitation and observation in conjunction with the training of practical-applicative skills on individual and collective defense lines, the manufacture of weapons or the building of fortifications. In fact, between 1878 and 1914, the training process was provided by: training schools (Stoina and Racovița: 1997, p. 35), proper military schools (Atanasiu, et al. 1972, 1978, p. 16), schools of further training and the Superior School of War (Oprîta, Atanasiu and Atanasiu 1986, p. 25).

As of the interwar period, military education begins to be modernized in structural and functional terms, comprising educational establishments for each of the stages of training or further training of future military personnel – military high schools, military

schools for officers, special schools and schools for military masters and higher education institutions (Gheorghe: 2009, p.134).

In the following period, a series of normative acts that predominated the structure of education in special schools were adopted, among which the following ones are mentioned: the Law on the Army progresses (1924), the Regulation of this Law (elaborated in 1928) and the Law on determination of Army Personnel and Effectives (1932). According to the norms, the mission of schools of further training/special schools was to provide the officers with the knowledge and skills needed in order to perform the function of a company commander, by broadening the technical and tactical horizons. On this basis, in 1932, their names were changed into schools of application, and their graduates were able to get promoted to the next military grades, including to captain, without further studies. At the same time, the place in the class ranking when graduating from the special school would be permanent for the rest of the officer's career, and this had implications for the promotion to the next military grades.

During the communist regime, the paradigm of military personnel training was marked by the ideological reform based on the Soviet model. The rigorous training process was provided by the military

schools dedicated to active officers, by the Military Academy, where course attendance was compulsory, and by the military schools for reserve officers.

Following the fall of the communist regime, after 1991, the training of the personnel was characterized by the transition process in accordance with Romania's socio-economic and political evolution. This manifests itself in the process of equipping the army, in conjunction with the news in the fight and specialized regulations, with the lessons learned from the training of the troops, the commanders and the military education institutions. Moreover, in terms of education, the accession to NATO complained about the need for concern for continuous improvement of curricula, specialized subjects and their judicious correlation over the years of study.

Thus, the current continuous training process shall be completed with the training of the professionals in the context of military and social needs on the one hand and individual career choices on the other hand.

3. PECULIARITIES OF THE PROCESS OF COUNTINUOUS TRAINING OF MILITARY PERSONNEL

In Romania, the military training process is a strategic dimension in the management

of human resources in the armed forces, which influences the professionalization, performance and reputation of the defense system.

According to the personal understanding of the existing norms concerning the vocational training, this is an instructive and educational process focused on the principle of specialization. According to the United States Army doctrine, training is defined as „continuous training and innovatively applied exercises in order to acquire the knowledge, abilities and attitudes required to perform specific tasks” (Greer: 2018). In the Romanian Army, I believe that training is the process of seeking to change the behavior and attitudes of military personnel in such a way as to increase the opportunities to perform military tasks that are specific to the position they are in or they intend to take. Broadly speaking, the process associated with education also incubates the learning valences. Thus, learning is the systematic assimilation of knowledge and skills, i.e. the skills needed in order to optimally perform the duties of the position specific to the specialization. In a narrow sense, education refers to the expansion of overall knowledge, the ability to make decisions and respond appropriately to various challenges.

Generally, continuous training is two-pronged: individual and collective – the latter is designed to facilitate the integration of soldiers into advanced teams. Consequently, I

believe that the approach to training, from this dual perspective, incubates some defining peculiarities compared to the initial training. Firstly, the requirements for continuous training are determined by the results of organizational assessments which show gaps in training and education on the one hand, and by the geostrategic, informational etc. evolution of the international environment, which reflects the preparation needed in order to deal with changes in the architecture of war, on the other hand. Secondly, the achievement of the objectives of the continuous training process is related to the human, financial, material etc. resources made available to enable its implementation.

As such, continuous training involves the development of new skills by strenghtening and broadening the knowledge horizon, in conjunction with the expansion of the skills needed to fill high-complexity positions and to prepare for future training in order to meet the still-emerging needs of the armed forces.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONS OF CONTINUOUS MILITARY TRAINING

Undeniably, the defining aim of the continuous training process is to prepare the military to carry out missions of the armed forces at the lowest cost in terms of the

national resources involved. Thus, the analysis of the implications that are specific to the current operational environment becomes particularly relevant for the future approach to the training process in military education institutions. Starting from the idea that the army is the body sanctioned by state with the authority to use lethal force, exercised as such by military-identity personnel, then having the skills and expertise specific to the action in hostile environments is the starting point of carrying out the missions of the armed forces. (Woodward and Jenkins 2011). This paradigm is supported by other specialists as well, who promote the strategic importance of vocational training (Miller: 2013), against the background of the considerations that military personnel are the engine of military missions. (O'Hanlon, 2009).

As a result, developing professional skills and competences is significant to the achievement of individual and organizational objectives in the military field.

In this respect, exploring how military personnel need to train and professionalize is the subject of this section. According to the education expert Richard Paul, the key features of the future: "accelerating change and increasing complexity, must be met with changes in the curriculum design and instructions favoring critical thinking" (Reich: 1991). In the same vein, Wayne E. Whiteman, a career officer in the

US Army, anticipated the impact of the transformations on the methods of designing the training process, saying that it should focus on critical thinking and reasoning, to the detriment of memorizing facts and events through courses, at the end of which diplomas are acquired (Whiteman: 1998).

Indeed, this trend already manifests itself in the architecture of the military education system, in order to meet the technological, informational and virtual reality challenges of the future operational environment. What is the impact of such challenges on the army as an organization? How will the continuous training process and military education institutions be influenced? I will continue to address these operational questions below.

In the context of current and future transformations and challenges, the army continues to be characterized by its bureaucratic profile, uniformity, discipline and leadership based on the hierarchy of grades and functions. However, achieving a balance between these traditional features and the ability to adapt to changes in the operational environment will be essential to meet the challenges of the age of technology and information. For example, the current trends regarding the joint training in an allied context reflect the strategic importance of multinational exercises for the training of individual skills and

cooperation and interoperability capabilities of the forces in the planning, organization and deployment of current military operations. Likewise, increasing the weight of operations under the North Atlantic alliance and missions under the auspices of the United Nations calls for a strategic revolution both in terms of structure and doctrine and in the way military personnel are trained. In particular, I believe that the professional training of military leaders will be marked by changes such as: joint or mixed training, specialized education and the development of linguistic and cultural communication skills. Moreover, with the emergence of new capabilities facilitated by technological developments, the integration of digital tools into the training process is a need already recognized at national level. As an example, I will mention the importance of war games in military training. They have evolved into multi-processor systems that use software-specific tools, thus facilitating shaping and simulating military operations in various scenarios (Smith 2009).

These new requirements reveal a new architecture of the military training dimension, with obvious implications for education institutions, which must develop and implement feasible strategies so as to guarantee flexible graduates that are ready to respond adequately to the requirements of their future functions.

In this regard, I believe that transversal skills acquired from the study of non-conventional sciences are also gaining importance (Curran: 2017), with an impact on the formation of efficient teams where the ability to work together develops with the individual's potential to meet the challenges of the current spaces of action. In addition, expert studies conclude that particular attention needs to be paid to the training of the cognitive skills of military personnel, on which self-effectiveness and performance at work depend (Adler, et al. 2015). Thus, providing military personnel with professional and psychological support is particularly important for their success in carrying out their new job-specific tasks effectively.

Clearly, in order to achieve these objectives, both military training institutions and their students face major challenges. Regarding military training institutions, I will mention the following major challenges: building the necessary infrastructure, maintaining permanent contact with new e-learning technologies, training the teaching staff to be in line with the technology, adjusting the curriculum, changing the teaching and learning policies, methods and techniques, motivating students and engaging them in academia. For students, changing the traditional way in which the training process is carried out entails a number of

implications, such as: familiarity with the computerized tools that are specific to education, lack of face-to-face socialization, self-confidence, development of the role of an autodidact and ownership of planning and carrying out activities planned to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

Overall, knowing the students' profile and their "belonging" needs, anticipating the difficulties that they need to overcome and facilitating their access to individual conversations with their trainers and mentors are aspects that influence the result of the process of continuous training of military personnel (Jane Canty, et al., 2020).

From this point of view, I believe that continuous training should not be just the attribute of the military institutions concerned, but a current responsibility in the workplace of both the individual concerned and his hierarchical superior as a mentor. In the reflexive-theoretical plan, the individual concern of being aware of the news in their own field of activity and mentoring facilitate the valorization of knowledge acquisition, thanks to the spores of the abilities of understanding the changes. In the practical-applicative plan, self-teaching and mentoring activities help military personnel to develop their skills, behaviors and professional expertise faster, as benchmarks of military identity,

thus helping to optimize career progression in line with individual aspirations and organizational needs. Thus, this "bottom-up" approach is significant for continuous training which is supported by conversations, feedback and recognition, is an effective way of developing military personnel.

Therefore, the aim to identify the challenges of the 21st century on the process of continuous training and the methods of coping with them, is to create an optimal framework for: characterizing the training process of the army as an organization; the present and future design of training institutions so as to provide training at a level appropriate to the skills required in order to conduct military actions in the context of ongoing changes in the security environment and complex operational requirements for professional development and career progression of staff.

As such, the complex training requirements for military personnel are highlighted by the importance of the correlation between successive changes in the military and the overall continuous training process.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Considering the importance of the changes and challenges specific to the 21st century, I argue that they will be of particular relevance to the training process of soldiers in

general and future leaders for the army in particular. On the one hand, these challenges are the quintessence of the scientific revolution which includes, among other things, concerns regarding technological development, information management, environmental protection etc. Digital tools allow a new approach to the training process. For example, instead of learning from books and manuals about military operations, military leaders have the opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills by effectively performing the tasks specific to their functions, using their own reasoning generated by critical thinking, not with the help of memorized information.

On the other hand, the army of the 21st century must deal with socio-economic and political issues, with its exponential role of protecting relations of national interest, just as natural resources and the territory have been defended in the past. In this respect, I believe that these new roles will make the traditional elements of the armed power more relevant, with a considerable impact on the training of military leaders and other staff. Leaders' awareness of how the scientific revolution and their social, economic and political evolution influence their methods of preparing themselves, will be the key to a successful career and an army capable of responding to the threats of the international environment.

Similarly, the changes and challenges we have discussed have a fundamental influence on the Romanian army and on the approach to the training process of the leaders and other staff that it entails. The Romanian military education is currently an integral part of the national education system. In particular, it develops instruments compatible with the education systems in the armies of NATO States and its mission is to train, specialize and improve military personnel, as well as other internal or external beneficiaries.

Regarding the continuous training of military personnel, we can say that it seeks to train and continuously prepare commanders, staff officers and military and civilian experts, command officers, military leaders, experts in the organizational management and military actions in times of peace and war, sub-officers and military craftsmen specialized in defense and national security sub-areas, engineering officers, experts in the management of integrated technical systems, in the organization and management of military actions and logistics in times of peace and war, capable of integrating the resources available to carry out missions.

In general, current trends point to the need for three-level training. The first one is embodied by university institutions and application

schools designed for institutionalized training by category of armory. The second stage, which is increasingly present in the training of our soldiers in the country, is operational training, carried out through exercises, in the military units or in the virtual system, with the help of war games. The third stage is self-development, led by each individual according to their own development needs. Although the tools, methods and techniques of training are distinct, the fundamental objective is to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to cover the gaps identified at individual and collective level of training.

From this point of view, I believe that continuous training of military personnel must be an individual and organizational priority. Even if the presence of a soldier in the unit is considered to be particularly important at a given time, the analysis between the implications of a vacant position during its participation in training activities and the disadvantages of working with a less qualified person in the context of increasingly complex situations, it is essential for today's military decision-makers.

As such, it is necessary for decision-makers to understand the challenges faced by leaders and other subordinate staff and to identify early methods of intervening systematically and helping them improve their learning and training experience.

Therefore, the process of continuous training of military personnel is influenced by the impact of the scientific revolution and socio-economic and political issues on the missions of the army as an organization. In this respect, the main concerns of military decision-makers will take into account fundamental concepts, organizational doctrine and future trends which are key points of interest in building a continuous training process based on effective practices and topical strategies.

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