INTRODUCTION

The international security environment is fluid and in an ongoing change and evolution; its dynamics influences in a decisive way the characteristics of conflicts. This has made possible that the way in which conflicts are carried out to gradually evolve from the 20th century confrontations between masses of people and equipment to confrontations occurring in more and more environments aimed at the reduction of enemy’s availability to engage in confrontations and also to minimize the number of lives lost among own troops. In the first half of the 19th century, Carl von Clausewitz noticed that each age had its own type of warfare, being characterized by restrictions and perceptions different from those of other ages and that is why it is necessary to develop a theory specific to each confrontation1.

At present, the typology of the contemporary conflicts is the result of globalization’s positive and negative effects and also of the dynamics of the relations between the main international actors. Thus, we can say that while, in the last part of the 20th century and the first part of the 21st century, conflicts were influenced by the implications of unipolarity and by US status of world sole superpower, after the world gained an increasingly clear multipolar character, it’s expected that the way to conduct conflicts undergo new changes and evolutions. However, all these changes and evolutions occur gradually, maintaining certain characteristics of the prior form whether we speak about the power relationships between international actors or the conflict typology.

Implications of conflicts’ asymmetric and unconventional character

Asymmetry and unconventional are without any doubt characteristics of contemporary conflicts, but this doesn’t mean that they are inventions of our century or of the last one. In the 5th century B.C., Sun Tzu established the principles of asymmetric conflicts –

“(…) choose from the elite troops and make special units. Find enemy’s weaknesses and conduct repeated incursions; if the enemy is united, divide it; attack them where it is weak, act when they don’t expect”.

According to the US Department of Defense, the asymmetric conflicts imply that, in conducting a military action, different strategies, tactics, capabilities and methods are applied in order to avoid or deny the enemy’s strengths while their vulnerabilities are exploited.

The unconventional warfare refers to the activities conducted in order to make possible a resistance movement or to offer support to an insurgency to disturb the government’s activity or overthrow it acting with illegal, auxiliary or guerrilla forces in a forbidden area. Similarities with the definition of unconventional warfare can be identified in Sun Tzu’s work – “if you are inferior in every respect, be able to shirk”.

Thus, asymmetry and unconventional also characterized the past military conflicts. However, the difference consists in the form and magnitude these had in the contemporary age, after the end of the Cold War. The two characteristics were substantially emphasized by the Revolution in Military Affairs which allowed not only the unprecedented development of military equipment, but also that of the vision about warfare, which, in western societies, is built around moral values, in accordance with the principle of just warfare, of liberal values. Thus, the development of military equipment represented a way to reach goals such as the reduction of human losses and collateral damage, the development of a highly professional armed force, conducting military actions in order to reach a clearly defined political goal.

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3 Ibidem.
Therefore, the emphasized asymmetric character of contemporary conflicts is determined by a high level of military resources owned by a group of states permitting precise military actions and fully avoiding the human losses and other resources which leaves the enemy with the only option of trying to prevent the capitalization of such advantages and exploiting its vulnerabilities. A relevant example is the war in Vietnam (1959-1975) during which the USA tried to achieve victory by using symmetric strategies and tactics against an enemy fighting using asymmetric strategies and tactics which led to the failure of US intervention. Asymmetry is therefore ensured by the quantitative and qualitative superiority of a participant in the conflict which allows him to reach his objectives with minimum losses and also by the attempts of the smaller participant to protect his resources or reach other type of military objectives by exploiting the stronger actor’s vulnerabilities.

Regarding the unconventional warfare, the definition given by the Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms elaborated by the US Department of Defense, has negative connotations implying that this type of war is conducted by illegal, auxiliary and guerrilla forces in order to disturb the government’s activities. The same document also mentions the irregular warfare, a violent combat between state and non state actors in order to gain legitimacy and influence over the population. It is a type of combat which favors indirect and asymmetric approaches although it can engage the whole spectre of military capabilities to erode the enemy’s power, influence and will. According to other studies, the irregular warfare is often associated to humanitarian warfare, implying interventions in cases with no threats to national security or to that of the allies. This type of warfare implies actions such as blockades, no-fly zones and refugee assistance.

Therefore, the unconventional warfare implies a confrontation where at least one of the parties uses special methods, means and environments in the sense that there are either regulations prohibiting

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10 Lawrence FREEDMAN, *op.cit.*, p. 54.
the use of the respective methods, means and environments or the latter are not mentioned in the doctrines. This evolution is favored by the asymmetric character of contemporary conflicts which determines weaker states to find innovative means to surprise their enemy. At the same time, another repercussion is the fact that, under these circumstances, the stronger state must adapt to these conditions. Therefore, the unconventional warfare does not belong only to resurgent forces but also to the legitimate ones since they are the targets of such actions. Kenneth W. Waltz explained this phenomenon very well: “The fate of each state depends on its responses to what other states do. The possibility that conflict will be conducted by force leads to competition in the arts and the instruments of forces. Competition produces a tendency toward the sameness of competitors”\(^\text{11}\).

The most obvious illustration of this phenomenon is represented by the terrorist attacks and the war against terror. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 represented without any doubt a type of asymmetric and unconventional conflict, being executed by an actor weaker than the attacked actor, but who used an unconventional method to attack its enemy. The USA started “the global war against terror” with a multidimensional character which comprised both conventional actions (defending strategic institutions and objectives through military means) and non conventional (destroying terrorist networks, infrastructures and bases).

The nuclear warfare is another clear illustration of non conventional military actions. This implies the use of nuclear weapons with a destructive potential much higher than that of the conventional ones and also an undiscriminatory character regarding military, economic and civilian objectives. Also, besides the nuclear weapons, there are other types of weapons with more destructive effects than the conventional ones and also undiscriminatory – chemical, biological and radiological.

The informational warfare implies imposing the political will by creating an impenetrable, active and offensive informational

system which can ensure the ongoing informational domination implying the use of propaganda and disinformation in order to demoralize or manipulate the enemy and the population, the undermining of the enemy’s information and preventing the enemy from gathering information.

The guerrilla warfare is an irregular and asymmetric warfare where imposing its own will over the enemy and determining it to give up its own plans are achieved by armed combatant groups including civilians using military tactics such as ambush, sabotage and raids. This type of warfare has conventional and unconventional characteristics.

The fluidity of the contemporary typology of conflicts is also determined by the difficulty to categorize a conflict as conventional or unconventional. Generally, the conventional character of conflicts can be considered, depending on their conduct, in accordance with the international humanitarian right, that is, the participants don’t have unlimited rights in choosing the war means and methods; they are used making a clear distinction between combatants and military objectives on one hand, and between non-combatants and civilian goods on the other, and the combatants’ sufferings and destructions are limited to a maximum. We can easily notice that the line between conventional and unconventional is very thin. The hybrid warfare is the best example given the fact that it is the result of the fusion of conventional warfare with the irregular one and also with the cyber warfare. Moreover, this also implies both symmetrical an asymmetrical traits while trying to get the control over the indigenous population of the conflict area by securing and stabilizing it. By definition, hybrid warfare consists of a fusion between conventional capabilities, irregular tactics, information operations and deliberate terrorism. In other words, hybrid warfare is placed in an area in which different generation warfare converge. Typical examples in this sense may be considered Israeli-Hezbollah war (2006), Russo-Chechen war (mid 1990s), Russia’s use of cyber attacks on Georgia (2008).

The emergence of the concepts of “hybrid warfare” and “5th generation warfare” clearly reveals the complexity towards which the typology of contemporary conflicts evolves. Thus, the “5th generation warfare” is a type of unrestricted confrontation being defined by the
use of “all available means – means that imply the force of weapons and the means that don’t imply the force of weapons, the means implying military power and the means that don’t imply military power, the means generating losses and the means that don’t generate losses – in order to force the enemy to contribute to reaching its own interests”. This type of warfare comprises all the asymmetrical and unconventional manifestations of confrontations – nuclear warfare with chemical, biological, radiological weapons, informational warfare, network-based warfare, hybrid warfare, cyber warfare, guerrilla warfare, civilian warfare, terrorist warfare, and war against terror.

Evolutions of the international security environment with impact on the typology of contemporary conflicts

Throughout history, the changes within the international security environment have directly influenced the conflict typology. After the end of the Cold War and the US affirmation as sole superpower, without any actors with comparable resources, there were more and more analyses revealing the irrational character of warfare; based on this, there were considerations on the irrationality of nuclear arms race between the end of the Cold War and the fall of Berlin Wall and also the idea that the concentration of power resources in a democratic and free state will contribute to maintaining a stable international security climate. The belief according to which “democracies don’t fight each other” and the clear superiority of the US conventional forces, the enlargement of partnerships globally after the end of the Second World War has had a great contribution to the development of this opinion.

All these considerations have proven viable only for the Euro-Atlantic community as the European states haven’t fought each other since the end of the Second World War. The world however continues to be profoundly conflictual at a military, economic, political and social level. Moreover, the conflicts in this period go beyond the immediate physical dimension. The globalization forces, the rapid circulation of information and the access to it, as well as the

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technological innovations, have determined the emergence of an informational dimension of conflicts, and this translates not only into the necessity of informational superiority, but also into a transgression of conflicts in the informational space. Thus, typologies of conflicts such as Network-Centered Warfare have emerged. This implied informational superiority, through sensors, rapid and powerful networks, technology, sophisticated shaping and simulation capabilities. Thus, the battlefield has become increasingly dispersed and the importance of masses of people, and that of conventional weapons, has gradually decreased. In the fourth-generation warfare, victory wasn’t about defeating the enemy in the battlefield, but about determining its implosion. Furthermore, in this context, the line between war and peace, between combatants and non combatants, between order and chaos, is very thin.

Thus, the globalization known for facilitating the contacts between people, economic growth and cultural freedom has made possible dividing the world into a democratic and stable part, on the one hand, and, on the other, an unstable one, characterized by poverty, extremism, imbalance of powers\textsuperscript{13}, etc. Most contemporary security risks and threats are linked to the existence of the second part mentioned. International terrorism, organized crime, religious and inter-ethnic conflicts and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are linked to these regions and spaces with actors with those respective deficiencies. In other words, not only the 21\textsuperscript{st} century conflicts are asymmetrical, but also the whole world, the whole international system is divided between a stable and secure world and an unstable world, generating risks, threats and instability at regional and even international levels.

Moreover, the main security risks and threats identified by most international actors have a deeply asymmetric character; furthermore, their approach cannot be achieved by symmetrical and asymmetrical warfare waged by an actor or alliance against the actor or alliance identified as a threat. The contemporary risks and threats are, generally, phenomena seldom associated to a certain state actor. For instance, regarding international terrorism, the US National

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{13} Stan ANTON, \textit{Războiul asimetric sau actualitatea trecutului}, în Buletinul Universității Naționale de Apărare „Carol I”, no. 1/2007, pp. 41-54.}
Strategy for Counterterrorism (2011) draws attention on new developments of this phenomenon. Thus, beyond the existing risks and threats about al-Qaeda’s activity, there can also be noticed its success in attracting individuals and groups.\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, al-Qaeda’s affiliated movements have started to develop beyond the core in Afghanistan and Pakistan, comprising now of the Middle East, East Africa, Maghreb, North West Africa and Central and South West Asia. In fact, it’s about different groups, all in al-Qaeda’s agenda, promoting it regionally and internationally, which contributes to the destabilization of the states where it conducts its activities, and to the amplification of the risks and threats to USA’s national security and to that of its allies.

The international context at the beginning of 21\textsuperscript{st} century was not characterized by the absence of conflicts, but by confrontations between unequal parts, with huge differences in terms of power resources and capabilities engaged in conflicts. Consequently, the conflict typology was characterized by asymmetry, dissymmetry and the unconventional. The asymmetric and unconventional character of current confrontations represents an adaptation to a certain type of enemy or threat.

During the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the most frequent were the dissymmetric conflicts which imply the confrontation between two unequal parts from the point of view of capabilities possessed but which uses the same type of capabilities, strategies and means of combat. Such a conflict is the Gulf War (1990-1991) which was conducted in a disproportionate context where the enemy’s reaction was almost negligible. The US rapid victory in Iraq with minimum losses represented a sign that, in the future, no other potential US enemy would be able to apply symmetrical and conventional strategies and tactics. Subsequently, NATO’s intervention in the wars that led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia confirmed this tendency. At the same time, US technological superiority, and the fact that military operations are supported by them, contributed to shaping this form of current conflicts.

The moment when the asymmetrical and unconventional character of contemporary conflicts became clear and the strongest argument to support this conflict typology is represented by the terrorist attacks in 2001. These practically revealed the disappearance of the front line, of the distinction between “in front of the frontline” and “behind the frontline”, between combatants and non-combatants.

Moreover, in this type of conflicts, it’s difficult to clearly identify the beginning and the end of a confrontation. Contemporary wars don’t start with a declaration of war clearly marking the beginning of the confrontation and don’t end with the invasion of a state by the winner, or with the enemy’s complete destruction. The studies on the phases of a crises escalation have made possible the development of prevention actions; at the same time, the decision to end a conflict isn’t the same as the implementation of immediate measures. The end of a conflict is a long process implying that military actions will be followed by “military actions other than war”, peacekeeping or peace enforcement actions. The main reason for this course of contemporary conflicts resides in the necessity to stabilize the security environment of the states associated with asymmetrical risks and threats. The key to minimize or eliminate them is to assist these actors in the development process so that they don’t represent a fertile ground for the evolution and manifestation of the respective risks and threats. This is the reason why the US statement that the operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan reached their objectives and consequently the US and NATO’s troops were to be withdrawn isn’t equal with their complete absence in these states. The documents already concluded with Baghdad and Kabul establish the framework of their relationships with Washington.

A negative effect of this approach is the mission creep tendency, which represents the tendency of asymmetrical military interventions to be longer than initially expected particularly when it’s about interventions in civil or humanitarian wars. There are numerous examples supporting this phenomenon – NATO’s intervention in Western Balkans has been prolonged until recently.

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15 Lawrence FREEDMAN, op.cit., pp. 55-57.
given that maintaining stability and security of the states in the region requires peacekeeping and peace enforcement forces; the intervention in Iraq (2003) following the US suspicion that Saddam Hussein developed weapons of mass destruction was prolonged after this assumption proved to be wrong; the purpose of the intervention in Libya (2011) was to defend the civilian population but finalized with the overthrow of Gaddafi’s regime; the operations in Afghanistan (2001-present) aimed at eliminating the terrorists in the country, prolonged not only in time but also in space – in Pakistan where they received the Talibans’ support. The tendency to delay the end of an operation has two causes – firstly, the complexity of risks and threats making it necessary to deal with their causes residing in the illegitimate corrupt governance and, secondly, applying the asymmetrical tactics and strategies by the enemies.

At present, international security environment undergoes new changes such as shifting from a unipolar to a multipolar configuration, the fact that US is losing its status of world sole superpower and the emergence of several comparable power centers. This phenomenon determined the development of new opinion on the emergence of new international conflicts, the relations between the US and China being very important within this theory aiming at conducting a conventional and symmetrical conflict given the fact that they are based on China’s tendency to invest more in defense due to its growing economy. Also, the development of its naval forces along with its disagreements with several actors in the Asia-Pacific area (many of them being US traditional allies) corroborates this type of theories.

If we were to consider these theories emphasizing the growth of China’s military power and the US tendency to decrease its military budget, then we could easily state that the future of military conflicts will reside in symmetry and conventional. However, in our opinion, this vision is a less probable scenario. Firstly, the decrease of the US military investments doesn’t mean the decrease of its military capabilities. According to the data provided by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Washington’s military investments tend to decrease but this doesn’t prevent the US from being the top defense investor with 711 billion dollars invested only in 2011 while China, the second investor has 143 billion dollar
investments\textsuperscript{16}. Furthermore, regarding the US, it’s necessary to consider the fact that it has a military power far superior to that of any emergent state, accumulated during the unipolarity period. This military power means the latest military equipment, very well trained professional forces and the fact that it’s part of the largest alliance network in the world.

Secondly, the probability of such a conflict to be symmetrical and conventional is very small as it wouldn’t favor either party, least of all US and China. Hillary Clinton’s statement in an article published in Foreign Policy is relevant in this regard – although it is necessary to be aware of and overcome the differences between the two states, Washington and Beijing stand to have more benefits from cooperation than conflict\textsuperscript{17}.

Thus, in our opinion, contemporary and future conflicts will maintain their asymmetrical and unconventional character. The main cause resides in the nature of asymmetrical risks and threats and also in the fact that the main conflict areas comprise of developing countries with main deficiencies regarding good governance. Among these, we mention the Middle East where the Civil War in Syria is still ongoing and also Northern Africa. This area, despite the end of the “Arab Spring”, is still facing political, economic, social and military instability. To this adds the recent crises in Mali. Also, we should note that the area with higher potential of being engaged in a conflict is also rich in natural resources, especially energy ones which can “attract” the participation of the main world powers that are, at the same time, the main participants to the competition for energy resources.

At the same time, the development of military resources indicates a future emphasis of the asymmetrical and unconventional character of current and future conflicts. The withdrawal of the American troops from the theatres in Iraq and Afghanistan, maintaining the concerns regarding nuclear threats and non-


\textsuperscript{17} Hillary CLINTON, \textit{America’s Pacific Century}, in Foreign Policy Romania, no.25, Nov/Dec 2011, p. 29.
proliferation and the emphasis on cyber defense indicate an unconventional future of conflicts.

**Recent developments and perspectives**

Contemporary conflicts have an asymmetrical and unconventional character favored by the ongoing development of information and technical equipment and also by the access to systems that can be used as real ”weapons” in an unconventional warfare. Short and long-term previsions\(^{18}\) show the fact that one of the global tectonic movements is a result of the increase of the access of individuals and small groups to lethal and disruptive technologies – precision strike capabilities, cyber devices, bio-terrorist weapons – which permit them to conduct violent acts on a large scale, a capacity which, until recently, has belonged solely to the states. In fact, if we deal with a power transition, visible within the international system, there is also a tendency to diffuse it from state to non state actors.

At present, cyber power is defined as “a set of resources linked to creating, controlling and communicating electronic information and connected with computers – infrastructure, networks, software and human abilities”\(^{19}\). Cyber power can be used like any other power resource to produce the expected results in cyberspace or even beyond it and is “the ability to get results by using informational resources electronically connected in the cyber field”\(^{20}\).

Therefore, the conflicts in cyberspace are expected to be much more frequent and complex. Unlike physical conflicts, the participants in cyber conflicts can be both state and non state actors; moreover, this has the advantage of being conducted from afar. Another characteristic is the fact that they can be prolonged in time. Physical, land, air or naval conflicts end when one of the participants faces scarce resources and attrition; cyber conflicts imply less costs and the possibility of inflicting great damage to the enemy. Furthermore, cyber innovations occur rapidly and are disseminated rapidly, which implies that “cyber weapon” is improving and is at the disposal of increasingly more

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\(^{20}\) *Ibidem*. 
individuals. Ever since 2004, military science researchers stated that “the impact of technology on battlefields undergoes a development in geometrical progression. The day will come when such an impact will be instantaneous”\textsuperscript{21}.

Therefore, cyber conflict is a new phase of evolution in the history of asymmetrical and unconventional conflicts including network-centered warfare, informational warfare, terrorist war and counter terrorist war. It is specific to the informational era we’re living in, determined by the access to recent informational and technological innovations and the high degree of dependency of the defense and security systems on the optimum function of ICT equipment. Moreover, it can be used to launch terrorist attacks (organizing, recruiting new followers by terrorist networks, facilitating network funding, disseminating the ideology etc) and to discover them in time. Cyber terrorism is the use of weapons in order to generate damage. However, given the fact that one of the characteristics of terrorist acts is generating terror among the population, the use of such type of weapon is not expected to interest the terrorist networks.

Moreover, the use of unconventional weapons doesn’t belong only to non state actors, as a result of the increased power and influence of individuals and small groups, but also to state actors. For instance, in our opinion, regarding China’s military development, the causes of US concerns are not necessarily the increased defense investments or its ability to arm a large number of citizens, but the development of A2/AD equipment. These capabilities imply the use of missiles for land and naval attacks, an increased submarine fleet, cyber and anti-satellite weapons capable to destroy or to neutralize another nation’s forces meant to prevent the US force projection in the region. Iran also possesses such capabilities. These developments can also be found in the US strategies. For instance, in the US strategic defense guide (2012);

among the US forces’ missions, there is also mentioned “power projection despite A2/AD challenges”\textsuperscript{22}.

Furthermore, the US established a Joint Operational Access Concept (2012) describing the way joint forces will act as a response to the emergence of A2/AD security challenges, given the fact that the US state and non-state enemies can consider the use of such capabilities as beneficial to them because the A2/AD equipment have increased throughout the world, the US naval defense has changed and space and cyber domains are very disputed\textsuperscript{23}.

Therefore, the conflicts using the A2/AD capabilities belong to fifth generation warfare, unconventional, asymmetrical and irregular being a combination between conventional and unconventional weapons, between cyber warfare, network warfare, space warfare and conventional ones.

Another new development of the US forces is the Pentagon’s decision to enlarge cyber forces dramatically from 900 employees to 5000 employees. This measure is part of an effort to transform an organization which aimed mainly at defensive measures into an Internet battle force\textsuperscript{24}. Also, the increase in the number of troops occurs following an incident in 2012 when a virus erased data in 30000 computers of a Saudi Arabia oil company which determined Panetta to fear a potential “cyber Pearl Harbor” during his mandate. Moreover, the event is not singular. In 2010, a powerful virus disturbed the activity of some Iranian nuclear plants. The attack wasn’t acknowledged by any government but some say they were conducted by the US and Israel.


NATO and EU make efforts to develop the cooperation in this domain together with the private sector\textsuperscript{25} which reveals not only NATO and EU concerns regarding cyber threats but also the magnitude of power diffusion by non state actors.

The strategic defense guide\textsuperscript{26} is relevant for the development of conflict typology given the fact that it mentions the following: a) **counteracting terrorism and irregular warfare** (emphasizing the fact that the withdrawal of the American troops from Afghanistan will be accompanied by the expansion of global efforts to counteract terrorism characterized by the combination of direct action and the support of security forces); b) **preventing and defeating the aggression** (emphasizing the prevention of the enemy from reaching its objectives in a certain region by conducting military campaigns in all domains – land, air, naval, cosmic and cybernetic); c) **counteracting the weapons of mass destruction**; d) **developing the capability to operate efficiently in cyber and cosmic space**; e) **defending the interests and the support of civilian authorities**; f) **providing a stabilizing presence**; g) **conducting stability and counterinsurgency operations**; h) **conducting humanitarian, post-hazard operations**.

We believe that asymmetry and unconventional will persist in the next conflicts through the role of information. Informational warfare doesn’t refer only to the contribution of intelligence services but also to capitalize information in other contexts; the informational warfare can merge with other types of actions such as cybernetic, network warfare, actions conducted within the cognitive space or those at bio-energy level.

According to the Dictionary of military and associated terms, the informational superiority is the ability to collect, process and disseminate an ongoing flux of information while exploiting or


forbidding the enemy’s ability to do this\textsuperscript{27}. In the event of losing it, high-technological military forces like those of the US and its allies would face the loss of anti-air defense systems, missile control and even command. Therefore, RMA’s unprecedented advantage was essential for shaping a new vulnerability given the fact that it determined the enemies of the states with high-technology armed forces, capable to ensure the informational superiority, to use unconventional weapons to attack the strongest and the most vulnerable item of this type of forces – informational systems.

Thus, the informational superiority could be cancelled by conducting cyber attacks and using a virus which could distort information or disturb its flux. Conducting conflicts in these non physical spaces has pros and cons. Among the pros, there is the decrease of human losses and the cons consist of the fact that such actions would determine considerable financial losses when they target the transportation, bank and health systems. Moreover, if we consider the possibility of launching a terrorist cyber attack on the air transport systems then we could talk about the increased possibility of human losses.

Another form of asymmetrical and unconventional warfare and especially of the irregular one, is conducted in the cognitive domain. This represents “the quality of leadership, morale, unity cohesion, level of training, experience, situational awareness and the public opinion, and also the space where there are “the commander’s intentions, doctrine, tactics, equipment and procedures”\textsuperscript{28}. Also, conducting a war within this domain is specific to fourth and fifth generation warfare characterized by the disappearance of the differences between civilians and military, between order and chaos. Also, the cognitive domain implies exercising influence on the perception about security, being specific to the informational era where the information flux is increasingly fast.

\textsuperscript{27} Department of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff, \textit{Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms}. Joint Publication 1-02, 8 November 2010 (As Amended Through 15 December 2012), http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine, p. 140.

In irregular warfare, informational superiority is the key to victory; without it, physical superiority is not enough. However, here it’s not about the superiority that can be capitalized for military purpose to gain superiority, but information that can be capitalized to get the population’s support, to influence its perception on security and on self and also to demoralize the enemy by gaining political support.

One of the main types of operations that can be conducted at a cognitive level is informational operations. These are conducted at a physical level (when there are command and control systems, key decision makers, support infrastructure permitting the individuals and organizations to create effects), informational (collecting, processing, storing, disseminating and protecting information) and cognitive (the minds of those who send, receive and respond or act). Thus, informational operations represent the integrated use, during military operations, of informational capabilities together with other types of operations with the purpose of influencing, disturbing, corrupting or usurping the decision making process by the enemies and potential enemies while protecting its own decisional process\textsuperscript{29}.

The operations typical to the cognitive domain are psychological operations (PSYOPS). Their purpose is to influence the perception of foreign audiences and their behaviour as a part of a program to support the government’s military and political objectives. Those responsible for organizing and conducting such operations aim at a well defined process aligning the commander’s objectives with the environmental analysis, selects the relevant target audience, develops concentrated messages and actions and, according to the environmental and cultural characteristics, uses sophisticated conduct means and produce observable and measurable behavioural responses\textsuperscript{30}.

PSYOPS’ purpose is to influence the emotions, motives, objectives, thinking and even the behaviour of foreign governments,

organizations and individuals. In fact, the purpose of psychological operations is to induce or favor behavior in favor of the objectives established by the actor implementing them.

NATO’s definition is similar, their utility resides in the ability to decrease the enemy’s moral and reduce its efficiency by creating doubts, dissidence and lack of loyalty among its own population and armed forces. Also, PSYOPS can be directed to discourage the enemy actions by influencing the decision making process and also determining it to cooperate actively or passively to reach NATO objectives in a certain operation.

It is a struggle for “the minds and hearts” not only of the civilian population but also those of the combatants and, at the same time, it is a military reflection of the power developments in the current international context. Joseph S. Nye speaks about the existence of three faces of power, concept he analyzes from a relational perspective, that is, from the perspective of an actor’s ability to operationalize the power tools in order to reach the objectives. The first face of power is the public one which we can find in the realism classic definitions and implies restrictions and awards to change the enemy’s behavior against its initial preferences and strategies, thing that he is aware about. The second face of power, the hidden one, is controlling the enemy’s agenda, limiting its strategic options, a thing that he might be aware of. The third face of power, the invisible one, is the contribution to creating and shaping the enemy’s core beliefs, perceptions and preferences without his being aware of this or of the effect of exercising power by the first actor.

From this point of view, psychological operations contribute to exercising a hidden power, but there are also similar elements specific to invisible power. Also, this type of cognitive action is not recent; such operations can be identified during the two world wars and after, through propaganda campaigns. The important difference,

31 Ibidem, p. GL-8
34 Ibidem, pp. 27-35.
compared to the contemporary period, is the increase in their role in conducting contemporary military operations, and in the development of the implemented methods favored by the characteristics of the current phase of the informational era where the access to information is much easier, wide, and easy to capitalize by both parties in a conflict.

During any conflict, PSYOPS is a force multiplier which can have a negative impact on the enemy combat power, can reduce the civilian engagement in the conflict, can minimize the damages and human losses and maximize the support of local population for the respective military actions.

The war against terror was conducted de facto on the territory of some states whose vulnerabilities, deficiencies regarding good governance and cultural characteristics permitted their transformation into real “safe paradises” for terrorist networks. Therefore, counteracting this threat implied a series of psychological operations from the second and the third face of power manifestation. This manifestation of power, the most effective during the theatres in the Middle East, had been revealed ever since 2004 by Zbigniew Brzezinski who, in “Great dilemma: to dominate or lead”, states that without a “careful and objective assessment of the Islamic cultural and doctrinal passions and of the potential danger to global security, America cannot control the complex, active forces in the Islamic regions or counteract the deliberate instigation of the hostility against it among a numerous population with an increasingly strong political conscience”35.

In this context, the strategic narratives are very important with a substantial contribution to shaping the responses of the others. They are deliberate narratives or emphases of ideas and opinions meant to explain the events in a convincing way. However, the strategic narratives go beyond manipulation, being an expression of the experience, identity, values, culture and interests of a certain people with reference to its cause, mission and purpose. This type of narratives resembles the psychological operations conducted by a certain actor to gain the support of its own population. The US

example on the missions in the Middle East – Iraq and Afghanistan – is eloquent in this regard. The public speeches and the media releases emphasized the existence of a US mission to spread democracy and freedom in the world while ensuring national security against an asymmetric and unconventional threat – international terrorism. Similarly, we can analyze the public speech of the allied states participating with troops in the respective theatres where the emphasis was on assuming the responsibilities deriving from NATO membership status and on the necessity to counteract a cross-border threat which can be reduced only through a common multinational effort. At the same time, the Talibans used strategic narratives to gain the population’s support, which was very important to them as, from the conventional point of view, they were far inferior to the coalition of states engaging in the fight against terror. The issue of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction can be examined in the same way.

Another aspect of the informational and psychological warfare, of the “battle for the minds and hearts” which attracts the strategists’ attention is the remote control, the distal psycho-informational influence. These actions imply sending information with the purpose of influencing and controlling the physiological, biochemical and psychological processes from afar by another actor with the purpose of receiving a certain type of behaviour. It is probably the type of action that can be capitalized within contemporary conflicts and has the most obvious asymmetric and unconventional character, being also subject to controversy. There are however studies confirming the use of this type of action ever since the second world war and the Cold War when the Germans, Russians and Americans began researches on the possibilities to use the extrasensory perception.

This type of action manifests itself in the form of Distal Psycho-Informational Influence Operations (IPsiD). These shouldn’t be confused with PSYOPS which are based on sensory and cognitive perceptions. Within some IPsiD, collecting and applying information is done by using the subliminal influence together with sensory and cognitive perceptions with the purpose of directly influencing the
emotions, attitudes and posture even inducing somatic structural changes.

IPsiD are operations that can be capitalized in all phases of a crisis. During the warning phase, IPsiD can be capitalized to reduce the conflict potential with the purpose of building the premises of extinguishing the outbreak of crisis. During the worsening phase, characterized by an increased violence, IPsiD are capitalized in order to reduce the aggressive manifestations and during the chronic phase, of armed conflict, this type of operations can influence the fighting forces and command and decision staff both for offensive and defensive purposes. In the post-conflict phase, IPsiD can aim at reducing the psycho-emotional effects determined by defeat, helplessness or concerns about the future.

Also, the IPsiD effectiveness is even greater as it unfolds in a synergic way with other types of operations specific to asymmetrical and unconventional warfare – informational operations, psychological operations, electronic warfare actions etc.

IPsiD operations are related to the informational and psychological ones but they have a higher degree of complexity aiming not only the cognitive and psychological domain but also the psycho-emotional one characterized by the lack of material means; they are conducted exclusively in the fundamental existential field.

In conclusion, contemporary conflicts and their potential developments on short and medium terms indicate an increasingly less restricted character from the point of view of the space where they are conducted, and also the methods, means and types of weapons used, or the capabilities, abilities and human skills, capitalized, of the objectives and targets.

As for the space dimension of contemporary conflicts, we can conclude by saying that these are conducted in more numerous spaces favoring the clear shaping of their asymmetric and unconventional character. At present, we can identify at least eight space dimensions of the confrontation environment among which are

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the conventional spaces such as the land, air and naval space and also spaces only recently capitalized, especially during the Cold War and increasingly frequent nowadays, such as cosmic, informational, cognitive, cybernetic and psycho-emotional space. The latter are spaces where asymmetric and unconventional conflicts are conducted and, in our opinion, the spaces where most medium and long term conflicts will be conducted given the fact that they allow the achievement of political objectives and also a high degree of protection of own troops and population, with minimum human, financial and material losses.

The asymmetrical and unconventional character of conflicts is not new in military history. Characteristic of the contemporary period are the magnitude and importance of these traits in recent periods. A considerable role was played by the transformations at the level of the international system, its configuration and the distribution of power resources. It’s not only an asymmetry of conflicts but also an identifiable asymmetry all over the world reflecting in the conduct of conflicts. This determined the weaker actors to identify asymmetric and unconventional means of combat which should give them the possibility of facing conventionally superior actors.

To this adds the nature of risks and threats to international security. International terrorism, organized crime, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts all have an asymmetric character and their counteracting can be achieved only in a way adapted to this reality.

Another factor contributing to shaping an increasingly obvious asymmetric and unconventional character of contemporary conflicts is RMA, the military innovations allowing the actors to conduct conflicts with minimum human, material and financial losses.

At the same time, the nature itself of the informational era favors this definition of conflictuality. The increasingly easy and large access to information and the technical innovations were not only advantages for guaranteeing security at different levels but also a real vulnerability, given the dependency of the security systems on these technologies. The benefits of the informational era and of RMA can be therefore considered a double-edged blade, a two face coin.
The present book approaches the close connections between the changes happened at the level of the international security environment’s characteristics level, the evolutions in the area of crisis management and the ones in military affairs, laying an emphasis on their interdependency. Also, I set myself to elaborate a paper of high actuality and most references are in accordance with this desideratum. But, in order to reveal the constant character of this interdependency, I was under the need to also refer to historical data.

Changes in the international security environment’s features influence at a great extent the manifestation of international crises, requiring a particular manner of approach in order to manage them in an optimal way which determines, at its turn, the dynamic of military affairs. Military actions evolve, thus, constantly, being determined, in all their components, by the mutations happened in terms of security risks, threats and challenges as well as in terms of international relations.

Given the fact that, after the global economic and financial crisis, the international system has been passing through thorough changes, we all shall expect changes in the area of crisis management as well as in the one of military affairs. Therefore, the present theoretical and empirical approach may turn out to be of maximum utility for all those interested in international security issues, crisis management and military affairs, may they be political, economic or military decision-makers or analysts.