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ISSN 2971-8139
ISSN-L 2971-8139

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INTELLIGENCE ȘI CULTURA DE SECURITATE

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CONFERINȚA ȘTIINȚIFICĂ STUDENȚEASCĂ



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CONFERINȚA ȘTIINȚIFICĂ STUDENȚEASCĂ
VOLUM DE PROCEEDINGS

VOLUMUL 1
2022

Editura Academiei Naționale de Informații
„Mihai Viteazul”

WEST UNDERSTANDS EAST?

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Abstract:

Seems that the dust is settling over Afghanistan due to the current situation in Ukraine. Extensive research about the causes of the collapse of Afghan National Army (ANA) are not completed yet, all the eyes are set on the main event on geopolitical arena-development of Ukraine-Russia crisis. Summarizing the analyses available in the aftermath of US –led coalition hasty withdrawal, most of them online short articles, there are two major findings: the situation in the field is presented only from a dominant culture perspective and ignoring the cultural differences influences on the desired end-state of the mission to build an ANA capable to defend Afghanistan.

The objective of this article is to provide an inside perspective based on personal experience, both as a subject of Romanian Army transformation from the soviet legacy army to the western standards and as a commander of Romanian forces deployed in Afghanistan, facing a similar process, operationally mentoring the new ANA.

The research method is qualitative analysis of existing data using deductive research strategy to empirically answer 2 main research questions: a) how the collapse of Afghan National Army is intrinsically influenced by the US led coalition ignoring cultural differences, and b) what are the other causes for the unsuccessful buildup of Afghan national defense forces.

The study aims to present the generic model of the process to build an army to NATO standards (doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership, education, personnel, and facilities) and specifically investigate the challenges faced by ANA to learn under fire. Additionally, the results of the research identify the major impact of coalition withdrawal to the ability to fight of ANA against Taliban offensive (I.e., command and control of the troops, intelligence gathering, mobility and the ability to operate and maintain the highly sophisticated weapons systems, fire power and aerial close air support).

Although the study is focused on the interaction between coalition forces and security forces from Afghanistan the conclusion and suggestions may be adequate for all the processes involving members with diverse cultural background to forge a unity of effort, initially, followed by a unity of thoughts, with the desired effect of making a fighting formation able to operate into a coalition and, more important with the capability to fight alone and sustain themself.

Keywords: *cultural differences, legacy, training, army transformation, sustainability.*

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Introducere

Definition of insanity given by Albert Einstein is doing the same thing repetitively while expecting different results. During history few attempts were recorded to build a “new” Afghan National Army. After the initial confrontation or invasion, the military objectives were the same: quickly win the war, establish a friendly ruler or government and withdraw as soon as possible from the country. The overall concept of transformation was aligned to external standards: a central authority supported by a governmental lead national security force; all of the attempts being recognized at the end were not very successful. For centuries people of Afghanistan were more family and tribe affiliated than connected to the capital ruler. First attempt (Lee, 2018), in 1840, after the first Anglo-Afghan war, during the British protectorate was the military reform of the Kingdom’s military in the attempt to build, train and equip 12.000 troops, dismantled in weeks after catastrophic British withdrawal and the civil war that followed. In 1924, the Turkish Ataturk reform model proved to be unsuitable for the Afghanistan army, main causes being the lack of education and illiteracy of the new officer corps and the heavy opposition of Islamic conservatives. In 1931 the non-existent army was rebuilt with German, United Kingdom and Russia assistance, from tribal to conscript based new army in preparation for the Second World War. Last attempt was made by the Soviet Union in 1979, after the invasion of Afghanistan, with the intent, like elsewhere the Russian influence was present, to build a replica of the Red Army. It was a very aggressive transformation, a top-down style of change like always in Afghanistan, during a decade that produced a generation of officers with a Soviet war mentality. With few of them I served in Afghanistan in 2006.

Purpose and objectives pursued

The purpose of this article is not to provide a detailed analysis of cultural differences. Instead, I will try to offer a different perspective: comparison between the Romanian army transformation and the Afghan army transformation in the last two decades. Even though we belong to very different cultural systems we share the same starting point of army transformation: the soviet legacy. From 1859, the birth of the modern Romanian army, we were in contact, in various coalitions and alliances, with many dominant cultures: French (First World War), German

(Second World War), Russian (from 1944 to 1989) and western NATO armies' culture (from 1989 to present days).

From the Romanian royal army (after the Second World War) to the popular army, the Soviet model was decisive: the doctrine, the legislation, the territorial organization, the regulations and instructions, the fighting technique, the uniforms, the equipment, the way of addressing - all taken over from the existing ones in the Red Army. Soviet advisers were ubiquitous (Giurescu, 2003, p. XV). Initiated slowly in 1945, the transition has been accelerated after King Mihai abdication in 1947 and the proclamation of the Popular Republic of Romania. The second stage (1948-1955), prior to the Warsaw pact, set up the foundation for what we are calling today- soviet legacy.

The road from the traditional military institution to one designed after the Soviet model was crossed in two stages: a preliminary one, between 1945- 1947, of the purges and massive reductions of the officer corps, simultaneously with the firm establishment of political control (in March 1945, 1948 officers and 70 generals among them were removed from active duty position) and a second one between 1948-1955 when new cadres are formed, commander of all ranks and the organization of the army is established, completely different from the previous one. This was an essential change, with the predominance of political and ideological criteria. Only 9% of the officers from the traditional army could be found in 1955 in active duty (Șperlea, 2003, p. 37).

Understanding the impact of cultural differences on the process of collaboration and integration, in a globalized world in general, and especially in an Afghanistan marked by a permanent transformation, is a growing concern of the civilian and military community involved in this process over the past 20 years.

The analysis of the cultural background of the Afghan National Army (ANA) has been treated like a peripheral issue. In the military world the process addresses initially the needs of the soldier in the field in order to increase their ability to cope with the people belonging to a different cultural system of values and customs, inside and outside the coalition or alliance. In December 2006 the new US Field Manual FM 3-24 – Counterinsurgency proposed a chapter dedicated to culture. Culture, from how to understand and assess a cultural situation and how to organize the staff to concentrate on cultural understanding and inject this understanding into their unit's plans and operations.

An experimental empirical analysis of the intercultural psychology of the US-Afghan coalition is virtually impossible due to the

fact that Afghanistan lacks all the studies on the psychological attributes of the Afghan people (see World Values Survey, 2010-2014, Geert Hofstede model 1998, to mention only a few). This is not very unusual, first scientific data about Romania is to be available only in 2015 (David, 2015, p. 18).

Considering ANA an army in transformation, I would recommend establishing a common starting point for our analysis – changing the Soviet legacy mentality and processes. In the 1980's the Soviet Union considered the Afghan Security Forces development as a central component of counter-insurgency effort. To this day, the memory and lasting impact of that experience continue to affect Afghan attitudes about security assistance and security force requirements (Oliker, 2011, iii). Afghan officers, especially the senior ones have been trained in soviet style military academy, being the first to be called to form the Taliban dismantled ANA, when after the Bonn agreement the international coalition decided to be finally involved in nation building.

There are voices that consider that even in Europe the transition to NATO standards has not finished yet, some even consider it a failure (YOUNG, 2017), identifying the result of the mentality shift process being too little and too late. The lack of progress to reform can be traced to a continued widespread use of legacy concepts which remain in place throughout these defense institutions (YOUNG, 2017, p. 6).

Even European countries (Estonia and Ukraine to mention only a few) are facing difficulties in following the defense planning process used by NATO and the implementation process using DOTMLPFI (doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership and education, personnel, infrastructure and logistics and interoperability).

The continuous change of the coalition focus of the mission in Afghanistan, the late start of nation building, and the lessons learned cycle inside the coalition spread a lot of confusion inside the coalition members. When a unit is to be evaluated according to CREVAL procedure, it should be 90% manned and equipped with essential material and weaponry and after that to be trained collectively for 18 months with an objective external evaluation. This has never been achieved in Afghanistan over the decades. Illiteracy in a conscription-based army, the losses in the field, and the existing legacy foundation make the job impossible.

The current tool used for strategic planners in the US and NATO is the Defense Planning Process. According to the doctrine, the aim of DDP is to allow the strategic planners to harmonize the defense planning

activities, provide the required forces and capabilities in the most effective way. Very elaborate, encompassing 14 different planning domains involved in capability development, the process consists in 5 steps: establish political guidance, determine requirements, apportion requirements, facilitate implementation and review results. For the purpose of this analysis, we will focus only on step 4 that depicts the process of implementation using DOTMLPFI evaluation (doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facility and infrastructure and interoperability). My personal experience in Afghanistan consists of two-by-seven months tours of duty, both in Zabul province, close to the Pakistan border. After four years of Kandahar airfield force protection missions, Romania took over in 2006 the responsibility of the province, in partnership with the existing ANA Brigade and assisted by US PRT (Provincial Reconstruction Team). In 2013 Romanian forces were in the full process to prepare to hand-over the responsibilities to the same ANA Brigade and prepare for the foreseen withdrawal of coalition forces, based on the NATO decision to end the ISAF mission next year, in 2014.

End ways means

In 1989 col. Artur Lykke published in Military review magazine the definition of strategy as a mathematical addition of ENDS (objectives to be achieved), WAYS (courses of action) and MEANS (instruments by which some end can be achieved). Even though there are voices that challenge this definition, the procedure is still actual and used extensively in the strategic planning process and for sure the foundation for army building in Afghanistan. According to the personal findings in my tours in Afghanistan the evolution of the process in the field was not very linear. In 2006 the approach of ISAF was to partner the Coalition maneuver units in the field with the existing ANA units following the guidance of Gen. Petraeus, based on lesson learned in IRAQ, to have an “Afghan face” in all interaction with the local population, in the attempt to fight for winning hearts and minds and get the necessary support. In 2013 the approach was different: “Afghan face” move towards “Afghan in the lead”, with the ISAF in supporting roles. Like Field Marshal Moltke saying: “no plan survives the first contact with the enemy” I can appreciate that the evolution of “enemy” in the implementation plan was not linear either. In terms of ends-ways-means approach – even though the Taliban insurgency reached the peak of violence – in 2006 the enemy was inside the fences and due to the soviet legacy and mentality inside

the ANA's officers corps the most affected pillar of the Triad was "ways", all the potential courses of action for development being influenced by the endemic corruption, illiteracy and the impossibility the quickly change the operational attitude under fire. Basic characteristics of soviet military culture are space as a barrier, emphasis on mass and surprise and an ambiguous attitude of military professionalism (Tsypkin, 2010, p. 270). The ANA brigade had the ability to mass the troops with the price of affecting speed of deployment and the inability to maintain the security of the operation in terms of surprise affecting the efficiency of counterinsurgency operations.

In 2013 I was surprised by the quality of the new ANA officers, well trained in the reformed national military academy, with decent language ability and with a very different professional attitude. At that moment the "enemy" was outside the fences: growing insurgency again, coalition perception affected by collateral damages inflicted to the local population, slow pace of economic development, increasing green on blue incidents. Inside the fences we can observe the incipient dependance of force multipliers offered by coalition through Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLT): intelligence sharing provided by aerial surveillance unmanned platforms, new equipment with increased protection, close air support on call, air lift logistics, maintenance done by coalition civilian contractors. War is not fair play. You adapt your procedures in accordance with the equipment you have on hand. The problem occurs when you are not able to sustain the new capability and it is impossible on the run to stop and return to the old-fashioned tactics. You need a generation to readapt. In 2020 was a perfect storm: inside the fences the ANA morale and will to fight affected by the direct US-Taliban negotiation in the spring, president Ghani leaving the country at the first sight of Taliban offensive, hasty withdrawal of US led coalition make all the sensitive equipment not available multiple causes (no technical knowledge related to maintenance and withdrawal of secret sensitive equipment to mention only the few) a broken logistic chain with essential equipment and ammunition shortage.

DOTMLPFI

Invented by the US Department of Defense, DOTMLPF is the way for the implementation of capability – based defense planning and the tool for army transformation. Adopted by NATO, with an additional I that stands for interoperability. Any combination of the letters of the acronym generates a specific capability, but the key word is the coordination of

the domains in order to get a full operating formation or unit ready to perform the designated mission. In the case of a transformation process if one domain is not continuously evaluated properly according to the NATO standards, the outcome will be very different. Using the same pattern as for Ends-ways-means evolution in the period, we can discover what are the major dysfunctionality for ANA transformation.

In western perspective, **doctrine** represents a common approach in problem solving based on the lessons learned and best practices in tactics and specific procedures for conducting tasks, constantly revised and used in collective training. **Organization** defines the structure of the units and formation, very flexible and mission tailored. **Training and education** include the professional military education during the active-duty period of time, both individual and performed collectively at the unit or formation level. Training to excellence and external evaluation of the performance are the core principles of the entire process. **Materiel** consists of various weapons systems, specific equipment, storing facilities and technology. The quality of the materiel influences the ability of the army to fight and win and determine the evolution of tactics and operating procedure. **Leadership** is self-explanatory, describing the ability of the commanders to understand, analyze, describe, define, direct and lead the troops. **Personnel** represents the type of needed servicemen and women, both in fighting formations and in combat service support units. **Facilities** encompass all the infrastructure needed to prepare, accommodate and train the members of the army. **Interoperability** is defined as the ability to fight together in Alliance or coalition, using standard agreements, common understanding and mentality, necessary to build compatibility, commonality, force interoperability and interchangeability.

For the beginning I would like to mention that those two systems are totally different. Even though both schools of thought are respecting the concepts of the laws of war and the principles of modern fighting, the way in which systems work are extremely different.

Supported by a solid empirical base provided by soviet military historians, the soviet scientific approach to war, rooted in the dialectic materialism of Engels, provides a rich foundation for an effective doctrine (Schneider, 1989, p. 492). Centralized command and control system, universal tactical doctrine and strong discipline are the keystones of soviet military planning, preparation and execution process.

In order to understand the antithetical nature of western armed forces and soviet legacy military formations is necessary to analyze the

command philosophy. Mission commands (western) produce the orders that clearly communicate the answers to 5 'W' questions: who, what, when, where? and why the subordinates should perform the mission. Detailed command (legacy) follows the same pattern with a minor but fundamental addition: how, very prescriptive and formal. Mission commands accept unpredictability and volatility of armed conflicts, lead to decentralization and informality, self-discipline, initiative and cooperation, based on implicit, interactive communication between echelons, collaborative planning, supported by organic or ad-hoc types of organization. Detailed command results are different: assume that the war is predictable and winning by all costs is acceptable, certainty can be achieved using scientific analyses, tends to lead to centralization, formality, imposed discipline, obedience and compliance, orders are communicated explicit and vertical and would be followed unquestionably (Ulrich, m.1999, p. 29) and organizational type is strictly hierarchical and bureaucratic. Detailed command produces leaders able to direct, but not able to delegate tasks to subordinates.

In 2006 there was not a single domain that allowed the coalition to fight alongside ANA. Doctrine is not existing as a word in Russian language, all the tactics were according to soviet legacy, materiel were obsolete or inexistent, training was performed only related to the infantryman basic skills, training to time not to excellence no artillery and force multipliers, language barrier and illiteracy, no field manuals and rigid discipline.

If I am to compare my professional evolution with an Afghan counterpart, sharing the same starting point I can realize how complicated the transformation process has been for ANA. Transformation of the Romanian Army to the western standards consists in 3 stages: a national (legacy) consolidated defense system, after Warsaw pact has been dissolved (February 1991), a transitional phase started in 1994 (Partnership for Peace) when, still keeping the legacy system functional due to the constitutional obligation to defend the country in the absence of an alliance, the new model is to be studied, accepted, understand and implement the new standards based on new mentality, and the final stage (NATO admission 2004) having the Army being integrated in the new military system. For ANA transformation the transitional stage was the same, all the efforts being affected by necessity to build-up under fire.

In 2013 the situation evolved in the right direction. ANA units' staff were more able to interact with the coalition, but from the soviet

legacy they didn't get to western doctrine, it was more like a conceptual spaghetti. (Young 2017, p. 38) Conceptual spaghetti is the situation in that the commanders will find themselves when the export has been implemented atop of their legacy counterparts, thereby resulting a new level of dysfunctionality as the two antithetical logic sets struggle for supremacy. Levels of corruption remain high, but the soldiers are better equipped, with vehicles and weapons with decent quality, able to communicate and familiar with the counterinsurgency fight, counseled by OMLT. A game changer in the transformation was the introduction of the embedded advisory team and operational mentoring and liaison teams from Kadaks (ANA battalions) up.

That gives more visibility and understanding to the coalition decision making level but creates a complicated dependence to the ANA regarding the force multipliers like demining devices, intelligence sharing, close air support and maintenance of sensitive equipment like army aviation assets.

In 2020 ANA already assumed control over the entire territory of Afghanistan having the coalition in a supporting role. Military leadership was established, facilities are organized to the western standards, infrastructure w better, electricity and access to education granted, military academy and training facility reformed materials for infantry fighting were in hands but various domains are still covered by coalition specialists. After the withdrawal everything that made the difference in the field and allowed the ANA to dominate the air-land battles were missing or not in the position to be operated by Afghan soldiers and airmen. The absence of national leadership, negotiation between US and Taliban, broken logistics and maintenance of material degrade catastrophically the will to fight in weeks.

Conclusion

The first Soviet military advisors arrived in Afghanistan as early as 1920's. The history of Soviet-Afghan security cooperation is nearly as old as the history of the Soviet Union. By 1977, some 3.700 Afghan military commissioned and non-commissioned officers had been trained in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union. Still more had received soviet training in Afghanistan. By April 1979, there were 4.500 Soviet advisors in Afghanistan. Soviet advisors worked closely with the Afghan military, providing guidance for training, planning, regulation development, and organization. (Oliker, 2011 XIV). In my opinion the soviet legacy has been underestimated at the beginning of Afghan Security Forces development.

There are many causes identified for ANA collapse in the aftermath of coalition withdrawal and the rapid country take-over by the Taliban, most of them related with no clear strategy based on condition-based hand over the responsibility to protect the regime from Kabul.

An identified problem was the unclear and frequently change of military objectives of the US led coalition: initially find Osama bin LADEN, dismantle Al Qaeda and Taliban regime military capacity to provide a safe haven to terrorists, with the reluctance to contribute to nation building, and only after the Bonn Agreement and Tokyo international conference to support the democratic election of the government and the buildup of Afghan security forces and Afghan National Army (Predoiu, 2021).

Acknowledging that the contact with a dominant culture, from the dominated culture perspective encompass few stages like cultural adaptation or acculturation, consolidation phase and, finally deculturalization (Fisher, K. and Christensen, J. T., 2005), when the transformation of ANA begun, the end state's evolution was well established, but fighting against time allocation and the need to learn under fire, the ways affected by the lack of continuous analyze of the impact of the evolution of cultural differences evolution in time, and the means availability affected by unappropriated training for ANA to sustain and operate the force multipliers associated equipment.

A good example of good practices in terms of continuous adaptation to the new security situations is offered by the UK Army. A founding member of the Alliance from 1949, an active contributor to NATO with continuous support and steadfast commitment, the UK Ministry of Defense has a particular approach in adopting the NATO doctrine. The UK doctrine architecture responds to the requirements to be a part of an alliance/coalition or independently. Where possible the UK will adopt NATO doctrine (Allied Joint Publication – AJP) rather than producing national doctrine. Where it cannot, the UK will ensure it remains compatible. These publications (AJP with UK national elements) may contain additional elements which explain a particular UK approach, clarify a UK definition and aid understanding. The UK additions take precedence where competing terms and processes differ. From DOTMLPFI perspective the ability to achieve coherence and maintain interoperability, taking into the consideration the need to address the national areas of defense not covered by NATO requires common understandings and mentality, continuous refinement of troop-to-task organization, standardized training to excellence, commonality in

material procurement and modernization, well established military leadership familiar with national interests and cultural particularities and strong investments in training and education of the professional personnel. This was not the case in Afghanistan.

In current crisis in Europe, the successful resistance of Ukraine against the second large army in the world is the result of 8 years of intensive training and transformation of the armed forces during the peace time period, strong leadership, both military and national, political and diplomatic support of the western world, winning the informational war in order to keep the nation cohesion and will to fight, economic sanctions against the aggressor establishments and logistic support with the state-of-the-art military materiel (low maintenance, user friendly equipment) make the difference. It was, once again, not the case in Afghanistan.

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