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Land Forces Academy Review
Vol. XXIX, No. 4(116), 2024

ADOPTING A "RED TEAMING" MENTALITY TO STREAMLINE THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN THE ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES

George-Ion TOROI
"Carol I" National Defense University, Bucharest, Romania
george_toroi@yahoo.com

"Only as you do know yourself can your brain serve you as a sharp and efficient tool. Know your own failings, passions, and prejudices so you can separate them from what you see."
(Bernard Baruch)

ABSTRACT

The failure of the Russians in the beginning of the Ukrainian conflict in 2022, amid faulty assumptions, has brought to the fore a less popular topic in the literature on operational planning, namely the influence of one's own biases on the outcome of the process. Uncertainty, which is part of the nature of warfare, makes it impossible to predict exactly how events will unfold. For this reason, most of the operational planning products are based on assumptions. They are the result of the thought processes of those involved in the process and are therefore subject to human error. The ability to see things from different perspectives and to accept constructive criticism can go a long way towards confirming or invalidating these assumptions and thus increasing the chances of operational success. In this context, employing a qualitative research approach, the article brings the concept of 'Red Teaming' to the attention of Romanian military commanders and planners in order to ensure an optimal framework for operational planning and decision-making. Through documentary analysis, multidisciplinary examination, and comparative analysis research methods, the main objective of this article was to provide a thorough understanding the concept of 'Red Teaming' and its potential benefits, and to develop a practical framework that enhances decision-making by reducing planning errors. The study's findings offer valuable insights and practical applications for military commanders throughout the operations planning process, highlighting the role of critical thinking in reducing planning errors and improving decision-making.

KEYWORDS: planning assumptions, biases, red teaming, errors in judgment, critical thinking

1. Introduction

What was supposed to be a three-day special operation (Watling & Reynolds, 2022, p. 1) has turned into a conflict for the Russians that has lasted more than two years, with considerable resources and effort expended. Even now, after so much time, there is no hope of an end in sight. These questions bring into focus the planning assumptions that the Russians took into account at the beginning of the invasion, on the basis of which they constructed the intervention plan, and which have turned out to be completely wrong. Among the most important I would like to mention the following:

- the leadership of the Ukrainian state would quickly leave the country and there

DOI: 10.2478/raft-2024-0051

would be chaos in Kiev, which the Russian forces would take advantage of;

- the level of readiness of the Ukrainian armed forces remained the same as in 2014, when the Crimean Peninsula was annexed by Russia without significant resistance from the Ukrainian state;
- NATO and its member states will have the same non-interventionist response as in the case of the annexation of Crimea in 2014 or the Russian military intervention in Georgia in 2008;
- the Ukrainians are unlikely to put up much resistance, given the longstanding friendship between the two countries, and Russia was hoping for popular support in Ukraine;
- the readiness of the Russian armed forces themselves to conduct joint operations is high.

It can therefore be seen that the Russians underestimated many aspects of Ukrainian resilience and the international community's support for their cause, while overestimating their own capabilities. In this context, the misperceptions impact on the course of the conflict and, implicitly, on its effects and outcomes, becomes extremely clear.

However, the Russians are not the only ones having developed faulty planning assumptions. There are also examples within Western states that have contributed to the conflict in Ukraine (Monaghan, 2022, p. 19), such as:

- The Russian Federation prefers hybrid and asymmetric actions to conventional ones, which was not the case in the military intervention in Ukraine;
- The Russian armed forces, which have undergone an intensive process of reorganisation and re-equipment over the past decade, will quickly defeat the Ukrainian army. However, overlooked elements such as poor planning, poor logistics, low operational readiness and an inefficient command and control system have proved otherwise.

All of these types of assumptions underpin the way military operations are planned, and if they lack substance, they can be disastrous in execution. Planning is about understanding a problem and developing solutions to solve it. But in conflict, when you are dealing with constantly changing variables, with human elements that are extremely difficult to understand, it becomes very difficult to anticipate how events will unfold.

In addition, the human factor specific to the planning process of military operations leads to an increased degree of subjectivism resulting from the way in which those involved understand the situation. Errors of judgement and assessment can thus occur against a background of distorted perceptions of how to anticipate events. This is **the research problem** from which I started this scientific endeavour.

These planning errors can have either external causes, such as a lack of conclusive information, or internal causes, determined by the prejudices and preconceptions of those involved in the process. For this reason, the thought process behind decision-making becomes crucial in developing viable options. Thinking involves a human-specific mental activity that supports the realisation of understanding, planning, problem solving or decision making (JDP 04, 2016, p. 42).

The application of critical thinking to specific activities in the operational planning process can help reduce the occurrence of such errors. This paper presents to the Romanian military commanders, **the main target of this study**, a product to improve planning results through the deliberate application of independent critical thinking and the identification of alternative perspectives to the way analysis is conducted, "Red Teaming" (RT).

The main objective of this paper is to determine the usefulness of incorporating the concept of red teaming into the operational planning process and to develop a product to achieve this.

The study carried out was a **qualitative** one, attempting to understand the deeper implications of integrating the concept of red teaming into the planning process, and the best way to achieve this. In terms of its qualitative nature, the **two questions** that guided this research were:

− *What is "Red Teaming" (RT) and what are its potential benefits?*

− *How can "Red Teaming" (RT) be integrated into the tactical-level operational planning process?*

In order to provide relevant answers to these questions and to fulfil the main research objective, I employed **the documentary analysis method** to collect the most relevant data for the study. I also carried out a **multidisciplinary analysis** to identify an optimal way of integrating RT into the tactical level operations planning process. In addition, **the comparative analysis** allowed me to identify the key aspects of the concept of "Red Teaming" according to the approaches of some relevant actors in the current security environment.

In terms of **structure**, the article is divided into two main sections, each corresponding to one of the two research questions previously presented.

2. What Is "Red Teaming" (RT) and What Are Its Potential Benefits?

"*Understanding underpins everything we do in the military*" (JDP 04, 2016, p. 3). An accurate understanding of the operating environment enables the commander to correctly define the problem, anticipate potential outcomes and risks, understand the implications of actions, allocate appropriate resources, and make timely and effective decisions.

Understanding is *"the perception and interpretation of a given situation in order to have a clear idea of the context of events, their true nature and their future implications, all in support of the most effective decision making"* (JCN 1/20, 2020, p. 29). However, this is an effect of the thought process conducted on the basis of the data and information available.

In the case of armed conflicts, characterised by uncertainty and chaos, where actions are planned and executed against an adaptive adversary seeking ways to gain operational advantage too, the thought process that supports the development of plans, decision making and the execution of those plans is perhaps the most important aspect of success. John R. Boyd recognised its importance when he emphasised that *"machines don't fight wars. People do, and they use their minds to do it"* (JDP 04, 2016, p. 36).

However, today's increasingly uncertain and complex operating environment with a high degree of volatility (JCN 1/17, 2017, p. 1; MCDC, 2020, p. 1-2; TC 7-102, 2014, p. 1-2), is having a profound impact on decision-making processes. Today, more than ever, it has become increasingly difficult to make the right decisions in a timely manner in the face of extremely rapid changes of the situation and the multitude of existing and conflicting information. All these features of the society we live in put additional pressure on finding solutions to optimise the thinking process that underpins understanding and decision making.

Human nature is also prone to making bad decisions. It is in our nature to develop behaviours that support the achievement of goals with minimal effort. As humans, we tend to assume that we know more than we actually do and rarely criticise our own assumptions. We also tend to perceive what we want to perceive. In addition, the human mind is very quick to form an opinion about something and can't be very easily changed, often by trying to find arguments to support these erroneous assumptions rather than trying to see things from a different perspective. Cognitive errors can also be cultural. The culture of each nation shapes the way its citizens think. As a result, people are prone to making mistakes when it comes to thinking and decision making.

An important aspect of cognition is cognitive biases. These affect how the brain processes information to form perceptions and understanding of a situation. The human brain is prone to systematic errors and biases (AJP-3.10.2, 2020, p. 42). A famous aphorism attributed to author Anais Nin highlights the importance of one's own cognitive aspects in the process of forming perceptions: *"We do not see things as they are, but as we are"*. Biases can be understood as mental automatisms that shorten the process of interpreting information. Although beneficial in some cases, in most situations these cognitive biases lead to errors in judgement, resulting in a distorted understanding of the situation that can determine uninspired decisions in key moments of the fight (Whitesmith, 2020, p. 2).

Critical analysis is recognised as having the potential to optimize thinking. It aims to ensure the robustness of information to support decision making through a rigorous and in-depth process of analysing the data at hand (Latta, 2018, p. 38). Critical thinking is the art of analysing and evaluating thought processes in order to improve them (Paul & Elder, 2020, p. 9). An important element of critical analysis relates to awareness of how we think, the influence of internal and external factors that can distort the results of this process. One's intelligence, temperament, personality, experience, motivations, emotions, as well as one's own biases, are all elements that directly affect the way we think. A skilled critical thinker analyses the data and information available to him or her with these potential biases in mind. Bernard Baruch, presidential advisor to Woodrow Wilson (WWI) and Franklin D. Roosevelt, believed that "*only if you know yourself can your brain serve as an effective tool. Know your own faults, passions and prejudices so that you can separate them from what you observe*".

"Red Teaming" (RT) is one of the tools that appeals to the critical thinking of those involved. Its importance in supporting the decision-making process is recognised (GOV. UK., 2021, p. 1), as it is useful for analysing the various products developed during the planning of the operation, providing alternative perspectives, analysing the understanding of the problem, of each planning assumption, but also of the options considered, in order to optimise the outcomes of the process (MCWP 5-10, 2020, p. 99).

RT involves *"the independent application of a range of structured, creative, and critical thinking techniques to facilitate more informed decision making or to support the realisation of a more robust product"* (JDP 0-01.1, 2023, p. 50).

Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, emphasised the importance of constructive criticism in enhancing the value of the products of the thinking process: "*Every hypothesis we support, every conclusion, every assertion, everything needs to be challenged"* (U.S. Army, 2022, p. 3).

RT is designed to complement, not replicate or duplicate, the other analytical functions already in place in the decision-making process. For this reason, it does not involve a staff carrying out planning in parallel, but rather uses the planning products already produced to critically analyse them and provide different perspectives that may not have been considered for reasons that may be due to the biases of those who produced them. In this way, RT:

- Ensures a deeper understanding of the operating environment.
- Fills some potential gaps in understanding.
- Identifies vulnerabilities, opportunities, risks and threats.
- Identifies biases, groupthink, false assumptions and the tendency to jump to conclusions.
- Identifies potential errors of judgement in the intelligence analysis process.
- Analyses how external influences, especially adversaries, may affect your own capabilities.

➢ Identifies second and third order effects and unintended consequences.

➢ Identifies the need for contingency planning.

➢ Focuses the information gathering process and improve information requirements.

The relevance of the issue analysed is also demonstrated by the importance attached to it by some international actors in the current security environment. Both the United States (U.S. Army, 2022), and the United Kingdom (GOV. UK., 2021) have developed specific manuals on the application of the "Red Teaming" concept. NATO, although using a different concept, Alternative Analysis − AltA (AltA, 2017), has also introduced such a document to encourage the application of specific critical thinking techniques to identify alternative perspectives to the plans being developed, thereby increasing the viability of their outcomes and minimising the potential risk to the mission.

All these documents provide a clearer picture of the operational situation, a deeper understanding of the problem faced by the forces, but also a more detailed analysis of the implications and effects of the actions taken. I have chosen to use the term "Red Teaming" in this article because it is the term that also gave rise to NATO's AltA.

In an ideal situation, where the time and resources are available, RT should be conducted by a team separate from the one planning the operation, the so-called red team. However, specific "Red Teaming" techniques can be used by all participants in the planning process and thus contribute to more reliable results. The two approaches are therefore not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary, and together support the decision-making process.

The red team is made up of subject matter experts (SMEs) from outside the structure, who subject the organisation's plans, ideas, arguments and assumptions to rigorous analysis and challenge to identify weaknesses, alternative perspectives and possible solutions to reduce the risk associated with military operations (JDP 0-01.1, 2023, p. 50). In Table no. 1 I have highlighted the main characteristics of potential red team members.

Table no. 1

Traits of potential red team members

Traits needed by potential red team members	
− High level of intellect and imagination	− Self-awareness
− Critical and creative thinking	− Familiarity with different cultural perspectives; cultural appreciation and empathy
− Ability to see things from different perspectives	− Experience of specific operational analysis techniques
− Confidence in challenging traditional thinking	− Understanding of the objectives of all relevant parties (e.g. partners or neutral actors)
− Ability to think strategically (ability to make connections)	− Knowledge of relevant organisational philosophy, theory and doctrine
− Attention to detail and analytical skills	− Knowledge of relevant capabilities and trends
− Ability to ask thought-provoking questions without provoking conflict	− Understanding of the wider context
− Communication skills	− Open and agile mind

The term "red" can be slightly confusing, as the term "red cell" is also used in the military system. However, they are not similar. "Red Teaming", as mentioned above, involves the application of structured, creative and critical thinking techniques to assist the commander in making a better informed and therefore more relevant decision for the situation at hand. "The Red Cell" is the structure within the Intelligence Module − J/G/A/N 2 responsible for developing the adversary's

perspective of the situation, intelligence assessment and possible enemy courses of action (COA). This team also provides the component within the war game that replicates the actions of the opposing forces. Table no. 2 summarises the main features of "Red Teaming".

Table no. 2

Characteristics of "Red Teaming"

RED TEAMING	
1.	**WHO DOES IT?**
	➢ Ideally, a dedicated group of specialists with skills in the area to be analysed. ➢ Each participant in the planning process can use specific RT techniques to increase the reliability of the results.
2.	**WHAT RT DOES?**
	➢ Provides objective, honest and constructive criticism of the resulting products during the planning process to improve decision making.
3.	**WHY IS IT DONE?**
	➢ Critique planning assumptions and identify alternative perspectives to the solutions already formulated that reduce risk and increase the chances of operational success.
4.	**WHEN IS IT DONE?**
	➢ Throughout the planning process. ➢ Where a dedicated team is not used, specific RT techniques should be applied by those directly involved in the planning of the operation throughout the process to ensure the highest degree of fidelity of the results obtained with a reduced risk to mission accomplishment.

An extremely important aspect of applying the RT concept relates to organisational culture. In order for RT to achieve its objectives and increase the chances of success of operational plans, it is crucial for those involved to be able to accept criticism. I am aware that the military system in general has some characteristics that often prevent this. Hierarchical organisation is perhaps the most eloquent example. For this reason, mental flexibility, greater acceptance of the fact that no one has the absolute truth, can create the conditions for better products and results in the operational planning process.

In the field, the Red Team can use a wide range of techniques that are tried and tested and scientifically proven to stimulate critical thinking. All of this supports the objective of the RT, which is to develop a better understanding of the situation facing commanders and to optimise solutions to the problems they face.

Following a comparative analysis of these types of techniques between the three approaches mentioned earlier, the US, NATO and the UK, there are four broad categories into which they can be grouped: structuring techniques (Mind Mapping, Concept Mapping), stimulating creativity / imagination (Brainstorming, Individual Brainstorming, Starbusting, Alternative Future Analysis), diagnostics (SWOT Analysis, Key Assumption Identification, ACH Analysis of Competing Hypothesis, 4 Ways of Seeing) and Contrarian / Challenging (Devil's Advocacy, Team A / Team B, Pre-Mortem Analysis, String of Pearls, What-If Analysis).

3. How Can Red Teaming (RT) Be Integrated into the Tactical Planning Process?

Plans are the foundation of all military action, and their success depends on the accuracy of the outcome of the planning process. However, because of the uncertainties inherent in armed conflict, all plans involve a degree of risk and vulnerability and are based on an understanding of the operational situation. It is intelligence function that underpins this understanding. However, there is no single instance where you have all the information you need. For this reason, planning is based on certain assumptions that may later prove

to be incorrect. Even with a large amount of information, given the importance of cognition in the planning process, there are many aspects that can distort the level of understanding. For example, errors can occur as a result of cognitive challenges such as mirroring, where the expectations and actions of other actors are treated according to one's own standards.

In addition, planning involves a group of soldiers carrying out specific activities to understand a problem and identify ways to solve it. Group-thinking is therefore another important challenge in developing a workable plan.

The benefit of involving a red team in the planning process ensures that such influences are reduced, thereby supporting optimised decision making. In this section I will suggest activities that this team should carry out at each step of the planning process, highlighting the most appropriate techniques to use during this process. I would like to mention, however, that this article does not intend to provide a description of these techniques, as they are extensively explained in the literature.

I have chosen the tactical level planning process specific to land forces according to NATO APP 28, as it is similar to the one carried out by the Romanian ground forces. According to Figure no. 1, the process consists of 3 phases and 7 steps that follow a logical progression from problem identification and situation understanding, to the development of response options, and finally to the selection of one of them based on a comparison between them against some pre-defined criteria.

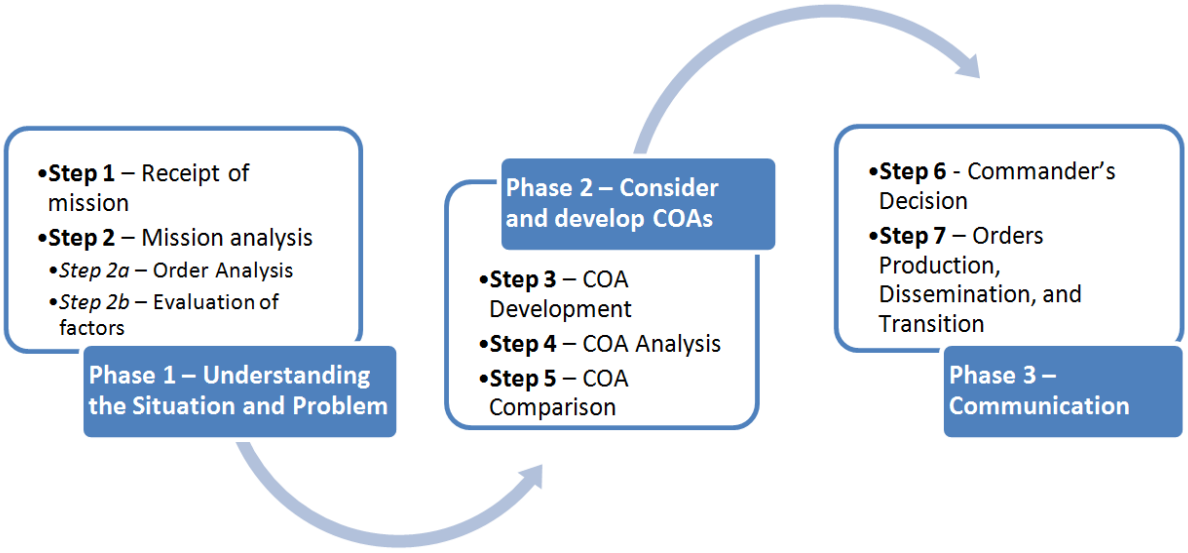

Figure no. 1: *Operations planning process*
(Source: APP-28, 2019, p. 1-9)

➢ **Step 1 – Receipt of mission**

The Red Team can support the process of information preparation of the operating environment (IPOE) initiated in this phase. By using the "4 Ways of Seeing Things" technique to analyse all the actors involved in the operation, a deeper understanding of their motivations, interests, perceptions and objectives can be gained. This technique can also support the development of multiple perspectives on the nature of the relationships between actors, with the potential to create opportunities for military force. All of these new alternatives are intended to complement the IPOE process prior to conducting the Receipt of mission briefing (RoMB) at the end of Step 1 of the operations planning process.

- **Step 2 – Mission analysis**

Step 2 is perhaps the most important step in the planning process. Its role is twofold, but it has a direct impact on all subsequent activities. It requires the operations planning group to develop an optimum level of understanding of the operational situation, but also of the mission set, in order to ensure the prerequisites for the development of response options. The more appropriate the level of understanding, the greater the chances of operational success of the plan. Thus, further analysis of the adversary through various diagnostic techniques can assist in the correct identification of his centre of gravity or desired end state and contribute to a deeper understanding.

One useful technique in this step is "Alternative Futures Analysis". Based on this, the Red Team can provide a broader analytical framework for examining the costs, risks and opportunities presented to decision makers. This will certainly lead to the development of multiple perspectives on how the operational situation might evolve.

The "4 Ways of Seeing Things" technique can also help to identify the key challenges to mission accomplishment by providing a better understanding of how the adversary perceives blue forces, how he perceives himself, and how blue forces perceive him.

This step can also begin the process of testing the viability of the planning assumptions developed by challenging and questioning each of them using the Key Assumption Identification technique. This may lead to either confirmation of the key assumptions or recommendations for changes.

Ideally, the red team's key findings should be presented prior to the Mission analysis briefing (MAB) so that they can be incorporated into the mission analysis briefing and provide the commander with relevant guidance for the next phases of planning.

- **Step 3 – COA Development**

Using "The devil's advocacy" technique can help to identify faulty reasoning, particularly about one's own beliefs and assumptions. Such a method can also analyse the validation of courses of action in terms of feasibility, acceptability, uniqueness and flexibility. In addition, during this planning step, the red team can help identify the 2nd and 3rd order effects of the specific actions of each COA, as well as the requirements for developing branch plans to respond to specific identified threats. The team's entire analysis process should provide information leading up to the COA briefing (COAB).

- **Step 4 – COA Analysis**

The "String of pearls" or "Pre-mortem" techniques can be used to analyse one's courses of action, providing the potential to identify risks, gaps and weaknesses in each, as well as deviations from the plan and unintended consequences that may affect the established mission. The time available will determine whether the String of Pearls (time-consuming) or Pre-Mortem method is used. This activity should be carried out prior to the wargame.

- **Step 5 – COA Comparison**

The role of the red team in this step is to monitor how the planning team carries out the specific activities to ensure that all the perspectives proposed up to this point have been considered.

- **Step 6 – Commander's Decision**
- **Step 7 – Orders Production, Dissemination, and Transition**

During these steps, the red team can ensure that the operational plan is reviewed to identify potential vulnerabilities arising from the plan or previously unidentified shortfalls.

In this way, "Red Teaming" helps to streamline the planning process, ensuring the potential for better results. It also helps to reduce groupthink by critically examining operational concepts, plans and projects, leading to better decision making.

Figure no. 2 succinctly highlights the key outputs that the red team can provide to support the operations planning process.

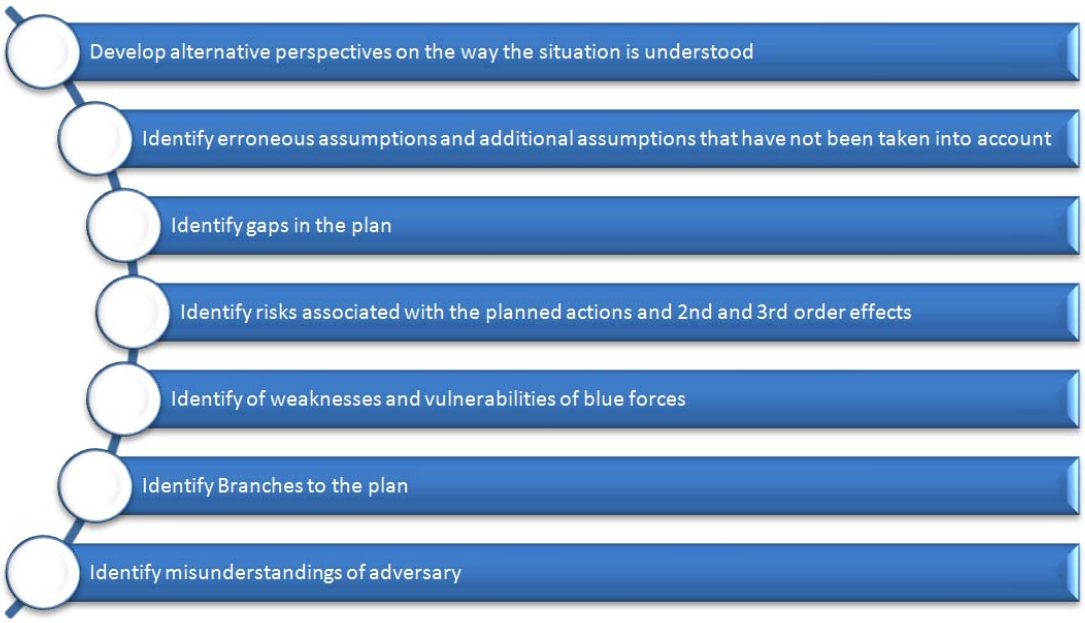

Figure no. 2: *RT results in the operations planning process*

However, in order to increase the chances of success of RT, the commander wishing to use such a team must adhere to the following principles:

− Plan for "Red Teaming" from the beginning of the planning activity, as it can only function optimally in parallel with it.

− Create the optimal conditions for the RT to take place. This requires an open, learning culture that accepts challenge and criticism.

− Give the red team clear objectives.

−Use the right people in the red teams, who have many of the traits I have highlighted in Table no 1.

− Encourage a constructive approach that contributes to overall success.

4. Conclusions

In conclusion, I believe that the increased uncertainty and complexity of the current operating environment has increased the challenges to planning military operations. For this reason, the application of structured methods to reduce this complexity by providing alternative perspectives that have not been considered in the process can support low-risk decision-making for the military force. Thus, the concept of "Red Teaming", recognised and used by prestigious international actors such as the US, NATO or the United Kingdom, can provide the Romanian Armed Forces with an effective framework for optimising the results of the operations planning process.

Moreover, this concept could also represent a solution in the training and education process, ensuring the possibility of developing the critical thinking of all those involved. In my opinion, the form of training that would best exploit the benefits of such an approach is the Command Master Program, where most of the skills to be taught are based on the cognitive component of officers. Moreover, by implementing such an approach within this study program, the potential for a much faster development of a "Red Teaming" mentality in the Romanian Armed Forces is ensured, with the current students representing the future commanders of the Romanian force structures.

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