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INTERCEPTOR DRONES: TECHNOLOGICAL, ECONOMIC, OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENTS, CHALLENGES AND PATHS FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN THE ROMANIAN ARMED FORCES

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ABSTRACT
The evolution of conflict at our borders has implied, from the very beginning, the need to take urgent measures regarding the equipment of Romanian Armed Forces, but also to reconsider combat tactics, given the trends in the use of drone-type means, intensively used by both sides. Interceptor drones are currently in a phase of accelerated industrialization worldwide, representing an interest also for Romania. The development of such capabilities also involves several challenges, both technological, economic and operational, related to the country's industrial capacity. This article analyses the main challenges identified and possible directions for solving them, by comparing international trends with the potential of the national defence industry. The results aim to outline a realistic framework for the rapid and efficient implementation of interceptor drones in the Romanian Armed Forces, contributing to the modernization of defence capabilities and increasing operational resilience to contemporary standards in the art of technology-based warfare.

KEYWORDS: interceptor drones, war in Ukraine, challenges, requirements, implementation paths

1. Introduction

The conflict in the eastern part of the European continent has highlighted in the last three and a half years that operations carried out on the battlefield involve increasingly sophisticated means from a technological point of view, which are also both practical and financially accessible. The intensive use of drones, from those for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) to those for attack, has created an operational environment in which countering these platforms becomes a strategic priority that in itself requires an urgent adaptation of the defence capabilities of all states to modern realities. In this context, interceptor drones – platforms designed to detect, disrupt or neutralize other unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) – have entered an accelerated phase of industrialization and development at a global level.

As for Romania, the adoption and industrialization of such capabilities involve a rigorous and simultaneous analysis of several aspects related to operational requirements, total cost and national industrial capacity. Whether it is the initial design and testing phase or a series production, there are several technological and economic challenges that need to be addressed, such as: standardization and interoperability with NATO forces or

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with other national networks in the national defence system, training of specialized personnel, development of local infrastructures, etc.

This paper aims to identify and disseminate these challenges, providing pragmatic recommendations for their solution and for a rapid and effective implementation in the Romanian Armed Forces. Although numerous papers analyse the use of UAVs for reconnaissance or attack purposes, the specialized literature on interceptor drones remains limited. This lack of dedicated research justifies the need for a focused study on these types of drones, especially on the technological, economic and operational challenges and the possibilities of their implementation, together with the public manifestation of national interest for these modern capabilities.

The purpose of this scientific research is to contribute to the development of the modern military capabilities of the Romanian Armed Forces, in terms of unmanned aerial vehicles, at a conceptual level, by correlating technological feasibility with economic efficiency and having operational applicability, thus providing a launching pad for future more in-depth research in this field of drones, to the advantage of the national armed forces.

This research is focused on 3 directions, represented by the assessment of the technological maturity and applicability of different categories of interceptor drones (kinetic, loitering, EW-based and Net-shooting system-based), the identification of bottlenecks in the national industrial and regulatory framework that could limit their development, and proposing a set of implementation paths to ensure interoperability, scalability and sustainability in defence applications.

In order to formulate the objectives, several research questions were formulated on the basis of which the research would be conducted. Thus, these are:

1. What are the essential requirements that define an effective arsenal of interceptor drones for national defence?

2. What are the main challenges and limitations that Romania currently faces in developing and integrating such systems?

3. How can a stepwise implementation strategy ensure both short-term operational readiness and long-term sustainability?

Based on the above, the main objectives of the paper are:

1. Identifying the technical-economic and operational requirements for the development of an arsenal of interceptor drones;

2. Analysing the main challenges identified regarding the research, production and integration of these systems;

3. Proposing a set of measures and implementation stages that will allow reaching a level of capability compatible with contemporary defence standards.

By achieving these objectives, the paper aims to provide a practical framework, integrating the technological, economic and operational dimensions into a coherent and accessible model, in order to support and accelerate projects and programs aimed at providing Romania with these unmanned capabilities, very necessary and useful for a modern army.

The following sections describe the problem and the methodology used, present the current technical status, analyse the technical-economic and operational challenges and propose implementation and prioritization steps.

2. The Operational Context and the Need to Develop Interceptor Drones

Following a recent meeting of the Romanian Government, it was specified that the SAFE (Security Action for Europe) program will seek to finance a project to produce interceptor drones, designed to ensure the defensive – and not offensive – capabilities of its own armed forces. This objective suggests the intention to benefit from Ukrainian military technological innovations, within the framework of an economic agreement in the form of a joint venture between the two parties – Romania and Ukraine. At the same time, tendencies can be observed in other states (for example: the United Kingdom) to enter such a partnership to produce drones for military use.

2.1. Description of Interceptor Capabilities

Interceptor drones are part of the category of anti-drone/C-UAS means (Counter-Unmanned Aerial System) that have become increasingly common in defensive doctrine. They represent a mobile alternative to jamming systems used by our own forces (example: BS-JDP01), which uses artificial intelligence, being a cost-effective solution and having a much-reduced cost compared to the missiles that were used for this purpose. (MARSS, 2025; Nyzhnyk & Partyka, 2025). These drones are divided into three categories, depending on the method they offer in their use:

1. Kinetic interceptors – used to neutralize the target by directly colliding with it, using only kinetic energy, or having an explosive charge (loitering ammunition), to destroy the target or targets in the swarm by detonating in the proximity of enemy drones (Figure no. 1);
2. Jamming interceptors – used to interrupt communication links between the target and the point that commands them, being an alternative to effectively act on the signal within the unmanned drone system (Chung & Tuan, 2025). Also, jamming the GPS signal can lead to the use of secondary inertial systems to engage ground targets, which will influence accuracy (Mirea, 2025) (Figure no. 2);
3. Net interceptors – used to capture a drone by launching a net over it, a method that basically acts on the drone's rotors (Figure no. 3).

Figure no. 1: *Kinetic interceptor drone*

Figure no. 2: *Jamming/EW interceptor drone*

Figure no. 3: *Net-shooting interceptor drone*

(Sources: MARSS, 2025; Defense News, 2025; DroneCatcher, n.d.)

Depending on their maximum supported range, interceptor drones also have three categories: short range, medium range, long range.

According to the technology company MARSS, the kinetic interceptor drones produced by them can reach distances of 5 km and speeds of approximately 290 km/h, compared to the Russian Geran-2 attack drones (type Shahed-136) that reach 185 km/h. The company also mentions that their capabilities can combat specific class I and II drones (Figure no. 4), the Russian arsenal including drones such as Molniya-2, Orlan-10, Geran-2, etc.

NATO UAS CLASSIFICATION						
Class	Category	Normal Employment	Normal Operating Altitude	Normal Mission Radius	Primary Supported Commander	Example Platform
Class III (>600 kg)	Strike or Combat	Strategic/National	Up to 65,000'	Unlimited (BLOS)	Theater	MQ9 Reaper
	HALE	Strategic/National	Up to 65,000'	Unlimited (BLOS)	Theater	Global Hawk
	MALE	Operational/ Theater	Up to 45,000' MSL	Unlimited (BLOS)	JTF	Heron
Class II (150 kg – 600 kg)	Tactical	Tactical Formation	Up to 10,000' AGL	200 km (LOS)	Brigade	Hermes 450
Class I (<150 kg)	Small (>15 kg)	Tactical Unit	Up to 5,000' AGL	50 km (LOS)	Battalion, Regiment	Scan Eagle
	Mini (<15 kg)	Tactical Sub-Unit	Up to 3,000' AGL	Up to 25 km (LOS)	Company, Platoon, Squad	DJI Mavic 3
	Micro (<66 J)	Tactical Sub-Unit	Up to 200' AGL	Up to 5 km (LOS)	Platoon, Squad	Black Hornet

LEGEND

HALE - High--Altitudine, Long Endurance
MSL - Mean Sea Level
BLOS - Beyond Line-Of-Sight
JTF - Joint Task Force
MALE - Medium-Altitudine, Long Endurance
AGL -Above Ground Level
LOS - Line-Of-Sight

Figure no. 4: *NATO classification of unmanned aerial systems (UAS)*
(Source: C-UAS Hub, 2023)

However, the Russian Armed Forces are responding by improving their model, changing the propeller-based variant to one based on turbojet propulsion. The new variant – Geran-3 – can reach speeds of up to 370 km/h and has a range of 1000 km (Epstein, 2025).

These developments on both sides demonstrate the need for constant adaptation to the technological means used in warfare, with new, more efficient and reliable variants sure to appear on the market as countermeasures against modern adversary technological devices.

2.2. Problem Definition

While the countries supporting operationally Ukraine in the conflict have evolved technologically a lot – due to the necessity imposed by the critical situation –, the other European countries not directly operationally engaged in the war have lagged far behind, requiring a technological and innovative leap or boost to bring them up to the standard of modern military operations today.

The central problem addressed in this paper consists of identifying the technical-economic and operational challenges that limit the development and implementation of interceptor drones in Romania, compared to the current level of industrial infrastructure and the tactical, operational and strategic requirements of the Armed Forces.

3. Methodology

The research is qualitative and descriptive in nature, based on documentary analysis of primary and secondary sources. Scientific articles, technical reports, as well as updated media sources on the use and evolution of unmanned aircraft systems in an operational context were analysed. The search strategy targeted scientific databases (IEEE Xplore, Google Scholar, etc.) and specialized portals, using key terms related to the field of UAVs and interceptor models.

The sources were selected based on their relevance, timeliness and credibility, with indexed scientific publications and official materials from drone manufacturers being prioritized. Information from journalistic sources and public releases were used to highlight recent trends and to exemplify practical applications of the technology presented, and these were taken over and verified based on their appearance in several sources.

The analysis was carried out by comparing data on different types of drones from several categories, following their capabilities, the interception methods offered and the related costs. The results of the analysis, together with the identification of challenges in the technological, economic and operational environment reported at the national level, lead to the synthesis of potential solutions or paths for the implementation and development of the mentioned systems, with applicability in the Armed Forces. Thus, information from open and official sources was correlated to outline a concrete picture of the current state, but especially to predict the direction of equipping the army with UAV interception means for the near future.

4. Results

4.1. The Requirements for the Interceptor Drone Arsenal

The arsenal for intercepting UAVs must be designed to the standards achieved in contemporary military operations. Table no. 1 below presents a series of characteristics specific to several domains, related to each type of drone from those presented in the introductory chapter, which are essential in choosing the best drone variant within a procurement project.

In an acquisition program, product requirements will represent the most efficient and multiple capabilities possible. In the case of drones, aspects such as the longest possible engagement distances, the highest possible speeds, the lowest possible weights, etc. will be pursued.

Table no. 1

Requirements of interceptor drones

Interceptor drone types / Requirements	**Kinetic (2)**	**Loitering munitions (-2)**	**Jamming/EW (-1)**	**Net-shooting (0)**
Operational (Engaging range / Speed)	Low and/or Medium / High	Medium and/or High / Low	Low and/or Medium / Medium	Low / Medium
Technological (Sensors / Weight/Payload)	Medium / Low	High / High	High / Medium	High / Medium
Economic (Cost)	Low and/or Medium	Medium and/or High	Medium and/or High	Low and/or Medium
Security (Collateral risk)	Medium	High	Medium	Low

(Source: Author's Research)

The table provides a quantifiable measurement of operational, technological, economic and cybersecurity requirements, which are categorized into three levels: small, medium and large. For example, the interceptor drones offered by the MARSS company are Interceptor-SR (Short-Range) – up to 1 km away - and Interceptor-MR (Medium-Range) – up to 8 km away from engagement (MARSS, 2025). Drones with loitering ammunition can reach tens and even hundreds of kilometres away (Nistorescu, 2024). On this principle, the distances were classified as:

- small – up to 1 km;
- medium – around 10 km;
- large – tens, hundreds of km.

The same classification was made for the other requirements. Another example, regarding the speed criterion, a Ukrainian drone, "Sting" targeting class III drones, such as the Russian ones - Shahed - and which has an integrated explosive can reach speeds of 160 km/h (Mulvihill, 2025), compared to commercial drones that reach speeds of approximately 50 km/h or more depending on the modernization. Other drones, at the opposite pole, reach speeds of over 300 km/h (Geran-3, Wild Hornets etc.).

The quantifiable measurement was used to determine a suitable variant of a type of drone, either depending on the type of requirements, or based on the final scores. The scores can be awarded as follows: Adding 1 point for the answer "small", 2 points for "medium" and 3 points for "large" in the case of the desired, advantageous criteria (speed, sensors etc.) and subtracting the same number of points, for the same levels, in the case of undesirable, disadvantageous criteria (weight, cost, etc.). In the end, a total score of 4 points for kinetic interceptors, 1 point for loitering ones, 1 point for jamming ones and 1 point for net ones results. As there are 3 types of drones with equal scores, the field of cybersecurity was introduced to separate the categories. The results, after the separation, are, in the same order: 2 points, -2 points, -1 point and 0 points.

Based on these results, the following conclusions can be drawn: For a drone acquisition program for the country's own armed forces, starting from the declared interest in interceptor drones, in order to consolidate the defensive doctrine and not the offensive one, then kinetic interceptors could represent a plausible option analysing their capabilities and the relatively low cost compared to other types. On the same path, according to the score obtained, new interceptor drones with the possibility of launching a net follow. These are increasingly promoted and marketed by manufacturers and companies.

However, from another perspective, it can be observed, analysing the three categories of interceptor drones – after the classification made at the beginning of the article – that the interceptor drone with jamming capabilities could have a considerable advantage over the other two categories, when considering their viability, their possibility of returning without material damage and their ability to combat the other two categories through the associated jamming system. In general, for all categories of drones (ISR, loitering, etc.) the integrated air defence system and EW (Electronic Warfare) systems represent their main threats (Nistorescu, 2024).

According to estimates made by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a single Patriot missile launcher system – one of the most expensive systems delivered to Ukraine by the US at the beginning of the war – has a cost of approximately 400 million dollars for the system itself, to which another 690 million dollars are added for the missiles – the example given is for the Patriot system equipped with 5 missile launchers (CSIS, 2022). This also denotes, from an economic point of view, once again, the need to focus military doctrine on tactics used in the past, on those that integrate financially accessible UAV technology.

4.2. The Analysis of Obstacles in Research, Production and Integration

To begin with, it is obvious that there are numerous challenges in terms of the rapid and efficient implementation of such interceptor drones in the Romanian Armed Forces.

The development of drone prototypes requires an interdisciplinary approach, in which several components are evaluated, including cybersecurity, EW, reliability, engineering and management, and artificial intelligence through machine learning (ML). For this reason, in-depth research and development (R&D) is necessary at the local and national levels, so that the country can primarily rely on its own production. As can be seen in the Russian-Ukrainian war, Ukraine very quickly rose to the top of the largest drone producers, with its transition to a war economy and due to the recognition of modern technological capabilities, the emphasis thus falling on drones.

As an observation on ML, it is this that gives the drone the ability to act based on integrated AI criteria. UASs learn by interacting with the environment, constantly adapting to new situations and permanently optimizing the decisions they are going to make (Mircea, 2025). In an environment such as the battlefield, characterized by variability, dynamism and uncertainty, these interceptor drones, based on ML of the RL type (Reinforcement Learning) or other more complex methods (Deep Q-Learning), can make a difference by countering enemy drones.

In Romania, drones for military use are not yet exploited, as there are not enough national manufacturers of military equipment or state military companies to produce them. However, it is observed how the interest in such intelligent devices also influences Romania, in such a way that the near future may bring new changes in the endowment of the Armed Forces.

Research activities in this field in the country are conducted more institutionally, through universities, and their development is extended to the level of private commercial companies.

Unfortunately, drones have not been a priority for the Romanian military arsenal. For this reason, there is, primarily, a noticeable lack of the necessary infrastructure to support the development, testing, and use of such modern military devices. Infrastructure remains a necessary component that will have to be developed in parallel with the acquisition of drones.

At the same time, the lack of specialists in the field represents another obstacle regarding drones, especially interceptor ones. Qualified personnel are needed, specialized in piloting such technological means, in dynamic, stressful conditions, as they are used on the battlefields, in critical moments. Users are closely correlated with the aforementioned infrastructure. Training cannot be carried out without the appropriate infrastructure, and the infrastructure cannot be capitalized if there are not enough drone operator specialists.

A solution from this point of view could be the establishment of several national centres of excellence in which future operators can be trained, in real, dynamic conditions and using the latest generation material base, current in modern combat.

The production capacity, as mentioned, is reduced, currently focused on drones used for ISR and not on interceptor ones. Up to this point, the development of ISR and EW capabilities has been pursued. Thus, in 2024, the three contracted Bayraktar systems entered service, to which the Watchkeeper and Mini UAS systems will be added. Furthermore, in December 2024, the contract for the EW C-UAS systems was signed, with deliveries planned to start in 2027 (Marin, 2025). Interceptor drones are part of this category of C-UAS.

Another challenge is the dependence on imports for vital components that make up drones (sensors, modules, batteries, etc.), which reinforces the need to develop local production.

A clear and long-term investment in this area is necessary, in a military sense, another solution being civil-military and/or public-private partnerships. The agreement in the form of a joint venture between Romania and Ukraine or between Ukraine and the UK represents a positive example in this regard, in the right direction, with a view to promoting this arsenal and, subsequently, equipping its own Armed Forces.

The perspective of integrating these systems into the army practically assumes the interoperability of UAV systems with existing C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) networks. The possibility of integration establishes the difficulty with which real-time missions can be coordinated, in which all military technological means are used in a single, common ensemble. Then, there is the possibility of integration not only with one's own forces, but also with allied ones, based on the interoperability and standardization promoted by NATO, for which a local production must operate on the criteria of standardization promoted by the alliance.

Finally, with the advent of unmanned aircraft systems, in general, there is a need for standard operating procedures (SOPs), which allow users to constantly know how to act in order to successfully achieve the objective in hand.

All these perspectives and challenges are current and require their immediate approach so that the army's acquisition and equipment program is efficient and rapid.

5. Implementation Plan: Stages, Timeline and Necessary Resources

To realistically implement an acquisition program for interceptor drones, as part of C-UAS, 5 stages would be needed to quickly achieve gains, aiming for sustainability and scaling of the program for the near future, to endow a large number of forces with such capabilities, and not just a few units. In Figure no. 5 below, the implementation stages can be traced, starting from the initial one and up to the last one, forecasted, on the one hand, in 2027.

Figure no. 5: *Phased implementation of the program to acquire and equip the forces with interceptor drones*
(Source: Author’s creation)

The previous figure starts from 2024, with the entry into the Romanian arsenal of ISR drones and the announcement of the other directions regarding interceptor drones. The 5 stages to be followed, chronologically, would naturally be:

• Stage 1, of defining the desired priority operational requirements, of feasibility studies on the concepts, of establishing the path to be followed for the acquisition and development through solid partners (approximately 6 months);

• Stage 2, of designing prototypes, of testing them, of adjusting the desired specifications, etc. (approximately 12 months);

• Stage 3, of certification based on NATO requirements and integration into operational and manoeuvre units (approximately 12 months);

• Stage 4, of limited production, of training and use within the established units, to result in operational feedback, so that production is constantly innovative (approximately 12 months);

• Stage 5, of large production capacity, industrial scaling and sustainability by integrating these weapons into the entire national defence system, and then by maintaining and updating them technologically (permanently).

The current situation in Romania regarding the acquisition of drones for ISR and interception seems to be in line with these stages. According to the statement of the Minister of Economy, a number of 3500 drones/year are to be produced from 2026 (Soare, 2025), which would correlate on the graph with stages 3 and 4, respectively.

Therefore, funding should be pursued for research and development of prototypes based on technological transfer within strategic partnerships, then for the infrastructure necessary for further testing of prototypes. Operational efficiency will be represented by the way in which it is possible to combine the rapid creation of prototypes of interceptor drones at the local and national level, with long-term development, sustainably and strategically - the same principle proven and used by the Ukrainians.

6. Limits of Research

The study is limited to unclassified, public and online information and does not present practical verifications by the author of the technologies presented. The paper also focuses on recent sources in the specialized literature to the detriment of information from older sources, which may still be applicable.

Finally, the rapidity with which modern military technologies evolve in a war in general will certainly lead to the development of new means or improved variants of existing models, so that the projects and endowment programs that the country has or is currently pursuing may undergo changes, with interest subsequently shifting to other types of drones.

7. Conclusions

This article summarizes the key arguments supporting the necessity of developing and integrating interceptor drones as part of modern military capabilities in the Romanian Armed Forces. Their adoption is justified by their operational reliability, cost-effectiveness, and high efficiency in neutralizing hostile UAV threats, thus contributing directly to the protection and modernization of national defence structures.

From a quantitative perspective, the study outlines a phased roadmap that prioritizes rapid achievement of critical operational capabilities within the first 12-18 months, followed by gradual industrial scaling and full integration within 4-5 years. These estimations provide a measurable framework for capability development and monitoring progress. Ways of implementing such equipment programs, in a phased manner, have been shown, which shows that the pace at which the Romanian Armed Forces are being equipped is on schedule, according to the forecasts given by the heads involved in the programs.

From a qualitative perspective, this paper identifies and evaluates the main obstacles that currently limit Romania's capacity to develop such systems. As with any implementation, there are a number of challenges or obstacles that make the adoption and integration of these systems difficult. Some of these operational, technological and economic challenges have been analysed in this study, thus finding possible solutions to circumvent them. Through comparative analysis of international practices and domestic industrial potential, the study proposes realistic and context-adapted solutions aimed at improving interoperability, reducing costs, and enhancing system reliability, focusing on types of drone that would be most advantageous and suitable for the country's interests at the moment.

The results confirm that Romania's industrial and technological base can support the initial phase of interceptor drone production and testing, but within inter-institutional, civil-military coordination and with ensured investment. A planned approach, with rapid production and continuous operational feedback, can provide Romania with relevant capabilities in a relatively short term, in line with contemporary NATO defence standards.

Ultimately, the research demonstrates that the development of an interceptor drone arsenal is not only technically feasible, but also strategically necessary. By pursuing the proposed directions – phased implementation, integration of national industry, and continuous modernization – the Romanian Armed Forces can achieve a significant qualitative leap in their deterrence and defensive capabilities in the near future.

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