The Role of *Intelligence* in Avoiding Surprise. Case Study: Trends in Militant Movement in Romania[1]

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Abstract

Dilemmas raised, on the one hand, by the need to get anticipatory and predictive information and, on the other hand, by the lack of a unitary perspective on the nature and terminology specific to prediction and foresight are a particular cause of concern for intelligence practitioners given that their core activities focus on preventing and countering actions with potential impact on national interests.

This paper highlights some aspects aimed at confirming that, in many cases, intelligence services have the necessary tools and are successful in anticipating and warning about potential negative developments and phenomenon, but they do not always succeed, out of objective reasons, in preventing their occurrence.

In order to substantiate this theoretical perspective, the results of a case study on the short and medium dynamics and prospects for the militant movement in Romania are put forth.

Keywords: *warning, prediction, security, national interest, crisis, indicators*

Anticipation and Prediction - Perishable Processes and Products

As defined in the dictionary, *to predict* means *doing or saying something before a certain (fixed) date or before the agreed time, to prevent, to get ahead, to avert* the occurrence of an event or phenomenon.

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It is a process associated, psychologically speaking, to a change in perception (Zlate, 1999), the latter being, in turn, a key element in assessing a situation as potentially negative in terms of security or protection of national interests. What was considered a risk factor yesterday, given its potentially harmful nature, is either a threat or a reality today and will turn into an opportunity tomorrow. That is the case of the global crisis that broke out in 2007: long preached by economists such as Warren Buffett, George Soros and Alan Greenspan (Morris, 2009), it has become the main threat to economic stability of the entire international community, from the USA to Lichenstein, generating also some measures, which, in time, have set a series of financial and economic mechanisms that did not seem damaged at first glance (through austerity measures) and established the premise for healthy economic recovery by stimulating investment.

According to the same source, *to predict*[2] is defined as *saying, announcing in advance what is going to happen, positioning according to certain existing indications, intuition, reasoning, reading or foretelling the future*.

Predictions are made in order to substantiate customer's decisions, thus avoiding surprises. However, according to Michael McCormick (1995), *surprise is characterized as a result of intelligence failure, specifically a failure of warning (...). Most attacks that have achieved tactical surprise have taken place in an atmosphere of strategic warning (…). In fact, more ironic is that so much surprise has been achieved in spite of warning.*

Based on these considerations, we find that it is difficult to quantify intelligence agencies' failure and success in making predictions. "To be right", meaning warning in advance about an event or phenomenon that subsequently happened, can be a success for theorists, but it is a real failure for an *intelligence* professional as important as the lack of warning itself.

Besides the global crisis that occurred in 2007, recent examples that fall into this category and have had a major impact on the strategic environment in which Romania develops include:

- The fall of the Berlin Wall (November 9, 1989) and collapse of the Communist regime in Romania (December 1989) that changed: the relevant geopolitical environment, triggering a fundamental shift of the

[2] Given that, in Romanian, there is no corresponding action word for the noun *prediction*, we chose the verb *to predict* as equivalent, based on the sinonomy between the words *prediction* and *forecast/ foresight*.

foreign policy towards the West and in-depth resizing of national objectives, with priority being given to Euro-Atlantic integration; the economic environment in which our country operates, characterized by painful but necessary transition from a centralized to market economy and a dynamic of trade relations with major impact on Romania's presence on international markets;

- The September 11 terrorist attacks, a tragic moment for the international community, which highlighted the action potential of our country in the fight against global terrorism and probably hastened our entry into NATO, a huge strategic advantage in terms of security guarantees Romania enjoys.

Last but not least, the crisis in Ukraine (2014) is a negative landmark for regional stability in Southeast Europe, the situation in the neighboring state surprising information services not only because it illustrates the so far theoretical concept of "hybrid war" but especially through the transparent manner in which actors such as Russia are conducting their actions, many of them specific to the *intelligence* community (diversion, sabotage, strategic influencing, etc.).

Because of their potential impact on domestic stability, even if they cannot be considered "strategic surprises", natural disasters such as the Fukushima nuclear accident (March 11, 2011) bring to attention the issue of nuclear security as well as of energy security, as a nuclear plant is operating in our country and great attention must be paid to its security.

Such contexts generated by human action or uncontrollable natural phenomena can make the information containing elements of warning and prediction to be provided to decision makers obsolete. Thus, we note that, sometimes, it is not crises themselves that take us by surprise but their magnitude in a certain context created by specific triggers and the actors involved.

Modern society continues to give us arguments about the uncertain environment we are living in and non-linear logic of events and the fact that intelligence cannot anticipate every potential crisis is a consequence of evolution itself, which has become more than a natural, linear, and gradual process, but one directed or at least steerable, where results can be optimally oriented towards a specific purpose by certain factors and known actors.

Conceptual Challenges

The inability to give accurate answers to security developments is also caused by profound terminology contradictions and failure to clearly

define the terms of *foresight* and *prediction*.

The specific literature has not reached a consensus on the perspective on prediction as well as on warning or anticipatory mechanisms.

On the one hand, it is difficult to establish the points where *foresight* processes end, which are translated into Romanian as prediction – prognosis - forecast, and where the warning processes start. For example, according to Denis Loveridge (2009), foresight is "practical and qualitative anticipation", but Bob Johansen (2009) found that the foresight does not refer to creating predictions, but to making decisions.

Language barriers add to ambiguity, the terms being used with the same meaning or with specific shades of meaning or in completely different contexts. The correspondence between the concepts of *foresight* (in English[3] meaning *the ability of looking into the future, becoming aware of something that has not happened yet*) and *la prospective* (in French, used to define *the science studying technical, scientific, economic, and social causes that accelerate development of the modern world, and predicting situations that may arise from their combined influences*[4]) is questioned.

Methodological aspects represent another debated issue, as foresight principles are not clear and transparency and replicability of its results are challenged, although efforts in this regard have already begun to get a clear outline. Jan Erik Karlsen (2014) proposed the use of an online platform to prove that there are practical and easy ways to build a common body of knowledge in the field to be further used and practiced by professionals.

All these challenges lead to the conclusion that we cannot talk about a conceptualization of anticipation and foresight or about a specific scientific field that explains these two terms and processes associated to them. For this reason, products resulting after applying anticipatory and predictive methodologies often lack consistency, clarity and durability.

Intelligence Agencies' Role in Issuing Warnings and Forecasts

Theorists' inability to set clear, scientific guidelines for these dilemmas does not help much intelligence community practitioners. In their activity, anticipation is a prerequisite for creating national security information and warning policy makers about developments that may

[3] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/foresight
[4] http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/prospective/64476

impact on national interests and domestic balance so necessary for the state development. It also represents a landmark in elaborating strategies to counter risks and threats or to eliminate systemic vulnerabilities that could have a major impact on society.

High quality predictive information requires solid expertise and sufficient and reliable data to be analyzed and converted into *intelligence* products, elements that can be found ready-made in external environments.

Intelligence organizations cannot compete with institutions that have a long tradition and expertise in prognosis and forecasting or with their databases and such an effort would not be feasible, being a major waste of time, the most valuable resource for analysts and case officers of the specialized information structures.

Surveys conducted by national statistical institutes, reports drafted by national banks or specialized companies, such as cyber security firms, assessments by academic institutions are used by intelligence practitioners to develop predictive analyses, scenarios or forecasts on economic, financial, social, cyber issues.

Although a valuable information resource, their level of abstraction is often so high that it is necessary to "translate" raw data in order to use it, forcing intelligence structures to develop cooperation with civil society partners. That is the case of exact sciences, which have, unlike social and political sciences, effective tools to issue predictions (Markov chains being one of them), but that requires *intelligence* practitioners to hold specialized knowledge and understanding of highly abstract models, the reason why most people avoid using them.

From this perspective, it is here where OSINT can bring a more significant contribution than secret intelligence disciplines (HUMINT, SIGINT, MASINT, etc.) to avoid surprise, especially strategic ones.

On the other hand, intelligence services keep the monopoly on crucial missions: espionage and counterespionage, preventing and combating terrorism, extremism and transnational organized crime. This is the niche where the contribution of secret *intelligence* disciplines is greater than that of open sources, whose role is to identify and analyze the phenomenon, but the real prevention activity is implemented by case officers.

Maintaining social stability is a primary mission for any intelligence service, which is achieved by specific means. These include monitoring security status based on lists of indicators whose variation can signal potential macro and micro imbalances, analysis of domestic and foreign security

environment, respectively, as a last resort, conducting specific activities to prevent and combat phenomena that may impact on national security.

Case Study: Trends in Militant Movement in Romania

The aim of this study was to identify potential developments of the radical leftist movement in Romania.

In order to conduct quantitative and qualitative comparative analysis, we selected materials and messages disseminated in the public space in the context of protest actions involving representatives who showed such ideological orientation, who challenged:

- Rosia Montana gold ore mining project using cyanide technology;
- exploration of shale gas deposits using the hydraulic fracturing technique;
- adoption of the Law on euthanasia of stray dogs captured on public domain;
- adoption of European cyber security norms, known as ACTA.

The reference period under review was 2013 - 2014, during which several public events of different intensity and duration, spread across the country and in locations outside the country, that challenged those decisions, took place.

At descriptive level, the analysis focused on presenting and tallying, from the historical point of view, the militant acts of protests in our country in the past 25 years. The most important movements specific to leftist radicalism took place in 2008, amid the Bucharest NATO Summit, when protests targeted globalization, war, the system, representing a classic example of anarchy in action.

Comparing the protests against the four civic causes, one can notice that if initially they had their own public and a distinct critical mass, which militated for each cause separately, shortly afterwards, the participants started to support each other and carry out joint actions.

Another conclusion was that the typology of these situations links only partially to the anarchist movement revealing traits specific to the civic militancy that may take the shape of street riots and violence.

Such mutations can be explained and included among *intelligence* services' activities by combining the knowledge provided by science and specific means of intelligence. A scientific approach aims at theories stemming in sociology of crowds and leadership, history, politics, economics, anthropology.

The explicative level resulted in identifying the causes and contexts of the manifestations unfolded around the invoked witness-situation, identifying a series of relevant trends for the activity of leading organizations promoting such ideologies.

By applying the simplified methodology of scenario analysis, as proposed by Daniela Mitu (2014, pp. 123-125), the following factors were selected to conduct an analysis of significant developments of those movements: tactical and operational models, communication *patterns* and channels, domestic and foreign actors, and types of message dissemination. Based on these benchmarks, we identified a series of patterns that affect the way messages and actions related to analyzed topics were aggregated.

As for actionable models, we note the import from the West of civil disobedience tactics and operational patterns that include strategies of organizing and mobilizing supporters, creation of a critical relatively stable crowd having long-term objectives.

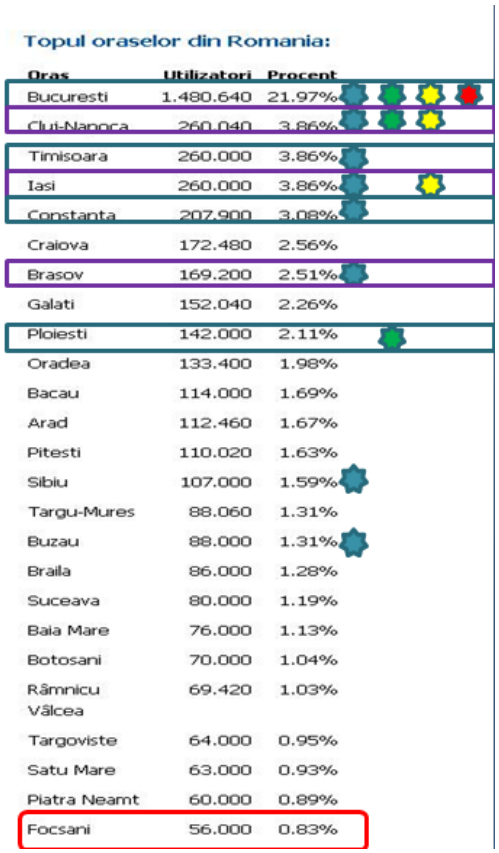
For instance, online petitions have been started to reject Government's decisions in the four cases, the one relating to shale gas exploration and exploitation by using hydraulic fracturing having gathered about 50,000 accessions. We also witnessed flash mobs in important spots, such as University Square; cultural fund-raising events, most recent one being held in August 2014 at Pungesti, Vaslui County; DIY (*do it yourself*) projects, flyers and dedicated websites used for disseminating materials illustrating the justice of the cause they support; *Occupy*-type "resistance camp"; protests in various locations, most of them peaceful and consistent with the legal exercise of citizens' rights.

In topical cases, and rather scanty, the manifestations had a slight tinge of violence – as in the case of Pungesti protesters, who "sanctioned" the presence of the gendarmerie and its attempt to unblock the public road for traffic and the wire mesh fences they lifted around the Chevron's drilling site.

Another major trend is using mainly the online environment for communication especially the socializing and content dissemination platforms, such as Facebook or Youtube.

Therefore, it was no surprise finding that the number of protests and civic initiatives was significantly higher in the cities with largest number of people using communication platforms, namely Bucharest, Cluj, Timisoara and Iasi. Demonstrations against Rosia Montana project are marked in blue,

protests against shale gas exploitation in green, those against ACTA in yellow, and rallies against stray dog euthanasia in red.



Topul oraselor din Romania:

Oras	Utilizatori	Procent
Bucuresti	1.480.640	21.97%
Cluj-Napoca	260.040	3.86%
Timisoara	260.000	3.86%
Iasi	260.000	3.86%
Constanta	207.900	3.08%
Craiova	172.480	2.56%
Brasov	169.200	2.51%
Galati	152.040	2.26%
Ploiesti	142.000	2.11%
Oradea	133.400	1.98%
Bacau	114.000	1.69%
Arad	112.460	1.67%
Pitesti	110.020	1.63%
Sibiu	107.000	1.59%
Targu-Mures	88.060	1.31%
Buzau	88.000	1.31%
Braila	86.000	1.28%
Suceava	80.000	1.19%
Baia Mare	76.000	1.13%
Botosani	70.000	1.04%
Râmnicu Vâlcea	69.420	1.03%
Targoviste	64.000	0.95%
Satu Mare	63.000	0.93%
Piatra Neamt	60.000	0.89%
Focsani	56.000	0.83%

Fig.1 Facebook users nationwide and incidence of analyzed protests
Source: www.facebrands.ro

Recent statistics show that the Romanian population is part of the international trend on the use of mobile communication and Internet access. Thus, it appears that the number of mobile phones is higher than the total population, being an average 115 mobile phones per 100 inhabitants. As for the use of smartphones, the number of owners of such devices tripled in 2013 as compared to 2012.

Fig. 2 Trend of mobile phone users in Romania
Source: www.ancom.org.ro

As for the involved actors, two distinct elements came in the limelight. On the internal plane, environmental organizations are among the most active and potent in terms of action and logistics. The rejection of the Rosia Montana mining project, as well as the shale gas alternative energy, enjoyed the highest public support as compared to the other two cases, both in the virtual environment, considering the large number of pages devoted and those who accessed them, and in the real world, as the number of participants in public protests held in various locations nationwide shows.

The connection between homegrown militant movements and international campaigners has become stronger. For instance, in the case of shale gas, visible liaisons was created with campaigners in Bulgaria, where protests had started earlier, as well as with Greenpeace, and, in the case of ACTA, ties between Romanian protesters and the Anonymus movement were obvious.

Some activists bragged with their experience gained in Turkey during Istanbul protests. No signals have been identified in the public space regarding their direct participation in the events, but just the fact that they have established ties with Turkish demonstrators and taken lessons on their resistance tactics.

From this point of view, the most important finding was the emergence of a civic activism nucleus in which environmental, animal rights and personal data protection activists have established strong connections so that they would be always prepared to support a certain civil cause, not

necessarily one of those already mentioned. The public message is developed around the following keywords: "solidarity", "united" and "saving".

Strength and relevance of connections established between the various involved entities are clearly shown in the chart drafted based on the social network analysis: the *organizations* that openly claimed their involvement in supporting a single cause are outlined in red, those involved in supporting two causes in blue, and those involved in three causes in black.

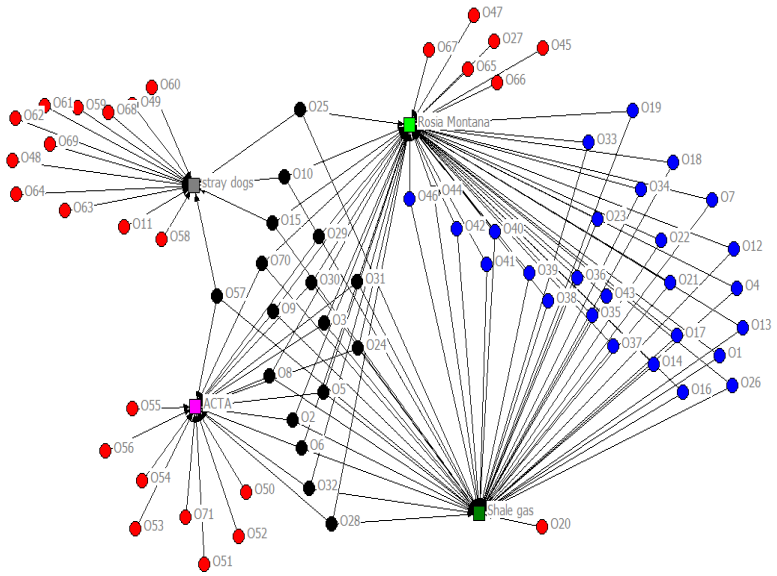


Fig. 3 Connections among the involved organizations involved in 2013-2014 protests
Source: Drafted during the research, using UCInet soft

No entity has been identified in all four cases, but this fact does not rule out the participation of distinct *persons* in these events.

It should also be noted that the analysis is based strictly on open sources and mass media, results being likely to be incomplete given that a significant amount of messages is disseminated through restricted channels such as closed discussion groups, private messages or the *dark web*.

As for the types of disseminated messages, an improvement in techniques for influencing public opinion can be noticed, starting from

emotional messages to the shocking ones, as well as the increased efforts in arguing the points of view through some specialized websites.

Viral marketing strategies are also widely used in promoting public causes, especially environmental ones, mentioning the efforts to "educate" the supporters by posting good practice guides on civic involvement and easing access to information resources. The degree of virulence of messages varies, reaching incitement to civil disobedience, but the transfer from virtual world into the real world is, at this time, reduced.

The anticipative dimension has been ensured by drafting several scenarios on development of the militant movement in Romania in terms of SRI's fundamental mission to protect democratic values and promote national interests in order to achieve national security, guarantee citizens' rights and freedoms and defend the rule of law[5].

To that end, we applied method called cone of plausibility (Taylor, 1990), which led to the following possible developments in the short- and medium-term:

- *Basis scenario*: a clear assumption of civic militancy will be outlined and "anti-system" hybrid movement will be agglutinated;
- *Best case*: a critical activist mass will be formed who will closely monitor policy decisions impacting the domestic social environment;
- *Worst ca*se: a core of potentially violent eco-anarchists will gradually strengthen that may have an impact on social stability, the most serious of which is eco-terrorism.

Conclusions

Intelligence services can avoid neither success nor failure, but they have to be rationally assumed and capitalized on to generate the anticipatory knowledge providing a country with the capacity of coping with any security challenge, regardless of how decision-makers are provided with future development projections, in multiple or single versions, as scenarios, respectively forecasts.

Beyond practical findings that can be developed in a strategic assessment on the militancy phenomenon in Romania, the case study

[5] https://www.sri.ro/misiune-viziune-valori.html.

reveals, once again, the dynamics of potential threats to which intelligence services have to find solutions. Most times, using their actionable tools and analytical capabilities, they manage to anticipate and warn on the evolution of negative events or phenomena.

In plainer words, they can predict the occurrence of certain events, but not the exact moment, and can also anticipate where and when messages and subsequent communications will be disseminated as well as the level of public support.

However, when failing to avoid surprises, they will be able to manage the crisis by: providing one or several versions of what the future might look like, building scenarios, projections or simulations; developing contingency or continuity plans, if facing a foreseen or unforeseen security crisis; strengthening internal flexibility in terms of organizational structure, capabilities to collect, analyze and disseminate national security information and to allocate resources.

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