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CONTENT

INTELLIGENCE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF PUBLIC TRUST IN PREVENTING SOCIETAL RADICALIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE DANISH MODEL

Ioana CHIȚĂ*

Abstract:

This article examines the role of public trust as a potential mechanism for preventing societal radicalization, with a particular focus on the national Danish model for preventing radicalization and violet extremism. The present study employs an instrumental case study methodology selected because the research question concerns a complex, context-dependent phenomenon that cannot be meaningfully examined through variable-based quantitative approaches alone. Denmark was chosen as the unit of analysis on the grounds that it represents a paradigmatic case of institutionalized trust-based prevention, offering theoretically transferable insights for low-trust societies. Data were drawn from policy documents, academic literature, and comparative institutional analyses, and were examined through a qualitative thematic framework linking trust, social cohesion, and radicalization prevention.

Public trust—defined as citizens' confidence in governmental and public institutions—has been increasingly recognized as a key factor in fostering social cohesion and resilience against extremist ideologies. By exploring the relationship between public trust, social cohesion and the processes that contribute to radicalization, this article aims to investigate whether promoting greater trust in the public sphere can serve as an effective preventive measure against social radicalization, polarization and violent extremism in low trust societies. In this context, the aim of the article is to analyze whether there are any lessons to be learned from high trust societies in order to address the socio-political factors that favor the emergence of radical ideologies and behaviors in societies with low trust, such as Romania.

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Drawing on theoretical frameworks related to trust and social integration, this study explores how Denmark's approach to preventing radicalization integrates trust-building measures into its policies and initiatives. The results suggest that promoting trust in state institutions and democratic processes can function as a protective factor against radicalization, by strengthening a sense of social belonging, alleviating grievances, and reducing individuals' susceptibility to extremist narratives. By critically assessing the strengths and limitations of the Danish model, this study contributes to the broader discussion about the effectiveness of trust-based approaches in preventing radicalization policies. The article concludes by highlighting the public policy implications for low trust European states that aspire to develop prevention strategies that emphasize institutional legitimacy, transparency, and citizen engagement.

Keywords: *radicalization, violent extremism, public trust, preventing radicalization, societal radicalization*

Introduction

Public trust has become a buzzword in public policy research. In the academic literature, public trust is conceptualized from multiple perspectives, highlighting its complexity and relevance in relation to the functioning of democratic institutions. Thus, Mansoor defines public trust in government as the level of confidence that citizens have that authorities "will do what is right, act appropriately and honestly in the name of the public interest" (Mansoor, 2021). In addition, Beshi and Kaur (2020) emphasize that public trust also reflects the general degree of satisfaction of the population with political decision-makers, suggesting a direct link between citizens' perception of the effectiveness of government and the support given to it (Beshi and Kaur, 2020). Therefore, public trust in the government refers to the public's expectations of their political leaders and the performance of government agencies in how they engage, behave, and fulfill their responsibilities.

According to Smith and Brooks (2013), there are at least three levels of trust: public trust, institutional trust, and specific trust (Smith and Brooks, 2013). Public trust refers to the "common societal feeling of trust towards institutions and public leaders," while institutional trust represents the "feeling of trust in a certain organization". Specific trust is

the "feeling of trust in a particular organization in relation to a particular issue" (Smith and Brooks, 2013).

High-trust societies are typically characterized by all three types of trust mentioned by Smith and Brooks (2013). In these societies, public trust is high, as citizens generally have confidence in the overall functioning of society and its institutions. Institutional trust is also strong, as people trust key institutions, such as government, the legislative system and also the media, to serve the public interest and function in an efficient manner. In addition, specific trust is prevalent, as individuals tend to trust certain organizations or entities, especially those involved in specific sectors or issues such as health, education, or business. Together, these levels of trust contribute to social cohesion, collective responsibility, and a sense of security, as citizens believe that institutions and individuals will act honestly, fairly, and in their best interest (Ronn et al., 2025).

Traditionally, Scandinavian societies are defined by a high level of public trust (Ronn et al., 2025)[1]. These societies typically have efficient institutions that are perceived by their citizens as trustworthy (such as the legal system, political authorities and the media), greater political stability, and resilience to social divisions and radicalization (Ronn et al., 2025).

Societies with a high degree of trust are valuable case studies that deserve to be analyzed in order to extract principles, traits and transferable lessons for the states with a poor social cohesion, low levels of public trust, social radicalization and violent extremism. Academics link increased public trust with pro-social behaviors (Uslaner, 2000), more solid democracies (Newton, 1997; Putnam et.al. 1994), and lower crime rates (Uslaner, 2002).

On the other hand, a low level of trust is widely considered an obstacle to social cohesion (Bargsted et al., 2023), which can lead to the emergence of "us versus them" narratives, fueling contempt and the phenomenon of "othering" in a process of social polarization, radicalization of ideas and violent extremism (Bardsley et al., 2021).

[1] Ronn et al. (2025) use the term social trust to refer to public trust, defined by the authors as the public's confidence in state institutions and the collaborative relationships between citizens and the state.

Evidence shows that trust in governments has declined over the past 50 years (Prats et al., 2024). The OECD study on the determinant factors of trust in public institutions reveals a worrying trend across 30 countries, with 44% of individuals reporting low or no trust in their national government, compared to 39% who express moderate or high trust (OECD, 2024). This discrepancy signals a growing problem, underscoring the urgent need to explore effective strategies for strengthening public trust, strategies that target the causes of distrust. A notable aspect of the survey is the increase of political polarization, fueled in part by misinformation, which can intensify social divisions and lead to political disengagement.

While governments have traditionally been perceived as the central actors responsible for maintaining public trust and social cohesion, this assumption no longer fully holds. In the contemporary, globalized and digitally networked environment, non-state actors—especially digital platforms—increasingly shape the frameworks within which citizens interact, form opinions, and pursue their needs (Crouch, 2004; Applebaum, 2020). Recent theoretical perspectives highlight a structural and cultural transformation of democratic systems that deeply affects the foundations of public trust. Colin Crouch (2004) introduces the concept of *post-democracy* to describe societies where democratic institutions persist formally, yet real power increasingly shifts toward economic and corporate elites, leading to the erosion of citizen participation and transparency (Crouch, 2004). In this context, civic engagement declines as citizens become political consumers rather than active participants in deliberation, while governance itself evolves into a form of perception management, where image and emotional appeal outweigh substantive ideas and policy debate. In parallel, Anne Applebaum (2020) illustrates how the cultural and emotional dimensions of this process—polarization, disinformation, and the nostalgia for authoritarian order—undermine liberal values and rational public discourse (Applebaum, 2020). Taken together, these analyses suggest that the crisis of trust is not merely institutional, but systemic: the authority once concentrated in governments is now dispersed across private, technological, and transnational actors who shape public discourse and social cohesion.

In this context marked by a rising distrust, Romania is often classified as a society with low levels of public trust (Globsec, 2024; INSCOP, 2023; Voicu et al., 2020), citizens showing considerable skepticism towards social and political institutions[2]. This widespread distrust in political and social institutions is not just the subjective perception of Romanians, but reflects dissatisfactions based on empirical realities. The persistence of systemic corruption, the lack of accountability of the political class and the constant failure of institutions to respond effectively to the needs of citizens have contributed significantly to the erosion of public trust and the creation of a climate of distrust. This relationship with reality has created a perception of distrust that has been perpetuated over time and is reflected in various indices of civic engagement and public trust, with Romanians consistently reporting low levels of trust in the government, the media and other citizens. Such a climate of distrust affects social cohesion and hinders the proper functioning of democratic institutions and public processes, already altered by its preexisting systemic problems.

Given the low levels of trust in state institutions in Romania, highlighted by various surveys (IRES, 2024; INSCOP, 2023), it is necessary to explore and implement effective strategies to increase public trust. In a context where the lack of public trust can undermine social cohesion and affect the proper functioning of democratic institutions, it is essential to identify solutions that respond to the needs of Romanian citizens and promote transparency, accountability and open dialogue between authorities and society. Such an approach could have a positive impact on political stability and sustainable economic development of Romania. In this sense, rebuilding public trust is not just an administrative objective, but an essential component of the strategy to prevent social tensions and systemic vulnerabilities that can foster radical manifestations. Public trust-building initiatives can play a key

[2] A survey conducted by IRES in 2024 highlights a low level of trust in state institutions in Romania among young people (aged between 18 and 35 years old) in state institutions in Romania. According to the data, 63% of young people do not trust the President of Romania, and 58% have a similar attitude towards the Government and Parliament. These results suggest a significant crisis of trust among the younger generation towards political authorities, which may reflect a mismatch between their expectations and current political realities (IRES, 2024).

role in mitigating social polarization, radicalization and right-wing extremism. Lack of trust in state institutions can create fertile ground for radical ideologies, which exploit citizens' frustrations and grievances, amplifying social and political divisions.

To fully understand the strategic potential of public trust in preventing radicalization, an in-depth analysis of how this trust is formed and transformed depending on risk perceptions, social experiences and institutional performance is necessary.

Public Trust: Theories, Trends and Implications

Trust is closely linked to the public perception of risk, being formed based on the subjective perception of reality, the causes of events, the values affected and the sources of information on risks. Public trust is based on a critical assessment of political actors and institutions, influenced by short-term changes in their performance, credibility and integrity.

Thus, it can be shaped by a series of events such as political uprisings, economic crises, corruption scandals or ideological adjustments of governments (Bargsted et al., 2017). At individual level, attributes such as wealth, education, and health status can serve as indicators of public trust, as people with higher socio-economic status tend to exhibit higher levels of trust in both the social and political spheres (Bornand and Klein, 2022). This is also reflected by the study[3] of sociologists Voicu, Rusu and Tufiş (2020) which provides empirical evidence supporting the link between socio-economic status and the level of public trust in Romania. The study confirms that people with a higher socio-economic status tend to exhibit higher levels of public trust (Voicu et al., 2020). On the other hand, Hwang's study (2023) shows how perceptions of inequality, which can be influenced by one's socioeconomic status, play a significant role in shaping trust in society[4].

[3]The study is based on complex sociological research and data collected from 1993 to 2018.

[4] The study uses data from 46 countries to show that trust in institutions that administer fair justice and protect property rights is directly correlated with economic development. This research emphasizes trust in social systems as an institution-dependent characteristic.

Although Hwang's study does not explicitly confirm that higher socioeconomic status leads to greater public trust, it supports the broader understanding that perceptions of inequality are linked to trust levels, aligning with research on the relationship between socioeconomic factors and public trust (Hwang, 2023).

Some studies suggest that institutions serve as foundational forces in the formation of social attitudes and behaviours. For instance, Sønderskov and Dinesen (2016) found that, in Denmark, public trust positively influences social trust[5], the general trust that individuals have in others, but not vice versa (Sønderskov and Dinesen, 2016). Seifert (2018) arrived at similar conclusions for Switzerland and the Netherlands (Seifert, 2018). Newton et al (2018 also suggest that societal trust and political trust[6]—that part of public trust that denotes the

[5]Social Trust/ societal trust refers to the general trust that individuals have in others within their society, including people they may not know personally. It reflects the belief that most people are honest, reliable, and cooperative, and that society is fundamentally trustworthy. Social trust is often seen as a key element of social cohesion and the functioning of everyday life, as it encourages cooperation and positive social interactions.

[6]Political Trust specifically relates to the trust individuals have in political institutions, leaders, and the broader political system. It encompasses belief in the legitimacy, effectiveness, and fairness of governmental institutions, as well as confidence that political leaders act in the public's best interest. Political trust is crucial for the stability and legitimacy of political systems, as it influences citizens' willingness to engage with and comply with political decisions and policies (Miller, 1974; Norris, 1999; Zmerli, 2014). Newton and Norris (2000) define political trust as the public's confidence in the ability and integrity of political institutions, particularly in the government (Newton and Norris, 2000). Trust is seen as an indicator of the public's belief that the government is competent, responsive, and works in the interest of its citizens. The authors emphasize that high levels of political trust are crucial for a stable and functioning democracy. Zmerli (2014) expands on the idea of political trust by defining it as a belief in the legitimacy of political institutions and a sense of confidence that political actors, including politicians and bureaucrats, act in the public's best interest (Zmerli, 2014). Zmerli also stresses the importance of political trust as an essential component for democratic stability and the effective functioning of governance, where trust facilitates political participation, compliance with laws, and overall societal cohesion. In both cases, political trust is seen as a cornerstone for the health and stability of democratic systems, as it enables citizens to feel that their governments and political systems are legitimate and worthy of their support. In the context of the three types of trust identified by Smith and Brooks (2013)— public trust, institutional trust,

confidence individuals place in political institutions, leaders, and the larger political framework—may be correlated, given that both are shaped by a number of individual factors that characterize privileged groups in a society (Newton et al., 2018). While these studies advance the understanding of trust dynamics, they remain limited to affluent and developed societies characterized by low inequality, expansive welfare states, and high levels of trust (Delhey and Newton, 2005).

Although, the connection between social and political trust does not make the object of the present study, the mechanisms of consolidating trust at societal level are so profound that the above-mentioned association reveals itself as we explore the processes of societal trust building. Research suggests that institutions play a central role in shaping social perceptions and behaviors (Bargsted et al., 2022). The effectiveness of political institutions and the policies they implement can directly impact the levels of trust in a society. According to Rothstein and Stolle (2008), three socio-psychological instruments can be distinguished through which institutions can foster trust: inference, incentives, and consequences (Rothstein and Stolle, 2008). Through the mechanism of inference, citizens who perceive public officials as fair and impartial will infer that other members of society are also trustworthy, thus strengthening social capital. From an incentive perspective, when institutions are efficient and impartial, individuals have fewer reasons to engage in unethical behavior, leading to an overall increase in honesty and cooperation. In terms of consequences, institutions that set clear rules and apply effective sanctions discourage opportunistic behavior, thus facilitating a climate of mutual trust. In addition, according to Spadaro et al. (2020), trust in state institutions contributes indirectly to

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and specific trust — political trust is directly related to public trust, playing an essential role in the functioning and stability of democratic regimes. Political trust can be seen as a subtype of public trust, being specifically related to citizens' perception of the government and the way it fulfills its role in society. Thus, high trust in government is an indicator of a society with high public trust, and a decrease in political trust may reflect a crisis of public trust. Thus, political trust can be considered an important component of public trust and institutional trust, having a direct impact on social cohesion, political stability, and the efficiency of democratic processes. High levels of political trust contribute to the better functioning of democratic institutions and strengthening the link between citizens and the state.

the development of social trust by instilling a sense of security, which reduces perceived vulnerability and fosters interpersonal relationships based on trust (Spadaro et al., 2020). Thus, in the complex process of building trust at societal level, efficient and fair institutions represent an essential factor for promoting a climate of stability and social cohesion.

Other scholars advance the idea that social trust influences political trust through projection[7] (Seifert, 2018) or cooperative expectations[8] (Dellmuth and Tallberg, 2020). The before-mentioned studies were based on surveys conducted in Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States (Dellmuth and Tallberg, 2020) on one hand, and Denmark (Sønderskov and Dinesen, 2016), the Netherlands and Switzerland, on the other (Seifert, 2018). Therefore, it is clear that the relationship between social trust and political trust in strong democracies is bidirectional and intricate, where each reinforces the other. Social and political trust are both causal factors and symptoms for a strong social cohesion. More recent empirical studies support this bidirectional relationship. For example, Bargsted et al. (2022) conducted a four-wave panel survey in Chile, a society characterized by low trust levels, and found that political trust positively influences social trust and vice versa. Their findings suggest that this positive relationship transcends different political settings and does not require a minimum threshold of trust to emerge (Bargsted et al., 2022). Further exploring this dynamic, Muringani et al. (2024) examined the interrelation between social trust, political trust and economic development in European regions. The authors hypothesized that social trust serves as a foundation for political trust, proposing that in societies with high general trust, this feeling extends to governmental and political systems. They argue that socially trusting individuals are more likely to accept the legitimacy of political institutions, thereby fostering political trust (Muringani et al., 2024).

[7] The experiences and knowledge accumulated by individuals through everyday social interactions function as a general heuristic, influencing the perception and degree of trust shown towards public officials.

[8] Individuals with a high propensity to trust are more inclined to anticipate cooperative behavior from others, which increases their likelihood of perceiving collective political institutions as legitimate.

These studies collectively highlight the reciprocal nature of the relationship between social and political trust, emphasizing their mutual reinforcement across varying societal contexts. The reciprocal relationship between social and political trust plays a critical role in shaping societal stability and cohesion, particularly in relation to phenomena such as social polarization, radicalization and violent extremism. When social and political trust reinforce one another positively, societies tend to exhibit greater civic engagement, institutional legitimacy and social cohesion. However, when either form of trust erodes, it can trigger a cycle of fragmentation and distrust, creating fertile ground for polarization and extremism.

In contexts of declining political trust—often due to corruption, perceived injustice or ineffective governance—individuals may become increasingly sceptical of democratic institutions and processes. This scepticism, in turn, weakens social trust, as citizens grow wary of those who hold opposing political or ideological views, leading to heightened social polarization. As divisions deepen, marginalized or disillusioned individuals may become more susceptible to radicalization and violent extremism, seeking alternative sources of identity and belonging outside mainstream political and social structures.

As individuals increasingly align with groups that reflect their disillusionment and perceived marginalization, this alignment often leads to the reinforcement of in-group biases and the vilification of out-groups, further entrenching societal divisions. Consequently, individuals within polarized societies are more susceptible to radicalization and violent extremism, as membership in extremist groups can fulfil needs for identity, purpose, and community that they perceive as lacking in mainstream society. These groups often exploit existing distrust, presenting themselves as the only credible alternative to a failing system. In such scenarios, the breakdown of mutual trust not only fuels polarization but also creates conditions conducive to radicalization and, ultimately, violent extremism.

Public trust has been analysed from multiple disciplinary perspectives—including political science, sociology, psychology and criminology—by the academic literature on radicalization, social polarization and violent extremism, often as a factor influencing

individuals' perceptions of legitimacy, governance and social inclusion. Still, the connection between public trust on one side, and radicalization, social polarization and violent extremism, on the other, is insufficiently explored by the existing body of research. Below are the main ways in which public trust has been examined in relation to radicalization, social polarization and violent extremism.

Public Trust, Radicalization and Social Polarization

A limited number of studies have investigated the role of public trust in preventing radicalization, emphasizing that individuals who trust state institutions are less likely to turn to extremist ideologies. Scholars argue that trust in democratic governance, law enforcement and social institutions fosters social cohesion and provides legitimate avenues for expressing grievances, thereby reducing the appeal of radicalization (Hegghammer, 2017). Studies indicate that when trust in democratic institutions declines, individuals become more vulnerable to populist and extremist rhetoric, leading to heightened polarization (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). This polarization can manifest in political extremism, social fragmentation and the weakening of democratic norms. Conversely, strong institutional trust has been linked to resilience against divisive ideologies and a greater willingness to engage in democratic dialogue and compromise (Putnam, 2000).

Research suggests that declining trust in institutions correlates with increased acceptance of extremist narratives that portray the state as corrupt, oppressive, or illegitimate (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2016). Dalgaard-Nielsen emphasizes that trust in institutions is a critical factor for the success of countering violent extremism efforts because when governments or law enforcement agencies fail to build or maintain trust, this can lead in turn to resentment, alienation and the perception that institutions are not addressing the real issues (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2016). Also, when citizens trust state institutions, the prevention and countering efforts are perceived as legitimate.

Other authors explore how feelings of precarity are associated with conspiracy beliefs, mediated by public trust. Their findings suggest that individuals experiencing economic and social instability are more likely to distrust institutions, leading them to endorse conspiracy

theories. This dynamic can contribute to the spread of extremist narratives that exploit such beliefs (Adamus, et al., 2024). Moreover, van Prooijen et al. (2022) found that suspicion of institutions reduces trust between strangers, within-group cooperation, commitment and prosocial behavior, while increasing prejudice. This erosion of social cohesion can lead individuals to seek belonging in extremist groups that promise solidarity and purpose (van Prooijen et al., 2022).

Given these considerations, the mechanisms underlying radicalization and social polarization are profound and complex, and cannot be limited exclusively to a single cause. These processes are influenced by a multitude of interconnected factors, including low public trust, social and economic instabilities, as well as collective dissatisfaction and frustrations generated by social inequalities or lack of opportunities. In a society where institutions fail to effectively respond citizens' needs or to promote a climate of trust and transparency, tensions may arise that facilitate the marginalization of some groups. These groups, faced with social and economic exclusion, can end up radicalizing, and the deepening polarization contributes to the consolidation of a climate of hostility and division. These problems, in essence, erode the foundation of today's society, which often seems to disregard the well-being of the individual, endangering social cohesion. Thus, the phenomenon of radicalization can only be understood in a broad context, which encompasses a variety of factors that interact and amplify each other.

From Trust Erosion to Radicalization and Violent extremism

The erosion of public trust is increasingly recognized as a contributing factor in the process of radicalization, particularly among marginalized communities. Perceived injustices, such as ethnic and religious discrimination, police brutality and political exclusion, contribute to declining confidence in state institutions, thereby heightening individuals' susceptibility to extremist ideologies (Köhler, 2017). In such contexts, radical groups strategically exploit these grievances, positioning themselves as viable alternatives to the state by offering ideological justifications for opposition to the government (Köhler, 2017). This process not only deepens societal polarization but also reinforces cycles of distrust, creating an environment where

radicalization can thrive. Addressing this issue requires institutional reforms that promote transparency, accountability, and inclusive governance to restore public confidence and counter the narratives advanced by extremist groups. While the before-mentioned studies provide valuable insights[9], generalizing their findings globally requires caution, as radicalization processes are shaped by specific cultural, political and historical factors. Effective counter-radicalization strategies must therefore be context-sensitive and tailored to the unique dynamics of each society.

Public trust may be eroded when individuals perceive or are faced with the absence of guvernamental action for combating discrimination and poor integration, which, in turn, is believed to increase the risk of radicalization (King and Taylor, 2011; Wilner and Dobouloz, 2010). According to Pressman (2006) "it is generally accepted by experts that failed integration, frustration within the host society, identity issues, and conflicting values with western democracies are contributing factors to radicalization." (Pressman, 2006). Indeed, it is well-documented that these factors contribute to radical behaviors (Pauwels and Schils, 2016).

The relationship between public trust and violent extremism has been examined in studies on radicalization pathways and counter-terrorism policies. Scholars argue that trust in law enforcement and judicial institutions plays a critical role in determining whether individuals resort to violence as a means of expressing their grievances (Vidino, 2020). When individuals perceive counter-terrorism measures as fair and non-discriminatory, they are less likely to support or engage in violent extremism (Cherney and Murphy, 2016). On the other hand, excessive securitization, profiling, and repressive policies can further erode trust in institutions, inadvertently fueling radicalization rather than preventing it (Schmid, 2013). A study on three Danish Communities examined factors that influence community resilience against violent extremism and concluded that standing up against violent extremists or seeking help when a close relation is suspected of engaging with

[9] Research on radicalization and disengagement has been conducted in diverse national contexts, including Colombia, Northern Ireland, and Spain, examining cases such as paramilitary demobilization, the transition of IRA members to peaceful political participation, and the disengagement of former ETA members (Bjørgo and Horgan, 2009).

extremism requires a certain level of trust in institutions. This implies that low public trust may hinder individuals from taking actions that counteract extremist influences (Dalgaard-Nielsen and Schack, 2016).

Interestingly, academic research suggests that terrorist attacks can temporarily increase trust in institutions due to a "rally-around-the-flag" effect, where people respond to crises by showing greater support for political leaders and institutions (Fenn and Brunton-Smith, 2021). However, more recent studies have found that there is no significant overall effect of jihadist terrorist attacks on institutional trust when looking at aggregated data, challenging previous assumptions that such attacks systematically generate rally effects (Nagel et. al., 2024). The authors warn against overgeneralizing findings from highly publicized cases (e.g., Charlie Hebdo in 2015) and emphasize the need for context-specific analyses.

Trust-Building as a Strategy to Prevent Radicalization

Academic literature also explores policies and initiatives designed to rebuild public trust as a means of preventing radicalization and violent extremism. In the academic literature, trust-building strategies can be classified into two main categories: strategies for strengthening inter-institutional trust and strategies for increasing citizens' trust in institutions (public trust). Both types of strategies are essential for strengthening social stability and preventing phenomena such as radicalization or violent extremism, as trust in institutions directly influences the efficiency of public policies and the level of social cohesion.

The first category aims to improve collaboration and coordination between different government institutions and non-governmental organizations, through mechanisms such as sharing responsibilities, decision-making transparency and the exchange of good practices (Ellis et. al., 2020). Studies have examined community-based approaches, such as Denmark's Aarhus model, which emphasizes dialogue, mentoring and multi-agency collaboration to foster trust between vulnerable individuals and state institutions (Lindekilde, 2012).

The second category focuses on increasing the legitimacy of public institutions in the perception of citizens, through measures such as ensuring fairness in decision-making processes, reducing corruption

and promoting social inclusion (Rothstein and Stolle, 2008). Research on deradicalization programs suggests that trust-building efforts, including fair policing, inclusive governance, and transparent communication, can improve cooperation between communities and authorities, reducing the risk of radicalization (Schmid, 2016). Enhancing institutional transparency and procedural fairness has been shown to improve public perceptions of government legitimacy (Rothstein and Stolle, 2008). Trust is also fostered through inclusive governance and civic engagement, where citizen participation in decision-making processes increases institutional accountability and strengthens social cohesion (Putnam, 2000). Additionally, reducing corruption and ensuring ethical governance are crucial, as studies indicate that low corruption levels are directly correlated with higher public trust (Bjørnskov and Svendsen, 2013). Inter-institutional collaboration and power-sharing further contribute to trust-building by creating cooperative and effective policy frameworks (Ellis et. al., 2020). Furthermore, long-term investments in education and media literacy can help counter misinformation and reinforce trust in democratic institutions (Norris, 2011).

Overall, public trust should play a more important role in academic discussions on radicalization, social polarization and violent extremism. While strong public trust can serve as a protective factor, its erosion—due to perceived injustices, discrimination, or excessive securitization—can act as a driver of radicalization and extremism. Therefore, policies aimed at strengthening institutional legitimacy and fairness are critical for fostering social resilience to radicalization. By adopting these evidence-based strategies, societies with historically low levels of trust, such as Romania, can gradually strengthen institutional credibility and foster a more resilient social environment.

Understanding the Danish Model to Preventing Radicalization and Violent Extremism

In the present section, we have opted to provide an introductory overview of the main actors and initiatives of the Danish model for preventing radicalization and violent extremism, as well as the theoretical foundation on which this model is built. Our study employs an instrumental case study methodology (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018;

Flyvbjerg, 2006), selected because the central research question—*how* and *why* trust-building mechanisms function as preventive factors against radicalization—requires context-sensitive analysis that quantitative approaches cannot adequately capture. Denmark was chosen as the unit of analysis through paradigmatic case selection (Flyvbjerg, 2006): it represents a well-documented, institutionalized example of trust-based prevention, making it theoretically informative for low-trust societies such as Romania. Following a most-different systems logic (Przeworski and Teune, 1970), the analysis draws on primary and secondary documentary sources—national policy documents, governmental evaluations, RAN publications and peer-reviewed literature—examined through a qualitative thematic framework. The aim is analytical rather than statistical generalization (Yin, 2018): to develop transferable theoretical propositions about the role of institutional trust in preventing radicalization.

Denmark features some distinctive characteristics, serving as a pertinent example of a high-trust state[10] with a notably lower prevalence of radicalization and social polarization. According to the Global Peace Index 2024, Denmark is ranked 8th among the safest countries globally (Global Peace Index, 2024), and the Global Terrorism Index 2024 also classifies Denmark as one of the relatively safest countries in the world and Europe as well. The index reflects a low score for Denmark in terms of terrorist incidents, indicating a stable environment with relatively few threats compared to its neighbours.

Conversely, according to the Danish Intelligence Service (PET, 2024), the terrorist risk level is classified as significant[11], having increased in 2024 from 3 to 4 on a 5-point scale, thereby indicating clearly defined internal challenges related to terrorism. Moreover, the assessment of the Danish Centre for Terrorism Analysis frames the terrorist risk from Islamist militants as significant (CTA, 2024). The

[10] According to OECD survey, in 2023, 75% of Danes reported high or moderately high trust in the judicial system, other people (75%), the police (69%) and national parliament (47%), while 44% of Danes reported high or moderately high trust in the national government, above the OECD average (39%) (OECD, 2024).

[11] The risk level was raised following calls by al-Qaeda to carry out terrorist attacks in Denmark (against the backdrop of the acts of destruction of the Quran in 2023) (PET, 2024).

Danish Defence and Intelligence Service (DDIS) states that the most likely form of terrorist attack could come from lone actors or small groups inspired by organizations such as the Islamic State or al-Qaeda, using easily accessible methods (bladed weapons, firearms or improvised explosive devices etc.) (DDIS, 2023). Due to these considerations, our selection process enabled the identification of Denmark as a European state that, despite facing internal security challenges, effectively mitigates the terrorist threat.

Furthermore, the Danish model of radicalization prevention is recognized in the academic literature as a holistic and effective framework based on inter-institutional collaboration, inclusive governance and community involvement (Hemmingsen, 2015) (OSCE, 2019). Empirical evidence—despite being limited—suggests that this approach has been effective in mitigating the risks associated with violent extremism, as Denmark has successfully curbed radical tendencies despite its growing cultural and religious diversity (Bakker, 2013).

The Danish prevention and counter-radicalization model emphasizes extensive coordination among governmental institutions, social services, schools, the healthcare system, police and intelligence services. The Danish preventive architecture was developed in practice through learning-by-doing and trial-and-error methods. Thus, the model was adapted throughout its development in accordance with the collection of practical experiences and the progress of scientific research. The approach was developed between different actors in a two-way process. Local practitioners received guidelines from the state and after testing them in real conditions provided feedback, which was later used to refine the guidelines. Alternatively, local practitioners have developed concrete initiatives or methods that they have tested in practice, subsequently being adopted at the state level and replicated in other local contexts (Hemmingsen, 2015). This reflects how the Danish state's approach and its concrete methods are continuously developed both top-down and bottom-up, a process that has enabled its continuous adaptation to changing threat and risk perception.

An example of a bottom-up Danish initiative is the contingency plan[12] for the intervention of people traveling to and from Syria and Iraq, developed through the already existing cooperation between the city of Aarhus[13] and East Judland police at the end of 2013 (Preben, 2015). The success and positive results achieved, particularly in the reintegration of individuals returned from conflict zones, led to the adoption of the approach at national level in 2014. The Danish government adopted elements of the Aarhus model in its National Action Plan for the Prevention of Extremism and Radicalization (Preben, 2015). Aarhus served as an early and successful local initiative that inspired the development of the Danish national model. As a consequence, *Life Psychology* discipline[14] on which the Aarhus model is based implicitly

[12] The plan was based on guiding and counselling individuals who wanted to travel to Syria or Iraq and aftercare for returnees, including debriefings, medical care, and psychological consultations and mentoring. It also provided guidance and mentoring to relatives and involved dialogue with local communities.

[13] There are several reasons why the initiative was adopted in Aarhus. In Aarhus, Denmark's second largest city, there has been an increase in radicalization especially among young people with an immigrant background. Aarhus also has a disproportionately high number of individuals who have traveled to conflict zones (around 30 people). Aarhus relies on local community ties with a long tradition. The city had pre-existing structures that allowed close relationships between schools, social services and the police (SSP). Furthermore, East Judland Police played a key role in developing the model through a preventative and proactive rather than punitive approach. Last but not least, the local authorities recognized the need to address radicalization not only from a security perspective, but also as a social problem that required rehabilitation and support.

[14] *Life Psychology* discipline was developed by the Department of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences at Aarhus University. This represents an interdisciplinary approach that integrates personality psychology, social and societal psychology with social sciences (politics, sociology, jurisprudence) and humanitarian (culture, religion, ethics) in understanding radicalization processes, risk factors and resilience (Bertelsen and Ozer, 2025). The main premise from which *Life Psychology* starts is that individuals aspire to a good enough life. Having a good enough grip on life involves dealing with the tasks that life throws at you, which depends on having the skills to handle them. Another assumption is that every individual, regardless of gender, cultural background, abilities or disabilities, life history, and social situation, faces the same fundamental tasks. A good enough life involves the possession of general skills and generic which

forms the basis of the Danish national model. The discipline is grounded in the principle that any policy or strategy should prioritize the inclusion and empowerment of an individual's life skills. By focusing on this approach, individuals are enabled to develop, educate themselves, and cultivate fundamental human skills.

Similarly, to its local pilot phase, Aarhus model, the national Danish model has been built on pre-existing structures in Denmark which were originally developed for other purposes like ordinary crime prevention[15]. The approach is entirely based on a set of fundamental premises that range from understanding the "welfare state"[16] to understanding crime and how human behaviour can be changed.

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facilitates the management of the basic tasks of life (Bertelsen, 2015). General because all individuals must develop the same basic life skills that match the basic tasks of life (Bertelsen and Ozer, 2025). Generic because each fundamental life task will surface in infinite individual, social, cultural and societal variations (implying that the specific management of a particular variation of a fundamental life task must be generated from the corresponding fundamental life skill).

[15] Denmark is a country with a long-standing tradition of using approaches based on multi-institutional cooperation and information sharing in order to launch preventive measures as early as possible. Since 1977 there have been networks between schools, social services and the police (SSP) in most municipalities (Hemmingsen, 2015). These networks were intended to prevent the commission of crimes by minors. Since then other networks have been developed for other target groups. In 2009 networks involving the police, social services and mental health services (PSH) were developed to prevent young people with psychiatric problems from committing offences. Similarly, in 2010 networks of the police, social services, penitentiary and probation service (KSP) were initiated in order to prevent individuals released from prison or other institutions to reoffend (Hemmingsen, 2015). All these already established networks have facilitated cooperation and information sharing in order to prevent violent extremism and radicalization. Thus, the Danish model involves the use of already existing structures and components that have a tradition of multi-institutional cooperation, not just the development of new initiatives.

[16] The term welfare state (Titmuss, 1974) is frequently associated with the modern interventionist state with a market economy that focuses on healthcare, increasing the level of education, regulating the labor market and social security. Wilensky H. and Lebeaux C.N. distinguish the residual welfare state and the redistributive-institutional one. In the former, the state seeks to limit its commitments only to marginal groups, and the latter is universal in its obligations to the state and considers the entire population. Titmuss R. (1974) uses these concepts and introduces an intermediate type

Furthermore, the Danish model heavily relies on early prevention. As a matter of fact, early prevention is an integral part and present in Danish society at all levels and social aspects. The area of crime prevention as well as social and healthcare problems in Denmark are often framed in the "Prevention Pyramid"[17] which identifies different stages (general, specific and targeted) in which different types of activities are carried out in order to prevent future problems or exacerbate existing ones (Hemmingsen, 2015). In the area of violent extremism and radicalization prevention, the general level[18] targets in particular young people and individuals considered opinion leaders. The focus is on awareness (Hemmingsen, 2015). The specific level[19] targets individuals or groups classified as non-violent extremists. At this level, the emphasis is on reinforcing the capacity of the individual and his environment in order to prevent the aggravation of sensitive aspects.

Lastly, the targeted level includes individuals already engaged in criminal behaviour or assessed to be at imminent risk of involving in such behaviour. At this level only exit and intervention strategies apply consisting of programs specially developed for each individual by the Danish Intelligence Service in cooperation with the Prison and Probation

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of welfare state, called the industrial achievement-performance model, in which welfare needs can be satisfied based on merit, work performance and productivity (Titmuss, 1974).

[17] The pyramid of prevention, in a general sense, uses three levels to organize preventive efforts, respectively general, specific and targeted to target different populations (Hemmingsen, 2015).

[18] Activities include but are not limited to strengthening resilience, educating about opportunities in Danish society through the education system, facilitating dialogue on controversial topics, strengthening critical thinking by including knowledge about handling and critical use of the Internet in primary school curricula, outreach and training of frontline professionals (Hemmingsen, 2015).

[19] Activities may include guidance to individuals through mentors, coaching on education, career, relationships or other factors that can improve the individual situation, guidance on accessing services available to all Danish citizens. It is also possible to intervene at the level of relatives by creating networks of parents or relatives, counseling offered to the parents or relatives of those concerned.

Service, municipalities and/or local police. Mentoring and coaching programs are also developed, as well as assistance with therapy, accommodation, medical help, and individual guidance on access to facilities available to all Danish citizens.

Another principle of the Danish model is that from its very beginning it pursued two agendas: on one hand, ensuring the security of society against terrorist attacks, and on the other, the responsibility of the state towards the individual's well-being which determines the commitment to protect the individual from harmful/self-harming behavior (Hemmingsen, 2015). "Ensuring citizen's well-being" involves a wider focus on preventing extremism and radicalization, which includes managing social issues such as education, immigration and integration. This dual nature on which the Danish model is based is present both nationally[20] and locally, reflecting an understanding of the fact that preventing radicalization and violent extremism with repressive measures is not enough.

At the national level, the main actors are the Danish Intelligence Service PET and the Center for the Prevention of Extremism, that cooperate and, to some extent, coordinate or at least advise the local efforts (PET, 2024; Hemmingsen, 2015). At the local level, the 98 Danish municipalities and 12 police districts cooperate in a forum called "info house". There is a total of 12 "info-houses" in Denmark, one for each police region.

[20] At the national level, the security agenda is ensured by the Ministry of Justice, the Prison and Probation Service, the Police and PET, the Danish national security and intelligence service. The institutional actors whose mandate is the "welfare" agenda are the Center for the Prevention of Extremism, the Ministry of Immigration and Integration, the Ministry of Children and Education, the National Agency for Education and Quality (PET, 2024, Hemmingsen, 2015).

The "info-house"[21] serves as a collaborative framework between law enforcement and municipal authorities[22], aimed at the early identification of individuals at risk of committing extremist-motivated offenses, thereby enabling the timely implementation of preventive measures (Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism, 2024; PET, 2024). Essentially, mixed teams of police officers and social workers are located within "info houses," which exchange information[23] on potentially radicalizing individuals in all directions, for example with schools. This means that either teachers or parents can go to these "info houses" and report their concerns, or the employed police officers and social workers can reach out to schools if they learn about problematic cases through

[21] Info houses are established in all 12 police districts to assess concerns about radicalization/violent extremism, to coordinate cooperation between all relevant actors and to address specific or general preventive efforts developed by the police or municipality (Hemmingsen, 2015). The "info house" collects the existing concerns and evaluates if they are justified and if have mandate in that specific case. If there are reasons for concern, it determines if the concerns are related to the "welfare" area in which the state intervenes with support in the area of immigration, integration, education, career counseling, mentoring, etc. or "security" which is the prerogative of the Danish national intelligence service. After the evaluation, the cooperation format decides if measures should be taken and by whom. If the concerns are related to security, the case falls under the responsibility of the PET. Other times, the case returns from the PET to the "info house" when there is no risk to Danish security and passes to the responsibility of the police or the municipality. There are specific or general initiatives. General initiatives are available to all citizens and include career counselling, therapy or housing assistance. Specific initiatives are designed specifically for each individual case. The case rests with an actor the individual knows and trusts, such as a specially trained mentor, soccer coach, or teacher. This is established within the concrete evaluation of each case.

[22] These are the police, municipal social service providers and administration and centers of excellence on extremism and radicalisation. Staff members from the Danish Prison and Probation Service and the psychiatric sector participate on an ad hoc basis (PET, 2024).

[23] The exchange of information required for such collaboration is governed by the Danish Administration Justice Act which states that the authorities may share information about a person if necessary for cooperation in crime prevention or for cooperation between the police, social services and psychiatric and mental health authorities in their efforts to help socially vulnerable people. However, the information cannot be shared for the purpose of criminal investigation (Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism, 2024).

police channels (Zeiger and Aly, 2015). This indicates a high level of trust between citizens and institutions, which plays a crucial role in the success of the Danish model. This mutual trust reduces resistance to interventions, fosters stronger community resilience, and enables institutions to implement preventive strategies more effectively and with greater legitimacy.

The Danish "info-houses" consist of two types of inter-institutional collaborations, each with their own distinct role. There is the "info-house network" where coordinators and other authorities exchange information at a general level regarding local challenges and trends, and the "info-house municipality" where concrete cases are managed. In the "info-house municipality" the authorities cooperate to prepare a holistic assessment of the reported concern based on an analysis of each individual situation based on risk assessment on one side and individual well-being and resilience, on the other. The purpose of this evaluation is to identify the specific needs of each individual that must be addressed to facilitate disengagement from extremist ideologies. Throughout the process, recommendations are formulated concerning the key challenges and strengths that should be targeted to effectively support the individual's progression away from extremism.

In cases where prevention and disengagement efforts are warranted, the competent authority[24] initiates a support intervention. The intervention will often be based on the legal possibilities offered by social legislation, labour, health and other relevant legislation to provide the individual with tailored support. When appropriate, parents or other people from the network of people[25] may also be involved in the intervention process. A potential component of this support may include the involvement of a mentor or parent coach, drawn from the nationally designated body of professionals specifically trained to work with vulnerable individuals and their families (Centre for Documentation and Counter Extremism, 2024). Naturally, "info-houses" are very well integrated into all aspects of local social life and can count on a very short and efficient communication path with local or civil society partners to provide the necessary support.

[24] For example, the municipality in collaboration with one or more institutions.
[25] This network includes coaches, mentors, parents, depending on the case.

Being highly effective in distinguishing security-relevant cases—which require judicial or police intervention—from those that call for social assistance measures, the Danish model can be regarded as a traditionally developed contact and communication hub within the police, particularly concerning youth radicalisation. Due to the very low level of public distrust, police officers are able to freely engage and interact with civil society and other partners (Zeiger and Aly, 2015).

Rooted in a long-standing tradition of collaboration among the police, social services, and civil society at the community level, the Danish model has proven highly effective. However, its successful replication in other contexts is unlikely, given the extended period required to cultivate a comparable degree of institutional legitimacy and trust. While the Danish model is often viewed favourably by other countries due to its effective police-led coordination and centralized oversight by governmental authorities, its implementation elsewhere would likely provoke significant public distrust and criticism. This is largely because similar levels of institutional control exercised by police forces may not be perceived as legitimate or acceptable in different socio-political contexts (Zeiger and Aly, 2015). In the following section we will address these criticisms facing the Danish approach. Our analysis is based on a critical review of existing academic literature, public policy documents and concrete instruments applied by the Danish authorities in radicalization prevention interventions in Denmark. The goal was to reach a comprehensive understanding of how Danish institutions have applied an integrated framework for preventing radicalization, emphasizing the promotion of public trust and inter-sectorial collaboration as essential tools for reducing the vulnerability of its communities to extremist ideologies.

Critical reflections on the Danish Model to Preventing Radicalization and Violent Extremism

The Danish model to preventing violent extremism and radicalization has been widely praised in the academic literature. In an analysis of the Danish model, it is noted that its development has undergone key improvements, including the professional refinement of initiatives and techniques, as well as organizational maturation

(Lindekilde, 2014). This has resulted, among other things, in the creation of individual-level interventions grounded in a solid psychological foundation, alongside local cooperation structures that establish the organizational framework necessary for training frontline personnel.

Similarly, in our view, the Danish model primarily represents a manifestation of advanced organizational development and institutional maturity. The multi-institutional cooperation structures within the Danish model reflect a shift away from the notion of competing institutional ideas and visions, replacing it with a focus on preventing radical and extremist acts. One of the strengths of the Danish approach is its flexibility, as it incorporates various types of professionals who approach specific cases and challenges from different perspectives.

Given that the Danish model is primarily defined by cooperative infrastructures ("info houses") among various institutions across different sectors, we sought to explore how Danish institutions are perceived in terms of trust by their citizens. The landscape of public trust in Denmark is comprehensively examined in the OECD Trust Survey, which evaluates citizens' perceptions of various government entities. Denmark is recognized for its relatively high levels of trust in public institutions (OECD, 2024). The study found that 44% of Danes reported a high or moderately high level of trust in the national government, surpassing the OECD average of 39%. Notably, Danes demonstrated significantly higher trust in the judiciary (75%) and the police (69%). Satisfaction with daily interactions with public institutions remains high, particularly in the education (74%) and healthcare (65%) sectors. Furthermore, a substantial majority (66%) of Danes expressed confidence in the government's ability to protect lives during a national emergency, reflecting a general belief in the integrity and effectiveness of public services (OECD, 2024).

This trend reflects a public feeling of trust in Danish government institutions, where day-to-day interactions and perceptions of decision-making processes play significant roles in shaping levels of trust. Danish citizens' trust in their institutions reflects a solid foundation for the Danish radicalization prevention model, which is based on inter-institutional cooperation. This cooperation is essential to effectively address the phenomenon of radicalization and violent extremism, as it

enables better communication and coordination between various government agencies and community organizations.

In addition, the Danish model emphasizes citizen involvement and building an open dialogue between the population and institutions. This not only enhances the legitimacy of government actions (Tyler, 2006), but it also helps to reduce the alienation of vulnerable groups, who may be more susceptible to the influence of extremism in contexts where trust is lacking. This participatory approach is supported by OECD data, which shows that a significant percentage of Danes trust that the political system allows them to have a say in government decisions (OECD, 2024).

Thus, trust in institutions contributes to the effectiveness and legitimacy of radicalization prevention initiatives in Denmark, demonstrating that a model based on collaboration and trust can produce positive results in the face of challenges related to radicalization/extremism. On the other hand, the integration of a multi-institutional model in contexts characterized by low levels of citizens' trust in state institutions can prove difficult. Multi-institutional work formats come with their own challenges, such as reconciling the interests of different fields and institutional visions regarding the phenomenon, the degree of trust between the component institutions. A context characterized by the lack of legitimacy of institutions in front of citizens would lead to additional challenges for these formats, thus having their own internal challenges that must be harmonized within the working context. The Danish model capitalizes on Denmark's cultural and social specificities, such as welfare state policies, social equity and community involvement, factors that deeply influence mental health and psychological well-being. This model highlights the central role of welfare systems and public policies in supporting psychological health, exploring the impact of social support networks, access to education, healthcare and community resources on individual well-being. The localized approach of the Danish model allows for a more nuanced understanding of psychological phenomena and effective interventions tailored to the unique needs of the Danish population. Thus, the cultural specificities of the Danish model may lead to different developmental outcomes compared to other socio-cultural contexts. Any translation of

specific elements of the Danish model in another country must consider the socio-cultural differences between the context of origin and the context of destination.

In addition, the Danish model signifies an evolving approach to radicalization, marked by a deeper and more sophisticated comprehension of its multifaceted nature, moving beyond simplistic linear models[26] that conceptualize radicalization as a series of clearly identifiable stages through which an individual is presumed to progress during their transformation. It is built on positive psychological concepts such as resilience, well-being and personal strengths (rather than exclusively addressing pathology or mental illness), but also on the holistic and comprehensive understanding of radicalization from the perspective of psychological and social factors. The Danish model considers these dimensions and how they interact to influence the course of an individual's life.

Recognizing the influence of contextual factors, the Danish model considers how different ecological systems, such as family, community and social structures, influence the personal development and coping mechanisms of individuals. Danish interventions include family support programmes, community mentors and psychological counselling, integrating these components to create a resilient and supportive environment that prevents marginalization and, by implication, vulnerability to radicalisation. Thus, the model emphasizes the importance of collaboration between social institutions and a coordinated response, adapted to each ecological level, to support mental health and social cohesion.

The philosophy behind Denmark's approach reflects a view of extremism and/or radicalization as a risk for the vulnerable young people, not as a national security concern or as a threat to the Danish state, the existing order or even a political challenge (Lindekilde, 2014).

[26] Linear models of radicalization refer to theoretical frameworks that conceptualize the process as a sequential progression through a fixed series of stages. These models typically suggest that individuals move step-by-step from initial exposure to extremist ideas, through increasing levels of commitment, until fully adopting radical beliefs or behaviors. Such models are often criticized for oversimplifying the complex, non-linear, and individualized nature of radicalization processes.

Consequently, the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism is included in the existing conceptualizations of common law crime prevention, with radicalization being seen as another "parameter of concern" for the mainstream crime prevention system (Lindekilde, 2014).

The focus on the vulnerable individual and socio-psychological explanations of radicalization and violent extremism leads in practice to a focus on the pull factors[27] rather than the push factors of the before mentioned phenomena. Thus, the Danish model examines what the individual has to attain from being involved in extremist activities. It aims to address their needs while also highlighting the potential consequences of their choices (eg. education, a job, restored family ties). This reflects an underlying understanding of the target group as being misguided or unaware of their own potential, in the same way that common law crime prevention addresses people vulnerable to engaging in risky behaviours, such as crime or illicit substance abuse. Therefore, this approach places significant emphasis on the role of mentors, coaches and therapeutic interventions, aiming to enhance individuals' self-awareness and reinforce their personal potential, thereby facilitating their successful integration into the Danish society.

The Danish approach also emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, encouraging the integration of perspectives from psychology, sociology, public health and education to develop a more nuanced understanding of human behavior and well-being. More precisely, once the differing perspectives arising from the varied professional backgrounds (such as psychology, sociology, and public order) are reconciled, these differences can enrich professional insights and facilitate the integration of institutional and expert resources, thereby enabling the development of more effective and

[27] According to academic literature, radicalization mechanisms are the product of the interaction between various push and pull factors within individuals. Push factors include social, political and economic grievances, a sense of injustice and discrimination, personal crisis and tragedies, frustration, alienation, a fascination with violence, the search for answers to the meaning of life, an identity crisis, social exclusion, alienation, marginalization, disappointment with democratic processes, polarization, etc. Pull factors include personal quest, sense of belonging to a cause, ideology or social network, power and control, loyalty and commitment, spirit of adventure, a romanticized view of ideology, possibility of heroism, etc.

tailored interventions responsive to both individual and community needs. The Danish model offers a coherent way of working whereby professional differences can be overcome in concrete work contexts through uniform procedures and the work tools.

Moreover, the Danish model is deeply research-oriented, prioritizing studies that can directly influence public policies and national practices to respond to the specific needs of the population. This model places particular emphasis on evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and programs (Bressan et. al., 2024), promoting continuous and informed adaptation and allowing adjustments based on the data obtained, in order to optimize resources. Furthermore, Denmark is one of the countries most frequently cited as sources of inspiration for innovation and evaluation of programs to prevent and counter violent extremism alongside Germany and the United Kingdom (Bressan et. al., 2024).

On the other hand, the Danish model continues to face its own dilemmas, challenges and criticisms. The Danish approach to preventing radicalisation, often praised for its emphasis on "soft" prevention strategies such as social inclusion, mentoring and counselling, has also been criticized in the literature for a lack of evidence of effectiveness. Critics argue that there is limited empirical evidence to demonstrate the long-term effectiveness of the Danish approach in preventing radicalization (Ragazzi, 2017). Reliance on "soft" interventions such as mentoring and counseling may be effective for some individuals, but these measures lack systematic evaluation, making it difficult to assess impact on a wider scale. Researchers noted a lack of standardized metrics and longitudinal studies, making it difficult to rigorously validate these interventions (Ragazzi, 2017; Lindekilde, 2012).

Indeed, while we consider the Danish model a good practice in the landscape of prevention-focused European initiatives, we believe that empirical evidence of its long-term effectiveness is limited. We also believe that systematic evaluations are needed. Although quantitative evaluations of prevention efforts cannot be carried out, it would be possible to carry out a qualitative study of intervention activities. In doing so, it would be extremely important to emphasize the user's perspective by interviewing those involved. On the other hand, we do not

agree that punitive measures are necessarily preferable to soft approaches. This discussion is not exclusive to the field of preventing extremism and radicalization, but is a broad debate characteristic of criminal law offenses lato sensu where it has been found that longer and harsher sentences do not necessarily lead to the empowerment of the prisoner (Beccaria, 2007). The broader discussion in criminal law is not an argument, but it is obvious that as the terrorist phenomenon acquires new nuances (for example, through digitalization) the classic punitive measures are not enough. At the same time, soft measures are not necessarily ineffective.

Debates also revolve around the extent to which the welfare state should be allowed to intervene in the lives of citizens. The collaboration between police and social services in the Danish model raises concerns about trust and oversight, as individuals may feel compelled to participate in intervention programs for fear of legal repercussions. Some authors argue that this combination can alienate target communities, as they may perceive the programs as a form of surveillance rather than support (Lindekilde, 2012). On the other hand, admission to such an intervention program is based on the consent of the individual concerned, which is why we believe that these concerns have limited foundation. Unlike the British PREVENT strategy, where measures can be adopted without the knowledge or consent of the individual, in the case of the Danish model access to soft measures is made exclusively on the basis of voluntary agreement.

The success of the Danish approach is based on voluntary participation and the willingness of vulnerable individuals to accept the support of support services. Thus, some authors have indicated that this voluntary basis is subject to self-selection bias and only those inclined to accept help participate in these programs, which may lead to the exclusion of certain individuals who could also benefit from the program (Hemmingsen, 2015), which subsequently limits the impact of the program.

However, despite the agreement of will, we appreciate that partnerships between the police and social services can erode trust and lead to the creation of a perception of surveillance in target communities depending on how they are managed. In this sense, some authors point

out that the Danish model can lead to the stigmatization or ostracism of certain parts of the population, contributing to social polarization and a climate of mistrust which themselves represent a problem even if they do not contribute to radicalization (although it can create the favorable context) (Linkedilke, 2012; Ragazzi, 2017). Raising awareness and creating extensive networks among professionals and members of civil society who have been trained and/or encouraged to identify early signs of concern can prove effective elements in any type of prevention, but also carry the risk of being perceived as surveillance networks of the general population or a part of the population when the network focuses on identifying those who are part of vulnerable communities—typically Muslim immigrants. In other words, awareness and outreach programs implemented precisely to create a space of safety and trust in society, risk having the unintended consequence of creating a society of mistrust which leads to the potentiation of radicalization, not its prevention. However, we appreciate that a continuous effort to delimit the concepts of radicalization and extremism, but also to dissociate these concepts from certain parts of the population can minimize the mentioned risk.

Thus, the whole debate comes down to a discussion in which the concept of trust plays a central role, whether it is trust between institutions, citizens' trust in institutions and the perceived degree of trust. In a society where institutions gain legitimacy through a high level of trust on the part of citizens, the perception of surveillance among communities is considerably reduced; individuals do not feel watched or controlled by institutions they trust. Moreover, the pre-existence of a climate of citizens' trust in state institutions can lead to overcoming the self-selection bias mentioned by some authors previously. Thus, it would be worth exploring ways of how increasing citizens' trust in governments and public institutions could lead to healthier societies in which alienation, marginalization and, implicitly, vulnerability to radicalization are reduced.

Some authors have highlighted ethical concerns over privacy and the risk of self-incrimination for people participating in these programs (Hemmingsen, 2015; Ragazzi, 2017; Lindekilde, 2012). In some cases, information disclosed during counseling or mentoring sessions could be used by the police or security services, creating ethical dilemmas and

thus discouraging individuals from participating openly. The researchers noted that unclear privacy boundaries can undermine trust, which is critical to the success of these interventions (Hemmingsen, 2015; Ragazzi, 2017; Lindekilde, 2012). These ethical dilemmas were over time replaced by regulations that protect the confidentiality of the participants with a special provision included in the Danish Administration of Justice Act that allows the participating authorities to exchange information in order to prevent crimes (Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism, 2024).

The Danish approach, like many others, focuses heavily on the individual, as it has its starting point in the radicalization process. That is why some authors have expressed dissatisfaction with the depoliticization of a phenomenon intrinsically linked to terrorism, a fundamentally political and deeply hyper-politicized field (Lindekilde, 2014). This criticism is not raised only in relation to the Danish approach: it is also present in the context of other countries' approaches and in the whole discourse on radicalization (Githens-Mazer and Lambert, 2010).

However, the criticism is not purely intellectual. These authors emphasize that the ways in which we understand challenges influence our ability to devise appropriate solutions. If radicalization is perceived exclusively as an individual problem, an irrational manifestation or the result of misunderstandings, there is a risk of overlooking responses that could be constructive. For example, it could be beneficial to address the political issues within current violent conflicts by offering socially acceptable and non-violent engagement alternatives. At the same time, dialogue with the immediate social environments and groups of belonging of the affected people can be essential to understand their grievances—whether real or perceived, or related to domestic or international politics – and to identify non-violent solutions. At the individual level, socio-psychological processes play an important role as mediators between political outrage, ideology and engagement in concrete actions. Although these processes are highly relevant to individual interventions such as mentoring or de-extremism programmes, completely excluding the political dimension would be problematic. Conceptually and practically, including in the design of individual programs, it is essential to recognize the existence of political agendas, real outrages and grievances.

Over time, complaints have been expressed about the lack of procedural clarity within the "info-house" initiative (Hemmingsen, 2015). However, such criticisms have been addressed through a continuous and systematic refinement of the Danish model, which now has common tools and clear and coherent procedures. The current model ensures a high degree of transparency on the part of the authorities, and the tools used in the preventive process are accessible to the public (https://stopekstremisme.dk/en).

Other criticisms that have been overcome are those related to the diversity of professional groups involved in the evaluation of cases of radicalization. Specifically, differences between professional groups, each with their own perspectives and methodologies, can lead to divergent interpretations of essential concepts. For example, notions such as "radicalisation", "signs of radicalisation" and "resilience factors" are often interpreted differently by a police officer compared to a psychologist, which can lead to inconsistencies in the assessment of vulnerable people. This diversity can compromise the uniform application of preventive measures, as what one professional group considers a risk factor or a protective factor may not be recognized in the same way by another group. Over time, the Danish approach has created clearly formulated common standards that ensure a cohesive and equitable approach across professional groups to limit subjective variation and ensure the effectiveness of interventions. For example, regarding the assessment of individual resilience and well-being, the dimensions to which practitioners must refer when assessing the level of individual resilience are specified in detail (Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism, 2024).

The Danish model illustrates how a prevention framework can evolve to overcome initial challenges through continuous adaptation and refinement. While some obstacles have been resolved by clarifying procedures and standardizing tools, other difficulties remain, reflecting the inherent complexity of the process of preventing radicalization. What remains essential is the recognition of existing limitations and challenges, as well as the commitment to constantly seek innovative and adaptive solutions. This open and reflective approach ensures the long-term relevance and effectiveness of the Danish model, while also

providing a valuable example for other states seeking to improve their own prevention strategies.

Whether the Danish model may or may not be a viable solution for other European states seeking to reduce the risk or radicalization and violent extremism, this depends on each state's own national context. While the Danish model has proven effective in preventing radicalization, its direct transfer to other national contexts poses significant challenges. This is particularly obvious in countries where long-standing institutions such as "safe houses" do not exist, and where inter-institutional cooperation and public trust in state authorities remain fragile. In contexts where governance structures are weaker, or where historical and sociopolitical factors have led to low levels of citizen trust in state institutions, replicating this model without significant adaptation may prove ineffective. Therefore, any attempt to implement similar approaches must consider that interventions are tailored to the specific realities of each national setting.

A critical starting point for research in the field of radicalization prevention should be the exploration of mechanisms to enhance citizens' trust in state institutions. In contexts where this trust is weak or fragmented, preventive efforts risk being perceived as coercive or ineffective, ultimately undermining their intended impact. Therefore, research should focus on identifying context-specific strategies for fostering institutional credibility, such as transparent governance, consistent community engagement and inclusive policymaking. By addressing the root causes of institutional distrust, policymakers can create a more resilient societal framework, reducing the vulnerabilities that extremist narratives seek to exploit.

Essential Insights for Preventing Radicalization in Low-Trust Societies

Amid rising concerns over radicalization and violent extremism, the urgency for effective prevention systems has become increasingly apparent. Radicalization is a complex phenomenon, influenced by a number of social, psychological and political factors, which requires a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to manage its root causes. By analysing the successful models of other countries, such as

Denmark, low trust societies like Romania can draw valuable lessons to strengthen its own prevention systems.

Denmark's approach to preventing radicalization is based on a high level of trust, both in terms of public trust in institutions and in terms of inter-institutional trust, collaboration between the agencies involved, research-informed policies and a focus on the well-being of the individual. This synthesis explores how these elements can be adapted and implemented in the Romanian context, formulating specific recommendations for improving the radicalization prevention framework in Romania.

A crucial element that emerges from the Danish model is the central role of trust (Solhjell et.al., 2022), whether we refer to public trust or inter-institutional trust. In Denmark, the high level of trust in public authorities, including law enforcement and government agencies, contributes significantly to social cohesion and reduces the perception of surveillance among citizens. As a result, people are more willing to cooperate with institutions in combating radicalization, perceiving them as legitimate and supportive, not coercive. In the Romanian context, there is a promising starting point for the implementation of similar strategies, given that trust in the Romanian army and police is relatively high compared to other public institutions[28]. This trust could be harnessed to strengthen institutional legitimacy and facilitate more effective collaborations between various institutions.

In a society characterized by a low level of trust, such as the Romanian one, strengthening trust between citizens and institutions is an essential element for preventing radicalization, violent extremism and ensuring social cohesion. However, this consolidation cannot be achieved by simply taking over external models, such as the Danish one, without careful adaptation to the local socio-cultural specifics. The transferability of elements of the Danish model *per se* in a low trust society is not possible. The Danish framework is based on a high degree of institutional and social trust, which facilitates cooperation between

[28] According to an INSCOP survey, the institutions in which Romanian citizens have the highest degree of trust are the army (70,4%), the church (62,5%), NATO (55,4%), EU (50,3%), the police (48,6%), and those with the lowest degree of confidence are the Government (19,4%) and the Parliament (17,4%) (INSCOP, 2023).

authorities and communities. Also, in Denmark, there is a culture of prevention, where the emphasis is on responsibility and proactive measures to maintain the well-being of the population, which reflects also in the way the Danish state institutions manage the preventing measures of radicalisation and violent extremism. In contrast, in Romania, where the perception of public institutions is often marked by skepticism, interventions must be personalized and anchored in local realities. Keeping in mind that Romania lacks a solid culture of prevention, it is necessary to develop mechanisms for authentic dialogue, decision-making transparency and direct involvement of local actors, so that prevention initiatives are perceived as legitimate and relevant. Also, methods of building trust must be gradual, based on tangible results and long-term collaborations, avoiding generic solutions that do not consider the particularities of a society with a low level of trust.

In Nordic countries, the credibility of government institutions is considered a key factor in promoting social cohesion and preventing radicalisation, alongside other factors such as ethnic homogeneity, wealth and income equality (Delhey and Newton, 2005). The procedural fairness of government institutions—characterized by impartial, fair, and efficient decision-making processes—largely shapes citizens' perceptions of trust in institutions[29] (Rothstein and Stolle, 2008). Researchers have examined the relationship between favorable socioeconomic conditions in the Nordic context—such as equality and low levels of corruption—and the high levels of trust that play a crucial role in sustaining democratic welfare states (Bjørnskov and Svendsen, 2013). These high levels of trust are vital to the implementation of public policies, including those aimed at preventing violent extremism (PVE), because they influence how citizens perceive government authority and its legitimacy.

Unlike Denmark, Romania faces persistent challenges related to corruption and socioeconomic disparities, which hinder the direct applicability of the Danish model. Romania's problem is not the public

[29] However, as mentioned in a previous section, the direction of causality remains unclear, with ongoing debates about whether a high level of generalized trust contributes to the creation of fair institutions or whether well-functioning institutions generate trust among citizens (Rothstein and Stolle, 2008).

perception of corruption, but the corruption itself, which in turn decreased the level of public trust. În other words, Romania's low levels of public trust are not merely a matter of perception, but reflect documented institutional realities. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (2024), Romania scored 46 out of 100, ranking among the three lowest-performing EU member states alongside Hungary and Bulgaria, in stark contrast to the highest-scoring European countries: Denmark (90), Finland (87), and Norway (84) (Transparency International, 2024). This is mirrored in the erosion of institutional trust: a 2023 INSCOP national survey found that only 19.4% of Romanians expressed high or moderately high trust in the Government and 17.4% in the Parliament—figures that have nearly halved compared to 2013 (INSCOP, 2023). The causal relationship between corruption and declining trust is further supported by OECD data showing that Romania's perception of widespread governmental corruption exceeds 80%, well above the OECD average (OECD, 2024).

While certain elements from the Danish model, such as early intervention strategies or community-based approaches, could be adapted, their success depends on tailoring interventions to the Romanian socio-cultural context. Therefore, Romania could increase public trust by solving the systemic problems of Romanian society that led to the reduction of public trust levels. For instance, adopting legal mechanisms in order to reduce systemic corruption is a viable option.

Moreover, trust is a crucial factor in inter-institutional collaboration, essential for effective strategies to prevent radicalization. Successful collaboration between agencies such as law enforcement, social services and community organizations requires mutual trust, respect and clear communication (Cooper et. al., 2016). Trust is particularly important when working with racially, ethnically and religiously marginalized communities who need to perceive the government as fair and just to support measures to prevent violent extremism (Ellis et. al., 2021). However, when services work in isolation, trust must be actively cultivated through efforts to align goals, values and objectives.

In an inter-institutional environment, trust is built on individual relationships rather than organizational ties, meaning that trust is more likely to develop between individuals who understand each other's

professional values (Buchbinder and Eisikovits, 2008). In the context of multi-institutional formats created to prevent radicalization, trust between the various actors is essential in the effective functioning[30] of the collaborative environment.

In the Romanian context, strengthening inter-institutional trust is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of efforts to prevent radicalization and violent extremism. Effective collaboration among governmental agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities requires a foundation of mutual trust, which can be fostered through power-sharing, shared learning, and leveraging existing high-quality relationships (Ellis et. al., 2020). While this process demands time and sustained commitment, it is crucial for improving coordination, reducing fragmentation, and ensuring a more cohesive response to security challenges.

In this sense, in-depth research on trust in this area could provide a better understanding of the psychosocial mechanisms and social dynamics that favor radicalization, while also identifying ways of effective intervention. Studies in social psychology and intergroup relations have shown that mutual trust between groups and institutions is essential to preventing conflict and social polarization (Newton, 2001), and in this context, exploring the concept from this perspective could be a key to developing more effective prevention strategies. Thus, future research should examine in detail the role of trust in pivot points for preventing the process of radicalization and how it can be cultivated and supported through public policies that promote inclusion, dialogue and cooperation between diverse social, cultural and religious groups.

Institutional trust sets the basis for a healthy society where the risk of radicalization is diminished. We don't see institutional trust as a solution for all the problems in connection to societal radicalization (e.g. societal polarization, terrorism, violent extremism), but an aprioric condition for preventing risks on one side, and better mitigating security challenges, on the other.

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[30] It can facilitate intercultural and intergroup dialogue, contribute to strengthening social cohesion and reducing vulnerabilities that can favor radicalization.

Therefore, we have developed a set of Insights for Increasing Public Trust in Preventing Radicalization in Romania that stem from the analysis of the Danish model:

1. Increasing institutional transparency and open communication by developing clear, constant and accessible communication mechanisms between authorities and citizens. This objective could be achieved by establishing strategic communication departments at the level of the main public institutions in Romania, through regular public reporting on the measures taken, without disclosing sensitive information, but explaining the reasoning behind the decisions.
2. Clear separation of social intervention from repressive intervention by creating structures dedicated solely to prevention (e.g. local social prevention units), distinct from public order structures. This way, vulnerable people might feel supported, not hunted.
3. Creating personalized and not standardized interventions because programs perceived as "made for everyone" lose the trust of those who feel that they do not reflect their reality. Prevention and "exit" interventions must be adapted to the profile and context of each individual (education, family, religion, and trauma) and tailored to the unique dynamics of each society.
4. Civic education and media literacy campaigns, as radicalization thrives in areas with a deficit of critical thinking and information. It would be useful to run programs in schools and communities on disinformation, tolerance, analysis of radical messages, and emotional skills in joint projects with educational institutions and NGOs. Also, school curricula could include media literacy and critical thinking courses, especially for adolescents.
5. Pilot locally, then scale up nationally: Solutions should be tested on a small scale, in collaboration with communities, before being applied on a large scale, in pilot projects in medium-sized cities or communities with specific needs, followed by evaluation and adaptation. This would increase legitimacy and reduce resistance to change.
6. Recognizing collective and individual trauma through policies that do not stigmatize, but recognize and address the real suffering of individuals and groups which vary from one cultural context to another. Behind radicalization is often suffering, exclusion, abuse or

grievances. Thus, vulnerable citizens need accessible psychological support, without labelling or fear of legal consequences.

7. Creating multi-institutional collaboration structures that manage in a personalized manner the prevention of individual cases of radicalization and violent extremism, avoiding one size fits all approaches. Although such a multi-institutional format will have to overcome the differences in vision between the various institutional actors involved, as well as inter-institutional competitions, nevertheless, by eliminating elements dependent on the Danish cultural context, it can constitute a valuable starting point for the development of effective mechanisms to prevent radicalization and violent extremism, which in time can undergo improvements.

By promoting transparency, civic education and more effective dialogue between authorities and citizens, such initiatives can help reduce tensions and build a more cohesive society. Building trust can also reduce the vulnerability of marginalized individuals and groups to extremist ideologies, offering them constructive alternatives and a more stable framework for expressing their views and actively participating in the democratic process.

Conclusions

This study highlights the crucial role of public trust in the prevention of radicalization, demonstrating that a strong and transparent relationship between individuals and state institutions can mitigate the factors that contribute to extremist engagement, although it cannot be considered a single and sufficient solution in this complex process. Radicalization frequently occurs in social and political contexts where individuals feel alienated, marginalized or exhibit a high level of mistrust of state institutions. Fair and transparent institutions have the potential to reduce the likelihood that citizens will turn to alternative, often extremist, narratives that challenge the legitimacy of the state. In this sense, public trust contributes to the consolidation of social cohesion, giving individuals a sense of belonging and inclusion, which diminishes the predisposition towards extremist ideologies.

Another fundamental aspect of institutional trust is its ability to encourage cooperation between citizens and authorities. Communities that trust government, law enforcement, and public agencies are more

likely to cooperate with state institutions, report and actively participate in radicalization prevention initiatives. In addition, trust in institutions contributes to increasing the population's receptivity to state-promoted counter-narratives, thereby reducing individuals' susceptibility to misinformation, conspiracy theories or extremist propaganda. Citizens who trust state institutions are therefore more resistant to recruitment attempts by radical groups, who often seek to discredit government institutions by portraying them as oppressive, corrupt or illegitimate.

However, public trust is not something one can impose. Trust must be earned and maintained through transparency, accountability and inclusive governance. In states where trust in institutions is already low due to historical injustices, corruption or structural inequalities, the process of rebuilding it requires time and consistent efforts. This can be achieved through decisional transparency and predictibility, as well as pre-established functional control mechanisms.

Radicalization is not only influenced by internal factors, but also by external elements, such as exposure to global extremist movements, online influences or transnational grievances, which can undermine trust in state institutions, even in established democracies. In this context, strengthening institutional trust must be an integral part of strategies to prevent radicalization, complemented by measures aimed to reduce social inequalities, promoting inclusion and improving communication between the state and citizens.

Through the case study of the Danish Model, it becomes obvious that a multi-agency approach—rooted in trust-building mechanisms such as dialogue, social inclusion and community engagement—can serve as an effective strategy for preventing radicalization. The Danish experience underscores the importance of balancing security measures with preventive social policies, ensuring that individuals at risk perceive institutions as legitimate, fair and responsive to their needs.

Although the Danish model cannot be directly transferred to the Romanian context due to differences in the level of public trust and socioeconomic conditions, some of its core principles and strategies remain valuable. Key elements such as early intervention, community engagement, and enhancing inter-agency collaboration can contribute to preventing radicalization in Romania, but only if they are carefully adapted to local realities. For these strategies to be effective, Romanian

authorities must prioritize strengthening their collaboration and mutual trust, fostering a more cohesive and coordinated approach.

Furthermore, in a low-trust society like Romania, adopting targeted strategies to enhance public trust is crucial for the success of radicalization prevention efforts. Strengthening institutional transparency, ensuring fairness in decision-making, and actively addressing corruption perceptions are essential steps in fostering trust between the state and its citizens. Trust-building measures should also include long-term investments in education, civic engagement, and social cohesion programs, which contribute to a more resilient and cooperative society.

In this context, although societal high levels of institutional trust cannot, alone, eradicate radicalization, social polarization and violent extremism, it constitutes itself as an important protective factor against the attraction of extremist ideologies. Effective strategies to prevent radicalization must include measures to strengthen and maintain public trust in government, law enforcement and social institutions. Thus, strengthening public trust not only reduces the vulnerability of individuals to extremist propaganda, but also contributes to the development of a more resilient society, capable of effectively responding to the challenges associated with radicalization and violent extremism.

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SECURITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

THE KANUN OF NORTHERN ALBANIA: TRADITION, ORGANIZED CRIME AND SALAFI NETWORKS

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Abstract:

The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini, a medieval corpus of customary law originating in the northern highlands of Albania, has long been considered one of the most enduring and culturally embedded normative systems in the Balkans. For centuries, the Kanun provided a framework of order and governance in spaces where state institutions were absent, fragile or deliberately resisted. In the post-Communist period, however, the Kanun resurfaced in a dramatically altered socio-political environment, where it encountered two powerful and transnational forces: organized crime and Salafi-jihadist religious networks.

This paper explores the historical origins of the Kanun, its reactivation in the post-1991 transition and its role in legitimizing the practices of Albanian organized crime groups. Using a qualitative analysis of existing scholarly literature and policy reports, the study examines how customary law interacts with both criminal networks and Salafi religious movements. It further investigates the complex interactions between this customary system and the rise of Salafi networks in northern Albania. The analysis argues that the Kanun operates as a parallel structure of governance, shaping both criminal practice and religious authority, while complicating state-building and security consolidation. The findings highlight the broader implications of this dynamic for social order, governance and counterterrorism in Albania and the wider Western Balkans.

Keywords: *Kanun, Albania, Organized Crime, Mafia, Salafi Networks, Terrorism*

Introduction

The *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*, also known as the *Kanun of Northern Albania*, is a traditional legal code that has shaped social conduct, dispute settlement and interpersonal relations in Albanian highland communities

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since the medieval era (Gjeçov, 1989). Attributed to the fifteenth-century nobleman Lekë Dukagjini, the code consists of more than 1,200 articles covering honour, hospitality, kin loyalty and social obligations (Hoxhaij, 2001; Cara and Margjeka, 2015). The *Kanun* integrates pre-Christian tribal traditions with successive cultural and political influences, constructing a form of social regulation that substituted for or resisted formal state authority in periods of political weakness (Voell, 2003; Carlone, 2023). Its best-known and most controversial component remains the regulation of blood feuds (*gjakmarrja*), which articulate strict rules of vengeance and family honour while simultaneously imposing limits on violence by defining legitimate targets (Bilefsky, 2008; Operazione Colomba, 2017). Yet, as anthropological and feminist scholarship has demonstrated, these norms often perpetuated patriarchal hierarchies, relegating women to subordinate roles and restricting their agency within family and community life (Winter, 1986; Sadiku, 2014; Doja, 2024).

Although heavily suppressed during Enver Hoxha's communist regime, the *Kanun* re-emerged in Albania's post-1991 transition, coinciding with the collapse of state structures and the resurgence of traditional forms of self-regulation (Burda, 2012; Hasluck and Hutton, 2015). Its revival reflects broader processes of cultural reassertion and identity negotiation in a period marked by rapid modernization, globalization and weak institutional consolidation (Bardhoshi, 2013; Joireman, 2014). The *Kanun* continues to exert influence over conflict resolution practices in northern Albania, particularly in remote rural communities and remains an object of political and scholarly debate regarding its compatibility with modern legal systems and human rights standards (Gárdos-Orosz and Fekete, 2017). Critics argue that its persistence not only perpetuates cycles of violence but also complicates reconciliation processes and the consolidation of state authority (Bilefsky, 2008; Sadiku, 2014).

The contemporary significance of the *Kanun* lies not solely in its cultural resilience but in its entanglement with emergent social forces. In northern Albania, the code has increasingly intersected with two competing systems of authority: transnational organized crime and Salafi religious networks. Both actors have sought to instrumentalize or challenge the *Kanun*'s legitimacy to consolidate influence over local

communities. Organized crime groups have selectively mobilized the language of honor and loyalty embedded in the *Kanun* to legitimize their operations, while Salafi movements have simultaneously contested its authority as un-Islamic but also strategically accommodated aspects of its communal legitimacy. This convergence illustrates how the *Kanun* has become more than a vestige of premodern custom: it is a living framework of governance that continues to mediate power, morality and authority in a complex and rapidly transforming environment.

This study employs a qualitative analytical approach based primarily on secondary literature, including academic studies, policy reports and historical analyses concerning customary law, organized crime and religious movements in Albania and the wider Balkans. Rather than presenting new empirical fieldwork, the article synthesizes and critically evaluates existing scholarship to examine how the Kanun functions as a parallel normative framework interacting with organized crime and Salafi networks. By integrating literature from criminology, anthropology and security studies, the paper seeks to provide a conceptual interpretation of the evolving role of the Kanun in contemporary governance and security dynamics.

Moreover, this paper examines this intersection, situating the *Kanun* as a parallel system of governance whose meaning has been transformed by its appropriation into organized crime and its coexistence with competing Salafi networks. The analysis proceeds in four parts: first, by tracing the historical roots of the *Kanun*; second, by examining its contemporary adaptations; third, by analysing the ways in which organized crime mobilizes its principles; and fourth, by exploring the interactions between Salafi actors and customary authority. In doing so, the paper seeks to illuminate the broader implications of customary law for governance, security and counter-extremism in Albania and the wider Balkans.

Historical Background

The *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini* constitutes one of Europe's most enduring and intricate systems of customary law, embodying centuries of normative regulation within the Albanian highlands (Cara and Margjeka, 2015). Attributed to the fifteenth-century nobleman Lekë

Dukagjini, the *Kanun* is widely recognized not merely as a set of prescriptive rules but as a cultural and moral continuum that incorporates tribal customs, pre-Christian traditions and ancestral practices. Some scholars even suggest that elements of its normative framework may trace back to the Bronze Age, reflecting the deep historical layering of customary norms within Albanian society (Aliu, 2021; Enkelejda and Koseni, 2023). Although the Kanun was traditionally attributed to the fifteenth-century nobleman Lekë Dukagjini, many of the customary norms later codified in the Kanun are believed to reflect much older tribal practices that predated its formal articulation. Scholars therefore argue that elements of these customary traditions persisted through successive periods of foreign domination, including Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman rule, before eventually being consolidated into the legal corpus known today as the Kanun (Hasluck and Hutton, 2015; Lugaj, 2018). The region's geography—marked by rugged terrain, isolated valleys, and limited connectivity to political centres—reinforced the persistence of clan-based autonomy and created conditions in which the *Kanun* served as the principal regulator of social, moral and economic life.

Codified in writing only in the early twentieth century by the Franciscan priest Shtjefën Gjeçovi (1989), the *Kanun* was for centuries an oral legal tradition transmitted through communal memory, ritualized practices and the adjudications of village elders. Its authority derived not from any state institution but from collective recognition: it was regarded as the embodiment of justice, social balance and communal honour. Structurally, the code encompasses over 1,200 articles, organized around four interrelated pillars: honour (*nderi*), hospitality (*mikpritja*), kin loyalty and proper conduct. These pillars defined both the moral compass and practical rules of daily life, embedding a normative order that shaped family relations, inter-clan obligations, and mechanisms of conflict resolution (Pula, 2013; Kalo, 2025).

At the core of the *Kanun* lies the principle of honour, articulated through concepts such as *besa* (a sacred pledge of trust) and *nderi* (dignity and reputation). Honour functioned as the fundamental marker of identity, binding individuals to kin and clan. Violations of honour demanded rectification, often through *gjakmarrja* (blood vengeance),

which was codified as a mechanism of social equilibrium. Unlike unregulated vendetta, *gjakmarrja* operated under strict limitations: retaliation was prohibited against women, children, and the elderly and killings were to be carried out according to well-defined procedures (Operazione Colomba, 2017). Although these provisions often perpetuated cycles of violence, they were historically understood as instruments of justice in the absence of state enforcement, embedding a sense of moral responsibility into acts of retribution (Arsovska and Verduyn, 2007; Bilefsky, 2008).

Hospitality formed another cornerstone of the *Kanun*, mandating sacred obligations toward guests irrespective of economic status or social rank. Households were required to provide protection and sustenance to visitors, while failure to uphold these duties brought shame upon the host. Hospitality was deeply connected to honour, and the concept of *besa* extended protection to guests even in times of conflict. This emphasis on mutual respect and ethical obligation underscores the *Kanun*'s role in sustaining inter-communal trust and solidarity (Sadiku, 2014).

The *Kanun* also placed kinship and patriarchal authority at the centre of social organization. Extended families operated as collective economic and political units, governed by patriarchs whose authority encompassed land management, inheritance and dispute resolution (Whitaker, 1981; The World Mind, 2023). Marriage arrangements, succession, and property distribution were carefully regulated to preserve alliances, maintain honour and ensure lineage continuity. In subsistence-based mountain economies, land was the primary resource, and rules governing its ownership and transfer were integral to clan survival (Xhaxho, 2018; Kalo, 2025). Collective labour obligations reinforced solidarity and interdependence, ensuring that the *Kanun* was as much a practical system of survival as it was a moral order.

Conflict resolution extended beyond blood feuds, with traditional Kanun courts functioning as community-based adjudicatory bodies. These tribunals, operating independently from state legal systems, relied on oral testimony, communal consensus, and the authority of elders to restore balance and prevent escalation (Celik and Shkreli, 2010; Ademi et al., 2013; Kalo, 2025). Emphasising reconciliation over rigid legalism,

the courts derived legitimacy from their social embededness rather than codified statutes (Arsovska and Verduyn, 2007; Cara and Margjeka, 2015).

Regional variations highlight the Kanun's adaptability. In northern Albania, the *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit* reinforced patrilineal structures and equal inheritance for male descendants, while other regions such as Kurveleshi developed alternative codes like the *Kanuni i Papa Zhulit* and *Kanuni i Idriz Sulit*. These regional adaptations blended customary norms with evolving socio-political contexts, yet retained core values of honour, kinship, and hospitality (Lugaj, 2018; Xhaxho, 2018).

The *Kanun*'s resilience across centuries of political transformation illustrates its capacity to function as a parallel legal order. Ottoman authorities, while formally sovereign, generally tolerated highland autonomy, allowing customary law to persist (İnan, 2008; Balci, 2016). In the twentieth century, Albanian state-building and later communist governance sought to suppress the *Kanun*. Enver Hoxha's regime criminalized blood feuds and sought to replace clan loyalty with ideological allegiance to the Party. Although these efforts temporarily undermined its practice, the *Kanun* endured in cultural memory, resurfacing after 1991 as Albania transitioned into a pluralistic, yet fragile, state (Mattei, 2016; Xhaxho, 2018).

The Post-Communist Revival of the Kanun

The collapse of Albania's communist regime in the early 1990s produced a profound institutional rupture and a deep societal dislocation. For nearly half a century, Enver Hoxha's dictatorship had imposed unprecedented levels of authoritarian control, dismantling traditional social structures, suppressing customary authority and criminalizing the practice of the *Kanun* (Xhaxho, 2018; Papathimiu, 2023). With the sudden disintegration of this centralized apparatus, Albania entered a period marked by political instability, economic collapse and widespread insecurity. The transition to a market economy generated soaring unemployment, mass emigration, and pervasive poverty, while the newly formed democratic institutions proved fragile, under-resourced and incapable of extending effective governance across the national territory (Rama, 2019; Jarvis, 2000).

This institutional weakness was most acute in the northern districts, historically semi-autonomous and geographically resistant to centralized control. State institutions, including courts and police, lacked both legitimacy and material capacity. Judicial systems were viewed with suspicion, police forces were chronically underfunded and distrusted, and the government in Tirana was perceived as remote and ineffectual. Against this backdrop, local communities increasingly turned to the *Kanun* as a familiar and culturally embedded normative system for resolving disputes and regulating social relations. As Jordan (1997) has observed, the *Kanun* did not persist as a folkloric remnant but re-emerged as a functional parallel legal order precisely because the formal legal framework had disintegrated.

The social consequences of this revival were immediate and dramatic. Blood feuds (*gjakmarrja*), which had been aggressively suppressed during the communist period, returned with alarming frequency. Families once again found themselves locked into cycles of retaliatory violence, and many households resorted to *ngujimi* (self-imposed confinement) to protect male members from vengeance killings (Operazione Colomba, 2017). In numerous northern villages, daily life was reordered around the fear of feuds, producing a pervasive atmosphere of insecurity and distrust. For many Albanians, particularly in rural and mountainous areas, reliance on the *Kanun* was less a matter of cultural preference than a practical necessity in conditions of state collapse—an available, if violent, mechanism of ensuring predictability and social regulation in a lawless environment (Smolar, 2011; Hosken and Kasapi, 2017).

The near-total breakdown of state authorities during the 1997 crisis, triggered by the collapse of fraudulent pyramid schemes, further entrenched this dynamic. The implosion of financial institutions provoked mass protests and armed uprisings, leading to the effective disintegration of state authority in large parts of the country (Lawson and Saltmarshe, 2000). The looting of military depots released hundreds of thousands of firearms into civilian hands, transforming Albania into one of the most heavily armed societies in Europe. In this context of near-anarchy, the *Kanun* resurfaced as a crucial organizing principle, providing communities with normative guidance and dispute

resolution mechanisms in the absence of functional state institutions (Xhaxho, 2018).

Yet the post-communist revival of the *Kanun* differed significantly from its earlier incarnations. In the premodern highlands, its authority had been confined largely to insular tribal societies; in the post-1991 period, it operated within a rapidly globalizing environment characterized by porous borders, transnational migration, and expanding Diasporas. The liberalization of Albania's borders facilitated unprecedented outflows of migrants, particularly to Italy, Greece and Western Europe (Mangalakova, 2004; Vullnetari, 2007). Migrant communities carried with them the values and practices of the *Kanun*, transmitting its logics into transnational spaces where they interacted with criminal networks and new cultural dynamics. Blood feuds, once localized to highland communities, became transnational phenomena, extending into the Albanian diaspora and complicating the efforts of European law enforcement to address Albanian-organized crime (Arsovska and Verduyn, 2007; Europol, 2021).

Thus, the *Kanun* in the post-communist era must be understood not as a static survival of tradition but as an adaptive system of governance that reasserted itself in conditions of state collapse and expanded into transnational arenas. Its re-emergence illustrates the resilience of customary law under conditions of weak statehood and its capacity to interact with and shape broader processes of migration, organized crime and globalization.

The Kanun and Albanian Organized Crime

By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Albanian organized crime had emerged as a formidable actor within both European and global illicit economies. Albanian criminal networks are implicated in heroin trafficking along the Balkan Route, human smuggling across the Adriatic into Italy and Greece, the proliferation of small arms in the aftermath of the Yugoslav wars and more recently, the control of cocaine importation routes from Latin America into Western Europe (Paoli and Reuter, 2008; UNODC, 2020; Europol, 2021). These groups have developed a reputation for adaptability, violence and cohesion, with analysts frequently highlighting the cultural resources of

the *Kanun* as critical to explaining their resilience and transnational reach (Arsovska, 2015; Mattei, 2016). The *Kanun* does not merely function as a folkloric backdrop to crime; rather, it provides a normative vocabulary and binding code of obligations that underpin trust, discipline and legitimacy within illicit organizations (Arsovska, 2006).

At the core of this linkage lies the *Kanun*'s emphasis on kinship and clan loyalty. Albanian society, particularly in the northern highlands, has historically been organized into extended family groups (*fis*), whose solidarity is codified and enforced by customary law (Schwandner-Sievers and Fischer, 2002; Plaku et al., 2019). In environments where state institutions were absent or distrusted, kinship provided the primary foundation of survival and trust. In the criminal underworld, this principle translates into recruitment and cooperation strategies that privilege blood ties and extended kinship networks over external partnerships. Criminal enterprises are often structured around close family units, which severely restricts outsider access and creates systems of "bonded trust" that are exceptionally resistant to infiltration. Betrayal within such groups is regarded not only as a criminal violation but as a dishonourable rupture of familial obligations—an act that, in the logic of the *Kanun*, justifies lethal retribution (Arsovska and Craig, 2006).

The *Kanun*'s principle of *nderi* (honour) reinforces this dynamic by operating as both a symbolic and practical mechanism of enforcement. In customary contexts, the defence of honour is paramount, and affronts demand retribution lest individuals and their families fall into disgrace. Within organized crime, this moral framework transforms loyalty and obedience into moral imperatives rather than mere strategic necessities (Smolar, 2011). Members who defect or betray obligations jeopardize not only their own lives but also the collective standing of their families. In this way, Albanian organized crime groups harness traditional codes of honour to strengthen internal discipline and to legitimize violence against defectors, rivals, or informants (Mattei, 2016; Arsovska, 2015).

Equally significant is the adaptation of *gjakmarrja* (blood vengeance). Historically codified as a mechanism for restoring balance in stateless societies, blood vengeance required the avenging of a killing by targeting the perpetrator or a male relative. Within criminal organizations, this principle has been repurposed as a rationale for

retributive violence against rivals or those who violate agreements. Violence is not arbitrary but cloaked in the cultural language of honour and obligation, lending it social intelligibility and legitimacy (Operazione Colomba, 2017; Debiais, 2022). This process mirrors the way in which the Sicilian mafia has historically invoked *omertà* and notions of an "honoured society" to imbue criminal violence with moral significance (Paoli, 2003).

The *Kanun*'s emphasis on secrecy and silence also finds resonance in the criminal underworld. In customary highland society, discretion was considered essential to maintaining honour and avoiding public shame. This ethos parallels the mafia principle of *omertà*, where silence in the face of external inquiries is regarded as both a duty and a shield. Members of Albanian organized crime groups are socialized into this culture of discretion, where cooperation with law enforcement is equated with dishonour and carries the certainty of retribution (Plaku et al., 2019). Such deeply internalized prohibitions contribute to the difficulty of penetrating these networks, as informants face not only legal consequences but also the existential risk of clan-sanctioned retaliation.

The interplay between *Kanun* values and organized crime extends far beyond Albania's borders. Following mass emigration during the 1990s and 2000s, Albanian Diasporas established significant communities in Italy, Switzerland, Germany, the United Kingdom, and beyond. Within these enclaves, organized crime flourished by drawing simultaneously on the vulnerabilities of immigrant populations and the cultural codes that fostered internal cohesion (Vullnetari, 2007; Europol, 2021). The *Kanun* thus travelled transnationally, shaping illicit practices in contexts as diverse as Milan, London, and Rotterdam, where Albanian networks invoke honour and kinship loyalty to sustain cohesion while engaging in globalized drug markets and human trafficking (Arsovska, 2015).

Crucially, the *Kanun* enhances the social legitimacy of these groups in the eyes of Albanian communities. Unlike purely profit-driven gangs, mafia-like organizations rooted in customary codes can present themselves as defenders of honour, justice and communal order, even while engaging in narcotics or arms trafficking (Arsovska, 2015). In some northern districts, criminal leaders' fashion themselves as *burrë i dheut* ("men of the land"), simultaneously enacting the values of loyalty and

protection while orchestrating transnational criminal operations. This symbolic positioning cultivates tacit community support—or at least acquiescence—in environments where state institutions are viewed as corrupt or ineffective.

The principle of *mikpritja* (hospitality) has also been reinterpreted in criminal contexts. Traditionally a sacred obligation toward guests, hospitality has been adapted into practices of mutual assistance among criminal allies, facilitating safe houses, fugitive protection, and reciprocal cooperation across networks. This reinforces solidarity and creates bonds of obligation that extend beyond kinship. Finally, the *Kanun*'s adaptability allows it to coexist with other normative frameworks, including religious law and transnational criminal logics. Albanian groups engaged in arms trafficking during the Balkan conflicts, for instance, could frame their actions as simultaneously fulfilling *Kanun* obligations to kin across borders and contributing to broader ethno-nationalist struggles (Arsovska, 2015).

Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate that the *Kanun* functions as more than a cultural residue: it operates as a living normative framework that furnishes Albanian organized crime with moral legitimacy, internal cohesion, and social embededness. In doing so, it contributes significantly to the adaptability and resilience of Albanian criminal networks in both local and transnational contexts.

Salafi Networks in Northern Albania

The post-communist transition not only facilitated the revival of the *Kanun* but also created the conditions for the expansion of Salafi networks across northern Albania (Elbasani, 2020). The fall of Enver Hoxha's regime in 1991 marked the end of nearly five decades of state-enforced atheism, during which religious practice was criminalized, places of worship demolished or repurposed and clergy systematically persecuted (Babuna, 2003). With the abrupt collapse of this apparatus of ideological repression, Albania experienced a profound religious vacuum. For many communities, particularly in the impoverished and marginalized northern highlands, this period was characterized by a search for new moral anchors, identity frameworks, and sources of legitimacy.

It was in this environment that foreign Islamic organizations—often financed by Gulf states, Turkey, and transnational Islamic charities—entered Albania with resources to rebuild religious infrastructures, including mosques, Qur'anic schools and humanitarian institutions (Kanellopoulos, 2023). Among these actors, Salafi-oriented movements were especially active. They promoted a scripturalist, text-centred and Universalist interpretation of Islam that sought to reorient Albanian Muslim practice toward what they presented as "authentic" Islamic orthodoxy (Jordan et al., 2022). Their activities were not merely theological but represented deliberate geopolitical and cultural interventions. Albania offered external sponsors a dual opportunity: as a humanitarian field in a society suffering deep economic dislocation and as a strategic outpost in the Balkans where religious traditions had been disrupted by decades of state repression.

The establishment of Salafi institutions was particularly effective in rural and semi-urban northern districts, where traditional Hanafi Sunni and Bektashi practices had historically dominated but where formal religious education remained minimal (Clayer, 2006; Elbasani, 2020). Salafi initiatives disproportionately targeted youth populations, offering material support, employment opportunities and pathways of belonging within a global community of believers. In this sense, Salafism functioned not only as a religious project but as a vehicle of social mobility and symbolic empowerment in a period of structural poverty and institutional fragility (Maliqi, 1992; Elbasani and Roy, 2017).

The ideological encounter between the *Kanun* and Salafism produced visible tensions. One of the most prominent concerns is the practice of *gjakmarrja* (blood vengeance). While the *Kanun* enshrined retributive justice as a sacred duty of kin groups, Salafi leaders condemned it as un-Islamic, emphasizing Qur'anic injunctions against extrajudicial killing and the primacy of shari'a-based adjudication. Similarly, the *Kanun*'s rigid prioritization of clan solidarity, inheritance rules and kin-based authority was regarded by Salafis as a survival of tribal custom that subordinated divine law to local tradition. Where the *Kanun* affirmed loyalty to kin above all else, Salafism demanded loyalty to the *umma*, the transnational community of believers, thereby undermining the normative foundations of clan authority (Smolar, 2011; Elbasani, 2020).

Yet, the relationship between the two systems was not defined solely by conflict. In practice, it evolved into a complex field of negotiation, accommodation, and pragmatic coexistence. Salafi missionaries understood that outright rejection of the *Kanun* risked alienating communities for whom customary law remained the deepest source of legitimacy. Consequently, many adopted gradualist strategies, reframing rather than erasing local practices. In areas devastated by blood feuds, Salafi preachers invoked Islamic principles of forgiveness and reconciliation, thereby positioning themselves as peacemakers while simultaneously undermining the authority of the *Kanun* (Jordan et al., 2022). In other contexts, rather than denouncing hospitality or kinship directly, Salafi actors reinterpreted them within Islamic terms, linking *mikpritja* (hospitality) to Qur'anic injunctions on generosity and kinship solidarity.

The rise of Salafism in northern Albania also reflected wider geopolitical currents. The 1990s and early 2000s were a period in which the Balkans became a significant arena for transnational jihadist networks, particularly in the wake of the Bosnian and Kosovar wars (Mangalakova, 2004). Albania's porous borders, weak institutions and existing criminal infrastructures made it a strategic corridor for the movement of resources, personnel, and ideologies (Perteshi, 2020; Europol, 2021). While many Salafi organizations focused on humanitarian aid and religious instruction, others provided ideological infrastructures that could be mobilized for political or militant purposes. Although the majority of Albanian Muslims rejected extremist ideologies, segments of northern populations became exposed to narratives that situated Albania not merely as a transitioning post-communist state but as part of a broader Islamic revival on European soil (Elbasani, 2020; Kanellopoulos, 2023).

Intersections of Custom, Crime and Religion

The coexistence of the *Kanun*, organized crime, and Salafi networks in northern Albania exemplifies a broader sociological and political phenomenon: the emergence of overlapping normative orders in environments of weak or contested statehood. Such dynamics are not unique to Albania; they reflect a recurring pattern observable in post-conflict, post-authoritarian and peripheral regions where formal institutions are fragile and the enforcement of the rule of law remains

inconsistent (Migdal, 2001; United Nations, 2019). In these settings, competing sources of authority, criminal, and religious—step into the vacuum created by absent or delegitimized state structures, each articulating its own logic of order, justice and legitimacy (Barfield, 2010; Medda-Windischer et al., 2024).

The interaction among these normative systems generates a complex field characterized simultaneously by competition, negotiation and convergence. Organized crime groups frequently cloak their activities in the symbolic vocabulary of tradition, invoking the *Kanun*'s idioms of honor, kinship and retribution to legitimize violence. By framing illicit practices as continuations of ancestral customs, criminal leaders enhance their local legitimacy and cultivate a degree of social tolerance within communities where the *Kanun* still resonates (Arsovska, 2015). In contrast, Salafi leaders often denounce elements of the *Kanun*, particularly *gjakmarrja* (blood vengeance), which they reject as incompatible with Islamic law. By presenting Islam as a higher normative order capable of breaking destructive cycles of retribution, Salafi actors strategically position themselves as moral reformers and peace builders. Yet, this opposition is not absolute: Salafi preachers have, in practice, coexisted with organized crime when illicit networks provided protection, logistical resources, or access to transnational circuits useful for religious expansion (Elbasani, 2020; Perteshi, 2020).

The broader implication of this triangular relationship is a fragmentation of sovereignty in northern Albania. Already weakened by corruption, clientelism and fragile institutions, the Albanian state competes not only with organized crime but also with entrenched customary and religious authorities (Zhilla, 2017). The result is a form of legal and political pluralism in which the state's Weberian monopoly on legitimate violence is dispersed across clans, mafia groups and religious actors. This pluralism complicates efforts at state consolidation, law enforcement, and counter-extremism, since interventions in one normative sphere often reverberate across the others. Campaigns that suppress organized crime without acknowledging the cultural legitimacy of the *Kanun* may inadvertently create openings for Salafi networks to present themselves as alternative moral authorities. Conversely, repressive measures targeting Salafism risk alienating marginalized

youth, pushing them toward the economic opportunities and protective networks offered by criminal structures (Barbalet, 2023).

This entanglement of customary law, criminal economies, and transnational religious movements underscores the importance of adopting holistic approaches to governance and security in northern Albania. Effective policy must recognize the layered nature of authority and legitimacy in these contexts, where state law operates alongside and often in tension with, other normative orders.

Comparative Perspectives

The Albanian case of overlapping customary law, organized crime, and Salafi networks exemplifies a broader socio-political phenomenon observable across weak-state environments, where formal institutions are absent, contested or ineffectual. Comparative analysis reveals that the persistence of customary law, its strategic adaptation by criminal actors and its entanglement with religious movements are not isolated to Albania but recur across diverse cultural and geopolitical settings.

Sicily provides a salient parallel. The Sicilian Mafia has long relied on *omertà*, a cultural code that emphasizes silence, loyalty and secrecy. Like the *Kanun* in northern Albania, *omertà* functions not only as a tool of organized crime but also as a moral framework that legitimizes mafia practices, discourages cooperation with state authorities and frames betrayal as dishonour while normalizing violence as a mechanism of dispute resolution (Paoli, 2003). Both the *Kanun* and *omertà* illustrate what Gambetta (1993) famously terms a "private protection industry," wherein criminal organizations enforce contracts, adjudicate disputes and provide order in contexts where state enforcement is unreliable. This blending of culture and crime generates resilient, socially embedded structures that are difficult to dismantle and capable of adapting to external pressures.

Chechnya offers another instructive comparison. The *adat* system, like the *Kanun*, is rooted in clan-based norms emphasizing honour, collective responsibility, and retributive justice. During the 1990s, criminal networks and Islamist actors alike drew on *adat* to reinforce their legitimacy, while Salafi-inspired movements simultaneously contested blood revenge yet often accommodated customary law for

pragmatic purposes (Cremer, 2012; Lazarev, 2019). The Chechen mafia's appropriation of *adat* mirrors Albanian dynamics, producing a layered normative system in which customary law, organized crime and religious authority coexisted in competition and cooperation (Jaimoukha, 2012).

Afghanistan provides a further parallel through the Pashtunwali code, which structures social life around concepts of *nang* (honor), hospitality and *badal* (revenge). Like the *Kanun*, Pashtunwali persisted under weak state conditions, coexisting with criminal economies, most notably opium production, as well as Taliban governance structures (Barfield, 2010; Coulson et al., 2014). Here, too, religious and criminal actors alternately challenged, co-opted or cloaked their practices in the language of customary norms, producing a form of legal pluralism in which state law was only one among several competing systems of authority.

Chinese organized crime, particularly the triads, demonstrates the global reach of this phenomenon. Triads rely on ritualized codes, kinship ties and secretive hierarchies to maintain internal cohesion and enforce compliance. These systems, shaped by Confucian traditions of loyalty and secrecy, operate most effectively in contexts where state surveillance is limited, ineffective or corrupt (Chu, 2000; Arsovska and Craig, 2006). Like the *Kanun* or *omertà*, triad codes provide both moral justification and operational discipline, enabling organizational resilience and transnational expansion.

The Balkan region itself further reinforces these patterns. In Kosovo, the collapse of Yugoslav state structures facilitated a resurgence of *Kanun* norms, which interacted with both organized crime and Islamist influence in shaping post-war social order (Mangalakova, 2004; Perteshi, 2020). Similarly, Montenegro's clan-based smuggling networks reveal the intersection of customary codes and illicit economies in sustaining transnational trafficking routes.

Conclusions

The persistence of the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini* into the twenty-first century demonstrates the remarkable resilience of customary law in structuring social life in the absence—or weakness—of centralized authority. Historically, the *Kanun* provided a normative framework that regulated behaviour, mediated disputes, and sustained order in the

stateless highlands of northern Albania. Its survival through successive periods of Ottoman domination, communist repression and the institutional collapse of the 1990s illustrates that customary law can function independently of state structures, deriving its legitimacy from kinship, honor and shared cultural norms. In this respect, the *Kanun* underscores the broader centrality of non-state legal systems in contexts marked by fragile or contested sovereignty.

Contemporary transformations of the *Kanun*, however, reveal its instrumentalization in new social and criminal environments. In the wake of Albania's post-communist instability, organized crime groups appropriated *Kanun* principles to enforce loyalty, justify violence and sustain clandestine networks. Practices such as blood feuds and kinship-based obligations—once mechanisms of communal justice and cohesion—were strategically redeployed as tools of mafia-style discipline and transnational criminal enterprise. This demonstrates how customary law can be selectively reinterpreted to serve objectives that diverge from its original communal function, contributing to the entrenchment of criminal economies that draw strength from cultural legitimacy.

At the same time, the interaction between the *Kanun* and Salafi networks illustrates the dynamics of normative contestation and coexistence. Salafi actors, emphasizing religious law and divine authority, have sought to delegitimize *Kanun*-based practices such as *gjakmarrja*, yet often engage in pragmatic accommodation to maintain local influence. This dual strategy—contesting certain elements while reinterpreting others—demonstrates the adaptability of religious movements in environments governed by overlapping normative systems. It also reflects the broader tension between Universalist frameworks of authority (Islamic law, human rights, or state law) and localized, culturally embedded customs.

The convergence of customary law, organized crime and Salafi authority in northern Albania has profound implications for governance, social stability and security in the Western Balkans. Customary obligations and criminal logic perpetuate cycles of violence, undermine trust in fragile state institutions and complicate law enforcement, particularly where transnational networks exploit cultural norms to reinforce cohesion and legitimacy. Meanwhile, the presence of Salafi

networks introduces new ideological challenges that intersect with, but do not displace, older customary frameworks.

This study contributes to the existing literature in three ways. First, it brings together discussions that are often treated separately by examining the interaction between customary law, organized crime and Salafi religious networks within a single analytical framework. Second, it conceptualizes the Kanun not merely as a cultural relic but as a dynamic normative system capable of shaping both criminal governance and religious authority. Third, by situating the Albanian case within broader comparative perspectives of legal pluralism, the article highlights how informal institutions continue to structure power and legitimacy in weak-state environments.

The Albanian case thus exemplifies legal pluralism in practice: a landscape in which multiple, overlapping, and competing normative orders—customary, criminal and religious—coexist and coevolve, shaping identity, authority and social behaviour. More broadly, it demonstrates how weak-state environments produce hybrid orders of governance that cannot be fully understood through the prism of state law alone. For policymakers and scholars of security, this case underscores the need for approaches that engage not only formal institutions but also the informal cultural logics and transnational networks that continue to structure social and political life in fragile states.

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RUSSIAN STRATEGIC REPRESENTATIONS OF NATO AND THE EURO-ATLANTIC COMMUNITY

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Abstract:
This article examines how the Russian Federation has progressively redefined its strategic positioning toward NATO and the Euro-Atlantic community across four key periods: 1999-2000, 2008, 2014, and 2022. The aim is to identify patterns in how official strategic documents portray NATO and the Euro-Atlantic community, with a focus on threat perception, security discourse, and the legitimacy of force. The methodology consists of qualitative content analysis of national security strategies, foreign policy concepts, and military doctrines issued in each period, using a chronological approach. Findings indicate a shift from a predominantly defensive posture to an increasingly assertive and confrontational stance. In the early 2000s, NATO is depicted as a potential challenge, but cooperation remains possible. By 2008 and especially after the war in Georgia, the tone becomes more critical, portraying NATO as a destabilizing actor. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 consolidate this trend: Western actors are now described as direct adversaries, and the use of force is legitimized by references to existential threats. The study highlights how Russia has embedded strategic and ideological elements into its official doctrine, reinforcing a discourse of defensive sovereignty while enabling offensive operations.

Keywords*: Russia, NATO, strategic documents, threat perception, Euro-Atlantic security.*

Introduction

Understanding how the Russian Federation formally constructs its perception of NATO is essential for grasping the evolution of its strategic posture and external orientation. In the context of intensifying geopolitical competition, the way NATO is framed in official Russian

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documents reflects deeper shifts in security priorities, regional ambitions, and institutional threat perceptions. Given the role official documents play in legitimizing foreign policy decisions and military actions, analysing their content over time provides critical insight into Russia's evolving international outlook.

This research seeks to address the following research question: How has the representation of NATO changed in the official strategic documents of the Russian Federation between 1999 and 2022? The study focuses on identifying how NATO has been portrayed over time by the Russian Federation, in strategic documents issued during moments of geopolitical shift.

The study proceeds from the assumption that changes in the portrayal of NATO are driven by shifts in the regional security environment and in Russia's interaction with the Euro-Atlantic community, which are subsequently reflected and formalized in official strategic documents.

The analysis is based on a qualitative, inductive content analysis of twelve strategic documents—national security strategies, foreign policy concepts, and military doctrines—issued during four key periods: 1999-2000, 2008, 2014, and 2022. These periods were selected due to their significance in the trajectory of Russian foreign and security policy: the consolidation of centralized power, the conflict in Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The theoretical and conceptual foundation treats strategic documents as official instruments that reflect not only policy priorities but also external positioning.

The structure of the paper integrates four main sections, beginning with a review of relevant academic contributions that examine how official documents define security priorities, frame external threats, and articulate strategic objectives in the Russian context. This is followed by a presentation of the methodological framework applied in the inductive analysis of selected strategic texts. The subsequent section analyses the representation of NATO in official documents issued during four critical periods, in relation to their political and military context. Finally, the paper concludes with a

synthesis of the main findings and an evaluation of their implications for understanding the evolution of Russia's strategic posture.

Throughout the analysis, contextual elements are included only as they clarify shifts in how NATO is represented in official Russian documents. The focus of the study remains on the evolution of this representation, rather than on a broader assessment of Russia's domestic or foreign policy dynamics.

This study does not seek to identify all the factors that influence Russia's perception of NATO, nor to determine whether domestic, international, or leadership-related elements prevail. Questions related to individual decision-making, including Vladimir Putin's personal motivations or worldview, fall outside the scope of this analysis. Instead, the paper is limited to examining how NATO is represented in official strategic documents. By focusing on this level of analysis, the study avoids speculative explanations and concentrates on what is explicitly stated and institutionalized in formal policy texts.

Theoretical framework and methodology

Academic research on the evolution of Russian foreign and security discourse has consistently emphasized the role of structural uncertainty, national interests, and historical memory in shaping strategic behaviour. Researchers such as Morgenthau (1948) and Waltz (1979, 118) have argued that states act to preserve sovereignty and ensure survival in the absence of a central authority, a view that continues to frame interpretations of Russian strategic conduct in international affairs.

In particular, the perception of NATO as a destabilizing presence against Russia has gained increasing prominence in both academic and political analyses of Russian behaviour. Mearsheimer (2001, 5-8) discusses how great powers are likely to view military alliances on their periphery as threats, especially when those alliances expand toward their borders. This logic has often been used to interpret Russia's opposition to NATO enlargement and its military posture in Eastern Europe.

Pevehouse and Goldstein (2017, 107-111) underline that power, measured in both military and economic terms, remains a key element in

a state's ability to shape external outcomes. In Russia's case, research has drawn attention to the anti-NATO stance employed in official documents, which often frame NATO actions as illegitimate or threatening to regional stability (Ungureanu 2006, 179-181; Miroiu 2006, 31-34). These framings are embedded in a broader logic of strategic deterrence and influence projection.

A number of studies also highlight the dual role of strategic documents as instruments for both internal coordination and external justification (Hanami 2003, 163-178; Elman 1994, 87-103). Such texts serve not only to formalize institutional priorities, but also to construct adversarial images, reinforce perceptions, and legitimize policy responses. Layne (1994, 5-49) and Zakaria (1998, 19) suggest that these mechanisms are especially evident during periods of geopolitical tension, when external actors are increasingly portrayed as direct threats.

While military capabilities remain a central reference point, recent research points to the growing presence of value-based components of strategic planning. For example, Rosenboim (2023, 140-145) notes that leadership perceptions and internal political constraints can determine how external threats are defined and prioritized. This is especially relevant in the Russian case, where official documents often combine language about national sovereignty, cultural values, and external pressure into unified constructs depicting strategic vulnerability.

The relevance of identity and threat construction is further explored by authors such as Hansen (2023, 180-186) and Wolfers (1962, 9-17), who show that official discourse not only reflects but also reproduces state perceptions of the international environment. This perspective supports the need to treat strategic documents as discursive acts that perform political functions.

Building on these insights, the present study contributes to the literature by tracing how NATO is represented in Russian strategic documents issued during four critical time periods—1999-2000, 2008, 2014, and 2022. These periods were selected based on their significance in shaping Russia's foreign and security policy: the rise of Vladimir Putin, the war in Georgia, the annexation of Crimea, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Each moment marks a shift in Russia's international behaviour and offers a relevant context for examining potential changes in strategic documents. Rather than focusing on static concepts of

alignment or opposition, the analysis explores how terminology and threat framing evolve in response to shifting political and military contexts.

This study does not adopt a single theoretical lens, but combines elements of offensive realism and constructivism in a structured manner. Offensive realism is used to contextualize why the expansion of NATO and the presence of military infrastructure near Russia's borders are consistently framed as security concerns. At the same time, constructivism guides the analysis of how these concerns are expressed in official documents, by examining the language and recurring formulations through which NATO is represented over time. The author's approach therefore consists in using realism to explain the persistence of security-driven interpretations, while employing constructivist tools to analyse how these interpretations are articulated, stabilized, and transformed within strategic texts.

The present analysis is anchored in a conceptual approach that treats official strategic documents as both expressions of institutional intent and instruments for projecting state identity and strategic orientation. From a theoretical standpoint, the analysis draws on the understanding that state-issued policy texts are performative in nature—they do not merely reflect foreign policy, but actively contribute to the construction of national priorities, external perceptions, and international positioning. Accordingly, changes in tone and content across these documents offer critical insights into how a state defines its security environment, allies, and adversaries over time.

This research starts from the premise that the Russian Federation employs strategic documents not only to articulate internal policy frameworks, but also to shape external perceptions of its geopolitical posture. In this context, the portrayal of NATO serves as a key indicator of Moscow's evolving international vision. These documents function as structured discourses that legitimize political and military actions and define the boundaries of acceptable strategic behaviour.

The conceptual framework centres on three interrelated dimensions: the representation of external actors, the framing of national security threats, and the strategic positioning of the Russian state in relation to global power structures. These dimensions guide the inductive analysis of recurring themes and discursive shifts related

to NATO, allowing for the identification of patterns and moments of rhetorical escalation across the four key-moments analysed.

Methodological approach

The research relies on a qualitative, inductive content analysis of twelve official strategic documents published by the Russian Federation, covering four distinct time periods: 1999-2000, 2008, 2014, and 2022.

These periods are selected based on major turning points in Russia's political and military trajectory, which also correspond to significant shifts in its interaction with NATO and the Euro-Atlantic security environment. The appointment of Vladimir Putin in 1999-2000 marks the consolidation of centralized authority and the beginning of a more coherent strategic outlook, formulated in the context of NATO's post-Cold War enlargement. The 2008 period, associated with the Russo-Georgian War, reflects the first direct military confrontation in the post-Soviet space linked to NATO's prospective expansion toward Georgia and Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 represents a decisive break in Russia-NATO relations, leading to the suspension of cooperation and the redefinition of NATO as a direct threat in official documents. Finally, the 2022 invasion of Ukraine marks the transition to a fully confrontational posture, in which NATO is consistently portrayed as a central adversary. These moments are therefore selected not only for their internal significance, but because they coincide with shifts in the regional security environment that are subsequently reflected in Russia's strategic documents.

The analysis is conducted on the following documents: National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation (2000, 2009, 2015, 2021); Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (2000, 2008, 2013, 2023); The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation (2000, 2010, 2014, 2021).

The selection criteria for these documents are based on temporal relevance, strategic significance, and comparability across periods. These documents are considered formal expressions of Russia's national priorities and strategic orientation, which makes them suitable for examining how perceptions of NATO are shaped within Russia's official documents. The documents are downloaded from official government websites and analysed in their original language.

The analysis does not apply a pre-established coding scheme. Instead, it follows an inductive, grounded theory approach, allowing categories and themes to emerge directly from the text. The unit of analysis is the paragraph or segment that contains meaningful references to NATO or related strategic formulations.

Based on the research question: *How has the representation of NATO changed in the official strategic documents of the Russian Federation between 1999 and 2022?* the research objective is to identify changes in the representation of NATO in the official strategic documents of the Russian Federation from 1999 to 2022.

Accordingly, the analysis does not aim to provide a comprehensive assessment of these documents, but selectively examines those segments that refer to NATO and the Euro-Atlantic community, in order to trace patterns of representation across time.

The article starts from the hypothesis that strategic documents issued by the Russian Federation in 2014 and 2022 portray NATO increasingly as a direct threat to national security, in contrast to a more reserved stance in previous periods. Through this analytical design, the study aims to identify shifts in tone, content, and strategic framing related to NATO, with attention to how such representations evolve in relation to broader geopolitical developments.

This study does not undertake a systematic analysis of NATO's institutional development, such as summit decisions or enlargement processes. Instead, it focuses exclusively on how NATO is represented within Russian strategic documents. References to external developments are included only when they are explicitly reflected in these documents, in order to clarify the context in which particular representations emerge.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the results of the qualitative analysis of the official strategic documents issued by the Russian Federation during the four key periods, selected for their geopolitical relevance and impact on Russia's foreign policy orientation. The aim is to trace how NATO and the broader Euro-Atlantic community are represented in

these texts, with a focus on identifying shifts in language, tone, and strategic framing over time.

The analysis is structured around four critical moments in recent Russian history—1999-2000, 2008, 2014, and 2022—each associated with major developments in the country's leadership and external behaviour: the rise of Vladimir Putin, the outbreak of the Russo-Georgian War, the annexation of Crimea, and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Prior to the analysis of each set of strategic documents, a brief contextualization of the corresponding period is provided in order to clarify the domestic and international dynamics that influenced the formulation of the official documents. This step ensures that shifts in the representation of NATO are interpreted in relation to the broader context specific to each juncture.

The 1999-2000 period marks the consolidation of centralized authority under Vladimir Putin following years of institutional instability and the 1998 financial crisis (Tsiganok 2008; Sakwa 2005, 56-62). It also coincides with the Second Chechen War, which reinforced the perception of internal and external threats to national sovereignty (Trenin 2007, 124-138). In this climate of acute vulnerability, Vladimir Putin's political ascent unfolded rapidly. Appointed Prime Minister in August 1999, he assumed the role of acting President on December 31, 1999, following Boris Yeltsin's unexpected resignation. His legitimacy was subsequently reinforced through a political campaign focused on restoring domestic order and reasserting Russia's status as a regional power.

The *2000 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* articulates a comprehensive vision of Russia's internal and external security posture in a context marked by political instability, economic decline, and perceived encirclement. It begins by reaffirming the role of the "multinational people" as the foundation of Russian sovereignty (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 1), underscoring the necessity of a strong central authority to counter secessionism and fragmentation.

The international environment is described through two divergent trends: the consolidation of new power centres, such as China and the EU, and the imposition of a unipolar order by the United States, which is portrayed as advancing unilateral interests (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 1). Russia's strategic position is

defined in opposition to this order, as it asserts a multipolar vision in which its sovereignty and global influence are to be acknowledged (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 3).

National interests are outlined across multiple domains – political, economic, military, social, and informational – reflecting an integrated approach to state security. Internally, emphasis is placed on maintaining constitutional order and territorial integrity, combating extremism and terrorism, and preserving political and economic stability (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 2). External priorities include strengthening ties within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and resisting "double standards" in international affairs (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 3).

The strategy highlights the importance of protecting national information space and developing domestic technological capabilities to reduce strategic dependencies (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 3-5). Russia's military posture is shaped by the goal of deterrence, ensuring sufficient force to prevent aggression against itself or its allies.

Internal vulnerabilities are addressed in detail, including economic stagnation, brain drain, and technological dependence, all seen as weakening Russia's global status (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 5). These economic issues are linked to rising separatism, radicalism, and loss of federal control in peripheral regions. Terms such as "ethnoegoism" and "chauvinism" are used to describe internal divisions (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 5-6).

Organized crime and corruption are identified as structural threats to state stability, with explicit reference to the infiltration of criminal networks in public institutions (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 6). Social instability, marked by poverty, demographic decline, and deteriorating health indicators, is seen as a long-term threat to development.

From a military perspective, NATO expansion, foreign military infrastructure near Russia's borders, and potential territorial claims by NATO are presented as primary security threats (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 6). The document also advocates

for economic independence through controlled integration into global markets, protection of strategic sectors from foreign capital, and tighter control over financial flows (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 9-11).

In the legal and political sphere, a centralized regulatory framework is emphasized, with restrictions on political or social organizations that undermine state unity (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 11). Strategic deterrence is reaffirmed through the maintenance of a credible nuclear force and permanent military presence in key regions (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 14). Defence industry modernization and technological self-sufficiency are also prioritized to reduce dependence on imports.

The *2000 Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000) outlines the strategic directions of Russia's external engagements considering global transformations at the turn of the century. It defines foreign policy as a system of fundamental principles and priorities, anchored in the Constitution, federal law, international treaties, and legal norms (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 2).

While acknowledging a partial consolidation of Russia's international position, the document emphasizes the need for a renewed strategy that ensures national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and a "prestigious" standing in the global system (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 2). It identifies multipolarity, legal cooperation, and internal economic stability as core priorities, alongside safeguarding the rights of Russian citizens abroad and preventing instability near Russia's borders (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 3).

The end of the Cold War is framed as both an opportunity and a risk—particularly due to the emergence of a US-dominated unipolar order and the weakening of the UN Security Council (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 3). Russia reaffirms its commitment to international law, sovereignty, and non-intervention, warning against arbitrary external interference and erosion of state

authority in international relations (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 3-4).

In the economic sphere, foreign policy seeks global integration under conditions that strengthen national competitiveness and economic security (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 7). Russia aims to expand trade, attract foreign investment, protect its external assets, and engage more actively in regional economic organizations, while also addressing ecological risks (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 10).

The document details regional priorities, with Asia receiving particular attention due to geographical proximity and strategic partnerships with China and India. Russia also seeks to enhance its role in Asian integration platforms (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 11). In the Middle East and Africa, Moscow aims to re-establish its economic presence and participate in peacekeeping processes and multilateral projects (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 12). In Latin America, the focus is on expanding political and military-technical cooperation.

While differences with the US are acknowledged, the document underscores the importance of maintaining dialogue on arms control and regional stability (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 11).

The *2000 Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000) defines the foundational principles governing the organization and deployment of armed forces. It presents the military dimension as defensive, emphasizing the protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The global environment is portrayed as unstable, with the emergence of new regional power centres, risks of nuclear confrontation, and the intensification of ethnic, religious, and national extremism (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 1-3). The document highlights crisis management and early stabilization as preventive measures against open conflict. Information warfare is identified as a rising threat dimension (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 2).

Risks include the use of military force labelled as "humanitarian intervention" without UN Security Council approval—framed as a violation of international law (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 2)—as well as the deployment of information technologies for offensive purposes. Military security is ensured through a combination of forces, resources, and nuclear capabilities deemed necessary to deter aggression, including large-scale conventional threats (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 7). The doctrine clarifies the conditions under which Russia may employ nuclear weapons and reiterates commitments under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Military security rests on centralized leadership and civilian oversight, early threat detection, and proportional response measures (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 8). Despite emphasizing international stability, the document defends Russia's right to safeguard critical infrastructure, including abroad and in outer space. In peacetime, military measures focus on internal political stability, territorial integrity, and readiness to neutralize threats, while during crises, total or partial mobilization is envisaged, alongside coordination across diplomatic, economic, and informational domains.

Force development priorities include modernizing deterrence capabilities, creating integrated command systems, and maintaining rapid deployment forces. Emphasis is placed on cooperation within military coalitions, though without explicit reference to partner states (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 10). Military reform is described as a central modernization goal, aiming for a professionalized force and improved planning, logistics, and strategic management (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 11-12).

The document outlines the legal and operational roles of the President, Government, Ministry of Defence, and General Staff. It provides detailed classifications of military conflict, distinguishing between "just" and "unjust" wars based on compliance with international law (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 14). Wars are categorized as local, regional, or large-scale, with the latter potentially involving global conflict and weapons of mass destruction (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2000, 14-16).

The 2008 period reflects a turning point shaped by the Russo-Georgian War and the growing friction over NATO's prospective enlargement, particularly toward Georgia and Ukraine. Russian leadership interpreted these moves as threats to its regional influence and strategic depth (Allison 2013, 260-271; Mankoff 2014, 60-68). The conflict demonstrated a renewed willingness to use military force in the near abroad and marked a departure from the rhetoric of cooperation with the West.

The *2009 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009) introduces an expanded concept of security, encompassing military, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. National security is defined as "the condition ensuring the protection of the individual, society, and the state from internal and external threats, enabling the defence of constitutional rights, territorial integrity, and sustainable development" (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009, 2). A national security assurance system is outlined, integrating not only the armed forces but also governmental bodies and information control technologies (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009, 2). The document emphasizes social cohesion and the promotion of traditional spiritual and moral values as foundations of internal stability (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009, 2-3).

Strategic priorities include enhancing Russia's international standing through adaptation to new geopolitical and economic realities, advocating a multipolar world order, and asserting national interests (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009, 3). Globalization is viewed as a process of interdependence and competition for resources, positioning Russia as a proactive actor in regional crisis management (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009, 6). The concept of a multivector foreign policy, grounded in pragmatism and energy leverage, is articulated alongside ambitions for global economic leadership.

Emerging threats include the unilateral use of force, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and advanced forms of terrorism, especially in cyber and biotech domains (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009, 7-8). The document also underscores the

significance of multilateral mechanisms such as BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and CIS in counterbalancing Western influence and facilitating regional security (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009, 8). NATO is briefly noted in the context of a reconfigured Euro-Atlantic security architecture, calling for a balanced legal framework.

Economic security is addressed through the reduction of external dependencies, diversification, and energy security, with emphasis on domestic supply and innovation (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009, 13). The social component highlights the improvement of living standards, infrastructure, and public services as safeguards against internal instability and radicalism (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009, 14-15). Social mobility is identified as a critical factor in ensuring equity (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009, 15).

Scientific and technological advancement is linked to defence readiness, with a focus on competitiveness and innovation (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009, 18), while delays in adopting new technologies and reliance on imports are flagged as potential vulnerabilities (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2009, 19).

The *2008 Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* outlines the strategic directions of Russian diplomacy, reaffirming its commitment to a multipolar international system, the advancement of national interests, and the strengthening of Russia's global influence. Strategic priorities include the development of good-neighbourly relations and the prevention of conflicts in bordering regions (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 3), alongside the protection of Russian citizens and compatriots abroad, considered a fundamental responsibility of the state (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 3). The document also highlights the projection of cultural influence through the promotion of the Russian language and civilizational heritage.

A just international order based on the primacy of international law and collective decision-making mechanisms is advocated. The United Nations is designated as the central pillar of the global system (*Concept*

of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation 2008, 2), perceived as the only legitimate institution capable of regulating interstate relations. Emphasis is placed on sovereign equality and mutual partnership, with unilateralism and hegemonic aspirations firmly rejected.

While supporting UN reform to reflect current geopolitical realities, Russia calls for maintaining the status of the permanent members of the Security Council and insists that any changes must be based on consensus (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 6-7). The document expresses concern over arbitrary reinterpretations of international law and unilateral modifications of existing norms.

Strategic stability is addressed through criticism of the US missile defence deployment in Europe, which is labelled as destabilizing. Russia advocates for a collective response mechanism to ballistic threats (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 9), opposes the weaponization of outer space, and stresses the prevention of a new arms race. The document confirms Russia's adherence to arms control and non-proliferation regimes, including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and conventions on biological and chemical weapons (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 8-9). Russia signals its willingness to participate in strategic arms reduction negotiations but insists on a multilateral format involving all nuclear powers.

The concept promotes a collective approach to international security, expanding strategic dialogue with other global actors such as China and India. It argues for moving beyond the bilateral US–Russia dynamic and toward a broader configuration of global power centres (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 9).

The document also emphasizes regional integration through the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space with Belarus and Kazakhstan, under the framework of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), with the stated intention of expanding membership to other interested states. Furthermore, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is identified as the primary mechanism for ensuring regional stability and security (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2008, 13-14).

The *2010 Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* presents a broad security framework that integrates political, economic, and military dimensions. NATO's expansion near Russian borders is listed as a key external threat, framed as a disruption of strategic balance (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2010, 2-3). The document differentiates between military dangers and threats, defines conflict typologies, and emphasizes preparedness through unified strategic command and scenario-based planning. Modern warfare is depicted as multi-domain, including cyber and informational dimensions, and characterized by precision weaponry, strategic mobility, and short, high-intensity operations (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2010, 7-9).

The maintenance of nuclear deterrence remains a strategic priority, alongside rapid deployment capabilities and aerospace control. The doctrine introduces the right to intervene abroad to protect Russian citizens under attack, without clarifying specific criteria (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2010, 12-13). Pea-cekeeping under CSTO, UN, or CIS mandates is also addressed. Further priorities include safeguarding maritime interests, enhancing high-precision and strategic nuclear systems, and developing integrated digital command networks (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2010, 13-21). Military-technical cooperation is framed as a geopolitical tool, and partnerships within CSTO, CIS, SCO, and the UN are promoted for both regional defence and global peacekeeping (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2010, 27-28).

The 2014 timeframe centres on the annexation of Crimea and the eruption of conflict in Eastern Ukraine. These developments followed the ousting of Ukraine's pro-Russian leadership and were framed in Russian official discourses as a reaction to Western interference and NATO encroachment (Sakwa 2020, 120-128). The resulting deterioration in Russia-NATO relations was accompanied by sanctions and a discursive shift toward a more hostile tone in official documents.

The *2015 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* frames national security as inherently tied to political stability and socio-economic development. It reaffirms Russia's role as a central actor in a multipolar world and defines NATO expansion and US missile defence systems as direct threats to strategic stability (*National Security Strategy*

of the Russian Federation 2015, 26). Western support for Ukraine's post-2014 leadership is presented as a violation of Russia's regional interests, with the Kyiv government portrayed as a long-term source of instability.

The document reflects a perception of international disorder, citing regime change, terrorism, and ideological subversion—including historical falsification and manipulation of public consciousness—as key threats (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2015, 5-6). It highlights risks from US biological labs near Russian borders, uncontrolled migration, and organized crime, calling for the strengthening of societal unity and interethnic harmony. Strategic deterrence remains a military priority, with emphasis on nuclear potential, defence industry modernization, and rapid mobilization capacity (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2015, 8-9). Internally, it identifies attempts to overthrow constitutional order, colour revolutions, and foreign intelligence activity as existential dangers.

Information security features prominently, with measures aimed at controlling digital content, countering cyber threats, and limiting external media influence (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2015, 10). In response to sanctions and economic stagnation, the strategy supports domestic food production, infrastructure modernization, and reduced dependence on imports (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2015, 13-14).

It promotes traditional values in education and tight regulation of ideological content, alongside environmental protection policies such as ecosystem monitoring and green technologies (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2015, 26). Externally, the document reiterates commitment to a stable, UN-centred world order, introducing new mechanisms for strategic oversight via annual reports to the president (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2015, 26-31).

The *2013 Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* frames Russia as a competitive power within an emerging multipolar order, emphasizing sovereignty, equality among states, and the central role of the UN in global governance (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 2-3). It promotes active engagement in

neighbouring regions to prevent and resolve conflicts, reinforcing influence in the post-Soviet space.

Global shifts are acknowledged, particularly the eastward redistribution of power, while NATO's expansion and strategic marginalization of Russia are portrayed as threats to indivisible security (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 3). The document criticizes the "responsibility to protect" doctrine as a justification for illegitimate interventions and reiterates that use of force must occur exclusively within the UN Security Council framework (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 10).

The Concept advocates arms control and multilateralism but expresses concern over the militarization of international affairs. It calls for enhanced information security and counters the political use of digital technologies, including through expanded Russian media influence abroad and the development of tools for shaping foreign public opinion (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 19-20).

Regionally, it identifies the CIS as a stabilizing platform and prioritizes deeper integration via the Eurasian Economic Union and Customs Union, and especially with Belarus and Kazakhstan (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 21). Relations with Ukraine are cautiously framed as a strategic partnership within the CIS (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 22).

The CSTO is reaffirmed as a primary security instrument. Russia also pledges involvement in frozen conflict mediation, including Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, and explicitly supports the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and neutrality of Moldova (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2013, 22).

The *2014 Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* asserts that military force should be used only after the exhaustion of non-violent means, while recognizing an increase in global instability and the emergence of new threats in the informational and internal domains (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 2-3). Although the likelihood of large-scale war is deemed low, the expansion of NATO is identified as a persistent threat (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 3-4).

Russia reserves the right to deploy troops within the post-Soviet space, both through the CSTO and other formats, to protect sovereignty and the security of allies, including the Union State with Belarus (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 9-10). The defence of Russian citizens abroad is also cited as a legitimate rationale for military engagement. The use of nuclear weapons is not limited to nuclear attacks but is extended to conventional threats that endanger the existence of the state (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 12). Peacekeeping is framed as a key function of Russia's role within international structures such as the UN, CSTO, and CIS (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 11-12).

The doctrine emphasizes full mobilization of the economy, defence industry, and governance structures to support military operations, highlighting the need for strategic reserves and advanced weapons systems, including UAVs, electronic warfare, and aerospace defences (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 18-20).

Russia also calls for pragmatic military-technical cooperation with allied states and opposes attempts by other countries to achieve strategic superiority through missile defence systems, space weaponization, or high-precision non-nuclear arms (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2014, 22-23).

The final period analysed, 2022, corresponds to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the emergence of a confrontational geopolitical doctrine. NATO is portrayed not merely as an unfriendly bloc but as a central threat to Russia's sovereignty and security architecture (Gibson 2022). This stage consolidates the securitization of the West in Russian strategic thought and reflects the culmination of a long process of discursive escalation.

The *2021 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* affirms the link between national security and economic development, emphasizing the economic dimension as a foundation of resilience. It describes the international system as undergoing a transition, marked by "the growth in the number of economic and political centres of power" (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2021, 3). Western states are portrayed as seeking to preserve dominance, using economic and informational instruments to undermine competitors, including through sanctions and financial pressure on emerging markets.

The document highlights societal and identity security, asserting growing national cohesion and warning against "propaganda campaigns" targeting Russia's "spiritual and moral values" (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2021, 6). NATO is explicitly cited as a threat due to its expansion and infrastructure near Russian borders (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2021, 5-6), alongside claims that "some states view Russia as a military threat and even an adversary" (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2021, 6), justifying strengthened deterrence.

Strategic risks include "attempts at military pressure on Russia and its allies" (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2021, 13), with particular concern over US missile systems in Europe and Asia-Pacific, seen as threatening "strategic stability and international security" (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2021, 14). Regional instability near Russia's borders is attributed to external actors (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2021, 14).

National defence priorities include nuclear deterrence, operational readiness, and modernization of the defence sector (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2021, 16), along with the protection of Russian citizens abroad. Internally, threats such as crime, digital subversion, and social destabilization are linked to foreign influence (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2021, 16-17), with accusations against foreign intelligence services for "sponsoring internal structures" (*National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation* 2021, 16).

The *2023 Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* frames Russia as a distinct civilizational entity rooted in its "historical and cultural legacy," positioning it within a unique geopolitical realm referred to as the "Russian World" (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 2). The document embraces a multipolar vision of the international system, advocating a transition toward a "new world order" shaped by the redistribution of economic and geopolitical power. Western states are accused of resisting this shift by "slowing the natural course of history" through sanctions, ideological interference, and political destabilization (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 2-4).

Russia is depicted as a target of exclusion by the West, which allegedly seeks to marginalize its role in global affairs. In response, the strategy calls for reinforcing Russia's autonomous international presence. The UN is portrayed as weakened by some states who are pushing a biased global agenda (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 3-4). Military power is described as increasingly central in global affairs, with rising tensions in strategic regions and the erosion of arms control mechanisms. The risk of confrontation among great powers is cited as a major threat to global stability (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 4), marking a more proactive posture than previous documents.

National security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity are presented as core principles, to be defended against "destructive external influence" (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 6). Emphasis is placed on preserving Russia's cultural heritage and "traditional spiritual and moral values" (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 6-7), consistent with earlier strategic documents. The main foreign policy goals include creating favourable conditions for national development and strengthening Russia's position as an "influential and autonomous" global actor (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 6-7).

The economic dimension includes calls for enhancing Russia's role in the global economy and achieving national development objectives (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 6-7), Russia pursues infrastructure development independent of "unfriendly" states, while deepening ties with neutral or friendly partners (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 16). Russia's intention to exploit oceanic resources is also reaffirmed.

The document highlights the need to "shape an objective perception of Russia abroad and strengthen its presence in the global information space" (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 7), thereby legitimizing external propaganda efforts. Counterterrorism objectives include the suppression of terrorism-related ideologies, as well as "neo-Nazism and radical nationalism" (*Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation* 2023, 17-18), continuing a framework used to justify repressive measures both domestically and abroad.

The *2021 Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* frames Russia as being "under siege" by the West (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2021, 3-5), with global dynamics marked by attempts to undermine its influence through information warfare, economic sanctions, and NATO's military presence near its borders. The document explicitly identifies NATO's eastward expansion and the deployment of Western military infrastructure in Eastern Europe as direct threats to Russia's national security. While NATO presents these actions as defensive, Russia interprets them as strategic pressure designed to limit its autonomy. US missile defence systems in Europe and the Asia-Pacific are also viewed not as defensive tools but as destabilizing elements that erode strategic deterrence (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2021, 20).

Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons if the existence of the state is threatened, including in scenarios involving conventional conflict. A distinct feature is the concept of "non-nuclear strategic deterrence" (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2021, 5), which includes cyber warfare, hypersonic technologies, and precision-guided munitions—positioning these as viable alternatives to nuclear capabilities within its deterrence doctrine.

The doctrine asserts Russia's right to protect its citizens abroad, a rationale already used in Crimea and employed in eastern Ukraine in the following year. It introduces the notion of "stabilization operations" (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2021, 5-6), which enables Russian military deployment in areas of interest to prevent escalation, even in the absence of a direct threat. This reflects a preventive and interest-based approach, not limited to conventional self-defence.

Emphasis is placed on developing autonomous military structures capable of sustaining long-term conflict through strategic reserves. The doctrine calls for readiness for attrition warfare (*Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation* 2021, 17-18), implying a vision of prolonged confrontation rather than limited engagements.

Cyber and information warfare are treated as essential dimensions of strategic rivalry. The document underlines the need to control information flows and resist Western influence operations aimed at destabilizing Russian society (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2021, 18). In this logic, information warfare is not merely

defensive but also offensive—serving to shape international perceptions and disrupt adversarial psychological operations.

Lastly, Russia affirms its right to deploy military forces in neighbouring countries to counter what it perceives as Western-orchestrated regime change attempts (*Military Doctrine of The Russian Federation* 2021, 18), reinforcing a doctrine that focuses on proactive regional intervention.

Table 1 summarizes the key findings of our content analysis for each coded document and time period. The results clearly show the evolution of Russian portrayals of NATO, UN and Western Europe on one hand and Eurasian partnerships on the other.

Table no. 1. Key findings (author's conception)

	National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation	Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation	The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation
1999-2000	➢ Defines NATO expansion as a *potential security threat* but still allows room for dialogue; ➢ Frames Russia as a sovereign pole in a multipolar world; ➢ Focuses on internal stability, economic independence, and deterrence capacity; ➢ Emphasizes state unity and control against separatism.	➢ Promotes *multipolarity* and *international legality* under the UN; ➢ Notes concerns about U.S. dominance but calls for pragmatic engagement and arms control dialogue; ➢ Advocates for non-intervention and sovereign equality.	➢ Portrays a *defensive military posture*, identifying NATO infrastructure near borders as a threat to balance; ➢ Emphasizes nuclear deterrence, strategic stability, and opposition to "humanitarian interventions" without UN approval.
2008	➢ Expands the notion of security to include social and informational stability;	➢ Highlights Russia's *civilizational identity* and promotes good-neighbourly relations;	➢ Identifies NATO's military infrastructure near Russia as a

	➢ Sees NATO expansion and U.S. missile defence plans as destabilizing; ➢ Introduces *multipolar order* as an alternative to Western dominance; ➢ Promotes national resilience through technological independence and social unity.	➢ Calls for a just, law-based international system centred on the UN; ➢ Criticizes U.S. unilateralism and missile defence in Europe; ➢ Promotes regional integration via CSTO and Eurasian structures.	*primary external threat;* ➢ Defines modern warfare as multi-domain (including cyber and information); ➢ Strengthens nuclear and conventional deterrence; ➢ Introduces right to intervene abroad to protect citizens.
2014	➢ Frames NATO enlargement as a direct threat to strategic stability; ➢ Connects Western support for Ukraine to regime change and external subversion; ➢ Emphasizes sovereignty, internal cohesion, and information security; ➢ Promotes traditional values and counters ideological interference.	➢ Depicts Russia as a *competitive global power* in a multipolar order; ➢ Criticizes NATO and "responsibility to protect" as tools of Western coercion; ➢ Promotes Eurasian integration and information sovereignty; ➢ Reaffirms CSTO as the core of regional defence.	➢ Defines NATO expansion as a *persistent military danger;* ➢ Reserves right to intervene within post-Soviet space; ➢ Expands nuclear doctrine to include conventional threats; ➢ Calls for full mobilization and strategic self-sufficiency; ➢ Emphasizes asymmetric responses and defence modernization.
2022	➢ Depicts NATO as a *central existential threat* undermining sovereignty and stability; ➢ Links Western actions to hybrid	➢ Frames Russia as a *distinct civilization* and independent pole in a multipolar world; ➢ Claims Western states resist the	➢ Explicitly identifies NATO's expansion and Western military infrastructure as *direct threats;* ➢ Introduces non-nuclear strategic

	warfare and cultural erosion; ➢ Prioritizes nuclear deterrence, identity protection, and control of information space.	"natural course of history"; ➢ Promotes the "Russian World" concept and information influence abroad; ➢ Legitimatizes counterpropaganda as strategic necessity.	deterrence (cyber, hypersonic); ➢ Asserts right to proactive interventions and long-term attrition warfare; ➢ Consolidates information warfare as both defensive and offensive.

Between 1999 and 2022, Russian strategic documents show a continuous shift in how NATO, the European Union, and the broader Euro-Atlantic community are portrayed. The tone evolved from cautious pragmatism to explicit hostility, reflecting changes in Russia's internal consolidation and its perception of international power relations. The Euro-Atlantic order, initially regarded as a structure of cooperation and dialogue, came to be depicted as a source of pressure, interference, and instability.

In 1999-2000, strategic texts were dominated by concerns over domestic order, territorial integrity, and economic recovery after a decade of crisis. NATO enlargement and Western interventions were noted as challenges, but not yet defined as direct threats. Russia presented itself as a state seeking balanced engagement, calling for respect of sovereignty and equality among international actors. The documents referred to international law and the United Nations as frameworks capable of regulating global competition. The United States was criticized for unilateral behaviour, yet cooperation with Western institutions was not excluded. Russia's main objective at this stage was to stabilize its internal system and regain recognition as an autonomous actor in a multipolar environment.

By 2008, the discourse hardened. The expansion of NATO, the recognition of Kosovo, and Western involvement in post-Soviet states were described as actions that weakened international stability. The *National Security Strategy* and the *Foreign Policy Concept* introduced the idea of a multipolar order as an alternative to Western dominance. The

2008 war in Georgia confirmed a change in Russia's approach to the Euro-Atlantic community: dialogue was replaced by competition, and deterrence became the central principle of security. The documents emphasized the need to counter external influence through regional mechanisms such as the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The European Union was treated with growing suspicion, perceived as aligned with U.S. strategic interests and unable to act independently.

The 2014 phase marked a decisive rupture. After the annexation of Crimea, Russian official discourse began to link NATO and the European Union directly to attempts to limit Russia's regional and global influence. Western states were accused of encouraging regime change and manipulating public opinion in neighbouring countries. The *National Security Strategy* and *Military Doctrine* associated Western activity with ideological subversion and information warfare. Security came to include cultural and spiritual dimensions, while protecting traditional values and social cohesion became strategic goals. The European Union was no longer framed as a pragmatic economic partner but as part of a collective Western bloc acting against Russian interests. Information control, media regulation, and cyber defence were integrated into the national security framework, reflecting a broader perception of encirclement and vulnerability.

In 2022, these tendencies reached their full form. NATO, the EU, and the Euro-Atlantic community were described as coordinated instruments of Western dominance. The *National Security Strategy* and the *Foreign Policy Concept* claimed that Western states sought to maintain global supremacy by restricting Russia's development and isolating it politically and economically. The *Military Doctrine* referred to the deployment of Western military infrastructure in Eastern Europe as a direct threat. The idea of a "Russian World" was institutionalized as a distinct civilizational model, presented as incompatible with liberal values promoted by the Euro-Atlantic community. Strategic deterrence extended to non-nuclear and informational domains, and military interventions were justified as protection of national identity and citizens. The European Union, previously seen as an economic counterpart, was now placed in the same category as NATO—an unfriendly actor supporting U.S. containment policy.

Over these two decades, Russia's representation of the Euro-Atlantic community evolved from conditional cooperation to ideological opposition. The early vision of international law and multilateral stability gave way to a doctrine centred on defensive sovereignty and confrontation. Each generation of documents reduced the space for dialogue and deepened the image of the West as a unified and hostile system. This evolution reshaped Russia's understanding of security: from the protection of borders to the preservation of political autonomy, social cohesion, and cultural identity in the face of perceived external interference. By 2022, antagonism toward the Euro-Atlantic community had become an integral element of Russia's strategic thinking, defining both its external posture and its internal justification for power consolidation.

Conclusions

The analysis of Russian strategic documents issued between 1999 and 2022 reveals a consistent redefinition of how the Euro-Atlantic community is perceived in Moscow's security and foreign policy doctrine. Rather than a series of isolated adjustments, the findings indicate a structural transformation in which the concepts of sovereignty, legitimacy, and threat became increasingly interconnected. Over time, the Euro-Atlantic framework ceased to represent a model of cooperation and evolved into the principal reference against which Russia defines its identity, interests, and strategic behaviour.

This process confirms that Russia's doctrine operates not only as a set of policy guidelines but as a discursive mechanism through which state identity and power relations are constructed. The notion of security is no longer confined to the military domain but extends to the political, informational, and cultural spheres, where Western influence is portrayed as an existential threat. Consequently, deterrence has acquired both a material and an ideological dimension, legitimizing pre-emptive and coercive measures in defence of what is presented as national and civilizational distinctiveness.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study demonstrates how official strategic documents function as instruments of identity formation and normative resistance. The shift from defensive pragmatism to ideological confrontation highlights the fusion of realism and constructivism within Russian strategic thinking: power and perception operate together to

sustain a narrative of threatened sovereignty. This integration explains why Western actions are interpreted not simply as geopolitical manoeuvres but as assaults on the legitimacy of the Russian state itself.

In practical terms, this evolution carries significant implications for Euro-Atlantic security. The institutionalization of antagonism in Russian doctrine reduces the credibility of cooperative mechanisms and embeds conflictual logic into the regional order. NATO and the European Union are no longer treated as external actors to be engaged diplomatically but as structural adversaries shaping Russia's internal and external behaviour. This framework limits space for dialogue and increases the likelihood that political disputes will be interpreted through the lens of existential rivalry.

The study contributes to existing scholarship by demonstrating that strategic continuity in Russia's official discourse cannot be explained solely through material power considerations. The persistence of threat narratives across successive documents indicates a deliberate alignment between state ideology, domestic legitimacy, and foreign policy objectives. Future research could expand this approach by examining how these narratives are received and operationalized within military planning, public communication, or regional diplomacy, providing a deeper understanding of how discourse translates into strategic behaviour.

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INTELLIGENCE, SECURITY AND INTERDISCIPLINARITY

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MANAGERIAL BEHAVIOUR AS A PREDICTOR OF ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: BETWEEN CONTINGENCY AND TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract:
This article explores the relationship between managerial behaviour and organizational performance from the theoretical perspectives of contingency theory and transformational leadership. Using empirical data collected during doctoral research in an intelligence organization, the study provides a multidimensional view of managerial behaviours that influence performance. The article includes both theoretical insights and practical findings derived from qualitative and quantitative research methods. The results confirm that adaptive, transformational managerial behaviours are significantly correlated with performance indicators in structured and hierarchical institutions.

Keywords: *managerial behaviour, performance, transformational leadership, contingency theory, intelligence organizations, military leadership.*

Introduction

Managerial behaviour is an essential determinant of organizational performance, especially in structures characterized by hierarchy, procedural discipline, and operational complexity, such as military and intelligence organizations. This paper aims to investigate the relationship between managerial behaviours identified within an analytical structure of an intelligence organization and the perceived or achieved level of performance, using internationally validated theoretical models: contingency theories and transformational leadership.

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By articulating an integrated perspective that combines a theoretical component with data obtained from empirical research, the study offers a relevant contribution to understanding how managerial behaviour influences organizational dynamics and decision-making efficiency in environments with high operational demands. The article is structured in four parts: (1) a theoretical analysis of the main explanatory models; (2) an exploration of managerial behaviour in intelligence and military organizations; (3) an applied analysis based on quantitative and qualitative data; and (4) conclusions and practical implications.

Theoretical foundations: explanatory models of managerial behaviour and performance

In order to understand the relationship between managerial behaviour and organizational performance, a rigorous analysis of the main theoretical models underpinning this link is necessary. This chapter brings together three complementary perspectives: contingency theory, transformational leadership, and the concept of organizational performance. Together, these subchapters provide a solid explanatory framework for interpreting empirical data and outline the conceptual framework of the research presented in the applied part of the article.

Contingency theories: models and behaviours

One of the models relevant to the analysis of managerial behaviour from the perspective of contingency theories is the Multiple Linkage Model (MLM), developed in the works of Gary Yukl. It proposes an integrative approach, in which a leader's effectiveness is determined by their ability to influence a set of interdependent variables that affect group performance: subordinates' effort, task clarity, activity coordination, available resources, or organizational support. The model argues that leaders do not directly influence performance, but do so indirectly through these mediating variables, and that their managerial behaviours must be adjusted according to situational factors and group dynamics.

MLM identifies six major categories of managerial behaviours that lead to increased performance:

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(1) goal setting – clearly defining tasks and performance standards;
(2) monitoring – supervising progress and results;
(3) problem solving – actively intervening in blockages or conflicts;
(4) sustaining motivation – recognizing and rewarding efforts;
(5) developing competencies – training and supporting personal development;
(6) securing resources - effectively managing the time, equipment, and information needed to achieve goals.

In addition to this model, other contingency theories identify several types of essential managerial behaviours considered to determine performance in an organization: clarifying objectives, removing barriers, and providing rewards (House and Mitchell's path-goal theory, 1975, later revised and reformulated by House, 1996); or appropriately involving subordinates in decision-making (House's normative decision theory, 1975, later revised and reformulated by House, 1996, Mitchell, 1975, later revised and reformulated by House, 1996); or appropriately involving subordinates in decision-making (Vroom and Yetton's normative decision theory, 1973).

Other contingency theories have shown that performance depends on adjusting behaviour according to: the maturity and competence of subordinates, oscillating between directing, supporting, participating, and delegating (Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership model, 1977); leadership style and the favourability of the situation (Fiedler's model, 1967); specifics of the task, group, or situation (Blanchard's situational leadership model, 1977); leadership style and situation favourability (Fiedler's model, 1967); task, group, or organizational specifics (Kerr and Jermier's leader surrogate theory, 1978).

All these models emphasize the contextual nature of effective managerial behaviour and offer us a diverse range of action strategies adapted to institutional specifics.

Transformational leadership from a behavioural perspective

The transformational leadership model, established through the works of James MacGregor Burns (1978) and Bernard Bass (1985), has emerged as one of the most influential paradigms in organizational leadership research. In its consolidated form, this approach is integrated

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into the Full Range Leadership Model (FRLM), developed by Bass and Avolio, which proposes an extended typology of leadership styles, organized in a continuum that starts from the passive (laissez-faire) style, crosses transactional leadership, and reaches the highest level of transformational leadership.

The transformational behaviours of the model are grouped into four main dimensions:

(1) Idealized influence – leaders act as models of integrity, taking risks and reflecting strong organizational values. This dimension is frequently associated with subordinates' trust and team loyalty (Bass and Riggio, 2006);

(2) Inspirational motivation – consists of expressing a compelling and mobilizing vision that generates commitment and a sense of mission. This trait is predictive of group cohesion and clarity of strategic direction (Judge and Piccolo, 2004);

(3) Intellectual stimulation – represents the encouragement of critical thinking, innovation, and creative problem solving. It is essential for the development of managerial skills, as it requires employees to take initiative and reformulate their approaches (Deng et al., 2012);

(4) Individualized consideration – involves paying attention to the needs of each team member, offering personalized support and mentoring. This dimension has positive effects on intrinsic motivation and employee retention (Bass and Avolio, 1994).

The theoretical assessment of transformational leadership reveals a balance between the positive impact on the organizational climate and the need to calibrate the leader's behaviour according to the team's level of autonomy, institutional specifics, and performance requirements (Skakon et al., 2010). In highly disciplined and controlled structures, such as military or intelligence organizations, the full applicability of this model may require significant cultural and structural adaptations.

Organizational performance in theoretical leadership models

In contingency theories, organizational performance is defined as the optimal result of the alignment between leadership style and situational variables (e.g., task structure, leader-subordinate relationships,

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and formal power). According to Fiedler's model presented in *New approaches to effective leadership: Cognitive resources and organizational performance,* effective performance occurs when the leader's style (task-oriented or relational) matches the favourability of the situation—suggesting a manager's performance-oriented framework as a predictive variable in context. Other models, such as normative decision-making or situational leadership, define performance as a measure of the effectiveness of decisions and their acceptance by the team—that is, team performance is influenced by adaptive managerial behaviours. Thus, performance is conceptualized both at the individual (leader) and collective (team/ structure/ organization) levels, depending on how the leader shapes the environment and facilitates the achievement of objectives.

In transformational leadership, performance is approached as a multidimensional construct that reflects the organization's results, the level of employee engagement and satisfaction, but also innovation and process efficiency (Sefidan et al., 2021). Recent meta-analyses (Judge and Piccolo, 2004; Avolio et al., 2004) clearly associate the four transformational behaviours with indicators of collective performance, intrinsic motivation, and cohesion (e.g., team performance). In addition, they argue that these relationships coexist with managerial performance in the sense of developing more adaptive leadership, capable of creating a context in which the team can perform structurally and strategically. Recent literature also shows that the positive effects of the transformational style can be mediated or even moderated by contextual characteristics—such as organizational culture or the level of autonomy of members—indicating that performance is not a one-dimensional indicator but varies between the levels of organization, team, and leader.

Managerial behaviour in intelligence and military organizations

Over the past two decades, academic research on organizational performance within intelligence structures has highlighted the essential role of managerial behaviour in defining operational efficiency.

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Within the intelligence services from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, behaviours such as intellectual stimulation, decision-making autonomy, promotion of inter-institutional collaboration, and human capital development have been investigated. These are directly correlated with organizational performance indicators such as internal cohesion, strategic innovation, and staff retention.

Recent studies have shown that transformational leadership positively influences morale, adaptability, and the ability of organizations to respond to complex challenges. Numerous meta-analytic assessments have confirmed that leadership styles based on empathy, involvement, and strategic vision contribute decisively to institutional resilience, especially in environments marked by uncertainty, ambiguity, and high operational pressures. Furthermore, leadership models applied in military and intelligence structures confirm that the causal relationships between leaders' behaviours and collective performance are mediated by situational factors specific to each type of organization. Thus, a nuanced understanding of how managerial behaviour influences performance, depending on the institutional context, the type of missions, and the nature of the activity carried out, becomes essential.

Specialized studies indicate that transformational leadership is an essential predictor of organizational performance, especially in rigid, hierarchical structures designed to cope with uncertainty. The most important theoretical contribution in this direction is Walsh's (2016) research, which explores the future of leadership in the US intelligence community, emphasizing the role of transformational behaviours in strengthening strategic and operational efficiency.

In his study entitled "Making Future Leaders in the US Intelligence Community," Walsh (2016) argues that organizational intelligence and decision-making autonomy must be cultivated through transformational behaviours such as intellectual stimulation, encouraging calculated risk-taking, and actively involving subordinates in institutional reform processes. These behaviours have been directly associated with improved strategic performance, operational efficiency, and increased collaboration between intelligence agencies.

A notable example is the study by Kettl and Kelman (2007), which analyses management in the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and highlights the importance of encouraging individual initiative and

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stimulating autonomy in decision-making. Another study by Ingraham and Moynihan (2001) within the National Security Agency (NSA) emphasizes the impact of transformational leadership on employee motivation and engagement, with positive effects on operational accuracy and analytical capacity. Similarly, research conducted by Davies and Gustafson (2013) within the British intelligence services (MI5 and MI6) shows that leadership styles based on trust and individualized consideration contribute to increased retention among senior analysts, a critical factor in maintaining strategic expertise.

An integrative assessment of these examples shows that the effectiveness of managerial behaviour is not only a result of the individual traits of the leader, but also of dynamic calibration to the operational context and the organizational competence to support adaptive leadership. Thus, for intelligence organizations, leadership development becomes a critical axis of institutional performance, with direct effects on anticipation, protection, and reaction capabilities.

The analysed studies converge towards the conclusion that performance in intelligence organizations depends a lot on the ability of leaders to adopt flexible managerial behaviour, focused on team development, supporting innovation, and assuming a strategic vision. Transformational leadership seems to be the form of leadership that best resonates with the dynamic needs of these structures, providing an effective framework for adaptation and sustainable institutional performance.

Research methodology

The research on the relationship between managerial behaviours and performance was based on a mixed design, combining qualitative and quantitative methods in a logical sequence intended to ensure both depth of exploration and empirical validation of the results. The investigation was conducted in an intelligence organization within the military sphere, structured hierarchically and characterized by a strongly normative institutional culture. The specificity of the research is given by the fact that it targeted an analytical structure responsible for processing and integrating information, which provided a unique perspective on managerial behaviours in a context where accuracy, discipline, and adaptability are essential criteria for performance.

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The qualitative component of the research was built on the basis of semi-structured interviews, selected to provide an opportunity to capture both general perspectives and specific details regarding the exercise of managerial functions. The interview was designed using a "funnel" model, starting with broad conceptual questions and moving on to specific questions about everyday managerial practices and experiences.

Between August and September 2022, 18 managers from the analytical structure were interviewed, selected from a total population of 58 management positions, covering two hierarchical levels: managers of the staff (level 1) and managers of the managers of the staff (level 2). This diversity ensured representativeness for both operational and strategic levels, with geographical coverage at central and territorial levels.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the organization's headquarters and lasted an average of 90–120 minutes. To ensure data quality and consistency, they were conducted by two research operators, with minor differences in style being noted and managed methodologically. All material was transcribed in full and subjected to thematic content analysis using an inductive approach. The categories of analysis focused on four major dimensions: (1) defining and measuring organizational performance; (2) identifying managerial behaviours perceived as effective; (3) characteristics of coordinated teams; (4) organizational context and contingent factors that enhance or diminish performance. The use of the qualitative method allowed the identification of subtle nuances in the way managers perceive performance, the detection of tensions and informal coordination mechanisms, as well as the highlighting of deficient behaviours, rarely documented in strictly quantitative approaches.

In the second stage of the research (July-August 2023), a quantitative methodology was used to validate and extend the conclusions resulting from the qualitative analysis. The main tool was the MLQ-5X (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire) questionnaire, developed by Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio, internationally recognized for measuring transformational, transactional, and permissive (laissez-faire) managerial behaviours. It was adapted to the specificities of the

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military intelligence organization, respecting the linguistic and cultural particularities of the Romanian context.

The questionnaires were administered in a 360° system, meaning that each manager was evaluated both through self-assessment and by subordinates, colleagues, and superiors. A total of 733 questionnaires were administered, corresponding to 333 unique respondents, 55 of whom held managerial positions. This method allowed for the triangulation of perspectives and the reduction of self-assessment biases, a phenomenon frequently encountered in organizational studies.

The questionnaire measured five dimensions of transformational behaviour (idealized influence—attributes, idealized influence—behaviours, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration), three dimensions of transactional behaviour (contingent reward, active management by exception, passive management by exception), and permissive behaviour (laissez-faire). At the same time, the tool assessed three criteria of perceived performance: extra effort made by subordinates (EE), perceived efficiency of the manager (EFF), and satisfaction with leadership (SAT).

The collected data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, looking for associations between managerial behaviours and performance indicators, but also for differences based on socio-demographic and organizational variables—age, gender, hierarchical level, job experience. The analysis revealed consistent trends, such as the positive association between transformational behaviours and performance, but also notable differences between managers' self-assessments and the assessments made by subordinates or colleagues.

At the same time, the research has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. The selection of respondents for interviews was non-probabilistic, being limited to a single intelligence organization, which restricts the possibility of external generalization. In addition, the interviews were conducted by two operators, which may introduce minor variations in the application method. Last but not least, the sensitivity of the field investigated imposed certain constraints on access to data and information, which may limit the openness of respondents. Nevertheless, the methodological robustness and

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consistency of the convergent results from the two stages allow for the formulation of conclusions relevant to understanding the relationship between managerial behaviours and performance in military intelligence organizations.

Research results

The analysis of the four transformational behaviours is structured to provide both a qualitative synthesis and a quantitative interpretation for each behaviour. This integrated approach allows us to outline a complete picture of how transformational leadership, through its essential manifestations, can concretely influence an organization's results, while also providing benchmarks for the development of leadership strategies adapted to specific contexts.

Individualized consideration. In organizations with a rigid hierarchical structure, such as military or intelligence organizations, the manifestation of this managerial behaviour poses significant challenges, but also brings significant benefits in terms of human resource development and organizational performance. In this section, we sought to identify how individualized consideration behaviours manifest themselves in the perceptions of managers and employees, as well as their relationship to perceived performance.

Within military and intelligence organizations, managerial behaviours are not only influenced by the rigors of hierarchical structure and specific organizational culture, but also become essential factors in shaping individual and collective performance. Qualitative data extracted from the interviews conducted in this research reveal a constant and striking presence of individualized consideration in the discourse and behaviour of the interviewed managers. Of the 18 participating managers, 14 exhibited explicit behaviours of this type, suggesting a generalized tendency to orient management toward relational, empathetic, and individually supportive dimensions, even in highly normative organizational contexts.

The most frequently mentioned behaviour was involvement in the development of subordinates. This indicates that managers do not limit themselves to formal supervision, but seek the professional and

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personal growth of team members. For example, actions such as "providing constructive feedback," "encouraging participation in courses," or "supporting personal training initiatives" were frequently mentioned. This behaviour is supported in the literature as a relevant predictor of organizational performance, as it increases employees' intrinsic motivation and commitment to the organization.

Another significant element was the attention paid to individual needs and expectations, which denotes a leadership style focused on the person rather than the formal position held. Managers showed interest in employees' personal issues, their aspirations, and adapting tasks to individual skills and abilities. In a system where uniformity is often the norm, this individual adaptability can make a decisive contribution to maintaining emotional balance and team cohesion. One example is provided by a senior manager who said: "I usually have regular one-on-one discussions with each team member, not just for evaluations, but to understand their expectations and needs. Often, these discussions reveal issues that, if resolved, significantly improve team dynamics." This behaviour reflects not only a transformational approach, but also an effective strategy for preventing conflict and optimizing human resources.

The participatory leadership style emerged as an expression of consideration by involving employees in the decision-making process. Although less frequently mentioned, this behaviour has significant implications for building trust, reducing resistance to change, and stimulating initiative. In the same vein, behavioural flexibility has been identified as a form of contextual adaptation by managers in relation to team dynamics and mission requirements. One of the managers surveyed stated: "Our manager has a habit of asking his colleagues how they are feeling and if they need help, without this seeming like a formality. It has become part of our team culture to support each other, and this motivates us even in difficult times." Thus, it can be seen how transformational behaviour generates not only a positive bilateral relationship, but an entire organizational culture based on support and empathy.

All these behaviours highlight a clear orientation towards transformational leadership in the sense of individualized consideration.

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Their importance in organizational performance is supported not only by their frequency in respondents' discourse, but also by how they correlate with positive perceptions of job satisfaction, team cohesion, and goal achievement. The analysis of the responses highlights the fact that employees deeply value this dimension of individualized consideration, and managers who apply it consistently are perceived as authentic leaders. In addition, it is noteworthy that this approach does not require additional material resources, but only time, attention, and availability—intangible resources that are essential in transformational leadership.

In conclusion, the overall qualitative analysis outlines the profile of a military manager who, despite institutional constraints, exhibits behaviour oriented toward the individual appreciation of employees. This behavioural model transforms an authority-based relationship into a professional partnership, in which performance is stimulated not only by orders and directives, but especially by understanding, support, and personal appreciation.

Managers who show individualized consideration tend to pay attention to the needs, aspirations, and unique characteristics of each employee, which directly translates into an increased perception of performance at the organizational level. Qualitative responses indicate that employees feel more motivated, respected, and involved when they are given personalized support and when their uniqueness is recognized.

From a quantitative perspective, statistical analysis of the correlation between items measuring individualized consideration and performance perception scores reveals a moderate positive association: $r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$. This result supports the validity of the qualitative observations and indicates that perceptions of performance are influenced by the quality of the direct relationship between managers and subordinates. Furthermore, comparative assessments between groups showed that employees who reported a consistent presence of behaviours considered individualized associated these behaviours to a significantly greater extent with a positive perception of team effectiveness and organizational climate.

Interestingly, the differences between managers and employees in terms of the perception of performance generated by individualized consideration are minimal, suggesting a consensus on the beneficial

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effect of this behaviour. This convergence of perceptions is important for organizational cohesion and for aligning managerial values with employee needs.

On the one hand, the qualitative analysis highlighted a series of recurring behavioural patterns within the organization, which include displays of empathy, openness to dialogue, adjusting communication style to individual needs, and offering personalized support based on the specific difficulties encountered by subordinates. These behaviours are perceived by respondents as essential for creating a positive organizational climate based on trust and collaboration.

On the other hand, quantitative analysis validates these observations through significantly high scores for the perception of individualized consideration among employees, in direct correlation with managerial performance evaluations. A positive association was found between the scores obtained on items measuring individualized consideration and the perception of team effectiveness, motivation level, and job satisfaction.

In terms of convergence between qualitative and quantitative results, a high degree of consistency is noted. The examples provided by respondents in qualitative interviews are consistent with the high scores obtained on items defining individualized consideration. At the same time, it is noteworthy that this component of transformational leadership has a compensatory role, especially in organizations where there are structural limitations or bureaucratic restrictions. Managers who exhibit individualized behaviours are perceived as facilitators of performance, despite systemic constraints.

The results of qualitative and quantitative analyses of individualized consideration clearly highlight the relevance of this transformational behaviour in shaping organizational performance, both from the perspective of managers and employees. Individualized consideration, defined by the leader's ability to respond to the individual needs of subordinates, to listen to them, to support them, and to treat them as partners in the leadership process, generated positive reactions and favourable evaluations in most of the responses analysed.

In conclusion, individualized consideration proves to be an important predictor of perceived performance in the organization, with

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a significant impact on the dimensions of team satisfaction, efficiency, and cohesion. However, its maximum effectiveness is achieved in combination with other transformational behaviours and in a flexible organizational framework that allows direct and frequent interaction between leaders and subordinates. This finding suggests the need for an integrated approach to leadership development in organizations, in which individualized consideration is cultivated alongside other dimensions of transformational leadership.

Idealized influence. In complex organizational environments, such as the military or intelligence, idealized influence behaviour becomes all the more relevant as it leads to strengthened team cohesion, increased loyalty, and sustained performance in tense and unpredictable environments.

In qualitative research, data analysis revealed a consistent prevalence of this dimension in respondents' discourse, regardless of hierarchical level or professional experience. Respondents identified idealized influence in both character traits (integrity, courage, responsibility) and behaviours (direct involvement, personal example, risk-taking).

This dimension was frequently correlated with leaders' ability to generate trust and respect, as well as their ability to motivate through behaviour, not just words. Thus, ethical behaviour and visible commitment were considered sources of perceived performance, being evoked by respondents in various contexts: crisis situations, difficult decision-making processes, or critical moments for the organization. Repeatedly, managers who demonstrated consistency between discourse and action were perceived as positively influencing team morale and organizational cohesion.

The interpretation of qualitative data shows that idealized influence is not only perceived as a desirable trait, but as a necessity in organizational environments characterized by risk, uncertainty, and pressure, as is the case with intelligence organizations. Personal example, the leader's willingness to "expose" themselves alongside the team, and commitment to common goals are described by respondents as differentiating factors between effective and ineffective managers.

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Furthermore, leaders perceived as role models generate a modelling effect on the behaviour of subordinates, which indirectly contributes to collective performance.

It is important to note that idealized influence is closely linked to the ethical dimension of managerial behaviour. Respondents' answers indicate a clear rejection of behaviours perceived as opportunistic, ambiguous, or duplicitous. Managers who adopt such a style are associated with decreased motivation, trust in organizational goals, and performance perception. Employees are willing to make extra efforts, voluntarily engage in difficult activities, and accept contextual constraints when the leader is perceived as authentic and involved.

A notable aspect of the data is the emphasis placed by respondents on value congruence between the leader and the organization. This congruence is seen as a key element of idealized influence, in the sense that leaders who live the organization's values beyond mere statements are perceived as legitimate. In contrast, a lack of congruence leads to cognitive dissonance among employees and decreased leadership effectiveness. Leaders' ability to remain steadfast in the face of external pressures, protect the team, and maintain strategic direction are interpreted as forms of moral and symbolic influence, with a profound impact on team performance.

Qualitative analysis of data on idealized influence shows that this managerial behaviour is perceived not only as effective but also as indispensable for generating performance in a demanding organizational context. Respondents identify idealized influence as a source of cohesion, mobilization, and commitment, but also as an ethical filter necessary for validating leaders in a strict value system.

The managers interviewed highlighted that leaders perceived as having high idealized influence are characterized by authenticity, the ability to convey stable values, and the assumption of decision-making responsibility in tense contexts. A common example is that of the leader who "not only demands performance, but is the first to generate and support it in the field." This type of attitude has been consistently associated with a high level of loyalty and commitment from employees.

The quantitative analysis shows that the average scores for idealized influence behaviour are among the highest of the

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transformational dimensions, both in the attributive (IA) and behavioural (IB) components. For example, the average score for IA was 4.39, and for IB it was 4.41—on a scale of 1 to 5—indicating a strongly positive perception from respondents. These quantitative results validate the qualitative data, confirming the presence and importance of idealized influence behaviour in the managerial practice evaluated.

Overall, the integration of the two approaches—qualitative and quantitative—provides a coherent and convergent picture of the central role played by idealized influence in defining effective managerial behaviour. This not only inspires trust and respect, but also acts as a catalyst for individual and group performance.

Idealized influence behaviour, analysed from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective, emerges as one of the most significant dimensions of transformational leadership in terms of its impact on organizational performance. This dimension reflects the leader's ability to act as a role model, to convey a set of firm beliefs, and to assume moral responsibility in a manner perceived by subordinates as authentic and inspirational.

Qualitative analysis has shown that idealized influence is frequently associated with behaviours that demonstrate congruence between values and actions, integrity in decision-making, and personal commitment to collective goals. Participants' statements illustrated that transformational leaders not only set high expectations, but also demonstrate through their own behaviour how these standards can be achieved. For example, one respondent described a leader as follows: "He is the first to arrive, the last to leave, and the only one who does not ask for anything he would not do himself." Such statements clearly reflect modelling through behaviour and portray the leader as a source of inspiration and ethical consistency.

The quantitative dimension of the research supports this interpretation, indicating average scores of over 4.3 (out of 5) for both components of idealized influence: attributes (IA) and behaviours (IB). This not only confirms the respondents' overall positive perception, but also indicates a high level of internalization of these behaviours in the managerial culture of the organization studied. Thus, IA and

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IB behaviours validate each other qualitatively and quantitatively, providing a coherent and robust picture of idealized influence.

The integration of the two types of analysis revealed a number of relevant correlations between idealized influence and demographic variables. For example, female managers are more often associated with this type of behaviour, both in subordinate evaluations and in self-evaluations, highlighting a possible link between more empathetic leadership styles and the transformational dimensions of leadership. Similarly, managers with long tenure and superior managerial experience demonstrate a stronger inclination toward idealized influence, suggesting that this behaviour is reinforced over time and through exposure to complex decision-making contexts.

From a transformational leadership perspective, idealized influence plays a central role in generating organizational performance. It contributes to the development of trust, the shaping of employee behaviours, and the alignment of individual values with institutional ones. When leaders act according to their own convictions, without ethical compromises and with a clear orientation towards the collective good, the organization gains moral stability, increased commitment, and sustained performance.

Inspirational motivation. Qualitative analysis of inspirational motivational management behaviour highlighted a number of relevant dimensions within the organization investigated. This behaviour is mainly expressed through the ability of leaders to convey a clear vision, to generate commitment and enthusiasm among employees, and to encourage a sense of belonging to the organization's strategic objectives. The data obtained through interviews and content analysis painted a relatively coherent picture of how inspirational motivation is perceived and implemented.

A constant theme in respondents' statements is the importance of communicating a clear direction and a common mission. Managers who were perceived as inspirational were those who managed to rally their teams around meaningful goals, generate a sense of purpose, and ensure consistency between words and actions. This consistency of values is central to building the credibility of an inspirational manager.

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The vision expressed by a manager is not only a strategic goal, but also a means of motivating and mobilizing human resources around a common ideal: "Let's take the unit to a level of nationally recognized excellence." This vision has a strong symbolic value, facilitating the alignment of employees with a common direction, which, according to transformational leadership theory, contributes to increased involvement and, implicitly, organizational performance.

Significantly, employees indicated that inspirational motivation is not just the result of persuasive speech, but of a constant attitude of support, encouragement, and recognition. Almost all interviews mentioned the importance of empathy and active listening, signalling that inspirational managers are those who value the ideas of others, promoting a culture of continuous learning and personal development.

Inspirational motivational behaviour is reflected in the way the leader appeals to high professional values: "professionalism and dignity in everything we do." This type of discourse resonates deeply with the professional identity of employees in intelligence organizations, contributing to the internalization of values and the creation of an organizational culture focused on excellence. This internalization indirectly leads to an improvement in the quality of work and accountability, factors that are positively correlated with performance.

Qualitative data has shown that leaders who express clear visions, convey optimism, courage, and confidence, and succeed in creating a sense of common purpose within their teams are rated as more effective. A telling example is the statement by a manager who said, "I made sure to explain to my colleagues why the strategic direction is important and to make them believe that they can actively contribute to success." This type of expression is frequently associated with positive evaluations of team performance.

We also identified a form of inspirational motivation—creating an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect: "I give people confidence and encourage them to think freely and creatively." In a bureaucratic and hierarchical environment, such as that specific to military or intelligence organizations, this behaviour takes on strategic value, as combats rigidity and promotes adaptability—essential elements of modern organizational performance.

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At the same time, quantitative analysis confirms this relationship: the scores obtained for items measuring inspirational motivation (IM) correlate positively and statistically significantly with items assessing perceived organizational performance. The correlation coefficients range from 0.47 to 0.58, indicating a moderately strong association. This finding indicates that, in the respondents' perception, the presence of an inspirational leader is directly associated with higher levels of perceived performance in the organization.

Also, high levels of inspirational motivation are often accompanied by a positive assessment of the organizational climate, which can be an important mediator in the relationship between leadership and performance. Qualitative statements show that employees perceive a positive atmosphere and increased collective commitment when leaders adopt an inspirational style.

A significant issue identified is the difference between managers' and employees' perceptions: while managers believe they provide sufficient motivational stimuli, employees often feel a lack of genuine involvement or valuable feedback. This perception gap indicates that inspirational motivation may often be overestimated by leaders and underestimated by those they lead.

Qualitative data suggest that inspirational motivation is one of the most appreciated transformational behaviours, but also one of the most difficult to implement in an authentic and sustainable way. This difficulty stems from the need for congruence between the leader's personal values, the organizational culture, and the emotional and professional needs of the team. The qualitative analysis also highlighted that emotional expressiveness, visionary communication, and a positive attitude are elements that contribute significantly to building inspirational managerial behaviour.

In conclusion, inspirational motivation makes a significant contribution to shaping the perception of performance, acting as a link between the leader's visionary behaviours and the perceived results of the organization. This behaviour not only leads to better team orientation towards goals, but also to increased cohesion and a shared sense of belonging and meaning, factors that amplify the perception of organizational efficiency and success.

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Intellectual stimulation. Intellectual stimulation is particularly relevant in organizations characterized by operational complexity, rapid change, and constant pressure for efficiency and innovation, such as military structures or intelligence organizations. In such environments, managers' ability to promote an organizational culture oriented toward learning, adaptability, and critical thinking becomes a differentiating factor in performance.

Through intellectual stimulation, leaders not only provide direction, but also build an environment in which team members are challenged to push their limits, take calculated risks, and actively contribute to identifying innovative solutions to organizational problems.

Intellectual stimulation behaviour is clearly illustrated in the responses of managers in the analysed organization, being the second most frequently mentioned transformational behaviour in the qualitative analysis, with 23 explicit references. This strong presence can be associated with organizational initiatives focused on innovation and change, but also with formal policies that encourage the development of new concepts and methodologies.

The analysis of managers' narratives highlights four main directions in which intellectual stimulation behaviour manifests itself:

1. Stimulating creativity and critical thinking in the team—several managers explicitly mentioned the importance of challenging team members to think "out of the box," giving them decision-making autonomy and the opportunity to come up with innovative solutions, one of them exemplifying: "I constantly challenge my team members to come up with new ideas. I don't expect standard answers, but try to encourage them to look for unexplored options."

2. Creating a context conducive to innovation—six managers emphasized their role in building an organizational climate that supports experimentation and learning from mistakes, as well as using weekly brainstorming sessions to identify innovative solutions.

3. Stimulating the team by delegating responsibilities and challenges—four managers highlighted that they assign complex tasks to stimulate the intellectual development and analytical skills of their subordinates.

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4. Developing new concepts and methodologies—three managers explicitly referred to their personal and team contributions to generating new operational practices or methodologies.

Overall, these behaviours reflect an active commitment to the development of critical thinking, innovative approaches, and continuous learning within the organization. Their relevance in the context of performance is significant, as they contribute to process improvement, team adaptability, and operational efficiency.

From an integrative perspective, qualitative data show that intellectual stimulation is perceived not only as a desirable trait of a leader, but also as a functional necessity in complex organizations such as intelligence agencies. The emphasis on innovation, critical thinking, and generating customized solutions aligns with both institutional requirements and the dynamics of a knowledge-based, rapid-response organization.

All these examples converge to outline a profile of a manager who systematically promotes cognitive autonomy, analytical thinking, and professional accountability. Intellectual stimulation behaviour manifests itself in various ways, from cultivating a learning climate to focusing on unconventional solutions.

It is noteworthy that, in the organizational context investigated, managers who frequently use intellectual stimulation are associated, in the perception of employees, with more autonomous, flexible, and high-performing teams. The behaviours analysed are also relevant for the development of human capital and for supporting innovation as a strategic vector of the organization.

From a qualitative perspective, intellectual stimulation proves to be a catalyst for creativity, innovative problem solving, and encouraging critical thinking among employees. Managers who adopt such behaviour not only generate an organizational climate conducive to change and continuous learning, but also support individual initiatives, which leads to increased engagement and accountability.

Data collected in quantitative research highlights the fact that respondents perceiving a high level of intellectual stimulation associated this behaviour with superior organizational performance. For example, the average scores obtained among managers who frequently exhibit

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intellectually stimulating behaviours correlate positively with assessments of innovation, operational efficiency, and the organization's ability to adapt to change. Thus, it can be seen that intellectual stimulation becomes a predictive factor for higher perceived performance.

The results indicate a significant difference between the perceptions of employees who work under managers who actively practice intellectual stimulation and those who work in an environment characterized by a transactional or authoritarian leadership style. In the first case, employees reported a higher degree of job satisfaction, involvement in decision-making processes, and a general feeling of appreciation for their own contribution, all of which are correlated with an increased perception of organizational performance.

Another significant aspect is the link between intellectual stimulation and innovation, an essential element of performance in modern organizational environments. Respondents noted that managers who stimulate critical and creative thinking facilitate the emergence of new solutions to recurring problems, as well as the development of more efficient procedures. These changes often translate into greater organizational adaptability, increased efficiency, and an enhanced ability to respond to environmental challenges.

Analysing the qualitative and quantitative data together reveals a positive correlation between intellectual stimulation and performance perception. Not only is this managerial behaviour valued by employees, but it also actively contributes to the consolidation of efficient, innovative, and sustainable organizational processes.

Especially in organizations with complex and dynamic missions, such as intelligence or military structures, intellectual stimulation becomes an essential strategic advantage for maintaining long-term performance.

In conclusion, the correlation between intellectual stimulation and performance perception is significantly positive, both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective.

Managers who apply this behaviour cultivate an organizational culture based on learning, innovation, and shared responsibility. Therefore, intellectual stimulation not only enhances perceived

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performance but also contributes to the sustainability and efficiency of the organization as a whole.

Intellectual stimulation is an essential managerial behaviour in an organizational landscape characterized by volatility and complexity. The research results support its integration into models for training and evaluating leaders in organizations, especially in strategic and highly specialized ones, contributing to the development of adaptive and effective leadership.

The quantitative and qualitative data from the research indicate a consistent and positive association between the frequency of transformational behaviours and the perceived level of organizational performance, confirming the theoretical hypotheses in the literature.

Idealized influence and inspirational motivation are directly correlated with indicators such as team cohesion, trust in the leader, and voluntary involvement, which are recognized predictors of long-term performance. Intellectual stimulation promotes innovation and adaptability, contributing to performance, especially in complex operational contexts or situations of rapid change. Individualized consideration has a direct impact on job satisfaction and staff retention, which are essential for maintaining performance over time.

The synergy between the four behaviours maximizes performance, creating a balance between strategic orientation, motivation, adaptability, and human resource stability.

Critical analysis of the direct correlation between transformational behaviours and performance

It is important to note that the relationship identified between transformational behaviours and organizational performance should not necessarily be interpreted as a direct causal one. The existence of a significant correlation can also be explained by the influence of contextual factors, such as organizational culture, institutional structure, or available material and human resources, which can simultaneously shape both the leadership style of leaders and the level of performance achieved by the organization. Furthermore, performance can be strongly influenced by external variables—such as economic dynamics, legislative changes, or geopolitical instability—factors that are beyond

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the control of managerial behaviour and that can artificially diminish or amplify the observed effects.

The literature warns that excessive expression of transformational behaviours, in the absence of adaptive adjustment mechanisms, can lead to undesirable effects, such as emotional overload of the leader, risk of burnout, or the creation of excessive dependence of team members on the manager's personalized vision.

Equally, individual differences among team members—such as personality traits, level of professional experience, or degree of autonomy—can act as moderating factors that influence how transformational behaviours are received and translated into performance, reducing the uniformity and predictability of managerial impact.

Methodological caution is required in interpreting the results, as the data obtained reflect a specific organizational and temporal context, which limits the valid extension of the conclusions to other types of organizations or institutional situations.

Conclusions

The integrated analysis of qualitative and quantitative data confirms the central hypothesis of the research: transformational behaviours—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—have a significant and positive impact on organizational performance. When manifested in a balanced and context-appropriate manner, these behaviours contribute to strengthening cohesion, increasing motivation, stimulating innovation, and maintaining job satisfaction.

Idealized influence is notable for its ability to generate trust and loyalty, having a direct effect on voluntary involvement and the level of cooperation within the team. Inspirational motivation supports collective morale and resilience, especially in times of uncertainty or high stress. Intellectual stimulation proves essential for adaptability and innovation, while individualized consideration contributes to staff retention and the creation of a positive organizational climate.

The results suggest that maximum performance is achieved not through the isolated manifestation of one of these behaviours, but through a harmonious combination of them. This complementarity

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allows leaders to respond effectively to a wide range of challenges while maintaining a balance between strategic objectives and team wellbeing.

The research also highlighted relevant differences between hierarchical levels and between managers' self-assessments and subordinates' perceptions, which not only confirms the theoretical hypotheses but also introduces critical nuances regarding their applicability. This dissonance is an original contribution, showing that the effectiveness of managerial behaviours cannot be assessed solely in terms of theory-data convergence, but must also be analysed in light of institutional constraints and divergent perceptions within the organization.

The practical implications are manifold. First, the results suggest the need for management training programs that include the development of transformational and skills tailored to the military and intelligence specificities. Second, they indicate that organizational performance does not depend exclusively on compliance with rules and procedures, but also on the ability of leaders to provide individualized support, inspire, and stimulate innovation under structural constraints. Third, the analysis highlights the importance of multi-perspective (360°) assessment to capture the gaps between self- assessments and collective perceptions, which is essential for realistic institutional calibrations.

In conclusion, the research demonstrates that, in military intelligence organizations, transformational leadership can be a vector for sustainable performance, but its effectiveness depends on the congruence between stated and practiced behaviours, the organization's ability to support innovation, and the willingness of leaders to adapt international theories to local specifics. These findings open up new avenues of research and provide a useful applied framework for strengthening managerial culture in highly complex strategic organizations.

It should be noted that the observed relationship between behaviours and performance may be influenced by contextual and individual factors, which requires caution in generalizing conclusions. The study provides a solid basis for the development of leadership training and development programs aimed at cultivating a balanced transformational style oriented toward sustainable results.

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THE NEURAL ARCHITECTURE OF ORGANISED CRIME NETWORKS INVOLVED IN DRUG TRAFFICKING

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Abstract:

The phenomenon of organized crime constitutes an increasing threat to regional security in Europe, where criminal networks demonstrate a persistent capacity to overcome the efforts of authorities to counter its proliferation. The most profitable form of organised crime is cocaine trafficking from South America to European markets. The dynamism and fluidity of the criminal entities that orchestrate cocaine trafficking reflect their flexibility even in terms of how they are structured. Considering the need to understand the complexity and multidimensionality of cocaine trafficking, a neural network model will be proposed that encompasses the main characteristics of the criminal networks involved in this form of crime. The purpose of this research is to identify a new conceptual model for the structure of organised crime groups. This research aims to generate knowledge about operational reality of criminal groups by drawing an analogy between their structure and a neural network. The data analysed in this article were derived from reports issued by European and international authorities with institutional mandates in the field of monitoring, preventing and combating international cocaine trafficking, covering the period from 2021-2026, including news publications and academic literature in the field of sociology and neuroscience. The research finds that the neural network conceptual model integrates the main characteristics associated with organised crime networks into a unified framework: fluidity, decentralisation, (re)configurability and organisational flexibility.

Keywords*: organised crime groups, neural network, cocaine trafficking, decentralised structure.*

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Introduction

In the context of a highly dynamic and fluid international system, the phenomenon of organised crime has historically experienced structural and operational transformations, in response to economic, technological and geopolitical developments. These adaptations have served both to preserve the efficiency of illicit activities and to facilitate the sustained expansion of the phenomenon on a global scale. In this regard, the vectors of the threat, the organised crime groups, have demonstrated their acumen and agility in overcoming the challenges existing at the level of international ecosystem. Although countermeasures at the national and international levels have intensified, organised crime networks continue to exploit the systemic vulnerabilities, continuously seeking opportunities to expand their illicit operations. The transition from traditional hierarchical structures of criminal groups to fluid and decentralised structures has been a catalyst for the global expansion of organized crime (McCarthy-Jones et al., 2020). As a result, these groups have extended their influence beyond the geographical borders of their countries of origin, becoming non-state actors with a decisive role in international security and stability.

Over recent decades, the concept of "organised crime groups" has evolved substantially, reflecting both the progressive consolidation of expertise among competent authorities at global level and the increasing diversity, adaptability and structural complexity of these criminal entities (Williams and Godson, 2002). In the context, this research adopts the definition formulated by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2002), as follows: "An organised crime group is a structured group of three or more people, existing for a period of time and acting in concert with the aim of committing one or more serious crimes in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit". Nonetheless, the definition proposed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime does not expressly integrate the transnational operability and adaptability of organised crime groups but rather provides a starting point for understanding the structuring model proposed in this paper.

From a structural point of view, different patterns can be identified in terms of how criminal groups are organised and operate. In

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2002, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime published a report entitled. "Results of a pilot survey of forty selected organized crime groups in sixteen countries" with identified five patterns regarding the structure of criminal organisations: hierarchical organisations and their derivatives (grouped hierarchy and regional hierarchy), such as the Italian mafias in the 20th century, which operated both in their country of origin and in the United States of America; core group organisations (the power of these organizations lies in the hands of a small group of individuals), such as the McLean Syndicate; and network-type organisations that are decentralised, fluid and informal, such as the Sinaloa Cartel and the Albanian Syndicate. The applicability of these typologies to the operational dynamics of organised crime groups remains limited within the specialized literature (Le, 2012). Therefore, the Europol report "Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment" (2021) identified a distinction of organised crime groups from a structural perspective, limited to two categories: hierarchical and decentralised structures.

The present scientific approach focuses on organised crime groups involved in the international cocaine trafficking from the countries of origin, Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru, towards European markets, particularly Albanian groups, as these groups have demonstrated notable resilience in the face of law enforcement interventions. The illegal cocaine trade in Europe is defined by increasing availability and purity, with cocaine being the second most consumed narcotic on the European continent (EUDA, 2024). This market stability ensures the profitability of illicit trade, making it attractive to criminal networks. Moreover, this phenomenon is inherently multifaceted, generating significant social, economic, and political distortions while simultaneously perpetuating a climate of violence and reinforcing patterns of corruption.

This research adopts a qualitative research design, emphasizing in-depth analytical examinations of data from reports issued by European and international authorities with institutional mandates in the field of monitoring, preventing and combating international cocaine trafficking, covering the period from 2021-2026, including news publications and academic literature in the field of sociology and

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neuroscience. These sources were selected in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of criminal networks and their structural and operational developments.

The methodological approach involves a comparative analysis between the decentralised structure of criminal networks and the neuronal structure. Following the data analysis process, an examination of the convergences between the decentralised structure of Albanian networks and the neuronal structure will be carried out, with an emphasis on the characteristics that facilitate adaptability, resilience, and optimisation of operational flows.

The specialized literature employs various terminologies to characterise the structure and operation of criminal networks, including "fluid", "decentralised", "reconfigurable", and "flexible". Collectively, these attributes can be synthesized into a unifying conceptual framework, referred to in this study as a neural model. The proposed neural model seeks to consolidate the defining characteristics of this structural configuration of organised crime groups into a single conceptual framework, while also providing an accurate representation of the contemporary dynamism of organized crime, which is characterised by operational flexibility, high interconnectivity, and systemic adaptability.

The progressive transition of organised crime groups—from hierarchical structures to decentralised models.

Groups with a history of violence and a large number of members, operating at international level, tend to have hierarchical structure, with a clear division of tasks and multiple levels of power and authority (EUROPOL, 2024). However, in the context of the fluidisation and decentralisation of organised crime, Albanian groups have undergone structural and functional developments, evolving from a strict hierarchical structure based on family connections to a more operationally efficient structure (Rama, 2021) characterised by decentralised distribution of power and responsibilities (Times, 2026).

The Albanian Mafia is a syndicate—a large number of groups of the same ethnic origin—that operates across Europe and maintains

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direct cooperation with criminal groups in both Latin America and Europe in the trafficking of cocaine (GIATOC, 2021). According to Europol, Albanian organised crime groups initially emerged as service providers for other criminal entities (EUROPOL, 2004). These groups had a hierarchical, homogenous structure based on family relationships and the "Besa" code, defined by the phrase "oath of honour" (Albanian Studies). This code was adopted to protect group members by strengthening internal cohesion and limiting the incursion of law enforcement into the hierarchical structure of the groups.

Since 2010, the Albanian groups have no longer relied exclusively on family or social ties, but have expanded their networks through cooperation with members outside the community and with foreign citizens (Fabian Zhilla, 2015). This has led to these organisations becoming more diverse, with both Albanians and people from other countries, especially from places along the main heroin and cocaine trafficking routes, like Ecuador, Mexico, the UK, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Turkey and Kosovo (VoxNews, 2024). By 2015, more than 40 organised crime groups were operating in Albania, engaging in illicit activities originating from Tirana, Shkodra, Durrës, Vlorë, Fier, Berat, and Elbasan, exhibited more fluid organisational structures compared to the initial mafia families that emerged at the end of the twentieth century (Zhilla et al., 2016). Fabian Zhilla and Besfort Lamallari, in their 2015 paper entitled "Albanian Criminal Groups", consider that the current organisational structure of Albanian criminal groups is significantly more efficient than in the initial stages of their formation. In terms of cocaine trafficking, members of these groups are present in European Union countries and in the countries of origin of cocaine, in order to facilitate trafficking across the ocean and to maximize their profits.

The Albanian syndicate has now extended its influence over the production-trafficking-distribution process, following the model of the Italian Mafia in the 20th century (the two groups began collaborating in the 1990s), by organising air, land, and transports through maritime ports in Ecuador (GIATOC, 2021), exploiting the infrastructure and connections of the 'Ndrangheta Mafia (the 'Ndrangheta is an organized crime group in Italy that reached its peak in the early 21st century through cocaine trafficking from South America (Mistler-Ferguson,

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2022). According to Kevin Mills, the Albanian Mafia is well positioned in the illicit cocaine trade to Europe: "he Albanians have had a meteoric rise in the cocaine trade, operating in many parts of Europe, particularly the UK and the Netherlands. If anyone is going to have an advantage in the container trade, it will be the Albanian Mafia. They have a footprint in Latin America and at many exit points. They still hold face-to-face meetings with people here in the region". This transnational expansion functions to mitigate the risk inherent in intermediation, optimise profits, and enhance the autonomy of criminal groups within the international trafficking process.

In this context, by adopting a decentralised structure, organised crime groups gain the capacity continuously reorganise themselves, thus limiting attempts to suspend their activities by law enforcement. This capacity for structural adjustment proliferates the threat posed by organised crime groups and allows them to exploit different environments to ensure the success of their criminal activities.

An overview of cocaine trafficking from South America to Europe

Within the context of international cocaine trafficking, organised crime groups exploit critical infrastructure—particularly European seaports—by corrupting customs and law enforcement officials, infiltrating logistics chains, and diversifying trafficking routes and methods of insertion, thereby limiting the capacity of competent authorities to contain the spread of this phenomenon (EUROPOL, 2022). The instrumentalization of corruption constitutes a core component of the operational DNA of criminal groups, acting as a catalyst both for infiltrating in the logistics of seaports (EUROPOL, 2023) and state institutions, and for circumventing law enforcement, thereby expanding their influence across political, economic, and social spheres (EUROPOL, 2025). Moreover, corruption is directly correlated with violence, with approximately 25% of organised crime groups frequently using both physical and psychological violence in a planned and premeditated manner (EUROPOL, 2021) to ensure compliance with the rules imposed by previously corrupt actors.

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The diversity of methods of insertion and transport routes underscore the high adaptability of these groups to the measures implemented by institutions responsible for combating and preventing the illicit international trafficking. In Latin American, cocaine shipping points are frequently changed by criminal organisations to avoid controls by authorities in the region (EUROPOL, 2025). In the case of European port terminals, there has been a shift in trafficking flows from the ports of the Iberian Peninsula, with in the 1980s were the epicentres of cocaine trafficking by Medellin and Cali cartels (Fernández, 2024; Resa-Nestares, 1999), to those in Western Europe notably in Belgium (Antwerp), the Netherlands (Rotterdam), and Germany (Hamburg) (Kundu, 2021; EUDA, 2022). Currently, organised crime groups tend to reuse Iberian ports (Saiz, 2025). The fundamental element underlying the transition is defined by operational flexibility in relation to the direction measures implemented in European ports, particularly those implemented in the port of Antwerp (Belga News Agency, 2024; Magli, 2023), as a result of the quantities of cocaine seized in 2022 (110.9 tons).

At the territorial and local level, criminal entities involved in cocaine distribution across Europe have both proliferated and diversified (EUDA, 2022). This fragmentation of the distribution market facilitates control of purity by criminal actors in order to maximize profits. Moreover, groups use minors to distribute cocaine in European markets in the interest of evading the authorities. This modus operandi reflects their flexibility in exploiting legislative loopholes and the protection of minors stipulated in national legislation, with the aim of reducing the risk of criminal sanctions for committing crimes (EUROPOL, 2025).

Due to the adaptability of these groups, technological challenges have not impeded their operational progress, as they have taken advantage of the benefits associated with the use of technology. Groups have resorted to encrypted means of communication such as EncroChat (EUROPOL, 2023), Sky ECC, and Anom (EUROPOL, 2024; EUROPOL, 2025), as well as the use of submarines or semi-submersible vessels to facilitate the flow of illegal shipments despite the tightening of interception measures by law enforcement agencies in European ports.

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In addition, organised crime groups use online markets (Darknet markets) to sell cocaine, taking advantage of anonymity of the Darknet and payment methods with low traceability (payments made in cryptocurrencies) (EUDA, 2022). This method catalyses the expansion of distribution networks by minimizing the risks associated with physical contact, which can compromise the smooth running of criminal activities.

The high profitability associated with cocaine trafficking provides considerable financial rewards (EUROPOL, 2021), generating interest from numerous criminal networks, which are often in direct competition with each other. Competition within the illicit cocaine market not only fosters illegal practices but also encourages a significant predisposition for violence and corruption, as criminal networks-including Albanian groups, Latin American Cartels, and Moroccan organisations (EUROPOL, 2021), and for control over lucrative trafficking routes and market domination (EUROPOL, 2025). The proliferation of criminal groups involved in cocaine trafficking creates opacity in the process by which competent authorities establish the structural configuration of these organisations.

Organised crime networks through the lens of the neural model: A structural and functional equivalence

The neural model of organised crime group structuring suggests that decentralised criminal networks exhibit structural and functional characteristics comparable to those of biological neural systems. Within this framework, organised crime groups are conceptualized as interconnected operational units whose efficiency derives from decentralised coordination, rapid information transmission, adaptive resilience, and continuous structural reorganisation. Consequently, the functioning of transnational criminal networks may be interpreted through principles analogous to those underlying neuronal architectures.

Rather than replacing hierarchical or network-based paradigms, the neural model expands their explanatory capacity by emphasizing the adaptive and decentralised properties of organised crime structures operating within fluid transnational environments. Thus, the neural model contributes to a more nuanced understanding of informal coordination mechanisms and structural adaptation processes,

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providing an innovative conceptual framework that complements and enriches existing models of the organisation and functioning of organised crime groups.

Within this structural-functional model, the transnational criminal network is conceptualised as a decentralised adaptive system structurally comparable to a neuronal network. Its architecture consists of geographically distributed yet operationally interconnected groups functioning as specialised nodes within the criminal structure. Similar to neurons within biological neural systems, each operational unit performs specific functions whose efficiency derives from interdependence, synchronization, and continuous information exchange.

Analogous to neuronal networks in the human brain, composed of neurons interconnected by synapses and organised into intricate functional structures (Kandel et al., 2013), organised crime groups operate within complex networks that are difficult for authorities to map. These networks are characterised by an internal distribution of roles among members, efficient communication mechanism, and a high capacity to adapt to the dynamic and fluid nature of the international ecosystem. In both types of previously presented structures, the network architecture is not randomly designed but is the result of an organisation geared towards efficiency and optimal functioning in relation to the established objectives. Within neuronal systems, these objectives involve the rapid processing and transmission of information necessary for cognitive and physiological functioning, whereas within organised crime structures they involve the coordination and protection of illicit activities intended to maximize operational efficiency and profit generation.

Within the neuronal networks, each neuron plays a key role in receiving, processing, and transmitting electrical signals, contributing to the coherence of the nervous system's functioning (Hăulică, 2000). These signals are transmitted using the action potentials of neurons, which, through their speed and accuracy, allow the body to respond immediately to internal and/or external stimuli. Functionally comparable mechanisms can be identified within transnational organised crime networks, where operational groups facilitate the rapid circulation of strategic information related to trafficking routes, financial transfers, corruption networks,

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and law enforcement activity. Each group has a well-defined function, and the success of an action lies in the complementarity of their synchronization and systematic collaboration within the network.

Throughout neural architectures, myelin facilitates the accelerated and protected transmission of electrical signals by insulating axonal fibres and minimizing signal dissipation (Moșanu-Șupac and Coșcodan, 2024). A functionally equivalent mechanism may be observed within organised crime networks through the use of corruption, intimidation, and encrypted communication technologies, all of which reduce operational exposure while facilitating rapid and secure information circulation throughout the network. Similar to myelinated neural pathways, these protective mechanisms contribute to the operational continuity and resilience of decentralized criminal structures, minimizing the risk of intervention by the authorities.

A defining characteristic shared by both neuronal and organised crime systems is decentralization. Within neural architectures, cognitive functionality emerges through the interaction of heterogeneously distributed neurons rather than through the existence of a singular coordinating core (Sapolsky, 2018). This principle of decentralization is likewise reflected in the structures of criminal groups, where criminal cells are capable of operating independently while remaining integrated within the broader criminal network through stable communication pathways and shared strategic objectives.

Another point of convergence between the two types of networks is the efficiency of internal communication. In the nervous system, as mentioned above, communication is ensured by action potentials, a process characterized by rapid execution (Blooijs et al., 2023). The same holds for organised crime networks engaged in global cocaine trafficking, which employ advanced encryption technologies, including secure messaging applications, to circumvent law enforcement possible detection.

Last but not least, the strongest structural-functional correspondence between neural and criminal systems lies in their adaptive capacity. Within biological neural networks, neuroplasticity enables the continuous reorganisation of synaptic structures in response to environmental stimuli and external pressures through the formation of new neural pathways and the modulation of synaptic connection strength (Kandel et al., 2013; Pop, 2024). A comparable phenomenon can

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be identified within decentralised organised crime groups, where neuroplasticity manifests through capacity for structural reorganization following a breakdown caused by law enforcement intervention, as well as through the diversification of trafficking routes and transportation methods. A conclusive demonstration of this capacity for operational adjustment is the reorientation of cocaine flows from South America to alternative European ports (Dunkerque, Helsingborg, and Nynashamn) in response to tighter security measures at established port hubs (Rotterdam, Hamburg, Antwerp).

Under this framework, transnational organised crime networks may also be understood as systems capable of generating operational intelligence through decentralised interaction. Similar to cognitive processes emerging from neuronal connectivity rather than centralized command, strategic adaption within criminal structures arises from the cumulative interaction of semi-autonomous operational units distributed throughout the network. Consequently, the operational behaviour of the network exceeds the capabilities of individual groups, reflecting a form of collective adaptive intelligence.

While this conceptual model captures the structural and functional complexity of organised crime networks involved in cocaine trafficking, several limitations should be acknowledged that may restrict its applicability and universality. Firstly, the analogy with the structure of neural networks may simplify the social and cultural dynamics of organised crime groups, neglecting the economic, political, and contextual factors that influence the behaviour of members and strategic decisions. Secondly, unlike organised crime groups, there are no power relations or divergent interests between the neurons of a network that could lead to internal conflicts or competition for resources. Finally, the neuronal structuring model was developed primarily with reference to Albanian organised crime groups involved in cocaine trafficking, which may limit the broader applicability of the framework across other forms of organised crime. Consequently, further comparative research is necessary to evaluate the applicability of the model to criminal structures operating within different geographical, cultural, and operational environments.

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Conclusion

The neural network proposed in this paper represents an innovative framework for interpreting the structure and functioning of Albanian organised crime groups involved in cocaine trafficking from South America to European Markets. This conceptual model synthesizes the main characteristics associated with the network-type structures—namely fluidity, decentralisation, (re)configurability, and organisational flexibility—into a unified analytical framework. Concurrently, it provides an accurate representation of the contemporary dynamism of organised crime, characterized by operational flexibility, high interconnectivity, and systemic adaptability.

The neural model is grounded in empirical data on Albanian organised crime networks, which reveal a transnational structure fragmented into a semi-autonomous group that are functionally interconnected both in key European market countries and in cocaine production regions in South America. These networks operate through distinct operational nodes, each specialised in segments of the production-trafficking-distribution chain, while remaining integral components of the same criminal system, similar to neurons within a neuronal network.

The research findings underscore the relevance of the neural model as a tool for interpreting and enhancing understanding of the multifaceted phenomenon of contemporary organised crime. In parallel, its application must be integrated with universally accepted theoretical paradigms to address the limitations inherent in biological analogies and challenges of empirical validations. Consequently, a coordinated, synergistic approach by competent European authorities is essential to curb the proliferation of this phenomenon. Effective control over cocaine trafficking is crucial for safeguarding the political, social, and economic stability of Europe, particularly in the context of the unprecedented rise in global cocaine availability and purity.

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HISTORY AND MEMORY IN INTELLIGENCE

INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS AND THE CIA—A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: REFORMING THE CIA ANALYTICAL SYSTEM UNDER CONDITIONS OF INSTITUTIONAL CRISIS (1973-1981)

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Abstract:
Drawing on declassified internal CIA documents, this article reconstructs the key structural transformations of the Agency's analytical apparatus between 1973 and 1981. The period is framed by two major institutional turning points: the dissolution of the Office of National Estimates (ONE) by Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) William Colby in 1973 and the sweeping reorganization of the Directorate of Intelligence (DI) undertaken by DCI William Casey in 1981. Between these two milestones, the study examines three main analytical developments: the establishment of the National Intelligence Officers (NIOs) system; the reorganization of the DI in 1976-1977 and the creation of specialized analytical units; three emblematic episodes that tested the limits of the reformed system. The analysis shows that the reforms implemented during this period produced a more structured analytical apparatus, more closely aligned with the needs of policymakers, while leaving unresolved the inherent tensions between analytical independence and policy relevance. This article represents the third part of a broader research project on the historical evolution of intelligence analysis within the CIA.

Keywords: *analysis, CIA, Cold War, Casey, Colby, crisis, declassified documents, estimates, intelligence, reform.*

Introduction

The sequence between 1973 and 1981 represents one of the most turbulent yet intellectually productive periods in the history of American intelligence. The geopolitical context of the era was shaped by a fundamental contradiction. On the one hand, Soviet–American rivalry had reached unprecedented levels of complexity, placing increasingly

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sophisticated analytical demands on political decision-makers. On the other hand, U.S. intelligence institutions were experiencing a profound crisis of credibility and legitimacy precisely at the moment when pressures upon them were intensifying.

The world of the early 1970s could no longer be interpreted through the simplified bipolar framework characteristic of the early decades of the Cold War. The policy of détente, negotiated by Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon with the Soviet Union and China, introduced new parameters into global strategic competition: arms-control agreements (SALT I, 1972), the normalization of relations with Beijing, and the multiplication of diplomatic channels. At the same time, the Third World became an increasingly dynamic and unpredictable arena of competition. The Yom Kippur War of October 1973 and the subsequent Arab oil embargo demonstrated that regional instability in the Middle East could generate systemic shocks for the global economy and Western security. Revolutions, coups d'état, and low-intensity conflicts across Africa, Asia, and Latin America required a nuanced understanding of local political dynamics—an area of expertise that the American analytical apparatus struggled to provide consistently.

Domestically, the CIA and the broader U.S. Intelligence Community entered a period of unprecedented scrutiny. The Watergate scandal (1972-1974) cast a shadow over the entire executive branch and triggered a strong congressional reaction against the secret activities of the state. Investigations conducted by the Church Committee in the Senate and the Pike Committee in the House of Representatives (1975-1976) brought to light a range of CIA covert operations—planned assassinations of foreign leaders, domestic surveillance programs, and drug experiments conducted on American citizens—generating widespread public outrage and intense legislative pressure for reform and oversight of the intelligence services. The disclosure of the *Family Jewels*—internal reports commissioned by Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) James Schlesinger in 1973 that catalogued the Agency's institutional abuses—further deepened the CIA's crisis of legitimacy and fuelled broader debates about the limits of executive power in the field of intelligence.

Within the CIA, this external crisis overlapped with structural tensions that had been accumulating for more than a decade. The Agency's analytical apparatus had largely been built in the 1950s, in a comparatively simpler strategic environment dominated by the direct Soviet threat and by the need for centralized strategic estimates. As the international environment grew more complex—with a greater number of relevant actors, a wider range of threats, and multiple dimensions of global competition—the institutional architecture of the Directorate of Intelligence (DI) became increasingly difficult to adapt to evolving requirements. Analytical offices operated largely in isolation, producing economic, political, or military intelligence without effective mechanisms for integration. At the same time, the pressure of current production—the daily intelligence deliverables required by the White House and the National Security Council (NSC)—consumed analytical resources that might otherwise have supported deeper, long-term research. Intelligence consumers, whose expectations were becoming progressively more sophisticated, increasingly signalled that CIA products were either too general, too fragmented, or too slow to keep pace with events.

Against this background, the period 1973-1981 became a laboratory of institutional reform of unusual intensity and depth in the history of U.S. intelligence services. Three major structural transformations unfolded almost simultaneously, fundamentally reshaping the way the CIA produced, organized, and delivered intelligence analysis.

In 1973, DCI William Colby abolished the Board of National Estimates (BNE) and the Office of National Estimates (ONE)—the traditional pillars of collective strategic estimation—and replaced them with a system of individually specialized officers, the National Intelligence Officers (NIOs), intended to provide a more direct and responsive link between analysts and policymakers.

In 1976-1977, a far-reaching reorganization of the entire DI was initiated through: (1) the separation of current production from in-depth research; (2) the creation of mechanisms for interdisciplinary integration; (3) the establishment of new structures dedicated to strategic military analysis and regional political analysis.

In 1979, DCI Stansfield Turner implemented a major organizational change by renaming the DI as the National Foreign Assessment Centre

(NFAC). This decision reflected Turner's broader vision of repositioning CIA analysis within the wider Intelligence Community. Through this change, Turner sought to emphasize that the CIA's analytical mission extended beyond the institutional boundaries of the Agency itself.

The move inevitably generated internal resistance. Some career officers within the DI viewed the rebranding as a dilution of the Agency's analytical identity and as a subordination of CIA expertise to broader interagency coordination objectives—an agenda that Turner promoted with considerable determination. Ultimately, however, the NFAC experiment proved short-lived. In 1981, with the arrival of William Casey as DCI, the structure was dismantled. The DI regained both its traditional name and its own organizational logic, reconfigured largely along regional lines.

The present study represents the third part of a broader research project on the analytical dimension of the CIA, conceived as a historical perspective on this core professional activity of the Agency. The first part covered the period 1947-1950, examining the beginnings of intelligence analysis within the CIA and the development of its first analytical structure—the Office of Reports and Estimates (ORE) (Roman, 2023, 164-188). The second part addressed the 1950–1973 period, highlighting the consolidation of the CIA's analytical architecture and its principal institutional components (Roman, 2025, 96-125).

This article focuses on the period of institutional turbulence and far-reaching reform between 1973 and 1981—a time when external pressures and accumulated internal deficiencies generated the most profound reorganization of the CIA's analytical apparatus up to that point. Its structure follows the chronology of the main institutional changes:

- the National Intelligence Officers (NIOs) system, introduced following the structural changes of 1973;
- the reform of the DI, 1976-1977, and the resulting analytical architecture, including a discussion of two organizational structures;
- vulnerabilities and failures of CIA intelligence analysis during 1973-1981.

Taken together, these transformations portray an intelligence apparatus that, under the pressure of events and criticism, sought to reinvent itself structurally to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world.

The article argues that the institutional reforms undertaken between 1973 and 1981 produced a more flexible analytical apparatus, better aligned with the needs of policymakers, but did not eliminate the structural tensions inherent in intelligence analysis. Despite organizational modernization, vulnerabilities related to interdisciplinary integration, political pressures, and the limits of strategic anticipation continued to shape the analytical performance of the CIA.

NIOs: Replacing the ONE with Individual Specialist Officers

In 1973, a new system of individually specialized officers was established in the DI under the title National Intelligence Officers (NIOs).

The reform of the CIA's analytical apparatus was the culmination of a decade of mounting tensions between the intelligence community and political decision-makers. The Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and the political pressures exerted by the Nixon administration generated a profound crisis of confidence in the analysis produced by the CIA, creating the conditions for a substantial reorganization of its analytical structures. The need for reform had already been clearly articulated in the Schlesinger Report of 1971, commissioned by President Richard Nixon and prepared by James Schlesinger in his capacity as Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget at the White House. The report noted that although intelligence expenditures had grown exponentially over the previous decade, the intelligence community had failed to achieve "a corresponding improvement in the scope and overall quantity of intelligence products." Consequently, the report advocated a structural reform of the entire U.S. intelligence community (Warner, 2009, 387-417).

The Watergate scandal disrupted these reform efforts, at the cost of directing intense political and public scrutiny toward the Agency. Richard Helms was dismissed as DCI in 1973 after refusing to involve the CIA in the cover-up of the scandal. His successor, Schlesinger, remained at the helm of the Agency for less than six months, during which he dismissed nearly 2,000 employees. Colby, who succeeded him, inherited an agency under intense media and political pressure and already

undergoing structural transition (CIA Document no. 1). It was within this institutional and political context that the transformation of the CIA's analytical apparatus unfolded during the early 1970s.

A brief overview of how strategic intelligence was produced within the CIA before the introduction of the NIO-based system clarifies the significance of the changes that followed.

The system for producing National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) was established in 1950 at the initiative of DCI Walter Bedell Smith, in response to the failure to anticipate North Korea's invasion of South Korea. Smith created the BNE, a collegial body of senior analysts responsible for coordinating and drafting the intelligence community's authoritative estimates. For nearly two decades, the BNE functioned as a quasi-academic body, enjoying a considerable degree of autonomy from the immediate pressures of political decision-making.

The bureaucratic model embodied by the BNE/ONE framework gradually revealed increasingly evident structural deficiencies as the Cold War intensified. For example, National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger considered that the BNE approached foreign policy issues with an excessive degree of academic detachment, producing analyses of remarkable intellectual quality but of limited operational utility (Ford, 1993, 39-44; Helgerson, 1995, 106-111).

A memorandum issued by the National Intelligence Council (NIC) in 1988 summarizes, in institutional rather than merely political terms, several of the criticisms that had fuelled the demand for reform: dissatisfaction within the White House regarding the control exercised by the DCI over the intelligence community, complaints about the declining clarity of NIEs, and accusations of "bias" toward the CIA's institutional perspective:

> "President Nixon faulted then CIA Director Helms for not exerting enough control over the Intelligence Community. Kissinger complained that National Intelligence Estimates had lost their edge and that they sometimes reached unsupported conclusions. Directors of other US intelligence agencies alleged that the Estimates were biased toward the CIA viewpoint." (CIA Document no. 2, 1)

The same document explicitly notes that "Colby put the system into place in 1973," while also tracing the origin of the concept to Schlesinger's earlier initiative to appoint senior intelligence officers who would serve as community-wide points of reference for specific geographic and functional areas.

From an explanatory perspective, Colby justified the implementation of the NIO system on operational grounds. In his memoir on his tenure at the CIA, he describes the difficulty he faced, as Director of the Agency, in rapidly obtaining an integrated picture of a given issue:

> "I was troubled over how badly the machinery was organized to serve me. If I wanted to know what was happening in China, for example, I would have to assemble individual experts in China's politics, its economics, its military, its personalities, as well as the clandestine operators who would tell me things they would tell no one else." (Colby, 1978, 352).

In formal terms, the establishment of the NIOs is recorded directly in several memoranda that Colby addressed to the United States Intelligence Board (USIB). One such memorandum, dated 3 October 1973, set out the functional framework of the new structure replacing the ONE/BNE, which had previously been responsible for the production of NIEs.

> "National Intelligence Officers will be appointed by the Director of Central Intelligence for such geographical areas or functional subjects as may be required from time to time. Each NIO will be the Director's personal representative and will report directly to him on his subject, but all direction will be issued through normal command channels to elements of USIB member agencies." (CIA Document no. 3)

This formulation is essential because it highlights three particularly significant features of the NIOs system: (1) a direct relationship with the DCI; (2) high-level staff status; and (3) a role as an extension of the DCI's authority within the Intelligence Community. Beyond the general rationale for their creation, it can therefore be argued that the NIOs were conceived as a mechanism of direct support for the

DCI, designed to facilitate the integration of community-wide analysis and to enhance the policy relevance of estimative intelligence.

Conceptually, the new organizational framework represented a clear departure from the collegial model embodied by the BNE/ONE structure. The establishment of the NIOs system shifted the emphasis from collective institutional deliberation toward the individual responsibility of senior officers operating in a direct relationship with the DCI.

Another memorandum, dated October 26, 1973, indicates the timetable for operationalization: "effective 1 November 1973," the first six NIOs were appointed. The responsibilities of five of them were defined on a geographic basis—one each for the following areas of interest: Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; Western Europe; Southeast Asia; Middle East and Islamic World; and Latin America. The sixth position was defined on functional grounds: James Critchfield, appointed as NIO for Energy Matters, whose name is also the only NIO identity left unreacted in the memorandum (CIA Document no. 4).

The Guide to the National Intelligence Community's Production Organizations and Their Products of October 1975 provides the clearest procedural description of the NIO's role in the production of intelligence. The document reaffirms that, through the memorandum of October 3, 1973, the DCI established the NIO functions in order to assume the responsibilities previously exercised by the BNE (CIA Document no. 5).

At the same time, the guide emphasizes that the specific responsibilities of the NIOs include:

- identifying the needs of national intelligence consumers;
- evaluating intelligence products and the effectiveness of relevant programs;
- identifying uncertainties that require guidance for intelligence collection;
- maintaining contact with the National Security Council (NSC) and other principal consumers;
- objectively presenting alternative viewpoints.

The document also explicitly notes that the bulk of analytical production remained within the DI, whose responsibilities are described in detail. At the same time, it contains no reference to any significant

transfer of analytical capacity to the NIOs themselves. This suggests that the system functioned primarily as a level of coordination and guidance rather than as an independent centre of analytical production.

Based on the documents examined, several observations can be made regarding the design of the system in its initial phase (1973-mid-1970s):

- the NIOs were conceived as a direct extension of the DCI, rather than as an autonomous bureaucratic structure;
- their role was primarily integrative and managerial-analytical, rather than one of primary analytical production;
- specialization followed a mixed pattern (regional and functional), reflecting the strategic agenda of the period;
- the link with the political decision-making level was explicitly institutionalized through the requirement to maintain close contacts with the NSC and other principal intelligence consumers.

In 1979, DCI Turner further institutionalized the arrangement by creating the National Intelligence Council (NIC), which brought together the senior officers responsible for coordinating NIEs and integrating analytic judgments across the Intelligence Community.

Both this new entity and the NIOs were incorporated, in the same year, into the National Foreign Assessment Centre (NFAC) (CIA Document no. 6)—an administrative arrangement that was abandoned at the end of 1981.

The creation of the NIC provided a clearer institutional framework for the exercise of the NIOs' responsibilities. The officers thus acquired their own organizational space, formally separate from the DI, thereby reducing the risk that community-level analysis would be subordinated to the institutional perspective of the parent agency. Internal documents indicate that, although the core functions of the NIOs system remained relatively stable, the way the system was used varied depending on the managerial style and priorities of the DCI.

An NIC memorandum from February 1988 provides a valuable perspective on these developments. It explicitly notes that Colby's successors—Bush, Turner, and Casey—retained the system, but did so while "imposing their own style and emphasis." In its initial phase, the

system continued to operate largely within the parameters established by Colby, preserving what the document describes as "from the beginning, a close and special relationship between the Director and the NIOs."

Under Colby, the responsibilities of the NIOs remained centred on the four functions already identified: substantive support for the DCI, community coordination, management of the estimative process, and the enhancement of the relevance of intelligence products for policymakers.

The Bush period appears as a relatively brief transitional phase. The NIC memorandum observes that Bush "was not in office long enough to have much impact on the system", although he did issue a statement of objectives for the NIOs and initiated "a start toward formalizing the Director's control over their activities" (CIA Document no. 2).

A more visible phase of adjustment emerged under DCI Turner. He considered that the NIO system required "more structural coherence and discipline", which he sought to achieve through the creation of the NIC. An analytically significant doctrinal element introduced by Turner was his insistence on explicitly highlighting differences of opinion within intelligence estimates (CIA Document no. 2).

The most dynamic phase reflected in the documents examined appears to be the tenure of DCI William J. Casey. The NIC memorandum portrays a Director "eager to make a strong impact on the workings of the Intelligence Community", who frequently relied on the NIOs as agents of change. Under Casey, the document points to several notable developments:

- increased direct involvement (Casey frequently requested immediate expertise from the NIOs and used them as a "reference library for quick response items", a formulation suggesting a highly operational use of their expertise);
- greater emphasis on short analytical products (the DCI encouraged the preparation of "short think-pieces" and showed openness toward dissenting views and unconventional approaches);
- expansion of estimative production (the memorandum states explicitly that during this period "the number of Estimates produced more than doubled, with NIOs deeply and personally involved at every stage of the process");

- a broader interface with the policy level (Casey placed several NIOs in direct contact with Cabinet members, and some of them were used as intelligence advisers both in Washington and during foreign travel).

The document also notes that many NIOs spent up to a third of their time in interdepartmental meetings or external consultations. Overall, under Casey, the NIO system was used in a more activist manner, oriented toward direct support of the decision-making process (CIA Document no. 2).

Based on the documents examined, the evolution of the NIO system between 1973 and the early 1980s can be characterized by functional continuity combined with variations in managerial style. The core functions established at the system's inception remained largely intact, but their emphasis differed across successive leaderships:

- under Colby, the focus was on implementation and the direct relationship with the DCI;
- under Bush, on limited formalization;
- under Turner, on structural coherence and analytical discipline;
- under Casey, on intensive use and a strong orientation toward the needs of policymakers (CIA Document no. 2).

Declassified CIA documents portray the NIOs system primarily in functional and utilitarian terms, as an instrument through which the DCI could obtain substantive support, integrate positions from across the U.S. intelligence community, and orient analytical production toward the needs of policymakers. At the same time, even within this "institutional" perspective, both structural advantages and potential vulnerabilities of a model based on individual roles with direct access to senior leadership can be discerned.

One major advantage was the flexibility of the system. In Colby's conception, it addressed the difficulty of organizing the "machinery" required to rapidly integrate dispersed expertise. At the same time, the implementation documents also assign the NIOs a coordinating role within the intelligence community, suggesting that they were designed as a mechanism for integrating multiple organizational structures.

Along the same lines, the October 1975 guide records that the NIOs were created to perform the functions previously exercised by the BNE and to ensure the briefing and coordination of national-level intelligence production. It explicitly mentions their obligation to maintain contact with the NSC and other principal consumers, as well as to present "fully objective presentations of alternative views" (CIA Document no. 5).

The documents also indicate an explicit orientation toward policy relevance. The NIC memorandum of 1988 cites Colby as stating that the NIOs were expected to make intelligence products "more relevant to the needs of the policymakers", including through the expansion of contacts and the identification of priority topics (CIA Document no. 2).

In a review of the book *Truth to Power: A History of the U.S. National Intelligence Council* (eds. Robert Hutchings and Gregory F. Treverton, Oxford, 2019), published in the CIA's professional journal *Studies in Intelligence* (December 2019), Roger Z. George emphasizes that the NIOs—more than the NIEs themselves—"produced impact and relevance for the NIC." The same author notes that, to be effective, NIOs had to be "recognized specialists but also well versed in intelligence practices and personally connected to those sitting in the White House, State Department, and Pentagon" (George, 2019).

Finally, NIOs often found themselves in the position of "estimating orally" for members of the NSC, demonstrating that their relationship with policymakers was direct and highly personalized.

Despite its advantages, the NIOs architecture also incorporated several notable structural vulnerabilities. Among these, the most evident was the high degree of personalization and dependence on individual officeholders, reflected even in the formal description of the NIO role as "the Director's personal representative." As a result, the effectiveness of the system depended heavily on the qualities of the individual officer, his or her credibility, and the strength of the personal relationship with the Director. While this arrangement provided flexibility—potentially a significant advantage—it also introduced a degree of institutional instability.

Reform of the DI and the Reconfiguration of the CIA's Analytical Apparatus

The reform carried out by Colby in 1973—the establishment of the NIOs system in place of the BNE/ONE structure – primarily targeted the interface between the CIA and political decision-makers, namely the level of coordination and strategic guidance of intelligence production. The DI as a whole, including its analytical offices and divisions, remained largely unaffected by this structural intervention.

A deeper reconfiguration took place during 1976-1977, driven by two converging factors: the external pressures generated by congressional investigations and the change in leadership at the top of the CIA.

The internal structural problems of the DI became increasingly visible by the mid-1970s. The DI entered a period of accumulated pressures that made the need for a thorough reorganization increasingly apparent. These pressures came from several directions simultaneously: congressional investigations, expanding demands from intelligence consumers, declining resources, and an increasingly intense internal debate regarding the quality and policy relevance of analytical products (*Final Report of the Select Committee…*, 1976).

The CIA document from February 1977, which provides an overview of the DI during that period, highlights the origins of these pressures. The impulse for a closer examination of how the CIA produced intelligence came from outside the Agency:

> "The momentum for undertaking a more intensive examination of the way in which CIA was organized to produce intelligence was given additional impetus by the numerous Executive and Congressional examinations of the production process. In particular, the findings of both the House and Senate Select Committees on Intelligence and a number of consumer surveys undertaken by the IC Staff all seemed to focus on two basic areas—the need for CIA to produce more integrated or interdisciplinary analysis and the need to create a working environment in which the analytic career could flourish." (CIA Document no. 7, 13).

The reform of the CIA's analytical activities began with a process of internal evaluation, materialized in an interim report submitted to the Executive Advisory Group (EAG) on August 25, 1976. The document identified four areas in which improvements were considered imperative.

The first concerned multidisciplinary (interdisciplinary) analysis. The organizational structure of the DI was predominantly vertical and organized by discipline: economists in one office, political scientists in another, and military specialists and geographers in separate offices of their own. The result was an artificial fragmentation of analytical responsibilities and a deficit of collaboration.

The second problematic area concerned the selection of analytical issues and the allocation of resources. The DI tended to respond primarily to the immediate demands of policymakers, often at the expense of anticipatory research. The document notes that the institution lacked adequate mechanisms and incentives to encourage analysts to come together at the outset of the analytical process to share their knowledge and perspectives. The difficulty of balancing responses to current requests with investment in deeper, long-term research is described as one of the most challenging structural problems to address.

The third area concerned the slow pace at which the DI adopted new analytical methodologies that had become available in the academic world, such as systems analysis, probabilistic analysis, mathematical and statistical procedures, and decision analysis. Moreover, these new techniques were often treated as institutional window dressing rather than as genuine working tools.

The fourth—and perhaps most important—issue involved strengthening the "analytical ethos" within the DI. The document identifies a vicious circle: career advancement was not directly linked to genuine analytical excellence, which generated a bureaucratic pressure toward the proliferation of managerial positions. At the same time, the internal review process tended to strip analytical products of their timeliness and practical utility; a study could circulate for up to six months through various levels of approval before being released (CIA Document no. 7, 16-17).

In parallel with the internal evaluation, the CIA contracted an external consulting firm to conduct an independent study on the

organization of the DI and the changes required—both structural and procedural. The study was carried out over two months, after which the consultants presented their findings and recommendations, concluding the process with a written report in November 1976.

Based on the two assessments—internal and external—the Deputy Director for Intelligence (DDI) established a working group tasked with preparing a series of documents outlining possible organizational measures. Drawing on these materials, the DCI authorized the implementation of the proposed reorganization on November 15, 1976.

The reform produced an organizational structure substantially different from the previous one. The document describes each component and its role within the new analytical ecosystem, as follows:

Office of the Deputy Director for Intelligence (ODDI). It remained the command center of the DI, incorporating staff responsible for administration, planning, and coordination.

Under the umbrella of the ODDI operated the Centre for Policy Support (CPS), described as the principal mechanism for monitoring the DI's production activities and maintaining relations with the policy-making community. The CPS was assigned three major responsibilities: 1) enhancing the relevance of CIA analytical production to the needs of policymakers; 2) executing and managing intelligence analysis across the entire directorate on key U.S. policy issues; 3) monitoring and maintaining effective managerial control over the production activities of the DI's component units.

CIA Operations Center (OPSC). It functioned as a 24-hour watch and alert unit for the entire Agency, providing a focal point for the reception of new information and for its dissemination to other components of the Intelligence Community.

Current Reporting Group (CRG). This was the new structure assigned exclusive responsibility for monitoring and providing immediate analysis of ongoing international developments, as well as for producing the DI's daily publications. CRG analysts operated in a manner similar to journalists, identifying relevant news coverage areas and drafting articles for current intelligence publications. The CRG prepared the President's Daily Brief, the National Intelligence Daily, and a weekly publication. At the same time, it provided analytical commentary based

on its own expertise as well as on consultations with analysts in the research offices.

Publications and Presentations Group (PPG). It was responsible for providing professional publishing services to the production offices, improving the quality of published products, and developing new presentation formats. The PPG concentrated advanced word-processing equipment and functioned as a centre where new presentation techniques could be developed for the entire DI.

Office of Central Reference (OCR). It was responsible for maintaining the Agency's central reference services and for producing biographical intelligence reports for the entire Intelligence Community.

Seven research offices which provided in-depth analysis and periodic reporting within their respective areas of specialization: Office of Economic Research (OER), Office of Geographic and Cartographic Research (OGCR), the Office of Strategic Research (OSR), Office of Imagery Analysis (OIA), Office of Scientific Intelligence (OSI), Office of Weapons Intelligence (OWI), and Office of Regional and Political Analysis (ORPA).

The OER was the largest research office within the DI and had developed a growing reputation for the quality of its analyses on international monetary issues, global trade, and petroleum-related matters. The ORPA represented one of the central innovations of the reform. It was organized primarily along geographic lines, and its missions covered three temporal horizons: current intelligence, medium-term analysis, and long-term research on selected topics relevant to the formulation of U.S. policy.

The institutional architecture resulting from the 1976-1977 reform reflected a more functional organizational logic in the production of CIA analysis. What were the major changes? At a preliminary level, at least three significant achievements can be identified: the separation of current production (CRG) from in-depth research (the specialized research offices); the creation of mechanisms for interdisciplinary integration (CPS and ORPA); and the strengthening of editorial support (PPG). One of the principal outcomes was the reduction of the fragmentation that had characterized the previous period.

OSR: The Institutionalization of Military Analysis within the CIA

Within the CIA's analytical architecture of the late Cold War period, the OSR represented the Agency's principal instrument for producing independent military assessments. The creation of this structure marked the maturation of the CIA's capacity to generate its own strategic military intelligence, distinct from the estimates produced by the Pentagon. Its evolution reflects both the interinstitutional competition within the U.S. intelligence community and the transformation of policymakers' requirements in an era dominated by nuclear rivalry.

Military intelligence analysis constituted one of the most contested and complex domains within the architecture of U.S. intelligence services throughout the Cold War. Unlike political or economic analysis, the assessment of Soviet military capabilities required not only highly specialized technical and analytical expertise but also constant navigation through the institutional tensions between the CIA and the military structures of the Department of Defence (DoD). In this context, the creation of the Office of Strategic Research (OSR) in 1967 represented a turning point in the history of the CIA, marking the Agency's explicit assumption of an independent and competitive role in the field of military intelligence estimates.

The principal source used in preparing this section is the official historical study authored by Robert Vickers under the auspices of the CIA History Staff, *The History of CIA's Office of Strategic Research, 1967-1981*, published August 2019 by the Centre for the Study of Intelligence. This work represents a primary source of exceptional value, incorporating declassified documents, memoirs of former OSR directors, and internal Agency studies that had not previously been made publicly available.

The origins of the OSR must be understood within the broader context of the evolution of the CIA's role in the field of military intelligence. The National Security Act of 1947 clearly delineated the intelligence responsibilities of U.S. agencies: The Department of State was responsible for political and social intelligence, the military services for military intelligence, and the CIA for economic, scientific, and technical intelligence (Vickers, 2019, X).

This division of responsibilities generated early tensions. Max Millikan, the MIT economist appointed by DCI Smith to lead the ORR established in 1951, argued from the outset that a nation's economic strength was inseparable from its capacity to wage war. Accordingly, he organized the ORR so that it could conduct comprehensive analyses of all aspects of the Soviet economy, including the defence sector. Vickers summarizes Millikan's conception in the following terms:

> "He believed that this micro-analytic approach would help analysts to estimate the total economic resources available to the Soviet Bloc, the allocation of these resources to the military sector, and the strengths and limitations of the economy. This, in turn, would assist in determining enemy capabilities and weaknesses and help policymakers exploit Soviet Bloc economic vulnerabilities." (Vickers, 2019, XI)

The ORR expanded rapidly in its early years: the four economic divisions alone grew from approximately 150 personnel to nearly 500 by 1953. A key element in this development was the creation within the office of a new component responsible for estimating the cost of the Soviet military sector.

The period 1953-1961 brought two major issues that further strengthened the CIA's analytical role in the military domain: the "bomber gap" and the "missile gap." Both involved intense disputes between the CIA and the military services regarding the actual size of Soviet forces. Although the CIA initially accepted higher estimates of Soviet air and missile capabilities, subsequent analysis—especially after the launch of reconnaissance satellites in the early 1960s—dramatically reduced these projections.

The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the expanded mandate granted to the CIA by DCI John McCone, and the debates surrounding anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems and Soviet ground forces marked a new stage in this evolution. Under the leadership of McCone and later Richard Helms, the CIA concluded that it needed to play a role in military intelligence comparable to the one it already held in political and economic intelligence. This shift in perspective created the institutional framework for the establishment of the Office of Strategic Research (OSR).

In July 1967, DCI Helms decided to create this new structure, bringing together nearly all DI analysts responsible for military intelligence. Its mission was clear: to provide the DCI with an independent assessment of strategic military threats to U.S. national security interests.

The OSR began with approximately 180 personnel, most of them drawn from the ORR and the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI). The initial organization of the office reflected both the complexity of its mission and the ambition to cover the entire spectrum of military analysis. According to the 1968 annual report, the organizational structure included four main divisions designed to address Soviet strategic forces, theatre forces, military-economic analysis, and technical intelligence:

- Programs Analysis Division (military-economic analysis);
- Strategic Forces Division;
- Theater Forces Division;
- Regional Analysis Division.

The first division assessed the costs and trends of military programs; the second focused on missile and space systems; the third analysed conventional forces; and the fourth produced current intelligence. This structure shows that the OSR combined in-depth research with operational support, a characteristic shared with other analytical offices within the DI. OSR later evolved through the creation of specialized centres, such as the Military-Economic Analysis Centre (MEAC) and the Strategic Evaluation Centre (SEC), designed to support analyses of Soviet military expenditures and the effectiveness of Soviet forces (Vickers, 2019, 38-40).

The core activity of the OSR consisted in producing and contributing to NIEs concerning the strategic military capabilities of the Soviet Union. OSR participated in a series of crucial estimates addressing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), nuclear submarines, anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems, and the conventional forces of the Warsaw Pact. These estimates were often a source of tension between the CIA and the DoD as the military services tended to produce higher assessments of Soviet capabilities, while OSR analyses frequently proved more cautious (Vickers, 2019, 208; Steury, 1996).

A declassified CIA document referring to an internal professional seminar on biases in intelligence analysis, organized by the Centre for the Study of Intelligence in January–February 1977, illustrates—somewhat anecdotally—the differing views within U.S. intelligence agencies. According to one participant's remarks, the Soviet threat was perceived along the following lines:

- from a right-leaning perspective—the U.S. Air Force: "The Russians are not only coming, they are already here";
- somewhat less pronounced, the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the other military intelligence services: "The Russians are coming; they are halfway here";
- the CIA, positioned closer to the centre: "The Russians are coming, but we do not know when";
- the DoD, situated on the left of the spectrum: "The Russians are not only not coming, they probably do not even care" (CIA Document no. 8).

Over its fifteen years of existence, the OSR has also experienced a number of difficult periods and situations. These were generated either by the complexity of its responsibilities, by the demands of political decision-makers, or by its interactions with other structures within the intelligence community.

An illustration of the first type of challenge was the persistent lack of reliable data on Soviet military expenditures. The USSR treated such information as state secrets, and the official figures published by Moscow were considered by the CIA to be either insufficient or misleading. In response, the OSR developed its own estimation methods—including cost models expressed in rubbles—which enabled it to produce independent assessments of the Soviet military budget. A significant revision published in 1976 indicated that Soviet military expenditures during the 1970-1975 period had been underestimated, generating a major controversy both within the intelligence community and in academic and political circles (Firth, Noren, 1998).

In addition to its strategic estimates, the OSR played an essential role in providing intelligence support for the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) and the Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR) negotiations. The office established dedicated structures—such as the Soviet Strategic Forces Division and the Theatre Forces Division—to

support U.S. negotiators with precise analytical data on Soviet arsenals. This function of direct support for foreign policy gave the OSR immediate practical relevance in the eyes of policymakers.

With respect to relations with policymakers, an important role was played by Henry Kissinger, the President's National Security Advisor. He introduced mechanisms such as the National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) and the Defence Policy Review Committee (DPRC), which required much more detailed military analyses. As a demanding consumer of intelligence, Kissinger did not seek conclusions that merely supported policy decisions. Rather, he wanted CIA documents to include the reasoning behind their judgments as well as alternative analytical perspectives (Vickers, 2019, 59).

Finally, the relationship between the OSR and the DoD was characterized by constant competition. Divergences in the assessment of the Soviet threat were recurrent, and former office managers emphasized the need for the CIA to provide independent estimates to better serve the President and other decision-makers.

These institutional dynamics were compounded by political controversies surrounding the OSR's analytical performance. Particularly in the late 1970s, the office was criticized in certain political circles and in Congress for allegedly underestimating the Soviet threat. These controversies also reflected the inevitable politicization of strategic military intelligence in the context of nuclear competition.

In October 1981, DCI Casey abolished the OSR as part of a broad reorganization of the DI. The restructuring replaced the DI's functional organization (by political, economic, and military themes) with a regional structure, grouping analysts into offices dedicated to specific geographic areas: SOVA (Soviet Union), OEA (East Asia), NESA (Near East and South Asia), EURA (Europe), and ALA (Africa and Latin America). The majority of OSR personnel were transferred to SOVA.

ORPA: Consolidating the Political Analysis Dimension within the DI

Within the DI architecture of the 1976-1981 period, the ORPA can be seen as the political and regional counterpart to the OSR. While the latter addressed the hard dimension of threats to U.S. national security—nuclear capabilities, weapons systems, and military doctrines—ORPA

covered the soft and political dimension: the internal dynamics of key states, political instability, opposition movements, interstate relations, and regional trends with implications for U.S. foreign policy. What internal drivers led to the creation of this new functional structure within the DI? Why was such a structure dedicated to the production of political intelligence considered necessary? Once again, a brief examination—supported by declassified Agency documents—helps clarify the issue.

At the beginning of the 1970s, the DI faced a profound structural crisis in political analysis. Resources were fragmented across distinct organizational entities—Office of National Estimates (ONE), Office of Current Intelligence (OCI), Office of Basic and Geographic Intelligence (OBGI), Strategic Research Staff (SRS), and Propaganda Analysis Staff (PAS)—with overlapping responsibilities and significant gaps in in-depth political research.

The diagnosis of this situation is articulated in an internal memorandum dated May 16, 1973, drafted by Richard Lehman, Director of Current Intelligence, and addressed to the Deputy Director for Intelligence. The document notes the following:

> "The Agency is not well organized to perform these functions. Its resources are scattered among a number of components which, through chance or evolution, overlap. Some jobs are done well, some are overdone through duplication, and some are neglected. We suffer notably in research, which is given second place in OCI, misdirected in SRS, and ignored in ONE." (CIA Document no. 9)

The same document lists four major CIA functions in the field of political intelligence production—current reporting, estimative writing, research, and basic intelligence—observing that these categories were not entirely distinct and that their separation was largely arbitrary. Lehman also notes that among the six organizations with analytical responsibilities in the political domain, the only one "fully devoted to political research" was the SRS. However, its research concept was described as "badly distorted by its isolation from the intelligence mainstream," with an excessive emphasis on historical reconstruction and too little concern for relevance to political decision-makers (CIA Document no. 9).

The response to this situation came a month later, as reflected in another internal document. The memorandum of June 21, 1973, signed by DDI Edward W. Proctor and addressed to the Executive Secretary of the CIA Management Committee, acknowledges the existence of significant problems in the Agency's production of high-quality political intelligence. The proposed solution was the creation of an integrated structure—the Office of Political Research (OPR)—designed to conduct in-depth political analysis and research (CIA Document no. 10).

OPR became operational in the autumn of 1973, amid major institutional turbulence that complicated the process of consolidation. The Yom Kippur War of October 1973 and the subsequent oil crisis immediately mobilized the analytical resources of the DI, delaying the planned personnel transfers and placing additional pressure on the OCI precisely at the moment when it was expected to relinquish part of its capabilities.

The period 1973-1976 represented for the OPR a phase of gradual consolidation and continuous negotiation of its institutional space in relation to the OCI. The structural tension between the two offices—anticipated and conceptualized in the founding documents—manifested itself in practice: officers capable of conducting in-depth research were often drawn into the immediate demands of OCI's current intelligence work, while the division of responsibilities remained ambiguous.

Nevertheless, OPR survived this period of uncertainty and produced sufficient evidence of its value for the concept of a structure dedicated to in-depth political research to be reinforced in the reorganization that followed.

The structural reorganization of 1976, which reshaped the analytical landscape within the DI, also led to the reconfiguration of political intelligence (Overton, 1992). OPR was transformed into a new structure: The Office of Regional and Political Analysis (ORPA), which represented the institutional crystallization of the project launched in 1973.

Compared with OPR, the new office was larger and more structurally articulated, with distinct regional divisions, including a USSR Division, as well as divisions for the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, and others. It also enjoyed a clearer organizational position in relation to

current intelligence production, which had now been explicitly separated through the Centre for Policy Support (CPS).

The founding philosophy, however, remained the same: ORPA was intended to produce analyses that went beyond reacting to the event of the day, identifying structural dynamics and constructing coherent interpretations of how political systems and international political forces function.

The structure based on regional divisions enabled the office to combine the ongoing monitoring of political developments in its areas of responsibility with broader research projects extending over months or even years. The USSR Division, for example, periodically published classified analyses—such as the series *The USSR: Regional and Political Analysis*—which combined current intelligence with deeper structural analysis of Soviet domestic politics, the dynamics of Moscow's relations with Western communist parties, or bureaucratic disputes concerning foreign economic policy (CIA Document no. 11).

An emblematic example of the type of analysis for which ORPA had been designed is the ORPA memorandum of October 19, 1978, on the implications of the election of a Polish pope for the Soviet Union. Written shortly after the election of Karol Wojtyła as John Paul II, the document anticipated the medium-term strategic consequences of this event for the stability of the Eastern Bloc and for the dynamics of Polish domestic politics:

> "The selection of a Polish Pope, which reflects the uniquely vital Polish church, will make even more difficult Moscow's traditional attempts to bind culturally Western Poland more closely to the East, to integrate the Poles more closely into the Soviet-dominated bilateral and multilateral system of alliances, and to foster greater social and political discipline in Poland by consolidating the power of the Polish communist party." (CIA Document no. 12)

The events of 1979-1980 subjected ORPA to intense operational pressures that tested the limits of its organizational model. The Iranian Revolution, the seizure of American hostages in Tehran, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan created three major crises requiring in-depth

strategic interpretation. ORPA produced significant analyses on all these issues, but the pressure of urgency reproduced—on a larger scale—the structural tension already identified in the founding documents: when events accelerated, analytical resources intended for long-term research were inevitably diverted toward current production.

The reorganization that brought an end to ORPA occurred in 1981, with the appointment of Casey as DCI under the Reagan administration. Casey promoted a markedly different vision from Turner regarding the organization of analytical intelligence: less centralization, greater institutional agility, and a stronger orientation toward operational support for foreign policy. The 1981 reorganization of the DI replaced the NFAC model with a system of autonomous, interdisciplinary regional offices.

This second major reform in less than a decade confirmed that the structural tensions identified in the 1973 documents could not be definitively resolved through a single reorganization. The 1981 model of interdisciplinary regional offices addressed many of the same concerns, particularly the need to integrate multidisciplinary analysis and eliminate overlapping responsibilities. The reorganization reduced analytical fragmentation and clarified regional accountability. Nevertheless, the structural tension between operational urgency and in-depth research appears to have remained an enduring feature of intelligence analysis within the CIA even under the new organizational framework.

Structural Vulnerabilities of Intelligence Analysis

The institutional reforms of the 1973-1977 period produced an analytical apparatus more closely connected to the needs of policymakers. Nevertheless, three major episodes from the same period demonstrated that no organizational architecture can fully eliminate the inherent vulnerabilities of intelligence analysis.

The first episode preceded the completion of the DI reorganization. In 1976, an internal review of the Office of Strategic Research concluded that CIA estimates of Soviet military expenditures during the previous decade had been substantially underestimated. This did not occur because the Soviet Union had spent more than previously believed.

Rather, the problem lay elsewhere: the cost models used by analysts contained systematic methodological errors in calculation.

The revision generated a major controversy both within the intelligence community and in political and academic circles. Its conclusions were quickly instrumentalized by factions opposing the policy of détente, providing a strong argument for the claim that the CIA had chronically underestimated the Soviet threat (Firth, Noren, 1998).

This vulnerability provided the ground on which the second episode, better known and more controversial, developed. Also, in 1976, at the initiative of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB) and with the approval of DCI George H. W. Bush, the Ford administration authorized an unprecedented experiment: a competitive parallel evaluation of the National Intelligence Estimate concerning Soviet strategic forces and objectives (Freedman, 1997, 122-142).

The CIA's internal analytical team, designated Team A, was confronted with an external panel of experts, Team B, led by the Harvard historian Richard Pipes and including figures such as Paul Wolfowitz and Paul Nitze, selected explicitly, as the documents note, from analysts known for holding a more pessimistic view of the Soviet threat. Team B's mandate was to determine whether the available data could support the conclusion that Soviet strategic objectives were more ambitious and more threatening than those assessed in existing NIEs. Team B's conclusion—that the CIA suffered from "mirror-imaging", projecting the logic of mutual deterrence onto Soviet military thinking—proved rhetorically more compelling than Team A's presentation and forced a revision of the NIE toward what Bush, in his covering letter, described as "a harder appreciation of Soviet strategic capabilities and objectives" (Freedman, 1997).

The political consequences of the exercise far exceeded its analytical validity: The Team B reports became the intellectual foundation for the concept of the "window of vulnerability" and for the large-scale rearmament pursued under the Reagan administration. Later, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the opening of Soviet archives, many of Team B's specific assessments proved largely inaccurate.

The Team B case demonstrated how permeable the estimative process could become to politically motivated interventions, even within a formally structured analytical framework:

> "Members of Team B were deliberately selected from among experienced political and military analysts of Soviet affairs known to take a more somber view of the Soviet strategic threat than that accepted as the intelligence community's consensus." (FRUS 1969-1976, vol. XXXV, doc. 171)

The third episode occurred two years later and struck directly at the core of ORPA's mission: understanding the political dynamics of states of importance for U.S. security. The Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979 and the collapse of the Shah's regime represented the most frequently cited analytical failure of the period.

The assessment commissioned immediately after the Shah's fall, and prepared in spring 1979 by Robert Jervis and John Devlin as consultants to NFAC, identified the mechanisms behind this failure. The two concluded that CIA analysts had provided little information about the opposition, that senior officials did not systematically read the available reporting, and that until August 1978, the CIA had described its reporting from Iran as "first rate"—at precisely the moment when the Israeli embassy in Tehran was assessing that a violent regime change was "highly likely."

As in many other intelligence failures, the problem lay not in collection but in interpretation—a crucial distinction in the literature on intelligence failure. The intelligence community viewed Iran almost exclusively through the lens of regime stability, ignoring the religious dimension of the opposition, which was treated largely as an anachronism. The Shah had survived previous predictions of his downfall and was expected to do so again—and this assumption was never subjected to systematic analytical testing. The two consultants concluded that the judgments of CIA analysts relied primarily on their intrinsic plausibility, while alternative possibilities were not seriously considered (CIA Document no. 13).

Taken together, the three episodes outline the systemic limits of the period. The reforms implemented between 1973 and 1977 addressed

some of the structural problems of the Directorate of Intelligence (DI). The deeper ones, linked to the very nature of intelligence as an activity that is both intellectual and political, inevitably remained unresolved. This suggests that while organizational reform can improve analytical performance, it cannot eliminate the inherent uncertainty of strategic intelligence.

Conclusions

The period 1973-1981 represented one of the most dynamic stages in the evolution of the CIA's analytical function. Under the simultaneous pressure of an internal crisis of legitimacy, transformations in the strategic environment, and increasingly articulated demands from policymakers, the Agency was compelled to fundamentally rethink its analytical architecture. The declassified documents examined in this study show that the process was neither linear nor free of ambiguity. Rather, it appears as a sequence of institutional adjustments intended to respond to converging pressures.

The introduction of the NIOs system sought primarily to shorten the distance between intelligence producers and political consumers. From this perspective, Colby's reform brought a clear increase in flexibility and responsiveness. At the same time, however, the shift toward individual roles operating in direct relationship with the Director transferred part of the system's institutional robustness to the personal performance of the officeholders. The system thus became more agile, but also more dependent on the quality of the individuals who operated it.

The reorganization of the DI in 1976-1977 went further. If the earlier changes had primarily modified the interface with policymakers, this new phase addressed the internal logic of analytical production itself. The separation of current intelligence from in-depth research, the emergence of mechanisms for interdisciplinary integration, and the consolidation of specialized structures such as OSR and ORPA all point to a serious attempt at organizational modernization.

In practice, however, the tension between the pressure of immediate deliverables and the need for forward-looking analysis did not disappear. At best, it was managed more effectively. The three episodes discussed—the revision of estimates concerning Soviet military

expenditures, the Team B experiment, and the strategic surprise represented by the Iranian Revolution—are particularly revealing in this regard. They suggest that the limits of intelligence analysis cannot be explained solely by institutional architecture. Even within a reformed organizational framework, vulnerabilities persist, linked to imperfect methodological models, explicit or implicit political pressures, and the inherent difficulty of interpreting opaque and fluid political systems.

Viewed as a whole, the experience of the 1973-1981 period confirms a recurrent pattern in the history of the U.S. intelligence community. Major reforms generally emerge in moments of crisis and produce real improvements at the procedural and organizational levels. Yet they cannot fully eliminate the structural tension between analytical independence and relevance to the decision-making process. In the case of the CIA, this tension was not resolved by the reforms of the 1970s; it was merely reconfigured in a form better adapted to the context of the late Cold War.

From this perspective, the transformations analyzed here can be interpreted less as a definitive solution to the problems of the analytical function and more as a phase of institutional maturation. The analytical apparatus undoubtedly became more articulated and more closely connected to the needs of its consumers. But the profession's underlying dilemmas—uncertainty, the risk of politicization, and the difficulty of anticipating major political change—remained, to a large extent, the same.

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GAMES, EXERCISES AND SIMULATIONS

SIMULATING COMMUNICATION DURING BLACKOUT SITUATIONS: A ROLE-PLAYING GAME[1]

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Context

In an era of total digital dependency, the total collapse of our communication infrastructure is a catastrophic scenario that demands proactive planning. This paper presents the critical insights, operational breakthroughs, and strategic failures uncovered during a table top role-playing simulation that tested community resilience under a total grid collapse. By asking participants to navigate the immediate loss of cellular networks, internet, and power, the simulation aim to evaluate the viability of low-tech relays, emergency radio infrastructure, and analogue courier systems under intense time and resource pressure.

A blackout represents an extended and unforeseen interruption of the electrical power supply at a local, regional, or national level for a significant period of time, affecting infrastructure, the economy, daily life, and the functioning of institutions. A national blackout can be generated by multiple causes: chain technical failures (as happened in Venezuela in 2019), natural events, cyber-attacks (Ukraine, 2016) or acts of sabotage, human errors during maintenance operations (Spain, 2025),

[1] Disclaimer: the material reflects the authors' opinions and beliefs and does not represent the opinions, policies or the views of the Romanian Intelligence Service or the "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy.

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grid overloading and the occurrence of an imbalance between production and consumption (a risk announced in Romania during the 2025 Easter Holidays), or a combination of these factors. During a blackout, authorities act swiftly to manage the crisis, ensure public safety, and restore essential services. Institutions must demonstrate transparency, speed, and coordination in decision-making to minimize negative effects, and communication becomes vital for preventing panic, limiting negative consequences, and ensuring a swift return to normalcy (Honeyager, November 2, 2022).

Citizen behaviour during a 72-hour national blackout evolves rapidly from simple initial curiosity and logistical adaptation (seeking resources, using cash) toward a deep state of anxiety generated by the information vacuum and the collapse of communication networks. As the crisis prolongs, society polarizes between spontaneous community cooperation actions (sharing resources, protecting the vulnerable) and manifestations of panic or urban insecurity fostered by darkness and the lack of visible authority. These dynamic underscores that the successful management of a prolonged power outage depends not only on technical repairs, but especially on the government's capacity to maintain public order and deliver clear messages through alternative channels to prevent social collapse.

The role-playing game approach. To address these institutional and psychological vulnerabilities this paper introduces the role-playing game, *Communication Strategies in Blackout Situations*, alongside an analytical breakdown of its primary outcomes. The simulation of the game Communication Strategies in Blackout Situations was executed by 33 selected students representing eight distinct Romanian universities. The exercise was hosted as a core operational module during the Fifth Edition of the Strategic Communication, Digitalization, and Security Summer School held within the "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy from September 17 to 19, 2025.

The core value of utilizing a role-playing exercise lies in its unique ability to simulate and document emergent resilient behaviours in real-time experiences and enable researchers and practitioners to learn from these experiences. In this type of game, participants assume roles of

various characters as well as their duties and tasks as specified in a scenario uncovering institutional gaps, test alternative communication methods, and improve decision-making under high-stress conditions.

Aim and objective of the game

The aim of the simulation game was to explore the importance of strategic communication during a 72-hours nationwide blackout (without electricity, mobile internet and partial classical telecommunications) in a European country, with implications for national security. Central to the exercise was the breakdown in communication between authorities and citizens during a blackout, testing how both groups cope with intense time pressure, unpredictable variables, and a total information scarcity.

The key objectives of the simulation game were: identifying communication vulnerabilities and the lack of preparation; identifying alternative communication channels (walkie-talkies, satellite phones, and manual signalling when cellular coverage fails); developing crisis communication competences; understanding how citizens react under uncertainty, time pressure, and limited resources and what they expect from government during long-term power outages. The idea of the game was to demonstrate our hypothesis that in a modern society highly dependent on electricity, analysing the impact of a blackout is essential for developing strategies for prevention, efficient communication, and response.

The following introductory scenario was presented:

"Dear participants, please take your seats and listen carefully. We are out of energy!!!!!!!

You are the National Crisis Cell. Your primary weapon is not engineering—it is information. However, information is scarce. Your mission is to develop a strategic communication plan to manage public panic, secure critical infrastructure, and deliver vital survival instructions to the citizens using only non-digital, alternative channels. Time is your enemy. The stability of our nation rests on your ability to coordinate, react swiftly, and communicate effectively under pressure. Assume your roles. The 72-hour countdown begins now."

The participants should analyse the impact of a blackout on society (institutions/infrastructure/citizens) and the development of a communication strategy by a European government in the event of a 72-hour national blackout, highlighting the objectives of the communication strategy and the required concrete communication actions, the responsible institutions, and the communication method/ channel used (including recommended key messages).

Organizational details. The participants were divided into three teams of 10 to 13 people, simulating a national crisis communication cell. The participants were emergency managers from different institutions, organisations and companies involved in power, telecommunications, and other critical infrastructure. These entities play an essential role both in transmitting information and in ensuring a continuous flow of relevant data and information to the population, aiming to propose an efficient communication strategy in the given context focusing on preventing panic, maintaining public order, and guiding the population in the absence of digital channels.

The teams were representing the institutions responsible for ensuring effective communication. In this respect, each team could use various artefacts, such as an Internet-based power grid coordination system, computers with e-mail, phones, maps, and also communicate face-to-face and using a white-board, which they would not be able to do in their usual distributed setting during actual emergency event. Data collection methods included direct observation by two observers, traces of artefact use (telephone, white-board, Internet), and log-files of the incidents in the scenario.

The game was structured in four steps:

- **Step 1 (40 minutes debate in plenary session or in groups):**

The coordinator presented the context and the request for each team to identify the impact of a blackout on society/ individual level (minimum information was provided). The crisis cell had to establish in 40 minutes how a grid collapse instantly paralyzes modern life: a) economic and financial collapse such as payment and supply chain failures or business paralysis; b) social and critical infrastructure

disruption such as water and sanitation failure, transport paralysis and healthcare strain; c) psychological cascades such as the information vacuum, isolation panic; d) security and public order threats such as systemic darkness, resource contention and first responder overwhelm; e) citizen-level everyday implications such as domestic paralysis and total disconnection etc.

Step 1 primary outcomes from all of three teams:

a. *Economic and Financial Impact:*

- All areas involving connectivity and communication are affected (mobile phones are out in 30 minutes in urban areas, fixed networks in 4 hours, no emergency communications, cloud centres in 72 hours).
- Sudden interruption of POS operations, ATM cash withdrawals, bank transfers/operations.
- Production stoppage, disruption of supply and food distribution chains, spoilage of perishable goods, and economic losses.
- In the financial sector, possible cancellations of transactions, contracts, agreements.

b. *Social Impact:*

- Blocked access to basic services (water, heating, electricity), healthcare, public administration, and financial services.
- Increased vulnerability in defence.
- Increased risk of accidents in the road sector.
- Lack of energy and backup systems can cause panic.
- Prevents direct communication and access to remote communication services (social media and other information channels).

c. *Psychological Impact:*

- Chaos, panic, epidemic, perishable medicines and food, lack of access to vital resources either or improperly stored
- Local communities can become panicked, aggressive, chaotic, easily influenced leading to increased vandalism against institutions, store networks, etc.
- The blackout highlights dependence on interaction, support, security, routine, comfort, communication, and constant access to information.

- Communicate at regular intervals, encourage interaction between communications and mutual aid.

d. *Impact on National Security:*

- Increased vulnerability to external attacks due to systems operating at partial, not full, capacity.
- Internal vulnerability as there is a possibility of increased aggression fuelled by the crisis through the spread of false news and misinformation via alternative communication channels.

e. *Impact at the Citizen Level:*

- Health problems for some dependent on certain treatments and medicines, unable to travel (e.g., no elevator access)
- Vulnerable groups: elderly and sick people, pregnant women, children.
- Risk of vandalism and aggression towards institutions and store networks, supply chains; crime rates increase (video monitoring fails).

Briefing session and determination of supplementary documentation requirements for step 2 and presentation of different materials regarding crisis communication best practices.

- **Step 2 (discussion 80 minutes in groups):**

Having in mind the impacts they had to develop rapidly a communication strategy for a European government in the event of a 72-hour national blackout, highlighting: the objectives of the communication strategy, the specific communication actions required, the responsible institutions, the communication method/channel used and possibly recommended key messages. In principle, answer the following questions:

- What are the needs for information of the target audience/ audiences?
- What are the objectives of the communication strategy?
- What should be communicated to the public at this moment?
- In what form should it be communicated to the public and by whom?

Imagine minute by minute on the first day, then by the hour on the following days and fill in the following table building step by step the communication strategy. Assign a suggestive descriptive title to the strategy. The scenario included frequent updates on new problems or solved problems in the electricity grid, but also injuries and casualties to electricity restoration workers, media and political pressure, terror threat, demands of other critical infrastructure, and a simulated casualty in the team of emergency managers that was studied. Dependencies between electricity and telecommunications networks also demanded re- prioritisations in order to secure a synchronised restoration effort.

To simulate time pressure, the exercise coordinator introduced unexpected events (injects) at fixed intervals:

Day	Minute/ Hour	Assessment of effects and identification of information/communic-ation needs	The institution responsible for returning to normalcy and crisis communication (identify and assign the role of each institution to a team player)	Required communication action/backup communication tools (identify and analyse availability in the event of a power outage)	Communi-cation channel/ method based on target audience and accessibility/ availability (identify) and construct possible necessary messages
🕐 Day 1 First 12 hours action plan - Initial Shock and Information Blackout	Minutes 0–15	Assessment or notification of national power grid failure and identification of information requirements (what priority information do citizens expect).	e. g. assessment and communication		
	Minutes 15–30	Determining nationwide effects, specifically regarding communication systems.			
	Minutes 30–60	Nationwide impact assessment, with a focus on critical infrastructure and essential services.			

	Minutes 60–120	Social and psychological impact assessment. Total isolation found. Lack of communication leaves people isolated and vulnerable, driving potential social tensions.			
	Minutes 120–180	Water and fuel distribution systems are compromised due to the inability of pumping stations and refineries to operate without electrical power. Immediate measures and communication are vital.			
	Minutes 180–360	Determination of the need for effective crisis communication management. Internet and television networks cease operations upon the exhaustion of electrical energy storage sources in data centres.			
🕒 Day 2 – Stabiliza-tion and confidence building	Hours 24-30	Assessment of the population's state of mind and identification of information requirements.			
	Hours 35-40	Assessment of the spread of rumours and misinformation, and the need to counter them through rapid and accurate information on the situation.			

	Hours 40-48	Assessment of blackout cause. The collapse of communication infrastructures generates a dangerous information vacuum, fuelling panic and facilitating the spread of fake news.			
🕒 Day 3 – Recovery and recommendations	Hours 48-60	A preliminary report detailing the causes and measures taken is published.			
	Hours 60-71	A plan for the gradual reconnection of the grid is published.			
	Hour 72	Assessment of the blackout end, methods for situation evaluation, and adaptation. The blackout concludes with an official message.			

At the end of the simulation, each of the three teams must present to the evaluators: the exact list of how they transmit messages in each phase (e.g., Public Radio, MAI megaphones, flyers left in mailboxes by postal workers/firefighters); crisis messages and the official statement imposing traffic restrictions; the simulation of a press conference by the spokesperson of the crisis cell with a three-minute speech.

Step 2 primary outcomes from all of three teams: They had minimal information, and a one-page best practices guide for various communication scenarios during crisis situations such as: Build your plan. Understand and take responsibility for the issue. Take the initiative in communication. Adopt immediate measures but avoid risky or chaotic actions. Be transparent. Communicate effectively with your audience. Provide the public with updated information. Ensure that you do not disclose unnecessary information. All three groups were really

interested to cover the requirements, however they realized after almost two hours of gaming that a crisis cell have a real responsibility and a difficult job: to efficiently communicate.

➢ **Step 3 (30 minutes presentation of strategies in plenary session)**

They had to choose a name and a representative for the team and to present the communication strategies. Each group had 10 minutes for their presentation and for discussion. They were asked to not forget that they were the ones who represented the institutions responsible for ensuring effective communication in crisis situation. These strategies with three names: Team 1 – The Best; Team 2 – Alpha; Team 3 – Chaos.

Step 3 primary outcome - one of their communication plans:

a. Public information needs: what is the status of the situation, whether remediation work is ongoing, the estimated time for resolution, what to do, if necessary, how to behave to minimize losses.

b. Strategy objectives: to calm the population, to guide the population towards appropriate behaviour message: the situation is being solved message type: empathetic → conveying a sense of "safe & security", promoting population resilience to prevent panic.

c. How to communicate: by radio**,** the ministry of internal affairs uses vehicles with loudspeakers to transmit messages in the locality and convey measures existence.

d. When to transmit messages: according to sensory organs' schedule related to mealtimes in the morning → a more comprehensive package, followed by additional updates during the day (lunch or evening)

e. Communication channels: radio, vehicles with loudspeakers.

f. Institutions: Ministry of Internal Affairs (message communication and social panic prevention), Ministry of National Defence, Special Telecommunications Service, Protection and guard service, Ministry of health, Ministry of transport, Ministry of energy for network remediation, involvement of private companies in case of public-private partnership existence.

➢ **Step 4 (120 minutes plenary debriefing and team management optimization feed forward)**

Group debriefing: analysis of the exercise results, challenges encountered, and successes achieved (ways to optimize and feed foreword). During the simulation the staff that observes the exercise focused on specific patterns in behaviour, communication, artefact use, in order to evaluate the display of deliberate actions related to resilience by the participants. Those two observers acted as complete observers not participating or interacting with the participants during the simulation. The debriefing session started with the observer presentation of an overview of the planned and unfolding events of the game. The concluding remarks were that simulating communication during blackout situations through role-playing games was a powerful experiential learning tool designed to train crisis teams, emergency personnel, and the public on how to function when technology, power grids, and mobile networks fail.

Collecting the feedback: participants shared their experiences and proposed improvement suggestions (more time, specific roles, resource allocation and availability with impact on communication volume, etc.). In their feedback the participants highlighted that it was their local knowledge and experience from similar events what influence their decision-making and consequently information seeking.

Annex 1: Instructions for facilitators, observers, and rapporteurs:

➢ Recapitulate the theme and stages of the exercise whenever you find it necessary, reminding participants of the requirements.

➢ Intervene to encourage participants to be active, rather than providing them with ideas to complete the framework.

➢ Offer support in the actual completion of the framework if necessary, and in selecting a representative to present the results.

➢ Intervene if required to ensure they complete the entire exercise within the allocated time.

➢ Observe teamwork dynamics, difficulties encountered, and potential areas for optimization.

➢ Alternatively, remind them of the six principles of effective crisis communication: speed of reaction; correctness; credibility; empathy; respect; solution-orientation).

➢ Depending on how the team discussions evolve, you can unlock the situation by suggesting ideas about the key questions expected to be answered in such situations:

- Who is handling the problem?
- Who is affected? Is the situation under control?
- What can we expect?
- What should we do?
- Why did this event happen (facts will be reported and concrete data will be mentioned)?
- Did you know such an event could happen? Why it was not prevented?
- What else could go wrong?
- When did work begin on rectifying the situation?
- What do this facts/information mean, and what are their consequences for the citizens?
- What negative elements/data are you hiding?[2]

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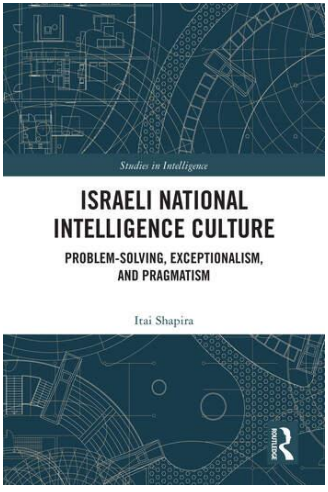
REVIEWS AND NOTES

REVIEWS AND NOTES (DOI: 1066766/RISR.2026.1.08)



Itai SHAPIRA, *Israeli National Intelligence Culture: Problem-Solving, Exceptionalism, and Pragmatism*, London: Routledge, Studies in Intelligence Series, 2026, 258 p., presented by Cătălin DUMITRIU

The events of 7 October 2023 constitute one of the most consequential intelligence failures in contemporary history, prompting an urgent and far-reaching reassessment of the conceptual, organisational, and cultural underpinnings of the Israeli intelligence apparatus. It is within this profoundly significant context that Itai Shapira's monograph, *Israeli National Intelligence Culture: Problem-Solving, Exceptionalism, and Pragmatism*, emerges as a seminal contribution to the field of intelligence studies. Published in 2026, by Routledge in the esteemed Studies in Intelligence Series[1], the volume represents the first systematic scholarly inquiry dedicated exclusively to the concept of Israeli national intelligence culture, thereby filling a conspicuous lacuna in both the theoretical and empirical literature.

Shapira, a retired colonel with over twenty-five years of service within Israeli Defence Intelligence (IDI) at the tactical, operational, and strategic echelons, occupies a distinctive epistemic position as a practitioner-turned-scholar. He holds a doctorate from the University of Leicester, where his research centred on the cultural determinants of

[1] Cover retrieved from https://www.routledge.com/Israeli-National-Intelligence-Culture-Problem-Solving-Exceptionalism-and-Pragmatism/Shapira/p/book/9781032779294

intelligence practice, and has subsequently served as a lecturer in the Master of Science in Intelligence Analysis programme at Johns Hopkins University[2]. The book is an expanded and refined iteration of his doctoral dissertation, enriched by post-October 2023 reflections that lend the work an acute contemporary salience[3].

The theoretical architecture of the volume is anchored in the concept of national intelligence culture, which Shapira conceptualises as the constellation of deeply embedded beliefs, values, norms, and cognitive dispositions that shape the manner in which a given polity perceives and practises intelligence. Drawing upon and extending the frameworks of strategic culture theory, the author advances a novel analytical model that integrates insights from organisational theory, political culture studies, and the sociology of intelligence communities. This conceptual apparatus enables a granular examination of the distinctive characteristics of Israeli intelligence praxis—characteristics that, as Shapira persuasively argues, are deeply rooted in broader Israeli strategic culture, historical experience, and national ethos (Chapter 1, 13-46).

Methodologically, the study is grounded in an interpretive qualitative approach, relying on thirty-four elite interviews conducted between 2021 and 2023 with serving and former senior practitioners from the three pillars of the Israeli intelligence community: IDI (Aman), the Mossad, and the Shabak (Shin Bet) (Introduction, 1-12). The calibre and breadth of these interlocutors imbue the analysis with a degree of empirical depth and insider authenticity that is seldom encountered in the published literature on Israeli intelligence. A complete roster of interviewees is provided in the appendix, further enhancing the work's methodological transparency (248).

The monograph unfolds across eight substantive chapters, bookended by an introduction and a concluding epilogue devoted to the October 2023 intelligence failure. The first chapter establishes the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study, situating the concept of

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[2] Biographical details drawn from the author's note in the volume (pp. ix–x) and from the Johns Hopkins University AAP Faculty Directory, https://advanced.jhu.edu/directory/itai-shapira/

[3] Itai Shapira, "Israeli National Intelligence Culture," PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2023. The monograph is an expanded iteration of this dissertation. DOI: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003485445

national intelligence culture within the broader comparative intelligence literature (Chapter 1, 13-46). The second chapter provides a structural anatomy of the Israeli intelligence system, delineating the respective mandates and institutional dynamics of IDI, the Mossad, and the Shabak, as well as the mechanisms—or lack thereof—of interagency coordination (Chapter, 47-72). Of particular note is the elevated status of IDI as the national intelligence estimator, a function that in most Western democracies is assigned to civilian agencies. The third chapter examines the historical, societal, and ideological origins of Israeli intelligence culture, tracing the formative influence of the perpetual existential threat perception, the pervasive securitisation of Israeli society, the ethos of military service, and the enduring legacy of national traumas—most notably the Yom Kippur War of 1973 (Chapter 3, 73-98).

Chapters four through eight constitute the analytical core of the volume, each addressing a distinct dimension of Israeli intelligence culture (Chapter 4, 99–122). Chapter four explores the marked preference for informal, decentralised organisational structures and the cultivation of bottom-up initiative. Chapter five examines the deep integration of intelligence production with decision-making processes and the attendant action-oriented ethos (Chapter 5, 123-148). Chapter six—arguably one of the most intellectually stimulating sections—analyses the tension between the traditionally intuitive, artisanal approach to intelligence analysis and the increasing reliance on advanced technological capabilities, drawing instructive comparisons with the intelligence cultures of the United States and the United Kingdom (Chapter 6, 149-174).

Chapter seven addresses the Israeli intelligence community's deeply ingrained aversion to theoretical abstraction and scientific methodology, a disposition that has simultaneously fostered a culture of pragmatic innovation and adaptive problem-solving (Chapter 7, 175-198). The eighth chapter foregrounds the normative ideals of contrarian thinking, moral courage, and individual accountability that are held to constitute the bedrock of Israeli intelligence professionalism (Chapter 8, 199-222). The epilogue (Epilogue, 231-247), devoted to the catastrophic intelligence failure of October 2023, serves as both a coda and a provocation, inviting the reader to interrogate the extent to which the very cultural traits valorised throughout the preceding chapters may

have, paradoxically, contributed to the systemic blindness that permitted the Hamas assault.

The central thesis of the book is both compelling and methodologically well-substantiated: that Israeli intelligence practices are not merely the product of organisational design or resource allocation, but are fundamentally shaped by a distinctive national intelligence culture characterised by pragmatic problem-solving, a conviction of Israeli exceptionalism, and a predilection for action over contemplation (see Conclusion, 223-230). While certain traits of this culture—such as adaptability, improvisation, and an entrepreneurial disposition—have historically contributed to Israel's formidable intelligence reputation, others—including overconfidence bordering on hubris, excessive reliance on technological solutions, and resistance to theoretical self-reflection—may have contributed to the conditions that enabled the failure of 7 October, as Shapira argues in the Conclusion (223-230).

A notable tension within the text, also identified by other reviewers (see Hamilton Bean's review in Intelligence and National Security 40, no. 4, 2025; and the INSS review at https://www.inss.org.il/strategic_assessment/shapira/), concerns the relationship between the research conducted prior to October 2023 and the trauma of that event, which appears to have exerted a retroactive shaping influence on the final manuscript. In particular, the book's emphasis on contrarian thinking and moral courage as defining features of Israeli intelligence professionalism sits somewhat uneasily alongside the documented suppression of dissenting assessments in the period preceding the attack—most notably the widely reported case of a junior analyst from Unit 8200 whose warnings regarding Hamas operational planning failed to reach the appropriate echelons of command (Epilogue, 231-247). This internal contradiction, while reflective of the genuine complexity of organisational culture, warrants more systematic exploration than the volume affords.

Notwithstanding this reservation, the volume's contributions to the field are substantial and manifold. First, it provides the first comprehensive empirical mapping of Israeli national intelligence culture as a coherent analytical category, thereby establishing an invaluable baseline for future comparative research. Second, the interview-based

methodology yields rich, practitioner-grounded insights that illuminate aspects of intelligence culture inaccessible through documentary analysis alone. Third, the comparative dimension—particularly the sustained engagement with Anglo-American intelligence models—enhances the theoretical generalizability of the findings. Fourth, the rhetorical questions appended to each chapter serve as effective pedagogical devices, inviting critical reflection on the relationship between cultural dispositions and strategic outcomes.

In terms of potential limitations, the work presupposes a considerable degree of prior familiarity with intelligence studies and Israeli security affairs, which may render certain passages less accessible to non-specialist readers. The proliferation of names, ranks, and institutional acronyms—while attesting to the author's intimate knowledge of the subject matter—occasionally risks overwhelming the reader. Furthermore, the epilogue on October 2023, while understandably included given the magnitude of the event, introduces a retrospective analytical frame that does not always cohere seamlessly with the pre-October research upon which the monograph is primarily founded.

In conclusion, Shapira's *Israeli National Intelligence Culture* constitutes an indispensable addition to the intelligence studies canon. It is a work of considerable analytical sophistication, empirical richness, and practical relevance, one that illuminates the deep cultural substrata underlying both the triumphs and the failures of one of the world's most closely scrutinised intelligence systems. The volume will be of paramount interest to scholars and doctoral researchers in intelligence studies, strategic culture, Israeli security policy, and comparative politics, as well as to practitioners engaged in intelligence reform and institutional learning. As the Israeli intelligence community embarks upon what will inevitably be a protracted and painful process of institutional introspection following the events of October 2023, Shapira's culturally informed analytical framework offers an indispensable lens through which to understand both the pathologies of strategic surprise and the wellsprings of institutional resilience[4].

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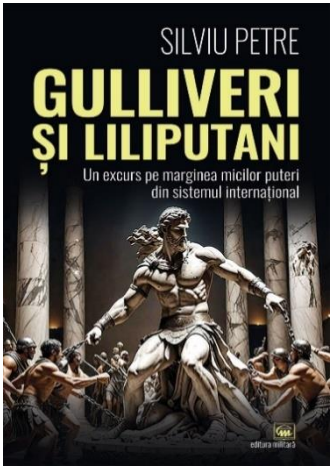

Silviu Petre, *Gulliveri şi Liliputani: un excurs pe marginea micilor puteri din sistemul international* (*Gullivers and Lilliputians: An Excursus on Small Powers in the International System*) Military Publishing House, Bucharest, 2025, 194 p., presented by Bogdan GHEORGHIȚĂ

Today, international relations are undergoing a process of reconstruction. The complex dynamics that followed the end of the Cold War raise a series of questions to which we are still seeking answers: How will the international system be restructured? Will China's rise materialize into a solid pole of economic and military power in the coming period, or will the Eastern colossus wait longer for a more favourable moment? What role will smaller states play: will they have a voice, or will they be reduced to "geopolitical silence" amid the confrontation of the major actors on the international stage?

For some of these questions, answers seem to be taking shape. For others, however, we are still unable to foresee a clear response. At present, we operate more with uncertainties than with certainties. We hypothesize, analyse, and attempt to anticipate developments. The violent conflicts erupting in various corners of the world are themselves signs of these ongoing realignments. Understanding the way in which the international system is being reconfigured is therefore a necessity not only for academia, but also for political decision-makers and institutions whose field of activity concerns this domain. Moreover, history teaches us that those who were unprepared for change have often suffered the most from its consequences.

The volume *Gullivers and Lilliputians: An Excursus on Small Powers in the International System*, published by Military Publishing House[1] in 2025 and authored by Silviu Petre, represents a comprehensive undertaking aimed at examining the current dynamics of international relations, clarifying emerging trends, and offering new analytical directions.

The analogy between Gulliver and the Lilliputians is a classic metaphor used in geopolitics and international relations to describe the disproportionate interaction between great powers (or superpowers) and small or medium-sized states in the international system. The work is divided into three parts, and its point of departure, as the author himself acknowledges, lies in an undergraduate thesis defended more than fifteen years ago—a sign that his interest has endured despite the multiple transformations that have reshaped the international arena. The observations underpinning the author's approach provide a rather accurate diagnosis of the world in which we live: the attempt of the nation-state to remain relevant today, the struggle among great powers to restructure the geopolitical axis, the ambition to transition toward a green economy, as well as ongoing ideological realignments and polarizations. One of the declared aims of the volume is pedagogical in nature, namely to assist students by clarifying concepts and trends within a field characterized by significant dynamism. The book first discusses the structure of the international system, then focuses on relations among powers, before introducing the issue of state fragmentation.

The author, Silviu Petre, writes with sincerity, openly acknowledging the limitations of the volume while also clarifying the importance of his undertaking. Following in the tradition of introductory works in the field of International Relations Theory published in recent years in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, yet focusing more specifically on power relations, Silviu Petre also allows himself the freedom of personal reflections woven into the broader argumentative structure. This feature further highlights the essayistic character of the work.

[1] The cover was retrieved from https://edituramilitara.ro/produs/gulliveri-si-liliputani-un-excurs-pe-marginea-micilor-puteri-din-sistemul-international/

Part I also introduces the principal aim of the volume: the investigation of the role and significance of small powers. Adopting the realist perspective within International Relations theory in order to engage with the problem of power, the work proposes a dialogue between the perspectives of Raymond Aron and Kenneth N. Waltz in order to provide answers regarding the manner in which small powers ("Lilliputians") operate within the international system. Proceeding methodically, the author offers convincing arguments for the selection of these two theorists within the context of his undertaking, as well as for the dialogue established between their respective perspectives. Moreover, the volume succeeds in clearly defining the concepts with which it operates, leaving little room for ambiguity. By testing his hypotheses through two analytical models, Silviu Petre concludes the first part of the work with an evident observation: "great powers participate alongside small ones in shaping a particular international order, albeit in an asymmetrical manner" (76).

The second part begins by identifying the themes that have structured the analysis of International Relations: the "end of history" and the "clash of civilizations." Drawing on the writings of Francis Fukuyama and Samuel P. Huntington, the author argues that these theories require updating. In this regard, the new structure of the international system is envisioned through a bi-multipolar perspective, with the United States and China occupying the principal roles, while being accompanied by secondary or regional powers.

This paper advances the argument that, alongside the nation-state, regions and transnational communities are becoming increasingly significant within the sphere of international relations. One idea put forward by the volume is the establishment, in Romania, of a group of experts tasked with proposing concrete ways of promoting the country's national interests within the context of a bipolar structure. In this respect, the author proposes two terms: "bipolarists" or "bipolarologists." The latter term—or perhaps an improved version of it—appears more appropriate, since the former tends to evoke associations more closely related to the field of psychology.

Another noteworthy idea advanced by the volume is the introduction of migration as a subject within International Relations

theory. Equally important, the work also addresses conspiracy theory in international relations. The military-industrial complex and the "deep state" are the two concepts associated with conspiracy theory in this context, and the text approaches the issue in both a courageous and balanced manner. The author examines the subject against the backdrop of a postmodern conflict that now permeates society as a whole. Last but not least, the volume also proposes a discussion on the intelligence cycle and international politics.

The third and final part of the volume is highly concise, consisting of only two relatively short chapters: "Putin's Last Crown Council" and "Ukraine and the Existential Embargo Imposed on Russia." These two chapters survey the issues surrounding the war at the borders of the European Union and propose several thought-provoking avenues for reflection.

The volume is characterized by a fresh and engaging style, both accessible and enjoyable to read. The inventive use of Hotpot AI software, together with the courageous use of concepts drawn from the social sciences and international relations, gives the work both fluency and intellectual dynamism. Although certain ideas might at times have benefited from further clarification or a more developed line of argumentation, the diversity of authors referenced, the structure of the text, and the clarity of the language all contribute to making this volume a valuable contribution, one that specialists in the field should regard as essential reading—political science students, diplomats, and any reader eager to understand why the world's military giants can often stumble in the web of normative and economic "strings" woven by small states.

The text also constitutes an invitation to reflection, while at the same time serving as a guide to the restructuring of the international system. The future is not merely uncertain; it is being reshaped before our very eyes, depending on decisions and circumstances. Both the Lilliputians and the Gullivers have a role to play. Our analyses seek to anticipate this future and render it more intelligible. Yet the contemporary world is characterized by a high degree of volatility. In the author's words: "It remains to be seen whether the persistence of nuclear arsenals and economic interdependence will be sufficient to avoid the Thucydides Trap. A world in which the Lilliputians numerically

outnumber the Gullivers may prove to be a more stable one, perhaps even one in which conflict remains marginal. At the same time, however, separatist tendencies, exacerbated nationalism coupled with populism, and the decline of interdependence raise serious concerns" (23-24).

The distinctive value of the volume lies in its ability to operationalize Jonathan Swift's classic literary metaphor into a rigorous, three-party structural framework for contemporary geopolitics. Instead of portraying small states as mere victims of great power rivalry, the volume argues convincingly that, within the contemporary international system, networks of smaller states possess the capacity to restrain, contain, and even paralyze an aggressive global power. Through smart strategies Lilliputians can influence the global agenda[2].

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ACADEMIC FOCUS

Erasmus+ Mobility Projects at "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy

In July 2026, "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy (MVNIA) will complete its 6th academic mobility project (KA131_2024) dedicated to the countries participating in the Erasmus+ programme.

With a history spanning more than three decades in the Romanian academic landscape, with a mission focused on (1) training human resources for the member institutions of the National Defense, Public Order and National Security System and (2) promoting security culture among civil society through university study programs, ANIMV is actively involved in increasing the quality of education both nationally and internationally, capitalizing on the uniqueness of the university study programs it offers. In this way, partnerships with similar higher education institutions in the European space contribute to streamlining activities, improving results and consolidating the European space of education in the academic niche represented by the field of intelligence, security studies and international relations. So far, through the Erasmus mobility projects, ANIMV has managed to consolidate its status as a trusted European partner and higher education institution focused on the development of students and staff, evidenced by the following academic milestones derived from the set objectives:

1. supporting participants to develop key competences and promote lifelong learning;
2. increasing the visibility of ANIMV among the European university community and facilitating the exchange of good academic practices with higher education institutions with a similar profile and training centers with a tradition in the area of training courses for professionals;
3. promoting diversity, inclusion and equal opportunities by organizing outgoing mobilities, for each of the four categories;
4. developing the capacity to offer study programs better oriented towards the European community—introducing new subjects taught in English, rethinking a master's degree program in order to increase its attractiveness—creating synergies with other Erasmus projects carried out at ANIMV level (Erasmus Mundus Design Measures, Erasmus Partnerships for Cooperation);
5. intensifying the digitalization process by transposing courses and support materials used in the traditional setting to the digital classroom;
6. mapping new possible funding opportunities offered within the framework of the Erasmus program and preparing project proposals with partners to create additional academic synergies.

The end of the KA131_2024 project represents another essential step in consolidating the internationalization process of ANIMV, with direct effects on the quality and relevance of the educational databases offered within the university study programs. During the implementation period ANIMV has reconfirmed its capacity to capitalize on opportunities for training, exchange and European cooperation, generating a visible impact on the development of the skills of teaching staff, administrative staff and students, and at the same time contributing to the consolidation of its position as a trusted partner and learning/research hub. Due to this solid basis, ANIMV will be able to build and expand future university partnerships, both in the area of classic university mobilities and in the area of broader projects,

It is beyond the shadow of a doubt that the 6th university mobility project has led to an increase in the prestige and visibility of the Academy at national and European level, has allowed the strengthening of European partnerships, especially with the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, has allowed the exchange of good practices, while facilitating the significant development of the professional, linguistic and intercultural competences of the participants.

Collectively, the 6 Erasmus+ projects that have been implemented so far have encompassed more than 20 beneficiaries, students and professors alike, who took part in different types of mobilities, as follows:

- training mobilities:
- traineeships;
- teaching mobilities;
- study mobilities.

The Academy will continue to disseminate and exploit their results in new projects, scientific publications, and by developing new study programmes.

Prevention of Weaponization and Enhancing Resilience against Security-related Disinformation on Clean Energy – POWER
Grant agreement no. 2024-1-RO01-KA220-HED-000245038
(2024 – 2027)

POWER Project addresses the fight against climate change by mitigating the effects of clean-energy-related disinformation on public policy adoption and implementation among both the target group and the general public. The project directly tackles two crucial societal challenges: climate change and the pervasive issue of disinformation, particularly around renewable energy. By engaging students, educators, and professionals across Romania, Malta, Spain, and Moldova, it aims to elevate media and clean energy literacy, foster a comprehensive understanding of environmental issues, thus enhancing resilience against disinformation.

The project consortium is headed by "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy and the partners are University Rey Juan Carlos, Spain, the University of Malta, Eurocomunicare Association. The project also has an associated partner The Center for Strategic Communication and Countering Disinformation, in the Republic of Moldova.

The project's first general objective is to facilitate transition to clean energy by fostering an informed fact-based public discussion on clean energy sources. In correlation, the second general objective is to strengthen societal resilience against the weaponisation of clean energy conversations by disinformation actors, and to contribute to the EU's policy objectives to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 and to generate at least 42.5% of the EU's energy from renewable sources.

These objectives have been broken down into six specific objectives: (1) to develop a lexicon related to clean energy and associated concepts in Romania, Spain, Malta and the Republic of Moldova in the target languages; (2) to map online disinformation modus operandi, techniques, and narratives in the four participating countries. The project will collect and analyse automatically and manually clean-energy-related disinformation narratives on three social media platforms. The results of both these research activities will represent the basis of the clean-energy lexicon; (3) to neutralize clean energy disinformation through dynamic science communication in Romania, Spain, and Malta; (4) to enhance clean energy and media literacy among students, teaching staff and employees of the partner organizations. These results will be achieved through organizing three, five-day, face-to-face Clean Energy Cafes as learning events which bring together students in the fields of security, intelligence, communication, social sciences, and sciences with teaching staff and employees in the same areas and are designed as experiential, learning-by-doing activities; (5) to foster a collaborative empowered community of practice among students in the partner organizations and local universities by organizing four three-day face-to-face Clean Energy Living Labs dissemination activities in each partner country. In these labs, participants will work together to design innovative, artistic, digital productions to increase clean energy literacy and preempt disinformation; (6) to create and populate digital educational content and tools addressed to stakeholders in the four partner countries. This e-learning hub will include a Practitioner's Digital Briefcase, an Educator's Digital Briefcase, digital storylines, online learning modules. These will foster the development of new teaching and learning practices through digital content and interactive learning resources.

At the heart of this initiative is the development of innovative educational content and digital tools. This includes a clean energy lexicon, immersive learning scenarios, and digital storylines, all designed to debunk myths perpetuated by disinformation campaigns about renewable energy. The approach integrates cutting-edge research,

participatory teaching methodologies, and broad dissemination activities, such as Clean Energy Living Labs and Clean Energy Cafés.

Key to the strategy is the cross-sectoral collaboration that leverages the expertise of the partner organizations with a proven track record in digital education, fighting against disinformation and environmental projects. By creating synergies between media literacy, environmental education, and digital pedagogy, POWER not only addresses the selected priorities head-on but also pioneers a holistic model for tackling complex global challenges.

EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation (EUKH)

The EU Knowledge Hub on the Prevention of Radicalisation takes up the legacy of the Radicalisation Awareness Network and aims to provide a set of resources and activities such as trainings, workshops and study visits, as well as mentoring and job shadowing for young professionals in the field of preventing and combating radicalisation. Further, selected experts will conduct research on specific topics in line with the project's general objectives. Two communities of experts will support the project: The Knowledge Hub Research Committee, composed of 15 internationally recognised researchers in the field and the EU Research Community on Radicalisation (ERCOR), a database of experts which will be called upon when their expertise is required.

The activities of EUKH will be grouped according to several thematic panels, which will represent the main directions of the projects and will be aligned with the priorities set out in the Strategic Orientations. The thematic panels will be composed of leaders and co-leaders, selected from the expert database, as well as invited researchers. The results of the activities of thematic panels will be summarized in annual reports.

Further, EUKH will offer tailor-made support services, requested by a member state, with the aim for addressing specific challenges in the field of combatting radicalisation. These tailor-made support services will assist Member States to implement EUKH results to their specific conditions.

The project was selected through a competitive tender organized by the European Commission. The project will be conducted over four years and has a total budget of 60 million Euros. The winning consortium is led by NTU Denmark and is composed of "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy (MVNIA), IPS Innovative Prison Systems (Portugal),

Polish Platform for Homeland Security, Fundación Euroárabe (Spain), Center for Security Studies (KEMEA – Hellenic Ministry of Citizen Protection), Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy, European Research and Project Office (EURICE, Greece), Deep Blue, European Centre of Studies and Initiatives (CESIE, Italy).

Romania is represented by the "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy, which will support training and research activities on the process and factors supporting radicalisation. It will also incorporate research findings in its B.A., M.A. and PhD curricula, as well as support the development of a common culture among practitioners dedicated to combating radicalisation.

CALL FOR PAPERS *ROMANIAN INTELLIGENCE STUDIES REVIEW*

"Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy publishes the *Romanian Intelligence Studies Review* (RISR), a high-quality peer reviewed and indexed research journal, edited in English and Romanian twice a year.

The aim of the journal is to create a framework for debate and to provide a platform accessible to researchers, academicians, professional, practitioners and PhD students to share knowledge in the form of high quality empirical and theoretical original research papers, case studies, conceptual framework, analytical and simulation models, literature reviews and book review within security and intelligence studies and convergent scientific areas.

Topics of interest include but are not limited to:

- Intelligence in the 21st century
- Intelligence Analysis
- Cyber Intelligence
- Open Source Intelligence (OSINT)
- History and memory in Intelligence
- Security paradigms in the 21st century
- International security environment
- Security strategies and policies
- Security Culture and public diplomacy

Review Process: RISR shall not accept or publish manuscripts without prior peer review. Material which has been previously copyrighted, published, or accepted for publication will not be considered for publication in the journal. There shall be a review process of manuscripts by one or more independent referees who are conversant in the pertinent subject area. Articles will be selected based on their relevance to the journal's theme, originality and scientific correctness, as well as observance of the publication's norms. The

editor evaluates the recommendation and notifies the author of the manuscript status.

The review process takes maximum three weeks, the acceptance or rejects notification being transmitted via email within five weeks from the date of manuscript submission.

Date of Publishing: RISR is inviting papers for No. 37 and 38 and which is scheduled to be published on June and December, 2027.

Submission deadlines: February 1st and July 1st

Author Guidelines: Author(s) should follow the latest edition of APA style in referencing. Please visit www.apastyle.org to learn more about APA style, and http://www.animv.ro for author guidelines. For more details please access the official website: **animv.ro** and **rrsi.ro.**

Contact: Authors interested in publishing their paper in RISR are kindly invited to submit their **proposals electronically in .doc/.docx format at our e-mail address rrsi@sri.ro, with the subject title: article proposal.**

Appearing twice a year, the review aims to place debates in intelligence in an institutional framework and thus facilitating a common understanding and approach of the intelligence field at national level.

The target audience ranges from students to professionals, from the general public to those directly involved in intelligence research and practice.

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