



Combat Mindset (CoMind): from an innovative project to a mandatory discipline

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Abstract

The article presents the evolution of the Combat Mindset Training for Romanian Military Students (CoMind) approach within “Henri Coanda” Air Force Academy in Brasov. Mental preparation for the battlefield is a tactical necessity for any category of armed forces and, for its inclusion in a curriculum that requires approval from the Ministry of National Defense, it needed a rigorous scientific substantiation. CoMind was the central theme of an inter-institutional cooperation project funded by EEA and Norwegian grants, as an optional training module conceived in an interdisciplinary manner (through the contribution of neuroscience, cognitive psychology, social psychology and martial arts). Taking over the model of good practices from the Norwegian cultural environment, adapting it to the conditions of the cultural environment and military organizational culture in Romania and implementing it, especially regarding mental preparation for battlefield or Combat Mindset (CoMind) as a subject or module, first optional, then mandatory, in the curriculum of “Henri Coanda” Air Force Academy, meant a long process, which, fortunately, can serve as a model of good practices regarding the implementation of research results in the higher educational process (BA degree)

Currently, CoMind is both a mandatory discipline and a research paradigm, embodied in scientific articles and communications and as the topic of bachelor's/dissertation theses.

Keywords: combat mindset (CoMind); mindset training; military students; military higher education; curriculum

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1. Introduction

1.1. National context

The Romanian Armed Forces has always had the trust of the Romanian population, and in last decades, is the first choice, compared to other authorities, according to national opinion surveys. For example, in July 2025, Romanian people entrusted the army with 63% for high or very high trust (INSCOP, 2025). This percentage alone is a remarkable one, compared with the percentages registered by other Romanian authorities and institutions, but also compared to numbers registered in similar surveys by EU or NATO. We consider that this high percentage was entrusted to the army institutions due to its constant concern for professionalizing the institution and multiple international missions.

If from an institutional point of view the risks regarding the Romania Armed Forces concerns budgets, equipment, capabilities -- here the aspects are quite old and are highlighted up to the level of the (former) Chief of the General Staff (Dănilă, 2021:18) or up to the political level --, the updating of doctrines and field manuals, the assimilation of the new technologies into the defense system, the configuration of operational requirements regarding the use of these technologies, hybrid risks, cognitive risks and risks related to political-military interference, in terms of military personnel is simpler to explain. In the past 30 years the main specific risk of military activity within the international missions is that of having posttraumatic stress syndrome (PTSD) and comorbid conditions (Andronic, 2021; Andronic et al., 2025). These kinds of psychological problems are defined in the Romanian Law (i.e. Law 168/2020, art 2., pct. i) as

“disorders developed by the participant personnel during military action, missions and operations, that trigger a significant disruption of thought, emotional management and behavior, that reflects an associated disfunction like emotional distress or significant disability within the professional, social and family roles, that are ascertained by the medical and military expertise commissions, by the occupational doctor and by the medical expert of work capacity, when suggested by the clinical psychologist and/or by the psychiatrist”.



PTSD affects between 5% and 18% of military personnel involved in international missions and NATO state members. When computing the actual number of what this percent reflects, PTSD could be registered for around 2750 and 9900 out of 55,000 military officers involved in international missions (Andronic et al., 2025). Still, in 2018, only 19 military officers were registered officially with the PTSD diagnosis, according to the minister of defense at that time (Sasu, 2018). Therefore, improving the way future officers can manage their own psychological state is a pressing matter for military students. Thus, our main goal within this project is to adapt an instrument relevant for psychological testing of self-control (psychological feature that prevents PTSD) and develop a training module for mindset control to better understand the psychological state associated with debilitating diagnosis (i.e. PTSD).

Starting with 1993, over 55,000 military soldiers participated in international missions, according to Army Press Trust, and were exposed to extreme and challenging events (Anghel, 2020). Romanian soldiers have now the opportunity to have multiple career opportunities, in both the national and international context where the militaries are deployed. Moreover, they can also work in other professional contexts, like private ones, before and after they finish their military service career (i.e. after the age of 50). Therefore, a military officer's career is considered by most as desirable and recommends militaries for other career opportunities because: a) there is a high trust Romanians have for the army, in general; b) there is a rigorous selection of militaries, including a psychological one, a medical and a physic one; c) competition is high and d) military students are given a motivating salary and they already know their uprising career evolution. Still, their career trajectory includes hardship and challenges. In fact, although most people see the military career as a sure and a lifetime job, the military service usually includes psychological risk in the form of different types of disorders (i.e. posttraumatic stress syndrome).

Nevertheless, a military career is extremely desirable for young people and there is higher competition in the military universities, compared to the usual national universities, especially for those from disadvantaged or vulnerable groups. In fact, students from



vulnerable environments represent 45 % of the military students enrolled in the Air Force Academy.

2. Literature Review

To address the issues regarding institutional risk factors and, especially, individual risk factors regarding military personnel involved in military confrontations - including aspects related to PTSD - it is necessary to consider adequate preparation for the battlefield, which should be carried out starting from the period of training in military institutions of higher education. The specialized literature on mental preparation for the battlefield or combat mindset is not very rich. Relevant in the field of mental preparation are also works or articles that belong to the field of individual security, implemented by police or law enforcement institutions, especially in the United States and Norway (Hynes, 2015; Boe et al., 2020).

Regarding the operationalization of the concept of combat mindset in the military environment and military institutions, the terminology has been used mainly in several scientific articles, without being the subject of a distinct doctrinal direction or in terms of field manuals, also in the United States and in several European countries. The concept has been used in various categories of armed forces, especially in the Marines (Singleton II, 2012; Levine & McCoy, 2020), so that later research would involve extending it to other military branches and specializations (Stump et al. 2017; Mair et al., 2025). The implementation of Combat Mindset training in Romania is a pioneering activity both at the national level and at the level of Air Force in general.

3. CoMind Project. Methodology of Implementations and Results

The project Combat Mindset Training for Military Students (CoMind) was funded through EEA Grants, due to the existing partnership between the “Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy; University of South-Eastern Norway (USN) and the Romanian Society of Military Psychology Association, and it was implemented during the period 2022-2023. The CoMind



project had three major outcomes:

2.1 Developing a training module regarding combat mindset for military students

This project was focused on the social inclusion of vulnerable groups, but also on democracy and citizenship topics because it will include a teaching module in a field with a strong inter-disciplinary component (i.e. combat mindset training). The second main goal of the project was to develop a training module for combat mindset (1 semester long training) and train 40 students enrolled in the bachelor and master studies of the PP (20 students / group training, 2 groups in implementation period).

As an intellectual product, the team had to elaborate a trainer's manual for combat mindsetting. To create the possibility that this training model to be adopted by other military universities, there was necessary to be organized a multiplier event where 50 participants teachers from the military universities will participate, and also other specialist from other military institutions (i.e. human resources department, medical department, etc.) (Boe et.al, 2002). Beyond the classic training of this program module, like the "on site" method, military students were provided with the opportunity to access online the training, through open education system and using an e-learning platform provided by Romanian Society of Military Psychology Association (platform integrated in www.militarypsychology.ro site and already includes various training materials). Support materials for the training module and also video resources and bibliographic resources were provided online. Based on the experience of this training module and collection of psychological and/ or medical data from the participants, a scientific publication was drafted and sent for publication, through the contribution of experts from "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy, University of South-Eastern Norway and Romanian Society of Military Psychology Association.

The curriculum of this module for continuous training was targeted and updated what has already been acquired as knowledge, like for example basic military training, but also new thorough and specific military training of the primary target group (military students). In the case of multiplier events, the project also includes staff learning mobility between the donor



and beneficiary countries, including the professional development of teachers. Specifically, these opportunities were accessible for on-site activities and on an e-learning platform, integrated on the website of the Romanian Society of Military Psychology Association. The staff from the military universities were coordinated by the National Defense Ministry and psychologists certified for practice in the National Safety and Defense Applied Psychology. Therefore, the practitioners can facilitate the collection of data using Multidimensional Self-Control Scale (MSCS) on a relevant group and refer to the training module in their professions.

2.2 Adapting in the Romanian language (from Norwegian) the psychological test “The Multidimensional Self-Control Scale” (MSCS)

The adaptation of the MSCS tool into Romanian was completed by the collection of in the military context (Nilsen et. al, 2002). The self-control scale and the combat mindset training are an absolute novelty within the Romanian university context and also in the military context. To our knowledge, there are no other available educational resources regarding the training of combat mindset and neither a psychological test as MSCS (according to the methods and techniques certified by the Romanian College of Psychologists). The assessment has been previously empirically tested (Nilsen et al., 2020) as: Multidimensional Self-Control Scale (MSCS) and the Brief Multidimensional Self-Control Scale (BMSCS). The 29-item MSCS consists of 6 first-order factors (Procrastination, Attentional Control, Impulse Control, Emotional Control, Goal Orientation, and Self Control Strategies), 2 second-order factors (Inhibition and Initiation), and a third-order self-control factor. Overall, results indicate that the new scales are useful measures that integrate recent theoretical and empirical findings of trait self-control.

Translation and adapting in the Romanian language were done by the experts of Romanian Society of Military Psychology Association, military psychologists practitioners, and in collaboration with the experts from University of South-Eastern Norway. The new psychological assessment was tested within the military students population, as well with the



help of other military experts and respecting the legal conditions specific to the country. The intellectual product is available as open educational resource to every practitioner certified to use these kinds of psychological assessments in the military domain. To ensure proper collection of data and dissemination, the Romanian Society of Military Psychology Association organized a multiplier event with 50 participants. Adapting and testing the psychometric properties of the MSCS was drafted in a research manuscript. The tool is available in Romanian online on the website of the Romanian Society of Military Psychology Association (SPM, 2024) and can be used by psychologists authorized to practice in the military field.

3. Conclusions. Curricular and Experimental Developments

Currently, “Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy is in the process of transitioning from the three-year duration of bachelor's studies to four years. In this context, the course Psychological Preparation for Combat – CoMind has been introduced as a mandatory subject in the curriculum and approved by the authorized structured of the Ministry of National Defense, in accordance with the legislation applicable to Romanian military higher education. Additionally, the interdisciplinary approach that underpinned the previously described project serves as the basis for the curricular redesign of the Psychological Operations course. The CoMind Laboratory is a research entity within the Faculty of Air Security Systems and is used both for experimental research and for the practical component of bachelor's and master's theses. To date, a number of 6 bachelor's theses and 4 master's theses have been developed using this approach. In addition, the “Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy organized and hosted an edition of *Redefining Community in Intercultural Context (RCIC)* dedicated to the issue of Combat Mindset, which resulted in a series of articles that highlight potential developments both in terms of research and in terms of curricular development and implementation of CoMind good practices in military higher education (Lesenciuc et al., 2023; Lesenciuc & Sauciuc, 2023)



At the same time, part of the CoMind grant team initiated another project financed from sectoral funds of the Romanian Ministry of Defense, regarding the extension of the CoMind platform with compatible and interoperable technologies for measuring cerebral and ocular parameters (EEG headsets, eye tracking technologies) for an accurate mental preparation for the battlefield. The project, entitled Measuring the parameters of mental readiness for the battlefield (MP-CoMind) emerged as a result of the need identified in the operational environment to reduce the time of reaction on the battlefield, to optimally respond to stressors and psychological demands generated by the uncertainty. The sustainability of this project results from the need to design and integrate equipment for measuring the parameters of mental preparation for the battlefield into the CoMind laboratory as a whole, in order to evaluate the progress of students in terms stressors, physical fatigue and mental demand, being useful to students from “Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy and other military categories in training modules outside the rhythm of current university activities.

Following the implementation of the initial project, but also following the implementation of the new one, a series of relevant papers have resulted (Boe et al., 2022; Andronic et al., 2025). They highlight, on the one hand, the utility and applicability of the CoMind laboratory as a research laboratory or as a platform for future studies on mental preparation for the battlefield, and on the other hand, as a platform for education, for assisting training of “Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy’s military students.

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