

# The main competencies of the strategic military leader for the 2040 horizon

*Las principales competencias del líder estratégico militar para 2040*

**Abstract:** Modern society is in constant transformation, in a complex and uncertain environment. The Brazilian Army (EB), aware of future challenges, developed the Operational Concept of the Brazilian Army (COEB) – Convergence Operations 2040 (EB20-MF-07.101), focused on joint, combined, and interagency operations. Quality leadership is essential for the EB to face these challenges. Strategic leaders must be high-level thinkers, combatants, knowledgeable in strategy and politics, with an understanding of human, physical, and informational dimensions, capable of anticipating the institution's future role. This article investigates the main competencies of strategic leaders in the context of COEB 2040, consulting experienced military authorities. These consultations helped identify essential competencies for future military leaders to respond decisively to emerging strategic challenges.

**Keywords:** Brazilian Army; COEB 2040; convergence operations; competencies; strategic leadership.

**Resumen:** La sociedad moderna enfrenta constantes cambios en un entorno complejo e incierto. Consciente de los desafíos futuros, el Ejército Brasileño (EB) desarrolló el Concepto Operacional del Ejército Brasileño (COEB) –Operaciones de Convergencia 2040 (EB20-MF-07.101)–, centrado en operaciones conjuntas, combinadas e interagencias. El liderazgo de calidad es esencial para que EB enfrente estos desafíos. Los líderes estratégicos deben ser pensadores de alto nivel, combatientes, conocedores de la estrategia y la política, con una comprensión de las dimensiones humana, física e informativa y capaces de anticipar el papel futuro de la institución. Este artículo analiza las principales competencias del líder estratégico en el contexto del COEB 2040, con la consulta a autoridades militares experimentadas. Estas consultas ayudaron a identificar las principales competencias para que los futuros líderes militares respondan de manera decisiva a los desafíos estratégicos emergentes.

**Palabras clave:** Ejército Brasileño; COEB 2040; operaciones de convergencia; competencias; liderazgo estratégico.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The emphasis the Brazilian Army Operational Concept places on the quality on the leadership of the Brazilian Army (BA) has configured an appropriate tool to enable service members to face the new challenges and uncertainties of future scenarios.

Military leadership actions require courage and integrity of character. Exercising direct leadership facilitates the removal of the barriers to understanding these premises since communication (a pillar of which consist of setting an example) is less subject to interference and manipulation. However, the strategic level includes variables that are more difficult to control: a more complex environment and physical distance increase the challenge of influencing behaviors and directing efforts toward institutional goals (Nunes, 2023).

At higher levels of leadership, strategic leaders are characterized by their duality as combatants and pundits of strategy and policy. They have a comprehensive understanding of the human, physical, and informational dimensions, showing deep appreciation for these aspects. They must be able to observe the current external environment to understand the future role of their institutions.

The ability to build and articulate strategic objectives toward a desired end state depends on these leaders. This requires safeguarding military leaders' adequate training and development to ensure the progress and adaptation of the organization to constant current and future changes.

In these situations, leaders mainly engage in long-term issues, such as the establishment or reinforcement of organizational culture and values, decision-making, and the prioritization in the allocation of scarce resources (Vieira, 2002).

The advances of modern society mean that we permanently find ourselves in a transforming, complex, uncertain environment that depends on the factors influencing its development. The current period has faced the rapid evolution of knowledge, a thriving technological revolution, the integrated use of information, and the permanent improvement of the management and leadership processes of organizations.

Regardless of the rapid technological evolution that has transformed the new information society, humans will continue to constitute the fundamental element to resolve conflicts (whether in crisis or war situations).

In this context, the BA conceived the first edition of the fundamentals manual of the Brazilian Army Operational Concept (COEB – *Conceito Operacional do Exército Brasileiro*) – Convergence Operations 2040 (EB20-MF-07.101) (Brasil, 2023b) to support the evolution of its Transformation Concept, which aims to forecast the future of the joint, combined, and interagency operations of its ground forces (GF) in the face of the challenges due to the complexity that will characterize the operational environment by 2040.

To adequately address all uncertainties in contemporary war, military commanders must acquire a set of skills than fit their level of leadership and the organizational structure to which they belong. Despite some possible overlap in the competencies required from strategic

leadership in relation to other levels of leadership, this context increases the need for such leaders (strengthened by their interpersonal, conceptual, and technical skills) playing interpersonal, informative, and decision-making roles.

Considering the challenges due to the complex and dynamic operating environment the 2040 COEB has forecast, the following research problem emerges: What competencies are essential for strategic military leaders to effectively lead the institutional transformation of the BA by 2040?

This study has eight sections, including this introduction. The second one describes the used methodology. The third one offers an overview of the world stage. The fourth one lists the concepts of the 2040 COEB. Sections five and six address the focal point of this study: strategic military leadership and the relevance of inherent competencies. The seventh section shows the results of this investigation. The last section makes final considerations and suggests further research on the subject.

Thus, this study aims to find the main competencies required of military strategic leaders in the 2040 horizon. It specifically seeks to understand the world scenario and its implications for military leadership, to explore the 2040 COEB concepts that impact leaders' training, to characterize the fundamental competencies for the exercise of strategic leadership, and to offer empirical evidence that confirms the most relevant competencies for future military leadership.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

An exploratory-explanatory methodological design and a qualitative approach with descriptive elements were adopted in this applied study given its focus on proposing subsidies to train and develop strategic leadership in the BA.

This research was developed on two complementary fronts, the first consists of a literature review based on classic and contemporary leadership authors, official BA documents (manuals, strategic plans, and guidelines), and the Brazilian and international academic literature on strategic competencies.

The second front involved an empirical investigation via a structured online questionnaire that was applied to an intentional sample of 10 active and reserve Army General Officers with proven performance in strategic leadership roles. This universe is composed of generals who belonged to the Army High Command or remain part of it, a group of notorious experience and institutional representativeness.

The questionnaire had two sections, the first focused on the association between competencies and the critical factors in the 2040 COEB and the second aimed to choose the six most important competencies for strategic leaders in 2040. The answers were organized in descriptive tables and graphs and were treated based on a simple frequency count. A qualitative analysis based on quantitative data was chosen as the small sample in this study makes statistical inference unfeasible. However, the analysis enabled robust interpretations due to respondents' expressive training.

Finally, the questionnaire was developed based on group dynamics in the BA's Politics, Strategy, and Senior Administration Course (CPEAEx/2024). The instrument (in line with the theoretical structure of this study) was validated in academia.

### 3 THE WORLD SCENARIO

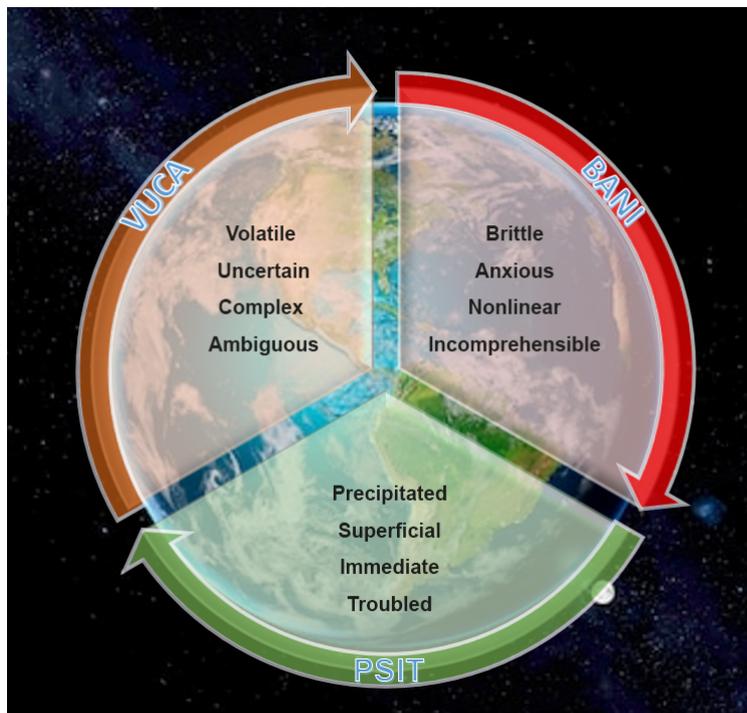
The world order is changing, increasing multipolarity and the number of countries seeking influence on the international stage. This dispute for power generates geopolitical tensions in several regions, such as the Middle East, the South China Sea, and Ukraine.

At the same time, global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, social inequality, and mass migration require urgent solutions from the international community. The proliferation of nuclear weapons and the growth of terrorism further increase global insecurity (World Economic Forum, 2023).

In the digital world, cybersecurity becomes increasingly critical since cyberattacks pose constant threats. Food insecurity, the water crisis, and transnational organized crime also put people's safety and well-being at risk, completing this dynamic and uncertain scenario (Spers; Carvalho; Tozzi, 2023).

The nomenclatures VUCA, BANI, and PSIT "worlds" emerged as attempts to classify the reality in which we live and highlight the essential competencies to address an ever-changing context. Figure 1 summarizes these acronyms, showing that the three concepts coexist in the current world.

**Figure 1 - Acronyms of the characteristics of the world**



**Source:** Prepared by the author (2024).

The acronym VUCA emerged in the military during the Gulf War in the 1990s. It refers to volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. It aims to describe possible war scenarios and contexts. After the September 11, 2001, attack, it also uncluded other expressions of power (Spers; Carvalho; Tozzi, 2023).

According to Spers, Carvalho, and Tozzi (2023), as of 2018, the acronym BANI has gained prominence as a new way of understanding a constantly transforming world. BANI consists of brittle, anxious, nonlinear, and incomprehensible. This new concept became even more popular during the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted the fragility of social structures and the unpredictability of events.

Nunes (2022) also suggested the acronym PSIT, which characterizes the current informational environment due to its precipitation, superficiality, immediacy, and turmoil. An environment in which the speed of information prevents critical analysis, the search for novelty generates superficiality, immediacy demands instant responses (leading to hasty decisions), and turmoil is linked to disinformation, which prevents constructive dialogue and facilitates manipulation.

**Chart 1 – Characteristics of the world in acronyms**

Acronym	Characteristics
VUCA	<p><b><u>Volatile</u></b>: The unpredictable and rapid nature of change</p> <p><b><u>Uncertain</u></b>: The lack of clarity about the future</p> <p><b><u>Complex</u></b>: A complicated world, with interconnected systems and multiple variables</p> <p><b><u>Ambiguous</u></b>: Situations can be interpreted in different ways, having neither clear nor definitive answers</p>
BANI	<p><b><u>Brittle</u></b>: a brittle and uncertain world in which everything can change at any time</p> <p><b><u>Anxious</u></b>: A sense of urgency in periods of uncertainty</p> <p><b><u>Nonlinear</u></b>: Changes follow unpredictable patterns</p> <p><b><u>Incomprehensible</u></b>: The excess of information generates ambiguity and different interpretations</p>
PSIT	<p><b><u>Precipitated</u></b>: Actions that disregard consequences; impulsive decisions</p> <p><b><u>Superficial</u></b>: Lack of depth or shallow analyses</p> <p><b><u>Immediate</u></b>: Search for immediate results without considering long-term consequences</p> <p><b><u>Troubled</u></b>: A state of confusion, turmoil, or disorder</p>

**Source:** Prepared by the author (2024).

The convergence of VUCA, BANI, and PSIC worlds (Chart 1) configures a scenario of profound complexity for decision-making. VUCA is intertwined with BANI, a combination worsened by PSIT.

The wide diffusion of the internet and social media brought several benefits, such as interaction optimization between individuals and accelerated message exchanges. The internet surely broke barriers and strengthened social ties, creating an innovative environment in which the sharing of data became essential.

According to Nunes (2023), the exponential accumulation of information disseminated via an uncontrollable mass of media entails discerning the essential from the superfluous, the significant from the irrelevant, and the authentic from the false or distorted. However, this task greatly challenges leaders since time for reflection is no longer proportionate. The pressure for immediacy and the rapidity and the volume of data available in the informational environment escape the traditional hierarchical logic, imposing on leadership a frenetic cycle of interpretation and decision-making. Thus, the ability to act with precision and timeliness becomes crucial for the success of communication strategies and effective management.

The world is experiencing a peculiar moment after the end of the Cold War in 1991. Despite the hope of a period of lasting peace, we are witnessing a significant increase in military investments. This arms race (driven by competition between great powers) echoes the ghosts of the past and generates apprehension about the future (Silva, 2023).

The coming years will witness the exponential increase in the military application of critical technologies, such as artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles and weapons systems, hypersonic missiles, cybernetics, nuclear propulsion, biosecurity, quantum computing, big data, machine learning, Internet of Things on the battlefield, laser weapons, electromagnetic weapons, among others. Such applications, associated with changes in the strategic environment, **will increasingly contribute to worsening power asymmetries**, constantly changing the character of war and the following evolution in the concept of military force use (Brasil, 2023b, p. 1-3, emphasis added, our translation).

Figure 2 shows the internal and external areas of instability and conflicts according to the Global Conflict Tracker (Council on Foreign Relations [CFR], 2024?). Note that this provision is updated in a timely manner, enabling access to more data about the respective conflict by clicking the orange circle representing its location.

**Figure 2 - Areas of instability and conflicts in today's world**



**Source: CFR (2024).**

Tensions and conflicts are multiplying across the planet. The lack of an actor that can stabilize and de-escalate crises creates an environment conducive to the threat of the use of force. States with superior military power use this tool to resolve territorial disputes and claim regions that remain subject to litigation due to historical and economic factors (Silva, 2023).

Geopolitical ambitions emerge every day, fueling global instability. The search for hegemony and the desire to control strategic resources put international peace and security at risk.

A world in constant transformation following social changes, generational differences, technological advances, and a dynamic informational environment profoundly impacts BA's other Armed Forces' human resources around the world. These variables interact in a complex way, affecting everything from the recruitment and retention of personnel to the training, operations, and organizational culture of these institutions.

In this turbulent context, achieving the situational awareness necessary for decision-making becomes an arduous task. The multiplicity of often contradictory and poor information makes it difficult to accurately understand panoramas and find the most effective directions.

The VUCA, BANI, and PSIT world characteristics (especially their instability scenarios) create a deeply complex environment that requires the ability to proactively lead and manage change, make the right decisions under pressure, and address ambiguity and uncertainty.

#### **4 THE CONCEPTS OF THE 2040 COEB**

The BA, a permanent national institution in accordance with a constitutional precept, that targets the evolution of contemporary conflicts, changes in society, and technological advances applied to defense affairs, which enables it to contribute to the guarantee of national interests and have capabilities that match the political stature of Brazil on the world stage (Brasil, 2014).

Based on this premise, the 2040 COEB (published in 2023) stands out as a beacon in its strategic landscape. In a changing world that intertwines multipolarity, uncertainty, and new challenges, the 2040 COEB takes the role of a compass, outlining how GF will apply their capabilities to fulfill their missions by 2040.

This document paves the way for the modernization of the BA as an urgent necessity, requiring significant investments in equipment, systems, and doctrines. It also reinforces interoperability with the other Armed Forces as a preponderant factor for the cohesion and efficiency of joint operations in the land, maritime, air, space, cybernetic, and electromagnetic domains and the physical, human, and informational dimensions of combat.

GF seek to act in convergence operations<sup>1</sup> to defeat the enemy based on an integrated and synergistic approach that combines the capabilities of several Armed Forces and government agencies. This involves physical force and an understanding of the human and informational aspects of conflict (Brasil, 2023b).

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<sup>1</sup> Convergence operations consist of the synergistic and multidimensional integration of military capabilities in a complex and dynamic operations environment to achieve decisive strategic effects (BRASIL, 2023a).

In summary, the 2040 COEB lays the foundation for the BA's evolution according to future challenges and the need to adapt to changes in the operating environment.

The panorama of future wars extends far beyond traditional armed conflicts between nations with common arsenals. Catastrophic terrorism and its serious consequences and asymmetric wars make up this complex scenario.

Asymmetric warfare (formerly called irregular) incorporates the old concept of terrorism, insurgencies, and the actions of non-traditional opponents. Asymmetric warfare has become even more challenging in the 21st century due to new insurgent groups, the proliferation of small arms, and the growing importance of information technology.

In addition to armed conflicts, some threats can destabilize the current model of society and individual freedoms. This challenging context also includes technologies that impact the information age and cyberspace and chemical, biological, nuclear, and radiological warfare actions.

The change in asymmetric conflicts significantly impacts global security, requiring innovative and customized solutions from the involved countries and entities. Cyber protection, for example, has become a priority for several nations, including Brazil, which has implemented strategic initiatives to protect its critical virtual sectors.

The current scenario has witnessed the intensification of competition between states (especially in science and technology) and the redefinition of regional power relations. Issues related to climate change tend to increase geopolitical tensions, whereas the cyberspace has become an increasingly crucial field of action, often generating instability on states, groups, and individuals. All these factors profoundly impact the preparation of GF to fulfill their missions (Brasil, 2019).

According to the 2040 COEB (Brasil, 2023b), in 2040, military operations will predominantly take place in highly connected urban areas. In this scenario, information and the public opinion will play primary roles.

The future operational scenario will be characterized by an increasing digitalization and automation of combat, significantly accelerating the pace of actions, which will reduce decision-making time, requiring leaders to act quickly and effectively in the face of circumstances. Lethality accuracy and selectivity will increase, and remote and autonomous platforms will monitor combat operations. This technological evolution may also increase the judicialization of conflicts since the global public opinion will more immediately and broadly know of parties' actions.

As per Figure 3, the 2040 COEB synthetically shows the character of future war, reinforcing the need for GF adaptation so they can operate in highly complex and challenging operational environments.

Figure 3 – Character of the future war according to the 2040 COEB



Source: Brazil (2023b), adapted by the Army General Staff (EME).

A complex web of interconnected factors will shape the future of military actions: from hyperconnectivity (which amplifies the flow of information) and urbanization (which concentrates populations in areas that challenge operations) to the relevance of information as a strategic weapon and judicialization (which imposes limits and responsibilities).

Expanded automation will bring new possibilities and challenges. The acceleration of combat will require instant decision-making and greater selective lethality. The constant monitoring of actions will make accountability a crucial factor, and as the transition of the battlefield into cyberspace and other domains will require comprehensive and integrated approaches (Brasil, 2023b).

The 2040 COEB defines critical factors as those that may significantly affect the BA's ability to fulfill its missions. A deep understanding of these factors is essential for effective strategic planning and sound decision-making.

Below follows a summary of the critical factors of the 2040 COEB (Brasil, 2023b):

1. **Public perception:** The lack of recognition of threats to national security after a long period of peace requires measures to make the population aware of potential risks;
2. **National integration:** Socioeconomic disparities and demographic gaps in some regions challenge national cohesion, requiring actions to integrate Brazil and strengthen its national security;

3. **Cybersecurity:** The protection of the Brazilian cyberspace is crucial for its national security, requiring investments in technology and training to ensure the operability of information and communication systems;
4. **Modernization of the Armed Forces:** The Armed Forces must be modernized, integrated, and combat-ready in joint operations to defend national interests;
5. **Technological autonomy:** Prioritizing science, technology, and innovation is essential to ensure the Brazilian technological and industrial autonomy in defense, reducing dependence on foreign technologies;
6. **Defense of maritime spaces:** The ability to defend maritime spaces must be improved, integrating the capabilities of the Brazilian Air Force and the BA to guarantee sovereignty in Brazilian Jurisdictional Waters and protect its interests in the South Atlantic;
7. **Complex informational environment:** It is necessary to intelligently navigate complex informational environments, combating disinformation and the war of narratives to protect the public opinion;
8. **Obstacles to doctrinal evolution:** Ensuring the effectiveness of the Armed Forces requires overcoming obstacles such as the difficulty in consolidating the joint culture in the Armed Forces; the tenuous alignment between State policies, budgetary constraints, risk aversion; and resistance to change.

The third chapter of the 2040 COEB, “Context of Future Operations,” lists future events with the following themes: higher competition between powers, greater technological dependence in all segments, worsening climate issues, increased polarization of the political environment across the world, increase in disruptive technologies in the military field, intensification of the use of space by large and medium powers, worsening of transnational organized crime, universalization of access to information, worsening inequality between rich and poor countries, and change in demographic profile.

By considering the evolving operating environments and emerging threats, the 2040 COEB fosters a culture of continuous adaptation and innovation within the BA, ensuring its future relevance in evolving geopolitical, technological, and social trends.

The 2040 COEB comprehensively overviews the challenges and opportunities that will shape the future of Brazilian military operations. Strategic military leadership emerges as a fundamental element to develop new capabilities and to adapt doctrines and strategies to this complex and dynamic environment containing multipolarity, uncertainty, new types of conflict, technological advances, and global interdependence.

## 5 STRATEGIC MILITARY LEADERSHIP

The BA defines “leadership” as the art of influencing and motivating a group of people to fulfill a common goal. Military leaders must be able to inspire confidence, make sound decisions under pressure, and maintain team cohesion (Brasil, 2011). This definition is in line with the most accepted definitions in the academic and business worlds.

Figure 4 represents the scope of military leadership, in which the human factor (symbolized by the soldier) serves as a basis, pointing to the direction in which the other capabilities must converge in harmony to be enhanced and achieve the common goal (characterized by the target).

The elements of ground combat power represent the essence of the capabilities that the GF employ in situations (whether in war or not). Namely: **Leadership**, Information and the Functions of Combat Command and Control, Movement and Maneuver, Intelligence, Fires, Logistics, and Protection (Brasil, 2019, p.53, emphasis added, our translation).

Figure 4 – Leadership and combat power



Source: Brasil (2019).

The essence of leadership lies in its ability to inspire and motivate others to accomplish what is necessary, which goes beyond mere obedience (Gonçalves, 2023). Based on influence, leaders guide their followers either by directive (clearly defining a path), participative (valuing collaboration and consensus), or delegated leadership (empowering individuals with autonomy).

At the command level, the ultimate goal is action: to accomplish the mission and get others to do the same. This responsibility derives from ethical imperatives and the nature of the mission, going beyond individual motivations and requiring an unwavering commitment to the well-being of the group and the fulfillment of objectives.

BA's Its 2024-2027 Strategic Plan (Brasil, 2023a) clearly shows its concern with leadership development in its professionals. Via the OEE 8 – Improving Education, Culture, and Physical Training Systems, Strategy 8.1 seeks to improve military professionals' training, focusing on leadership development and the internalization of military ethics and values. Moreover, strategic initiative 8.1.1.1 proposes the systematization of leadership development in the Army Education and Culture System training, continuing, and higher education schools. This initiative shows the BA's commitment to training leaders that can guide their troops with ethics, professionalism, and efficiency, in line with the values and principles of the institution (Brasil, 2023a).

In this alignment, the Army's Department of Education and Culture published, on March 27, 2024, the *Diretriz para a sistematização das ações voltadas ao fortalecimento da ética profissional militar e ao desenvolvimento da capacidade de liderança militar no âmbito do sistema de educação e cultura do Exército* (Guideline to systematize actions to strengthen military professional ethics and develop military leadership capacity within the Army's education and culture system), which aims to improve ethics and leadership (Brasil, 2024) by specific measures to strengthen ethical values and develop leadership skills in Army members by seeking to ensure that service members can meet contemporary challenges maintaining the highest ethical standards and leading effectively in all situations.

According to Costa (2015), effective commanders have a deep understanding of the problem at hand, an ability to visualize the desired outcome, and the skills to develop an operational concept that fits the mission. They clearly and precisely define the time, space, resources, purpose, and action of operations, skillfully guiding combat functions. Moreover, continuous evaluation (in which leaders would monitor progress and adjust strategies according to the needs and challenges) ensures the effectiveness of the mission.

Strategic leaders play a key role in large organizations. They influence significant personnel, structure the Force, allocate resources, and disseminate their vision. They also prepare subordinate commands and the organization as a whole for future challenges (Gerras, 2010).

These leaders operate in uncertain environment, addressing issues that affect and are affected by external events and organizations. They also consider the global context of the organization, including factors such as government concepts, budget constraints, procurement systems, civilian programs, research, development, and interorganizational cooperation (Senge, 1999).

As other leaders, they quickly process information, generate alternatives based on incomplete data, make decisions, and seek support. However, their decisions have broader consequences regarding space and time. They often see no immediate

realization of their ideas as planning, preparing, and executing their initiatives can take years.

[Leadership] is defined as a competence that gives the individual the ability to direct and influence other military personnel via **motivation, objectivity, and example**. The environments in which **ground operations** currently take place require GF element commanders and leaders to be extremely adaptable and capable of **effectively employing skills** related to critical thinking and creativity (Brasil, 2019, p. 53, emphasis added, our translation).

Strategic leadership is of paramount importance for the BA as its effective conduct depends on it. At this level of command, these leaders must have skills to influence other military leaders at several echelons. They must also be able to precisely and effectively achieve the established purposes (Gonçalves, 2021).

According to Vieira (2002), strategic leaders focus on the future. They need a vision based on their conscience, understanding of the external environment, and their natural skills, experience, and personal growth in leadership.

In an extremely uncertain, complex, ambiguous, and volatile scenario, strategic leaders operate in multiple time domains and show flexibility to manage changes. These experts in their fields must also consider the political environment during their decision-making process. These leaders should show excellent attitude and behavior with the public sector and the agents of political power.

Thus, strategic military leadership takes a leading role in the contemporary scenario, especially in the face of growing challenges and the complex nature of military operations. Leadership stands as the cornerstone of military success, going beyond mere command and control to become a vital force in conducting effective operations and achieving strategic objectives.

## **6 RELEVANCE OF STRATEGIC MILITARY LEADERS' COMPETENCIES FOR THE 2040 HORIZON**

According to Vieira (2002), a complex structure of knowledge (rather than only by their technical knowledge) defines strategic leaders. Their entire professional life, training in educational institutions, practical experience, and constant self-training build this structure.

For strategic leaders, this structure of knowledge goes beyond a mere set of information. It configures a formative itinerary in the strategic universe, a dynamic reference that enables us to understand the interrelations of cause and effect in complex and constantly changing environments.

According to Chiavenato (2008), competencies consist of multidimensional sets of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that, when strategically integrated and used, enable individuals to achieve their desired results.

While the core attributes and competencies of leadership remain constant, their importance can vary depending on leaders' responsibility and position. Proficiency in each of these aspects is individual and depends neither on age, job title, nor assigned position. Leaders of all skill levels should seize opportunities to enhance their capabilities. The true nature of leadership attributes and competencies lies in the incessant search for improvement (which has no endpoint). Regardless of their abilities, leaders can always learn more by increasing their adaptability, versatility, and effectiveness in influencing others and improving their organizations (United States, 2015).

Throughout their leadership journey, competencies take on different weights and relevances. At the beginning of one's career, they may focus on basic skills such as communication, decision-making, and problem-solving. Leaders' rise through the ranks increases the importance of attributes such as strategic vision, critical thinking, and the ability to influence.

Leadership development constitutes an ongoing process that spans staff's entire career. Effective leaders recognize the need to improve their skills, constantly seeking learning opportunities, which can take place by courses, training, readings, mentoring, and practical experiences (Chiavenato, 2008).

An ever-changing world requires adaptable and versatile leaders. They must be able to address complex and unpredictable situations, adjust their strategies and methods according to the circumstances, and effectively communicate with different audiences (United States, 2015).

One of the main goals of leaders involves influencing and inspiring their followers. Effective leaders can motivate their team to achieve challenging goals and overcome obstacles via communication, charisma, personal example, and clear vision (Vieira, 2002).

Gerras (2010) proposes that leadership competencies can fall into three main categories: conceptual, technical, and interpersonal. Conceptual skills involve those such as critical thinking, strategy formulation, and decision-making in complex contexts; technical skills refer to the command of methods, processes, and specific knowledge for organizational management; and interpersonal skills are the ability to influence, communicate, and lead people. Although relevant at all hierarchical levels, their manifestation varies according to the environment in which they work. At strategic levels, these competencies tend to manifest themselves in a more comprehensive and sophisticated way due to the increasing complexity and breadth of leaders' responsibilities.

According to the North American *Strategic Leadership Primer* (Gerras, 2010), leadership doctrine finds that leaders emerge throughout their careers rather than being born so. Such development takes place in several environments, such as military educational institutions, operational missions, and self-study.

According to that document, a meta-analysis of research on leadership development shows that successful transitions from the tactical to the strategic level has no basis in replacing

old competencies with new ones. Instead, leaders adapt and enhance their skills, accumulating experiences according to their leadership context.

Thus, the development of strategic leadership involves quantitative and qualitative growth. Leaders quantitatively expand their repertoire of competencies, incorporating new skills and strategic-specific knowledge. Moreover, their qualitative maturation of their skills increases their adaptability and flexibility to address the most complex challenges of the strategic environment.

In summary, the development of strategic leaders configures a process of continuity and evolution rather than one of rupture. Improved tactical-operational skills that fit new contexts serve as a solid foundation for building effective strategic leadership.

According to Gonçalves (2021), a detailed analysis of Army Generals, conducted via leadership tests, interviews, and reviews of their records, showed an essential set of attributes that define them, especially empathy, emotional balance, motivation, humility, strategic communication, socialization, self-confidence, dedication, courage, flexibility, self-improvement, example, and conservatism regarding laws, rules, and regulations.

To find the set of most prominent competencies in military leaders, the questionnaire—applied during Professor Marco Túlio Zanini<sup>2</sup>'s lecture within the scope of the Executive MBA in Administration—served as a parameter on Strategic Leadership: Politics and Strategy for student officers of the 2024 CPEAEx at the Escola de Comando e Estado-Maior do Exército (ECEME).

The proposed activity included presentations from six groups, who described and debated the following question: What skills should BA strategic leaders have?

The analysis of these groups' responses established the profile of BA's strategic leaders, the following competencies were the ones most often mentioned: communication skills, management skills, interpersonal relationship skills, negotiation skills, moral courage, vision of the future, ability to build consensus, critical thinking, strategic change management, systemic vision, leadership capacity, and ability to solve complex problems.

The following subsection characterizes the main competencies of military strategic leaders.

## 6.1 Communication skills

According to Chiavenato (2008), leaders' communication skills should include the ability to clearly, concisely, and persuasively articulate thoughts and instructions, adapting them to audience and context. Strategic leaders with this skill express themselves using accessible language that is appropriate to the situation, thus ensuring that their message is understood and interpreted

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correctly. They should also be capable of actively listening, considering different perspectives, and adapting their communication to build bridges and reach consensus.

## **6.2 Manageability**

Manageability includes planning, organizing, directing (leading), controlling, and paying attention to subordinates' needs according to their level of maturity. Strategic leaders with this skill set clear goals, adapt their leadership style to the competence and motivation of their team, delegate tasks according to subordinates' training, monitor performance, and adjust their guidance according to results, seeking efficiency and effectiveness in administrative processes (Hersey; Blachard, 1986).

## **6.3 Interpersonal skills**

The skill to build and maintain interpersonal relationships goes beyond having an affinity with people. It refers to the propensity to create positive bonds with individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, and hierarchical levels, building an environment of trust, collaboration, and mutual respect. Strategic leaders with this skill show empathy, recognize individualities, cultivate open and transparent dialogue, and invest in building a positive organizational environment (Gerras, 2010).

## **6.4 Bargaining skills**

This trait refers to seeking advantageous solutions for all parties, especially under divergent interests, skillfully using techniques of persuasion and argumentation. Strategic leaders with this skill find stakeholders' interests, propose creative and innovative solutions, negotiate firmly and flexibly, and build lasting agreements that benefit all (Gerras, 2010).

## **6.5 Moral courage**

Moral courage goes beyond difficult decisions. It refers to the strength of character to act in accordance with one's values and principles even under risk or pressure, defending what is right and fair with conviction. Strategic leaders with this skill take responsibility for their decisions, face challenges, inspire confidence and admiration in their followers, and serve as a model of ethics and integrity for the entire organization (Brasil, 2011).

## **6.6 Vision of the future**

A vision of the future goes beyond anticipating trends. It refers to the ability of forecasting a strategic vision for the future of the organization, defining the directions to be followed with clarity and inspiration. Strategic leaders with this skill create a shared vision that

mobilizes and motivates team members, set challenging and inspiring goals, and proactively adapt the organizational strategy to changes in the environment (Vieira, 2002).

### **6.7 Ability to build consensus**

This ability integrates perspectives and promotes collective decisions that are accepted and supported by all. Strategic leaders with this skill encourage open and transparent dialogue and active participation, seek creative solutions that reconcile interests, and strengthen collaboration and mutual respect (Gerras, 2010).

### **6.8 Critical thinking**

This skill involves questioning assumptions, finding what is relevant and seeking innovative solutions to complex problems with insight. Strategic leaders with this skill rigorously examine data, find flaws in arguments, formulate creative hypotheses, and propose effective solutions that challenge the *status quo* (Gerras, 2010).

### **6.9 Strategic change management**

This refers to a willingness to adapt to new scenarios and contexts with flexibility and resilience, skillfully leading the organization to a desired future. Strategic leaders with this skill create a culture of adaptability and innovation in the organization, effectively manage the risks and challenges of change, and implement new strategies that ensure the long-term success of the organization (Vieira, 2002).

### **6.10 Systemic vision**

In today's complex and dynamic world, systemic vision constitutes a fundamental tool for strategic leaders, going beyond the mere understanding of the organization as a whole and recognizing the interconnections between its departments, processes, and people as essential for effective leadership. This skill enables leaders to see the "big picture," anticipate the consequences of their decisions, and face an ambiguous and ever-changing environment (Senge, 1999).

### **6.11 Directing skills**

Inspiring, motivating, and guiding teams to success comprise the art of directing skills. Setting clear goals, wisely delegating responsibilities, and carefully monitoring progress configure the pillars of effective leaders. It also refers to the ability to create a positive and productive environment in which each team member feels valued and engaged (Brasil, 2011).

## 6.12 Ability to solve complex problems

In the face of the increasingly complex challenges of the modern world, the ability to solve these problems becomes a crucial skill for strategic leaders. Shrewdly analyzing, finding causes and solutions, making effective decisions under pressure, and successfully implementing solutions configure the characteristics that define leaders who can overcome obstacles and lead their teams to victory (Vieira, 2002).

The 2040 horizon emerges as a complex and dynamic scenario for the BA, requiring strategic leaders with a set of unique skills. The skills that define these leaders go beyond technical knowledge, encompassing a structure of knowledge that is built throughout leaders' professional lives and that adapts to the ever-changing demands of the world.

## 7 ANALYSIS

This investigation aimed to find the main competencies of strategic leadership in the 2040 COEB.

Such endeavor applied a questionnaire to general officers with professional experience in strategic leadership. This made it possible to highlight the eight most significant competencies of leaders who have reached the highest level in the institution.

The competencies participants could choose referred to those pointed out during the group dynamics in the lecture on strategic leadership at CPEAEx (item 6 of this study).

Note the careful selection of professionals who gave their opinion on the topic in this study (thus prioritizing those with extensive experience in the institution and in-depth knowledge of the analyzed phenomenon). This study included highly trained and engaged professionals, which ensured a richly detailed in-depth analysis and contributed to highly reliable results.

The online data collection questionnaire had two sections:

- **Section 1:** This section described the critical factors (item 2 of this study) the 2040 COEB listed and asked participants to mark up to two competencies of strategic leaders that were associated with each factor;
- **Section 2:** This section asked participants to mark the six most significant competencies strategic leaders must show to enable the evolution of the BA's 2040 Transformation Concept.

The statistical treatment of the collected data aimed to find the main military strategic leadership competencies in line with 2040 COEB projections by focusing on:

- Finding the skills most often reported by participants;
- Analyzing the relationship between competencies and the 2040 COEB critical factors;

- Assessing the most important competencies for strategic leaders within the BA’s transformation.

Regarding Section 1, Chart 2 shows the competencies that were most associated with their respective critical factors.

**Chart 2 – Critical factors and competencies of strategic leaders**

Critical factor themes	Competency most associated with the theme
1. Public perception	Communication skills
2. National integration	Strategic change management
3. Cybersecurity	Systemic vision
4. Modernization of the Armed Forces	Vision of the future
5. Technological autonomy	Ability to solve complex problems
6. Defense of maritime spaces	Systemic vision
7. Complex informational environment	Communication skills
8. Obstacles to doctrinal evolution	Critical Thinking

**Source:** Prepared by the author (2024).

The analysis of Chart 2 shows that “systemic vision” and “communication skills” are linked to two critical factors each. However, this fails to prevent us from stating that strategic leaders must use a wide range of competencies to face the critical factors in the 2040 COEB.

Section 2 aimed to find the most specific competencies for this level of leadership considering the 2040 horizon based on the sample of strategic leaders in this research. For this, it analyzed participants’ responses considering as a guiding criterion the parameter indicator that featured in 50% of answers regarding the most significant competencies (Graph 1).

The competencies with the greatest connection with the 2040 COEB critical factors in Chart 2 and the main competencies for strategic leaders in 2040 in Graph 1 shows that “communication skills” configures the only competency in Chart 2 outside the parameters of Graph 1. The relation of this competence to multiple critical factors and its transversality with the other competencies placed it in the main competencies for strategic leaders.

Thus, this investigation found seven essential competencies for the exercise of military strategic leadership in the 2040 horizon: systemic vision, critical thinking, vision of the future, ability to solve complex problems, strategic change management, communication skills, and moral courage. Based on the categories in Gerras (2010), this study analytically organized these competencies, classifying the first four as conceptual; strategic change management, as technical; and the last two, as interpersonal. This distribution shows that effective military strategic leadership in the future will require the integrated balance and command of intellectual, operational, and relational capabilities so leaders can consistently and quickly respond to the highly complex challenges that tend to mark the institutional scenarios of the coming decades.

**Graph 1 – Main competencies of strategic leaders**



**Source:** Prepared by the author (2024).

## 8 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the 2040 COEB horizon, the dynamic and improved combination of key competencies for military strategic leadership becomes essential to meet the complex and dynamic challenges of future operational environments. Strategic leadership requires a unique intersection of skills, including strategic vision, analytical ability, decision-making skills under pressure, and technological competence. Military leaders in 2040 will need to understand the changes in threats and defense technologies and possess strong interpersonal skills to lead diverse teams in joint and multinational missions.

Moreover, adaptability will be key in the face of an increasingly complex and unpredictable security environment. The effective combination of these competencies will enable future military leaders to anticipate, plan, and decisively respond to emerging strategic challenges, ensuring defense and national security in the evolving global context.

Thus, this study aimed to stimulate the debate on strategic military leadership and arouse readers' interest in the subject within the BA.

Above all, it is also important to highlight the contribution of this study to the expansion of the body of knowledge on the subject as it aims to increase assumptions that foster and serve training parameters for future strategic leaders, detailing the competencies required to conduct the best solutions to the challenges and opportunities in the 2040 COEB.

Finally, the current moment of intense and disruptive transformations challenge GF precisely by rupturing the linear patterns that have been considered until recently, making strategic leaders develop priority skills and better preparing themselves to face adversity and take advantage of opportunities, which is fundamental for the success of the BA evolution up to 2040.

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