



Fox or lion? Are we worthy descendants of the Marshal of Villars?

military-Earth thinking notebook

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Under the prism of recent commitments that combine technology, daring and surprise, cunning remains an inescapable principle that allows one of the belligerents to gain ascendancy over the other.

"All war is based on deception". This quote from Sun Tzu from "The Art of War", a treatise on strategy written in the 6th century B.C., still ^{retains} all its sagacity today. Faced with the increasingly common use of unconventional warfare and given the relative failure of military technology in counter-insurgency operations, it is crucial for Western forces to reappropriate certain inescapable operational principles where cunning is among the most illustrious.

Let us proceed in stages and first define the trick, otherwise known as, depending on the time and the country, deception or deceit. The trick is the fact of wanting to mislead the opponent by deliberately deceiving him and/or to train him to commit imprudence without there necessarily being deception [1]. 1] Thus, the use of trickery is considered perfectly lawful by the Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, even if Article 37 restricts its scope by prohibiting certain practices described as perfidious (for example, feigning non-combatant status). According to Sun Tzu, the art of trickery must be employed at all times (before and during confrontation) and at all levels - diplomatic, political and military. We will deliberately reduce our field of investigation to the use of cunning in the military context.

Cunning is a principle known to the general public, but it is no less enigmatic because of its evolutionary nature. These differences are also reflected in opposing schools of thought on the use and importance of cunning in operations. In a context marked by increasingly coercive land engagements, should cunning be considered an outdated process or is it still relevant?

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cunning remains an inescapable principle that allows one of the belligerents to gain ascendancy over the other.

Nowadays, as the use of force is very limited in our Western societies due to public opinion, the use of trickery may appear as a new mode of action allowing to keep the initiative on our adversary.

Cunning: a polymorphous principle, a source of incomprehension

Many doctrinal works, particularly those emanating from the U.S. military, define cunning as a set of measures designed to deceive theby concealing, manipulating or falsifying data in order to mislead the enemy and cause him to react in a manner prejudicial to his interests. In the understanding of this term, there is a real dichotomy between its passive and active forms.

The first of these forms, and certainly the best known of the two, is concealment. This is a simple procedure that has always been used by armies to conceal their true intentions. Thus, the belligerent who resorts to concealment aims at hiding the true one and keeping the enemy in ignorance. The preservation of secrecy thus becomes paramount. This translates in particular into the classification of documents to prevent the leakage of sensitive information to the public, as was the case in November 1942, when a New York newspaper announced the forthcoming invasion of French North Africa a few days before it was launched. At the tactical and operational levels, secrecy is achieved above all through camouflage.

Nowadays, concealment has become more difficult because of the means of observation and geolocation, but it is still of interest. During the 1999 bombings of Kosovo and Serbia, NATO's air force destroyed only a very small part of Serbia's military potential because of its remarkable mastery of the art of camouflage.

In the light of contemporary events such as the use of camouflage by Serbs in Kosovo in 1999 or more recently by AQIM fighters in the Sahel, the passive form of the ruse thus retains a certain tactical and operational interest for ground forces. However, recent years have shown that cover-up would remain relevant only if it were fully integrated into a broader framework encompassing the active form of the ruse, otherwise known as deception. For example, there is a very interesting case of active-passive camouflage that took place during the Second World War in the Pacific. In the fall of 1943, many aerial photographs were taken of the island of Rabaul, New Guinea, which was home to a large Japanese naval air force complex with nearly 110,000 men. These pictures showed a large number of model aircraft at various sites on the island. These decoys did not deceive the Americans, and the Americans shifted their effort to other sites. Until the end of the war, they used this complex as a training area for the bomber crews newly assigned to the area. In 1944, however, one of them hit one of the models and more than four hours of secondary explosions ensued. It turned out that the Japanese had used these inflatable structures representing aircraft as fuel and ammunition bunkers.

Churchill wrote in his "War Memories": "In war, truth is so precious that it must be protected by a bulwark of lies". Disappointment, an active form of cunning aimed at providing the adversary with the wrong elements, is a process that knowsToday, in the age of network-centric systems and information warfare, there is a renewed interest.

More complex than concealment, there are three levels of disappointment: strategic, operational and tactical.

We will confine ourselves to the operational and tactical aspects. As a preamble, it is important to know that this categorization depends on the effect to be achieved.

Thus, cunning operations at the operative level are intended to instil confusion in the mind of the adversary about the operation that is to be triggered shortly. The use of mock-ups and dummy structures is certainly the best known example of all. During the Battle of El Alamein in 1942, General Charles Richardson, a member of Field Marshal Montgomery's staff, devised a major deception manoeuvre to mislead Rommel. The objective was to make it look like an attack from the south. As such, the British deployed dummy logistic depots and artillery batteries in the vicinity of...a probable line of attack, while at night they concentrated their troops near the actual line of attack to the east.

At the tactical level, deception operations seek to directly mislead the enemy we face. This is what Hannibal did against Flaminius in 217 BC when he simulated a movement towards Rome to engage Roman troops on favorable ground.

To conclude this first part, and before evoking the two main schools of thought that clash about the relevance of the ruse, it seems interesting to dwell for a few moments on the most successful example of the ruse combining concealment and deception: Operation FORTITUDE which took place during the first half of 1944 in preparation for the Normandy landings. Thus, the 5th Wireless Group-electronic warfare created innumerable radio networks in order to simulate a concentration of forces under General Patton's orders facing the Pas-de-Calais and to deceive German listening stations (active ruse). At the same time, intensive bombardments of communication routes in the north of France took place from January to April 1944 in order to confirm the Germans on the hypothesis of a landing in the Pas-de-Calais. Finally, controlled leaks in diplomatic channels were orchestrated by the allied secret services. At the same time, the concentration of Allied forces between Plymouth and Newhaven was done discreetly in front of Normandy (passive ruse). Ultimate measure, during the night of June 5-6, 1944, thousands of dummies nicknamed "Rupert" were dropped north of the Seine estuary to definitively lure the OKW [2].

This audacious operation, although old, demonstrates the predominant place that cunning can still occupy in operations.

Cunning: a controversial principle opposing the school of the fox to that of the lion

From ancient times, long before Sun Tzu's writings reached the West, authors such as Frontin and Polyen opposed two ways of waging war, that of the fox and that of the lion. This opposition can be understood through the role that cunning must play in the preparation and conduct of operations. It is a question of knowing whether or not cunning has a predominant place or not.

First of all, it is necessary to tackle a commonplace that confines the fox school to the Eastern sphere. It is true that "The art of war Sun Tzu's " " is a must in any study of cunning, but it should not overshadow the many publications that have dealt with this subject in

the West, with authors as illustrious as Machiavelli or the Count of Guibert. The first Western translation of "The Art of War" was not published until 1772.

But what then is the postulate of this current of thought? It considers cunning as the basis of all victorious operations; it is the weapon of choice. In its simple form, this process resorts to the simultaneous use of two independent but coordinated forces, one whose mission is to divert the enemy's interest and the second whose mission is to conduct the main action. This two-tiered, comprehensive manoeuvre of concealment and deception is designed to deprive the enemy of its centre of gravity. The final objective is to force the enemy to engage in misuse following a feint. One of the most brilliant Confederate generals, T.J. "Stonewall" Jackson, winner at Bull Run in 1861, expressed this in an axiom: "Mystify, mislead and surprise the enemy". As Jean Guittou wrote in "Thought and war" to deceive is to alter the enemy's calculation of the probable" and thus hinder his willingness to use full force as advocated by the lion school.

Against the followers of the fox school are the proponents of force who consider the use of cunning as negligible or even useless.

For Clausewitz[3], the use of trickery is a waste of time and an uncertain value, it is the option of last resort. For him, cunning is merely an aid to force. The outcome of the war being decided above all by the test of strength and the decisive battle, cunning can only be for him an aggregate among others, but in no way a decisive factor. Thus, trickery can only be used in limited conflicts and certainly not in major conflicts where mass armies confront each other. The case of Operation FORTRITUDE, previously cited, however, demonstrates the limits of Clausewitz's argument concerning the use of trickery. Finally, the omnipresence of the author of "Of war" within mileage thinking has for a long time had as a direct consequence a certain disaffection for trickery. The land operations of the First World War, characterized by the systematic use of force, illustrate this most convincingly.

Antoine de Jomini[4], on the other hand, quite simply evacuates cunning as a parameter of the design and conduct of operations. Cunning is not important and does not deserve to be studied.

This last observation is interesting for more than one reason because it demonstrates the open-mindedness of Americans, who do not allow themselves to be locked into any intellectual straitjacket. Imbued with Jominian thought, the American armies are nonetheless pragmatic. Going beyond conceptual divisions, they have demonstrated on numerous occasions that they give a very large place to cunning in their operations, as was recently the case during the second battle of Fallujah in Iraq in November 2004.

Cunning appears to be a new mode of action to be favoured.

Let's face it. In recent years, terrorist organizations have been the most active users of deception operations. The operational and media success of the attacks of 11 September 2001 is essentially due to a remarkable mastery of the art of deception. Knowing how to spy (Echelon network), Al Qaeda used means that had fallen into disuse to maintain its communications while continuing to use current means of communication to intoxicate Western intelligence agencies. Thus, Al Qaeda used couriers to transmit its operational directives to the various entities of the organisation. In the register of concealment, the terrorist teams that perpetrated the attacks of September 11th endeavoured for several

months to blend in as much as possible into American society by adopting a Western style of dress and avoiding mosques. This camouflage process, simple as it was, allowed all team members to easily pass through airport security checks.

In the light of this observation and with a view to finding effective responses to the new threats, we should reflect on the relevance of reappropriating the know-how associated with cunning.

First of all, since the end of the Second World War, we have witnessed in Western societies a rejection of all forms of violence, hence a limitation on the use of force and a systematic search for a peaceful settlement. The weight of public opinion, which can very easily turn around after heavy losses, also explains this denial. Cunning therefore appears to be a means of compensating for this lack of force. It can also be a means of multiplying the force and winning the decision when the two belligerents have similar forces at their disposal. Concealment and deception can therefore contribute to the application of one of the principles of Foch's war, which is economy of means, since the ruse undoubtedly allows the leader to compensate for a lack of means or to allocate them to other missions. On 26 July 1712, Villars, commander of the last army of the kingdom, which was then in an extremely unfavourable situation, succeeded in defeating Prince Eugène at Denain thanks to the application of this principle, which resulted in the splitting of his army on several routes, thus misleading his adversary.

There are many examples of victories due to the use of cunning. However, are our armies trained in these methods? Contrary to the Israeli armies, but especially the American armies, which have raised cunning to the rank of a joint concept with Joint Publication 3-13.4 Military Deception, the French armies do not seem to have taken this notion into account in its entirety. With the exception of a few publications from military schools, there are no doctrinal documents on this subject. Furthermore, there is currently no training, instruction or at least awareness of the concepts of deception and concealment in initial training schools. Although some camouflage rules are reminded to students during the practical phases in the field, these procedures are by no means developed at the conceptual level and incorporated into the design phases of orders and the conduct of an operation. It would therefore seem advisable to reintroduce into the corpus of courses given in schools and training centres dedicated instruction sessions. It would therefore seem appropriate to reintroduce into the corpus of courses given in schools and training centres training sessions dedicated to the implementation of concealment and deception at the tactical level, with a view to disproving the assertion of Count de Guibert, which unfortunately remains as acute as ever: "We have, it must be agreed, no idea what kind of war we are fighting".

"It is what the enemy least expects that will succeed best," said Frederick II in the 18th century. Cunning, which encompasses a wide range of methods such as concealment or deception, is a concept that has recently enjoyed renewed interest due in particular to the development of asymmetrical conflicts, where the weak use subterfuge in order to annihilate the numerical or technological superiority of their adversary. Even if, in a high-intensity conventional conflict, cunning cannot be sufficient in the long term if it is not supplemented by force, it is nonetheless currently a factor of success in the conduct of the operations we are experiencing in sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia.

Faced with new threats whose contours are particularly shifting, our way of planning, designing and conducting operations must move away from pre-established frameworks in order to surprise the enemy.

Tomorrow we will win if we are cunning, daring, responsive and far-sighted. It is up to us to change mentalities and to educate the new generations in order to prepare them as well as possible for the commitments they will face.

1) A definition derived from and translated from "Primer on deception"(see bibliography).

2) OKW: The Oberkommando der Wehrmacht was the supreme command of the German armed forces from 1938 to 1945.

3) Carl Von Clausewitz (1780-1831) was a Prussian military officer and theorist. He is the author of a major treatise on military strategy: "... the most important military strategy in the world.Of the war».

4) Antoine de Jomini (1779-1869) is a banker, military, historian and theoretician of military strategy, having been part of Napoleon's staff and then that of Tsar Alexander I.

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