



## Remote Warfare(s) 1/2

Gaining in contact

Général d'armée Jean-Pierre BOSSER

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Engagement opérationnel

**This book, published by the Command Doctrine and Training Centre, is a collection of speeches given at the Military Thought Colloquium held on 31 January 2019 at the École Militaire.**

**The purpose of this book is to provide food for thought on the use of the Army and more generally on defence issues.**

### INTRODUCTION

On 31 January 2019, the French Army organised a military thought symposium which invited us to reflect on a particularly vast and contemporary theme: "War at a distance(s), winning through contact". This colloquium was preceded by a seminar designed to give students interested in military issues a better understanding of what is at stake in the current period.

The colloquium on military thought has now established itself in the intellectual landscape of the world of defence, by endeavouring to stimulate our reflection on varied and fruitful themes. In 2016, it was devoted to new forms of conflictuality, before studying, in 2017, the link between military action and sovereignty and, last year, the meaning of the notion of victory in the 21st century. This symposium, which is attracting a growing audience, has thus become the symbol of an army that is returning to strategic thinking, in a way that is perfectly consistent with the rebirth of the Earth Warfare School.

To open these proceedings, which are the written translation of the exchanges we had on the occasion of this day at the École militaire, I would like to summarize a few personal reflections that I shared with the audience at the end of this symposium.

### A THEME WITH MANY ENTRIES

The theme chosen this year appears at first glance to be relatively complex, no doubt a

sign that it is a well-chosen theme for a symposium whose objective is to stimulate reflection from various and complementary angles. I would add that the fact of having conceived, constructed and implemented the "In Contact" model is perhaps not unrelated to the difficulty I felt in talking about the notion of distance?

I am also the one who inspired the height of man in the law of military programming. As I develop it, between the combat dress and the renovated sportswear, we are far from war at a distance. I also wanted the warrior spirit to be the guiding thread for the year 2019, which brings back to the forefront traditions that are also quite distant at first sight from the theme of distant warfare. But as I began to think about it, I realized that distance was almost consubstantial with the state of being a soldier. In a way, I was even able to summarize my military past from the perspective of "distance".

When I chose this profession, one of my first highlights was the discovery of the firing range, with this recurring instruction: "from left to right, number yourself". The shooting range is also about adjusting the rear sight and the handlebars, according to the distance from the target you are aiming at. A little later, as a captain or corps chief, I had to coordinate short, medium and long distance fires. The appreciation of distance therefore finally appeared to me as a permanent necessity of the soldier's trade.

I then remembered a few close order sessions. That's what makes soldiers look good, and what makes them cohesive. It also reminded me of the first footwork exercises, where the instructor always reminded us to "keep your distance".

Then came the marches, for the beret (20 kilometres), for the kepi (30 kilometres), for the fodder (40 kilometres). It was a question of surpassing oneself, of getting better and better, by achieving greater and greater distances. It is also to do things you have never done before (parachute jumping, horse riding).

It also means conquering distances. Some people will see it as the silly games of the military, such as running as far as possible in twelve minutes with a watch in hand, or covering eight kilometres with an eight-kilo bag, in order to get ahead of the enemy on a point. Sports challenges fall into this category. It is the conquest of distance, because we are here to win. Even on a sports field, we're not there to play.

Little by little, as we grow older, the need to obey from a distance and then to command from a distance appears. To command at a distance is like trying to permanently reduce the distance. It means getting to know all your subordinates, understanding, by their voices on the radio, whether they are stressed or not. It means knowing the data of your environment and mastering staff procedures. It's about making decisions in war and in war.

What is the right distance? How much distance should be placed between the political and the military, for example? I encourage you to read General Henri Bentegeat's latest book, *Chefs d'Etat en guerre*, especially its last two chapters devoted to Presidents François Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac, which are very interesting on this theme.

Too much distance often leads to failure. It is a sign of error. A mistake, in topography, it induces twice as many kilometres to be covered on foot. Too great a distance, with one's men, towards one's leaders or political power, can also be a sign of failure, a difficulty to exchange.

Finally, war at a distance can be a proxy war. This notion allows me to evoke here the robots, whether they are assisted robots or autonomous robots, these two categories should obviously not be confused.

What is the right distance? It is difficult to decide for an unambiguous option. Circumstances dictate. As Chief of the Land Staff, I'm thinking about what will change (regardless of doctrine and capabilities) this de facto distance in our operational commitments. Will it change the profile of tomorrow's leader?

In this respect, comparisons with other trades have their limits. Of course, it is possible for a surgeon to operate at a distance. While he has many tools at his disposal to do so, the person being operated on does not have the right to speak. Remote military operations represent a confrontation of two wills, which is not quite the same thing. Faced with a resolute, even fanatical enemy, the decision is not taken in the same way.

It is also a question of distance and time. Today, satellite links make it possible to erase the notion of distance in a spectacular way. You can be very close and very distant. We are lucky enough to be able to talk to our African comrades, without necessarily having our feet on the same ground. There are nationalities in Africa who cannot understand each other, even face to face, because they cannot speak a common language.

**Since the expression "in contact" refers to both confrontation and cohesion, it seems interesting to me to reflect on what this notion of distance implies in the two fields of relations with the enemy and relations between friends, before talking about logistics and command.**

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**Title :** Général d'armée Jean-Pierre BOSSER

**Author (s) :** Général d'armée Jean-Pierre BOSSER

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