



## Remote Warfare(s) 2/2

Gaining in contact

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Engagement opérationnel

### THE CHALLENGES POSED BY THE NOTION OF DISTANCE

#### Distance, against who?

**When facing an opponent, making contact means abolishing, at least partially, the distance. Our recent engagements remind us that in order to track down a determined opponent on difficult terrain, it is sometimes necessary to go as far as hand-to-hand combat, and therefore to go to zero distance. However, even in contact, good soldiers know that they must keep a distance, which will then be called retreat, composure and discernment, in order to provide a firm, safe, appropriate and proportionate response - as we have seen recently on national territory.**

In the same way, strategy is theory and practice in contact with another, who is proactive (he has an intention) and reactive: my own intentions and behaviours will lead to an imperfectly predictable reaction on his part.

Knowing the other is therefore crucial. In Future Land Action<sup>1</sup>We have translated this imperative into "understanding of the other", which highlights eight factors of operational superiority. To me, while remote intelligence gathering often provides the means to know how to get close and understand the other, there is no substitute for proximity (feeling the threat, sensing the adversary, and gaining a true understanding of the other). I have had the opportunity to stress the importance of tactical level intelligence, field intelligence, which must complement in operation the intelligence provided by highly sophisticated sensors. This is the raison d'être of the intelligence pillar of the new "In Touch" model.

#### Distance, with whom?

Distance can be a challenge for our cohesion and from the point of view of our relations with our partners. Between comrades wearing the same uniform, being in contact means wanting to abolish distances of all kinds, be they social, of origin or other, the aim being to live a true brotherhood of arms, based in particular on proximity.

In the Army, this abolition of distances is lived with simplicity on a daily basis. It is the result of local human resources management. These are good intercategorical relations. It is also a high level of confidence in the command, both in conducting operations and in dealing with day-to-day difficulties. However, even in contact with his brothers in arms, I hope that a soldier does not dissolve 100% in a collective. Each soldier retains his own personality, individual conscience and inalienable dignity.

The Green Paper on the exercise of the profession of arms<sup>2</sup> - which the Army has just reissued - rightly emphasises the share of responsibility and individual freedom that still falls to each soldier, even if he was a member of a group. So there is still a distance, that of conscience. This is reflected in the rules of engagement in combat.

Between partners who share the same interests or are fighting the same adversary, the notion of distance gives rise to another reflection, the one that has been evoked through the operational military partnership, which is part of the global strategy desired by our President of the Republic. The operational military partnership is anything but a form of proxy warfare. Today, it is an association. Tomorrow it may be integration. It will never be a remote war. Let us not lose sight of the fact that the credibility and legitimacy of the operational military partnership rests on the ability to accompany our partners in combat, which cannot be done at a distance.

In the way we fight, we will no doubt have to combine distances. In terms of the operational use of forces, the notion of distance leads to the classic debate between strategies that focus on neutralizing the adversary and those that favour control of the environment. It is reasonable to assume that the neutralisation of the adversary can be carried out at a distance, whereas control of the environment involves contact.

This debate was widely discussed at the time of Afghanistan: some advocated counter-terrorism while others argued for counter-insurgency. In reality, a strategy of neutralizing the adversary does not always exonerate contact. Conversely, a strategy of controlling the environment can also be carried out remotely. If we think, of course, of cyberspace, some of us here have also experienced civil-military actions using radio in Kosovo or leafleting in Kurdistan. In a strategy that is intended to be global, which can alternate between neutralising the adversary and controlling the environment, it will be necessary to be able to combine actions from near and far.

I am also thinking of the Scorpion programme. The Scorpion collaborative combat will indeed change our concept of distance. It will offer unprecedented convergence and dispersion capabilities, it will speed up the integration of indirect fire, wherever it comes from, and finally it should facilitate the composition of ad hoc tactical packages. I therefore confirm here what I said last year at this time: I think we are going to have to revise our principles of warfare. The concentration of efforts will be more about effects than about means, and the economy of forces will certainly take on a new dimension.

## **Distance and logistics**

The war is also won thanks to our logisticians. The spread of forces, the dispersal of our

forces and the lengthening of our theatres of operations lead to logistical tensions. I absolutely do not believe in power projection without force projection.

Tomorrow as today, distance will therefore challenge logistics to preserve the mobility of forces and the continuity of flows to and within theatres. Foreseeable developments in this area are pushing us to develop our capabilities to secure, in a dynamic manner, routes, networks and flows, whether terrestrial or intangible. It also prompts us to seek a minimal, efficient and appropriate physical and logistical footprint.

### **Distance and command**

The first thing that strikes one is the crushing of the distances between the strategic, operational and tactical levels of warfare. We all have in mind this photo from 2011 in which we see Barack Obama, surrounded by high civil and military authorities, watching live from a war room in Washington the operation that led to the neutralization of Osama Bin Laden. This image has become the symbol of the ability of the political and strategic level to order and monitor in real time the tactical details of an operation.

This capability obviously has advantages, in the verticality that is implemented. It also presents risks, in particular those of diluting the effectiveness or working methods of our headquarters. The Army continues to believe in the subsidiarity of the different levels of command. In high-intensity situations, the question does not even arise. The corollary of this subsidiarity is the performance of the operational and tactical commands. This is why we have put the Earth Warfare School back on the map.

Ethical issues are not absent from this field of reflection. The history of weapons technology, from the invention of the jet weapon to the invention of the intercontinental missile, including gunpowder, can be read as an attempt to increase the soldier's reach so that he can reach the enemy before the enemy is able to do so.

What seems new to me today is the addition of an extra interval: to the distance that is the range - the distance from the weapon to its target - is now added the distance between the operator and his weapon. Some might imagine that the progress of digitisation makes it possible to envisage the realisation of an old dream: waging war at home, without risk or limitation of range.

This remote warfare is attractive on paper but raises fundamental questions. Who is responsible? Who makes the decision? Who bears the consequences? Let us return to the medical analogy. If you are operated on by a robot and an error occurs during the operation, who can you turn to?

The Army is opposed to the myth of a clean war, which would make the use of armed force more acceptable to the public and more tempting to our political leaders. Through the spirit of war, we wish to recall military honour. Without naivety, this honour, the symbol of France, is based on the fighter's acceptance of the supreme risk, for others but also for himself. Therein lies the legitimacy of the exorbitant right he is given to kill his adversary if the mission so requires. A war conducted entirely at a distance would be tantamount to projecting power without projecting vulnerability. In other words, the only vulnerability in this type of engagement would be that of an enemy reduced to the status of a target, which raises a major ethical problem.

This is one of the reasons why I wanted the army to reissue the Green Paper, which aims to redefine and reaffirm our concept of warrior honour, otherwise the soldiers in a war

conducted entirely at a safe distance would be nothing more than technicians of death.

## **CONCLUSION**

No matter how advanced technology and artificial intelligence may be, no matter how advanced, warfare will never be an exact science. The spirit of finesse and the fog of war will remain disturbing elements in the spirit of geometry that befits many observers.

In a word, distance is undoubtedly what separates the map from the terrain. On the map appears a smooth, above-ground representation. On the ground there is a rough, even viscous reality, and above all an extremely important human space, which conditions the success of the operation.

We will therefore have to combine for a long time to come two capabilities, the ability to fight effectively from a distance - particularly through the use of high technology - and the ability to accept paying the price of blood, up close or even very close. At its core, this dual capability forms the very essence of the warrior spirit that I wanted to see deployed in 2019.

The most important factor of effectiveness in combat remains trust, which cannot do without physical and fraternal relations between soldiers.

I would like to conclude by warmly thanking the Command Doctrine and Training Centre for the perfect organization of this colloquium, as well as the production of these proceedings, which are intended for wide dissemination.

I wish you all a good reading.

1 Action Terrestre Future (ATF): a prospective study carried out by the French Army Staff (EMAT), the aim of which is to anticipate the needs of the French Army over the long term. Equipment, materials, human resources and deployment of soldiers have been (re)designed to meet tomorrow's challenges. Paris, September 2016.

2 Green Book - The alliance of meaning and force: this book is an update of the 1999 edition of L'exercice du métier des armes dans l'armée de Terre, made necessary by the general evolution of the context. Paris, summer 2018.

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