



War at a distance(s), a reality that has become a reality

Gaining in contact

Colonel (r) François MIRIKELAM

Published on 10/05/2019

Engagement opérationnel

As a follow-up to the 2008 symposium¹, the third annual military think tank symposium on the theme : "was held on 31 January 2019 at the École militaire, in the presence of Jean-Jacques Bridey, MP and Chair of the National Defence and Armed Forces Commission.es of the National Assembly, the Major General of the Armed Forces, Admiral Jean Casabianca, and the Chief of Staff of the Army (CEMAT), Army General Jean-Pierre Bosser.

It is part of the movement to renew military thinking within the French Army, which was called for by the CEMAT and instigated by the Centre de doctrine et d'enseignement du commandement (CDEC) (Centre for Doctrine and Command Education).

Recent conflicts have made it possible to better define and deepen the reality of warfare from a distance, the many questions it raises and finally theThe recent conflicts make it possible to better understand and deepen the reality of war at a distance(s), the many questions it raises and finally the importance of reducing the distance to "contact", which is the only way to avoid a total dehumanisation of war and subsequently to achieve lasting peace.

The two round tables, which brought together speakers from various backgrounds, made it possible to identify these problems from several angles: tactical, strategic, philosophical, psychological, ethical and scientific, in an operational context where the relationship between war and the notion of distance is particularly acute for the armed forces.e de Terre, and at a time when future and foreseeable advances in armaments, technology and artificial intelligence are likely to bring about major transformations in the operational environment.

Distance is almost consubstantial with soldiering. Appreciating the (right) distance is a permanent and vital necessity (a matter of survival) for the soldier, to enable him to carry

out the mission entrusted to him: to master and control at the same time a territory, an adversary, a population.

1') The remoteness of war through technology

In the Western conception, war proceeds from a confrontation of opposing wills but also of forces that are measured quantitatively and that confront each other in a battle that each of the belligerents wishes to be decisive.

Therefore, the first distance to be taken into consideration is the physical distance separating the combatants. Faced with adversaries who are moving up the scale and hardening, Western army models and strategies aim to increase this distance by relying in particular on an increase in technical capabilities at the top of the spectrum and on technologies of superiority. Moreover, as Admiral Casabianca explains, in coalition action (which is becoming the norm in conflict resolution), the aim is to favour options that limit the exposure of partners in order to maintain their cohesion.

Mr. Bridey emphasises that our defence policy and our military programming law "Ambition 2030" favour the conduct of complex, technological armament programmes based on excellence in innovation, pushing back the frontiers of the fields of conflict: "whatever the scale, it is a question of pushing the frontier of war ever further away from our borders, our equipment and our soldiers" .

2') In opposition to Western strategies, the distance tends to diminish or even disappear.

The notion of distance in relation to the fighting and the enemy tends to reduce or even disappear. This observation is shared by General Jean-Claude Gallet who believes that "the notion of distance no longer exists". This shortening can be deduced from a combination of several factors. Firstly, it is the omnipresence of images and information conveyed by the media and social media that shortens space-time.

Ms. Monique Castillo testifies that reality is entirely transformed into information. Images, whether positive or negative, take on an inordinate importance. It allows contact with the reality of conflicts in that it makes a distant place and events present. Mr. Etienne Klein evokes a "teleportation of presence" . But the power of the image also runs the risk that the viewer's judgment may be distorted or altered by the emotion it arouses, "all the other distances that should intervene in the judgment are masked by the shock of the presence" .

Second, this shortening of distance is due to the procedures adopted by the enemy. In the face of technological superiority, it traditionally puts in place a strategy of avoidance, dispersal, tactical interlocking, but also of exporting the combat to the territory of the force. Referring to the terrorist threat on national territory and the dramatic attacks of November 2015 in Paris, General Gallet explains that "if we do not succeed in containing the capacity to organise and lead a force, we will be unable to prevent it from becoming a terrorist force". If the capacity of jihadist groups to organize and carry out large-scale actions abroad is not contained, this will result in events such as those of 13 November 2015, or in harassment by mimicry, on national territory" .

The protection of the national territory and its population then appears all the more essential since the current wars are no longer between states but against societies. Mrs

Dana Purcarescu believes that "it is our society, our way of life and our vision of the world that are under attack" .

General François-Xavier de Woillemont said that it was not only combat and manoeuvre units that were in contact: "everyone is in contact". It is therefore up to politicians, but also the military, to remember that there is a strong link between the battles ahead and the internal security of the French.

3°) Three new battle spaces

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, in addition to the traditional areas of conflict between land, air and sea, three new areas are now being added: exo-atmospheric space, cyberspace and the information battle.

These three spaces will no longer be dominated by a single actor and may become the object of new conflicts. A strategy for controlling the environment could take the form of a remote attack on cyberspace. Foreseeable developments should lead the army to adopt the necessary protective measures to secure networks and their flows as well as its manoeuvring capacity.

Distance from the enemy is not only physical distance but also perceived distance. Admiral Casabianca testifies in this regard that the deception manoeuvre is taking an increasing place in hybrid approaches, and that disinformation is integrated into the strategies of authoritarian powers: "Transparency... practiced in our democracies, multiplies the perception of threats and generates a distance from reality that is favourable to our adversaries".

4°) An improvement in situational awareness

War is an eminently political act, but one whose social, sociological and ethnographic consequences are increasingly important.

French history and military past have shaped the French soldier. His training, cultural sensitivity and political sense make him unique and often successful. He knows that knowing the other is crucial. This imperative is recalled in the Action Terrestre Future outlook document, which distinguishes among the eight factors of operational superiority the "understanding" of the other. Collecting information at a distance often makes it possible to know how to get closer and to understand the other.

The cultural knowledge of a country and the need to maintain contact with it is also done through France's diplomatic representations. Ms. Purcarescu emphasizes the essential role of diplomats in this respect: "if you don't have anyone on the ground, to understand in which direction societies are moving, who are the actors of influence, we won't achieve much" . She explains that diplomats try not to stop thinking about the countries with which diplomatic relations can be suspended. This is the case of the Syrian example, where France has taken care, as much as possible, to continue teaching French and humanitarian stabilization projects. It is the role of the diplomat not to stop thinking of the country as a potential partner. We must always be careful not to manufacture our enemies of the future.

General Pascal Facon points out that it is in this concern to take into account the social, sociological and ethnographic dimensions of war among peoples that the CDEC has set

up a partnership with the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations.

5°) New ways of ordering?

Satellite and digital capacities today make it possible to erase the notion of distance. They offer the possibility for the chef to be both very close and very distant. They make even more efficient what is one of France's assets and specificities, namely the vertical operational chain that links the meadow to the sea. sident of the Republic, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, the commander of the force in the field, the colonel who commands his battalion to the captain who commands his company. Strategic decisions may require frequent updating of the president's decisions and rapid transmission of those decisions to the bottom of the chain. General de Woillemont explains that this chain works extremely well. He does not hesitate to call it "a treasure for military operations. But conversely, and in the event that the elements of this chain are not perfectly aligned, this could give rise to "disasters, on the ground, politically or in terms of image".

In a space as vast as the Sahel, part of Barkhane's command is done remotely, whether by the general commanding soldiers in N'Djamena or Bamako or from Mount Verdun for certain air operations.

But while technology does allow for remote command, it is still up to the man to make the choices and take the decisions required by changes in the situation on the ground and the manoeuvre. Admiral Franck Baduel explains that during Operation Serval, he did not hesitate to rely on the analysis of the members of the crisis cell of the Operations Planning and Control Centre (CPCO) to make his decisions. It also required that all leaders be imbued with the spirit of the mission. At the other end of the chain, it is also up to the individual to obey from a distance.

For General Bosser, commanding from a distance "is like trying to reduce the distance all the time. 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 is to decide in war and in war".

This shortening also applies to the interministerial and political level. This requires particular attention to coordination and synchronisation. "Working at an interministerial level, with different doctrines and leaders, under almost instantaneous pressure from the media and political leaders, does not facilitate coordination and synchronisation," notes General Gallet.

General Bosser wonders what will change (independently of doctrine and capabilities) with the distance that is taking hold in operational commitments: "Will this distance change the profile of tomorrow's leader? ».

6°) Robots and autonomous weapons

If there is one area where remote warfare makes sense, it is that of robots and autonomous weapons. A distinction is made between assisted (remotely operated) robots and autonomous robots: autonomous lethal weapon systems (ALWS). They are designed to eliminate opponents while saving lives.

While it is likely that in the foreseeable future there will be fighting with remotely-operated robots, General Charles Beaudouin states that the French Army does not intend,

for legal and ethical reasons, to equip itself with autonomous robots. If the Army were to face such robots, it would fight and destroy them by conventional means.

For General Bosser, while the subject of robots is a topical one, he considers that the army is still relatively far away in terms of equipment, but that it must integrate them into its thinking. He states that the army is opposed to the myth of "clean war". It is the spirit of war and military honour that legitimizes the exorbitant right to kill the adversary: "this honour, symbol of France, is based on the acceptance by the combatant of the supreme risk, for others but also for himself" .

Title :	Colonel (r) François MIRIKELAM
Author (s) :	Colonel (r) François MIRIKELAM
Release date	09/05/2019
