



The need for contact to achieve lasting peace

Gaining in contact

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Engagement opérationnel

War is not just a technological race where the most powerful and the richest are guaranteed to win the battle. It is also, and above all, a test of intelligence and man.

1') The different notions of contact

The notion of contact warfare is understood in different ways depending on whether one is a submariner, combat pilot or infantryman, as Admiral Casabianca points out. For the first two, "winning in contact paradoxically means keeping at a distance". On the contrary, the army must combine the necessary distance from the enemy and its search for proximity with the population. General Facon explains in this respect that the army is an army of furrows "which must find through its engagement on the ground a subtle balance between putting the enemy at a distance and seeking proximity with the population. The army must strike a subtle balance between the distance provided by technology and the unique familiarity, intimacy and contiguity that must be maintained with the non-homogeneous, particularly complex and fundamentally human terrestrial environment".

Referring to Descartes, who believed only in the forces of contact, Klein explains that "without contact, there is no interaction, because a force, in his view, can only be transmitted from one point in space to another if a physical entity propagates it". He also notes a strong similarity between the vocabulary of physics and that of military thought: forces, interactions, contacts, influence, intensity, power, representation, chaos.

The principle of war is that of circumvention: the enemy will always try to avoid the type of war that his adversary wishes to impose on him.

But, as Admiral Casabianca points out, one should not allow oneself to be locked into melee combat, nor, at the other end of the spectrum, into the use of weapons to The success will come from the ability to combine the effects on opponents at both ends of the spectrum.

2°) Contact combat

Making contact means at least partially eliminating the distance. For, as Mr. Bridey points out, "there is no war without contact". General de Woillemont shares this analysis: "the soldiers, in the field, have returned to contact - including physical contact". The reconquest of Mosul and the recent engagements such as the taking of the Adrar of the Ifoghas (Operation Serval), or the actions of the special forces in the Sahel-Saharan strip (Operation Barkhane), illustrate this.

Military victory requires and ultimately imposes contact in the face of an enemy who flees or fights. This is what General Bosser calls zero distance: "to track a determined opponent on difficult terrain, it is sometimes necessary to go to hand-to-hand combat, therefore at zero distance".

But this lack of physical distance does not mean that all distance disappears. For, according to General Bosser, "even in contact, good soldiers know that it is necessary to know how to keep a distance, which will then be called recoil, composure, discernment, to provide a firm, safe, appropriate and proportionate response".

The French strategic culture is moreover marked by the physical confrontation of proximity: Azincourt, Verdun, Monte Cassino, Adrar des Ifoghas. As Admiral Casabianca analyses, "we cannot say that inhibition for contact combat is part of the DNA of French armies. Few nations today support the principle of an army of employment, with all that this implies in terms of political will (assuming the price of blood) and the need for operational preparation. This courage is precious to us. It arouses respect, credibility and trust, and brings together around us the partnerships of those who can and those who want".

3°) But the requirements of force protection become incompatible with the proximity of the populations.

In external operations, the French concept and tradition advocate the establishment of relations of proximity and trust with the aim of stabilising the situation and then establishing the conditions for lasting peace. Mr Bridey testifies that in Côte d'Ivoire, as in the Sahel-Saharan strip, the French armies continue to act alongside the local population, in particular through the action of the health service. However, this desire to go into contact with the population comes up against the requirements of force protection, which now involves the establishment of very well-protected life camps (most of the time outside the towns) and the reinforcement of vehicle armour. General de Woillemont justifies this lack of proximity, while regretting it, by the needs and operational constraints in the acute phases of the conflict. Mr. Bridey calls for a special effort to be made to ensure that proximity remains a military capability in its own right.

4°) The need for a global approach

Because modern conflicts are no longer between States but between societies, military action by itself cannot ensure a robust and lasting peace. Moreover, tactical victories do not resolve conflict and do not necessarily, as Admiral Casabianca notes, prevent a strategic setback. That is why the civil and societal dimension must necessarily be taken into account in order to emerge from a crisis. The Quai d'Orsay plays a major role. And to do this, it is appropriate for Mrs Purcarescu to abandon the traditional sequential

reasoning: "I am disengaging the diplomat because he has failed. I engage the military, then disengage the military because of the budgets mobilized, the fatigue and the human losses suffered, which make the conflict very unpopular. The diplomat - the one who had been ousted for having failed - is then brought back to the forefront.

It proposes replacing cooperation with integration, and this should be done as soon as a policy is designed, and not a posteriori, when a manoeuvre is conceived. The advantage, once a manoeuvre has been launched, lies in the fact that the military perfectly defines the desired end state: "Their objectives are extremely precise, unlike those of diplomats, who willingly invoke peace, humanity, generosity or balance, all of which no one can say where they begin and where they end.

Mrs Purcarescu invites the military and diplomats to better define together the objectives of military victory in the short term but also the medium-term objectives and the exit strategy. She also suggests that political leaders should be made more aware of these objectives. For military action must take place in a broader context of security and development.

The actions for development carried out by the French Development Agency (AFD), combined with military action, make it possible to accompany States, which are often bankrupt, towards the end of the crisis.

According to Mr Bridey, defence, development and diplomatic actions must, "complement each other, enrich each other and be coordinated within the same strategy, with the same ambition and the same interests - those of our country".

5°) The operational military partnership

Confronted with more numerous and more diverse players, with more assertive ambitions and postures, with more robust capabilities, acting under the UN mandate, the French forces intervene in cooperation and partnership.

General de Woillemont explains that the Barkhane force trains and instructs the Malian forces and fights alongside them not in an integrated manner but in an operational military partnership: "In doing so, we are learning and helping the Malian army to build itself up to become part of the structures of a future robust Malian state. This operational military partnership is based on the ability to accompany one's partner in combat, which cannot be done at a distance," says General Bosser.

6°) A questioning of the principles of war?

SCORPION, based on digital fluidity, will enable more decentralised collaborative combat and tactical agility, which are major characteristics of the new model of the French Army.

SCORPION will offer convergence capabilities, unprecedented dispersion, acceleration and integration of indirect fire, wherever it comes from. This will facilitate the composition of ad hoc tactical packages. SCORPION will change the concept of distance and bring new possibilities to the implementation of the three principles of warfare known since the end of the 19th century, namely freedom of action, economy of forces and concentration of effort. General Bosser believes that these new capabilities will lead to a revision of the principles of warfare: "The concentration of effort will be more about effects than means, and the economy of forces will certainly take on a new dimension".

CONCLUSION

The ambition of the conference "Distance Warfare(s), Winning through Contact" was to present a dynamic strategic thinking, consecrating the Army as a key actor of a lasting peace achieved through a necessarily collective action. Thus, in a global, complex and evolving operational environment, the army offers the capacity to accommodate contact distances - that is to say, to find the best balance between This means finding the best balance between the distance provided by technology and the promiscuity inherent in the commitment of land forces - in order to contribute, in an integrating logic, to the establishment of a lasting peace.

War, like other human activities, cannot escape the progress of technology and artificial intelligence. New areas of conflict, such as space and the cyberspace, are emerging. Media and social networks are omnipresent in modern engagements. War now breaks down boundaries in an internal-external continuum.

Consequently, the control of the terrestrial environment (where people live and exercise their powers) remains the major challenge of any war. To win the decision, there is no other solution than to go to the ground - in contact: to conduct the war in the midst of the people. This will continue to require the application of strictly human values, which are part of French military culture: honour, courage, composure, cohesion, understanding of others and the spirit of the mission, will, discernment, respect, a sense of law and ethics, and trust.

Thus, war remains a test of intelligence and manhood.

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