



Setting the framework for reflection on the principles of warfare to 2035...

CDEC

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Engagement opérationnel

In the field of the art and science of warfare, European theorists have been interested since antiquity in the search for fundamental rules enabling the strategist and tactician to gain the upper hand over an adversary. Inspired by each other over the centuries, they have contributed to the emergence of a common corpus, which each nation today declines according to its own military culture. The principles of war can just as easily be understood as precepts of strategy and precepts of manoeuvre.

This dual field, both political and operational, encourages us to understand them either as invariants, **i.e.** timeless and universal laws, or as rules of conjunctural action that can be **interpreted according to** technical, temporal and spatial contingencies. Practice shows that differences in military culture and command style, the stakes, level, specificities and context of an engagement, generally lead to a highly variable application of these principles. Moreover, after a period marked, not to say frozen, by specific operating modes developed in the context of stabilisation operations, it is very likely that the extension and hardening of current conflicts will only foreshadow the challenges that our future commitments will raise.

The typology of likely adversaries, the porosity of the fields of confrontation, and societal and cultural developments, which are already major observable trends, will have a major impact on the future. The typology of likely adversaries, the porosity of the fields of confrontation, and societal and cultural changes, which are already major observable trends, will very likely have consequences in the near future, both on the way to victory in combat and on the conditions necessary to achieve lasting peace. Even assuming that the nature of warfare will not change fundamentally, our understanding of what the strategic context and the conditions necessary to achieve a lasting peace might be, twenty years from now, is limited by the fact that the nature of warfare will not change fundamentally. However, even assuming that the nature of war will not fundamentally change, our understanding of what the strategic context and operational environment of

our forces might be in 20 years' time does raise legitimate questions about the relevance of the principles now accepted by Western forces and the French army in particular.

The anticipation of the imminent emergence of new, potentially disruptive technologies also raises questions about the durability of the fundamental principles that have framed French doctrine since the end of the 19th century. The understanding of these principles, which are regularly questioned or supplemented, is therefore today sometimes confused and their teaching, at all levels of training of military decision-makers, is often difficult.

The international forum of June 2019 and its preparation were thus an excellent opportunity to take stock of what is admittedly called the principles of war and to lend itself to multiple questioning. What do these famous principles really cover today, in France and abroad? What are their scope and operational utility? Does the analysis of recent conflicts validate or invalidate their topicality? Do they allow us to reason equally well in high and low intensity warfare? In other words, are the current principles sufficient and appropriate tools to design and conduct today's air-land operations and anticipate those of tomorrow?

Far from being able to answer all these questions in the affirmative and precisely, the forum nonetheless highlighted the need to carry out an in-depth reflection without delay on the fundamental principles underpinning our doctrine and, above all, on the procedures for applying them. Future work will therefore have to focus on determining the decisive effects to be achieved in an air-land manoeuvre in the midst of peoples in the future, the possible reinterpretation of current principles or the definition of new precepts and their possible combinations. The proposed conclusions will be decisive in anticipating and directing the ways in which land forces are trained, trained and employed in a strategic context, technological, societal and operational context that is likely to be very different from that which has characterised the operations conducted by the French army over the last three decades.

The principles of warfare: what is it all about and why?

The term *princeps* in Latin means both beginning (the first cause, the foundation of a reasoning or science) and command (by abstraction, which orders thought). Generally speaking, it is usually understood that a principle is a fundamental proposition, a law or a rule defining a phenomenon in a field of study. It can also be a hypothesis serving as a basis for reasoning and defining a mode. Understood morally, it is a rule of action, which prescribes what must be done. In the physical sciences, it is a very general statement that serves as a starting point for part of a line of reasoning.

The Army Glossary (ex ATT 106) of 2013 defines the principle as follows: it "enables us to identify an intellectual posture, an attitude, a way of being. In terms of substance, essence and fundamentals, it must be based on structure. Rooted in the absolute, it is permanent .

French joint doctrine currently sets out three major principles in the 2013 Use of Force Concept (CEF): the **freedom of action**, the **economy of forces**, the **concentrated effort**. These principles, inspired by the studies of the future Marshal Foch at the end of the 19th century, are taken up again and completed in the Army glossary by those defined at the

end of the 20th century by Admiral Labouérie: uncertainty and the "uncertainty of the future". crazydroyance.

However, the latter have not been updated in previous doctrinal documents of the land forces, which still mention only the first three. The land forces doctrinal corpus provides an essential reference for decision-makers at all levels to design a land forces employment appropriate to each context. The founding documents of this repository specify the conditions necessary to achieve specific goals for each type of engagement and thus contribute to the achievement of strategic success. Doctrine specifies the effects that can be achieved on the adversary and on the environment, formalizes the possible modes of action and the missions that can be entrusted to land forces.

It is based on supposedly invariant principles aimed at organising the means and framing the procedures for conducting action. Its teaching makes it possible to disseminate a **common way of understanding, reasoning and acting collectively** at the operational level. These principles, drawn from experience or history and commonly referred to as "principles of war", are therefore essential notions. As Admiral Labouérie pointed out in the early 1990s, "the comparison of as many and as varied historical experiences as possible should make it possible to identify laws (for dogmatists) and constants or at least regularities (for relativists). These laws, constants or regularities are going to become principles of permanent value and which form the basis of the whole art of warfare. »

It is in passing important to distinguish the sometimes misunderstood terms "principle" and "process". Admiral Castex thus defined the principle as an "intellectual and practical movement that permeates all the processes of execution". Labouérie therefore invites us to make a clear distinction between principles and generic processes. "The principle makes it possible to define an intellectual posture, an attitude, a way of being, whereas processes are aimed at the search for an effect. ». The principles therefore refer to the conception of the action and its objectives to be achieved, while the processes refer to its implementation and the use of means.

Today, beyond their purely referential aspect, the principles constitute, in the field of operational reasoning methods, an analytical grid for **evaluating a decision**. Considered as an analytical sieve, the principles form criteria for validating or invalidating an option or an operating mode, for rationally considering a risk taking or a potential opportunity. However, their reading and application cannot be dogmatic. Indeed, the study of past commitments shows that their simultaneous application is often difficult, if not impossible, due to their very interdependence. Concentration of efforts is, for example, impossible if freedom of action is too restricted and/or if the organisation of forces is inadequate.

Operational success is therefore generally based on a variable, spatially and temporally sequenced application of these principles. Using this analysis grid, feedback can thus be used to demonstrate that an operation has ended in failure due to a lack of reasoned application of all or part of these principles. On the other hand, demonstrating a posteriori the success of an operation through this grid alone remains paradoxically more subjective and globally unsatisfactory. Having a list of major principles and an inventory of procedures to be followed is therefore not an exclusive condition guaranteeing victory. As these are in fact only practical recommendations taught by experience, it is important to understand them more simply and without dogmatism, as a means of ensuring that they

are not dogmatic. They are both axes of orientation, enabling the strategist and tactician to decide in the face of adversity, otherness, complexity and uncertainty. In his lectures at the School of War, Foch compared the principles to "shepherd's fires lit on the stormy coast to guide the uncertain navigator".

The two reference documents, the concept of force employment and the forward-looking document Future Land Action (ATF) published in 2016, therefore complement the principles cited above with factors of operational superiority (FSO). The EFC recognises five, while the ATF drafters identify eight. These OSFs are defined as qualities or aptitudes, which make it possible to gain ascendancy over an adversary and, contrary to the principles, are not invariants.

They can therefore evolve in time and space according to the context, the environment and the technique. **FSOs, initially designed with a capability logic in mind, are thus of particular interest in the field of operational decision-making. Indeed, combined with the principles, they make it possible to facilitate reasoning on the effects to be obtained on the adversary, on our own capabilities and on the environment, and thus to deduce the articulations and execution procedures adapted to each context.**

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