



Possible breakdowns in 2035

VIP Workshop

CDEC

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Engagement opérationnel

The workshop for foreign and French general officers was based on the following question: "The operational environment envisaged in 2035 leads us to wonder about the durability of the principles inherited from military thinkers of previous centuries. What forward-looking approaches are being adopted by Western nations to reflect on this question? ».

The discussions focused firstly on the operational environment up to 2035, i.e. the likely framework for the engagement of armed forces in 2035 and secondly on the consequences of this environment for the understanding and application of the principles of warfare. Among the potential areas of change in the operational environment in 2035, four have been proposed: geopolitical, technological, **societal** and the **adversary of 2035**.

Concerning the **geopolitical environment**, it was first of all stressed the profound change in the international order, which concerns on the one hand the undermining of multilateralism and on the other hand, one of its corollaries, namely the resurgence of empires' logics. Considered by some to be an order of winners for winners, the legitimacy of the international order is being challenged by the emergence of new regional powers in the economic and technological fields. Another point highlighted, and a consequence of the first, is that the disintegration of the international order also involves the weakening of international organisations and regulatory bodies, first and foremost with regard to armaments (INF, New Start, etc.).

At the same time, these new trends would also weaken the logic of alliances by 2035. Indeed, the difficult convergence of strategic priorities in Europe due to a divergent perception of threats complicates the alignment of political will. Within NATO itself, these differences in perception are palpable, with a shift of American interests from Eastern

Europe to the Indo-Pacific zone, while some Western European nations perceive the rise of Russian power as an existential threat.

Others, on the other hand, see threats on Europe's southern border and are more concerned about mass migration. On this basis, the speakers unanimously recalled the value of solidarity that must unite the Alliance: there can be no opposition between the eastern and western flanks of the Alliance.

South, we will have to do "both at the same time". To that end, complementary cooperation initiatives within NATO, the European Union and the European Intervention Initiative in particular will make it possible to make better use of resources and develop a joint capacity for action across the whole spectrum of crises.

Following on from the **societal environment of 2035**, the speakers wondered about maintaining a critical mass of recruits capable of absorbing the impact of a high-intensity conflict within Western armies. Several issues were then addressed: the maintenance of hardiness and hardening (the resilience of soldiers), tradition (why a soldier fights and why he wants to win). For while mastery of high technology will certainly allow the entry into high-intensity conflicts, the confrontation could very quickly tip towards a degraded environment where mass and hardiness would become paramount to win the decision. Highlighting the problems of recruitment and retention experienced by Western armies, some speakers referred to the paradox of armies that have never been so popular and so little understood.

One of the challenges of the mass would therefore be to move beyond mere sympathy for armies to empathy. Another issue raised concerns the need for the population to become aware of the importance of defence issues. Faced with a particularly diffuse threat, Western public opinion might find the efforts required too great to achieve lasting peace. A strategic communication effort, particularly in the face of the multiplication of disinformation actions, would therefore be necessary to reintegrate defence issues into the concerns of Western societies. The third factor of change in the operational environment by 2035, new technologies and **their impact on the conduct of warfare were** discussed at **length**. Unanimously regarded as the sine qua non for entering a high-intensity conflict, new technologies should not, however, disrupt the conduct of warfare, despite increased transparency of the battlefield.

In this connection, it was recalled that while more sophisticated information systems should provide a better picture of the battlefield, reducing the opportunities for surprise, such systems should also be able to provide a more accurate picture of the situation. They also open the way to "infobesity", which the enemy could take advantage of, leading to surprise effects that may be obtained in different ways but are always possible. Furthermore, the relationship between ethics and new technologies was also discussed, particularly with regard to the concepts of the "augmented soldier" (use of pharmacology, transformation into a "cyborg", etc.) and autonomous weapons systems, whose use and responsibility are questionable. Starting from the observation that not all societies have the same ethical and moral ties, Western societies will have to be prepared to face adversaries who may not have the same scruples about the use of these technologies.

The last factor likely to change between now and 2035 is that the understanding of the

enemy has been widely debated .Recognising that our armies are now facing adversaries who are increasingly resorting to indirect or even hybrid approaches, speakers recalled the need to fight our adversaries in all areas and fields of conflict. This capacity to understand the new forms of conflictuality will be inseparable from the preservation of our freedom of action. For this, a convergence between Western nations in the use of all possible levers of action (economy, diplomacy, etc.) is indispensable.

Finally, the question of the sustainability of the principles of warfare in the face of changes in the operational environment up to 2035 had to be answered. It was unanimously recognised that if the **principles were to endure, the way in which they were applied would necessarily be influenced, particularly as a result of** new technologies. Thus, how can the freedom of action of the tactical echelons be preserved when recent innovations in information technology allow for near real-time knowledge for the command echelon and faster decision-making? Several corollary remarks were made. Firstly, the divergence of the Clausewitzian school, characterised by the adoption of "warfare" and Jominian principles, rather inclined towards "warfare" principles, was highlighted. In this sense, the NATO planning method, the COPD, is a brilliant convergence of the two schools, preserving their inductive and deductive characters.

Secondly, if these principles were initially thought for an almost exclusively terrestrial dimension, they must now be adapted to all dimensions, maritime, air, space and even cyber. The application of these principles, the result of purely human reflection and activities sometimes escaping pure rationality and calculation, to a perfectly artificial and software dimension such as the cyber, has moreover raised many questions.

The workshop finally concluded with the common conviction that the changes and breakthroughs envisaged for 2035 would not call into question the inviolability of the principles, but rather their application procedures and the definition of new tactical and operational effects to be achieved.

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