



## Why a challenge to the principles of war?

Workshop n°2

CDEC

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Engagement opérationnel

**Why a challenge to the principles of war? In order to answer the question posed, it was necessary to come back to the definition of a principle of war for the different participants. The following elements were quickly retained.**

### Definitions

The principles of war are general rules, axes, tools for evaluating operational decisions. Dictated by experience, present and past (military history teaching), they are supposed not to vary over time. They are thus distinct from their execution modalities. Sometimes assimilated to the principles of so-called "operations", the latter evolve according to the context, terrain, weather, the adversary and the state of technological progress.

It is impossible to respect all the principles permanently, as they are sometimes contradictory. Nevertheless, deviations from these principles are deliberate, not negligent. According to a formula approved by the participants, it is ultimately a matter of "making different recipes, but always with the same ingredients".

### Background

Further debate focused on clarifying some presuppositions that should limit the answer. It was agreed that in order to arrive at a common definition of the main drivers of change in the operating environment by 2035, several elements would remain permanent. Western societies would need to retain a democratic character. Their economic functioning will continue to be based on the market economy. Finally, humanistic values will continue to form the basis of their systems of standards.

On this basis, the four areas proposed by the preparatory study were analysed: technology, society, threat and geopolitics:

Technology, which is more endogenous to the military environment and influences the choice of its own equipment, is undoubtedly the easiest area to grasp. Connectivity and, more generally, the revolution that has taken place in recent years in information and telecommunications technologies is the most striking element, likely to generate real operational disruptions.

At the societal level, there is a consensus around a concern about patriotic consent in Western Europe. The questions of radicalisation of public debate within societies, social nuclearisation, the place of sacrifice and understanding of defence/security issues are raised. The question of the growing importance of perceptions in the debate and strategic choices is also systematically raised.

With regard to the threat, we now observe "States that behave like armed groups and armed groups that behave like States". While the term hybrid remains controversial, participants agreed that there is a growing complexity of threats and adversaries, as well as a general hardening of engagement contexts.

Finally, in the geopolitical field, a recurring point of attention is found in a perception of a global weakening of international organizations (both the UN and NATO, for example). Similarly, global warming will induce major changes and disruptions, which are likely to have an impact on the state and nature of threats, as well as on operational planning.

These disruptions will be the result of the convergence of several factors. For example, the possible emergence of autonomous lethal systems is the consequence of technological evolution, while at the same time strongly questioning societal issues (moral and ethical barriers, demographics). The same applies to the impact of the media, the importance of perceptions, or the upheavals linked to climate change.

## **Response**

If the principles do not change, the operational environment influences how they are perceived by the operational decision-maker, how they are implemented, and how they are weighted among themselves. The formula can be summarized as follows: permanent principles lead to evolving implementation modalities, which influence strategic choices, such as the format of a force system or the use of specific means. The group's choice was based on the application of two principles: freedom of action and concentration of effort. By examining these two principles of warfare through the lens of the four areas, fundamental capabilities and critical vulnerabilities were identified. From the latter, it was possible to deduce developments in the implementation processes (essential needs).

For freedom of action, the core capabilities identified are free access to information, the ability to deliver precision strikes in depth and the ability to fight in coalition. Several of these capabilities appear to be challenged by the operational environment. The

legitimacy of military action is going to become an even more inescapable factor than before because of the multiplication of channels of information on operations and the sensitivity of public opinion to such information and, above all, its possible manipulation. Disinformation, whose potential is multiplied by new technologies and, more particularly, social networks, will be more and more present.

The highly technical Western command and control (C2) systems are a major vulnerability. Threats will prove increasingly complex, all in an international environment constrained and disrupted by climate change. In order to maintain freedom of action, the resilience of our societies must therefore be strengthened by all means and the effort focused on strategic communication (StratCom) must be stepped up. The units will have to continue to master basic combat skills, particularly communication and navigation, enabling them to continue fighting in a technologically degraded environment.

The intelligence capability will have to be increased in order to understand, discriminate and confront the new threats. We will also have to increase our meteorological and geographical intelligence capabilities. Finally, cyber defence must now become a permanent concern.

For the concentration of efforts, the fundamental capabilities are the mastery of collaborative combat, networked C2 and, here again, the ability to fight in coalition. The fragmentation and growing lack of cohesion in our societies, weapons of mass destruction, or the fragility of the international system all threaten, in a sense, our ability to join forces and concentrate them to achieve an objective.

**To remedy this, we must develop operational reserve, command and training mechanisms, produce redundancy in forces and equipment, while developing monitoring and anticipation measures and strengthening our counter-espionage and counter-proliferation efforts.**

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