



## Uncertainty, the only universal principle?

Workshop n°4

CDEC

Published on 23/07/2019

Histoire & stratégie

**Workshop 4 was structured around three phases:**

- **a reminder of the definitions of the principles of warfare and application processes accompanied by an exchange within the group;**
- **a reflection around two predefined questions: on an increasingly transparent battlefield, which principles can guarantee surprise and security?**
- **Isn't the uncertainty principle the only principle that is permanent and timeless?**

The definitions as outlined in the preparatory document circulated to all participants did not call for specific comments. The understanding of the principle as a fundamental proposal, of a permanent and timeless nature, is commonly shared. The principles of warfare are considered to be intangible, regardless of the period, the course of an operation, the type of enemy or the environment. Nevertheless, the principles are the result of our histories and cultures of war. They serve as a guide but do not in any way guarantee victory. Finally, their application procedures may vary according to the level and context of engagement, the style of command, the adversary or the resources available.

Reflection on the principle of uncertainty (French principle only) has highlighted its two corollaries, namely safety and surprise. Discussions focused on the means of achieving these effects on a supposedly less opaque confrontation field. The discussions on the future battlefield thus brought out the idea of an illusion of transparency due to the demands of public opinion and the preponderance of the media.

How then can we both create surprise on a supposedly transparent battlefield and simultaneously generate opacity around our own devices and uncertainty around our

intentions? The five principles of war (economy of means, concentration of efforts, freedom of action, uncertainty, lightning) are all likely to contribute to the achievement of an effect of surprise, then of astonishment. Since this effect is always consubstantial with the achievement of a major effect, the question therefore arises as to how to adapt the application of these principles to the new capabilities afforded by technology, to the adversary and to our own forces. The answer provided by the group unanimously calls for disappointment.

It seems reasonable to admit that technical developments in intelligence gathering (UAVs) or analysis (AI) should promote transparency, in particular through infovalorisation. However, the modification of signatures, the new masses made possible by robotisation or precision strikes on sensors (including in space) should qualify this phenomenon. Sub-state adversaries are likely to use deception to circumvent our material superiority. Interstate competition will see the maintenance of a permanent ambiguity, based on discrete, reversible and non-attributable actions of high performance.

Finally, in the event of a symmetrical conflict, disappointment will guarantee safety and even survival. **This ability to disappoint will be defined by the combination of three variables: passive, active and intoxication.** At the technical level, it is a matter of changing the perception of means. Tactical levels will see the use of ruses of war, insinuating doubt about the intention, times and places of effort. The operative level will decline the same processes on a larger scale. The strategic level will have a much more manipulative dimension and will address, in addition to military leaders, politicians and public opinion.

It is likely to be at this level that the scopes will be the most diverse and therefore the most effective. More broadly speaking, any action of deception will imply a minimal knowledge of the other, of his or her intelligence and command systems. However, disappointment may come up against political and ethical limits, which will vary, logically, according to the issues at stake. It is important to deal with this issue very seriously from now on, particularly at the doctrinal level, as the risks associated with "false transparency" are so great.

Essentially technical, disappointment will in fact be subject to the manipulation of data flows and analyses. Finally, disappointment cannot be properly implemented without a fair gradation of processes and expected effects according to strategic time (peace, crisis, war).

**Thus, if uncertainty does indeed seem to be one of the only principles that can guarantee surprise and security, it nevertheless makes the other classic principles equally relevant for the 2035 horizon. It is thus through their implementation procedures, the disappointment of which will be of paramount importance in the future, that future reflections must be conducted.**

---

**Title :** CDEC

**Author (s) :** CDEC

**Release date** 13/07/2019

---

[DOWNLOAD DOCUMENT](#)

---