



## The principles of operational conduct ... and those of politico-strategic conduct are distinct?

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Engagement opérationnel

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The speaker first returned first to the definition of war, then to the principles of operational conduct, and finally to those of political-strategic conduct. He presented two different conceptions of war. The first is based on the general dialectic of power, violence and force leading to politics, while the second is based on operational conduct. The nature of war is, according to Clausewitz, fully and essentially political.

War has two notable dimensions. Being at war relates to political-strategic conduct, and being at war relates to the conduct of operations. The political decision-maker will direct and govern the former, while the military decision-maker will plan, pace and conduct the latter. It is important to note that these two dimensions form a whole. However, there is still a tension that will weigh on the definition and exploitation of principles.

The French forces adopt a Clausewitzian posture which is defined as: "thinking war". In this vision, politics is closely linked to the military. Its role is to understand the tension, the dynamics of the conflict in order to be able to adapt as well as possible while preserving a flexibility of action and a certain realism. From this point of view, the Clausewitzian

posture admits a corpus of principles that are few and timeless. Friction and non-linearity are at the heart of this trend. They are therefore still usable despite the changing forms of conflict.

The Jominian posture is the posture on which the Anglo-Saxons rely. It defends a particular approach, that of making war. War is intended for a particular professional body, which defends a political group organised by arms and the use of force. Strategy is an applicative science oriented towards operational decision making. It is therefore based on operational processes and the establishment of power relations. In this logic, there are many and varied principles that must be applied in the light of the strategic (and therefore changing) situation. We therefore have a differentiated translation of strategy, the fundamental structure of operational reasoning and principles. The cultural differences, and therefore the diversity of principles, conceal a confusion between political-strategic conduct and conduct in the operational domain. Can this framework, this paradox be overcome?

Principles do not have the same timelessness. Some are more cyclical. The result is a princely malaise among the Jominians. Evolutions make it possible to reinterpret these principles.

These successive revolutions, be they cultural, technological, media or legal, will lead to a reevaluation of the principles of war. The same applies to the feedback from the contact cadres of the armed forces.

We can distinguish three main periods in these developments. The first is represented by the advent of nuclear deterrence. It is particular and will therefore not be presented here. The second includes all the peripheral wars (Vietnam, Indochina, etc.). Finally, more recently, and with the appearance of the techno-centric Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), reinforced by the conflicts in Iraq and then Afghanistan, the principles have been called into question by the various armed forces. Indeed, the concepts of "war among the peoples" or irregularity/asymmetry have led to doctrinal changes (in particular the questioning of the mass). The armed forces are now pushing forward the concepts of legitimacy and restraint in the use of force.

We can therefore see that the nature of war does not change, but the form of conflicts is evolving. Three solutions are open to us: change everything, change nothing or remove principles to guarantee freedom of action. Olivier Zajec believes that these are not good solutions. He rather advocates the distinction of principles without dissociating them. The forward-looking document Action terrestre future (ATF), released by the French Army in 2016, offers a solution. It presents principles, operational superiority factors, aptitudes and capabilities organised in a pyramid-shaped manner according to a logic of timelessness. Contrary to the principles, the operational superiority factors are not invariants. They can evolve while preserving the principles. This allows doctrinal stability to be maintained.

**In conclusion, the principles of war must be handled with caution because of their timelessness. Since operative principles are not invariants, they can evolve according to the form of the conflict.**

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