



## How do "principles of war" and "principles of strategy" converge in practice?

CDEC Symposium - First round table

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Engagement opérationnel

Lieutenant General Guionie spent most of his career in the marine infantry, notably in the 8th Marine Infantry Parachute Regiment. This career allowed him to acquire a rich operational experience (Chad, Cambodia, Central Africa, Bosnia, Kosovo, Ivory Coast). He commanded the 9th Marine Infantry Brigade (notably in Mali during Operation Serval) before joining various staffs. Today he is the commander of the land forces in Lille.

The speaker began by stressing that, whatever the rank or function occupied, he had always endeavoured to follow, or try to follow, the three main principles of Foch. In his view, those principles could be respected, both in substantive areas and in the field in an operational framework. These principles were all the easier to remember as they are three in number and are, in his view, timeless. Indeed, these principles are the result of a long military history, constantly shaken by major developments, some of which, such as the gradual introduction of gunpowder, have caused considerable upheaval in the way war is fought.

In the face of current developments, these principles provide us with a form of permanence in action. At the same time, they are general enough to be plastic and allow for permanent adaptation. Foch's three principles are perfectly suited to French military culture and spirit. Indeed, this spirit defends a very global approach to defence issues. However, this is not sufficient for other schools of thought (the general speaks here of cultural relativity). The French are adept at a global approach leaving a large part to adaptation. This model and vision will not work for other military cultures and other schools of thought.

On a personal note, the speaker felt that he had never interpreted the principle of economy of forces from a mercantile perspective. He had always drawn from it requirements for the fair distribution of available forces. On operations, he had therefore endeavoured to have a permanent reserve, ensuring that it was regenerated immediately after each use. At the organic level, within the framework of the Land Forces Command,

this principle now drives him to always seek the best possible match between the activities carried out and the resources available.

The principle of concentration of efforts is reflected in the French operational order in the search for "major effect". This conceptual approach, which is specific to France, consists of identifying the effect that is likely to contribute with the greatest probability to the achievement of the main objectives of a mission. At the organic level, the concentration of efforts also appears to be a necessity. As land forces cannot be mobilised everywhere and all the time, the speaker explained that efforts should always be both simultaneous and successive, in order to allow concentration on the missions entrusted to them (external and internal operations, operational preparation, information, etc.).

Freedom of action, finally, is undoubtedly the most difficult principle to implement. On the one hand, this principle is liable to be called into question by the enemy. On the other hand, it sometimes seems easier to do the work delegated to a lower level than the work to be done at one's own level. In practice, in operations, over and above the delegation of a certain number of tasks, preserving freedom of action implies, within a given space of time and according to the means available, leaving the person to whom a mission has been entrusted the freedom to make choices. At the organic level, this principle finds its translation in the notion of "subsidiarity". This form of relationship with subordinates is, however, increasingly liable to be called into question, on the one hand, by the hypercentralisation of decisions and, on the other, by the illusion produced by the new information technologies of being able to know everything and know everything.

Admiral Labou rie's principles of uncertainty and lightning strikes are intended to be applied more in the operational framework than in the organic framework. Nevertheless, uncertainty must always be taken into account in thinking, at both the operational and the organic level, because that is where it is possible to fall.

**In conclusion, the Commander Land Forces acknowledges that he does not directly pronounce on the articulation between the politico-strategic and military levels. Nevertheless, he reaffirms that the principles of warfare must be applied in context, i.e. in relation to the adversary and the balance of power, both in defining political objectives and in managing the use of force in the service of those objectives.**

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