



## The neutralization of enemy leaders

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**In Indochina or North Africa, air-land bases were numerous and designed as real support points for tactical operations. This remains essential today.**

Indeed, the most visible results of neutralizing enemy leaders are primarily achieved by Special Forces units that employ special skills and benefit from significant support from these same bases.

The logistical cost of air-land bases in terms of their effect on the ground should also be stressed. The transport of the resources (water, food, fuel, ammunition) necessary for the life of these settlements is as costly as it is dangerous. Their size certainly reduces the risk of being submerged by an enemy attack, but the threat has ultimately shifted to the numerous logistics convoys.

Discussions are now challenging the notion of the "unsinkable pawn" to give way to the "autonomous pawn". This change of paradigm is desirable in the sense that the joint commander, if he benefits from adapted logistics and support, gains from being more visible in the field, more reactive in the use of intelligence and in the face of threats. Mobility makes it possible to carry out regular reconnaissance, impress the adversary and, as far as possible, prevent him from constituting sanctuaries. The acceptance of obviously controlled risk-taking will make it possible to return to processes that the Army previously mastered, such as nomadisation or "tours", which are currently too short to achieve lasting effects. Recent experiments with operations conducted jointly with local armed groups, with a very light footprint on the ground, have fully demonstrated their relevance. Working jointly with sympathetic armed groups cannot be done without taking risks, but is proving to be extremely effective, as recent experiences in Mali show. In particular, it makes it possible to obtain quality intelligence, to let the local population provide protection in certain areas, and to regain the initiative. The Operational Military Partnership

(OMP) to train regular armies is an old and valuable know-how of the French army that is achieving very good results.

One of the major challenges today is to create a relationship of trust with the population. In this field, the human know-how of the French military was undeniable. They managed more easily than other nations to forge the first links with the population. Admittedly, the low volume of forces deployed and the duration of the mandates of the French military are not enough.<sup>22</sup> are obvious limitations. It is difficult to guarantee the permanent protection of populations that openly declare themselves in favour. Moreover, the French army does not have sufficient means to improve the economic and social situation in its immediate environment. Acceptance of force, however, depends heavily on it.<sup>23</sup> This was already the case at the beginning of the 20th century, when the ingenuity of the military made up for the lack of resources from the metropolis. The skills of the military are thus regularly used, whether it is a question of local medical assistance, work requiring the use of specific machines by the engineers, but also of individual know-how that can be practised. Resourcefulness and imagination do the rest.

Indeed, an additional feature of French military culture is the capacity for process innovation. The aim is not to reproduce systems that worked previously, but to find ways of optimising the use of limited resources. A certain latitude must be given to the force commander so that he can adapt his system. The concept of a predominantly air-mobile joint subgroup (SGTIA-A) has been tested in an interesting way, giving an exceptional extension to deployed forces, even if it cannot be permanent and requires significant logistical support. This ability to innovate must be applied to other areas. With regard to equipment, it is necessary to be able to adapt it to theatres, either by modifying equipment or by rapidly purchasing identified assets.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in terms of logistics, the developments linked to Scorpion will probably provide an opportunity to adapt systems in order to be more flexible, or even to move away from one axis to another. In conclusion, it is necessary to combine the rusticity associated with light logistics with innovations, for example through the use of airships transporting containers.<sup>25</sup>

The ability to acquire a culture of counter-rebellion and to maintain it afterwards is not a simple thing. This is where the richness of French military and colonial history proves to be a valuable asset. It is interesting to note that the first expeditions were made difficult by the desire to discard the methods that had served under the Empire, particularly in Spain.<sup>26</sup> As you can read in the watermark through a collection of letters relating the Algerian campaigns between 1835 and 1848<sup>27</sup> The acquisition of knowledge of the environment and the adaptation of military processes have been gradual. The columns became lighter, in particular by limiting the amount of artillery carried and the modes of action developed. An important place was given to mobility by employing mounted units or by massively using mules or dromedaries. Similarly, alongside the metropolitan troops initially engaged, specific forces were created (foreign legion, African hunters, Zouaves, etc.) supported by faithful and efficient indigenous troops (riflemen, spahis, goumiers). Finally, coordination between the political and military had to be constantly adjusted, oscillating between the centralisation of competences in the hands of certain chiefs, such as Bugeaud in Algeria or Lyautey in Morocco, and the establishment of a civil administration. The duration of the assignment in Africa (generally more than two years) encouraged the managers and the troop to take an interest in the populations, to learn their language and to acquire their own know-how.<sup>28</sup> Aeromobility was widely used

during the Algerian War, both for tactical missions (setting up commandos for example) and logistical missions (evacuation of the wounded).

In this domain, the volume of means available is a crucial issue today.<sup>29</sup> Subsequently, the preservation of a culture of counter-rebellion was achieved through successive engagements in Africa, which is now well reflected in the military RETEX chain.<sup>30</sup> as well as multiple official or personal publications, also demonstrating individual curiosity<sup>31</sup>. On the tactical level, despite technical developments, many of the historical lessons remain viable. Beyond knowledge of the population, the enemy or the terrain, or the acquisition of know-how, the main lesson is the ability to adapt to situations within the framework of clear political mandates. But the dissemination of know-how is also the result of informal discussions between different military generations. It is essential to stress that it is not so much knowledge of theatres that is important as the transmission of a culture of curiosity, adaptation and initiative.

There can probably not be a single doctrine to respond to the difficulties generated by these conflicts. It is clear that the resolution of modern asymmetric conflicts requires the implementation of a comprehensive strategy, built on clear and long-term political goals. Similarly, having all the means to fight in a conventional war (the "top of the spectrum ") does not necessarily guarantee success against rebels. Adaptation is far from easy, as everyone is tempted to reduce reality to his or her own experience, but it is necessary in order to cope with the diversity of situations. Thus, the know-how required for counter-rebellion comes from an ancient and precious heritage that must be maintained and developed.

**22** In order to cope with the impression of perpetual rotation of forces, the preparation periods preceding the projection must be particularly well developed to enable the rising units to start their mission immediately and in continuity with their predecessors.

**23** It is essential to clearly align tactical and strategic actions even though a large part of the latter are not the responsibility of the military but rather of national (embassies) or international (UN, EU) partners, or even the uncontrollable action of other actors (NGOs, media). The very strong tendency to reduce the military in principle to the role of executor or technical adviser presents real risks.

**24** The interest of "off-the-shelf procurement" should be put into perspective. Although in some cases it proves indispensable, it often creates problems of coherence in terms of support or even employment.

**25** The automatic container transport air shuttle (NATAC) currently being developed by the French company Voliris is directly aimed at being able to transport freight in desert areas. Other possibilities exist through the use of transport UAVs.

**26** Etienne de Durand, op. cit.

**27** Campaigns in Africa, 1835-1848. Letters addressed to the Marshal of Castellane by Marshals Bugeaud, Clauzel, Valée, Canrobert, Forey, Bosquet and Generals Changarnier, de Lamoricière, Le Flo, de Négrier, de Wimpffen... 1898 . Source gallica.bnf.fr / National Library of France.

**28** Lyautey, op. cit .

**29** Guillaume Rolland and Antonin Tisseron: "The use of helicopters in counter-insurrection - What is at stake for what threats? "Cahier de la recherche doctrinale, Centre de Doctrine d'Emploi des Forces, January 2012.

**30** Nicolas Rey and Valentin Germain: "50 ans d'OPEX en Afrique (1964-2014)", Cahier du Retex, Centre de Doctrine et de l'Emploi des Forces, September 2015.

**31** Captain Aymard, op. cit . Battalion Commander Bétrix: "La pénétration Touareg", 1911 . Source gallica.bnf.fr / National Library of France.

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