



Towards a more nuanced typology

2/2 - BRENNUS 4.0

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Histoire & stratégie

Seeking to define "high-intensity conflict" cannot therefore be limited to a simple assessment of the degree of limitation or "totality" of the resources committed by the belligerents, nor can it be limited to the level of violence of the clashes.

Indeed, this quantification, if at all possible, is not a sufficient parameter to enable the political or military decision-maker to prepare for a major armed engagement. Taking into account the **nature, level and simultaneity of violent interactions between all types of belligerents and in all fields must therefore** complete an analytical grid defining, not a level of intensity, but rather a typology of future confrontations. The following definitions can therefore be proposed.

A **"low-intensity conflict" applies** to a politico-military confrontation aimed at achieving limited political, social, economic, military or psychological objectives. It is often protracted and covers a spectrum ranging from diplomatic, economic and psycho-social pressures to terrorism and insurgency. These conflicts are confined to a geographical area that can be extensive (e.g. the Sahel-Saharan strip) and are not limited to inter-state wars. They usually involve factions or countries with a low level of development, often facing equipment constraints, shortfalls in tactical capabilities and a degraded security and overall governance environment. The operational objectives in such interventions, known as stabilization interventions, generally boil down to the control of a territory and its population, by destroying factional armed groups to avoid losing control. The coalition operations in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2012, or in the BSS since 2013, are a good illustration of this.

A **"high-intensity conflict"** is a state of armed violence, with or without a declaration of war, between two or more nations and their potential allies. The belligerents use their full capabilities and firepower, including weapons of mass destruction. The notion of "high

intensity" implies that no limits are set on the use of force and that the commitment of resources is total for a nation whose vital interests are threatened. This paradigm prevailed from 1947 to 1989 and structured for France the doctrine for the use of the 1st Army-Air Force tactical couple in the face of a deadly threat, which was to be used by the French army and the air force in the event of a crisis. We can imagine being able to unveil ourselves in the Fulda Gap, "two stages away from the Tour de France", in the words of General de Gaulle. This definition is close to the Clausewitzian concept of total warfare.

This dual typology of "high/low intensity", however, only imperfectly responds to the full range of threats that France could potentially face in the next twenty years. The equipment used in recent conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen or Ukraine shows that we can potentially be opposed to an enemy with armoured means, ground-to-ground and ground-to-air artillery, drones, cyber means, etc. Our potential adversaries are also capable of implementing so-called "levelling" capabilities and innovative tactics that make it possible to circumvent our technological superiority, while bringing the confrontation to a "high level of intensity". Finally, our alliances, particularly within NATO, also require us to equip and train for coalition engagement against modern armies.

Rather than the notion of intensity, it may therefore be more relevant to qualify this typology and simply retain the concept of major intervention, which is more **appropriate to the reflections** needed to prepare for the future. This concept is also consistent with the major commitment hypothesis (HEM) of the joint doctrine, as set out in the 2019-25 Military Planning Act and confirming France's ability to conduct a major coercive operation in coalition. A major conflict can thus be defined as a confrontation between two or more adversaries, state or non-state, and their respective allies. This type of confrontation implies the engagement by the belligerents of battle corps, whether proportionate or not, and the use of the most modern technologies, as well as all their available resources in terms of intelligence, projection, firepower (excluding nuclear weapons), and command. This broader classification thus makes it possible to cover the Indochina War (11 deaths per day for eight years) as well as the Gulf Wars of 1990-91 and 2003. This type of engagement corresponds to limited objectives within the framework of clearly defined political guidelines as to the use of force and the extent of the geographical area that can be involved. For France, it may therefore involve military operations aimed at deterring and defeating large-scale aggression by a State or coalition threatening an ally or the stability of a region. These operations involve the projection, support and eventual regeneration of large joint combat forces in a non-permissive environment.

A more structuring but still insufficient conceptual framework

The operational contract includes three hypotheses for the use of the armed forces, that of a major intervention commitment (HE-INTER), while carrying out missions related to an emergency commitment in the field of protection. This HE-INTER provides for a coalition engagement (MJO or SJO), within six months and for a six-month intensive engagement, for a force volume of two brigades, together with associated command and support assets (up to 21 000 men), in order to meet the requirement to be a "framework nation". This hypothesis of engagement, which is by nature air-land-based, assumes in its most restrictive sense:

- a maneuver conducted at a high tempo , which may experience sudden breaks in

rhythm;

- violent, close and frequent kinetic engagements;
- rare operational pauses of short duration;
- a complexity of coordination induced by the massive use of joint and inter-allied effectors;
- the simultaneity of attacks in the immaterial fields, both in the theatre of operations and on the national territory;
- ad hoc logistics ;
- potentially very high human and material losses.

A major intervention commitment can therefore be translated into operational readiness policy, as a framework encompassing coercive operations over time, in the face of a symmetrical conventional enemy and in a contested environment. This type of confrontation is characterised by its hybridity and by clashes in all areas and domains of conflictuality, with no guarantee of technical, tactical and informational superiority and no certainty of a rear area allowing a form of strategic comfort. Finally, this type of engagement involves a level of violence or lethality for which one must be prepared. If France is to take part in a major conflict, tomorrow or in the next ten years, the level and scope of its commitment will most likely be constrained by a limited capacity to rapidly regenerate its forces in the event of massive losses; by a DTIB and stocks that are insufficiently robust to sustain a long-term effort. This type of engagement cannot, therefore, at present be conceived outside a strong and reliable alliance or coalition.

Preparing for a major conflict today therefore calls for multiple questions, the answers to which will make it possible to direct efforts and priorities in the area of operational preparedness very directly:

- in the face of which adversary(ies)?
- Within what type of alliance?
- What geographical scope (area of engagement and distance from the metropolis) should we prepare for?
- for what duration?
- with which objectives (terrain, enemy, population)?
- according to what " territorial protection/coercive action" continuum in the theatre of intervention?
- According to which " conventional/nuclear" continuum?
- what essential capabilities should be held before, during and after the conflict?

- What critical vulnerabilities can/should be protected or targeted in the adversary?
- What force employment doctrine should be developed (offensive, defensive)?
- What types of engagement or modes of action should be favoured and in what fields?
- how to prepare for mass casualties?
- how to prepare for combat in a degraded technological environment?

In conclusion, it seems relevant to recall that France is a global power whose security challenges are not confined to a major threat in Europe. Its territory also extends over all oceans and its status as a permanent member of the Security Council obliges it to take a broader view of security. The instability and demography of the peripheral regions in the south of Europe remain key issues for it, which also affect its military tool. Our defence planning is therefore based on generic scenarios and not on a single identified threat, on which it is not possible to focus excessively. Because of economic realities, it is not conceivable to retain specific capabilities dedicated solely to Eastern Europe. However, to question "high intensity" is to reason about the most dangerous and dimensional confrontation, the one that requires the highest degree of political, industrial and human mobilisation. It is a scenario that no one today would venture to say is unlikely, and it is therefore essential to prepare for it.

The Army has never abandoned preparation for "high-intensity" combat, which has always been at the top of the spectrum of its potential engagement and operational readiness. It is this assumption of major engagement that structures our Army model with a Land Task Force (LTTF) organized in two divisions, sharing two armoured brigades, two so-called medium or light armoured brigades and two emergency brigades. All of these forces are capable of being engaged and relieved in "high intensity" combat within a coalition. With the implementation of the Scorpion programme over the next few years, the army will have sufficient equipment to allow coalition engagement up to the level of a division. The armoured brigades will of course remain the decision-making brigades in a major engagement. But they will not be the only ones to be engaged, the two middle brigades and the two light brigades (also equipped with Scorpion) will also remain complementary and indispensable entities in such a framework.

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