

The role of the Army in tomorrow's conventional deterrence, the "war to come" ...

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Histoire & stratégie

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While the fall of the USSR made the prospect of a direct confrontation between two major military powers unlikely, almost thirty years after the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union is still in the midst of a major crisis. The emergence and re-emergence of nations determined to challenge the international order raises questions about the ability of our forces to carry out a major battle.

These have, in the meantime, evolved: the absence of an adversary determined to challenge the Western world's control of air or sea space [1], or even the mere supremacy of military technology, have led our leaders to consider only [1], or even the mere technological supremacy of the military, have led our leaders to consider confrontation only through its most widespread prism, encouraged, it is true, by financial policies that do not allow for the proliferation of heavy equipment or the maintenance of large numbers of troops.

Faced with an adversary lacking not only air or sea forces but also mechanised or armoured elements, France has to face up to the fact that it has no air or sea forces, but also no mechanised or armoured elements. It is used to low-intensity conflicts where artillery, armoured cavalry and massed infantry are no longer as decisive as in the past. The deployment of limited contingents alone, supported by few but decisive air assets, proved sufficient to decide victory. This war, alternating ambushes, commando raids, light and mobile lightning deployments of small, light and mobile detachments and air strikes, France knew how to do it. It is without doubt the only European power capable of achieving such significant results with so few means; a capability that the United States, among others, envy us [2]. [2] However, these one-off successes, although impressive, do

little to conceal growing deficiencies.

Because it no longer had the use of them and because it claimed it no longer had the means to do so, France turned away from many tools: the numbers and equipment of the armoured and cavalry army (ABC) have melted away. As snow in the sun, anti-aircraft and artillery systems are scarce, our airlift capabilities are severely compromised and the Ministry of the Armed Forces is shrinking [3]. In the face of the Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) encountered in Africa and the Levant, this state of affairs imposes some overall restrictions but is not decisive; at most it reduces our strategic and tactical options. It would be a mistake, however, to consider that our forces have no chance in the future of facing adversaries who are much better equipped to deal with them. The mistake, however, would be to assume that our forces have no chance of facing otherwise better-equipped adversaries in the future and that the only military opposition would be light infantry, courageous though it may be, but poorly organised and poorly equipped. More than in today's war, it is in the war to come that the army must prepare itself, at the risk of being swept away by those who, far from our borders, will not have made the same mistakes.

Forces in presence

While the collapse of the Eastern bloc paved the way for the emergence of a multi-polar world for a time - albeit one dominated by the only remaining superpower, the United States of America - the collapse of the Eastern bloc has not yet been reversed.^{4]} - the rise of China and the return to the international arena of a Russia endowed with new means, make it possible to visualize a return to a relative but confrontational bipolarity. This new emerging geopolitical order seems to hold the promise of indirect confrontation, once again making conventional deterrence a strategic tool of the first plan [5] , as an indispensable complement to nuclear fire.

On the one hand, there are the powers which, in the American wake, are satisfied with the current international order. They benefit from the current power structures to varying degrees, but on the whole would have more to lose than to gain from an overthrow of Washington's hegemony by one or more of its rivals. These powers, which we shall describe here as "guarantors", share only a limited number of secondary interests and maintain variable and sometimes even opposing positions on a number of issues. Nevertheless, they remain united, to the supreme degree, by a desire to guarantee the international order in its present form.

On the other side of this crest line are powers that are very diverse, not only in their aims, but also in their characteristics and capacities. Nevertheless, they decisively share the ambition to see the international order evolve in a way that would promote their own interests. ^{7]} These "alternative" powers defend, more or less directly, disparate political projects whose keystone remains the questioning and overcoming of the hegemony of the United States.

These two camps, organized over time into legal, economic, political and material fortresses, do not represent the entire international geopolitical ecosystem. Between them survive a constellation of third-tier actors, capable of navigating from one event to the next, from "guarantors" to "alternatives" and vice versa. Unable to get the flag brought to its adversary, each fortress turns its gaze towards this myriad of relative and indecisive

powers: It is a question, in this colourful ensemble that is the "in-between", of conquering the capital that will secure the supremacy of the "guarantors" or, on the contrary, will structure the advent of the "alternatives".

The supremacy of some, as well as the emergence of others, is based today only on the accumulation of diverse capitals, economic, political, demographic and social, deriving from sources that are at least as diverse - economic, diplomatic and military successes, political exploits. The domination of the "in-between" is interesting in that it allows both the exploitation of resources and the diffusion of a socio-political and cultural model - and thus of influence - reinforcing the position of the camp concerned. In this sense, the geopolitical rivalry, which could and still can find in military confrontation one of its many natural developments, has been superimposed on the liberal and capitalist dynamics: two international monopolies thus confront each other for the accumulation of capital, paving the way for the "supreme triumph". Thus, if the two fortresses seem to be safe from a direct assault, the Entre-Deux asserts itself as a territory conducive to confrontation: The enemy of the "guarantor" powers will only be able to intervene more firmly in the years to come, with the prospect of a rise in power that will ultimately allow direct confrontation between fortresses.

The French Armed Forces are today the armed arm of France, one of the main Guarantor Powers. Their main duty is to prepare for the decisive confrontation of tomorrow which, within the "in-between", will determine the country's ability to safeguard its rank within its geopolitical family. This presupposes being able to identify the signals that will herald the future confrontation, but also to have a force capable of dealing with it.

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