The densification of the earth's action

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Histoire & stratégie

Synthesis and critical approach of General Guy Hubin's "Tactical Perspectives".

THE DENSIFICATION OF THE EARTH'S ACTION

Land forces today are preparing for a major capability transformation. Known as SCORPION, it involves a federative programme of equipment designed on a common platform[1] : new armoured vehicles [2], equipment refurbishment [3], information system [4] and operational readiness system [5]. Its main challenge is to exploit infovalorisation [6]. The programme is preceded by a series of technical experiments [7] which, although they have made it possible to deepen the possibilities offered by the technology, have not led to any real doctrinal inflections [8]. The originality of SCOR-PION lies, in this respect, in the elaboration of an exploratory doctrine, while certain technical characteristics of several materials are still unknown [9]. 9] A considerable effort of reflection has also been undertaken. It is notably reflected in the production of the reference document Action Terrestre Future (ATF), or the work to recast the Land Forces (LF) doctrinal documents 01 to 05. Part of this work involves the breakdown of the operational superiority factors (OSF) identified by ATF in terms of capabilities[10]. However, one of them proves to be singularly problematic: mass.

ATF defines it as "the ability to generate and maintain sufficient volumes of forces to produce strategic decision effects (...)"[11]. [11] Set at 77,000 men, the land forces are sized to the exact minimum. In a constrained budgetary framework, the sudden launch of Operation Sentinel and the multiplication of external operations (OPEX) are putting a strain on manpower and skills. In particular, it weighs on certain functions such as command structures, information and communication systems and logistics. In today's environment (demographic expansion on Europe's southern flank, the multiplication and extension of urban areas), technology alone cannot compensate for numerical inferiority. Mass can only be generated or reinforced partially [12]. This is where the idea of densification of terrestrial action comes in. If mass corresponds to a number, density refers to the ratio between mass, on the one hand, and a unit of distance, on the other hand [13]. Densifying

the terrestrial action thus amounts, for a defined mass, within the framework of the global manoeuvre and on a given space, to multiply the operations aiming to obtain an effect, direct or indirect. Far from expressing certainties, it is only a question of asking a few questions. The purpose of this article is to synthesize and put into perspective the reflections developed by General Guy Hubin[14] in his book, Perspectives tactiques.

War takes on forms of expression that are as diverse and changing as the times or societies that practice it. Thus, if the hoplitic phalanx and medieval chivalry cannot be understood outside the Greek city and feudal society, "from the mêIn the same way, the conception of war that prevails today, in our globalized society, refers to contemporary complexity"[15]. 15] The latter is deeply marked by a decisive fact: the computer and its computing power. Computing, the automated processing of information by machines, is present everywhere, permanently. Our smartphones, veritable miniature computers with multiple sensors, are perhaps its most visible expression. War is no exception in this respect. These manifestations are omnipresent, means of communication, information systems, fire control, munitions, countermeasures, jammers, at all levels.

In his book, General Guy Hubin provides a tactical analysis based on a prospective study of combat conditions. According to him, since the 1970s, this equipment has been integrating into our combat systems without, fundamentally, calling them into question[16]. 16] He thus identifies six major technical developments: navigation performance, moving fire, indirect fire accuracy, logistics, identification and communication systems. 17] They strongly influence, according to him, several parameters. Concentration becomes difficult to achieve, on pain of destruction. In Ukraine, during the battle of Debalstevo from 24 to 30 August 2014, two regiments were 70% destroyed in the space of six minutes by multiple rocket launchers[18] . 18] We also recall, during the Gulf War, the images of the 'highway of death' and of hundreds of Iraqi vehicles destroyed by coalition aircraft on 27 and 28 February 1991.

The battlefield was depolarized and security took on a very marked internal character, especially in the immaterial fields. Legibility is considerably increased, in particular via the 3rd dimension (3D). A difficulty arises with the classification and management of a considerable mass of information. The multiplication of sensors on the battlefield changes the nature of surprise. Being able to count much less on the dissimulation of means, it must play, as in chess, on that of intentions [19]. Two examples illustrate, each one differently, this process. The absence of identification of the Russian troops in Crimea, however quickly identified [20], becomes a safety measure, playing on the legal, political and operational ambiguity of the maneuver [21]. In Afghanistan, few concentrations of troops can be masked from the Taliban. French officers use the following stratagem on several occasions:

CH-47 Chinook helicopters carry troops, while others take off empty. Both land on many different points, sheltered by masks, without systematically dropping off the troops. If the different landings do not escape the Taliban, it is more difficult for them to determine the real objective of the manoeuvre[22] . 22] While these methods are nothing new historically, the parenthesis of Western technological superiority may have contributed to relegating them to the background.

Information processing is losing its vertical character. The physical involvement of the chief becomes less necessary, whereas it is his responsibility to ensure the dissemination of information according to its operational implications. The conclusions he draws for the

organisation, in the light of the proposals of the exploratory SCORPION doctrine, remain of great interest. They cover three major parameters, discussed here successively: the organisation of forces through the prism of communication systems, an outline of future manoeuvre and convergence with the asymmetric model.

THE ORGANISATION OF FORCES THROUGH THE PRISM OF COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

General Hubin's hypothesis is that the organization of force systems is always a direct consequence of the communication methods that can be used. However, he believes that if the latter change in nature, the former must follow. Current means seem to allow us to permanently modify our operational structures according to the needs (force volume and space) of the manoeuvre [23]. Similarly, smaller C2 cells [24], subject to the availability of the necessary networks, can more easily benefit from reachback [25]. Moreover, it becomes possible to rely, at the tactical level, on strategic-level capabilities (satellite imagery for example) [26].

Thus, the levels of responsibility correspond, schematically, to three levels: design, **conduct and execution**. The sheer volume of information to be exploited at each level would make it impossible to provide several at the same time. Assuming that any concentration of force above the company level runs the risk, given the new precision of the fires, of being destroyed before being committed, the author sketches the following organization:

Design level : This level exploits the totality of intelligence. It sets objectives, coordinates indirect fires and manages air assets.

Conduct level : equivalent to the GTIA/S-GTIA [28], it ensures the coherence of the action of the execution cells. It coordinates specific actions, ensures space management and information transmission.

Execution**level:** the attention of this echelon is entirely taken up by the service of very complex weapon systems and the use of terrain. At the platoon/section level, the platoon leader operates his own cell of two or three vehicles, plus two or three other cells.

In this sense, only the elementary execution counter (section/group) has a predefined structure. Its role is similar to that of an air patrol, while that of the driving level is similar to control. Changes of subordination thus occur, according to the movements of the execution level, the conduct level, or the area of responsibility of the latter. In short, under the responsibility of the design level, several command cells, in charge of a given geographical area and with provisional limits, ensure the management of a volume of assets transiting and fighting in this area, to achieve the objectives of the design level.

Such operation is not without consequence on the link units/individuals have with each other. For General Hubin, the ability to constantly adapt the volume and nature of means implies that the leader himself is disconnected from them. He also stressed that the supports of this link (communication systems) can now be attacked or degraded without physical damage to units (jamming, intrusion, etc.). The Gulf War is, for him, an example of the collapse of a coherent whole caused by the massive severance of this link. It is therefore important, in his view, to accept the loss of substance of the personal link, to the

benefit of global references (doctrines, traditions, moral strength, confidence in training) allowing coherence, even in the event of rupture, of individual actions. The risk would be, by maintaining traditional structures, to accentuate the gigantism of command organs incapable of controlling the agitation of combat [29]. However, agility[30], identified as OSF, owes a great deal to the organisation of forces[31]. It is now well established that, far from reducing the complexity of operations, command structures can help to increase it[32]. 32] Not to mention that overly large C2 centres inevitably become obvious targets. In Donbass, Ukrainian posts would have been powerfully hit within fifteen minutes of being detected by electronic warfare companies equipped with RP-377/LA mobile stations[33]. 33] This necessary fingerprint control must, moreover, be as physical as it is electromagnetic.

Considering the regimental structure to be no longer suitable for use, General Hubin proposes to return to the requirements of the training. It is also difficult, according to him, to make it coincide with the employment cell, as the latter uses too many specialties [35]. 35] The framework he recommends is that of the different schools, bringing it closer, in logic, to the shooting campaigns conducted in specialized centers. In fact, today, operational evaluation frequently takes place at the Centre d'entraînement aux actions en zone urbaine (CENZUB) and the Centre d'entraînement au combat (CENTAC). The problem of the design, stability and critical analysis of simulation systems representative of contemporary engagements (deployment over large areas and over time [37], differentiation between digitised and infovalorised units) remains to be resolved. While the use of simulation is already perfectly included in force preparation, it can now be used to contribute to discussions on decision support tools. Experiments in collective training areas in support of operations have been underway since 2016 for operations Daman (GTIA) and Barkhane (within the Operational Support Group (GSO) in N'Djamena)[38].

1] " Scorpio Exploratory Doctrine", Command Doctrine and Training Centre (CDEC), Doctrine Division (DDo), p.13.

2] Griffon Troop Carrier, Jaguar Armor, Serval Light Armor.

3] Leclerc tank.

4] Scorpion Combat Information System (SICS).

5] In particular, through the use of simulation: CERBERE, SOULT, SPARTE, SPARTE ALAT, SERKET (not exhaustive). Since 2014, these tools have made it possible to conduct scorpion combat experiments (SCORPION I to SCORPION VI).

6] "The exploitation of the added value of information resources enabled by new information and communication technologies to improve operational efficiency. "Scorpio Exploratory Doctrine.

7] Regimental Information System (SIR), Infantryman with Integrated Equipment and Liaison (FELIN), Infantry Combat Vehicle (ICV).

8] Colonel Sébastien de Peyret, "Can we innovate in terms of doctrine? "Revue de doctrine des forces terrestres, 01/2019, CDEC, p.16.

9] Colonel Sébastien de Peyret, "La place centrale de l'expérimentation dans le processus d'exploration doctrinale", Revue de doctrine des forces terrestres, 01/2019, CDEC, p.23.

10] "Special provisions for fulfilling a mission set in general terms. They are expressed in terms of competencies, without reference to a specific volume of means. " Action Terrestre Future,État-Major de l'Armée de Terre, Paris, September 2016, p.22.

11] Op. cit. p.37.

12] Military Operational Partnership (MOP), private operators, coalitions, reserves, Idem, p.39.

13] " Army Glossary ", EMP 60.641 , CDEC, 2013.

14] Guy Hubin is an active officer from the armoured army and has spent most of his military life with the airborne troops. In particular, he commanded the 1st Parachute Hussar Regiment (RHP), served in the 13th Parachute Dragon Regiment (RDP), the Special Operations Command (COS) and the Directorate General of External Security (DGSE).

15] Tenebaum Élie, "La manœuvre hybride dans l'art opératif", Stratégique 2016/1 (No. 111), 2016, pp. 43-61 , p. 43.

16] Hubin Guy, Perspectives tactiques, Economica, 2003, p. 2.

17] Op.cit, pp. 15, 17, 21, 25, 31, 37, 63.

18] Senate, "Hearing of General Pascal Facon, commander of the doctrine and command training centre", Defence and Armed Forces Committee , Tuesday 25 September 2018.

19] Ibid, p.43, 50.

20] In less than "twenty minutes" by Western chancelleries according to Joseph Henrotin, editor-in-chief of the journal Défense et Sécurité internationale, researcher at CAPRI, interview with the author, May 2018.

21] This process sends to the notion of "plausible deniability", see Tenebaum Élie, Art. cit. p.53.

22] Sergeant N. A., recounting his experience with the 16th Foot Fighter Battalion (BCP), interview with the author, August 2017.

23] Hubin, Ibid, pp.57, 63, 66, 68.

24] Command and control of operations: Authorities, responsibilities and activities of military commanders for the direction and coordination of forces and for the implementation of orders relating to the execution of operations. " Army Glossary" , EMP 60.641 , CDEC, 2013, p.152.

25] Ability for a unit to benefit from capabilities of other units not deployed or further back in the arrangement, operation centres, national territory.

26] "Comprendre les facteurs de supériorité opérationnelle", Centre de doctrine et d'enseignement du commandement (CDEC), pôle études et prospective (PEP), p.9.

27] Hubin, Ibid, p.71, 73, 76.

28] Joint Battle Group/Sub-Battle Group.

29] Hubin, Ibid, pp. 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 87, 92, 93.

30] It is defined as "the continuing ability of forces to respond to a changing environment characterized by variety, turbulence and uncertainty. (...) the ability to cope with surprise, to react to change, even to provoke it, to make oneself unpredictable, thanks to significant capacities for adaptation, innovation and learning. ». ATF, p. 33.

31] CDEC, op. cit. p. 37.

32] General Pascal Facon, "Editorial", La prise de décision opérationnelle dans l'armée de Terre, Revue militaire générale, 53/2019, p.6.

33] Hubin, Ibid, p.90.

34] Squadron Leader Stéphane Jay, "Networked Command Systems in Tomorrow's War," La prise de décision opérationnelle dans l'armée de Terre, Revue militaire générale, 53/2019, p.46.

35] A cell of 20 to 30 individuals, comprising a dozen specialties, serving two or three types of vehicles and three to four categories of weapons. Hubin, Ibid, p.139.

36] Ibid, p. 140.

37] Squadron Leader Stéphane Jay, Art. cit. p.53.

38] "Réflexion doctrinale sur l'emploi de la simulation pour l'expérimentation de la doctrine", RFT 7.7.2, Centre de Doctrine et d'Enseignement du Commandement, Division doctrine, 2018.

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