



## General Beaufre, "Einstein" of strategy.

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Published on 22/09/2020

Histoire & stratégie

**Writing in his war memoirs - "In economics, no more than in politics or strategy, there is, in my opinion, no absolute truth" - General de Gaulle emphasized the extreme complexity inherent in certain disciplines of study. Strategy, a major art of thought, is no exception to this reality and few people have managed to pose as enlightened popularisers. General André Beaufre was one of them, and has handed down to posterity a formula that is all too little known, which nevertheless, like Einstein's  $E=mc^2$ , opens the doors of understanding to as many people as possible.**

All the schools of war quote the great historical strategists such as Clausewitz, Sun-Tzu, Mahan, Jomini and others. These thinkers of war whose reflections constitute a cultural foundation that cannot be ignored. However, the learning of the great theory of strategy is rapidly giving way to a realistic transposition to current conflicts, marked by asymmetrical confrontation, internationalized anti-terrorist struggle, complex systemic analysis, comprehensive approach. So much so that other greats that cannot be controlled are imposed: Trinquier, Galula, Petraeus, Lyautey. Then comes the litany of currents of thought: historical, constructivist, realist... So that in the end the only thing that appears to the philistine is the terrible conclusion that strategy is a science-art of such complexity that it is almost impossible to provide a model.

Yet in this tangle of concepts, theories, historical references, all relevant but so difficult to embrace in their entirety and even more difficult to apply to the changing world that is ours, it seems that the work of General Beaufre has gone almost unnoticed. They are, of course, cited whenever there is talk of nuclear deterrence or guerrilla warfare. But in the end, we rarely pay tribute to the genius of the man who left the world a definition of strategy in the form of an equation whose simplicity and fullness are reminiscent of Einstein's  $E= Mc^2$ .

$$S = K \times F \times T$$

(Strategy of a State = State-specific factors X Tangible forces X Intangible forces X Time)

The strength of this equation is mainly expressed on three levels:

- Firstly, it sounds the end of the ancient conceptual and ideological confrontation between the relentless Wardenians who thought the strategy of a state only through power factors and the defenders of an approach based on the field of perception. The material forces (bombs, tanks, production apparatus...) and the immaterial forces of a Nation (morale, resilience, capacity to influence...) no longer represent the alpha and omega of Strategy. Anyone who wants to approach the Strategy must, since Beaufre, come out of his ideological blindness in order to embrace with the same seriousness and the same acuity these two approaches, which have become pillars and no longer the edifice itself.

- Moreover, by giving this equation a weighting coefficient K[1] ("specific factor"), he reconciles all the great families of strategists engaged until recently in a fratricidal and somewhat outdated power struggle. This famous K-factor, which the evil spirits could define as a sort of indefinite "catch-all", offers on the contrary to who wants to understand the world, the possibility of relying on the most relevant results of each model of strategic analysis, without rejecting any of them by ideological bias. More than it offers this possibility, it imposes the imperative need for it in order to get closer to the truth. Thus, in order to understand the strategy of a country such as Egypt, the geographical approach would insist on more than 4,000 years of a socio-political organization based entirely on the economic and emotional relationship with the Nile. The historical approach would lead us to take into account the extreme intrication between the exercise of power and the army, of which the Mamluk period is the most important period. The historical approach would lead us to take into account the extreme intricacy between the exercise of power and the army, whose Mamluk period is the known representation of an ancestral fact going back to the Pharaonic origins (General Horemheb succeeded Tutankhamun nearly 1300 years before JC). The sociological approach would lead us ..... to viewpoints whose relevance is undeniable and which cannot be ignored in order to draw conclusions on a country's strategy. It is indeed this grouping of analyses into a single coherent and meaningful whole that the K-factor allows. and in order to give a definitive answer to the detractors of this concept, we shall reply that it is nowadays no more and no less than the laboratory in which the systemic analyses that all modern armies carry out in order to develop their comprehensive approach are carried out.

- Finally, General Beaufre gave his letters of nobility to a notion that is almost systematically forgotten by analysts, strategists and geopolitologists: time. A primordial factor to fully understand the strategy of the other. This is exactly the mistake made by the Soviets during the Afghan conflict. Where popular pressure forced the Moscow government to obtain quick results, the Mujahideen leader Amin Wardak fought with the philosophy "I knew we would win. Maybe not me, but my son or grandson" [2]. Not taking into account the time factor, but also the way in which the other approaches this factor is a major fault. All the more so as the present era, post-revolution of the Internet, is defined by a drastic contraction of time, which is counted in nanoseconds in stock market

transactions. The current post-Internet revolution era is defined by a drastic contraction of time, which can be counted in nanoseconds in stock market transactions, or even hours when it comes to public opinion, which has become particularly volatile. Every state has to deal with time in the development of its strategy in order to detect future internal weaknesses and asynchronisms with its environment, just as it has to understand how its rival (be it economic) sees its own relationship with time (China). Any strategic thinking that omitted this key factor would take on the colour of an intellectual exercise out of place, the inevitable consequence of which would be inefficiency, at best. This is the pitfall from which Beaufre's equation protects us.

In the end, General Beaufre was able to iron out conceptual divergences, offer a field of expression for systemic analysis and reintroduce the fundamental notion of time. He did this by establishing four factors of equal importance but diverse in nature as the essential pillars of strategic thinking. In doing so, he provides what Plato called the greatest number, as well as the most knowledgeable specialists, with a tool whose formidable ease of use allows them to analyze the world by combining exhaustiveness and intellectual honesty.

This equation of truth, to the credit of General Beaufre's brilliant mind, as Einstein was in his time, deserves to be elevated to the rank of the great intellectual achievements of the twentieth century. Don't make Aldous Huxley lie:

"Elegant and memory-friendly as it may be, brevity can never, in the nature of things, account for all the facts of a complex situation".

Preface to "Back to the Best of Worlds,

Aldous Huxley, 1958.

1) "k a case-specific coefficient resulting from local and general conditions".

Beaufre, André. *Stratégie de l'action* (French Edition) (p. 142).

2) Cahier de la Recherche doctrinale, "les soviétiques en Afghanistan", p76.

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**Release date** 17/06/2020

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