



# Reflections on the reappropriation of combat in the face of a major enemy

General Tactical Review - Fire 1/2

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**The theme of reappropriating war in the face of a major enemy is very present in military thinking. Armies have a great deal of recent experience in peacekeeping, counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations, but they no longer have practical experience "of" war, a sustained confrontation between masses of aggressive manoeuvres contesting each other to the depths and in different environments all the fields of conflict (physical and immaterial) and whose objective is to defeat the power of the adversary" 1.**

The Army has a solid professional record, that of recent engagements that put the combatants and their equipment to the test. Many lessons, relevant whatever the type of conflict, have been learned from the field. However, the word reappropriation suggests that we have gaps and shortfalls, oversights of previously mastered know-how. We observe them during exercises at corps and divisional levels, when we lose the initiative in the face of a (generic) enemy on the same footing and when the management of flows (logistics, information) jeopardises the success of operations. These two aspects of the reappropriation issue, which may seem anecdotal, clearly set the framework for reflection. The enemy exerts a pressure in time and space that puts a staff in a state of saturation of which it has no experience: mass of information to be managed, sequence of events, friction of the organisation...

Let us attempt a summary typology of the shortcomings of a staff. The first is the "thought defect", which translates into poor manoeuvre design or lack of responsiveness. It stems from blindness, a lack of intelligence, but above all from a lack of critical thinking. It is not enough to know in order to understand. The second is an inability to cope with saturation, the pressure of events. When a complex organization gets caught up in the flu or misunderstood, getting it back on track becomes a priority. It's all about training, accepting failure in order to bounce back. The third and last one is the "disembodiment" that occurs when respect for the plan takes precedence over reality. The modes of action

are generic and the information is not totally reliable.

Forces up to brigade level win the physical duel, fighting an opponent "in the ring and with gloves". A level 1 or 2 CP wins the intelligence duel; it penetrates the opponent's mind to allow his forces to defeat him in the ring. The spirit of the mission is embodied in the physical strength provided by the brigades. The body and the division must create the conditions to ensure that they win this duel for which they are equipped, organized, trained.

### **1. Subsidiarity and substitution, understanding one's role in the maneuver, the role of the brigade and the role of the division in the battle.**

The principles of subsidiarity and substitution, which go hand in hand, have a real operational value in understanding the place of each in a manoeuvre. The principle of subsidiarity establishes that a subordinate level is capable of fulfilling a given mission. The principle of substitution adds that the higher echelon must provide its subordinate with what it does not have at its disposal natively (with regard to the missions for which it is suited). A subordinate is given a mission within his reach; it is the responsibility of his leader to put him in a position to carry it out. Having these two principles in mind allows the leader to give realistic missions to his subordinates and to determine what is theirs by themselves. The head-to-head command dialogue focuses on the division of responsibilities and possible additional requirements. The principles are applicable to manoeuvre (including logistics), intelligence sharing, all the subtleties of modern warfare brought together under the theme of effects in intangible areas.

What is it all about? To understand the essence of a crisis and the reason for its action

We are used to starting our work with the question: "What is this all about? ». The risk is to trivialize the intellectual process and lose sight of its purpose. Jean Guittou invites us to hunt down "the fact that carries the spirit".

As he points out in *Thought and War*<sup>2</sup> The distinction between petrol and accident requires careful thought. It is a question of distinguishing the universal from the contingent, a difficult activity given the abundance of technical and doctrinal developments, questioning concepts or creating new ones. It is not a question of being innovative, but rather of uncompromisingly tracking down the most meaningful facts and actions. Let us do the intellectual exercise of retaining from a dossier only what is absolutely essential; what characterizes one thing and cannot be applied to another without changing its essence. That a troop is well-equipped and trained is an accident, and that applies to everyone. That an infantryman carries out his duel with his eyes in his eyes at close range, that distinguishes him from the others and constitutes the quintessence of his combat: his essence. Each mission is embodied in a milieu and a moment: what is strictly unique about it?

The "witty fact"? Jean Guittou, after pointing out that "truth and reality are neither in the abstract nor in the special" is interested in singular cases "which contain the universe in potential and which are likely to give you much more knowledge". It looks for the

transitions between elements, between events; the thing to be known and understood and which leads to all the others. As much as an intellectual exercise to which one must be committed, this search for "the fact that carries the spirit" is a habit to be developed in order to perceive the essence of a crisis, nestled in events and analyses that seem uninteresting at first glance. Observe a watercolour and you will see what is the brushstroke that brings out the light by contrast.

Putting into perspective to embody action and decision

We often reason within the context of the moment. Thinking about the return of war requires a paradigm shift to project ourselves into a new political, economic and social framework. At the tactico-operational level, we must be able to imagine the practical conditions of the moment:

political sensitivity (especially to losses), logistical resilience, the solidity of coalitions, the leader's freedom of action, the availability and level of training of the forces... Let's call this exercise contextualization.

Contextualisation is not about questioning history but rather about placing the decision in the context of an embodied, concrete action. Let us retain from this principle the idea of not sticking to principles but of determining in which real framework they would apply. The political, economic and social context in which decisions about Operation Barkhane are made will probably have nothing to do with the context of a war against a major enemy. If we have reached such a level of crisis, the political, social, national and international conditions will be very different from those of today. The habit of foresight has been established for armaments programmes; the ability to project oneself into a new operational paradigm still has some way to go.

A practical conclusion of contextualization is to ask what part physical combat will play in the future. Today, the immaterial fields of conflictuality focus attention wisely. Public opinion and moral force are sensitive to the effects of STRATCOM. Everything is done to avoid direct, physical confrontation. The covered war, that of the shadows, is in full swing and can make people lose sight of the need to get into the ring. However, the tendency to resort to violence to settle conflicts, which is resurfacing today, is a cruel reminder of the need to return to the classic fundamentals of duel confrontation; in the ring. We can consider that we are in a state of "war danger".<sup>3</sup> ».

The maneuver designer is the highest level of synthesis deployed in the field: the consistency of the maneuver

There is a very human flaw in everything<sup>4</sup> to be of interest to him. This translates into a maneuver that many want to be leading, and not very competitive. This is seen when a subordinate echelon, instead of reflecting its action in a whole, that of the large unit, considers the higher echelon as a provider of means. He takes it as his "Enabler". This is why it is important to define who establishes the synthesis of the actions to be carried out and the desired effects in order to ensure overall coherence.

The need for synthesis is obvious to everyone. However, it is still necessary to agree on its nature. It is understood as the art of bringing out from a flow of information those that contribute directly to the assessment of the situation and the taking of decisions. The main difficulty comes from the audience: to whom is the synthesis intended, the chief or the staff?<sup>5</sup> ? Synthesis is therefore, "basically", the correct use of flows.

Another aspect, based on the distribution of responsibilities, deserves our attention for the level 1 and 2 staffs. It is a question of distinguishing between design and execution responsibilities. The highest level of command, deployed in the field, is in charge of design synthesis, while the subordinate levels execute. Design, in a logic of substitution and subsidiarity, consists in defining effects that contribute to the achievement of a major effect in order to reach a desired end state. The subordinate levels have the initiative to achieve the expected effects, issue an opinion on the appropriateness or timeliness of these effects, discuss them with their leader, but they do not have the freedom to redefine them at their level. Depending on the operations, the level of synthesis corresponds either to the corps or to the division. The fact that all parties participate in the achievement of a common goal is called coherence. It is often represented as verticality. The more complex and subtle the operation, the more important the level of synthesis is. An influencing manoeuvre implies several effectors who create a network of all the actors in the area of action, from the local to the regional - national level.<sup>6</sup> They are part of a manoeuvring design that sets them the effects to be achieved as well as requirements and constraints. Each person sets up his own manoeuvre, but this does not constitute a design in the strict sense of the word.

Synthesis is not limited to anticipation/coordination of action. It is also the ability of a staff to identify the trajectory of an action in relation to the expected effect, a bit like the infrared tracer of a MILAN missile that would bring it back to its target. The proper exercise of the synthesis level presupposes ad hoc organisation . We will limit ourselves to the level of processes, and will only mention two in which the commander and his group are directly involved, namely the Assessment Board and the Risk Management Plan . These two processes facilitate the decision making process to move from one phase to another (decision point in Operational Design) and to draw up new plans when a new risk emerges.

### Multi-domain conflict and the importance of a good definition of subsidiarity

The emergence of the immaterial domain pleads for a good understanding of subsidiarity. The enemy must receive physical blows; that is the purpose of military action to make him bend. The subtlety of immaterial warfare (originally designed to circumvent physical warfare) requires the commander to be surrounded by a group of advisers, to steer this subtlety himself. For the corps, the Senior Advisor Group (SAG) - Legal Advisor (LEGAD) - Political Advisor (POLAD) - STRATCOM - Gender Advisor ( GENAD) - Gg - Cyber (offensive computer warfare - LIO...) under the direction of the commander, or his deputy, deals with immaterial aspects on a daily basis. It deals with all joint, multinational, diplomatic and political areas including the host nation, the link with non-state organisations, etc. It proposes to the commander or the higher echelon of the armed forces to take a decision



on the matter. It proposes to the commander's decision or to that of the higher level combinations of different actions (fight against trafficking, embargo, international law, economic, cultural, religious levers...) which go beyond the strict framework of the competences of the specialised units of the staff.<sup>7</sup> The EMC is more concerned with kinetic actions that are more difficult to plan and implement (errors are paid for immediately and in cash).

Various actions in the immaterial domain are grouped under the title of winning the Narrative Battle. On the one hand, it is about protecting oneself from adverse multi-spectral actions, especially those that undermine cohesion, and on the other hand, it is about determining all the levers to counter the physical action of the opponent (example of human rights violations - HRD, historical and political liabilities, factional splitting...). Once again, the highest level of synthesis is the designer. The others are effectors with actions to be planned and carried out at their level.

The level of synthesis is particularly justified to lead the battle in the new spaces of conflictuality, more specifically immaterial ones. Having few physical holds to apprehend the reality of certain actions, acting on perceptions, influencing or deploying a manoeuvre of deception, the subtlety is such that an unfortunate initiative would call into question the common edifice. Moreover, centralization, often feared a priori, is necessary when means are counted. The cyber domain provides a good example: an offensive operation requires scarce skills and resources and a high level of operational security. We will have more of a "right to draw" than a real disposition of means. A Security Operational Center (SOC) that monitors networks in the context of cyber defence covers all levels. The IOL cannot be considered in the package of operations in the immaterial fields, down to the level of a cell integrated into a branch. The commander is personally involved and approaches such operations as if they were special forces operations.

### The space-time framework and the corresponding responsibilities

The principles of subsidiarity/supplementarity are placed in a specific space-time framework. Indeed, it is obvious that a subordinate unit receives orders in a more reduced framework than that of its leader, it is the very principle of the division of actions in time (orders) and in phases (plan). This division in time and space does not prevent the plan from being communicated and known to all.

The size of the areas of action and the distribution of responsibilities in space and time depend on the nature of the enemy and the crisis. It is clear that the need to understand an enemy device in depth and in layers (from cyber to space) increases with the level of command and with the means at its disposal. The definition of organic elements, apart from the interest of concentrating counted and indispensable means for manoeuvre (such as crossing or electronic warfare) at the level of the corps or division, is also based on a logic of depth and duration. The most blatant need is that of fire delivery, observation and surveillance of the battlefield. There is a real need for permanent observation in depth and deep reconnaissance.

The delineation of responsibilities within an area, or across a boundary, is a subject in itself. Fires and Targeting are understood in terms of the reality of the effectors and their performance and not only in terms of theoretical limits. The inter-allied interoperability of fires is indispensable and particularly effective for the Fires domain.

Levels 1 and 2 have the main responsibility for joint and multifunctional coordination. They are subordinate to a Joint Force Command (JFC), to which they report on mission accomplishment (in planning) and interact during action.

Finally, the larger the space-time framework, the greater the requirements. The battle of the flows increases.

### Taking and keeping the initiative

If we wanted to sum up the challenge of fighting an enemy on the same footing, we could say that it is the fight for control of the initiative. As in chess, the one who loses is the one who can no longer manoeuvre for whatever reason.

In a multi-domain war against a major enemy, 4 great superiorities condition the initiative and thus the freedom of action. Losing them, even partially, would call into question the achievement of the objective. It is up to the leader of the large unit to ensure that his subordinates are in the right initial conditions in the four major areas of superiority described below. Let us take the example of a brigade that would be ordered to seize an objective. It is sized, organized and trained to do so. But, placed in a wider combat environment, it does not have the means to ensure its air defence at all altitudes, the conquest of fire superiority in depth, maintain logistic flows over time, etc. The principle of substitution applies.

**Superiority of indirect fire.** Certainly, historically a flood of fire is not enough to seize an objective, but the considerable losses that the enemy artillery can inflict on us would be enough to stop an action. In addition to this, the improvement of artillery precision, the increase of ranges, the reduction of loops of acquisition/decision/execution of a fire, the ability to fire in depth. Some countries, such as Russia, favour the concentration of effectors on their modernity by betting on the saturation effect (dispersion).

The superiority of fire is rather in the depth because the artillery is rarely in contact. Moreover, if in the past the blindness of the observatories gave a minimum guarantee of limiting the effectiveness of the fires, today the redundancy and the capacity of acquisition of the firepower is more important. Moreover, if in the past the blindness of the observatories gave a minimum guarantee to limit the effectiveness of the fires, today the redundancy and the capacity to acquire objectives in depth and to observe the fires replace the question of the acquisition of the superiority of the fires in a multidimensional planning (traditional, 3D...).

**Air superiority.** It has two components: defending oneself and taking the initiative. The first is to protect against adverse attacks, including missile strikes on main command posts (MC) far from the line of contact. The second is to have superiority in the 3D domain,

which is essential in several respects: intelligence, support, support. Simply having a strong air defence, as was the case in Ukraine, is enough to neutralise the air superiority factor. Nothing flies. In this case, fire superiority becomes decisive.

**Superiority in the electromagnetic spectrum - cyber - influence.** The command and control of an operation presupposes a technical communication architecture highly dependent on sophisticated technical means. In this field, the arms and independence race is developing in all areas, including space. Let us imagine an army with a very favourable balance of forces in the "traditional" areas (artillery, infantry, armoured vehicles, helicopters, etc.), jamming communications and neutralising information systems would ensure that it could use its mass as a decisive asset. High technology will never solve the problems that the manoeuvre must solve.

**Superiority of execution.** This last superiority is based on the fluidity of the PCs, which is understood as the ability to produce orders on time and to react to the unexpected. As Jean Guittou would say, a PC does not make bets, it calculates probabilities. Superiority of execution covers many aspects; we see the idea of taking the ascendancy and defeating the will of the opponent. A command post makes the duel of intelligence<sup>8</sup> with the opposing HQ.

### The impact of the initiative on the manoeuvre

The question of initiative arises as early as the manoeuvre design stage, if only for the calculation of power ratios. Having it in mind avoids betting and allows to play more on the probabilities of success. To every risk taken corresponds a weighting of it.

Having the initiative or not prefigures the ability to maneuver: there is offensive action by having the initiative and that by losing it, the same applies to defensive actions. In the favourable case, the opponent undergoes our rhythm, which augurs well for the achievement of the objective. In the unfavourable case, the pressure is maximum on the staff and the forces because if the loss of initiative persists, the achievement of the objective is compromised. In practice, in training, in exercise, putting a staff under pressure consists of making it lose the initiative for a given period of time.

1 Definition of high-intensity conflict adopted by the French Army, March 2020.

2 Jean Guittou, *La Pensée et la Guerre*, Desclée de Brouwer, 2017.

3 The philosopher Simone Weil distinguishes two possible states for our societies confronted with real enemies, with a claim of universal domination: the state of peace and the state of danger of war.

4 The formulation is meant to be radical. In reality, the utilitarian norm is not inevitable. Intention takes precedence.

5 Example of the SAB, Situational Awareness Brief, a daily situation report to the commander and staff.

6 The strategic level takes into account the international level while looking at the lower levels.

7 They implement, with the advisers being directly involved in their work, and for some directly command them.

8 The etymology of the word intelligence which suggests the idea of reading inside a thing is appropriate to military art. He who reads into the manoeuvre and thought of the adversary, and at the same time makes himself unreadable to him, has the ascendancy.

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