



## Command and Moral Forces

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Le général Xavier PINEAU

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**"When we look at the four components that make up the atmosphere of war, we see that: danger, physical effort, uncertainty and chance, it is easy to understand that it takes great moral and physical strength to move forward with any guarantee of success in this disconcerting element.<sup>1</sup> »**

**We might consider that, by dint of having been exploited, the vein of moral strength has been exhausted and that since Ardant du Picq and Clausewitz - whose reading is always recommended - much has been written on the subject. Yet, even if the deep nature of man remains, even if the main characteristics of war remain the same, it makes sense to put the work back on the job regularly, if only to ensure that current societal expectations or the contingencies of the wars of the moment do not alter the perception we have of the subject.**

Moral forces allow each individual to resist the exorbitant constraints of the battlefield, and the leader to lead a troop united behind him to reach a superior objective. There are thus several dimensions: one individual and two collectives, either vertical - hierarchy - or horizontal - comradeship. Moral forces are based on three pillars: discipline, cohesion and command, and they are a necessary condition for gaining or regaining the ascendancy over the opponent in order to win the battle and achieve victory. From discipline flows the hierarchy that defines the respective areas of responsibility through which everyone finds his or her place in our complex systems; with cohesion, it is the basis for the development of the moral forces. Trust comes from the certainty that the other will do his or her duty, including assistance when necessary; and the action of command, finally, generates and

maintains discipline and cohesion. Thus, it is less a question of the sum of moral forces than of the activation of a collective power. Now, "force is the sum of its parts, power is the multiplication of its parts" (ibid., p. 2).<sup>2</sup> so that if one of the three factors in this equation is zero, the result of this equation is zero.

We will focus on the role of command and, in particular, the command of regiments or large units. It is not a question of pitting the qualities of young leaders against those of more experienced leaders: The qualities of one, such as the acceptance of danger and physical courage in the field of battle, serve as a foundation for the qualities of the other, which are expressed in tactics and operational art. All these qualities settle down, but not all of them find expression in the same way at different stages of the career. The leader is a fighter who has the ability to train men in fire, yet physical courage and drive are not enough; other qualities are essential to command larger units than a platoon or company. Clausewitz notes: "We believe, therefore, that resolution is due to a particular orientation of intelligence, an orientation which belongs to the vigorous rather than the brilliant mind. To confirm this genesis of resolution, let us add that there are many examples of men who, having shown the greatest resolution while in a lower rank, lose it the moment they reach a higher position. While feeling the need to decide, they recognize the dangers of making a mistake, and, being unfamiliar with the things they are dealing with, their intelligence loses its primitive vigour; they become more timorous. They become more timid as they become aware of the danger involved in this indecision, which paralyses them all the more since they were previously accustomed to acting on the spur of the moment."<sup>3</sup>

There are three main components to the command role: intention or vision, control, and support to subordinates. In each of these components, the moral strength of the military leader must be exercised around the notion of doubt, which Clausewitz calls "uncertainty" and "chance," in order to reduce first and foremost that of his subordinates but also that of his own leader and his allies, to increase that of his adversaries and, a contrario, to cultivate it for oneself as a healthy practice in order to fight the Hubris, the illusion of omnipotence.

## **Moral strength, a responsibility of the leader**

The first duty of the military leader is to give meaning to action by elaborating his intention, the fruit of exhaustive reflection, while having the wisdom to be temperate in order to free the energies of his subordinates and to accept contradiction and sometimes divergent opinions. This temperance finds its balance in the risk-taking assumed by the expression of presuppositions.<sup>4</sup> This is a choice of command that allows subordinates to continue to work while filling in uncertainties because, as Paul Valéry said, "there are many things to ignore in order to act". Communicated to subordinates with conviction and enthusiasm, intention directs their energy and guides their action, which is decisive because "action confers the fullness of reality on the motives that produce it".<sup>5</sup> The greater the risk of loss of life, the greater the importance of full awareness of motives, so that the risk of death is consented to by the subordinate and assumed by the leader, who must consent to the death of others without necessarily having his own death at stake.

The leader, who is responsible for the instruction, training and equipment of his troop, generates by the care and the requirement he places on these subjects, self-confidence and confidence in the group and, by the same token, the cohesion and moral strength of his unit.

Since one does not give an order as one would get rid of a problem, the command must resolutely exercise its function of control, never turning its head away out of ease or cowardice. It must voluntarily and courageously confront reality, what resists, the difficulties, sometimes even the result of its own mistakes, because no leader is perfect or infallible. For the subordinate, the guarantee of control is in essence reassuring and a source of certainty: corrected, he progresses and the value of his work is recognized. Through control, command decisions are followed through over time. Command and control are the obverse and reverse sides of the same banner, and responsibility is to command what tenacity is to control.

The purpose of monitoring is not to seek responsibility - that is the role of the inquiry - but rather to establish an assessment of the situation shared between several hierarchical levels. It makes it possible to correct an action, to influence or confirm a decision, to justify support from the higher echelon. Not only does trust does not preclude control, but control creates trust, whether it is self-confidence or trust between hierarchical levels: knowledge of the quality of the execution of an order by the subordinate, certainty of the reality of the help given by the leader in case of need. Trust comes from the leader and from it comes cohesion. "And this is what trust looks like ... this intimate, firm, conscious trust, which is not forgotten at the moment of action, makes real fighters." <sup>6</sup>.

Although rarely, because the methods of decision making aim to avoid it, it is possible to be right alone against all; however, Cassandra's role is never easy to take on? Stubborn patience is then a determining factor in explaining, convincing and rallying her partners, sometimes her own superior, to her ideas, while assuming a disagreement and risking to displease. In these battles of ideas, work, pugnacity and strength of conviction are at work. General de Gaulle fought against the Allies to liberate Paris in August 1944, arguing that character was "the virtue of difficult times".

As a power factor for us, moral forces are also a power factor for the enemy and, as such, can be a privileged target of the action of the great unit.

### **Moral force, a target to be hit**

From enemy to fire, military action is not without adversaries of any kind. In its conventional form, it takes the form of a confrontation of antagonistic wills, as Clausewitz put it: "War is an act of violence whose aim is to force the adversary to carry out our will". Thus, from the confrontation of wills flows that of the moral forces of the troops and those of the chiefs; hence the importance for the latter to be convinced, like General de Monsabert, who was driven by a single goal: victory.

The moral strength of a troop makes it possible to prevail over a competitor on the same footing, or even to dominate an opponent with superior material strength but less determined, less enduring, less combative. "The action of an army, of a troop on another troop is at the same time a moral action and a material action. The material action of a troop is its destructive power; its moral action is the fear it inspires. In combat, two moral actions, rather than two material forces are present; the stronger one prevails. The victor has often lost by fire more people than the vanquished; this is because moral action is not only because of the power of destruction, real, effective, it is especially because of this presumed power, threatening, in the form of a reserve threatening to renew the fight" <sup>7</sup>. As such, the example of the Battle of Rorke's Drift<sup>8</sup> during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 is edifying. After a day of fighting, the two hundred British soldiers, victorious over four thousand Zulu warriors, not only avenged the defeat of Isandhlwana suffered the day before, but also opened the door to British domination over the whole of southern Africa.

In his duel with the opposing leader, the military leader aims to raise hyperbolic doubts about the balance of power, the appropriateness of his choices, the cost-effectiveness, his ability to re-engage in future battles, and the very hope of winning. The desperation to win may lead the opponent to abandon the fight and not accept further losses in vain. At Waterloo, "Hope changed sides, the fight changed souls" <sup>9</sup>.

Doubt acts as an acid that eats away at the certainties we have about others, about ourselves, about the validity of our choices, about our own will to succeed, even about the very meaning of our mission or the rightness of our cause. This is what must be attacked in the adversary, defended within the troop and in the very heart of the leader. His moral strength is crystallized in his ability not to doubt himself or his men.

Exacerbating doubt in the enemy generates fear in him: " Fear!... There are leaders, there are soldiers who do not know it; they are people of a rare temperament. The mass trembles - for flesh cannot be suppressed - and this trembling, on pain of being misunderstood, must be an essential part of all organization, discipline, devices, movements, maneuvers, modes of operation, etc., and must be a part of the whole of the organization.all things which have precisely as their final aim to mast it, to deceive it, to make it deviate at home, and to exaggerate it in the enemy" <sup>10</sup>. Fear is, in the military leader, of a different nature than for the troop exposed to physical risks. He may be afraid of making mistakes and losing soldiers, of course, but he may also be afraid of displeasing his leaders, of being - badly - judged by his peers, or even of leaving a pitiful mark on history.

The immaterial field of moral forces is a battlefield in its own right, where perceptions carry at least as much weight as physical reality. Bonaparte summed it up as follows: "In war, morale and opinion are more than half of reality" <sup>11</sup>. Doubt has a full part to play in the battle that is waged, both to protect against it and to maintain it in the enemy. However, doubt itself is ambivalent because it can also be a means of self-control for the military leader.

### The power of virtue



In the exercise of command, moral force cannot dispense with the dialectic of the morality of force and the profound humanity that must be expressed in it. Indeed, war is one of the most paroxysmal expressions of human action with, probably, the rescue that makes men accept to risk their lives to save the lives of their fellow men. It is this strength of soul which will choose the narrow path between the principle of efficiency and the principle of humanity; this same strength of soul which will be communicated to subordinates, sparing them the "enemies" of the enemy....] the same fortitude that will be communicated to subordinates, sparing them pathological "states of mind"; the same fortitude by which "moral" and "moral", far from being mutually exclusive, will support and strengthen each other with their respective powers of impulse ...".<sup>12</sup>.

In this respect, doubt takes the form of circumspection to weigh up in fine detail the just and strictly indispensable share of human suffering - whether that of our soldiers or that of the adversary - in order to achieve the objectives set. It also takes the form of humility to guard against vanity or the illusion of absolute knowledge or the temptation of omnipotence. Paradoxically, therefore, doubt is salutary for the military leader when it is thought of as a conscious, voluntary, thoughtful, and ... personal process shared with a very small number of intimates. This approach is balanced with the determination that animates the military leader; it allows him to detect within himself the tipping point between perseverance and obstinacy. " War is the realm of chance. ...] But to get through these incessant conflicts with the unexpected, two qualities are indispensable: first, a spirit that even in the midst of this increased darkness does not lose any trace of the internal clarity necessary to lead it towards the truth; and second, the courage to follow that faint glow. The first has been referred to figuratively as the French expression de coup d'oeil; the other is the resolution "to be able to see the truth".<sup>13</sup>.

The action of the command also takes on a social dimension by considering the soldier in its fullness not only as an individual member of a combat collective, but also as an individual member of a family. The "rear" must hold; that is why, beyond any consideration of humanity, the consideration of soldiers' families is of such great importance for the military leader.

Beyond that, the moral strength for leadership lies in the full awareness of the deep nature of the human being, body, mind and soul, and in the full awareness of the needs of the human soul : order and hierarchy, liberty and equality, obedience and responsibility, a sense of usefulness, honor, justice. The satisfaction of these needs for oneself and especially for soldiers, because esprit de corps is not the negation of the individual, responds to the most pressing need of the human soul, which is rootedness. "A human being has a root by his real, active and natural participation in the existence of a community which keeps alive certain treasures of the past and certain presentiments of the future".<sup>14</sup>. For the soldier, it is esprit de corps and national sentiment. This moral dimension takes on its full tragic dimension when the military leader exposes himself to the eyes of the comrades or family of the soldier who died for France; eyes that often oblige him.

Unsurprisingly, command and fortitude are intimately linked, whether it is a fundamental quality of the military leader or whether the leader is primarily responsible for the quality of his troops, particularly in terms of the quality of their preparation. For command, and especially at higher levels, the notion of moral strength is based on the mastery of an

ambivalent dialectic of doubt in addition to the more obvious qualities of any leader of men.

**1** Carl von CLAUSEWITZ: De la Guerre, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1955, p. 89.

**2** Julien FREUND: Sociologie du Conflit, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1980, p. 98.

**3** Carl von CLAUSEWITZ, Ibid. , p. 86-89.

**4** Hypothesis conditioning the validity of the planning studied (CICDE, Glossaire Interarmées de Terminologie Opérationnelle, 2015, p. 199).

**5** Simone WEIL: L'Enracinement, Gallimard, Paris, 1990, p. 263.

**6** Charles ARDANT du PICQ: Études sur le Combat, Librairie Chapelot, Paris, 1914, p. 82.

**7** Ibid. , p. 121.

**8** Reported in the 1964 film Zulu by Cyril R. ENDFIELD.

**9** Victor HUGO: Les Châtiments, 1853.

**10** Charles ARDANT du PICQ, ibid. , p. 12.

**11** Quoted by Hervé COUTAU-BÉGARIE in "Traité de Stratégie ", Economica, Paris, 2008, p. 105 .

**12** Jean-René BACHELET: "Inflexions ", La Documentation Française, Paris, June 2007, p. 35.

**13** Carl von CLAUSEWITZ, ibid. , p. 86.

**14** Simone WEIL, ibid. , p. 61.

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**Title :** le général Xavier PINEAU

**Author (s) :** le général Xavier PINEAU

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