



From a forward defence to the enemy from within, what are the consequences on the role of the soldier?

Earth Thought Notebooks

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L'Armée de Terre dans la société

"The continuity of politics" has always made the soldier wonder about the role he is being asked to play. For even if military action responds to specific logics, the mission assigned to the soldier remains the extension of a political problem. Each person's thoughts thus vary according to the evidence or the complexity of the conflict, but the leader rarely makes an economy of it because he assumes a singular responsibility, that of giving meaning to the action. While the threat of invasion puts an end to many questions, the current use of the armed forces no longer offers the same intellectual comfort and marks a new stage in terms of complexity.

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Historically proven loyalty

Historically, the French soldier is not only obedient: he is also loyal. Like many historians, Marshal Juin has stressed this in his book "Three centuries of military obedience"» [1]. 1] This tradition is a precious heritage, as the turbulent history of states that have not been able to claim such loyalty underlines. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate to recall that while such loyalty is a due, it is not automatic. For it is nourished by elements such as the

perception of legitimate objectives, a real understanding of the goals pursued, methods of action consistent with common values, equitably shared efforts, consistency between requests and allocated means, support for actors in the field, etc. Thus, a conflict often leads each military leader to reflect on these issues, which then enables him to establish the loyalty of his subordinates. However, the current complexity of conflicts makes it necessary to bear in mind that such loyalty is not self-evident.

Let's consider our Hairy ones. Regardless of their level of understanding of the events leading up to the conflict, one can imagine that most soldiers of the time initially had few questions about the invader. The borders are threatened: it is the family, it is the village that must be defended. The situation was similar during the Cold War, when the soldier protected what was dear to him from invasion or annihilation. The stakes of the conflict are easy to grasp because the threat has material evidence and tangible aspects.

External operations, already a special situation

Long before the contemporary period, the army was already regularly used as a tool of foreign policy rather than as a protector of the national sanctuary. Nevertheless, after centuries of military conquests, France gradually stopped seeking to extend its territory. The Ministry of National Defence replaced the Ministry of War. The citizen-soldier gives way to the citizen-soldier. The end of decolonization consecrated him as a soldier defender. And it is in this spirit that he is now engaged and committed. The status and role assigned to him logically affect his state of mind and his relationship to the mission. All the more so as this same state of mind is the subject of particular attention from political leaders and military leaders, who are very concerned about the motivation of the recruited officers and frequently stress the importance of their open-mindedness for the country.

In a foreign operation, the military commander is responsible for defending the national interest abroad as defined by the decision-making spheres of the moment. That this state of affairs leads him to question the meaning of his action does not seem incongruous. This is what makes the difference between obedience and submission, between soldier and mercenary, between defender and warrior.

It is the wars of decolonization that provide the opportunity to perceive with the greatest acuity the questions that can animate both sides as to the legitimacy or appropriateness of the action. This is certainly not the first time that the army has fought outside metropolitan France. But the interpretation of Bugeaud's doctrine or Gallieni's management of "fahavalism" [2] seem to have elicited few reactions in their time. From the writings of the time, it appears that it is not really a subject. Thus, the disagreements of a General Dubern ("We are destroying the country that we claim to colonize and civilize") find little echo.

On the other hand, the tribulations of the lieutenants and captains engaged in Indochina are well known today. From Jean Lartéguy to Pierre Schoendoerffer, the privileged witnesses of these conflicts have been eager to share their dramatic complexity. Haunted by the memories of the massacres of the populations they had sworn to protect, the survivors of Indochina who then fought in Algeria did everything possible to avoid a new

abandonment of those who risked everything on the word of France.

New dimensions with significant implications

No doubt, French soldiers have not had to endure such a painful dilemma since then. Nevertheless, among those who are likely to give and receive death, the very nature of the operations in which they have since been engaged has not made the questioning disappear. What is the real meaning of my action, beyond what is said? Is legality sufficient to legitimize the objectives that have been set for me? How can I explain the discrepancy between what I observe in the field and the communication that each stakeholder makes of it? Because there is nothing inert about the military tool, whatever such a term implies. And the "refocusing on the core business" will not make the men and women "refocused" in this way any less thoughtful.

For the boss, there is no question of allowing these questions to permeate downwards. It would be a mistake against the spirit. And upwards, the doubts generally stop at the direct leader. De facto, the level of demand on the leaders and the intellectual discipline do not lend themselves well to such exchanges. Moreover, open questioning remains rare as long as the leaders of the moment are in office, with a few exceptions. With the publication of "Who are we dying for?" [3], **many** soldiers had thus seen the echo of the discrepancy they had observed in the former Yugoslavia between the field and the representations made of it. Such uneasiness was once again perceptible in Kosovo, with the military letting those [4] who were not bound by the duty of reserve express this discrepancy.

However, the farewell to arms and the passage of time regularly frees up the floor, reducing its potentially polemical nature. It is thus interesting to observe that the interrogations of the young lieutenant lost in the middle of the jungle or the sands are perpetuated decade after decade, operation after operation. Colonel Goya thus evokes his commitment in Rwanda in 1992, saying that "he wondered every day what interests France was defending in this country". The most recent commitments are no exception to the rule, whether in terms of operations carried out or those planned for a while. While exchanges are generally confined to exchanges between peers, it is nevertheless difficult to refrain from passing judgment on a mission in which one has been deeply involved for months. The "knowers" will see it as a lack of wisdom, in view of everything that escapes the greatest number of people. But this is precisely what prevents the soldier from risking his life and that of his men on the whims of a few, however enlightened they may be.

"Feelings?", will annoy, mock, a few proud warriors...

Of course you do. History shows us with sufficient evidence of how the absence of a state of mind favours immediate success at the expense of lasting victories. This is what the geopolitician Dominique Moïsi[6] reminds us when he details the belligerent resentments we face today, following conflicts that seemed to belong to the past.

They are also resentments because that is precisely what differentiates the hotheaded soldier from the soldier. As long as the enemies, what is at stake and the aims of war are

obvious, the question does not arise. But in today's context, where complexity prevails and many elements are not so obvious, how could it be otherwise? Arming something other than robots is one of the safeguards of democratic functioning. The army has understood this perfectly well, and is committed to training its officers in "moods" through reflections on ethics and deontology.

All the more so since it is not necessary to go back very far in history to identify dysfunctions with far-reaching consequences in the decision-making processes of a democracy. In his book on the American engagement in Iraq[7], Thomas Ricks details in particular the dramatic sequence of choices for which many leaders did not want to hear anything and many subordinates did not dare to speak up. In the Iraqi conflict alone, the instrumentalization of the 3,000 deaths of September 11th resulted in the deaths of 4,000 American soldiers and hundreds of thousands of civilians. However, Thomas Ricks' well-documented study shows that these thousands of victims paid the price more for individual ways of being than for failing structures. These included rivalries, lack of real competence and intellectual pride on the part of political, administrative and military elites.

As a result, after centuries of self-satisfaction with the functioning of our democracies and forgetting the prophecies of Tocqueville,[8] so much bloodshed is driving us to be vigilant, unless we can imagine ourselves being immune to such abuses. Moreover, in the light of such experiences, some people regularly call for an evolution from the great mute to a model in which the new generations would "dare" to express themselves more. The example coming from above, this generation is likely to be long awaited, as the hunt for the editors of the Surcouf group or the fate reserved for General Desportes have shown that such an aspiration was not unanimously shared. And while calls for free and original thinking are recurrent, the reality of daily operations seems to have taken little notice of the abundant literature on the subject. In this case, contradiction remains a sport with random results, regardless of the concern for form that accompanies it.

Moreover, the outcome of the Iraqi conflict, although largely consensual, has not put an end to the military adventures of a country that has nevertheless never ceased to promote democratic values. Already, the methods of American intelligence had led some to wonder whether the United States had not left its soul in its war on terrorism. Today, drone strikes in countries with which the United States is not at war are a practice halfway between extrajudicial execution and political assassination. However effective such a course of action may be in the short term, it seems unlikely to stop the spiral of revenge and sets a dangerous precedent. How will we react when a state more powerful than ours acts in this way on our territory?

The philosopher Michel Terestchenko thus observes that the threats facing our societies today generate dynamics of internal transformation that result in a weakening of law and consciences[9]. 9] The adoption of Orwellian "emotional laws", to which digital technology gives an unprecedented scope, offers the military new subjects for reflection on the articulation between ends and means. 10] All the more so since these changes can sometimes lead soldiers to wonder on what to base their actions, at a time when the word "value" appears everywhere and when big words are constantly invoked, but when so many ethical questions have never been so little agreed upon.

A wide variety of forms of conflict

In external operations, armies are regularly engaged to guarantee "a safe and secure environment". Without a designated enemy on whom to impose their will, i.e. without political confrontation, these missions take on the character of police operations. They lead the military to have to control those who break the law, which is a permanent and therefore potentially endless mission. At the same time, peace on our borders cannot overshadow the new forms of violence that are at work in our societies from within. So much so that the armed forces are now involved in internal security issues. In France, the militarization of terrorist action has led the decision-making spheres to commit the armies on national territory. "France is at war against terrorism, jihadism and radical Islamism" declared the Prime Minister on 15 January 2015. For the armed forces, this commitment has resulted in Operations Barkhane, Chaman and Sentinel. In terms of the volume of forces, this deployment corresponds to a major conflict in terms of the White Paper. However, our country is no longer just the target of the attackers, but also their cradle. As a result, the soldier's adversary is no longer just another soldier. It is also the one who comes from the school of the Republic, is born in France, is a French, British or Scandinavian citizen.

Fighting against an ideology with FAMAS remains futile because it is ephemeral.

"We can't kill the idea with a cannon, or give it a thumbs-up," Louise Michel used to say. Indeed, many conflicts have shown that the violence that the military is asked to contain is only a symptom of deeper causes. As a result, the societal origins of this violence rarely allow us to decipher it beyond the taboos, which is the only way to dry up its source. The analysis of these phenomena regularly raises disturbing questions, as it questions the very substratum of our societies and the validity of the ideas on which they are built. But simply expecting the soldier to contain the effects of these phenomena, or even to catalyse the upheavals in him, can only give ephemeral results. Taking symptoms for evil invariably leads to "the impotence of victory" [11]. [11] Thus, given the demands made on them, soldiers need to observe that the causes of this violence are the subject of a consensus, or at least of a constructive debate, in order to find meaning in their actions and become fully involved in them.

All the more so as the use of the armed forces in situations that require ever greater discernment seems far from being temporary. Thus, for the time being, the majority of violence is no longer predominantly State-originated. The nature of the producers of violence continues to evolve, faced with armies that remain more designed to deal with institutional and structured violence. Yet, according to the UN, the global financial system laundered nearly \$1.6 trillion in 2009 [12], allowing many private actors to become more powerful than public actors. The example of Mexico, another large democratic country, illustrates the extremes the state can reach in the use of armed forces.

These different elements illustrate the extent to which the soldier's job is becoming more complex. And how much these developments require the soldier to discern and reflect in order to always work in the general interest. Clearly aware of the forces of our democracies, citizen-soldiers are familiar with volatile public opinion and sometimes have little knowledge of the mechanisms of conflict. They see it pushing for military

intervention, only to become impatient immediately afterwards. The general feverishness that results sometimes leads to the deployment of armies ultima ratio in reaction, to "do something" . This risks reducing it to the role of a communication tool, or even an anxiolytic. However, for the soldier, the lack of legibility of the goals pursued is difficult to reconcile with the demands of the profession of arms and the constraints that result from it. The general status of military personnel explicitly stipulates the obligation of loyalty. However, both abroad and on national soil, the existence of a clear strategy supports the efforts required, the risks taken and the awareness of the defenders. Ultimately, it therefore contributes directly to their loyalty.

1] Alphonse Juin, "Three centuries of military obedience"Plon, 1964.

2] Malagasy brigandage movement of the end of the 19th century amplified by the refusal to enlist in forces loyal to the authorities.

3] Emmanuel de Richoufftz, "Who are we dying for?", Broché, 1998.

[4] Alice Krieg, "A look at the media in the Yugoslav conflict"», 2002

Jürgen Elsässer, "West Germany in the war in Kosovo. Chronicle of a manipulation"L'Harmattan Publishers, 2002.

Carla Del Ponte, "The hunt, me and the war criminals" Feltrinelli , 2008

5] Radio France international, 8 August 2015.

[6] Dominique Moisi, "The Geopolitics of Emotion: How Cultures of Fear, Humiliation and Hope Shape the World"Flammarion, 2008

[7] Thomas E. Ricks, "Fiasco: the American Military Adventure in Iraq"Penguin Books, 2006

8] Alexis de Tocqueville, "What kind of despotism do democracies have to fear".Democracy in America", Chapter IV, 6, 1842

[9] Michel Terestchenko, "The Dark Ages"Paperback, 2015

[10] Jean-Claude Cousseran, Philippe Hayez, "...Educating democracies, democracy education"Paperback, 2015

[11] G. W. F. Hegel, "Reason in History"», , 1822

12] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Estimating illicit financial flows resulting from drug trafficking and other transnational organized crime, 2011, p. 5.

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