

# From the foundation of moral forces

Earth Thought Notebooks

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**The Army is today facing a hardening of its commitments with a radicalization of armed violence led by an irregular enemy. For the author, it is the moral forces of its soldiers that count to win or resist over time. Cultivating moral strength therefore means developing an army's ability to give confidence to its troops and to cope with adversity.**

The technological superiority of the Israeli armed forces over the Hezbollah militias should have enabled the Israeli State to achieve a crushing victory over its adversary in 2006. Many factors specific to the evolution of the Israeli army explain this paradoxical situation. Above all, it illustrates that despite the continuous progress of science, man remains "the primary instrument of combat" [1].

## **Moral strength, an individual fact**

The strength of an army depends first of all on the value of the individuals who make it up and on their own moral strength. If the soldier does not have confidence in his own abilities, how will he impose his will on his opponent? 2] A soldier's moral strength lies in the confidence he has in himself. The Army has developed a particular pedagogy, the Participatory Objectives-based Pedagogy (PPO) [3] to instruct its soldiers and make them aware of their abilities. Throughout military life, the Army seeks to develop in the soldier a taste for effort, surpassing oneself and courage.

This state of mind is reinforced by consistent physical training. Hardiness and endurance are more sought after than pure physical strength. These qualities will enable the soldier to resist and overcome harsh climatic conditions and difficult situations. The commitments of the French forces in Afghanistan as well as the recent fighting in the Adrar of the Ifoghas clearly demonstrate this necessity. Likewise, the passage of soldiers to training centres or commando centres contributes to this process of developing moral

forces, by forging the character of the soldier and the leader.

Confidence is then based on competence, because the soldier is first and foremost a trained professional [4]. The operational preparation of units engaged in external operations always starts at the lowest level. Every soldier must master the fundamentals of the combatant [5] and the specialties for which he has been trained. A soldier's fighting spirit is multiplied tenfold by the mastery of his military skills. The enemy may also be discouraged by the certainty of having trained soldiers in front of him who will impose their "tempo" on the battlefield.

The superiority felt by the combatant and his morale will also be enhanced by the quality of the weaponry, equipment and weapon system he serves. The technological power of modern armies also contributes to the confidence of the fighter and the fear of his opponent [6]. 6] Technological superiority allows for the ascendancy over the opponent. The appearance of the tank in World War I had a devastating effect on the morale of German troops and increased the hope of victory for Allied soldiers [7].

## **"An army ceases to be effective when it is no more than the sum of its soldiers" (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry)**

The moral strength of an army is not only the sum of individual moral forces. It is also based on the strength of collective trust, the trust placed in the group at large. This positive synergy will strongly influence the operational effectiveness of the group. The collective trust of its members is acquired through living together. Since the initial training of the soldier, the Army has endeavoured to make each of its members aware of the need for group spirit and mutual aid. Comradeship plays a key role on the battlefield [8]. 8] In addition to the need for training to maintain technical skills, the pre-projection conditioning process (PCP) developed by the Army prior to each deployment offers the advantage of working together with those who will share the same mandate. Soldiers discover each other and then become aware of their complementarity, interdependence and the means used to their benefit (support and sustainment) to carry out the mission. Soldiers then become aware that they belong to a larger group, where everyone has a role to play. They are confident that they can count on each other and trust each other.

However, the solidarity and cohesion of a troop does not come about spontaneously; it is always the work of the leader. Within the <sup>2nd AD</sup> the amalgamation of a handful of members of the Free French Forces with soldiers of the African army, enlisted men and conscripts from North Africa is to the credit of its leader, General Leclerc [9]. 9] The soul and morale of this unit are his direct work. Aware of this fact, the army is therefore committed to training its cadres to make them competent leaders who care about their men. This will create mutual trust between leaders and subordinates, which is also a key element in the operational effectiveness and morale of a troop [10].

10] Furthermore, the virtue of the leader's example increases the moral strength of his subordinates tenfold. Faithful to his motto "Do not suffer", General de Lattre, arriving in Indochina in 1951, raised the morale of the French expeditionary force and ensured a military leap against the Vietminh in 1951. Thus, from confidence in the leader was born the brotherhood of arms, which engendered the spirit of sacrifice, loyalty and courage on the battlefields [11].

11] The culture of arms promotes the integration of the soldier or the different units into the group, and strengthens mutual trust and a sense of belonging. It completes the

cohesion of the members of the unit. It allows the emergence of esprit de corps, which is a pillar of moral strength. This voluntary adherence to a common history, culture and values pushes everyone to give the best of themselves. It produces increased confidence, which is an adjunct to operational effectiveness[12]. 12] All elite troops have developed a strong esprit de corps.

### **The importance of the cause being defended, the framework in which armies are employed and their recognition in society**

Legitimacy of action is a key element in ensuring the moral strength of an army. A sense of cause or ideal is a powerful moral adjunct. It allows confidence in the spirit of the mission and justifies the ultimate sacrifice if necessary. This feeling is further exacerbated when the homeland is under direct threat. The start and victory at the Battle of the Marne in September 1914 can be explained in part by these exceptional circumstances.

On the other hand, the morale of the troops engaged under UN mandate in Bosnia was not at its best at the beginning, with a mission with vague contours ("peacekeeping"), the relative powerlessness of the blue helmets (not using their weapons) and the heaviness of the UN organisation. The armies need a clear employment framework set by the policy, with the means to act. Without these conditions, the soldier does not accept the risks involved and feels badly employed. The change in policy in 1995 under the impetus of the President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac, with the resumption of the Srebrenica bridge and the modification of the UNPROFOR mandate, thus rekindled the moral strength of the French troops.

The soldier also draws his moral strength from the support of the nation and its representatives. The importance of the army-nation bond that helped to unite the French and their armies was well and truly taken into account. The recognition of the specificities of the military profession and its constraints by their fellow citizens gives soldiers the assurance that their sacrifice will not be in vain. The 2014-2019 military programming bill is a step in this direction by seeking, for example, to protect soldiers from excessive judicialization of their actions. If the nation no longer supports its army, it can no longer win. The United States of America had bitter experience of this with the Vietnam War, where the American people expressed their disagreement through large-scale protest movements.

The moral forces of an army are thus based on a particular alchemy between the moral forces of the individual, the military entity, society and its rulers. By acting on these four pillars, armies have a significant additional means of improving the operational effectiveness of their forces and meeting the challenges of tomorrow. Today, more than ever before, power is based on capabilities and the will to use them. Our military capabilities are still of the highest order. But in a hedonistic and individualistic society where death is banished, our will, that is to say our moral forces, must be the object of all our attention.

# Pensées mili-terre

## Centre de doctrine et d'enseignement du commandement

[1] Colonel Ardant du Picq, "Combat Studies", Economica - Paris, 2004

[2] Carl von Clausewitz, "From the war"Midnight - Paris, 1959

3] cf TTA 193 Manual of Military Pedagogy

"The greatest immorality is to do a job you don't know!" Napoleon I.

5] Especially shooting with one's weapon and combat first aid.

[6] Ernst Jünger, "Steel Storms"Le livre de poche -Paris, 1989: "Behind us, the enormous noise was only growing, although it seemed impossible to get worse. In front of us, a wall of smoke, dust and gas, impenetrable to the eye, had risen. Strangers ran across the trench, shouting joyful injections into our ears. Infantrymen and artillerymen, sappers and telephone operators, Prussians and Bavarians, officers and men of the troops, all were overwhelmed by the elemental violence of this igneous hurricane and were eager to mount an assault at 9.40 a.m.". p. 301

[7] Michel Goya, "The invention of modern warfare", Tallandier - Paris, 2014, chapter 10

[8] In "Anatomy of Battle"John Keegan shows that at the Battle of the Somme in 1916, the cohesion and solidarity of the British soldiers of the battalions of the "Kitchener" army enabled them to continue to fight and advance despite terrible losses.

9] Erwan Bergot, [9 ] Erwan Bergot, "The <sup>2nd DB</sup> ", Presse de la cité, Paris, 1995.

[10] Brice Erbland, "In the claws of the tiger", Les belles lettres - Paris, 2013

[11] Ernst Jünger, "Steel Storms"Le livre de poche - Paris, 1989: "When I asked for volunteers, I was surprised to see - because we were still at the end of 1917 - almost three-quarters of the strength of the battalion's companies". p. 243.

[12] Claude Barrois, "Warrior psychoanalysis"Hachette, collection Pluriel - Paris, 1993: "The group often becomes the true homeland in whose name everyone is ready to kill or die".

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