



Concentration of effort and balance of power

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By approaching the principle of concentration from the point of view of the balance of power, Lieutenant-Colonel Emmanuel Dubois shows that this has been a permanent concern of all great captains throughout the centuries. In the end, concentration is, of all principles, the one that seems most self-evident. Yet its application has always mobilized impressive energy and intelligence.

Concentration of efforts is one of the three principles of war attributed to Marshal Foch and adopted, since then, as cornerstones of French military thought. Conceptually, it is a matter of making the vectors of his power converge towards the same point at a chosen time and place. By focusing force in this way, the expected effect is to bring about a decisive change in the course of the battle. The concentration of efforts thus consists in imagining and then implementing a set of convergent actions intended to modify the balance of power, the balance of power, with the aim of defeating the opponent.

This notion of balance of power deserves special attention despite its apparent simplicity. Etymologically, the balance of power characterizes a link, a relationship of power between two or more entities. The balance of power is never fixed or definitive. It is a relative notion which engages the responsibility of the leader. The idea he has of this relationship will be decisive in determining the exact nature and intensity of the risks that will have to be taken.

The evaluation of this balance of power is not limited to a mathematical count of the technical capacities of the various parties that would be compared. It is the meeting of methodical analysis and intuition. It is because of this element of subjectivity that it is essential that future operational leaders of the Army handle this concept with agility.

To do this, drawing on contemporary doctrine, it is essential that they grasp the thinking of military theorists, whether they approve or challenge the way they combine the multiple dimensions of the balance of power. Thus, distinguishing with finesse the

contingent from the permanent, they will be able to think about the principle of concentration of efforts in the perspective of a collaborative Scorpio battle that, tomorrow perhaps, will reshuffle the cards of the balance of power.

What does the doctrine say today about the balance of power?

A quick review of contemporary French doctrine provides solid reference points for fully appreciating the thinking of the classical authors who have influenced it in one way or another.

First of all, Land Forces (FT-04) describes, in coherence with the three founding principles, general principles of tactical engagement with a threefold purpose: to constrain the adversary, to control the environment and to influence perceptions. They then list a list of success factors for the engagement of a land component, including a favourable balance of power[1] "based on the dynamic combination of joint operational functions within the framework of joint effects". The aim is therefore to dominate the adversary by reaching the peak of its strength through an optimal combination of effects produced by different vectors.

In order to be receptive to other visions of the balance of power, it must be understood that this is a doctrinal bias. The question is not whether it is right. By its nature, a doctrine takes a position, it is operative. Ours today considers power and coordination as key elements of the balance of power. Perhaps the dispersal of means that Scorpio will authorize tomorrow will lead us to reconsider these key elements.

Recently published, Armée de Terre future (ATF), in a prospective approach, counts eight factors of operational superiority (FSO) [2]. One of the strengths of this reference document is that it describes them in a systemic vision. It thus highlights both the interactions and interdependence of these factors. It therefore allows the study of a large number of combinations, each one bringing its share of lessons and conclusions of a capability, doctrinal, organisational nature...

Describing these combinations is a long-term task that we will not discuss here. However, in order to provide food for thought from the point of view of the concentration of efforts, it should be noted that these eight FSOs can be considered as so many dimensions, "levers for action", making it possible to obtain a favourable balance of power.

What do military theorists say about this?

Having a few keys to doctrinal understanding, it is time to put the classics of military thought into perspective on the theme of the balance of power. The interest of the exercise lies in highlighting the underlying trends. It is thus easier to distinguish between the evolution of revolutions, the cyclical from the permanent.

- Jomini: a single principle

General Baron de Jomini (1779-1869) stated that "one is quite surprised to find that the battles of Wagram, Pharsale and Cannes were won by the same primary cause".

According to him, warfare is not a science, but an art based on the application of a fundamental principle that "consists in making a combined effort with the greatest mass of one's forces on the decisive point". He considers three ways of applying this principle:

- "To take the initiative of the movements"...
- "Directing movements to the weakest and most advantageous part"...
- "Make the enemy commit faults contrary to this principle."

Jomini, finally, recognizes only one principle, the concentration of efforts, of which the three means of application correspond in fact to two interpenetrating factors of success.

The first of these means, "taking the initiative of the movements", conditions the realization of the next. Initiative is a factor which is familiar to us and which figures prominently in our doctrinal reflections. It is, for us, in line with the principle of freedom of action. But familiarity does not necessarily imply consensus. Let us note, for example, that a foresight exercise by the CICDE [3] recently proposed revising the Foch principles and elevating the initiative to the rank of principle. Without dissenting on the relevance of this proposal, let us simply note that this debate highlights the still predominant place of initiative in modern military thinking.

The second factor is clearly related to the concept of the balance of power. It is conceived as the combination of two complementary actions: the first concerns friendly forces, "directing movements to the weakest and most advantageous side", the second concerns the adversary, "making the enemy commit faults contrary to this principle". In Jomini's reasoning, it is a matter of making his mass converge towards the main objective at the right moment while ensuring that the opponent's mass, dispersed in the face of minor objectives, is split up. One can therefore understand the importance of the maneuver for Jomini. It is the necessary condition, if one is not forced to act in reaction, to obtain a favourable balance of power.

- Clausewitz: numbers are the primary factor

Clausewitz's reasoning is very interesting because it is pure abstraction. He approaches the concept of mass (in the sense of the FSO[4]) with incredible modernity. Clausewitz reasons with the data of his time, always considering the least favorable hypotheses (our approach with the most dangerous ME[5] process is quite similar). He therefore assumes similarly equipped armies from peoples of a comparable degree of civilization. It thus eliminates by convention the differences in technical means, organization and training: "If we strip combat of all the modifications that it can undergo according to the determination and circumstances from which it originates, if we finally disregard the value of the troops because this is a given, all that remains is the naked concept of combat, that is to say, a formless struggle in which we distinguish nothing but the number of combatants".

So what is left? Moral strength and numbers. Clausewitz emphasizes the number. Although he considers that a troop with the same number, a troop imbued with warrior virtue (Napoleon, Frederick) is somehow more numerous, he believes that number is the

key factor. On the one hand, he is aware of the random and fluctuating nature of moral strength on the battlefield and, on the other hand, he considers that moral strength can compensate for numbers only up to a certain point.

It is at this point in Clausewitz's reasoning that there is a risk of going against the grain. He does not say that the bigger one is sure to win. He does not conceive of the battle as a rudimentary and brutal confrontation of two masses in a crushing logic. On the contrary, he also promotes the dynamic idea of maneuvering. This is where Clausewitz's reasoning joins that of Jomini and the great captains. Strategy (in the Clausewitzian sense, what precedes and prepares the battle) "determines at what point, at what moment and with what forces the battle will be fought; by this triple determination, it exerts a very important influence on the outcome of the battle". In fact, the maneuver determines the conditions of combat. Once the fight begins, there is only the number.

Let us note, to drive home the point, that Napoleon Bonaparte said nothing else. For him, war is an art, battle the masterpiece of the strategist, "his plan alone can be stopped in advance and improvisation is the very law of its production" [6]. Napoleon believed that the outcome of the battle depended on one effect: to produce on the opposing front a local disorganization powerful enough to bring about total disorganization: "It is necessary to unite one's fire on the same point. Once the breach is made, the balance is broken, everything else becomes useless" [7].

To fully appreciate the scope of this assertion, it is necessary to understand that Napoleon deliberately sought the decisive battle. He created, in a way, the conditions for a direct confrontation by an indirect strategy. This is characterized both by an end-to-end initiative and at the same time (corollary) by a perfectly controlled risk-taking. By cutting off his opponent's lines of communication and retreat, Napoleon forced him to make a Cornelian choice: surrender or fight to try his luck at the place and under the conditions he had chosen. It is easy to imagine that under these conditions, the morale of the opposing troops, at least that of the leaders, was not a factor that multiplied the balance of power!

- Vegetable and ancient tradition

Végèce made an effort to abstract the principles of warfare. Let us recall, to clarify the context, that he was writing to edify his Prince in the perspective of the battles to come at a very unstable time: the great invasions. From this conceptual approach, let us retain two maxims that enlighten us on his very modern conceptions of battle:

- "Opportunity is an art more useful in war than value."
- "What contributes greatly to victory is to have infantry and cavalry in reserve which have no fixed position. The Lacedemonians invented the reserve, the Carthaginians adopted the use that the Romans have always practiced since."

The first sentence enlightens us on his conception of battle. It is neither predictable nor fixed in its course, the balance of power can only be relative and provisional, never definitive. In fact, to perceive the fluctuations, the changes of balance and to be able to deduce the opportunities to be seized is an art. Here again, the role of the leader, the quality of his discernment and his ability to take risks are of prime importance. However, it seems useful to point out that Végèce's reasoning is strongly imbued with Roman culture, which readily associates courage with barbarians. Contrary to the Romans who had

discipline and intelligence, moral strength ("value") was the only virtue accessible to frustrated and undisciplined peoples. In concrete terms, when Caesar says of the Belgians that they "are the bravest", it is not really a compliment!

The second statement refers, once again, to the notion of initiative. He considers that reserve, like Foch almost 15 centuries later, is an essential instrument for preserving freedom of action. Through the manoeuvre made possible by the use of the reserve, it is possible to act on the balance of power in order to change it. Let's note in passing that the definition given would find its place in a contemporary staff manual (the reserve doesn't have a "fixed position", it's not a QRF[8]!).

- SunTzu and the Chinese tradition

Sun Tzu wrote: "All you have to do is to make a concrete assessment of the enemy's situation and concentrate your forces to take him over. That's all." Although this injunction may be self-evident in tone, Sun Tzu has a much more sophisticated approach to its implementation. Chinese tradition considers that cunning and strategy are intertwined [9].
g) It is a matter of elaborating a stratagem, a trap set for the opponent to commit a foul. The enemy is expected to be the source of his own vulnerability which will then be exploited. It is interesting to compare this conception with that of Napoleon. Without neglecting the initial dispersal of his troops to mask his main objective and plunge his opponent into uncertainty, Napoleon paid little attention to his enemy's intentions. He does not wait for him to lose himself, he does not count on his action, he takes it fast and forces him into battle.

In addition to the traps set, it is also necessary to guard against those of the enemy. The Chinese tradition is full of maxims inviting the strategist to be unpredictable by anticipating. Sun Tzu thus affirmed that "he who has only one goal and one way to reach it is only a fool" because, definitely predictable, his stratagems will be fanned and he will easily fall into the traps set for him. Without making confusion, let us retain that, in our doctrine, the deception maneuver contributes to modify the balance of power by inhibiting the opposing will (indecision, incomprehension) or by provoking a dispersion greater than that consented to for deception. It is all a matter of dosage. For it to be credible, the deception manoeuvre has a cost in terms of resources. In addition, the secondary objective being sought must be sufficiently important for its achievement to contribute directly to the final goals.

The submission of the opponent, in the Chinese tradition, therefore involves a permanent manipulation of the balance of power. This is what focuses the energy of the strategist, not the manoeuvring of forces. It is a question of blurring perception, making him commit missteps, masking his intentions to render the opponent's strength inoperative because it is unsuitable, incoherent and useless.

The balance of power tomorrow, food for thought

Almost every age has been tempted to think that it has unlocked the mysteries of humanity. Ours, just as humane as the previous ones, is no exception to this rule. We need only mention the "Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA)" [10] to be convinced of this. Foresight is always a delicate exercise in the sense that it is not predictive. To guard against certainties, historical perspective acts as a remedy against historical sufficiency

and egocentrism.

Does this mean that nothing changes? Probably not, and it is obvious that the Scorpio program opens up a field of possibilities full of promise as the recent exploratory doctrine published by the CDEC suggests. However, we must remain measured, and the preceding long development on the perception of classical authors has no other ambition than to invite us to prudence, a cardinal virtue, which allows us to avoid the impulses of pride or the intoxication of exalted enthusiasm.

- To know the strength of the adversary

Yesterday, as today, the assessment of the balance of power is based first and foremost on objective elements in multiple dimensions: numbers, organization, doctrine and technology. It should be noted that overall coherence is a dimensional factor in the balance of power. This is the famous DORESE[11] cycle, which is both a guarantee of efficiency and operational effectiveness. Although these elements are not perfectly quantifiable, they can be assessed. In the beginning, therefore, is the mathematical count (number of pieces, units, technical capacities...) weighted by doctrinal data.

Then are aggregated subjective elements related to the nature of the adversary, his strategic culture, his goals of war. It is there that the general culture, the "true school of command", which allows, according to General de Gaulle, ".to rise to that degree where the sets appear without prejudice to the nuances", will give life to statistics. Recourse to geography, history, sociology, philosophy and theology will make it possible to develop an intimate knowledge of the adversary, to understand his reasoning, to perceive his feelings, his contradictions and, to a certain extent, to foresee his reactions.

The evaluation of the balance of power, because of the subjective character previously mentioned, is the responsibility of the leader. It is on the basis of this vision, which he will have forged with the help of his staff, that he will determine the nature and extent of the risks he will accept to take.

- Modulating the strength of the adversary

This is to give substance to the means evoked by Jomini: "to make the enemy commit faults contrary to this principle [of concentration]". These faults can be provoked in various ways: hiding one's objectives, distorting perception, devising a stratagem, gaining speed, carrying out deception maneuvers, breaking the rhythm, surprising... All of them have dispersion as their common denominator.

"Effort everywhere, effort nowhere," is a saying that is often repeated in all tactics courses. Concentration may seem obvious because it makes sense from a rational point of view. Human instinct, on the other hand, is more inclined to attack all the enemy's interests simultaneously and, at the same time, to defend everywhere. "Concentration" necessarily implies a decision, the choice to sacrifice the contingent in order to preserve the essential. It is taking a risk that humans are reluctant to take. On the contrary, dispersion gives a false sense of security.

It is therefore a question of either preventing the enemy from taking the initiative or making him lose it. In the first case, having understood his mode of reasoning, he will be

prevented from deciding. This is exactly what Guderian had perceived, as he constantly re-launched his attack in the Ardennes in May 1940. He knew that the French, obsessed with maintaining a continuous front line, would never dare to launch a counter-attack until they had a clear idea of the situation. In the end, this would come too slowly and too late to influence the course of events. The second case is a great classic of tactics, which consists in forcing the enemy to engage his reserve early or on a secondary objective to make him lose the initiative. It is from this perspective that the distinction "main operations/shapping operations" should be read, between the main operations that will bear the effort and for which the balance of power will have to be very favourable, and the secondary operations that will contribute to it, in particular by causing the enemy to disperse.

- What about the Scorpion programme?

The main tactical problem of concentration is that it is necessary to disperse in order to provoke the dispersion of the enemy and ensure one's own safety. It is also fundamental to be able to rapidly increase the density of one's resources, to concentrate them, in order to benefit from a favorable balance of power. It is in the dispersal/concentration dynamic that Scorpion will make it possible to achieve a considerable qualitative leap. Scorpion is conceived as a system in its own right, or even a meta-system. It is a guarantee of coherence, and therefore of efficiency. The performance of the equipment, the power and precision of the armaments, the capabilities of the transmission systems and the collaborative technology will be valuable assets. Scorpion will allow us to go very far in the division. So much so that some, including General Hubin, are questioning the relevance of our current model of organising forces into regiments, companies and sections. Who says large division means many combinations. Scorpion will therefore also allow us to go very far in the ways of obtaining a favorable balance of power, probably by requiring a lower density of means and probably also by relying on speed and surprise.

However, while enjoying Scorpion's formidable capabilities, one must remain lucid and cautious. First of all, if Clausewitz reasons the balance of power on the hypothesis of two armies with similar equipment, it is because he knows (or suspects) that a technological innovation only provides a temporary advantage, until the opponent possesses it or circumvents it. The literature on levelling technologies abounds. The technological monopoly of the West is coming to an end. The pace of innovation and its widespread diffusion is accelerating. The struggle of the coalition against DAECH, in a ratio of strong to weak (or strong to crazy, depending on one's point of view), is an illustration of this. With limited means and in a context of time not conducive to research and development cycles, DAECH has been able to design and tactically use armed UAVs.

Secondly, the cultural revolution represented by Scorpion must be measured from a doctrinal point of view. Our doctrine, as we said earlier about FTs, looks at the balance of power in terms of power and coordination. Now Scorpion will reach its fullness more in the field of surprise and speed, which corresponds rather to an Eastern vision. It is not enough to decree revolution for it to take place. We are dependent on our culture of war, and changing it takes time and energy. Neglecting this reality can have serious consequences such as losing touch with reality, turning doctrine into dogma. We dream of an aggressive wildcat, we discover ourselves as a big, harmless tomcat.

Finally, we must be careful not to push the limits of dispersion too far. If simplicity is one of the most commonly used criteria for comparing manoeuvres, it is not because tactical

leaders lack creativity. It is because combat does not adapt well to too much sophistication. The fog of war darkens even more the human mind, already focused on a confrontation where one risks one's life. Moreover, what technology makes intellectually possible will always be limited by the human dimension of war, in particular by the amount of uncertainty we will be able to bear and, incidentally, by the risks we will be able to take.

By approaching the principle of concentration from the point of view of the balance of power, we have been able to show that this has been a constant concern of all great captains throughout the centuries. In the end, concentration is, of all the principles, the one that seems most self-evident. Yet its application has always mobilized impressive energy and intelligence.

Although Foch does not use the word "principle", we could legitimately wonder about his paternity of the principle of concentration. What is its merit, after all, once we have read Jomini, Clausewitz and the theorists, once we have gathered the experiences of the practitioners?

Military thinking is a creative process. It is neither plagiarism nor necessarily the invention of a new world. Steve Jobs used to say that "creativity is only about connecting things". Foch simply connected experiences and ideas by synthesizing them into a new form. His genius lies in a formulation that is clear and accessible enough to achieve consensus for almost a hundred years in the Gallic village.

As far as military thought is concerned, everything may have been said for twenty-five centuries, but, in the end, everything has yet to be invented. It is now up to us to question the evidence.

1] The link between the latter and the principle of concentration is, moreover, explicitly evoked.

2] Comprehension, cooperation, agility, mass, endurance, moral strength, influence, command performance.

3] Joint centre of concepts, doctrines and experimentation. Its motto perfectly reflects its mission: "Thinking War".

4] "The ability to generate and sustain sufficient force volumes to produce the effects of strategic decisions over time..."

[5] Enemy Mode of Action (EMOA)

[6] «The Napoleonic Battle» H. Camon (artillery squadron commander), 1899.

[7] Napoleon Bonaparte

[8] Quick reaction force

9] Sun Tzu, in the first chapter of his "I Ching", H. Camon (Chief of Artillery Squadron), 1899. "Art of War" claims that "strategy is the art of lying".

10] In the United States in the 1990s, a trend developed that was based on the belief that technological advances in information and communication technology were radically changing the nature of warfare.

11] Doctrine, organization, human resources, equipment, support, training.

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