



## Why would the war be more complex today than it was yesterday?

Earth Thought Notebooks

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**If war appears to be an ever-changing phenomenon, is it nowadays considered to be becoming more complex than the world itself, or does it simply follow the natural cycle of history?**

**Squadron Leader JAY considers that despite the uncertainty and instability of our environment, the sustainability of the principles of warfare is not questioned and that the evolution must also find its declination in the training of military leaders. Inter-service, joint, inter-domain skills, understanding of the environment and adaptability appear as threads directors.**

If there is one immutable rule in the art of war, it is the law of circumvention. At the strategic level, the theories of the direct and indirect approach confront and complement each other without the debate being able to be settled. At the operative and tactical level, technological developments, from archery to air combat, including the Gribeauval gun or tank, or the At the operational and tactical level, technological developments, from archery to air combat, from the Gribeauval cannon to the tank, or tactical procedures, from conventional warfare to guerrilla warfare or hybridity, underline this constant desire to adapt to the tactics and techniques of the adversary. These breaks, cyclical in nature, are consubstantial with war. Thus, even if the latter evolves in its modalities, it is a constant phenomenon constantly adapting itself to the technical and organizational capacities of its time.

In this context, the complexity of war can be understood as the gap generated by the friction and resistance of an organisation to adapt to the operational environment it faces. This complexity, more than simply a quantifiable phenomenon, appears as a general feeling in the face of the difficulties encountered. Complex is not synonymous with complicated here. Complexity represents more the accumulation of tasks and problems to be taken into account, rather than the ability to analyse and understand their workings.

Thus, if war appears to be a constantly evolving phenomenon, can we consider today that it is becoming more complex than the world itself, or does it simply follow the natural cycle of history?

As the debate on new forms of conflictuality and the widening of the sites of war intensifies, it seems that the complexity felt does not necessarily reflect a break in its traditional evolution, but rather our relative inability to adapt to its changes. The Western "operative comfort" after 1945 is thus a historical exception to which we had become accustomed.

After having proposed avenues for reflection on the future operational environment, it will be necessary to show that its evolution does not fundamentally affect the principles of operational commitment. It is nevertheless important not only to make more radical changes in the modalities of this engagement, but also to prepare the military framework more thoroughly.

## **The future operational environment**

Characterizing the future operational environment, the place of war, is a major issue that is the subject of much work and can only with difficulty be summarized or circumscribed in this study. Rather, it is more appropriate to try to define some trends that will enable us to apprehend the major developments to be taken into account in future commitments. Multiplicity, enlargement and immediacy appear to be the prospects for the evolution of the war.

Multiplicity of forms of conflictuality: the CICDE[1], in "Future Operational Environment 2035", translates this dominant conflictuality under the term "widened, structural and mutant asymmetry". This form of asymmetry seems to best characterize the notion of hybridity, at the heart of our sense of the increasing complexity of the battlefield. On the occasion of the 2016 CDEF[2] colloquium on new forms of conflictuality, this very notion has struggled to be clearly defined, as it covers re3] or characterizing a global strategy using military and non-military levers. 4] However, the threat from the top of the spectrum characterized by the return of force states, or the growing instability of failed states, as described in the "Strategic Defence and National Security Review 2017", broadens the spectrum of conflictuality.

Enlargement of the battlefield: War has moved beyond the three traditional battlefields into the fields of space, digital and information[5]. 5] As such, new forms of conflictuality are developing coordinated strategies in these six areas. Military action must take these new domains into account, following the example of the American concepts of multi-domain battle or the future Scorpion force. It appears that the ability to pervert digital data will be one of the major challenges of tomorrow's war. Information warfare should generate as many effects as kinetic action in the field. In any case, they will be intimately linked.

Acceleration of tempo, immediacy, transparency and ubiquity: The globalization of trade, reinforced by the digital revolution and the dual use of technologies which levels the technological advantage, generates an imbalance within the "remarkable Clausewitzian trinity" [6]. Immediacy and a form of informational ubiquity are causing new tensions on military action. The legitimacy of the action [7] and its maintenance over time within public opinion becomes an essential characteristic of the conduct of war. Political action, inscribed in a short period of time, can clash with the long, necessary time of military

action. The entry of politics is a proven risk. This phenomenon is also an opportunity (action of influence), and here again a new line of operation, in war.

## **Long-lasting principles**

As a result, the operating environment is constantly changing. A definite acceleration of this evolution even seems to be taking shape. However, these changes do not fundamentally alter the principles of operational commitments.

Ten years after the release of FT-01, the intervention-stabilisation-normalisation continuum remains relevant. The stabilisation phase remains the most uncertain and decisive. However, the widening of the battlefield (both in terms of place and time)[8] testifies to the emergence of an environmental modelling phase, preliminary to intervention, essentially based on actions in the cyber domain. The cross-domain approach [9] does not revolutionize the cycle, but makes the passage from one phase to the next more diffuse and complex. The definition of an end state sought (by the political) and the definition of the means necessary to achieve it will also be a key that goes beyond strictly military action.

Despite the uncertainty and instability of our environment and the risks of breakdowns mentioned by the CEMAT [10], the sustainability of the principles of warfare is not questioned. At the end of the work of Future Land Action[11] The Foch principles are supplemented by two complementary principles, namely uncertainty and lightning. These principles can be understood as the will to generate doubt and surprise in the opponent. The definition of the eight factors of operational superiority now makes it possible to make the link between the principles (permanent) and the aptitudes to be developed (variable in essence). These factors reflect the desire to better control the complexity of the environment by proposing the guiding threads of the changes to be made.

The nature of the war has not fundamentally changed. War remains a social act, an expression of organized human societies. A political act in essence, it is "a real political instrument [...] war is simply the pursuit of politics by other means" [12]. [12] However, new forms of conflictuality seem to abound in the sense of a more complex relationship between the politician and the soldier. In Understanding War[13] The complexity of these relations is reflected in General Desportes' report: war can tend to become an end in itself, political instability requires permanent adaptation of military action and there is a porosity between internal and external policy. These relations reflect the complexity of the relationship between politics and the military. They are not new and are simply reaffirmed in the current context.

Thus, on the scale of principles, war does not seem more complex today than it did yesterday. However, in view of the changing environment, its modalities have changed and it seems complicated to adapt to it.

## **A more complex adaptation**

Victory is at the heart of the subject of the complexity of war. Much more than mere military action, having in the past been able to enable a decision, including a political one,

to be taken over the enemy, political success can no longer be summed up in this way. Christian Malis, in "War and Strategy in the 21st<sup>Century</sup>" [14], stresses that it is necessary to move from the Napoleonic paradigm (where military confrontation is the criterion of victory since it prefigures the peace of the victor) to the Gallic paradigm: "It is a question of conducting military operations with peace in mind above all else, whether we are talking about targeted executions or large-scale expeditionary warfare". As such, victory must be based from the outset on a precise political definition of the ends of the war, commonly referred to as the desired end state (EES), and on a comprehensive approach to achieving this objective. Thus, the "final victory" takes on an eminently political meaning to which military action contributes, in the same way as economic, social, legal and cultural action [15]. [15] The absence of this EFR appears to be a determining factor in our difficulties in "ending" our wars, considering that military action alone would make it possible to "win the peace". Once this EFR has been determined, the strategy to be implemented must be global. According to the CICDE, the eight pillars of power must be part of a single integrative strategy [16]. [16] The modalities for implementing such a policy require the integration of these dimensions at the operational level. The American multi-domain battle is directly in line with this inter-ministerial approach, and far beyond, by also integrating civil society actors. This decompartmentalization is probably one of the keys to tomorrow's success. Military action, through the Scorpion Force, prefigures this cross-domain approach. It prepares the Army to integrate into this logic.

The operational environment is also characterized by the end of "operational comfort". Challenging a form of Western strategic impunity is fundamental to the sense of complexity of the environment. Without going further into the factors that contribute to this phenomenon (nature of conflicts, hardening of access conditions, return of mass need), Western armies agree on three areas in which the organisation must evolve in order to face the threat. Firstly, they will rely on a more agile command, allowing for a better understanding of the environment and the adversary, interoperable with our allies and with a more limited signature. Our forces will also have to adopt a more deconcentrated manoeuvre, but one that allows for a concentration of effects and not necessarily of forces. Finally, they will have to have high-performance tools to meet the new operational requirements (in terms of command, manoeuvre, fire and expeditionary logic). These tools will be based in particular on robotics, cyber and artificial intelligence. The Scorpion force and multi-domain battle are directly in line with this perspective.

The risk of strategic disruption has been proven and requires accompanying innovation and the digital revolution in favour of greater operational agility [17]. The ability to adapt will become one of the keys to success in an increasingly uncertain world. The end of the Cold War marks the return of unpredictable conditions of engagement. Reactive adaptation, both organisational and technological, should be sought to cope with it. "History shows that the armies that win wars are very different from those that begin them: the important thing is therefore the overall capacity to adapt. [18] This intellectual agility needs to be encouraged in the training of leaders at the lowest level and to rely on a solid military and historical culture to find depth and take into account the tactical lessons of the past.

### How do we cope?

All these developments must also be reflected in the training of military leaders. Without attempting to be exhaustive, it would seem interesting to propose some avenues for reflection in this area. Inter-service, joint, inter-domain skills, understanding of the environment and the ability to adapt appear to be guiding threads.



An inter-service and cross-domain approach is becoming an indispensable prerequisite for tomorrow's information-based combat. It can be applied at several levels. Thus, at the tactical level, the capacity for inter-service integration must be developed from the lowest levels of command. As early as the application division, the young lieutenant should be acculturated to this integrative approach and then develop inter-service skills in view of his elementary unit command time [19]. 19] The reform of the joint cycle at the Staff College is part of this dynamic. It would also deserve to be supplemented from the time of entry into the higher military education cycle [20] by an approach, complemented by knowledge of the joint level, in order to acculturate future staff members to the social, cultural and economic issues that they will have to take into account in operations [21]. This logic seems to be particularly developed at the operational level through the cycle of higher military education at the second level. Conversely, the professional expertise of the chief operations officer level is only partially addressed. It could be useful to redevelop, in conjunction with the schools of arms, a reappraisal of the inter-service skills of this level and thus strengthen inter-service cooperation.

Understanding the environment is essential to future success. It will require both cultural development of officers and the integration of new technologies. It appears necessary to deepen the behavioural culture (social sciences, foreign languages and strategic cultures) to facilitate both interoperability with our allies and partners and the integration of our action in the environment. This culture should also be based on a solid military culture as a common basis for reflection. The digital revolution will also make it possible not only to better model the environment (cultural, ethnic, economic mapping, etc.), but also to improve its understanding through decision support mechanisms (big data processing, artificial intelligence). However, the development of cognitive sciences will have to be supervised in order to avoid the emergence of biases that could jeopardize the chief's decision-making capacity [22].

As mentioned above, the ability to adapt appears to be an essential quality of the military organisation. This quality deserves to be further developed at the level of the military leader. It could be expressed through intrinsic skills in command, and through the development of prospective thinking. Command by intention, coupled with real subsidiarity in the chain of command, is the basis of the French approach [23]. 23] It should be reinforced by the development, through exercises for example, of a real appetite for risk-taking, and of an improvement in the ability to "decide in uncertainty" by integrating the commanders of elementary units. It is interesting to point out that this debate is also driving the Anglo-Saxon armies through the notion of mission command. On the other hand, military thinking, especially prospective thinking, could be encouraged. Following the example of the British prospective cycle Agile Warrior, it would be interesting to develop this type of reflection exercise at the level of higher military education and/or to bring together the various prospective bodies around a seminar led, for example, by the EMAT's prospective threat study group.

### **By way of conclusion**

Although the operational environment is changing significantly, the war has not fundamentally changed. The sense of complexity felt is more a reflection of our difficulty in adapting. The character of warfare is changing and we need to adapt, both in the way we conduct operations and in the way we understand it at the level of decision-makers.

There are many avenues for organisational change (Scorpion infovalorisation, British CTF, Multi-domain battle...). They can only be fully effective through a significant effort to

acculturate managers to increase their understanding of the world and cultivate their sense of adaptation.

The merger of the CESAT and the CDEF to create the CDEC, as well as the reform of the Cours supérieur interarmes (CSIA) and its extension to one year are fully in line with this new dynamic.

[1] CICDE: Joint Centre for Concepts, Doctrines and Experimentation

2] CDEF: Centre de doctrine d'emploi des forces, which merged with CESAT (summer 2016) to form the CDEC (Centre de doctrine et d'enseignement de commandement).

3] Réflexions tactiques spécial colloque, CDEF, June 2016, p. 8.

4] General Barrera: "Military levers (use of conventional and special forces, use of "proxies", use of chemical, biological, and nuclear threat) and non-military levers (economy, finance, diplomacy, social pressure, cultural and informational influence, cyber and collective security...)"

5] CICDE, Future Operating Environment 2035, p. 44.

6] Clausewitz considers that the shaping of the phenomenon of war is the result of a political balance between three poles: the people, the government and the army.

7] The FT-02 establishes as a corollary of the principles of war the notions of legitimacy and reversibility of action.

8] Evoked during the quadripartite prospective seminar of the EMAT in 2017.

9] Included here both vertically (from tactical to strategic) and horizontally (including all areas contributing to the establishment of new governance).

10] Introductory remarks of the Allied prospective meeting seminar on 25-26 April 2017.

11] Land Staff, Future Land Action. Tomorrow is won today, 2016.

[12] Clausewitz, "From war", I:1 p. 87.

[13] General Desportes, "Understanding War", Economica, 2011.

[14] Christian Malis, "War and strategy in the 21st century" Fayard, 2014.

[15] General Vincent Desportes, "Probable war. Thinking outside the box", Economica, p76.

16] DIMETJIC: diplomacy, informational, military, economic, legal, technological, industrial, cultural, legal, technological

17] National Defence and National Security Strategic Review, Ministry of the Armed Forces, 2017.

18] General Vincent Desportes, La guerre probable. Penser autrement, p.192.

19] For example, the head of a logistics convoy must combine several functions from the outset: escort/protection, CIS, SAN, engineering, 3D support to the transport department. Overall coherence requires the development from the outset of an inter-service culture.

20] At the level of QIA 2, for example.

21] Operation Barkhane can be characterized as a war of flows (financial, human, cultural). Understanding these flows would make it

possible to modulate military action by taking advantage of "civilian" leverage effects.

22] These biases can be expressed not only through the cognitive load (risk of loss of rationality in the face of the mass of information or loss of free will in the face of the tool's proposals), but also through more subjective aspects (behaviour, culture...). For more information: Lettre de la prospective n°1 du PEP, "Les sciences cognitives et l'organisation des postes de commandement".

23] The notion of major effect, a direct reference to the spirit of order, offers this capacity for initiative and therefore adaptation to the subordinate.

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