



Of the new nation-armed bond

military-Earth thinking notebook

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L'Armée de Terre dans la société

The transfer of support from the armies to other parts of the Ministry, including the APG, effectively established an intermediary that did not exist between the armies and the nation. This new role requires the administration to realise that it now holds the morale of the troops in its hands.

"I have not accepted - I will never accept - that the moral contract that binds the nation to the commitment of its soldiers should be undermined in this way" Mr Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister of Defence, Varcès, 3 December 2013.

Such a statement to those who, for more than two years, have been suffering on a daily basis from the failures of the Louvois "system" [1] is more than welcome. Not only does it reaffirm the existence of a moral bond between the nation and its soldiers, but it also confers on it an almost sacred value since it is not tolerable that it should be harmed. However, it also leaves a significant amount of doubt. Certainly, it is the payment of pay that has been affected. But there is no doubt that there is a point in saying it again: a soldier is not a mercenary. And while pay is an indispensable material element, it does not reflect the sense of sacrifice inherent in the military profession.

It is this material dimension that has been the most important aspect of the debate. The Committee on Defence and Armed Forces (CDFA) - which represents the nation - has certainly not forgotten the impact of this ubuesque situation on the morale of the troops, but it has concentrated on the essentially financial and organisational aspects of the problem. The various reports of senior officials interviewed by this commission between March and June 2013 bear witness to this [2]. [2] These concerns persist on all sides. They are legitimate and undoubtedly necessary given the tense context in which this fiasco is taking place.

But to consider that the problem will be solved because the balances will again be

correctly paid, and for some simply paid, is only practical. Thinking that this will bring back the status quo ante is probably true from the point of view of the payment of the balance. But if one looks at Louvois from a broader perspective, one can see that the before-and-after situations will be totally different. Moreover, beyond all the legitimate reasons for concern, extra costs and confidence in the system, Louvois has shed new light on the link between the army, i.e. all personnel under military status, and the nation - which will be clarified in a few lines. He is the real issue at stake. He has been forgotten, and he is still the great absentee of the debates even though he is at the heart of them.

Indeed, caught up in the gruelling pace of reform, like the Titanic in its blind race, the armies and the nation were surprised by the presence of an unprecedented intermediary who must be given his rightful place.

For whereas the original link between the army and the nation was based on the principle of national solidarity, it has in fact become a genuine contractual relationship. While the latter is still based on the moral dimension of the soldier's sacrifice, a new intermediary of weight, the administration, translates into practice the material expression of the nation's consideration. An administration that must become aware of its new role and assume it fully, otherwise no reform will be of any use.

The armed-nation link as it is highlighted today seems to be based on an archaism and does not yet take into account the recent "customer-supplier" relationship.[3] which has in fact become established

Originally, the issue underlying the importance of the relationship between the nation and its army was based on the notion of solidarity. This means that in the event of danger, each citizen participates in the defence of the community, which implies that everyone is aware of belonging to the community. De Gaulle, referring after the Great War to the centuries-old relationship between France and its army, wrote in this regard that it sometimes happened that "a great danger would make France aware of itself" [4]. 4] In fact, this solidarity was expressed in various ways throughout history and was concretely supported by citizens until the Great War, as a 1999 CDFA information report[5] points out. The term "nation army" - as he also mentions - dates back only to the end of the 1970s. The aim of the link has therefore always been, and still is, to guarantee the participation of the people in the event of war.

But to give the nation a sense of its own identity is what national service, in particular, has made possible. The end of conscription caused this lever to disappear and the problem of popular support was raised once again. The aim of the 1999 CDFA report was precisely to respond to this. It clearly identified the dual imperative of not cutting the nation off from its army and vice versa. That was 15 years ago. Since then, professionalisation has taken shape, a changing form since the armies are constantly restructuring - they have been since the disappearance of the Soviet bloc. Threats have evolved so rapidly that two White Papers in five years have been deemed necessary, even though they have a strategic scope that reasonably exceeds such a horizon. Yet these two reference books reaffirm the principle of national ownership because, as a last resort, national solidarity would be required.

In order to maintain this membership, the armed forces are competing in ingenuity to show themselves, to be seen, to be seen, to be seen, to be heard: the visibility of armies

has become the cornerstone of the armed-nation bond. It is the main means of combating the risks identified at the end of conscription, and this effort is essential. Dedicated Internet site, publications, open days, communication actions, enhancement of a heritage that carries the history of France, nothing is neglected, not even calls for a civic sense to to a people who, although they are still capable of showing solidarity, hardly ever go out except on the occasion of the parade on National Holiday and very little, if any, to pay a final tribute to their heroes.

In spite of all these efforts, the military seems to have been gradually sidelined from a society that is at best indifferent to them, "a-military", as explained in the work of Commander Hugues Esquerre, "... the military is a society that is, at best, indifferent to the military. Repositioning the army in the nation"»[6]. The title is chosen; it is clear: the army is outside the nation. And the struggle against this state of affairs is almost a one-way street, right up to the term "army-nation", which expresses the meaning of the effort: armies towards the nation. And this effort will be redoubled by the many events planned to commemorate the Great War.

We must therefore face the facts: more than fifteen years after the end of national service, with a professional army - it shows this sufficiently everywhere it is engaged - and the tacit thought that the threat of war on its soil is a thing of the past, the French citizen has detached himself from his army. Although it constantly reminds him of the extent to which his effective support is necessary and will always be necessary, national solidarity is now only a vague concept, a relic that has faded in favour of another concept that is much more in tune with the times: the contractual relationship based on the "client-supplier" model. This contract is more in line with individualistic values: risk paid, no need to participate. The main terms of the contract can be explained.

The moral contract that unites the nation with its army is based on a simple exchange: sacrifice in return for consideration and respect. It is now expressed through a new intermediary, the administration, the custodian of the nation-armed bond.

On one side of the relationship, then, is the soldier with, as a cardinal virtue, his sense of sacrifice. Essential to his mission, this sense of sacrifice is not based on material interest: money is no longer of any use to the deceased, and no financial compensation will ever replace the loss of a loved one for the bereaved families. Sacrifice is a selfless gesture that draws its strength, according to André Comte-Sponville, from the conviction that one's life "is only worth serving something else that is beyond it, or someone else that one cannot abandon without betraying oneself. That is what heroes do, and that is what, once they are dead, we recognize them for" [7].

On the other side of the relationship is that "other" - for it is not one thing - for which he is ready to lose his life: the French nation. This nation which proceeds as much from the spiritual principle and the will to live together of Renan - for whom "a nation is a great solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices one has made and those one is disposed to make again" [8] - as from the people forming a body, with the inalienable and indivisible sovereignty of Rousseau. The Constitution gives it the form of an indivisible, secular, democratic and social republic, sovereign and therefore free. This nation owes its soldiers consideration and respect[9].

The contract also contains clauses. The soldiers' commitment is compensated for by the guarantee that the risks incurred by them are covered, for them and their families, notably in the form of pensions in the event of injury or death. The contract also gives them

special legal protection to enable them to carry out their mission, in particular by giving them authorization to use lethal force in this context. Finally, it provides for remuneration. All this, quite logically in a State governed by the rule of law, is set by law, in the general status of military personnel, which is governed by the Defence Code.

Previously, the army itself carried out most of the functions relating to the execution of the clauses of the contract, in particular the payment of pay. As a result, it formed an autonomous microcosm responsible for its own support as well as its administration. No intermediary separated it from the nation in the material realization of the relationship. The reforms, with the legitimate aim of rationalizing costs, led to the transfer of this responsibility to administrative and support bodies - to which the term "administration" refers. The principle is simple: the army is responsible for training, combat and sacrifice, while the administration is responsible for the implementation of the material clauses. So it now forms an indispensable intermediary. It has become the depositary of this sense of the link - nation-army-nation - in a way. However, the reciprocal is not achieved: the army always serves the nation directly.

In the new distant "client-supplier" relationship that seems to have taken hold, the administration now plays a full part in giving concrete expression to the consideration of the nation and respect for its citizens. The latter pay their taxes and count on it to return to its defence supplier the share that is due to it. At first glance, this seems simple and, above all, banal: one could almost talk about a form of subcontracting. But it is not at all.

Respect for the moral contract requires the affirmation of the new role played by the administration in the essential - but not indestructible - link between the army and the nation; otherwise any reform will be pointless.

The term "contract" in fact only imperfectly conveys the relationship between the nation and its army. On the one hand, nation and army are inseparable and one cannot survive without the other. On the other hand, both interact through the very values on which the republic is founded. Indeed, if soldiers are sent to defend the material interests of the nation, be they economic or security interests, they do so in accordance with the moral principles recognized by France, with human dignity as the keystone, as General Benoît Royal emphasizes [10]. 10] Their ethics thus participate directly in translating and expressing these values into reality, an efficient means of opposing violence without limits according to General Jean-René Bachelet. 11] And the exemplary nature of their behaviour in the face of adversity does not leave their fellow citizens indifferent. Through a subtle play of mirrors, the former send back to the latter the idealized image of the nation as it should be and, so to speak, force their respect. The confidence that the French have in their army has never been so high, since it reached a favourable opinion level of 91% last July[12] according to an IFOP poll. This representation is undoubtedly the one that best characterizes the human bond that underlies the acceptance of sacrifice. It is part of an immaterial virtuous circle that needs to be constantly nourished.

In this context, the administration acts as a lever. For the quality of its work largely depends on the morale of the troops, and it encourages either virtuous behaviour or slippages that damage the image of armies. Through its support action, it in turn participates in the virtuous circle, but in a unidirectional way because, working in the shadows for the soldiers, it does not reflect any particular image to the people. This is why the administration is so important today in terms of the nation-armed bond. Louvois has thus clearly shown that a lack of material support implies a deterioration in behaviour. From this point of view, it was an extreme situation - whose social consequences for

those most affected are not yet well known - that motivated legitimate, partly desperate reactions. In this tense context of a succession of reforms, the attention of the military is now in danger of being exacerbated and other reactions - less legitimate ones - could damage the excellent image of the armed forces.

If this administration in turn were to cut itself off from those it serves - if it were to get to the point of serving itself before serving them - the virtuous circle would be broken. Without material support that also expresses the consideration and respect due to them, where will they draw the strength of their example? If the image they are given of seeing them confines them to a legitimate sense of abandonment, then what image will they send back? If the mirror of values is shattered, then nation and army will find themselves in the Nietzschean situation of having only a bottomless abyss to look into. 13] If tomorrow no one shows anymore that the gift is possible and that it has a meaning, if there is no more, on both sides of the link, than a gaping abyss, who will stop the madness? Who will tomorrow be the bulwark against blind violence, the very violence against which the French soldier is fighting at the risk of his life? Today's soldiers are setting an example: they have not stopped risking their lives and sacrificing themselves, even though respect and consideration were expressed less and sometimes no longer. But if they no longer feel supported as they should, how long will it be before that community is replaced by another one, which will worry less about principles and probably more about pay?

That's the real issue that Louvois revealed. It stems from the new link that has been established underhandedly between the nation and its army. The new division of labour should make it possible to rationalise the cost of a defence that is still necessary. It must not lead to a deterioration, due to lack of efficiency, of the idealized image that soldiers have of their compatriots as well as of other nations. For if the concept of nation tends nowadays to fade under the effect of the questioning of citizenship [14] - no doubt tomorrow giving rise to a larger whole - the imperative of defence remains the same. And the same mechanisms will work on a different scale for a different community. No matter what form this community takes, it will always need to be self-aware. Just as it will always need soldiers who respect the values on which it is based and who will do everything possible to ensure that it does not forget them - just as French soldiers do today.

1] LOgiciel Unique à VOcation Interarmées de la Solde. The term Louvois will be used alone to refer to the whole system, sometimes referred to as the Louvois "ecosystem".

2] Reports available on the Assembly's website: <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/cr-cdef/13-14/index.asp>

3] This term comes directly from the vocabulary used in the context of the reforms; it clearly reflects the distance which, after having cut the army off from its nation, now separates it from its support.

4] De Gaulle, Charles, "France and his army", from the collection "The Thread of the Sword and other stories" Plon, Paris, ed. 1999, p. 335

5] Information Report No. 1384, available online at: <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/11/pdf/rap-info/i1384.pdf>

6] Esquerre, Hugues, "Remplacer l'armée dans la nation", Economica, Paris, 2012.

[7] Comte-Sponville, André, "Philosophical Dictionary", PUF, Paris, 2001, article "sacrifice", p. 517.

8] Renan, Ernest. "What is a nation", Flammarion, Paris, ed. 2011, p. 75.

9] Article L4111-1 of the Code of Defence: "The military state requires in all circumstances a spirit of sacrifice, which may go as far as the

supreme sacrifice, discipline, availability, loyalty and neutrality. The duties it entails and the subjections it entails deserve the respect of citizens and the consideration of the nation".

10] Royal, Benoît, "[10] Royal, Benoît, ".The ethics of the French soldier - the conviction of humanity", Economica, Paris, 2011.

[11] Bachelet, Jean-René, "[11] Bachelet, Jean-René," p. 517. For an ethics of the profession of arms - overcoming violence", Vuibert-espace éthique, Paris, 2006.

12] FIFG survey available for download at: http://www.ifop.com/?option=com_publication&type=poll&id=2292

13] Nietzsche, Friedrich, "Beyond Good and Evil", Flammarion, Paris, ed. 2000.

[14] Schnapper, Dominique, ".....Welfare Democracy - An Essay on Contemporary Equality" Gallimard, Paris, 2002.

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