



The armed-nation bond is nonsense

military-Earth thinking notebook

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L'Armée de Terre dans la société

The term army-nation link leads to the particularization of the military world in relation to the civilian world, without including one in the other. This approach is likely to provoke a phenomenon of communitarianism and withdrawal into itself of an army perceived as a micro-society that would voluntarily place itself apart from the nation, to the detriment of the latter's interests. The author of this article gives some answers to these possible risks, even if he does so, as he himself says, in an iconoclastic manner..

What audacity, one might say, to assert that the term armed-nation link' is not relevant today! At the risk of appearing somewhat iconoclastic, the facts are there: there is no armed-nation link because the entire French army is not facing the nation. On the contrary, it innervates the nation. One is included in the other. However, it must be acknowledged that a formulation is needed to evoke the responsibility of the armed forces to weigh in the national reflection on the future of French society. While the expression "armed-nation link" seems to be commonly accepted, it only makes sense if it is understood not in terms of a link but in terms of the daily influence of each of its members taken individually in relation to civil society.

The term "army-nation bond" leads to the particularization of the military world in relation to the civilian world without including one in the other. This approach risks provoking a phenomenon of communitarianism and withdrawal into itself of an army perceived as a micro-society which would voluntarily place itself apart from the nation, to the detriment of the latter's interests.

France is going through a triple crisis, severe and lasting, to the resolution of which the military could humbly contribute better if it seized daily opportunities, legitimate and regulatory, to highlight a body of values that have been tried and tested but are still too

little shared in the national community.

A triple crisis, severe and lasting...

The French nation, like other countries in Europe, is going through a triple crisis, while no political solution seems to suggest a rapid return to national cohesion and economic growth.

A crisis of values, first of all, which makes the sense of the general interest and the understanding of the nation's best interests disappear. Yet this crisis is not new. It has existed for several decades and reflects a gradual but inevitable loss of adherence by the men and women of the nation to the values of respect and work, as well as a lack of understanding, or even a rejection of any notion of family or institutional authority. The consequences are easily identifiable in the younger generations. The PISA[1] ranking and the recent rather unoptimistic diagnosis of national education in France are indicative of this trend, through which everyone can observe a certain levelling down of the work performance of young French people, associated with a somewhat naive egalitarianism.

This is followed by an identity crisis, which highlights the loss of the sense of belonging to a national community that protects and reassures. French society seems today to be disoriented in its identification and its search for meaning in daily action. This comforting sense of belonging to a large French community can only be built if its basic element, the family, remains preserved. Today, however, the family is seriously undermined by the phenomenon of individualism in which the interests of the individual take precedence over those of his or her social or professional group[2]. The role of the family is diminishing because the geographical distance of its members is becoming more widespread, in particular due to greater professional constraints of mobility[3]. 3] It is also diminishing because it has been supplanted by the permanent search for new rights aimed at satisfying the individual's needs.

Finally, there is an economic crisis which, after the "Trente Glorieuses" and the various oil shocks, has gradually highlighted the fragility of the country's economic and social model. This crisis, the lasting effects of which date back to autumn 2008 and from which it is not yet certain whether the country will recover, is today accentuating the excesses of the consumer society: consumerism, materialism, the search for easy gain, the creation of need through advertising and systematic solicitation. The notion of money as king is at the root of this economic malaise. Thus, since everything seems to have a monetary value, there is no longer any room for the taste for free effort, the one that simply gives the satisfaction of having acted to preserve the individual's higher interests.

This gloomy but very real framework, from which the armed forces are not completely immune, reflects the problem of national resilience. While it is the responsibility of the military institution, its men and women, to protect the nation and its vital interests, the army can make its contribution to the project of a gradual but solid reconstruction of the national cohesion that seems so lacking today.

...to the resolution of which the military could humbly better contribute...

The army, as an institution, conveys a body of values, know-how and interpersonal skills that has little influence on French society. As such, it communicates officially with the national agora to highlight the expertise, seriousness and dedication of the men and women who serve it.

Generally speaking, the outreach of the armed forces and defence services is a mission in its own right for military organizations, particularly schools or operational units. Outreach today involves a multitude of activities designed to communicate with members of the national community, from citizens to political decision-makers. Through unit sponsorships, corps create strong ties with the communities around them and find the opportunity to showcase the intrinsic qualities of the soldier, innate or more often acquired through training: discipline, rigour, esprit de corps and a taste for effort. More broadly, recruitment campaigns aimed at young Frenchmen seek to give meaning to a voluntary commitment to a profession proud of its particularities. Thanks to the expertise of the DICOD[4] and other communication and recruitment specialists, leitmotifs such as "Becoming yourself" [5] are de5] and seem to contribute to the efficiency of recruitment in the army, which is necessary to maintain a low average age in its ranks.

Moreover, 75% of the military being under contract, the armed forces radiate in the civilian world, in other words in the nation, through the second parts of their career, imposed or chosen. The military has rather good press and a good reputation on the job market. They are generally perceived as punctual, hard-working, stubborn and respectful of the instructions given[6]. It is not surprising in this context to note that employers are generally not reluctant to recruit former military personnel who have served their country for many years, possibly on permanent contracts. Once converted, supported by PRD As a former soldier, the former soldier contributes to maintaining the image and popularity of the French army high, directly within the economic fabric of the country. By continuing to be exemplary in his behaviour and doing everything possible to achieve the objectives and fulfil the mission, he can individually and humbly disseminate this body of values and a certain way of managing men. Is operational management the command of men? Beyond the semantic battle, the fundamentals remain the same: concern for the subordinate or the employee, the desire to encourage adherence to objectives set by a leader or a manager.

All these institutional arrangements make it possible to make the institution known and recognized with all its particularities. A question then arises. Are they sufficient to really have a lasting influence on civil society? Are they not still too discreet, perhaps due to a military inferiority complex, a humility close to self-effacement or a comfortable habit of very formal obedience to the civilian world?

...if he personally seized every opportunity to highlight a body of values still too little shared...

Since this is a major issue of national cohesion, and since it is necessary to avoid at all costs any form of military corporatism, it seems indispensable to improve the integration of the soldier in the nation, by going beyond the restrictive framework of a link that

differentiates and particularises.

When it comes to declining the supreme interests of the nation, it is the education and training of our children, symbols of the future and the sustainability of the nation, that intuitively come first. National education in France is going badly, it is a commonly accepted fact^[8]. ^{8]} There are many reasons for this: the perceptible disengagement of parents in the education of their children, the lack of appropriate teacher training, and complex hierarchical and functional relationships within schools. ^{9]} In order to guarantee itself generations of suitably educated children, ready to engage in working life and to educate their own children in the same way, France must draw on a voluntary human pool, uncompromising on the values of respect and work, and familiar with the particularities of education in difficult conditions. There, every soldier or former soldier can act, if he is authorized to do so. Why, in order to reverse the spiral of academic failure, not gradually introduce former military officers, selected for their teaching skills, into our republican schools? The recently created budget posts, together with the cuts in the Ministry of Defence, must be able to guarantee a satisfactory and inexpensive result in the long term. As regards teacher training, the introduction of pedagogy courses, those we used to call FEXA^{10]} or FCM^{11]} in Coëtquidan, within the ESPE^{12]} could also be part of the solution. The country would gain, the youth would gain and this would be an opportunity to boost the dissemination of the spirit of defence and the action of academic trinomas^[13].

^[13] Secondly, it might be appropriate to take advantage of the recent and important measures of reorganization of the Ministry of Defence. The expected reductions in personnel, particularly among senior officers, could provide an opportunity for the armed forces to make better use of all the know-how acquired over many years of service^[14]. Not that we should wish to see the best among us leave, but in the field of management, the officers in arms can certainly instil a special spirit in French companies. This is, moreover, what is beginning to be done through groups such as the Saint-Cyr Foundation, which organises courses of acculturation to the problems of defence and its methods of solving complex problems for the benefit of young or old, students or employees of French industry. A recent book titled: «Management: The military as a role model?»^{15]} Proof, if proof were needed, of the attraction felt by a civil society, now exempt from national service, for the military spirit and style. Therefore, since the workforce is melting away, we might as well make the most of this capital of experience and know-how for the benefit of the economic and social health of the country. Even if they are removed from the controls, officers starting a second career must be aware of their responsibility in transmitting the values that guided their actions when they were active. On this condition perhaps, and provided that the effort is global and daily, the country's societal malaise, such as individualism, could be halted to give way to more solidarity in the effort or natural adherence to a common goal.

Finally, it would be pointless to talk about national cohesion, its cement, and the resilience of society, without mentioning the fundamental role of decision-makers and political thinkers, and more broadly of the actors in public life. It is indeed the latter who provide the necessary impetus for major societal and economic reforms. In this context, the military should become more involved in public life, even if only locally, within its municipality. This is not a question of possibility, but rather of will. The general status of military personnel, as well as the duty of reserve, are not incompatible with greater involvement in associative networks in the public interest. In doing so, the military, whether active or retired, would contribute to the visibility of the military institution as

close as possible to the population in order, perhaps, to have a progressive influence on the societal reflections that mark out the electoral and political periods. The officer, in particular, must play his role, a social one in this case. The idea is not new: Marshal Lyautey already said it very well in 1891.¹⁶ Every officer can and must interact with the public in his commune and his immediate environment. He must, at the very least, make himself known to them, communicate and exchange views. The Marshal of Mac-Mahon had said that he would strike from the promotion board any officer whose name he read on the cover of a book. Fortunately times have changed, and officers are now asked to express themselves by publishing. But publishing is not influencing, much less acting. To do so, you have to make sure that you are read and understood, and not only by the military world, a public often already convinced by the opinions expressed.

Ultimately, the term "armed-nation link" has probably led to the systematic peculiarization of the military world in relation to the civilian world, at the risk of provoking a phenomenon of communitarianism within an army perceived as a micro-society that would voluntarily place itself apart from the nation. Failing to change the term, it would be appropriate to review the way military personnel, whether active, reservists or retirees, interact with their civilian counterparts, whether public men and women or ordinary citizens. Since we soldiers are proud of our values, our traditions and our know-how, since we are convinced that they are a possible response to the prevailing French malaise, let us disseminate them without shame or false modesty. Let us do so on a daily basis, to our friends, acquaintances, neighbours or local elected officials. Beyond the simple acceptance of military matters by public opinion, this is a matter of national cohesion of which the political decision-maker is certainly aware. Later on, decision-makers will perhaps undertake to redefine the statutes governing the exercise of the political profession. Is it really a profession in its own right, with special training and a standardised career path that guarantees progress whatever the outcome of the ballot box? Could the position of public man or woman constitute a temporary status, a kind of citizen service for anyone who wants to act for the well-being of the French nation, the observance of the law and the economic and diplomatic success of the country? These are all questions that remain unanswered and should be answered without delay.

1) Programme for International Student Assessment: a set of studies conducted by the OECD aimed at measuring the performance of education systems.

2) As the philosopher Fabienne Brugère points out in her book "La politique de l'individu", Seuil, 2013.

[3] Ibid.

4) Delegation for Defence Information and Communication.

5) Initiated by DRHAT/recruitment, "Devenirsoimême.com" was contractually developed by an advertising agency.

6) "Management: the army, a model to follow?" Patrice Huiban and Hugues Marchat, Focus RH collection, 150 pages.

¹⁷⁾ Defence Conversion Agency.

8) The latest PISA report of 2013 shows in particular a widening of the inequalities between the best and worst pupils.

9) Court of Auditors report of May 2013: "Managing teachers differently".

^[10] Training in the exercise of authority.

^[11] Training in military behaviour.

^[12] Higher Schools of Professorship and Education, new name of IUFMs, University Institutes of Teacher Education, since the beginning of the 2013 academic year.

13) Since 1988, the academic trinomas have brought together representatives of national education, defence and the IHEDN, and are intended to promote the spirit of defence in school education.

14) Notably by facilitating access to reserved jobs in the public service.

^[15] Book by Patrice Huiban and Hugues Marchat, Focus RH collection, 150 pages.

^[16] "Du rôle social de l'officier dans le service militaire universel", unsigned article, published in the magazine "Les Deux-Mondes".

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