



## Chronos, god of war?

military-Earth thinking notebook

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**Time is relative and irreversible. This is why its management requires a real reflection on the part of the decision-maker in order to be controlled and thus be a factor of domination of the opponent.**

Unlike Mao, Che Guevara believed that revolutionary ideas would triumph regardless of circumstances. The success of the first and the failure of the second show the influence of time on action. Moreover, for General Yakovleff, "the mastery of time - enemy and friend - is therefore the essence of military art."<sup>[1]</sup>

Although relative and irreversible, time requires real reflection on the part of the decision-maker in order to be mastered and thus be a factor in the domination of the opponent.

In order to impose himself, the decision-maker must seek to control time by having a reactive decision-making system, by imposing his rhythm on the opponent and by apprehending time in a global way. But to be totally effective, this reflection must integrate time into the reality of the battlefield, notably by relying on the notions of time reserve, relativity and opportunity.

### Mastering time to dominate the adversary

The reactivity of the decision-making system is essential to dominate the other. This idea is based on the theory developed by John Boyd according to which the decision-making process can be modelled in the form of a cycle called the OODA loop (observation, orientation, decision, action).<sup>[2]</sup>

Now Clausewitz defines war as an interaction between two sides. When an adversary acts, his enemy can react at any time. This may render the decision or action null and void.

In addition, General Desportes says that war "remains the realm of uncertainty."<sup>[3]</sup> . As a result, each stage of the cycle is likely to be imperfect (incomplete observation, wrong decision...). This interaction with the adversary and this uncertainty forces us to constantly adjust the choices that are made according to the evolution of the situation and to restart an OODA loop.

The one who has the fastest decision cycle will thus be able to refine his choices faster than the opponent. He will even be able to render the enemy's actions useless if the latter makes chain decisions too late. This was the case in May 1940, when French counter-attacks fell into the void because they were launched too late. On the subject of the German break-up of the Meuse front, General Weygand concluded that "the speed and violence of this exploitation paralyzes the efforts to rebuild the broken front; counter-attacks fail or cannot even be mounted".

The decision-maker must then set the pace of his action so as to maximize the potential of his forces while minimizing the potential of the opponent. Changing the speed at which the action is executed is in effect a double-action lever.

The first action is to make the friendly effort more effective. For example, during an offensive mission in an urban area, the leader could take advantage of alternating rhythms. After the seizure of a neighborhood by a unit, he will plan a phase of reconstitution of its potential (supply, reorganization) before renewing the operation in a following neighborhood. The relevance of this adaptation of the rhythm was demonstrated by the Americans during the Battle of Fallujah.

The second action can reduce the opponent's efficiency or even lead to his dislocation. A tactical game, rugby is a perfect illustration of this idea. In this area, France focuses its efforts on the static phases and the test of strength. Conversely, Australia have developed a very dynamic style throughout the game. Because they impose their tempo, the Australians manage to physically crack the French team and have dominated the game for the past 17 years.

Thus, as stated in The Battle Staff<sup>[6]</sup> of the US Army, "controlling or altering that rate is necessary to retain the initiative"... . As with terrain and enemy forces, time must be thoroughly analyzed to determine the opponent's weaknesses and exploit them.

The leader must also think about the time as a whole. Indeed, man is capable of apprehending the three times - past, present, future - because he is endowed with faculties such as memory and imagination.

This capability allows the decision-maker to project into the future and anticipate the opponent's problems and possible actions. Based on various hypotheses, the leader will imagine the answers to be given. It is necessary to "consider the action as a series of acts, each of which can be defeated by the opponent's reactions. The problem does not consist only in foreseeing the case of failure, but especially in foreseeing the counter-reactions which could be opposed to the adversary to maintain the action in the desired direction". . This work of anticipation will make the leader save time when the difficulty will arise. It will also reduce the effect of surprise whose consequences are often disastrous for a troop.

Man can also seek to detect in the present the clues to future events. The present contains the causes or warning signs of future things. "When I perceive the dawn, I predict as soon as the sun rises: What I perceive is present, and what I predict is to come."

Apprehending time in a global way avoids finding oneself locked in the present moment and therefore in the ephemeral. It gives man a temporal depth, a new dimension where he can anticipate the blows and regain a margin of manoeuvre.

However, this theoretical and chronological approach to time is insufficient to fully account for reality. This is one of the reasons why Western armies do not systematically manage to dominate their opponents, despite having the fastest decision cycle. To be effective, thinking about time must take account of circumstances.

### **Integrating time into the reality of the battlefield**

One of the realities of the battlefield is the friction that makes nothing go as planned. It is less a matter of deciding faster than the opponent than it is of deciding more fairly.

In a multi-unit force, different steps are necessary. First of all, it requires a precise assessment of how long it takes for a unit to complete a task. From there, the tasks of each unit should be synchronized to achieve coherent overall action and to maximize the work of each unit. This then requires integrating the notion of friction into its calculation of the time needed for action, because despite the precision of the calculations, accuracy does not exist. Indeed, as Clausewitz explains in "**De la guerre**", the general should not "expect clockwork precision where it is precisely impossible because of friction". The chief must therefore integrate possible delays into his study. For this, it is necessary to have a reserve of time at his disposal just as the chief must have a reserve of strength to react to the unexpected. These time margins provided for in the manoeuvre will allow for adaptation to reality. They will avoid disrupting the synchronization of units at the slightest delay. From this point of view, time is considered a resource that must be managed.

Finally, in order to be able to carry out its action in spite of the unforeseen, it is necessary to have three reserves: a force reserve, a logistical reserve and a time reserve.

Moreover, time is a relative concept. Deciding faster is sometimes useless (especially when the two opponents do not have the same type of decision cycle).

But the time of friends will not necessarily be the time of their opponents. This is typically the case in Afghanistan, where the time of the coalition is not the time of the insurgent. While allied action is a short time, insurgent action is a long time. This allows them to create a temporal asymmetry to counterbalance the material asymmetry.

Forgetting this notion of relativity runs the risk of being disconnected from reality. To avoid this, it is necessary to determine the referential where one is located and the one where the opponent is located. This frame of reference will depend on many parameters such as space, culture, political system... It will make it possible to take into account the relativity of time and to avoid taking decisions that do not contribute to the achievement of the set goal.

It is also a question of deciding at the right time, when circumstances are favourable.

Once again, speed of decision may no longer be the only criterion of quality. Hervé Coutau-Bégarie, in his "**Traité de stratégie**", **gives the example of** Marshal Pétain who, during the First World War, knew how to wait for the right moment: "I am waiting for the Americans and the tanks". Here again, this ability to wait for the right moment to act

makes it possible to adapt to the reality of the battlefield.

This idea is in line with the Greek notion of *kairos*, that is to say, the time of opportune opportunity. *Kairos* is a dimension of time different from the chronological dimension. Time is not considered as linear and regular but as a sequence of more or less favourable moments. Seen from this angle, the role of the decision-maker is to succeed in seizing opportunities when they arise.

Political time, military time: political action is characterised by immediacy, whereas military action is long-term. Consequently, the soldier is most often limited to tactical uselessness or forced into a blitzkrieg.

Tactical uselessness when military deployment is a sufficient political signal or the use of force is counterproductive. The virtue of prudence, in the Aristotelian sense, will then help the leader discern whether military action is effective or whether he must resign himself to tactical inaction.

Blitzkrieg in order to leave the media scene with a quick and symbolic tactical success. No longer in political time, it is then possible to continue the war in what is long and difficult. This type of action was led by the Americans during the second battle of Fallujah. The phase of conquest of the city lasted only a week and was the object of all the attention of the American government. The clean-up phase lasted a month, but it took place in a less restrictive media environment.

Thinking of action through the prism of political time therefore imposes immobility or extreme speed on the military leader. In both cases, the character, a virtue of difficult times according to General de Gaulle "...is indispensable.

<sup>[1]</sup> General Yakovleff, **"Theoretical Tactics"**, **Economica**, 2007, p 137.

<sup>[2]</sup> John Boyd, Patterns of conflict.

<sup>[3]</sup> General Desportes, **"Understanding War"** **Economica**, 2001.

<sup>[4]</sup> General Weygand, "History of the French Army", Flammarion, 1961, p. 400.

<sup>[5]</sup> The Furious Ghosts of Fallujah, CDEF. "The GTIA 3-5, at the western limit, resists the temptation of speed and prefers to advance in a very methodical way from line to line [...] The progression is very slow. The progression stops every day at around 16:00 in order to learn from the day's "hot" lessons, to plan precisely the next day's progress and to allow the men to rest. After a hot meal, the companies set up defensive positions for the night and do not conduct foot patrols. This battalion finally had fewer casualties than the others".

<sup>[6]</sup> US Army, The Battle Staff, The Lightning Press, p 1-19.

<sup>[7]</sup> General Beaufre, **"The strategy of action"**, L'Aube, p.114.

<sup>[8]</sup> Saint Augustine, "Confessions" Garnierite Frères, 1865, p 455.

<sup>[9]</sup> Clausewitz, **"Of the war"** Tempus, 2011, p.105.

<sup>[10]</sup> Return of experience of Colonel GOYA.

<sup>[11]</sup> General de Gaulle, "The Thread of the Sword", Berger-Levrault, 1944.

Saint-cyrien of the promotion "of fighting France". Battalion Chief RONDET served as a section leader and unit commander in the 3rd Marine Infantry Parachute Regiment. Within this framework, he took part in several short-term missions in Gabon and New Caledonia, an intervention in the Democratic Republic of Congo and two missions in Afghanistan. He also served in the 2nd Marine Infantry Parachute Regiment of Reunion Island and in the operational assistance detachment for the preparation of units departing for Afghanistan. He is a graduate of the 126th promotion of the CSEM.

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