



The contribution of the army to standardization: the Ivorian example

military-Earth thinking notebook

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Histoire & stratégie

In Mali, French Army units are engaged in operations, some of them in stabilization and others in normalization. On the one hand, they seek to reduce and then contain violence in order to create the conditions for a return to peace, while on the other hand they ensure that the "establishment" and "consolidation of a sustainable political, legal and social system accepted by the protagonists of the conflict" [1]. 1] Complex, these missions impose particular modes of action that are not strictly speaking warlike, but are no less demanding on force, with political and military actors sometimes reluctant to organize elections or to promote a transition that challenges their power and resources. Each theatre imposes its own constraints and requires specific solutions. However, the example of the Licorne force in Côte d'Ivoire illustrates how land forces can contribute to a phase of normalisation to accompany the transition from a situation of war to one of peace.

1] Winning the battle. Conduire la paix, FT-01, CDEF, January 2007, pp. 12-13.

A fragile situation

On 6 April 2005, the main players in the Ivorian crisis met at the invitation of South African President Thabo Mbeki to find a political solution to the crisis. This mediation led to the signing of the Pretoria Accords, designed to put an end to the division of the country into a north in rebel hands and a south controlled by Laurent Gbagbo. To this end, they specifically provide for the relaunching of negotiations on disarmament and set the modalities for the presidential election scheduled for October 2005. However, when Gbagbo's constitutional mandate ended on 30 October 2005, no new elections were held due to the persistence of blockades. The United Nations considers that the conditions necessary for holding an election have not been met and therefore maintains Gbagbo in power, even though he has to contend with Charles Konan Banny, the interim Prime

Minister appointed by the international community, and an International Working Group (IWG) responsible for overseeing the transition^[1].

1) The Ivorian president, however, is taking his opponents in the wrong direction by marginalising the international community. Contrary to the IWG's demands, Laurent Gbagbo refuses to attend a high-level meeting in New York on 20 September 2006. In the aftermath, he denounced the UN agreements and resolutions, refuted the international forces and announced the imminent proposal to the African Union of an inter-African solution to end the crisis. On 20 December, in a televised speech, he proposed "the establishment, with a view to the disarmament and reunification of the country, of a direct dialogue with the rebellion". After an initial refusal, Guillaume Soro, the head of the Forces Nouvelles, accepted. Sponsored by Burkinabe President Blaise Compaoré, the negotiations culminated in the signing of the Ouagadougou Agreement on 4 March 2007. Soro becomes Prime Minister and Gbagbo retains his presidential chair. The normalisation phase begins.

On 16 April 2007, the reunification of the country begins. The Djébonoua checkpoint, between Yamoussoukro and Bouaké, is gradually dismantled even though combatants maintain control of the crossings for several months. On 30 July, a large ceremony is held in the Bouaké stadium to mark the end of the conflict. 30,000 people, rebels, young patriots and anonymous people alike, welcomed the President and his Prime Minister with a standing ovation. "Our turpitudes have led us to war, but there is peace," said Guillaume Soro - who escaped an attack on 29 June - from the top of the tribune set up on the lawn and decorated in Ivorian colours. "I declare Bouaké the capital of peace," he continued. For his part, Gbagbo, after stressing the importance of "direct dialogue" without outside interference and of the agreement signed in Ouagadougou, declared that "the war is over" and then called for elections.

The peace flame ceremony, however, does not hold any illusions for long. At the end of December, elements of the Forces nouvelles invaded Bouaké several times to demand payment of their pay. Above all, the process of emerging from the crisis was in a state of flux. There are two points of friction: the appointment of the independent operator responsible for coordinating identification operations for the elections, and the disarmament of armed groups. Four supplementary agreements were signed in Ouagadougou, but without any real effect. Soro and Gbagbo put the blame on the other, each taking advantage of a situation that allowed them to remain in power [2]. 2) Despite this inertia, UNOCI peacekeepers and French soldiers of the Licorne operation withdrew between mid-April and mid-September 2007 from the zone of confidence that had cut the country in two since 2002. Mixed brigades made up of government troops, former rebels and United Nations police officers took over and formed a "green line" consisting in principle of 17 observation posts supported by very limited logistical means.

With the dismantling of the buffer zone, the administration returns to the north without any real transfer of authority. "The political situation in the north of Côte d'Ivoire", UN experts analysed in October 2009, "resembles more at present an economy of warlords than a functioning government administration". Despite the return of the local authorities, the zone commanders control the population, the administration and the economy. "They exploit and export natural resources [...] and collect taxes on road trade and apparently public services, including electricity, which the Ivorian government provides free of charge to the population. Equally, if not more worrying, each side is preparing for

confrontation. "Despite the arms embargo," UN experts continue, "the Ivorian parties in the north and south are rearming or re-equipping themselves in a related manner" [3].

The Licorne missions

Between 2005 and 2010, the various mandates of the Licorne force have two main missions. The first is in the framework of Article 8 of UN Security Council Resolution 1739. It is to support UNOCI by intervening on its behalf and upon request as a rapid reaction force. To this end, the commanders of UNOCI and Licorne meet at least once a week and, from March 2007, they also meet with the commanders of the ex-belligerent forces. The two staffs, PCIAT and Force Headquarters (FHQ), also have regular weekly contact which involves, in particular, French officers embedded in UNOCI units. It is intended to share information and coordinate possible operations. These exchanges are supplemented by the action of the liaison detachments (DL). Coordinated by a head of the DLs, they are placed with the FHQ, the brigade headquarters and each UNOCI battalion. Locally, the articulation between UNOCI and the Licorne force is based on the positioning of units and the proximity between contingent elements with, when means and mission permit, support as close as possible to the peacekeepers with nearby areas of deployment.

In parallel with its mission to support UNOCI, the Licorne force contributes to the normalization of Côte d'Ivoire. This mission takes different forms at different times, depending on the progress or lack of progress in the discussions between the belligerents. During phases of tension, such as during the first three months of 2005, the manoeuvre is centred on a strong presence in the former demilitarised zone of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. During phases of tension, such as during the first three months of 2005, the manoeuvre focuses on a strong presence in the former demilitarized zone separating the belligerents, by means of long patrols aimed at preventing any destabilizing undertaking and at acquiring information complementary to that provided by the LDs. The research section is also called upon for ad hoc objectives. Dialogues with Ivorian actors are also opportunities to understand the atmosphere in the unit's area of action, but also to explain France's position, and even to disseminate messages on the conduct of the action of its government and the Licorne force. Sometimes tense, these direct contacts help to ease tensions and dissuade the actors in the crisis from resuming combat by displaying the firmness of the group and its determination.

The implementation of the arms embargo, decided by the vote on resolution 1584 of 1 February 2005 and entrusted to the Licorne force in the northern zone, is another opportunity to gather intelligence. In order to gain acceptance of the controls by the Chief of Staff of the Forces armées des Forces nouvelles (FAFN), they are presented as a means of giving a strong signal of goodwill to the international community and conducted gradually, so that the FAFN validate the procedure adopted so as not to create tensions with an approach that could be perceived as authoritarian. Little by little, the pace of unit visits was then accelerated and controls were extended outside Bouaké, allowing Licorne to learn about FAFN units, their organisation, armament, morale and also their shortcomings [4].

Presence operations

With political progress and the dismantling of the buffer zone, Presence Operations (POs)

are the preferred mode of action of the Licorne force. Initially conceived by General Clément-Bollée as demonstrations of force including intelligence gathering[5], they are evolving towards support for the normalisation process. Far from being secondary, "they are real military operations planned, coordinated and carried out according to political and operational objectives, aimed at acquiring the ambient and security intelligence that will enable the force to be in a position to engage throughout the territory, under the best conditions and as soon as possible, in support of UNOCI" [6], when the force had been absent from certain regions of the theatre for several years.

Usually lasting two weeks, the POs consist in synergising the force's confidence-building capabilities in the areas of civil-military actions (CMA), engineering, health support and military influence operations (MIO). As a consequence of the short duration of each operation, but also because they are perceived as more effective than major projects with an often strong emotional dimension, small ACMs that are quick to carry out (repair of a school, construction of a bridge, etc.) are favoured by the command. In order to strengthen the effectiveness of the POs in the context of normalisation, Ivorian combatants are associated as far as possible. Thus, the Licorne battalion of mandate 22 (October 2009-February 2010) integrates elements of the defence and security forces (FDS) into its medium-term POs. On average, eight to nine OPs were conducted by each IATF during the 2007-2008 period at the request of the theatre command, in addition to OPs conducted at the initiative of the IATF leaders. To ensure overall coherence, Licorne Command is creating a deputy chief staff position and an "environment" function within the staff that includes the Jg and IMOs[7].

In the city of Abidjan, the missions are broadly comparable to those carried out in the rest of the country. The aim is both to contribute to the security of the Port Bouët camp, to provide intervention elements (a tactical staff and two sections ofThe aim is to contribute to the security of the Port Bouët camp, to provide intervention elements (a tactical headquarters and two alert sections at three o'clock) to intervene in Abidjan or the rest of the Ivorian theatre for the benefit of an IATF and, on a daily basis, to seek civil, political or military intelligence. In addition to these main missions, there are other more ad hoc missions: securing unloading or loading operations in the port of Abidjan (mainly during relief operations), escorting logistical convoys, forming an alert unit for the UNOCI elements monitoring the embargo put in place by the international community. However, certain peculiarities are inherent to the economic capital, starting with the presence of a large population that is quick to react to violent demonstrations based on rumours. The POs of the 2007-2008 period thus require an adaptation of the modes of action. Due to the importance of the intelligence sources present in the city, the units are confined to ambient intelligence, while progressive contacts are established with the "dressed corps" [8], then with the administrative authorities, and finally with the local population through sports or cultural activities according to a distribution by company and then by section. It should be noted that these activities are not without risks, first of all "being used or manipulated" or "replacing existing structures". In the same way, and unless we put down the efforts already made, General Yves Jacops reminds us that "we must neither create habits nor abandon people once contact has been established" [9].

Demanding mandates

For young unit commanders and section chiefs, POs are particularly demanding. Opportunities to exercise their command in a joint environment and away from their base

place them in a relatively long period of executive responsibility, imposing discipline in behaviour, human relations, organization and situational awareness. Indeed, POs are "not insignificant operations and are riskier than they seem because it is a question of maintaining total freedom of action to obtain the intelligence indispensable for any future action without offending the population and creating the conditions for a return to a normal situation" [10]. 10] While any slippage can have strong consequences, not without recalling the notion of strategic corporal developed by American Marine General Charles Krulak, the ability of officers to lead OPs cannot be improvised. It is prepared through training, training, but also through contacts between young section chiefs, older section chiefs and unit commanders, or between young officers and experienced NCOs.

Initially intervening for the protection of nationals of the international community, the Licorne force has also had to adopt very different operating methods depending on the situation. Coercion during the clashes in Duékoué or Man, control of violence in the rest of the territory with, in particular, crowd control in Abidjan, Bouaké or Alangouassou, the French soldiers, who had been in the field for some time, had to be trained in the use of force. However, the French soldiers had to both manage the rise in tensions and be able to respond to them with credibility in order to limit the use of force as much as possible [11]. 11] The mandates after the signing of the Ouagadougou agreement are not strictly speaking "war mandates", even if the groups are led to open fire. The emphasis is on appeasement and the control of force. On a day-to-day basis, it is essentially a question of dissuading the belligerents from resuming combat by demonstrations of force and a firm attitude, and then accompanying the peace process.

In this context, it is important to bear in mind the fragility of the situation and the indispensable reversibility of modes of action, behaviour and equipment. Companies must be able to move from a light organization to the rapid deployment of their support weapons in order to be able to respond adequately and gradually to an enemy with heavy equipment, or to be able to switch from one mission to another without delay. Likewise, the ability of units to quickly grasp the specificities of the theatre and to acclimatize to them are essential elements of the capability of French soldiers to control violence in order to remain credible and legitimate in the eyes of local players and French and international opinion. However, although the commitment in Kosovo and the knowledge of the African continent through projections as pre-positioned troops or during external operations have been very useful, they have not yet been fully exploited. While the commitment in Kosovo and knowledge of the African continent through projections as pre-positioned troops or during external operations have obviously played an obvious role in terms of preparation, understanding of the other does not rest exclusively on experience, sharing or sensitivity. A culture of openness, without arrogance, and local contacts to obtain relevant information and address the right interlocutors are as if not more important for the success of the mission in the normalisation phase.

1] Established by resolution 1633 (2005) of 21 October 2005, it brings together France, the United States, the United Kingdom, South Africa, several countries neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire and several international organizations, including the United Nations, the African Union and the European Union.

2] Without a political alliance, Gbagbo cannot win the election, since his ethnic group is a minority and his record is catastrophic. As for Soro, he is the Prime Minister of the south and therefore benefits from the direct and indirect revenues linked to this function, while remaining the real leader of the northern zone.

3| Report of the UN Group of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire, October 2009. In April 2011, the experts reiterated their concerns about the rearmament of the Gbagbo and Ouattara camps. In addition, they denounced the lack of free access to military sites and installations and recommended that UNOCI no longer warn the protagonists 48 hours in advance of their arrival (report of the group of experts on Côte d'Ivoire, October 2009). (Report of the UN Group of Experts on Côte d'Ivoire, April 2011 - note that this report was completed in September 2010 but was not made public until seven months later, presumably due to the upcoming elections).

4| However, the IATF responsible for the initial implementation of the controls was not able to combat arms trafficking, as initially planned, as its commander did not feel that he had sufficient means at his disposal to carry out this mission.

5| This is known as OP2R (Operation Presence and Intelligence Requirement).

6 | General Yves Jacops, Retour d' expérience opération Licorne. Interviews with authorities. Summer 2007-summer 2008, CDEF, undated. The concept of IMO includes several different actions designed to influence the environment: ACM, public relations, operational communication, local communication, information operations, military influence operations, free medical aid.

7| At the theatre level, the coherence of IMOs suffers from two limitations: the central level, at the operational level, tends to take initiatives with its specialised assets without notifying the responsible IATF in its area of action; the selection and training of Tactical Military Operations and Influence Teams (TOMI) is insufficient, particularly in the areas of psychology and local culture.

8| This term refers to security forces.

9 | General Yves Jacops, op. cit.

10 | General Yves Jacops, op. cit.

11| In Côte d'Ivoire, unlike in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995, the rules of engagement authorize the use of force and allow French soldiers to remain credible with local actors.

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