



From the Argument of Strength

military-Earth thinking notebook

le Lieutenant-colonel Gabriel SOUBRIER

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Challenged by the generalisation of diffuse and uncontrolled violence, the state's use of armed force, even if only as a deterrent, risks gradually eroding the very concept of power. Military intervention can only strengthen the legitimacy of an international community with a force that is universally recognized as virtuous and consistent with a redefining geopolitical paradigm.

"Ultima ratio regis." Engraved on the bronze of the Sun King's cannons, this ultimate warning was both the safeguard of power and the guarantor of the kingdom's sovereignty. The argument of force, the last resort invoked in case of diplomatic failure, was solid because it was appropriate in those Westphalian times. It was a matter of defending borders, strongholds, fortifications and garrisons against possible aggression by the neighbouring state. The argument of force converged with the strength of argument, because there was coherence between interests, threats, defence tool and strategy.

In the name of the "responsibility to protect", the international community intervened in Libya, while Russia, China, Brazil and South Africa, united in a common front of protest against that aggression, intervened in the name of the "responsibility to protect". The international community intervened in Libya in the name of the "responsibility to protect", while Russia, China, Brazil and South Africa, united in a common front of protest against this ingenuity, denounced the misinterpretation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 by Western countries. Thus, the argument invoked for the use of force lost its relevance because it did not respond to the demands of the new powers.

Moreover, an argument put forward as a last resort remains powerful only if it is legitimate and perceived as such by the adversary. However, it is not certain that in the future the pirate, rebel or fanatic will be sensitive to military warnings which are supposed to be dissuasive and which today prove their weakness in their implementation in Afghanistan.

Thus, it is not only a question of the credibility on the ground of deployed troops. The success of the use of force determines a posteriori the legitimacy of a strategy, a foreign policy and a paradigm of international relations. It is therefore an a priori condition for peace. But are we still in the geopolitical system we were used to in the past?

The frustration of powerlessness

Manifestation and source of all power, force is a form of controlled violence, both an accumulation of coercive means and the capacity to impose one's will. As such, and seen through the Clausewitzian prism, war is the final expression of an inter-state balance of power, thus legitimizing the use of force.

Peace, in such a system of international relations, is thus ensured by the balance of military capabilities and by a certain symmetry of wills. Deterrence, through its persuasive virtue, is the cornerstone of such a dialectic. It is finally in this capacity that the world balance was maintained during the nearly 45 years of the Cold War.

However, peace today is less weakened by situations of war than by untamed violence. Violence is the primary argument in any dispute, a force that cannot be contained, and against which the state and the international community can oppose only one argument: force. Hence multilateral interventionism, limited and validated by Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

The contemporary adversary has understood this. It is thus seeking to fight on its own ground, that of ultra-violent non-warfare, outside all legal and moral norms, in order to render any deterrent ineffective, to discredit armed intervention and to delegitimize an international community that is increasingly perceived as purely Western. This asymmetrical relationship was embodied in the liberation of the Franco-Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit against 1 027 Palestinian prisoners: two different strategies, two different cultural prisms, confronting each other.

The most serious thing is that, in a context where "if the strong don't win, they lose, if the weak don't lose, they win", the state is de facto playing on its credibility as master of force, guarantor of national security and actor of world peace. Powerless to compel its adversary, is the State condemned to have no more arguments and therefore to withdraw? Is the West, which is contradicted by the emerging countries, obliged to recognize that it no longer has a monopoly of power?

The spectre of a strategic disconnection

In this new geostrategic context whose contours are gradually emerging, the argument of force retains its symbolic significance as a vector of power. The military effort thus made by Brazil, Russia, India and China proves the fundamental aspect of the military tool as a factor of influence. All the more so as these countries have a policy consistent with strategic thinking that always advocates force as a last resort.

But the "right to interfere" and now the "responsibility to protect" may in the long run undermine the credibility of Western countries and in particular of Europe, which is still trying to make its voice heard as a strategic player. The choice is between extinguishing fires as they light up, at the risk of discrediting oneself, and developing a long-term strategy that is part of a new balance of power, at the risk of temporarily losing a certain

global leadership.

Indeed, shaken by strategic surprises that are difficult to predict, the international community, in its current momentum, can only move in the long term towards admitting its powerlessness. Drawn into this landslide, the state would not only be paralysed in its capacity to react, but could also lose the very essence of its power. If countries are not threatened today in their territorial existence, they are threatened in their moral existence.

Above all, in the international system still in gestation in the post-Cold War era, analysts are looking at what the future geopolitical paradigm might look like. It must be said that, perhaps due to a lack of imagination, and certainly due to a loss of reference points, neither the United States, nor Europe, nor France are capable of imposing new rules of the game acceptable to the new powers and of proposing credible criteria for the use of force. The "just war" is no longer really a fair argument.

Finally, in a Europe that is unable to assert itself as a strategic player, as it has once again proved by its near silence, France is not able to impose new rules of the game acceptable to the new powers and to propose credible criteria for the use of force. Three weeks after the Tunisian uprising, France is trying, through the Libyan intervention, to remain connected to the strategic landscape, illustrating a crucial question: At what level (State, regional integration, international organizations) will the geopolitical connection be made tomorrow?

Reconciling peace and force

World peace can no longer be imposed by a balance of power exclusively monopolised by Western countries. The search for peace must remain the central definition of the common good, universally shared. It is for this reason that the world order must be rethought, including the new powers to a greater extent, correcting the criteria for intervention, sharing interests and making strategies consistent.

Since war is no longer the exact opposite of peace, all efforts should converge towards the elimination of violence. This fight can be carried out more through an indirect rather than a frontal approach. Conflict resolution is much more a long-term "therapy" by initiating a virtuous circle than a brutal intervention that will only fuel the infernal spiral of violence-hate-venge-violence. The lynching of Colonel Gaddafi does not herald the end of the Libyan nightmare. On the contrary perhaps.

In this respect, force as a principle, but above all as a virtue, regains its central and vital role: not perceived as a force for order', but as a force for reconstruction'. Hence the urgency of reaching a consensus with the emerging powers on resolutions that are responsible for crises. Hence the importance of reflecting on crisis exit strategies well in advance of intervention strategies. Hence the need to re-establish the authority of the force.

The authority of force can only come from a virtuous approach to its use by discerning the right means to be used, by demonstrating honesty and mastery of the means. This authority of force can only come from a virtuous approach to its use by discerning the right means to be used, by being honest and masterful, by clarifying the common basis of the general interest, of the intangible rights of peoples and nations, by remaining courageous and firm in the face of adversity. The establishment of a responsible peace depends on the appropriation of this virtue by international organizations, States, armies

and societies.

Finally, if the state remains within international relations, regional integrations such as Europe can only survive if it has authority. In a changing world, peace needs identified and strong actors, not dematerialized, dehumanized bodies. Europe, if it wants to exist, must find a strong personality, not a virtual one. The Treaty of Lisbon has begun a timid attempt. It is time for Europe to assert itself, or to remain silent for good.

Recalling the strength of a State therefore remains not only consistent in combating violence, but also essential to remain a deterrent in a redefining concert of powers.

The use of such force must therefore be reintegrated into an acceptable system in which the balance remains between States and organizations, between armed forces and societies, between old and emerging visions, between the level of violence and the durability of peace.

On the strength of the conviction of the initiatives proposed by Western countries, in particular France, to accompany this geopolitical change, the renewal of the very meaning of the use of force could depend.

Lieutenant-Colonel SOUBRIER is a naval officer from Saint-cyrien. He is a graduate of the Spanish War School and since September 2011 has been studying for a Master 2 at the Institute of International and Strategic Relations in Paris (IRIS).

Title : le Lieutenant-colonel Gabriel SOUBRIER

Author (s) : le Lieutenant-colonel Gabriel SOUBRIER

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