



NATO in Afghanistan

military-Earth thinking notebook

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Published on 21/08/2018

Histoire & stratégie

The Supreme Commander of NATO's military forces is still an American Army General: the first was General Eisenhower, and the second - excuse me - was Marshal Montgomery. This general wears "two hats", that of SACEUR (supreme commander of NATO forces) and that of USAREUR (commander of US forces stationed in Europe and Turkey).

In 1991, the Americans, for the conduct of the war in the Gulf, called upon the USAREUR (American cap) for logistical, medical and administrative support, first for the deployment of forces in Saudi Arabia and then for the war operations in Iraq...with success. I was then the head of the French Military Mission at SHAPE (NATO Headquarters) and, as our French forces were engaged I was then the head of the French military mission at SHAPE (NATO Headquarters) and, as our French forces were engaged in the Gulf alongside the Americans, I was able to observe, at leisure, how the Americans were operating from the inside. Thus I was invited every morning at eight o'clock to the underground bunker which had become a sort of remote replica of General Schwarzkopf's CP in Saudi Arabia. In these moments of precipitation, even confusion, which staffs sometimes experience when suddenly plunged into uncertainty, doubt and urgency, our General-in-Chief, General Galvin, reacted without too much wondering which cap he was wearing at the time ("NATO" or American). But no one cared since he was deciding for the common good!

Ten years later, in the aftermath of the destruction of the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001, the Americans, with the almost unanimous approval of the Western world, launched a full-blown hunt against Al Qaeda in Iraq and Afghanistan. They then reactivated the NATO system that had worked so well towards the Middle East and, once again, the generalissimo found himself involved first with his "bitter" cap. Once again, the Generalissimo found himself involved first with his "American" cap for Iraq and then with his "NATO" cap for Afghanistan with, for the first time, operational responsibilities in this

new theatre of operations. As a result of a deviation that can be explained by events, the command of Alliance operations is today exercised by the SACEUR (NATO cap) from the Bunker (which I have just mentioned) located in Mons, Belgium.

These operations may have been placed under a UN mandate, but almost no Afghan knows this or, which amounts to the same thing, everyone pretends to be unaware of it, all the more so as NATO's image in the Middle East is deplorable. We found this out in Beirut in 1983 and we paid the price. This image suffers from a simplistic amalgam, skilfully peddled to the basic Muslim: NATO = United States = Satan. Clearly, our French forces in Afghanistan today suffer from this confusion, which is widely maintained and amplified among the population.

Since September 11, 2001, Al Qaeda has multiplied its attacks throughout the world, hitting more "non-NATO" countries than NATO member countries...the last countries hit being Algeria and China but we can recall Sudan, Tunisia, Australia via Indonesia etc..., etc.... Therefore, insofar as Al Qaeda poses a threat on a planetary scale, we are entitled to ask ourselves why NATO would have the exclusive responsibility for the operations of Al Qaeda. rations in Afghanistan, if, moreover, it can be seen that, beyond the dead end represented by the al-Qa'ida sanctuary, half of humanity, or three billion people, are to be found: Pakistan, India, China, Indonesia, Japan....all of whom are as concerned by terrorism as the countries of Europe.

Would it not be more appropriate for the UN, whose 1945 Charter aims at "international security", to delegate to its Security Council the responsibility for "international security"? for operations carried out under Chapter VII of the Charter (opening of fire in "war" configuration) and not Chapter VI ("self-defence", as in Lebanon)?

It would then remain to find an appropriate staff structure: in the present state of affairs, this could only be provided by the Western European Union, whose image in the Middle East is still more or less preserved to this day.

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Release date	12/02/2021
