



## Knowing and believing you can: the American post-industrial illusion

military-Earth thinking notebook

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**The idea of the superior power of "knowledge" is an idea that is now commonplace in societies described as post-industrial and where companies increasingly focus on the intangible and largely outsource physical production to countries with low labour costs. The working class is thus tending to disappear from the most advanced countries, in a way realising Jean Fourastie's old dream of (Western) man liberated from the labour of matter.**

### **Towards a post-industrial army**

Since the beginning of the Cold War, the Americans have undoubtedly had the most efficient intelligence and analysis apparatus in the world. This has not prevented, in the midst of numerous successes, a number of spectacular failures, due to a lack of man-made data, because the data are not correctly interpreted because of certain biases (cultural or corporatist, for example) or simply because the right analyses are not believed by decision-makers. Other failures include the attack on North Korea in June 1950, the Chinese offensive the following October, the Tet offensive in 1968, the Iranian revolution in 1979, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the attacks of September 11, 2001.

With the end of the Cold War and the first Gulf War consecrating the era of the hyperpower, the Department of Defense tends, and this is a constant in American military history, to draw inspiration from the dominant economic model. We are therefore beginning to imagine a defence system based on the "knowledge economy" with a strategic surveillance network that is all the more important and tightly woven as the threats are multiple and diffuse, in conjunction with forces that are themselves made omniscient by the new information technologies. With the fog lifted, war becomes a hunting expedition with "sensors" and "effectors", essentially coming from a perfectly controlled sky.

The armies themselves are "tertiarising", i.e. the number of soldiers in the service of other

soldiers becomes much higher than the number of combatants. The number of computer users exceeds the number of soldiers, especially since part of the combat function is subcontracted to private companies or allied contingents, especially in countries where one does not want to be too open. American combat units, especially land units, thus decreased by a good third during the 1990s. But even in the "tertiary" (or "back office") sector, there is increasing use of "part-time military" (reservists and national guards). The result is a structure that is close to that of private industry[1].

1] In this "tertiarised" model applied in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan in 2001[2] and, in a less "pure" manner during the2] and, in a less "pure" way during the invasion of Iraq in April 2003, the Americans seem to have initiated the "post-industrial" army, which is omniscient and almost free of losses. 3] But things went wrong afterwards, a bit like the "internet bubble" and the "new economy" in 2000.

## The Setbacks of the "Knowledge" Army

From the very beginning of the Iraq conflict, things did not go exactly as planned either at the strategic level with the opposition to this war by many countries or at the operative level ("we are not fighting the enemy we had foreseen", General Wallace). But the most unpleasant situations came later.

From the summer of 2003, the Iraqi theatre became one of permanent surprise and reactionary action. The entire analysis and intelligence apparatus is incapable of understanding that the harassment that is growing in scale is not the last fires of Saddam Hussein's regime but the beginning of a movement to reject the occupation.

After the capture of Saddam Hussein in December 2003, General Odierno, commander of the 4th ID[4], declared: "the remaining rebels are on their knees [...] things will be back to normal in six months". The spring 2004 relief is thus carried out in optimism. A few days later, in April, the Marines are pushed back to Fallujah, the Shiite South revolts, the Iraqi security forces collapse, and images of Abu Ghraib's abuses are broadcast around the world. All things that no one saw coming.

It took a year to regain lost ground, but at the end of 2005, with the success of the various polls, General Casey, commanding the theatre, could calmly envisage a local takeover by the Iraqi army and the withdrawal of the interior to large bases. A few months later, the country was in chaos. More than a hundred civilians are murdered every day and nearly 10% of the population has already been displaced. Baghdad is becoming a "black hole of violence" that is dragging the rest of the country down. A new operation to regain control of the ground has been launched as a matter of urgency, the surge, and in September 2007, General Petraeus can testify once again that the situation is on the right track.

Strategic and operational intelligence has therefore always been deficient in Iraq. As for the Network centric warfare at the tactical level, an officer said in 2004: ' We were told that we would know everything about the enemy before we even approached him. In reality, in 90% of cases, we only find out when we see the RPG rocket leave.

## Questioning the model

There are now 8 times more American soldiers who have fallen in this theatre than in all the other operations conducted by the all volunteer force since its creation in 1973. Undoubtedly, it has missed fighters on the ground. With a brigade of 3,500 men, the

Americans are capable of controlling a Sunni city of 200,000 people. With an average of 15 brigades, they have thus been able to control a total urban population of 3 million inhabitants, while the city of Baghdad alone already has 6 million [5]. 5] They are thus condemned to constantly take the cities and then to abandon them (we speak of the "Sisyphean War"). The city of Ramadi, for example, has been taken over by the Americans every year since 2003.

Since 2003, the US Army and the Marine Corps have been trying to reconstitute combat units, but it is a long and difficult process. It is significant that when the Surge was triggered, the Department of Defense, which has 2.2 million men and women in uniform, was only able to release (provisionally) 30,000 soldiers (including 20,000 combatants) to overturn a situation in Iraq that was then highly compromised.

Subcontractors" [6], "part time" and Allies pose a multitude of problems in the combat zone. The mercenaries obey the logic of their contracts and do not care about the "battle of hearts and minds". Their action can even seriously disrupt that of the armies (cf. the death of Blackwater's volunteers in Fallujah in March 2004, which in a few days led to the overthrow of the entire military strategy in the Sunni provinces).

Reservists and National Guards have ended up representing 40% of the troops but as they are in the front line in this context, they are the source of most of the blunders and also of protests in the press. Their morale and therefore their recruitment is at an all-time low.

The coalition of the willing was finally able to gather only 30,000 soldiers (35 contingents) in southern Iraq, a number very insufficient to control 12 million Shiites, even those initially favourable to the coalition. The surprise of the April 2004 revolt led to a massive retreat (division by two of the contingent) and a retraction on the bases. The entire Shiite south is now in the hands of the militias.

The Iraqi institutional forces are unreliable (the case of the army and even more so the police) and the non-institutional ones often drift into "death squads" and above all their development contradicts the establishment of a solid power with its regalian prerogatives. This multiplication of military actors (not to mention civilian actors) is, on balance, a major factor of disorder that has hampered all the strategies implemented.

### Conclusions

The scientist's illusion of perfect knowledge, which would allow us to act with great efficiency, and therefore to have few means of action, has fizzled out. Strategic action, as long as it remains subject to dialectic, also remains subject to uncertainty.

The "unblocking" of private companies, where engineers are grouped together and contact with the world of production, itself largely delocalized, has introduced a social malaise. The same process in the US military has led to tactical inefficiency and thus also to unease.

As after the return to the real economy in the early 2000s, the US Army and the Marine Corps, like the Israeli army after its military transformation, have become more and more reluctant to take action. The US Army, after its victory against Hezbollah in 2006, is returning to much more classicism (modification of the credo of the American soldier in a much more warlike sense, rediscovery of close combat, increase in the number of combatants, etc.). The US Air Force and the US Navy, less concerned by the problems of war among the population and fearing a rebalancing to their disadvantage, are challenging this trend. This creates a

new split within the US armed forces.

The small and expensive professional Western armies are designed for limited operations. They are much more uncomfortable in the face of adversaries who practice all-out warfare at their level. These adversaries, such as Hezbollah or the Mahdi Army, are the exact opposite of a post-industrial army. Command, intelligence, propaganda, actions with the population and combat are perfectly integrated under a single command. The combatants are both numerous and versatile (they can in turn fight, help the population, provide information, etc.) and are ready to die.

1) Renault has gone from being a car manufacturer who manufactured 80% of its models in the 1950's to being a car "designer" who only manufactures 20% of cars today.

2) The first two American conflicts in which the US Army did not intervene.

3) But also in close combat; the number of American soldiers who actually applied fire on a specific enemy does not exceed 1% of the contingent engaged in Iraq in March-April 2003. This is evidenced by the very low number of Medals of Honor awarded .

4) And current deputy to General Petraeus in Iraq.

5) At the end of 2003, there were fewer American infantrymen in Iraq (27 million inhabitants) than police officers in New York (8 million inhabitants).

6) The current trend is to bring Angolan volunteers into the PMS, as they are the cheapest on the "market".

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