

Thoughts for the Army of Tomorrow

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Valeurs de l'Armée de Terre

Recent statements by our political and military authorities set an unprecedented level of ambition for our armed forces:

The President of the Republic, on 1 March 2018, on the occasion of his visit to the Champagne camps, declared: "We are at a turning point for ourarmies, particularly the Army. My objective is simple: that our army should be unquestionably the leading European army, in terms of capabilities and technology".

The CEMAT, on 11 October 2017, during its hearing before the National Assembly's Committee on National Defence and the Armed Forces, noted: "The President of the Republic has set us an ambition and given us the means. He wanted us to be the first European army. **Today**, the French army is undoubtedly the first in Europe, but how will it remain so? What are the criteria that will enable us to tell the President how we are going to keep it that way? »

Defining what could be "the first European army" is a fascinating and rewarding task, seemingly straightforward for the G2S. And, what's more, it's rather exciting because it's part of a clearly positive dynamic of increasing power.

It is in fact a "tricky " and extremely difficult dossier. There are many difficulties in dealing with it.

The first is that of clearly **defining the effect to be obtained: to be** the first or to be very good? Should we try to "define" or "specify" an army of excellence in absolute terms? Or is it a question of defining the contours of an army that is the best in Europe, in relative or comparative terms? With the risk of becoming part of a form of competition that could lead us to make more or less negative judgements about our partners. Is this not a purely prospective exercise, linked to innovation, concerning a "fourth generation " army, in reference to 4G, which improves the performance of mobile telephony?

A second difficulty lies in the context **in which this forward-looking exercise should be conducted: to be** first, for what purpose? In what type of environment? In the face of what kind of threat? For what types of conflicts? In what international context? Depending on the stated ambitions and the positions sought, "being first" will not have the same impact in terms of capacities, know-how or means. Let us remember that the U.S. Army was undoubtedly the first army of the Cold War, but that at the same time it suffered a heavy defeat in Vietnam...

The issue of threats alone would deserve a broad development. For it determines many choices to be made, enemies to be considered, and can lead to different models, and therefore different ways of being first:

- A "classic" adversary , whose armies are known, structured, with identified weapons, in symmetrical mode.
- A "terrorist" type of adversary , more difficult to define, capable of acting inside the territory with weapons that can range from the most basic to the most sophisticated.
- A possible flood of unarmed populations, driven by poverty and determined to settle in a rich country, through poorly controlled areas.
- A stealthy, or "sneaky", adversary without fighters (drones, robots, chemical and biological threats, cyber-actions, etc.) capable of affecting our environment...

The question of the international framework is obviously also important: The question of the international framework is obviously also important: should we remain capable of fighting alone in certain cases, outside or inside the territory, but also of working with friendly armies of various ranks, which presupposes interoperability and the ability to conduct combined operations.

The exercise is all the more delicate as this environment is changing: we will not just have to be the first, but we will have to remain the first when the context changes, as a result of demographic shifts, changes due to global warming, the emergence of new powers (regional and global) or the appearance of new breakthrough technologies.

The third difficulty relates to the scale and variety of the areas to be addressed. It can be tempting to add up the requirements: should we "be first everywhere", as one of our legion of songs says? There is the risk of a bidding war through an accumulation of equipment, manpower, needs to be met, high technologies mastered... with the pitfall of quickly ending up in a totally utopian, inaccessible exercise. This is why it quickly appeared wiser to reason about what is existential in a perspective of excellence.

Another pitfall would be to be content with "living on our achievements". After all, the situation of the French armies with regard to their recent operations remains enviable on the surface: Their critical mass enables them to cope with most situations, except in the event of the resurgence of a major conflict, and they remain capable of acting on the entire spectrum of operations; they benefit from the experience of their armed forces, which are structured on a comprehensive model that current military programming work has decided to maintain; their critical mass enables them to cope with most situations, except in the event of the resurgence of a major conflict, and they remain capable of acting on the entire spectrum of operations; they benefit from the experience of their armed forces, which are structured on a comprehensive model that current military programming work has decided to maintain. Their critical mass enables them to deal with most situations, outside the resurgence of a major conflict, and they remain capable of acting on the whole spectrum of operations; they benefit from a unique operational experience and culture, the fruit of intense commitment, itself based on a decision-

making system that our constitution intended to be reactive; the effort devoted to equipment, despite some delays and capability shortfalls, has made it possible to meet requirements overall ...

It should not be forgotten that behind these more or less measurable criteria of excellence, what underpins the success of an armed force is above all the state of mind of the soldiers who make it up : Moral, esprit de corps, sense of sacrifice, warrior spirit... In this field, a certain humility must be required, to recognize that nothing is ever acquired, that excellence is in perpetual evolution and that collective know-how needs to be carefully cultivated.

Finally, **historical experiences** may seem, at first glance, very disparate and may not provide a "miracle recipe ". There have even been episodes in which a first-class status and reputation have not spared their beneficiary a bitter defeat .

The story, however, gives some interesting clues:

- Prussia after Jena was able to rebuild its army by making efforts on command structures and staff training.
- It is by bringing military thought and doctrinal reflection up to date that the French Army after 1870 was rebuilt.
- The German army of the inter-war period was re-articulated around the very high level of competence of its cadres.
- THE S.Army at the end of the Vietnam War was able to rebound around the studies of the RMA (Revolution in Military Affairs).

Two major lessons can be drawn from these historical precedents:

- The first is that it is only by injecting **intelligence**, reflection, training, general culture, that one builds the strongest armies; in other words, to build (or rebuild) on rock, one must privilege the brain over the muscle.
- The second is that one must know how to **question** oneself ; **and** ideally, one should not wait for military setbacks to provoke this awareness but, on the contrary, be constantly concerned to anticipate ruptures and opportunities.

The G2S dossier proposed to you is based on these two major axes: that of a successful army, which despite everything wants to rethink its future, without resting on its recent laurels; and that of a rich reflection that should irrigate the preparatory work for the future.

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