

On the perpetuation of the principles of war

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GCA (2S) Martial de BRAQUILANGES

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Valeurs de l'Armée de Terre

To think about the army of the future, do we have to start from a blank page?

On the occasion of his recent visit to the Army in the camp of Mourmelon-le-Grand, the President of the Republic displayed his high level of defence requirements by declaring his ambition to make the army "the first in Europe". With this in mind, the French Army recently developed its ATF project^[1] (Action Terrestre Future), which has the great merit of setting a course in the developments to be conducted to better meet future needs. In this context, one may legitimately question the durability of the three **well-known** principles of **warfare** expressed at the end of the 19th century, namely freedom of action, economy of **forces and concentration of** efforts . Indeed, could the changing characteristics of conflicts and the development of new technologies not call into question, even if only partially, the observance of these interdependent principles, which were supposed to lead to the success of the country's weapons?

General de VILLIERS recently presented the new characteristics of the conflicts by insisting in particular on the hardening of confrontations in a joint and very often inter-allied framework. He emphasized the increased duration of engagements before hoping for stabilization, but also the dispersion and spread of the devices whose zones of action are increasingly extended. It also detailed the multiplicity of opponents, real or potential, and the diversity of their modes of action, which we have to face, integrating both the return of the Power-States and the development of the new democracies. It also detailed the multiplicity of opponents, real or potential, and the diversity of their modes of action, which we have to face, taking into account both the return of Power States and the development of terrorism without frontiers and the increase in the number of interlocutors with whom we have to deal, in a context where Western technological supremacy is less prevalent than in the recent past. Finally, he stressed, among other things, the gap between the media, political and military times and the growing share of irrationality linked to the "new" terrorism. It also underlined the refusal of our adversaries to

bend to the rights and customs of and in war, considered as tools at the service of Westerners.

We find the same vision of the threat in the Strategic Review of Defence and Security drawn up in 2017, which states: "The increase in arsenals, the dissemination of modern conventional equipment and technological progress allow a growing number of state and non-state actors to acquire advanced military means. Combined with innovative modes of action, these developments may call into question the operational and technological superiority of Western armies in all fields"..."

In fact, this development, like many others in the past, does not really call into question the principles of warfare, which are still relevant, but rather the ways in which they are implemented. Let us return to each of these three principles.

Freedom of action is "the freedom to choose, therefore to decide", as General Lucien POIRIER said. It is also to be free to move around in order to be able to act, free from one's own constraints (logistics, support, morale, availability...), those of the natural environment and those that the adversary wants to impose on us. It is finally the ability to remain in control of our action and our intentions by trying to impose our tempo on the opponent, in short the ability to keep the initiative. In this context, the ability to have our autonomy of situation assessment must be preserved in the same way as the ability to act alone, when the opponent wants to impose his or her will on us. In this context, the ability to have autonomy in assessing the situation must be preserved as well as the ability to act alone, when the urgency of the situation demands it, even if intervention in coalition is of undeniable interest, without being naive, especially when one is in charge of the leadership. It is therefore important to be able to count on a sufficient number of committed, well-trained national units, as well as on efficient chiefs and staffs mastering all interoperability procedures.

The **economy of forces** is "making the most of the forces at our disposal", said Marshal FOCH, who added: "it is also the art of assembling forces into a system" rather than compartmentalizing them. To save forces is to preserve them for the main effort and thus ensure that their capabilities are maintained, or even developed. A number of factors come into play at this level, such as morale, training and equipment, experience, availability, mobility, and the particular aptitudes of certain units. On this last point, the search for greater versatility of training courses should be pursued in order to broaden their spectrum of employment and thus increase their optimisation. Here again, it is important to note that the ability to employ foreign units within a coalition, to advise or assist local security forces and to encourage a form of support from the local population for our action, in conjunction with public or private operators, are all measures that contribute to a greater economy of our forces. Finally, let us not forget, in this regard, the efforts to be made to reduce the vulnerability of our troops to IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices), suicide attacks and cyber-attacks.

Concentration of effort, "is the concentration of strength against weakness" (LIDDEL HART), it is the diversity of effects to be produced in a global manoeuvre, it is the concentration of strength against weakness (LIDDEL HART). It is also the result of planning and the ability to exploit an opportunity, taking advantage if possible of surprise, mobility and a favourable balance of power.

The progress made in the fields of Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, automation, digitisation, interoperability, reThe progress made in the fields of Artificial Intelligence (AI), robotics, automation, digitisation, interoperability, networking and, more broadly, communication, nanotechnology, equipment and armaments, provide new opportunities

for the proper implementation of the three principles of warfare. They should make it possible to improve situational awareness and understanding, disseminate information almost immediately, speed up the decision-making process, apply fires with greater range and accuracy, concentrate mobile forces and effects of all kinds quickly and discreetly, shift efforts by restructuring units, and so on. All these new capabilities will make possible frequent and rapid changes in operational posture that will obviously require an adaptation of mindset, organisations and modes of action under the guidance of effective chiefs and staffs. In this respect, it is essential to be able to continue to rely on a high-quality training and evaluation system, which is regularly called into question in order to adapt pragmatically to the evolution of operations.

For fear, no doubt, of having an approach deemed too conformist, there is a strong temptation to add to the old principles, other more innovative ones such as dazzle, surprise, or uncertainty, which in my opinion should rather be considered as conditions for the proper implementation of our three basic principles.

A few years ago, some people might have believed that they could wage war in a different way, from a distance, a clean war with zero deaths, avoiding any large-scale footprint on the ground in order to reduce the risk of getting bogged down and to reduce the vulnerability of the forces. Clearly, political and industrial leaders quickly identified all the potential advantages of this new paradigm. Others have considered the option of a blitzkrieg before passing the baton to other forces that, it must be said, are not really rushing to take over. And then there was the temptation to focus on technology at the expense of manpower, believing that the supremacy acquired would make it possible to deal with all the threats. Such modes of action should not be dismissed out of hand and can be implemented on an ad hoc basis, but they are no longer a panacea in the face of the new characteristics of conflicts.

The facts are stubborn: action with the population remains a key issue, the need to cooperate with many partners, and the conduct of coercive and stabilization actions require large numbers of staff with long-term commitment, particularly in urban areas that are constantly growing. Having sufficient "critical mass", as the ATF project points out, with the necessary ad-hoc equipment, and the capacity to take over in the long term, is now a real imperative, unless one accepts to be a mere fig leaf. Operation Sentinel on the National Territory (TN) and the commitments in the Sahel-Saharan strip (BSS) are there to demonstrate this, while we are only facing the terrorist threat.

But, here again, let us be clear, the "critical mass" to be engaged is not a new principle of war but an essential condition for the success of an operation. It is one of the responses to the clearly stated ambition of our Chief of the Armed Forces, who states in the Strategic Review that "The preservation of a complete and balanced model army is essential to ensure France's national independence, strategic autonomy and freedom of action. In a more demanding operational environment, this model must have all the skills and capabilities needed to achieve the desired military effects across the entire spectrum of threats and possible commitments, including the most critical ones"...

[1] <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/communaute-defense/action-terrestre-futuretomorrow--wins-today-today>

2) La guerre du Golfe dans la généalogie de la stratégie, *Stratégique*, n° 51/52, 3rd quarter 1991.

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