



War by proxy 1/2

military-Earth thinking notebook

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Histoire & stratégie

Proxy warfare is a notion connoted in the wrong terms: is proxy or distant warfare by nature cowardly, illegitimate, ineffective or immoral? What if proxy war were, on the contrary, the future of war? And what if the long movement to question the "decisive battle" - practiced by Napoleon and codified by Clausewitz to perpetuate itself in the future? to kill each other to the present day - had reached its natural conclusion and logically exceeded it? The war of robots activated by civilian and foreign technicians? Are we so far away from it?

As old as war itself, and as decried as it is ethically and deontologically, proxy war still has a long way to go.

The generalization of ambiguity or concealed aggression is also confirmed by the increasingly frequent use of the term "proxy war". The widespread use of ambiguity or covert aggression is also evident in the increasing use by some states of proxy groups (proxies), ranging from instrumentalized diasporas to militias or armed groups capable of holding conventional forces in check.»

During a televised debate on Iran on 11 May 2018, Mr Pierre Servent showed that Iran was using "proxies" to confront Israel because of the relative weakness of its military means in the face of an army that was militarily and technologically superior to it. The use of pro-Iranian Hezbollah thus proves to be relevant in the context of a confrontation between the weak and the strong. It is the ideal means for a regional power anxious to gain respect and to mark its zone of influence to harm a rival power.

The use of "proxies" can also be practised regularly, or even claimed if not in official doctrine, at least in operational practice, as the Russians do. The Russian CEMA, Valery Gerasimov (2013), is credited with developing this form of warfare into a conceptual arsenal (Crimea): "The role of non-military means in achieving political and strategic objectives has grown and now exceeds the effectiveness of armed force". The

intervention of pro-Russian forces in the Donbass (CDEC/DDo Retex Papers - November 2017) is a perfect illustration of the use of paramilitary forces to prevent Moscow from committing its own troops on the ground and, above all, from having a free hand on the international political, diplomatic and legal level. However, this practice is old if we remember the partisan war waged during the Russian campaign and during the Second World War.

A practice as old as the war itself

The auxiliaries in the Roman army

The use of auxiliary troops is known in the Roman army and attested by many sources. These auxiliaries were either attached to a legion or were independent in provinces without a legion. They were of all levels and assigned to all types of missions: static forces dedicated to guard and protection or units of real operational value (Gallic and Spanish cavalymen, Breton scouts, Thracian and Syrian archers...). As a sign of their usefulness and numerical importance, it is estimated that their numbers doubled those of the legions: in 23 AD, there were 125,000 legionnaires and 125,000 auxiliaries, or 250,000 men permanently under arms. In principle composed of non-Roman citizens, the auxiliaries were commanded by Roman officers (prefects, tribunes, centurions...) and organized in structures similar to those of the Romans (wings, cohorts...).

"The auxiliaries should not be confused with the "auxiliaries", non-permanent forces sometimes used by Rome in case of war" (Yann Le Bohec, La guerre romaine).

In other words, auxiliaries are a force of foreign origin (often local), but permanent and integrated into the regular army. As such, they correspond fairly closely to the model of the units of the French colonial empire (mainly the African army), whose decisive role was known during the two World Wars, then in those of independence (Indochina and Algeria).

The Roman model is emblematic because it raises the question of the definition of these auxiliaries: are they proxies or do they belong to regular Roman units? Or is it the type of operation and combat conducted that distinguishes the proxy from the regular soldier? Hervé Coutau-Bégarie classifies the auxiliaries as actors of "irregular warfare" because, despite their insertion in the military organisation (see above), these forces carry out particular missions and a specific form of combat: harassment combat, ambush warfare, raids on enemy territory... This is undoubtedly too limiting a role for them, because, in the end, these soldiers carry out practically the same missions and, above all, ensure the defence of the limes, in areas where the Roman legions are not stationed, the latter being reserved for operations or strategic or critical areas.

The case of the foreign soldiers of the Great Army

Throughout his reign, Napoleon was confronted with the crucial problem of manpower in the face of a Europe that was coalescing against France. It is known that he integrated more and more foreign bodies into the Grande Armée until he achieved a Franco-European coalition against Russia (campaign of 1812), then in 1813. On the banks of the Niemen, the Emperor succeeded in concentrating "one of the most impressive armies of

all time, which was called the "Army of the Twenty Nations", around 680,000 men (including 356,000 French). Between 400,000 and 450,000 soldiers were to invade Russia, half of them foreigners. These foreign units had a national organization, officers, manpower and equipment; only the high command (staff of the marshal commanding the corps) was French, with the exception of the Austrian corps of Schwarzenberg. They were therefore allies, not auxiliaries or auxiliaries. At first glance, the few units of foreigners integrated into the Grande Armée serve in the Imperial Guard on horseback - in the same way as their French counterparts in the regiments of chasseurs, grenadiers on horseback, dragons and scouts : they are the famous Mamelucks, Polish and Dutch Lancers, and Lithuanian Tartars. These forces are an integral part of the French army. They represent, in the end, a small volume compared to the Guard, and especially to the Grande Armée taken as a whole.

Supplements in Indochina: a real case of Proxies' employment

Non-permanent foreign force not integrated into the French army, but attached to the CEFEQ (French expeditionary force) in Extrême-Orient and under French command, the use of these units proved to be relevant and effective on a strictly operational level.

Etymologically, the term "suppletive" has just supplemented, i.e. "that supplements". The officers are generally European; the same is not true of non-commissioned officers: archives and documents abound and often show brigadiers, corporals, sergeants (...) from the local populations. And this is still true during the First World War, when France had to draw soldiers from its colonies to cope with a shortage of men compared to the central Empires. In Indochina, these same reasons quickly appear. As early as 1946, General Leclerc, who was at the head of a force of only a few thousand men, appealed to the Indochinese population to fight communist Vietminh. The reasons are many:

- a question of manpower: the Vietminh uprising and the deterioration of the situation by the guerrillas forced the French army to multiply its operational actions while maintaining a constant presence in the large towns of the rice-growing provinces, the deltas and the coastal plains. General Leclerc also decided to enlist Vietnamese because he thought they were better suited to the terrain and local living conditions, while at the same time having a low cost. Initially formed into self-defence groups in their villages, the partisans recruited were first attached to regular units and then, very quickly, formed into light indigenous units. This led to the creation of the zone deputy offices responsible for their administration, which lasted until 1954.
- A question of financial means: a soldier from the metropolis had to be transported from Marseille, trained for many weeks and received a higher pay than a native could receive; finally, the partisan's pay was a few piasters a day: about ten, the price of a bottle of locally brewed beer in central Vietnam. And there was no provision for a pension for the invalid or widow, nor for retirement...
- a question of acculturation: the recruitment of local men allows a real immersion in the heart of the countries concerned, if only for questions of language, knowledge of the terrain and of the Thai or Muong peasants know the terrain; they are familiar with the climate and are more enduring than soldiers from the metropolis.
- no French deaths.

In 1950, more than 40,000 men made up the workforce of the substitute forces: they are integrated into CSMs (companies of substitute soldiers) of CEFEQ units such as the

parachute battalions, the Foreign Legion (CIPLE - Indochinese Company of the Foreign Legion), the classic units of the Colonial Army and other units with evocative names: Far Eastern marching battalions, Indochinese marching battalions, Tonkin skirmishers regiments, the Annamese battalion, the Tonkin Coastal Forces battalion, the Muong battalions, the Thai battalions, the Laotian fighter battalions, the mixed regiment of Cambodia. In 1954, the CEFEQ had about 200,000 men, including 55,000 to 60,000 replacements, while the national armies (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) numbered between 250,000 and 300,000 men (including 45,000 replacements). The SSCs generally take part in village surveillance missions, support for metropolitan units, track opening, reconnaissance and lighting missions.

But they are also integrated into maquis or commandos, in a perspective dear to French counter-espionage. Thus, the mixed airborne commandos group (GCMA) set up the maquis in the Haute-région (Tonkin), under the responsibility of Lieutenant-Colonel Trinquier. Their mission: "To prepare, organise, set up and command elements likely to carry out maquis, itinerant guerrilla warfare, special missions (in particular sabotage) through the use of the French army. The mission was to prepare, organise, set up and command elements likely to carry out maquis, itinerant guerrilla warfare, special missions (particularly sabotage) by individual elements or very light teams infiltrated clandestinely, set up escape routes, participate on order in psychological warfare".

The CSMs quickly became indispensable auxiliaries to the French forces throughout Indochina. Little by little, they gradually took over a large part of the territorial missions. The losses suffered by the auxiliary formations during the eight years of their existence speak for themselves: more than 15,000 killed, 18,000 missing and nearly 30,000 wounded, i.e. a quarter of the total losses of the CEFEQ.

What about today's legionnaire? It is generally believed that the Foreign Legion is the heir of those troops of foreign origin who have faithfully served France over the centuries, like the troops of the CEFEQ. It is generally believed that the Foreign Legion is the heir to those troops of foreign origin who have faithfully served France over the centuries, such as the legionary troops in **charge of carrying out the "small war"** or "partisan war", a type of manoeuvre fully integrated into the campaign plans in the 18th century: Maurice de Saxe will illustrate this perfectly and the use of light cavalry is experiencing an unprecedented growth and success (remember that France formed its first regiment of hussars with Hungarian refugees in 1720). If we now compare the hussar of 1720 **and the legionnaire of 2018, we can measure the distance travelled by the foreigner who enlisted in the service of France: the units of foreigners (legionnaires) are nowadays very integrated in the Army, even if they keep their specificity and esprit de corps. The process of standardization of armies has, in fact, been asserting itself over the centuries and has led to an unprecedented degree of standardization (missions, organization, command, doctrine, armament and uniform).**

From this historical overview we can retain that :

- Contrary to certain preconceived ideas, the use of auxiliaries, foreign or substitute soldiers is a guarantee of success and has enabled France to count on valuable soldiers at critical moments in its history;
- the association or integration of foreigners over the centuries in the French army is today reflected by a standardization pushed to the extreme that no longer makes any difference between a French soldier and a legionnaire.

The advantages of proxy warfare: the benefits of subcontracting or outsourcing

The "hybrid" enemy and the strategy of the weak against the strong

"There is no consensus on the concept of hybrid warfare. It is accepted that it encompasses a mix of military and civilian, state and non-state means, from the strategic to the operational level. It is accepted that it combines a set of practices combining military and civilian means, state and non-state, from the strategic to the tactical level, without being limited to a particular physical space, but using all means of deception, propaganda to achieve its objectives, including in cyberspace and in the adversary's psyche" (G. Lasconjarias and J. Larsen). Whether it is called hybrid warfare or "a combination of the two modes of regular and irregular warfare", it is generally agreed that "hybrid warfare" is the best way to achieve the objectives of the war. Whether it is called "hybrid warfare" or "a combination of both regular and irregular warfare", it is generally accepted that this type of warfare combines conventional confrontation with the destabilization of the adversary by other unconventional means, including the use of non-military tools and processes.

While the modes of regular and irregular warfare date back to antiquity at least, it is the combination of modes that is rarer: a concept of operations combining regular and irregular warfare in an integrated maneuver.

In recent military history, five theatres of operation stand out:

- AFGHANISTAN (a/c 2001)
- HEZBOLLAH versus IDF (2006)
- LIBYA (2011)
- DONBASS in UKRAINE (2014-2015)
- DAESH in the Sahel (2013)

Each of these conflicts has been the subject of numerous studies. The "hybrid" enemy is not new, but its proliferation today and its capacity for resistance, if not tactical success, make it a formidable and permanent threat. Among these characteristics, the ability to blend in and protect itself among our populations and to organise itself into highly structured and redundant networks, or the ability to use "cheap" capabilities (cyber, IEDs, chemical weapons, snipers, fighting in urbanised areas, hiding in crowds, suicide bombers, etc.). The use of unskilled street men and off-the-shelf products facilitates subcontracting.

The permanent temptation of subcontracting in history: the British example

England financed the wars against Napoleon and fomented all the anti-French coalitions of the time. It is an example of proxy warfare, in which the use of (other) European armed forces (or partisans in the Iberian Peninsula) against the French army is favoured.

And it is a fact that the actual British contingent engaged against the French has always been very small: a few thousand men (Spain and Portugal), only 24,000 British in the army from Wellington to Waterloo, the bulk being composed of 26,000 Germans and 18,000 Dutch (before the arrival of Marshal Blücher).

According to Liddell Hart, Great Britain has always practised a peripheral or indirect strategy based on financial assistance to continental allies and limited military intervention, avoiding any massive engagement on the continent. This strategy, whatever one may think of it, beyond the example of Waterloo, has paid off over the centuries.

A growing trend: the development by Anglo-Saxons of the lucrative concept of "privatisation of security".

It is not surprising, with a similar military tradition, based on an Anglo-Saxon-style "private" legal and financial framework, that the lucrative concept of "privatization of security" has become more and more popular. privatization of security" has found such development in Britain and especially in its former colony of America. The spectacular rise in power of these companies during the 1990s is not so much the result of the collapse of the communist bloc as of the "deThe spectacular rise in power of these companies in the 1990s is less the result of the collapse of the communist bloc than of the "disengagement by the great powers from their former theatres of influence, which had no strategic appeal and were suddenly transformed into "grey" zones. At the same time, the reduction in defence budgets brutally threw many soldiers into the private security market" (De Carthage à Bagdad, le nouvel âge d'or des mercenaires, Jean-Marie Vignolles, éditions des Riaux, 2006).

A former founder of SAS, David Stirling sent teams of British mercenaries to Yemen (1963-67), and his company, Watchguard International Ltd. offers training to the special forces of anti-communist countries.

The traditional mercenary has changed its face: "less romantic and more business-like", it has left the ideological or political garb to become a businessman ... concerned, however, as a good businessman, respectability in order to differentiate himself from the mercenary type Bob Denard.

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