New world – new conflicts
Winning the Battle Leading to Peace – Land Forces in Conflicts Today and Tomorrow

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Histoire & stratégie

SETTING THE CONDITIONS FOR STRATEGIC SUCCESS

For a long time the usual mode of resolving conflicts marked by power interests and the desire for conquest, the use of war has gradually entered an international legal framework that no longer recognizes the use of force as a means of settling disputes between States. In this new framework, our armies now intervene essentially within systems marked by disorder, violation of the law or threats to peace in order to restore an order that often requires the restoration of a stable social and political system.

Thus, whereas in the past the strategic objectives of a conflict were most often directly dependent on the fate of the weapons, the military results achieved in today's theatres of operations now lead only to the establishment of the minimum conditions for **strategic** success.

However, in the world and within societies, war is not only understood in different ways depending on the position of nations or individuals, but is also represented, or even idealised, according to different ways of thinking. Conceptualized rationally as a social and political activity subject to laws in the West, war is often thought and experienced differently elsewhere. This can have fundamental consequences in defining the political objectives of a conflict, even within the same camp, because thinking differently about war is also thinking differently about victory.

LA STABILIZATION, DECISIVE PHASE IN THE CONFLICTS OF'TODAY'HUI

Following the period of preparation and decision-making, three main phases of the same continuum characterize the engagement of forces in armed conflict: intervention, stabilization and normalization. They all involve, in different and variable proportions, moments of coercion, control of violence, high and low intensity.

Intervention, an indispensable phase

Through the introduction of an armed force into a given geographical area, this phase generally aims to impose a temporary order by using force to overcome violence and chaos.

A phase in which the military prevails over the diplomat, the intervention is generally the time of armed confrontation, sometimes of high intensity, against an adversary who is most often identified. The objectives are usually clearly defined: a military victory, the cessation of fighting between belligerents or the successful deployment of forces in theatre. The conduct of this phase has a profound influence on the continuation of operations, because the choices made (modes of action, means employed) have lasting consequences in the later phases. Moreover, while the success of this phase opens the door to strategic success, failure logically leads to failure of the operation and becomes synonymous with political defeat. Therefore, an armed force that commits itself to this phase must be able to impose itself in the face of any adversary likely to oppose its action. It must have at its disposal the means to achieve military objectives defined in accordance with the strategic goals of the operation, even if the intervention phase must be prepared and conducted in accordance with those goals.

Stabilisation, the new decisive phase

In this phase of the conflict, the aim is to consolidate the transitional order previously imposed by reducing and then containing the violence in order to allow everyone to embark on the path to peace. For all the actors involved, this is a time of complexity and management of opposites, when it is necessary to respond to both short-term emergencies and long-term needs in a country that has been turned upside down to its very core.

The presence of the armed forces is essential to accompany and support those who are working to establish a lasting peace. However, unlike in the previous phase, the objectives are rarely precisely defined, even if it is a way to achieve them.However, unlike in the previous phase, the objectives are rarely precisely defined, even if it is a general matter of restoring stability through a general mastery of the zone and allowing a return to confidence between the protagonists.

This phase must lay the foundations for the reconstruction of the state, for which the military force works in close coordination with its environment in order to bring all the lines of operation into line. Acting on these lines of operation alongside non-military actors whose importance is growing, the armed forces can play the main role (military operations, security, etc.). security), only in support (public order, restoration of the state, humanitarian action, environment) or only indirectly (justice, economic support, diplomacy).

But it is also a question of rebuilding the nation. In all theatres and beyond political and economic structures, it is the rejection of secular ties and the disruption of social foundations that ethnic, religious or cultural rifts reveal. Together with others, the armed forces must help to heal the wounds and rebuild a common vision, a necessary condition for a return to peace.

The stabilization phase is the decisive phase of a military operation; the decisive**action** is carried out on the ground, at the heart of human societies. Here, the armed forces establish the conditions for strategic success. The stabilization phase depends to a large

extent on a preparation which, involving the multiple actors, begins as early as the conception of the operation and allows a successful transition from one phase to the other, because it profoundly orientates the continuation of the conflict. The success or failure of the operation is usually decided at the outset.

Normalization, the phase of the return to peace

Thanks to the relative stability achieved and the foundations necessary for the reconstruction of the state and the nation, normalisation is the phase of establishing and consolidating a sustainable political, legal and social system accepted by the protagonists of the conflict. The success of this phase presupposes a clear understanding that the "normality" to be re-established is, in most cases and in most of its dimensions, very different from normality as understood within the intervening nations. As with the previous stabilization phase, this success requires that it be thoroughly thought through before the intervention. A crisis can only be brought out of crisis if it is well entered.

The gradual withdrawal of the armed force in favour of the legitimate authorities, local security forces and non-military actors marks the ultimate success of the military operation.

Whereas in the past, the achievement of the strategic objectives of a conflict was closely dependent on the fate of the weapons, the military results achieved in current theatres of operation only lead to the establishment of the conditions for strategic success.

Prior to the continuation of the operation, the **intervention** phase **must** lead to an indispensable tactical **success** , **be conducted** in accordance with the strategic **goals** and allow a smooth transition to the next phase.

The stabilization phase is the decisive phase. Here the military forces act in close coordination with their environment and restore stability through general control of the area. This phase makes it possible to establish the conditions for the achievement of the strategic objective and precedes a phase of normalization, which is the **return to peace** .

DE SYMMETRICAL WARFARE TO ASYMMETRICAL CONFLICTS

An immemorial form of warfare, the fight of the weak against the strong is now taking on increased importance because, having been permanently installed in a position of operational superiority, Western armies are increasingly confronted withThe fight of the weak against the strong is now taking on greater importance, because Western armies, which are permanently in a position of operational superiority, are increasingly confronted with new forms of conflict, which Clausewitz already described as "small wars", and must be able to engage in different forms of conflict.

Symmetric and asymmetric conflicts

A traditional form of armed conflict, these conflicts can be described as conventional. They involve institutional armies that pursue similar goals and use similar means and modes of action. Their essential difference lies in the difference in power between the belligerents and the consequences it may entail.

Symmetrical conflicts pit comparable adversaries against each other and are not exempt from the risk of defeat. Therefore, apart from developing a deterrence strategy that prohibits armed confrontation, the interest of each potential protagonist is to seek the superiority of the other.riority for its own benefit, i.e. to create a dissymmetry that can ensure victory and thus enable it to enter into conflict with every chance of success.

Asymmetric conflicts pit adversaries of the same nature but with unequal military capabilities against each other. They offer a high chance of success to the most powerful belligerent. However, since most conflicts no longer formally end in surrender or armistice, wars continue in a different way. Also, unless it ends quickly with a victory accepted by all, such a conflict often leads the weakest to move towards an asymmetrical form which is his only chance of winning in his fight against the strong.

Asymmetrical conflicts

In an asymmetrical conflict, one of the belligerents deliberately places itself in a different domain from that in which its adversary possesses manifest superiority and emphasizes the total disparity in the nature of the means and modes of action. In such a conflict, the form of which is largely nourished by the technological or material supremacy of one of the protagonists, the objective of the belligerent who engages in it is the transformation of the operational domination of his adversary into impotence or vulnerability. In this way, the belligerent emphasizes his own factors of superiority, which are all the stronger as they are materially, psychologically and morally distant from those of his adversary. The military superiority of Western armies should lead to increasingly asymmetrical responses.

However, it seems necessary to distinguish between two types of asymmetry which involve the armed forces in different ways:

- the conflict in which a subversive system is waging an overall asymmetric struggle against the interests of a state or an alliance and in which the armed forces are only part of the instruments of response to this threat;

- the conflict in which an armed force is confronted with an asymmetric form of combat directly linked to its engagement and represents the violent response of its adversaries on the ground; as the main target of these actions located in the theatre of operations, the armed forces are the essential actors in this struggle.

From symmetrical to asymmetrical conflicts

Although they have become increasingly important in recent decades, asymmetric conflicts are not new. On the one hand, they have always been part of humanity's warmaking panoply and all eras, all armies, have been confronted with them. On the other hand, asymmetry is often referred to as asymmetry, which seems both new, outside the traditional field of military combat and temporarily without an appropriate response.

Heir to a national history essentially marked by war on the European continent, the French army has above all been organised and equipped with reference to conflicts of a symmetrical nature. However, its military past, whether distant or recent, has also led it to deal with conflicts of an asymmetrical or dissymmetrical nature without these having significantly influenced its organisation.

While a symmetrical conflict involving our country cannot be totally ruled out for the future, it remains unlikely for the coming decades. Asymmetrical and, even more so, asymmetrical models are now the conflicts of reference for our army. Since asymmetrical wars find their full expression in insurrection, guerrilla warfare, terrorism or the manipulation of populations, certain indispensable capabilities in the conduct of symmetrical or asymmetrical wars prove to be partially unsuited to the asymmetry of conflicts.

Still essentially organised in the context of conflicts between forces of the same nature, Western armies are today confronted with the rise of asymmetry which is **largely nourished by their** technological or material **supremacy** . As they can **only** hope to win **otherwise, their** adversaries stress the disparity in the nature of the means and modes of action that enable them to highlight their own factors of superiority.

DE NEW OPPONENTS

Confrontations between states by means of regular armed forces are giving way to conflicts in which new adversaries are emerging alongside states taking an asymmetrical approach.

As in the past, some states use asymmetry, either as an indirect military approach to avoid the enemy's strong points and exploit its vulnerabilities (the general case of fords, for example), or as a means of avoiding the enemy's strong points and exploiting its vulnerabilities.rillas), or as an indirect strategy seeking to defeat the enemy's will by non-military or non-conventional means (terrorism, development of weapons of mass destruction, manipulation of information).

However, other actors are asserting themselves and developing. Non-state and diverse, they use fundamentally asymmetrical modes of action, the form of which depends on the goals they set themselves:

- As organizations with a criminal purpose oriented towards the pursuit of profit, predatory systems rarely fall within the field of competence of the armed forces and mainly concern the judicial and police systems, Pursuing localized political goals through armed struggle, claim systems seek participation in or conquest of local power and use armed struggle to remove territories and populations from the authority of the state they are fighting,

- of a revolutionary nature, subversive systems employ unbridled violence for an overall political goal, usually based on the uncompromising creation of a new society

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