



## □ The future of air-land operations

General Military Review

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**War, the extreme expression of a relationship of conflictuality between two actors, is in essence a contingent phenomenon, but one whose historical permanence is assured.**

Its declinations are multiple and evolutionary, and the comfort of a perfect understanding of an enemy in symmetry in its equipment, its modes of action, its conceptual and ethical mechanisms is definitively called into question by the general hybridity of its manifestations.

It is difficult today to have certainties when, under the fire of multiple expertises, ends and means, instantaneous vision and duration, continuity and ruptures are mixed with envy. By levelling out facts and ideas, everything becomes a paradigm shift - necessarily strategic - or a signal of a definitive fracture of balance.

However, given the dramatic consequences of a possible maladjustment of the tool of war, taking a step back is essential to separate the essential from the accessory and to develop an overall vision. For, on reflection, the enemy's modes of action - and our own constraints - now require us to think anew, with humility, about war in terms of purpose, time and intelligence.

Indeed, if the fundamentals of war have not changed, we must, on the other hand, integrate from the outset a lasting hardening of the forms of conflict.

History is made up of ruptures which, a posteriori, are easy to identify. If we perceive that the evolution of the forms of warfare are plural, it is not easy to determine their scope.

In the first place, these changes are linked to the very transformation of the earth's environment. Thus, the latter, which is a central political issue in terms of population control, retains all its human and physical complexity, with shifting areas of engagement.

The 2008 White Paper already noted the obsolescence of the border between internal and external security. Today, the disappearance of these physical borders is enriched by the disappearance of new areas, notably the distinction between public and private actors of violence, with a confusion between armies, armed groups, militias, criminal networks, etc. The very framework of expression of violence is becoming polymorphous and suggests either the use of an institutionalized form - armed force - or a kaleidoscope of expressions - attacks, assassinations, surgical strikes, hostage-taking, commando operations, etc. - as diverse as, for some of them, on the fringes of international law. In this sense, the city, a readily chaotic assembly area for populations and decision-making centres, will be the heart, not the only one, of tomorrow's commitment. The enemy will be able to use it as a place where the many facets of violence can be expressed without limit, easily freeing itself from the sequence of peace - crisis - war and denying us any sanctuary.

Secondly, the technological domination on which Western armed forces have relied since the 1990s has been steadily levelling off. Faced with this undivided domination, the adversary was quick to seize low-cost, accessible civilian technologies to counter our forces. The use of drones, 3D printing, ballistic technology, biological or chemical agents, improvised explosives, but also psychological manoeuvring around false information or threats to our computer systems, testify to a perfect knowledge of our weaknesses, in particular our increased dependence on digital objects. Our spaces of supremacy are now contested, so that control of information and command systems, of the third dimension or of cyberspace, is no longer assured. By intervening in these areas, the enemy can regain the symmetry he has lost on the ground in traditional face-to-face encounters.

However, beyond these observations, there is no reason to believe that the way in which warfare is waged is likely to change radically in the foreseeable future.

Clearly, the principles of warfare are in no way called into question in their foundations, and the use of force remains subject to the mastery of enduring operational skills. In order to control a geographical area, it will always require men to provide information, artillerymen to hit targets, infantrymen, cavalrymen and sappers to intervene and destroy the enemy... Able to fight in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic and the Sahelian strip...lo-Saharan strip, the Army had no problem deploying on the national territory with the same soldier, effectively taking ownership of the associated problems - especially legal ones. Freedom of action, economy of forces and concentration of efforts are still at the heart of the tactico-operational reflection, to which s'To these are added, as necessary and according to the type of commitment, other principles of action whose relevance is proven - safety, lightning, unpredictability... -.

Moreover, even if the conditions for absolute victory no longer exist, and apart from a symmetrical confrontation at the extremes with a superpower, it is hardly realistic to consider that the current or foreseeable enemy can be in a position to ensure lasting strategic success. At present, the global destruction of our forces is beyond the reach of our adversaries, even if we were to suffer a local infra-tactical defeat due to too great a dissolution of our assets in a large theatre. It is reasonable to consider that no actor, in the short or medium term, is in a position to put our forces permanently out of fighting condition.

France's military tool, which is complete, is stable and well-established, with solid experience, but is constantly striving to adapt its operational preparation. The illusions of "all air" having been shattered by a few tactical and strategic realities, political decision-makers have fully grasped the need to ensure freedom of manoeuvre and action, they

need a broad spectrum of command and control resources and forces that can be deployed on the ground and are fully prepared.

No capability deadlock is thus envisaged. The continuum of "operational foresight/feedback/doctrine/equipment/training" is fully assured in a logic where only the satisfaction of operational requirements takes precedence.

Finally, the Army is, by its very nature, an organisation that is constantly reforming and adapting to new conflicts. Since 1990 and Operation Daguet, it has gone through a phase of interposition, interspersed with a few operations to evacuate nationals before being confronted, in Kosovo as in Africa, with stabilisation missions. Counter-insurgency followed, in Afghanistan and in the Sahel in the continuity of the Serval episode. At present, the aim is to contribute to the support of internal security forces in metropolitan France and to participate, through training but also through fires, in the destruction of Daech in Iraq, while contributing to the NATO presence in the Baltic States. In thirty years of commitments, no one will contest the plasticity of men, structures and modes of action to develop, often pragmatically, systems of men who have always proved their worth in combat.

Today, on the strength of these observations, the Army remains vigilant not to fall into the traps of fashion or the air of time which lead to confuse short and long time. Because war is fundamentally cruel and because soldiers are the primary actors in this tragedy, our armies are constantly seeking conditions of superiority. In particular, the Army will have to continue to seek to resolve a difficult equation: how to defeat such multiple and different enemies, aggressive and acting outside any ethical reference, often in deconcentrated, non-state and deterritorialized modules, while maintaining the coherence of a traditionally structured, hierarchical and institutional defense tool? Undoubtedly, it will be necessary to return to a fundamental reflection on the tactico-operational art and not focus solely on a strategic art that can only be "covering". This will undoubtedly involve improving the agility of organisations and minds, developing the ability to act autonomously while being able to interface with one's environment, and fully integrating the exceptional capabilities offered by technology, first and foremost SCORPION. This will also obviously involve consolidating the warrior spirit of its men and units, who, perfectly trained and prepared, will go into battle and ultimately win victory.

In Saint-cyrien, Colonel Gilles HABEREY served in the infantry of the 1st RI and the 126th RI, in schools and staffs before taking command of the 92nd RI in CLERMONT-FERRAND in 2010. During his career, he has been involved in more than a dozen field operations. After serving as Chief of the Employment Office of the Army Staff in PARIS, he was assigned, in 2018, as Chief of Staff of the CDEC. He has published several works including "The art of leading a battle", "The 7 deadly sins of the military leader in battle" and "Engaged for France, 40 years of OPEX".

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