



The chief's full attention must be focused on his subordinates...

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Valeurs de l'Armée de Terre

When discussing the subject of "ethics" with a member of the military, several values immediately come to mind: discipline, a sense of duty, the sacredness of the mission, availability, the spirit of sacrifice... Among these values, one holds a very special place: loyalty to the leader.

For the military, loyalty is in fact a **dual exercise of truth and discipline, due to the person** who exercises hierarchical authority over him or her. It finds its natural place in the decision-making process. And it takes on a very special importance in operational situations.

Truth is what is owed to the leader in all circumstances, before a decision is taken, when it comes to providing him with his assessment of the situation, his ideas and his feelings. It takes precedence over the desire to please; it even takes the deliberate risk of displeasing; for it clearly exposes itself to the possibility of a divergent point of view. But it does not mean in any way a willingness to oppose or a lack of adherence to follow.

For once the decision is made, it is time for discipline. It consists in implementing the leader's choices, without any ulterior motive, even when these choices are not the ones we had advocated. Better still: this discipline leads the subordinate to make the leader's ideas his own.¹

This form of loyalty, abrupt, sometimes rigid, confusing in many ways, is not always understood in the **civilian world**. There are more subordinates acting according to more subtle, even self-serving logics: they say yes to their authority from the outset, but then don't necessarily act in the actual sense ... The decision taken may not be considered as a decision of the government, but as a decision of the people. The decision taken may be

considered as a mere basis for negotiation; where the military subordinate sees the formalization of a mission, the character of which takes on a form of sacredness!

This loyalty "in military fashion" can be surprising; it can even generate certain reflexes of mistrust for those who discover it: if a subordinate asserts a contrary opinion with such conviction, is it not suspect of lacking the most elementary loyalty? Can he be relied upon to carry out orders or apply instructions contrary to the ideas he had defended so vigorously? Is not a man who seems to oppose the leader's will with such a rough sincerity to be considered a potential rebel or factious?

This apparent ambiguity of military loyalty is particularly a source of misunderstanding between military leaders and **political authorities**. While the former consider their transparency and sincerity as the most elementary manifestation of their loyal behaviour, the latter are sometimes tempted to see it as a possible sign of disobedience in the making. These preconceptions have remained alive and well, and this is particularly visible when new teams are being set up...

Despite these prejudices, it is important to cultivate this "military-style" loyalty. In spite of these prejudices, it is important to cultivate this "military-style" loyalty because, in an operational context, **it** remains of paramount importance: both a guarantee of **unit cohesion and coherence of action, it is consubstantial** with military **know-how**. All the more so as it is most often coupled with loyalty of the leader towards his subordinates: a form of "reciprocity" that is the cement of the forces engaged in combat.

On the other hand, it probably needs to be better **explained to those who** are tempted to see this apparently contradictory binary form of transparency and discipline as ferments of inertia, obstruction or even rebellion. For the military leaders of the twenty-first century remain perfectly loyal actors, in the service of their country and at the orders of those who are in charge of its destiny. The latter simply need to know that a soldier will always tell them the truth, even when it disturbs them, will always carry out the orders they receive², even when they are not², even when he believes that things could have been done differently, and will always accept responsibility for his actions, even when he could take refuge behind the orders he receives.

1. Let us evacuate here the paroxysmal cases:

- For example, in June 1940, when the chiefs call for renunciation;

- Or again during the Algerian War when ambiguous speeches or questionable modes of action may have pushed some, often high up in the hierarchy, to reject the decisions taken?

2. ... unless, of course, the said orders are manifestly illegal, in accordance with the regulations in force, or if they pose a serious problem of conscience for the person responsible for carrying them out, who may in that case prefer to resign rather than disobey...

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