



Building an "ideology of ethics" to win the war of ideologies

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Histoire & stratégie

In 1957, in the middle of the Algerian conflict, General Pierre BILLOTTE²³ published an article in OuestFrance which did not go unnoticed and in which he declared:

"... In the ideological conflicts of modern warfare, victory must go to the highest ideology. One of the most effective means of victory lies precisely in the greatest respect for moral and human values, because it goes straight to the hearts of men who are temporarily hostile to you. »

The imperative relevance of this declaration takes all its meaning in the light of the events that shook the city of Algiers in the months that followed and which directly questioned the question of ethics and honour.

But make no mistake, the war of ideologies that General BILLOTTE spoke of is not over. It is now in full swing in our daily lives in 2018. Admittedly, this war does not have the face of the Algerian war, but the stakes involved are no less crucial because, without over-dramatizing, it affects the moral health of our civilization.

Let us first talk about the violent and open war against Islamic terrorism. Why has part of our youth left to join the ranks of the Islamic state? Why have very young adults, some (but not all) of whom were at odds with the values of our society, been seduced by the values of an ideology that has, however, made violence its banner? Because they are not offered - or they do not find - the perspectives and values that make them dream in their immediate daily lives. These young people soon exhausted the forces of consumerism and individualism, and found in those of exacerbated communitarianism certain

perspectives - admittedly misguided - but which surpassed them and gave a certain consistency to their lives.

What an admission of failure for our society! A society in which whole sections no longer dare to speak of ideals, altruism, sacrifice, respect, love of country, patriotism. A society that has forgotten that when you are 20 years old, you want to devour the world and do better than your elders. Our children do not expect laxity, softness and individualism taken to extremes. They do not dream of self-flagellation and regret, but they aspire to strong values, heroisms that touch them, that carry them and that make them dream.

When we ask our young citizens why they join our armies, especially the Army, the answers revolve precisely around values, adventure and something greater that gives meaning to their professional and personal path.

Without having the exclusive right to do so, our armies are committed to cultivating this environment that makes them attractive. They are committed to passing it on in our training schools, which forge the recognised quality of our soldiers.

Within these values lie those dealing with the behaviour and ethics of the soldier, which are essential because they are ontological. They touch on the very nature of human beings when it comes to making choices and decisions. They are primary because they reject relativism and affirm that no, all is not equal, and that yes, some references are better than others. They assert that in the criteria of choice, the dignity of populations, exemplarity, respect for the adversary and the defence of the weakest are above hatred of others, exclusion and violence. This discourse is certainly carried internally in our armies, as well as in the public domain - and it is heard - but it still lacks resonance.

So let us not be afraid to go further and talk more about this ethic that makes us act and that the great military leaders no longer hesitate to talk about openly. Let us not be afraid to make these value choices into a claimed ideology. It is not, of course, a question of becoming dogmatic, because ethics must absolutely remain a matter of human conscience. But a question is not a hesitation. Hesitation can be as dangerous as dogmatism. That is where the difficulty lies. Ethics must be a permanent questioning, a personal questioning, but at the same time, it must also be a matter of course. And it is this self-evident fact that must be taken higher, stronger and without complex.

This obviousness was brought home by Lieutenant Colonel BELTRAME, a gendarmerie officer who became a French hero for having freely chosen to put himself in danger to save a woman taken hostage by an Islamist terrorist. But make no mistake: this was not a sudden sacrificial inspiration. Arnaud BELTRAME's moving choice is the fruit of a recurring and thoughtful commitment to the ethical and moral values on which he had based his way of life for many years. This officer, through his professional but also personal action, had given meaning to his life... which led him to this act, the outcome of which has moved the whole of France. Proof that ethical values resonate strongly in the hearts of our fellow citizens. Our soldiers, when they risk their lives in our theatres of operation, carry no less the same values.

In his latest book²⁴ Régis Debray said about this ideological fight against Islamic terrorism: "We have the morals for us. It is not out of the question that morality is on the other side". The culture of ethical values as the central driving force of our daily action, carried without complex loud and clear, and offered as a model can be a means of regaining this moral ascendancy over the adversary.

While the armies and their leaders are all convinced of this need, our French institutions still lack a real organisation dedicated to this objective. Following the example of what exists within the Canadian, German and British armies, which are particularly advanced in this field, we can go further and better structure the organization of ethical and moral training in the central headquarters.²⁵

Let us beware, of course, of an excessive affirmation of the specific nature of the military institution, which would be unfortunate because it could be a break with the national community from which it emanates. There is thus a sort of schizophrenia of the profession: fighting against trivialisation, but not posing as an exception. This should not prevent us from making our human and ethical values shine through, by openly calling for their imitation and appropriation by other areas of society, because our fellow citizens recognise that armies "have the capacity to transmit certain basic values and know-how, even if only those relating to civic behaviour".²⁶ »

These values fight against the cultural fracture of our societies because they carry emotions that unite beyond ideologies. We must believe in them because "the world belongs first and foremost to the optimists and the pessimists are only spectators."²⁷». They defend love of one's own, the universality of friendship, respect for the dignity of others and exemplarity. in the face of the deadly ideologies of hatred, lies and violence, or more insidiously of communitarianism, relativism and selfishness. They describe a certain way of "living together" advocated by Ernest Renan to which our fellow citizens will naturally adhere because these values touch their hearts. Let us not be afraid to make them a torch by making them a way of life for our youth who dream of beauty and greatness.

23. Pierre BILLOTTE (1906-1992) : [French](#) general and [politician](#) . Chief of General [de GAULLE's staff](#) and [secretary of the](#) National Defence Committee in LONDON; he landed in Normandy at the head of one of the three [battle](#) groups of the Leclerc division. Companion of the Liberation, he was Minister of National Defence in the Edgar FAURE government in [1955](#).

24. L'Angle Blind Spot, Le Cerf edition, 2018.

25. In France, there is no "ethics officer" within the EMA, nor the EMAT in charge of coordinating the actions in this area, and to set the main policies. In the Army, this training is devolved to schools (and too often confined to them), remains little controlled, and depends very much on the will of the commanders of these schools.

26. Alain BARLUET, Le Figaro of 27 November 2018, page 3.

27. François Pierre Guillaume GUIZOT (1787-1874).

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