



## Black Hawk Down and the French principles of war

BRENNUS 4.0

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Histoire & stratégie

Black Hawk Down is one of the most iconic war movies. Produced and directed by Ridley Scott in 2001, it is the adaptation of the book, Black Hawk Down : a story of Modern Warfare , written by Mark Bowden.

The spectator is plunged within the Battle of Mogadishu, which took place on October 3rd and 4th 1993, between American forces and the Somali militiamen of general Mohammed Farah Aidid. The interest of the movie, independently of the accuracy of the presented facts, is to offer a demonstration of sometimes underestimated realities of contemporary conflicts. Friction, defined by Clausewitz as the part of uncertainty which surrounds the conduct of operation, or what “distinguishes the real war from the one that we can read in books ”, is a central element. Among the forces that contribute to friction are political pressure, conflicts within joint forces, lack of means, unexpected resistance, mistakes in planning and execution, erroneous interpretation or performance of an order. One of the best examples illustrating friction is the fall of private Todd Blackburn at the very beginning of the operation. The movie also offers a demonstration of the mechanics of the principles of strategy. They can be understood as criteria for assessing the validity of a decision, from the tactical to the strategic level.

There are “general rules to avoid the enemy’s law and to ensure superiority over chosen points by a quick and determined action.” Marshal Ferdinand Foch initially retained four: freedom of action, economy of forces, free disposal of assets and safety. His work strongly inspired the doctrine of the French Army, which retained the first two, as well as the concentration of efforts. The recent document Future Land Action added two others, the so-called “complementary” ones. Coming from the work of Admiral Guy Labouérie in the 1970s, they respectively are the principles of uncertainty and “staggering”. Given the circumstances of the battle, it is not useless to bring some others as well, such as direction, objective, mass or initiative.

The economy of forces mandates finding the correct balance between ends and means.

During the battle of Mogadishu, while the American forces may have been able to estimate the forces of their opponent, they apparently underestimated their resolve and their ability to manoeuvre. Similarly, general Garrison may have made the mistake of not having sufficient reserves. Concentration requires as many forces as possible to be combined at the point chosen, to create a mass of manoeuvre or shock that allows, as Corbett says, "to be the strongest in the right place at the right time". Napoléon makes it a major imperative. It is a question of managing the necessary balance between the cohesion of the entire system and its extension in order to fulfil other tasks. This is probably part of the problem that has arisen in the American command. The principle of uncertainty aims to provoke surprise for the opponent. It is necessary to take all necessary measures to allow the execution of an operation without risking being surprised by an unexpected movement of the enemy. However, from the first few minutes of the operation, in the movie, the spectator attends the signalling of the American entry force, in both land and air, by a network of unarmed lookouts. Staggering is defined by Labouërie as the need to "break the rhythm of the other", to "break at the right time and on sensitive hinges any attempt to take or retake initiative." Jomini makes it the privileged way to impose his influence on the opponent. The initiative is obtained by creative imagination in design, speed and flexibility in execution. The loss of initiative is one of the iconic moments of the movie, with general Garrison acknowledging "We just lost the initiative" after the first helicopter crash.

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