

C.D.E.F



In an outstanding book¹, Mr. Van CREVELD properly describes the transformation of current conflicts. He underlines how frequently the weaker prevails over the stronger during wars labeled as “low intensity” (but for which side does this term apply - for those on the receiving end ?) Accordingly, it is in this general framework that we should be thinking of the command organization that we will have to choose, because we are undoubtedly in the “stronger” role - today in Kosovo or in the Ivory Coast, and tomorrow on a new African or Middle East theater. And we may be defeated by the “weaker”, whether fighting alone or not. Indeed, either the “weaker” is definitely very weak and we may eventually fight him alone ; or the “weaker” is not so weak and we can realistically anticipate to be committed only within a European Alliance context beside our American allies. In any event, we will be in the “strong” position.

Altogether, it is relatively easy for an enemy, considered as “inferior”, to overcome over the long term because it can adapt its COAs (Courses of Action) to exploit the weaknesses of a mechanized and digitized force. And yet, this same force relies on **speed** : speed of decision, theoretically improved by digitalization ; speed of reaction, thanks to modern weapons and platforms ; and on **effects produced on targets**, always more accurately and more rapidly delivered.

Thus, the weaker naturally offsets his superior enemy with the element of time, as it neutralizes speed, and presents no or few targets. In this endeavor, he uses the population, with or against its will, more than the terrain. Some of the military terms that can now be applied to civilian populations involved in modern conflict range from logistical and psychological support, to environment and center of gravity.

So, the stronger has no other recourse but to revert to a sole strategy. A strategy that is often identified, but more rarely carried out successfully by the stronger - that is, as Mao Zedong advocated - one that separates the fish from the water. In other words, to isolate, find and neutralize enemy logistic bases, and cut this virtual line of communication of a new type, that which connects the enemy to the population.

French Armed Forces know how “to conquer hearts and souls”, and how to live among populations while fighting for them. Our troops repeatedly proved it, and they still testify to this everyday. This is a greater challenge than the traditional “strong-to-strong” warfare. This kind of combat requires the full commitment of all the elements of power, as well as everyone’s daily contribution of courage. This is reflected in soldiers’ conduct, moral strength to endure and overcome, a sense of honor, and the dignity to respect mankind - civilian or enemy.

Although it is in the “strong” position, a paradoxically vulnerable position because of the omnipotent power of images and omnipresent information, the Army possesses all the ingredients to succeed in overcoming the “weak” tomorrow. However, it must persevere in preserving the ability to adapt itself within its own structures, its COAs (Courses of Action) and its equipment ; that it remains skilful enough to be modernized without borrowing the false precept that technology is a universal remedy - it is a “ready-to-wear” concept, and thus does not fit all. This Army must remain sufficiently strong to preserve a warlike spirit tinged with humanism, as opposed to becoming a war technician. We pledge with confidence that it is the force model that must and is guiding us.

Major General Gérard BEZACIER,
Director, Center for Force Employment Doctrine

¹ “La Transformation de la Guerre”, 1991, éditions du Rocher.