

The **multinational** nature of all operations in which the French forces are committed no longer needs to be demonstrated, LICORNE, through the UNOIC, is no exception to the rule.

What is less clear for many of us is that **interoperability is a much larger requirement**, as it encompasses the combined arms domain as well as the **joint one**, and that now, through the evolution of the engagement contexts, the multi-agency **cross-ministry one**.

What is also much less obvious, is that interoperability is above all something different from technique. Recently one of our great commanders stated: *"if we have the political will of committing ourselves with another army, we will always find the required technical interfaces"*. This is widely shown in History, which does not prevent, in this domain, to prefer anticipation to haste. There is no doubt that **interoperability is firstly a question of mutual understanding**, i.e. a question dealing with cultural awareness and **compatibility of doctrines**. And this is really in this field that efforts are to be carried out.

Time plays against interoperability which is a global concept with multiple dimensions and evolving variables. **Interoperability is more difficult to achieve today than in the past**. Technical reasons are not the least ones as, for example, the evolution speed pertaining to information systems already causes serious interoperability issues between the various components of a given army. Whatever the regrets that one might have, the **technical interoperability grows in complexity at the same pace as that of equipments**.

**But the main reasons of the difficulty of interoperability are of a political nature.**

Let's go back: it is the common project that has led to NATO, the huge standard creating machine. As it is still understood today, the notion of interoperability was built up, both in the European and the American minds, thanks to the similitude of the main strategic projects connected with the cold war. This reflected the need for coordinating the efforts in view of a common action, interoperability at that time derived from the compatibility of equipments and harmonization of operational procedures with the will of understanding each other both technically and culturally. This interoperability translated into the NATO standardization of equipments and employment doctrines; the similarity of technological levels made this possible. This is over. The highly constraining common project

pertaining to the society project that supported the cold war interoperability no longer exists. The stability of engagement conditions and the alliance notion rendered efforts necessary and useful. Conversely, **the instability of contingencies and the notion of coalition minimize the need for interoperability and tend to ruin efforts**, as it becomes impossible to know in advance under what conditions and with whom we will be committed.

**This requires a complete rethinking of interoperability, to really understand that it is firstly a political object before becoming a technical one.**

It is not possible to make efforts in all directions and **therefore, effort should be carried out where and when it is meaningful**. After having well taken into consideration the extremely demanding constraints pertaining to multinationality (as well as its unavoidable nature!), one must exactly determine what is expected in political terms: with whom am I the most likely to be committed? With whom can I commit a given volume of force to achieve a given nature of mission? What is the minimal level of forces that has to remain national, both for technical and political visibility reasons, as participation is of no use if the forces are too much scattered and therefore not visible? Therefore, all in all, with which forces and at which levels do I want to become interoperable?

By the way, it should be noted that the evolution of the international context leads from now on to a **reciprocal requirement for interoperability**. Today in fact, a great part of legitimacy derives from an effective multinationality of deployments and commitments. If the "smaller" partners need the "larger" ones, the contrary becomes true as well and this gives to the "small" a new weight in the negotiation on interoperability and compels the "large" to take into account the constraints of the "small" in their own changes, especially the technological ones.

No use running after interoperability for the sake of it: it is not a cardinal virtue. **What matters is the meaningfulness of interoperability**: firstly an operational meaning but moreover, a **political one**. Therefore, the only meaningful interoperability is the **differentiated interoperability**. Its own main drive lies within the shared nature of the project and Europe, from now on, could very well be its best vector.

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