

Land Forces and New Types of Conflicts

War hasn't changed. It remains a political action resulting from a struggle between two independent willpowers.

We are still impressed by that concept which eventually prevailed for the last forty years and according to which war was a technical confrontation between two arsenals and consequently, the more powerful the arsenal, the greater the chances to win. Gradually, too much gradually, today's crises however make us understand - slowly, much too slowly - that an accumulation of technical power could very well be the illustration of a corresponding accumulation of political impotence if we wouldn't understand at the same time that the military force employment conditions have changed.

Nevertheless the obviousness that even our most sophisticated weapons may have it very difficult to achieve the desired political objective must make us - the military as well as the politicians who, at the end, make the decisions about force structure and employment - reflect upon and understand that **we have to adapt to the new conditions of the war if we want the military force to keep on being useful to the State.**

History demonstrates that, should it want to be able to have an effect on the Nation's destiny, should it want to have an important position on the world stage, the State must have a military force at its disposal, a useful military force.

And this is the very heart of the issue.

BY MAJOR GENERAL VINCENT DESPORTES, COMMANDER, FORCES EMPLOYMENT DOCTRINE CENTER

New circumstances

Although war hasn't changed, war circumstances have. What has changed the most is that these circumstances are nowadays particularly variable, evolving, uncertain and always renewed.

Yesterday's circumstances, those upon which had been and are still being built our forces balancing and structures were, except at their periphery:

- the fixed circumstances of an absolute force on force conflict which opposed a strong opponent to another strong one,
- circumstances that made it paramount, in front of the maritime and air enemy that then prevailed, to keep one's freedom of action on the seas and in the air until the last moment,
- circumstances that had turned destruction capability into being the military efficiency's major factor,

- circumstances which, consequently, induced armed forces into developing in priority destruction capabilities, the tools to destroy the opponent's means that were intended to express its willingness, i.e. its naval, air and ground arsenals,

- circumstances where land forces constituted the service in charge of achieving the operational coherence of an overall system of forces, of which they weren't then the central element.

But war circumstances have changed. It is not possible anymore to envision - at least in a foreseeable future - an absolute, force on force confrontation of symmetric types of arsenals, even if it remains fundamental - but in a lesser proportion - **to keep the capability to deal with that type of confrontation.**

As a matter of fact, these capabilities are **indispensable to maintain a conventional deterrence capability** which - on the top of the nuclear deterrence capability - led to put to

sleep the concept of a “major classical type of war”; in addition, it is also absolutely obvious that western forces will have periodically to be able to use the full conventional power and the violence it allows during a short period of the confrontation in order to brutally impose their willpower onto a “traditional” or State opponent.

Contrarily to a not so good idea which is too often widely spread today, it becomes again obvious that massive deployments and destructions may be indispensable to the achievement of the expected psychological effect of forces and weapons employment. As from now on it is well known, surgical type of destruction doesn't constitute the alpha and omega of a political tool whose efficiency is mainly of a psychological nature.

What changed the most amongst circumstances is that, from now on, these short periods of war are not capable anymore to **achieve by themselves the strategic objective that was established by the political authorities**. Destruction, especially when conducted from a remote security distance doesn't constitute anymore the major efficiency factor. As a matter of fact, our current and forthcoming engagements are primarily built around **control and influence maneuvers** where force, as they have always done it, except during the twentieth century, will have most often, after and also during the destruction phase, to conduct rebuilding activities during a **stabilization phase**. That stabilization phase follows the violent and only preparatory initial intervention phase; it is often protracted and is conducted at the contact of human societies and **it is crucial for achieving the strategic effect**. During that crucial phase, it will then be a question of materially **rebuilding**, but even more important, at the contact of reality, within the populations, at the very heart of human societies, it will be a question of rebuilding a “social contract” - or rather **“their” social contract**, which makes a big difference - and all what it implies in matter of reorganization of the environment in crisis into which we intervene.

Forces capable to achieve a peaceful end-state better than the previous one

The systems of forces that demonstrate today their relevance are those that are capable to achieve a peaceful end-state better than the previous one -this is the objective of any confrontation - **those systems of forces capable to both destroy and rebuild**, those that can at the same time deter at the contact, be powerful and capable of mastering the violence, that can immediately feel the slightest changes of the situation, and keep a deep understanding of human beings, situations and cultures. Those are the only systems of forces - weapons systems but also and above all human beings - which are capable to become the **tools necessary to resolve crises** and not only the muscle tools, the crisis management tools or even the demonstration tools. In that sense the **capability to reverse an operational** posture immediately at local level becomes an essential condition for the forces' political efficiency. And when thinking of it, it becomes obvious that the action legitimacy which - as it is

well known today - is being built *ex post*, renders this reversibility capability indispensable.

This allows us to notice **the importance that the world changes gave back to the land forces**. Of course, today more than ever, land forces cannot operate without being supported by air and maritime components. These two services appear more and more as being indispensable since they provide the coherence for an action whose main focus is on the ground, at the contact and in the duration. France's willingness to operate throughout the world to support its politics imposes that 80% of the deployed forces belong to the land component. But what would be these 80% if they weren't supported by the remaining 20% which prepare the major action, support it, and render it possible by providing coherence to the overall action?

The major characteristic of the circumstances is thus their inherent uncertainty. This is fundamental since it's **absolutely impossible to foresee with some degree of certainty which will be the next crisis** into which the government will choose to get military involved. This is fundamental because consequently it is impossible for us to foresee what our future enemy will look like.

We are thus today in a reactive posture. Reaction first to the circumstances of the crisis that will induce our military reaction and, then very rapidly, right after the initial and rapid intervention phase, reaction to the new contour of future enemies and threats, since the only certainty we have about our future and irregular opponent is that it will adapt very rapidly to our forces' characteristics in order to transform them into weaknesses. This is the most obvious lesson learned during the course of the last ten years; it is obvious that our opponent is more clever than us at innovating.

When confronted to diversified crises with characteristics that are not very much foreseeable and into which we must be able to achieve the expected political effect, **we have thus two obligations**. First, we must have at our disposal, not a set of multipurpose tools - good for all, good for nothing - but rather a real “tools box”. The overall operational capacity, the one that is deployed in accordance with the circumstances, must be comprised, in accordance with the circumstances, with **a diversified combination of**



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different means which have a wide scope of capabilities within their own domain of action. Secondly we must, more than ever, be able to adapt, and to adapt rapidly our operational postures, in the short, medium and long term, in the field, and also our staffs which must be able to rapidly respond to the new requirements since we'll never be confronted to the opponent we had envisioned and very seldom our equipment will be used under the conditions it had been developed for.

Winning a war means controlling the environment.

We also have two certainties. First, we have to get ready for **three major types of intervention.**

The **first one** is a **rapid conventional confrontation** where technology will play an indispensable role of force multiplier. Technology - high technology - is indispensable since, and although war remains a human confrontation, technology serves as a human efficiency's multiplier. High technology is indispensable, absolutely indispensable, but it has also to be sensible since it is being financially traded against quantity and, contrarily to well accepted wrong ideas, the extreme widening of the spaces of engagement continues to impose quantity and thus to respect the wise concept of keeping the "right technological sufficiency".

The **second type** of intervention is the **war among the populations**, and this will constitute, by far, the most frequent occurrence and the longest type of intervention because from now on, populations constitute the major interventions' stake since war, which often takes place in urbanized areas, is mainly conducted within the populations.

The **third type** is the **engagement to the benefit of "our populations"** to the benefit of their security, to help them. This is fundamental because this constitutes the very root of the forces' existence. In that domain, land forces constitute a major asset for the success of the State's fundamental missions since they are able, on a very short advance notice, to deploy important volumes of forces, well organized and that are capable - thanks to their professionalism and the experience they gained during actions at the contact of populations - to restore degraded conditions.

The land forces provide an indispensable support to France's security.

These generic characteristics of our future military interventions have a **clear consequence**: due to the current

circumstances, **the land forces' capabilities constitute today an indispensable support to France's external and internal security, a major factor of France's position on the world stage, of its ability to react and to demonstrate its political willingness.**

Of course this is not a French specificity. Many are the States which reinforce their ability to operate on the ground or close to the ground. Among those, and in order to maintain their

rank amongst the nations and to preserve their ability to operate throughout the world and to the benefit of their own populations, the Norwegian, the Australian and the Canadian governments have decided to increase the volume of their land forces respectively by 25 and 15 %. The British did the same and even more the Israeli government recently decided to increase by 25% their land forces; not to forget the United States Congress which has obtained an increase in volume of 92,000 troops, 65,000 for the Army and 27,000 for the *US Marine Corps*.

The second certainty is that we have come back to the truth of the war. War is fundamentally a struggle to keep one's freedom of action. This is the very essence of the war. This means that the ultimate mission at war is "to control". You may destroy, you may strike with accuracy, you may disintegrate, you may cruise the high seas, you may fly over a territory for years, you may nuke it, if you don't control it, it's useless. You may control sky and sea, if you don't control the ground - the very heart of human societies - it's useless. And in order to control, since the beginning of the world, there is only one solution, be it on the national territory or abroad, should you want to control, you've got to be present there in numbers, in that physical environment where crises were born, where they develop and where they can be resolved, i.e. on the ground. Ask the question to our American or Israeli friends, they do know what it means.

Winning a war is not to conduct a few surgical destructions even if it is indispensable. **Winning a war means controlling the environment.** Our western difficulties in Afghanistan, in Iraq and elsewhere acutely remind us the Hegel's word who was evoking Napoleon's forces failure in Spain: he spoke about the "victory's impotence". Napoleon had won the battle but was unable to "control" the environment.

Today, the **land forces**, thanks to their specific characteristics, and being part of a political efficiency and coherence logic rather than a demonstration one, **represent the major political tool of France's engagement into the most complex crises** which are also and unfortunately the most probable. The understanding of that evolution progresses in the right direction and the political authorities are more and more conscious of that reality which has become evident, abroad as well as in France.