

There is no longer any modern combat on the ground.

We become today fully aware of this evolution which is mainly rooted in the sequencing of World War I. At that time, artillery is giving up direct fire and is turning to indirect fire support. Shortly after, this indirect support is depending on observation from aerial sites. From then on, ***there is no more tactical commitment of land forces without using the tactical third dimension.*** There is no commitment ***which does not demand to tightly interlink assets on the ground and land assets using the third dimension.***

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Indeed, by drift, tank became an anti-tank asset and we finally ended up to assign it proper missions. Similarly, aircraft became first an anti-aircraft asset and was assigned dedicated missions beyond the tactical battle-space. But ***the tactical third dimension, for its part, really became consubstantial to the efficiency of land forces.*** This went up to the point we needed to form the ALOA¹ in Indochina and the ALAT² during the Algeria war. At that time, the Air Force's own missions did not enable them to contribute as much as necessary to the tactical success. The evolution was emphasized up to such point that we could no longer speak of "ground combat" for land forces, but merely of "aérocombat"*. ***"Aérocombat" became a component which could not be dissociated from the air-land battle conducted for its part at joint level.***

The combined-arms commander is the one who ***"combines the effects of weapons to achieve operational efficiency"***. He develops now his action in this new tactical space which is his maneuver space. The employment of ***the tactical third dimension*** enables him to see, to understand and to act quicker. This means quicker than the adversary who is subsequently placed in a reaction situation. ***Acting quicker than the adversary means seizing then keeping the initiative. It means depriving the Other from his freedom of action. That is to say to control and subsequently to constraint, which is at the end the goal of any tactical action.*** This is however only possible through ***a really comprehensive maneuver***, combining from the conception phase on, the whole of resources, whether they act on the ground or close to the ground; this is really about ***a sole maneuver***. It has nothing to do with the concept of "maneuver support" even if this can reveal indispensable such as close air support (CAS). This became again in the current operational commitments, the most indispensable contribution of the Air force.

The comprehensive feature of the maneuver assumes some conditions. The first one is the ***mutual knowledge***. It comes from belonging to a common world and a common culture. To take an example from abroad, this is all the spirit of the motto of the US Marine Corps, ***"Every Marine a Soldier"***: in this elite Corps, pilots of support aircraft are all first and for long trained as infantry platoon leaders. They are regularly sent back as infantrymen in operations. The second condition is ***the command of the maneuver and all its vectors by a sole***

commander. Such commander is the one in charge of achieving the tactical effect on the ground. By his culture, education and training, he is the best capable to achieve it. He is the combined-arms tactical commander at battalion task force or combined arms brigade level. Such control favors in particular the effect accuracy, not only in space - modern weapons are naturally more and more able of it - but also in time. This assumes, from the time it has been considered as opportune, that ***action is immediate.*** It can then no more comply either with the long planning constraints or the risks of an overall coordination performed at a high level. ***Tactical command - G3's- should then decide on the action to respond to operational requirements whereas early coordination should facilitate the achievement of the selected maneuver.***

Comprehensiveness at the lower tactical levels of the various vectors of "aérocombat" is imperative. In addition, there is a new constraint: it was generated by cuts in the volumes of forces. Consequences were exacerbated by the widening of spaces to control. The problem is solved by a ***centralization of reserves and an increase of their availability.*** ***Extreme mobility*** is their essential feature. We see here the fundamental contribution of "assault and utility" helicopters - instead of just "utility" ones - in the overall operational capability of land forces with a reduced format.

The maneuver of modern land forces is a comprehensive and integrated maneuver under the command of a sole tactical commander. He controls at his level the various operational vectors in order to enhance the effect through short decision/command loops. The implementation of this concept, not a new one, assumed ***digitization*** of platforms and headquarters. It will be, as we know, at the crossroads of ***the army's tactical modernity. This is built around operational priorities and not around technical procedures of battle-space management.***

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1 *Aviation légère d'observation d'artillerie*: Artillery Observation (Light) Aviation.

2 *Aviation légère de l'armée de terre* : Army Aviation.

* "Aérocombat" is the co-ordinated and integrated maneuver of tactical level units operating on the ground and in an air-space close to the ground, under the direct responsibility of the Force's Land Component Commander.

In addition to ground units, "Aérocombat" addresses all the aircraft and delivery vehicles that transition across this dedicated air-space, especially helicopters, drones and artillery ammunitions; it is conducted in close coordination with the Air Component Command.