

C.D.E.F



**T**he new conditions of operations made protection come up as a key dimension of efficiency. Paradoxically, when war was conceived only in the view of a paroxysmal confrontation of blocks, force protection displayed a less sensitive feature. For two reasons. The first one is that our vision of war was primarily this of an absolute war for vital interests. We felt, under the pregnant hold of Clausewitz' thoughts, that it justified and inexorably assumed mass losses. The second one is that protection insufficiency only amended the less important dimension of military action, i.e. its operational efficiency.

But circumstances dramatically changed and with them, the importance of protection. Should it confirm its **impact on the technical efficiency of the armed forces**, it becomes in addition **a condition of the freedom of action of governments**. These should remain capable to act in crisis, not only in today's one but also in tomorrow's. In the same way as likely war found back a political substance that had become shaded off, **force protection takes today a really political dimension**. Protection finds then a new status between "the means" and "the end"; it shows a new complexity because, **bypassing the passive aspect that characterized it for long, it now appears as the convergence of active and passive, direct and indirect measures**.

**Force protection becomes a political stake because it is the condition to political freedom of action**. It is enough to remind here the withdrawals of US and French contingents after Beirut deadly attacks suffered in 1983, or the withdrawal of US Forces from Somalia ten years later, after "Blackhawk down". In commitments not perceived as vital, the political freedom of action - today but tomorrow as well - from now on goes through force protection. Besides that, as we are no longer in the assumption of a sole and massive commitment - the "all-in" of the poker player - **it is indispensable to preserve the force for its employment in future crisis that will obviously occur in succession**. Likely wars are waged with forces that cannot be consumed. **The use of force should be designed under the constraint of its imperative conservation** - subsequently of its imperative protection - as they are the same forces and the same equipment, scarce and

expensive, coming from a non-renewable envelope, which are successively engaged on various theaters of operation. This is truer now as forward defense leads to a number of engagements, always long and overlapping each other; western forces cannot bear significant losses. These requirements are deeply changing our warfighting modes; we no longer use force whatever its cost is to achieve the goal - what was the Cold War philosophy because we were in an absolute conflict -, but we use methods enabling us to preserve the force.

**At tactical level, in current crisis, protection remains an efficiency stake**. The aim is indeed to act first through proximity, among populations, looking for contact and violence de-escalation. For simple reasons of credibility and confidence, the force should be capable to protect itself, because if it is not capable of it, the population has no reason to believe that if it sticks to the project supported by the force, it will be itself protected from the Other. If the force "loses face", the force loses credit and with it the intervention project; therefore, **should it "attack" or it "be attacked", the force should "win"**.

**Obviously, a permanent antagonism remains between the force and its capability to achieve the mission at contact**. If it is adequately protected, the force may go in for intermingling without being obliged to respond to violence by increasing violence, but, in the same time, measures of physical protection isolate the soldier from the population which perceives him as an "Other"! By reducing the footprint, the visual presence quickly perceived as oppressive, risks and need for protection decrease correspondingly. But the transformation in depth of local situations requires conversely to be at contact by numbers. The poorly protected force entrenches itself, cuts itself off, does not understand anymore; it quickly falls in a spiral of inefficiency or of violence, both of them being frequently mixed together by the way. Once more, the impact of losses is immediate: to get convinced of it, we have just to observe the change in UNIFIL behavior after the terrorist attack that took the lives of six soldiers from Spanish armed forces in the month of June 2007. We can report here **the deeply paradoxical feature of protection: tactical efficiency presupposes protection but excess in protection damages efficiency**. The challenge to meet is that, if protection should be looked for through convergent approaches, it should avoid to jeopardize the force efficiency because such efficiency is itself a protection component.

As a key element of the overall efficiency of forces, the issue of protection reveals then very complex. Coming from the simple concept of "armor", it now involves all aspects of the daily life of the force; the soldier on patrol should be protected but also the logistic support convoy or the accommodation places, more and more victims of the RAM (rockets, ammunition, mortars) threat or even chemical threat by spreading toxic clouds on the ground as it is the case in Iraq.

### **Paradoxical feature and complexity!**

This eliminates simple solutions and states **protection as a resultant, an effect achieved at the convergence of various actions, an overall concept.** The mere passive protection is useless; its bypassing will stay possible as it is true that the cannonball always ends up by winning over the armor<sup>1</sup> (the evolution of improvised explosive devices demonstrates it clearly) and that the best technological ideas also include perverse effects: such as the effects of reactive armor on accompanying infantry or jamming equipment on other pieces of equipment. These limits of the passive way should not prevent us to adjust our vehicles deployed on the theaters and build micro-stocks of vehicles adequate for the specific threats of a commitment.

**The limits of passive protection are however leading us to an obvious fact: the "active" approach should be privileged as the one which goes by the threat decreasing and therefore a comprehensive maneuver and general tactics.**

Protection as safety generally speaking is a comprehensive resultant, in its various dimensions (man, convoys, settlements ...), against the various threats (improvised explosive devices, third dimension, rudimentary chemical bombs...), considering various families of responses (active and passive, direct and indirect, preventive and pro-active), in its various fields (doctrine, equipment, education and training), using various technical tools (general intelligence, early detection, immediate detection, robotics...). **Protection requires adaptation, if possible, at the same pace as the counter-adaptations of the Other.**

The conditions of realizing such adaptation, obviously reactive, should respond to the fundamental question of the risk that we are prepared to put on our own troops and the duration we consent to. In this area,

the political and military hierarchy is really in a rationale of responsibility of results and not of resources.

The experience of the last fifteen years of commitments clearly shows us also clearly that **number is a factor of protection by itself.** It enables the understanding of environments and their control; it has a direct effect on the behaviors of our forces as well as on their opponents. In this respect, even if reducing the footprint on the ground should be looked for and - through the use of the tactical third dimension - the one of land convoys too, **deploying a low-numbered force, too tightly designed is already jeopardizing it** whatever the passive protection resources it is allotted with. Scarcity of forces on the ground obliges them either to lock themselves in - which turns them useless - or to take more risks. It also requires a greater dependence on air strikes, increasing then the risk of collateral damages, and, in return, the subsequent risk for the troops on the ground. **Tactically speaking, the best way to protect troops is to have enough of them.** Even before that, history demonstrates that poorly trained troops are those suffering more casualties; however, training means time and time means manpower. **If number does not "make" quality - which is a result of equipment and training - it "is" in itself a quality.**

**An army far too low numbered in regard of unavoidable missions it is tasked with means men being put in danger.** We are here facing a moral obligation.

**Major General Vincent DESPORTES\***  
**Commander, Forces Employment Doctrine Center**

*\* Now Commander, French Joint Defense College (CID).  
 The present Commander, CDEF, is Major General  
 Thierry OLLIVIER.*

<sup>1</sup> The improvement of the armor is however indispensable. For long, it will go through thickness increase. This will result in an increase of the vehicle fleet heaviness. The Brits subsequently consider that by the end of 2007, the average weight of their car park will significantly increase. The dream about multi-purpose combat vehicles in the range of 20 tons is really over. We now know that for a combat platform to survive on the real battlefield, its weight cannot be much less than 30 tons. We can no longer barter protection against urgent strategic deployment ability. By the way, we understood that such deployment ability should efficiently relate only to a small part of the deployable force.