ONTOLOGICAL-CULTURAL ASYMMETRY AND THE RELEVANCE OF GRAND STRATEGIES

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For a few years, we have heard a lot about asymmetric warfare. Most of the time, the question of asymmetry is however reduced to the instrumental aspect of the problem. If you really want to understand the complexity of asymmetry you need to dig further. The purpose of the article is to understand some other characteristics of asymmetry, namely the ontological, cultural, moral facets of asymmetry. These are the forgotten dimensions of asymmetry in the public debate. Therefore we must recognize asymmetry as a general strategy that needs to be counterbalanced by a grand/integral strategy.

In games like chess, stratego or go, two opposing forces, having the same resources, confront each other to obtain a strategic gain. The outcome of the game is determined only by the skillfulness of the players. Even in backgammon, the

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outcome depends partially on the factor "chance" for two symmetric forces[3]. For the last two centuries, most of the wars, particularly in Europe, have taken a symmetrical form or shape. Not only was there only an instrumental symmetry – as was particularly the case in the *Blitzkrieg* models that have shaped the development of the NATO and Warsaw Pact forces during the Cold War[4] – but there was also symmetry of norms and rationalities. That is one of the reasons underlying the perception and conduct of so-called "conventional warfare"[5]. The wars were planned and conducted following the same pattern, the same code of honour. This is not the case any more. The purpose of this article is to understand the ontological-cultural facet of asymmetry.

The rules of the game, norms and suasion

Symmetry tends more and more to give way to asymmetry. In a way, people and States are fighting each other, but without understanding each other's reciprocal strategies, because they are acting according to different cultural, ontological patterns, making it impossible to adopt common rules. In the evolution of strategy, defined as *a conceptual object where force – in its physical and psychological forms - is the medium between opposing adversaries*[6], this could mark a dramatic shift, where one's force will try not to enter in the game of the other to fight him – as this was the case in the traditional way to conduct military operations – but rather to fight in a completely different way, negating the norms of combat of the adversary. As a

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[3] W. Schwartau, « Asymmetrical Adversaries », *in* J. F. Lehman and H. Sicherman (Ed.), *America the Vulnerable Our Military Problems and how to fix them*, Philadelphia, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2000, p. 216.

[4] And that still models the development of some Middle-East, African, South-American and Asian forces, partially more for reasons of political prestige than for operational rationality.

[5] H. Coutau-Bégarie, *Traité de stratégie*, Coll. « Bibliothèque stratégique », Economica/ISC, Paris, 1999.

[6] A definition coming as an extension from the one given by general André Beaufre in his *Introduction à la stratégie*, Armand Colin, Paris, 1963.

result, the adversaries, in our globalisation-centric/post-modern world, could fight within their own norms.

This is a major problem for the analyst and the military on the battlefield. During the Cold War, Edward Luttwak showed the existence of *suasion*, a neologism contracting the terms *dissuasion* and *persuasion*[7]. In his view, the adversaries engaged in a conflict (or in a on-going conflict) act on a formal or informal system of norms that can offer boundaries to the conflict, defining limits of action or non-action, and creating a conflict stability. Of course, the suasion creates possibilities for the emergence of tensions between the adversaries, explaining the dynamic of an arms race, or the perturbations of a specific balance of power following the conclusions of a diplomatic agreement. This was certainly valid in the (neo)-realist analysis of the Cold War, in a way that would not be negated by Hans Morgenthau or Kenneth Waltz[8]. The fall of the Soviet Union, with the perception of a globalisation process where an individual could be more important than a State[9] (in the heuristic point of view of the comprehension of a given strategic issue) has altered the vision that we could have of suasion. The numbers of actors, what we know and what we think of their intentions and their capabilities or, more simply the complexities of the contemporary international relations are the sign of the emergence of new rationalities.

The new rationalities that we observed during the Cold War were often linear, easily creating norms and rules for adversaries that could be the victims of a nuclear

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[7] E. N. Luttwak, *Le paradoxe de la stratégie*, Odile Jacob, Paris, 1989.

[8] K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison Wesley, Reading (MA.), 1979.

[9] From a military-strategic perspective : L. Monnerat, « Faire face à l'émergence de l'individu comme acteur stratégique », www.checkpoint-online.ch, 31 mai 2003. For a more politological vision: J. Rosenau, « Many Damn Things Simultaneously: Complexity Theory and World Affairs » *in* D.S. Alberts, and T.J. Czerwinski, *Complexity, Global Politics and National Security*, National Defence University, Washington, 2003.

genocide and that had, in consequence a real and strong interest in the full respect of a normative framework that was the sedimentation of more than 50 years of tensions explained by the constructivist approach of the international relations study[10]. In the post-Cold War environment, the rhetorical figures of fluidity of the international relations or the increasing number of studies evaluating the place of time and speed in the sociological and strategic environment show us that the "classical", nuclear related, suasion loses its heuristic value. But a more adapted vision, better suited to the new international environment could be envisioned.

In fact, time-compression and complexity are not the only reasons that can impeach the constitution of a phenomenon of suasion within a particular conflict: the nature of the adversary is another. Trying to gain some lessons of the *Desert Storm* operation in 1991, an Indian general told some observers that the only way to fight with the technologically dominant United States was the use of nuclear weapons. The second life of the Iranian nuclear program itself[11] was due to the Gulf War, when Teheran's officials considered that any political/military conflict with Washington would be fought with powerful weapons. Practically, this vision is considered as the will to establish a dissymmetric military capability that can overwhelm the United States forces. At the same time, only a few international actors – in fact, essentially some States – can develop an dissymmetric capacity, generally considered as the possession of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) weapons. However, the ability to fight a powerful, conventional, technologically intensive, force can also pass by asymmetric doctrines and tactics.

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[10] The constructivist approach seeks to understand the process between the actors of a problematic by analysing their interactions (their inter-subjectivity) and their perceptions, creating then individual realities in parallel of the objective realities. A. Wendt, « Identity and Structural Change in International Politics » *in* Y. Lapid and F.Kratochwil, *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory,* Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 1996.

[11] During the seventies, Teheran considered the possibility of a civilian related nuclear program that can know military developments. The program was stopped with the Islamic revolution of 1979.

Even though most of the analysts reduce the field of asymmetry to instrumental asymmetry – concretely, using asymmetric tactics and weapons to gain a strategic advantage by refusing the proposed suasion imposed by the strongest adversary during the conduct of the conflict -, we have to dig further. A lot has been said since the end of the Cold War about asymmetric warfare, but one aspect of it has continually been underestimated, namely its expressive or ontological aspect. In fact, asymmetric warfare is not only a question of different means: terrorism, NBCR and so on, but first and foremost, it is a question of mind, of ideology, and in a certain sense, a question of culture. Steven Metz and Douglas V. Johnson, for instance, a few years ago, defined asymmetry in the following way:

> "In the realm of military affairs and national security, asymmetry is acting, organizing, and thinking differently than opponents in order to maximize one's own advantages, exploit an opponent's weaknesses, attain the initiative, or gain greater freedom of action. It can be political-strategic, military-strategic, operational, or a combination of these. It can entail different methods, technologies, values and organizations, time perspectives, or some combination of these. It can be short-term or long-term. It can be deliberate or by default. It can be discrete or pursued in conjunction with symmetric approaches. It can have both psychological and physical dimensions"[12].

What is interesting in their definition, compared to others that have fuelled the field of strategic studies in the last ten years, is their focus on values, organizations and the different way of thinking of the actors in the asymmetrical relation/suasion.

Ontological-cultural analysis

Characterizing asymmetry only as an *instrumental* form of strategy is a very constricted approach of the matter. It becomes then a mean as one other. In fact, there's another step to accomplish to fully understand the profound nature of the adversary, the ontological and cultural one. When we study asymmetric warfare we

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[12] S. Metz, D.V. Johnson II, *Asymmetry and U.S. Military Strategy: Definition, Background, and Strategic Concepts*, London, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, January 2001, p. 6.

cannot only focus on the capacity and the cinematic (i.e. the strategic progression toward action) of the adversary, we also have to be able to understand what the adversary represents: intentions, culture and values. These are more important than the means he could acquire. C. Geertz observed, in the Sixties, that

> "culture patterns – religious, philosophical, aesthetic, scientific, ideological- are ' programs'; they provide a template or blueprint for the organization of social and psychological processes, much as genetic systems provide such a template for the organization of organic processes"[13].

From a more operational perspective, A. Wendt more recently put it in a different way, by saying that "*a gun in the hand of a friend is a different thing from one in the hand of an enemy, and enmity is a social, not material, relationship*"[14].

In addition, research conducted in the field of innovation sociology shows a similar approach.[15] For authors like McKenzie, a system like a cruise missile is not only the sum of knowledge and techniques, but also the result of a historical and social process[16]. *Techniques* are related then to materials, and *technology*, as well as to the spectrum of skills, social relations and representations attached to a (military) system[17]. In a sense, the constructed opposition between technology and strategy that we can perceive in many publications concerning the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) or counter-insurrection loses its relevance. Strategy and technology, across the full spectrum of strategic-military action, could be envisioned as a syncretism and, more importantly for our purpose, as a global system of social relations. Perceptions and intentions lie at its conceptual heart, or, at its ultimate

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[13] C. Geertz, « Ideology as a Cultural System » *in* D. Apter, *Ideology and Discontent*, Collier-MacMillan Limited, London, 1964, p. 62.

[14] A. Wendt, « Identity and Structural Change in International Politics » *in* Y. Lapid and F.Kratochwil, *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, London, 1996, p. 50.

[15] J. Henrotin, *L'intégration stratégique de la technologie. La stratégie génétique dans la stratégie des moyens*, Coll. « Les Stratégiques », ISC, Paris, 2004.

[16] McKenzie, D., *Inventing Accuracy: A Historical Sociology of Nuclear Missile Guidance*, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA.)1990.

[17] A. L. Ross, « The Dynamics of Military Technology » *in* D. Dewitt ; D. Haglund. And J. Kirton, J., *Building a New Global Order. Emerging Trends in International Security*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1993.

center of gravity. And for the technologically centric occidental military systems, it is also the conceptual door to act in the asymmetric domain of action.

We cannot ignore the fact that the understanding of the social relation between different actors is crucial, certainly since the end of the Cold War. Since the end of the Cold War, international relations are a lot more complicated. Potential and current adversaries have become more plural. Failing states, rogue states and transnational actors (drug cartels, radical groups, mafias, etc) have arisen, using specific development and action strategies against their enemies. Studying these actors through the Cold War lens and conceptual instruments is impossible. We have to comprehend them one by one, writing a new page in social science methodology and epistemology. This requires our analysts to specialize more in the way these actors think, the way they act and react. We cannot afford to be passive, because our opposition to them is not only based on instrumental rationality but also, and more importantly on ontological rationality: the system of thinking must be adapted in theory courses as in practice, from the strategic to the tactical level.

But one thing remains the same: every actor fights in the name of specific values, perceptions, and, ultimately, gives it a specific sense. For the French general Loup Francart, one of the most prominent European strategists, conflicts in the post-Cold War era become "wars of senses"[18]. Consequently, the first adversary to see and perceive the sense of a conflict – from the sense of political intentions to the multiple senses of tactical actions – is then the first that will be able to react in an appropriate way. This vision is even more relevant in a strategic environment marked by the emergence of new chrono-strategies where time often replaces space as the

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[18] L. Francart, L., *La guerre du sens. Pourquoi et comment agir dans les champs psychologiques*, Coll. « Stratèges et stratégie », Economica, Paris, 2000.

major dimension of action in the current conflicts[19]. Neglecting that fact could become catastrophic while defending our system values, understood here as the combination of legality, democracy, human rights, equality between peoples and so on.

We do need to recognize the importance of strategic ontology and culture. Since the end of the Cold War, the West has been convinced that its *Weltangschauung* (vision of the world) required a predominant position, but at the same time we have seen others reinforcing and consolidating themselves. There is consequently a wish to modify, to transform, to oppose or even to destroy the western system of values. Does that mean the end of the western model? Clearly, the answer is no. However, there are ideologies developing of breach, of split with regard to values defended in the West. That sort of gap can and will only lead to different political, social, military strategies and approaches. Without being too simplistic, we cannot refute an obvious evolution: the determinant place of identity and culture in international relations and military thinking. So there is not only an instrumental asymmetry, but also an ontological, cultural and moral one. These are the forgotten dimensions of asymmetry in the public debate.

Technological superiority alone is not going to be a guaranty against actors thinking in ontological more than instrumental terms. As General Wesley Clark pointed in the case of terrorism, it is "*low technology, high concept*"[20]. His view is also relevant in the more general case of asymmetry. Let us illustrate what we advocate. Since the Nineties we have been able to observe that the "end of history " defended by F. Fukuyama corresponded more to a myth than to the reality. The end

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[19] About the concept of chronostrategy : A. De Neve, J. Henrotin et C. Wasinski « Quelles conséquences stratégiques ? » *in* J. Henrotin (Dir.), *Au risque du chaos. Premières leçons de la guerre d'Irak*, Armand Colin, Paris, 2004. and J. Henrotin, « Une campagne paradoxale. *Iraqi Freedom* entre classicisme stratégique et chronostratégie », *in* RMES *Et alii.*, *Iraqi Freedom. Analyse géopolitique, stratégique et économique de la troisième guerre du Golfe*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2004.
[20] Quoted by A. Adler, *J'ai vu finir le monde ancien*, Grasset, Paris, 2002, p. 40.

of the Cold War has brought uncertainty and no "new world order" has arisen. Everywhere in the world, we have been noting an ideological and cultural withdrawal, stimulating a return to certain rituals, to certain barbaric customs in total contradiction to the Enlightenment's Reason. The humanitarian crisis in Darfur, the civil wars in Liberia, Ivory Coast, Congo, recurrent fights in Nigeria, the Balkan's wars, even the mythical will of Osama Bin Laden to create a new Islamic empire are irrational from our occidental point of view – they do not show the expression of reason.

However, they all proceed from some kind of rationality, in the sense of a logic driving a combination of political-strategic actions toward a defined objective. Penetrating these rationalities is then the first step towards the ultimate key to strategic success, the full comprehension of each particular war. Social sciences aren't often the sciences of linearity, but have the advantage to open our minds to complexity, and, *in fine*, to a neo-clausewitzian world[21]. And so, the thinking of Clausewitz is particularly relevant, as Laurent Murawiec argued, that the Prussian general was, the "thinker of the uncertain"[22]. Consequently, cultural factors lay at the center of his vision. Instead of remembering his approach, we have the tendency to believe that our potential opponents think and act in the same way as we do. There is a tendency of "mirror imaging" the enemy that presupposes that he will follow the same rationality or more precisely the same perception of rationality as ours. But the rationality of one person is not necessarily the rationality of another. As Lieutenant-General E.L. Rowney reminds us:"

> Our biggest mistakes stem from the assumption that others are like us, when in fact, they are more unlike than like us. We insist on ascribing to others our cultural traits, not recognizing that we have different objectives due to our

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[21] « Neo-clausewitzianism » was initially coined in a pejorative sense, trying to explain the thinking of the tenants of nuclear warfighting. J. Henrotin, A. De Neve et T. Struye de Swielande « Vers un monde néo-clausewitzien ? » *in* J. Henrotin (Dir.), *Au risque du chaos. Premières leçons de la guerre d'Irak*, Armand Colin, Paris, 2004.
[22] L. Murawiec, « Clausewitz, penseur de l'incertain », *in* C. von Clausewitz, *De la guerre*, Paris, Perrin, 1999.

unique historic backgrounds and sets of values. In short, we fail to place ourselves in the other person's moccasins"[23].

In other terms, we fail to penetrate the rationality of the adversary, never fully understand his *Weltangschauung*.

The contemporary vision of conflicts is thus still too impregnated with "the western paradigm of war": the confrontation between States with the same political, cultural and ideological concepts. It is nothing else than an ethnocentric and simplistic vision of warfare, which reflects imperfectly the reality and restraints of conflict. We share the view expressed by Colonel Dunlap, a few years ago, when he stated "*our likely future opponents will be unlike ourselves* ". The occidental culture of zero death, the attempts of minimizing collateral damage in operations, the respect of (our) laws, the moral restraints or the strict rules of engagement are some typical figures of the post-modern evolution of our societies[24]. And we aren't even talking about the famous and too often used "CNN effect"[25]. The enemy has, like Victor Davis Hanson puts it, "*mastered the knowledge of the Western mind*"[26]. Our potential adversaries know our vulnerabilities far better than we do ourselves. They realize that the struggle will not be won on the battlefield, but on the field of images, rhetoric and changing public opinions, as David took down Goliath. Simply stated, perception is the new battlefield and the mind is the weapon.

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[23] Quoted by C. Dunlap Jr., "Preliminary Observations: Asymmetrical Warfare and the Western Mindset" *in* L. Matthews (Ed.), *Challenging the United States Symmetrically and Asymmetrically: Can America Be Defeated?*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, July 1998, p. 4.

[24] Z. Bauman, "Wars of the Globalization Era", *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 4, n°1, 2001.

[25] F. Géré, *La guerre psychologique*, Coll. « Bibliothèque stratégique », Economica/ISC, Paris, 1994.

[26] V.D. Hanson, "Our Weird Way of War ", *National Review Online*, May 7, 2004.

Ontological vulnerabilities

However, do we really understand our own cultural nature? From the same ontological point of view, do we really understand the profound nature and structure of our societies? If the answer to these questions is both "no", then we can prepare for another 9/11, as the adversary will target our ontological nature. Another more, explicit example: how can our economies survive three weeks without electricity? According to some analysts, the United States is the most vulnerable country in the world because as a technologically intensive country they multiplied the terrorist backdoors[27]. However, the United States is not alone: Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan or Asian emerging countries are virtually in the same situation. The rationalities underlying the development of their economical basis are not that different. It is not a question of technical hardware (electrical and informatics networks, for instance) but of sociological software: the way we think things should work. Eliminating the historical and social dimension of the question equals to forgetting hard learned lessons from 2.000 years of military history[28].

In a recent book, titled *Unrestricted War*, two Chinese colonels declared that in view of the Chinese incapacity to currently prevail in a conventional conflict with the United States, China should target the civil infrastructures of their adversary[29]. One of the two colonels amplified his thoughts in August 1999: "*War has rules, but those rules are set by the West…. If you use those rules, then weak countries have no chance… We are a weak country, so do we need to fight according to your rules? No*".[30] The consequences of this statement are important, because in a certain way,

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[27] R.E. Stephens, « Cyber-Biotech terrorism: Going High-Tech in the 21st Century », *in* W.H. Kushner, *The Future of Terrorism: Violence in the New Millennium*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, 1998.

[28] A. Latham, "Warfare Transformed: A Braudelian Perspective on the "Revolution in Military Affairs"", *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol.8, n°2, 2002.

[29] Q. Liang, Q. et W. Xiangsui, *La guerre hors-limite*, Bibliothèque Rivages/Payot, Paris, 2003.

[30] W. Schwartau, « Asymmetrical Adversaries », *Orbis*, Vol. 44, n° 2, Spring 2000, pp. 198-199.

our western values are making us vulnerable. This is a vulnerability that our adversaries are not and will not hesitate to exploit. Some say that the book, written in 1998, inspired the terrorist attacks of New York and Washington. The development of the text and the conclusions of the two Chinese colonels are without any appeal: the abuse of technology is enclosing our societies in a false-rational iron collar where every action can have an impact on our individual perceptions. In fact, in this context, our values of peace, tolerance, human rights, democracy can be easily attacked, once weakened by a linear, mathematical thinking, while the rationality of our potential adversaries – and China, since its inclusion in our economic circle is not necessarily one – is non-linear.

But this non-linear thinking applies to the world of the inherently asymmetric enemy. Terrorists, for instance, act without any considerations for civilians, infrastructures, thus bypassing an ethic that the Chinese colonels consider as an ethnocentric mode of conflict regulation[31]. And so, the adversaries of the United States and others will perceive their advantage not in technological terms but more likely in cultural, ideological and ontological terms. We just have to remind ourselves of the pictures of an American helicopter pilot being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. These images caused the pull out of the US military engaged in Somalia. More recently the images of four American contractors burned and hanged in Fallujah had the same purpose. These facts remind us what real war is like. Like Mao said to the Japanese: "you fight your war and I'll fight mine". Previously to the 9/11 attacks, some flights of drones over Afghanistan located Osama Bin Laden. He was in the sights of the operators. But they did not fire, because he was travelling

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[31] Q. Liang, Q. et W. Xiangsui, *La guerre hors-limite*, op cit.

with women and children[32]. Hamas leaders used the same tactics. So, let us just ask one question: if you were sitting at the place of the drone operator, in just the same conditions, would you fire? Ethics have penetrated us individually. It is a chance – and the guaranty of the Reason's perpetuation – but it can also be a fatal weakness.

Consequently there is a growing "asymmetrical gap" between the two arts of war of States and their adversaries. We will increasingly witness human shields, military resources in civil neighbourhoods and an impossibility distinguishing combatants from non-combatants. Things will not be black and white anymore but grey, and we had better get used to it. Like Colonel C. J. Dunlap puts it:

> "what is necessary for the United States and the West is to expand its assessment of asymmetrical warfare. Asymmetrical warfare needs to be examined from the culturally distinct perspective of potential enemies. As unpleasant as it may be, the West must consider that enemies may try to turn against us the very values that the West is seeking to protect. In particular, the United States and the West must not allow its technologically-oriented mindset to blind it to the fact that modern war remains a struggle of psyches and wills"[33].

So too often we fail to ask ourselves two fundamental questions: "Who is our enemy?" and "do we know (understand) him?"

Looking for an ontological-cultural response

There is a tendency in political and military circles to search for the enemies that suit us best, instead of preparing ourselves to confront our real enemies. We should continually remind ourselves the words of R. Peters:

> "we pride ourselves on our rationality, while avoiding reality. If we are to function effectively as diplomats and soldiers, we need to turn a dispassionate eye on mankind. We need to study the behaviour of the individual and the mass, and to do it without stricture. We cherish the fiction that technology will

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[32] A. Dumoulin, J. Henrotin et T. Struye de Swielande « De nouvelles perceptions ? » *in* J. Henrotin (Dir.), *Au risque du chaos. Premières leçons de la guerre d'Irak*, Armand Colin, Paris, 2004.
[33] C. Dunlap Jr., "Preliminary Observations: Asymmetrical Warfare and the Western Mindset" in *Challenging the United States Symmetrically and Asymmetrically: Can America Be Defeated?*, op cit., p. 12.

be the answer to all of our dilemmas, but our enemies know that flesh and blood form the irresistible answer to our technologies" [34].

The whole security environment is completely fragmented into vastly different ontological, ideological and cultural identities. From Somalia to Iraq, Sierra Leone, Bosnia, Afghanistan, and so on, war has taken multiple forms. Warlords, paramilitaries, children soldiers, etc have opposed high-tech forces. Consequently in the next decade, our enemy will probably not be a high tech army nor will we see a *"Desert Storm* bis" campaign (where the enemy was more or less chosen and had a globally incorrect level of adaptation to the strategic and operative environment.), but rather we will be opposed by clans, cartels, mafias, extremists, who will not have our rationality and who will fight by different rules. The battlefield has never been linear and will never be completely predictable, even if informatics can lift a little part of the fog of war.

The future strategic environment will become more non-linear, indeterminable, chaotic and diffused than in the past. The strategic forms adopted by terrorist actors are networked and do not fill traditional criteria of operations driven in 1991 or in 2003, despite the always-useful lessons they gave us. Our unlimited confidence in technology has come from *Desert Storm* and it was probably the more inadequate lesson*.* From there on, technology would not only provide a capability, it would also provide a strategy and implying certainty in future wars[35]. Such a vision is a certain recipe for strategic defeat and is an invitation to some kind of stagnation in reflection and action. The facts have shown that war is still unpredictable, complex and far from an exact science: if it is a science, it serves first the art of its conduct. In fact, we cannot eliminate psychological, social, cultural, and political dynamics with

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[34] R. Peters, *Fighting for the Future, Will America Triumph?*, Stackpole Books, Mechanicsburg, 1999, p. 194.
[35] H.R. McMaster, *Crack in the Foundation: Defense Transformation and the Underlying Assumption of Dominant Knowledge in Future War*, Student Issue Paper, Us Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, November, 2003, p. 13.

technology. Destroying a tank or an armed vehicle does not erase necessarily the adversary's will to fight. Clausewitz reminds us that an adversary is never defeated until he recognizes it. The Iraqi campaign shows that phenomenon quite perfectly. Three weeks of "major combat operations" destroyed any structured capability from the Iraqi army. Some groups, however, acting on different rationalities and with various, sometimes-antithetical objectives – fight unconventionally. War, certainly on the strategic level, is still dominated by subjectivity; by the human mind. Prediction based solely on technological superiority would be a big mistake.

The major challenge for the armed forces will be to continue to adapt high-tech forces – that can effectively enhance our chances to defeat the adversary – to the new battlefield. The RMA has not erased the relevance of the Clausewitzian concepts, and perhaps we need to read him again. The overvaluation of technical superiority, which is indisputable, could be catastrophic if the point of view of the other side is neglected. "*The enemy we're fighting is different from the one we'd war-gamed against*," said General Wallace, the commander of the US army's V Corps, after a week of fierce fighting during *Iraqi Freedom*[36]. In a May 2003 report, titled "Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) Lessons Learned", Major General. Jim Mattis declared that

> "when the enemy failed to act in accordance with common military practice, we were caught flat-footed because we failed to accurately anticipate the unconventional response…There was no available intelligence on the opposition commanders' personalities, educations, decision-making styles or previous experiences. Lacking this information, we were left with guessing what we would do in their place"[37].

In the current battle zones, anything can happen. From this point of view, if you cannot erase the risks, you can minimize them by taking a doctrinal and a

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[36] « US Advance stalled: says general », *The Sunday Times*, March 28, 2003.
[37] P. Sperry, « Marine Commander: Human Intel flawed », *World Net Daily*, Friday, June 27, 2003.

conceptual advantage using audacity and instinct. The commander genius and "coup d'oeil" are better compensators that technologies could be. A trained soldier will always be the first and the more advanced sensor at the army's disposition. During the Cannae Battle, Hannibal didn't have nor information dominance nor a rifle, but he won against a numerically superior force in defensive posture. If technology can help the commander by giving him a better visualization of the battle-zone with software that can sort millions of bits of information or if some drugs can keep him aware and awake for a longer time, technology is still first an addiction. This is a very important point because if the military and the politics take the success of technology for granted, it will have an effect on the training and formation of the military for sure. So, even when the armed forces use technologies to perfection, they cannot afford to forget the art of war that is the first framework to every technological-strategical deployment.

History's greatest Captains were generally historians and Napoleon advised all the candidates to:

> "make offensive war like Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustave-Adolphus, Turenne, Prince Eugene and Frederic; read, read a second time the history of their eighty-three campaigns, model you on them; it's the sole mean to become great captain, and to surprise the secrets of the art"[38].

In the same way, Patton, planning the Sicilian campaign, was reading a history of its invasion by the Normans[39]. During *Iraqi Freedom*, the US relied too heavily on stand-off technology, and neglected the human proximity aspect of the battlefield, leaving troops vulnerable to ambushes. You have to detect what is happening in the mind of your adversary from the decision-maker to the foot soldier. You have to discern whom you are fighting, or you will learn it at your expense. Each war and more

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[38] Quoted by H. Coutau-Bégarie, *Traité de stratégie*, Coll. « Bibliothèque stratégique », Economica/ISC, Paris, 1999, p. 254.
[39] J. Luvaas, "Military History: is it Still Practicable?", *Parameters*, Summer 1995.

specifically each stage of a war requires an absolute comprehension of the adversary of the moment. We systematically consider the notion of security in its mathematical sense, attempting to transform it in probabilities and, more generally, in numbers. There is a relentless human temptation to define, to calculate, and to rationalize everything.

For McNamara's whiz kids, the Vietnam War was perfect: tactical successes, high technology and advanced management methods should *logically* bring victory or, at least, success to US forces[40]. We should not make the same mistakes by quantifying and codifying everything. We know what happened then. There was a cruel conclusion, enlightened by the discussion between an American Colonel and a Vietnamese one, the first saying that the United States always tactically prevailed. His colleague responded that he was probably right, but also that the assertion was not relevant in the specific context of the war they had fought. In the same way, Ken Booth reminds us in *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* that

> "self-confidence is important for effective military behaviour, but too often it has been inflated into foolish over-confidence as a result of the interplay between psychological needs of those involved, the pressures of the moment and ethnocentric predispositions"[41].

We systematically consider the notion of security in its mathematical sense, attempting to transform it in probabilities and, more generally, in numbers. It is a drift at the basis of the United States failure in Vietnam.

As employees are specialized in enterprises, following a technologically intensive path, they create an organizational scheme that will then be used by the armies. The academic centrality of strategy in the management schools creates a return effect where armies take examples of management techniques. From this

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[40] J.W. Gibson, J., *The Perfect War: Technowar in Vietnam*, Atlantic Monthly Press, Boston, 1986.

[41] K. Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism*, London, Croom Helm, 1979, p. 33.

point of view, the Revolution in Business Affairs (RBA) is first an economic measure, aiming to reduce the costs of the weapon systems, but the use of a managerial approach in the strategic conduct can be a mistake. Never forget that if you consider an army as an enterprise, an enterprise is submitted to the possibility of a failure. Once again, it implies a linearly pattern of thinking while any confrontation is essentially non-linear. Specialization cannot permit a critical evaluation/analysis of the situation. This was perfectly illustrated during *Iraqi Freedom* when captured US soldiers of a supply company were unable to fight correctly, just because they were too specialized in a certain task but not trained well enough how to fight.

In short, even though the new technologies facilitate certain aspects of the war, a soldier who is adapted to guerrilla warfare, to counter terrorism and Human Intelligence gathering is essential. The soldier of tomorrow will need a better comprehension than ever before of the environment in which he is fighting. He must be the perfect combination of the instinct-lead warrior and the academic-lead professor. The knowledge of languages, local customs, psychology and a sharp sense of diplomacy and negotiation will become an unavoidable asset in the conduct of military operations. Learning from the experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US Army has retrained thousands of tank operators, artillerymen and others to take jobs in long-term stability operations: military police officers, civil affairs experts and intelligence analysts.

The need for global answers

At the societal level, every citizen is becoming a receptor of strategies and counter-strategies, as perceptions become weapons. Influenced by media, rumours, tons of daily information, too much connected to the world to gain perspective on it,

the citizen is becoming one of the centers of gravity of political decisions. As notions as "new forms of political governance", "new political culture", "and direct democracy by e-government" progress in our societies, the individual gains more importance in the decision-making process. By itself, it is a chance for all democrats and democracies, but that is not the problem. The problem is that incorrectly formed/informed citizens can adopt inadequate positions regarding an international situation. The result often shows paradoxes. For instance, some political parties in Belgium were very reluctant to support an operation against the Taliban a few weeks after 9/11, amplifying then the positions of many citizens. Three years after, commentators and politicians – from these parties or adopting political equivalent positions – assert in the media or in various publications that the terrorist threat was reduced and was near a global defeat… without any reference to Operation *Enduring Freedom*. It was just before the bombings of Madrid on March 11, 2004. The purpose here is certainly not to criticize political positions: they are an inherent part of the political debate that forms the heart of a democracy that we want to protect. However, these paradoxes perfectly reflect what is coming: a paradoxical society, believing in its ontological commitment to Reason, but facing adversaries that reject the last one.

How can we then become a little bit more committed to Reason, just enough to have a real defense capability in societies that individually reject any form of violence, while, by another paradox, our societies reproduce and amplify constantly new forms of violent transgressions?[42] The answer is not simple, but if we take the

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[42] Of course, it's another debate, but can we negate the fact that video games becomes more violent, allowing the players to shoot at "anyone", forgetting any status distinction between the "persons" in the game? That sexuality in its commercial representations becomes more violent? That the sado-masochist sexual practices seem to be more and more diffused, and that they leave the field of a subtle game to gain the status of a structural sexual behaviour tending to nihilism? M. Théorey et S. Gladu, « Analyse systémique de l'influence de l'idéologie sexuelle dominante sur les thérapies sexuelles », *Revue de modification du comportement*, Vol. 14 n°1, 1984.

hypothesis that the current conflicts target individual, social and political perceptions – strategically acting then on the material and the psychological sides of the international environment – any consideration for a defence policy should pass by the awareness of the risks induced by these perceptions. Education as a vector of objectivity, knowledge and methodological instrument aiming to apprehend at the individual level the complexities of sociological and international environments is one of our best line of defence. It is not a question here to proceed to some kind of military preparation or to the militarization of the children, as some philosophers, as Fichte, or political leaders, as Napoleon or Jean Jaurès have proposed in their respective times. In fact, it is more about the capacity for post-industrial societies to have better economical, political conditions and more conscious and well-informed citizens. But this emphasis on education is not the sole mean of action at our disposal.

We need to activate a real grand strategy or, more appropriately in a time where we are not living in a situation of total war, a real *integral strategy*. The term was coined by general Lucien Poirier and seeks to create an interaction between all the components serving the defense of a given social community[43]. The concept was a response to the *possibility* of a nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union during the Cold War and is still relevant in the current context of the *possibility* of asymmetric conflicts. In his view, the principal components were the specific diplomatic, military and economical strategies. But we can extend this first architecture to the legal, cultural, educational, technological strategies, integrating without strangling, different social fields of all the human activities.

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[43] Poirier L., *Les voix de la stratégie, généalogie de la stratégie militaire – Guibert, Jomini*, Fayard, Paris, 1988. The concept is discussed again in the post-Cold War environment in F. Géré et T. Widemann, *La guerre totale*, Coll. "Bibliothèque stratégique", Economica, Paris, 2001.

Strangling our societies by some kind of militarization would create in times of terror the conditions for a fragmentation of the social network that would, *in fine*, play against the assigned objective, namely the defense of the society. In fact, we cannot reduce the concept of grand or integral strategy to a material or an economical scheme. We need to integrate in the definition a political, social, psychological and cultural facet. Only this complex architecture of ideas can permit a correct exploitation of what Sun Tze defended more than 2500 years ago. The Chinese general examined the indirect maneuver, the preparation of the psychological ground, making recommendations to launch attacks on one's adversary plans and alliances, and more largely, to "take the time" necessary to attack at the best advisable moment. If, in fact, you really need to attack your adversary (to paraphrase him), the good general wins 100 battles out of the 100 that he fought. But the best general wins without any fight, just by an adequate maneuver.

We should translate this vision at the societal level. The United States and Europe have a too large technician vision of the use and management of force. Our societies – from governments to enterprises or to the individual – resolve most of the problems encountered by technocratic, bureaucratic procedures beginning with a formulary. From this point of view, a too managerial vision of the conduct of human activities – one more time, from governments to individuals – creates "time-consumer schemes" where the resolution of a given problem relies on the combination of more or less appropriate procedures. But the use of these schemes results in a limitation of our ability to have initiatives or to exploit our instinct. Stanley Hoffmann had underlined this risk already in the sixties. As Bruno Colson explains it, "*the reduction of foreign policy to strategy is due to a typically American managerial*

and technical approach (that S. Hoffman) calls the "skill thinking""[44]. In this view, the fascination for a technical resolution of strategic problems would give the possibility to evince philosophy to the profit of a rational perception. Reality is more complex and our thinking must consequently undergo transformation. Transformation of our thinking about the nature of the threat environment is essential to the development of a sound defense strategy and policy, and operational concepts that will prevent future defeats and contribute to the ensuring victory in forthcoming contingencies[45]. Consequently, like Sun Tze said more than 2 500 years ago: "*Know the enemy and know yourself, in a hundred battles you will never be in peril*".

So perhaps we do need more philosophy, more sociology, more history, and some disciplines whose principles and applications are not, by essence, linear and can assume a better mental preparation to confront combat realities. This kind of education is neglected. History or literacy analyses are disappearing from our courses, even if they are the refuge of intellectual liberty. But this kind of education does not pay immediately, in a technical view, and needs time, experience and many books as it creates favorable conditions to a useful instinct, harder to acquire without a correct mental and multidisciplinary training. In a technical society and for the general interest, everything has been done to make instinct something that will not be a matter of survival anymore. Courses that are considered as peripheral disappear. These absences will make it more difficult to adapt to our strategic environment, which relies on a correct analysis of the threat, itself referring to the education given to the analyst, the military and the politician. Any good manager or good officer knows that there is no "command technology" or "decision technology"

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[44] B. Colson, *La stratégie américaine et l'Europe*, Coll. « Hautes Etudes Stratégiques », Economica/ISC, 1997.
[45] S. J. Blank, *Rethinking Asymmetric Threats*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, September 2003, p. vi.

but an art of command and decision, and the best preparation for it are human sciences.

In the introduction of his famous *Traité de Stratégie*, Hervé Coutau-Bégarie teaches, "*..the strategic science is only a preparatory step to the strategic art*"[46]. Art can be mathematical or technical, but history demonstrates that it can only be a means and not an end by itself. So, in our world, we probably need to reconsider the foundations of our perceptions, particularly in a security environment where the adversary targets our values and "raison d'être". Therefore we must recognize asymmetry as a general strategy that needs to be counterbalanced by a grand/integral strategy.

Conclusion

Asymmetric warfare is a confrontation between political, cultural, social and organizational systems, obedient to different logics, and far away from the single question of its weapons. For lieutenant–general Van Riper and lieutenant-colonel F.G. Hoffman:

> "War is a highly complex interactive system characterized by friction, unpredictability, disorder, and fluidity. It is not a mechanistic system amenable to precise, positive control mechanisms or synchronized, centralized systems. (…) War has more in common with biological and ecological systems… than with closed mechanical systems"[47].

In a certain sense, Clausewitz has never been more relevant than today. His concepts of fog and friction and his vision of a political sense given to war still form the scheme by which our societies are trying to defend themselves.

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[46] The introduction can be consulted at the following Internet address: http://www.stratisc.org/pub/traite_intro-traite.html.

[47] Quoted in E. Dorn, H.D. Graves, *American Military Culture in the Twenty-First Century*, CSIS Report, February 2000, p. 58.

Irregular forces, paramilitaries, terrorists and so on first and foremost characterize contemporary conflicts. They are motivated by religion, ideology, ethnicity or reasons that were erased from the debates seen in our post-modern, post-industrial – perhaps post-intellectual – societies. And there is a strong risk that we will not be able, in a near future, to communicate anymore with an adversary seeking to cut any relations with us in order to preserve himself. If any suasion cannot be created, we then lose the ability to first negotiate with the adversary or to second, defeat him completely (meaning the capacity to conceive an asymmetric strategy) by targeting his values, his plans and, ultimately, his will to fight. Incapable of confronting the armies of industrial countries front to front, future adversaries will resort to every modus operandi, without any respect of the rules of engagement or chivalry.

We will also have to take in consideration the remark from General W. Kerwin for whom "*the values necessary to defend the society are often at odds with the values of the society itself. To be an effective servant of the people, the Army must concentrate not on the values of our liberal society, but on the hard values of the battlefield*"[48]. But will that be at the risk of losing our fundamental values? Are democracies capable and ready to fight the wars of the twenty-first century and win them? Are public opinions and decision-makers aware of these crucial issues, for the survival of our societies as for their democratic mode of government? These are questions that less and less public opinions and politicians in Europe, in the United States and elsewhere want to take into consideration. They suffer from some sort of short-sightedness, while they tend to sink into technocratic seas. But these are

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[48] Quoted in J. Hillen, « Must U.S. Military Culture Reform?, *in* J.F. Lehman, H. Sicherman (Ed.), *America the Vulnerable Our Military Problems and how to fix them*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Philadelphia, 2000, p. 167.

fundamental questions, because the world is still more Hobbesian than Kantian. And it will not be more Kantian until correct answers to these questions will be given.

It is important to understand that the "end of history" is not for tomorrow. In this context we have to develop new ways of thinking that take into account more than the technological dimension of warfare. We cannot afford to fail to understand the enemy. Otherwise the awakening will be nightmarish. Like H. Coutau-Bégarie puts it: "*It is an error to believe that material is antithetic to the idea. To the contrary, more the material investment is high, more the intellectual investment must follow*"[49]. Napoleon tells it in another way, posing that there only exists two powers in the world: the Saber and the Spirit… He concludes that in the long run, the Spirit always prevails. But if we do not teach that kind of recommendations, how will our future leaders correctly answer the existential questions?

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[49] H. Coutau-Bégarie, *Traité de stratégie*, *op cit.*, p. 249.