

Grégory Daho, *La transformation des armées. Enquête sur les relations civilo-militaires en France* [*The Transformation of the Armed Forces : An Inquiry into Civil-Military Relations in France*], Paris, Éditions de la Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 2016, 408 p.

By Jérónimo Barbin

The end of conventional conflicts, and above all, the growing significance and place of humanitarian and stability operations since the 1990s, have revolutionized the way Western military organizations deal with populations and with civilians in general. Where they were only a marginal or even negligible factor in past nuclear escalation scenarios, “civilians” are now a fixture looming large, if not even the main focus, in any military engagement. The emergence of civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) aiming for the “*coordination of relations between military and civilian actors in mission areas abroad*” (p.18) seems an adequate and promising response to this new strategic environment as it facilitates the acceptance of a military presence by the local population and is apt to accelerate the transfer of responsibility to civilian authorities.

It is precisely this deterministic, linear and positivist conception that Grégory Daho refutes in *La transformation des armées* – a publication in book form of his doctoral dissertation, funded by a grant from the Armaments Agency (DGA). In order to account for the institutionalization of civil-military cooperation, Daho, a former researcher at the École Militaire’s Strategic Research Institute (IRSEM), currently a lecturer in political science at the University of Paris-I Panthéon-Sorbonne, relies on Crozier and Friedberg’s “strategic” (resource dependency) approach which he combines with a constructivist epistemology, thus suggesting that he rejects studies that embrace a realist approach. According to Daho, the strategic environment, or indeed “reality” as a whole, is neither objectively predefined, nor intrinsically linked to the subjective representations of actors. It is in fact undetermined, since it is a social construction lying “*halfway between the relations among actors and the systemic constraints that permeate them*” (p.26). To him, the institutionalization of CIMIC was rather the result of a patchwork of “*fixes, improvisations and arrangements cobbled together among officers*” (p.337) mainly from the Army and Special Operations Command (COS), whose specific conceptions of this rather new military function were divergent.

It was in the wake of their 1990-91 Gulf War experience and in light of a poor “return on investment” therefrom that, according to the author, the American *Civil Affairs* model was imported by officers of the French Special Forces tasked with the analysis of post-conflict reconstruction market prospects. These officers saw their French version of Civil Affairs as an economic and political lever to promote national interests in post-crisis environments as part and parcel of a military intervention. This so-called “extensive”, eminently political, interpretation was all about establishing a rapport early on with governments and winning the support of bureaucracies in countries that benefited from the presence of French military forces, with the goal of facilitating access to new markets for French industries. Sending a team of reserve and active-duty soldiers to Bosnia-Herzegovina

with a view to snatching the lion's share of Sarajevo airport's post-war rehabilitation market was a first, but that effort ended in commercial failure for the then (1992) newly established COS Civil Affairs Office. *“Despite the efforts made to ‘secure’ the airport, the contracts won by French companies were pathetic compared to those captured by countries that had hardly, if at all, contributed to the military effort”* (p.66).

Army officers and key service chiefs, or so the thesis goes, held a different conception of civil-military cooperation, one that did not focus on the promotion of national influence, but rather on supporting military manoeuvres by gaining the local population's acceptance of the military's presence. In Bosnia, this “military-centred” view of civil-military cooperation took on a humanitarian slant as it translated into coordination with international organizations and NGOs. The French Army provided NGOs and local companies with logistic support, escorted UN convoys transporting humanitarian aid or participated in mine clearance operations. According to Daho, these relations between officers and humanitarian workers, first built in Bosnia and later in Kosovo, were fundamental to the emergence and subsequent institutionalization of CIMIC in France. This was followed by the creation of a CIMIC Office within the Defence Staff's Operations Command and Control Centre (CPCO) in the mid-1990s.

These different visions of civil-military cooperation were later discussed in CIMIC working groups trying to envision a concept and subsequently the corresponding doctrine. By controlling the “lessons learned” process applied to operations in former Yugoslavia, the Army gradually reduced and ultimately erased from institutional memory the COS's contribution to the emergence of CIMIC in France. In these working groups, many opposing sides with overlapping views faced one another: “modernists” opposed “traditionalists”, who did not like the idea of having the military perform civilian crisis management; “conceptualists” were pitted against “operationalists”, who refused to admit that their freedom of action depended on negotiations between junior officers. In the end, the Army Staff (EMAT) defused these ideological tensions by imposing a third “pragmatic” way, which denied this conceptual duality and placed operational concerns above bureaucratic considerations. It simultaneously supported and legitimated the two visions of CIMIC, both seen as valuable contributions to the overarching goal of crisis resolution. Nonetheless, they were prioritized and their extremes seen as deviant. Both the mercantilist drift in the “extensive” vision of civil-military affairs – doing business as “sales representatives in uniform” – and the humanitarian slant of the restrictive, “military-centred” vision turning soldiers into “NGO activists in khaki” were now to be avoided.

Eventually, the multinational mission in Afghanistan occasioned a rediscovery or “reinvention” of a forgotten national tradition of civil-military affairs in the wake of the unearthing by the US Army of an ancient French counterinsurgency doctrine dating back to the pacification of France's colonies. Thus, from the mid-2000s on, freed from inhibitions about embracing a lost national heritage, French officers now openly claimed this colonial reference for their CIMIC practices. The prosopographical investigation conducted by Grégory Daho to highlight the career lines of those most actively engaged in the institu-

tionalization of CIMIC is particularly interesting in that regard, as it usefully draws attention to the fact that all claim a common heritage, namely that of the *Armée d'Afrique*, the expeditionary corps which performed colonial pacification duties as early as 1830.

While the rediscovery of this heritage only had a small influence on actual CIMIC practice, it radically transformed its sources of justification and legitimation. “*Civil-military cooperation as a specialty (once again) becomes the heritage of the French officer ; it is no longer an imported operational mode*” (p.252). This erosion of the “*Algerian taboo*”, which even caused the Army Staff to launch studies on stabilization based on lessons learned in the Algerian War, also has a tangible effect on civil-military relations in general. First of all, it led to a repudiation of earlier inhibitions in the way the military communicated with the public. This ranged from giving testimony about personal experiences in operations to comments regarding decisions in the areas of foreign and defence policy. In addition, with the parallel attenuation of conventional threats and the shrinking importance of nuclear deterrence, the military’s influence on the political decision-making process was finally renegotiated and reweighed in its favour.

In *La transformation des armées*, Grégory Daho thus highlights the emergence of a young military specialty, widely overlooked but nevertheless of central importance in all contemporary multinational military operations. To trace its genealogy and evolution, the author – who maintains close institutional ties with the military – draws on large amounts of classified “lessons learned” archives and verbatims of meetings. By including more than fifty unstructured interviews, he makes use of a methodological triangulation that allows him to beef up his documentary base, hitherto unbalanced as can be expected when dealing with only recent civil-military activities. The high degree of analytical reliability and validity of his main findings owes much to the combination of these different sources.

Nevertheless, it is a matter for regret that the author’s theoretical framework is only very briefly presented to the reader. The so-called “adaptation thesis” which the author wishes to refute is barely touched upon and devoid of reference to authors or corresponding theories. An introductory discussion of the neorealist thesis on the emulation of States in the international system – notably exemplified by the works of Kenneth N. Waltz – or at least a mention of *military innovation studies*, would have been in order. Such a digression would have made it possible to embed the conclusions in a larger theoretical framework at the end of the volume. Reflections and questions of a more general nature regarding civil-military activities could have served as a basis for further, notably comparative, studies enabling a better understanding of the concomitant rise of civil-military affairs in Western armed forces. For, *contra* the author’s affirmed stance against the thesis which grants pride of place to changes affecting the international system when it comes to intra-state adjustments in the defence area, it clearly remains that the driving force behind these adjustments was the disruption of the post-bipolar strategic environment.

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