

INTERVIEW WITH THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF, LIEUTENANT GENERAL JUAN MARTÍN PALEO

By **VISIÓN CONJUNTA**

In 2020, the current political leadership of Defence issued the corresponding directive that initiated a new planning cycle. What is your vision of Military Strategy in the light of this document?

I am grateful for the opportunity to express my views on these issues through this prestigious magazine that analyses military strategic thinking. Indeed, the planning cycle began with the issuance, by the political power, of the National Defence Policy Directive (DPDN), which led to its implementation at the military strategic level, the operational level, and finally at the specific level of the armed forces.

Based on this political definition, we issued a Directive for the Elaboration of Military Strategic Planning (DEPEM), with the purpose of precisely guiding the work of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which, after the military strategic assessment and resolution - carried out with the utmost professional rigour, and in close interaction between the General Directorate of Military Strategic Planning, the Operational Command and the

Undersecretariat of Planning of the Secretariat of Military Affairs of the Ministry of Defence - allowed us to prepare and obtain ministerial approval of a Military Strategy Directive (DEMIL), a key document for subsequent planning.

We saw an interesting possibility in this cycle and took it as a challenge: to develop planning that was more realistic, that responded to "our strategic equation", firmly based on our country's context and possibilities. What do I mean by "more realistic"? If we start from the marked influence of different world views, the study of military history, the main doctrines in force, as well as the main conflicts in development in the global order, could lead us to make the mistake of copying or repeating strategies, tying ourselves to concepts that respond to other logics, to situations that are, in this strategic equation, different from our requirements.

I want to be clear that I am not opposed to the knowledge of other conceptual lines, of other strategic visions; on the contrary,

it is essential to consider them, because they are part of the cultural heritage, of history, and especially because the experience of others in the art of war is very valuable; what I do emphasise is the need to be creative and to develop responses that are appropriate to our particular situation.

Strategic thinking, starting with the conflicts that developed in Europe, was fundamentally tied to Jomini's Strategic Board, which was undoubtedly an attempt to mathematise the battlefield, useful and reasonable for the European reality, given the reduced spaces, the large numbers of troops and the enormous quantities of means, which were poured with mathematical criteria into

the board I mentioned. It is the principle of all doctrines and regulations whereby a brigade or a division or an army corps defends on a specific front with a specific depth.

The US doctrine, for its part, is based on the idiosyncrasies, possibilities and circumstances of the United States, whose main source was and is its unparalleled industrial production capacity; thus, in response to its military problems, it developed strategies of media saturation. Perhaps in terms of analysing the manoeuvres they executed, they might seem modest in terms of brilliance or creativity, but through the application of huge amounts of resources, they managed to prevail

in some conflicts. However, in our assessment, these types of solutions do not correspond to our situation, which does not mean that they should not be studied or considered.

The military strategic leader must consider them, but he must also have the vision of how to adapt this thinking to our reality, so as not to fall into what I colloquially call "psychotic planning", if I may be so bold, which consists of planning based on an imaginary reality, which is extremely pernicious. The challenge of this new planning cycle involves trying to think "outside the box" and adopting a strategy that responds to our challenges, i.e. one that addresses large spaces - the eighth largest country in the



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world whose land area doubles if we project the maritime coastline and our Antarctic aspirations - with a population of 46 million inhabitants, and with a particular population density, since it has regions with less than one inhabitant per square kilometre.

The armed forces have a reduced troop capacity for these very large spaces and modest possibilities for the availability of resources; if they were doctrinally bound and took Jomini's strategy as the norm or law for defending on a given front and depth, they would need hundreds of divisions and brigades, which we will never have.

We believe that the most appropriate strategy is the "area restriction" or "multi-layer" strategy, which is the one used by the weakest. There is an abundance of literature analysing this strategy from a historical and statistical point of view. I recently read an article that analyses conflicts from 1800 to 1998, with an emphasis on how the weak win wars; it states and concludes that out of all that analysis of conflicts, the weakest who opted for a frontal strategy, a direct confrontation, were only successful in 19% of the cases.

On the other hand, when they adopted an indirect strategy, which we call "area restriction" or "multi-layered", success amounted to 69% of the cases. What does

it consist of? It is the use of the military instrument in a non-linear way, contrary to the previous or conventional doctrine that prevails in most countries, mainly in the United States and Europe. The "multi-layered" strategy consists of the non-linear use of the military instrument, seeking to avoid a direct or decisive confrontation, since our forces will always be insufficient for the demands of our spaces; we cannot afford to engage in an all-out battle, because we would surely lose the entire instrument or it would be left with a level of degradation incompatible with a confrontation with a superior force.

Why do I say a superior force? Because that is what the national defence planning directive states, which talks about the use of the military instrument against an external state threat. Obviously, we deduce that it must be a military instrument with projection capability.

Something that is part of our idiosyncrasy, that we must change and that takes a lot of effort, because it requires a cultural change - which is what takes the longest - is that we have always seen our immeasurable spaces as a hardship, instead of seeing them as an advantage. That is the change we need to bring about, to see these vast expanses as an asset.

How do we make these vast expanses work to our advantage in defensive terms? There are historical examples of large armies that were defeated in large spaces: the Napoleonic troops, or the German forces in the Russian theatre of operations during the Second World War; they were large war machines against smaller armies that used that space as a tool that forced that enemy projection force to overextend itself, and ended up defeating them because the moral collapse of those forces occurred. In effect, it is not physical destruction that is sought, but moral defeat.

At its core, what changes is the grammar of strategy, although the strategic principle remains the same. At its core, strategy is not a fuzzy science; it all boils down to the basic principle of military strategy, which has been fundamental since Clausewitz's time and even earlier: open or close space. In a conflict, one always seeks to open and the other to close spaces. The one who seeks to open spaces does so through offensive action, and the one who defends seeks to close spaces through defensive action.

In this sense, the strategy of area restriction is a specific grammar of how we seek to close spaces because we have an active defensive strategy, which is another

aspect that we have to learn and instil in our drivers and explain in our political leadership: active defensive, because of the small size of our forces.

Acting only by reaction can be extremely expensive, for which we need very effective military strategic intelligence that provides us with sufficient information to know when the enemy attack is imminent; it is unacceptable to wait for the first impact, because it would produce a decisive degradation of a naturally reduced force such as ours. So, our strategy must be defensive but with an active attitude. That is what we are doing.

How important is the implementation of the FONDEF (National Defence Fund-Fondo Nacional de Defensa) for achieving

the goals of the Military Strategy?

FONDEF is precisely the great catalyst that should enable us to move away from psychotic planning. For the first time in a long time, we will be able to acquire resources with a certain time horizon by having multi-year funding. Then, foreseeing that in a certain period we will have such means at our disposal, what we plan will allow us to recover or incorporate capacities, thus giving support to the forecasts, by planning on a more certain and predictable basis.

Does the implementation of FONDEF have an impact on training?

We are on the right track, FONDEF certainly helps in terms of availability of means, but for training we need more means and other types of resources geared to

the operating budget. If we look at the film, I am optimistic because some things are being done in a virtuous way.

In that sense, the activity of the three specific war colleges and the joint war college conducting exercises in an integrated way where activities are coordinated with the operational command are an encouragement. As we enter the development of the short-term plan phase within DEMIL, we want our students from the four schools - who are the best prepared minds - to make contributions and inputs as part of this process.

The long term, in terms of military strategic planning, implies close links with the national scientific-technological system. How do you envisage this interaction?

Now we have approved the



Military Strategy Directive (DEMIL) and we are continuing with a line of planning that contemplates this interaction. The Military Strategy works in the short, medium and long term. For the short term, the DEMIL envisages the development of plans for the employment of the military instrument with the means currently available; it is a question of how we do in the "meantime". There is also a medium-term DEMIL, which involves the gradual incorporation of certain means, to recover and maintain important military capabilities in a process that will take no less than ten years to complete.

What do I mean by important capabilities? Supersonic fighter interception, submarine capabilities, the renewal of a

complete line of armoured vehicles, short, medium and long-range air defence systems. To the extent that FONDEF allows us to foresee and realise this in the medium term, we will be recovering capabilities, and in the long term, we will fundamentally apply what is called a "genetic strategy".

What does this allow? When we issue the medium-term DEMIL, a message is sent from the defence jurisdiction, which states: this is what we need to develop in the medium term, in order to focus our efforts; and in this sense, we are working with the Ministry of Science and Technology, but also with the private sector, to coordinate their contributions to the defence area. We have had meetings in which we have presented our needs, for example,

that the next satellite, ARSAT 3, should include a transponder, initially a communications satellite for military use only; it is something intermediate, which aims at a long-term objective, since the evolution of warfare demands the development of a military satellite that will allow us to have data and images.

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The Antarctic issue was defined in the National Defence Planning Directive as one of the fundamental aspects and for this reason we have taken concrete actions. The Antarctic Logistics Pole is being developed, with the integrated naval base.

A small force like ours, in order to defend itself against an attack, has to know how to attack, to be able to degrade an external military state threat from the maximum distances, so that it reaches our territory with the maximum possible wear and tear and allows its disarticulation; we must have these ingenuities that allow us to affect enemy military power from its very place of origin.

Today, the interconnectedness of computer systems makes such attacks possible. I should not fail to mention that we are always trying to identify trends and opportunities; in that sense the creation of the Cyber Defence Institute was a significant step forward. In the same way, information is used practically as a weapon, the manipulation of international public opinion directly affects the morale of societies, generates a global vision of who is the aggressor or provocateur and who is the aggressed, which has legal implications at the international level, and has a decisive influence on the evolution of conflicts.

We must therefore go beyond the traditional dimensions and prepare our drivers to execute military operations in all these non-physical domains.

It has been 40 years since the conflict with the United Kingdom

over the Falklands, Georgias and South Sandwich Islands. What is your analysis of this?

One of the conclusions of the Rattenbach Report, which was accepted by the armed forces and the political powers, was the clear need for joint military action. I note positively how the figure of the war veteran evolved; we went from a vision of concealment and denial to a plain and simple attitude of "they lost", i.e. not accepting what happened, as something almost sporting; then to a vision of "the children of war", where the war veteran was a victim.

Subsequently, this metamorphosis continued towards a more balanced perspective, arriving at the epic vision of the present, because the conflict was very much an epic.

Do you believe that the experiences of the conflict have been adequately integrated into the organisation and training of the armed forces?

It is a path that has begun and is in full process. Although there is still a long way to go, because it has several aspects, not only in training, but also in training, both are very much conditioned by the available resources, especially financial resources. Joint military training requires a logical sequence. If I want to do a joint exercise, the parties must first be trained.

Bringing together organisations that are not trained in the specifics can be dangerous. The logical thing to do is to train each force individually and when it reaches the required level, only then do joint training.

Ideally, these trained joint forces should participate at a higher level, in combination with other countries. We cannot send our organisations that are not specifically or jointly trained to participate in exercises, and even less so in operations, when there is a UN requirement to do so. This is complex because it is tied to several conditions.

How would you define the role of the armed forces in the execution of "Operation Belgrano" during the Covid 19 pandemic?

Pandemics are like war; they are never good. Despite this, the Armed Forces played an important role, which was positive because it made them visible, especially to the political leadership who saw in them a formidable tool with the capacity to react immediately - and who could make a fundamental contribution - because they are physically and psychologically prepared for a military conflict.

During the pandemic we had the opportunity to apply the experience we had gained with the electoral commandos and the operational command, that is, what it means to

manage a national election, which has to occupy the entire territory of the country in terms of deployment, to reach the last little school in the mountains or in Patagonia or on an island. We adapted that structure, and it allowed us to react quickly, with very short planning and to adapt the structure so that the 14 electoral commands became emergency zone commands. The important thing is that the state was able to respond quickly to a problem that at the time had more uncertainties than certainties about contagion and spread; for example, when the pandemic began, it was not known what protective measures should be used; that level of ignorance was extremely traumatic.

I believe that the military instrument was up to the task, and this was recognised by the political leadership and the population. The image of military fractions entering certain neighbourhoods, without weapons, bringing health aid, food, infrastructure, moving people who were stranded somewhere in the country or abroad, accessing inhospitable areas, islands in our rivers, was reflected in the opinion polls, which put the Armed Forces in a place of relevance, among other institutions.

What other community support operations are the Armed Forces carrying out?

We are now during the River Health Campaign. We started in Rosario; then we went to the area of Ibicuy, Ceibas, Ibicuycito, which are areas that are very difficult to access by land. We arrive in boats from the river naval area, with a Multi-agency Campaign, made up of people from the Ministry of Health, our health resources, doctors, nurses, and various types of assistance. Employees of the RENAPER (National Registry of Persons) also participate because there are areas of undocumented people. Later, in Misiones, the

Brigade of Monte XII installed a bridge to connect two important towns that had been cut off by a flooding river that had destroyed the bridge.

In the north, with the V Mountain Brigade, we are providing water purification support to the Wichis. In different parts of the country, we work with specific requirements.

During the summer, our brigades were very active in the National Fire Fighting Plan. The difference was that Operation General Belgrano was national in scope and spread over a period that required a supreme effort from the command-and-control elements to the last man on the front-line vaccinating or serving a hot meal.

Antarctica is a vitally important arena. What is your vision for the future of issues related to the white continent?

The Antarctic issue was defined in the National Defence Planning Directive as one of the fundamental aspects and for this reason we have taken concrete actions. The Antarctic Logistics Pole is being developed, with the integrated naval base. We are planning several facilities, an army unit on the Isla Grande of Tierra del Fuego, a forward deployment base for Air Force training in Ushuaia, the mobile radar that we are placing in Río Grande and, fundamentally, the investment we are making in the Petrel Base, which we want to transform into the new gateway to the Argentine Antarctic Sector, because we believe it has unbeatable conditions. Petrel was only a summer base, now it is functioning as a permanent base, and we want it to become the Argentine base with the greatest logistic capacity, even more than Marambio.

We are now working flat out throughout the winter, supporting the people who stayed there. We have a four-stage base development plan, which in

addition to infrastructure includes an airstrip - which will be easily accessible because it is above sea level - and a pier, which will lower the costs of Antarctic logistics. We are continuing with our plan to generate background information that can then be used as evidence for our just claim to Antarctic sovereignty.

Specifically on the Antarctic Peninsula, claims from several countries, many of them major powers, converge, so our expectation is to continue working so that when the international community defines the future of the Antarctic Treaty, we will have solid elements of judgement to be able to defend our claims.

Based on your vision of the role of Military Strategy, what do you expect from the Armed Forces Joint War College?

ESGC students must learn to think "outside the box", which is a short and simple phrase but complicated to implement. We in the military are very fond of traditions - the least mobile part of culture - and it is good that this is so, but sometimes we confuse what is tradition with what is not, and we believe that all military culture is like tradition, forgetting that culture is dynamic, and that doctrine is part of culture.

We must be perfectly aware of what is tradition, which it is desirable to maintain; for example, seeing a charge of the Grenadier Regiment, the parade of the Patrician Regiment, visiting the Sarmiento Frigate or the pioneering aircraft in a museum, moves anyone and is part of the *raison d'être* of the forces, but there are aspects in which we must evolve and understand what is tradition and what is not. Tying what should evolve to tradition can immobilise us in time, which is why it is important to learn to think by appealing to creativity and innovation. ■