The Influence of the Criminal Psychology of Islamist Terrorists on Military Operations Abroad

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From Alexander the Great (356 BC–323 BC) to Emperor Mauritius (539–602), via the Zealots and then the Assassins (1090– 1215), Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, the world has constantly encountered terrorism in its various forms and ideologies, which have evolved over the centuries.[1]

The most striking terrorist attack of recent decades was that of September 11, 2001, when the whole world witnessed first-hand a massive act of terrorism committed on the territory of the world's most powerful country. For the general public, this event is engraved in their memories as an act of fear and terror, but for the armed forces, this attack is the beginning of a "new terrorism," an attack planned in millimeters outside the borders of the East, prepared by cultivated, educated individuals who have evolved in the Western world.[2]

Terrorism is no longer just the work of national anarchists acting on their own territory against policies or ideologies they oppose. Terrorism is now extra-territorialized, and the cards in the fight against it have been reshuffled. The armed services, their missions, their technologies and their fight against terrorism must evolve at the same time as the criminal psychology and methods of terrorists.

The main question we need to ask ourselves is: how can a theater of operations comprising several OPEX operations fail to annihilate terrorist groups? The answer is complex, but the first certainty is that the enemy cannot be defeated, because it migrates, it changes, it evolves constantly as armed forces attack its structures and resources. But also, because terrorism has a new face, that of globalization, with an ideology and recruitment that are widespread thanks to social networks and international cells. The evolution of terrorists' criminal psychology enables them to remain invisible while operating internationally, until they are caught.

The evolution of the criminal psychology of terrorists is forcing conventional armed forces to reinvent themselves by setting up long-term operational theaters, whereas the principle that dominated post-Vietnam War OPEX was short, stealthy deployments that did not require a lasting presence on a territory.

1 Post, Jerrold M. (2007). "The mind of terrorist: the psychology of terrorism from the IRA to Al-Qaeda," edition Palgrave Macmillan.

2 Etienne, Bruno. (2002). "Les amants de l'apocalypse," Édition de l'Aube.

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Indeed, since 2001, it has become difficult or virtually impossible to combat terrorism, or at least to contain it, without direct, long-term intervention in the "host" countries of Islamist fighters. To combat them more effectively, it is first necessary to break the terrorists' hold within their own countries, and then to gather enough intelligence to prevent further international attacks.

This was the case in Iraq, for example, and even more so in Africa, where there is already a strong feeling of colonialism on the part of "white" people.[3]

Governments no longer want to see wars of stalemate lasting decades, as was the case with the Vietnam War. However, the evolution of terrorists is undoubtedly leading to a long, drawn-out war (experts seem to agree that the war against terrorism seems to be never-ending, because as far back as the time of "the assassins" in 1090, there was already a fight against terrorism) and a hybrid war (it includes physical combat as well as ideological warfare on social networks...). Nowadays, it only seems possible to limit this war, as the actors and means used by terrorist groups transcend all borders.

After the failures of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the war has become a stabilization operation[4] still involving intense combat against terrorist groups, but with a reduced number of conventional armed forces, as the allied countries no longer have as many financial, human and material resources as before.

According to Xenophon (430–355 BC), war was culturally determined. This is still the case today, since warfare changes according to the psychology of terrorists, the culture of terrorist groups and their evolution.

For some researchers, "understanding the other's culture is the ultimate answer to solving strategic dilemmas."[5]

This phrase seems perfect for high-intensity wars or in the presence of state-sponsored terrorism, where it's easier to understand the adversary's culture. For example, we can understand the culture of Russia and the Ukraine to resolve strategic dilemmas, because these countries have a fairly clear diplomatic line, and we can understand their military strategies in the light of their history and politics ... but can we really know and understand the culture of an Islamist terrorist? If this were really the case, shouldn't the USA and its allies have won the war on terror? Or is Islamist terrorism such a mixture of cultures adapted to each terrorist group that their own culture and strategy is impossible to understand?

If we look at the history of warfare, enemies often act according to their culture, which would explain the dysfunctions that can be found among terrorist

3 Boniface, Pascal. (2008). "les opérations militaires extérieures," Pouvoirs, n°125, pp. 55–67.

4 Grant, Rebecca. (2005). "The Fallujah model," *Air Force Magazine*, vol 88.

5 Schmitt, Olivier. (2020). "opérations extérieures et culture stratégique française" in : Fernandez Julian, Jeangène Vilmer, Jean-Baptiste. (2020). "Les opérations extérieures de la France," ed CNRS, pp. 57–78.

groups such as al-Qaeda, EI or Boko Haram. In Mali, for example, several terrorist groups operate with different cultures, creating ethnic and tribal disparities and complicating the interventions of armed forces who have to adapt to a multitude of cultures, all of which influence the way terrorists act and think.

The evolution in the criminal psychology of terrorists is also reflected in the fact that, prior to 2001, discussions of surrender and peace treaties were possible with certain terrorist groups (political or religious), but now, the rule valid for all countries at war against terrorism is the absence of any discussion.[6]

For radical Islamist terrorists, the only solution is death.

This lack of negotiation makes wars and anti-terrorist operations permanent, making it impossible to envisage the end of conflicts, and interventions in countries requesting international military aid become part of the problem, because they last. What's more, as external operations have often become stability operations, our soldiers have to train local armed and security forces in the fight against terrorism. Indeed, theaters of operation have evolved according to the criminal psychology of terrorists, the way they fight conventional armed forces, and the emergence of new terrorist groups, as OPEX have moved from large-scale warfare (Iraq war, Afghanistan war with Al-Qaeda and the EI) to stability operations (Mali with Boko-Haram ...).

The new face of warfare shows Western countries no longer able to consolidate the powers that be in countries plagued by Islamist terrorism,[7] while in countries without Islamist terrorism, Westerners manage to consolidate the political powers they have helped to establish. Today, the evolution of terrorists' criminal psychology enables them to highlight the failure of governments to protect their populations, creating a constant feeling of insecurity.

Over the centuries, wars have evolved in response to terrorist attacks, and the mission of soldiers in OPEX has changed, as has their commitment. In the past, wars were fought to overthrow ruling regimes in order to establish democratic regimes, but nowadays it's no longer a question of placing "allies" in power of these regimes—it's a question of waging war against terrorist groups that are not states (no defined territory), that are multiple and dispersed across different countries

In contrast to the various high-intensity wars that the European continent has experienced, lower-intensity wars outside Europe are becoming increasingly

6 Charbonneau Bruno, Debos Marielle, Hanon Jean-Paul, Olsson Chirtsian, & Wasinski Christophe. (2021). "De la guerre contre le terrorisme aux guerres sans fins; la coproduction de la violence en Afghanistan, au Mali et au Tchad," Culture & conflits, n°123-124, pp. 67–82.

7 Pérouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine. (2018). "Face à Boko Haram, l'impossible coalition," in Badie, Betrand, and Vidal, Dominique. (2018). "Qui gouverner le monde?" ed La découverte, pp. 316–323.

difficult to win, mainly because soldiers are fighting in unfamiliar areas, with varying climatic conditions, in hostile places such as the mountains of Pakistan or Afghanistan (see attached testimonial), the rice paddies or jungles of Vietnam, which is a huge disadvantage in battle because the enemy knows his terrain perfectly and can hide anywhere, but also because the ideology of terrorists has changed as has the geopolitical environment.

As a result, the conventional armed forces of countries fighting terrorism have to adapt and evolve in line with the terrorists. It's not just a question of attacking their structures and leaders ... we now need to consider all possible avenues for combating these terrorist groups, and this requires new, more powerful technologies, new intelligence-gathering techniques and the fight against the spread of ideology via social networks. Unfortunately, with the evolution of the criminal psychology of terrorists and its influence on OPEX, this fight seems endless.

Indeed, during OPEX, the mission of the armed forces, as well as their intervention techniques, will vary according to the terrorist groups they are fighting. Each terrorist group has a different criminal psychology (study of the psychic facts and causes that lead an individual to commit criminal acts), even if the predominant ideology is the dominance of Islam over the Western world.

In the 21st century, according to Anne Maria Möller-Leimkühler,[8] the Islamist doctrine of terrorist groups may be "based on fundamentalist political or religious ideologies" that legitimize the violence committed by these groups. For example, Islamist extremists believe that only the true religion (radical Islam) should remain in the world, which justifies terrorist attacks not only on Westerners fighting against this extremism, but also on liberal Muslims practicing non-radical Islam. It is with the aim of limiting the actions of terrorist groups and the spread of their ideology that OPEX operations have been set up, and the outlines of intervention (necessary resources, intervention techniques, etc.) have been defined through a military doctrine for a better fight against terrorism

This difference in ideology, which is reflected in the way terrorists fight, is mainly the result of an evolution in their interpretation of the Koran. Terrorist groups interpret the Koran differently and give it the meaning they want (radical interpretation of the Koran and its suras), which enables them to justify killing innocent civilians (unbelievers) in the name of Allah, as was the case with Bin Laden, who justified his October 1996 attacks on civilians in the USA by citing the writings of the Koran.[9]

The most recent example of this "justification" appears to be the attack

8 Möller-Leimkühler, Anne Maria. (2017). "Why is terrorism a man's business?" CNS Spectrums, Cambridge University Press.

9 Post, M. Jerrold .(2007). "The mind of terrorist: the psychology of terrorism from the IRA to Al-Qaeda," ed Palgrave Macmillan.

on a Russian concert hall on March 22, 2024, claimed by EI. When claiming responsibility, the EI said that the civilians had been killed because they supported their country's anti-Muslim policy. In reality, this justification by Islamist terrorist groups is merely a practical and symbolic means of achieving a more ambitious objective[10] which could be a show of force and a desire to frighten people.

Fear is part of the very definition of terrorism, as is intimidation. To succeed in instilling fear in the minds of Westerners (the main targets of Islamist terrorist groups today), terrorists rely on the group effect, since a group is more frightening than an individual. Group psychology is therefore a key variable in the minds of terrorists, in their actions and in their recruitment.

With the internationalization of terrorist acts, a "violence of fear" and a feeling of insecurity are emerging among populations, including those not usually familiar with the terrorist threat.

"While nothing is easier than denouncing the evil-doer, nothing is more difficult than understanding him."[11] When it comes to terrorism, can we really understand it?

According to researcher John C.G. Horgan,[12] there is no such thing as a typical profile of terrorist psychologies, as the composition of groups is too diverse. This lack of profile has been confirmed by researchers Martha Crenshaw and Jerrold M. Post. From a psychological point of view, terrorists cannot be categorized as unstable because, in order to preserve the group and avoid any internal risk, terrorist groups themselves exclude those who are psychologically unstable.

Over the last few decades, the image of terrorists has changed in the eyes of the world. Indeed, for a long time, Western populations had the idea that a terrorist was a poor goat herder or opium grower from the depths of the mountains of Afghanistan or Iraq, with no intellectual culture and no openness to the world. But since September 11, 2001, this image has been challenged, as over the years terrorists have become better educated, some of them with a high social standing, while others have studied in the West[13] as was the case for Bin Laden (educated, from a noble family, and educated in the USA).

For Jerrold M. Post,[14] understanding the psychology of terrorists will enable us to fight them more effectively. If we understand their psychology, we can understand how they recruit, their ideology, why people join them and we can try to sow disorder within this group.

10 Hoffman, Bruce. (2017). "Inside terrorism," Paperback edition.

11 Dostoyevsky, Fyodor Mikhailovich. (1995). *Crime and Punishment*, Paperback edition.

12 Horgan, John. C.G. (2014). *The Psychology of Terrorism*, Routledge edition.

13 Etienne, Bruno. (2005). "les combattants suicidaires," L'Aube Publishing House.

14 Post, Jerrold M. (2010). "When hatred is bred in the bone: the social psychology of terrorism," Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, vol 1208, pp. 15–23.

Paradoxically, while it's difficult to understand the criminal psychology of terrorists, they have no trouble recruiting by exploiting the psychological flaws of their future recruits (feelings of social exclusion, the search for self and employment, the desire to become someone but the impossibility of doing so in our society, not to mention religion).

When it comes to recruiting and training terrorists, the focus is on the group, and the individual is erased, i.e., identity becomes collective (without a group, terrorists are nothing). This provides a unifying message to give meaning to the lives of individuals within the group, and to recruit future fighters who feel excluded from society, outside its values, and who could find themselves in the "terrorist family." The unification of members is reflected in the training of fighters in terrorist groups. For example, al-Qaeda is an Islamist terrorist movement that structures its entire organization, right down to the training of its fighters, with a published operations manual covering training techniques, training courses and their contexts, as well as how to assassinate a person or resist interrogation. According to Jerrold M. Post, every possible course of action seems to have been envisaged in this manual. The most striking article in the manual is Article 8, which advocates techniques for concealing oneself in a crowd, which was perfectly applied by the terrorists of September 11, 2001. For example, a terrorist should not wear a long beard, as this could draw attention to himself, and he should behave like the inhabitants of the country he is in.

In terms of recruitment, the 21st century has seen the emergence of international terrorism, with recruitment and the spread of ideologies no longer confined to the borders of the Middle East. Indeed, in June 2014, EI took over al-Qaeda's recruitment codes, modernizing and internationalizing them, i.e., no longer confining itself solely to fighters from the Middle East.[15] As a result, the terrorist group EI now recruits fighters from all over the world, without any borders, thanks to new technologies and, above all, the emergence of social networks.

This internationalization of recruitment and social networks enable terrorists to highlight the image of the terrorist group's "Leader,." who attracts future recruits with his aura, his word, his promises, and who makes those who want to join a terrorist group dream of becoming a person or gaining recognition, identifying themselves with this leader through strong propaganda.

What's more, while terrorists exclude all psychologically unstable or weak people from their groups, they use social networks to play on the weak psychology of future recruits, on their family or social problems, on their sense of not belonging to any particular group to recruit them. They put forward new utopias, a promising future filled with glory, a future and a place within a group, a family

15 Jones, Edgar. (2017). "The Reception of Broadcast Terrorism: Recruitment and Radicalisation," International Review of Psychiatry, vol 29.

(terrorists call each other "brothers") that "only terrorist groups" can offer. Terrorist groups use social networks to recruit Westerners rather than just "locals."

International recruitment, and consequently the development of training camps for future terrorists, has led to an increase in the number of fighters in terrorist groups, which has had a considerable influence on OPEX. For example, intervention in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) was primarily aimed at eliminating terrorist leaders, but also at dealing a blow to the organization by eliminating its training camps and weapons stockpiles.[16] In 2004, the International Institute for Strategic Studies wrote that a blow had been struck, but the organization had risen and mutated to become decentralized, virtual, and invisible.

Since the Vietnam War, the missions of the air force have been stepped up, in particular to limit collateral damage (especially to civilians, who are the terrorists' preferred targets), thanks to new technologies such as laser-guided bombs for more precise firing.[17] In addition to the air force, this limitation also applies to ground forces, which can use hellfire to destroy a target.

War has a new face, as the instruments of warfare evolve according to the threat and the geopolitical context.

In order to alleviate the problems of instability linked to the various terrorist groups, allied forces are called upon by local governments to help them in their fight against terrorist groups, in order to obtain training, equipment and materials, but also so that these allies can gather intelligence.[18]

The material resources used by the allies evolved in line with the terrorist groups they had to combat, and the revival of warfare was mainly driven by the development of air forces, notably in Fallujah in 2004.[19] This operation highlighted the importance of air power in urban warfare as a means of limiting damage.

Air warfare provides better support for forces on the ground, with non-stop aerial surveillance to locate and destroy terrorists, and rapid, precise strikes to limit intervention on the ground, as was the case with Operation Vigilant Resolve.

The most striking example is the drone war in the USA, where military operators operate in Afghanistan or Pakistan while physically in Las Vegas. This once again demonstrates the revival of warfare, with a transnational dimension to combat, casualties, and surveillance operations. As a result, the recent wars against Islamist terrorism and the evolution of the criminal psychology of terrorists, which consists in being discreet and blending in with the crowd, have led to

16 Hanon, Jean-Paul. (2004). "Militaires et lutte antiterroriste, cultures & conflits," n°56, pp. 121–140.

17 Ochmanek, David. (2003). "Military operations against terrorist group abroad implication for the US Air Force," RAND.

18 Ochmanek, David. (2003). "Military operations against terrorist group abroad implication for the US Air Force," RAND.

19 Grant, Rebecca. (2005). "The Fallujah model," *Air Force Magazine,* vol 88.

a strengthening of the relationship between land and air, which was not as strong before.[20] In addition to the development of airpower and firepower, the new wars are emphasizing the use of special forces for stealthy, targeted interventions requiring little logistics.

"When the enemy is united, divide him; and attack where he is unprepared, springing up when he is not expecting you,"[21] is an admonition that is still relevant in the 21st century to describe the interventions of special forces in the fight against the adversary with the motto: "Do things differently."

The history of special forces really began during the Second World War. Given the intensity of the conflict with the Nazis, Winston Churchill relied on the action of special forces, which were created by David Stirling in 1941[22] for stealthy, undetected actions. Over the years, French Special Forces have become indispensable when armed conflicts arise.[23] Indeed, when a conflict arises in the Middle East or the Sahel, it has to be "nipped in the bud" and a rise in insecurity avoided by limiting and managing the consequences. However, conventional armed forces are unable to intervene rapidly, as their deployment—particularly in terms of logistics—is costly, time-consuming and requires political approval, whereas SF intervention is rapid and stealthy. It's easier to deploy a handful of men who have been trained to operate in any theater of operations, regardless of the enemy, and who can adapt to any situation, any geographical relief, any criminal psychology of the terrorists, than to deploy a whole contingent that will have to be trained according to the threat and the geopolitical context of the country in which they are to intervene.

According to the COS (special operations command), we have to adapt to the adversary and try to reduce the asymmetry that separates him from our counter-terrorism policy in order to reach him in his preferred area.[24]

At present, the main objective of special forces is to create one-off strategic effects (leverage) against terrorist groups, i.e., to destabilize them, eliminate their leaders, destroy their infrastructures and weapons stockpiles, and affect them in order to weaken them, although they can also act clandestinely.[25]

The adaptation of special forces to the criminal psychology of terrorists also concerns new technologies, such as cyber warfare, which special forces are

20 Grant Rebecca (2013), "Iraqi Freedom and the air force," *Air Force Magazine*, vol 96.

21 Sun Tzu (5th century BC), *The Art of War*.

22 Senate information report (May 13, 2014), "Le renforcement des forces spéciales françaises, avenir de la guerre ou conséquence de la crise?" no. 525.

23 Delpit Michel (2020), "les forces spéciales" in: Fernandez Julian, Jeangène Vilmer Jean-Baptiste, "Les opérations extérieures de la France," ed CNRS, pp. 99–138.

24 Bruyère-Ostells Walter (2022), "Le COS : Histoire des forces spéciales françaises," ed Perrin.

25 Delpit Michel (2020), "les forces spéciales," in : Fernandez Julian, Jeangène Vilmer Jean-Baptiste, "Les opérations extérieures de la France, " ed CNRS, pp. 99–138.

training to use, but adaptability also results from the countries of intervention, the missions ... As a result, terrorist groups will have an influence on army OPEX and therefore on special forces interventions, and special forces will have an influence on terrorist groups, as their interventions will push them into their entrenchments and force them to reinvent and reorganize themselves. A feeling of disorder will spread within the terrorist group, which could push them to commit a mistake that could benefit conventional forces.

When talking about Islamist terrorist groups, it's important to distinguish between groups in the Middle East and those in the Sahel. Indeed, their psychology and means of achieving their ends are not the same, particularly in the case of the Boko Haram terrorist group, which favors terrorist bomb attacks.[26]

Unlike other terrorist groups in the Middle East, whose main aim is to expand a religious ideology worldwide, those in the Sahel are intent on expanding their territory, which explains why the fight against terrorism in the Sahel is spread over several countries, whereas Middle Eastern terrorists (EI, Taliban, etc.) are a little more focused on one area.

The ideology of groups in the Sahel is the desire to achieve an Islamic society (fundamentalist Islamism) with the rejection of Western modernity, whereas those of the Islamic State do not reject modernity because they will use it, but they reject Western values which are contrary to the Koran and therefore to Islam

In 2013, to counter the growing terrorist threat in Africa, French conventional forces were sent to the Sahel under Operation Serval, later replaced by Operation Barkhane. During these operations, the French military doctrine applied in the Middle East proved ineffective in combating terrorist groups in the Sahel.[27] Indeed, given the different ideology and means of attack of Middle Eastern terrorists, conventional forces had to change their strategy and adapt to the criminal psychology of Sahelian terrorists.

The criminal psychology of the terrorists in the Sahel will have a real influence on the French army's OPEX operations.

The complexity of these operations and of the criminal psychology of terrorists is demonstrated by the increasing use of special forces to combat terrorism in the Sahel, whereas in the Middle East, conventional forces are favored, as well as the use of air warfare to cover a large area of the Sahel.

Mali recently demonstrated the limits of counter-terrorism programs in Africa, with African units deciding to abandon training and the role of soldiers

26 Pérouse de Montclos Marc-Antoine (2012), "Boko Haram et le terrorisme islamiste eu Nigeria: insurrection religieuse, contestation politique ou protestation sociale?" *Question de recherche*, n°40.

27 Charbonneau Bruno, Debos Marielle, Hanon Jean-Paul, Olsson Christian, & Wasinski Christophe (2021/3-4), "De la guerre contre le terrorisme aux guerres sans fins ; la coproduction de la violence en Afghanistan, au Mali et au Tchad," *Culture & Conflits*, n°123-124, pp. 67–82.

being called into question. These training missions may be carried out by private companies, whose presence could be "a brake" on the development of terrorism

The failure of the French army can be explained by the criminal psychology of terrorists, who prefer to fight over too large a territorial area to be fully covered by conventional forces, thus preventing an effective fight against terrorism. The Sahel's terrorist groups cover five countries, but unlike the Middle East, the Sahel's terrorists retain "the time, place and mode of confrontation,"[28] making allied forces dependent on technology and resources.[29]

The criminal psychology of Sahelian terrorists is different, as they have fewer resources and are less confrontational with armed forces representing a weaker threat than Middle Eastern terrorists.[30] But this low threat is a veil over reality. Indeed, while local governments are rejecting the French army in favor of Russian mercenaries, and tearing themselves apart internally, the terrorists are taking advantage of the situation to develop, create new alliances, expand territorially and incubate an ever-growing threat.

Whereas terrorists are not bound by any rules, laws or doctrines, conventional armed forces must act in accordance with the doctrines laid down for OPEX. The principle of doctrine is that it evolves according to the context of operations, the threat, but also the terrorists to be fought and their psychological evolution (doctrine will not be the same for Islamist terrorists in the Middle East as for Islamist terrorists in the Sahel, even if, as we saw earlier, during the Serval and Barkhane missions the same doctrines were used, leading to the failure of French forces in the Sahel).

Military doctrine is based on feedback from past experience, as well as on military experiments that could enable us to anticipate the future. Good military doctrine means that the political objectives (the goal) and the military means to achieve it must be mutually dependent, as confirmed by Prussian theorist Carl Von Clausewitz.

After September 11, 2001, military doctrines in all countries evolved as threats changed. The Islamist terrorists of al-Qaeda had a new vision of war, but also of how to wage it, notably by externalizing the threat. Third-generation warfare is not based on a doctrine of firepower like second-generation warfare, but on a maneuver-oriented doctrine that takes into account today's technological evolutions (evolutions included in army doctrine).

28 Fernandez Julian, and Jeangène Vilmer, Jean-Baptiste (2020), "Les opérations extérieures de la France," CNRS edition.

29 Charbonneau Bruno (2017), "De serval à Barkhane : les problèmes de la guerre contre le terrorisme au Sahel," Les temps modernes, n°693-694, pp. 322–340.

30 Ochmanek David (2003), "Military operations against terrorist group abroad implication for the US air force," RAND.

In 2007, in a document entitled "Winning the battle, leading the peace. Les forces terrestres dans les conflits aujourd'hui et demain," French military doctrine highlights the changing face of war and its place in the world. This change (war is a chameleon, according to Clausewitz) is the result of the evolution of warfare and the criminal psychology of terrorists, who are not the same as they were yesterday, and the doctrine notes that "new forms of threat are emerging" (*FT-02, Emploi des forces armées et nouvelles conditions des opérations*)

With the changing face of warfare, and the evolving criminal psychology of terrorists, external operations are evolving into joint operations. To coordinate these operations, a Joint Center for Concepts, Doctrines, and Experiments was created in 2005.

In 2015, a report by the COS (Command of Special Operations) led to a change in French military doctrine in the fight against terrorism, with increased targeting of group leaders (find, track down, finish off, exploit) and interaction with the special forces of allied countries[31] while remaining subject to and framed by international law. The use of special forces has proved particularly effective in the targeting doctrine with Task Force Sabre in the Sahel.

In the 21st century, wars are less and less high-intensity as they used to be, but they are becoming asymmetrical, meaning that the combat is unequal (a national army against a terrorist group).

But who benefits from this asymmetry? Terrorist groups, even if materially weaker, are still present, and in the end, state armed forces seem to be the weakest, particularly in terms of the fight against terrorism.[32]

The evolution of OPEX and the psychology of terrorists will require an evolution of equipment in the fight against terrorism.

Today, in their fight against terrorism, soldiers are equipped with HK 416Fs with grenade launchers that adapt to the shooter's morphology, and HK 416Ss for soldiers in OPEX (possible incorporation of a bayonet that can be useful for hand-to-hand combat, which corresponds to a new reality on the ground), whereas during the Second World War, they only had basic equipment such as MAS 36/ MAS 40 rifles.

What's more, aircraft are becoming increasingly high-performance, with the Rafales F4.1, and pilots are equipped with Scorpion helmets featuring augmented reality, giving them direct knowledge of the tactical situation unfolding on the ground (Pod Talios) (Ministry of Defense, France).

But terrorists are much better equipped, taking advantage of the evolution

31 Bagayoko Niagalé (2024), (The French army in the Sahel: A doctrinal corpus put to the test, IFRI)

32 Leistedt Samuel J. (2013), "Behavioural aspects of terrorism," *Forensic Science International*, vol 228, pp. 21–27.

of the weapons they receive from their "allies" or that they recover after the withdrawal of troops, notably during the American withdrawal from Afghanistan. The revival of these weapons can also be explained by changes in the psychology of terrorists, who are increasingly dangerous, better trained in engineering and therefore able to develop new, more powerful weapons themselves. For example, terrorists such as the Islamic State now use drones to monitor armed forces operating in their countries, as well as MANPADS[33] air defense systems, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars.

The advent of new technologies linked to AI and the evolution of connected objects (watches, etc.) will reshuffle the cards in the fight against terrorism, as they will enable terrorists to carry out large-scale attacks that could be coordinated with each other, leading to new terrorist "alliances" to carry out increasingly large-scale and spectacular attacks (*The world in 2040 as seen by the CIA*). But this also enables armed forces to develop new combat technology.

But the other side of the coin is that, in the hands of expert terrorists, the production of new, more powerful and more destructive weapons is likely to become a new threat to the armed forces.[34]

Based on this necessary technological evolution, the American army developed AC-130 aircraft (as early as the Vietnam War), which are still used today, particularly for air support. In addition, various armies have used new air technologies to build "silent" helicopters, enabling infiltration and exfiltration of special forces, so that they can operate stealthily, undetected by terrorist groups—their main objective.

New sensors embedded in drones or aircraft are also being developed to track down terrorist groups among a multitude of people (such as the AN/APG-63 and AN/APG-70 radar systems, which can detect terrorists hiding under foliage, whereas before, terrorists knew that by hiding under foliage or wool blankets, they could not be detected) or in remote mountains to which ground forces have no access (due to a number of factors, including unfamiliarity with the area, which can result in an ambush for armed forces on the ground).

To this end, the United States Air Force has developed technologies such as the ROVER, a video receiver for remote image enhancement, and the technologies and functionalities of drones such as the MQ-9 Reaper, which has become a "hunter-killer" drone rather than just an intelligence drone.[35] What's more, in its fight against terrorism, the U.S. Air Force has developed the HADES program (an outgrowth of the RAPCON-X program, which is an overhaul of digital approaches

33 Grant Rebecca (2013), "Iraqi freedom and the Air Force," *Air Force Magazine*, vol 96, n°3.

34 Ochmanek David (2003), "Military operations against terrorist group abroad: Implication for the U.S. Air Force," RAND.

35 Grant Rebecca (2013), "Iraqi freedom and the Air Force," *Air Force Magazine*, vol 96, n°3.

to best adapt to the needs of each mission), focused on surveillance, intelligence, and aerial reconnaissance to adapt to the changing psychology of terrorists

This adaptability of existing technologies is the result of the reality on the ground and the need for armed forces in OPEX to adapt to their adversaries, notably because the requirements are not the same in the fight against terrorism in the Middle East or Africa.

In conclusion, to be able to fight your enemy effectively, you need to study him, get to know him, put yourself in his shoes to counter him and anticipate his actions. By taking into account the criminal psychology of terrorists, we can better anticipate the threat and fight terrorism more effectively in OPEX. As well as having an influence on OPEX, the criminal psychology of terrorists also has an influence on the geopolitical landscape, as is the case with Russia's state-sponsored terrorism or Israel (the criminal psychology of terrorists has evolved, and now plays with the law and pushes victims into a corner in order to get them to commit crimes. In this way, Israel has gone from being a victim state to an executioner state, thanks solely to the influence of the criminal psychology of the terrorists, who were able to turn the situation to their advantage). Armies now have to evolve to stay several steps ahead of terrorists, even if, unfortunately, knowledge of the terrain and the ability of terrorists to hide within the population is a huge advantage over conventional armed forces. The question now is whether armies (conventional or non-conventional forces) will ever have a real influence on the criminal psychology of terrorists in order to annihilate them.