

DESTROYING AN INSURGENCY: A SUCCESS CONDITIONED BY THE POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE OF THE MILITARY FORCE

*Thomas Flichy de La Neuville*¹

Chronic insurrections, which arise because of the acceleration of international migrations, or following the dismantling of a nation-state, are not easily vanquished. This is partly due to their very nature: unlike spontaneous and short-lived riots, insurrections draw their longevity from the perseverance of their organizing nucleus. An army, which wishes to defeat an insurrection, must therefore combine technical efficiency with political intelligence. Otherwise it will be quickly disbanded and in its turn could serve the insurrectional movement it intends to fight. The times of decline obviously provide a breeding ground for the development of insurrections. Even though the forms of an insurrection vary over the course of history, its deep mechanics hardly alter. It follows that the exploitation of the structural weaknesses of the insurrection by the military force will enable it to overcome the subversive movement it intends to destroy.

Insurgencies often arise in times of decline

Times of decline are all the more difficult to identify that their most obvious manifestations only appear on the day before the final collapse. Moreover certain signs can be misleading. This is the case for military expansions, which usually go hand in hand with unprecedented internal collapse. Arnold Toynbee notes that militarism was by far the most frequent cause of the collapse of societies during the last four to five millennia. He writes: "*During the two centuries that followed the passage of the Hellespont, Hellenism extended to Asia and the Nile valley at the expense of all other civilizations it encountered: the Syrian, the Egyptian, The Babylonian and the pre-Indian. For about two centuries, it continued to progress under the Roman aegis in the barbaric hinterlands of Europe and North-West Africa. It is undisputable, however, that the Hellenic civilization was then in a process of disintegration. The history of almost all civilizations provides examples of simultaneous periods of geographical expansion and social disintegration*"². Let us recall for example the brutal collapse of Assyria in 612 or the Roman-Bulgarian fratricidal war, which condemned the Byzantine Empire to its loss, four centuries before its final collapse. It follows from these first thoughts that insurrections can punctuate the political life of civilizations long before their fall.

Like military expansionism, the loss of the creative power of the elites accelerates the decline and promotes the rise of insurrections. Indeed, decline presents itself as a loss of creative power in the souls of individuals or creative minorities, a loss that deprives them from their miraculous hold over the apathetic masses. In effect, where there is no act of creation, there is no possibility of imitation. At the end of the eighteenth century, the French nobility had, for example, been emptied of its power by the administrative monarchy. Hippolyte Taine writes: "*Since Louis XIV, everything has bent under the clerks; All the legislation and all the administrative practice have operated against the local lord to deprive him from his effective functions and confine him to his naked title. By this disjunction of his functions from his title, he became all the more proud that he appeared less useful. From now*

¹ Professor in Saint-Cyr's military academy

² A. Toynbee, *L'histoire*, Paris, 1954, p. 216

on he sought out distinctions, not influence, and thought of prevailing, not of governing"³
When a creative minority degenerates into a dominant minority, it tries to maintain itself by constraint. This causes the secession of the proletariat. The Proletariat than divides itself into two distinct parts: an external Proletariat outside the borders, and an internal one, violently resisting any integration. Everything is thus ripe for an insurgency. At the root of insurgencies we often find a small group of ideologues. At the beginning, they diffuse vague ideas in closed cenacles in order to calculate the effect of their propaganda. Now, since nothing offers less obstacles than perfecting the imagination, the crowds listen in the first place with curiosity, and in the second with enthusiasm. Thus, the multiplication of military offensives combined with the emergence of an alternative ideological project, can be considered as the warning signals of an insurrection.

The torrents of insurrection pour into the dried-up bed of the same river.

At the roots of the insurrection we often find the same motor, a sect of violent and determined ideologues concluding a pact with the dregs of the population in order to seize power. The dominant minority is therefore hybrid comprising both exalted and decommissioned individuals. The dregs represent the most valuable auxiliaries of the ideologues. Their attachment to the new chiefs is all the more natural that they have regressed to the primitive stage of the unorganized band⁴. Now, we know that determined minorities can easily prevail over apathetic majorities. By this regime, in Greece, 10,000 Spartans after the Dorian invasion have mastered 300,000 slaves. In England, 60,000 Normans have controlled two million Saxons after the battle of Hastings. In Ireland, after the Battle of the Boyne, 200,000 English Protestants have mastered a million Irish Catholics. In France 300,000 Jacobins have been able to control six to seven million royalists. The system is very simple, and consists in maintaining the population subjected thanks to extreme terror. A will stretched to the extreme and no restraint to contain it, an unshakeable belief in your right and a perfect contempt for the rights of others, the energy of a fanatic and the means of a villain: with these two forces, the minority can subdue the majority. Victory thus always belongs to the group which is the least numerous, but which has the most faith and the least scruples. Once the alliance is cemented between the ideologues and the dregs, the instruments of political subversion can be easily put in place⁵. Thanks to political pressure and electoral manipulation, the majority resigns.

As for the control of the population, it rests upon the double paralysis of the sensitive elites and the inert masses. In 1789, the paralysis of the nobility is partially due to its extreme sensitivity: "*These were Frenchmen and Frenchwomen of the eighteenth century, brought up in the most exquisite politeness, accustomed to obliging methods, to continual attentions, were so penetrated by their savoir-vivre that their conversation seemed almost insipid to strangers. And all of a sudden, they were transported into the thorny terrain of hateful denunciations, open invectives, in this all-arms struggle that composes Parliamentary life*". At the end of the eighteenth century, in the upper class and even in the middle class, shedding blood would have horrified the elites. Everywhere the magistrates had forgotten that the maintenance of a civilization was infinitely superior to the life of a handful of criminals and madmen, that the primary object of government, was the preservation of order by force. As far as the masses are regarded, the outcome of the conflict was the same everywhere. In every town or town, the

³ Hippolyte Taine, *Les origines de la France contemporaine, L'Ancien Régime*, Paris, Hachette, 1879, p. 48

⁴ Konrad Lorenz, *L'agression, une histoire naturelle du mal*, Champs science, 1983, p. 139

⁵ For example, the clubs "*created an artificial and violent opinion, under the appearance of a national and spontaneous wish. The rights of the silent majority were thus given to the noisy minority*".

aggressive squad of unscrupulous fanatics, resolute adventurers, and avid vagabonds, imposed its domination on the sheepish majority, who, accustomed to the regularity of an ancient civilization, dared not disturb the new order to rise up against the insurrection.

The reversal of the insurrection conditioned by the intelligence of the armed force

For an army wishing to overthrow an insurgency, the first step consists in exploiting the weaknesses of the insurgents who have often promoted incompetent or corrupt people to power. *"If it is true that a nation must be represented by its elite, France was strangely represented during the Revolution. From assembly to assembly, the political level lowered; Especially from the Constitutional to the Legislative Assembly. The true actors withdrew as they began to understand their roles. Much better, they excluded themselves from the theatre, and left the stage to little actors "(...)" Let us imagine these directors of opinion as they were three months ago: Desmoulins, a lawyer without business, living thanks to a few Louis, given by his family; Danton, another second-rank lawyer, who had come out of a hamlet of Champagne, and survived thanks to one Louis given each week by his father-in-law. Brissot, a traveling bohemian, who has been travelling during fifteen years without bringing back from England or America anything but pierced elbows and false ideas. Finally, Marat, whistled writer, a failed scientist, an aborted philosopher, falsifier of his own experiments, who had finally found a job in the stables of the Count of Artois"*. The weakness of the political staff, brings about important consequences in terms of foreign policy. These failures can be exploited.

Overcoming an insurrection is only possible if one relies upon an absolutely determined armed force. The most striking example is that of the German Army in 1918. What saves the General Staff in these critical days of November 1918 is that it has a technical task to fulfil, that no other can perform in its place⁶. A few weeks later, however, this army breaks up. However, like these organic bodies, which emit living cells in order to ensure the continuity of the species before they die, the imperial army gives birth to a series of small units. These free corps, grouping themselves together, constitute the provisional Reichswehr. The *Freikorps* are formed of soldiers who have taken root in the war. They bring back with them a sort of funeral exaltation combining despair, the taste for violence and a thirst for heroism. They will quickly destroy the soldiers' councils, where one finds a small percentage of agitators, a certain number of chimerical spirits, and a large majority of opportunists.

However, the destruction of an insurrection is not just an affair of ratio of power. The methods used by the French army in Algeria to dismantle the terrorist networks of the FLN in Algiers required, for example, a great deal of skill. At the time, the FLN had a relatively segregated and organized hierarchical organization. The French intelligence service reconstructed these networks thanks to interrogations by completing the missing names, while knowing that an activist knew only his immediate chiefs. In addition to identifying networks, the French intelligence service returned activists in order to create double agents. This was a very delicate task because, in some regions, double agents had succeeded in poisoning the intelligence service itself. These dual agents were able to gather first-hand information, move up into the hierarchy, and transmit the internal archives of the organization. The third phase consisted in sending false information to these agents in order to create a climate of paranoia among the leaders of the FLN who understood that their troops had been infiltrated. This broke the morale of the troop⁷.

⁶ Jacques Benoist-Méchin, *Histoire de l'armée allemande*, Albin Michel, 1936, p. 73

⁷ Gregor Mathias, *La France ciblée, terrorisme et contre-terrorisme pendant la guerre d'Algérie*, 2017.

In sum, the insurgencies, which multiply during periods of transition, often take similar forms. They are organized and run by very small human groups. To combat them, one will have to separate carefully the active fraction of the ideologues from the violent proletariat. The empowered minority will also have to be cut from its foreign supporters. In both cases, the speed of execution will be paramount. Indeed, the inert and stupefied masses must only realize at the last moment that those who were still holding power yesterday have joined the nothingness from which they emerged.