

Madam Deputy Minister of Defence, Admiral Apostolakis Chief of the Hellenic National Defence General Staff, General Alkiviadis Stefanis, Chief of the Hellenic Army, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured for your invitation to give the opening address at this important conference, because it demonstrates your respect for the importance of history and the role of historians and also your appreciation for the organization I chair, the *International Commission of Military History*, the Vice President of which happens to be a Greek Dr. Efpraxia Paschalidou. We have an excellent collaboration with Greece, after the Congress in 2001 we actually already planned another one in 2021 on the topic *Independence Wars since the XVIII century*.

Thucydides said that «History repeats itself». The Italian political scientist Vilfredo Pareto had an opposite view: «History never repeats itself». British historian George Macaulay Trevelyan wrote that practically both statements are equally true. Actually, lessons from history must be learned with great care. Michael Howard, possibly the greatest living military historian, warns, in my opinion too pessimistically, that: «The lessons of history are never clear. Clio is like the Delphic oracle: it is only in retrospect, and usually too late, that we understand what she was trying to say».

So, why politicians, Generals and Admirals should study military history? We must avoid two extremes. The first is to believe that the study of military history is useless, or even harmful. There is a famous quip, that I will quote in Churchill's version: «It is a joke in Britain to say that the War Office is always preparing for the last war». The second is to believe that history can offer precise solutions.

The primary purpose of studying military history is not, in my opinion, to ape the tactics of past commanders, but rather to learn about leadership, command, logistics, and the working of the commander's mind; in short, why some leaders, both political and military, have succeeded while others failed. Military history may be useful in developing an individual's understanding of war, alerting to issues that have been important in the past and that may reasonably be expected to be important again; the tactician must study operational history, whereas the strategist must study the history of war. And of course no Armed Forces may have an esprit de corps without celebrating their past. «To be a successful soldier you must study history» was General Patton's opinion.

Above all, the study of history is a powerful antidote to current intellectual arrogance. To quote Colin Gray, military history provides protection against theories that, «repackage the obvious in ways that mislead the credulous». We pretend to discover new things, but knowledge of history helps demythologizing innovations. For example, car bombs already existed in the past: in December 1800 in Paris a carriage filled with gunpowder and nails aimed to strike at First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte killed 22 persons and injured about one hundred. Each historical period had its favourite bomb. In the XIX century it was the "Orsini bomb", named after the Italian Felice Orsini who in January 1858, killed 12 persons and injured other 156, leaving unscathed Emperor Napoleon III, protected by an armoured carriage. Terrorists and fanatics employ the technology available in their age. Already in the Fifties of the last century Carl

Schmitt described the «industrial partisan», who in the name of a «moral obligation» kills using modern technological means. A good description of Osama Bin Laden.

Many new definitions used today in the strategic and military language actually describe situations which always existed in the history of warfare. This applies, among others, to *joint and combined operations*, *asymmetric wars*, *coalitions of the willing*. *Asymmetric wars* always existed even if they were a minority until the Second World War. During history, most wars have been fought by one or both sides by coalitions. In the sixth anti-Napoleonic coalition (1812-14) we even had national corps included in multinational armies. Always Armies and Navies collaborated; in most cases fleets confined themselves to carrying Armies, but we have also examples of joint strategies and coordinated actions. For instance, during the Second Persian War (480-479 a. C.) the operations of the Greek Army were coordinated with those of the fleet; the heroic land defeat at Thermophiles was redeemed by the sea victory of Salamis, a useful precedent for the subsequent land victories at Plataea and Mycale, where disembarked sailors fought side by side with the Hoplites.

At a certain stage of their development, even traditionally land empires acquired a naval capacity, making a leap forward in order to strengthen their power, defeat the enemy and increase their conquests. During the First Punic War, Rome built its first large fleet, which was crucial for victory, while Carthaginians carried out joint land and naval operations. In the last decade of the XX century, German Emperor Wilhelm II decided to build a large navy. The Soviet Union was not satisfied of just reaching missile parity with the United States, but at the instigation of Admiral Gorshkov, also aimed at reducing Washington's naval superiority, being aware that without a strong naval component USSR could not be a true superpower and that the Navy was a particularly effective means to promote the country's interests at international level. In the Italian edition of Alfred Mahan's major book there is an interesting and significant map, which is an example of historical continuity; it bears this caption: «Soviet naval bases and anchorages at the time of Admiral Gorshkov along the same routes of the old British bases».

The advent of aviation added a third element to joint cooperation. The Air Force as an independent service was born in different times in the various countries. Strangely, only in 1947 in the United States, the country which placed the highest stakes on air power. Even after the birth of the Air Force as an independent service, in many countries Navies maintained their own naval aviation and Armies have a light aviation. Strategic debates on air power have seen the opposition between theorists who supported its supremacy and independence, as Giulio Douhet in Italy and William Mitchell in the United States, and those who favoured an air force marked by close cooperation and interoperability with land and naval forces, as the Italian Amedeo Mecozzi. Another Italian, General Francesco Pricolo, chief of staff of the Air Force between 1939 and 1941, summed up in a somewhat brutal way the role of the three Armed Forces: «The effective weapon of the air fleet is terror, while that of the Navy can be starvation, and that of the Army the actual occupation of the territory».

War is an instrument of politics. Clausewitz wrote: «No-one starts a war – rather no-one in his senses ought to do so – without being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war, and how he intends to conduct it». This lesson, recently, has been forgotten too often.

Armed Forces are employed to fight wars, but also as an instrument of pressure to prevent their outbreak through dissuasion, deterrence and a minimal use of force. About the first task, fighting wars, strategists who follow the “realist model”, stress the importance of technological progress, underrate historical, ethic and political factors, and look for the *silver bullet* providing the “ultimate solution” to wars. However, technological superiority certainly cannot be decisive in irregular wars, as demonstrated in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. «Airpower may devastate, punish and destroy, but cannot, dominate, keep and control land or territories», «may delay, harass and hinder land lines of communication, but alone cannot cut them completely», as the Americans realized with the “Ho Chi Minh’s pathway” during the war in Vietnam.

Moreover, «there are no military solutions to an ethnic conflict or to a civil war. Force may only create the pre-conditions for an eventual political solution. [Force] may do some things, but not other ones. For example, may separate two ethnic groups [...] but cannot compel them to live together».

In the past, wars were aimed just to defeat the enemy and the victor did not care about the political reconstruction and management of the defeated country. In recent conflicts «the political goals to be pursued – regime change, conflict resolution, stabilization, democratization, reconciliation, etc. – cannot be obtained just through military victory». In May 2003 President Bush landed on aircraft carrier *Lincoln* where a banner featured the caption «mission accomplished». But the phase of major combat operations was only the first of that conflict. In contemporary wars real victory depends from subsequent events.

More than ever, a serious military policy requires thinking in terms of joint forces and the achievement of political and diplomatic goals almost invariably requires a control of the territory that can only be guaranteed by land forces. This necessity was already stressed by a theorist of sea power, Sir Julian Corbett (1854-1922). In his volume *England in the Seven Years’ War: A Study in Combined Strategy*, he writes: «Now, as Nelson lamented, where great empires are concerned, wars cannot be concluded upon the sea. Such wars cannot be made by fleets alone. [...] Great wars [are] conducted by the ordered combination of naval, military, and diplomatic force». In his main work, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*, states clearly: «army and navy must be used and thought of as instruments no less intimately connected than are the three arms ashore. [...] Since men live upon the land and not upon the sea, great issues between nations at war have always been decided— except in the rarest cases— either by what your army can do against your enemy’s territory and national life or else by the fear of what the fleet makes it possible for your army to do».

Usually, military interventions to promote stable political solutions require using land forces. «You can fly over a territory for years, you may bomb it, pulverize it and make it completely devoid of life, but

if you want to defend it, protect it, keep it, you must do so on the ground, as did the Roman legions: putting their young into the mud».

This conference pays particular attention to the recent document *Multi-Domain Battle: Evolution of Combined Arms for the 21st Century 2025-2040*. I refer to the version released in October 2017. It aims to describe «How U.S. ground forces, as part of the Joint Force and with partners, will operate, fight, and campaign successfully across all domains—space, cyberspace, air, land, maritime—against peer adversaries in the 2025-2040 timeframe».

I would just make two remarks. The first is that nowhere in this 84 pages' document is ever mentioned a past experience. The second is that it refers to military campaigns «against peer adversaries in the 2025-2040 timeframe». Well, of course General Staffs must prepare all sort of contingency plans, but, leaving aside the fact that six years is a long period, the document is clearly aimed to a conflict with Russian forces and to a much lesser extent with China; actually Russia is mentioned 12 times and China 3 times. Terrorism is just mentioned once and guerrilla twice. Islam never. The civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), which is fundamental in the stabilization process, does not appear. Is this a realistic approach? The value of this document lies at tactical and logistical level; certainly it offers little indications about strategy and grand strategy. In my opinion it should be read in comparison at least with the paper *Stability in Multi-Domain Battle*, by Col. Stephen Marr, U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute, June 2018.

We remember that in the nineties of the last century American strategic planning aimed to win «in concert with regional allies» «two nearly simultaneous major regional conflicts»; these are quotes from the document *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* of 1994. Actually, the contribution of Allies was not much forthcoming and the real conflicts didn't follow the patterns envisaged; therefore, the traditional difficulties of regular armies to confront guerrilla re-emerged.

In the late 1990s, to illustrate the complex spectrum of challenges likely to be faced by on the modern battlefield, U. S. Marines General Charles Krulak described the *Three Block War*, according to which soldiers may be required to conduct full scale military action, peacekeeping operations and humanitarian aid at the same time within the space of three contiguous city blocks. The thrust of the concept is that modern militaries must be trained to operate in all three conditions simultaneously, and that to do so, leadership training at the lowest levels needs to be high. The latter condition caused Krulak to invoke what he called «strategic corporals», low-level unit leaders able to take independent action and make major decisions. In 2005 General Mattis, now Secretary of Defence, added a fourth element: «The Four Block War adds a new but very relevant dimension to situations like the counterinsurgency in Iraq. Insurgencies are wars of ideas, and our ideas need to compete with those of the enemy».

The above mentioned concepts find little space in the *Multi-Domain Battle* document. I found just two short sentences: «Multi-Domain Battle demands formations capable of conducting semi-independent,

dispersed, mutually supporting, cross-domain operations at operational and tactical levels». Joint and partner forces «enhance their forces' and populations' will to resist by aligning and sustaining their forces' actions with their narratives, and sustaining the congruence of actions and ideas, both militarily and politically».

The *Multi-Domain Battle* document is certainly interesting. Its validity will be tested in future conflicts. Actually, since we study wars but we don't necessarily like them, we hope it will remain an intellectual exercise.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I will conclude this necessarily synthetic survey just quoting what Jacob Burckhardt once said: «the true use of history, civilian or military, is not to make men clever for the next time; it is to make them wise forever».

Thank you for your attention.