

# FM 3-0

## OPERATIONS



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**HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**



## Appendix A

# The Principles of War

*The art of war owns certain elements and fixed principles. We must acquire that theory, and lodge it in our heads—otherwise, we will never get very far.*

Frederick the Great

This appendix discusses the traditional principles of war. It then discusses the principles of joint operations.

## THE TRADITIONAL PRINCIPLES OF WAR

A-1. The nine principles of war represent the most important physical, human, and information factors that affect the conduct of operations at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. The principles are not a checklist. While considered in all operations, they do not apply in the same way to every situation. Rather, they summarize characteristics of historically successful operations. Applied to the study of past campaigns, major operations, battles, and engagements, the principles of war are powerful analysis tools. Joint doctrine adds three principles of operations to the nine traditional principles.

A-2. Originally derived from J.F.C. Fuller's published works for the British army, the principles have essentially remained the same over the last century, standing the test of analysis, experimentation, and practice in war. Fuller is not the only influence on the U.S. Army's theory of victory, which is the sum of over two centuries of experience and study on the art of war and warfare. Eastern and Western military theorists have often debated constants in the nature of war, and the principles of war as currently described are informed by many points of view. Though the theories of victory and operational concepts have evolved to meet the demands of military operations throughout the decades, the principles have stayed relevant. Fuller ended his work in 1926 with a valuable maxim. Quoting Napoleon Bonaparte, he wrote, "The whole art of war consists in a well-reasoned and extremely circumspect defensive, followed by rapid and audacious attack." Fuller closed his 1926 work, *The Foundations of the Science of War*, by summarizing the quote in three bold words: GUARD, MOVE, HIT.

A-3. In Army doctrine, a *principle* is a comprehensive and fundamental rule or an assumption of central importance that guides how an organization approaches and thinks about the conduct of operations (ADP 1-01). Principles apply to the conduct of operations in general and to specific organizations or functions. The principles of war are just one example. The nine traditional principles are organized deliberately, enabling a practitioner to begin with actions on the objective and cognitively work backwards to through the process of organizing forces and activities to accomplish their mission. The principles are—

- Objective.
- Offensive.
- Mass.
- Economy of force.
- Maneuver.
- Unity of command.
- Security.
- Surprise.
- Simplicity.

**OBJECTIVE**

A-4. When undertaking any mission, commanders should have a clear understanding of the expected outcome and impact. The ultimate military purpose of war is the defeat of the enemy's armed forces and will to fight by the use of organized violence or the threat of violence. The principle of objective drives all military activity toward that end, with the least possible employment of resources on secondary considerations. This requires a clear vision of the desired end state. Army commanders need to appreciate the political purpose that war aims to achieve, and they need to understand how military conditions contribute to national policy objectives. Commanders cannot separate the objective from the considerations of restraint and legitimacy. Without these considerations, military actions can make strategic objectives unobtainable.

A-5. Below the strategic level, objective means ensuring all actions contribute to the goals of the higher echelon headquarters. The attainment of intermediate objectives must be direct, quickly and economically contributing to the ultimate end state. Commanders designate objectives that are decisive to accomplishing the mission. These become the basis for all subordinate plans. Actions that do not contribute to achieving the objective should be avoided. Conversely, determining and denying enemy forces their objectives narrow options for enemy commanders to freely maneuver and exploit emerging opportunities. Denying enemy forces their objectives while achieving the friendly objective is the ultimate purpose of all operations.

**OFFENSIVE**

A-6. The principle of offensive suggests that offensive action, or maintaining the initiative, is the most effective and decisive way to pursue and attain a clearly defined common objective. This is fundamentally true across all levels of warfare. When it is necessary to defend, commanders and staffs maintain an aggressive mindset that seeks to attack the enemy throughout the depth of its formations and sets the conditions for offensive action. The offense ensures that a force captures and holds the initiative, maintains freedom of action, and achieves results. It permits political and military leaders to initiate operations on their own terms, impose their will on the enemy, set favorable conditions for battle, exploit vulnerabilities, and react rapidly to changing situations or emerging developments. No matter the echelon, the side that retains the initiative through offensive action forces its opponent to react, rather than act.

A-7. The offensive applies to the operations and activities Army forces conduct in each domain. An operational approach focused only on land can be defeated by opponents exploiting an offensive approach in the other domains. Likewise, an offensive approach should extend to the human and information dimensions of an operational environment. Commanders and staffs maintain an offensive mindset during competition, crisis, and armed conflict.

**MASS**

A-8. Integrating all the elements of combat power and synchronizing their application against a decisive point achieves mass. Mass can be achieved in any of the domains and is mostly tied to the destroy defeat mechanism. Massing effects against one or more decisive points in one or more domains is typically an element of convergence. Concentrating forces, which should be done for only as long as necessary to avoid providing the enemy lucrative targets, is typically necessary to achieve favorable ratios during close combat. The massing of effects, together with the proper application of the other principles of war, may enable numerically inferior forces to achieve decisive campaign and battle outcomes. Mass, like objective, implies that it is best to minimize the use of resources on secondary efforts. The massing of effects at any echelon to produce a desired effect on enemy forces is crucial to enabling maneuver.

A-9. Denying enemy forces the ability to mass at the time or place of their choosing is another consideration for applying the principle of mass. Forcing enemy forces to maintain distributed operations, rather than massing effects or forces as they require for success, can keep an enemy force from achieving its objectives, reorganizing, or consolidating gains.

**ECONOMY OF FORCE**

A-10. A commander must employ available combat power in the most efficient way possible, and there is seldom enough combat power available to enjoy a favorable correlation of forces everywhere. Economy of

force, a reciprocal of mass, demands the judicious employment and distribution of forces. It requires deliberately accepting risk in selected areas to achieve relative superiority—or overwhelming effects—in others. Economy of force involves the discriminating employment and distribution of forces. Commanders never leave any subordinate element without a purpose. The allocation of available combat power to tasks such as limited attacks, defense, delays, deception, or even retrograde operations is measured to achieve mass elsewhere. Accepting risk through economy of force creates opportunities to exploit.

## MANEUVER

A-11. Maneuver is coordinated movement and fire in relation to enemy forces to put them at a disadvantage with the least cost to friendly forces. Firepower, mobility, protection, and leadership enable maneuver. Intelligence focuses—and sustainment enables—maneuver over distance and time. In the strategic sense, maneuver has three interrelated characteristics: flexibility, mobility, and maneuverability. Flexibility must characterize thought, plans, and operations to maintain the initiative during changing conditions with an adaptive enemy. Flexibility enhances rapid reaction to unforeseen circumstances. Mobility is the capacity to respond rapidly in crisis, move across strategic distances, and move to a position to conduct operational- and tactical-level maneuver.

A-12. Tactically, maneuver is about moving forces and firepower into better positions relative to enemy forces to gain a compelling advantage: the ability to destroy enemy forces unless they reposition while making friendly forces more difficult to fix and destroy. It contributes to seizing, retaining, and exploiting the initiative and preserving freedom of action. Maneuver allows commanders to concentrate and disperse forces to keep enemy forces off balance and out of position. Conversely, limiting enemy maneuver keeps them in positions of disadvantage, ideally leading to their eventual destruction or defeat at the time and place of the friendly commander's choice.

## UNITY OF COMMAND

A-13. This principle ensures that all efforts focus on a common goal. Unity of command means that a single commander coordinates the actions of all forces toward a common objective. Cooperation may produce coordination, but giving a single commander the required authority is the most effective way to achieve unity of effort. Ultimately a single commander is responsible for an objective at each echelon. Diffusing responsibility otherwise creates misunderstandings during the stress of combat. Commanders deny enemy forces unity of command by destroying or disrupting enemy C2, taking action to isolate enemy echelons, and exploiting boundaries between enemy formations. This makes coordination of forces, collaboration of planning, and cohesive operations more challenging for enemy commanders. Denying enemy forces unity of command is crucial to denying them the ability to exploit emerging tactical opportunities.

A-14. The joint, interagency, and multinational nature of operations creates situations where the commander does not directly control all organizations in the area of operations (AO). Achieving unity of effort under such conditions becomes the goal, which requires coordination and collaboration among forces—even though they may not be part of the command structure—toward a commonly recognized objective.

## SECURITY

A-15. Security enhances freedom of action by protecting and preserving combat power while reducing friendly vulnerability to surprise. Every Army formation is responsible for its own security. The application of the principle of security does not suggest over-cautiousness or avoidance of risk but rather the unwillingness to cede any advantages to the enemy unnecessary. Security is closely related to the operational imperative that friendly forces operate under the assumption that they are under observation and always in contact with enemy forces. Security relies on gaining and maintaining enemy contact on friendly terms, and it is directly related to the principle of surprise. Preventing surprise by maintaining contact with enemy forces enhances security and denies them opportunities to seize the initiative.

A-16. At the strategic level, security requires active and passive measures to protect Army forces from espionage, subversion, and strategic intelligence collection. At the tactical level, it is essential to protection and the preservation of combat power. Security results from the protective measures commanders take to prevent surprise, observation, detection, interference, espionage, or sabotage.

## **SURPRISE**

A-17. Surprise results from taking actions for which an enemy or adversary force is unprepared. It is a powerful, but temporary, combat multiplier. It is not essential to take adversary or enemy forces completely unaware; it is only necessary that they become aware too late to react effectively. When done well, surprise can decisively shift the balance of combat power in favor of friendly forces. Concealing capabilities and intentions is difficult. Rapid advances in strategic surveillance, information gathering, and data skimming, as well as the pervasiveness of social and mass media compound the difficulty of large-scale marshalling and movement of manpower and equipment.

A-18. Factors that contribute to surprise include speed of movement, employment of combat power the enemy does not expect, operations security, and variations in tactics that create ambiguity. Commanders can create surprise using changes to tempo, size of forces, direction or location of a main effort, and timing. Deception can aid in the probability of achieving surprise, and at the tactical level it is best practiced by showing enemy forces what they expect to see until the last possible moment and then doing something different. Proactive friendly reconnaissance and security measures deny enemy forces opportunities to surprise friendly forces.

## **SIMPLICITY**

A-19. Guidance, plans, and orders should be as simple and direct as possible. Objectives and operations must be presented in clear, concise, understandable terms. At the tactical level, simplicity of plans and instructions contribute to successful operations and reduce the chances for misunderstanding and confusion. All factors being equal, a simple plan executed promptly is preferred to a complex plan executed too late. Simple plans allow better understanding and troop leading at all echelons, and they also permit branches and sequels to be easily nested, understood, and executed. Joint, interagency, and multinational operations place a premium on simplicity, accounting for differences in language and culture that can inherently complicate integration. Simple plans and orders minimize the confusion inherent in command posts during operations. The more complicated a plan is, the more vulnerable it is to friction. Simplicity addresses the fog and friction of war, helps commanders and their staffs to maintain shared understanding, and accounts for the nature of war as a human endeavor.

## **PRINCIPLES OF JOINT OPERATIONS**

A-20. Joint doctrine adds three principles of operations (perseverance, legitimacy, and restraint) to the traditional nine principles of war to account for operations other than conventional large-scale combat, such as peacekeeping and counterinsurgency. The additional principles are relevant to how the joint force uses combat power across the competition continuum, particularly during limited contingency. Like the traditional principles, these three do not apply equally across all joint operations but can be universally important and directly relate to the laws of armed conflict. The additional principles are—

- Restraint.
- Perseverance.
- Legitimacy.

(See JP 3-0 for more detailed information on the principles of joint operations.)

## **RESTRAINT**

A-21. The purpose of restraint is to prevent the unnecessary use of force when better methods of achieving the objective exist. Restraint informs legitimacy.

A-22. Destructive force can have a negative military and political consequences in some contexts. Therefore, judicious use of force is necessary. Restraint requires the careful and disciplined balance of security, the conduct of military operations, and national objectives. Excessive force antagonizes those parties involved, thereby damaging the legitimacy of friendly forces and potentially enhancing the legitimacy of the adversary. Sufficiently detailed rules of engagement from a commander tailored to the specific circumstances of the operation can facilitate appropriate restraint.

## **PERSEVERANCE**

A-23. The purpose of perseverance is to ensure the commitment necessary to achieve national objectives. Perseverance recognizes that enduring outcomes may require enduring commitment of forces.

A-24. Perseverance involves preparation for measured, protracted military operations in pursuit of national objectives. Some joint operations may require years to reach the desired end state. The underlying causes of the crisis may be elusive, making it difficult to achieve decisive resolution. The patient, resolute, and persistent pursuit of national goals and objectives is essential to success. This frequently involves diplomatic, economic, and informational measures to supplement military efforts. Army leaders contribute to perseverance by managing the expectations of seniors and subordinates while setting reasonable objectives to achieve over time.

## **LEGITIMACY**

A-25. The purpose of legitimacy is to maintain legal and moral authority during the conduct of operations. It is relevant across the competition continuum and the range of military operations. Legitimacy, a decisive factor in the application of information in the operational environment, is based on the actual and perceived legality, morality, and rightness of the actions from the various perspectives of interested audiences. These audiences can include our national leadership and domestic population, governments, civilian populations, and nations and organizations around the world.

A-26. Committed forces must sustain the legitimacy of the operation and of the coalition and host government, particularly when the host or partner government's legitimacy is decisive to the operation. All actions must be considered in the light of competing strategic and tactical requirements, and exhibit fairness in dealing with competing factions where appropriate. Legitimacy may depend on adherence to objectives agreed to by the international community, ensuring the action is appropriate to the situation and to the perception of fairness in dealing with various factions. Restricting the use of force, restructuring the type of forces employed, protecting civilians, and ensuring the disciplined conduct of the forces involved may reinforce legitimacy.