

PRINCIPLES OF WAR, OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE COMBAT

ANNEX B TO ADVANCE SHEET

Principles of War

The following is extracted from FM 100-5
Pages 5-1 to 5-2

Section 1. PRINCIPLES OF WAR

5-2. General

The principles of war are fundamental truths governing the prosecution of war. Their proper application is essential to the exercise of command and to the successful conduct of military operations. These principles are interrelated and, dependent on the circumstances, may tend to reinforce one another or to be in conflict. Consequently, the degree of application of any specific principle will vary with the situation.

5-3. Principle of the Objective

Every military operation must be directed toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective. The ultimate military objective of war is the defeat of the enemy's armed forces. The objective of each operation must contribute to this ultimate objective. Each intermediate objective must be such that its attainment will most directly, quickly, and economically contribute to the purpose of the operation. The selection of an objective is based upon consideration of the means available, the enemy, and the operational area. Every commander must understand and clearly define his objective and consider each contemplated action in light thereof.

5-4. Principle of the Offensive

Offensive action is necessary to achieve decisive results and to maintain freedom of action. It permits the commander to exercise initiative and impose his will upon the enemy, to set the pace and determine the course of battle, to exploit enemy weaknesses and rapidly changing situations, and to meet unexpected developments. The defensive may be forced on the commander, but it should be deliberately adopted only as a temporary expedient while awaiting an opportunity for offensive action or for the purpose of economizing forces on a front where a decision is not sought. Even on the defensive the commander seeks every opportunity to seize the initiative and achieve decisive results by offensive action.

5-5. Principle of Mass

Superior combat power must be concentrated at the critical time and place for a decisive purpose. Superiority results from the proper combination of elements of combat power. Proper application of the principle of mass, in conjunction with the other principles of war, may permit numerically inferior forces to achieve decisive combat superiority.

5-6. Principle of Economy of Force

Minimum essential means must be employed at points other than that of the main effort. This principle is the reciprocal of the principle of mass. Economy of force does not imply husbanding but measured allocation of available combat power to the primary task as well as to supporting tasks such as limited attacks, defense, cover and deception, or even retrograde action to insure sufficient combat power at the point of decision.

5-7. Principle of Maneuver

Maneuver is an essential ingredient of combat power. It contributes materially in exploiting successes and in preserving freedom of action and reducing vulnerability. The object of maneuver is to dispose a force in a manner that places the enemy at a relative disadvantage and thus achieves results that would otherwise be more costly in men and material. Successful maneuver requires flexibility in organization, combat service support, and command and control. It is the antithesis of permanence of location and implies avoidance of stereotyped patterns of operation.

5-8. Principle of Unity of Command

The decisive application of full combat power requires unity of command. Unity of command obtains unity of effort by coordinated action of all forces toward a common goal. While coordination may be attained by cooperation, it is best achieved by vesting a single commander with the requisite authority.

5-9. Principle of Security

Security is essential to the preservation of combat power. Security results from the measures taken by a command to protect itself from espionage, sabotage, annoyance or surprise. It is a condition that results from the establishment and maintenance of protective measures that insure a state of inviolability from hostile acts or influences. Since risk is inherent in war, application of the principle of security does not imply undue caution and the avoidance of calculated risk. Security frequently is enhanced by bold seizure and retention of the initiative, which reduces the enemy's capability to interfere.

5-10. Principle of Surprise

Surprise can decisively shift the balance of combat power. By surprise, success out of proportion to the effort expended may be obtained. Surprise results from striking an enemy at a time, place, and in a manner for which he is unprepared. It is not essential that the enemy be taken unaware but only that he becomes aware too late to react effectively. Factors contributing to surprise include speed, cover and deception, application of unexpected combat power, effective intelligence and counterintelligence (to include communication and electronic security) and variations in tactics and methods of operation.

5-11. Principle of Simplicity

Simplicity contributes to successful operations. Direct, simple plans and clear, concise orders reduce misunderstanding and confusion. Other factors being equal, the simplest plan is preferred.