
An Overview Of The Principles Of War

Introduction

Since the birth of the military setups there has been an idea that there are certain rules or fundamentals which usually are going to be implemented to conduct and assess a war. These guidelines or fundamentals are known as the Principles of War. There is no worldwide harmony on one common list of these principles as most nations have their own list of principles, based on their military culture, experience and heritage but still there is no immense difference in them. Principles of War actually are a guide to actions pertaining to the appliance of combat power.

Though these Principles are helpful in providing a better understanding of warfare but these should be taken only as guidelines and not a prescription, method, procedure or checklist for success. Hence Principles of war cannot be a replacement to the professional experience, knowledge and education.

Historical Evolution of Principles of War

The Principles of War are the guidelines expressing the policy of military thought and actions that function as a permanent base for combat doctrine. The list of principles may be a methodological tool that differs from army to army and from era to era. It seems that the principles remain almost same over the years with very little change but with the advancements of human kind they kept evolving over an extended period of time. The evolution is often categorized into three stages:

1. Pre-BC to Napoleonic War Era.
2. Napoleonic Era to End of World War II.
3. Post-World War II Era. As stated earlier that there is no agreement amongst different countries on a single catalog of principles of war; but they all do approve that such rules are a better initiation point for the evaluation of military strategy and form the very base of operational policy. Following chart shows the comparison of these principles for different countries:

These were developed over the time and reflect the manner in which we fought and planned to fight during the 20th century. With this present global security environment of the 21st century, growth of IT, inventions of WMDs, proxy war and non-state actors, we must make better use of the advantages that new technologies bring along. Some of the Principles of War are improved

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while others have become vulnerable by the execution of the network-centric operations model. Two of the existing principals of war i.e. Maintenance of Morale and Flexibility still hold their importance even in today's warfare which is elaborated in detail in subsequent paragraphs.

Maintenance of Morale

A huge army, excellent weaponry and brilliant Generals are not enough if the soldiers don't believe in what they do or in their capacity to achieve the objective, so much that instead of fighting bravely they just want to retrieve back to the shelter as soon as quickly in any possible way. A country may not lose a war entirely because of low morale but it can still be a major factor to a loss of war. To ensure high morale, the war objective should be put up as a rational, attainable and one that the soldiers will recognize or at least accept.

- Examples

In 1940 there was a lack of morale in the French military and their political leadership. The German had an immense victory not just because of the Blitzkrieg approach and the quality of their army which was at its best at that time but also because of the low morale of the adversaries. Likewise during Vietnam War, low morale of American military troops was one of the contributing factors of US defeat. In recent past, low morale of the Iraqi armed forces was one of the reasons why the Coalition forces in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) were able to take down Saddam Hussein's regime in just less than three weeks.?

Flexibility

It is one of the characteristics of air power that can create multiple advantages in operations. It is the unique capacity within a force to adjust plans during the course of the operation to cater for unpredicted situation as well as to exploit advantageous opportunity that may come up during a battle. This means that commanders must be able to adapt the ways and means of an operation to overcome unanticipated events in order to achieve the desired end-state. Air forces can only be flexible to the extent that they have adequate sustainability and can bring to bear sufficient air mobility capabilities. This would ensure that the force retains the ability to be redeployed rapidly so that the necessary effects can be created at the desired focal point and to the level required. An air force that does not offer sufficient flexibility to the commander will not be able to contribute effectively to the joint campaign.

- Examples

In 1965 Indo-Pak war, a formation of F-86 Sabres who were carrying out close support mission

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in Chamb Sector, were immediately directed to stop the Indian assault which was poised to enter Lahore. They destroyed several tanks and put a timely halt to the Indian move. This was all possible due to the flexibility of PAF. Another example is of Ghazwa-e-Uhud, Prophet Muhammad ? had put 50 archers at a mountainside and ordered them strictly to stay there until further orders. When enemy got defeated and started to retreat, the archers (assuming that the battle was over) deserted their stations and left the Muslims vulnerable to a counter attack by the enemy. Khalid bin Waleed (who was not Muslim till that time) realized about the wrong move of the guards and lead his cavalrymen to attack the Muslims from behind which created panic in Muslims when they saw themselves surrounded, they were overtaken by disorder and failed to carry out any reactionary tactics except a safe retrieval. Khalid bin Waleed while retreating exercised the flexibility and took the shot of opportunity.?

Conclusion

If we analyze the Principles of War adapted by various nations, it will reveal only a narrow range of divergence. Our current Principles of War are more reflective of the way we fought in the past but they may not depict the way in which we plan to fight in the future. We have fought quite a number of wars with India and have also participated in Arab-Israel war and Afghan war, carrying out counter-insurgency operations and fighting out the proxy wars, in the last 50 years. With so rich direct understanding and experience, we must drive the valid lessons learnt and implement them all and move towards the future.

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