

Section 2

INTRODUCTION TO THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR AND OPERATIONS

Key Points

- 1 History of the Principles of War
- 2 The Principles of War and Operations
- 3 Limitations of the Principles of War

The nine principles of war represent the most important nonphysical factors that affect the conduct of operations at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.

Field Manual 3-0, Operations

Introduction

The foundation of Army battle operations is the nine principles of war. These principles are crucial to successful military planning and actions, from the squad to the theater command levels.

Leaders have long sought the most effective ways to conduct war. From the ancient Chinese and Greek tacticians onward to the French, British, Germans, and Americans of more modern times, military leaders have sought to distill the lessons they have learned into a set of key principles of war. After World War II, the Army incorporated the principles of war into its officer training, and they became a mainstay in Army field manuals. Recently updated joint doctrine adds three principles of operations to the traditional nine principles of war.

The principles continue today as the cornerstone of Army operations. You and the Soldiers in your platoon must know them so well that they become an automatic part of your thinking in the field.

The Nine Principles of War

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

*Some Soldiers find that the acronym **MOOSE MUSS** helps them remember the nine principles of war.*



No one starts a war—or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so—without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war.

Karl von Clausewitz

History of the Principles of War

In college, you are studying “military science” and “the art of war.” Both of these expressions imply a set of guiding principles or techniques that you should be able to study and master.

For nearly 2,500 years, military leaders have tried to identify and employ those basic principles of war. The best known of the early strategists was the legendary Chinese general and military theorist, Sun Tzu, who lived about 500–400 B.C. His seminal work entitled *The Art of War* included chapters on such subjects as doing battle, planning attacks, Army maneuvers, ground formations, and using spies. His chapter on “calculations” you might recognize as today’s strategic planning—and he said the more of that you do, the more you will win.

At just about the same time Sun Tzu was writing, the ancient Greeks were formulating their own military philosophy. At the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C., the Athenians under the battlefield command of Miltiades routed the Persian armies. Although he was not thinking specifically in terms of the nine modern principles of war, Miltiades’ tactics showed a grasp of the principles of *mass* and *economy of force*.

In the later campaigns of Napoleon Bonaparte, emperor of France, military strategists further explored the principles of war. Swiss-French-Russian general and military theoretician Antoine Henri Jomini, after studying Napoleon’s methods and strategies, said: “There exists a small number of fundamental principles of war the application of which has been in almost all time crowned with success.” According to Jomini, Napoleon proved that an Army usually succeeds when it operates against its enemy’s lines of communication, masses its force against a fraction of the enemy’s, attacks the enemy’s weakest point in force, and attacks the enemy speedily at the right place and time. These ideas became the foundation for some of the later principles you are studying today.

Still later, World War I led to the final formulation of modern principles of war. Because of the inefficiency, waste, and inconclusiveness that characterized that war, military theorists concluded they needed a new approach to war. By approaching it in a scientific way, as a “military science,” they began to develop the modern principles. In 1916, British Gen. John Frederick Charles (J.F.C.) Fuller published a military journal article entitled “The Principles of War, With Reference to the Campaigns of 1914–1915.” His article was the first detailed explanation of eight modern principles of war.

Following World War I and building on Fuller’s principles, in 1921 the US War Department published *Training Regulations No. 10-5*, which was the Army’s first official publication outlining nine principles of war. Soon after, Army COL William K. Naylor, a World War I veteran, published three articles in *Infantry Journal* espousing the nine principles. But by 1930, criticism of the principles led to their deletion from both British and American military doctrine.

Just after World War II, the Army republished the nine principles in the 1949 Army Field Manual 100-5, *Field Service Regulations: Operations*. This was the official recognition of the principles as “the bedrock of Army doctrine.” After the Vietnam War, from 1976 to 1982, the nine principles of war disappeared again from FM 100-5, but reappeared with the introduction of the AirLand Battle doctrine in the 1980s. The nine principles of war have remained in Army doctrine and in FM 100-5 and its successor manual, FM 3-0, ever since.

America is at war: Global terrorism and extremist ideologies are realities in today’s world. The Army has analytically looked at the future and believes the nation will continue to be engaged in an era of persistent conflict—a period of protracted confrontation among state, nonstate, and individual actors increasingly willing to use violence to achieve their political and ideological ends.

The operational environment in which this persistent conflict will be waged will be complex, multidimensional, and increasingly fought “among the people.” Previously, the Army sought to separate people from the battlefield so that it could engage and destroy enemies and seize terrain. While recognizing the enduring requirement to fight and win, the Army also recognizes that people are frequently part of the terrain and their support is a principal determinant of success in future conflicts.

The most recent edition of FM 3-0, dated 27 February 2008, is the first update since 11 September 2001, and is a revolutionary departure from past doctrine. It describes an operational concept where *commanders employ offensive, defensive, and stability or civil support operations simultaneously as part of an interdependent joint force to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative, accepting prudent risk to create opportunities to achieve decisive results*. Just as the 1976 edition of FM 100-5 began to take the Army from the rice paddies of Vietnam to the battlefield of Western Europe, this edition will take it into the 21st century urban battlefields among the people without losing the Army’s capabilities to dominate the higher conventional end of the spectrum of conflict.

The US Army is a doctrinally-based army. FM 3-0 provides the intellectual underpinnings that lie at the core of how this Army will organize, train, equip, and conduct operations in this new environment. It recognizes that the US *will achieve victory in this changed environment of persistent conflict only by conducting military operations in concert with diplomatic, informational, and economic efforts*. Battlefield success is no longer enough; final victory requires concurrent stability operations to lay the foundation for lasting peace. In support of this effort, three principles—*perseverance, legitimacy, and restraint*—have been added to the nine principles of war. Together, these make up the principles of joint operations.

Although the strategic environment and operational concepts have changed, *Soldiers remain the centerpiece and foundation of the Army—as they have been since 1775*. These Soldiers are led by leaders proficient in their core competencies, sufficiently broad to adapt to conditions across the spectrum of conflict, and courageous enough to see enemy vulnerabilities and exploit opportunities in the challenges and complexities of operating environments. It is the obligation of these leaders to understand and be proficient at employing Soldiers in full spectrum operations. They must read, study, understand, and implement the doctrine in FM 3-0.

The Principles of War and Operations

The Nine Principles of War

objective

the clearly defined, decisive, and attainable goals toward which every military operation should be directed

Objective means purpose. The fundamental purpose of war is the destruction of your enemy's armed forces and their will to fight. Each operation in military planning must contribute to this ultimate strategic aim and to the defense of the United States and its allies. The ultimate objectives of operations in peacetime, as well, must contribute to the readiness, agility, and capability of the Army to respond defensively or offensively to accomplish its overarching mission: the security of the United States and the American people at home and abroad. Army planners, therefore, determine objectives with this ultimate end in mind and these objectives inform operations and missions down through the ranks, even to your platoon and squad level.

offensive

seizing, retaining, and exploiting the initiative

Offensive

Offensive action—moving toward and engaging your enemies and their assets, including lines of supply and communication—is the most effective and decisive way to attain a clearly defined common objective. Offensive operations are the way you seize the initiative while maintaining freedom of action and achieving decisive results. This principle of offensive action is critical to all levels of war you might experience.

mass

concentrating the effects of combat power at the decisive place and time

Mass

A hammer drives nails because of its **mass**. Achieving mass means organizing all the elements of combat power at your disposal to have decisive effect on your enemy very quickly. Massing means that you hit the enemy with a closed fist; you don't poke at him with open fingers. Thus, mass seeks to smash the enemy, not to sting or harass him. Military leaders from Stonewall Jackson to Dwight D. Eisenhower to Norman Schwarzkopf all understood and applied this principle successfully. The massing effect has two distinct advantages: It allows a numerically inferior force to achieve decisive results and limits your unit's exposure to enemy fire.

economy of force

allocating minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts

Economy of Force

Sometimes, less is more. To achieve mass effectively at the decisive point and time on the battlefield, you need to effectively coordinate and allocate your force. **Economy of force** is the principle that helps you to judiciously employ and distribute your force. In battle, all parts of your force must act. You should never leave part of the force without a purpose. That doesn't mean everyone has to do the same thing. You need to coordinate and employ your Soldiers using all available combat power, even while you are engaged in such tasks as limited attacks, defense, delays, deception, or retrograde operations.

Maneuver

It's very difficult to aim at, fire at, and hit a moving target. The nature of movement itself is unpredictable. So effective maneuvering keeps your enemy off balance and protects your force. You use your ability to **maneuver** to exploit your successes, to preserve your freedom of action, and to reduce your vulnerability. When you maneuver, you continually create new problems for your enemies by thwarting their planning and actions, eventually leading to their retreat or defeat. At all levels of warfare, successful maneuvering requires that you demonstrate agility in thinking, planning, operating, and organizing.

maneuver

placing the enemy in a disadvantageous position through the flexible application of combat power

Unity of Command

One of GEN Robert E. Lee's fundamental principles was that he hated to divide his forces (although he did it from time to time as the situation demanded). **Unity of command** means that all of your forces are acting under one responsible commander. Unity of command and unity of effort at all levels of war refer to using your military forces to mass combat power toward a common objective. Success on the battlefield demands that a single commander hold the authority to direct all forces toward the objective in a unified, coordinated effort.

unity of command

for every objective, ensuring unity of effort under one responsible commander

At the Civil War Battle of Antietam (Sharpsburg), in Maryland, Union GEN George McClellan divided his forces, did not coordinate his attacks, and failed to seize the initiative when Union troops broke through Confederate lines. McClellan failed to deliver the decisive blow that would have won the battle and perhaps ended the Civil War in 1862.

McClellan Lets Lee Off the Hook

When [Confederate LTG Thomas "Stonewall"] Jackson's troops reached Sharpsburg [Maryland] on September 16th . . . Lee consolidated his position along the low ridge that runs north and south of the town—stretching from the Potomac River on his left to the Antietam Creek on his right. "We will make our stand on these hills," Lee told his officers.

General Robert E. Lee had placed cannon on Nicodemus Heights to his left, the high ground in front of Dunker Church, the ridge just east of Sharpsburg . . . and on the heights overlooking the Lower Bridge. Infantry filled in the lines between these points, including a sunken lane less than a half mile long with worm fencing along both sides. . . . A handful of Georgia sharpshooters guarded the Lower Bridge (Burnside Bridge).

By the evening of the 16th, Gen. George McClellan had about 60,000 troops ready to attack—double the number available to Lee. The battle opened at a damp, murky dawn on the 17th when Union artillery on the bluffs beyond Antietam Creek began a murderous fire on Jackson's lines near the Dunker Church. . . .

[In the morning phase of the battle, Union and Confederate troops slaughtered each other at point-blank range in Miller's Cornfield.] During the three hours of battle, the Confederates . . . stopped two Federal corps and a division from another, totaling about 20,000 men. Approximately 10,000 men from both sides lay dead or wounded.

Meanwhile, Gen. William H. French's division . . . moved up . . . but veered south into the center of the Confederate line, under Gen. D. H. Hill. . . .

From 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., bitter fighting raged along this deeply cut lane . . . as [Union troops] sought to drive the Southerners back. By 1 p.m. about 5,600 killed and wounded troops from both sides lay along and in front of this 800-yard lane.

Finally, seeing a weak spot in the Confederate line, the 61st and 64th New York regiments penetrated the crest of the hill at the eastern end and began firing volley after volley full length down the sunken line. Then, misinterpreting an order, a Confederate officer pulled his regiment out of the road. The remaining defenders rapidly scrambled out of the lane, over the fence, and fled through the cornfields to the south, some not stopping until they had reached the outskirts of Sharpsburg itself. More than 300 Rebels threw down their arms and surrendered on the spot.

"Lee's Army was ruined," one of Lee's officers wrote later. "And the end of the Confederacy was in sight." About 200 Rebel infantry attempted a weak counterattack, while Lee rushed 20 cannon to the Piper farm. An attack through this hole would have crushed the Confederate center, and the remaining divisions could be destroyed piecemeal. Fortunately for the South, however, McClellan decided against a counterattack with his fresh reserves. That fateful decision would allow the Confederacy to fight on for three more years.

Southeast of town, Union Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside's corps of 12,000 men had been trying to cross a 12-foot-wide bridge over Antietam Creek since 9:30 a.m. About 450 Georgian sharpshooters took up positions behind trees and boulders on a steep wooded bluff some 100 feet high and overlooking the Lower Bridge. Greatly outnumbered, the Confederates drove back several Union advances toward the bridge.

Finally, at 1 p.m. the Federals crossed the 125-foot-long bridge (now known as Burnside Bridge) and, after a 2-hour delay to rest and replenish ammunition, continued their advance toward Sharpsburg.

By late afternoon about 8,000 Union troops had driven the Confederates back almost to Sharpsburg, threatening to cut off the line of retreat for Lee's Army. By 3:30 p.m. many Rebels jammed the streets of Sharpsburg in retreat. The battle seemed lost to the Southern Army.

Then at 3:40 p.m. Gen. A. P. Hill's division, left behind by Jackson at Harpers Ferry [Virginia] to salvage the captured Federal property, arrived on the field after a march of 17 miles in eight hours. Immediately Hill's 3,000 troops entered the fight, attacking the Federals' unprotected left flank. Burnside's troops were driven back to the heights near the bridge they had taken earlier. The attack across the Burnside Bridge and Hill's counterattack in the fields south of Antietam resulted in 3,470 casualties—with twice as many Union casualties (2,350) as Confederate (1,120).

LTG James Longstreet later wrote, "We were so badly crushed that at the close of the day ten thousand fresh troops could have come in and taken Lee's Army and everything in it." But again McClellan held the 20,000 men of V Corps and VI Corps in reserve—and lost a second opportunity to defeat the entire Confederate Army. By 5:30 p.m., the Battle of Antietam was over.

National Park Service

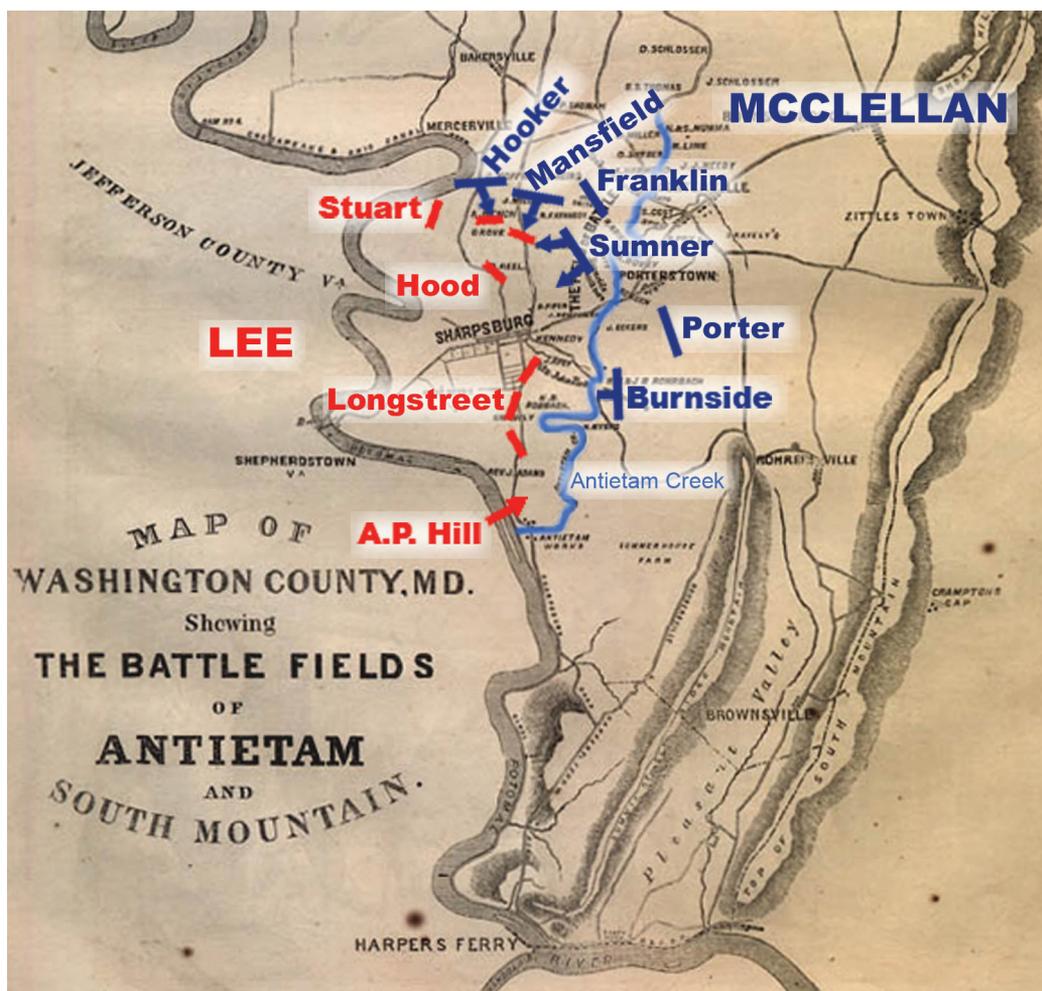


Figure 2.1 The Battle of Antietam

security

never permitting the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage

Security

Security results when you take measures to protect your forces. At Antietam, GEN Ambrose Burnside failed to protect his flank, allowing the Confederates to repulse his attack.

Appropriate security allows freedom of action by reducing your vulnerability to your enemy's actions. Intelligence—the knowledge and understanding of enemy doctrine, planning, strategy, and tactics—enhances security.

War is a risky business. To be successful, you need to be willing to take necessary, calculated risks to preserve your force and defeat your enemy. Protecting and securing your force, in turn, leaves you free to take those risks.

surprise

striking enemy forces at a time or place or in a manner for which they are unprepared

Surprise

For a traditional military force, **surprise** in warfare today is more difficult than ever. Rapid advances in surveillance technology and communication have compounded the difficulty of masking or cloaking the movements of large forces in the field. As recent battle experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has shown, surprise can decisively shift the balance of combat power for you or for your enemy. Remember that the element of surprise can work both ways—you can be surprised, too.

By seeking surprise, you can achieve success greatly out of proportion to the effort you expend. Surprise can come in size of force; direction or location of main effort; and timing. Factors that contribute to surprising your enemy include effective intelligence, deception, speed, application of unexpected combat power, operations security (OPSEC), and variations in tactics and methods of operation. So, as you can see, coordination of effort is a huge part of surprising an enemy.

simplicity

preparing clear, uncomplicated plans, and clear, concise orders to ensure thorough understanding

Simplicity

Simplicity contributes to successful military operations. Simple plans lead to better understanding of a commander's intent and assist leadership at all levels to accomplish the mission. Simple plans and clear, concise orders minimize the possibility of misunderstanding and can limit confusion.

It pays to remember to simplify a plan or operation by “finding the longest pole in the tent”—addressing priorities first and not sweating less significant details until later. Simplicity is especially critical when you and your Soldiers are tired or stressed. So keep the number of moving parts to a minimum. All things being equal, the simplest plan is usually the best.

Additional Principles of Joint Operations**Perseverance**

Commanders prepare for measured, protracted military operations in pursuit of the desired national strategic end state. Some joint operations may require years to reach the desired end state. The solution to a crisis's underlying causes may be elusive, making it difficult to achieve conditions that support the end state. The patient, resolute, and persistent pursuit of national goals and objectives often is a requirement for success. In the end, the will of the American public, as expressed through their elected officials and advised by expert military judgment, determines the duration and size of any military commitment.

Army forces' endurance and commanders' **perseverance** are necessary to accomplish long-term missions. A decisive offensive operation may swiftly create conditions for short-term success. However, it may take long-term stability operations, along with defensive and offensive tasks, to achieve the strategic end state.

perseverance

steadfastness and persistence in adhering to a course of action

Legitimacy

For Army forces, **legitimacy** comes from three important factors. First, Army forces must conduct the operation or campaign under US law. Second, they must conduct the operation according to international laws and treaties recognized by the United States, particularly the law of war. Third, the campaign or operation should develop or reinforce the authority of the host-nation government and acceptance of that government—by both the governed and the international community. This last factor is frequently the decisive element.

legitimacy

the perception that something or someone is in compliance with the law and in accordance with what is right or reasonable

Legitimacy is also based on the American people's will to support the mission. The American people's perception of legitimacy is strengthened if obvious national or humanitarian interests are at stake. Americans' perception also depends on their assurance that American lives are not being placed at risk needlessly or carelessly.

Other interested audiences may include foreign nations, civil populations in and near the operational area, and participating multinational forces. Committed US and allied forces must sustain the legitimacy of the operation and of the host-nation government, where applicable. You must balance security actions with the need to maintain legitimacy. When you are dealing with competing factions, all actions must exhibit fairness. Legitimacy depends on the local population's consent to the force and to the host-nation government, on the people's expectations, and on the force's credibility.

Restraint

Restraint requires careful and disciplined balancing of security, the conduct of military operations, and the desired strategic end state. Excessive force antagonizes friendly and neutral parties. It damages the legitimacy of the organization that uses it while potentially enhancing the legitimacy of any opposing party. Army leaders must carefully match the rules of engagement to the strategic end state and the situation. Commanders at all levels—including you as a platoon leader—ensure their personnel are properly trained in rules of engagement and quickly informed of any changes. Rules of engagement may vary according to national policy concerns but should always be consistent with the inherent right of self-defense.

restraint

to limit collateral damage and prevent the unnecessary use of force

Restraint is best achieved when the rules of engagement issued at the beginning of an operation address a range of plausible situations. Commanders should consistently review and revise rules of engagement as necessary. Additionally, commanders should carefully examine them to ensure that the lives and health of Soldiers are not needlessly endangered. Since national concerns may lead to different rules of engagement for multinational participants, commanders must be aware of national restrictions imposed on other forces.

Limitations of the Principles of War

In planning successful military operations, the nine principles of war are not a prescription, formula, recipe, or checklist. They provide no pat answers to the many challenges and dilemmas commanders encounter in battle. They are guidelines for applying your critical thinking and decision making to the entire range of operations that will follow your training, in both combat and noncombat situations.

While these principles are only guidelines, your failure to at least consider them can lead to situations such as the one Colin Powell found himself in as a young officer in Vietnam in 1963.

The A Shau Outpost

Finally, on January 17 [1963], at Quang Tri, I boarded a Marine H-34 helicopter loaded with ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] replacements, bags of rice, and live chickens and pigs. We darted and bounced through thunderheads and showers over dense jungle terrain and plopped down onto a crude perforated-metal airstrip stamped out of the jungle. . . .

ARVN soldiers trotted out to the helicopter and began unloading. An American Soldier came up, saluted, and introduced himself as Sergeant First Class William Sink. Sink led me through a barbed-wire gate into the compound where a Vietnamese officer saluted and put out his hand. "Captain Vo Cong Hieu, commanding 2nd Battalion," he said in passable English. . . .

Directly behind A Shau, a mountain loomed over us. I pointed towards it and Hieu said with a grin, "Laos." From that mountainside, the enemy could almost roll rocks down onto us. I wondered why the base had been established in such a vulnerable spot.

"Very important outpost," Hieu assured me.

"What's its mission?" I asked.

"Very important outpost," Hieu repeated.

"But why is it here?"

"Outpost is here to protect airfield," he said, pointing in the direction of our departing Marine helo.

"What's the airfield here for?" I asked.

"Airfield here to supply outpost."

From my training at Fort Bragg, I knew our formal role here. We were to establish a “presence,” a word with a nice sophisticated ring. More specifically, we were to engage the Viet Cong to keep them from moving through the A Shau Valley and fomenting their insurgency in the populated coastal provinces. But Hieu’s words were the immediate reality. The base camp at A Shau was there to protect an airstrip that was there to supply the outpost.

GEN Colin Powell, *My American Journey*



Critical Thinking

Which of the principles of war do you think were violated in the A Shau Valley of Vietnam in 1963?



CONCLUSION

Developed by a long line of successful military leaders throughout history, the nine principles of war are the “enduring bedrock” of modern Army doctrine. Originally published after World War I, the Army modified them in the ensuing years. Together with the three additional principles of operations, however, the nine principles remain, proven and practical tenets of field operations.

The principles of war are far from a strict formula or game plan for “how to fight in war.” Rather, they provide field-tested advice, summarizing the characteristics of successful Army operations.

In addition, the principles offer you an invaluable leadership tool for analyzing the decision making of field commanders of past campaigns, major operations, and engagements. After having committed them to memory, you will employ the principles in future academic activities and tactical exercises.

Key Words

objective

offensive

mass

economy of force

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security

surprise

simplicity

perseverance

legitimacy

restraint

Learning Assessment

1. Name the nine principles of war and the three additional principles of joint operations.
2. Is it correct to say that you cannot use the nine principles separately? If so, explain how they interrelate and depend on one another.

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