PRINCIPLES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN MILITARY ART

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Abstract: *This paper focuses on the issue of military principles in terms of their meaning and significance for the personnel applying the military art. The author argues that principles are important factors that influence the planning and conduct of wars; some of them exist since antiquity but their application may differ according to the environment and specific circumstances. More than a focused discussion about each of the principle the author reveals approaches to their application in military thinking as well as their value for the military operations planning process.*

Key words: principle, military art, operation, doctrine.

1. Introduction

Since ancient times, rulers, warlords, commanders and prominent theorists of military art equated with the idea that there exist a set of guiding tenets and ideas that govern the study, preparation, and conduct of wars. They continually attempted to define the relevant rules, which, if properly exploited, could lead to success in military campaigns and battles. In the military environment, these basic tenets and rules are known in the term principles. [1]

Generally, the meaning of the word “principle” (from the Latin principium, the beginning) indicates the major and widely recognized intellectual theme (theses, rule or law) of any teachings, from which may be derived further consequences for behaviour or knowledge in practice. Just as these principles exist in every scientific discipline, they also exist in the military.

The principles represent important intangible factors that influence the planning and conduct of wars, campaigns, operations and battles at the strategic,

operational and tactical levels. In the context of military operations, the principles are generally associated with the terms such a war, warfare, a campaign, an operation, a military art or the operational art.

In the books, military manuals, treatises or military doctrines can be found the phrases war principles, principles of warfare, principles of operations, principles of military art or principles of operational art. Single term that would unite a common understanding of the principles, therefore, is not a dogma.

Over the centuries there were raised, accepted and used various principles which were understood differently by individuals, communities or the whole societies. The principles were also different in the way they were presented and applied by the generations of commanders and military theorists. However, the common view on the general principles demonstrates a basic continuity in the development of the most of them. [2]

It can be stated that there are only minor differences between the principles raised roughly 2,500 years ago by the Chinese philosopher and strategist Sun Tzu, and those which accept modern armies in dealing with the current military conflicts. It's also noteworthy that the principles applied in the era of medieval, are equally valid in the age of computer-guided missiles. Generally, the basic principles are constant, unchanging and timeless. [3]

2. Significance of principles

Generalized from the studies of past wars, campaigns, operations, and battles principles are useful analytical tools. Their value as a guide for commanders, however, depends on their understanding of a given commander, his knowledge, and skill in applying the principles of use of military force within a certain operating scenarios.

Principles of war and military art are valuable not only for analyzing of the previous campaigns and their lessons learned but also for utilization of this knowledge for the current armed forces to improve their battle skills, readiness, and performance. In addition, these principles, defined by the needs of a particular nation and its priorities are also a clear sign of attitudes the nation and intentions how to deal with the issues of national security.

Most countries and their armed forces, respectively, declare its own list of principles based on the military culture, history, heritage, and experience. These principles also act as a set of guidelines for the planning process at the national strategic and military-strategic level before the launch and during the campaign or the military operation.

The principles are simple and logical rules, according to almost all military activities can be controlled. A history offers numerous examples of unsuccessful campaigns; their analysis indicates that this failure often stemmed from breaching the fundamental principles of war.

As experience has shown, the problems

consisted not in understanding the principles of the war, but in a guarantee that they will realistically abide by politicians as well as military officials during the campaign.

In reality, however, this progress is often hampered by a large number of existing variables and the very complexity of the campaign or operation. It should also be noted that not all the principles are applicable in all situations during the conflict. It may often be necessary to replace the use of one principle over another, depending on which is more convenient and rewarding.

Although the principles of war can be expressed quite simply, they cannot be studied and understood in a purely academic way. Given that they relate directly to the conduct of the war, it is the best way to learn and perceive them in the context of the specific situation. Principles are certain "statements" and generally do not provide an explanation or justification, through which their understanding will be more simple. Therefore, there is a possibility of misinterpretation due to failure to understand the consequences of their use.

Thus the principles are not a set of laws and rules that in case they are blindly followed, will lead to the desired success. Their compliance does not always produce a predictable result; as well as their disobeying may not ultimately result in unfavorable effects. Principles are merely sophisticated indicators extracted from historical experiences, which were found to have an almost timeless application, contributing to the successful conduct of wars, military campaigns, and operations.

Principles do not replace professional knowledge, experience, skills and education; they only help to better understand the rules and way of waging war. The principles are rather a guide for management activities of military forces than unquestioned truth with universal application for each individual operation. In

this respect, they are guidelines, not regulations, formulas, recipes or list for success. Principles are important elements of the military art, but mastering this art requires a deep understanding far beyond the principles themselves.

Knowledge of the High Command can only be obtained by studying military history and actual experience. There are no strong and rigid rules; all it depends on plans of the general, on the status of his troops, the season and thousands of other circumstances which dictate that no case will resemble other.

Napoleon (1769-1821), von Freytag-Loringhoven, Generalship in the Great War, 1920's. [4]

3. Features and application of principles

For the conduct of operations, it is important to understand and know the main principles (rules) that have proven successful in the past conflicts. These principles have not absolute validity and even individual states may not put the same emphasis on different principles. However, there is general agreement about their importance and relevance. Merely applying of principles will not guarantee victory; common sense, balanced judgment, and feeling of commander play a critical role. The relative importance of each of the principles is dictating by circumstances; in some cases, the commander cannot cling only on one principle, without neglecting the others.

The principles of war guide warfighting at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. According to the military doctrines applied in the most of the countries there are several fundamental principles which can be involved in any particular application concerned. Using the American military approach the following lists the purposes of each:

- Objective: To direct every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective
- Offensive: To seize, retain, and exploit

the initiative

- Mass: To concentrate the effects of combat power at the place and time to achieve decisive results
- Economy of Force: To allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts
- Maneuver: To place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power
- Unity of Command: To ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander for every objective
- Security: To never permit the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage
- Surprise: To strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which it is unprepared
- Simplicity: To prepare clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders to ensure thorough understanding [5]

The role of the commander, among the others, is to know where to put the emphasis on the specific principle at the given moment. The principles are not immutable laws, but only a general guide to the way of thinking and acting of the commander. Throughout the history, they retain their severity, applicability, and the relative importance despite dramatic changes in methods, techniques and war weapons. The situation may require a greater emphasis only on some of the principles. For example, the principles of surprise, security or mass may have a different meaning in large-scale combat operations contrary to stabilization and peace support operations.

Among the aforementioned principles applicable to all operations it may be required to respect and apply additional specific principles in operations such as peace support, stabilization, and humanitarian assistance. These include impartiality, consent, restraint in the use of force, perseverance, legitimacy, credibility, mutual respect, transparency, freedom of movement, environmental protection, and others.

In various joint (allied) and national doctrines there are given additional rules as an art of leadership, sustainability, initiative and decisiveness, aggressiveness, intelligence security, combat support, logistic support and host nation support, endurance and force protection, multinationality and others. Designation of certain principles enumerated in the sense of "principles" can often appear inconsistently. As visible from doctrines, in many cases, these principles are apparently joint or operational functions whose doctrinal meaning is different. It is necessary to note that in this respect, understanding of such differences is an issue of individuals and their personal point of view how to approach to this discrepancy. Current doctrines also identify other specific principles for planning, logistics, protection, counterinsurgency, command and control, principles of multinational joint command and further principles related to the organization and the use of various forces and services. Many of these principles are important for preparation, conduct, and support of military operations.

4. Value of the principles

The question is how to use the principles? There are several ways the principles can be beneficial regardless of they are defined in NATO publication, the American, British or other national doctrines. These include:

4.1 Study and understanding of history.

One of the ways how to use principles is the analysis of battles, campaigns, and even war. A scholar or student can take a list of principles and determine why and where one of the parties lost because it failed to apply some principle (or more principles). He or she can also take these principles and compare where the one party could have an advantage over another. That advantage could finally lead to victory. Simply the principles are mere instruments.

4.2 Assistance in the course of actions development.

According to experience, some commanders can use the principles as a guide for their staffs in the development of alternatives. For example, a commander may discuss all principles or only selected principles and tell his/her staff how to develop a specific course of action according to this principle. He/she can use all principles or just focus on a few. Again, it is only a method that can be used by commanders in the right or wrong way.

4.3 Support in the course of action analysis and comparison.

The staff members can also use the principles during comparison of course of action developed when they assist the commander in their selection. A staff can use all the principles and attribute advantages to the specific course of action. Before the comparison, the staff members may consider certain principles they feel they are important for the operation. After the comparison, the course of action which has more advantages related to the principles is an alternative which will be recommended to the commander for approval.

4.4 Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the plan.

After the plan was developed and approved, the principles can be useful for performing a quick analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the plan. Understanding of each may facilitate a development of preliminary plans. Such plans can take advantage of these strengths, or they will be activated if the weaknesses are exploited by the enemy.

4.5 Assistance in the evaluation of performance.

In every effort regarding tactics, it is a wise commander who looks objectively at the performance of his/her units. A one way to analyze the performance is a utilization of the principles. The commander and his/her staff observe the operation or battle and analyze its course according to the

principles selected. To conclude, the principles can always be utilized in a certain way, according to one of the aforementioned methods.

Principles of war have become an interesting topic for discussion of military experts for decades. In the context of their significance, there are two aspects above which circulate debates in military circles. At first, are the principles of war still relevant? Is it possible to link the success or failure on the battlefield with a list of principles? Such questions could certainly become one of the focal points of constant debates about the operational art. Secondly, if possible to attach the success or failure of the operation to the principles, which are the principles that should be used? Does the technology change the method of applying these principles? Vary these principles depending on the type of conflict or the operation? These and other similar ideas could employ the minds of not only military theorists but also their colleagues in practice. [6]

5. Conclusion

Principles are tenets expressing the rules of military thinking and acting. Their application varies at different levels of command and for different operations. It can be expected that their relative importance will vary, depending on the

specific situation. While the principles remain the same, their list varies according to time and place and always depending on the context.

When studying the principles two aspects are important. The first is that the basic principle (of war, military art, operations ...) can never be entirely passive. This means that even though the principle is the time-tested it is still further developed and "cultivated" in relation to the role of military forces in the wider security context. Secondly, it must be clear that while the principles themselves are independent of one another, in their application they are interconnected. To be clear, the application of one principle should be done only after consideration of the primary and secondary impacts and influences that this application will have on the other principles, which may or may not have the same priority.

Although the principles do not require great erudition and genius to be appreciated, their study must be analytical and tailored. It should again be stressed that the principles of war provide, at best, only a holistic guidance on the conduct of military operations. Inflexible insistence on them without adequate understanding and flexibility in thinking can easily lead to errors.

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