



Established principles?

GENERAL TACTICS, Perennial Principles of Warfare... New Processes

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Tactique générale

The Army recognizes three principles of warfare - freedom of action, concentration of effort and economy of means - to be applied by land forces at the tactical level.

The procedures for applying these principles must give priority to surprise in all areas, since this makes it possible to impose a permanent delay in action on the adversary. Tamerlan put it simply: "It is better to be with 10 men where you have to be than elsewhere with 10,000".

Surprise can take several forms which, successive or coordinated, contribute to the acquisition or maintenance of freedom of action:

- that of innovation in a specific field, particularly technical;
- that obtained by the constitution of reserved training courses or by a new structure compared to the usual organization;
- that acquired through the application of tactical procedures that the adversary does not foresee.

Surprise is furthermore favoured by factors such as disappointment, intelligence and mobility, which will be developed in the following chapters.

Freedom of action

Since war is fundamentally a struggle for freedom of action, this principle can be established as the first of the principles of war. It is based on an ability to understand the adversary and the environment.

Principle of freedom of action:

The ability of a leader to use his means at all times and to act in spite of the adversary and the various constraints imposed by the environment and circumstances in order to achieve the assigned goal.

Freedom of action is based on :

- Safety, which protects against surprises;
- Forecasting and anticipating adverse events and actions;
- the ability to gain the upper hand and impose one's will on the opponent.

Freedom of action thus consists in keeping the initiative in relation to the opponent to allow "mastering the next move" and seizing opportunities.

Initiative

Ability to set or define the terms of the action throughout the manoeuvre or operation.

- If it is possible for the enemy to make a mistake, it can also be provoked. In both cases, this advantage must be exploited in order to take or maintain the ascendancy over the opponent.
- But to maintain the initiative cannot be conceived without the leader showing audacity. Indeed, this one takes part in maintaining the moral ascendancy on the enemy. It is characterized by a reasoned risk-taking which makes it possible to impose one's action on the adversary.

Erwin Rommel's commentary on boldness -

Notebooks, war without hate. 1952

"Experience proves that the boldest decisions ensure the greatest promise of victory. But a distinction must be made between strategic or tactical daring and the roll of the dice. The bold operation is one in which success is not guaranteed, but in which, in the event of failure, the leader remains at the head of forces sufficient to deal with any situation. The roll of the dice, on the other hand, can give you victory or lead to the total destruction of your army. In some situations, even this roll of the dice is justified. For example, when the normal course of events should result in defeat, which is only a matter of days away. No reason, therefore, to delay, and the only thing left to do is to launch a high-risk operation."

Concentration of effort

It differs from the concentration of forces by the need to combine actions and optimize the effects to multiply the efficiency on the chosen objective. Coordination between weapon systems is complemented by coordination between constraint, control and

influence capabilities. As part of an overall manoeuvre that goes beyond the simple military aspects, concordance of effects will be achieved through the necessary and systematic complementarity between the different services, or even between services depending on the level.

Principle of concentration of efforts :

Convergence in space and time of the actions and effects of the various operational functions.

The effectiveness of the concentration of efforts is achieved by the conquest of a relative superiority applied to the point of rupture of the balance of physical and moral forces. It is exercised even at the risk of weakening secondary points.

This breaking point is established:

- By the concept of balance of power which makes it possible to appreciate the moments and places of relative superiority or inferiority of friendly forces and, by the same token, to deduce the material efforts to be applied.
- By the optimization of the psychological effects obtained by surprise and a preponderant will - a combination of the conceptual strength of the chiefs and their staffs and the spirit of initiative developed at each level - and, from this, to deduce the most favourable circumstances.

Relative superiority is more the consequence of a moral struggle between two wills than the physical shock between two masses. Napoleon stated that " moral forces account for three-quarters of the final result; numerical and material forces account for only a quarter. Moral forces and opinion account for more than half". Concentration will be all the more effective when it is exercised against a surprised and weakened opponent.

Economy of means

Principle of economy of means :

The judicious allocation and application of resources with a view to obtaining the best capacity/effect ratio to achieve the assigned goal.

This principle implies the clear and precise expression of the choice of leader to achieve an objective. The allocation of resources to the various tactical units is primarily the result of this choice. But it must also allow for the risks associated with boldness and the acquisition of relative superiority referred to in the two preceding principles.

The instruments of economy of means are :

- Modularity which is concretized by the constitution of units adapted to the mission to be carried out and by the inter-services manoeuvre.

- The articulation of forces which contributes to it in particular by the management of the spaces occupied by them. It must result in having the means to acquire relative superiority, to exploit opportunities and to avoid surprises.

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