



## The evolution of principles of war in French military doctrine, from Antiquity to today

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In the field of the art and science of war, theorists since Antiquity have been interested, in the search of fundamental rules allowing the strategist and the tactician to gain the ascendancy over an adversary.

Inspired by each other over centuries, they have contributed to the emergence of a common corpus, which each nation declines today according to its own military culture. Principles of war are multifaceted and can be understood as strategic principles and action principles. This article focuses on France and how prominent military theorists detailed the principles of war throughout history. The key idea is that principles of war as defined by Marshal Ferdinand Foch and currently endorsed by French Armed forces are the result of multiple influences.

It is only after Napoléon's military campaigns that the basis for defining unconditional principles of war are set with Jomini and Clausewitz. Foch synthesized Clausewitz and Jomini's ideas of principles of war and suggested a series of principles aimed to inform military decision-makers. These first principles are the pillars of the French military culture today, although it took roughly a century for their importance to be recognized. Two British theorists in the 1920s and the 1950s drew on the work of Foch to develop the doctrine used to wage war. J.F. Fuller in 1920s reasserted the predominance of the principle of economy of forces and erected this particular principle as the pillar of this theory. Fuller's theory on principles of war would then be greatly appreciated by American strategic and military thinkers. In the early 1950s, Liddell Hart theorized an indirect approach consisting of six positive principles and two negative such as not to engage all the resources in front of the enemy or not to repeat an attack on the same line of battle.

After 1943, freedom of action became another pillar of the principles of war. Relatively new principles start to gain momentum such as agility, fluidity and surprise. In France in the 1960s, interest in principles shifted from definition and random identification to a total absence of principles of war. Only with the publication of General Instruction on land forces in 1994 was

the meaning of the principles of war doctrinally reasserted. Drawing on Foch's identification of principles, the general instruction defined three principles that prevailed in the 1970's: freedom of action, economy of forces and concentration of efforts. From each of these three principles resulted complementary principles. For example, in order to assure oneself freedom of action one has to have legitimacy in action. Legitimacy in action relies on the principle of necessity. These new principles imply moderation and a principle of reversibility in action.

More recently, General Guy Hubin proposed an interesting approach of the principles of war. He suggested that the basis for analyzing principles of war relies on Foch's three main principles followed by three guidelines: knowledge, will and power. Therefore, freedom of action would be the principle to establish and maintain power. The principle of economy of resources would allow knowledge by estimating the risks and advantages of an action. Finally, the principle of concentration of efforts would embody the will for success.

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