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## The Principles of War

The nine principles of war are aids to a leader as they consider how to accomplish a mission. As opposed to being prescriptive steps or actions that must be accomplished, they are guidelines for conducting operations through all the levels of war; strategic, operational, and tactical. (*Warfighting, 28-32*) Sightless adherence to these principles will not guarantee success, but each deviation increases risk. It is the tactician who will thoughtfully apply these principles, recognizing the risk versus gain of any omission, to focus their tactical thought into execution. The nine Principles of War are easily remembered by the acronym MOOSEMUSS. They are defined below:

### Mass

The concept of “concentrating the effects of combat power at the decisive place and time to achieve decisive results.” (*Marine Corps Operations, B-1*) As you learned in *Warfighting*, we must first identify which factors are critical to the enemy, and then identify a relative weakness to that strength – this is the enemy’s critical vulnerability. Vital to the concept of mass is having the insight to identify the decisive place and time in which to attack the enemy’s critical vulnerability. Concentrated fire power is irrelevant if applied to an objective of no significance. We seek mass to overwhelm the enemy in an attempt to deliver the decisive blow. It applies not only to fires, but supporting elements as well. It is closely related to economy of force, as force available is limited and we must decide when and where it is appropriate to mass or economize our force.

### Objective

The concept of “direct[ing] every military operation toward a clearly defined, decisive, and attainable objective.” (*Marine Corps Operations, B-2*) Related to mass and economy of force, we must know where to mass and where to economize, which is defined by a decisive objective. It is also related to unity of command, as each subordinate must be lead by the intent of one commander, towards the commonly defined objective. Communication is also critical, ensuring that the elements of the military operation are acting in consonance towards the same end.

### Offensive

The concept that we, as a fighting force, are continuously focused on “seiz[ing], retain[ing], and exploit[ing] the initiative.” (*Marine Corps Operations, B-2*) Maintaining an offensive mindset does not imply that we seek to avoid defense. Rather it implies the use of the defense as a temporary expedient to prepare to resume the offense. Offense being the decisive form of combat, it is the method by which we exploit the enemy weakness, impose our will, and determine the course of war.

### Security

The concept of “never permit[ing] the enemy to acquire an unexpected advantage.” (*Marine Corps Operations, B-2*) We look to, at appropriate times and places, adopt measures to prevent the enemy from imposing their will on us faster than we can react. It allows us to ensure our freedom of action on the battlefield and preserve our combat power for decisive action. It does not imply the over-application of caution to eliminate risk, but rather seeks to enhance our operations through bold maneuver and acceptance of calculated risk.

### Economy of Force

The concept of “allocat[ing] minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts.” (*Marine Corps Operations, B-3*) This goes hand-in-hand with the concept of mass. In order for us to concentrate decisive combat power at the decisive point, we must know where to economize forces at our secondary efforts. This also implies an acceptance of calculated risk at these secondary efforts. Limited attacks, defense, deceptions, or delaying actions can help us economize forces allowing us to weight the main effort with mass.

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## The Principles of War (Continued)

### Maneuver

The concept that we seek to “place the enemy in a disadvantageous position through the flexible application of combat power.” (*Marine Corps Operations, B-3*) The traditional understanding of maneuver is a spatial one; that is, we maneuver in space to gain a positional advantage. (*JP 1-02, 200*) However, in order to maximize the usefulness of maneuver, we must consider maneuver in other dimensions as well. The essence of maneuver is taking action to generate and exploit some kind of advantage over the enemy as a means of accomplishing our objectives as effectively as possible. That advantage may be psychological, technological, or temporal as well as spatial. Especially important is maneuver *in time*—we generate a faster operating tempo than the enemy to gain a temporal advantage. It is through maneuver in all dimensions that an inferior force can achieve decisive superiority at the necessary time and place. (*Warfighting, 72*) Maneuver alone will not defeat a force, however maneuver in conjunction with Mass, Surprise, and Economy of Force allows a seemingly inferior force to achieve decisive superiority at the necessary time and place.

### Unity of Command

Best exemplified by commander’s intent, “Unity of Command” is the concept that “for every objective, [we] ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander.” (*Marine Corps Operations, B-4*) Mass, economy of force, and maneuver would be impossible without the vision of a single leader. To ensure that vision is carried to the lowest levels while still allowing for flexibility and initiative we use commander’s intent. It allows for and leverages mass, objective, and economy of force at the decisive point.

### Surprise

The concept that we seek to “strike the enemy at a time or place or in a manner for which he is unprepared.” (*Marine Corps Operations, B-4*) It does not require the enemy to be caught unaware, but rather that he becomes aware too late to react effectively. May include the use of speed (maneuver in time), unexpected forces (mass), operating at night (psychological and technological maneuver), deception (psychological maneuver), security, variation in techniques, and use of unfavorable terrain (spatial maneuver).

### Simplicity

The concept that the preparation of “clear, uncomplicated plans and clear, concise orders ensures thorough understanding” (*Marine Corps Operations, B-4*) and therefore ease of execution. Plans and orders should be as simple and direct as the situation and mission dictate. This reduces the chance of misunderstandings that inject internal friction and therefore cause ineffective execution. *Ceteris paribus* (all variables being equal), the simplest plan is preferred.