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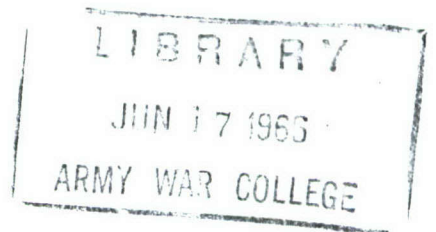
22 April 1966

## THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR; SENSE OR NONSENSE IN THE COLD WAR?

By

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USAWC RESEARCH ELEMENT  
(Essay)

The Principles of War;  
Sense or Nonsense in the Cold War?

by

Col John O. Shoemaker  
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US Army War College  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania  
22 April 1966

## SUMMARY

The problem in understanding and explaining the Cold War appears to be one of first appreciating the fact that it is a real war and then selecting commonly accepted and understood principles for analysis and application. It is therefore considered useful to consider the principles of war to determine their applicability to the protracted conflict in which the Free World and the Communist Bloc are now engaged.

The principles of war through the ages have been many and varied, followed and ignored, accepted and denied. The United States Army today teaches nine principles. These nine principles can be used to analyze and define the progress of the Cold War in Europe, in Africa, in South America, and in Asia. They are a handy tool to compare Free World and Communist Bloc strategy in different geographical areas and in the political, economic, and military phases of the worldwide Cold War.

The principles have definite application in the Cold War. With isolated exceptions the principles are now being followed in the different theatres of the Cold War and in the active campaigns now in progress. That the principles are being applied intuitively in some cases rather than with conscious perception does not detract from their validity. Not only do the principles make sense in the Cold War, they can serve a most useful purpose in helping to make sense out of it.

The United States and its allies are today engaged in a global war the outcome of which will determine whether the democratic nations can survive a protracted conflict with the Communist Bloc. Whether this war is referred to as a Cold War, a conflict of communist and democratic ideologies, or as a confrontation of major world power blocs, it is a war nevertheless and a war that the free nations cannot afford to lose.

The United States is deeply involved in a shooting war in Vietnam which is part of the larger struggle. As more and more American resources are committed to this war the average American and his congressional representatives are expressing increasing concern and apprehension about our national objectives and goals in the cold war in general and in South Vietnam in particular. Specific American stakes in the cold war are difficult to understand and even more difficult to explain in the precise terms that are now being demanded by administration critics and certain vocal minorities in the nation. The difficulties, although considerable, are not insurmountable. Although the issues are involved, and the goals therefore complex, the issues and opportunities are amenable to organization and explanation in terms that are understandable to all. The problem appears to be one of selecting commonly accepted and understood principles for analysis and application in determining and expressing goals desired. In this endeavor perhaps an examination of the military approach to problem solving and the military methods of organization of means and expression

of tasks to be undertaken and objectives to be attained may be helpful. If we accept the fact that the United States is at war with the Communist Bloc around the world and not just in Vietnam, it might be useful to examine the time-honored principles of war to determine their applicability to the protracted conflict in which our nation is now engaged.

Although the principles of war to be discussed herein will be enumerated and defined in order to obtain a mutual understanding of the terms used, their application will be suggested in general terms and on the strategic rather than on the tactical level. These principles should not be considered as rigid, restrictive, religious dogmas but as axioms or common sense propositions. The principles are basic doctrines which have been either kept alive through the ages or rediscovered on the basis of common sense and discernment.

The principles of war were used naturally and intuitively by the world's great captains centuries before they were categorized, catalogued, and enumerated by modern military theorists. If, for example, one reads Xenophon's account of the Greek expedition into Persia, one finds in the frequent orations of the Greek generals to their troops views expressed that are very similar to those now found in our military manuals and dignified by the term principles of war.

Many, if not most, of the axioms now referred to by modern military strategists as principles of war were "rediscovered" and

elucidated by Karl von Clausewitz in his much quoted treatise "On War" published in 1833. Clausewitz is most useful when used as a guide to the application and interpretation of principles rather than a source of infallible and immutable dogmas. A careful reading of his work discloses that the great theoretician and philosopher was more concerned with the qualifications, exceptions, and interpretations of his "principles" than he was with the specific ideas themselves. Clausewitz wisely cautioned that blind application of principles is unwise and dangerous; that principles are not a substitute for imagination and thought; and that principles should not become slogans which may be nothing but well phrased insights into the past. Clausewitz has no single most important rule for the conduct of war except perhaps for his frequently reiterated insistence that all war ought to be politically purposeful--that the political objective should be paramount and guide the military conduct of the war.

The United States, for complex cultural reasons, has come to identify strategic principles and national objectives in the Cold War almost exclusively with the staging and fighting of the immediate military engagement. To some Americans it is even vaguely immoral to employ political, economic, and psychological warfare although no intelligent Cold War strategy against the Communist Bloc can be developed without it. The Communists, on the other hand, have adopted a less circumscribed and more esoteric and ambiguous concept of conflict, in which political, economic, and



psychological modes are carefully integrated with purely military activities. It is as dangerous to believe that the defense of the West in the Cold War can be reduced to a purely military problem as it is naive to believe that massive political and economic aid and pressure can defeat the new Communist Bloc technique of assault by subversion.

The new war to which old principles must be adapted has a greatly broadened spectrum. It is indeed a total war and encompasses political, economic, psychological, and social as well as military aspects and phases. We cannot by wishing it otherwise change the rules of the game which we have permitted the aggressor to lay down. One hundred and thirty years ago Clausewitz wrote:

The first, the grandest, the most decisive act of judgment which the Statesman and General exercises is rightly to understand the war in which he engages, not to take it for something, to wish to make of it something, which by the nature of its relations it is impossible for it to be.

From the above, two basic deductions can be made which form the foundation upon which the application of the principles of war to the Cold War may be profitably examined. These are: (1) Regardless of the type, scope, or complexity of war the political objectives must be paramount; and (2) After determining that a true state of war exists, the nature of the war must be recognized and national objectives and strategy developed on that basis.

The conduct of war has been variously described as an art and as a science. If it is a science it is an imprecise science in that the general cause and effect relationships between the phenomena

of war may not be stated with the quantitative and qualitative precision customary in the physical sciences. Thus no tidy rules or formulas exist for the student or practitioner. No encapsulated wisdom or eternal verities can be provided concerning the conduct of war. This is unfortunate, for in our modern nuclear, automated, scientific society we have come to expect such assurances based on proved data and feel uneasy without an elaborate body of analytical laws upon which to base our decisions and judgments. Although the phenomena of war follow the natural laws of cause and effect, the principles derived therefrom are subject to interpretation and the interpretations are as many and as varied as there are "experts" in the field.

Maurice de Saxe, Marshal of France, once stated that:

War is a science so involved in darkness and attended with so much imperfection, that no certain rules of conduct can be given concerning it; custom and prejudice, the natural consequence of ignorance, are its sole foundation.

Clausewitz, conversely, believed in the study of principles and his disciple Jomini said: "The fundamental principles upon which rest all good combinations of war have always existed, . . . These principles are unchangeable; they are independent of the arms employed, of times, and of places." Napoleon advised his Marshals to peruse the campaigns of the great leaders and concluded that: "Your own genius will be enlightened by this study, and you will learn to reject all maxims foreign to the principles of these great commanders."

Sun Tze, writing in China in the sixth century B.C., listed thirteen principles of war; from Napoleon's extensive writings one hundred and fifteen maxims have been derived; Clausewitz gives us seven or more depending on one's interpretation of the word "principle." General Foch, writing prior to World War I lists four principles, concluding his list with a cryptic "etc." The modern British Army teaches eleven principles including "Public Opinion" which originated with Clausewitz, was inserted in the British list by Field Marshal Montgomery, and has obvious application in the Cold War today. The French limit their list to three principles and the Soviet list contains ten. Each nation selects those principles which in the opinion of the times represent those proved concepts or points of doctrine deserving more emphasis than other concepts or doctrines.

The United States Army Training Regulation No. 10-5 of 1921 contained the first official list of US principles but listed the names only without explanation. The current edition of US Army Field Manual No. 100-5, "Field Service Regulations-Operations" lists nine principles of war. These nine principles express present military doctrine and are the principles against which the validity of current US Army military concepts and doctrine are measured.

The current US Army principles of war, with brief explanatory notes are:

- (1) The principle of the OBJECTIVE. The principle of the objective states that all efforts must be directed toward a clearly

defined, decisive, and obtainable goal. Selection of the proper objective is the first and most vital step in the application of the principles of war. The ultimate objective of military operations in war is the destruction of the enemy's armed forces and his will to fight.

(2) The principle of the OFFENSIVE. The principle of the offensive states that offensive action is necessary to achieve decisive results and maintain freedom of action.

(3) The principle of SIMPLICITY. Simplicity is a quality or state of being clear and uncomplicated and is essential if plans are to be executed effectively. Simplicity is applied to organization, methods, and means.

(4) The principle of UNITY OF COMMAND. The principle of unity of command states that the decisive application of full national power requires unity of effort under one responsible commander.

(5) The principle of MASS. The principle of mass requires the achievement of superiority of national power at the critical place and time for decisive purpose.

(6) The principle of ECONOMY OF FORCE. The principle of economy of force requires the allocation of available combat power in such a manner that all tasks together achieve results effectively.

(7) The principle of MANEUVER. The principle of maneuver states that military resources must be positioned to favor the accomplishment of the mission and disposed in such a manner as to place the enemy at a relative disadvantage.

(8) The principle of SURPRISE. The principle of surprise connotes striking the enemy when, where, and in a manner for which he is unprepared.

(9) The principle of SECURITY. Security is essential to preserve national power and retain freedom of action.

It is not the purpose of the author to propose a global strategy to win the cold war but to translate the current war situation into military terms and suggest the manner in which consideration of the principles of war may clarify the current strategy of the Free World. Let us consider that the global war today consists of several theatres of war, some active, some inactive. Within each theatre the war is conducted in identifiable phases. At the risk of oversimplification these phases can be described as political, economic, and military. While under certain isolated conditions these phases may be successfully undertaken concurrently, it is more usual to find them entered into sequentially with, of course, some unavoidable overlap between phases. In most cases, if the political and economic phases of a Cold War campaign are initiated early enough, and to the necessary extent and degree, the military phase is unnecessary. For example: the European theatre is an active theatre in which the front has been stabilized although the opposing forces still confront each other across a clearly defined line of contact. The European theatre is now in a predominantly political phase of warfare. Although some vestiges of the economic phase are still evident, this phase has largely been won by the

West. If, hopefully, the political phase now in progress can be won by the West as now appears likely, there will be no military phase required and although constant vigilance and preparedness will be required, the Western Powers will have achieved their objectives in Europe.

The African theatre and the South American theatre are semi-active theatres in which the opposing factions are conducting a meeting engagement on a broad front. With the exception of minor military forays and probing actions such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and the Congo, these theatres are in a political-economic phase. Proper and prompt application of the principles of war to these theatres can stabilize the front and achieve Free World objectives. Here General Forrest's aphorism has obvious application. "Them that gits thar fust with the most" will have a significant advantage. This general philosophy must be applied, however, considering all of the principles of war.

The global policy of the Free World vis-a-vis the Communist Bloc is one of containment. This policy dictates that the principles of the OBJECTIVE must be defensive in nature. It is a military axiom, however, that no defense is credible unless the defender has some offensive capability. Thus the Free World must apply the principle of the OFFENSIVE in the African and South American theatres by quickly initiating political and economic support to these areas to eliminate conditions that foster and breed communism.

The provision of Free World aid and assistance must consider the principle of SIMPLICITY. Both the African and South American theatres are relatively underdeveloped areas. Programs for their support must not be so sophisticated or complicated or their objectives so circumscribed that they cannot be accomplished. Such plans would not only be unremunerative but would be self-defeating.

Keeping Free World campaign plans and programs simple does not mean that they cannot or should not be comprehensive. The principle of MASS and ECONOMY OF FORCE must also be applied. The preparation of a war plan by military professionals is preceded by a detailed estimate of the situation in which friendly and enemy strengths and weaknesses are analyzed and evaluated. The campaign plan is then designed to exploit friendly strengths and apply pressure on the areas of enemy weakness. The great strengths of the Free World and Free World advantages in the elements of national power are in the areas of organization, technology, agriculture, and health, education, and welfare. The use of these elements of national power in MASS at the critical time and place for decisive purposes assumes the corollary application of ECONOMY OF FORCE in that each element is provided in the proper ratio, one to the other, in the proper sequence, and in such a manner that all elements together achieve results effectively.

The application of elements of national power, in their proper proportions, and at the proper time, positions the strength of the Free World to favor the accomplishment of our objective and disposes

the power in such a manner as to place the enemy at a relative disadvantage. The principle of MANEUVER is thus recognized and applied.

The prompt and effective deployment of political and economic resources to the African and South American theatres achieves SURPRISE and the initiation of simple, comprehensive, and carefully proportioned programs contributes to the SECURITY of the area without which gains cannot be consolidated and long range objectives achieved.

The principle of UNITY OF COMMAND is particularly important. Not only is central direction of political, economic, and military phases of a Cold War campaign indispensable, the one manager concept must apply within as well as between each phase. Military experts long ago discovered the necessity of joint and combined command of armed forces. The same principles must be applied to the direction and control of the social, industrial, political, psychological, health, education, public information, and agricultural portions of the economic and political phases of a Cold War campaign.

North America, the geographical areas controlled by the Soviet Bloc, and the British Commonwealth can be considered inactive theatres of war although the British are still experiencing some turbulence in former colonial areas. Asia, however, is a very active theatre of war at the moment and presents some interesting aspects to consider in the application of the principles of war toward an understanding of the situation there.



The war in Vietnam in which the United States and its allies are now engaged is a complex conflict. The American people and their leaders, and certain allies of the United States, have an uneasy feeling about this war. They are asking themselves and others how the Free World became so entangled in this war in a far part of the world and how and if the war can be won. They are also inquiring as to the specific military and political objectives of the Free World in Vietnam.

The situation in Vietnam is better understood if it is placed in proper perspective and considered as but one campaign in one theatre of the current world war between the Free World and the Communist Bloc, and a campaign that is now in a predominantly military phase. Although the military phase of the Vietnam campaign can and will be won, the campaign itself cannot be successfully concluded and Free World objectives achieved until the political and economic phases are also successfully terminated.

The OBJECTIVE is the principle of war most frequently discussed when activities in Vietnam are debated. Containment of Communism is the major and overriding political objective of the Free World. This objective is paramount in Vietnam with the implied sub-objective of removing Communist forceful aggression from the Vietnamese scene and permitting that nation to develop as it will in an environment free from external coercion. In the Vietnamese campaign one can observe the three phases of the battle--the political, the economic, and the military.

Although all phases of a campaign contribute to the overall general objective, they each have objectives of their own which are expressed differently as the tasks and missions differ between and within phases. The objective of the political phase is to establish a stable government representative of and responsive to the needs and desires of the people. The economic objective may be stated simply as freedom from want and development of hope and opportunity. The military objective remains the same as the military objective of all shooting wars--the destruction of the armed enemy of the nation and his will to fight. In the case of the Vietnamese campaign, this means the destruction of all enemy forces in South Vietnam and their will to fight. As the overall Free World objective is containment and does not contemplate aggression against the Communist Bloc, it follows that once South Vietnam is cleared of military forces, the enemy's will to continue the struggle is destroyed and those who sponsored and supported their activities are unable or unwilling to reinitiate hostilities, that the military phase will have been successfully terminated.

The objective of the military, economic, and political phases of a Cold War campaign are neither mutually inclusive nor exclusive. They are, however, different. This is not to say that military forces and resources cannot or should not be directed toward assisting political or economic programs during the political and economic phases of the campaign. The military can and should, for example, assist in civil construction, education, health, and like

activities to the degree that such assistance does not detract from the accomplishment of their primary mission. On the other hand, to require them to divert significant resources to civic action programs prior to the destruction of the armed enemy makes no more sense than placing rifles in the hands of agricultural or educational experts and directing them to stalk the Vietcong through the jungle. This is precisely the point at which the phases of the campaign become confused and its objectives become unclear. To some, this effort to delineate objectives, sub-objectives, and tasks may appear as laboring the obvious. Nevertheless, to reduce the obvious to order is the first prerequisite for establishing a common understanding of the problem.

The overall political objective of the Vietnamese campaign is clear, and the political, economic, and military sub-objectives can be expressed with a reasonable degree of precision. The difficulty, if any, in defining objectives is experienced in areas where objectives overlap in terms of time, in requirements for resources, or in determination of authority. Here definition is less precise and objectives tend to become less distinct. The application of the principle of UNITY OF COMMAND is absolutely essential to assure clarity and meaning to the situation.

The military are fortunate that a well understood chain of command is established from the President through the Secretary of Defense to the Unified Military Commander in the campaign area. A less well-defined and understood chain of command exists for the

blending and synchronization of the political, economic, and military aspects of the campaign and for the coordination and control of the separate political and economic components. The United States Ambassador as the personal representative of the President is vested with overall responsibility for the decisive application of all elements of national power and unity of effort. His actual command authority is recondite, however, because of the special relationship between the directors of political, economic, and military programs in the campaign area and the executive departments they serve. In addition, there is no evident corporate body or staff between the Ambassador and the President with authority for staff coordination that compares to the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the military departments, unless one considers the Cabinet or the National Security Council as performing this function. It appears that improvements can be made in the present system to assure adherence to the principle of Unity of Command. Directing component commanders to coordinate, cooperate, and support each other seldom proved effective in the military establishment. Positive command and control was determined to be necessary to achieve results. It appears unlikely that civilian departments will be more inclined than the military to achieve Unity of Command without overall positive direction and precisely defined authority.

Free World objectives in the Asian theatre are clear and they are simple. An offensive defense has been adopted in the area and resources deployed there in mass. The extent and scope of Free

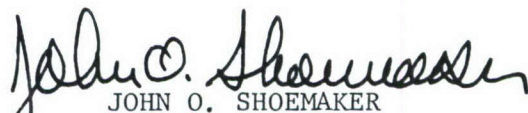
World defensive maneuvers and reaction in Asia undoubtedly surprised the Communists; and successful termination of the Vietnamese campaign will provide increased security to other free nations in Asia. Steps can and are being taken to improve overall unity of command in the theatre.

The current debate on the conduct of the Cold War in the Asian theatre centers on the application of the principle of MASS and its corollary ECONOMY OF FORCE. The principle of MASS requires the achievement of superiority of power at the critical place and time. Critics of current Free World policy dispute that Vietnam today is the critical place and time. They argue that concentration of force in Vietnam at this time cannot produce decisive results while a commitment of massive resources to the Vietnamese campaign severely limits freedom of action and results in strategic inflexibility. Thus, they say, the principle of MANEUVER is also violated in that the enemy is not at a relative disadvantage worldwide, that the Free World is subject to SURPRISE in another more critical world area in which it will be unable to respond, and that the SECURITY of vital areas of the Free World is therefore in jeopardy.

Whether Vietnam today is the proper place and time is a judgmental decision related directly to the principle itself. Free World leaders, with the best information available to them, have determined that Vietnam is the critical place and today the critical time to apply the principle of MASS to the Cold War. Only historians at some future time can evaluate the wisdom of this particular decision.

The principles of war have definite application to the Cold War. To a large degree, with limited and isolated exceptions, the principles are now being followed in the different theatres of the Cold War and in the active campaigns now in progress. That the principles are being applied intuitively in some cases rather than with conscious perception does not detract from their validity. To the degree that the principles can be employed with complete recognition of their applicability and with full awareness of their interrelationships, the conduct of the war will be improved.

In the military profession great stress is laid upon reducing problems to terms that can be easily understood. More important perhaps is the effort devoted to defining objectives, tasks, and desired goals in sufficient detail and clarity that they cannot be misunderstood. To this end an understanding of the principles of war and their intelligent application to the Cold War makes sense. Not only do the principles make sense in the Cold War, they can serve a most useful purpose in helping to make sense out of it.

  
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