

PRINCIPLES OF WAR IN ASYMMETRICAL CONFLICTS

Principles of war, tested several times throughout history, guide military conduction to achieve success. In current settings, there are conflicts called asymmetrical, featured by a clear imbalance among opposing forces in dispute.

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INTRODUCTION

War implies imposing to the weakest one defeating the will opposed. This power superiority is not only measured by men and means, but also the type of conflict in which those forces are opposed must be considered.

Asymmetrical conflicts have three general features:

1. They aim at causing a significant psychological impact on the people.
2. They require a prior analysis of the opponent vulnerabilities.
3. They are based on tactics, innovative and non traditional weapons or technology.

In order to properly face said conflicts, it is necessary to make planning at operational level that will turn into a Campaign Plan. This planning is based on operational art prepared by a series of Elements of Operational Design.

If we observe conflicts of the last decades, such as the Vietnam War (1959-1975), Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), we can state that most of them are asymmetrical, which makes it necessary to analyze how principles of war affect operational planning in an environment of this type, conditioning decision- making of the Commander of the Theater of Operations.

ASYMMETRICAL CONFLICTS

One of the first thinkers that talked about Asymmetrical Conflicts was Mao Tse- Tung, Chinese statesman and

politician that proposed a revolutionary war of this type. This design was seen in the Vietnam War¹.

Colonel (retired) Rodolfo Ortega Prado of the Chilean Army, wrote: (...) *Asymmetrical war is a conflict in which there is a great disproportion among forces opposed, not only military, but also all those resources or manners of fighting that may be used to dissuade the opponent from their objective, whether they are conventional or irregular forces. Here, the setting is not estimated as in traditional war, even many of the classical principles of war are replaced by innovative harassment tactics that wear away any army*².

As examples of asymmetrical conflicts, we can mention:

- › What happened in March 1993, in Somalia streets when 18 soldiers of special troops of said country died.
- › Terrorist attack to the Twin Towers in 2001.
- › Iraq War in 2003, among many others.

According to Iván Arregín Tolf, specialist in asymmetrical war: (...) *weak actors have defeated in 30% of conflicts since 1809 and with time, this will deepen even more*³. We can then state that most current conflicts are asymmetrical.

1. Prado, Rodolfo Ortega. "Asymmetrical War and Information Operations", Military Review, Estados Unidos, May- June, 2011, p. 24.
2. Prado, Rodolfo Ortega, op. cit., p. 22.



In this type of conflicts (...), *there is no determined side, nor conventional military actions. On the contrary, it is based on a combination of political and military actions that generally involve civil population in different operations (psychological, attacks, veil and deceit, among others)*⁴.

Based on these definitions, we can observe that in these current settings, the field of war becomes unclear and includes unimaginable areas. Threat is not only an adversary power but can be limited to a hostile group, either of small dimension or transnational scope.

PRINCIPLES OF WAR

We must consider that there are principles that guide those that conduct war in the correct direction in order to achieve success and that they were applied to conventional conflicts in many situations.

Colonel John Mattox of the US Army indicates: the word principle appeared at the end of the 14th century and means a truth or main statement on which many others depend. The word comes from the Latin word *principium* which refers to the head of an Army, Staff and General⁵.

In the first half of the 19th century, Antoine Henri Jomini, stated that: main principles in which all good combinations of war lie, have always existed and we must refer to all other principles to understand their respective merits. These principles are unchangeable, independent from weapons used, time and places⁶.

On the other hand, Carl von Clausewitz, contemporary with Jomini, did not share the idea of universality of principles and concluded that they can only serve as important and general guides as it stated that war could not be made with fixed rules⁷. Other authors have also written about the Principles of War⁸.

In conclusion, evolution of all conflicts from sword, going through rifles and latest technology weapons, including satellites and cyber attacks is based on the principles of war although these change depending on the importance or nature of action. Success will depend on the fact that those who conduct actions⁹ have the capacity and opportunity to apply them.

OPERATIONAL PLANNING

After the Franco- Prussian war, in 1870, the German

3. Prado, Rodolfo Ortega, op. cit., p. 4.

4. Locatelli, Omar, "Asymmetrical War: a new war equation - Evolution to a new type of war", second part, Information Manual, Buenos Aires, p. 10.

5. Mattox, John Mark, "Separar el grano de la paja: Cambian las épocas o los principios?" Military Review, United States, January - February, 2009, p. 8.

6. Glenn, Russell, "Se han eliminado los principios de la guerra?", Military Review, United States, May- June, 1998, p. 21.

7. Glenn W. Russell, op. cit., p. 21.

8. Glenn W. Russell, op. cit., p. 22.

9. Mattox, John Mark, op. cit., p. 9.

introduced a classification of the levels of war into three: strategic, operational and tactical. Operational is the link between both levels making national strategic objectives clear to those merely tactical¹⁰.

After the experiences of the Soviets in World War I and the Russian Civil War explanations started to be sought as to complexities of war¹¹.

For them: Military strategy had increased so much that it included a great diversity of activities, including planning and preparation at the highest levels, orchestration and prioritization of all means available and identification of objectives that ended with direct application of military power for the achievement of the objectives of the State¹².

It is necessary to take into account that in order to solve a problema in the military context, it is advisable to apply a planning method defined by the Joint Staff.

PRINCIPLES OF WAR IN ASYMETRICAL CONFLICTS

In the Argentine Armed Forces, there are eleven principles upon which this article will be based:

Principle of command unit: Its purpose is to assure unity of effort to the order of a commandant responsible for each operational objective.

For its application, it is necessary to have cooperation and coordination in order to reach a common purpose¹³. Unity of

effort is necessary to efficiently apply full combat power of forces available¹⁴.

In asymmetrical conflicts, there are organizations formed by civilians (transnational corporations, non-governmental groups, the media, private organizations and NGOs)¹⁵, some of which will fight to keep autonomy and interests complicating Unity of Command of the Commandant of the Theater of Operations.

In such manner that it is important to implement a chain of command that allows the Commandant of the Theater of Operations to make decisions, to be able to control them in any operation or circumstance so that they can reach the Operational End State¹⁶.

Objective: It is based on the correct determination of an objective that must be clear, defined, decisive and reasonable for all types of operations within the Theater of Operations¹⁷. This objective must be essential for the fulfillment of the mission of the Commandant of the Theater of Operations and attainable with means available and within the limits of time and space imposed¹⁸.

Defining the objective is of vital importance in any type of conflict as once it is established, efforts will be directed for their obtention.

According to Herfried Münkler, Professor of Political Theory at Humboldt University (Germany), 21st century wars will be fought by soldiers and, in its greatest part, will not be



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directly addressed to military objectives. Military objectives are being replaced by civil objectives, from cities and towns invaded and looted by leaders of militia and military heads to economic and political power symbols that were the target of the September 11 terrorist attacks¹⁹.

Security: Its purpose is to prevent the enemy from acquired an unexpected advantage²⁰.

Within an asymmetrical context, the non-conventional opponent will try to use concealment and surprise to carry out their actions while state forces are highly identifiable and this is why security is a principle to be considered to preserve one's own forces.

In this sense: support to people is subject to the perception they have as to which band actually assures welfare and protection. Perception of security of people is highly important for the success of the operation²¹.

Suprise: The intention is to keep initiative without providing the enemy with time to react in the proper manner²².

It is necessary to have a proper information system together with the application of technological advance and great speed in maneuver developed within the campaign.

This will require: proper veil and deceit plans, active

intelligence, efficient counter intelligence, an agile and flexible decision making process and forces with tactical, strategic and operational speed²³.

Attack: Its purpose is to exploit the initiative, imposing the will to the enemy, which contributes to get the necessary freedom of action to manage one's own forces properly²⁴.

In this sense, non conventional forces tend to mix with civil population and they will be the ones that can use this advantage in a broader sense, as they will be the ones that generally have the initiative of actions.

Concentration: The intention is to provide sufficient means at the decisive moment and in the place as well as the necessary means in secondary areas.

In the asymmetrical context, it is necessary to take into account that for the Commandant of the Theater of Operations, this concentration does not only refer to military means, but it must also refer to economic, psycho social efforts and NGOs, for example, a situation that will make the mission even more difficult. Also, it will be difficult to apply concentration if the enemy is permanently hidden and moving.

Maneuver: The intention is to position forces in such manner so as to obtain an advantage over the opponent, keeping freedom of action and own initiative. This maneuver will be influenced by the logistics of the Theater of Operations, as the operational scope of forces and their direction depend on this.

Here, non conventional forces will have the advantage due to their intention to keep themselves invisible trying to get and keep initiative. It is necessary to take into consideration that in asymmetry, there are no fronts or devices specifically defined in such a manner that it will be difficult to carry out a maneuver.

Morale: Keeping morale is one of the most important factors in asymmetrical wars. The famous strategist and historian

10. Mattox, John Mark, op. cit., p. 185.

11. Menning, W. Bruce, "The origins of Operational Art", Military Review, United States, May-June, 1998, p. 3.

12. Menning, W. Bruce, op. cit., p. 8.

13. Argentina. Ministry of Defense – Joint Staff of the Armed Forces. Manual of Strategy and Planning for Joint Military Action, Operational level – La Campana 2013. MC 20-01 p 186.

14. Glenn W. Russell, op. cit., p. 28.

15. Ramirez, Gonzalo Martin, "Asymmetrical War – Fourth generation conflicts", a Revista, Nro. 546, Buenos Aires, July- – September 2002., p. 30.

16. Tievias Marcelo. Validity of principles of conventional war and appearance of new principles in the creation and direction of a Campaign, in a context of Fourth Generation War. Final Assignment. Buenos Aires. 2011. p. 12.

17. AArgentina. Ministry of Defense – Joint Staff of the Armed Forces. Manual of Strategy and Planning for Joint Military Action, Operational Level – La Campana, MC 20-01, 2013, p. 187.

18. Llocatelli, Omar, op. cit., p. 13.

19. Herfried, Munkler, "21st century wars", International Journal of the Red Cross, No. 849. Recuperado de <http://www.upf.edu/materials/fhuma/etfipo/eticaa/docs/20.pdf>.

20. Argentina. Ministry of Defense – Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, op. cit., p. 187.

21. Artelli, Michael – Deckro Richard, Fourth Generation Operations: principles for the Long War. Available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09592310802061372>.

22. Argentina. Ministry of Defense – Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, op. cit., p. 188.

23. Tievias Marcelo, op. cit., p. 14.

24. Argentina. Ministry of Defense – Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, op. cit., p. 188.

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sir Basil Liddel Hart wrote: The loss of hope, rather than the loss of lives is what actually decides success of war²⁵.

The use of the media, management of public opinion and effects of psychological action are very important to get success in a campaign. The power of affectation, initiative and surprise that non conventional actors have caused that soldiers, beyond being persuaded of the cause they defend, feel mental and psychical pressure of this type of conflict that make them rethink what the limit of their action is²⁶.

Support: It is based on the capacity and skill of the commandant of the Theater of Operations to keep their force, supplies and material required to support their force.

Here, it is necessary to state that non conventional forces will find difficulties when dealing with this support due to the characteristics of this type of conflicts as they will act in an isolated manner to keep a logistic chain and it will be necessary to interact with civil population.

Simplicity: This refers to preparing plans that are clear and easy to interpret by those who will execute them preventing risks and confusion of operations.

For non conventional forces, it will be easier to act and prepare their plans, carrying out specific, concrete and simple operations. As regards plans of conventional forces, they tend to be more complicated as it will not be easy to distinguish the opponent when they have to face the unlimited enemy imagination.

Freedom of action: The intention is to have a favourable military situation that allows for freedom of action of one's own forces and deny action of opponents. It refers to having the initiative taking advantage of the moment indicated. We can say that freedom of action allows to keep attack or go for it²⁷.

Taking this into consideration, we must also consider the difficulty of conventional forces to reach freedom of action, contrary to non conventional.

PRINCIPLES OF WAR. OPERATIONAL PLANNING AND ASYMMETRICAL CONFLICTS

The planning method selected by the Joint Staff to plan the campaign is the Joint Planning Procedure which has seven steps to reach the solution of the problem and is detailed in the Strategy and Planning Manual for Joint Military Action-Operational Level- The Campaign.

This method has great scope in the military environment due to its vertical and hierarchical nature and because it is rational and logical, which can be applied in conventional conflicts²⁸. Operational planning is based on operational art which is the use of forces aiming at getting operational objectives through interrelation, organization and conduction.

The center of operational art are the elements of operational design, therefore, we will explain how the principles of war affect those elements, which only have direct implication in Step 2 of the planning method mentioned.

End Operational State: It is defined as: Conditions which, when achieved, fulfill the mission. At this level, these conditions get the objectives stated for the campaign²⁹, taking into account that identifying said objectives correctly will be key to reach success of the campaign.

In this element of the operational design, we must apply the Principle of the Objective, considering that in some occasions it will be difficult to determine it due to the uncertainty caused by the asymmetrical context. Not applying it correctly subjects the End Operational State wrongly directing decisions of the Commandant of the Theater of Operations.

Center of Gravity (COG): It is the group of characteristics, skills and sources of power of which a system derives its freedom of action, moral or physical force and will to win. In sum, it is the skill of the opponent that defeated or eliminated will force one or another to surrender or negotiate peace³⁰.

For this reason, it is essential to determine one's own Center of Gravity to protect it properly and determine the one of the opponent in order to direct efforts to eliminate or neutralize it.

In asymmetrical conflicts, there will be a person or organization that will not be visible as in conventional conflicts, in which the Center of Gravity will be materialized

25. Tievias, Marcelo, op. cit., p. 17.

26. Locatelli, Omar, op. cit., p. 15.

27. Martínez de Campos y Serrano, Teoría de la Guerra, Ediciones Ejército, Madrid, 1945, p. 25.

28. Martínez de Campos y Serrano, op. cit., p. 91.

29. Vergara, Evergisto de, "El Planeamiento Operacional", Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos de Buenos Aires, 2003.

30. Argentina. Ministry of Defense - Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, op. cit., p. 47.



(at this level), among others, by the division of the army, a natural resource, a command structure or national will³¹.

On the other hand, the Center of Gravity is materialized by a series of Critical Factors that are part of it³²:

Critical capacities: It is the primary skill or a group of skills which gives force to its Center of Gravity. It refers to causing destruction, creating effects or preventing success of enemy forces.

Critical requirements: These are specific conditions, components or essential resources for the functioning of critical capacities. It is necessary to pay attention to those critical requirements that break a critical capacity and may be considered as such.

Critical vulnerabilities: Once critical requirements have been determined, it is necessary to analyze which one is vulnerable to neutralization and/or destruction in order to significantly affect it to cause collapse of the enemy Center of Gravity.

This item is closely related to the principle of security as once one's own Center of Gravity has been identified,

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it must be protected preventing the opponent to acquire an unexpected advantage and acts over one's own critical vulnerabilities.

Another principle that influences is morale. Loss of morale of forces may cause the collapse of one's own Center of Gravity. In this sense, the Commandant of the Theater of Operations cannot disregard morale of their forces under no circumstances.

Modes of Action and Capacities of the Enemy: Modes of action are the possible solutions to the problem while capacities of the enemy are the possible modes of action of the enemy.

31. Vergara, Evergisto de, op. cit.

32. Argentina. Ministry of Defense – Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, op. cit., p. 51.

Due to the complexity and uncertainty of asymmetrical conflicts, it is difficult to identify the enemy and it is almost impossible to determine what their possible objectives are, reasons for which, it is not possible to state different modes of action and capacities of the enemy on which operational planning will be based.

Therefore, it is necessary to apply the principle of the objective for which it is necessary to identify, at any moment, the objective in spite of existing difficulties.

On the other hand, the mode of action must be supported in a logistic manner in all dimensions and it is impossible to support it without taking into consideration support of intervening forces.

Also, for the intelligence area of a Staff, it is very difficult to determine capacities of the enemy considering support of the opponent's forces due to the dispersion of forces and support by civil population.

Operational planning is based on operational art which is the use of forces aiming at getting operational objectives through interrelation, organization and conduction.

Moreover, the Commandant of the Theater of Operations must consider the freedom of action that they will give to the modes of action. Planning must be such that Specific Commandants have freedom of action in order to carry out their own detailed planning.

Momentum and tempo: Momentum can be defined as the opportunity to carry out actions that allow to exploit the opponent's vulnerabilities. This is closely related to the initiative they have. Tempo is based on keeping a constant pressure over the opponent in order not to give them enough time to successfully develop their actions³³.

It is necessary to take into account that operations will be carried out at a high tempo, both for the conventional and the asymmetrical actor, due to the speed in the action of the latter. This is possible once the objective over which there is an intention to act has been identified.

The Commandant of the Theater of Operations must consider the principle of attack, the purpose of which is to take, retain and exploit the initiative imposing their will to the enemy. It is not easy to find a proper moment to make a certain strike over the asymmetrical opponent who generally has the initiative and acts surprisingly and wrongly where it is less expected. This principle also tries to apply proper pressure to retain freedom of action from the enemy.



If we observe conflicts of the last decades, such as the Vietnam War (1959-1975), Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), we can state that most of them are asymmetrical, which makes it necessary to analyze how principles of war affect operational planning in an environment of this type, conditioning decision-making of the Commander of the Theater of Operations.

In order to apply proper effort in the proper moment, the principle of Unity of Command and the essential cooperation and coordination in order to reach success. Moreover, in order to keep high tempo, it is necessary to have a unified command to prevent interference or lack of precision in operations carried out.

Effort and operational maneuver. Operational effort is defined as the application and/or correction of means, forces or effects and time given, through which a Commandant expects to reach success of the Campaign³⁴.

Operational maneuver is the combination of said operational efforts, whether they are main or secondary, to be carried out by means of the best use of resources and forces available in a given time and space in order to break up the Center of Gravity of the opponent and reach the operational objective³⁵.

We can see the difficulty to make efforts in an operation against an asymmetrical opponent due to the fact that they carry out rapid and concrete actions in an unexpected manner, in illogical occasions and even in unexpected geographical spaces.

In general, these operations will be isolated and carried out by small groups of men. This is why it will be difficult to apply one or several efforts over a particular target.

The Commandant of the Theater of Operations must apply the Principle of Maneuver in order to get an advantage over the opponent keeping freedom of action and initiative.

In order to carry out maneuver in a synchronized and successful manner, it is necessary to have a proper Unit of Command to dispose of forces with the corresponding coordination and control in time.

Culminating Point. It is defined as the situation given in the development of the conflict in which the relation

of power among actors, within the space in which they interact prevents one of them from keeping the ongoing operational attitude with reasonable expectation of success forcing to take a change of path that preserves from a highly likely failure³⁶.

It is necessary to consider that the asymmetrical actor receives support from people that gives: logistic support, hiding places and intelligence information, among others. This support will make it difficult for operational attitude over the enemy that will try to hide among civil population to make it difficult for the conventional actor to act. This is why the culminating point is easier to be reached by conventional forces than asymmetrical ones.

In order not to reach this point, the Commandant of the Theater of Operations must consider the principle of support, thus assuring an uninterrupted logistic chain.

Another point to be considered is morale. A low morale makes one's own forces to reach one's own culminating point.

Here, the use of the media managing public opinion and the effects of psychological action are really important.

Operational scope. It is the capacity to act within a certain area, that is in line with the magnitude and support of one's own force³⁷.

Conventional forces do not generally find difficulties with their operational scope as they are made up of coalitions or Armed Forces that belong to countries which are superior in means and keep a proper logistic support of their own forces.

Operational pause. This is a pause in activities during an extended time in order to try not to reach the culminating point of one's own force or generate combat capacity to face the enemy³⁸.

In these conflicts, operational pause is given due to the lack of identification of the enemy, their dispersion or even constant help of civil population. Here, operational pause is less controlled than in conventional conflicts which makes it difficult to get success of the campaign.

Principles that influence this element of design are morale and support. It is important for the Commandant of the Theater of Operations to apply the principle of morale as in this type of conflicts, the opponent will try to use this point in their favor trying to reduce morale of

33. Argentina. Ministry of Defense – Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, op. cit., pp. 63 - 64.

34. Argentina. Ministry of Defense – Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, op. cit., p. 69.

35. Argentina. Ministry of Defense – Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, op. cit., p. 66.

36. Barrales, Paulo Jorge, "Punto Culminante y Estado Final Deseado". Gazette of the Navy Center No. 835. Buenos Aires. Jan / Apr 2013.

37. Argentina. Ministry of Defense – Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, op. cit., p. 73.

38. Argentina. Ministry of Defense – Joint Staff of the Armed Forces, op. cit., p. 72.



their opponent in order to take conventional forces to an operational pause.

The principle of support is also applicable as interruption of logistic chain of one's own forces leads to an operational pause that affects operations and may represent a turning point in the campaign.

In graphic No. 1 and in order to make it easier for interpretation, we will establish relations that exist among different concepts.

CONCLUSIONS

We can state that these are not rules to be followed and that lack of compliance with one of them does not prevent anyone from getting success of the campaign.

We must consider that it is not easy to apply these principles and that conventional forces face an opponent that in many occasions it is not visible because, as it has been said,

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it gets mixed with population and it may be used as a human shield, if necessary, and also they do not follow logics but make wrong movements.

Not all these principles adapt to Operational Planning in asymmetrical conflicts. Those with greater influence are: Target, Security, Attack, Morale, Support and Freedom of Action.

It is worth mentioning that Principles of War have a positive influence on operational planning posing a condition to the decision making process of the Commandant of the Theater of Operations as lack of application may disregard important points to be considered during planning, which affects the course of the campaign.

We can question the following:

- › If it is not advisable to analyze another planning method for Asymmetrical Conflicts as in case the Joint Planning Procedure method is applied, all branches of non conventional conflicts analyzed in light of Principles of War will not be considered.
- › If in order to face Asymmetrical Conflicts, there is the possibility to rephrase principles used by Argentine Armed Forces.

Joint doctrine specifies the planning method of the operational level but it does not define its application to this type of conflict.

There is the need for Argentine doctrine to have a planning method that allows to face Asymmetrical Conflicts.