

# Principles of War: The Apocrypha

By Sid Heal

Principles are fundamental laws or truths from which insight and understanding can be derived. They are not rules, but rather generalizations that serve to focus attention and provide guidance. The “nine principles of war”<sup>1</sup> have been used to understand conflicts<sup>2</sup> since they were first introduced in their present form a century ago. These were never intended to be exhaustive, but rather just nine concepts that had proven so relevant that they applied in all conflicts. To any tactical commander, these are considered “need-to-know.” “Nice-to-know,” however, are those that have applications whether they are relevant in every instance or not. Although these so-called “apocrypha”<sup>3</sup> have never been codified, *per se*, they nevertheless have influence and are often cited as major factors by militaries beyond the United States.

*Legitimacy* is so often cited that it is sometimes referred to as the “10<sup>th</sup> Principle of War.” Legitimacy identifies the absolute necessity of maintaining the confidence of the lawfulness and morality of actions. It is critical to sustainability in that it impacts both the psychological and physical ability to sustain operations. In a free country, loss of support of the people is a showstopper and not only affects the current operations but any that immediately follow because the people remain distrustful long after their initial misgivings. Moreover, moral warriors will refuse to participate in operations that

Although these so-called “apocrypha” have never been codified, *per se*, they nevertheless have influence and are often cited as major factors by militaries beyond the United States.

they do not believe are legitimate. This psychological effect is so powerful that it also affects physical sustainment by the loss of funding and logistical support or even demands for withdrawal and/or disbandment.

The importance of *initiative* has long been understood as essential for success in conflicts. Initiative refers to the power or ability to begin and follow through with some plan or task. In and of itself, initiative does not require action — only the freedom to act. While initiative is important in all crises, it is crucial in conflicts. Having the initiative allows a commander to choose the time and circumstances under which to pursue actions instead of simply reacting to unfolding circumstances. Initiative is so critical that one adage states that the implied objective of every confrontation is to gain and maintain the initiative.

The principle of *speed* refers to the rapidity and quickness of actions. It includes all functions and operations involved in a tactical operation but is es-

pecially critical in a conflict. Speed is one of the most effective methods for gaining surprise and seizing the initiative. While speed is important in and of itself, its greatest contribution is as an enabling objective. This is particularly important for recovering from unexpected setbacks and exploiting opportunities when they arise. Speed is also commonly used to gain and maintain the initiative.

The principle of *opportunity* refers to the ability to identify and exploit a set of circumstances to gain an advantage. Opportunities are simply brief intervals in time during which circumstances are temporarily favorable and occur in all tactical operations. Some opportunities are so critical that they can provide a decisive advantage.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the importance of being able to recognize and exploit one when it occurs can hardly be overestimated. Conversely, failing to recognize and exploit them in a timely fashion renders them meaningless. Like the principle of speed, however, opportunities are almost always in a supporting role.

The principle of *repetition* can be defined as any series of drills, exercises or practices intended to increase proficiency in preparation for an actual event. Repetition reduces unfamiliarity, increases confidence and enhances the speed necessary for surprise. Repetition, then, also indirectly contributes to gaining and maintaining the initiative. Because it improves the skills of both individuals and units it tends to refine procedures and enhance simplicity. In

this manner, it also reduces friction. Repetition is commonly exercised in elite units as some form of rehearsal.

The principle of *perseverance* (sometimes called steadfastness) identifies the importance of a relentless determination to succeed. Setbacks will always occur but are only calamitous when they result in preventing some action. Perseverance is necessary to maintain operations and carry on despite adverse conditions. This factor is so critical that in some cases it is the only thing that separates success from failure.

A paradox often cited in tactical operations is that the only certainty is uncertainty. In simpler terms, this simply means that uncertainty is inherent. Understandably, planning for uncer-

tainty requires *flexibility*. The principle of flexibility refers to the ability to adapt and improvise to accommodate and overcome changes in circumstances. It requires a nimble mindset coupled with agility to quickly adapt, improvise and overcome a change in a situation.

The principle of *cooperation* refers to the coordinated application between all personnel and elements involved in a tactical operation or response. It creates synergy by sharing dangers and burdens and is necessary for reducing friction. At its best, cooperation creates collaboration, which unifies individual efforts toward accomplishing a common objective.

The principle of *morale* refers to a positive state of mind and a shared

sense of purpose and values. It reduces friction while increasing persistence and determination. Furthermore, it increases confidence and willingness to accept hardships in return for collectively achieving some goal. As such, it can be a key factor in achieving success. Units with a high esprit de corps are far more formidable than others that are equally equipped and trained but with poor morale. While on the surface this principle seems to focus only inwardly, like all the other principles, it is neutral. Degrading or diminishing an adversary's morale can have devastating effects on abilities to persevere and cooperate, which in turn create other failures.

Even though these principles may not have the same impact as the traditional nine principles, they remain important. Most attain their importance because they are enabling of others. Regardless, the value of any principle is attributed directly to how well it provides insight and guidance in situations that are inherently confusing, chaotic and ever-changing. Leaders who have a better understanding of the factors and influences at play gain advantages over those who comprehend only what is apparent or obvious. //

## RUBEN MENDIOLA / DEALERNFA, INC

Class III Dealer Since 1985 / [www.dealernfa.com](http://www.dealernfa.com)

PO Box 566300 • Miami, FL 33256-6300 • (305) 271-3436 • (305) 499-3674 Fax

[ruben@dealernfa.com](mailto:ruben@dealernfa.com)

Call Toll Free 866-NFA-WANT, 7 Days a Week, 7am to 9pm (Eastern)

### LAW ENFORCEMENT CASHLESS TRADES WELCOME!

We are extremely flexible and can suit all your Departmental needs. Turn your outdated or confiscated firearms into any brand of advanced weapons, uniforms, Electronics, vehicles, etc!

**Consistently Providing Excellent and Discreet Service & Fairly Priced High Quality Machine Guns for Over 24 Years!**

**You won't find a better deal!**



**Paying Top Dollar for Legal Machine Guns  
Before Selling or trading Your Guns Please Call Me  
To Make Sure You Are Getting The Most For Them!!**

**Call for FREE Appraisals on your Old Guns!**

### ENDNOTES

1. For more information on these principles, see "Nine Principles of War," *The Tactical Edge*, Summer 2001, pp. 49-50.
2. For more information on the nature of conflicts, see "Characteristics of Crises and Conflicts," *The Tactical Edge*, Fall 2002, pp. 57-58.
3. While the term "apocrypha" is more appropriately used to describe religious writings that were not accepted into scripture, the more generic meaning (and as used here) is for concepts and principles that have not achieved the status of the original nine. What is more, this list simply represents some of the more commonly known and is by no means exhaustive.
4. For more information on these types of opportunities, see "Junctures and Leverage Points," *The Tactical Edge*, Summer 2012, pp. 72-73.