



CHAPTER FOUR: THE PRINCIPLES OF JOINT OPERATIONS

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The military student does not seek to learn from history the minutiae of method and technique. In every age these are influenced by the characteristics of weapons currently available and the means at hand for maneuvering, supplying, and controlling combat forces. But research does bring to light those fundamental principles, and their combinations and applications, which, in the past, have produced success.



— General Douglas MacArthur

The role of the Air Force is to defend the United States and protect its interests through [airpower](#), guided by the principles of joint operations and the [tenets of airpower](#). Airmen should understand these fundamental beliefs as they apply to operations across all domains, not just air, space, and cyberspace. This section introduces these principles, with links to full discussion of each item.

THE PRINCIPLES OF JOINT OPERATIONS

In conducting contemporary operations, commanders generally consider 13 broad principles collectively known as “the principles of joint operations.” They combine the long-standing principles of war with four additional principles of operations¹ developed through experience in irregular warfare. Both sets of principles are described below.

THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR

Throughout the history of conflict, military leaders have noted certain principles that tended to produce military victory. Known as the principles of war, they are those aspects of warfare that are universally true and relevant. As members of the joint team, Airmen should appreciate how these principles apply to all forces, but should most fully

¹ Joint doctrine recognizes three additional principles. The Air Force recognizes Unity of Effort as a fourth additional principle to better highlight its importance.

understand them as they pertain to Air Force forces. Airpower, no matter which Service operates the systems and no matter which type of platform is used, provides unique capabilities.

Valid principles, despite how deeply they are held, are no substitute for sound, professional judgment; however, ignoring them completely assumes unnecessary risk. The complexity of war in general, and the unique character of each war in particular, preclude commanders from using these principles as a checklist to guarantee victory. Rather, they serve as valuable guides to evaluate potential courses of action. The principles are independent, but tightly fused in application. No one principle should be considered without due consideration of the others. These principles are not all-inclusive; the art of developing airpower strategies depends upon the Airman's ability to view these principles from a three-dimensional perspective and integrate their application accordingly. The principles of war, combined with the additional tenets of airpower discussed elsewhere, provide the basis for a sound and enduring doctrine for the air, space, and cyberspace forces of America's joint force.

The principles of war are:

- ★ [Unity of Command](#)
- ★ [Objective](#)
- ★ [Offensive](#)
- ★ [Mass](#)
- ★ [Maneuver](#)
- ★ [Economy of Force](#)
- ★ [Security](#)
- ★ [Surprise](#)
- ★ [Simplicity](#)

ADDITIONAL PRINCIPLES OF OPERATIONS

In addition to the traditionally-held principles of war, an additional set of principles has been developed as a result of experience in contingency operations. These were first cast as "principles of military operations other than war" and later as "the political dimension of smaller-scale contingencies." A distinguishing characteristic of such operations has been the degree to which political objectives influence operations and tactics. (Note that joint doctrine does not contain unity of effort as an additional principle.)

These additional principles are:

✦ [Unity of Effort](#)

✦ [Restraint](#)

✦ [Perseverance](#)

✦ [Legitimacy](#)
