



The Growing Imperative to Adopt "Flexibility" As an American Principle of War

Robert S. Frost

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While clearly a mark of service parochialism, Army officers are usually surprised when an Air Force Officer brings forward something in the realm of the theory of war that addresses anything other than strategic bombing or air superiority. Yet here is a truly thoughtful monograph that does just that. The author wrote this when a student at the U.S. Army War College in academic year 1998-99. Lieutenant Colonel Robert S. Frost makes it clear that he is not interested in throwing out the old tried and true Principles of War, he only wants thought given to their expansion to include a principle of Flexibility. After all, the hallmark of the course of instruction at the U.S. Army War College is the new environment in which its graduates should expect to operate—an environment that we at the War College characterize as vague, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. In such an environment, the author argues, Flexibility must be an operating principle and it would serve all the services well to recognize it as such. Frost begins with a useful review of the development of the existing principles and on that same basis suggests inclusion of Flexibility is more than warranted. In this, he draws upon the Strategic Studies Institute's earlier review of the Strategic Principles of War, as well as Robert R. Leonhard's work on Principles for Information Age Warfare, among others. Frost's proposed short definition: "to be responsive to change and adaptable to the volatility, pressures and complexities of military operations, while constantly focusing on the objective" reminds us that military operations are subject to numerous conflicting pressures. He describes those pressures, now emerging from our current military operations other than war, in a 21st century context. Especially in that future context, Frost sees a heightened need for adopting Flexibility as a principle of military operations. Finally, for those wishing to study the Principles of War further and for a compilation of salient articles on those and other suggested Principles, Frost's endnotes offer a rich source. We commend this study to your thoughtful attention and debate.

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