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Defense officials from the Office of Force Transformation and the Navy secretariat have joined forces with academics and other strategists in a project to rethink basic military principles that guide U.S. war plans.

Participants are looking at whether those principles, which have shaped existing military doctrine, need to change in light of the security challenges that arose after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. They also are considering ways in which those guidelines may have to be altered as the military continues to leverage precision weaponry and Information Age technology.

The “Principles of War” project involves a series of seminars that started in June and is slated to continue through October; an essay contest with a \$15,000 top prize; and a bound volume of essays that eventually could be used by the service academies, war colleges and private-sector graduate programs, according to an OFT fact sheet.

“Rethinking the principles of war, and recasting the doctrine that rests upon them, ensures that the lessons of history are learned and passed on to future generations,” the document states. “Accepting the idea that [they] are changeable, and are changing now, suggests acceptance of the responsibility to think rigorously about those changes, as well as the actions necessary to keep pace with them. The debate must extend beyond military theorists to include the leaders and operators who will be called to put these principles into practice.”

The U.S. Naval Institute, the Royal Uniformed Services Institute in England and Johns Hopkins University are other partners in the effort.

The project was kicked off last October, when Rear Adm. John Morgan, Anthony Mc Ivor, and the Navy secretary’s “action team” published an article on rethinking basic military principles in the Naval Institute’s *Proceedings*.

Morgan, a senior military assistant to the Navy secretary, chairs the Principles of War steering committee, which oversees work performed under the initiative.

Mc Ivor, vice president for intelligence and national security studies at Gray Hawk Systems in Alexandria, VA, also sits on the panel, along with Marine Corps Col. Eric Van Camp, a transformation strategist at OFT, Harlan Ullman, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Fred Rainbow, editor in chief at the U.S. Naval Institute Press, and Duncan Brown of the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory.

A principle of war is a “fundamental precept or truth derived from experience and demonstrable by example that may guide -- time and circumstances permitting -- the effective conduct of military actions,” Mc Ivor wrote June 28 in response to written questions posed by *Inside the Pentagon*.

According to the *Proceedings* article, today’s military doctrine is rooted in the Napoleonic Wars and the Industrial Age.

The authors cite the influence of Carl von Clausewitz on developing theories of warfare during the 19th century, which in turn influenced the nine principles enshrined in U.S. naval doctrine. Those are listed as surprise; security; simplicity; objective; economy of force; maneuver; unity of command; mass; and the “offensive,” or the ability to seize the initiative in battle.

Some of the principles, like surprise and security, are unlikely to change; they are still important to commanders fighting modern wars, the article states. Others, like maneuver, may only need to be updated.

However, heavy use of precision weaponry could lead to new thinking about how to mass forces for battle, according to the authors.

Further, “coalition campaigns that include diplomatic and economic, as well as military, efforts raise new issues with respect to unity of command,” the article states. “Concurrently, there is a growing body of evidence that makes a persuasive case for the addition of new principles such as will and simultaneity.”

The principle of will deals with warfighters’ resolve to keep fighting. While using combined arms to engage in multiple locations at the same time has always been part of conflict, “achieving simultaneous effects has become ever more central to the modern commander’s battle plan,” the article states.

The authors also say the following three factors are forcing strategic thinkers to re-examine the nine principles:

* The modern battlespace is more “diffuse” than they were in the past, with the enemy willing to fight in urban environments.

* The “re-emergence” of hostile forces who draw no distinction between civilians and combatants.

* The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which may be possessed by rogue regimes and terrorists.

“Each of these emerging changes is serious by itself,” the article states. “Magnified by open-source technologies, they force policy makers to revisit their approaches to national defense.”

In his responses to *ITP*, Mc Ivor said the Principles of War project is timely because it can be a mechanism for assessing transformation efforts -- and it could lead to “a new definition of the ‘American Way of War.’” The initiative could “shape decisions on acquisitions, recruitment, training and deployment . . . for years to come,” he added.

Morgan -- nominated to be the next deputy chief of naval operations for plans, policy and operations (a three-star slot) -- says the impetus behind the project is tied to his experience in Operation Enduring Freedom as the Enterprise Battle Group’s commander. The battle group participated in the first strikes of OEF.

While in theater, Morgan asked himself whether the classical principles of war were at work in the conflict, he told *ITP* in a June 29 interview. “Is there a hidden hand that’ll guide us in war?” he asked.

Back in the United States, the admiral brought together a group of young officers to discuss this issue, and the *Proceedings* article was intended to spur further thinking.

That exercise prompted a question: Could the exercise be considered part of transformation, the Pentagon’s effort to revamp the military for the 21st century? Retired Vice Adm. Arthur Cebrowski, OFT’s director, was approached to measure his interest in the discussion; his backing will help draw the attention of others in the overall defense community, sources tell *ITP*.

Cebrowski offered some introductory remarks at the project’s first seminar, which was held June 8. It featured presentations by Vice Adm. Timothy Keating, the Joint Staff director, and retired Army Maj. Gen. Robert Scales, who ended his military career as the U.S. Army War College commandant.

The next seminar took place June 30 in Arlington, VA, with the Royal Navy’s Adm. Ian Forbes, the deputy supreme allied commander-transformation, and Army Maj. Gen. James Dubik, the director of joint experimentation at U.S. Joint Forces Command, scheduled as speakers.

The seminars are expected to address the “changing character of war and potential changes in the principles of war due to changes in the threat, global societies,

technologies and other factors,” the OFT fact sheet states.

As the principles are reviewed, “some will be reaffirmed, others updated, and a few may be discarded or replaced,” it adds. “The objective should be clear -- it is not to replace one set of principles, hostage to time and place, with another set equally constrained. There will be no perfect or easy answers, but the beginning can pose the right questions.

“As the nation faces new conflicts and forms of warfare, there must be confidence in the underlying principles that guide our actions,” it continues. “Rethinking the principles of war will help prepare military leaders to better understand the relationship of war to our nation’s future, as well as its past.”

Morgan hopes the seminars will draw interest of thinkers from a wide range of fields -- “anyone who can contribute,” he told *ITP*.

The project team must “cast a wide net for debate,” he said. “I’m interested in open, honest, intellectual discussion.”

The first seminar included discussions about lessons from Operation Iraqi Freedom, but the project itself is not supposed to be a “referendum or even a review of specific recent campaigns,” Mc Ivor said. Still, “the questions posed, lessons learned and the debates stimulated by those campaigns” will come up as participants mull the future national security environment, he added.

Participants also can be expected to discuss ideas originally generated by military thinkers other than Clausewitz -- Basil Liddell Hart, perhaps, or the late Air Force Col. John Boyd.

“Scholars and operators from all disciplines have engaged with the project; some bring a classical approach, others a rich dose of iconoclasm, both are needed,” Mc Ivor said.

Participants have been considering the extent to which technology should drive changes in principles of war, he said.

“Some have said that technology has changed the very nature of warfare; others consider that view a lot of tosh,” he added. “The challenge now is to forge a new consensus that will provide a foundation for U.S. military doctrine in the years ahead.”

There are “partisans for a number of new principles,” Mc Ivor said.

A key objective for the project is getting young officers to think about the underlying guidelines for effective U.S. and coalition operations, possibly as part of military education and training programs, according to Mc Ivor.

“The project is fortunate to have the collaboration and benefit of counsel from faculty members at all three war colleges, [the National Defense University] and other such

institutions,” he said.

Ken Krieg, the Defense Department’s director of program analysis and evaluation, is following the project closely, Mc Ivor said. Andrew Marshall, director of the Pentagon’s Office of Net Assessment, is interested, while members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have expressed support, Mc Ivor added.

Those involved with the project have begun distributing information about the essay contest throughout DOD.

The deadline for the contest is Feb. 1, 2005. Writers will be asked to answer questions such as: Have the principles of war changed or are they changing? Do the principles remain valid?

In addition to the \$15,000 first prize, \$10,000 will be awarded for second place and \$5,000 for third. Judges also can award \$1,000 each to five entries recognized as honorable mentions.

The winning entries are candidates for inclusion in the bound volume of essays on the principles of war, which could be published next September, according to Mc Ivor.

“The rest of the contributions will be selected from a range of backgrounds and perspectives,” he said. -- *Keith J. Costa*

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