



SOURCES OF DOCTRINE

Last Updated: 27 Feb 2015

Doctrine should be based on critical analysis and the lessons of operations rather than driven by rapidly changing policies, promising technologies, individual personalities, budget battles, and politically trendy catch-phrases. **Doctrine should not be written to backwards-justify a policy position or codify a uniquely-tailored organization.** As such, doctrine reflects what has worked best with full consideration of what has worked poorly. In those instances in which experience is lacking or difficult to acquire, doctrine may be developed through analysis of exercises, wargames, and experiments. The military experience of other nations and non-defense organizations should also be considered.

It should be emphasized that doctrine development is never complete. Any given doctrine document is a snapshot in time—a reflection of the thinking at the time of its creation. Innovation has always been a key part of sound doctrinal development and continues to play a central role. Doctrine should evolve as new experiences and advances in technology point the way to the operations of the future.

Three constantly evolving variables affect doctrine: theory, experience, and technology. Sound doctrine strikes a balance among all three.

- ★ Theory may be an excellent starting point, but doctrine based solely on theory may not survive contact with reality. An



[Doctrine] reflects an official recognition of what has usually worked best from observation of numerous trials. These may be reports of actual combat operations, or they may be limited to tests, exercises, and maneuvers. Only when necessary will doctrine consist of extrapolations beyond actual experience of some sort, for example, in the use of nuclear weapons where the nature of the weapon normally precludes the gathering of experience in any but the most limited sense.

— Maj Gen I.B. Holley,
*Technology and
Military Doctrine*

example of this is the Army Air Corps' advocacy of daylight precision bombing; bombers initially had neither the necessary precision nor the survivability required to implement the theory. On the other hand, theory can support technological investment and experimentation, as in the German Wehrmacht's decision in the interwar years to pursue air-ground integration. A good grasp of [operational art](#) can provide the flexibility to adapt new theories within real-world situations, and prevent doctrine from becoming dogma.

- ★ While experience plays a major role in doctrine formulation, too great a reliance on past experience leaves one open to always fighting the last war. Experience must be tempered with current realities to develop future plans. New technology can provide solutions to long-standing problems, as the advent of mobile, mechanized forces and aviation overcame the stalemate of trench warfare. Theories of war, sufficiently taught, should be open to reinterpretation in light of current circumstance. The US military experienced this in its recent formulation of doctrine for irregular warfare.
 - ★ Technology constantly evolves, but by itself is not a panacea. While technology alone may be good at providing single-point solutions, technology should be acquired with due consideration for operational art and [design](#), taking into consideration theory and experience; sound reasoning must accompany realistic projections of what capabilities will actually be available to warfighters. Discussion in the 1990s of the "Revolution in Military Affairs" pointed to a similar interplay of ideas involving technology, organization, and doctrine, and held that all three were necessary to achieve a "revolution." Thus, technology should not be acquired in isolation.
-