

# Military doctrine, command philosophy and the generation of fighting power: genesis and theory

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Let us learn to think in the same way about fundamental truths.

Darrieus

It was the British maritime strategist Sir Julian Corbett who, on the eve of the First World War, described doctrine as ‘the soul of warfare’.<sup>1</sup> This assertion conceals as much as it reveals, leaving out any explanation of how doctrine is formulated, disseminated or used, and any account of the relationship between doctrine and command philosophy. It is only through a synthesis of these two factors that fighting power can be generated. Doctrine can be described as a force multiplier in that a fighting organization that applies it consistently will be able to take on a larger force in battle and win. It is often analysed and evaluated in isolation from command philosophy. How, then, do we define doctrine and what are the major variants of command philosophy? What is the nature of the relationship between doctrine and command philosophy? Is it possible to identify and assess the component parts of doctrine, and to understand how they manifest themselves at the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war?

The important context for answering these questions is the fighting power of a state’s armed forces, which is a product of physical factors (e.g. human resources, equipment), moral factors (e.g. leadership, management and motivation) and conceptual factors (e.g. doctrine, force development and the principles of war). Both the physical and the moral component feed into and are dependent on the conceptual component.<sup>2</sup> It is the sustained functioning of this nexus, when combined with the appropriate command philosophy, that creates a force multiplier effect.

## Defining doctrine

The first question is: how do we define doctrine? The North Atlantic Treaty Organization interprets it as ‘fundamental principles by which military forces guide their actions in support of objectives’.<sup>3</sup> This Spartan definition, however, does not help to establish how doctrine is to be understood and evaluated as an

<sup>1</sup> J. Corbett, ‘Staff histories’, in *Naval and military essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> This outline is summarized from the *British Defence Doctrine, JDP 0-01*, 3rd edn, Aug. 2008, pp. 4-1-4-10.

<sup>3</sup> AAP-6, *The NATO glossary of terms and definitions* (Brussels: NATO, 1989).

object of thought. That can only be achieved by highlighting a number of inter-related perspectives. In one sense doctrine, if it is interpreted literally, means 'what is taught'. The word comes from the Latin term *doctrina*, meaning teaching. This in turn raises the question: to whom is it taught? The term had utility in the context of the Roman Catholic Church, where it was used to designate the accepted and correct articles of faith taught by the Church (although the term can be said to predate the Catholic Church). Doctrine can also be understood as a set of corporate beliefs, or the principles which guide an organization on how it interacts with a wider environment.

The second perspective in understanding doctrine as an object of thought is to conceive of it as embodying the vital link between theory and practice. As far as military doctrine is concerned, this approach can be said to have its roots in the early drill manuals, such as those promulgated by Maurice of Nassau in the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup> The modern concept of doctrine attempts to avoid being overly prescriptive, the aim being to avoid a descent into dogma.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the objective has been to develop the most effective conceptual framework in terms of undertaking military operations. Doctrine can be conceived as a bridge between thought and action. It interprets ideas about war, and how they affect its conduct and its character, by combining strategic theories and operational plans into functional guidelines for action. To put this another way: military doctrine articulates war.<sup>6</sup> It is important to stress that definitions and the relationship between these elements have not always been clear:

Military writers do not agree on definitions of the terms strategy, military doctrine, and tactics. In simplest terms, however, tactics is the study of how battles will be fought. In my view, once one begins to ask questions about how battles will be fought, one has entered the realm of military doctrine. When one begins to ask *which* wars will be fought, or *if* war should be fought, one has entered the realm of strategy.<sup>7</sup>

The final perspective in understanding doctrine as an object of thought is to understand what this bridge consists of. More specifically: what processes have to be undertaken for doctrine to have a force multiplying effect? Colin Gray has argued for the need to recognize a compulsory partnership with respect to one of the key dimensions of this bridge:

Strategy and doctrine, doctrine and strategy, are necessary partners. Strategy decides how policy's goals are to be advanced and secured, and it selects the instrumental objectives to achieve these goals. Military doctrine, for its vital part, explains how armed forces of different kinds should fight. Doctrine should be the subordinated party in their necessary

<sup>4</sup> Maurice of Nassau (1567–1625) organized the rebellion against Spain into a coherent, successful revolt. He used drill not just to instil discipline or to keep men physically fit, but also to disseminate tactics. This change affected the conduct of warfare as it required officers to train men in addition to leading them. It also decreased the size of an infantry unit for functional purposes, to enable more specific orders to be given, and required more initiative and intelligence from the average soldier.

<sup>5</sup> Dogma in this sense is interpreted as an established and unchanging belief.

<sup>6</sup> This phrase is taken from the title of J. S. Sauboorah, 'The articulation of war: an assessment of British military doctrine', PhD thesis, University of Reading, 2009.

<sup>7</sup> B. Posen, *The sources of military doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the world wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 245.

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partnership, but such is by no means the case. The reason is because the doctrines with which armed forces implement strategy must shape the expectations and the plans of strategists.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the most important aspect in this relationship is the winning of institutional approval:

Military theory is the body of ideas that concern war, especially those that are involved in the organization for training and fighting war. Doctrine is that accepted body of ideas concerning war. The acceptance of ideas can be the result of long-term usage or official sanctioning by the appropriate military authorities in a particular Service branch, nation or specific group. After examination and acceptance by highly experienced professionals that constitute the various review groups and doctrine committees, theory and best practice becomes doctrine.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from institutional approval, doctrine needs to provide the means of succeeding in warfare. In order to meet this critical requirement, the doctrine bridge has to contain one key element, namely 'a set of beliefs about the nature of war'.<sup>10</sup>

Doctrine performs different, but linked, functions at the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war. At the strategic level, doctrine provides direction and understanding; at the operational level, doctrine provides understanding and instruction; and at the tactical level, doctrine provides instruction and training. Doctrine should also be regarded as a seamless web: it should define how an armed force trains in peace, the weapon systems that it procures and the way it fights in war. There is also a critical difference between doctrine and a set of orders. While both are authoritative, the former requires judgement in application, and is dependent on the nature of the orders which are received. This gives doctrine its unique character and underlines both its strengths and its weaknesses in the trinity of components that contribute to the generation of fighting power. It can become dated very quickly. Therefore there is an onus on senior commanders to ensure that doctrine changes as circumstances, character and the conduct of a particular war dictate. In this sense doctrine is potentially an unstable phenomenon. The danger is that it comes to be considered as permanent, leading to failure to reassess its relevance and to revise it in the light of new circumstances. It is easy for doctrine to become dogma and in due course fail to act as a force multiplier.

Another essential attribute of doctrine is an ability to steer transition. It must start at the tactical level and ultimately produce tempo. This quality, or the lack of it, has been well summarized in the context of the recent conflict in Iraq: 'We failed to apply our tactical doctrines to operational effect in the pursuit of strategic goals. At the heart of successful tactics is the concept of transition—the ability to switch between operations of war. Get your transitional procedures right and tempo—the ability to outpace your enemy on the battlefield—follows

<sup>8</sup> C. S. Gray, *The strategy bridge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> Sauboorah, 'The articulation of war', p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> J. Snyder, *The ideology of the offensive: military decision making and the disasters of 1914* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 27.

naturally.’<sup>11</sup> This ability to steer transition can be said to represent one of the vital prerequisites of tactical doctrine.

### Command philosophy: two variants

Having identified a number of interrelated perspectives that enable doctrine to be understood as an object of thought, I move on to outline the two major variants of command philosophy. In one sense any command system has a simple aim, namely to bring about the correct alignment of authority and responsibility among the various levels in a military hierarchy: ‘Without striking a correct balance between centralization and decentralization, discipline and initiative, authority and individual responsibility, it is impossible for any organization, let alone a military one, operating as it does in an environment where disorder and confusion are endemic, to function or, indeed, exist.’<sup>12</sup> The first variant can be described as centralized control. The German word *Befehlstaktik* (orders-based tactics) refers to this concept. This restrictive approach informs the command chain why, when and, critically, how operations will be carried out. The second variant is often referred to in German as *Auftragstaktik* (mission-based tactics). This approach informs the command chain why and when operations will be carried out, but, critically, delegates the ‘how’ to the initiative of officers in the command structure.<sup>13</sup> It is often referred to as mission command. Giving practical expression to this is not straightforward: ‘Mission Command is a complex, elusive and multi-factorial phenomenon not easily quantified or measured.’<sup>14</sup>

In terms of land warfare, the latter approach has been closely identified with the Prussian military tradition. Indeed, this second variant has its origins in the social structures and ethos of Prussia:

This was a tradition that harkened back to the old Prussian social system, particularly the distinct social contract between the king and the Junker nobility. In return for the Junkers’ fealty and service, the king allowed them near total control over the peasants in their domains. This arrangement was extended to the general’s relationship with his troops who could deploy them in any operational manner that he saw fit.<sup>15</sup>

The crucial relationship between doctrine and command philosophy had developed further by the nineteenth century. German military reformers and thinkers such as Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke the Elder stressed that ‘adherence to a battle plan must not be allowed to crush the initiative of individual commanders and ... the Feldherr (Theatre Commander) must have the courage and wit to change his dispositions as the situation required.’<sup>16</sup> This relationship evolved, and

<sup>11</sup> R. Fry, ‘Expeditionary operations in the modern era’, *RUSI Journal* 150: 6, Dec. 2005, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> M. van Creveld, *Fighting power* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1983), p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed discussion of the development of the second variant, see B. Condell and D. T. Zabecki, *On the German art of war: Truppenführung* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001), pp. 3–6.

<sup>14</sup> E. Shamir, ‘The long and winding road: the US Army managerial approach to command and the adoption of mission command (*Auftragstaktik*)’, *Journal of Strategic Studies* 33: 5, Oct. 2010, p. 668.

<sup>15</sup> Weichong Ong, ‘Blitzkrieg: revolution or evolution?’, *RUSI Journal* 152: 6, Dec. 2007, p. 88.

<sup>16</sup> D. Abenheim, *Reforming the Iron Cross: the search for tradition in the West German armed forces* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 18.

in the years following the First World War underwent what could be described as a devolving development. Before and during the First World War the German army operated on a command philosophy known as *Weisungsführung* (leadership by directive).<sup>17</sup> This devolved responsibility down to army or corps commanders and gave them broad discretionary power in the execution of their missions. This approach facilitated the development of fluid, non-linear infiltration tactics supported by neutralizing artillery fire which the Germans used to great tactical advantage during Operation Michael in 1918.

It was the first head of the interwar German army, General Hans von Seeckt, who set in motion further developments that were to have a radical impact on both German doctrine and mission command. His could be described as a tripartite approach. First, during his own operational experience on the Eastern Front during the First World War he had witnessed how better-trained, better-led and better-equipped forces could decisively defeat much larger enemy forces. In the aftermath of the war he set up 57 committees and subcommittees staffed by 400 officers who would write assessments of the effectiveness of German tactics, regulations, equipment and doctrine. The aim was to put the recent experience of war into some coherent context. These officers were given clear instructions as to what they were expected to achieve:

The officers named to committees were to write short, concise studies on the newly gained experiences of the war and consider the following points: a). What new situations arose in the war that had not been considered before? b). How effective were our pre-war views in dealing with the above situations? c). What new guidelines have been developed from the use of weaponry in the war? d). Which new problems put forward by the war have not yet found a solution?<sup>18</sup>

The second aspect of von Seeckt's approach focused on one of the conceptual components of fighting power: force development. This perspective was both fresh and innovative:

His vision of a *Neuzeitliches Heer* (modern army) was of special importance to him and became the core of his innovative thinking, even if the restrictions of the Versailles treaty made sure that it remained only a vision. This army would be characterized by a small number of soldiers, who would be well trained and equipped. This would enable the army to conduct a highly mobile war, which Seeckt saw as the key to success in future conflicts.<sup>19</sup>

The third element was based on a vision of a need for further doctrinal development. This process was taking place at a time when the German general staff had been abolished under the Treaty of Versailles, and the *Truppenamt* (Troop Office) had been developed as a substitute: 'Under Seeckt's guidance, the German army developed the theory and doctrine for a quick war of manoeuvre which would lead to an early decision to attack and fast annihilation of the enemy force.

<sup>17</sup> See R. T. Foley, *German strategy and the path to Verdun: Erich von Falkenhayn and the development of attrition 1870–1916* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> J. S. Corum, *The roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and the German military reform* (Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1992), p. 37.

<sup>19</sup> M. Stroh, 'Hans von Seeckt and his vision of a "modern army"', *War in History* 12: 3, 2005, p. 320.

This idea offered some chance for straightforward victory—once the army was expanded and modern equipment acquired.<sup>20</sup>

A comparative analysis of the British and German approaches is instructive. ‘Whereas the Germans assigned experienced officers to analyze tactics—the lowest ranking army officers assigned to tactical doctrine studies in 1919–1920 were experienced captains who had been admitted to full membership in the General Staff corps—the British War Office in 1920 assigned the task of rewriting the infantry tactical manual to Liddell Hart, a twenty-four-year old lieutenant of limited experience.’<sup>21</sup> Between 1921 and 1923 the *Reichswehr* published a new tactical doctrine universally known as *Das FuG*.<sup>22</sup> This publication was revolutionary in a number of ways. First, it fused together doctrine and a variant of command philosophy while also absorbing many of the tactical developments of the First World War. Second, before 1914 each arm of the German army had had its own publication governing command philosophy and tactics; not surprisingly, this had caused confusion. *Das FuG* brought together all these disparate approaches into a single publication which remained in use without modification until the early 1930s. Finally, the cardinal factor embedded in *Das FuG* was the extension downwards, in the command structure, of discretionary power in the execution of a mission. This principle was devolved to squad leaders and even to individual soldiers. Writing in 1925 in his *Observations of the Chief of the Army Command*, General Hans von Seeckt noted: ‘The principal thing now is to increase the responsibilities of the individual man, particularly his independence of action, and thereby to increase the efficiency of the entire army . . . The limitations imposed by exterior circumstances cause us to give the mind more freedom of activity, with the profitable result of increasing the ability of the individual.’<sup>23</sup> This radical idea was subsumed under the existing command philosophy of *Auftragstaktik*, and was to become incorporated in the seminal German doctrine manual of the 1930s, *Die Truppenführung*.

This view of the future of war was not the only one that was articulated in the German army of this period:

Running parallel to this was a doctrine of delaying defence that had been formulated by General Beck in the early 1920s, and had become firmly established. It has been suggested that it was not without its dangers. While it enabled the defenders to withstand a higher attack-to-defence ratio, the doctrine was clumsy and dangerous in the hands of a non-expert.<sup>24</sup>

*Die Truppenführung* was published in two parts, the first in 1933 and the second in 1934. It fused together doctrine and command philosophy in a way that was

<sup>20</sup> Strohn, ‘Hans von Seeckt’, p. 335.

<sup>21</sup> Corum, *The roots of Blitzkrieg*, p. 39. This assertion, which is taken from Liddell Hart’s *Memoirs*, needs to be set against the facts of sustained attempts by the general staff of the British army to formulate and update their doctrine in the light of their experiences in the First World War, as represented by the *Field Service Regulations Part 2 (Operations)* in the 1920s and 1930s.

<sup>22</sup> *Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen* (Command and combat of combined arms).

<sup>23</sup> Taken from R. Citino, *Path to Blitzkrieg* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999), p. 57.

<sup>24</sup> R. O’Neill, ed., ‘Doctrine and training in the German army’, in *The theory and practice of war* (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 153.

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then unique to land warfare. It has been described as ‘the finest exposition of the nature of war at the operational level ever written’.<sup>25</sup> This publication also built upon the reforms initiated by von Seeckt. He wanted to build a more cohesive force that was founded on trust, mutual respect and comradeship, irrespective of social background or position in a military rank structure. This change of culture enabled mission-type orders to have a dynamic impact at the tactical level which was unique at the time:

For *Auftragstaktik* to work, a subordinate leader or even a common soldier given a mission must fully understand his commander’s intent—and in most cases, the intent of the next higher commander. This of course implies that the subordinate leader must understand ‘why’. If he doesn’t understand, he has the obligation to ask. Conversely, the superior leader issuing the orders has the obligation to explain.<sup>26</sup>

This cultural revolution in military affairs is also reflected in the introductory section of *Die Truppenführung*. This part of the manual contained 15 paragraphs which created a synthesis between doctrine and command philosophy which was and is unique. The tenth paragraph, for example, underlines clearly the extent to which a profound cultural change had been brought about in terms of the relations between officers and enlisted men.

The decisive factor, despite technology and weaponry, is the value of the individual soldier. The wider his experience in combat the greater his importance. The emptiness of the battlefield [*die Leere des Gefechtsfelds*] requires soldiers who can think and act independently, who can make decisive and daring use of every situation, and who understand that victory depends on each individual.<sup>27</sup>

The introduction also sets out very clearly another cultural innovation. Paragraph eight insists that both officers and enlisted men have a responsibility for leadership:

The example and personal bearing of officers and other soldiers who are responsible for leadership has a decisive effect on the troops. The officer, who in the face of the enemy displays coolness, decisiveness, and courage, carries his troops with him . . . Mutual trust is the surest foundation for discipline in times of need and danger.<sup>28</sup>

It is important to stress that the formulation of an appropriate doctrine and use of a pertinent command philosophy are only part of the challenge that military organizations face. Perhaps the greater challenge is the dissemination of doctrine. This is best achieved through training; it is this activity that validates doctrine. It was the approach followed by the German army:

At the heart of German training was the inculcating of a progressive, universally taught doctrine: a set of basic assumptions, beliefs and operating instructions that all German troops, irrespective of service, learned and were expected to follow. Adherence to this

<sup>25</sup> W. Murray, ‘Thinking about innovation’, *Naval War College Review* 40: 2, Spring 2001, p. 124.

<sup>26</sup> Condell and Zabecki, *On the German art of war*, p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Condell and Zabecki, *On the German art of war*, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Condell and Zabecki, *On the German art of war*.



modern, uniform and realistic doctrine, enshrined in the 1936 *Truppenführung* (Troop Leadership Manual), was one of the great strengths of the German Army.<sup>29</sup>

Of the two variants of command philosophy that have been outlined, *Auftragstaktik* fused with a manoeuvre doctrine gave the German army the potential to generate a force multiplier effect. It is important to understand the nature of the challenge that these two command philosophies were designed to meet. They both represented an attempt to do the same thing: to exercise command and control (leadership and management) in the context of war: 'Modern war is distinguished above all by its speed and the need for close co-operation between many kinds of specialized troops. This means that other things being equal a command system that allows for initiative on the lowest level and for intelligent co-operation between subordinate commanders is likely to be superior to one that does not.'<sup>30</sup>

## Doctrine and the nature of war

It is pertinent at this point to establish exactly what Corbett meant by his aphorism that doctrine is the 'soul of warfare'. It provides us with a way of understanding the relationship between two sets of phenomena: the nature of war—its changing character and conduct—and doctrine. War is fought in an environment of uncertainty, fear, danger and ambiguity: 'The resort to war is also a choice for unpredictability which is not simply the uncertain nature of battle, but the very nature of war.'<sup>31</sup> Commanders have to rely on information that is only partially accurate, and some of which may be a product of deception by the enemy. It is within this changing context that doctrine has to succeed or fail. Coupled to this is the challenge of understanding the kind of conflict in which an armed force is going to be involved. Assessing that correctly is critical, as it will affect how one side, at least, conducts its operations. Clausewitz recognized the importance of what is an intellectual task:

The first, the supreme, the most far reaching act of judgement that the statesman and the commander have to make is to establish the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for nor trying to turn it into something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.<sup>32</sup>

It is in the process of answering this premier question that the departure point for the formulation of doctrine can be discerned. It is at this juncture that we can understand the pivotal importance of Corbett's aphorism about doctrine.

Having established the relationship between the nature of war, including the importance of assessing its character correctly, and formulating, disseminating and applying an appropriate doctrine, it is important to ask two important questions

<sup>29</sup> S. Hart, R. Hart and M. Hugher, *The German soldier in World War Two* (Staplehurst, Kent: Amber Books, 2000), pp. 8–9.

<sup>30</sup> Van Creveld, *Fighting power*, p. 35.

<sup>31</sup> J. Black, 'What is war? Some reflections on a contested concept', *RUSI Journal* 152: 6, Dec. 2007, p. 45.

<sup>32</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On war*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 88–9.



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about doctrine itself. First, what are the component elements of doctrine? Second, how do these components affect the way that doctrine is formulated, disseminated and implemented at the three levels of war? In 1997 Professor Gooch identified six diverse components that produce doctrine, setting them out as follows:

- the nature of weapons technology;
- the influence of formative experiences;
- organizational and institutional interests;
- ideology;
- national culture;
- the political and strategic situation.<sup>33</sup>

It can be suggested that there is a lacuna in this component-based approach to doctrinal theory. Gooch does not evaluate critically how these components manifest themselves at the three different levels of war. The cumulative insights derived from exploring this aspect of the topic will further facilitate an understanding of how doctrine has enabled the generation of fighting power.

Before investigating these components it is important to note that other writers have developed alternative interpretations of doctrine. Barry Posen views doctrine as having three dimensions: offensive, defensive and deterrence. He also uses the categories of innovative and stagnant doctrine, and integration with national policy or the lack thereof.<sup>34</sup> This view of doctrine has influenced other writers in the field. Elizabeth Kier, for example, states in a footnote: 'I have used Barry Posen's definitions of offensive and defensive military doctrines'.<sup>35</sup> Posen's approach can be characterized as one in which the varieties of doctrine, combined with a broad overall definition, provide a sufficient analytical resource for a critical evaluation of the sources of British, French and German doctrine between the First and Second World Wars.

By contrast, Gooch's component-based approach enables the effectiveness of a specific doctrine to be investigated with greater precision. This is important for two reasons. First, doctrine represents the link between thought and action. Second, as noted above,<sup>36</sup> there is an onus on senior commanders to ensure that doctrine changes as the circumstances, character and conduct of a particular war dictate. The circumstances in which doctrine will be formulated will be unique. This analytical approach helps to understand the utility of the components of a specific doctrine. It is also important to stress that the impact of a doctrine is not restricted to the enemy: it also impinges on allies. 'Doctrine, to be of value, must guide thought and appropriate action or it will not act as the binding agent of all the separate operational practices ... doctrine must be sufficiently encompassing to accommodate the allies.'<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> J. Gooch, 'Introduction: military doctrine and military history', in J. Gooch, ed., *The origins of contemporary doctrine*, occasional paper 30 (Camberley, Surrey: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, Sept. 1997), p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Posen, *The sources of military doctrine*, p. 14.

<sup>35</sup> E. Kier, *Imagining war: French and British military doctrine between the wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 173n.

<sup>36</sup> See section above on 'Defining doctrine'.

<sup>37</sup> Communication from Gen. Sir Rupert Smith to the author, 11 March 2008.

Gooch's first component, weapons technology, is by far the most important. It is part of the 'compound alignment of technology, doctrine and command philosophy that can generate fighting power'.<sup>38</sup> There is no doubt that certain technological developments in metallurgy and gunpowder, and the invention of weapons such as the crossbow enabled their possessors to steer transition in applying tactics with operational effect and thereby to achieve their strategic objectives. Yet technology was and is only an enabler. What really mattered was the doctrine within which this technology was employed. This process of conceptualization was not automatic—it often took a number of years for a particular doctrine to emerge—and was also dependent on another of the components, namely organizational and institutional interests. The development of combined arms warfare in Germany in the interwar period was a good example of this.<sup>39</sup> The analysis of the use of tanks during the First World War was the first step. Heinz Guderian came to the conclusion that without mechanical assistance even the German infantry of 1918 would pay a heavy price to achieve a breakthrough. Perhaps more importantly, events had shown that the German army's tactical doctrine during Operation Michael had been unable to develop that quality of steering transition, ultimately failing to have an operational effect and thereby to facilitate the achievement of strategic objectives.

Technology can act like a double-edged sword. It can initially affect a particular level of war, increasing the importance of that level and ultimately requiring a riposte from the opposing side: 'The first great wave of technologies privileged above all firepower, strategic mobility, and strategic communications. The result in the First World War was tactical and operational immobility and the horror of immense losses for virtually no visible gain.'<sup>40</sup> In essence, doctrine can bequeath force-generating advantages at one level of war and present profound challenges at other levels.

The manifestation of this kind of doctrinal challenge can be illustrated by the British army in the First World War. It was not until 1918 that the British army produced an effective operational-level doctrine that facilitated the achievement of strategic objectives. This was the British Expeditionary Force's 'Division in Attack' doctrine (SS135) used during the successful 'Hundred Days' campaign from August to November 1918.<sup>41</sup>

The second component of doctrine is the influence of formative experiences. Military organizations are often accused of fighting the last war. The challenge to any armed force is to distil the continuities from the discontinuities. The logic would then be to build a new doctrine on the foundation stone of the former, which would inform the doctrine at tactical, operational and strategic levels. While the past cannot be a sure signpost to the future, Gooch suggests that 'it

<sup>38</sup> Communication from Lt.-Gen. Sir Rob Fry RM to the author, 2 Oct. 2009.

<sup>39</sup> See H. Guderian, *Achtung Panzer* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1992).

<sup>40</sup> M. Knox, 'Conclusion: continuity and revolution in the making of strategy', in W. Murray, M. Knox and A. Bernstein, eds, *The making of strategy: rulers, states and wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 639.

<sup>41</sup> See B. James, 'The Division in the Attack—1918, SS135, T/1635, 40/WO/7036', occasional paper 53 (Camberley, Surrey: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 2008).

can, nonetheless, be of some assistance to those whose present-day task is to write the doctrine of tomorrow'.<sup>42</sup> It can, for example, provide insight into whether the ability to steer transition was in evidence at the tactical level. One difficulty is that peace presents unique problems in terms of developing new doctrines based on the experiences of the past: 'The basic problem is that military organizations can rarely replicate in times of peace the actual conditions of war. It becomes increasingly easy as the complexities, ambiguities, and frictions of combat recede into the past, for militaries to develop concepts, doctrines, and practices that meet the standards of peacetime efficiency rather than those of wartime effectiveness.'<sup>43</sup> The period during which a fighting organization has the opportunity to set the experiences of a recent conflict in a broader light is laced with distracting challenges, the most prominent of which is the temptation to set aside painful experiences which then have to be relearned at a later date.

The experience of the United States army is instructive in this respect. When it left Vietnam in 1973 it faced two broad challenges. First, it had to realign itself in accordance with one of the other components of doctrine, namely the political and strategic situation, with the Nixon Doctrine of 1969 placing a renewed emphasis on the defence of Western Europe at the expense of commitments in other parts of the world. Second, American statesmen and commanders had to confront their failure to answer correctly the premier Clausewitzian question with respect to the nature of the war they were fighting—a failure that had its own consequences: 'The politico-military leadership had lost any moral or professional credibility it may have enjoyed. The war had not supplied this army with institutional heroes around whom the faithful could rally. Under the circumstances, neither vision or visionary seemed possible.'<sup>44</sup> Worse than this, the inappropriate configuration of the US army had been recognized by only a handful of officers: 'I felt that we sent an army to Vietnam that was not prepared to fight the war. We sent an army that was top heavy in administrators and logisticians and bloody thin on fighters, not trained for the war. I felt that we didn't understand the nature of the war in the military.'<sup>45</sup> The defeat suffered in Vietnam also brought with it problems of its own. The US army of 1973 was 'an army that was suffering from the after effects of the war in Vietnam. In addition to both professional and morale crises at all levels of the Army, the trauma of Vietnam created a crisis of confidence between the military and the public, the Congress, and the executive branch.'<sup>46</sup>

Despite these problems, between 1973 and 1976 the US army successfully reinvented itself in many respects.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps most instructive in terms of the formulation of doctrine, substantial use was made of formative experiences, although interestingly not its most recent ones nor indeed exclusively its own. This process of doctrinal genesis would not have been possible without the

<sup>42</sup> Gooch, 'Introduction: military doctrine and military history', p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Murray, 'Thinking about innovation', p. 122.

<sup>44</sup> R. J. Spiller, 'In the shadow of the dragon', *RUSI Journal* 142: 6, Dec. 1997, p. 43.

<sup>45</sup> Col. D. Hackworth, *About face* (London: Guild Publishing, 1990), p. 781.

<sup>46</sup> S. Bronfeld, 'Fighting outnumbered: the impact of the Yom Kippur War on the U.S. Army', *Journal of Military History* 71: 2, April 2007, p. 469.

<sup>47</sup> A good example of this was the abandonment of the draft and the introduction of an all-volunteer force.

establishment of the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) on 1 July 1973, initially under the command of General William De Puy. Despite the fact that he had been one of the senior US commanders in Vietnam, the personal formative experience that was critical to the process of doctrinal formulation did not derive from that war:

The defining experience for De Puy was his service in the European theater in World War 2. As an officer in the 90th Infantry Division, he was struck by the weaknesses of the U.S. Army: notably, unrealistic training that did not prepare the soldiers properly for the battlefield and the appointment of unqualified officers ... De Puy's other revelation during World War II concerned the tactical excellence of the German Army.<sup>48</sup>

The second formative experience on which De Puy drew was that of a war in which the US army did not participate: the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. Its timing was fortuitously helpful in that it appeared to offer a contemporary example of the kind of conflict that might occur along what was then the inner-German border. Direct evidence of the influence of this war on the process of doctrinal formulation can be found in a statement made by Lieutenant-General Orwin C. Talbott, De Puy's deputy who visited Israel in February 1974. After meeting 45 Israeli army officers he declared: 'Much, perhaps most important, of what we learnt (about the tactical aspects) is not new, but needs a re-emphasis and confirms most of our tactics and doctrine.'<sup>49</sup>

The result was the publication in 1976 of *FM 100-5 Extended Battle*. This articulated a tactical doctrine called 'active defence' that called upon US commanders to move their units and rapidly change the force ratio at key points. It moved the existing doctrine beyond static defence or a mobile defence relying on territorial depth; in short, it was the force multiplier that would enable the US army to win the first battle of the next war while fighting superior numbers of Warsaw Pact troops. In 1982 a new version of *FM 100-5* included an operational level doctrine that had been developed between 1977 and 1981. The operational doctrine was called the 'extended battle', later renamed 'air-land battle'. It is often credited with being the conceptual basis for the planning of Operation Desert Storm in 1991. It has also been argued that the first component of doctrine—weapons technology—was important in this process: 'The new systems, based on emerging technologies, enabled an operational doctrine that synchronized the engagement of the follow-on echelons with defense against the first echelon. There was also a need to put doctrinal and organizational muscle on the technological skeleton.'<sup>50</sup>

Finally, it is important to note that this doctrine received endorsement from the *Bundeswehr*, the main continental European army alongside which the United States army would fight in the event of hostilities with the Warsaw Pact. This component of doctrine has been shown to depend on two others: weapons technology and the political and strategic situation. Furthermore, it manifested itself first at the tactical level before being extended to the operational level.

<sup>48</sup> Bronfeld, 'Fighting outnumbered', p. 471.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Bronfeld, 'Fighting outnumbered', p. 472.

<sup>50</sup> Bronfeld, 'Fighting outnumbered', p. 494.

The third component is organizational and institutional interests. Initially it would appear that this dimension is irrelevant to doctrine in a way that is the converse of weapons technology. Doctrine, in a normative sense, is a result of a successful response to the premier Clausewitzian question. Once that answer is formulated, an armed force can conceive of a form of war that is considered best suited to a particular conflict. When this process has been successfully completed, there is a requirement for an organizational and institutional structure to sustain it. An insight into this relationship was given in an article that was published in 1911—anonymously, but probably written by Corbett. This article accused the British general staff of failing to formulate a doctrine that could be adequately supported by the organization:

The General Staff selected for the Army a 'method of action' that has failed to give it a 'doctrine of war', not because it has formed no particular 'conception of war', but because it does not consider the organization and administration of the army as yet quite adequate to the tasks which would be imposed on it by the form of war that it considers the best.<sup>51</sup>

Another aspect of this component could be described as 'internal culture'. This can play an important role in military innovation: 'The services that innovated with considerable success in the interwar period possessed internal cultures that encouraged debate, study, and honest experimentation in their preparations for war. Professional military education was clearly a part of the process; so was serious study and writing ... The German army particularly encouraged its officers to engage in serious debate.'<sup>52</sup>

Internal culture can also have a negative impact on the effectiveness of doctrine. The British army of the interwar period provides an instructive example of this. Despite accusations that it failed to study the lessons of the First World War,<sup>53</sup> there is a wealth of evidence to suggest a contrary conclusion: 'The General Staff promulgated its initial thoughts on the lessons of the Great War as early as 1920, when it published the first post-war edition of the Field Service Regulations. Two amended editions followed in the 1920s, the second in 1924 and the third in 1929.'<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, it can be suggested that by the end of this decade the general staff had developed a tactical combined arms doctrine based on the combat experience of the First World War and postwar developments. The pathway to victory in future wars was seen to lie in surprise, coupled with the deployment of technology-generated firepower and the minimal use of manpower.

Yet this doctrine failed to find expression in practice, owing to two factors. First, there was a lack of new weapons systems that would enable this new doctrine to be validated by training. However, this was not a problem that was unique to the British army. The *Reichswehr* similarly lacked modern equipment, yet did not have the same problem of validating its doctrine through training. Why was this so? The answer lies in the second factor. Any attempt by the British general staff to

<sup>51</sup> *Edinburgh Review* 133, April 1911, p. 346.

<sup>52</sup> Murray, 'Thinking about innovation', p. 128.

<sup>53</sup> See Murray, 'Thinking about innovation', p. 124.

<sup>54</sup> D. French, 'Big wars and small wars between the wars 1919–1939', in H. Strachan, ed., *Big wars and small wars: the British army and the lessons of war in the twentieth century* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 39.

impose a common understanding of the combined arms doctrine was undermined by problems of dissemination: 'The interpretation of doctrine was apt to change with every posting of a senior officer.'<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the training of junior officers was devolved to unit commanders and their second-in-commands. The consequence was that the level of doctrinal understanding varied hugely between units. This problem was not systematically addressed until July 1939—too late to make any difference to the performance of the British Expeditionary Force in 1940.

The third factor is something that affects all organizations whose role is to prepare for and fight wars. Their efforts to formulate, disseminate and implement doctrine are frequently challenged by two of the other components of doctrine: changing geostrategic circumstances and technological innovation. This has given rise to a remarkably pessimistic assessment by Sir Michael Howard as to whether militaries can actually be counted on to become effective learning institutions: 'I am tempted to declare dogmatically that whatever doctrine the Armed Forces are working on now, they have got it wrong. I am also tempted to declare that it does not matter that they have got it wrong. What does matter is their capacity to get it right quickly when the moment arrives.'<sup>56</sup> The capacity to be a learning institution can also be affected by another component of doctrine: national culture. Sir Michael Howard illustrates this with trenchant criticism of the culture that has been dominant in the British Isles: 'Still, do not let me give too much encouragement to that English vice of laziness masquerading as pragmatism. The appalling dictum of the lazy man, that the British Army loses all battles except the last, glosses over a vast quantity of misery and bloodshed, not least at the expense of Britain's allies'<sup>57</sup> The influence of organizational and institutional factors can manifest itself at all three levels of war. In particular, it can impede the development of a tactical doctrine and the appropriate command philosophy, which is critical to the capacity to steer transition that tactics need if they are to have operational effect and achieve strategic objectives.

## Doctrine, ideology and culture

From the perspective of armed forces in western liberal democracies, ideology initially appears to be an anomaly as far as doctrine is concerned. Yet it has been a critical element of doctrine since the end of the eighteenth century:

It is ideology, the secular variant of religion, that has exerted the most potent influence over strategic policy during the past two centuries. The French Revolution and the nearly quarter century of war that ensued set the tone for the twentieth century. Secular religions particularly plagued the first half of our century and came close to breaking the back of Western civilization during World War II.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> D. French, 'Officer education and training in the British regular army, 1919–39', in G. C. Kennedy and K. Neilson, eds, *Military education: past, present and future* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), p. 115.

<sup>56</sup> M. Howard, 'Military science in an age of peace', *RUSI Journal* 119: 1, March 1974, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Howard, 'Military science in an age of peace', p. 7.

<sup>58</sup> W. Murray, M. Knox, A. Bernstein, eds, 'On strategy', in *The making of strategy: rulers, states, and war* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 15.



In terms of how it has manifested itself, ideology has had the greatest impact at the strategic level, but it can also have an impact at the operational and tactical levels. This component can be likened to what T. S. Eliot described in one of his poems as a 'wilderness of mirrors'. It offered the solace of a distorted reality. In the twentieth century one of the best illustrations of this point, although not the only one, was Nazi Germany. This was a regime that developed an ideology of International Relations that stressed the notion of a Social Darwinist struggle for survival. In terms of strategic objectives, there was an emphasis on war for *Lebensraum* (living space) in the east. War and military preparations suffused both German society and foreign policy. It had done so, with a less lurid vocabulary, even during the reign of Wilhelm II, and this theme complemented a military tradition that went back to the Second Reich.<sup>59</sup>

The success of the *Wehrmacht* in Poland and then Norway, France and the Low Countries was based on the successful use of a combined arms doctrine of warfare which facilitated the innovative and very efficient employment of limited resources. The invasion of Russia with the launch of Operation Barbarossa in 22 June 1941 marked a discontinuity that was to have important implications for the ideological component of doctrine. First, the gross underestimation of the logistical problems of invading Russia meant that the doctrine of combined arms warfare could not be adequately supported beyond December 1941, when the German offensive was halted in the suburbs of Moscow. Second, the attack on Russia had an ideological dimension to it that had been absent from previous offensives in the West. From the beginning the war in Russia was characterized as a *Weltanschauungskrieg*—a war of ideology. This aspect of the conflict could be sustained relatively easily in the German army, which was an organization already adept at using radio, film and written propaganda to convey important messages to its soldiers.<sup>60</sup>

As the gap in resources and technology between the Red Army and the *Wehrmacht* widened in 1942–3, the transition-steering power of the latter's tactical doctrine was increasingly challenged. A consequence of this was an increasing recourse by the leadership of the Third Reich to inserting ideology into the command structure, with the aim of explaining the political situation and hardening the morale of German soldiers. For example, 'On 22nd December 1943 Hitler issued an order establishing "NS-Fuehrungsstab" in the OKW which made for the creation of "National Socialist Leadership Officers" (NSFO) in all military staffs down to divisional level. Thus ended a gradual process, begun almost ten years earlier, of an ideological and institutional penetration of the army by the Nazi party.'<sup>61</sup> In some divisions of the German army, company commanders conducted twice a week ideology sessions with their men. This increased emphasis on propaganda

<sup>59</sup> See E. R. Wolf, *Envisioning power: ideologies of dominance and crisis* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), p. 220.

<sup>60</sup> See O. Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–1945: German troops and the barbarisation of warfare* (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 69–76.

<sup>61</sup> Bartov, *The Eastern Front*, p. 75.



was combined with a personal belief in the Führer on the part of German soldiers.<sup>62</sup> This had the effect of stiffening their morale, even in defeat. Yet ultimately it did not prove an antidote to the greatest challenge that the German army faced from 1942 onwards, namely, the process of de-modernization. In a perverse way the increased emphasis on ideology between 1942 and 1943 can be interpreted as a substitute for a combined arms warfare doctrine that could no longer generate the fighting power that it once had been capable of producing. Ideology, which seemed to serve as a force multiplier when things went well, gave the German high command a very poor alternative to attaining operational effect and reaching strategic objectives.

If the armed forces of any country are a product of the society to which they belong, then national culture is a component of doctrine. Yet this proposition presents a number of problems. First, the concept of culture is both contested and unbounded. Culture can mean anthropology, historical sociology, international security, organization theory, psychology, sociology and social theory. Any concept and definition of culture is problematic. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz, writing in the Weberian tradition, states that 'Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun'.<sup>63</sup> In short, people live in a symbolic world that they themselves have socially constructed or inherited, and action is taken in this symbolic environment. Viewed from this perspective, cultural explanation is based on signs, symbols and their interpretation. With respect to national culture and doctrine, this raises the question whether the former should be seen as context for the latter, as Colin Gray has suggested.<sup>64</sup> Alistair Finlan has suggested another relationship between a specific fighting organization and national culture: 'They share much in common, from an explicit focus on identity and an awareness of the power of social construction and the influence of ideas, norms, values as well as identity in shaping preferences. An important historical linkage between the two areas has been in relation to the significance of doctrine in shaping the preferences of military establishments.'<sup>65</sup> Inevitably, scholars who have written about this topic have taken different perspectives on its influence on doctrine, fighting forces and the choices of strategies. Snyder stressed the pressures that are generated within a particular military organization.<sup>66</sup> Posen laid a far greater emphasis on the political elite of a particular country and the balance of power within the international system.<sup>67</sup> Rosen invoked external factors and technology.<sup>68</sup> What is instructive about Finlan's ideas is that he then qualifies the proposition about doctrine shaping preferences: 'The causal chain between doctrine as an independent variable and strategy as a dependent variable is not at all assured, even more so, in times of conflict.'<sup>69</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Bartov, *The Eastern Front*, p. 104.

<sup>63</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5.

<sup>64</sup> C. Gray, *Modern strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 153.

<sup>65</sup> A. Finlan, 'A comparative study of US/UK military culture and the global war on terror', unpublished thesis, RCUK Academic Fellowship, Aberystwyth University, 2010, p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> Snyder, *The ideology of the offensive*, 1984.

<sup>67</sup> Posen, *The sources of military doctrine*.

<sup>68</sup> Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the next war: innovation and the modern military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

<sup>69</sup> Finlan, 'A comparative study of US/UK military culture', p. 7.

If the weapons technology component of doctrine can generate fighting power only when it is employed within a certain conceptual framework, then a similar claim can be made for national culture. It provides a crucial context that can have both negative and positive implications for the formulation, dissemination and implementation of doctrine. Not only is an interdisciplinary approach unavoidable in explaining this approach, it has also been argued that these diverse factors are in turn refracted through the prism of constitutional arrangements: 'The measures which communities adopt for their defense are intimately connected with their internal political structure, and in consequence with their traditions and their ideas.'<sup>70</sup>

The negative effects of this component may be illustrated by returning to the British army in the interwar period. The Field Service Regulations of the 1920s and 1930s articulated general principles. They did not prescribe how those principles should be applied. Instead, this responsibility was devolved to senior officers on the assumption that implementation would require a combination of judgement and experience. Part of the reason for this lay in the strategic realities of the British Empire: the army was pulled between the competing priorities of preparing to fight a European war and garrisoning the colonies. However, David French has claimed that national culture was also an important driver:

This indulgent approach to the interpretation of doctrine was also the creation of a particular notion of what it meant to be 'British' that had developed since the eighteenth century. It was widely assumed that one of the factors that set the British apart from the Germans or French, and made them superior was the fact that their actions were determined by 'character', not abstract reason and prescriptive rules ... a readiness to muddle through was a trait that was supposed to distinguish the British from their continental neighbours.<sup>71</sup>

The idea of 'character' in this sense was also linked to a unique conception of liberty: 'Our liberty is neither Greek nor Roman, but essentially English. It has a character of its own.'<sup>72</sup> The debate between this British emphasis on character and the subsequent erosion of a prescriptive nature of doctrine is not new. In 1911 a plea was registered against the 1910 Memorandum on Army Training. Character, it was argued, was the implicit factor that militated against the construction of a sound doctrinal bridge:

Our General Staff, unlike those of France and Germany, has not taken the opportunity presented to it [assessing the Russo-Japanese War] to impress seriously upon the Army the soundness of that doctrine of war which is the logical and necessary spiritual link between the methods it advocates in Field Service Regulations and the parent conception of war which is the sole justification for adopting any particular method of action.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> M. Howard, 'Introduction', in M. Howard, ed., *Soldiers and governments: the armed forces as a political problem* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1957), p. 23.

<sup>71</sup> French, 'Big wars and small wars between the wars', pp. 40–41.

<sup>72</sup> T. B. Macaulay, quoted in J. W. Burrow, *A liberal descent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 57.

<sup>73</sup> L. H. R. Pope-Hennessy, 'The British army and the modern conception of war', *Edinburgh Review* 213: 436, April 1911, p. 334.

This debate also underlined how the negative aspect of this component can contribute to doctrinal failure at a tactical level. One of the key functions of training is that it should validate doctrine. This should be the business of a general staff, which should also facilitate the dissemination and implementation of doctrine: 'It is among the first duties of the General Staff of a great modern national army to indoctrinate it with a clear conception of the basic principles of war, and of the method on which it intends to apply those principles to the conduct of national war.'<sup>74</sup> What is interesting about national culture as a component of doctrine is that its effects are counterintuitive in terms of the level of war. It is natural to assume that this aspect would have the greatest impact at the strategic and operational levels; yet, as the British interwar example clearly shows, its implications in fact manifest themselves most strongly at the tactical level.

The final component, the political and strategic situation, inserts a geostrategic dimension into doctrine.<sup>75</sup> This aspect brings to the fore a challenge unique to the armed forces of each particular country. There is always one constant that remains unchanged: human dependence on a geographical base for existence. However, changing conditions determine how territory will be exploited, contested and defined. It would initially appear that this component would affect only the strategic and operational levels of war.

Germany offers a good example of this. With the inception of a united Germany in 1871 a new strategic situation was brought into being: 'Central Europe was now united for the first time in modern history under the Hohenzollerns, who commanded the finest army in Europe and the world.'<sup>76</sup> Yet military thinkers such as the elder von Moltke had a perceptive grasp of the fact that this new state faced a lethal strategic scenario of a Franco-Russian alliance that could result in a war on two fronts. He also recognized that there was no easy solution, in terms of military planning, to these dilemmas. Yet he was to do his best to find one. The intensive diplomacy of Bismarck with respect to other European powers clearly had its limitations. The problem arose with the accession of Wilhelm II to the throne in 1890, and the desire of a group of general staff officers around Count von Schlieffen to bring about a rapid decision on the battlefield through manoeuvre and encirclement:

Moltke's plans in this situation were in line with his strategy in the past, namely to fight one enemy with as little as possible in order to make available superior forces with which to crush the other. His advice was to stay on the defensive in the west and to take the offensive against Russia. Germany, in possession of Alsace-Lorraine, could defend her western frontier with small forces, whereas she could not hope to achieve rapid decisions against the rising line of French fortifications. Greater results could be hoped for in Russia. Moltke's second successor as chief of the general staff, Count Schlieffen, reversed the sequence in 1894; from that time on, the German plans for a two-front war envisaged making the first offensive in the west.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Pope-Hennessy, 'The British army and the modern conception of war', p. 338.

<sup>75</sup> Geostrategy concerns a state's projection of military power and direction of diplomatic effort towards a particular location or locations.

<sup>76</sup> H. H. Herwig, 'Strategic uncertainties of a nation state: Prussia-Germany 1871-1918', in Murray et al., eds, *The making of strategy*, p. 250.

<sup>77</sup> E. M. Earle, *Makers of modern strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1943), pp. 185-6.

### *Military doctrine, command philosophy and the generation of fighting power*

This approach to the political and strategic situation in which Germany found itself had an effect on the framework of tactical doctrine that the German army developed. This was discerned by writers before the First World War:

The German method, which in itself is a perfectly logical whole springing from a conception of war in which the ruling factors are held to be seizing and maintaining the initiative at all costs and the envelopment of an enemy whose general direction is often only surmised to avoid loss of time, and consequent loss of initiative, in more accurate verification.<sup>78</sup>

In the interwar period under von Seeckt a doctrine was developed that was based on manoeuvre and the rapid annihilation of the enemy force. The other assumption that was made was that the German army could be rapidly re-equipped and expanded in numbers. This approach offered a chance of victory instead of the prospect of stalemate. Furthermore, it was not novel but rather a return to the traditions of the past:

Seeckt's conception of modern warfare was not innovative, but rather a return to traditional German warfare. The army had always accentuated the necessity for quick decisive blows. A static defence of Germany has always seemed impossible because of its unfavourable geostrategic position, and its inferiority in material and numbers of men. The enemy armies should not be given a direct target, which they could crush by sheer mass.<sup>79</sup>

But there was also an element of discontinuity with the past. Seeckt disagreed with von Schlieffen's judgement that fast mobilization was the key to success.<sup>80</sup> Instead, he placed emphasis on using highly mobile forces to make a first strike that would yield decisive results.

By December 1941 Hitler's invasion of Russia, and his declaration of war on the United States, had brought about the two-front scenario that von Moltke had identified. The critical difference was the geographical scope of Germany's new enemies. This scope brought about an increase in the material and human resources, plus the technology, that were to be deployed and used against Germany. The result was that the considerable tactical and operational virtuosity of the Germany army was progressively subjected to a dual force: it became less modern and there was a loss of the transition-steering quality in its tactical doctrine.

## **Conclusion**

This article has pursued a threefold analysis. First, doctrine as an object of thought has been evaluated, as have the two main variants of command philosophy. Second, the synthetic nature of the relationship between doctrine and command philosophy has been assessed. It has been hypothesized that they are part of what Fry has described as a compound alignment. This relationship between doctrine and command philosophy is seen as critical by practitioners. Ironically,

<sup>78</sup> 'The British army and modern conceptions of war', *Edinburgh Review* 113, April 1911, p. 336.

<sup>79</sup> Strohn, 'Hans von Seeckt', p. 335.

<sup>80</sup> See G. E. Rothenberg, 'Moltke, Schlieffen, and the doctrine of strategic envelopment', in P. Paret, ed., *Makers of modern strategy from Machiavelli to the nuclear age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 306–11, p. 310.

it is completely absent from one of the most recent surveys of doctrine and the British armed forces.<sup>81</sup> In a perceptive examination of British doctrine in Iraq and Afghanistan, no reference was made to the kind of command philosophy that was being applied to these two operations: 'This disquiet was twofold: first there was frustration born of the lack of strategic direction in Iraq and Afghanistan; second there was a palpable loss of confidence in the robustness of the doctrinal foundations supporting British military operations.'<sup>82</sup> The relationship between doctrine and command philosophy contributes greatly to the ability, as stated at the beginning of this article, to create a force multiplier effect. 'If doctrine is the epoxy the commander's way of command in the circumstances is the hardener.'<sup>83</sup> The importance of aligning doctrine and command philosophy at the tactical level is paramount. However, writers such as Geoffrey Till have generated only confusion as to which command philosophy can generate this effect when harnessed to doctrine: 'There is the balance to be struck between centralized control and that form of delegated authority that has become known as "mission command" of the sort associated with Nelson.'<sup>84</sup> Moreover, a recent insightful article on the challenges that British command philosophy has faced in Iraq and Afghanistan makes only one attempt to explain the relationship with doctrine: 'The independence of these in-theatre commanders may be explained by reference to the introduction into the British army of the concept of "mission command" following Field Marshal Nigel Bagnall's doctrinal reforms in the mid to late 1980s.'<sup>85</sup>

The third aspect of evaluation has identified the existence of an important lacuna in the theory of doctrine. Gooch argued that the six components of doctrine came together differently in each and every case. They represented a 'cocktail' in terms of affecting the formulation, dissemination and implementation of doctrine.<sup>86</sup> What has been shown is how the different components have manifested themselves at the tactical, operational and strategic levels of war, and the linkages that exist between these components.

Corbett's aphorism of doctrine being the soul of warfare does underline a crucial continuity from the past to the present and into the future. This continuity can be described as the premier Clausewitzian question: what is the nature of the conflict in which statesmen and commanders find themselves engaged? It is in the process of answering this question that we have the departure point for the formulation of doctrine and the subsequent command philosophy. The ongoing operation in Afghanistan illustrates this point well: 'The offensive is, in many ways, a distillation of a counterinsurgency doctrine that General McChrystal and his team have been shaping since arriving in Afghanistan.'<sup>87</sup> The use of doctrine, like that of strategic thinking, is heavily context-dependent. This is one of the

<sup>81</sup> See M. Mader, *In pursuit of excellence* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004).

<sup>82</sup> S. Griffin, 'Iraq, Afghanistan and the future of British military doctrine: from counterinsurgency to stabilization', *International Affairs* 87: 2, March 2011, p. 318.

<sup>83</sup> Communication from General Sir Rupert Smith to the author, 11 March 2008.

<sup>84</sup> G. Till, *Seapower: a guide for the twenty first century* (London: Frank Cass, 2006), p. 175.

<sup>85</sup> A. King, 'Military command in the last decade', *International Affairs* 87: 2, March 2011, p. 390.

<sup>86</sup> Gooch, 'Introduction: military doctrine and military history', p. 6.

<sup>87</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, 16 Feb. 2010, p. 1.

factors that makes doctrine such a transient phenomenon. It is also important to underline the point that the utility of doctrine is still contested in the literature. It has been interpreted as being devoid of the ability to generate fighting power and thus facilitate military success: 'With each conflict being fought according to quite different political, military and legal requirements from the last, the question might be asked: how can doctrine be guaranteed to give us the keys to success on the battlefield? The answer to the question is that it cannot.'<sup>88</sup>

The importance of Corbett's wisdom is that it provided, and continues to provide, a beam to illuminate for senior commanders and policy-makers the continuing importance of correctly answering the premier Clausewitzian question. The centrality of this for the formulation of doctrine is ignored by a fighting organization at its peril.

The components of doctrine are not restricted to steering transition from the tactical level to achieving operational effect and strategic objectives. These components at the strategic and operational level can present commanders with difficult challenges at the tactical level. In summary, doctrine, irrespective of the level at which it manifests itself, is pivotal to success in war. This is not exactly a new claim or insight: 'There is little or no exaggeration in the assertion that without doctrine large military operations cannot be carried on satisfactorily against a strong and active foe, and that the influence of doctrine upon victory is profound.'<sup>89</sup>

Alongside the investigation of the different components of doctrine, this article has emphasized the importance of applying the appropriate command philosophy. It is this synthesis that generates a force multiplier effect. Doctrine and command philosophy are like two halves of a banknote: each is useless without the other. Of the two command philosophies, the application of 'mission command' is by far the most challenging. It requires certain qualities in an officer corps. Among them is the ability to think holistically, and the willingness to take initiatives and pursue them despite adversity. This in turn underlines the importance of an officer corps to these matters: 'it is indeed true, as is so often said, that the officer corps counts for everything in war.'<sup>90</sup>

A paradigm of doctrine has been developed that lends itself to being tested through case-studies. The use of historical material would illuminate the nature of the thought required to arrive at a particular conception of war, and establish what kind of doctrines came out of a particular conception. The doctrines arising and their accompanying command philosophies could be analysed to gain an understanding of the role of both deductive and inductive approaches in this process. This would enable an evaluation to be made of how effectively the premier question has been posed and answered.

<sup>88</sup> O. J. Daddow, 'Facing the future: history in the writing of British military doctrine', *Defence Studies* 2: 1, Spring 2002, p. 160.

<sup>89</sup> D. Knox, 'The role of doctrine in naval warfare', *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 41: 2, March–April 1915, p. 340.

<sup>90</sup> Van Creveld, *Fighting power*, p. 168.