DOCTRINE, STRATEGY AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

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All the branches of the Indian armed forces have released their 'official' doctrines. Some of these doctrines are in the process of being modified or re-written. Nevertheless, there remains considerable doubt about what a 'doctrine' is and how it is different from other very closely related concepts such as 'strategy' and 'grand strategy'. This essay outlines some of these distinctions.

A common misperception needs to be set aside first. No organised military force can exist without a doctrine, as I explain later. Therefore, one can understand a doctrine even if the doctrine is not officially written down. For example, Indian Army officers,

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especially those engaged in counter-insurgency operations or those who have had such experience, routinely complain that India has no counter-insurgency doctrine, meaning that there is no written doctrine. Though the army now has a written counter-insurgency doctrine, that complaint was not valid even during the period before it was written, because the army has had a reasonably stable counter-insurgency doctrine for decades. The Indian Army's view of guerrilla war can be gleaned from the writings of military officers in professional journals published by various arms of the Indian military, from autobiographies and memoirs of army officers, and from unit histories. In a previous essay, I have examined army training, the debates about appropriate doctrine, and the weapons sought by the army to understand its doctrine, particularly with reference to counter-insurgency war.[1]

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1.   Rajesh Rajagopalan, " 'Restoring Normalcy': The Evolution of the Indian Army's Counterinsurgency Doctrine," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, 11:1, Spring 2000, pp. 44-68.

Training provides an operationalised view of military doctrine. It represents the army's institutionalised view of war and the method for prosecuting it. Examining debates within the military is important because these would reveal differences as well as conformity in the army's view of war. More importantly, these would reveal how important particular missions were—for example, a dearth of articles on counter-insurgency, but a wealth of essays on armoured combat reveal important details about the military's perspective on future war. Thus, though writing down a doctrine is useful, to suggest that a doctrine exists only if it is written down is fallacious.

In addition, doctrine writing has become something of a fashion. This raises issues about whether such popular and political doctrine writing corresponds to both what the organisation's actual doctrine is, and where it should go. Without prejudging the veracity of written doctrines, this suggests the need for caution in taking written doctrines at face value. Such documents always need to be compared with other elements, such as training, to make a judgment about what the doctrine actually is.

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In the following sections, I look at some of these basic definitional issues, using both military history and other academic writings on the subject. I focus on how doctrine has been conceptualised by scholars and military historians, and the importance of drawing some distinctions between them. Subsequently, I briefly look at whether such distinctions are important when examining nuclear weapons.

PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION: MILITARY STRATEGY AND DOCTRINE

Studying military doctrine is important, but it also requires that the term first be defined properly. Previous studies have defined military doctrine such that it also included elements of military strategy. The confusion is compounded because different military organisations have different ways of defining military

doctrine, and some include elements that point towards strategy. Nevertheless, military doctrine needs to be defined so that it is distinct from military strategy. I use previous studies of military doctrine, which do not set apart these concepts clearly, to illustrate the drawbacks that result from mixing these concepts.

I define military doctrine as Dale Smith does, as a set of views on war and the principles concerning its conduct that are adopted by the military leadership, taught in military academies and which provide the basis for war plans.[2] Therefore, military doctrines represent beliefs about the kind of war the military expects to fight and the accepted wisdom about the best method for fighting it. Both the expectations of future war as well as the prescription for prosecuting it will be evident in the preparations the military makes during peace-time. This includes the weapons the military believes are necessary to fight the war and the manner in which it trains its soldiers to use these weapons.

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An example of a military doctrine is the French concept of the "methodical battle" which was employed in various French Army field service regulations in the inter-War years. Though the doctrine's roots can be traced to earlier periods, the doctrine was stressed in the inter-War years partly as a consequence of the French belief in the dominance of firepower in any future war, as well as their lack of confidence in short-term conscript troops, which they sought to alleviate by detailed preparation and simplified operations. The doctrine formed the basis of various French war plans during this period.[3] Another example of a military doctrine is what Andrew Krepinevich refers to as the "Army Concept" of the United States Army, which defined conventional, medium intensity war as the most likely type of war that the United States

2. Dale O. Smith, *US Military Doctrine* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1955). See also, Julian Lider, *Military Theory: Concept, Structure, Problems* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), p. 306; Allan R. Millet, Williamson Murray and Kenneth H. Watman, "The Effectiveness of Military Organizations," *International Security* , 11: 1, Summer 1986, pp. 37-71.
3. Robert Allan Doughty, *The Breaking Point: Sedan and the Fall of France, 1940* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1990), pp. 27-30.

would fight, and prescribed methods for fighting such a war.[4] Krepinevich blames this 'concept' for leading the US to fight the Vietnam as a conventional war. The current US imbroglio in Iraq suggests that the US Army still adheres to this "Army Concept."[5].

It is important to keep in mind that the comprehensiveness of military doctrines varies: some might only provide general guidelines for combat behaviour, while others might prescribe specific methodology. Most military doctrines are not as detailed as the French doctrine was during the inter-War years.[6] German military doctrines during the inter-War years provide a good contrast to the comprehensiveness of French military doctrines. German doctrine expected field commanders to understand and accomplish the military objectives given to them on the basis of the broad guidelines set out in the doctrine. The German Army saw war as being unamenable to strict schedules and rigid plans and expected initiative from their well-trained commanders and troops.[7] German doctrine probably represents the opposite extreme from the French in comprehensiveness, while most other doctrines fall somewhere between these two.

DIFFERENTIATING MILITARY STRATEGY FROM MILITARY DOCTRINE

It is also important to separate military doctrine from military strategy. Military strategy specifies how a particular objective is to be reached and is conditioned by various environmental factors that include, but are not limited to, the balance of opposing forces, the capabilities of the respective commanders, and geography.[8]

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4. Andrew F. Krepinevich Jr., *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 4-7.
5. Of course, US Army officers would argue that the problem in Vietnam was that the US did not fight the war like a conventional war. The best such argument is in Harry G. Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato: Presidio, 1982).
6. On the detailed nature and the inflexibility of the French doctrine, see Robert Allan Doughty, *The Seeds of Disaster: The Development of French Army Doctrine, 1919-1939* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1985), pp. 10-11.
7. Doughty, n. 3, pp. 30-32; James S. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992), pp. xiv-xv.
8. Military strategy can itself be further divided, as Luttwak does, into the overall, or theatre level of strategy, and the operational level, which deals with a specific geographical sub-set of the overall strategy. See Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, MA.: The Belknap Press, 1987). Millett et al n. 2, also make a similar distinction in "Military Effectiveness." This distinction between theatre level strategy and the operational level of strategy might be important if the dependent variable is military strategy. For my purposes, it is more important to note the distinction between military strategy and military doctrine. See also Lider, n. 2, especially, chapter 5.

Military strategy, dependent as it is on the specifics of the military problem, could change to accommodate changes in the environment. Thus, German military strategy for the invasion of France in 1940 changed dramatically during the six months preceding the invasion, as several German military and political leaders came to the conclusion that an offensive through the Ardennes offered greater chance of success than the previous strategy which emphasised an offensive through Belgium, similar to the Schlieffen Plan of the pre-World War I era. Similarly, Indian military strategy for the assault on East Pakistan in 1971 was totally different from its traditional attrition strategy, and it was adopted during the six months prior to the war in response to the conditions in the East Pakistan theatre. In this case, what changed was not Indian doctrine, but rather Indian strategy about how to employ force, and it changed primarily because of the particularities of the theatre of war, and the flow of battle.

Military doctrine is less flexible. Though changes in the environment can illustrate the need for change in an existing doctrine, the cumbersomeness of the process can discourage such change. Changing a doctrine involves acquiring new tools, learning new skills and sometimes new attitudes. More importantly, in times of uncertainty and danger, making such fundamental changes can be risky. Barry Posen points out that the Russians were in the midst of just such a change when Germany attacked in 1941, with disastrous consequences for the Russians. On the other hand, the French, though

recognising the need for changing their doctrine, nevertheless refused to make the necessary changes because they did not want to be caught by a German invasion before such changes could be completed.[9] Though doctrinal changes have been known to take place even during war, this is unusual. Doctrinal changes should be expected to take place when the threat of war is low.

This definition of military doctrine is different and considerably narrower than other recent definitions. Posen, and more recently, Elizabeth Kier, both define military doctrine in a manner that also includes elements of military strategy. Posen defines military doctrine as a sub-set of grand strategy. In his definition, grand strategy is the "political-military, means-ends chain, a state's theory about how best it can 'cause' security for itself," while military doctrine deals with the military part of this means-ends chain, specifying what military tools are to be used and the method for using them.[10] Excluding tactics from his definition, he suggests that military doctrine deals with "how battles are fought."[11] His characterisation of *Blitzkrieg*, which was a specific military strategy, as a military doctrine, provides further

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indication of his inclusion of strategy in the definition of military doctrine.[12] His conclusion that balance of power better explains the military behaviour of Britain, France, and Germany between the World Wars, applies more to military strategy than to doctrine.[13]

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9. Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrines: France, Britain and Germany Between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 30-31.

10. Ibid., p. 13.

11. Ibid., p. 245, footnote 3.

12. Ibid., p. 14 and passim. Luttwak, Mearsheimer and others characterise *Blitzkrieg* accurately as a military strategy rather than as a military doctrine. Luttwak, n. 8, p. 91; John Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 35-43. See also Doughty, n. 3, pp. 19-26 and 323-324. Both Mearsheimer and Doughty clearly distinguish between German military doctrine and German military strategy.

13. This is not to suggest that balance of power considerations will not explain military doctrines. Indeed, it might. The point is that since Posen focusses mostly on military strategy rather than doctrine, we cannot draw many conclusions about the sources of military doctrines.

Similarly, Kier includes components of strategy in her definition of military doctrine. Like Posen, Kier defines military doctrine as something between tactics and strategy, but unlike Posen, she includes "the operational" level, which she borrows from Luttwak, in her definition.[14] Though she explicitly states that doctrine is not the same as strategy, by including the operational level in her definition, she mixes strategy in her definition of doctrine. Still, Kier is somewhat more accurate in identifying French military doctrine, as indicated by her attention to the French thinking on the defensive use of tanks, on the importance of firepower in future battles, and on the French concept of "methodical battle."[15] On the other hand, she also reverts to explaining French military strategy at various times, for example, when she discusses French war plans.[16] When she does write about strategy, her definition of strategy is similar to Posen's, and refers to grand strategy, the meshing of political goals and political-military means, rather than just military strategy. Thus, the three-fold distinction that Kier makes is the same as that of Posen, between grand strategy, military doctrine and tactics, with military strategy included in the definition of military doctrine.[17]

THE PROBLEMS OF DEFINITIONS: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Defining military doctrine so broadly as to also include military strategy leads to more than just semantic confusion. It is methodologically unsound and complicates theory testing. When Posen and Kier write about military doctrine as the dependent variable, they are talking about two different variables, military doctrine and military strategy. These could have different, independent causes. For example, the French Army doctrine's emphasis on firepower appears to be a

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14. Elizabeth Kier, "Changes in Conventional Military Doctrines: The Cultural Roots of Doctrinal Change" (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1992), 94. Luttwak, n. 8, p. 91. Kier appears to have misunderstood Luttwak. Luttwak uses the term "operational" only to indicate one level of strategy. Luttwak sees the operational level of strategy (see p. 91) as being between the tactical level of strategy (see chapter 6, especially p. 84) and the theatre level of strategy (see p. 113). His intention in using this terminology is clear when he writes about distinguishing among the various levels: "The boundary of what is 'operational' in methods, ongoing command, and action is evident in any real-life case, even if very difficult to demarcate in the abstract . . . there is no need for any arbitrary definition: we need only uncover the natural stratification of strategy in any given episode to grasp what is operational and what comes below and above." (p. 91) Emphasis added.
15. Kier, Ibid., pp. 110-115.
16. Ibid., pp. 127-131.
17. Kier also includes procurement decisions as the operationalised element of military doctrine. Ibid., pp. 96-97.

reflection of the experience of World War I, whereas the French strategy can probably be explained better by reference to balance of power considerations. .If the same independent variable explained both military strategy and doctrine, or if there was a close correspondence between military strategy and doctrine, this distinction would not be methodologically problematic. If changes in military doctrine were reflected by changes in military strategy and vice-versa, the above distinction would be unimportant. However, no such correspondence exists. Military strategy and military doctrine are determined by different factors. Thus, each can change without corresponding changes in the other variable. Military strategy generally changes much more rapidly than military doctrine, in response to changing environmental conditions.

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German strategy prior to the invasion of France in May 1940 illustrates this clearly. As Germany invaded Poland, it adopted a defensive strategy towards France in the west. After the defeat of Poland, Germany adopted an offensive strategy toward France. Additionally, Germany had not one but at least two different strategies for the invasion of France. The various drafts of the original strategy for the war against France, called Plan Yellow, sought a massive attack by the northern wing of the German Army (Army Group B) through Belgium, with the southern wing (Army Group A) covering its eastern flank. When it became clear that this plan would not give Germany the rapid and decisive victory that Hitler wanted, Germany changed its invasion strategy. The new plan shifted the main attack from Army Group B to Army Group A, which would attack through the Ardennes to envelop the French and British forces from the south.[18] These dramatic changes in German strategy were accompanied by no changes in German military doctrines as such. All three major changes in German strategy — from a defensive strategy, to an invasion through Belgium, and finally, to an attack through the Ardennes — were based on the same, existing German military doctrine. If doctrine

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18. Doughty, n. 3, pp. 19-26; Posen, n. 9, pp. 86-88.

is defined to include strategy, the only conclusion that can be reached is that German doctrine changed thrice in six months. Defining doctrine as distinct from strategy enables us to see these changes for what they were, as changes of strategy, all based on an enduring doctrine that stressed mobile, combined arms operations, initiative in battle, and infiltration tactics to avoid defensive strong points.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MILITARY STRATEGY AND DOCTRINE

This does not mean that military doctrine and military strategy are unrelated. They are closely related and indeed this close relationship partly explains the confusion in definition. Ideally, military doctrine should support military strategy and military strategy should correspond to the capabilities of the doctrine. When strategies are adopted that are unsupported by doctrines or when existing doctrines force the military to apply unsuitable strategies, military forces are likely to face difficulties in accomplishing their mission.

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Military doctrines can enable different military strategies. By the same token, military doctrines can also disable military strategies. German military doctrine of the inter-War years, with its emphasis on flexibility and battlefield initiative, permitted widely varying strategies to be adopted, as conditions and military objectives changed. It enabled viable defensive, offensive and even counter-insurgency strategies to be adopted.[19] French military doctrines of the same period permitted French military leaders fewer options in strategy.

It should be noted that though military doctrine can increase or decrease the options for military strategy, military doctrine does not determine military strategy. For example, the French military doctrine reduced the options for French military strategy, but did not actually determine the strategy that France

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19. On the defensive use of German doctrine, see Robert Citino's discussion of the use of German doctrine to meet the perceived threat from Poland in the 1920s in Robert M. Citino, *The Evolution of Blitzkrieg: Germany Defends Itself Against Poland, 1918-1933* (New York: Greenwood Press, Contributions in Military Studies, no. 61, 1987). See also Corum, n. 7, pp. 173-174. I disagree with Citino's use of the concept doctrine, for many of the reasons stated earlier, but Corum is more careful. On the use of German doctrine for counter-insurgency purposes, see Otto Heilbrunn, *Partisan Warfare* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1962).

eventually adopted. Just as German military strategy changed in the period before the War, French strategy also evolved. The original French strategy planned a defence along the river Escaut (Plan E), but this changed to holding the line at the river Dyle (Plan D), which was also given up in favour of an advance into southern Holland, the so-called Breda variant of Plan D. The rigidity of the French military doctrine did not determine a rigid French military strategy; France had more than one viable military strategy to choose from. Clearly, therefore, military doctrine does not determine military strategy. Why one strategy was chosen over another would be difficult to explain on the basis of military doctrine alone. It might be possible to explain, on the basis of existing military doctrines, whether offensive strategies or defensive strategies will be favoured, but even here determinate explanations are probably not to be expected.

Military doctrines, even if not useful in explaining or predicting specific military strategies, can still be useful in explaining why military forces sometimes adopt apparently inappropriate strategies, or why they fail in their mission even when their strategy appears appropriate. For example, in the Battle of Britain, victory and defeat was determined to a larger extent by the appropriateness of the doctrine that underlay the British and German air doctrines rather than by the superior quality of British equipment or superiority in numbers. The Royal Air Force's (RAF's) doctrine stressed air defence, and it supported a strategy that aimed pragmatically at defending British skies. The potential of the RAF's doctrine and the requirements of its strategy blended together to produce victory. On the other hand, the Luftwaffe's strategy of bombing Britain into submission was poorly served by a doctrine that had all along emphasised medium-range close air support of fast-moving assault columns rather than strategic bombardment.[20] In this

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20. Posen, n. 9, pp. 95-99.

case, the failure of the Luftwaffe can be traced in large measure to the inappropriate doctrinal basis of the Luftwaffe's strategy in the Battle of Britain. Thus, doctrine can limit the effectiveness of strategy, even if the strategy itself is appropriate. .

On the other hand, doctrines can sometimes also lead to the adoption of inappropriate strategies. Counter-insurgency strategies of conventional armies are good examples of this. Conventional armies fighting counter-insurgency wars tend to adopt strategies that fit their doctrinal possibilities rather than the requirements of counter-insurgency. The US Army in Vietnam, for example, insisted on applying strategies that fit army doctrines but were unsuitable for the needs of the Vietnam War, rather than change doctrines to fit the needs of the war they were actually fighting. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, the Indian Army used strategies that fit existing doctrines but were unsuitable for the task of dealing with the Tamil insurgents. Indeed, Indian counter-insurgency doctrine, while one of the most innovative in the world in many ways, is deeply conditioned by the positional-war bias of the Indian Army, which sees future war as yet another conventional slogging match with Pakistan—or, less likely, China—and prepares for just such a war.

The different causes and consequences of military strategy and military doctrine require that these two concepts be examined separately. We can also examine military weapons appropriations to gain some idea about the thinking behind particular doctrinal ideas. But arms appropriations as a way of deducing doctrine is a method that needs to be handled carefully. In looking at military appropriations, one should examine the kinds of weapons the army sought, rather than the weapons the army actually acquired. Kier argues that weapons acquisitions, as a political process, reveal the political elite's understanding and acceptance of military doctrine and should, therefore, be included in studying doctrines.[21] I disagree, for two reasons. As Kier points out, the acquisition of military equipment can be the result of a number of factors, many unrelated to military doctrine.[22] In the Indian case, the logic of military

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21. Kier, n. 14, pp. 96-97.
22. Ibid.

arms acquisition is somewhat mystifying, and many times has been unrelated to military demands or needs. Two well known cases in the Indian Air Force reveal this problem. For more than three decades, the Indian Air Force has been seeking an advanced jet trainer without success, because of inadequate civilian attention.[23] On the other hand, the Indian Air Force did acquire two squadrons of Mirage-2000s fighter jets in the early 1980s as a

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consequence of a political decision rather than a military requirement.[24] These instances reveal that, at least in the Indian case, arms acquisition tells us little about the military organisation's perspectives and preferences. Therefore, the focus in such questions needs to be on what the military sought rather than what it actually acquired, since this is more likely to give an indication of the military's perspective of future war.

Secondly, as I have argued earlier, Kier includes military strategy in her definition of doctrine. Strategy is partly determined by the political needs of the state and, thus, requires political acceptance. My definition of doctrine explicitly excludes military strategy and so does not require political acceptance of the military's perspective about future war.

DOCTRINE, STRATEGY AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The confusion about the terminology is easily evident when dealing with Indian and Pakistani nuclear weapons and policy.[25] In India and Pakistan, and among scholars looking at these issues, 'doctrine' is more in vogue than 'strategy'. There is rarely any discussion of Indian or Pakistani nuclear

23. "Aborting A Take-Off," *Sunday*, July 19-25, 1992, pp. 14-15.
24. Jerrold F. Elkin and W. Andrew Ritezel, "The Indo-Pakistani Military Balance," *Asian Survey*, 26:5, May 1986, p. 527.
25. For a similar exploration of these definitional issue on nuclear weapons, see Raja Menon, "Nuclear Doctrine in South Asia," in P.R. Chari, Sonika Gupta and Arpit Rajain eds., *Nuclear Stability in South Asia* (New Delhi: Konrad Adenauer Foundation/Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies/Manohar, 2003).

strategy. Unfortunately, what is generally characterised as either the Indian or Pakistani nuclear 'doctrine' also contains elements of strategy. Whether it is the Indian doctrine, or various Pakistani semi-official pronouncements and expert opinions, they all include some statements about when India or Pakistan might resort to nuclear weapons. 'When' nuclear weapons might be employed is, of course, in the realm of strategy, but it remains incomplete without a statement of 'how' nuclear weapons might be employed. The Indian government, for example, will use nuclear weapons only in retaliation, i.e. after it has already been attacked with nuclear weapons. There has been little debate about how the retaliation might take effect. Indeed, the National Security Advisory Board's (NSAB's) 'draft' Indian nuclear doctrine leaves questions of strategy out, stating simply that these will flow from the basic framework set out in the draft doctrine. The subsequent 'official' statement of January 3, 2003, also includes within it elements of both strategy and doctrine.[26] In addition to asserting that India will use nuclear weapons only in retaliation, and that it will not target non-nuclear countries (both variants of the 'when' question), the statement also makes assertions about the 'how' question, stating, for example, that the

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retaliation will be massive. Of course, this statement did not carry the imprimatur of 'doctrine' or 'strategy'. Nevertheless, this is taken as the official Indian nuclear 'doctrine' rather than 'strategy', though the first set of elements clearly can be seen as examples of strategy. The same is true of Pakistan's nuclear 'doctrine'. Again, most of these deal with the when question: for example, the endless discussion about Pakistan's red-lines.

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26. Prime Minister's Office, "Cabinet Committee on Security Reviews Progress in Operationalizing India's Nuclear Doctrine," January 4, 2003, at http://pib.nic.in/archieve/lreleng/lyr2003/rjan2003/04012003/r040120033.html.

CONCLUSION

'Doctrine' has become a shorthand for all manner of policy statements from the armed forces and the political leadership. But misusing the concept in such ways carries with it a practical danger. It is liable to create an impression of thought and preparedness for a future war where none might exist. Without clearly understanding what these concepts might mean, there is a likelihood that we will also talk past each other because the word means different things to different people. Thus, the time has come not just to discuss different doctrines and their effectiveness, but also to discuss what the concepts mean.