CHAPTER ONE: DOCTRINE

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There is no end to the number of people who will line up to make flippant remarks that the doctrine is too long, too short, has too many pictures, is too academic, is not academic enough…. The acid test is do we read it, do we understand it, and do we use it, and DOES IT WORK? … "all else is rubbish" to borrow from Baron von Richthofen. Our doctrine does not mirror the Navy's, nor the Marine's, nor the Army's… it is aerospace doctrine… our best practices… and we should not be bashful about how we write it or what it says.

— From briefing notes by then-Brigadier General Ronald Keys to a doctrine symposium, 1997

DOCTRINE DEFINED

Doctrine is defined as "fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application" (Joint Publication [JP] 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*). This definition is explained in more detail below.

✪ *"… fundamental principles…"*

Doctrine is a body of carefully developed, sanctioned ideas which has been officially approved or ratified corporately, and not dictated by any one individual. Doctrine establishes a common frame of reference including intellectual tools that commanders use to solve military problems. It is what we believe to be true about the best way to do things based on the evidence to date.

✪ *"…military forces…"*

For the purposes of Air Force doctrine, this includes all Airmen, both uniformed and Department of the Air Force civilians. These constitute the uniformed warfighters, their commanders, and the capabilities and support that they employ. They operate across the range of military operations (ROMO) and can be task-organized into the "right force" for any particular joint contingency.

✪ *"…in support of national objectives…"*

Military forces should always conduct operations in order to support objectives that create continuing advantage for our nation.

✪ *"…guide their actions… authoritative… judgment…"*

Doctrine is a guide to action, not a set of fixed rules; it recommends, but does not mandate, particular courses of action.

> *We have identified danger, physical exertion, intelligence, and friction as the elements that coalesce to form the atmosphere of war, and turn it into a medium that impedes activity. In their restrictive effects they can be grouped into a single concept of general friction. Is there any lubricant that will reduce this abrasion? Only one: combat experience.*
>
> — Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

Air Force doctrine describes and guides the proper use of airpower in military operations. It is what we have come to understand, based on our experience to date. The Air Force promulgates and teaches its doctrine as a common frame of reference on the best way to prepare and employ Air Force forces. Subsequently, doctrine shapes the manner in which the Air Force organizes, trains, equips, and sustains its forces. Doctrine prepares us for future uncertainties and provides a common set of understandings on which Airmen base their decisions. Doctrine consists of the fundamental principles by which military forces guide their actions in support of national objectives; it is the linchpin of successful military operations. It also provides us with common terminology, conveying precision in expressing our ideas. In application, doctrine should be used with judgment. It should never be dismissed out of hand or through ignorance of its principles, nor should it be employed blindly without due regard for the mission and situation at hand. On the other hand, following doctrine to the letter is not the fundamental intent. Rather, **good doctrine is somewhat akin to a good "commander's intent:" it provides sufficient information on what to do, but does not specifically say how to do it.** Airmen should strive above all else to be doctrinally sound, not doctrinally bound.

In the current turbulent environment of expeditionary operations and the arena of homeland security, **doctrine provides an informed starting point** for the many decisions Airmen make in what seems to be a continuous series of deployments. Airmen no longer face the challenge of starting with a blank sheet of paper; **with doctrine, Airmen now have a good outline that helps answer several basic questions:**

- ✪ What is my mission? How should I approach it?
- ✪ What should my organization look like, and why?
- ✪ What are my lines of authority within my organization and within the joint force?
- ✪ What degrees of control do I have over my forces?
- ✪ How am I supported? Who do I call for more support?
- ✪ How should I articulate what the Air Force provides to the joint force?

From one operation to the next, many things are actually constant. Doctrine, properly applied, often can provide a 70-, 80-, or even 90-percent solution to most questions, allowing leaders to focus on the remainder, which usually involves tailoring for the specific operation. Good doctrine informs, provides a sound departure point, and allows flexibility.

A study of airpower doctrine should draw a distinction between theory and practice. Theory is less constrained by limited empirical context, and designed to encourage debate and introspection with an eye towards improving military advantage. It is part of a vital, iterative investigation of what works under particular circumstances, and why. Theoretical discussion is critical to a successful military. This publication does not present a comprehensive theory for airpower. Instead, it focuses on those ideas and validated concepts, grounded in experience and Service consensus. This is the heart of doctrine.

Finally, a study of airpower doctrine should also distinguish between doctrine and public relations-like pronouncements concerning the Air Force's role. There have been many of the latter since the Air Force's inception. Some have been developed with an eye towards influencing public and congressional perception of the Air Force's role and value. Others have been made in a strategic planning context (e.g., a "vision-mission-goals" development process) that are a normal part of formal, long range corporate planning. Such statements are not enduring and not doctrine; they should be viewed in the context in which they were created.

Further discussion on doctrine includes the following:

- ✪ A review of the differences between policy, strategy, and doctrine. Although distinctly different, there is significant interplay among them.

- An overview of the uses of doctrine.
- Discussion on sources of doctrine: the interplay among theory, experience, and technology.
- Discussion on the levels of doctrine: basic, operational, and tactical.
- Discussion of the types of doctrine: Service, joint, and multinational.
- A discussion on the interrelationships between doctrine, operating concepts, and vision.