



DOCTRINE, OPERATING CONCEPTS, AND VISION

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The doctrinal maxims of this document are based on experience, hard-won with the blood of Airmen, and tempered by advances in technology. If properly employed, doctrine can lead to great success, and if ignored, can lead (and has led) to disaster. Therein lies the challenge: doctrine should convey the lessons of the past to guide current operations, but should still be flexible enough to adapt to change. Yet while forming that baseline for current operations, doctrine also provides a baseline for future thinking. One way to put this relationship into perspective is to understand the different uses of vision, operating concepts, and doctrine.

If placed along a continuum, doctrine, operating concepts, and vision provide a model for thinking about future technology, operating constructs, and doctrine in a coherent temporal framework.

- ✦ **Doctrine is focused on near-term operational issues and describes the proper employment of current capabilities and current organizations.** Doctrine addresses how best to employ, how to organize, and how to command today's capabilities. Doctrine is examined and validated during training, exercises, contingency operations, and times of war. Exercises, wargaming, and experiments allow us to test emerging doctrinal concepts and better align predicted capabilities with sound operational practices. Experience during conflict refines doctrine in real time. Encounters with unpredictable adversaries often highlight doctrinal gaps and provide fresh perspectives on historic and future challenges.
- ✦ **Operating concepts generally look out from five to fifteen years, and postulate reasonable operating scenarios that, through a combination of analysis and the use of descriptive examples, examine a range of issues such as employment, operating environment, command and control, support, organization, and planning considerations.** As new technologies mature to the point where their performance can be reasonably bounded as a new, separate system or part of another system, they can be

A hiatus exists between inventors who know what they could invent, if they only knew what was wanted, and the soldiers who know, or ought to know, what they want, and would ask for it if they only knew how much science could do for them.

— Winston Churchill,
The Great War

examined within the framework of an operating concept. Depending on their purpose, operating concepts can speak to the present, near future, or distant future. Operating concepts define the parameters of envisioned capabilities. Experiments, wargames, and historical study, when honestly and rigorously conducted, are useful methods for evaluating new operating concepts and providing a basis for doctrinal considerations.

- ✦ **Vision statements describe key operating constructs and desired operational capabilities well in the future**, usually fifteen years out and beyond. Vision serves to focus technology investments toward achieving these capabilities. Emerging concepts and technologies are best investigated through experimentation and wargaming techniques. As future concepts are envisioned, it is important to also examine doctrine to support these potential capabilities. Vision provides the basis for wargaming, and the results of wargaming may point to doctrinal considerations requiring further examination.

Using doctrine, operating concepts, and vision, the Air Force can look toward the future and consider the long-term impacts of advanced technologies such as directed energy weapons, new unmanned systems, new space capabilities, and conceptual advancements. As this framework builds from the general (long term) to the specific (near term), Airmen can investigate a wide range of doctrine, organization, training, materiel, logistics, personnel, and facilities issues at the appropriate point during technology development, concept exploration, and systems acquisition.
