

Revitalising the Conceptual Component: Addressing Britain's Future Strategic Challenges

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With the end of British combat operations in Afghanistan and an imminent SDSR, it is time for the MOD to critically analyze how it develops and maintains the conceptual component of fighting power. Budget cuts, hugely expensive acquisitions and a political thirst for overseas operations have left the military in the unenviable position of justifying how it grows the collective intelligence of the Armed Forces. Consequently, the first half of this work examines the evolution of the conceptual component, and how modern British doctrine serves to undermine its own credibility through ambiguous claims regarding its purpose. The second half focuses on critical thinking and how its inclusion into a redefined and repositioned conceptual component is a necessary first step in the process of preparing the Armed Forces an uncertain budgetary and operational future.

Introduction

As British Forces recover from their withdrawal from Afghanistan, there is a very real possibility that military thinking has reached a zenith until it is once again spurred by the demands of war. Arduous campaigns stimulate innovative thinking across a wide range of fields. Advances in tactics, medicine, computers, logistics and a nearly limitless list of technologies and practices find their origins in the realm of military necessity. In the absence of war or existential threat, a familiar and tired cycle is oft repeated: fleeting national euphoria (or relief) over the cessation of hostilities gives way to an underlying national fatigue, leading to decreased military budgets and manpower. Defence is then asked to prepare for a broad set of future contingencies with less resource, an imbalance that leaves the military unable to replicate the depth of thinking and pace of innovation it so recently enjoyed. Without this focused thinking, the military struggles to “do more with less”, which usually translates into “less with less” until some military contingency or crisis forces the system to adjust accordingly, usually at great cost.

Today, the British Armed Forces are dealing with a particularly onerous version of this cycle, where national fatigue and subsequent budget cuts have preceded the decrease in operational demands. Under these financial pressures, the MOD chose to reduce spending in a number of personnel-related areas in order to preserve expensive and politically volatile acquisitions projects. General Sir Nicholas Houghton, Chief of the Defence Staff warned of the potential consequences of this action in his speech to RUSI in December of 2013. ‘Unattended our current course leads to a strategically incoherent force structure: exquisite equipment, but insufficient resources to man that equipment or train on it.’¹ Cutbacks in personnel do not relieve the Armed Forces of its responsibilities, so individuals are left with less time to hone the improvement of their knowledge and thinking; what doctrine labels the “conceptual component of fighting power”.² To spur the development of the conceptual component within the forces, military professionals must be encouraged to *think about thinking*; to have *ideas about ideas*. Unfortunately, without institutional support, the pace of life for the average military member leaves little time for careful thought and reflection on subjects beyond their primary duty, as put by General David Petraeus. ‘[M]ilitary professionals often live a cloistered existence that limits what we experience first hand...we have our noses to the grindstone, which tends to make us unaware of what we’re missing. We don’t pause and look up often enough, because we don’t have the time.’³ Building the necessary time and space for this reflection is the responsibility of all service members, but especially those chosen to lead in an increasingly complex global environment where political decisions and 24-hour news cycles often outstrip the ability of militaries to adequately plan for operations.

Facing the simultaneous challenges of significant structural change, the end of operations in Afghanistan and a Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2015, the Armed Forces must enter into an intellectually honest and open debate regarding the importance of the conceptual component and the essential role the military must play in infusing reason into the decision-making process of the government. This dialogue is already overdue, as *Joint Doctrine*

Publication 0-30, the newly released *United Kingdom Air and Space Doctrine*, acknowledges the need for change, stating, 'we must grow the conceptual component ('how we fight') to compensate for shortfalls in the physical component ('what we fight with');'⁴ What follows is therefore the opening argument in this debate, in the form of a proposed transformation in how defence approaches conceptual knowledge and critical thinking. Consequently, the first half of this work examines the evolution of the conceptual component, and how the current iteration of British doctrine serves to undermine its credibility through ambiguous claims regarding its purpose. Rather than making a case for the significance of knowledge and learning, the doctrine's failings reveal a pressing need to adjust the way defence articulates conceptual matters. The second half focuses on critical thinking and how its inclusion into a redefined and repositioned conceptual component is a necessary first step in the process of preparing the Armed Forces for its uncertain future.

The Evolution of Fighting Power

Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01 (JDP 0-01) *British Defence Doctrine* (BDD) is the capstone doctrine document of the UK Armed Forces.⁵ This volume is designed to serve as a guide for all subordinate UK military publications, detailing the 'broad philosophy and principles underpinning the employment of the Armed Forces.'⁶ Chapter 4 of BDD is titled 'Fighting Power', a term which 'defines the Armed Forces' ability to fight'.⁷ Fighting power is divided into three components, including a 'conceptual component (the thought process), a moral component (the ability to get people to fight) and a physical component (the means to fight)'.⁸ As this article will propose a new construct for both the conceptual component itself and in its philosophical relationship to the other components, it is necessary to first understand its meaning, inception and evolution.

Defined as the 'coherent intellectual basis and theoretical justification for the provision and employment of Armed Forces', the conceptual component is comprised of three elements, the Principles of war, doctrine and conceptual innovation.⁹ Principles of war 'guide commanders and their staffs in the planning and conduct of warfare. They are enduring, but not immutable, absolute or prescriptive, and provide an appropriate foundation for all military activity'.¹⁰ In both NATO and UK military parlance, doctrine is '[f]undamental principles by which the military forces guide their actions in support of objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgement in application'.¹¹ The third pillar of the conceptual component, conceptual innovation is defined as how military thinking evolves over time, resulting in the development new tactics, procedures, structures and capabilities.¹² Together, these three components offer an avenue to maintain corporate memory and a framework to critically analyze how the military conducts itself across all of its diverse functions. Whilst militaries have sought to improve themselves in these terms for millennia, the formalisation of the conceptual component in British doctrine is a relatively recent phenomenon.

In 1989, under the authorisation of the Chief of the General Staff, the British Army released *Design for Military Operations: The British Military Doctrine* (BMD).¹³ This short pamphlet was

designed to provide a 'better understanding of what is required of the Army and how it will operate' and was issued to all Army officers above the rank of lieutenant.¹⁴ Included in BMD was the first description of 'fighting power', which consisted of the same three elements as it does today, but only due to the influence of one of Britain's most accomplished military thinkers.

After the select team of two officers largely responsible for writing BMD had solicited inputs from across the Army and briefed a range of Brigadiers and Generals, they travelled to Oxford to brief Professor Sir Michael Howard, who would prove to be their sternest test.¹⁵ Upon hearing the brief, including the description of fighting power as consisting of just two components, a moral and a physical, the Professor dismissed the team 'rather like undergraduates at the end of a seminar'.¹⁶ Days later, a letter from Professor Howard arrived, proposing a third, 'intellectual' component, which was subsequently adapted and renamed

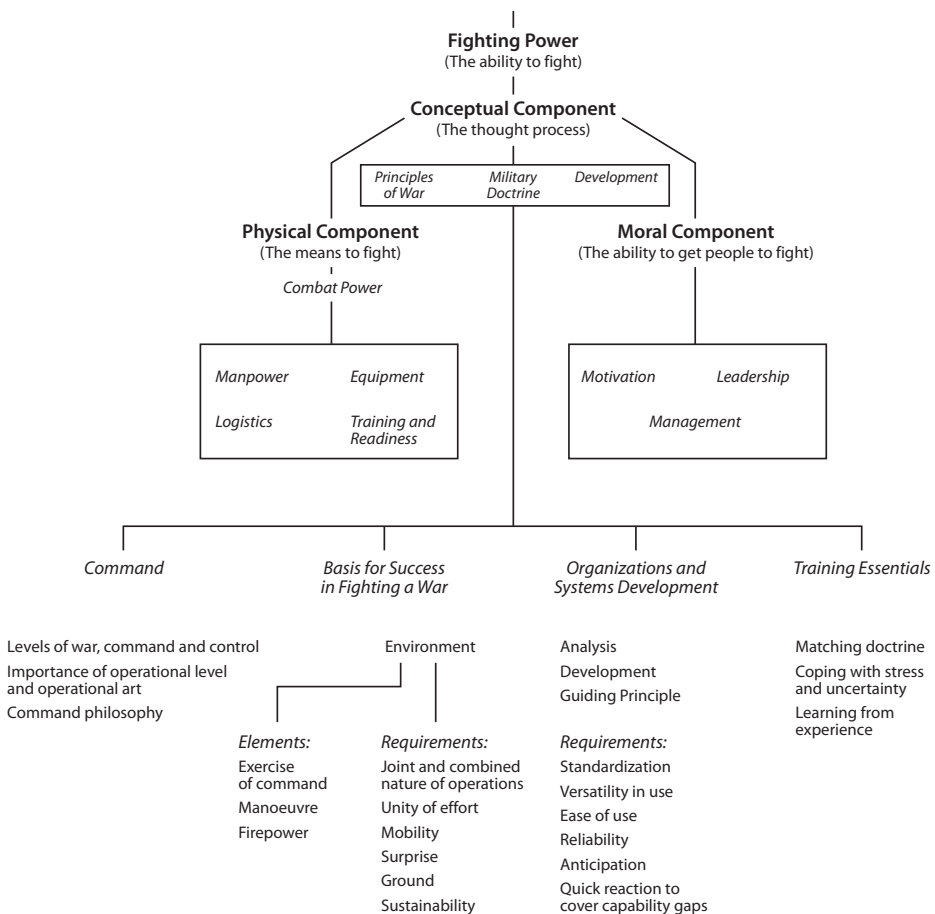


Fig 1. The Components of Fighting Power, British Military Doctrine, 1989

the 'conceptual' component to avoid alienating officers who might have rejected an overly academic approach to warfare.¹⁷ The team instantly realised the importance of capturing 'the thought process' in a separate component, and placed the conceptual component at the top of its diagram of fighting power.¹⁸ Unfortunately, this promising beginning has given way to a slightly muddled view of the conceptual component today, as evidenced by the current British doctrine.

The Failings of British Doctrine?

In its Foreword, BDD includes two statements designed to outline its importance and purpose. The first is an original, though not unique, claim regarding British doctrine: 'Far from replacing individual initiative, doctrine is said to guide commanders and subordinates how to think and not what to think.'¹⁹ Second, is an oft-used (or possibly misused) quote from *On War*, in which Clausewitz describes theory as 'a guide to anyone who wants to learn about war from books; it will light his way, ease his progress, train his judgement and help him to avoid pitfalls... [doctrine] is meant to educate the mind of the future commander... not to accompany him to the battlefield.'²⁰ What is troubling about these assertions is the message they send regarding military thinking, given BDD's preeminent place in the MOD's doctrinal hierarchy. Specifically, these statements reflect a mindset that is all too pervasive in British military circles. Collectively, the MOD publicly touts the merits of the conceptual component and its major subset of military doctrine, but due to its overstretched resources and manpower its actions in supporting these essential elements often fail to live up to the rhetoric.

A military deficient in the conceptual component will not realise its full potential, as a force 'derives its effectiveness from harmonising all 3 components of Fighting Power.'²¹ Conceptual ineptitude manifests itself in a variety of ways, but is clearly evident in the crafting of military strategy, the 'alignment' of *ends*, *ways* and *means*.²² Colin Gray reminds strategists that this relationship between ends, ways, and means is a 'complex balance of relative weight' which 'will vary hugely from occasion to occasion.'²³ These variations are clear, as military strategy is used not only in response to fast-moving crisis situations, but also in long-term contingency planning and procurement. Both Gray and Clausewitz would likely take issue with calling the latter concept 'strategy' as they define it much more narrowly. For Gray, military strategy is 'the direction and use that is made of force and the threat of force for the ends of policy.'²⁴ This definition is a hybrid of two statements from *On War*. In the first, Clausewitz differentiates between tactics and strategy. '[T]actics teaches *the use of the armed forces in engagement*; strategy, *the use of engagements for the object of the war*.'²⁵ The second ties war to policy. 'The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it.'²⁶ Wartime strategy is essential, but militaries cannot afford to only think strategically whilst embroiled in conflict, as put by Michael Handel. '[S]trategy is the development and use of all resources in peace and war in support of national policies to secure victory.'²⁷ Leaders and commanders must understand and employ strategic thinking to ensure the Armed Forces are prepared for the next contingency. What is hugely important with respect to the conceptual component is the truth that doctrine and concepts must inform decisions regarding strategy.

In response to a crisis, senior commanders decide on military ends (or provide advice to national leadership on what ends are feasible) based on the ways and means at their disposal. During peacetime planning, military leaders must first attempt to identify potential future contingencies. Then they must lead the procurement of the appropriate means and implement the development of ways over time.²⁸ In 2010, three British senior officers raised concerns over conceptual weakness in the Armed Forces, bemoaning the lost art of British strategic thinking in the *RUSI Journal*.²⁹ They called for an examination of the military's ability to develop strategic thinking, which springs from development of the conceptual component, and is the key to successful and politically acceptable military operations.³⁰

Ultimately, military strategy, planning and execution all depend heavily on the experience, intellect and decision-making of fallible human beings. It is essential to provide commanders with necessary training, education and experience to develop these skills, all of which are underpinned by service doctrine. By misstating the purpose of doctrine and downplaying its usefulness on the first page of the UK military's most important volume, BDD opens a door to clouded thinking regarding the processes and tools used to develop the minds of service personnel. Though an argument focusing on a narrow portion of a document may be refuted as overly semantic, doctrine is designed to provide a common language for military professionals requiring precision, clarity of message and consistency. It is therefore incumbent upon military officers to critique these documents, as proposed by *US Army Field Manual 3-0, Operations*. '[L]eaders must examine and debate the doctrine, measuring it against their experience and strategic, operational, and tactical realities.'³¹ Though these realities change with time and context, the intellectual standard for such debate was set by Clausewitz. His words are therefore ideal for inclusion in doctrine, but the utility is lost without a clear understanding of his true meaning.

Arguably, the robust and erudite nature of Clausewitz's insights makes *On War* the most fertile ground for quotations on military matters ever devised. Unfortunately, what is all too commonplace is authors who take licence with his language to make them fit for purpose. In the case of BDD's Foreword, Clausewitz's description of doctrine as 'meant to educate the mind of the future commander... not to accompany him to the battlefield' can easily lead the reader astray.³² As couched in BDD, this statement, intended to stress doctrine's importance, actually undermines its credibility. Describing doctrine as an educational resource, meant to be left at home, rather than as a tool used by military personnel on operations is wildly inaccurate. Clausewitz never intended this statement to relate to doctrines, but rather theory, as this article will explore. Disappointingly, BDD is not the only senior doctrinal publication to take such license. The British Army's capstone doctrine, *Army Doctrine Publication, Operations* uses the now familiar quote (in a slightly altered fashion) to describe the conceptual component, rather than doctrine. It reads: 'the conceptual component is meant to educate the mind of the future commander...'³³ What is troubling about the use of this 'quote' is that it either represents one of two negative outcomes. At best, this is abysmal editing and at worst, it is intellectually dishonest. By not including brackets, parentheses or some other

identifying mark around the words 'conceptual component' the doctrine passes these words as the author's, despite a footnote which leads the reader to a version of *On War* that uses the word 'doctrine'. Taken together, this misuse of Clausewitz's language in two of the British Armed Force's central volumes does not signal the disintegration of military thought, as quotes of this nature are often useful in bolstering a theoretical point. What both of these examples demonstrate is a misinterpretation of their true meaning. By bending his words to show his praise for utility of doctrine, the authors demonstrate unfamiliarity with the text, damaging the conceptual credibility of JDP 0-01.

Interestingly, the now familiar quote from *On War* appears in *Book Two, Chapter Two* in a section titled, 'Theory Should Be Study, Not Doctrine'. Clausewitz articulates a difference between the two concepts to, in part, draw a firm distinction between his writings and those of his contemporaries, including noted thinkers Baron Antoine Jomini and Prussian theorist Heinrich von Bülow. These men both espouse unique but relatively scientific approaches to warfare, with the latter's theory culminating in warfare as a series of geometric principles.³⁴ Clausewitz found merit in parts of these theories, but ultimately deemed them unrealistic.³⁵ In his view, strategy (the culmination of theory) is 'not only the forces susceptible to mathematical analysis; no, the realm of the military art extends wherever in psychology our intelligence discovers a resource that can serve a soldier.'³⁶ Clausewitz's rejection of a mathematical approach to warfare is not his final word, as he explores the need for clear direction in tactics, saying, '[p]rinciples, rules, regulations and methods are, however, indispensable concepts to or for that part of the theory of war that leads to positive doctrines.'³⁷ Positive doctrines, he argues, are useful but overly prescriptive, unless the overarching theory properly accounts for the inherently complex nature of warfare. Clausewitz emphasises that theory must address this complexity through the prism of his paradoxical trinity of passion, chance and reason, and its respective bedfellows, the people, the commander and his army, and the government. What is growing increasingly clear is that the military commander must now do much more than execute the strategy; they must manage chance *and* reason because the political appetite for operations and procurement is often unreasonable. Prime Minister David Cameron's wish to engage in military action in Syria, despite a clear end-state and the lack of critical military capabilities, is instructive in this regard.

For the military, theory therefore spans a broad spectrum of study from the necessarily rigid doctrines of the tactical level, to the crafting of strategy - the intricate meshing of ends, ways and means at the strategic level. It can be inferred that a talented commander who has studied theory and understands doctrine will have greater ability to craft strategy that is more likely to overcome the play of chance and achieve the military aim. The military aim will contribute to the fulfilment of the political objective, which stems from the government's reason. Recent history suggests that the objectives will be incomplete or unattainable, leaving the military to muddle-through difficult and costly operational situations. Theory that fails to address the concerns of the trinity 'conflicts with reality' and is, in his words, 'totally useless.'³⁸ Defence's ability to recognize the failings of unreasonable political decisions is essential in

crafting the right policy. Though often pressed to praise policy in public and criticize in private, it is curious that with so much controversy surrounding military operations since September 11, 2001 that no senior military figure still serving has taken anything more than a token stand against government policy. Whilst a military subservient to freely elected politicians is a cornerstone of democracy, it seems that senior military officers may have lost some perspective on serving the people of Britain rather than the political class. This misnomer no doubt springs, in part, from how the British military educates its force and how it addresses its fundamental principles.

In an attempt to lay out its purpose, British doctrine blurs the distinction between theory and doctrine and betrays a larger lesson regarding military thought. Clausewitz's central theme is the need for the commander to constantly apply intellectual rigour, which is why doctrine and the conceptual component are so important, especially in an era where the trinity he espoused no longer functions as it should, with so much more being asked of military commanders, and the government abandoning reason for passion or political gain. Doctrine's role in developing this rigour leads to another controversial phrase from BDD, which is analyzed in the subsequent dialogue on thinking.

How to Think or What to Think?

Though not attributed to a specific author, the second passage in BDD worth exploring deals with a concept that pervades British military doctrine. Its claim that 'doctrine is said to guide commanders and subordinates how to think and not what to think' is far from unique.³⁹ The premise of teaching one 'how to think' versus 'what to think' is found in military training and educational materials the world over.⁴⁰ Despite wide usage, it is difficult to discern what this phrase actually implies. By examining the constituent parts of the phrase 'how to think' it is possible to determine what message the authors of BDD wished to convey. The Oxford Dictionary defines 'how' in this context as 'the way in which', and 'think' as to 'use one's mind actively to form connected ideas'. It is therefore prudent to describe 'how to think' as 'the way in which one uses their mind to actively form connected ideas'. Clearly, doctrine has a key role to play in exposing its readers to a variety of subjects, thus increasing the likelihood of more successfully connected ideas. In the view of the British Army, doctrine 'offers a handrail to assist commanders and staff in the planning and executing of current and future operations in order to achieve success. **There can be no excuse for not reading, knowing or using it.** (emphasis in original).⁴¹ Whilst it can *assist* military professionals in framing their thinking and decision making (how to think), doctrine obviously cannot offer a perfect solution (what to think) for those that lack sound military judgment.

On the surface this seems to end the debate on the purpose of doctrine, but this is not the full story. An alternative perspective is offered in *United States Air Force Doctrine Document 1* (AFDD-1), which reads: '[doctrine] provides sufficient information on what to do, but does not specifically say how to do it.'⁴² Significantly, AFDD-1 focuses on what and how 'to do' rather than 'to think'. This is an important distinction as it describes not the process of using one's mind to

come to a decision, but rather on options available to the commander. Military doctrine offers guidance on how to think, and by presenting a range of options it also *does* tell the reader what to think regarding a host of complex issues across a wide range of military tasks. For example, *British Army Field Manual (AFM): Countering Insurgency* describes how the British Army plans and conducts counterinsurgency operations at the tactical level.⁴³ In its 206 pages, *AFM Countering Insurgency* contains seven case studies and twelve chapters, each with several sub-sections, all arguably designed to aid the commander or his subordinates in determining how military professionals dealt with similar situations in the past, and what they need to consider in the present. The various tomes of British doctrine deal with subjects including, *Campaign Planning, Joint Medical Doctrine, Civil Military Cooperation, Media Operations*, and a vast array of other joint and single-service topics. Each of these publications contains an in-depth look at the relevant subject matter detailing what British military professionals (and their civilian counterparts) should think and do in various contextual situations.

As a starting point or baseline of knowledge, doctrine aids the commander in preparing for what former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld quite humorously but insightfully called 'unknown unknowns'.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, such a pithy statement quickly entered the defence lexicon and describes the things 'we don't know we don't know,' and has spurred purveyors of military thought to focus on how to mitigate the impact of these unanticipated events.

Every operational situation is unique, so commanders must endeavour to deal with 'unknown unknowns' by identifying linkages and commonalities with their previous experience and knowledge of historical precedents. Doctrine's role in the generation of fighting power is therefore fundamental, but limited: '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.'⁴⁵ Though doctrine may not provide tidy solutions for operational problems, familiarity with its content allows a commander access to a trove of relevant information regarding what to think. Clausewitz contends that '[t]heory exists so that one need not start afresh each time sorting out the material and ploughing through it, but will find it ready to hand and in good order.'⁴⁶ This is not to say that military victories are impossible without a comprehensive doctrine library that is understood and used by commanders in the field. What is clear from history, and the more recent past, is the fusion of appropriate doctrinal concepts and outstanding leadership provides national leaders the opportunity to maximise the utility of military force. The US-led military intervention in Iraq is an example of the unquestionable role of doctrine in preparing, or in this case adapting, a military force for battle.

By 2006, the military effort in Iraq had reached a near breaking-point. US casualty figures were reported nightly on news broadcasts and comparisons to Vietnam were ever present. In an effort to fuse the lessons of history with the realities on the ground in Iraq, then Lieutenant Generals David Petraeus of the US Army and James Amos of the US Marine Corps co-released *Army Field Manual 3-24* (also known as *Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 3-33.5*).

Titled *Counterinsurgency (COIN)*, the manual's stated purpose was to 'fill a doctrinal gap' to 'provide principles and guidelines for counterinsurgency operations.'⁴⁷ What followed the release of FM 3-24 is now well known to history. Petraeus's ascendancy to the Commander of Multinational Force Iraq and his execution of the so-called 'surge', along with an indigenous rejection of the insurgency that entered the public consciousness in the form of the Sunni 'Awakening', turned the tide in 2007. Whilst the lasting impact of the surge on the long-term security of Iraq is yet unknown, it is clear that his leadership along with the implementation of the principles outlined in FM 3-24 led to a palatable exit for US forces. When properly supported and resourced, the right commander, applying an appropriate strategy is often the difference between defeat and victory. It is this 'craftsmanship' that ties together the concepts of what and how to think, as stated by J.F.C. Fuller: "...what to think" of itself is not sufficient; it may be said to supply the raw material - historical facts, etc. - in which "how to think" operates. "What to think" supplies us with bricks and mortar, "how to think" with craftsmanship. Both are all important and complimentary, for the greater our knowledge, the greater, so to speak, the capital at the disposal of our originality.⁴⁸ The significance of a commander's 'originality' on operations, or indeed national policy, cannot be understated, highlighting the need to focus on developing the thought processes of individuals through a variety of means.

Redefining the Conceptual Component

As previously defined, doctrine is but one of the three elements, along with the principles of war and conceptual innovation that comprise the conceptual component. Notably absent is any direct emphasis on critical thinking skills. This somewhat nebulous definition of the conceptual component is hampered by the confusing juxtaposition of its three elements. BDD further defines the principles of war as 'enduring principles, whose expression and emphasis change only in relation to context, and are consistent with similar principles applied by the UK's major allies and potential coalition partners.'⁴⁹ Based on this description and the aforementioned definition of doctrine, the principles do not stand-alone as a part of the conceptual component. Conversely, they are the foundation upon which all service doctrine is created, not a separate concept. Thus, the conceptual component is now only comprised of doctrine (which includes the principles of war) and conceptual innovation. The component as currently defined does not capture all of its necessary elements, and the evolution of modern doctrine highlights this fact.

Conceptual innovation was evident in the development of FM 3-24, which not only served as a catalyst for an (arguably) operationally successful plan in Iraq, but also led to a rethinking of doctrine's utility in general. For the British Army to harness the power of innovation, a change in culture with respect to both the creation and usage of doctrine was required, as argued by Stuart Griffin. 'Though an iteration of British *COIN* doctrine remained extant at the time of US *COIN*, it was not widely read within the British army, certainly not within the wider armed forces, and creative thinking in the field of counterinsurgency had largely atrophied.'⁵⁰ Though different in timing and relevance, the American and British experiences with *COIN* doctrine are instructive with respect to the conceptual component. Innovation like

the development of contextually appropriate doctrine does not happen by chance, thus the conceptual component is incomplete. This imbalance is more evident if viewed through an *ends, ways and means* analogy. The conceptual component contains the *ends* in the form of new doctrine; the *means* in conceptual innovation, but it lacks the *ways*. How does an individual or an organisation go about innovating and problem solving? The answer is critical thinking. One of the problems surrounding the development of critical thinking is that whilst few will underestimate its importance, there is no consensus agreement on how best to define the concept or to put it into practice.

Diane Halpern offers a useful definition of critical thinking as 'the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. It is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned, and goal directed.'⁵¹ An individual's cognitive skills, purposeful and reasoned thinking are not only gleaned from reading doctrine or from learned experience. Study of principles and procedures can provide relevant standards and criteria with which one can measure and test against, but learning how to think is a unique discipline.⁵² Writings on leadership and command are filled with language that stresses the importance of thinking, but too little attention is actually paid to instilling service personnel with this skill in an academic environment. Julian Lindley-French, who is leading *Connected Forces, Connected Minds*, a NATO effort to ensure professional military education is meeting the future needs of the Alliance, agrees. 'The link between commanders and academic expertise is too often weak, preventing effective reach-back from the field to knowledge communities... Sadly, too many commanders remain dismissive of knowledge and expertise.'⁵³ Though many in the forces possess traits that give them the potential to become excellent critical thinkers, the development of thought should be specifically addressed as one of the three essential elements of the conceptual component. A reorganised conceptual component into the three pillars of doctrine (now including the principles of war), conceptual innovation and critical thinking will introduce a more specific emphasis on the development of military thought in all service personnel. This rejuvenated focus, when combined with a new theoretical relationship between the constituent components of fighting power will encourage all subordinate military publications, training courses and educational programs to follow suit. Institutional acknowledgement of the importance of critical thinking should also lead to more robust personnel policies designed to best utilise those individuals with a high capacity for thought, especially in specialist areas.

Primus inter pares

Whilst a conceptual component emphasizing the need for targeted development of thinking is a necessary step for the Armed Forces, the current model describing the three components of fighting power is also problematic. This model, recently reinforced in JDP 0-30, is seen in Figure 1.

What this model implies is that in the majority of cases the components of fighting power will be applied without reference to the other two. The Venn Diagram is typically used for its

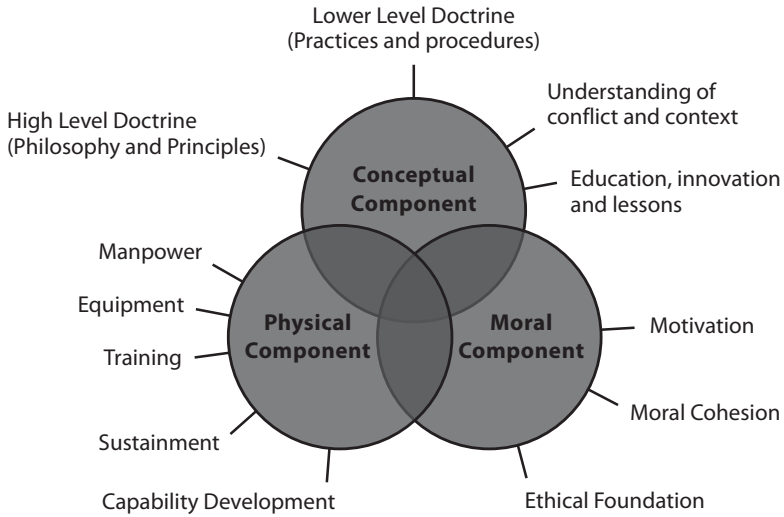


Fig 1. The Components of Fighting Power *Joint Doctrine Publication 0-30, 2013*

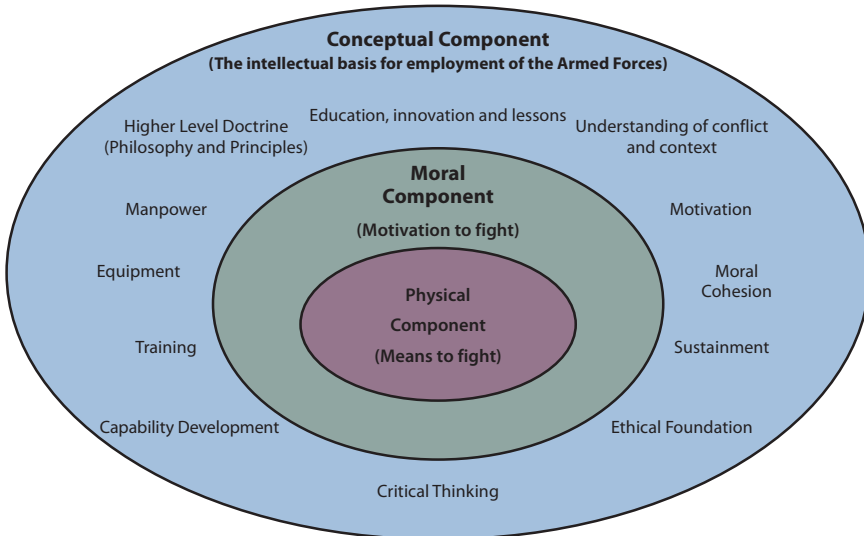


Fig 2. The Components of Fighting Power Revised

simplicity and visual balance, but in this case it sends a confusing message about the relative importance of the components. The conceptual will in most cases, especially in a time of austerity, be the *primus inter pares* of the components, and will underpin the other two in *all* cases. No military activity, whether it be training, procurement, mentoring or the application of force, can be accomplished without an understanding of, and adherence to, the elements of the conceptual; doctrine, innovation and critical thinking.

For this reason, a more helpful (and accurate) visual representation is proposed in Figure 2. The new model seeks to emphasise the conceptual component's centrality to every facet of the military profession. Far from an original creation, this 'new' model builds on the original version inspired by Professor Howard and published in the 1989 BMD; returning the conceptual component to its rightful place as the foundation of fighting power.

Sound critical thinking built on a foundation of best practice and cutting-edge doctrine must permeate every activity, at all levels. Contemporary speeches and literature from British military senior leaders are filled with language emphasising the importance of developing the highest quality soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and civilians. It is time for the MOD as an institution to emphatically state that this development of people will not be sacrificed; changing in the way BDD describes fighting power is a necessary first step.

Conclusions: A Way Forward

The combination of financial austerity, high operations tempo and the growing complexity of the geostrategic landscape present a significant test for the British military. A highly-educated, well-trained, motivated and professional force is critical in maintaining Britain's reputation as one of the world's leading militaries. Maintaining such a force cannot be done on the cheap - it takes thoughtful and calculated decisions, often without all of the information necessary to do so. Senior officers must have the moral courage to fight against the tyranny of gold-plated acquisition solutions that drain so much from wider defence. In addition, leaders must digest the difficult fact that the Clausewitzian trinity of the passion of the people, the military commander's management of chance and the government's distillation of reason is fundamentally broken. The Armed Forces are increasingly asked to deal with two-thirds of the trinity, since the government's decision-making process is often driven by passion, rather than reason.

Whatever further measures are implemented to address the improvement of the conceptual component, they must avoid a common pitfall of defence reform, so succinctly described by former Chief of the General Staff, Sir Mike Jackson. 'Far too often, the MOD confuses activity with achievement.'⁵⁴ Changes including increased joint oversight of education and better career management policies are probably necessary to fully realise a renewed focus on the conceptual component, but these types of measures will not gain traction without a change in culture. Without this cultural shift, even systematic changes will not lead to a successful transformation in how defence approaches the conceptual component, which is central to Britain's strategic future.

By addressing the doctrine before attempting any number of disassociated change programmes, the military will send a clear signal to a variety of key audiences. Ministers, Allies and serving personnel will understand that defence is serious about transforming and subsequently maintaining its standing as a leading military power. The Armed Forces will then have the impetus to implement logical steps aimed at reinforcing the development of the critical thinking skills that will forever remain in high demand amongst military leaders at all levels.

The conceptual component of fighting power is the foundation of every military activity. Clausewitz understood and articulated this fact, and this is why the misapplication of his words in senior British military doctrinal publications is so unfortunate. Strategy, theory, doctrine are all paradoxically part of the conceptual component and a result of its application. This complexity is easily overlooked, especially in an age where the acquisition of modern technology and the allocation of scarce financial resources dominates much of the intellectual capacity of the Armed Services. The trials of 21st Century warfare have revealed the enormous challenges faced by those responsible for balancing the ends, ways and means of national policy. Prudence therefore demands that defence renew and energise its focus on developing the minds of the current and future generations of military professionals. Otherwise, it runs the risk that these skills will atrophy until once again spurred on by the demands of war.

Notes

¹ Nicholas Houghton, 'Annual Chief of the Defence Staff Lecture 2013', speech made by CDS at RUSI, Whitehall, London, 18 Dec 2013, retrieved from <http://www.rusi.org/events/past/ref:E5284A3D06EFFD> on 20 Dec 2013.

² Ministry of Defence, 'Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01: British Defence Doctrine (Fourth Edition)', Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, Shrivenham, November 2011, p. 4-1.

³ David Petraeus, "Beyond the Cloister," *The American Interest*, (July/August 2007), retrieved from <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=290> accessed 28 Nov 13.

⁴ Ministry of Defence, 'Joint Doctrine Publication 0-30: UK Air and Space Doctrine', Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, Shrivenham, July 2013, p. 2-5.

⁵ Ministry of Defence, 'Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01', p. iv.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. iv.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4-1.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4-4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

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