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Douglas V. Johnson Dr.

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DOCTRINE THAT WORKS

Dr. Douglas V. Johnson II
Strategic Studies Institute

I recently spent a morning talking with a scholar who is researching material for a book on the U.S. Army's willingness to learn about war above the tactical and operational level. His thesis echoes, to some degree, Dr. Antulio Echevarria's monograph that concludes that there is an American Way of Battle, but not an "American Way of War," as Russell F. Weigley's well-studied book suggests. This scholar was asking for evidence to identify change points in the development of U.S. Army thinking about war during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s.

I suggested that the 1973 Arab-Israeli War was one of those points because it gave the Army a tangible event that was relevant to a key national security objective: the defense of NATO Europe. That war allowed the Army to put Vietnam behind it. It signaled that Russian military technology had caught up with and in some ways surpassed western military technology. That technology, in the hands of—from an American perspective—ill-trained Arab conscript armies could be enormously effective, particularly in the tactical defense. Three years later, FM 100-5, *Operations*, emerged from the pen of General William DePuy, reflecting General Donn A. Starry's analysis of this remarkable war. That field manual tacitly recognized the insufficiency of American materiel to do much more than fight an Active Defense. Properly, it did not address that the same Army was still recuperating from its Vietnam-inflicted wounds and was struggling to become a real All-Volunteer Army—something it had always wanted since the days of Emory Upton. Active Defense also fit the NATO defensive philosophy. In short, it was comfortable at the time, even though its apparently defensive orientation was anathema to American Army officers who actually had studied their profession. Starry must be credited for making a major attempt to correct that deficiency as he continued to insist on the development of an 'historical mindedness' in the officer corps.

The publication of FM 100-5, 1982 edition, changed things. That manual revived the centrality of offensive action and recognized the growing reality of the Big-Five in the reequipping of the Army, giving it the potential to conduct offensive operations at the tactical and operational level. The AirLand Battle concepts that underlay the 1982 edition of FM 100-5 frightened NATO Europe, partly because it demonstrated this offensive character which was so at odds with the basic concept upon which NATO rested its existence. But it made the U.S. Army happy, and the years that followed demonstrated that the U.S. Army could revive itself and recreate itself as a genuinely professional military force without equal in the tactical and operational realms. Operation DESERT STORM validated the AirLand Battle concept, the Big-Five reequipping choices, and the Training Revolution that had taken hold during those two preceding decades.

Then hubris set in. It was evident at nearly every level in the institution. Read U.S. Army doctrine today, and you will see a struggle to trump each successive set of

superlatives—*Full Spectrum Dominance* is a good example. *The Quality of Firsts—See First, Understand First, Act First, Finish Decisive*—is another. These may be neat slogans, but they reflect a sense of sophomoric chest-pounding totally inappropriate as doctrine and reflect shallow thinking about the present realities now confronting us, or more importantly the future. They are little more than statements of what every military person of every age has sought within the limits of the tools available. It goes deeper as each successive description of the future operating environment repeatedly recites that the future will be chaotic, irregular, ambiguous, and so forth—as if it was not equally so for our forefathers.

What are the military realities facing the nation today that suggest to an organization that it is steadily “learning” and not simply resting on its laurels? I would suggest there are two: adopting the concept of the Soldier as a System, and the progressive Modularization of the entire force enroute to an approximation of the Future Combat System. Realization of the concepts that allow the Soldier to be treated as a System will provide Soldiers the tools to be able to adapt to whatever the future brings. The adoption and progressive realization of the modular concept will make it possible to deal with almost anything that emerges at any point along the Spectrum of Conflict. So it should be.

But it is past time to give sober address to doctrine in an imperfect world, employed by imperfect people, against implacable but human enemies. Too much current doctrine is self-congratulatory nonsense written to deal with tank armies on the plains of central somewhere. It fails to partake of the relatively clear directive qualities of the above two cited FMs. Doctrine should set forth principles and precious little more. That would allow the Army to adapt those things that endure to ever-changing conditions and the tools available. Paring the baroque structure of developing doctrine might facilitate deeper discussion of its application, and that just might protect us from the charge of failing to understand the war in which we are engaged and of trying to make of it something which, by its nature, it cannot be.

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