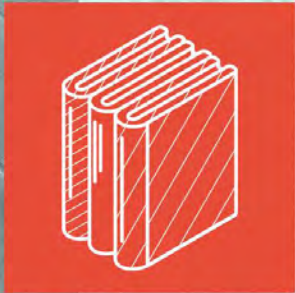
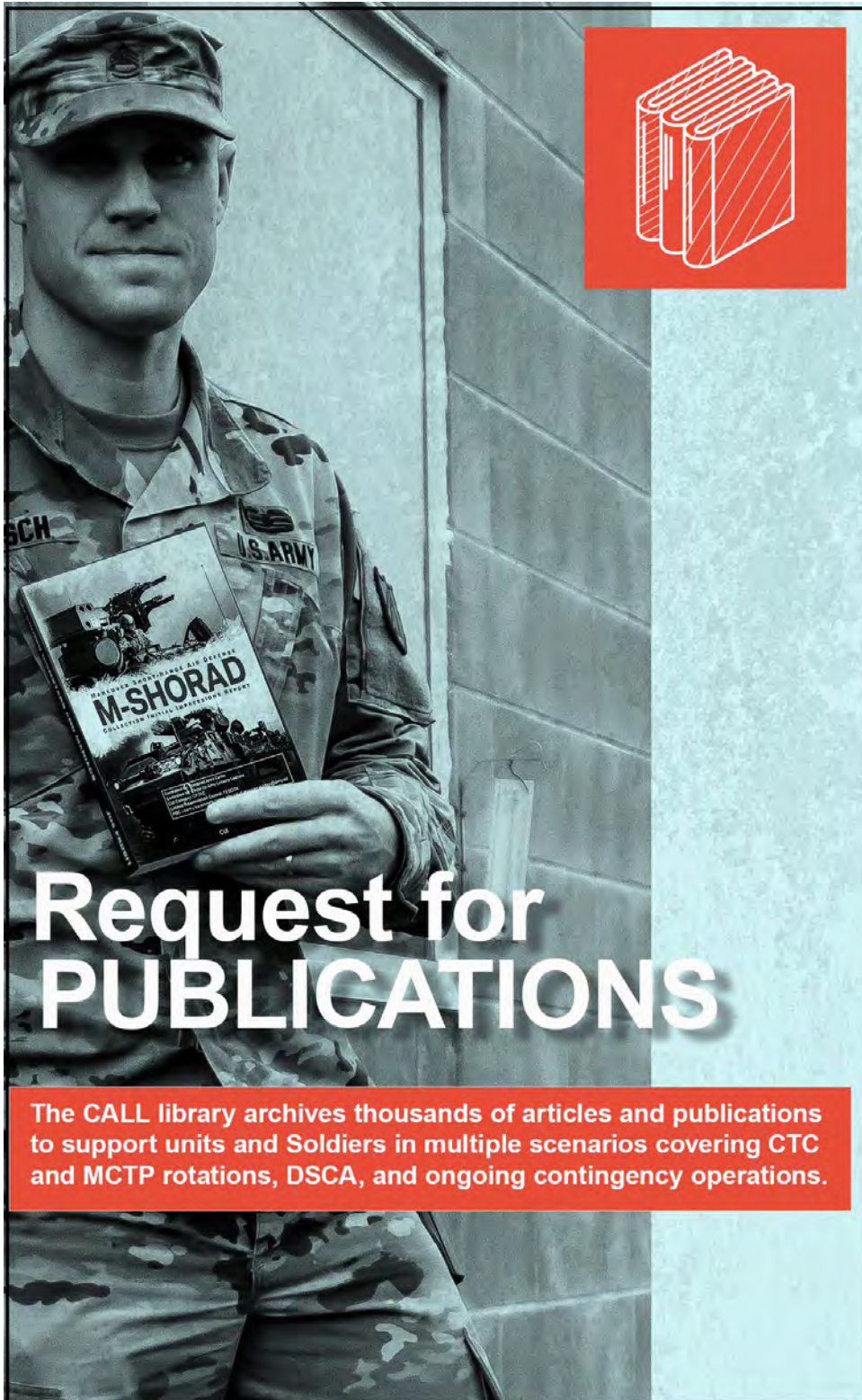


UNDERSTANDING IRREGULAR WARFARE



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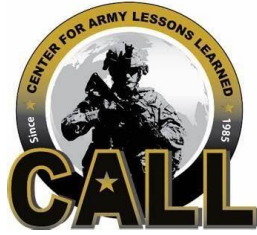
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Disclaimer

On occasion and dependent on author, British spelling may be used in various chapters of this publication.

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Part 1
U.S. Irregular Approach to Joint Campaigning
Chapter 1
Introduction

Background

The Department of Defense (DOD) recognizes two general forms of warfare: conventional and irregular.¹ DOD defines conventional warfare as a violent struggle between nation-states or coalitions, and alliances of nation-states, fought with conventional forces.”² It is important to note that as we seek to rebuild our own lethality in conventional warfare, our adversaries will become more likely to emphasize irregular approaches in their competitive strategies to negate our advantages and exploit our disadvantages.³

As the joint force increases its conventional credibility, Army forces can expect threats to increasingly pursue irregular warfare (IW). The armed conflicts in both Afghanistan and Iraq combined irregular and conventional warfare because the U.S. and its coalition ultimately sought to defeat enemy conventional forces, terrorists, and insurgencies. While they were fighting, Army forces addressed grievances within the local populace and countered external threats, such as China, Russia, and Iran. Yet, despite the pivot to great power competition, the U.S. Army recently invested into security force assistance brigades (SFABs) which, while being a conventional force, frees up other conventional forces to focus on conventional warfare, and has an enduring mission that achieves desired strategic outcomes. This assures allies through building partner capacity which simultaneously deters adversarial aggression.⁴

The SFABs demonstrate that both IW and conventional warfare should not be thought of as dichotomous forms of warfare, each with its own distinct capabilities, nor as hybrid warfare (as all warfare is hybrid), but rather as complimentary means to strategic ends. IW is often conducted independently of conventional warfare. IW provides options to economize the use of combat power and relies on nonmilitary sources of power to achieve policy aims. The U.S. irregular approach includes irregular activities during competition below armed conflict to create and exploit strategic advantages to win without fighting. During armed conflict irregular warfare adds lethal force to compel enemies, but at levels that prevent escalation and help avoid the high risk of conventional warfare. The Army’s irregular approach to joint campaigns may require influencing populations but may also focus on eroding enemy capacity and its political will to pursue malign interests.

This recognition is part of a wider discussion in which the term IW is imperfect because strategic competition is neither irregular, nor is this form of competition really warfare, because some believe that violence is not a defining feature of IW.⁵ Yet, because warfare, which is considered how one wages war, is the second part of the name in IW, some believe that IW must be binned

¹ Joint Publication, JP, 1 Volume 1, *Joint Warfighting*, 27 August 2023, II-6.

² Ibid, II-6.

³ Ibid, 4.

⁴ In other words, security force assistance provides an indirect approach of deterring adversarial aggression by training foreign security forces to a higher degree of competency. Moreover, security force assistance is not the monopoly of the SFABs as other conventional forces can train with foreign friendly forces as seen in the major combined exercises executed across the globe annually, such as Avenger Triad in Europe or Southern Vanguard in South America.

⁵ David H. Ucko, 2020, “Nobody Puts Irregular Warfare in an Annex: It’s Time to Embrace Irregular Warfare as a Strategic Priority.”

under the context of armed conflict. Some proponents of this view acknowledge the importance of nonlethal actions and call them irregular activities. Military forces conduct irregular activities below the threshold of armed conflict and then weave them in with IW and conventional warfare when policy requires armed conflict. There is also the discussion that, as an alternative way forward, we should be thinking of IW in terms of irregular competition, in which the U.S. military must, “Acknowledge competition’s two coequal parts: the threat of military domination through conventional deterrence and the contest for legitimacy and influence through irregular competition.”⁶ However IW is conceptualized, consider that not having a universally accepted definition for modern warfare or contemporary conflict will lead to further misunderstanding of how to apply nuanced approaches to adversarial capabilities or, far worse, not understanding it all and thus affording it no space in policy, plans, or strategy. If defined too broadly, then IW has little practical use for policymakers. Define IW too narrowly, then policymakers will fail to appreciate the significance of irregular tactics and strategies.

Purpose and Approach

The purpose of this publication is to inform potential practitioners on IW and to provide recent vignettes and updated definitions. This handbook describes the current IW operations and activities conducted by the U.S. and its allies and partners against threats. Moreover, this handbook is designed to help readers understand a variety of approaches to IW. Finally, this publication supplements formal and informal education conducted at joint service (JS) academic institutions in accordance with the JS J7 IW Curriculum Development Guide.

This handbook is composed of 3 parts, covering 12 chapters, with 9 written perspectives from practitioners and theorists, and 3 appendices. This chapter is the introduction and provides the research design of this handbook as well as an in-depth examination of the definition of IW and its relationship with strategic competition and the strategic environment. Chapter 2 Briefly describes the strategy, policy, and doctrine associated with IW. Chapter 3 describes the U.S. approach to IW through the 12 IW operations and activities and provides vignettes for each. Part 2 describes the 9 informed perspectives on IW ranging across the JS, its academic institutions, civilian universities, as well as perspectives from our Dutch ally. Finally, regarding the appendices to this handbook, while Appendix A is a brief discussion on how China, Russia, and Iran perceive IW, Appendix B is a recommended reading list on IW and, although not all inclusive, is useful for those who wish to read or learn more on IW. The glossary follows as Appendix C.

Definitions Matter

Defining IW is not without its challenges as the services will have their own interpretation of the joint definition. Yet, employing IW during strategic competition requires an understanding in systems thinking or how states leverage their resources against adversaries or enemies to maximize national objectives, while minimizing risk against military escalation through adversarial response. Therefore, to overcome this challenge, IW is defined more comprehensively here.

Irregular warfare. DOD defines IW as a form of warfare where state and non-state actors campaign to assure or coerce states or other groups through indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric activities, either as the primary approach or in concert with conventional warfare.⁷ The term irregular highlights the character of this form of warfare, which seeks to create dilemmas and

⁶ Eric Robinson, 2020. “The Missing, Irregular Half to Great Power Competition.”

⁷ JP 1 Volume 1, *Joint Warfighting*, 27 August 2023, II-7.

increase risk and costs to adversaries to achieve a position of advantage.⁸ While IW operations and activities assure, they also coerce through both forms of deterrence and compellence (coercion), which are recognized strategic uses of military force across the competition continuum.⁹

The U.S. Army defines IW as, “the overt, clandestine, and covert employment of military and non-military capabilities by state and non-state actors to achieve policy objectives other than military domination against an enemy, either as the primary approach or in concert with conventional warfare.”¹⁰ IW may include the use of indirect military activities to enable partners, proxies, or surrogates to achieve shared or complementary objectives. The main objective of IW varies with the political context, and it can be successful without being combined with conventional warfare.¹¹

IW may employ the threat or use of organized armed violence for purposes other than physical domination over an adversary. States and non-state actors may conduct IW when they cannot achieve their strategic objectives by nonmilitary activities or conventional warfare. IW favors indirect and asymmetric warfare approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities to erode adversarial power, influence, and will.¹² At its core, the U.S. irregular approach provides, across the competition continuum, economy of force options to joint force commanders (JFCs) that they can tailor to a wide range of policy objectives. Although any operation can have negative outcomes, irregular approach options are less costly and typically incur risk to a smaller number of forces. Irregular approach options provide flexibility and allow JFCs to adjust the level of lethality over time as needed. At the national strategic level, an irregular approach allows policy makers to manage the rate of escalation or de-escalation. In contrast, conventional warfare often leads to rapid and uncontrolled escalation, especially during large scale combat operations.

U.S. Army Irregular Approach to Campaigning

The U.S. Army is currently working on doctrine and training material to mature and unify its irregular approach to joint campaigns. These documents will complement Field Manual (FM) 3-Operations, 21 March 2025 and joint doctrine and capture IW lessons learned from history, including recent conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. The Army’s irregular approach will define key terms, account for different perspectives, and describe how Army forces weave together irregular activities during competition, irregular warfare, and conventional warfare as part of joint campaigns. The Army’s irregular approach uses combined arms thinking for how to employ special operations forces and conventional forces (from all services) together with multinational forces. It also explains how Army forces integrate with other U.S. departments and agencies, multinational government agencies, and the wide range of nongovernmental organizations, irregular forces, and the private sector. Integrating with each of these groups requires different considerations for how to generate the unity of effort necessary for success.

The Army’s irregular approach will focus on offensive options, such as unconventional warfare and conducting all irregular warfare activities with an offensive mindset. The Army’s view of IW will not be constrained to population-centric operations that often require long costly U.S. efforts.

⁸ Joint Doctrine Note 1-22, *Joint Force in Strategic Competition*, 2 February 2023, II-7.

⁹ JP 1 Volume 1, *Joint Warfighting*, 27 August 2023, I-3.

¹⁰ Field Manual, FM, 3-0, *Operations*, 1 October 2022, 1-9.

¹¹ Ibid, 1-9.

¹² *Summary of the Irregular Warfare Annex to the National Defense Strategy*, 2 October 2020, 2.

While retaining population-centric IW as an option, Army doctrine will describe risk and provide enemy-focused options that seek to erode enemy capabilities and capacity for hostile action.

Conclusion

IW is more common than conventional warfare and needs greater emphasis in doctrine. China and Russia pursue their own version of IW against our national interests both at home and abroad, such as the cyberattack on the Colonial Pipeline in 2021, or more recently, Iran-sponsored Houthi forces harassing U.S. Navy ships in the Red Sea. Understanding IW allows for commanders and their staff to plan, prepare, execute, and assess their assigned missions with greater clarity of the threats and capabilities of their adversaries or enemies. Historically, most Army forces employed to conduct IW have been conventional forces. This publication underscores these points.

Chapter 2

Strategy, Policy, and Doctrine

Introduction

Understanding irregular warfare (IW) presents unique challenges, as it operates outside the traditional norms of conventional conflict. Threats from actors like China, Russia, and Iran extend beyond armed conflict, manifesting across the competition continuum and often deliberately remaining below the threshold of open warfare with the U.S. This chapter details the national security, defense, and military strategies, focusing on their strategic guidance for IW operations and activities. This chapter also outlines key U.S. policy approaches to IW, including relevant terminology and definitions from the Joint Force and the Army.

Provided below are summaries of the core tenets of the national strategic documents (Office of the Secretary of Defense, Joint, and service doctrine) as they relate to IW. It also outlines key U.S. policies guiding the Joint Force in IW operations and activities.

Strategic Foundations, the Triad of National Direction

The U.S. approach to national defense is structured around a cascading series of strategic documents. The President's National Security Strategy (NSS) sets the overarching direction, informing the Secretary of Defense's National Defense Strategy (NDS), which is then operationalized by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's National Military Strategy (NMS). This framework ensures alignment between national interests, defense priorities, and military actions, all within legal and constitutional boundaries.

Currently, all three strategies identify China as the most consequential strategic competitor for the coming decades. Russia is recognized as an acute threat, particularly highlighted by its invasion of Ukraine. These nations are viewed as actively challenging U.S. power, influence, and prosperity through economic, military, and informational means. This represents a continued focus on the Great Power Competition and a renewed emphasis on IW as a critical component of national security. The current NSS and NDS emphasize leveraging alliances and partnerships to counter these threats. The NMS focuses on Integrated Deterrence, aligning Department of Defense (DOD) priorities and investments to deter adversaries effectively.

Irregular Warfare, Core Competency

The current strategic environment necessitates maintaining a robust U.S. capability in IW. The above strategies recognize that modern conflicts are rarely purely conventional and often involve a complex interplay of political, economic, and informational factors.

Key policy directives reinforce this focus:

- **Department of Defense Directive (DODD) 3000.07** (Irregular Warfare). This mandates that the joint force is equally capable in both conventional and IW, recognizing the applicability of skills across both domains.
- **Department of Defense Instruction (DODI) 3000.11** (Management of DOD Irregular Warfare and SFA). This highlights Security Force Assistance (SFA) as a key activity, directing the Services to identify and develop personnel with IW and SFA skills. The creation of security force assistance brigades (SFABs) is a direct result of this directive.
- **Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 3210.06** (Irregular Warfare). This instructs the services and combatant commands to integrate and de-conflict IW concepts and capabilities across all DOD activities.

Joint Doctrine on Irregular Warfare

U.S. Joint Doctrine provides the framework for how the military employs forces in joint operations, including those involving IW. While there isn't a single dedicated IW doctrine manual, IW principles are integrated throughout existing publications.

Key Joint Publications (JPs) include:

- **JP 1, *Joint Warfighting*, 27 August 2023.** This recognizes IW as a joint force activity, not limited to special operations forces (SOF).
- **JP 3-0, *Joint Campaigns and Operations*, 18 June 2022.** This emphasizes the synergy between conventional warfare and IW, particularly the importance of information activities.
- **JP 3-04, *Information in Joint Operations*, 14 September 2022.** This highlights the importance of achieving strategic outcomes beyond tactical victories, emphasizing the need to influence enemy behavior.
- **JP 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, 9 September 2022.** This incorporates civilian harm mitigation and response (CHMR) and institutional capacity building as key components of SC.
- **JP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*, 17 August 2018.** This defines FID as a whole-of-government approach to assisting host nations with internal security threats.

The importance of IW is consistently underscored in Joint doctrine, recognizing that controlling the narrative and influencing perceptions are crucial for success.

Army Doctrine

The U.S. Army has significantly expanded its IW doctrine in recent years, recognizing the need for broader participation beyond SOF. Yet, Army doctrine does not unify IW nor does relevant IW doctrine, such as Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-07, *Stability* 31 July 2019, identify itself as being an IW activity.

Key ADPs and Field Manuals (FMs) include:

- **ADP/FM 3-0, *Operations*.** This establishes the foundation for multidomain operations and emphasizes the importance of understanding the operational environment, OE.
- **ADP/FM 3-05, *Army Special Operations*.** This defines Army Special Operations and highlights the principles of discreet, precise, and scalable operations.
- **ADP/FM 3-07, *Stability*.** This focuses on establishing conditions for long-term stability, including security, governance, and economic development.
- **FM 3-22, *Army in Security Cooperation*, 1 July 2023.** This provides doctrine for Army support to SC activities, including SFA.
- **Army Techniques Publication, ATP, 3-05.2, *Foreign Internal Defense*, 19 August 2015.** This provides guidance on planning and executing FID operations.
- **ATP 3-07.10, *Advising Foreign Security Forces*, 15 June 2023.** This serves as a reference to ensure coordinated multi-service operations for those planning and conducting advisor team missions.
- **ATP 3-96.1, *Security Force Assistance Brigade*, 2 September 2020.** Although SFA doctrine exists at joint and multinational levels down to tactical echelons, this is the primary doctrinal publications applicable to all SFAB Soldiers.

- **FM 3-57, *Civil Affairs Operations*, 28 July 2021.** Having stated earlier that IW is population centric, civil affairs conduct direct engagements with civil populations and institutions as a means towards establishing a stable OE.

The Army is increasingly emphasizing the integration of SOF and conventional forces, recognizing the complementary strengths of each. Recent revisions to FM 3-0 emphasize this integration, highlighting the benefits of combining SOF's precision and low signature with the scale and firepower of conventional forces.

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Chapter 3

The Twelve Irregular Warfare Operations and Activities

The U.S. approach to irregular warfare (IW) reflects a recent pivot towards understanding IW at large. For example, the 2021 *Irregular Warfare Mission Analysis*, published by the Joint Service J7 Office of Irregular Warfare and Competition, found that IW is fundamentally a joint force activity, because no IW activities are conducted without conventional force lead, facilitation, or participation.¹³ The Joint Force conducts IW across the continuum through all domains, on its own, or in concert with conventional warfare.

The approach of the U.S. to IW requires a firm understanding of the 12 IW-focused operations and activities as depicted chronologically in Figure 3-1. In this chapter, each operation and activity will be defined and described through joint and Army doctrine and contemporary operational vignettes or examples, where applicable.

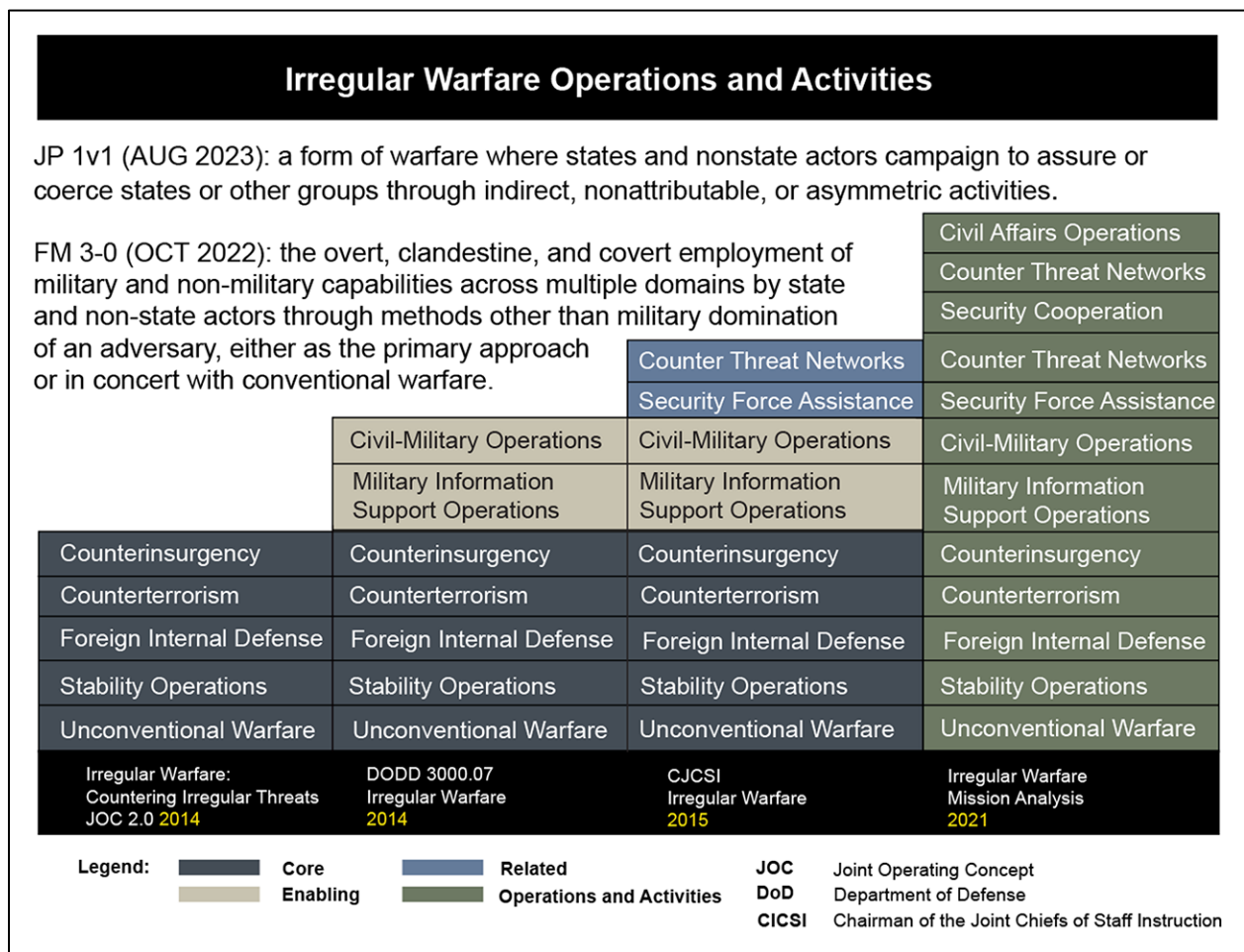


Figure 3-1. Irregular Warfare Operations and Activities
Combined Arms Center

¹³ *Irregular Warfare Mission Analysis*, 19 October 2021, iii.

1. Unconventional warfare (UW) includes “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerilla force in a denied area.”¹⁴ UW operations present significant risks, but they can also help resolve international crises without overt large-scale conventional force.

UW methods are highly sensitive in nature and failure can have significant political consequences.¹⁵ For these reasons, UW requires assessments of the depth of support for opposition groups, opposition groups’ plans for forming a new government (including plans to re-integrate former regime elements), and the presence and influence of radical or extremist elements among opposition groups.¹⁶ An example (on Stinger missiles in Afghanistan) of this follows.

Wanting to punish the Soviets for their interference in Vietnam and to contain further territorial expansion, U.S. foreign policy during 1979-1989 focused on providing covert military assistance to the Mujahadin [forces in Afghanistan] through Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence.¹⁷ In 1986, the introduction of U.S.-manufactured shoulder-fired Stinger missiles created a relative advantage in favor of the Mujahadin. In this example, U.S. support to the Mujahadin was covert, indirect, and mostly non-attributional. It involved no deployed conventional or special operations forces and thus, the political risk was acceptable, even though the Soviets knew that the U.S. had supplied the Stinger missiles to the Mujahadin.¹⁸

2. Foreign internal defense (FID) is the “participation by civilian agencies and military forces of a government or international organization in any of the programs or activities taken by a host nation government to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, violent extremism, terrorism, and other threats to its security.”¹⁹ One of the principal characteristics of FID is that it involves all the instruments of national power. FID is not just a military operation but rather it typically includes an inter-organizational approach to assisting a host nation’s security, stability, and development.²⁰ FID occurs throughout the competition continuum and is conducted by both conventional forces and special operations forces (SOF). FID generally takes a programmatic approach, such as through assistance and development programs, to enhance the internal defense of a partner nation by specifically focusing on an anticipated, growing, or existing internal threat.

FID may be planned and implemented as a program, an operation, or both from simple military engagement and routine security cooperation (SC) activities within an FID program up to a complex FID operation. FID programs primarily entail SC activities, such as foreign military sales or security force assistance (SFA), integrated with interagency activities, as required, and under the coordinating authority of both diplomatic and military leadership. In some cases, FID is often misunderstood as SFA, which the latter is just a military tool utilized in an otherwise broader program or operation requiring a whole-of-government approach.

¹⁴ JP 3-05, *Joint Doctrine for Special Operations*, 22 September 2020, II-7.

¹⁵ Ibid, II-9.

¹⁶ Ibid, II-9.

¹⁷ Seth G. Jones, *In the Graveyard of Empires: America’s War in Afghanistan*. W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 2009, 39.

¹⁸ Mostly non-attributional because throughout the war, the Central Intelligence Agency had provided no U.S. weapons to the Mujahidin until the decision to supply Stingers in 1986.

¹⁹ JP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*, 17 August 2018, I-1.

²⁰ Ibid, I-2.

Plan Columbia, whose policy success is still debated, remains perhaps one of the best examples of a successful FID program. Plan Columbia was different than its previous campaigns for three reasons: the scope was larger; it was a combined political, military, and economic effort as opposed to seeking a strictly military solution; and there was unprecedented level of support from the U.S.²¹ Although initially programmed for six years but lasting much longer and, despite being touted as a counternarcotics strategy, Plan Columbia eventually brought the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (also known as FARC) to the negotiation table for an eventual disarmament, full demobilization, and reintegration into Colombian civil society and politics. That Plan Columbia was successful is debatable because there were shortfalls in its counternarcotics outcomes, but as a whole-of-government approach from the U.S. perspective, Plan Columbia did modernize the Colombian military and police forces to a higher standard where these security forces are still partnered with the U.S. forces there today.

3. Counterinsurgency (COIN) is the combination of measures undertaken by a government, sometimes with U.S. Government (USG) and multinational partner support, to defeat an insurgency. COIN is the blend of comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes. Some of the key objectives of COIN operations are to reduce violence, address core grievances, and enable the host nation government to exercise political control over its population/territory via a system of legitimate governance. This all said, insurgency is a form of intrastate conflict and involves the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.²² Insurgents can combine the use of terrorism; subversion; sabotage; other political, economic, and psychological activities; and armed conflict to achieve its aims.

COIN approaches should be adaptable and agile. COIN strategies need to utilize a balanced approach that seeks to affect the population and insurgents. These strategies will seek to reinforce the legitimacy of the affected government while reducing insurgent influence.²³ This can often only be achieved in concert with political reform to improve the quality of governance and address underlying grievances, many of which may be legitimate. COIN operations, if they are to be effective, will utilize all instruments of national power to integrate and synchronize political, security, legal, economic, development, and psychological activities carried out by the host nation and applicable USG and multinational partners to create a holistic approach aimed at weakening the insurgents while simultaneously bolstering the government's legitimacy in the eyes of the contested population.²⁴ This may seem like a lot to unpack, but the key lesson that must be learned here is to not mirror image host nation policy objectives and pay attention to ensure that the U.S. policy objectives are not more difficult than the will of the host nation will accept for political and cultural reasons.

²¹ Robert W. Jones, Jr., 2006. *Plan Columbia and Plan Patriota: The Evolution of Colombia's National Strategy*. Veritas, Volume 2, No. 4, 60.

²² JP 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 22 September 2020, I-1.

²³ Ibid, III-1.

²⁴ Ibid, I-2.

4. Counterterrorism (CT) are those activities and operations that “are taken to neutralize terrorists, their organizations, and their networks in order to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals.”²⁵ The purpose of CT is to disrupt, isolate, and dismantle terrorist organizations and networks to render them incapable of striking the homeland, U.S. facilities and personnel, or U.S. interests abroad.²⁶ Terrorism is defined as “the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence, often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs, to instill fear and coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are usually political.”²⁷ Terrorism is not in and of itself an ideology or a form of war, but a tactic used by organizations trying to achieve specific goals.

CT operations require collaboration, balance, and precision.²⁸ Collaboration creates a common and increased understanding of the operational environment and must be managed to preserve the precision and capabilities of forces conducting CT operations. Balance is critical to CT operations as overly offensive or aggressive action risks eroding the legitimacy and support. The purpose of precision is to limit unnecessary collateral damage. CT operations must be scalable in application and effect to address everything from individual actions by small groups of terrorists to enduring operations as part of a campaign to dismantle large terrorist networks.

CT is a core task of SOF, but global demand for CT activities and the varied conditions under which the broad range of CT activities occur dictate that SOF cannot be the sole force engaged in CT operations.²⁹ Yet all SOF CT forces, whether based in the continental U.S. or forward-stationed, are part of a larger global SOF network where all SOF coordinate, exchange information and intelligence, and otherwise synchronize their efforts in support of the global combatant commands. The key CT organization in each area of responsibility is the theater special operations command and its subordinate assigned and attached organizations and supporting forces.³⁰

There are numerous recent examples of CT to draw upon, but the most significant strike against a high-profile terrorist was the SOF raid on Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan on 2 May 2011. The raid, dubbed *Operation Neptune Spear*, was approved by U.S. President Barack Obama and involved two dozen Navy SEALs in two Black Hawk helicopters, launched from about 120 miles away in Afghanistan where U.S. forces were stationed. The raid lasted no longer than 40 minutes and resulted in the death of Osama bin Laden and four other combatants. *Operation Neptune Spear* was touted as a resounding success. Yet, this mission was not without significant political and diplomatic risk as the raid was conducted in Pakistan, an ally in the U.S. COIN operations in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan came under intense international scrutiny after the raid but denied that it had sheltered bin Laden and said it had shared information with the Central Intelligence Agency and other intelligence agencies about the compound since 2009.³¹

²⁵ JP 3-26, *Joint Combatting Terrorism*, 30 JUL 20, I-5.

²⁶ Ibid, I-6.

²⁷ Ibid, I-5.

²⁸ Ibid, II-1.

²⁹ Ibid, III-3

³⁰ Ibid, III-5.

³¹ Chris Allbritton and Augustine Anthony, “Pakistan says had no knowledge of U.S. bin Laden raid”, *Reuters*, 3 May 2011. Retrieved 24 May 2024.

5. Stability activities are “the various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment and provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.”³² Stability activities to include SC programs, activities, and interactions are an integral part of combatant command campaign plans, integrated country strategies, and any phase of an operation that supports a comprehensive stabilization process. Stability is the desired end state and stabilization is the aggregation of activities to restore the functions of the legitimate authorities. For this reason, stability activities may be conducted across the competition continuum.

The Department of State is the lead federal agency for U.S. stabilization efforts, mostly due to the inherently political nature of stabilization. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is the lead implementing agency for non-security U.S. stabilization assistance, and the Department of Defense (DOD) supports both DOS and USAID through the provision of security, where applicable and the reinforcement of civilian efforts.³³ ³⁴ In this comprehensive approach, U.S. military forces may support one or more stabilization partners to improve human security, provide humanitarian assistance, and enhance institutions of governance.

Second only to providing security, the major role for Army forces in stabilization is to help reform the host nation security sector and build partner capacity to enable long-term stability.³⁵ This is SC and SFA and both are often a necessary component of stabilization. In post-conflict areas, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan, consolidations of gains were necessary to translate temporary military victories into enduring political successes. During stability operations, consolidating gains become central to the mission. Engaging with the civil component, along with maintaining security, were critical to preventing conditions from deteriorating further.³⁶ Stability tasks address the needs of the host nation and its population and consolidate gains U.S. forces made during armed conflict. They help drive the transition from the military occupation of territory and control of populations by land component forces gained because of military operations to control by legitimate authorities.

6. Security cooperation encompasses “DOD interactions with foreign security establishments that build and develop allied and partner security capabilities and capacity for self-defense and multinational operations, provide the Armed Forces of the United States with access to the foreign country during peacetime or a contingency operations, and build relationships that promote specific United States security interests.”³⁷ The U.S. leverages its alliances and partnerships to respond jointly to shared security threats, yet sometimes the allies and partners who work with the U.S. to address these threats often lack key capabilities and capacity. SC programs and activities seek to build these capabilities and capacities through various programming including foreign military sales, international military education and training, institutional capacity building, SFA, etc.

³² JP 3-07, *Joint Stabilization Activities*, 11 February 2022, I-1.

³³ Ibid, I-5.

³⁴ Despite the recent executive dismantling of U.S. Agency for International Development, USAID, Army doctrine on USAID” s role in stability has not changed.

³⁵ Ibid, C-1.

³⁶ ADP 3-07, *Stability*, 1 July 2019, 2-4.

³⁷ JP 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, 9 September 2022, I-2.

Like most IW focused operations and activities, SC occurs throughout the competition continuum and is conducted by both conventional forces and SOF. SC contributes to the ability of allies and partners to perform roles in support of U.S. combatant command campaign plans (CCPs) and contingency plans. During low or moderately adversarial competition, where the United States seeks to deter a competitor, CCPs are likely to emphasize shaping the operational environment (OE) through SC engagements and development with third parties or to position the U.S. in an advantage should competition escalate into conflict.³⁸ At more adversarial points in the continuum where the U.S. uses military force to compel or force a competitor to behave in a certain way, SC is more likely to emphasize ally and partner participation in joint operations. During armed conflict for example, security assistance to the Ukrainian Armed Forces enabled their resistance to Russia's conventional invasion of Ukraine in 2022. SC promoted U.S. interests by eroding Russian offensive military capacity and without direct involvement of U.S. forces in combat roles.

7. Security force assistance is the set of “DOD activities that support the development of the capability and capacity of foreign security forces and their supporting institutions.”³⁹ Consistent with DOD policy for SFA, the Army develops, maintains, and institutionalizes the capabilities of its personnel to support DOD efforts to organize, train, equip, build and rebuild, advise, support, and liaise with foreign security forces and relevant supporting institutions.⁴⁰ SFA often results in improved security relationships that strengthen decision making and interactions at multiple levels between the U.S. and partner nations' foreign security forces on matters related to security. These forces include military, paramilitary, police, intelligence forces, border police, coast guard, customs officials, prison guards, and correctional personnel.

SFA is the primary tool for executing the theater army strategy across the competition continuum. SFA activities contribute to multinational operations and help develop or reform a country's security forces and supporting institutions. For example, SFA contributes to DOD's role in USG-coordinated security sector assistance efforts that support a partner nation's security sector reform initiatives whether through routine training, equipping, or advising activities to a broader FID operation or even broader stabilization effort.⁴¹

The U.S. Army's security force assistance brigades (SFABs) remain the best example of tactical employment of SFA developmental activities, such as training and advising foreign security forces. SFABs are purpose-built and the only conventional formation completely dedicated to conducting SFA worldwide. The SFABs operate in diverse threat environments, geographic locations, legal agreements, and command structures across the competition continuum.⁴² SFABs allow the U.S. Army to preserve the readiness of its brigade combat teams (BCTs) by primarily conducting SFA missions and persistent engagement with allies and partners in the cooperation and competition below armed conflict stages of the competition continuum. This allows the BCTs to focus on large-scale combat operations.⁴³

³⁸ Ibid, II-2.

³⁹ Ibid, I-3.

⁴⁰ FM 3-22, *Army Support to Security Cooperation*, 1 July 2023, 1-5.

⁴¹ JP 3-20, *Security Cooperation*, 9 September 2022, B-1.

⁴² ATP 3-96.1, *Security Force Assistance Brigade*, 1 September 2022, I-1.

⁴³ Ibid, I-1.

8. Counter threat finance (CTF) refers to “the activities and actions taken by the joint force commander (JFC) to deny, disrupt, destroy, or defeat the generation, storage, movement, and use of assets to fund activities that support a threat network to negatively affect the JFC’s ability to attain a desired end state.”⁴⁴ It is policy that DOD shall work with other USG departments and agencies and with partner nations to deny, disrupt, or defeat and degrade adversaries’ ability to use global licit and illicit financial networks to negatively affect U.S. interests.⁴⁵ Effective CTF operations depend on an understanding of the functional organization of the threat network and its financial capabilities, methods of operation, methods of communication, and operational areas as well as upon detecting how revenue is raised, moved, stored, and used.

It is important to understand that CTF is a joint effort, but DOD may not always be the lead agency for CTF. Frequently, the efforts and products of CTF analysis will be used to support criminal investigations or regulatory sanction activities, either by the USG or one of its partners. Military support to CTF is not a distinct type of military operation, rather it represents military activities against a specific network capability of business and financial processes used by an adversarial or threat network.

CTF is best known as a policy approach mitigating the funding of illicit non-state actors, such as the Taliban, especially when the U.S. policy approach is focused on countering violent extremism. CTF; however, could also be applied in strategic competition “against state adversaries that use both licit and illicit financial levers to shape, influence and control relevant populations, revenue streams, state and local governments, officials, and supply chains.”⁴⁶ In an article published in *The RUSI Journal*, the authors refer to CTF utilized as a model of economic warfare and an extension of statecraft. The authors argue in the context of strategic competition that CTF must “concentrate on both the traditional illicit organizations such as drug trafficking organizations, terrorist groups and transnational criminal organizations, as well as the licit networks involved in foreign direct investment, debt financing, and company acquisition.”⁴⁷ The purpose of this discussion is to illustrate the strategic potential of CTF beyond the narrow scope of targeting criminal organizations.

9. Counter threat networks (CTN) is the “aggregation of activities across DOD and United States departments and agencies that identifies and neutralizes, degrades, disrupts, or defeats designated threat networks.”⁴⁸ CTN activities are a focused approach to understanding and operating against adaptive network threats such as terrorism and insurgency and organized crime. Threat networks often operate clandestinely which makes traditional intelligence collection and analysis as well as operations and assessments much different than activities against overt military threats.

⁴⁴ JP 3-25, *Countering Threat Networks*, 21 December 2016, A-1.

⁴⁵ Department of Defense Directive, DODD, 5205.14, *DOD Counter Threat Finance Policy*, 19 August 2010, 1. Changes to this DOD policy were incorporated 3 May 2017.

⁴⁶ Stringer, K. D., Urban, M., & Mackay, A., 2023. *Counter Threat Finance for Strategic Competition*. *The RUSI Journal*, Volume 168, Number 7, 42.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 46.

⁴⁸ JP 3-25, *Countering Threat Networks*, 21 December 2016, GL-4.

Threat networks are part of the OE, utilize existing networks, and may create new networks that seek to move money, people, information, and goods for the benefit of the network. Yet not all these interactions create instability, and not all networks are a threat to U.S. policy and goals.⁴⁹ While different societies view corruption and criminal behavior differently, the joint force cannot end corruption everywhere, so it focuses its efforts on countering networks that pose a threat to U.S. policy goals. Countering or otherwise disrupting the threat's global reach and the ability to influence events far outside of a specific operational area requires unity of effort across combatant commands and with all instruments of national power. The assistance of friendly nations and international organizations to address threat network financing, recruiting, propaganda, and operational cells that cross multiple regions and exist in areas where U.S. influence and presence is of limited assistance.

The groundwork for successful CTN activities starts with information and intelligence to develop an understanding of the OE and the threat network.⁵⁰

10. Military information support operations (MISO) are “designed to develop and convey messages and devise actions to influence select foreign groups and promote themes to change their groups’ attitudes and behaviors.”⁵¹ MISO includes those operations that convey selected information and indicators to influence a target audience’s emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately their behavior in a manner favorable to U.S. objectives.⁵² Just as MISO can amplify desired effects of foreign humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations in cooperation, so too can MISO also amplify mutually desired effects of both assurance and coercive activities during crisis response or armed conflict.

Military Information Support Task Force-Afghanistan (MISTF-A), for example, utilized electronic warfare (EW) operators to execute EW missions, delivering tailored MISO products over Taliban communications systems to disrupt Taliban narratives while promoting host nation legitimacy.⁵³ MISTF-A was able to capture live responses from the insurgent audience by monitoring Taliban networks. In another instance, MISTF-A supporting aircraft were diverted to forces that were in contact with Taliban forces. The MISTF-A employed its EW capability to disrupt the Taliban’s command and control network. Unable to communicate, the Taliban withdrew which allowed coalition forces time to defend their operational area.⁵⁴

11. Civil-military operations (CMO) are the “activities performed by military forces to establish, maintain, influence, or exploit relationships between military forces and indigenous populations and institutions.”⁵⁵ CMO includes an inherent command responsibility because CMO incorporates a range of activities that establish and maintain relations with the civil authorities, general population, and other organizations. Commanders conduct CMO to coordinate civil and military activities, minimize civil-military friction, reduce civil component threats, and maximize support for military operations. It is important to understand that commanders conduct CMO throughout the conduct of joint campaigns.

⁴⁹ Ibid, I-1.

⁵⁰ Ibid, I-7.

⁵¹ JP 3-13.2, *Military Information Support Operations*, 21 November 2014, I-1.

⁵² Ibid, I-2.

⁵³ Ibid, II-8.

⁵⁴ Ibid, II-8. This vignette is cited originally from various sources.

⁵⁵ JP 3-57, *Civil-Military Operations*, 9 July 2018, I-1.

CMO efforts coopt the civil component to provide stability and unburden military forces who can focus more on threat forces. CMO seeks to restore basic services, such as CMO integration with public affairs and other information activities to amplify the positive impact on target audiences. The use of medical treatment stations established by conventional units and staffed with medical officers and technicians to treat the local populace is an example of an effective CMO demonstrating goodwill and promoting trust between the population and military force. CMO provides an opportunity for information collection from the population about threat networks. For example, activities to inform populations about humanitarian assistance and medical support increases legitimacy of the conventional units. This helps reduce threat influence and provides engagements with local supporters who may have valuable threat information.

12. Civil affairs operations (CAO) includes actions “planned, coordinated, executed, and assessed to enhance awareness of and manage the interaction with the civil component of the operational environment, identify and mitigate underlying causes of instability within civil society, and/or involve the application of functional specialty skills normally the responsibility of the civil government.”⁵⁶ Unlike CMO, CAO conduct is by civil affairs forces only and encompasses those activities that engage and leverage the civil component (people, organizations, and capabilities) to enhance, enable, or provide governance, increase situational understanding, identify and defeat threats within the civil component, and consolidate gains.⁵⁷

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) expansion across northern Iraq and northeastern Syria had an overwhelming destabilizing effect on the integrity of national governance institutions and their ability to control activities within the region. In 2016, U.S. forces deployed to remove ISIS from northeast Syria in partnership with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The mission required military forces to be prepared to assume certain governance responsibilities over newly liberated areas until legitimate authorities were able to assume control. ISIS had controlled the region for nearly two years and the city of Manbij in particular and oversaw the normal functions of government such as essential services.

Civil Affairs teams on the ground partnered with the SDF to initially identify specific priorities for stabilization and humanitarian efforts. As the area became more stable and as ISIS fighters were increasingly pushed from the region, the reestablishment of government became a top priority. Civil affairs teams advised and assisted the local population of Manbij in the creation of the Manbij Civil Council. Once created, the council began the process of restoring essential services and partnering with the international community to establish work throughout the five U.S. stability sectors to bring economic and individual prosperity back to the region.⁵⁸

The Manbij Civil Council was so successful that its model was copied numerous times throughout the region as ISIS was pushed further and further back. Manbij became such a prosperous area that dislocated people from across the country flocked to the city for a new start. From the beginning, civil affairs teams on the ground, partnering with local leaders, assisted in the transition towards prosperous governance and stability for the people of Manbij and surrounding areas.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Ibid, GL-6.

⁵⁷ FM 3-57, *Civil Affairs Operations*, 28 July 2021, 2-1.

⁵⁸ JP 3-07, *Joint Stabilization Activities*, 11 February 2022, II-4 through II-10. The five U.S. Government stability sectors are the security sector, justice and reconciliation sector, humanitarian assistance and social well-being sector, governance and participation sector, and the economic and infrastructure sector.

⁵⁹ FM 3-57, *Civil Affairs Operations*, 28 July 2021, 2-8. From the vignette *Transitional Governance in Syria*.

Conclusion

Collectively, these 12 IW operations and activities give the commander a range of military options in which to achieve U.S. strategic objectives through campaigning in the competition continuum. During cooperation and competition below armed conflict, IW operations and activities set the theater and shape the operational environment in favor of U.S. strategic objectives and outcomes. During the armed conflict phase, IW operations and activities can achieve policy aims without resorting to the high risk of conventional warfare. However, they retain their utility during large-scale combat operations by supporting deep operations and helping consolidate gains made during offensive and defensive operations.⁶⁰

IW provides joint force commanders with options for pursuing objectives without resorting to conventional warfare. IW contributes to joint campaigns on their own and in concert with conventional warfare. Warfare usually reflects a blend of IW and conventional warfare, especially over the course of a conflict.

⁶⁰ For a better detailed example of stability operations in division rear areas, read CALL 24-844 *Civil Affairs Task Force: Conducting Stability Operations in the Division's Rear Area During the Offense*.

Part 2

Perspectives in Irregular Warfare

In this section the perspectives of irregular warfare (IW) we explore through literature from select authors who have expressed an interest in contributing to this handbook. The purpose of this section is to share the perspectives of these authors as it relates to the practice of IW operations and activities in multiple domains. Thus, the perspectives present here are not just for the land domain, but highlight the other domains, such as air and maritime, as well as factors in those activities that influence the three dimensions of interoperability: human, the technical, and the procedural. It is worth concluding here that it is within the procedural dimension where IW derives meaning in the form of military doctrine and the processes associated with establishing norms through tactics, techniques, and procedures that mitigate the occasional ambiguity associated with military doctrine.

In each of the submissions, we use a call-out box (like this one) at the beginning to provide a so what to the narrative. This is intended to be a roadmap for the reader to identify the major theme(s) and to provide enough information to arrive at the same conclusions as the authors or, just as important, arrive at differing conclusions that still promotes a broader, more useful dialogue among IW stakeholders.

Chapter 4

What is Missing in Irregular Warfare Education?

LTC Paul Amis and Amy Frumin⁶¹

Institutional knowledge of Irregular Warfare (IW) is lacking in the Army. What is needed is a departure from traditional learning models and broader education on topics such as design thinking, complex adaptive systems, and international relations.

The Professional Military Education (PME) system is, most fundamentally, a vocation education system for the military. As such, the PME system educates the force on the profession of arms. The military's PME institutions teach the skills and knowledge in operations and procedures of their industry so that future leaders can function optimally.⁶² the profession of arms is often based more on art than the science of war, especially in an environment of strategic competition.

While technical skills are important in an increasingly complex world fueled by the fourth industrial revolution, PME institutions must evolve with the times. The Officer Professional Military Education's policy calls for creating creative and critical thinkers to be able to operate in an environment of strategic competition and to be able to think not just in terms of winning and losing, but in terms of incremental advantage in a competition that is changing and never ending. PME must consider the changing character of war to continue to evolve the force with the times.

⁶¹ LTC Paul Amis currently serves as the G-4 for the U.S. Army Special Operations Aviation Command. When this article was written, he served in the Joint Service J7 Office of Irregular Warfare and Competition. Ms. Frumin also works for the Joint Service J7 Office of Irregular Warfare and Competition as the IW Education Lead.

⁶² McDonald's "Training and Education," McDonalds, February 2023, [Training and Education, mcdonalds.com](https://www.mcdonalds.com/training-and-education).

The U.S. has for decades been used to an overwhelming military advantage over our adversaries. This asymmetry in relative combat power has driven our adversaries and competitors to shift their aims to achieve their political goals without escalating to armed conflict. Although relative advantage is in a constant state of flux, “The current character of war indicates that most competition occurs below the level of armed conflict through irregular and often non-armed means.”⁶³ Additionally, how we engage in competition is also changing with the fourth industrial revolution and technological advances in everything from artificial intelligence to electromagnetic weapons.

Recognizing the dynamics in international relations (IR) and warfare, the Department of Defense (DOD) identified nuclear warfare and IW as two enduring special areas of emphasis (E-SAE) for PME.⁶⁴ America’s nuclear capability is central to our international influence and, coupled with our military prowess, the cornerstone of our deterrent capability. It is our overmatch which pushes competitors and adversaries alike to choose irregular warfare as their preferred means of engaging the U.S. These two E-SAEs can only be appreciated and properly employed within the context of strategic competition. In fact, IW could go the way of counterinsurgency (COIN) if not properly contextualized. COIN, like irregular warfare, is a capability set to be used towards a broader goal. Of itself IW (and COIN for that matter) are not a goal or a strategy. We often use COIN as if it is a strategy, rather than a tool, which obfuscates goals. IW is a capability set that can be used across the competition continuum, to include during kinetic operations. It must be understood as a tool to create incremental advantage in ongoing perpetual competition. IW activities are often tactical actions with strategic effects. It is essential to understand the strategic effect we aim to achieve.

While the PME institutions have begun integrating IW education into their curriculum, much of the teaching does not go far enough into the non-vocational theoretical grounding that students need to be successful at the profession of arms in an age of strategic competition. Therefore, it is suggested that the following four topics be more fully integrated into PME:

1. Basic **international relations** need to be a foundational part of the PME. Not everyone who comes into the military comes with an IR or political science background. Short of clear policy guidance, at the very least our future leaders should have an appreciation of what we are fighting for in this strategic competition, why, and what is at stake. Without a basic understanding of the international system, the role of the state in that system, and America’s role and mythology within the international system, it will be hard to expect tactical actors to appreciate the strategic effects we aim for them to have regarding IW. We must reinvigorate the IR curriculum at PME institutions to ensure there is a baseline across the military. IR also gives us a broader perspective on problem sets which will allow the joint force to engage more productively with the interagency (IA) and partner nations (PN).

⁶³ *Irregular Warfare Curriculum Development Guide*, 3 June 2022.

⁶⁴ Chairman Joint Chief of Staff Memorandum 1810.01, *Outcomes-Based Military Education Procedures for Officer Professional Military Education*, 1 April 2022.

2. To fully appreciate the international system, PME students must learn about **complex adaptive systems**. While the international system was always complex and adaptive, the rising importance of non-state actors, the role of the internet in propagating ideas globally, and the use of proxies by state actors add infinitely more complexity to the system. We no longer can rely on industrial revolution styled rote memorization education or aircrew style checklists or linear thinking to navigate the increasingly crowded and complex landscape. Future leaders need to be able to understand if the decision they face is indeed complex or simply complicated and apply appropriate techniques to think through the issue. In complicated problems, analysis is appropriate. However, in complexity, analysis could lead us to the wrong conclusions because it does not account for the dynamic interactions of systems and the un-predicable emergence which may occur when systems interact.

3. **Design thinking**, as defined in the “Complexity, Organizational Blindness, and the U.S. Southern Command (SOCOM) Design Way,”⁶⁵ is one effective approach. Design thinking is not the same as operational design. Design thinking is meant to compliment operational design and build in mitigation for cognitive bias. Design thinking invites a variety of divergent perspectives, not just the commander’s perspective, to appreciate the issue more broadly and to guard against individual and bureaucratic bias (often confirmation bias) and blinders. In addition to soliciting additional perspectives, the SOCOM design requires a level of empathy for those perspectives. Unless one has empathy for a different perspective, that perspective will be irrelevant in the decision-making process. Design thinking is a methodology that helps to account for complexity, emergence, and the reality that we will never have perfect information about the interactions of the state, group, or individual we aim to influence.

4. **Perspectives of our IA and PN** are invaluable to our appreciation of any problem set. Strategic competition is not the purview of the Department of Defense (DOD). Tactical actions by DOD will have implications for other U.S. government actors. We therefore must learn about and work with our interagency partners to not only gain a more complete picture of the problem set, but also to understand the theory of success for the entire U.S. Government to ensure that DOD’s tactical actions have the desired strategic effect. The education with the IA should be two directional, in that DOD must educate our IA partners about DOD capabilities in IW to ensure the rest of the IA does not just see DOD as an up armored or rotary wing lift into a conflict zone. Our partner nations also have an important perspective to offer. Not only are they more often more attuned to the problem set than the U.S., but they have their own goals and aspirations which we must empathize with to know what they are willing to do and why. For IA and PN we must listen, apply empathy, and leverage what we have learned towards our strategic goals.

⁶⁵ David Ellis and Charles Black, “Complexity, Organizational Blindness and the SOCOM, U.S Southern Command, Design Way,” JSOU Report 18-3, 2018, Joint Special Operations University, MacDill Air Force Base.

In summary, DOD faces a much more complex problem in an era of strategic competition. Learning actions and activities that could be considered IW and how we have applied IW in the past is not sufficient. Students need to contextualize IW in strategic competition through an understanding of international relations. Students must understand what we are fighting for and what we are fighting against in the broadest sense. Students must also have a grasp of complex adaptive systems and design thinking to be able to think through the web of interactions that is the international system. Lastly, the entire interagency must learn more about each other to be able to leverage the entire power of the U.S. government in strategic competition. Similarly, we must take the time to listen to the perspectives of our partner nations to know how best to employ them in pursuit of U.S. national interests. It is incumbent upon DOD to explain to partners what we can do with IW and to discuss how it can be used to the best effect in strategic competition.

Chapter 5

The U.S. Marine Corps' Unique Perspective on Irregular Warfare in Competition and War

Reyes Cole⁶⁶

This chapter provides observations and definitions on how the U.S. Marine Corp (USMC) views irregular warfare. For example, USMC general-purpose forces contribute to joint irregular warfare through the conduct of irregular activities, which are defined as being conducted with, through or against non-state actors across the competition continuum. Network engagement, as described in this article, is an example of an irregular activity with a focus on non-state actors that make the activity irregular, and these activities can include second order effects against the state forces of an adversary nation.

Introduction

Since the 2019 National Defense Strategy (NDS) and subsequent strategic documents, the conventional elements of the joint force have largely jettisoned many of the key capabilities and lessons learned from past and recent irregular warfare (IW). The USMC is no different. Since 2019, the USMC has focused on China as its peer threat, divesting from many of the capabilities that have proven vital in both conventional and IW. However, the military has a command structure and risk is always part of the calculus. The USMC has consciously decided to assume risk in IW capabilities and capacities to prepare for a high-end conflict with China. As with the entire joint force, tight budgets have also contributed to prioritizing conventional warfighting capabilities and new weapons systems over IW.

That does not mean that the USMC has walked away from IW completely. In its force design efforts that seek to ensure it can dominate in a conventional fight with a peer adversary, it has also developed important capabilities and capacities that can directly support or conduct IW.

For example, there is the creation of three Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) Information Groups (MIG)s. MIGs provide USMC MEFs and subordinate USMC elements with the ability to integrate communications, intelligence, electromagnetic spectrum operations (EMSO), inform and influence operations, cyberspace operations and space operations conduct, and other information-related missions. The MIGs contain specialized information units such as intelligence, communication strategy and operations (COMSTRAT),⁶⁷ psychological operations (PSYOP), cyberspace, civil affairs, and other like units. The MIGs can be organic to Fleet Marine Forces (FMF)⁶⁸ units or available through reach back support from joint, interagency, intergovernmental, or multinational partners.⁶⁹ It is easy to see how such a unit, built for high-end conflict, is also instrumental in IW across the competition continuum.

⁶⁶ Reyes Cole is an irregular warfare and competition senior program analyst who works at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corp, Combat Development and Integration.

⁶⁷ Communications strategy and operations, COMMSTRAT, is both public affairs and combat camera combined now into one Marine Military Occupational Specialty.

⁶⁸ Fleet Marine Forces, FMF, are synonymous with those Marine forces located at the tactical level of war, which are assigned to the Marine Expeditionary Force, MEF, and equivalent units within the Marine Reserves. A MEF is a three-star command and consists of a Marine Division, Air Wing and Logistics Group consisting of 46 to 90 thousand Marines.

⁶⁹ Marine Corp Warfighting Publication, MCWP, 8-10, *Information in Marine Corps Operations*, February 2024.

Challenges

True synchronization and understanding across the services to train and conduct IW is hampered by misconceptions and ignorance, coupled with the use of vogue buzzwords, all cause confusion. As discussed in Chapter 3 of this publication, IW has expanded beyond the original five operations, but many do not know this. Additionally, countless military personnel still believe, or verbally contend, some of the misconceptions in Table 5-1 as justification for not investing time and resources, even if minuscule, into IW.

Table 5-1. Misconceptions

Term	Misconception
Irregular Warfare	Special Operations Forces (SOF) only
	* Counterinsurgency (COIN) only
	* Large scale stabilization only
	* Counterterrorism (CT) only
	Conventional Training can be easily used for IW
	Services do not have to worry about this anymore based on peer threats as priority
	Services will never do this again
* Operation or activity that was part of the original five IW activities	

Reyes Cole

Buzzwords have always been part of organizations, both military and non-military, as they strive to adapt or change to current or future conditions. However, Merriam Webster Dictionary defines buzzwords as “*an important sounding usually technical word or phrase often of little meaning used chiefly to impress laymen*” and “*a voguish word or phrase.*”⁷⁰ Buzzwords that affect IW can come from academia, think tanks, articles, web journals, and even Department of Defense (DOD) strategic documents and leaders. The challenge comes when these new terms are introduced into the military lexicon without a universal understanding or definition, accepted by all. The Services are a “train, man, and equip” entity, and therefore must have standardized terms for our profession. But over the decades and recently other terms have risen to the top of military jargon, without uniform understanding, or an approved DOD definition. The examples in Table 5-2 demonstrate the ignorance that infects the joint force’s understanding of IW discussed above and adds to the confusion on what IW is and is not.

⁷⁰ Merriam Websters Dictionary, [Buzzword Definition and Meaning - Merriam-Webster](#).

Table 5-2. Buzzwords

Buzz Phrases thought as Synonymous with IW	Legitimacy of term
Small wars	No DOD definition
Hybrid warfare	No DOD definition
Gray zone	No DOD definition
Political warfare	No DOD definition
Asymmetric warfare	No DOD definition
Unconventional warfare	*(DOD) Activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area. Also called unconventional warfare (UW). Source: Joint Publication (JP) 3-05
* Is only one of many IW operations and activities, but is not synonymous for IW	

Reyes Cole

With the 2023 publication of Joint Publication (JP) 1, Joint Warfighting, 27 August 2023, a new definition for IW has been produced as has been discussed in prior chapters of this publication. However, as the USMC is a small force and has a unique mission as stated below, analysis was required to determine what IW capabilities and capacities the USMC can realistically invest in, as it modernizes its force to dominate in a conventional war.

“The Marine Corps shall be organized, trained, and equipped to provide fleet marine forces of combined arms, together with supporting air components, service with the fleet in the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign”.⁷¹

This treatise will illuminate USMC perspectives on IW and how it uniquely contributes to joint IW and land operations in competition and in war.

U.S. Marine Corps Perspective on IW

The USMC is a force provider to combatant commands and other joint elements. As such, the USMC is trained, manned, and equipped to support and conduct certain IW activities. The USMC only looks at its conventional forces when institutionalizing irregular capabilities and capacities. This is because Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC) falls under Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and, as such, is already IW capable and much of their specialized IW training is sponsored or directed by SOCOM. The USMC places its focus on institutionalizing irregular abilities under capability development across doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, and facilities (DOTmLPF), which will be discussed in more detail in subsequent sections of this publication.

⁷¹ 10 United States Code, USC, 8063: United States Marine Corps: composition; functions, August 25, 2024, [10 USC 8063: United States Marine Corps: composition; functions, house.gov](#).

So, the question for the USMC continues to be, how to meet current conventional requirements and mitigate IW shortfalls, then prioritize which conventional units might need to conduct IW. To delineate the unique USMC perspective of IW, it is necessary to look at the components of the joint definition of IW.

“IW is a form of warfare where states and non-state actors’ campaign to assure or coerce states or other groups through indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric activities, either as the primary approach or in concert with conventional warfare.”⁷²

By looking at the joint definition, the USMC examined the three IW variables of indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric military activities. Joint doctrine indicates that not all IW is indirect, non-attributable, and asymmetric, but IW includes at least one of these essential characteristics.⁷³

Non-attributable is defined in Joint Warfighting as, “*activities that target an opponent or support an ally or partner in ways that conceal the source of the activities or their sponsorship.*” USMC conventional forces generally do not conduct such operations. This perspective is based on the DOD dictionary which defines, “*covert operations as an action of activity that is planned and executed to conceal the identity of, or permit plausible deniability by, the sponsor.*”⁷⁴ Covert action is also codified in Title 50 of the U.S. Code as an intelligence activity or activities of the U.S. Government to influence political, economic, or military conditions abroad, where it is intended that the role of the U.S. will not be apparent or acknowledged publicly.⁷⁵ Another related DOD term is clandestine operations which are “*operations sponsored or conducted by governmental departments or agencies in such a way as to assure secrecy or concealment.*”⁷⁶ Most clandestine operations fall under Title 50 or Title 10 of the U.S. Code which describes activities that can be used for a range of sensitive intelligence and military activities, in which the activity itself, as well as U.S. sponsorship, is secret. Both covert and clandestine operations in many cases require a presidential finding or notification to the U.S. Congress. For these reasons, USMC FMF generally does not maintain this capability and has not been the focus of institutionalizing IW.

Next, the USMC examined the asymmetric variable and how it applies to operations. Joint warfighting doctrine describes asymmetric activities as being those that target an opponent or support an ally or partner when a gross disparity in relative comprehensive power causes the weaker party to resort to irregular methodologies. That doctrine also states that a stronger party may target opponents asymmetrically when the risks and costs associated with a direct, symmetric approach are unacceptable. The USMC incorporated asymmetry as a foundational principle in the 1997 Capstone Publication, Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 1-3 *Tactics*. That publication states, “*fighting asymmetrically means fighting the enemy on our terms rather than on the enemy’s. By fighting asymmetrically, we do not have to be numerically superior to defeat the enemy. We only must be able to exploit enemy vulnerabilities.*” Therefore, fighting asymmetrically or being prepared for an adversary’s asymmetric strategy is already ingrained in the ethos of USMC planners and commanders and is not considered a unique attribute of operations and activities.

⁷² Joint Publication JP 1 Volume 1 *Joint Warfighting*, August 2023, II-7.

⁷³ Ibid, pg. III-8.

⁷⁴ Department of Defense, DOD, Dictionary and Terminology Repository, [DOD Terminology Program, js.mil](https://www.dodterm.com/), retrieved 12 August 2024.

⁷⁵ Congressional Research Service, *Covert Action and Clandestine Activities of the Intelligence Community: Selected Congressional Notification Requirements*, [r45191.pdf, menlosecurity.com](https://www.menlosecurity.com/r45191.pdf), retrieved 12 August, 2024.

⁷⁶ Department of Defense, DOD, Dictionary and Terminology Repository, [DOD Terminology Program, js.mil](https://www.dodterm.com/).

Finally, the USMC analyzed the indirect variables, which are activities that target an adversary or support an ally or partner through one or more intermediaries such as allies, partners, proxies,⁷⁷ state and non-state actors, military networks, and non-military networks. It is here that the USMC has decided to place its focus on its FMF. Force design efforts to re-align to the Pacific and against Chinese threats began in 2020 under the direction of the Commandant of the USMC, General David H. Berger. Those force design efforts mandated the establishment of certain capabilities that apply to indirect activities in competition and war, such as the MIG, as discussed above. As a result of USMC force design, it had to reconcile joint expectations for IW and how the USMC was changing due to national and commandant directives.

Because of this, the USMC developed a supplemental definition that outlined where they would place their efforts and established a specific definition for the USMC. This supplemental definition and description states that general-purpose forces contribute to joint IW through the conduct of irregular activities defined as:

- Irregular activities are conducted with, through or against non-state actors across the competition continuum.

The USMC focus on non-state actors is what makes the activity irregular, and these activities can include second-order effects against the state forces of an adversary nation. Irregular activities focus on the indirect variable of the definition of IW.

The definition for irregular activities has been approved to be added to Marine Corps Reference Publication (MCRP) 1-10.2, *Marine Corps Supplement to DOD Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. This MCRP is an extension of DOD Dictionary and provides USMC-specific terms and definitions. This MCRP and the DOD Dictionary are to be used in conjunction with each other. Terms, definitions, and acronyms contained in MCRP 1-10.2 come directly from USMC doctrinal, warfighting, reference, and tactical publications where DOD Dictionary terms are amplified with USMC-specific definitions.⁷⁸

U.S. Marine Corps Unique Perspective on Competition

Joint doctrine lists four strategic uses of military force:

- Assurance
- Deterrence (form of coercion)
- Compellence (form of coercion)
- Forcible action⁷⁹

The definition of IW also highlights the importance of both assurance and coercion and rightly emphasizes it can be done by states and non-state actors. Joint doctrine also defines strategic competition as “the persistent and long-term interaction that occurs between relevant actors pursuing their interests across the competition continuum.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Joint Publication JP 1 Volume 1 *Joint Warfighting*, August 2023, II-8.

⁷⁸ Marine Corps Reference Publication, MCRP, 1-10.2, *Marine Corps Supplement to DOD, Department of Defense, Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, September 2020.

⁷⁹ Joint Publication JP 1 Volume 1 *Joint Warfighting*, August 2023, I-3.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

The USMC acknowledges and agrees with the importance of the above text across the competition continuum and has incorporated it, and more specific means, to achieve assurance and coercion. USMC Doctrinal Publication 1-4 *Competing* (while written in 2020 compared to Joint doctrine on Warfighting, published in 2023) contains some distinctions from the USMC perspective on competition, but rather than contradicting joint doctrine, provides specificity for the USMC.

Table 5-3 shows how the USMC views competition as attraction and coercion strategies.⁸¹ The USMC believes that these strategies can be conducted in cooperation, competition, and war and supports joint doctrine assurance and coercion intent. USMC attraction and coercion strategies and methods can be conducted by many of the irregular activities discussed in the next section.

Table 5-3. Marine Competition Strategies and Methods

Attraction Methods	Attraction Definitions	Coercion Methods	Coercion Definitions
Inducement	Motivating an actor to action without promise of reward or punishment. Inducement appeals to the self-interests of an actor, often appealing to their emotions, desires, or self-interests they feel wary of pursuing.	Compellence (coercion)	Same as Joint Doctrine
Persuasion	Seeks to convince others with evidence and rational arguments. This is used when it becomes necessary to change the minds or opinions of actors toward taking or not taking particular action.	Deterrence	Same as Joint Doctrine
Enticement	Lures an actor with a promise of personal or collective reward for taking or not taking particular action.		
Color Legend			
Marine Unique Perspective		Matches Joint Doctrine	

Reyes Cole

⁸¹ U.S. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1-4, *Competing*, December 2020, 2-9 to 2-13.

While assurance is not in USMC competition doctrine, it is fully described in the 2023 USMC Tactical Publication (MCTP) 3-03A *Marine Air-Ground Task Force Civil-Military Operations*. The USMC adheres to the joint doctrine on assurance by the conduct of security cooperation, civil-military operations, civil affairs operations, humanitarian assistance, disaster response, and participation in multi-national exercises with allies and other partners. Additionally, USMC operations, both irregular and conventional, can promote assurance to an adversary that forces will abstain from conducting their threats if the adversary complies with the demand. USMC doctrine on competition was written before the idea was incorporated into joint doctrine, yet still we find in joint doctrine that commanders may employ measures and overtures of assurance, persuasion, and attraction.”⁸²

U.S. Marine Corps Focus on Capability Development

Capability development across the joint force is threat based. So, what findings did the USMC find as it built threat-informed irregular capabilities? First, the 2022 National Security Strategy outlined numerous topics that meet the USMC supplemental definition for irregular activities, including countering trans-national organized crime, cybercrimes, and corruption and working with allies and partners to counter infectious diseases, terrorism, violent extremism, irregular migration, and other threats.”⁸³ Secondly, the 2022 National Defense Strategy states, “*non-state actors pose an increasing threat to U.S. regional interests, including allies and partners, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. On today’s battlefields, non-state actors are employing increasingly complex offensive sUAS [small-unmanned aircraft systems], rocket, and missile capabilities, and continue to benefit from technology transfer by U.S. adversaries.*”⁸⁴ Thirdly, the 2022 National Military Strategy lists persistent threats that include North Korea, Iran, and violent extremist organizations.⁸⁵ Finally, in August of 2024, the USMC commandant published planning guidance that describes the elements of the current environment as:

- Chinese illegal and coercive practices
- Non-state actors obtaining advanced conventional weapons and long-range precision munitions
- The continued threat from violent extremist organizations

The threat of non-state actors is also discussed in joint doctrine on warfighting, “U.S. adversaries can employ deception, conventional forces, coercion, irregular tactics, terrorism, criminal activity, and operations in the information environment to complicate operations.”⁸⁶ Therefore, the USMC, through its supplemental definition and focus, is addressing a non-state actor threat whether criminals, insurgents, terrorists, militias, private military contractors, or any of these networks working as proxy for a state adversary. By working with and through non-state networks, the USMC can gain a competitive edge in Chinese information operations directed toward non-state and non-military actors.

⁸² Joint Publication JP 1 Volume 1 *Joint Warfighting*, August 2023, III-21.

⁸³ *National Security Strategy*, October 2022, 19.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁵ *National Military Strategy*, 2022, 2.

⁸⁶ Joint Publication JP 1 Volume 1 *Joint Warfighting*, August 2023, I-5.

The USMC has been using the 2020 DOD Irregular Warfare Implementation Plan and the subsequent 2023 Irregular Warfare Implementation Guidance as the basis for force employment, development, and design.⁸⁷ One of the highlights of USMC institutionalization of irregular warfare and irregular activities is the irregular categorization of Marine Corps Tasks (MCTs) that can be recommended for consideration for a unit mission essential task list (METL). Analysis has identified and codified 26 MCTs that directly relate to either IW or irregular activities. Each of these MCTs are backed by USMC-specific doctrine and each possesses measurable individual and collective training standards. Table 5-4 portrays the MCTs, the ones that exist in a unit's METL and others that are presently not assigned to any unit. The addition and creation of irregular activities is a continual process that starts when a unit is scheduled for a METL review and update. Table 5-4 depicts the main irregular activities and identifies by color coding which ones are assigned to a unit's METL, and which ones are unique to the USMC based on its definition of irregular activities.

⁸⁷ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction, CJCSI, 3030.01A, *Implementing Joint Force Development and Design*, October 2022, which defines Force Employment, 0–3 years. Force Employment involves planning, force management, and decision making required to fulfill the defense objectives of the National Defense Strategy, NDS, and U.S. national interests in the NSS, Force Development, 2–7 years, Force Development is the structure mechanism for adapting current functions, capabilities, and concepts to improve future joint force effectiveness in achieving national strategic objectives in accordance with NDS prioritization. Force Design, 5–15 years. Force Design is a process of innovation through concept development, experimentation, prototyping, research, analysis, wargaming, and other applications of technology and methods to envision a future joint force. The joint force continuously innovates to discover new ways of operating and integrating revolutionary capabilities that maintain and expand competitive advantage against potential adversaries in accordance with NDS prioritization. page A-3.

Table 5-4. Marine Irregular Activities

MCTs <u>assigned</u> in Various Units METL	Plan and Direct Stability Operations	
	Conduct Maritime Interdiction Operations	
	Conduct Stability Activities	
	Conduct Civil-Military Operations (CMO)	
	Conduct Information Actions	
	Conduct Interorganizational Cooperation	
	Plan and Direct Information Activities	
	Conduct Security Force Assistance (SFA)*** SFA does not meet the definition of Marine irregular activities but does meet the Joint IW definition.	
	Conduct Security Cooperation Activities*** SC does not meet the definition of Marine irregular activities but does meet the Joint IW definition.	
	Conduct Network Engagement	
	Plan and Direct Network Engagement	
	Support Influence Activities	
	Conduct Human Intelligence Activities	
Conduct Counterintelligence Activities		
MCTs available but <u>not assigned</u>	Coordinate Foreign Assistance	
	Conduct Counter insurgency (COIN) Operations	
	Conduct Counterterrorist (CT) Operations	
	Provide Support to Unconventional Warfare (UW)	
	Facilitate Stability Operations	
	Conduct Civil Affairs Operations (CAO)	
	Conduct Military Information Support Operations (MISO)	
	Conduct Counterthreat Finance (CTF)	
	Support Counterdrug Operations (CD)	
	Conduct Identity and Attribution Activities (IA2)	
	Employing Non-Lethal Weapons (NLW)	
	Conduct Visit, Board, Search and Seizure (VBSS) Operations	
Color Legend		
Relates to the 12 Joint IW focused operations and activities	USMC conducts network engagement that includes countering threat networks (CTN)	Unique Marine irregular activities

Table 5-4. Marine Irregular Activities (continued)

Note: The MCTs on this list represent the main irregular activities available for units to choose from. There are many sub elements units can also choose, for example under security force assistance, units may have train, mentor, or advise foreign security forces. This list does not account for MARSOC units.

Reyes Cole

The evaluation of units for consideration to assume an irregular activity for their METL is part of capability development efforts that the USMC considers under the organization category. Having a definition of irregular activities allows focus across other DOTmLPF integration efforts. As already identified, they emphasize doctrine and training, but they also place focus on leadership and education and personal issues such as tracking Marines who have specific IW and security force assistance training and experience.⁸⁸

U.S. Marine Corps Focus on Network Engagement

The Marine Corps believes that by focusing on network engagement, those skills will better enable other IW missions⁸⁹ that take considerable time and resources to make a unit capable in those operations and activities. Network engagement is defined as *“Interactions with friendly, neutral, and threat networks, conducted continuously and simultaneously at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels, to help achieve the commander’s objectives within an operational area.”*⁹⁰ Network engagement is a type of military engagement, but more specifically it focuses on three pillars: building friendly, engaging neutral networks consisting of foreign state and non-state actors. And lastly it focuses on countering threat networks. Threat networks could include insurgents, criminal, terrorist, private military contractors, and mercenaries who may function as a proxy or surrogate for a state adversary. Network engagement has a specific intelligence and operational focus on existing networks with strong trust and bonds and determining their dependencies, vulnerabilities, and key nodes for engagement.

Joint doctrine for Planning identifies network engagement as a planning step and provides associated output products at each state of the Joint planning process. Joint doctrine for Operations states, *“Once the joint force commander identifies the networks in the operational area and understands their interrelationships, functions, motivations, and vulnerabilities, the commander can tailor the force to apply the most effective tools to engage neutral networks and counter the threat.”*⁹¹ Other Joint doctrine that strongly advocates for network engagement are the Joint Doctrines on Counterinsurgency, Stabilization, Information in Joint Operations, and Countering Threat Networks. Additionally, the May of 2022 Joint Guide for Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment (JIPOE) provides special considerations relevant to applying the JIPOE process in support of nontraditional missions and network engagement.

⁸⁸ Department of Defense Instruction, DODI, 3000.11, *Management of DOD*, Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare and Security Force Assistance Capabilities*, May 2016, 3.

⁸⁹ Activities such as counterinsurgency, large scale stabilization missions, large scale combat that includes involvement of irregular forces.

⁹⁰ Joint Publication JP 3-25, *Countering Threat Networks*, 21 December 2016, III-4.

⁹¹ Joint Publication JP 5-0 *Joint Planning*, June 2022, IV-4.

Marine doctrine also highly favors network engagement as the best activity to support both conventional, IW, and irregular activities across the competition continuum. When a unit wants to add network engagement to its METL but does not have the capability or capacity to fully conduct, many units take elements from network engagement MCTs and incorporate only certain elements and match them under what they deem a more important METL item.

The Army and USMC have collaborated for years on network engagement doctrine. The USMC specific publication is MCTP 3-02A *Network Engagement: Targeting and Engaging Networks*, June 2022.⁹² The Army specific doctrine is Army Tactical Publication (ATP) 5-0.6 *Network Engagement*, June 2017.

Conclusion

The USMC continues to focus on its irregular activities in support of current and future combatant commanders' IW requirements. As an expeditionary force, expected to be ready when the nation is least ready, it constantly analyzes irregular threats to stability in dedicated regions of the world. It also looks for unique ways to leverage irregular activities to not just counter threats but also seize the initiative and present challenges to an adversary's strategy.

⁹² For reference, this publication is available to authorized users only with valid Common Access Cards (CAC).

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Chapter 6

The Changing Face of Security Assistance in Europe, Africa, and Asia

LTC Jahara Matisek and Dr. William Reno⁹³

There are growing perceptions in warfare trends that indicate that militaries must be prepared to conduct large scale combat operations. To some senior military leaders in the west advising and training foreign militaries detracts from preparation for large-scale combat operations. The authors contend security force assistance is undergoing a process of change across each region due to changing threat perceptions with a new U.S. focus on promoting integrated deterrence.

Known originally as great power competition in the first Trump Administration (and then described as Strategic Competition in the Biden Administration) the United States is dealing with an international order that is rife with conflict and numerous challenges to the liberal rules-based order from state and non-state actors. In this context, U.S. competition has remained consistently applied at the policy level yet inconsistently executed. For instance, the U.S. has been attempting a “pivot” of resources to Asia since 2011 to confront a rising China, this included getting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) leadership to identify China as a “challenge” in 2019. Yet, the U.S. has been burdened with keeping personnel and weapon systems across Europe and the Middle East due to instability and the outbreak of wars of varying intensity.⁹⁴ At the same time, the U.S. Security Coordination (USSC) mission, operating since 2005, is dedicated to the idea of building up the capacity of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces (PASF). The PASF are equally committed to building up their effectiveness, but U.S. efforts to create a competent PASF to maintain internal security are hamstrung by Israel.⁹⁵

Going back to the George W. Bush Administration (2001-2009), the logic of maintaining international security and stability was through the building of security forces in fragile states, which was viewed as cheaper than a direct intervention by U.S. forces.⁹⁶ Under the Trump administration, there was a decreasing emphasis on counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism (CT) operations across the Middle East (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq, etc.) and Africa (e.g., Somalia, Sahel, etc.). Similarly, Western militaries have followed the U.S. trend, albeit the European Union (EU) has carved out its own niche approach to defense and security in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. In these regions, the EU currently has seven military training missions, 13 civilian advisory missions, three naval military operations, and one civilian/military initiative.⁹⁷ Additionally, the U.S. has relied on the State Partnership Program (SPP) since 1993 to develop and foster security relationships between U.S. National Guard units and foreign militaries, which is now at 106 Guard-country relationships.⁹⁸

Growing perceptions of warfare trends indicate that militaries must be prepared to conduct large-scale combat operations (LSCO), and to some senior military leaders across the West, advising and training foreign militaries detracts from preparation for LSCO. Such a view leads to a strategic

⁹³ LTC Jahara Matisek, PhD, is a military professor in the national security affairs department at the U.S. Naval War College. Dr. William Reno is a professor and chair of the Political Science Department at Northwestern University.

⁹⁴ Specifically stated as “We recognise that China’s growing influence and international policies present both opportunities and challenges that we need to address together as an Alliance.”

⁹⁵ <https://www.state.gov/about-us-united-states-security-coordinator-for-israel-and-the-palestinian-authority>.

⁹⁶ Karlin, Mara E. *Building militaries in fragile states: Challenges for the United States*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017.

⁹⁷ <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/our-mission/eu-missions-worldwide/>.

⁹⁸ <https://www.nationalguard.mil/leadership/joint-staff/j-5/international-affairs-division/state-partnership-program/>.

disconnect. It creates a U.S.-led obsession on LSCO, even though this form of warfare seems more likely due to rapid battlefield innovations defined by growing use of artificial intelligence, drones, electronic warfare, and other cheap attritable weapons. If the West does not integrate lessons learned from the battlefield dynamics in the Russia-Ukraine War, it will undermine the effectiveness of traditional NATO approaches to joint warfighting that emphasize high-end weapon systems (e.g., F-35 jets, main battle tanks, etc.), joint all domain command and control, and a network-centric kill chain. By having Western advisors involved in the training of Ukrainian forces, this creates a feedback loop via experiential teaching and learning, which can inform the development of doctrine and tactics for the advising military. In fieldwork, we learned from Polish and Germany military trainers, that from their time advising Ukrainian infantry, it was forcing them to revise and modernize their tactics, techniques, and procedures for warfighting.⁹⁹

A decline in U.S. forces (to include NATO allies and associated contractors) conducting the training and equipping of host-nation security forces to conduct COIN and CT operations means less advisory specialization. This has translated into U.S. Army plans to downsize each security force assistance brigade (SFAB) to approximately 500 personnel,¹⁰⁰ even though “combatant commands asked for SFAB assistance more than 500 times last year, but the Army could fill a fraction of those requests.”¹⁰¹ One strategy the U.S. appears to be pursuing to counter China is to enhance the military effectiveness and interoperability of regional allies and partners through security force assistance (SFA) activities. Achieving these goals will be increasingly difficult without sufficient personnel capable of conducting foreign military advising duties. At the same time, such a focus has opened vulnerabilities in other regions due to the inability of the U.S. to signal robust commitments to allies, partners, and friendly nations. Moreover, the lack of Department of Defense (DOD) emphasis given to advising, training, and equipping foreign militaries (per our interviews with many U.S. advisors), has led to less-than-optimal approaches to U.S. security assistance.¹⁰²

The growing hostility of China and Russia in Europe, Africa, and Asia has increasingly put the United States (and its allies and partners) at a crossroads of how best to compete against authoritarian governments bent on defying the liberal rules-based order. Similarly, Western militaries are also attempting to pivot from building armies in weak states to developing more capable allies and partners that can function as regional nodes of deterrence and respond effectively in a crisis on the frontlines of competition. We contend that SFA is undergoing a process of change across each region due to changing threat perceptions, a new U.S. focus on promoting integrated deterrence in a time of decreasing resources and personnel, and the necessity of professionalizing military advising and assistance missions.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Fieldwork and interviews with dozens of German and Polish advisors at their respective training bases, 5-7 February 2024, Germany, and 28-29 August 2024, Poland.

¹⁰⁰ <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/can-startup-culture-and-army-culture-coexist-lessons-from-the-creation-of-the-5th-security-force-assistance-brigade/>.

¹⁰¹ <https://taskandpurpose.com/news/army-sfab-starshield-spacex-elon-musk/#:~:text=Despite%20the%20end%20of%20the,have%20partners%2C%E2%80%9D%20said%20Col.>

¹⁰² 2019-2024: DECUR-Minerva fieldwork and interviews with over 400 U.S. and Western military advisors. <https://minerva.defense.gov/Research/Funded-Projects/Article/2469108/foreign-military-training-building-effective-armed-forces-in-weak-states/>.

¹⁰³ Magula, Justin, “The Theater Army’s Central Role in Integrated Deterrence,” *Military Review*, May-June 2022: 77-89.

Surveying the Landscape of Competition

Shifts in U.S. security assistance and military cooperation over the last two decades reflect a strategic reorientation for great power competition, particularly with China and Russia. The attempted pivot towards Asia signifies a broader recognition of the Indo-Pacific region as a central arena for geopolitical competition, necessitating a reallocation of resources and strategic focus as the Philippines and Taiwan appear to be the likely flashpoints in the coming decade.

Europe

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has led to massive U.S. (and Western) security aid packages to support Ukraine's military. Per the Kiel Institute, since 2022, over €105.5 billion (euros) in military assistance has been provided to Ukraine.¹⁰⁴ In addition, the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) NATO mission, which deployed to the Baltics and Poland in 2017 in response to the 2014 invasion of Ukraine, has been further strengthened from its original four multinational battlegroups to eight battlegroups because of Russia's actions in 2022.¹⁰⁵

In such a context, U.S. actions have been to reassure and strengthen allies and partners across Europe. However, the U.S. has not prioritized the training of Ukrainians like other NATO allies have.¹⁰⁶ For instance, the U.S. has trained 20,000 Ukrainian troops (at most) primarily through the National Guard-operated mission of the Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine (JMTG-U).¹⁰⁷ Whereas the British-led Operation Interflex has trained over 45,000 Ukrainian forces¹⁰⁸ and the European Union Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) in support of Ukraine has trained about 60,000 Ukrainians.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, based on our fieldwork and interviews with Western military advisors and Ukrainian trainees, we have discerned that Ukrainians prefer military training from Eastern European personnel because of their understanding of the Ukrainian way of war (i.e., doctrine, organization, tactics, etc.) and willingness to be more flexible in adapting programs of instruction to keep pace with changing conditions in the war.¹¹⁰ The U.S. military could be more effective in its advising, but it would require a major overhaul where "Training programs must "Ukrainify" by integrating Ukrainian battlefield innovations."¹¹¹

The Russia-Ukraine War has also put the U.S. at a strategic crossroads politically and diplomatically as well. The 2024 U.S. election cycle had Europeans gravely concerned about the future of U.S. willingness to maintain a military presence in Europe and to remain in NATO. Such issues have brought *Strategic Autonomy* back to forefront, albeit it was a concept first introduced in 2016, but perceptions about a wavering and unreliable U.S. have made the EU anxious about

¹⁰⁴ Trebesch et al., 2023, "The Ukraine Support Tracker" Kiel WP. <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>.

¹⁰⁵ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm.

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/russia-war-ukraines-hidden-advantage>.

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.europeafrica.army.mil/ArticleViewPressRelease/Article/3678384/press-release-continued-support-to-ukraine-is-top-of-mind-as-us-army-secretary/#:~:text=Of%20the%20more%20than%20more,and%20Grafenwoehr%20and%20For%20Hohenfels>.

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-extend-training-programme-for-ukrainian-armed-forces-personnel-throughout-2025>.

¹⁰⁹ <https://kyivindependent.com/eu-to-train-another-15-000-ukrainian-troops-by-end-of-2024-borrell-says/>.

¹¹⁰ <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/what-does-european-union-advising-of-ukrainian-troops-mean-for-the-blocs-security-policies-an-inside-look-at-the-training-mission/>.

¹¹¹ <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/its-time-to-ukrainify-us-military-assistance/>.

the future of European security.¹¹² Growing EU independence means that European countries might be making defense decisions that undermine U.S. interests or render future cooperation less likely. Hence, European allies are increasingly shouldering more of the defense burden, leading to initiatives like the European Defense Fund (EDF)¹¹³ and PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation).¹¹⁴

Africa

Competing for influence in Africa via SFA is complex.¹¹⁵ Plagued by a resurgence of coups, democratic backsliding, and increasing Chinese and Russian presence, the U.S. and the collective West are losing influence across the African continent. This trend is the most pronounced in the Sahel, where the U.S. and numerous other European militaries (e.g., French, etc.) have essentially been asked to leave by the governments of Chad, Mali, and Niger, while the presence of Russian troops, equipment, and private military contractors (i.e., mercenaries in the Africa Corps)¹¹⁶ has increased.¹¹⁷ A growing part of Russia's strategy in the Sahel is to shore up economic and diplomatic support, which is tied to increased security cooperation with governments across Africa (such as the Central African Republic) that want help fighting extremism, but also want to defend their regimes from pro-democratic movements. This is most pronounced in Libya where Russia supports the faction that controls the eastern part of Libya and Russia plans on building a naval base in Tobruk.¹¹⁸ Russian growth of influence and access across Africa is also due in part to rising anti-colonial attitudes, where access to resources and markets in Africa allows Russia to economically endure current Western sanctions due to the Russia-Ukraine War.

Decreasing focus on CT and COIN has led to a reduced U.S. presence, creating a vacuum that China and Russia exploit through economic investments and military partnerships. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) exemplifies this trend. Chinese economic investments in Africa create strategic footholds, challenging U.S. influence. Meanwhile, the West has attempted to counter BRI with the Lobito Corridor project, but this collaborative U.S.-EU infrastructure project to connect the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia to markets via an Angolan port is too narrow of an approach for the West to outcompete China and Russia on the continent. Additionally, China has increasingly relied on SFA across Africa "to pursue a strategy of economic alignment," because "peace, security, and development are deeply interconnected and which is at the core of its Africa strategy."¹¹⁹ Over time, this may cause fragmentation of militaries within countries due to their relationships and dependence on certain foreign militaries that they rely on for education, training, and equipment.¹²⁰ For instance, in the early 1970s, China "won" the SFA competition for influence and access in Tanzania as Canadian military advisors struggled to maintain relationships within

¹¹² <https://ecfr.eu/article/onwards-and-outwards-why-the-eu-needs-to-move-from-strategic-autonomy-to-strategic-interdependence/>.

¹¹³ [https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/european-defence-fund-\(edf\)](https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/european-defence-fund-(edf)).

¹¹⁴ [https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/permanent-structured-cooperation-\(PESCO\)](https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/permanent-structured-cooperation-(PESCO)).

¹¹⁵ <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2383173/international-competition-to-provide-security-force-assistance-in-africa-civil/>.

¹¹⁶ <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/russias-africa-corps-more-than-old-wine-in-a-new-bottle>.

¹¹⁷ <https://apnews.com/article/mali-wagner-mercenaries-russia-abuses-b03cf8fe6d9ddbcb2d012464944906>.

¹¹⁸ <https://adf-magazine.com/2024/06/report-kremlin-seeks-to-use-libya-as-base-to-spread-russian-colonialism/>.

¹¹⁹ Carrozza, Ilaria, and Nicholas J. Marsh. "Great Power Competition and China's Security Assistance to Africa: Arms, Training, and Influence." *Journal of Global Security Studies* 7, no. 4, 2022: ogac027.

¹²⁰ Robinson, Colin D., and Jahara Matisek. "Military advising and assistance in Somalia: fragmented interveners, fragmented Somali military forces." *Defence Studies* 21, no. 2, 2021: 181-203.

the armed forces of Tanzania due to China outspending them.¹²¹ As China looks for ways to outcompete the U.S., such as building a new naval base in Djibouti¹²² and eying a new base in Equatorial Guinea,¹²³ the West has to identify alternative mechanisms of SFA that make relations with the U.S. and Europe more attractive than partnerships with authoritarian countries like China and Russia.

Asia

According to Security Force Assistance Command (SFAC), which manages six SFABs that are dedicated to specific regions, SFAC contends that 5th SFAB (Joint Base Lewis-McChord) has a “persistent presence [that] plays a critical role” across the Indo-Pacific “to implement integrated deterrence which can be defined as the sum of capabilities, posture, messaging and will. Through integrated deterrence, 5th SFAB ... bolsters our allies’ and partner’s respective defenses to promote restraint and respect among neighbors.”¹²⁴ Already, the U.S. has committed \$2 billion of security assistance to allies and partners across the Indo-Pacific region to help with modernization efforts and “help wean countries off Russian military equipment, help island nations monitor their surrounding waters and perhaps also have others partner with the U.S. to build arms.”¹²⁵

Cooperative measures such as the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) and AUKUS (Australia-UK-U.S. partnership) are pivotal for the U.S. countering China because such efforts foster deeper military coordination and technological sharing. At the same time, Russia is becoming a “strategic spoiler in the Indo-Pacific” as Russia grows closer in cooperative activities with China and North Korea due to growing dependence on them for goods, supplies, and war matériel.¹²⁶ At the same time, Russia is losing influence and access with India due to the fallout of the Russia-Ukraine War, where India has been cancelling defense contracts with Russia and has been reducing cooperative military activities.¹²⁷ Since 2023, Indian concerns about China has led to “working groups on everything ranging from cyberspace and critical technologies to maritime security, and India is leading in those forums together with the U.S. and like-minded partners.”¹²⁸

The U.S. is circumnavigating difficult SFA relationships across the Indo-Pacific region due to fears of provoking China. According to our interviews with SFA policymakers and practitioners since 2019, there has been an aversion to advertising too openly about U.S. military assistance efforts across the region, especially in Taiwan. However, in the aftermath of the 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict, growing concerns that Taiwan is much more vulnerable than originally assumed, the U.S. has been more transparent and vocal about support for Taiwan, such as the 2024 announcement to provide \$8 billion in military aid to Taiwan as the country signs “billions in contracts with the U.S. for latest-generation F-16V fighter jets, M1 Abrams main battle tanks, and the HIMARS rocket

¹²¹ Joyce, Renanah Miles, *Exporting Might and Right: Great Power Security Assistance and Developing Militaries*. Dissertation, Columbia University, 2020.

¹²² Joyce, Renanah Miles, and Brian Blankenship. “The Market for Foreign Bases.” *Security studies* 33, no. 2, 2024: 194-223.

¹²³ <https://ecfr.eu/article/chinas-new-military-base-in-africa-what-it-means-for-europe-and-america/>.

¹²⁴ *Security Force Assistance factbook*, 12 June 2024,

<https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2024/06/12/893cd554/sfac-smartbk.pdf>.

¹²⁵ <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2024/07/19/us-close-to-sending-2-billion-in-security-aid-across-the-indo-pacific/>.

¹²⁶ <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2024/07/russia-is-a-strategic-spoiler-in-the-indo-pacific.html>.

¹²⁷ <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/3475660/india-takes-a-step-away-from-the-russian-defense-industry/>.

¹²⁸ <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3433245/us-india-rapidly-expand-their-military-cooperation/>.

system.”¹²⁹ With only about 200 U.S. military advisors stationed in Taiwan, this may not be enough to help reform and modernize Taiwan’s armed forces.¹³⁰ Hence, there have been renewed calls to bring back the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group-Taiwan that was shuttered in 1979 due to recognition of Beijing as the legitimate government of China as such as advisory group would ensure “that increased U.S. defense support provided to Taiwan is synchronized and woven into a holistic plan that enables a credible defense of the island and helps to reverse the erosion of cross-strait deterrence.”¹³¹

¹²⁹ <https://apnews.com/article/china-taiwan-us-lai-congress-funding-8571139dd8cd1d069a53cfebaccf99c6>.

¹³⁰ <https://www.newsweek.com/america-taiwan-china-military-advisers-armed-forces-training-1794970>.

¹³¹ <https://warontherocks.com/2022/01/reestablish-the-u-s-military-assistance-advisory-group-taiwan/>.

Chapter 7

An Allied Defense Perspective on Irregular Warfare

Dr. Martijn Kitzen and Vibeke Gootzen¹³²

The authors contend that viewing irregular warfare (IW) on a continuum, in which conventional and IW are not dichotomies but rather complementary, is essential in the current era of modern war. This chapter provides an allied perspective of five IW operations and activities, not all twelve.

Introduction

Western armed forces have traditionally been equipped to wage conventional wars in which similarly organised armies must be defeated. However, history has shown that Western militaries were forced to adapt to the fight against irregular opponents at times. For instance, the colonial counterinsurgency campaigns by France or Great Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth century are well known. More recently, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have shaped the allied perspective on IW and crystallised the difficulties in conducting successful IW operations. With today's rise of hybrid warfare, in which a combination of conventional and irregular tactics is deployed (particularly by great powers such as Russia), needs Western militaries to rethink their approach to IW and effectively embed IW capabilities into their military toolbox.¹³³

Although this type of warfare is far from new to Western armed forces, there is no official consensus about a definition of irregular warfare.¹³⁴ One commonality is that IW is typically related to the realm of special operations forces (SOF). In addition, IW is viewed on a continuum next to conventional warfare, whereby the former is below the threshold of the latter (the study of the IW Center by Fabian and Kennedy compared the conceptualisations of IW among five European academic institutions).¹³⁵ Viewing IW on a continuum, in which conventional and IW are not dichotomies but rather complementary, is essential in the current era of hybrid modern war.¹³⁶ Both state and non-state actors deploy kinetic and non-kinetic means to challenge adversaries and persuade entire populations. These activities increasingly take place below the threshold of war, in the so-called 'gray zone.'¹³⁷

Instead of discussing the characteristics of irregular warfare, this chapter provides an understanding of IW from an allied perspective by about five types of IW operations:

- Counterterrorism (CT)
- Counterinsurgency (COIN)
- Stability operations

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¹³³ Kitzen, Martijn, "Operations in Irregular Warfare," in *Handbook of Military Sciences*, ed. Anders McD Sookermany, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020, 1–21.

¹³⁴ Fabian, Sandor and Kennedy, Gabrielle, "The Conceptualization of IW in Europe", Arlington, VA: IW Center, 2023.

¹³⁵ Fabian and Kennedy.

¹³⁶ Kitzen, Martijn, "Conventional and Unconventional War Are Not Opposites," *War Room - U.S. Army War College*, March 28, 2019. <https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/conventional-and-unconventional-war-are-not-opposites/>.

¹³⁷ Votel, Joseph L. et al., "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," *JFQ*, 2016, 101–9.

- Security force assistance (SFA)
- Unconventional warfare (UW)

These have been developed by Western countries to operationalise IW capabilities. The first four operations are defensive strategies as these are focused on countering irregular threats, whilst the latter is an offensive strategy.¹³⁸ These operations largely concur with the U.S. IW Joint Operating Concept 2.0. Indeed, U.S. military doctrine has been very influential on the understanding of IW by European defence institutions, particularly in the 21st century.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, there are a few conceptual and practical anomalies that will be discussed throughout this chapter.

The Operationalisation of Irregular Warfare

The five types of IW operations are closely related to each other and often undertaken at the same time or in a blended form. For instance, the war in Afghanistan encompassed a mixture of all operations. In addition, these are often supported by other activities such as information operations or strategic communication.¹⁴⁰

Counterterrorism

Counterterrorism in the broad sense is aimed at disrupting and countering terrorist threats. This usually demands a whole-of-government approach involving domestic civil authorities. To effectively combat terrorism, one must commit to a strategy of prevention and address the causes of violent extremism as well. For instance, as a response to the wave of Islamist terrorist attacks after 9/11 in Europe, this has led to national countering violent extremism (CVE) programmes.¹⁴¹ However, in the narrow military sense, counterterrorism operations are focused on defeating terrorists or pre-empting threats abroad. These operations, while being part of a defensive strategy, generally have an offensive and conventional character.¹⁴²

From a historical perspective, European countries are quite familiar with counterterrorism operations as several nationalist movements used terrorism as a method to challenge European authorities (for instance the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna [ETA] in Spain or the Irish Republican Army [IRA] in Northern Ireland). Nevertheless, the current approach to counterterrorism is largely defined by the fourth wave of terrorism during the Global War on Terror (GWOT) in the wake of 9/11. The collective defence clause of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was for the first and only time invoked in response to the Al-Qaeda attacks,¹⁴³ which drew many European states into a prolonged war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, whilst initially intended to deal with the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, the U.S.-led counterterrorist campaign turned into a protracted irregular conflict. This exposes the risk of retaliatory operations as these often provoke new attacks or may escalate into an irregular war.¹⁴⁴

When the GWOT expanded, retaliation turned into pre-emption as fighting terrorists abroad made more sense than waiting for attacks at home. Ultimately, this led to the militarisation of

¹³⁸ Kitzen, "Operations in Irregular Warfare."

¹³⁹ Fabian and Kennedy, "The Conceptualization of IW in Europe."

¹⁴⁰ Kitzen, "Operations in Irregular Warfare."

¹⁴¹ Frazer, Owen and Christian Nünlist, "The Concept of Countering Violent Extremism," *CSS Analyses* 183, December 2015: 1–4.

¹⁴² Kitzen, "Operations in Irregular Warfare."

¹⁴³ NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Countering Terrorism," 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_77646.htm.

¹⁴⁴ Kitzen, "Operations in Irregular Warfare."

counterterrorism and a blended form of IW operations in which also counterinsurgency, stability operations, and security force assistance operations existed as part of the larger counterterrorism campaign. The latter has, however, remained at the forefront. Through concepts such as find, fix, finish, exploit, and analyse (F3EA) as well as the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), western armed forces can optimise the process of targeting violent extremists.¹⁴⁵ The latter has been used by some Western militaries not only to identify targets, but also to execute strikes on individuals and facilities. For example, in 2021, the leader of Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, Adnan al-Sahrawi, was killed by France using an armed drone. Nevertheless, the increased use of armed UAVs has led to a hesitancy among European states to use them and raised serious concerns about the legitimacy of the strikes.¹⁴⁶

Counterinsurgency

The practice of counterinsurgency is far from new to Western states as they have led several colonial counterinsurgency campaigns in the nineteenth and twentieth century.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the current field of counterinsurgency, similar to counterterrorism, draws heavily on the Western experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan during which a population-centric approach was adopted (particularly after the release of 2006 version of Field Manual [FM] 3-24, *Insurgencies and Countering Insurgencies*). This entails defeating insurgents by focusing on the needs and security of the population rather than the use of brutal force or an enemy-centric approach. Indeed, due to military asymmetry in irregular warfare, insurgents are forced to use the population for strategic and tactical purposes. Insurgents clandestinely hide among populations and limit Western militaries in their ability to attack out of fear for civilian casualties. In addition, since irregular conflicts are inherently political, insurgents focus on the population for gaining resources, mobilising recruits, and eroding the control of the existing authority.¹⁴⁸ Thus, winning the population has become paramount in Western counterinsurgency.

Military counterinsurgency operations are much more comprehensive than counterterrorism operations. This is because both kinetic and non-kinetic activities are being conducted under counterinsurgency. These activities are labelled under Défense, Diplomacy and Development (3D approach). This means that not only the military, but also other organisations ought to take part in counterinsurgency campaigns. Nevertheless, most of the time it is the military that leads operations and fulfils both kinetic and non-kinetic activities. Since counterinsurgency stressed a comprehensive and integrated approach, security force assistance and stability operations are also often part of the campaign (for the sake of raising a local defence capability and augmenting stability respectively). An important aspect of counterinsurgency for Western countries is the ability to develop situational awareness. This is necessary to conduct information and influence activities with the purpose of influencing the perceptions of the local population. As mentioned before, winning the hearts and minds of the population is crucial.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Kitzen.

¹⁴⁶ Paul Lushenko, Shyam Raman, and Sarah Kreps, "Multilateralism and Public Support for Drone Strikes," *Research & Politics* 9, no. 2, 2022: 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20531680221093433>.

¹⁴⁷ Boyle, Michael J., "The Military Approach to Counterterrorism," in *Routledge Handbook of Terrorism and Counterterrorism*, ed. Andrew Silke, New York: Routledge, 2019; Thomas Rid, "The Nineteenth Century Origins of Counterinsurgency Doctrine," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 33, no. 5, 2010: 727-758, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2010.498259>.

¹⁴⁸ Kitzen, "Operations in Irregular Warfare."

¹⁴⁹ Kitzen.

Although counterinsurgency has been thoroughly researched in theory, in practice it proves to be challenging for Western countries. This became clear during the early stages of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.¹⁵⁰ For instance, NATO forces in Afghanistan were too slow in adapting to the population-centric counterinsurgency approach and gaining the support and trust of the population.¹⁵¹ There are multiple causes to this inability to successfully adapt to counterinsurgency operations. One important issue is the inherent preference of Western militaries for conventional warfighting. Indeed, Western militaries tend to fall back on traditional skills of conventional warfare. In Chora district in Uruzgan, for instance, Dutch armed forces fought a conventional battle against the Taliban forces. The experiences of this battle that were shared in the aftermath focused mostly on conventional warfighting skills, while the focus should have been predominantly on gaining the support of the population.¹⁵² Similarly, in Helmand Province, British armed forces focused on traditional offensive operations (characterised by dispersal through forward operating bases) rather than on counterinsurgency principles.¹⁵³ “Dispersal and the endless but indecisive fighting that followed obstructed engagement with the local population, an understanding of the politics of the theatre, and the acquisition of contact intelligence necessary for the interdiction of hostile forces.”¹⁵⁴

Western military culture and the failure to understand the political, economic and social dynamics of society hampers an effective approach to population-centric counterinsurgency. For instance, at the end of 2007, the town of Musa Qala in Helmand Province was recaptured from the Taliban by the 52nd Brigade of the British Army and brought under control of the internationally backed Afghan government.¹⁵⁵ Despite various development initiatives and attempts at winning hearts and minds, local discontent grew. Governor Mulla Salaam proved to be unpopular as he started feuds with tribal enemies and he was “an ineffective and largely uninterested district governor.”¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, eradication measures targeting the opium poppy cultivation (source of income for the rural population of Helmand) fuelled further discontent.¹⁵⁷ Eventually, “Musa Qala, like much of Helmand, was embroiled in a perfect storm of Taliban resistance that fed off local grievances, reinforced by civilian casualties and collateral damage caused by the fighting.”¹⁵⁸ The clear aspect of the clear, hold, build counterinsurgency tactic was successful but the other aspects proved to be unattainable.

How counterinsurgency operations will be shaped in the future remains uncertain. Based on the outcomes of counterinsurgencies in the past, some scholars emphasise the need for a balanced approach to counterinsurgency, which views the population-centric approach and the enemy-

¹⁵⁰ Kitzen.

¹⁵¹ Kitzen, Martijn, “Western Military Culture and Counterinsurgency: An Ambiguous Reality,” *Scientia Militaria - South African Journal of Military Studies* 40, no. 1, 2012: 1-24, <https://doi.org/10.5787/40-1-982>.

¹⁵² Kitzen.

¹⁵³ Egnell, Robert, “Lessons from Helmand, Afghanistan: What Now for British Counterinsurgency,” *International Affairs* 87, no. 2, 2011: 297-315, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2011.00974.x>.

¹⁵⁴ King, Anthony, “Understanding the Helmand Campaign: British Military Operations in Afghanistan,” *International Affairs* 86, no. 2, 2010: 330, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2010.00884.x>.

¹⁵⁵ Tripodi, Christian, “Hidden Hands: The Failure of Population-Centric Counterinsurgency in Afghanistan 2008-11,” *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 2023:1-29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2023.2169673>.

¹⁵⁶ Tripodi; Theo Farrell, *Unwinnable. Britain's War in Afghanistan*, London: Vintage, 2017: 225.

¹⁵⁷ Farrell, *Unwinnable. Britain's War in Afghanistan*.

¹⁵⁸ Barry, Ben, *Blood, Metal and Dust: How Victory Turned into Defeat in Afghanistan and Iraq*, London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020: 401.

<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kcl/detail.action?docID=6386194>.

centric approach as complementary instead of dichotomies.¹⁵⁹ In addition, there is the question of the willingness of Western countries to engage in violent counterinsurgency campaigns in the future. According to Rid and Keaney, there seems to be a certain gulf between the U.S. and Europe regarding the use of military force in counterinsurgency.¹⁶⁰ Caveats concerning tactics, spending, or troop levels imposed by governments limit several NATO countries in being interoperable with the U.S. in counterinsurgency operations. “In counterinsurgency [...] America is able to tolerate a level of risk, casualties, defence spending, and just violence that its European allies are unwilling to stomach.”¹⁶¹ However, whether this will lead to a discrepancy in the support and conduct of counterinsurgency operations between the U.S. and its allies remains to be seen.

Stability Operations

As the previous section suggests, stabilisation is often an aspect of counterinsurgency. Both stability operations and counterinsurgency operations are focused on securing the needs of the population and enhancing good governance. Nevertheless, there are differences between the two types of IW operations. Stability operations are, in contrast to counterinsurgency, not focused on fighting insurgents but rather on creating stable environments in weak or failed states to prevent the development of irregular threats. These operations therefore pursue a long-term goal as opposed to counterinsurgency operations that are aimed at establishing an acceptable level of stability. In addition, stability operations are therefore more focused on prevention. Another difference concerns the timing. Stability operations are traditionally conducted after the end of a conflict, although this is usually extremely challenging in IW contexts. Sometimes these are also executed during the fighting instead of the aftermath when the operations are part of a counterinsurgency campaign.¹⁶² For instance, in Mali and in the Central African Republic, United Nations (UN) stabilisation operations existed parallel to France’s counterinsurgency campaigns.¹⁶³ Finally, stability operations are often related to peacekeeping and (liberal) peacebuilding, although these should not be confused. While stability operations were originally accused of being “social-engineering efforts pursuing the utopian long-term goal of building Western-type states in fragile countries,” recent efforts tend to take a more local perspective.¹⁶⁴

Stability operations typically require civil-military cooperation as these involve development, the promotion of good governance and state building and humanitarian aid besides security. “Accordingly, most Western governments and multilateral organisations endorse ‘whole of government’, integrated and comprehensive approaches involving a range of hard and soft stabilisation measures.”¹⁶⁵ This leads to a complex system of actors.¹⁶⁶ For instance, in Uruzgan,

¹⁵⁹ Paul, Christopher et al., “Moving Beyond Population-Centric vs. Enemy-Centric Counterinsurgency,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 6, 2016: 1019–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2016.1233643>.

¹⁶⁰ Rid, Thomas and Keaney, Thomas, “Counterinsurgency in Context,” in *Understanding Counterinsurgency*, New York: Routledge, 2010, 255–60.

¹⁶¹ Rid and Keaney, 258.

¹⁶² Kitzen, “Operations in Irregular Warfare.”

¹⁶³ Zimmerman, Shannon, “Parallel Lines in the Sand: The Impact of Parallel French Interventions on UN, United Nations, Stabilization Operations in Mali and the Central African Republic,” *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 28, no. 1, 2022: 58–79, <https://doi.org/10.1163/19426720-02801001>.

¹⁶⁴ Kitzen, “Operations in Irregular Warfare,” 13.

¹⁶⁵ Belloni, Roberto and Moro, Francesco N., “Stability and Stability Operations: Definitions, Drivers, Approaches,” *Ethnopolitics* 18, no. 5, 2019: 446, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2019.1640503>.

¹⁶⁶ Gans, Ben, “Stabilisation Operations as Complex Systems - Order and Chaos in the Interoperability Continuum”, Dissertation, Tilburg University, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.26116/CENTER-LIS-1916>.

the Dutch Task Force-Uruzgan (TFU) consisted of a battle group that focused on the provision of security and a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) that focused mainly on development initiatives. In addition, there were many other agencies, local actors, non-government organisations (NGOs), and the private sector present in the province.¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, a lack of long-term commitment often hampers the effectiveness of such an integrated approach. For this reason, as the next section illustrates, stability efforts also often rely on security force assistance. This allows a host nation to maintain stability and security without the long-term commitment of the providing state.¹⁶⁸

Security Force Assistance

The Allied joint doctrine for security force assistance (SFA) by NATO defines security force assistance as an activity that “assists a host nation in developing a sustainable capability that should enable its defence against threats to stability and security.”¹⁶⁹ SFA operations encompass the training, advising, assisting, and equipping of foreign armies in support of a legitimate authority’s effort to protect its population from internal and external threats. SFA activities range from providing education and equipment to actual assistance during combat operations, whereby SFA practitioners advise, liaise, and mentor soldiers in the field.¹⁷⁰ Since SFA allows for a light footprint and burden sharing, it has become a popular tool among particularly small Western countries.¹⁷¹

The concept of SFA emerged during the GWOT in response to the growing threat of terrorists and insurgencies in weak and fragile states. By enhancing the security apparatus in those weak and fragile states, western countries believed that these threats could be disrupted. This shows that SFA is often part of a larger counterterrorism or counterinsurgency campaign. Although SFA is therefore linked to IW and the GWOT, it can also be used in the context of conventional warfare. The training of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the United Kingdom (UK)-led Multinational Operation Interflex is a prime example of SFA provided to security forces with the purpose of fighting a conventional opponent.¹⁷²

Traditionally, special forces were tasked with SFA operations under the label of military assistance. However, the growing need of assistance during the war in Afghanistan led to the deployment of regular units for SFA activities in so-called operational mentoring and liaison teams (the equivalent of the U.S. embedded training teams).¹⁷³ Today, with the rising demand for SFA, these operations have entered the realm of regular units and have become more and more embedded in the military toolbox of Western militaries.¹⁷⁴ For instance, NATO is still present in Iraq to strengthen the Iraqi Security Forces.¹⁷⁵ In addition, there have been several SFA programs across the African Continent in which Western countries participate, through the European Union (EU), bilateral programmes,

¹⁶⁷ Gans.

¹⁶⁸ Kitzen, “Operations in Irregular Warfare.”

¹⁶⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Allied Joint Doctrine for Security Force Assistance,” May 2016, 1-1.

¹⁷⁰ Kitzen, “Operations in Irregular Warfare.”

¹⁷¹ Wiltenburg, Ivor, “Security Force Assistance: Practised but Not Substantiated,” *Militaire Spectator* 188, no. 2, 2019: 88–99.

¹⁷² UK, United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, “UK to Extend Training Programme for Ukrainian Armed Forces Personnel throughout 2025,” GOV.UK, September 6, 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-extend-training-programme-for-ukrainian-armed-forces-personnel-throughout-2025>.

¹⁷³ Wiltenburg, Ivor, “Adapting to Improve. The Odyssey of the Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams of the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Belgium,” PhD diss, Universiteit Leiden/NLDA, 2023.

¹⁷⁴ Kitzen, “Operations in Irregular Warfare.”

¹⁷⁵ NATO, “NATO Mission Iraq,” 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_166936.htm.

or global initiatives.¹⁷⁶ Finally, as mentioned before, SFA is currently used by Western countries in support of Ukraine against Russia as a conventional opponent. This shift has an impact on the character of SFA as new challenges and priorities arise that have not been prominent in the traditional concept.¹⁷⁷

Important to mention is that the term is often used interchangeably with the so-called concepts of foreign internal defence (FID), military assistance (MA), security sector reform, or security cooperation. Although these concepts are closely related to each other, these should not be confused. For instance, military assistance as mentioned is restricted to the activities of special forces and not regular units.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, foreign internal defence is unique to the U.S. and is not used by allied countries. SFA does not address economic or government issues as FID does.¹⁷⁹

Despite the benefits and popular use of SFA activities, there are also risks involved. These can often be attributed to interest misalignments between the provider and host nation. Whilst the provider is usually focused on countering an external threat (such as transnational terrorism), the receiver is more concerned with the internal balance of power.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, these misalignments can undermine the effectiveness of SFA programs as illustrated by the Afghanistan case study. In addition, SFA is often provided in weak or fragile states, which means that providers often must operate in a challenging environment characterised by corruption and sectarianism.¹⁸¹ Thus, although SFA operations allow Western states to indirectly fight irregular opponents, these should only be executed when local power dynamics and interests are understood.¹⁸²

Unconventional Warfare

Being a special operations force's domain, unconventional warfare has been described by Kilcullen as "one of the oldest most cost-effective and historically most successful forms of warfare."¹⁸³ The basis for today's iteration of Western unconventional warfare was laid during the Second World War when the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) accompanied resistance movements in Nazi-occupied territories.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, in unconventional warfare operations, special forces act as irregulars and team up with local irregular forces to "coerce a hostile power to act in another way, to disrupt it by destabilising its authority so it can no longer effectively take adverse actions, or to overthrow a (shadow) government or enforce the withdrawal of an occupying force."¹⁸⁵ Thus, while the other operationalisations of IW are usually in support of a friendly nation state, unconventional warfare is in support of an insurgency or resistance. The occupying power or nation

¹⁷⁶ Marsh, Nicholas et al., "Compounding Fragmentation: Security Force Assistance to Fragile States in the Sahel and Horn of Africa", Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo, 2020.

¹⁷⁷ Gootzen, Vibeke, Wiltenburg, Ivor, and Kitzen, Martijn, "Operation Interflex: A Change in the Character of Security Force Assistance," *Defense & Security Analysis*, 2025, forthcoming.

¹⁷⁸ Wiltenburg, "Security Force Assistance: Practised but Not Substantiated."

¹⁷⁹ U.S. SOCOM, "Security Force Assistance Introductory Guide", U.S. SOCOM, July 28, 2011.

¹⁸⁰ Biddle, Stephen, Macdonald, Julia, and Baker, Ryan, "Small Footprint, Small Payoff: The Military Effectiveness of Security Force Assistance," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, no. 1–2, 2018: 89–142, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2017.1307745>.

¹⁸¹ Emily Knowles and Jahara Matissek, "Western Security Force Assistance in Weak States: Time for a Peacebuilding Approach," *The RUSI Journal* 164, no. 3, 2019: 10–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2019.1643258>.

¹⁸² Kitzen, "Operations in Irregular Warfare."

¹⁸³ Kilcullen, David, "The Evolution of Unconventional Warfare," *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 2, no. 1, 2019: 70, <https://doi.org/10.31374/sjms.35>.

¹⁸⁴ Kilcullen.

¹⁸⁵ Kitzen, "Operations in Irregular Warfare," 15.

state is in this case the hostile actor. As such, unconventional warfare can be used by governments to engage in proxy war against other states or it can be used against nonstate actors and occupying powers that gained control over a population and territory.¹⁸⁶ Although unconventional warfare is usually a special force's domain, regular forces are occasionally introduced to this type of IW as well.¹⁸⁷

Supporting irregular allies can range from providing training to combat assistance. The political context in which this support takes place is important to consider and partly determines the outcome of the operation. The cooperation serves an overarching strategic purpose. As mentioned, the aim is usually to overthrow a government or destabilise an authority. Supporting movements that are unpopular will not be able to rule through consent and gain international support. "Thus, SOF not only rely on proxy forces for tactical effects but also for the political legitimacy of their mission."¹⁸⁸ This also means that there must be enough common ground and shared interests with the irregular ally beforehand. Ultimately, this requires in-depth knowledge of the irregular groups as well as the relation of this group to the population.¹⁸⁹ In other words, a proper understanding of the human domain is crucial in unconventional warfare. Additionally, building trust with allies is important. Abandonment of allies can have detrimental long-term consequences.¹⁹⁰

Western IW scholars are currently focused on the question as to how unconventional warfare will be used and shaped in the future. With regards to the former (use), although there is a turn to great power competition, states continue to use unconventional warfare as a tool. For instance, Russia is using unconventional military means beyond Ukraine to destabilise European countries and gain influence in Africa and in the Middle East.¹⁹¹ Since special forces are able to conduct "low-visibility, small-footprint and politically sensitive operations," they are therefore attractive for Western governments to deploy as a strategic tool in response to such hybrid threats.¹⁹²

In the UK, this has led to the creation of the new ranger regiment in 2021, which forms the foundation of the Army special operations brigade and is optimised to operate below the threshold of war alongside, and through, specialised partners to deliver operational-level insights and effects.¹⁹³

With regards to the latter (shape), according to Kilcullen, unconventional warfare will be shaped by certain trends such as electronic connectivity that lead to ambiguous spaces between overt and clandestine activities (liminal warfare).¹⁹⁴ Additionally, technologies and connectivity have opened up the possibility for remote unconventional warfare whereby partners are being supported

¹⁸⁶ Kitzen.

¹⁸⁷ Kitzen.

¹⁸⁸ Burchall Henningsen, Troels, "Great Power Competition, Proxy War and Special Operations Forces," in *Into the Void: Special Operations Forces after the War on Terror*, ed. James D Kiras and Martijn Kitzen, London: Hurst, 2024, 28.

¹⁸⁹ Kitzen, "Operations in Irregular Warfare."

¹⁹⁰ Kitzen.

¹⁹¹ Watling, Jack, Danylyuk, Oleksandr, and Reynolds, Nick, "The Threat from Russia's Unconventional Warfare Beyond Ukraine, 2022–24", London: Royal United Services Institute, 2024.

¹⁹² Schwarzbauer, Matthias and Tuinman, Joost, "NATO's, North Atlantic Treaty Organization's, Special Operations Forces. Strategic Utility for Strategic Competition," in *Into the Void: Special Operations Forces after the War on Terror*, ed. Kiras, James D. and Kitzen, Martijn, London: Hurst, 2024; Votel et al., "Unconventional Warfare in the Gray Zone," 102.

¹⁹³ "Ranger Regiment," <https://www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/corps-regiments-and-units/ranger-regiment/>, No pagination.

¹⁹⁴ Kilcullen, "The Evolution of Unconventional Warfare."

from a distance without actual physical presence.¹⁹⁵ These trends have a nonlinear character; however, which means that it remains difficult to predict the future of unconventional warfare.¹⁹⁶

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced an allied perspective on IW by outlining five types of IW operations that are executed by Western armed forces to counter irregular threats. As this chapter has shown, these operations are often implemented in a blended form, whereby there is overlap between the tasks and purposes of the operations. In addition, while these closely align with the operationalisation of IW by the U.S., there are small differences such as the concept of FED that is unique to the U.S., the operational experiences particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the diverging perspective on the use of force.

Today, in a context of strategic competition, Western armed forces turn to adapt for regular warfare again and NATO is focusing on the traditional strategies of deterrence and defence. However, the lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan have not been properly institutionalised yet. This is problematic as the dissemination of lessons allows for military flexibility, which is needed to respond in today's operational environment.¹⁹⁷ As emphasised in this chapter, the hybrid character of modern warfare entails both regular and irregular methods. It is therefore essential for the U.S. and its allies to properly embed IW capabilities in their militaries.¹⁹⁸

The IW operations described in this chapter will continue to be relevant for Western armed forces. For instance, SFA as a traditional IW activity is now deployed as a strategic tool to counter Russia as a conventional threat. In addition, even in conventional wars, irregular tactics are being used by both the state as well as state proxies, particularly in the gray zone.¹⁹⁹ Finally, instability in Africa and the Middle East (regions that are increasingly being destabilised by great powers) require Western states to keep up with IW operations. Thus, only by embracing IW operations and the underlying body of knowledge in addition to traditional tasks and ideas, will today's militaries prepare themselves for fighting tomorrow's wars.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵ David Kilcullen, "Irregular and Unconventional Warfare," in *Routledge Handbook of the Future of Warfare*, ed. Artur Gruszczak and Sebastian Kaempf, London: Routledge, 2023, 166–77, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003299011-19>.

¹⁹⁶ Kilcullen, "The Evolution of Unconventional Warfare."

¹⁹⁷ Christopher Tuck, *Understanding Land Warfare*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003096252>.

¹⁹⁸ Kitzen, "Operations in Irregular Warfare."

¹⁹⁹ James W Derleth, "Great Power Competition, Irregular Warfare, and the Gray Zone," *IW C Perspectives*, 2023:1-3.

²⁰⁰ Kitzen, "Operations in Irregular Warfare," 18.

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Chapter 8

China's Irregular Gray Zone Air Power

Dr. Peter Layton²⁰¹

The author contends that China has turned to an irregular warfare approach with its increasing use of gray zone air power. China's gray zone air power is a steadily worsening problem but not a problem that focusing on fielding high-end military equipment will solve. This article examines China's use of airpower in so called gray zones to project its presence and its threat to U.S. allies and partners in the Pacific region.

The rapid expansion of China's military forces has attracted considerable attention. The response to China's buildup has generally been symmetrical with others also embarking on acquiring high-end military equipment. U.S. air power's key operational imperatives are an example and include designing the next generation of air dominance fighter, fielding the B-21 next-generation bomber, and upgrading the F-35 jet. Such responses have important deterrence value but can obscure the fact that air power can be used in more ways than major conflict warfighting.

In the last few years, China has turned to an irregular warfare approach with its increasing use of gray zone air power. China's largest irregular air power application occurs daily within Japan's and Taiwan's air defense identification zones (ADIZs).²⁰² China's use of air power in this gray zone manner is novel in not being employed in a regular manner or intended to achieve a conventional air power goal.

China's gray zone air power has been most effective in gaining the close attention of Japan and Taiwan. Worryingly, China is steadily escalating both in the means used and in the aggressiveness this air power is being yielded. China's gray zone air power is a steadily worsening problem but not a problem that focusing on fielding high-end military equipment will solve. Attention also needs to be given to China's gray zone strategy and its strengths and weakness when considering possible gray zone counters.

Gray Zone Strategy

Gray zone activities aim to gain others' deference through their concern over the consequences if the state taking such actions escalates to using violence. It is not the actions themselves but the fear of what could happen that is influential. Gray zone actions involve a carefully measured movement toward political objectives while deliberately staying below key escalatory thresholds to avoid war.²⁰³ In contrast, as noted in Frank Hoffmann's 2018 distinction, hybrid warfare uses violence and as the name suggests, is a form of war.²⁰⁴

In excluding war, but also not being at peace, several inferences can be drawn from experiences in employing military forces in both circumstances. Gray zone actions aim to gradually accumulate successes through a series of interlinked actions. This means implementation in a carefully

²⁰¹ Dr Peter Layton is a Visiting Fellow at the Griffith Asia Institute, Griffith University, and a Royal United Services Institute Associate Fellow.

²⁰² Trent, Mercedes, *Over the Line: The Implications of China's ADIZ, Air Defense Identification Zones Intrusions in Northeast Asia*, Federation of American Scientists, 2020.

²⁰³ Mazarr, Michael J., *Mastering the Gray Zone: Understanding a Changing Era of Conflict*, Carlisle: United States Army War College, 2015, 58-67.

²⁰⁴ Hoffman Frank G., "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges," *PRISM*, Volume 7 no. 4, 2018, 30-47.

designed campaign plan and control by strategic-level commanders able to allocate and apply significant resources.²⁰⁵ Moreover, tactical-level operations in the gray zone must be tightly controlled to avoid an unintended escalation into war. It's a form of carefully scripted brinkmanship.

Considering the resources required for cumulative interlinked actions, China has an inherent strategic advantage in having vast scale. Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi once famously declared, "China is a big country and you are small countries and that is a fact."²⁰⁶ Beijing exploits this advantage to gradually wear other nations down and into showing deference, an acceptance of China's influence and that they should always consider China before they take actions.

China's gray zone activities are protracted by design and a seemingly forever drain on other smaller nations' resources. However, inherent in this drawn-out approach is the need to keep continually ratcheting up the gray zone actions.²⁰⁷ The nations targeted will be less attentive and less fearful if China's activities become seen as normal.

Such ratcheting requires some prudence as gray zone operations need to be calibrated to the resilience of the existing peace. If the peace is delicate with all the posture to fight, gray zone operations may be too risky to undertake. Gray zone activities rely on the current peace having sufficient resilience to absorb a gray zone shock and bounce back, not a fragile peace that can suddenly shatter and end up in a war.

Gray Zone Air Power

China's gray zone strategy (way) is to use military and paramilitary means to incessantly intrude into geographic areas of concern to the countries affected, continuously reminding them of China's presence and the threat it poses.²⁰⁸ Japan's ADIZ surrounds the nation but the sensitive area where Chinese aircraft mainly intrude is in the East China Sea. For Taiwan, the pressure points are on the western side of the island's ADIZ, particularly the median line halfway between Taiwan and the mainland of China.

In the case of Japan, there are about 600 Chinese military aircraft intrusions annually.²⁰⁹ Most are twin-engine fighters (such as J-16s and J-10s), often in multiple aircraft formations, with occasional long-range H-6 bombers, Y-8 electronic reconnaissance aircraft, and uncrewed air vehicles.²¹⁰ The fighters are at times armed with air-to-air missiles.

In 2013, China ratcheted up matters by declaring an ADIZ in international airspace that overlapped Japan's. Against international law, China then began requiring all transiting aircraft to comply with

²⁰⁵ Layton, Peter, *China's Enduring Grey-Zone Challenge*, Canberra: Air and Space Power Centre, 2021, 2-4.

²⁰⁶ Storey, Ian, "China's Missteps in Southeast Asia: Less Charm, More Offensive," *Jamestown Foundation: China Brief*, Volume 10 Issue 25, December 17, 2010, 4.

²⁰⁷ Layton, Peter, "China's discordant grey-zone grand strategy," *Australian Journal of Defence and Strategic Studies*, Volume 5 no. 2, 2023, 337-339.

²⁰⁸ Layton, Peter, "As the world looks elsewhere, China stirs trouble in the South China Sea," *Interpreter*, October 25, 2023, <<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/world-looks-elsewhere-china-stirs-trouble-south-china-sea>>.

²⁰⁹ Solen, Derek, *Beijing's "New Normal" in the Skies around Japan*, Maxwell: China Aerospace Studies Institute, April 2021.

²¹⁰ Newdick, Thomas, "Japanese Fighters Intercept China's High-Flying WZ-7 Drone for First Time," *The WarZone*, January 2, 2023, <<https://www.twz.com/japanese-fighters-intercept-chinas-high-flying-wz-7-drone-for-first-time>>.

certain procedures.²¹¹ In 2024, China further heightened tensions with the stationing of four Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) Navy warships on its ADIZ boundaries. These ships now request all non-Chinese civilian aircraft in the ADIZ to immediately leave and sometimes threaten so-called defensive emergency measures if an aircraft fails to comply.²¹² This appears another step in trying to turn international airspace in the East China Sea into China's territorial airspace with PLA fighter interceptions of transiting civil aircraft possible in the future.

Around Taiwan, China uses its air power in a similar manner although with greater scale and belligerence.²¹³ After decades of generally avoiding Taiwan's ADIZ, Chinese aircraft intrusions have recently dramatically increased. In the three years from mid-2020 to mid-2023, there were some 4,000 intrusions involving approximately 20 different types of aircraft: fighters, bombers, early warning aircraft, and antisubmarine warfare aircraft with about 10 percent uncrewed air vehicles. The largest daily event involved 103 PLA aircraft, 40 of which crossed the median line.²¹⁴

Fighters make up most aircraft crossing the median line with the most common being the J-16, an improved Chinese-built development of Russia's Su-27. Considering large aircraft, the Y-8 anti-submarine warfare aircraft is the most prevalent.

PLA aircraft incursions mostly occur in the southwest sector of the ADIZ and often roughly midway, about 100 nautical miles, between Taiwan and the Taiwanese Pratas Islands.²¹⁵ To some extent, many of these incursions could be excused as aircrew training as they do not fly toward Taiwan or the Islands but directly into the Pacific.²¹⁶ This is not so of the incursions across the median line immediately adjacent to Taiwan. These are clearly designed to send a message, at times clearly spelt out in the media to avoid missing the intent.²¹⁷ Their rate has been rapidly increasing, from 22 in 2020 to 703 in 2023.²¹⁸ These incursions are usually shallow, 4-5 miles or so, and sometimes involve only a single aircraft.²¹⁹ Nonetheless, their high-speed approach can lead to quick reaction alert aircraft scrambling from Taiwanese airbases.

²¹¹ Pedrozo, Raul "Pete," "China's Legacy Maritime Claims," *Lawfare*, July 15, 2016, <<https://www.lawfaremedia.org/article/chinas-legacy-maritime-claims>>. Defense Ministry spokesman on China's air defense identification zone, Embassy of the People's Republic of China in India, December 4, 2013, <http://in.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/gdxw/201312/t20131204_2143850.htm>.

²¹² "4 Chinese Warships Deployed Around Taiwan, Sources Say; Believed Ships Will Collaborate with Other Warships in East China Sea," *The Japan Times*, January 30, 2024, <<https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/politics/defense-security/20240130-165702/>>.

²¹³ Doyle, Gerry, Katakam, Anand, Blanchard, Ben and Hernandez, Marco, "The skies over the South China Sea," *Reuters*, October 19, 2021, <<https://www.reuters.com/graphics/TAIWAN-CHINA/byvjrimgnve/>>.

²¹⁴ Aita Morik, "Chinese PLA, People's Liberation Army, Intrusions into Taiwan's ADIZ, air defense identification zones, 2", *NIDS Commentary No. 275*, September 28, 2023, 1-5, <<https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/commentary/pdf/commentary275e.pdf>>.

²¹⁵ Salmon, Andrew, "China's Taiwan incursions are more sound than fury," *Asia Times*, October 7, 2021, <<https://asiatimes.com/2021/10/chinas-taiwan-incursions-are-more-sound-than-fury/>>.

²¹⁶ Shih, Silva, Kao, Daniel, Lee, Sylvia, Chen, Yingyu and Koo, Shuren, "Why the Chinese Military Has Increased Activity Near Taiwan," *Commonwealth Magazine*, November 2, 2021, <<https://web.cw.com.tw/taiwan-strait-2021-en/index.html>>.

²¹⁷ For example: Liu Xuanzun, "PLA warplanes, warships spotted in nighttime patrols around Taiwan island," *Global Times*, January 18, 2024, <<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202401/1305673.shtml>>.

²¹⁸ An important database for analysts is Ben Lewis and Gerald C. Brown, "Taiwan ADIZ Violations," *China Power: Center for Strategic and International Studies*, <<https://chinapower.csis.org/data/taiwan-adiz-violations/>>.

²¹⁹ Everington, Keoni, "China's September incursions into Taiwan ADIZ up by 42% from August," *Taiwan News*, October 2, 2023, <<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/news/5011824>>.

During the Fourth Taiwan Straits Crisis in August 2022, 11 ballistic missiles were fired into zones north, east, and south of Taiwan. Four missiles passed over Taiwan at more than 100 kilometers altitude, technically outside Taiwan's airspace. Five impacted in Japan's exclusive economic zone.²²⁰

China continues to ratchet up its actions. In late 2023, China started sending balloons into Taiwan's territorial air space. An estimated 26 had overflowed the island at altitudes between 15,000 and 38,000 feet by the middle of February 2024.²²¹ In early 2024, and resembling its 2013 ADIZ attention-seeking lawfare stunt with Japan, China announced it would unilaterally move an earlier mutually agreed civil aircraft flight corridor eastward in the Taiwan Strait to within four nautical miles of the median line.²²² Accordingly, Chinese civilian aircraft making even minor diversions for weather conditions are likely to intrude across the median line.

Implications

Responding to China's incursions is taxing for both Japan and Taiwan. Japanese fighters are frequently scrambling to try to intercept Chinese military aircraft penetrating their East China Sea ADIZ. However, Japan is finding it difficult to sustain this air policing posture and is being forced to cut back, creating a vacuum that China might fill and thereby incrementally gain de facto control of much of Japan's East China Sea ADIZ airspace, particularly that over the Senkaku Islands. Despite the drain on resources, this worry drives Japan to believe it must continuously demonstrate strong determination to maintain its ADIZ and territorial sovereignty.²²³

Taiwan is even more stretched given its limited air capabilities compared to China and that China also uses ballistic missiles and balloons to ramp up pressure.²²⁴ Initially, Taiwan scrambled fighters in response to China's aircraft incursions but the dramatic increase in 2020 began imposing unsustainable costs. By the end of the year, some 8.7 percent of Taiwan's defense budget was being spent on responding (this cost also included increased naval tasking). In early 2021, policy changed to emphasize surface-to-air missile system tracking of incoming PLA aircraft rather than fighter aircraft scrambles.²²⁵

Both Japan and Taiwan are assiduous in publicizing China's incursions, including by providing records accessible on the internet.²²⁶ This can help mobilize domestic public opinion to support

²²⁰ China Power Team, "Tracking the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis," *China Power: Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Updated November 8, 2023, <<https://chinapower.csis.org/data/taiwan-adiz-violations/>>.

²²¹ McCartney, Micah, "Map Shows China's New Pressure Tactic Against Taiwan—Balloons," *Newsweek*, January 26, 2024, <<https://www.newsweek.com/china-taiwan-weather-balloon-map-airspace-violation-political-military-pressure-1864165>>. Wu Che-yu and Jake Chung, "A record eight Chinese balloons detected: MND," *Taiwan News*, February 11, 2024, <<https://www.taipetimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2024/02/11/2003813398>>.

²²² Eldridge, Robert D., "A New Trojan Horse from China, Why It's Irresponsible to Outright Dangerous," *Japan Forward*, February 5, 2024, <<https://japan-forward.com/a-new-trojan-horse-from-china-why-its-irresponsible-to-outright-dangerous/>>.

²²³ Layton, Peter, *Grey Zone Challenges and Australia-Japan Defence Cooperation*, Brisbane: Griffith Asia Institute, 2022, 7-10.

²²⁴ Emily Feng and Connie Hanzhang Jin, "China is subtly increasing military pressure on Taiwan. Here's how," *NPR*, December 18, 2023, <<https://www.npr.org/2023/12/18/1216317476/china-military-taiwan-air-defense>>.

²²⁵ Ben Blanchard, "Taiwan says tracks intruding Chinese aircraft with missiles, not always scrambling," *Reuters*, March 29, 2021, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-security/taiwan-says-tracks-intruding-chinese-aircraft-with-missiles-not-always-scrambling-idUSKBN2BL0JS/>>.

²²⁶ For Japan example see: "Statistics on Scrambles through the First Quarter of FY2020," *Joint Staff Press Release*, July 10, 2020, <https://www.mod.go.jp/js/pdf/2020/p20200710_02.pdf>. For Taiwan see: Thomas J. Shattuck and

pushback. More ambitiously, some consider that China can also be embarrassed by a wider and more comprehensive publicizing of its gray zone actions and thus be deterred from continuing them.²²⁷ However, there is no firm evidence to support this. To the contrary, it may be considered helpful to China by widely publicizing its power in a manner that wins it deference.²²⁸

Indeed, the Chinese Communist Party's major media mouthpiece, the *Global Times*, continually uses Taiwan's Defense Ministry information on ADIZ incursions in its propaganda posts. An example is a recent article that argued that PLA aircraft incursions into Taiwan's ADIZ are legal as Taiwanese airspace is rightfully China's.²²⁹ The *Global Times* is diligent in using such issues to showcase Chinese military power, stoke Chinese nationalism, and gain support for the Communist Party taking an aggressive stance toward its neighbors.²³⁰

Counter-gray Zone Guidelines

Countering China's gray zone efforts is difficult as responding is an outcome China pursues in its quest for others' deference. Considering gray zone characteristics and China's concerted actions, several high-level guidelines are offered:

- First, a counter-gray zone campaign is likely to be a drawn-out operation taxing for all, not least because of the extra people, funds, and equipment required during the long process. The level of such support available is likely to shape the counter-gray zone actions taken, their frequency, and duration. Gaining and sustaining material support and societal backing for the counter-campaign will be fundamental to the campaign.
- Second, focus on the decision makers involved. Decision makers at various levels controlling a local gray zone activity will have goals, motivations, and vulnerabilities that may be able to be discerned, understood, and exploited. Strategic-level decision makers in being remote and making long-term set-and-forget plans may be less aware of the local operational setting, the daily shifts in the local balance of forces, or the possibilities of pushback. The operational commanders seeking to avoid escalation may have concerns that can be manipulated to make them worried about events if these unfold differently or faster than planned. At the tactical level, there may be opportunities to create confusion through acting unexpectedly and using deception. Such confusion at the tactical level may reverberate upwards, creating uncertainties, upending planning, and impeding decision making. The more the architects of deterrence measures understand the key actors, the more tailored the measures and the more effective they will be.
- Third, China's ADIZ incursions are inherently theatrical and consequently, responses might be designed to concern, confuse, or deceive China's political and military leadership. An obvious example is to implement a tit-for-tat strategy, reciprocating China's incursions with

Benjamin Lewis, "How Taiwan's New President Should Respond to Chinese Coercion," *War on the Rocks*, January 31, 2024, <<https://warontherocks.com/2024/01/how-taiwans-new-president-should-respond-to-chinese-coercion/>>.

²²⁷ Shattuck, Thomas J., Lewis, Benjamin, and Allen, Kenneth, "Taiwan Should Follow the Philippines" Model for Revealing China's Gray Zone Tactics," *The Diplomat*, 3 November 2023, <<https://thediplomat.com/2023/11/taiwan-should-follow-the-philippines-model-for-revealing-chinas-gray-zone-tactics/>>.

²²⁸ Xuanzun, Liu, "Over 100 PLA, People's Liberation Army, warplanes set new record in drill around Taiwan island," *Global Times*, September 18, 2023, <<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202309/1298396.shtml>>.

²²⁹ Xuanzun, Liu, "PLA aircraft approach 24-nautical-mile line of Taiwan island," *Global Times*, June 25, 2023, <<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202306/1293135.shtml>>.

²³⁰ A typical example is Xuanzun, Liu, "Taiwan's exercise hyping PLA turning drills into attack only political show, exposes guilty conscience of "Taiwan independence" secessionists: experts," *Global Times*, February 1, 2024, <<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202402/1306507.shtml>>.

symmetry in time and space. If Taiwan briefly penetrates the median line about 4-5 miles to the west before turning around, China might face the unwelcome choice of either stopping its gray zone activities or escalating. The latter is improbable since the success of China's gray zone activities rely on today's peace holding. Escalation would globally signal a significant Chinese failure. Nevertheless, any pushback carries risk and needs prudent management.

- Fourth, an important part of a successful gray zone counter may be a capability to respond quickly to new developments before they become the new normal and wargaming could help develop these responses. Such considerations highlight the need for high-quality intelligence, both quantitative information about the participating military units and qualitative intelligence about how each of the various actors may be expected to react.
- Fifth, efforts should be made to establish a dedicated hotline between Japan, Taiwan, and China to allow military-to-military communication if a gray zone event occurs that threatens escalation into conflict. Such efforts might be guided by the experiences of both the U.S.-Russia and the Israel-Russia hotlines established in 2015 to manage risks arising from inflight incidents over Syria. The Israeli hotline aimed to enhance cooperation with Russia. The U.S. hotline deliberately shunned cooperation and sought instead simply to be able to defuse tensions in a crisis.²³¹ The two hotlines have had mixed success but appear to have been successful in acting as a circuit breaker in times of crisis. China and Japan already have a hotline, but it seems at the diplomatic not military level and its use and operating parameters are opaque.²³² Efforts to establish military-to-military hotlines between Japan, Taiwan, and China may not be successful but publicizing the effort will at least gain regional and global approval.

Lastly, both Japan and Taiwan have similar problems with China's gray zone actions. These actions and China's increasing belligerence have led to closer linkages emerging between Japan and Taiwan.²³³ Conditions seem set for greater cooperation including exchanging experiences, examining expected future developments, providing air tracking data and possibly coordinated air policing. However, China is very sensitive about Taiwan and that means any Japan-Taiwan military-to-military cooperation would evoke noisy outbursts from China. Such sensitivities of course are also a possible pressure point able to be used in response to some new ratcheting up by China of its gray zone actions. Nevertheless, openly discussing such cooperation would signal displeasure to Beijing about China's actions and may be used to send a strong deterrence message to China to cease ratcheting up its actions.

Gray zone activities do not involve violence normally associated with offensive air power. Instead, China is seeking deference and submissiveness from others through implying the possibility of

²³¹ "Russia-Israel "hotline" to prevent aerial clashes in Syria," *The Times of Israel*, October 15, 2015, <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/russia-israel-hotline-to-prevent-aerial-clashes-in-syria/>>. Juliette Faure, "The U.S.-Russia military hotline in Europe: Key principles for risk reduction from the U.S.-Russia deconfliction measures in Syria," *European Leadership Network*, March 17, 2022, <<https://europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/the-us-russia-military-hotline-in-europe-key-principles-for-risk-reduction-from-the-us-russia-deconfliction-measures-in-syria/>>.

²³² MacArthur Bosack, Michael, "How the Japan-China Hotline Can Help Stop Crisis from Turning into Conflict," *United States Institute of Peace*, September 7, 2023, <<https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/09/how-japan-china-hotline-can-help-stop-crisis-turning-conflict>>.

²³³ Yang, William, Increased Chinese Military Maneuvers Prompt Japan to Appoint New Defense Personnel, *VOA*, September 18, 2023, <<https://www.voanews.com/a/increased-chinese-military-maneuvers-prompt-japan-to-appoint-new-defense-personnel-/7272630.html>>.

military escalation and bloodshed. The maintenance of the peace, not the winning of a skirmish, shapes gray zone actions. It is a use of air power fundamentally different to conventional thinking and that exploits both China's advantages and a good understanding of others' anxieties. It is a form of irregular air warfare but not as often imagined.

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Chapter 9
Maritime Maneuvers
Navigating Irregular Warfare in Yemen's Civil War
James Micciche and Adam K. Christensen²³⁴

In this chapter, the authors contend that irregular warfare activities conducted in the maritime domain restricted adversary access to proxies, bolstered humanitarian efforts, and facilitated a shift in control to an international authority in Yemen. The maritime strategy for Yemen did much to stabilize the region, supporting foreign internal defense and counterterrorism. While the military aspect of the maritime strategy was not the primary focus, it was crucial to its success.

Before the 2018 National Defense Strategy recognized irregular warfare (IW) as a key competency for the joint force, a unique cell of Navy surface warfare and intelligence officers, an Army civil affairs team (CAT), and Royal Navy of the United Kingdom personnel initiated a maritime irregular warfare campaign in the early stages of the country of Yemen's civil war. Led by the Maritime Coalition Coordination Cell (MCCC), this 18-month campaign successfully restricted adversary access to proxies, bolstered humanitarian efforts, and facilitated a shift in control to an international authority. The MCCC's experience managing effects of this conflict provides lessons for conducting irregular warfare in the maritime domain, particularly in establishing clear objectives, building and maintaining human networks, effective information sharing, and integrating military actions with diplomatic and economic initiatives. The MCCC's lessons apply not only to strategic competition with the People's Republic of China (PRC) but also on the reemerging threat to the Red Sea by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

Responding to the Yemeni Civil War: The Maritime Coalition Coordination Cell's Role in Irregular Warfare

Long plagued by civil wars, extremism, and poverty, Yemen faced a new crisis in January 2015 when the Houthi-Saleh alliance overthrew the sitting government.²³⁵ This sparked a civil war, drawing in Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and leading to a United Nations arms embargo.²³⁶ The conflict, characterized by extensive air strikes and missile use, also posed major maritime challenges which included threats to the Bab-el-Mandeb oil transit route, through which an estimated 6.2 million barrels of oil (accounting for approximately nine percent of the world's seaborne traded petroleum) passed daily.²³⁷ Recognizing that most Yemenis depended on maritime-transported food imports for survival, the U.S. Navy responded by establishing the MCCC.

²³⁴ James P. Micciche is a recently retired U.S. Army Strategist. Adam K. Christensen is a U.S. Navy Surface Warfare Officer and is currently assigned to U.S. Strategic Command.

²³⁵ Almasmarie, Hakin and Chulov, Martin, "Houthi Rebels Seize Yemen President's Palace and Shell Home," *The Guardian*, June 20, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/20/houthi-rebels-seize-yemen-presidential-palace>, retrieved August 12, 2024.

²³⁶ United Nations Security Council, *S/RES/2216*, New York, New York: The United Nations, April 14, 2015, <https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/s/res/2216-%282015%29-0>, retrieved August 12, 2024.

²³⁷ United States Energy Information Agency, *The Bab el-Mandeb Strait is a Strategic Route for Oil and Natural Gas Shipments*, Washington, D.C.: United States Energy Information Agency, August 27, 2016, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=41073#:~:text=In%202018%2C%20an%20estimated%206.2,million%20b%2Fd%20in%202014>, retrieved August 12, 2024.

This multinational organization was tasked not only with securing oil routes and enforcing the arms embargo, but also with protecting essential food shipments into Yemen. Addressing these interconnected challenges involved building a network of diverse partners to lessen the Civil War's impact. Over its 18 months of operational activity, this network was instrumental in understanding the dynamic interests of influential regional and international actors and working towards realigning objectives to support all partners and foster compromise. The network was one of the most important tools in effectively transitioning the MCCC into an internationally recognized mechanism under the United Nations (UN) while concurrently addressing the humanitarian crisis and countering conditions that foster extremism and terrorism.

Maritime Coalition Coordination Cell's Approaches and Successes

The MCCC's strategy for Yemen did much to stabilize the region, supporting foreign internal defense and counterterrorism. Four lines of effort were key to the MCCC's success:

- Goal alignment
- Network building
- Information sharing
- Aligning military actions with diplomatic and economic initiatives

Despite limited resources, the MCCC improved the ability of regional partners to focus limited resources on interdicting small vessels, a greater smuggling threat, and worked with a wide range of unified action partners to help foster a multilateral approach. The MCCC's approach offers a model for future engagements, particularly in the Indo-Pacific area and in addressing emerging crises like Gaza in the Middle East where maritime humanitarian delivery and deconfliction are highly likely. Additionally, in late 2023 the Houthi rebels, who still control most of the west of Yemen, have begun targeting commercial vessels transiting the Red Sea in their efforts to support Hamas in the ongoing Israel-Hamas war. This capability has already begun affecting commercial maritime shipping and calls for a multinational solution in which industry plays a major role.

Setting, Changing, and Achieving Objectives Through a Network

The U.S. Navy, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Department of State always aimed to transition the MCCC's functions to an internationally recognized organization. Although the campaign's end goal consistently focused on transition, the specifics of who would take over the MCCC its functions evolved up until the day the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) for Yemen began operations.²³⁸ The MCCC developed its initial objective in collaboration with the U.S. State Department, USAID, and policymakers in Washington, D.C., a luxury not all organizations engaged in irregular warfare are afforded. Despite this alignment of policy and strategy, the MCCC learned that in any form of warfare, allies and partners often have a significant say, sometimes even more than the adversary.

One major challenge of collaborating with multiple partners is identifying and understanding their interests to find a mutually agreeable end state. This task was more complex than just overlapping two circles in a Venn diagram, the MCCC had to consider half-a-dozen shifting interrelated circles across each element of national power. Regular and open engagement with partners through liaison officers stationed at their headquarters, operations centers, or embassies was key to managing this intricate problem. This network not only helped establish the initial goals for the MCCC but also quickly identified shifts in partners' interests based on battlefield developments allowing for the

²³⁸ UNVIM: United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism for Yemen Home Page, <https://vimye.org/>.

adjustment of goals and objectives within the constraints of the adversary and complex operating environment.

As the coalition's de facto leader, Saudi Arabia's main objective was to stop the influx of illicit cargo into port facilities that could strengthen the Houthi regime and enable attacks on Saudi territory. The Saudis initially blockaded the ports to halt commercial maritime traffic and prevent arms trafficking as outlined by United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2216. While this blockade achieved the coalition's goal, it exacerbated the humanitarian crisis, as 90 percent of all goods in Yemen, including food, are imported. This action inadvertently drove neutral parties toward the Houthis and, in some cases, towards groups like al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State Yemen Province (ISIS-Y). To mitigate these secondary effects and counter negative press and Iranian propaganda, the MCCC collaborated with diplomatic partners to find a solution that supported Saudi security goals while allowing legitimate shipping into the port facilities and deconflicting humanitarian access in a war zone.

The solution that all parties eventually supported was transitioning to an independent mechanism for processing humanitarian access and screening, verifying, and inspecting all incoming commercial cargo vessels. This allowed the Saudi and Emirati Navies to focus on intercepting small crafts used for weapons trafficking. This mechanism also served as an interim extension of the Yemeni Ministry of Transportation, with the long-term goal of returning governance to the internationally recognized Republic of Yemeni Government (ROYG). The MCCC quickly realized it needed a network of unified action partners for this interim solution.

Building and Fighting Through a Network

Using Naval Co-operation and Guidance for Shipping (NCAGS) Reserve officers from the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet (who were commercial mariners in their civilian lives), the MCCC began collecting data, identifying best practices, and working with agencies to ensure the flow of aid and necessary commercial goods into Yemen.²³⁹

These efforts led to relationships with various intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which provided goods and services for Yemen and advised Saudi Navy leadership on how to best deconflict humanitarian access to an active warzone. After recognizing the diversity and number of involved parties and their diverging interests, the MCCC expanded its network to include organizations like the UN's World Food Program (WFP) and Office of Coordination Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), as well as port operators and commercial shipping lines. These organizations also highlighted a shared need for a rapid process to verify legitimate cargo to ease Saudi concerns while delivering lifesaving aid to Yemen.

The MCCC's priority was to establish relationships that would support their operations and set the stage for a transition to what would become the UNVIM. Initially, the MCCC built networks based on existing military-to-military relationships developed through security cooperation and exercises in Saudi Arabia, primarily with the Royal Saudi Naval Forces and 5th Fleet personnel. The MCCC also collaborated with IGOs, NGOs, and diplomatic partners and brought in a U.S. Army CAT from the 83rd Civil Affairs Battalion to focus on this effort. Using a combination of NCAGS and their assigned CAT, the MCCC worked with commercial shipping agencies and private firms in Yemen. A core group of military, commercial, diplomatic, and humanitarian actors soon formed

²³⁹ Garat, Luis Perales, "What the Heck is NCAGS, Naval Co-operation and Guidance for Shipping," *Proceedings* 143, no. 3, March 2017, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2017/march/what-heck-ncags>.

the foundation of the MCCC's center of gravity (its network of unified action partners). The general framework of the MCCC's network is depicted in Figure 9-1.

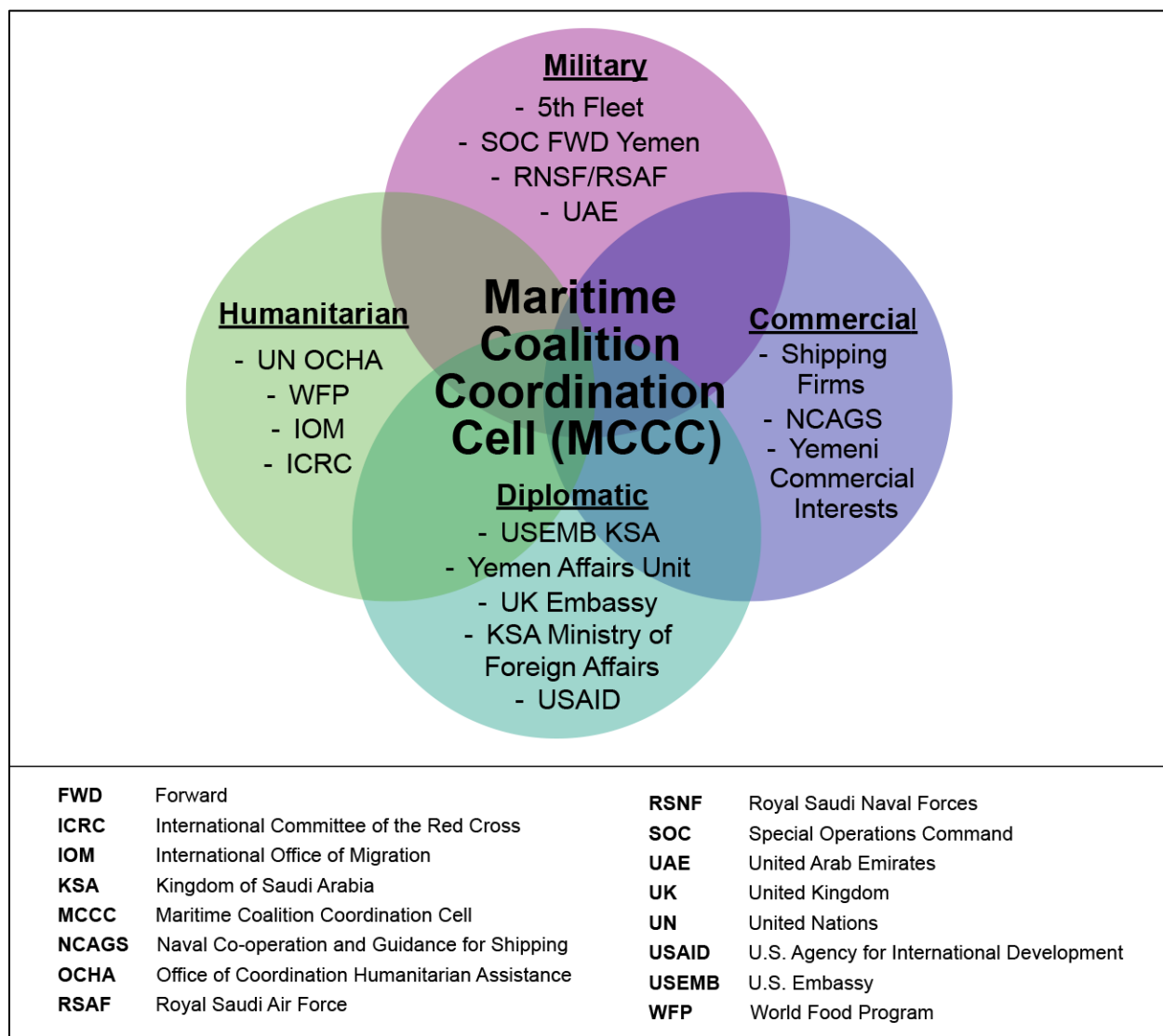


Figure 9-1. Diagram Showing the Four Primary Partner Groups Maritime Coalition Coordination Cell built their Network Around

James Micciche and Adam K. Christensen

The MCCC's network expanded rapidly, mainly the principle of open and candid information sharing was its foundation. The MCCC made all its data available to any partner willing to collaborate with them or the coalition. It published weekly reports on the conditions of Yemeni ports, updates on threats and security concerns, expected wait times, and running totals on imported cargo. Examples of these reports are depicted below. The MCCC also informed coalition forces and UN officials of any suspicious vessels applying for entry to Yemeni ports for follow-up search or interdiction. Furthermore, the MCCC maintained a watch and any partner could reach out and submit questions via phone or email increasing bidirectional information sharing within the network. Conducting over 90 percent of its daily activities on unclassified networks was key

to the MCCC's success and a vital reason for its seamless transition of databases, processes, and reporting mechanisms to the UN in early 2016. Any organization taking a similar approach to irregular warfare must also strive to operate unclassified and openly, regardless of institutional and organizational resistance.

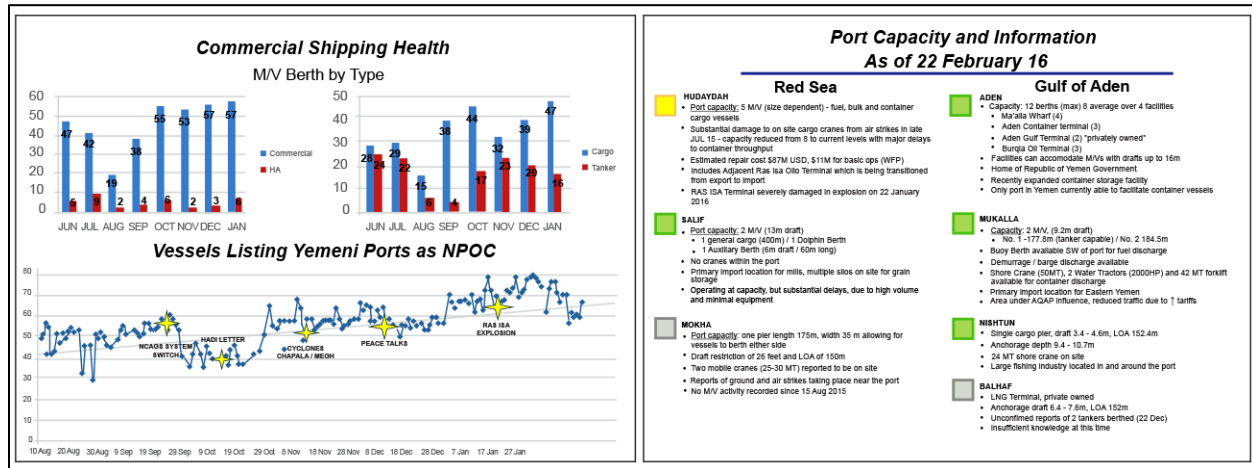


Figure 9-2. Examples of Maritime Coalition Coordination Cell's Weekly Reports

James Micciche and Adam K. Christensen

Although the 5th Fleet rapidly mobilized military capabilities for initial deconfliction and coordination, growing regional demands led to a consensus that transferring long-term responsibility to groups specializing in humanitarian aid and commercial cargo oversight would be more effective. Also, the more the U.S. military became the visible face of maritime access and deconfliction into Yemen, the more vulnerable the ROYG and coalition became to malign influence operations and the greater the loss of legitimacy for ROYG and other regional actors. Additionally, during this period, the U.S. Central Command was conducting Operation Inherent Resolve and any military resources dedicated to Yemen detracted from the United States' primary regional effort of defeating the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.

Having senior leaders within 5th Fleet recognize the need for non-military and international solutions to the problem in Yemen and empowering the MCCC to pursue such a course of action was critical to enduring success and a reason UNVIM is still operational today, seven years after taking over from the MCCC. Frequent meetings with the U.S. State Department's Yemen Affairs Unit, video calls with USAID in D.C., and regular interactions with UN and nongovernment organizations officials were key to aligning military efforts with interagency activities. In fact, this approach foreshadowed the 2023 Joint Concept for Campaigning, which emphasizes that during strategic competition, "the Joint Force will routinely play a mutually supporting role with other U.S. government departments and agencies, allies and partners, and other interorganizational partners."²⁴⁰

While the military aspect of the MCCC was not the primary focus, it was crucial to its success. Before the UNVIM became operational, U.S. Navy intelligence assets frequently identified vessels carrying suspected contraband. This intelligence enabled the Royal Saudi Naval Forces and Emirati vessels to interdict these ships and prevent their entry into Yemeni ports. Furthermore,

²⁴⁰ Cordesman, Anthony H., "The U.S. Joint Chiefs New Strategy Paper on Joint Concept for Competing," CSIS, 17 May 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-joint-chiefs-new-strategy-paper-joint-concept-competing>.

many essential relationships underpinning the MCCC's network stemmed from longstanding contacts established through regional naval exercises and operations in the region. These relationships leveraged the infrastructure of the Combined Maritime Forces, established in the early 2000s, to collaborate with volunteer member nations and enhance maritime security in the region.

In addition, the MCCC's military training and security cooperation activities aimed to bolster partner capabilities at both the tactical and theater strategic levels of war. On the tactical front, the focus was on enhancing partner naval forces' ability to conduct seaborne visit and board, search, and seizure operations which are essential for interdicting small vessels used in smuggling. Strategically, the training enabled the Saudi military to develop civil-military coordination and humanitarian deconfliction mechanisms. These were vital for managing access to conflict zones, protecting humanitarian actors and gaining an advantage in the information and human dimensions of warfare.

The Power of Common Goals

During its tenure, the MCCC enhanced U.S. engagement and influence in the Middle East, improved cooperation with regional partners, and effectively managed large quantities of humanitarian aid. It played a key role in facilitating commercial access to Yemen's western coastal ports and supported partners with vital data and information, thereby strengthening maritime security in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. The success of the MCCC was largely due to its ability to align goals with international partners, share information openly, and coordinate its efforts with other instruments of power. MCCC's innovative approach to complex maritime challenges offers valuable lessons for dealing with similar issues in the Indo-Pacific area and potential humanitarian responses to conflicts like the war in Gaza. This model set by the MCCC not only underscores the power of collaborative and adaptive strategies in irregular warfare but also stands as a testament to the potential of innovative solutions in shaping a more stable and secure global maritime landscape. At the time of publication, Yemen is once again playing a disruptive role in the maritime domain and whatever solution is implemented it will require some form of civil-military coordination between the region's naval forces and commercial shippers as well as enduring presence from regional partners. The MCCC offers a potential framework to begin planning such a solution.

Chapter 10
From the Shadows to the Social Sphere
The Ministry of Defence of Ukraine's Strategy of Engagement
Dr. Peter Schrijver²⁴¹

In the information dimension, the Main Directorate of Intelligence of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine (HUR) maintains an extensive social media presence and engages in multiple activities in Ukrainian civil society. Although not status quo, this showcases irregular activities designed to crowdsource much needed resources from Ukrainian civil society to support the ongoing war effort in Ukraine. The access to digital media platforms has streamlined the relationship between host nation military and the civilian population during armed conflict.

Conventional wisdom suggests intelligence services should maintain a discreet profile to avoid drawing undue attention to the secretive nature of their work.²⁴² However, *Intelligence Laboratory Express*, a Russian journal focused on intelligence studies, spotlighted early 2024 the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (HUR MO) as an exception.²⁴³ It characterized the military intelligence service HUR as notably visible in the media, alleging that its operations are primarily aimed at achieving media success with evident propaganda elements.

Although this portrayal is somewhat demeaning and undoubtedly influenced by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, it underscores a relevant aspect namely the HUR's significant presence across social media platforms like Facebook, X/Twitter, Telegram, and Viber. On these channels, it offers comprehensive military insights, personalizes the conflict with stories of its operatives, and emphasizes humanitarian efforts and audience participation. Beyond maintaining an extensive social media presence, the HUR engages in multiple activities with Ukrainian civil society. These include crowdfunding initiatives, mixed martial arts (MMA) tournaments, and partnerships with popular music bands. Such actions mark a departure from the traditional subdued public profile typical of intelligence services. This divergence is further underlined by the frequent media appearances of the HUR commander, LTG Kyrylo Budanov, who enjoys, “an almost cult status” among Ukrainians.”²⁴⁴

Currently, the HUR is actively engaged in the ongoing war with Russia. This level of involvement would have likely shifted the primary focus of many intelligence agencies towards operations, reducing their emphasis on public interaction. The HUR has chosen a different path, and in this context, it is interesting to delve deeper into the interplay between the Ukrainian military intelligence service and civil society. This exploration includes its social media engagement, extensive relations with crowdsourcing organizations, and the public profile of HUR commander LTG Budanov.

²⁴¹ Peter Schrijver is a researcher affiliated with the Netherlands Defence Academy.

²⁴² Riemer, Ofek and Sobelman, Daniel, “Coercive Disclosure: The Weaponization of Public Intelligence Revelation in International Relations”, *Contemporary Security Policy* 44, no. 2, 3 April 2023, 5, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2022.2164122>.

²⁴³ “Lieks - Glavnaya”, <https://intelligence-express.ru>.

²⁴⁴ Miller, Christopher, “Kyrylo Budanov: The Ukrainian Military Spy Chief Who “Likes the Darkness””, *Financial Times*, 21 January 2024.

Social media and Public Engagement: From Facebook to Mixed Martial Arts Fights

The evolution and operational dynamics of the HUR MO reflect its strategic adaptation and involvement in both conventional and irregular warfare. Following Ukraine's independence in 1991, the HUR was officially integrated into the Ministry of Defense in 1993 after the unification of the Military Strategic Intelligence Directorate and the Intelligence Directorate. This signaled the start of a comprehensive approach to national defense and intelligence operations, mirroring the wider post-Soviet shift in Ukraine's defense policy.²⁴⁵ The HUR consequently exemplifies a fusion of intelligence-gathering and special forces capabilities that enables it to play an extensive role in the country's defense architecture.

Since 2015, the HUR's role within Ukrainian society has notably intensified, propelled by its deployment of extensive social media campaigns on six different platforms (see Figure 10-1). These initiatives go beyond mere information dissemination, they are concerted efforts to counter adversarial narratives and keep the Ukrainian public informed about ongoing developments in territories under Russian occupation.²⁴⁶

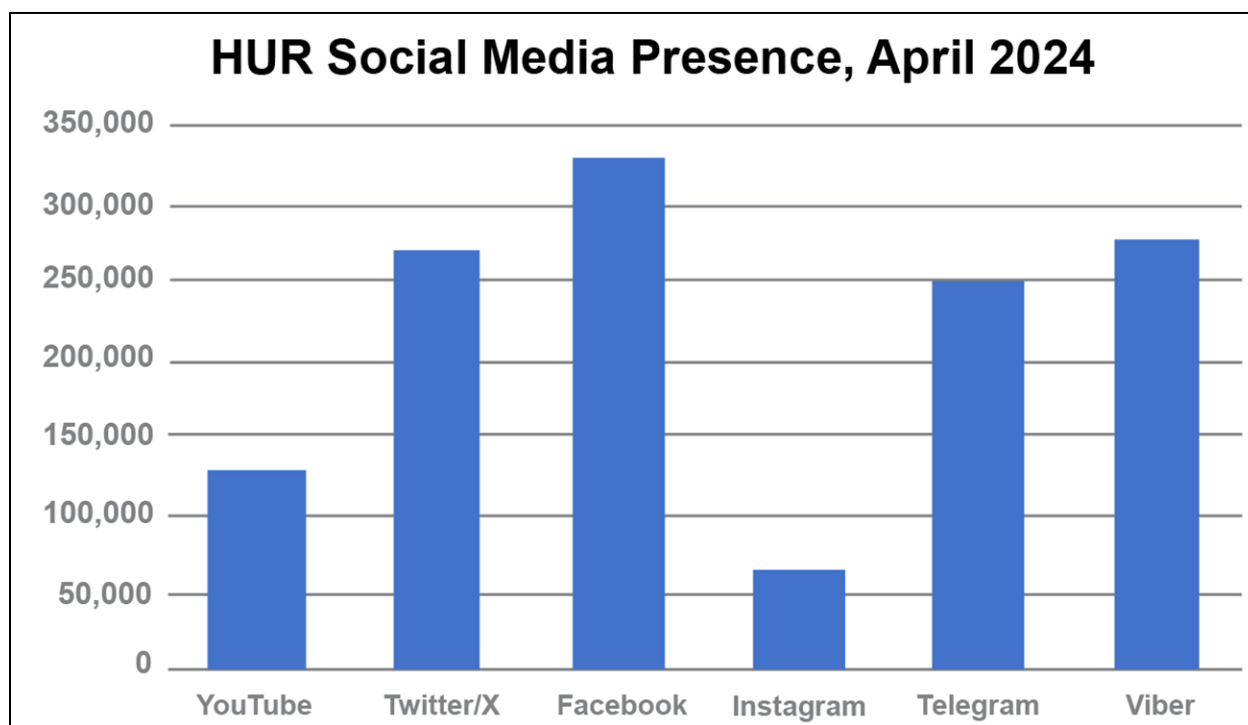


Figure 10-1. The Number of Ministry of Defence of Ukraine Account Followers on Social Media Platforms

Dr. Peter Schrijver

²⁴⁵ Dieanu, Adrian-Corneliu, "The Role of Ukrainian Special Operations Forces Within the War in Ukraine", in *Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference Strategies XXI. Volume XVIII*, Carol I National Defence University Publishing House, 221, <https://www.cceeol.com/search/chapter-detail?id=1120550>.

²⁴⁶ Schrijver, Peter, "The Wise Man Will Be Master of the Stars:" The Use of Twitter by the Ukrainian Military Intelligence Service", Irregular Warfare Initiative, 27 June 2023, <https://irregularwarfare.org/articles/the-wise-man-will-be-master-of-the-stars-the-use-of-twitter-by-the-ukrainian-military-intelligence-service/>.

An innovative facet of the HUR's engagement strategy via social media is the deployment of the Main Intelligence Bot, a Telegram bot conceived to leverage the vigilance of the Ukrainian populace for intelligence-gathering efforts.²⁴⁷ This initiative converts ordinary citizens into active participants, empowering them to contribute actionable intelligence directly. The HUR reports that over the past two years since the full-scale invasion, the bot has yielded significant operational success.²⁴⁸ Contributions from Ukrainians have led to the destruction of enemy warehouses, equipment, and naval assets, and have provided critical information on the whereabouts of high-ranking officials and collaborators.

A significant portion of HUR's social media content highlights successful operations against Russian forces, especially the exploits of various special forces units operating under HUR command like Group 13, Artan, and Timur. These units have garnered attention for their achievements, such as Group 13's recent destruction of three Russian naval vessels in the Black Sea. These ships are the corvette Ivanovets on 1 February 2024, the amphibious landing ship Tzezar Kunikov on 14 February, and the patrol ship Sergei Kotov on 5 March. The HUR publicized all three attacks on its social media channels, in which Group 13 used Magura V maritime drones.²⁴⁹ It also shared footage from the onboard cameras of the attacking Unmanned Surface Vehicles (USVs). Exacerbating the situation for the Russians, the attacks on these ships were not only filmed and subsequently posted online, but the HUR also managed to confirm its success by intercepting and publicly sharing communications of Russian navy personnel discussing the sinking of these ships.²⁵⁰ Without hesitation, the HUR posted these sensitive intercepts online and in doing so, has challenged traditional views that intelligence services should prioritize the protection of their collection assets.²⁵¹

In addition to posting operational reports on social media, the HUR also commemorates fallen personnel with the hashtag #ГУРпам'ятає (#HURremembers) to underscore their bravery, resilience, and perseverance. One poignant example from November 2023 is a eulogy for Andriy "Yankee" Yaremchuk, whose ultimate sacrifice, "in the battle for his country's freedom exemplifies the utmost patriotism and courageous leadership."²⁵² His commitment, reflected in his return from the French Foreign Legion to defend Ukraine, inspires a legacy of bravery and selflessness. Over a two-year period, the HUR posted messages with the hashtag #HURremembers 26 times, often highlighting the deep connection between the fallen and their local communities. These messages not only commemorate the past deeds of fallen HUR soldiers but also acknowledge the support they received from their families while serving in the HUR.

This theme of support from civil society is frequently addressed in the HUR's social media messaging. This includes posts about renowned Ukrainian music groups creating tributes to the military intelligence service. For instance, Monoton Music Label produced an uplifting song "To

²⁴⁷ "Main Directorate of Intelligence", Telegram, <https://t.me/diukraine/2476>.

²⁴⁸ Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "HUR MO Ukraine Launches Updated "Main Intelligence Bot." <https://t.me/DIUKraine/3494>. Tweet, Twitter, 20 February 2024.

²⁴⁹ "Thermal Imagers and Radars Do Not See Them" - Ukrainian Naval Drones "Magura V5" Destroy the Russian Air Force", <https://gur.gov.ua/content/ikh-ne-bachat-teplovizory-i-radary-ukrainski-morski-drony-magura-v5-znyshchuiut-chf-rf.html>.

²⁵⁰ Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine], "#HURintercepts!! «Kotov Was Attacked by 5 USVs» The commander of the 184th Maritime Security Ships [Novorossiysk], under whose command the Russian Black Sea Fleet patrol ship "Sergei Kotov" was, describes the details of the ship's destruction., Tweet, Twitter, 5 March 2024, https://x.com/DI_Ukraine/status/1764950327390773295.

²⁵¹ Clark, Dr Robert M., "The Protection of Intelligence Sources and Methods", 2016, 61.

²⁵² "Main Directorate of Intelligence," Telegram, <https://t.me/diukraine/3006>.

the Heroes From the HUR MO,” expressing gratitude for their valor.²⁵³ Additionally, to demonstrate its approachability and desire to foster connections with the public, the HUR organized a drawing contest for Ukrainian children coinciding with the organization’s 31st anniversary.²⁵⁴ The contest aimed to nurture artistic talents, provide an outlet for children's creative capacities, and instill patriotism which is a sentiment the HUR echoed on its social platforms with pictures of the children’s artistic contributions.

Moreover, the HUR actively hosts and participates in events such as mixed martial arts competitions, which bolster its visibility and aid in recruiting its special forces. It also marks its presence at key cultural occasions like the Frankfurt Book Fair.²⁵⁵ At the 2023 fair, author Artem Shevchenko showcased his work *Military Intelligence of Ukraine: In the Sky, On the Sea, On the Ground*, which chronicles the HUR’s special missions. The book, which has drawn interest from German media, literary critics, and security experts, is published in both Ukrainian and English. It provides a deep dive into the strategic planning and implementation of missions, along with firsthand accounts from those involved, underscoring the HUR's resistance against the Russian invasion.

The HUR’s outreach extends beyond cultural contributions to include humanitarian acts. One of the HUR’s special forces units known as Kraken has collaborated multiple times with the Humanitarian Center of Kharkiv Oblast relief missions (see Figure 10-2).



Figure 10-2. Volunteers and Operators of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine Kraken Special Forces Unit deliver Supplies to Civilians

Photo is a Screenshot from Ministry of Defence of Ukraine’s Telegram Channel

²⁵³ “Main Directorate of Intelligence,” Telegram, <https://t.me/diukraine/2789>.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. “Main Directorate of Intelligence,” Telegram, <https://t.me/diukraine/2774>.

²⁵⁵ “Main Directorate of Intelligence,” Telegram, <https://t.me/diukraine/3186>.

The HUR reported on its social media channels that during the final months of 2023 these joint efforts led to the distribution of humanitarian aid to approximately 2,000 inhabitants of several liberated villages within the Kharkiv and Donetsk regions.²⁵⁶ Essential provisions such as food kits, medicines, and medical supplies were disseminated, targeting specifically a medical center and a hospital in the noted areas. This initiative is but one example of many more units of the HUR who have been directly involved in assisting the civilian population with their needs.

Crowdsourcing Equipment

Despite being actively involved in humanitarian relief efforts for the civilian population in frontline areas, HUR units themselves depend on the public for crowdsourcing their specialized equipment. Since the full-scale Russian invasion in February 2022, the HUR has been bolstered by substantial financial contributions and material donations that have been vital for their sustained operations and for the families of fallen soldiers.

This relationship is illustrated by the musicians of Dance on the Congo Square, who raised over 1.8 million hryvnias (approximately \$46,000 U.S. dollars[USD]) to support the children of fallen intelligence officers.²⁵⁷ The initiative, as part of a larger charity tour across 22 European cities, also raised funds for first-person view (FPV) drones that enhance the capabilities of the HUR's Shaman special forces unit on the battlefield. Similarly, the band Botashe collected 306,000 hryvnias (approximately \$7,815 USD) during the Lviv music festival. These funds were earmarked for the care of injured members of the Timur special unit and the Special Operations Center Alfa Group of the internal security service known as SBU.²⁵⁸ These acts of philanthropy extend to tangible goods, with the members of Antitila providing five thousand tactical North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-standard first aid kits to frontline soldiers.

The HUR has also witnessed a significant amplification in its operational capabilities through contributions and donations of a larger nature, encompassing both financial support and the provision of specialized equipment. These contributions have come from various semi-professional crowdfunding organizations and initiatives, reflecting a robust partnership between the military and civil society designed to bolster Ukraine's defense against Russian aggression. A few examples:

- Through its Black Box project, the Come Back Alive fund provided 13 new pickup trucks to the scouts of the HUR for 15 million hryvnias (\$353,000 USD).²⁵⁹ These vehicles are key to enhancing the mobility of these specialized fighters and allow them to execute combat and special tasks more effectively across Crimea and other temporarily occupied territories.
- In an act of international solidarity, the people of Poland, through the volunteer initiative Zbroimy Ukraine (Arm Ukraine), donated an MI-2 AM-1 medevac helicopter equipped with modern medical equipment that helps the HUR provide immediate medical assistance to evacuees from the frontline.²⁶⁰
- The synergy between the HUR and civil society is further evidenced by a charity auction in Dnipro organized by the non-governmental organization Strength of Hearts. The event

²⁵⁶ "Main Directorate of Intelligence," Telegram, <https://t.me/DIUkraine/3299>.

²⁵⁷ "Main Directorate of Intelligence," Telegram, <https://t.me/diukraine/3065>.

²⁵⁸ "Main Directorate of Intelligence," Telegram, <https://t.me/diukraine/2983>.

²⁵⁹ Defence intelligence of Ukraine [@DI_Ukraine].

²⁶⁰ "Telegram: Contact @diukraine," <https://t.me/diukraine/3355>.

raised 11 million hryvnias (\$281,000 USD approximately) with the proceeds going towards the purchase of combat and special task vehicles, such as buggies and all-terrain vehicles, for the Timur unit.²⁶¹ This auction highlighted the commitment of Dnipro's local business community to Ukraine's defense.

- The last example pertains to the donation of two vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) tactical UAVs from the Serhiy Prytula Foundation.²⁶² The HUR claims it contributed to a leap in reconnaissance and surveillance capabilities for the organization. Purchased with funds totaling 11.6 million hryvnias (\$294,000 USD approximately), these Estonian-made drones are known for their stealth, reliability, and ability to operate under extreme conditions, illustrating the strategic impact of public donations on Ukraine's military intelligence operations.

These donations, which include both financial contributions and sophisticated equipment, highlight the crucial role that civilian and international support play in enhancing the capabilities of the HUR. Moreover, they demonstrate a close collaboration between the military intelligence service and the broader civilian community.

Budanov: Bridging the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine-Civil Society Divide

Lastly, the personal influence of HUR commander Budanov is a significant factor in the interplay between HUR and civil society. Budanov, acknowledging the indispensability of visibility and engagement in modern conflict, leads with a philosophy that a spy boss cannot merely operate from the shadows.²⁶³ This approach is an example of Ukraine's pivot since the onset of aggression by Moscow in 2014, which saw the annexation of Crimea and the ignition of conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Budanov's insights into the transformative nature of future conflicts underscore the critical role of information warfare.

In mid-February 2024, this strategic emphasis was vividly illustrated when the HUR, under Budanov's directive, released a video that blurred the lines between digital culture and military recruitment. The video depicts a young individual, sitting in a hoodie behind his computer, immersed in a first-person shooter game. During his gameplay, an individual with the username Kyrylo86 approaches him through an on-screen chat.²⁶⁴ The young player is then shown footage of spectacular attacks by the HUR against Russian targets. The climax of the video occurs when Kyrylo86 types: "We need your skills," offering the young man a position at the HUR. As the camera zooms out, the viewer is presented with a scene of @ChiefDI_Ukraine Budanov sitting behind his desk, personally recruiting much-needed information technology-savvy personnel.

This creative strategy underlines Budanov's cult status among Ukrainians as evidenced by the widespread sharing of memes featuring his likeness, especially following military setbacks in Russia or Russian-controlled regions.²⁶⁵ The HUR's engaging and adept use of social media starkly contrasts with the Russian Federation's less effective propaganda, which is often seen as heavy-

²⁶¹ "Main Directorate of Intelligence", Telegram, <https://t.me/DIUkraine/3096>.

²⁶² "Telegram: Contact @DIUkraine", <https://t.me/DIUkraine/2956>.

²⁶³ Balmforth, Tom, "Ukraine's Spymaster Comes out of the Shadows", *Reuters*, 14 July 2023, sec. Europe, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraines-spymaster-comes-out-shadows-2023-07-14/>.

²⁶⁴ Schrijver, Peter [@psguu], "Ukraine's Military Intelligence Service, HUR, Has Released a New Recruitment Video Aimed at Attracting Much-Needed IT-Savvy Personnel, Featuring @ChiefDI_Ukraine", *Twitter*, 2 March 2024, <https://x.com/psguu/status/1763869695399141770>.

²⁶⁵ Miller, "Kyrylo Budanov."

handed and less trustworthy.²⁶⁶ This contrast not only highlights the HUR's successful engagement with the digital generation but also amplifies Budanov's popularity and the broader cultural resonance of the HUR's digital outreach efforts.²⁶⁷

After polling both experts and readers in October 2022, *The New Voice of Ukraine* newspaper identified Kyrylo Budanov as one of the most influential military leaders in Ukraine.²⁶⁸ Due to the war, the site clarified that its list of personalities was not arranged in order of popularity. Nonetheless, The paper placed Budanov, referred to as the man without a smile, at the forefront of its list ahead of former Commander-in-Chief General Valery Zaluzhnyi and former Minister of Defense Oleksiy Reznikov. This recognition signifies Budanov's broad influence within not just the military domain but also civilian and government circles, and in doing so presents him as a central figure in Ukraine's defense. His visibility and acclaim underscore a unique relationship where public sentiment and military leadership intertwine.

The Ministry of Defence of Ukraine and Participatory Warfare

The HUR's approach to social media engagement, in which it builds relations with civil-society initiatives and supports LTC Budanov's leadership, transcends the traditional bounds of a military intelligence service and therefore challenges conservative views on public engagement.

A 2022 article by researcher Asmolov explores the role of digital media in contemporary conflicts, with a particular emphasis on the Russia-Ukraine war. Asmolov analyzes the ways in which digital platforms have introduced new avenues for participatory warfare, enabling a broader spectrum of individuals to become involved in the conflict.²⁶⁹ His analysis highlights the crucial role of narratives in mobilizing support and shaping public perception.

Asmolov argues that Ukraine's population is aware of Ukraine's limited statehood and acknowledges the need for full societal mobilization to counter Russia's invasion.²⁷⁰ As a result, Asmolov's work offers a valuable perspective on the HUR's innovative strategies, underscoring the significance of digital mobilization and narrative construction in influencing the outcomes of modern conflicts.

Nevertheless, the approach of the HUR is not without controversy. Specifically, the active involvement of civilians in wartime intelligence collection on enemy troops is the subject of heated debate within Western military institutions. Critics argue that it may infringe upon the humanitarian rules of war by blurring the lines between combatants and non-combatants. Despite these debates, the communication between the HUR and the Ukrainian public continues unabated, at least for the foreseeable future.

²⁶⁶ "Ukrainian Drones Sink Russian Warship Caesar Kunikov on Valentine's Day, Spark Social Media Buzz," <https://english.nv.ua/nation/social-media-reaction-to-the-date-of-the-magura-drones-with-the-landing-ship-caesar-kunikov-50392717.html>.

²⁶⁷ "Zelenskyy Promotes Intelligence Head Kyrylo Budanov to Lieutenant General / The New Voice of Ukraine," <https://english.nv.ua/nation/zelenskyy-promotes-intelligence-head-kyrylo-budanov-to-lieutenant-general-50351880.html>.

²⁶⁸ "Platoon No. 1. NV Names the 25 Most Influential Ukrainian Military Figures," <https://nv.ua/ukr/ukraine/events/generali-peremogi-nv-nazivaye-25-nayvplivovishih-ukrajinskih-viyskovih-50276584.html>.

²⁶⁹ Asmolov, Gregory, "The Transformation of Participatory Warfare: The Role of Narratives in Connective Mobilization in the Russia-Ukraine War", *Digital War* 3, no. 1-3, 2022, 25.

²⁷⁰ Asmolov, 25.

Conclusion

The HUR engages with civil society through a multifaceted approach that incorporates social media, collaboration with crowdsourcing organizations, and the public profile of its commander Lieutenant-General Kyrylo Budanov. This strategy aligns with the insights of Asmolov regarding the role of digital media in modern conflicts. These platforms can extend participation beyond traditional military roles. Even amidst the hardships of war, the Ukrainian people have demonstrated remarkable resilience and an eagerness to support their nation's defense, through diverse acts of civil resistance and the backing of their military forces.²⁷¹ The HUR's use of social media for information dissemination, narrative construction, and public engagement, along with its interactions with crowdsourcing initiatives, reflects an adaptation to contemporary warfare dynamics. Moreover, LTG Budanov's visibility illustrates an approach where leadership plays a significant role in shaping public perception and mobilization that transcends more conventional forms of intelligence communication.

²⁷¹ "The Resilience and Trauma of Ukraine's Civil Society - Carnegie Europe", <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/06/the-resilience-and-trauma-of-ukraines-civil-society?lang=en¢er=europe>.

Chapter 11

Winning the Operational Air Campaign, but Losing the Information War The Israeli Air Force's Twitter Narratives

Heather P. Venable, PhD²⁷²

Israel, despite its lethality, did not have control of its messaging during its air campaign against Hamas. Such miscalculations in managing its reporting on social media accounts call into question its precision and proportionality metrics in densely populated urban areas. In this article, the author contends that information is a strategic weapon and militaries must include those who decide how to convey and disseminate information in the highest planning circles.

In the week before Hamas undertook a brutal terrorist operation against Israel, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) feed on the media platform X (formerly known as Twitter) understandably contented itself with the usual topics of air forces around the world. On 3 October, avid followers could download attractive pictures of airplanes on “Wallpaper Wednesday.”²⁷³ Another post wished a happy independence day to its air force friends in Germany while one showed both female and male Airmen walking on the flight line while celebrating “Mean Girls Day,” a reference to the U.S. movie of the same name.²⁷⁴ The IAF posted each tweet in English, suggesting its attempts to reach a bilingual audience at home or perhaps even more at Western audiences abroad. Of the three tweets, the most popular, the IAF’s well wishes to the German Air Force, received a total of almost 200,000 views. The sole post in Hebrew that day netted the lowest views at about 10,800.²⁷⁵



Figure 11-1. Screenshot of Israeli Defense Force Post to X

Heather P. Venable, PhD

²⁷² Heather Venable is an Associate Professor of Military and Security Studies at the Air Command and Staff College where she is the course director for Airpower Strategy and Operations.

²⁷³ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 4, 2023, 9:05 AM; <https://twitter.com/IAFsite/status/1709570476991766953>.

²⁷⁴ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 3, 2023, 9:05 AM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1709208056536481972>; Israeli Air Force, Twitter Post, October 3, 2023, 11:16 AM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1709241137142133098>.

²⁷⁵ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 3, 2023, 4:15 AM; <https://twitter.com/IAFsite/status/1709135187374686448>.

Since the attacks on 7 October 2023, IAF has shown a different side to the world, which in some ways, is understandable given the circumstances, yet in other ways remains troubling. Once well-known for the warnings it provided to civilians by the so-called tactic of “knocking on the roof,” the IAF has now abandoned that conscientious approach as official policy in the wake of Hamas’ terrorist attacks, except in rare circumstances.²⁷⁶

Now, it increasingly looks like the IAF has rolled back the clock to an era before collateral damage concerns muddled one of the original intents of precision weapons, more efficient destruction of targets. In one 12-second video from the IAF, they show the impact of a bomb followed by an enormous cloud of smoke, suggesting an entire building’s destruction.²⁷⁷ Setting aside the tremendous ethical implications of potentially flattening one-fourth or more of Gaza, as some journalists have suggested while citing United Nations (UN’s) reports, much of the IAF’s Twitter campaign serves as an example of what not to do in the age of social media weaponization.²⁷⁸ This approach has further isolated Israel from Western supporters with an almost total elimination of English-language tweets

The Israeli Air Forces’ X Campaign in Response to the 7 October Hamas Attack

The IAF initially responded to the horrific Hamas attacks in a measured and brief way. Though posted only in Hebrew, translating the IAF’s posts is as simple as allowing Google Translate to provide English text almost instantaneously, which resulted in “The air force is now attacking targets of the terrorist organization Hamas in the Gaza Strip. More details to come.”²⁷⁹ Whatever the limitations of Google Translate might be, this article deems all results of Google Translate as “accurate” because they represent how recipients read the message rather than reflect the message the IAF intended to send. In other words, any public relations campaign must be deft and agile to ensure that the message can be conveyed clearly and not get lost in translation among key audiences who speak different languages.

Subsequent social media messages that day disseminated more problematic messages, as the IAF quickly amplified its response by mismatching its videos and its wording while showing the deaths of individual people. About two hours after its initial response, the IAF posted a subsequent update in Hebrew followed by one in English announcing that “dozens” of aircraft had begun counterattacking Hamas.²⁸⁰ Less than three hours later, anyone could view the results of those attacks, including direct hits on vehicles presumably filled with Hamas terrorists. Only one hour later it posted another message in Hebrew, this one claiming to have, “attacked 17 military compounds and four operational headquarters.”²⁸¹ The accompanying minute-long video;

²⁷⁶ “Senior Israeli source: Gaza will not be Hamastan; “roof knocking” policy no longer norm,” *The Times of Israel*, October 9, 2023; https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/senior-israeli-source-gaza-will-not-be-hamastan-roof-knocking-policy-no-longer-norm/; Abeer Salman, “Israel seemingly stops ‘knock on the roof’ military tactic. Here’s what it means and why it matters,” *CNN*, October 11, 2023; https://edition.cnn.com/middleeast/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-10-11-23#h_b213ec9e2882bc819f20cb6a96bcec92.

²⁷⁷ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 23, 2023, 12:28 PM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1716506936940634332>.

²⁷⁸ “Before and after satellite images show destruction in Gaza,” *CNN*, October 25, 2023; <https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/25/middleeast/satellite-images-gaza-destruction/index.html>; *The Telegraph* Podcast, “The smell of bodies hangs in the air” - reporting on the ground in Israel,” October 20, 2023; <https://shows.acast.com/battle-lines-israel-gaza/episodes/658301a6306e830016a099f7>.

²⁷⁹ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 7, 2023, 12:24 AM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1710526370554532155>.

²⁸⁰ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 7, 2023, 2:51 AM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1710563400361918631>; Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 7, 2023, 2:52 AM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1710563715081203756>.

²⁸¹ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 7, 2023, 5:04 AM; <https://twitter.com/IAFsite/status/1710596920631050655>.

however, primarily showed individuals being targeted.²⁸² First, the headline's focus on buildings did not match the video's emphasis on people. Second, the viewer was expected to assume that the casualties were legitimate targets and not innocent civilians caught in the wrong place at the wrong time in one of the most densely urban populations in the world, a leap of faith that would likely not be taken in the emotionally charged information warfare ecosystem.

This is not the first time Israel has made significant missteps in the information arena. In May of 2021, the IAF bombed a building in Gaza after determining through the tactic of "knocking on the roof" that two foreign newspapers had offices there, a decision that Israel deemed legal by international law although a few advisors dissented, worrying about the public relations damage. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) subsequently posted videos showing the building before and after being destroyed, a move that the IDF's spokesperson at the time (Hidai Zilberman), opposed. Taken together, this event led some to conclude that Israel lacked a deft touch with public affairs.²⁸³

Searching for Narratives of Precision and Proportionality

Based on media reports during the first three weeks of the campaign, the IAF was hard to be distinguished as a Western air force seeking to wage precision air war.²⁸⁴ If one wanted to accept the Israelis' claim that the media was biased; however, one would only have to examine the IAF's social media feed to see the likelihood of vast civilian casualties. In the days after the initial attack, the videos showed entire buildings being destroyed. On 8 October, for example, the IAF sent a message as a motivational post about Israeli airmen, "continuing with all their might," showing men and women preparing fighter aircraft.²⁸⁵ While one might view this post as an understandable attempt to shore up morale at home, the fact that Israel sent this post only in English suggests it was intended for foreign audiences. Another post on that day included the first official response by an IDF spokesperson, offering the explanation that, "Our air force is attacking hundreds of Hamas and Islamic Jihad targets in Gaza. We follow international law, while exercising our right and responsibility to protect our civilians."²⁸⁶

However, the imagery of the post did not reinforce suggestions of respect for the principle of proportionality. It is true that proportionality, or the idea that damage to human life and property must not be excessive in proportion to the expected military advantage, is difficult to quantify.²⁸⁷ But this subjective evaluation can be placed against the IAF's own self-selected video footage. A few hours after an IDF spokesperson stressed adherence to international law, the IAF's social media feed released a multiple thread explaining how the IAF had struck 150 targets in Shuja'iyya,

²⁸² Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 7, 2023, 5:50 AM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1710608508725415985>,

²⁸³ "Israel Revised Intel File It Gave U.S. on Bombing Gaza High-rise That Housed AP, Al Jazeera," *Haaretz*, November 19, 2021; <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2021-11-19/ty-article/israel-revised-intel-biden-answers-gaza-bombing-ap-al-jazeera/0000017f-e1ca-d75c-a7ff-fdcf6a6e0000>.

²⁸⁴ "Israeli Airstrikes Surge in Gaza, Destroying Homes and Killing Dozens at a Time," *Associated Press*, October 24, 2023; <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2023-10-24/israel-increases-strikes-on-gaza-as-two-more-hostages-are-freed>.

²⁸⁵ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 8, 2023, 11:42 AM; <https://twitter.com/IAFsite/status/1711059623027827136/photo/1>.

²⁸⁶ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 8, 2023, 12:24 PM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1711069954034852340>.

²⁸⁷ U.S. Space Force, "Law of Armed Conflict Doctrine," <https://www.schriever.spaceforce.mil/Portals/17/documents/LOAC-Mar%2020.pdf>; Bryan Frederick and David E. Johnson, *The Continued Evolution of U.S. Law of Armed Conflict Implementation: Implications for the U.S. Military*, November 9, 2015; https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1122.html.

one of Hamas's "terror nest[s]." ²⁸⁸ Recorded from a significant distance away, the accompanying video merely displays a series of consecutive explosions, which undermines the IDF spokesperson's claims of adherence to international law and misses an opportunity to reinforce their message with more thoughtfully chosen footage. The next post also failed in this manner, with the translation from Hebrew to English stating that the IAF had used, "[a]bout a hundred tons of ammunition." ²⁸⁹ 100 tons of bombs is equivalent to 200,000 pounds of bombs. Taking the average bomb as being a 500-pound bomb, this bombload equates to 400 bombs dropped that day, raising questions as to the extent to which the IAF had up-to-date intelligence and proper time for targeting. Accompanying photos also showed entire buildings placed in red prior to destruction with a small target symbol placed over each in case the viewer might have any doubt as to each building's fate.

Expecting Israel to achieve the same level of precision as the U.S., which has demonstrated the capability to destroy targets while preserving nearby structures, might be considered unreasonable by some, who suggest that the public's standard for precision weapons has become too high. Mike Benitez and Mike Pietrucha, for example, argue that the, "unanticipated product of the precision revolution was the mistaken belief that these weapons could be used to make warfare less messy by limiting collateral damage." ²⁹⁰ Admittedly, despite its high standard for precision, the U.S. has also failed at times in its precision targeting due to improperly vetted intelligence among other targeting and tactical errors.

Regardless of whether the IAF has access to enough precision weapons to employ them most of the time, there is something that is completely in its control and that is projecting consistent imagery of precise operations. Yet, a video from 9 October, shared multiple times on its feed showing the collapse of several adjacent apartment-sized buildings, indicates that the IAF does not want to promote a narrative of precision. ²⁹¹ This is further supported by another video released the same day, which, by zooming out to show a broad swath of Gaza, reveals extensive destruction of large buildings. ²⁹² Two additional posts on 9 October, one an English-subtitled video and one in Hebrew, demonstrated a desire to reach both of its target audiences. Both videos show the destruction of large buildings. The footage contains added wording, most of which received labels like "military headquarters" before showing attacks on what are problematically labeled as "high-rise buildings," opening the IAF to criticism for attacking civilian instead of military targets. ²⁹³ It is correct to point out that Hamas deliberately uses civilian infrastructure as a kind of protection for its facilities. The point though is that the IAF has a choice about the narratives it disseminates, and it could make smarter decisions regarding precision, especially if it wanted to retain public support across the globe.

²⁸⁸ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 8, 2023, 2:32 PM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1711102379762810950>.

²⁸⁹ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 8, 2023, 2:33 PM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1711102411706626386>.

²⁹⁰ Mike Benitez and Mike Pietrucha, "Political Airpower, Part II: The Seductive Allure of Precision Weapons," November 30, 2016, *War on the Rocks*; <https://warontherocks.com/2016/11/political-airpower-part-ii-the-seductive-allure-of-precision-weapons/>.

²⁹¹ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 9, 2023, 5:50 AM; <https://twitter.com/IAFsite/status/1711333324893904925>.

Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 9, 2023, 3:55 AM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1711304246363083046>.

²⁹² Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 9, 2023, 8:09 AM; <https://twitter.com/IAFsite/status/1711368236539744506>.

²⁹³ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 9, 2023, 8:05 PM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1711548494131888311>.



Figure 11-2. Screenshot of Israeli Defense Force Post to X
Heather P. Venable, PhD

Subsequent social media messages, some accompanied by videos, only raised further and unhelpful questions about how carefully the IAF was planning and launching attacks against Gaza. One video showed repeated strikes and highlighted a targeting crosshair and a subsequent explosion. These were intended to demonstrate precision, but other clips from the video seemed to suggest bombs had gone astray.²⁹⁴ Even more troubling was the IAF's 12 October message where it self-reported that it dropped 6,000 bombs since the terrorist attack, with no emphasis on precision or effect.²⁹⁵ The IAF failed to demonstrate any actual productive effects resulting from the strikes.²⁹⁶ Moreover, anti-Israeli commentators quickly compared it to the U.S.-led coalition

²⁹⁴ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 11, 2023, 11:54 PM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1712330858848268368>.

²⁹⁵ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 12, 2023, 10:03 AM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1712484101763342772>.

²⁹⁶ For a discussion of the tendency to focus more on measures of performance than effectiveness, see Westphal, CPT Tom and Guffey, CPT Jason, "Measures of Effectiveness in Army Doctrine," eArmor, October-December 2014; https://www.moore.army.mil/armor/eARMOR/content/issues/2014/OCT_DEC/Westphal.html.

dropping 5,000 bombs per month at the peak of its air war against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and suggesting the IAF was carpet bombing Gaza.²⁹⁷ As recently as 20 October, for example, the IAF claimed to have destroyed dozens of “operational headquarters.”²⁹⁸ Close followers of the IAF may perhaps be forgiven for wondering how many operational headquarters Hamas can possibly have.²⁹⁹

The same day it even released a message image of a fighter aircraft with bombs that appeared to be unguided, a story that multiple Western news organizations quickly disseminated, including *Business Insider*. Journalists subsequently gave Israel the opportunity to set the matter straight, but it declined to comment.³⁰⁰ It is one thing to struggle with an opponent regarding truth in information battles, it is another way to generate one’s own self-generated soundbite that undercuts claim the IAF makes other places about precision difficult to believe.

Continuity and Change in the Israeli Air Force’s Twitter Narrative October 2023-March 2024

Videos of destroyed buildings continue to dominate the IAF’s social media feed. IAF also shows some specific defensive actions in response to rocket attacks by Hamas and Hezbollah.³⁰¹

The IDF’s most popular messages combine short ones stressing defending the homeland with attractive photographs of fighter jets. A 19 October message of this type received 433,000 views with another similar one receiving about 230,000 views.³⁰² Fighters are apparently more evocative than air defense weapons, with one tweet comparatively receiving about 50,000 views, which aligns with a rough average for the IAF’s social media tweets since the campaign began.³⁰³

²⁹⁷ Epstein, Jake and Lee, Lloyd, “Israel dropped more bombs on Gaza in 6 days than the US-led coalition dropped in any month fighting ISIS, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, *Business Insider*, October 13, 2023; <https://news.yahoo.com/israel-dropped-more-bombs-gaza-211449462.html>.

²⁹⁸ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 20, 2023, 12:38 AM; <https://twitter.com/IAFsite/status/1715241100082876815>.

²⁹⁹ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 16, 2023, 11:29 PM; <https://twitter.com/IAFsite/status/1714136440836096165>; Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 19, 2023, 3:48 PM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1714926456109666651>.

³⁰⁰ Panella, Chris, “As Israeli Jets Devastate Gaza, Photos Appear to Show Fighter Aircraft Armed with Unguided Weapons,” *Business Insider*, October 16, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/israeli-air-force-photos-fighter-aircraft-armed-unguided-weapons-2023-10>.

³⁰¹ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 13, 2023, 11:14 AM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1712864354423472541>.

³⁰² Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 19, 2023, 7:20 AM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1714979743458591203>.

³⁰³ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 13, 2023, 11:14 AM; <https://twitter.com/IAFsite/status/1714998200879198462>.



Figure 11-3. Screenshot of Israeli Defense Force Post to X
Heather P. Venable, PhD

Since the first weeks of the campaign, the IAF's approach has not changed significantly except in one important area. It continues to showcase repeated photographs of aircraft, many in settings removed from combat. It also continues to highlight its destruction of buildings.³⁰⁴ However, it almost always now posts exclusively in Hebrew. The rare messages in English focus on conveying messages of precision. These messages are difficult to reconcile with the satellite imagery of Gaza today.³⁰⁵ Having not messaged in English in an almost six-week period shows an increasingly self-isolated IAF that rarely bothers to connect with a broader audience.

Information is a strategic weapon, and the military must include those who decide how to convey and disseminate information in the highest planning circles. They should also provide the decision makers with the tools to respond as quickly and effectively as possible with truthful, accurate, and effective information. It is also important to establish and maintain a level of trustworthiness, a past shortcoming that may have undermined the credibility of Israel's self-reporting.³⁰⁶

Conclusion

Apart from a few social media messages that sought to personalize the war by highlighting Israeli Airmen and how Hamas's brutal attack has shaped the course of their lives, the dominant narrative of the IAF's X (Twitter) thread was to showcase explosions of entire buildings that seem to belie any attempts at proportionality or precision.³⁰⁷ The IAF's use of information has not come across as well tuned and appears to ignore the necessity of winning global hearts and minds. Instead, by showing an air campaign that many perceive as lacking precision and proportionality, the IAF comes across as seeking revenge against the Palestinian people, exactly the wrong narrative it

³⁰⁴ Israeli Air Force, X Post, March 1, 2024, 12:57 PM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1763639614772814156>.

³⁰⁵ Israeli Air Force, X Post, January 28, 2024, 3:15 AM; <https://x.com/IAFsite/status/1751534426373185885>;

"Gaza looks like a wasteland from space in these before-and-after photos," *Associated Press*, October 23, 2023; <https://apnews.com/article/satellite-images-israeli-airstrike-destruction-gaza-4477db1cfc39f38ac6cfff55330a7635>.

³⁰⁶ *The Telegraph* Podcast, "'The smell of bodies hangs in the air'" - reporting on the ground in Israel," October 20, 2023; <https://shows.acast.com/battle-lines-israel-gaza/episodes/658301a6306e830016a099f7>.

³⁰⁷ Israeli Air Force, X Post, October 19, 2023, 3:41 PM; <https://twitter.com/IAFsite/status/1715105885180109031>.

should be sending. In an era of strategic competition in an interconnected world, the IAF's messaging undercuts the emphasis democracies have placed on reducing collateral damage in what is an increasingly urban battlespace.

It is understandable that the nation of Israel is hurting after Hamas's 7 October attacks, but the IAF's actions, reinforced by its own narrative, might eventually undermine Israel's strongest supporters.³⁰⁸ The IAF failed to craft its narratives of airpower for Western audiences. As some have argued, "successful insurgents, and now successful counterinsurgents, seek to persuade an audience in such a way that the political message delivered is an end in itself."³⁰⁹ Israel may or may not achieve its operational goal of destroying Hamas, but it is well on the way to losing the strategic information war.

³⁰⁸ Pinkas, Alon, "Biden Is Angry and Frustrated with Netanyahu. But He Has Realistic Options to Change Course," *Haaretz*, January 15, 2024; <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/2024-01-15/ty-article/.premium/biden-is-angry-and-frustrated-with-netanyahu-he-has-realistic-options-to-change-course/0000018d-0d2e-de9c-a3df-6ffffc000000>.

³⁰⁹ Simpson, Emile, *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics*, Oxford University Press, 1st edition, 2012, xix.

Chapter 12
More Than “Wet Gap Crossings”
Riverine Capabilities are Needed for Irregular Warfare and Beyond
Walker D. Mills³¹⁰

While the U.S. military is equipped to conduct wet gap crossings, it is not adequately prepared to use rivers as a maneuver space or prevent adversaries from doing the same. In this article, the author contends that the U.S. military is neglecting its own riverine capability and, by extension, its ability to control key terrain in future conflicts.

The Dnipro River runs more than 1,300 miles, beginning near Smolensk in Russia and emptying into the Black Sea. It is the third-largest river in Europe and is nearly two miles across at its widest points. It cuts across Ukraine for over 600 miles from north to south and bisects several of Ukraine’s largest cities including the capital of Kyiv.

The Dnipro and its reservoirs power no less than six major hydroelectric stations that together comprise one of, “largest hydropower systems in the world.”³¹¹ It provided water for the reservoirs at the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant on the banks of the river and one of its tributaries, the Pripyat River, provided water for the cooling at Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. It is difficult to understate the importance of the river in Ukraine’s history, where it was a key part of the trade networks for luxury goods like walrus ivory and amber, linking the Baltic and Black Seas as far back as the Vikings and the ancient Greeks.³¹² The Dnipro River is a defining geopolitical and historical feature of Ukraine.

Given its centrality to Ukraine’s commercial and trade development, it is not surprising that the river has again become a focal point for the ongoing war in Ukraine. Both Russian and Ukrainian forces have used Ukrainian waterways as space to maneuver troops and move supplies.³¹³ Ukrainian forces have become especially proficient in using small boats to carry out raids on Russian forces.³¹⁴ Today, in certain areas, the Dnipro River is a de facto demarcation of the front line and in other places is the de jure demarcation for regions claimed by Russia.³¹⁵ The Russian withdrawal from Kherson and the west bank of the Dnipro leaves the river marking hundreds of miles of front line as the conflict continues.³¹⁶

³¹⁰ Mills, Walker D. is a co-director of the Irregular Warfare Initiative’s Project Maritime, and an active-duty officer in the U.S. Marine Corps, serving as an MQ-9A ‘Reaper’ pilot.

³¹¹ “A Visit to the Dnipro Hydroelectric Station – Past, Present, and Future Champion of Sustainable Development in Ukraine,” *World Bank Group*, April 16, 2009.

³¹² Barrett, James, et al “Walrus on the Dnieper: New Evidence for the Intercontinental Trade of Greenlandic Ivory in the Middle Ages,” *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, April 6, 2022; Curt Beck, “Criteria for “Amber Trade:” The Evidence in the Eastern European Neolithic,” *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol 16, 1985.

³¹³ Grylls, George, “Russia Uses Attack Patrol Boats from Kherson to Slip Behind Enemy Lines,” *The Times*, April 26, 2022; David Axe, “Ukrainian Commandos Riding in Speedboats Captured a High-Tech Russian Radar Vehicle,” *Forbes*, April 9, 2022.

³¹⁴ Gall, Carlotta, “On the River at Night, Ambushing Russians,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 2022.

³¹⁵ “Ukrainian Forces Advance Southward, Mirroring Success in the East,” *Al Jazeera*, October 3, 2022.

³¹⁶ “Russia Says it Has Completed Retreat from Kherson,” *Reuters*, November 11, 2022.

In many places, rivers and adjacent infrastructure have become key terrain in the conflict. The *New York Times* reported that the battles in southern Ukraine have, “revolved around rivers and bridges” since the opening days of the conflict.³¹⁷ In May of 2022, a Russian unit attempting a river crossing on a pontoon bridge in the east of Ukraine took “significant” losses, an embarrassing setback for the Russian military.³¹⁸ In October 2022, Ukrainian forces surrounded as many as 25,000 Russian troops in Kherson, where they were pushed up against the western bank of the Dnipro River and the crossing points could be targeted by artillery.³¹⁹ Ukraine has also accused Russia of planning a “false flag” attack on the dam over the Dnipro at the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant, which would flood dozens of Ukrainian towns and villages downstream.³²⁰ A canal from the Dnipro in Kherson also provides some of the only freshwater supplies to Russian-occupied Crimea, making it a critical objective of the invasion.³²¹ In November of 2022, Ukrainian forces launched an amphibious assault on the Kinburn Peninsula in Crimea, which dominates the mouth of the Dnipro River, showing the interplay between riverine and coastal operations. In the Dnipro estuary, Ukrainian and Russian special operations forces are still struggling for control of key islands.³²²

The importance of river systems in Ukraine highlights the disappointing reality that the U.S. is neglecting its own riverine capability and, by extension, its ability to control key terrain in future conflicts even as the U.S. government helps support Ukrainian riverine forces.³²³ Competency in riverine warfare will continue to be important in Ukraine whether the conflict continues with high intensity or dampens to a low boil because it can enable high-end combat operations, resistance, or local security operations. Despite clear lessons from Ukraine on the importance of riverine capability, the U.S. military does not have adequate forces that specialize in riverine or fluvial operations and security. In many military operations, rivers are seen only as obstacles to be crossed despite the opportunities they present for maneuvering and sustainment. However, properly trained and equipped units can use river systems to penetrate behind enemy lines and conduct targeted raids, sustain forces, or secure population centers. Riverine capability is especially important in irregular warfare and asymmetric conflicts because rivers are often key terrain for the military but also support critical infrastructure for civilian populations.

³¹⁷ Kramer, Andrew E., “For Ukraine, the Fight IS Often a Game of Bridges,” *The New York Times*, September 10, 2022.

³¹⁸ Stashevskiy, Oleksandr and Keyton, David, “Russia Takes Losses in Failed River Crossing, Officials Say,” *Military Times*, May 13, 2022.

³¹⁹ Landay, Jonathan, and Balmforth, Tom, “Ukraine Forces Advance on Two Fronts, Cross Russian Lines in the South,” *Reuters*, October 3, 2022; Jack Watling, “The Ukrainian Offensive Must Come in Stages,” *Royal United Services Institute*, September 2, 2022.

³²⁰ Bilefsky, Dan, “Zelensky Says Russia Plans to Blow Up a Major Dam in a ‘False Flag’ Attack, Flooding Southern Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, October 20, 2022.

³²¹ Miller, Micheal E., “Why. Putin Will Fight for Kherson: Fresh Water and Land Bridge to Crimea,” *The Washington Post*, November 3, 2022.

³²² Borger, Julian, “The Big Battle Is Coming”: Ukrainian Forces Prepare for the War’s Most Intense Phase,” *The Guardian*, January 27, 2023.

³²³ Suciu, Peter, “The U.S. is Sending 40 More Boats to Join Ukraine’s Growing ‘River Navy,’” *Business Insider*, November 13, 2022.

While the U.S. military is equipped to conduct wet gap crossings and cross rivers (despite the U.S. Marine Corps' divestment of its bridging companies), it is not adequately prepared to use rivers as a maneuver space or prevent adversaries from doing the same and it has not been for years.³²⁴ The U.S. military should maintain a dedicated riverine capability in its conventional forces that can be employed in irregular warfare and beyond and that can be exported to allies and partners in need. The U.S. Army and Marine Corps have largely abandoned their own riverine capability, and the U.S. Navy has precious little left. The Navy's special boat teams are capable but only one of the three teams, Special Boat Team 22, is focused on riverine operations and operates a riverine-specific platform, the Special Operations Craft-Riverine. On the conventional side, the U.S. Navy's Maritime Expeditionary Security Forces are chronically under resourced and focused on coastal rather than riverine environments. In a rare bit of good news for riverine capability, U.S. Marine Forces Reserve has been moving toward reestablishing a small craft capability for the Corps, though it remains to be seen if the effort will be successful.³²⁵

³²⁴ Eckstein, Megan, "Now Marine Corps Cuts Will Slash All Tanks, Many Heavy Weapons as Focus Shifts to Lighter, Littoral Forces," *USNI News*, March 23, 2020.

³²⁵ Wheeler, Jeremy, "Marine Forces Reserve Eyes a New Small Craft Mission," United States Marine Corps Public Affairs, 1 November 2022.

Ignoring History

Historically, the U.S. military has assembled riverine units in an ad hoc manner when they were needed, usually for counterinsurgency operations. The U.S. Navy has a “long and varied but episodic history of riverine operations,” according to a Center for Naval Analyses report.³²⁶ The Army and Navy both have experience in riverine warfare dating back to the American Revolution and inherited experience from even earlier colonial conflicts along North American inland waterways. In the years before and after World War II, the U.S. Navy had a dedicated so-called Yangtze Patrol of riverine gunboats conducting security operations in China. Vietnam saw large numbers of soldiers and sailors working to provide security on the Mekong River and elsewhere in the country as part of the Mobile Riverine Force which was inactivated in 1969. After the invasion of Iraq, U.S. Marines in a special riverine company were tasked with providing security for critical infrastructure along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, responsibilities that were later taken up by the U.S. Navy’s new (at the time) Coastal Riverine Force, which executed thousands of missions and helped train Iraqi police when the U.S. Marine unit was disbanded in order to free up personnel for other units.^{327, 328} a U.S. Army unit around the same time found the need for riverine capability so critical that it used local fishing boats to patrol Iraqi waterways.³²⁹ But today, there is almost nothing. The U.S. Navy has recently rebranded the Coastal Riverine Force as Maritime Expeditionary Security Forces because, “riverine warfare is no longer an assigned mission area for the U.S. Navy, and the legacy name no longer captures the roles and missions of our force.”^{330, 331} The change was also part of a shift from irregular warfare to great power competition.

Paradoxically, some of the best American riverine expertise is at the Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School (NAVSCIATTS), under U.S. Special Operations Command but the school only instructs international students from allied and partner nations. NAVSCIATTS is a critical organization that helps the U.S. export riverine expertise to partners around the world where coastal and riverine forces are not only key to defense but also to internal security and stability. The Pentagon recognizes that riverine expertise is important enough that we pay to bring hundreds of foreign students per year to the United States to learn it and related skills, but the U.S. military doesn’t maintain adequate riverine capability itself. Worse, NAVSCIATTS is at risk of closure, a move that would also rob many U.S. allies and partners of a key riverine training resource and further gut the U.S. military of resident expertise in riverine operations.

³²⁶ Benbow, Robert, et al. “Renew of Navy’s Riverine Capability: A Preliminary Examination of Past, Current and Future Capabilities,” *Center for Naval Analyses*, March 2006.

³²⁷ Fitzgerald, Paula, “Small Craft Company Fills Niche on Iraq’s Rivers,” *United States Marine Corps Public Affairs*, May 22, 2004.

³²⁸ Burke, Matthew, “Riverine Success in Iraq Shows Need for Naval Quick Reaction Force,” *Stars and Stripes*, October 29, 2012.

³²⁹ Mott, Zach, “Hunters Survey Lake, Hoppe to Halt Insurgent Flow of Goods,” *Defense Visual Information Distribution Service*, October 7, 2006.

³³⁰ Burgess, Richard, “The Navy’s Shrinking Patrol Boat Force,” *Seapower Magazine*, 2 June 2021.

³³¹ Ziezulewicz, Geoff, “Don’t Call It ‘Coastal Riverine Forces’ Anymore,” *Navy Times*, 18 September 2020.

Rivers are not Going Away: The Joint Force Needs More Riverine Capability

The Pentagon needs dedicated riverine warfare capability focused on irregular warfare but also valuable in other types of operations and in other contexts. Recent U.S. wars have shown the enduring value of brown-water navies in irregular warfare in Iraq, Vietnam, and Ukraine and continues to demonstrate the value of riverine capability in high-intensity conflict. Exporting riverine expertise to allies and partners through training exercises with conventional U.S. riverine forces and schools like NAVSCIATTS is valuable for all the above reasons.

Exporting U.S. riverine expertise to allies and partners improves American relationships and interoperability. Colombia is one of the best examples of a country that has benefitted from U.S. expertise in riverine warfare and from U.S. investments in Colombian equipment and training to the level where Colombia is now a world leader in such operations. Rivers are critical in Colombia because the country relies on over 7,000 miles of navigable rivers for everything from transportation to border security and hydroelectric power. The Colombian military has sent dozens, if not hundreds, of sailors, soldiers, and marines to NAVSCIATTS as students and this has helped transform the Colombian Marine Corps into one of the most capable riverine warfare organizations in the world. Today, the Colombian Marine Corps boasts 13 riverine battalions supported by indigenously designed and built riverine gunboats and naval aviation units that were critical in beating back the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) insurgency and forcing the group to the negotiating table in 2016.³³² Much of Colombia is only accessible by river, and the Colombian Navy and Marine Corps are not just guarantors of security but the only presence of the state in remote communities where they also help provide basic services like health care. Today, Colombia exports riverine expertise from its Centro Internacional de Excelencia Avanzada Fluvial (International Center of Advanced Riverine Excellence) to other countries from inside and outside the region and this includes Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Mozambique and has designed a family of purpose-built riverine patrol vessels built by COTECMAR (a domestic shipbuilder).

Riverine environments present a dichotomy. On the one hand, recent research from Stanford University shows that navigable rivers historically played a large role in the foundations of economic and political development and are linked with prosperity and democracy.³³³ However, riverine environments are also more likely to suffer from insecurity than other environments as they, “are susceptible to the greatest shock in security terms.”³³⁴ They are often adjacent to population centers and supply irrigation systems, drinking water, and power generation. Compounding the risk of insecurity, they are also vulnerable to severe weather events to include flooding and drought.

³³² Flores, Ricardo, “Improving the U.S. Navy Riverine Capability Lessons from the Colombian Experience,” thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2007.

³³³ Haber, Stephen, “Q&A: Stephen Haber on the Ecological Origins of Economic and Political Systems,” interview, Hoover Institution, 28 July 2022.

³³⁴ Rowlands, Kevin, “Riverine Warfare,” *Naval War College Review* Volume 71, 2018.

From the Seminole Wars to Vietnam and Iraq, American riverine capability has been critical for irregular warfare and beyond but assembling brown-water forces has always been an ad hoc process. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has demonstrated how important rivers and the riverine environment are to larger more conventional conflicts in today's era, characterized by strategic competition as well as irregular conflict. Recognizing this, the U.S. has announced multiple transfers of dozens of riverine patrol boats, including some likely from its own stocks which is a move that ironically emphasizes both the importance of riverine capability and simultaneously the U.S. military's disinterest in it.³³⁵ Unlike the U.S. Defense Department's donations of HIMARS and Javelin missiles and other weaponry, the patrol boats will not be replaced. The U.S. military cannot again wait until riverine capability is in high demand before bringing it back. It needs to establish an enduring conventional riverine capability that can support irregular operations or a large-scale conventional conflict and everything in between.

³³⁵ Mongilio, Heather, "18 Patrol Boats Sent to Ukraine for River Duty, Says Pentagon," *USNI News*, June 24, 2022, "Pentagon Adds 40 Armored Patrol Boats to Latest Ukraine Military Aid Package," *USNI News*, 7 November 2022.

Part 3

Concluding Thoughts on Perspectives in Irregular Warfare

Irregular warfare (IW) occurs throughout the competition continuum from building partner capacity in cooperation as part of a wider foreign internal defense (FID) program to supporting and consulting with partner forces during large-scale combat operations. In Part 2 of this handbook, differing perspectives of IW across multiple domains and dimensions were shared. This section reflects upon some considerations about the definitions of and the concepts for IW through a brief capability gap analysis.

Doctrine

IW is rooted in joint and Army doctrine, but what does doctrine really tell us?

From an Allies perspective, Dr. Martijn Kitzen and Ms. Vibeke Gootzen claim that in the context of strategic competition, IW is characteristically defensive in nature, but the authors also acknowledge that a fifth pillar of unconventional warfare (UW), is specifically offensive in nature as it involves training and employing a resistance force to overthrow an occupying force. It is worth noting here that UW is the core component to the concept of resistance operating, which emphasizes the importance of dispersing and decentralizing resistance forces, making it more difficult for the adversary to target and neutralize them.

Kitzen and Gootzen argue that outside of UW, the remaining pillars of IW are blended. These activities are blended because they are mutually supporting stabilization, which occurs predominantly in competition. This is indeed true in U.S. doctrine, where at least half of the 12 IW-focused operations and activities support stabilization. The degree to which these activities are blended often results in conflation of the activity itself, such as if building capacity in a partner force is really security force assistance (SFA), security, assistance, or foreign internal defense. If a blended approach is doctrinal to our Western allies, what is the doctrinal approach from another sister service, such as the Marine Corps?

In terms of a doctrinal approach to IW from another service, Mr. Reyes Cole claims that Marine Corps doctrine favors network engagement as the best activity to support conventional, IW, and irregular activities across the competition continuum. In reference to the doctrinal review found in Chapter 2, joint doctrine supports this claim, and similar advocacy can also be found in Joint Publication (JP) 3-04, *Information in Joint Operations*, 14 September 2022, JP 3-07, *Joint Stabilization Activities*, 11 February 2022, JP 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 25 April 2018, and JP 3-25, *Joint Countering Threat Networks*, 28 February 2023. Stated differently, the Marine Corps seeks to leverage their irregular activities not to only counter threat networks, but to be transformational in their approach to imposing strategic costs to U.S. adversaries and their proxies.

Material

Is there a need to develop or renew capabilities that require a material solution?

In terms of developing or renewing capabilities, according to Mr. Walker D. Mills, the U.S. military is equipped to conduct wet gap crossings and cross rivers, but it is not prepared to use rivers as a maneuver space, nor can it prevent adversaries or enemies from doing the same. Which, to the latter, is why the U.S. needs a dedicated riverine capability. In regions where rivers are the featured routes of transport, such as Columbia, it makes sense to at least export this capability to our allies and partners. However, maintaining a dedicated riverine capability within the U.S. military will

require dedicated resources, and in a resource-constrained environment, it would be a highly difficult sell to Congress on creating and maintaining a riverine capability, despite the utility.

Leadership and Education

Concerning irregular warfare, what is missing in current professional military education?

While joint professional military education institutions have been integrating IW into their curriculum, LTC Paul Amis and Ms. Amy Frumin advocate that non-vocational theoretical grounding in the profession of arms needs to go further. Stated differently, not enough education in non-military subject matter, such as international relations theory or complex adaptive systems, is taking place in the classrooms. There is merit to this observation because while doctrine defines strategic competition, it lacks the nuance of understanding of the international system and the role of the state in the international system. Why should this matter? Without a fundamental understanding of international relations theory, it will be difficult for the Soldiers on the ground to appreciate the strategic effects of IW without an understanding of why malign-state actors or their non-state proxies behave the way they do.

This is also true of complex adaptive systems, which are systems that consist of several interacting components that adapt to one another over time. Strategic competition, or how great powers deal with one another, is an example of a complex adaptive system. To echo the previous paragraph, without a fundamental understanding of complex adaptive systems and their key characteristics (self-organization and autonomy) it will also be difficult for Soldiers on the ground to appreciate the strategic effects of IW without an understanding of nonlinearity, which explains how small actions may often result in larger turbulent outcomes.

In 2011, for example, U.S. military personnel at Bagram Airbase in Afghanistan burned copies of the Quran as part of a routine disposal of sensitive materials. However, the burning was not done in a respectful or culturally sensitive manner, and the incident was soon discovered by local Afghans. Many Afghans saw the incident as a deeply disrespectful and insulting act, and it was widely condemned by local leaders and officials. The incident led to an increase in protests and demonstrations across Afghanistan, which resulted in the deaths of at least 30 people and injured many more. In the aftermath, U.S. President Obama had to apologize for such a seemingly innocuous task of disposing of sensitive items. This is why understanding complex adaptive systems shapes an appreciation of the strategic environment.

Policy

What is missing from the current policy approach to IW that better informs real-world multidomain operations?

LTC Jahara Matisek and Dr. Will Reno contend that U.S. SFA is undergoing a process of change across each theater due to changing threat perceptions, a new U.S. focus on promoting integrated deterrence in a time of decreasing resources and personnel, and the necessity of professionalizing military advising and assistance missions. In Africa, for example, the recent decreased focus on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations has led to a reduced U.S. presence on the continent, thus creating if not expanding, a vacuum that China and Russia exploit through military and economic means like China's belt and road initiative.

However, in Asia support for building greater capacity in Taiwan's security forces has increased despite the limited number of military advisors tasked to assist reforming and modernizing Taiwan's forces. Yet, despite the risks associated with an escalation of military forces in the South

China Sea with China, building capacity in Taiwan's security forces and institutions can achieve at least two strategic effects of deterrence and stability. On the one hand, building capacity in Taiwan's security forces can help deter China from using force against Taiwan, as a stronger Taiwanese military would make any potential invasion more costly and difficult. Whereas, on the other hand, a stronger Taiwan can contribute to regional stability as it would be better equipped to defend its own territory and interests and potentially serve a more active role in regional security initiatives.

In terms of deterring China in the South China Sea, Dr. Peter Layton believes that China's use of its airpower has become increasingly irregular in its approach to intimidating both Taiwan and Japan using so-called gray zone strategies. Stated differently, China seeks to escalate tensions in the region through the deliberate use of its airpower as the daily incursions within Japan's and Taiwan's air defense identification zones. This is a classic form of brinkmanship, but in escalating the potential for the use of military force in the South China Sea, China seeks to wear down the resolve of Taiwan and Japan to continue to demonstrate territorial sovereignty. Deterring China, the author claims, requires countering China's gray zone efforts.

The U.S., Taiwan, and Japan need to develop a counter-gray zone campaign that is likely to be prolonged, expensive, and will need the buy in from the societies affected by Chinese aggression. This campaign, if it does not already exist, needs to address the complexities in the region and have an understanding that the South China Sea, for example, is itself a complex adaptive system.

Layton recognizes that China's air defense identification zones (ADIZ) incursions are inherently theatrical. Knowing that China is highly sensitive over any action Taiwan makes provides political, military, and diplomatic potential pressure points against China and these may have utility in off-ramping Chinese escalatory tactics.

In the maritime domain, authors Micciche and Christensen posit that campaigning through IW-focused operations and activities throughout the earlier periods of the country of Yemen's civil war successfully restricted adversary access to proxies, bolstered humanitarian efforts, and facilitated a shift in control to an international authority. The U.S. Navy recognized that most Yemenis depended on maritime-transported food imports for survival and responded by establishing a Maritime Coalition Coordination Cell (MCCC), which has been used historically as a coordination mechanism used by naval forces from different countries to facilitate cooperation and information sharing during multinational maritime operations.

During its tenure, the authors claim, the MCCC enhanced U.S. engagement and influence in the Middle East, improved cooperation with regional partners, and effectively managed large quantities of humanitarian aid. These are the typical functions of an MCCC, but it did have a key role in facilitating commercial access to Yemen's western coastal ports thereby strengthening maritime security in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Thus, in terms of IW in the maritime domain, it is necessary to understand one's own military capabilities, conventional or otherwise, and how these capabilities achieve desired effects, such as managing access to conflict zones, protecting humanitarian actors, and gaining an advantage in the information and human dimensions of warfare.

In the human dimension, not to be conflated with the information dimension, social media factors heavily on influencing populations and is a perfect example of irregular capabilities available to both allies and adversaries. In the current Russia-Ukraine War, Dr. Peter Schrijver illustrates the depths in which the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense (HUR) Main Intelligence Directorate participates in social media, which is a departure from traditional low-public profile activities

typical of intelligence services. Dr. Schrijver asserts that a significant portion of HUR's social media content highlights successful operations against Russian forces, especially the exploits of various hacker groups operating under HUR command, such as Group 13, a collective of Ukrainian hackers who continually target Russian and separatist websites, social media, and other online platforms to disrupt their operations and gather intelligence.

In terms of leveraging information in the human dimension of the air domain, Dr. Heather P. Venable claims that the approach of the Israeli Air Force (IAF) to the weaponization of social media, in the wake of the Hamas attacks on 7 October 2023, has been rather counterproductive. In its air campaign to destroy Hamas targets, the IAF had become tone deaf to the public, showing more images of damaged or destroyed infrastructure in densely populated urban centers. Despite the questionable accuracy of precision munitions, the IAF had complete control over the narratives it disseminated, but oddly the IAF had chosen to not share images where precision munitions were more accurate. To make the matter more complicated for an IAF winning narrative, according to Dr. Venable, the IAF had not posted in English during a six-week period, a move which had isolated the IAF from its broader audience in the West. The IAF's managing of its social media narrative is a great example of how despite tactical overmatch and air superiority, Israel's inability to control its own narrative in the information space may have cost them much needed legitimacy in the international system.

Grasping the concept of IW requires a nuanced understanding as it demands flexibility in thinking about achieving specific effects rather than solely focusing on desired outcomes. While effects and outcomes can sometimes converge, IW often necessitates a more adaptive approach. The failure to comprehend IW and its relationship with our national power instruments poses a significant risk as adversaries will inevitably exploit the spaces where we lack presence or influence. This is not merely a discussion about risk versus reward, but rather a critical consideration for Army senior leaders to make informed decisions about strategy, policy, plans, and doctrine. By understanding what distinguishes irregular capabilities, leaders can develop more effective approaches to counter emerging threats and stay ahead of adversaries.

Appendix A

Major Threat Practitioners of Irregular Warfare

Background

Regardless of how the West defines irregular warfare (IW), the concept of waging war without traditional armed conflict has been found in the doctrine of China, Russia, and Iran for decades. China's *san zhong fa* or three warfares, describes the use of the media, legal systems, and psychological aspects of warfare. The three warfares, for example, combines the interpretation of international maritime law with proxy groups to increase antagonistic behavior in the South China Sea. Russia has been a practitioner of *aktivnyye meropriyatiya*, or active measures, since the Cold War. However, has recently experienced success through cyber operations and disinformation campaigns to increase political divide in the U.S. and in the West. Likewise, Iran uses terms like *jang-e narm*, or soft war, which like the Russian approach to IW, also includes activities like propaganda and disinformation to influence others.³³⁶

In this appendix, the approaches to IW from China, Russia, and Iran will be explored with the sum of this exploration resulting in the understanding that all three employ aggressive cyber and disinformation campaigns against the U.S. and its allies and partners. This is an important reality as it highlights that China, Russia, and Iran see themselves already at war with the West, despite their activities not nesting comfortably under Western definitions of war.

³³⁶ Jones, Seth G., *Three Dangerous Men: Russia, China, Iran, and the Rise of Irregular Warfare*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, NY, 2021, 12.

China

The 2025 U.S. national security strategy states that the People's Republic of China (PRC) “benefits from the openness of the international economy while limiting access to its domestic market and it seeks to make the world more dependent on the PRC while reducing its own dependence on the world.”³³⁷ Moreover, the PRC is “also investing in a military that is rapidly modernizing, increasingly capable in the Indo-Pacific, and growing in strength and reach globally. All of this is while seeking to erode U.S. alliances in the region and around the world.”³³⁸ That the PRC seeks regional hegemony is not disputed, but the manner in which its national instruments are applied should be acknowledged as forms of IW, not solely in terms of military power, but also recognizing that the PRC's use of diplomatic, economic, and informational advantages are components of its three warfares approach.

The three warfares approach refers to the PRC's official political and information non-kinetic warfare strategy of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) employing media or public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare. In February 1999, two PLA Air Force Senior Colonels (Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui) published *Unrestricted Warfare*.³³⁹ In the volume, Qiao and Wang laid out a vision of mobilizing all elements of government and society as complementary foreign policy tools. Perceptive as it may have been, *Unrestrictive Warfare* neither represented the official view of the PRC, nor was it likely that the book influenced Chinese military strategy. That said, a few years later, the PLA published a much more authoritative report called *The Science of Military Strategy*.³⁴⁰ This report highlighted the importance of IW, especially within the cyber domain.

The PRC's use of IW is shaped by its history and geopolitical context. Despite ending nearly 80 years ago, China's “century of humiliation” (lasting from the First Opium War and collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1839 to Mao Tse-tung's victory in the Chinese Civil War in 1949) plays a prominent role in the PRC's approach to statecraft.³⁴¹ The century of defeats and colonization convinced national leadership from Mao onward that every element of national power must be harnessed to prevent China from ever being subjugated again. In Mao's day, this meant martialing peasants to supplement the Red Army in the Chinese Civil War and the industrial labor force during what was called the “Great Leap Forward.” Today, under Xi Jinping, this has come to mean empowering and equipping fishing vessels to cut undersea communications cables to Taiwan and enlisting scores of nationalist “netizen” groups to quash dissent and spread misinformation.

China's empowering its maritime militia in the South China Sea is an example of leveraging proxy forces to conduct activities that are by design to be non-attributable to the PRC. On the one hand, the maritime militia takes part in anti-access and area denial missions in areas of the Pacific Ocean claimed by China. Whereas, on the other hand, by using law enforcement and civilian fishing vessels, the PRC can use so-called gray zone tactics, which seek to avoid military escalations while still pursuing and enforcing its maritime claims. Thus, the strength of the maritime militia is its

³³⁷ *National Security Strategy*, 12 October 2022, 23.

³³⁸ *Ibid*, 24.

³³⁹ Jones, Seth G., *Three Dangerous Men: Russia, China, Iran, and the Rise of Irregular Warfare*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, NY, 2021, 140.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 141.

³⁴¹ In most sources the naming convention of Mao Tse-tung is accepted as Mao Zedong, but this handbook uses references from *On Guerrilla Warfare* translated from Chinese to English by Samuel B. Griffith, who uses the formal Tse-tung rather than Zedong.

deniability, which allows its vessels to harass and intimidate foreign civilian craft and warships while leaving the PRC room to de-escalate by denying its affiliation with these activities.³⁴²

In the early 2000s, Chinese-backed advanced persistent threat (APT) groups focused on a broad range of economic espionage activities using high-volume uncoordinated attacks that corresponded to lower levels of operational security and resulted in numerous instances of high-probability attribution.³⁴³ In 2013, the cybersecurity firm Mandiant published a 76-page document correlating years of global, malicious cyber activity of APT to the PLA Unit 61398.³⁴⁴ The report indicated intellectual property theft from 141 companies across 20 different industries while maintaining presence in victim networks for an average of a year, in one case exfiltrating 6.5 terabytes of intellectual property from a single company.

In the last five years, Chinese-affiliated cyber groups have focused on political and military intelligence gathering and internal threats (such as dissidents and ethnic-groups), all with careful coordination to support Chinese strategic economic and policy objectives like China's five-year plan and their belt and road initiative. During the first quarter of 2023, 79 percent of all nation state-focused cyberattacks came from APT groups associated to China, with the group Mustang Panda accounting for 72 percent of worldwide cyberattacks.³⁴⁵

³⁴² Luo, Shuxian and Panter, Jonathan G., "China's Maritime Militia and Fishing Fleets: A Primer for Operational Staffs and Tactical Leaders," *Military Review*, January-February 2021, 16.

³⁴³ Insikt Group., November 7, 2023. *Cyber Threat Analysis: China. Recorded Future*. <https://go.recordedfuture.com/hubfs/reports/cta-2023-1107.pdf>.

³⁴⁴ Mandiant., 2013. APT, Advanced Persistent Threat, 1: Exposing One of China's Cyber Espionage Units. <https://www.mandiant.com/sites/default/files/2021-09/mandiant-apt1-report.pdf>.

³⁴⁵ Trellix., 2023, June. The Cyberthreat Report. <https://www.trellix.com/advanced-research-center/threat-reports/jun-2023/>.

Russia

The current national security strategy states that over the past decade, “the Russian government has chosen to pursue an imperialist foreign policy with the goal of overturning key elements of the international order.”³⁴⁶ This is most evident with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2022, where most Western analysts have, until recently, credited the new model of Russian hybrid warfare incorrectly to the so-called Gerasimov Doctrine. That is, Gerasimov’s 2013 speech titled “Value of Science in Prediction” did not reveal any innovation in Russian military strategy but rather explained his interpretation of how the U.S. relies on color-coded revolutions, precision munitions, and special operations forces to influence regime change through the perspective of the Arab Spring. In fact, Gerasimov’s observations were widely ignored in 2013, until a Western scholar called Gerasimov’s remarks by the name “Gerasimov Doctrine.”³⁴⁷ Gerasimov’s observations; however, do highlight Russia’s population-centric approach to modern warfare called new generation warfare, but this concept is nothing new in terms of how the U.S. understands IW.

Gerasimov referred to new generation warfare as a synonym to other terms such as gray zones or hybrid warfare, but these terms are not helpful in understanding current Russian military strategy or doctrine. That is, what some pundits describe as gray zone activities really describe great power competition, especially those activities that are prevalent at the threshold just below armed conflict.³⁴⁸ One should understand that these terms are not universally accepted by international relations scholars or professional military strategists. However, these terms highlight how much more we need to learn and understand about the Russian approach to IW.

The Russian approach to IW, as we understand it, is rooted in what is called active measures, which encompass a range of activities such as disinformation, forgeries, front groups, agents of influence, and covert broadcasts.³⁴⁹ During the Soviet era, active measures were not employed by the military, but rather by Service A of the Committee for State Security, better known as the Russian KGB (secret) police. Yet, active measures were not the traditional espionage or counterespionage tradecraft, such as stealing state secrets, but were activities meant to influence U.S. audiences as an offensive weapon of Soviet Russian foreign policy.³⁵⁰

The implication here is that active measures are both, “an expression of Russia’s strategic culture, with its inclination to see the world as full of covert challenges, and the operational code of the Putin regime, which considers the best defense against such threats to be a good offense.”³⁵¹ Stated differently, the Russian approach to IW is shaped largely by its Soviet heritage and the desire to restore its global standing while adapting many of the same tactics to the information environment. Thus, it is not surprising that Russia’s approach to IW today exhibits many of the same traits of

³⁴⁶ *National Security Strategy*, 12 October 2022, 25.

³⁴⁷ Mark Galeotti coined the term *Gerasimov Doctrine*, but it is neither doctrine on an expanded theory of modern war nor a blueprint on Russian new generation warfare. Galeotti apologized for the confusion his term created in a 2018 *Foreign Policy* article found here: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/05/im-sorry-for-creating-the-gerasimov-doctrine/>.

³⁴⁸ Stoker, Donald, *Why America Loses Wars: Limited War and U.S. Strategy from the Korean War to the Present*, 2d Edition. Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 2022, 230.

³⁴⁹ Jones, Seth G., *Three Dangerous Men: Russia, China, Iran, and the Rise of Irregular Warfare*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, NY, 2021, 30.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 30. Jones cites as original source Interagency Intelligence Study, “Soviet Active Measures,” in *Soviet Active Measures*: hearings, 31.

³⁵¹ Galeotti, Mark, *Active Measures: Russia’s Covert Geopolitical Operations*, George C. Marshall Center, 2019.

Soviet Russian activity during the Cold War, including disinformation, but also gaining proficiency in the cyber domain.

Like the PRC, Russia employs an aggressive disinformation and cyber campaign. In July 2016, Russian hackers released thousands of private emails obtained by penetrating the networks of the Democratic National Committee.³⁵² Russian meddling revealed that deep divisions in Western society at-large were, “ripe for exploitation by foreign actors who could aspire to political influence beyond their borders, but the magnitude and significance of the Kremlin-backed effort was not yet fully understood.”³⁵³ Stated differently, the 2016 presidential election brought Western attention to the issue of Russian interference in foreign elections. Moscow’s political activity abroad intensified with interference in the United Kingdom Brexit vote and U.S. elections using methods that included cyberattacks, hack-and-leak operations, and online disinformation campaigns. Russia even supported a failed coup in the country of Montenegro to unseat the pro-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) government. Yet, despite worldwide condemnation of Russian interference, Russia has continued using these methods in elections throughout Western Europe, Scandinavia, and the Balkans.³⁵⁴

However, most recently over 350,000 disinformation posts were noted on social media ahead of parliamentary elections in Slovakia.³⁵⁵ These posts covered a variety of topics critical of the European Union, the war in Ukraine, immigration, and Western political influence in Slovakia and they reached over five times the average population likely due to their being repeated by pro-Russian individuals. The Russian disinformation campaign in Slovakia has been effective as social media has spread anti-Ukraine narratives all the while advocating for an end to hostilities though a compromise with Russia.

In terms of Russian cyber capabilities, Russia is a, “cyber-superpower with a serious arsenal of cyber-tools and hackers capable of disruptive and potentially destructive cyberattacks.”³⁵⁶ For example, cyber actors affiliated with the Russian General Staff Main Intelligence Directorate’s 161st Specialist Training Center (better known as Unit 29155) are responsible for computer network operations against global targets for the purposes of espionage, sabotage, and reputational harm since at least 2020. It has been documented that Unit 29155 actors began deploying the destructive malware called WhisperGate against multiple Ukrainian victim organizations as early as 13 January 2023.³⁵⁷

Recently, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has indicted a Russian cybercriminal accused of breaking into the networks of several companies in the Dallas, TX area and holding their data for ransom.³⁵⁸ The day before the DOJ unveiled the charges, a ransomware attack crippled a medical

³⁵² Tennis, Maggie, *Russia Ramps up Global Elections Interference: Lessons for the United States*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., 2020. <https://www.csis.org/blogs/strategic-technologies-blog/russia-ramps-global-elections-interference-lessons-united-states>.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Rogalewicz, Mikołaj, *Russian disinformation vs. parliamentary elections in Slovakia*, Warsaw Institute, 2023. <https://warsawinstitute.org/russian-disinformation-vs-parliamentary-elections-in-slovakia/>.

³⁵⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-60841924>.

³⁵⁷ Ibid. WhisperGate is a multi-stage wiper designed to look like ransomware that has been used against multiple government, non-profit, and information technology organizations in Ukraine since at least January 2022. For example, WhisperGate has been disguised as a JPG extension to avoid detection as a malicious Portable Executable file.

³⁵⁸ <https://www.govtech.com/security/russian-hacker-indicted-for-cyber-attacks-against-north-texas>.

center in Lubbock, TX which forced one of the largest hospitals in the west of Texas to reroute ambulances to other facilities. Russian cyberattacks on U.S. critical infrastructure is nothing new but understanding how other great powers compete in the information domain is important in the sense that cyber actors (whether they are Chinese, Russian, or Iranian) are little more than proxy forces as they are generally a step removed from the official decisions made by these malign-state actors.

Iran

Iran is a theocratic republic of 87 million people that has had a contemptuous relationship with its neighbors and Western countries for the last 40 years, while engaging in a wide range of belligerent activities including missile strikes, conventional war, hostage taking, training and supplying militant proxy forces, cyberattacks, and human rights violations.³⁵⁹ Iranian officials publicly applaud attacks on Israel and other nation states aligned with the U.S (including Saudi Arabia) while making great effort to mask connectivity with these events.³⁶⁰

While Iran possesses a relatively weak conventional military, Iranian proxy forces have conducted successful operations in Israel, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen and have grown in numbers and sophistication.³⁶¹ Iran's support to proxy forces and named terrorist groups throughout the Middle East, its improving relationships with China and Russia, and persistent attempts to enrich uranium solidify its position as a top security challenge in the area.³⁶²

Upon seizing power in Iran in 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini was suspicious of the Army's loyalty to the recently deposed Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and created the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to protect theocratic rule in Iran and defend it against internal and external enemies. The IRGC was born out of a clear understanding of Western conventional superiority and the Iran-Iraq war promoted the need for a specialized component of the IRGC which could focus on paramilitary activities, the Quds Force.

The Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) provided a difficult yet valuable lesson to the post-revolutionary Iranian leadership. The lack of military successes against a smaller conventional Iraqi Army and the absence of global support to fight the invading Iraqis suggested Iran adopt new strategies to project power and promulgate ideology.³⁶³ This became the origins of what we understand as the Iran Threat Network (ITN), which is really an association of non-Iranian non-state proxies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq in Iraq, or Ansar Allah in Yemen. From Iran's perspective, the ITN allows it to pursue its strategic objective of imposing costs on U.S. regional interests without escalating the confrontation to a conventional war.³⁶⁴ Yet, based on its past behavior, members of the ITN, not Tehran, are most likely to strike against U.S. or partner military targets, as Shia militia groups have been doing in Iraq recently against U.S. military bases.

Iran is aware of the long-term benefit of advancing pro-revolutionist ideology. Information campaigns require patience and are successful through expansion and repetition. Part of the informal strategy to conduct what is called soft war is through world-wide education on the principles of Shia Islam (to present Shia Islam as the true form of Islam) supported by additional

³⁵⁹ United States Institute of Peace., 2023, July 11. U.N. Report: Human Rights in Iran. <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2023/jul/11/un-report-human-rights-iran>.

³⁶⁰ Azizi, H., 2023, Nov 16. How Iran and its Allies Hope to Save Hamas. War on the Rocks. Azizi, H., 16 November 2023,. How Iran and its Allies Hope to Save Hamas. War on the Rocks. <https://warontherocks.com/2023/11/how-iran-and-its-allies-hope-to-save-hamas/>.

³⁶¹ Jones, S. G., 2020, January. *Containing Tehran: Understanding Iran's Power and Exploiting Its Vulnerabilities*. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/200110_Jones_ContainingIran_WEB_v2.pdf.

³⁶² Congressional Research Service., 2023, September 29. *Iran: Background and U.S. Policy*. <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47321>.

³⁶³ Murray, W. & Woods, K. M., 2014. *The Iran-Iraq War: A Military and Strategic History*. Cambridge University Press.

³⁶⁴ Ariane M. Tabatabai, Jeffrey Martini, Becca Wasser, *The Iran Threat Network: Four Models of Iran's Nonstate Client Partnerships*, Rand Corporation, Santa Monica, CA, April 14, 2021, 4.

humanitarian and social projects and to ensure this message is communicated across national and economic lines, and in many instances, ensure it is the only message received.

Iran is a key practitioner of IW and arguably one of the most successful. Despite economic sanctions and death of IRGC chief Qasem Soleimani in early 2020, Iran has expanded the Quds Force and its partnerships throughout the Middle East and continues to create infrastructure that will enable its activities for near future. Iran is not timid with their support to proxy groups who actively attack its enemies, exemplified by over 4,000 attacks conducted by Ansar Allah between 2016 and 2021. Using a variety of Iranian made rockets, ballistic and cruise missiles, and explosive-laden unmanned aircraft and maritime craft, Ansar Allah has effectively targeted Saudi Arabian oil and gas refineries and other civilian infrastructure at a fraction of the cost of what Saudi Arabia spends to defend against these attacks.³⁶⁵

Iran maintains the ability to operate effectively across the warfighting domains. This means that while Iran's greatest concentration of mass and conventional capability is in the land domain, Iran can leverage what are arguably more potent asymmetric advantages in other domains such as in maritime, through their asymmetric fast attack and swarming capabilities, or in the air through their advanced ballistic missile program and an improving air defense system. Yet, it is the cyber domain where Iran maintains an important component of its overall military strategy.

Iran sees cyberattacks as part of the asymmetric military capabilities it needs to confront the U.S. Iran's recent development of its cyber capabilities is likely a response to its vulnerabilities from cyberattacks or espionage intrusions from other foreign governments.³⁶⁶ That said, years of constant engagement with Israel and Saudi Arabia have improved Iran's cyber capabilities, and Iran's experience with covert action gives itself the ability to conceptualize how cyberattacks nests within its national security strategies, especially as a military instrument.

Iran's hacking program is not as sophisticated as that of China, Russia, or the U.S. however, the government in Tehran has built up a corps of capable advanced persistent threat actors who have routinely attacked critical infrastructure in the U.S., including the transportation sector and the healthcare and public health sector.³⁶⁷ The Iranian government-sponsored group MuddyWater, for example, has been known to exploit publicly reported vulnerabilities and use open-source tools and strategies to gain access to sensitive data on victims' systems and deploy ransomware since 2018.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁵ Jones, S. G., Thompson, J., Ngo, D., McSorley, B., & Bermudez Jr., J. S., 2021. The Iranian and Houthi War against Saudi Arabia. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/211221_Jones_IranianHouthi_SaudiArabia.pdf?VersionId=fn1d98tAhj7yOUr.IncppMueLOC4kv83.

³⁶⁶ <https://www.csis.org/analysis/iran-and-cyber-power>.

³⁶⁷ <https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/cybersecurity-advisories/aa21-321a>.

³⁶⁸ <https://www.cybercom.mil/Media/News/Article/2945592/iranian-government-sponsored-actors-conduct-cyber-operations-against-global-gov/>.

Appendix B

Recommended Reading

This recommended reading list is not a comprehensive literature review. This list is compiled for the novice scholar and practitioner in mind. These books and reports serve to anchor much of the academic discussions outside of the formulation of U.S. policies relating to irregular warfare. Thus, this reading list encourages the scholar or practitioner to build his or her library on irregular warfare so that there is an appropriate return on investment in future scholarly debate about the strategic importance of irregular warfare in U.S. policy, plans, and strategies.

There are a growing number of online resources for tracking the continuing evolution of IW thinking. Two good places to start researching are the *Irregular Warfare Initiative* <https://mwi.usma.edu/irregular-warfare-initiative/> and the *Irregular Warfare Center* <https://irregularwarfarecenter.org/>

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Boyle, Michael J., *The Drone Age: How Drone Technology Will Change War and Peace* (Oxford University Press, New York, NY, 2020).

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Congressional Research Service (2021), *Defense Primer: DOD Title 10 Security Cooperation*.

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Congressional Research Service (2024), *U.S. Security Assistance to Ukraine*.

Congressional Research Service. (2023), *China Primer: U.S.-China Relations*.

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Koduvayur, Varsha, James Kiras, and Richard Newton, *The Future Faces of Irregular Warfare: Great Power Competition in the 21st Century* (Irregular Warfare Center Press, Washington D.C., 2024).

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McFate, Sean, *The New Rules of War: How America Can Win—Against Russia, China, and Other Threats* (Morrow, New York, NY, 2019).

Moghadam, Assaf, Vladimir Rauta, and Michel Wyss, *Routledge Handbook of Proxy Wars* (Routledge, New York, NY, 2024).

Mulder, Nicholas. *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 2022).

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Appendix C Acronyms

ADIZ	air defense identification zones
ADP	Army doctrine publication
APT	advanced persistent threat
ARSOF	Army Special Operations Forces
ASCC	Army service component command
ATP	Army techniques publication
BCT	brigade combat team
BRI	Belt Road Initiative
CA	civil affairs
CAO	civil affairs operations
CAT	civil affairs team
CbT	combating terrorism
CCDOR	combatant command daily operational requirements
CCDR	combatant commander
CCMD	combatant command
CCP	combatant commander campaign plan
CHMR	civilian harm mitigation and response
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CMO	civil-military operations
COIN	counterinsurgency operations
CONUS	continental U.S.
CT	counter terrorism

CTF	counter threat finance
CTN	counter threat networks
DOD	Department of Defense
DODD	Department of Defense Directive
DODI	Department of Defense Instruction
DOS	Department of State
DOTmLPF	doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and personnel, facilities
EDF	European Defense Fund
eFP	enhanced forward presence
E-SAE	enduring special areas of emphasis
ETA	Basque Homeland and Liberty or <i>Euskadi Ta Askatasuna</i> ,
EUMAM	European Union Military Assistance Mission
EW	electronic warfare
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia
FID	foreign internal defense
FM	field manual
FMF	Fleet Marine Force
HUR	Main Directorate of Intelligence of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine
IA	interagency
IAF	Israeli Air Force
IDF	Israeli Defense Force
IR	international relations

IRA	Irish Republican Army
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ITN	Iran Threat Network
IW	irregular warfare
JDN	joint doctrine note
JFC	joint force commander
JIPOE	Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment
JMTG-U	Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine
JP	joint publication
JS	joint service
KGB	Committee for State Security or <i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i>
MARSOC	Marine Special Operations Command
MCDP	Marine Corp Doctrine Publication
MCRP	Marine Corp Refence Publication
MCTP	Marine Corp Tactical Publication
MCWP	Marine Corp Warfighting Publication
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MIG	Marine Expeditionary Force Information Group
MISO	military information support operations
MISTF-A	Military Information Support Task Force-Afghanistan
MTTP	multi-service tactics, techniques, and procedures
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NAVSCIATTS	Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School
NDS	national defense strategy
NMS	national military strategy
NSS	national security strategy
OE	operational environment
OPMEP	Officer Professional Military Education Policy
PESCO	permanent structured cooperation
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PME	professional military education
PN	partner nation
PRC	People's Republic of China
ROYG	Republic of Yemen Government
SA	security assistance
SC	security cooperation
SDF	Syrian Defense Force
SecDef	Secretary of Defense
SFA	security force assistance
SFAB	security force assistance brigade
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
SOF	special operations forces
UAVs	unmanned aerial vehicles
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
USMC	United States Marine Corps
UW	unconventional warfare



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