



# CURTIS E. LEMAY CENTER

FOR DOCTRINE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION



## ANNEX 3-2 IRREGULAR WARFARE

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ANNEX 3-2 IRREGULAR WARFARE

**INTRODUCTION TO IRREGULAR WARFARE**

Last Updated: 15 March 2013

Our current conflicts represent a generational struggle in which we must prevail. The asymmetric advantages of [airpower](#) are decisive factors in the Nation's future success. This annex provides operational level doctrinal guidance for [irregular warfare](#) (IW), and presents fundamental IW principles and core IW activities in the context of contemporary challenges to our national security. It examines the adaptability of the Air Force's capabilities, and how they support Air Force, joint, and multinational missions across the [range of military operations](#) (ROMO) including IW.

This annex is based on the premise that IW is best viewed as a form of warfare that is both different from and complementary to [traditional warfare](#) and should not be viewed as a lesser included form of major operations. Therefore, Air Force responses to irregular threats and challenges should not rely on a specific suite of capabilities applicable only to IW. The Air Force provides combatant commanders with critical capabilities to defend the US and its interests against all consequential threats—across the ROMO. [Airmen](#) should be as competent in and capable of conducting IW as in conventional warfare. Airmen should use the skills of their specialty and leverage airpower's inherent flexibility and adaptability to shape the operational environment by building positive relationships with [host nations](#) (HNs) and fielding appropriate capabilities, thereby eroding the effectiveness of both state and non-state adversaries.

HNs with undeveloped/underdeveloped military capabilities are more likely to fail in countering challenges to security, stability, and legitimate/effective governance. As such, these shortfalls may require prolonged Air Force involvement in [counterinsurgency](#), [counterterrorism](#), [stability operations](#), [foreign internal defense](#), and other IW-related activities to ensure security and stability, and assist the HN in developing its own aviation capabilities. However, within the context of the full range of IW activities, the US will not always be dealing with a HN. During [unconventional warfare](#) (UW), forces partner with opposition groups and aspiring governments, not yet "host nations." As Air Force planners assess these groups and/or HN's needs, they should consider both internal issues and regional implications. Some solutions to internal challenges may have regionally destabilizing effects. Due to the complex and political nature of IW, Airmen should be able to articulate Air Force capabilities as well as the utility and employment of airpower in IW.

To prevent, deter, disrupt, and defeat irregular threats, the Air Force partners with the joint force, other governmental agencies, multinational partners, and the host nation to address the dynamic and complex nature of the problem. Success in IW requires a sustained and balanced approach that seeks to protect and influence populations,

mitigate violent threats, and improve legitimacy of host nation government and social structures. The desired end state is a self-sufficient partner with a supportive population.

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[ANNEX 3-2 IRREGULAR WARFARE](#)

**IRREGULAR WARFARE FUNDAMENTALS**

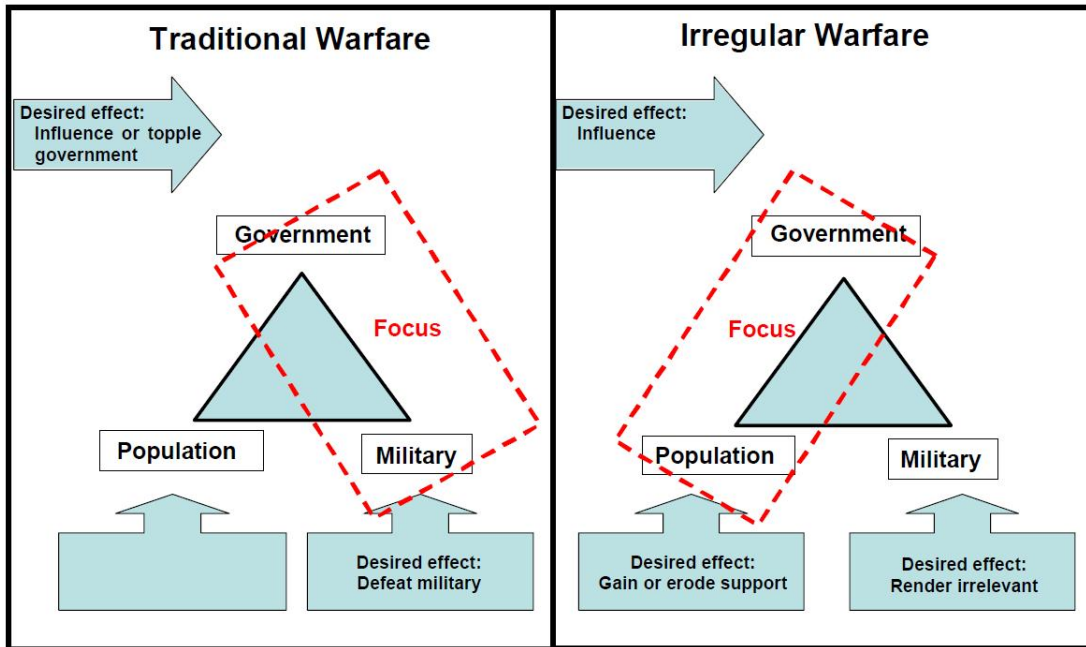
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The United States' overwhelming dominance in recent traditional wars has made it highly unlikely that adversaries, especially those state and non-state actors with less-robust military capabilities, will choose to challenge the United States in traditional force-on-force engagements. Irregular forms of warfare have become attractive, if not the most preferred options for adversaries such as terrorists, insurgents, criminal networks, and non-friendly states to effectively challenge US interests and national security. The term [irregular warfare](#) (IW) evolved from efforts to define those conflicts that manifest in violent and non-violent adversarial actions, but typically lack traditional force-on-force confrontations. The key distinctions between IW and traditional warfare<sup>1</sup> are the context and conduct of the conflict, particularly with regard to the population. Traditional warfare regards the population on the periphery of the conflict, whereas IW considers the population as central to the conflict.

Both IW and traditional warfare seek to resolve conflict by compelling change in adversarial behavior. However, they differ significantly in both strategy and conduct. Traditional warfare focuses on dominance over an adversary's ability to sustain its war fighting capability. IW focuses on population-centric approaches that affect actors, behaviors, relationships, and stability in the area or region of interest (see figure [Contrasting Traditional and Irregular Warfare](#)). Therefore, IW requires a different level of operational thought and threat comprehension.

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<sup>1</sup>The National Defense Strategy of March 2005 and the subsequent Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) adopted the term "traditional" to describe "recognized military capabilities and forces in well-understood forms of military competition and conflict." In practical terms, the term is interchangeable with the term "conventional." This document will remain consistent with the National Defense Strategy and the QDR by using conventional and "traditional" interchangeably. Source: IW Joint Operating Concept, 11 Sep 07.



**Contrasting Traditional and Irregular Warfare**

The Air Force’s ability to operate in the [air](#), [space](#), and [cyberspace](#) domains provides our fighting forces with a highly asymmetric advantage over adversaries. Command of the air prevents adversaries from conducting sustained operations in this domain while allowing US and coalition forces to exploit numerous advantages. Airpower can create effects using range, speed, and flexibility, without the impediments to movement that terrain imposes on ground forces.

National level guidance and operational experience increasingly emphasize indirect activities to strengthen [host nation](#) (HN). The Air Force possesses the ability to assess, train, advise, assist, and equip HN’s forces. Enhanced aviation enterprise capabilities enable HN’s to strengthen internal security, defend against external aggression, and act as trusted participants in regional security structures. HN’s can then help prevent festering problems from turning into crises that may require costly US intervention.

To succeed in IW, Airmen should balance partner development, engagement of irregular threats, and the Air Force’s ability to maintain air, space, and cyberspace superiority.

## Fundamentals

### IW Defined

Much confusion exists between irregular warfare and [counterinsurgency](#) (COIN), as these two terms are often used interchangeably to describe conflicts that are other than traditional. IW is defined as “**a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other**

**capacities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will.”<sup>2</sup>** COIN, on the other hand, is a specific subset of IW involving civilian and military efforts taken to defeat an insurgency and address core grievances. Irregular warfare is a much wider-ranging umbrella concept that covers multiple areas of non-traditional warfare.

## **History**

The use of IW to unhinge and defeat a militarily stronger adversary is as old as war itself. It is described in the earliest treatises on combat—by Sun Tzu and Thucydides, for example. Actions which today would be characterized as elements of IW have been employed against powers great and small throughout history. Often, these tactics contributed to the defeat of major powers and the demise of empires—the Ottoman, the Napoleonic French, the Soviet empires and the Portuguese empire in Africa being the most noteworthy examples—through national overreach, erosion of will, and sheer exhaustion.

More recently, post-World War II decolonization, national liberation movements, proxy conflicts, the rise of globalization, demographic pressures, and ethno-religious strife have all made IW a persistent strategic challenge. Indeed, when one considers the entire history of conflict, IW has been one of the most common forms of warfare.

Throughout history, warring sides have sought to advance their objectives through irregular means. Several terms have been used to describe similar IW activities in the past such as small wars, revolutionary warfare, guerrilla warfare, low-intensity conflict, and military operations other than war. Though IW terminology has changed, the basic defining characteristics have not. Despite variations in terminology, belligerents engaged in irregular warfare use asymmetric violence to gain advantage and influence over the relevant populations.

## **Strategic Context**

The complexities of the global environment and the changing character of 21st Century warfare from predominantly traditional, force-on-force warfare to irregular operations have led would-be adversaries to adopt asymmetric approaches to attack key elements of US power. Their strategies, some of which can be broadly categorized in doctrine as “irregular warfare,” are specifically designed to avoid the costs and risks of confronting superior powers directly. In many cases, IW-based strategies are a function of limited capability rather than choice, and they are the only strategies available to a weaker force. Adversaries deliberately circumvent core military advantages and exploit vulnerabilities while seeking to undermine the superior power’s international support and domestic resolve.

The rise in irregular threats and their actions is a major challenge to global US interests and national security. Irregular threats employ asymmetric capabilities (e.g., suicide bombers; improvised explosive devices; hazardous material devices; cyber attacks; provocation; subversion; and intimidation) while exploiting sanctuary among civilian populations in ungoverned and under-governed areas, or external sanctuaries in other states. However, these threats lack the ability to effectively challenge the Air Force’s

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<sup>2</sup> JP 1, [\*Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States\*](#)

dominance of the “high ground,” a key advantage that superiority in air, space and cyberspace provides to US and coalition forces. The perspectives and capabilities that Airmen possess are as relevant in IW as in traditional conflicts.

The joint force then works with other governmental agencies, multinational partners, and the host nation, to fully analyze and understand the situation, integrate plans and actions, and continually assess and adapt in response to the dynamics of the conflict. Success in IW requires in-depth appreciation of the precursors and causes of the conflict; as well as deliberate, sustained, and balanced approaches to engaging the threat and mitigating population-centric drivers of instability which ignite or fuel the conflict. IW strategy seeks to promote stability by assisting in the development and enhancement of the capabilities of local partners (usually the host nation) to address causes of conflict and challenges to security, improve capabilities and infrastructure, sustain economic growth, and provide legitimate and effective governance to its population.

Many of the Air Force’s capabilities and skills which enable dominance in traditional force-on-force conflict are also applicable to IW. IW activities and engagements can parallel traditional [phasing of major operations](#) and campaigns and may occur across the range of military operations. They may be conducted prior to, in conjunction with, in lieu of, or after major operations. IW engagements may involve direct action in support of a HN or may be focused on indirect activities to develop and sustain the airpower capabilities of the HN. Airmen adapt capabilities and employ resources in IW operations, they should also comprehend and appreciate how IW conditions, environment, and objectives significantly differ from those of traditional warfare. IW requires a different level of operational thought and threat comprehension. Operational focus shifts toward less-kinetic means of defeating the threat while protecting the population, both of which are often co-located. **Therefore, seemingly tactical decisions in the IW context can have significant strategic implications.**

IW operations are ideally conducted by working by, with, and through HNs, but this is not always the case, and the joint force may have to operate without effective HN support. In either case, the military’s role—in concert with other instruments of national power—is to establish a secure environment in which HNs can flourish—ultimately without direct assistance. This does not necessarily imply the total elimination of internal strife, but it does require the state to have adequate capability and capacity to defend and care for its population.

### **IW and the Whole of Government**

Unified action that includes all relevant agencies (US government, host nation, multinational, and non-governmental) is essential for successfully dealing with IW challenges. A US whole-of-government approach leverages skill sets and capabilities that do not traditionally reside within the armed forces, but have direct application to IW. Regardless of who leads the overall effort, unified action can be challenging due to the wide array of potential actors in IW. However, unified action is vital to ensure consistency and synergy across all IW activities. Whenever possible, civilian agencies should lead whole-of-government IW efforts. Military participation supports a whole-of-

government approach and is typically focused on establishing security, assisting security sector reform, and supporting other [stability operations](#) as required.

### **Operations and Activities**

US forces should be prepared to deter, disrupt and defeat irregular threats, while securing, stabilizing, and building a local partner's legitimacy and influence over the relevant population. The ultimate goal is to enable partners to address root causes of conflict and violence, meet security challenges, and sustain stability and economic growth in lieu of major US involvement. In addition to employment of core capabilities and skills against irregular threats, Airmen should assess, train, advise, assist, and when directed, equip HNs with development of civil and military aviation capabilities and capacity. Partner development includes building institutions, organizations, and infrastructure necessary to protect themselves from internal threats and instability, defend their sovereign borders, and enable them to effectively contribute to coalition or allied operations.

As an integral part of the IW campaign, the Air Force is prepared to support and conduct principal IW activities or operations that may be undertaken in sequence, in parallel, or blended within a coherent campaign to address irregular threats. Five such principal activities include: [foreign internal defense](#) (FID), [unconventional warfare](#) (UW), counterinsurgency (COIN), counterterrorism (CT), and stability operations (SO). Additionally, there is a host of key related activities including security force assistance (SFA), information operations (IO), civil-military operations (CMO), support to law enforcement, intelligence, medical, and counterintelligence operations, all of which may be used to counter irregular threats.

The primary way the joint force normally counters irregular threats in both steady-state and surge conditions is through a combination of some or all of the principle and key related activities of IW. These activities are typically persistent, population-focused activities which are conducted with HNs. The joint force should tailor these activities to best meet the operational challenges presented by the adversary. Integrated application of these activities is the hallmark approach to address irregular threats that are often unaffected by the use of only one activity.

**Counterinsurgency** is defined as “comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to defeat an insurgency and to address any core grievances.”<sup>3</sup> The purpose of an insurgency is to overthrow and replace an established government or societal structure, or to compel a change in behavior or policy by the government or societal structure.

An [insurgency](#) may extend beyond the borders of a single threatened state. Non-state actors such as transnational terrorist and criminal organizations often represent a security threat beyond areas they inhabit. Some pose a direct concern for the United States and its partners. Non-state actors often team with insurgents to profit from a conflict. Insurgencies can expand to include local, regional, and global entities. This may require the United States to employ forces not only to help defeat an insurgency in

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<sup>3</sup> JP 3-24, [Counterinsurgency](#)



a single country, but also to defeat small extremist cells operating in other countries or ungoverned areas. The proliferation of [weapons of mass destruction](#) and the ability to affect international commerce give small, non-state organizations potentially disproportionate capabilities. As such, strategies should be tailored to the threat and environment, precipitating a more direct and drastic approach. The way insurgencies are inspired, organized, and perpetuated should be of principal interest to Airmen.

COIN operations will most likely require a sizeable commitment of assets and personnel. The United States normally conducts COIN operations when the HN is incapable of conducting any substantial operations, the situation has deteriorated significantly (approaching a failed state environment), or when there is no effective government in power (i.e., a failed state). When there is no legitimate government in power, coalition partners and the United States will most likely be responsible for all aspects of the COIN strategy. Thus, some of the restrictions and limitations on employment that occurred while providing capabilities to a HN's COIN effort may be reduced. However, creating a legitimate government will often be far more difficult in this situation. The Air Force will not only be called upon to conduct military operations but also execute missions in support of other agencies. Tremendous demands for Air Force capabilities may be placed on the air component.

[Counterterrorism](#) is defined as “actions taken directly against terrorist networks and indirectly to influence and render global and regional environments inhospitable to terrorist networks.”<sup>4</sup> Successful CT necessitates stable, protracted engagement that leads to familiarization with the operating environments and facilitates security and stability for key populations. It requires a coordinated use of the [instruments of national power](#) to negate the terrorist network's physical or psychological violence and undermine its power, will, credibility, and legitimacy among the population. Security is of the utmost importance. In its absence, terrorist networks are able to exacerbate or exploit a population's grievances and gain influence.

In most cases, CT operations require the long-range employment of specific Air Force assets. Conducting operations against loosely-networked organizations may require significant time for the level of intelligence capabilities to mature. As actionable intelligence is gathered, US forces may be called upon to conduct indirect and direct operations. Airpower provides a range of options for a joint force commander (JFC) when deciding how and when to engage a potential terrorist target set. Plans beyond steady-state operations are normally short in duration and may rely heavily on the Air Force's lethal and nonlethal capabilities. The ability to generate operations quickly and deliver precise effects is critical as terrorist targets are often fleeting.

[Foreign internal defense](#) is defined as “participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization, to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security.”<sup>5</sup> FID is often conducted in

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<sup>4</sup> JP 3-26, [Counterterrorism](#)

<sup>5</sup> JP 3-22, [Foreign Internal Defense](#)

conjunction with COIN, CT, SO, etc., in support of a HN. However, it is not solely a military function. The diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) instruments of national power are keys to successful FID. Air Force FID missions can range from narrow to broad focus in a specific area or across the entire [range of military operations](#) (ROMO). Air Force personnel conducting FID will typically operate in the context of indirect support, direct support (not including combat), and combat operations. Air Force [special operations forces](#) and general purpose forces both play critical roles in preparing for and executing FID activities to include assessing, advising, training, assisting, and equipping HN forces. For more information about the employment of airpower in FID, see Annex 3-22, [Foreign Internal Defense](#).

[Stability operations](#) is an “overarching term encompassing 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, provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.”<sup>6</sup> Airpower’s ability to leverage speed, range, flexibility, precision, and tempo allows it to effectively support stability operations. Airmen should understand that operations during stability operations often require more subtle applications of airpower to prevent the alienation of the affected population. Further, airpower should be used in such a way that it will not undermine the legitimacy of the host nation government. For more information on stability operations, see JP 3-07, [Stability Operations](#).

[Unconventional warfare](#) is defined as “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.”<sup>7</sup> UW operations can be used to exploit a hostile power’s political, military, economic, and psychological vulnerability by developing and sustaining indigenous resistance forces to accomplish US and coalition strategic objectives. UW can include a broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominantly conducted by, with and through indigenous or surrogate forces that are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source. It includes, but is not limited to, guerrilla warfare, subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and unconventional assisted recovery.

US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is the lead DOD component for UW, although in some cases general purpose forces support is required. In a conflict environment characterized by rogue states, radical nationalism, [terrorism](#), and asymmetric warfare, the ability to successfully apply airpower in joint and combined UW operations is critical to US defense needs. The [joint special operations air component commander](#), in particular, should be aware of current Air Force capabilities and employment methods to deal with threats that do not readily yield to other conventional solutions. UW operations are usually conducted in enemy-held, enemy-controlled, or politically sensitive territory.

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<sup>6</sup> JP 3-0, [Joint Operations](#)

<sup>7</sup> JP 3-05, [Special Operations](#)

### **Security Force Assistance**

SFA is conducted in support of the HN and it is defined as “activities that contribute to unified action by the US Government (USG) to support the development of the capacity and capability of foreign security forces and their supporting institutions.”<sup>8</sup> SFA is conducted to assist HNs in their efforts to defend against transnational and internal threats to stability. As HN requirements increase to protect civil society and expand security and development, Airmen may be called upon to help provide SFA. This typically involves direct work with the HN population to recruit, train, and possibly equip indigenous security forces. These forces can help reinforce the security capacity of the HN and add credibility to the HN government. SFA spans the ROMO and includes military engagement, [security cooperation](#), crisis response, and contingency operations. It can even be accomplished during major operations and campaigns in support of US national strategic objectives. SFA should be closely coordinated with relevant USG agencies. FID and SFA are similar at the tactical level where advisory skills are applicable to both. At the operational and strategic levels, both FID and SFA focus on preparing foreign security forces (FSF) to combat lawlessness, subversion, insurgency, terrorism, and other internal threats to their security; however, SFA also prepares FSF to defend against external threats and to perform as part of an international force. Although FID and SFA are both subsets of security cooperation, neither is considered subsets of the other.” For a more in-depth discussion on SFA, refer to JP 3-22, [Foreign Internal Defense](#).

### **Surrogate Operations**

In some circumstances, political sensitivities or resource constraints may prevent direct US involvement in an IW campaign. In these cases, the United States may work by, with and through friendly surrogates, such as regional partners and allies, to conduct operations and achieve mutually agreeable objectives. In 2002, for example, a US Pacific Command joint task force (JTF) in the Southern Philippines provided indirect support to Filipino special forces and Marines to severely degrade the Islamist terrorist group Abu Sayaf. The success of this effort provided a model for subsequent surrogate operations in the Horn of Africa and Arabian Peninsula.

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<sup>8</sup> JP 3-22.



ANNEX 3-2 IRREGULAR WARFARE

**AIRMAN'S PERSPECTIVE OF IW**

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Host nation (HN) with undeveloped or under-developed aviation capabilities are more likely to fail in countering insurgencies, terrorism, and other challenges to security, stability, and legitimate/effective governance. As such, [air domain](#) capabilities in at-risk and developing HNs may require a much greater emphasis on developing a basic aviation infrastructure vice implementing more advanced capability packages. The approach used by the Air Force to assist HNs, especially those with undeveloped or underdeveloped aviation capabilities, is to help develop, enhance, and sustain their aviation enterprise. An aviation enterprise is the sum total of all air domain resources, processes, and culture, including personnel, equipment, infrastructure, operations, sustainment and [airmindedness](#). HN shortfalls may require prolonged Air Force involvement to assist in developing their aviation capabilities. As Air Force planners assess HN needs, they should consider both internal issues and regional implications. Some solutions to internal challenges may have regionally destabilizing effects.

Air Force commanders and planning staffs should seek to offer strategic options and room to maneuver. Preferred solutions are organic to the HN. Failing this, a solution should espouse providing external, but regional, support through coalition allies. If or when US forces are called upon as a last resort, it is best if they are employed to improve host-nation or regional capabilities (assess, train, advise, assist, and equip).

Across the range of [irregular warfare](#) (IW) scenarios a set of overarching concepts provide a foundation for planning and employing Air Force capabilities. These do not apply to all conceivable situations. However, they do represent broad concepts that Airmen should consider. These overarching concepts either reflect a best practice in evolving IW concepts or are based on significant lessons learned from operations that failed to meet expectations.

- ✦ **Though combat is often present in IW, traditional strategies that seek continuing advantage through combat alone are seldom appropriate or successful in IW.**
- ✦ **In IW, winning the population's support for the strategic objectives and desired [end state](#) is paramount.** The population is the essential element; it represents the battleground and operational terrain. Like physical terrain factors, planners should skillfully navigate social structures, culture, religion, language and history.

- ★ **The Air Force should be prepared to simultaneously conduct irregular and traditional warfare operations.** The nature of a single conflict can easily shift between types of warfare. Failure to understand or anticipate shifts often leads to fighting the wrong type of conflict, or focusing on the wrong effects for a given conflict. IW and traditional warfare are not mutually exclusive, and both are often present in the same conflict. Air Forces designed for conventional combat have the added advantage of creating theater deterrence effects when used in IW roles. While these assets may often have capabilities in excess of the specific requirements for IW, they can limit the nature and amount of third party interference in the HN. Finding a critical balance in capabilities is essential to overall success in both types of conflicts.
  
- ★ **IW is a different form of warfare and not a lesser form of conflict within traditional warfare. The struggle for legitimacy and influence over a relevant population is the primary focus of operations, not the coercion of key political leaders or defeat of their military capability.** In conducting operations, adversaries commonly use tactics to provide asymmetric advantages that erode the US population's support for the conflict. These tactics often diminish the effectiveness of traditional military modes of attack. Therefore, while many IW tactical-level airpower applications may not be distinguishable from traditional operations, the desired effects at the operational and strategic levels may require a different mindset in order to better plan, understand, and coordinate Air Force capabilities.
  
- ★ **IW is intelligence-intensive.** Providing actionable [intelligence](#) is challenging. The ability to hide among the population, the tactics employed, and the distributed nature of insurgent organizations make finding, identifying, and engaging targets difficult. Intelligence efforts may focus on non-traditional areas such as cultural, social, political, and economic issues rather than military capabilities and key leaders. Fusing information obtained from multiple sources, methods, and levels is required to provide timely, accurate, and relevant intelligence to all levels. Because the population is a key [center of gravity](#) in IW, [human intelligence](#) (HUMINT) is the most vital aspect of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) used to gather ground truth feelings and perceptions from the populace.
  
- ★ **[Unity of effort](#) across all instruments of power is essential to overall strategic success.** Success in IW depends on a high degree of integration of the military with other elements of national power within a national security strategy. Organizationally, the instruments of national power—diplomatic, information, military and economic (DIME)—should operate in close cooperation among joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) organizations. In some circumstances, Airmen should be prepared to assume non-traditional roles until other JIIM organizations are able to assume these roles. Providing security, basic services, and other forms of development should be coordinated and integrated.

- ✦ **Integrated command and control (C2) structures enable flexibility at all levels and are vital to successful IW scenarios.** The complex operating environment of IW requires rapid, adaptive application of capabilities at the operational and tactical levels. Conducting multiple, separate operations against different IW adversaries in a single theater may require that the combatant commander (CCDR) establish multiple JTFs. Key assets, especially ISR; [special operations forces](#) (SOF); and all other low density/high demand systems, are scarce resources and their use should be prioritized to most directly affect achievement of the combatant commander's (CCDR) or joint force commander's (JFC) strategic objectives. This prioritization decision is best accomplished through [centralized control and decentralized execution](#).
- ✦ **Effective working relationships between people and organizations are key to success in IW.** Coordinated effort across the spectrum of operations is vital, and success often hinges on effective interpersonal relationships. IW operations often use small teams of integrated airpower functional experts working in concert with HN forces and other joint/Interagency/coalition partners, as well as acting as liaisons to the HN, to integrate and bring together the full range of Air Force capabilities.
- ✦ **Operational effectiveness can be very difficult to measure; thus, feedback through a strong operations assessment and [lessons learned](#) process is essential to strategic success.** Complex localized conditions and issues require an adaptive strategy and assessment process. Measuring effectiveness of lethal and non-lethal operations is challenging. Determining which operations are effective and modifying those that are not are critical to adjusting strategy.
- ✦ **The adversary may be highly complex and adaptive.** The adversary often adopts a decentralized, broadly networked organization that operates semi-independently, taking advantage of local issues and conflicts that can be radically different in adjacent locales. Additionally, adversaries are adept at operating within the seams of military and political boundaries. To counter these tactics, military operations should be timely, precise, and coordinated. This often necessitates that military planning and ISR processes be conducted and aggregated at a much lower level than in traditional warfare, but still requires operational level guidance from the JFC. Ultimately, the management of scarce resources to generate the most appropriate effects against a highly adaptive adversary remains critical to overall success.
- ✦ **In an IW context, non-combat support elements can deliver effects that matter more than those of kinetic engagement platforms.** This represents a significant paradigm shift for conventional forces. For example, agile combat support functional capabilities, such as civil engineers, medical and legal personnel, or technical skills trainers, can positively influence an affected population. Additionally, non-kinetic manifestations of airpower such as [airlift](#); [aeromedical evacuation](#); [ISR](#); [information operations](#); or [military information support operations](#) (MISO) can provide immediate and enduring effects that significantly impact the population and its perceptions.

- ✦ **IW is about “right-tech,” not about high- or low-tech.** Both high and low technology assets have applicability in IW. Commanders should understand the appropriate technology to apply to the specific operational or tactical problem.

### **IW End State**

The desired IW [end state](#) is a self-sufficient partner with a supportive population. This partner is able to sustain its self-defense capabilities and is a trusted partner in regional security structures which support both HN and US national interests. These end states may include: HNs able to mitigate violence to a level that does not threaten US interests or regional stability; US prevention of the use of ungoverned and under-governed areas as a launching pad for attacks; terrorists, sponsors of terrorists and irregular threats deterred or defeated; or an aviation enterprise which supports security, good governance, and economic prosperity. Airmen should understand that the conduct of an IW campaign will impact the post-conflict prospects for enduring peace and stability. For this reason, Airmen should consider the end state during all phases and aspects of IW.

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## ANNEX 3-2 IRREGULAR WARFARE

### IW COMMAND AND ORGANIZATION CONSIDERATIONS

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Irregular warfare (IW) is characterized by rapidly evolving circumstances requiring situational awareness and responsiveness that can only be achieved through carefully conceived command and control (C2) structures. Unlike air operations against conventional forces, the adversary is fleeting and may only be vulnerable for short periods of time. In a theater-wide contingency, airpower may be limited and dispersed throughout the joint force commander's (JFC) area of responsibility (AOR) with additional capabilities provided through reachback to functional commands outside the AOR (e.g., space support, air mobility, and cyberspace support). As friendly surface forces are geographically dispersed, the need to carefully balance centralized control with the demands of decentralized execution makes planning critical.

The air expeditionary task force (AETF) model described in Volume 1 applies during IW. To properly integrate airpower across a joint force, the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR) may distribute liaisons and joint air component coordination elements (JACCE) as necessary to provide two-way interface with appropriate joint force elements involved in planning and execution. In some cases, subordinate AETFs may be established and placed in direct support of other joint force elements.

During some IW scenarios, surface forces may decentralize their daily planning below a level with which the air component can directly integrate. Senior Air Force leaders should emphasize that coherent air-ground planning may not realistically occur below the surface echelon that hosts an attached air component C2 element such as an air support operations center (ASOC). Surface commanders may have to aggregate their subordinate echelons' airpower requirements upward to a level supported by such an air component C2 entity. Execution of air component capabilities, however, may occur at lower levels such as joint terminal attack controllers, tactical air control parties, or air liaison officers.

Command relationships between the air and surface components may be established in a manner that provides the desired degree of control by the supported forces without

Recent experience has revealed that tracking small, remotely located Air Force elements, especially in the distributed environment encountered in irregular warfare, has posed challenges for the Air Force component headquarters. These challenges may range from lack of administrative support to improper employment of small units and individual Airmen in tasks for which they have not been trained. **The AFFOR staff should take special efforts to maintain effective over-sight of such elements in order to fulfill proper ADCON oversight.**

—Volume 1



sacrificing centralized control. This is normally done by the commander, Air Force forces's (COMAFFOR) retention of [operational control](#) (OPCON) over air component forces and provision of air component forces in support. The retention of OPCON allows the COMAFFOR to re-task forces, based upon JFC or CCDR priorities, if the situation dictates. The establishment of effective command relationships necessitates continuing dialogue between the respective joint and Service component commanders and their common superior commander.

### **Command and Control**

C2 relationships in IW scenarios are usually dependent upon which commander in the joint force is supported. In many of these scenarios, the air component may support multiple surface components in the same joint operations area (JOA) (for example, one surface force element may conduct COIN while another force conducts CT in the same JOA). It is imperative that the COMAFFOR understands the joint force commander's (JFC) priorities for supported land forces and his staff produces relevant and timely air component directives that communicate those priorities to subordinate echelons. In IW, the tenet of centralized control and decentralized execution still applies, and effective decentralized execution requires focused support to ground force elements. **Careful consideration should be given to command relationships.** Regardless of what relationships are established, the key is to provide effective support that facilitates decision making capable of anticipating and outpacing the enemy.

Each IW scenario is unique, and command arrangements should be tailored to meet the requirements. To better integrate the capabilities that airpower provides, the Air Force component should have a robust presence on the JTF staff. The COMAFFOR and staff identify the issues and challenges and match Air Force capabilities to meet mission requirements. In most IW scenarios, ground forces push planning and decision-making to lower echelons, which may require more air component liaisons at lower levels. **IW operations highlight the need for Air Force liaisons at lower supported echelons.** When designing an air component C2 structure, the COMAFFOR may also need to include appropriate elements from the "whole of US government," coalition partners, and HNs.

### **COMAFFOR SUPPORT OF IW OBJECTIVES**

The objective of IW is to use indirect or asymmetric approaches to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will. The process by which the COMAFFOR arrives at a C2 architecture is the same for any activity within the ROMO.<sup>1</sup> IW may require more decentralized execution in support of distributed ground operations. In addition to decentralized execution considerations, the potential significance of [theater air control system](#) (TACS) elements, combat support elements, [public affairs](#), [base operating support](#), distributed communications, and [military information support operations](#) (MISO) at forward operating locations should not be overlooked.

Both traditional warfare and IW use elements of security cooperation (SC) for Building Partner Capacity (BPC) objectives. BPC objectives are designed to help a partner

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<sup>1</sup> Volume 1, [Basic Doctrine](#)

nation eventually become self-sufficient and take care of their own challenges with organic resources. These Phase 0 activities permeate both operating environments and can occur during all 5 phases of conflict. SC initiatives are established jointly by the CCDR and the US ambassador (and his/her country team) assigned to a particular HN. Therefore, the command and organization for SC includes input and planning with US Department of State (DOS) and can include other governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

[Volume 1](#) establishes the basic philosophy for decentralized execution:

Execution should be decentralized within a command and control architecture that exploits the ability of front-line decision makers (such as strike package leaders, air battle managers, forward air controllers) to make on-scene decisions during complex, rapidly unfolding operations..... As long as a subordinate's decision supports the superior commander's intent and meets campaign objectives, subordinates should be allowed to take the initiative during execution.

Furthermore, not all IW activities are conducted through the air operations center AOC. Some activities, such as Air Force support to reconstruction, joint expeditionary tasking elements, etc., are best directed through the [A-Staff](#). These present a different C2 challenge for the COMAFFOR.

In situations where IW operations are distributed among multiple subordinate areas of operations (AO), a single, theater-level COMAFFOR may not possess the requisite degree of situational awareness occurring at the tactical levels. In some cases, the COMAFFOR may delegate some aspects of planning and decision-making to subordinate Airmen positioned at lower levels within the TACS. Increasing the role and authority of subordinate Airmen may provide more effective uses of Air Force capabilities.

### **COMAFFOR Contribution to Diplomatic Efforts**

In addition to the military elements of power, the COMAFFOR contributes to the CCDR's effort to shape the AOR with the diplomatic element of national power before, during, and after IW.

To ensure availability and access to airspace, airfields, and host/HN facilities in the AOR, the COMAFFOR should be engaged with the DOS within the AOR. Diplomatic efforts are critical to planned or contingency operations. US embassies and consulates may provide regional information and are likely involved in ongoing security assistance.

The COMAFFOR collaborates with the diplomatic country teams using an ends, ways, and means approach. The "ends" include the support of coalition efforts to counter violent extremism, collaboration with HN's to deter and defeat aggression, and to strengthen regional security. The "ways" created to identify the methods and process to support the CCDR's strategy are to collaborate with international partners to enhance their national security capacity and capabilities, and to identify and enhance partnership capabilities that seek to foster interoperability, integration, and/or interdependence. The

“means” to affect the “ways” are most normally through air advisor programs, international military education and training, mobile training teams, foreign military sales, direct commercial sales, humanitarian assistance, and expeditionary medical support. See Annex 3-0, [Operations and Planning](#), for further discussion of ends, ways, and means as they relate to planning, [operational design](#), and the [effects-based approach to operations](#).

### **Security Cooperation**

[Security cooperation](#) (SC) is defined as “all DOD interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific US security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide US forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.”<sup>2</sup> The Secretary of Defense’s *Guidance for Employment of the Force* contains DOD guidance for SC. It can involve indirect support through security assistance (SA), military exchange programs, and joint and multinational exercises, and air advisor engagements that all focus on building strong national infrastructures through economic and military capabilities. SC can also involve direct support (not involving combat operations) by focusing US forces on CMO, MISO, communication and ISR cooperation, medical, mobility, and logistic support. Each of these direct and indirect support examples may contribute to the COMAFFOR’s IW objectives. The COMAFFOR’s A-5 directorate normally develops the Air Force component’s campaign support plan and theater engagement activities to support the Ccdr’s SC objectives.

### **Other Instruments of National Power**

The conduct of IW often requires whole-of-government cooperation for success. The COMAFFOR should be prepared to integrate military activities with the other non-military elements of national power: diplomatic, informational, and economic. Proper integration of all instruments of national power leverages the capabilities of all participants to achieve US objectives.

### **Basic COMAFFOR Responsibilities**

**Operational responsibilities of the COMAFFOR.** The COMAFFOR’s desired effect(s) in an IW mission may require capabilities that are not traditionally the main effort in a major operation. The COMAFFOR should identify IW-related airpower requirements for steady state and surge campaigns. Some IW-related operational requirements of the COMAFFOR as the Service component commander to the JFC include:

- ✦ Establish an [air operations directive](#) in support of ongoing operations—establish /implement priorities.
- ✦ Develop, coordinate, and execute the Air Force component’s campaign support plan to support the Ccdr theater campaign plan and individual country plans.
- ✦ Provide TACS.
- ✦ Provide [personnel recovery forces](#).

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<sup>2</sup> JP 3-22, [Foreign Internal Defense](#)

- ✦ Provide [airspace control](#) as [Airspace Control Authority](#) (short term versus long term).
- ✦ Provide air defense as required.
- ✦ Provide [airlift](#).
- ✦ Provide [air refueling](#).
- ✦ Provide [close air support](#) (CAS) to ground forces under conditions of immediate needs, difficult target identification and close scrutiny of adverse results.
- ✦ Provide [space](#) and [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance](#) (ISR) support, as modified for IW ops.
- ✦ As required, delegate aspects of planning and decision-making to subordinate Airmen in the TACS to increase flexibility in rapidly evolving situations.

**Service responsibilities of the COMAFFOR.** Like operational responsibilities, the Service responsibilities of the COMAFFOR are described in [Volume 1](#). Each of the Service responsibilities should be considered in light of the specific scenario. In addition to those listed in Volume 1, some of the COMAFFOR's IW-related Service responsibilities include:

- ✦ Advise the CCDR on the Air Force's capability to implement theater campaign and contingency plans relevant to IW.
- ✦ Incorporate AOR-specific IW-related concepts into training, exercises, and planning.
- ✦ Accomplish assigned tasks for IW missions.
- ✦ Establish local defense requirements specific to the threat.
- ✦ Provide air liaisons knowledgeable in IW related aviation capabilities to appropriate headquarters.

### **Distributed/Split Operations**

Distributed operations, split operations and reachback are relevant to IW activities. Distributed operations involve conducting operations from independent or interdependent nodes in a teaming manner. Some operational planning or decision making may occur from outside the JOA. Split operations are a type of distributed operations conducted by a single C2 entity separated between two or more geographic locations. A single commander should have oversight of all aspects of a split C2 operation. Reachback, which can be applied to both distributed, and the more specific case of split operations, is the process of obtaining products, services, and applications

or forces, equipment, or materiel from Air Force organizations that are not forward deployed.<sup>3</sup>

The decision to establish distributed or split operations invokes several tradeoffs. When mission needs dictate, the COMAFFOR may empower commanders at subordinate echelons to provide support to closely position ground forces in order to provide better or timelier response. It is important to note that more supported echelons may result in more robust TACS requirements such as, for example, increased numbers of tactical air control parties among surface units.

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<sup>3</sup> Volume 1, [Basic Doctrine](#)



[ANNEX 3-2 IRREGULAR WARFARE](#)

**PRESENTATION OF IW FORCES**

Last Updated: 15 March 2013

Although Air Force forces are presented through the [air expeditionary task force](#) (AETF) construct, they may be tailored differently from traditional warfare operations. Two considerations that should be taken into account when tailoring and sizing AETFs for [irregular warfare](#) (IW) are the overall US strategic aim, and the US' relationship with the host nation (HN).

**Supporting/Supported Relationships**

The ability to project influence across large distances is a great benefit in IW. The most important aspect of this is to get the right people, supplies, and needed reachback to the region where IW is being conducted. Intertheater [airlift](#) and [aerial refueling](#) enables the US to conduct IW operations across the globe. In some cases, [cyberspace](#) and [space-based capabilities](#) allow US forces to conduct global operations without leaving their permanent base, while global strike operations may be generated from and return to CONUS bases. These inter-regional capabilities are available simultaneously to multiple geographic CCDRs. As such, prioritizing these capabilities is increasingly important. In order to provide effective and timely support to the CCDR, these capabilities are presented through the COMAFFOR. The high demand for these capabilities may dictate that a supporting/supported relationship be established. For more discussion on supporting/supported relationships, see Volume 1.

**Supporting the HN**

Air Force forces should be tailored to support the HN government's ability to bolster its legitimacy and influence over the relevant population. These activities include, but are not limited to, [foreign internal defense](#) (FID), counterterrorism (CT), and civil-military operations (CMO). Forces should be tailored to support the HN government's [internal defense and development](#) (IDAD) plan by providing capabilities that can address deficiencies in HN security and governance. If the security situation in the HN is particularly dire and HN capabilities are lacking or inadequate, US forces may be required to assume the lead for IW activities during certain times and in specific locations; this will most likely require the deployment of a larger US force. A larger US military presence in the HN creates a more significant logistical, political, and cultural footprint. Consideration should be given to basing forces outside the HN; however, this may not be a viable option, depending on other regional considerations.

Expect minimal HN support from a nation where the government is unable to conduct its own operations requiring an AETF to possess robust capabilities for self-sustainment, [combat support](#), reachback, and [force protection](#). In such cases, operations from theater bases may be warranted. However, political sensitivity or operational

considerations may impose limits on the overall size of an AETF's in-region footprint, which may require that some Air Force forces operate from outside the region.

### **Air Advisors**

[Air advisors](#) are personnel who communicate professional knowledge and skills to HN aviation personnel in order to improve HN airpower capabilities. Air advising is comprised of five core functions: assess, train, advise, assist, and equip. These activities are conducted “by, with, and through” the HN counterpart and can be accomplished at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. While these functions can be performed across the [range of military operations](#) (ROMO), they are often used to help shape the environment and deter future aggression. Air advising has historically been associated with SOF conducting aviation FID. As IW scenarios have become more common—in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example—the demand on SOF assets has significantly increased, and general purpose forces (GPF) are now more frequently used as air advisors. In addition to full-time air advisors, the USAF employs numerous personnel to perform the five air advising activities on a part-time or as-needed basis. These personnel are deployed to HNs as part of mobile training teams, extended training service specialists, etc. For further general information and C2 specifics on SOF combat aviation advisors and GPF air advisors, see Annex 3-22, [Foreign Internal Defense](#) and AFTTP 3-4.5, [Air Advising](#).

### **IW-Unique Considerations**

When conducting IW activities, it is important for the COMAFFOR and staff to understand some IW-unique considerations. First, IW environments generally require greater flexibility at subordinate levels to support decentralized execution. ISR operations in IW may differ from those in traditional warfare. In IW, ISR often seeks small, dispersed, concealed targets versus large targets in the open. Successful prosecution of such targets, as well as self-defense and force protection, is significantly improved through the application of advanced ISR technologies. ISR also relies heavily on HUMINT as HN personnel can more readily engage the population and collect information about the adversary. If AF HUMINT personnel or linguists with the appropriate language abilities are not available or assigned, the AFFOR commander may need to employ HN or other Services HUMINT elements. Because it is vital to engage with the HN population, several small, forward operating locations may be required. It is not uncommon for many of these bases to be operated by other Services with small, collocated Air Force elements. In such situations, the COMAFFOR should take special care to ensure proper [administrative control](#) (ADCON) support for Airmen attached to, or collocated with, non-Air Force organizations. Remote operating locations present logistical challenges and may entail flexible air mobility and [airdrop](#) plans. Although these are several significant IW-unique considerations, they are not all-inclusive.

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[ANNEX 3-2 IRREGULAR WARFARE](#)

**STRATEGY, PLANNING, EXECUTION, AND ASSESSMENT**

Last Updated: 15 March 2013

Today's adversaries are becoming more flexible and adaptive. Some include terrorists, criminal networks, insurgents, and non-state actors. These groups are leveraging advances in communications, technology, and cyberspace to make regional and global impacts. Increased use of irregular warfare as an asymmetric means to offset the strengths of the US conventional military power requires a different mindset for strategy development, planning, execution, and assessment. Airmen should strive to understand the inherent differences between the characters of [irregular warfare](#) (IW) and traditional warfare, and they should conduct operations to capitalize on those inherent differences.

**STRATEGY**

Military leaders create strategy, campaigns, and plans using the entire spectrum of military capabilities. [Strategy development](#) is iterative, relying on feedback to evolve and adapt to the dynamic environment in which it operates. Assessment becomes the critical ingredient that provides feedback for the development and modification of strategy. Understanding what actions have taken place and subsequent effects allows strategists to evolve their strategy. [Operational design](#) is an element of strategy that enables planners to develop a framework to underpin a campaign or major operation plan. The use of operational design helps planners build a consistent structure from which to identify an operation's objectives. See Annex 3-0, [Operations and Planning](#), for further information on operational design.

In IW, success requires a mindset that focuses on how to positively influence the population to support the host nation (HN) leadership. Airmen should understand the nature of IW by carefully examining its complex political context and operational environment. This understanding provides the foundation for the development and conduct of strategy and planning.

**IW Strategy and Development**

Each IW engagement has its own unique characteristics, and each situation should be analyzed independently before developing a strategy. Airmen should understand the nuances of IW versus traditional warfare strategy development, including differences in duration, [centers of gravity](#) (COG), and focus on stability. Campaign strategies involve more than just the use of armed forces: they should integrate military, HN, and whole-of-government capabilities. Each situation will have a different balance of economic, political, diplomatic, military, and informational instruments that might be used to promote a nation's interest or secure a state from IW adversaries. The military portion of a theater strategy is only a part of the strategy, and should not be a sole course of action in itself, but rather should seek to establish favorable conditions for the other



instruments of national power to operate. Within the context of IW, many campaigns and operations may not be led by the military. The effect of these strategies may not be readily apparent, requiring years and even decades before tangible results are evident.

IW strategy ultimately seeks to promote stability by assisting in the development and enhancement of the capabilities of local partners (usually the host nation) to address causes of conflict and challenges to security, improve capabilities and infrastructure, sustain economic growth, and provide legitimate and effective governance to its population.

### **Center of Gravity**

Each IW campaign is unique, and no single COG or strategy can be applied to every operation. In traditional warfare scenarios, fielded forces and command and control (C2) are the most common COGs while in IW scenarios, a segment of the relevant population is commonly a COG. To exploit a COG in IW, strategies should be developed with the goal of enhancing host nation (HN) legitimacy and influence, while eroding an adversary's power, influence, and will.<sup>1</sup>

The primary way to influence the COG is with a strategy of identifying, assessing, and resolving any underlying grievances within the population. If the HN's government fails to address grievances perceived by the population to be valid in a timely manner, the population will continue to be disaffected. Such a disaffected population could stop supporting the legitimate government or be motivated to provide direct or indirect support to an insurgency operating among the general population. An adversary may attempt to fill the void left by a government that does not adequately address these grievances.

Identifying, finding, and separating individual adversaries and networks from the general population are difficult. In addition, depending on the location of the target, the effects desired are often "soft" and may require non-kinetic means. Targeting opportunities, when they emerge, may be time sensitive, and collateral damage restrictions can be challenging.

Finally, strategy should account for the fact that the population may not be homogenous in all areas of the HN. Cultural, geographical, religious, and economic differences within a state or region may motivate different parts of the population differently. Thus, different strategies may need to be employed within one engagement to achieve desired effects.

### **Focus on Stability**

Where traditional warfare focuses more on major combat operations and campaigns, IW focuses largely on stability. A safe and secure environment should be established and maintained for the population and government. The legitimate local government, US government and international agencies, as well as nongovernmental organizations and intergovernmental organizations cannot effectively work in an area until it is secure.

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex 3-0, [Operations and Planning](#), for expanded discussion on COG identification and various COG models.

If a national government is weak, corrupt, or incompetent, or if the governing authority is absent, a triggering shock can exacerbate an already difficult situation. This shock can produce widespread suffering, grow popular dissatisfaction, and result in civil unrest—all of which can be intensified by several interrelated factors. The absence of key government functions, competing ideologies, widespread lawlessness, poor economic performance, pronounced economic disparities, and in some cases, a serious external threat, all influence the strategic context of any operation.

The Air Force, through its functions and capabilities, provides the joint force commander (JFC) key enablers to maintain a safe and secure environment. In providing security, the majority of military operations should focus on stability and deterrence. This requires early involvement in fragile states. The Air Force brings a flexible force for such operations. Rapid [mobility, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance](#) (ISR) capabilities, [special operations](#), [combat support](#) capabilities, and the ability to deter external involvement through traditional deterrence of other state actors all provide a more conducive environment for HN governments to develop and stabilize.

### **Long-term, Persistent Political and Military Commitment**

The protracted approach that adversaries may use in IW requires a long-term strategy to achieve continuing advantage. Winning a protracted conflict requires winning the struggle of ideas, undermining the legitimacy of a competing ideology, addressing grievances perceived by the population to be valid, reducing an enemy's influence, and depriving the enemy of the support of the people. It requires a “crawl, walk, run” mentality when developing host nation infrastructure and security. IW requires patience and adaptation. The long view requires Airmen to consider preservation of the force and family issues to include; personnel rotations, equipment wear and tear, and the impact on training and education early on in the [operational design](#) process.

Persistence is intrinsic to effective IW operations. The joint force should use its long-term regional engagement strategy to shape the operational environment and influence adversaries. Episodic short-duration deployments to at-risk states may be an inadequate operational approach, because the short-term results of these deployments may be overcome by adversary countermeasures and by the inertia that is common in failed and failing states. Continuity of effort hinges upon the ability of joint force members to establish and maintain long-term interpersonal relationships with their counterparts in US missions and with foreign governments, traditional political authorities, and security forces. The long-term, persistent character of IW should be carefully considered during strategy development.

### **Theater Campaign Plan**

US interests are best served when countries are internally secure, regions are stable, and other countries are willing and their military forces are able to contribute effective capabilities to regional, national, and international operations. The theater campaign plan (TCP) provides the direction and effort of US military forces for each geographic combatant commander (GCC), and the combatant commander's (CCDR) strategy informs the TCP. Ideally, the TCP should support the host nations' internal defense and development (IDAD) plans and ensure the United States achieves our objectives and

those which are mutually beneficial to our partners. The TCP combines the effort of each of the individual Service component commanders and HN's forces, and it should contain IW-related information. Each commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR) should ensure that his forces' capabilities are considered and incorporated into the geographic CCDR's TCP. Properly developed and executed TCPs can significantly shape the environment for future efforts against IW adversaries. This will require continuous engagement with Department of State (DOS) country teams and other interagency organizations to help shape the TCP. Regional specialists, operational planners, defense attaches, component numbered Air Forces, and CCDR staff elements should all engage in this process. The Air Force may aid the TCP through SA and through building partner/regional capacity to counter IW threats. The AFFOR may publish a campaign support plan.

### **Security Assistance**

[Security assistance](#) (SA) fosters interoperability between US forces and our allies. Within applicable legal and policy constraints, Air Force personnel can train and equip friendly foreign forces. The DOD and other government agencies train foreign militaries and law enforcement personnel through several different programs, some funded by accounts within the DOD budget and others by the DOS-administered foreign aid budget.

SA is designed to help selected countries meet their internal defense needs and to promote sustainable development and growth of responsive institutions. The JFC should understand the distinction between personnel performing mission activities under the C2 of a CCDR and personnel performing those activities under the laws, regulations, and funding applicable to Title 22, USC, *Foreign Relations and Intercourse*.

Delivery of [foreign military sales](#) items can be performed in conjunction with combined operations and contingencies or with other training programs conducted by the geographic combatant commands. These operations may also be conducted by various departments and agencies of the US government.

### **Building Partnerships and Capacity to Counter IW Threats**

In some instances, the best solution may be to work with strong regional partners to increase their capability and capacity to work with lesser-developed HNs. This approach is especially important in regions where historical post-colonial relationships and regional balance-of-power influences provide strong allied partners who have greater access and influence than the United States. This approach may also reduce the negative political repercussions of US assistance efforts in some countries and regions. The US government may still need to make equipment and training available to the HN and its allies. Ultimately, BPC efforts should consider the development and/or enhancement of a HN's aviation enterprise and enable a HN to assume primary responsibility for deterring and preventing security challenges to itself and US national interests, serving to enhance the US/HN enduring relationship and resulting in significant military cost savings to the United States in the long-term.

The Air Force describes building partnerships as “Airmen interacting with international airmen and other relevant actors to develop, guide, and sustain relationships for mutual benefit and security.”<sup>2</sup> These interactions should always be in support of the CCDR’s TCP and the individual country plans. Building partnerships is about interacting with others and developing relationships, it is therefore an inherently interpersonal and cross-cultural undertaking. Through both words and deeds, the majority of interaction is devoted to building trust-based relationships for mutual benefit. It includes both foreign partners as well as domestic partners with an emphasis on collaboration with foreign governments and US government agencies, industry, and nongovernmental organizations (NGO). To better facilitate partnering efforts, Airmen should be competent in the relevant culture.

Building partnerships with allied and coalition forces comprise an important defense against adversaries using IW. Regional partnerships serve the strategic purpose of reducing instability, preventing terrorist attacks, building multiple partner capacities, and reducing the potential for expanded conflict. Advance planning in building partnerships enables US forces, when the need arises, to rely on these states’ indigenous forces rather than a significant US military commitment.

## **PLANNING**

[Unity of effort](#) during strategy development and throughout the [planning](#) phases is instrumental to formulating a coherent achievable plan. The role of ongoing activities such as Air Force [security cooperation](#), theater security cooperation, US aid to international development operations, and embassy team initiatives is applicable and all associated elements of national power should be integrated during the early stages of planning. Air planners should begin the planning process with a thorough understanding of the operational environment. They should then consider operational phases and maintain a good grasp on Air Force capabilities. All these planning considerations should be addressed in light of the strategic context and the JFC’s mission.

### **Geopolitical Considerations**

Geographic and political factors contribute to the complex problems that impact IW activities. These factors range from basing locations and the regional environmental concerns to the political climate of the host nation, HNs, and surrounding states. They also include the influence of the adversary among both the HN government and the local population. Planners should make every effort to thoroughly understand the geopolitical environment prior to engaging in IW operations.

### **Geographical**

Airpower’s speed and flexibility allows US forces to surmount geographic hurdles more rapidly than ground forces. However, in IW, proper operating locations are paramount to enable the reach and capacity in order to achieve the objectives and present the COMAFFOR with the best access and engagement opportunities. The decentralized nature of ongoing operations is particularly challenging as the COMAFFOR provides critical support to both air and surface forces throughout the theater. For example, air

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<sup>2</sup> Vol 1, [Basic Doctrine](#)

mobility and combat support may enable sister components to maintain and sustain their [forward operating bases](#) when overland resupply is not practical due to geographic constraints or enemy surface threats.

### **Basing Inside the Host Nation**

Basing Air Force assets within the HN may provide advantages compared to continental US or out-of-region basing. Inside-the-HN basing (near-basing) should increase Airmen's understanding of the operating environment through immediate exposure and increase capabilities. Near-basing may increase loiter time while reducing transit and response time. This should be weighed against the possible negatives of increased [force protection](#) requirements and a larger logistical footprint. The CCDR should balance having enough people to do the job versus having too big a local footprint. Generally speaking, the closer airpower gets to the HN, the greater the risk to Air Force assets and personnel, yet the greater the utility.

In some scenarios, there may be multiple JOAs in a region and airpower might have to serve more than one JTF. IW operations might be occurring at the same time as traditional operations. Assets based in a particular JOA may routinely be tasked to create effects for that specific JOA. Increasing the role of subordinate C2 nodes (such as an ASOC) may enhance integration and increase airpower's effectiveness. Regardless of the overall force laydown, the COMAFFOR should retain the flexibility to shift airpower capabilities throughout the theater when needed, based on the CCDR's and/or subordinate JTF/CC's priorities. To be successful, subordinate echelons should be provided unambiguous statements of the JFC's and COMAFFOR/JFACC's intent, [rules of engagement](#) (ROE), and operational guidance.

#### **Forward Air Controllers (FACs) in Vietnam**

FACs conducted visual reconnaissance in the same area every day. They became familiar with the terrain and regular activity in their sector and would notice if any big changes took place. Based with the Army units they supported, the forces in action below them were not strangers. FACs had a divided command structure. They lived with the Army, and their mission orders came through a different chain. The FACs' operational boss was an air liaison officer attached to an Army headquarters.

**—Multiple sources**

In some situations, Air Force assets may be unable to base within the supported HN and will consequently be required to base elsewhere in the region. This may result in additional combat support requirements and other operational considerations, such as an increased need for air refueling. In such circumstances, coordination with DOS personnel and country teams for overflight permission and basing requirements is normally required.

## **Environment for Employment**

In IW, small unit employment of forces from remote locations may become more prevalent. This is especially true when conducting early shaping and deterring operations. Operating in remote areas has numerous implications. It may, for example, increase requirements to live off the local economy or incur greater reliance on satellite communications due to lack of secure land lines.

Major environmental factors affecting planning and execution include physical and psychological pressures from hostile elements, exposure to extensive human suffering, social fragmentation, political instability, and economic impoverishment. Difficult terrain, physical isolation of population groups, and poorly developed infrastructures often impedes counterinsurgency and insurgency operations. Air Force capabilities are inherently flexible and can overcome many of these obstacles.

Given such environmental features as poor infrastructures, limited reachback, and increased risk, it is essential that Air Force personnel operating from forward locations (e.g., as embedded trainers and advisors for either [unconventional warfare](#) (UW) or [foreign internal defense](#) (FID)) are organized, trained, and equipped to operate for extended periods of time independent of traditional support structures. Experience indicates that personal safety and performance are maximized when personnel are organized into teams with mutually supporting, interdependent skill sets. These teams should be capable of operating autonomously with maximum self-sufficiency, which in turn supports reduced presence and logistics signature while deployed. However, the potential for larger scale operations in IW may arise. Commanders may still need to support and provide for Air Force forces operating from multiple areas. The requirements for support may be drastically different for each operational area. This may create increased demand for [airlift](#) throughout the theater. All of these factors emphasize the importance of clearly stated command relationships and chain of command.

## **Operational Environment**

Adversaries employing IW realize that they cannot achieve their desired ideological or political objectives through conventional force and seek to achieve public support for their cause (or at minimum acquiescence to their presence) by creating problems and instability that can be blamed on the government. [Disinformation and propaganda](#) campaigns targeting the populace are very effective means of achieving these goals, especially when tribal, ethnic, and religious differences can be leveraged or played against each other.

All operations should be integrated to promote governmental legitimacy. As no single component has a monopoly on the information environment, a joint approach integrated with governmental and civilian efforts is essential. This ensures that the cumulative psychological effect of operations works towards defeating the ideologies of a government's opponents and does not send conflicting messages to the populace or fuel the insurgents' disinformation and propaganda campaigns.

Some IW operations are likely to be conducted in austere, remote regions that are under-governed or on the fringes of HN government control. This characteristic affects the communications and logistics reachback requirements of deployed friendly forces. It may also affect force protection requirements including situational awareness enablers and self-defense measures. Small force size plus limited reachback capability may expose deployed forces to greater threats and increased risk. This is especially true of Air Force trainers and advisors embedded for extended periods of time at forward locations with HN forces.

Nations susceptible to [subversion](#), lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to its security may be characterized by various forms of social, economic, and political fragmentation and by a lack of a unifying national identity within population groups who resist or are denied integration into the national community. Some factors which contribute to this fragmentation include religion, political and ethnic alienation, separatism, lack of accessibility to government resources by certain groups, poor income distribution among social classes, poor economic opportunities, and disenfranchisement or lack of other political rights. Situations most likely to involve Air Force IW activities are prevalent in developing nations where public services, industrial infrastructures, and aviation infrastructure are relatively primitive by Western standards. For additional information, see Annex 3-22, [Foreign Internal Defense](#).

IW may occur in many different operational environments. Adversaries are likely to operate in and from states that can be characterized as failed, cooperative, or non-cooperative (see figure titled *Irregular Warfare Operating Environments*). The environment influences the types of actions to be taken as well as the ability to conduct these actions. Adversaries are likely to operate within and from non-cooperative states that limit or restrict joint force access. They may exploit state boundaries and other political, economic, and demographic seams in order to seek sanctuary from conventional military capabilities complicating coalition planning. Operations in these environments will either support or target state and non-state actors. Finally, operating environments may also be influenced by external states that may have an interest in the conflict. Once the general environment is determined, Airmen should understand the political, military, demographic, social, cultural and environmental context in the area or state of interest to develop a more comprehensive picture of the strategic problem.

### **Cooperative Governments**

Support to counter-insurgency (COIN) operations occurs with HNs that either require or request US participation. This environment enables the United States to employ many different forms of support including security assistance (SA) and FID. The level of US involvement will likely depend on the capabilities and level of threat to the HN government as well as US strategic goals. Operations in this environment may range from small unit involvement to larger force requirements if a crisis deteriorates to the point that the HN cannot maintain security on its own. Careful consideration and Presidential approval is required when moving from indirect support to direct support involving combat operations as this often not only changes the commitment required but also the perception of the HN populace regarding the credibility and legitimacy of their government.

## **Non-cooperative Governments**

Conducting IW against or within a non-cooperative state normally involves UW and other indirect approaches applied in conjunction with other diplomatic or economic actions such as embargoes or sanctions. While UW has been a traditional core mission of SOF, conducting UW as part of a larger IW effort may be more common in the future. UW has traditionally confined itself to operations against a single hostile state or occupying power. Many of the activities took place either within the hostile or occupied state or in the neighboring countries that either directly or tacitly supported efforts against the hostile state. This construct is changing as non-cooperative states have ever-increasing global linkages and interests. The increasingly transregional nature of IW may require joint forces to plan and execute IW against a non-cooperative state's [decisive points](#) or vital interests that may reside outside the borders of the state itself. These interests may include offshore banking and financial assets, businesses, and other strategic resources, production operations, and facilities. Action against these interests provides the JFC with additional pressure points that can indirectly influence the hostile state adversary without entering the adversary's sovereign territory. Some non-cooperative states may be supporters or sponsors of non-state adversaries; whereas others may be unwilling or unable to take effective action against non-state adversaries operating within their borders. Operations in this environment normally require extensive coordination between SOF and the conventional Air Force.

Air Force forces may support operations against a non-cooperative state in a variety of manners. Oftentimes, the operation will require a limited footprint or no footprint. Use of ISR in this context becomes increasingly important. If the IW campaign includes UW, [airlift](#) may be instrumental in the insertion, extraction, and resupply of SOF and unconventional forces. Air refueling aircraft may be needed to support SOF and UW air assets. [Aeromedical evacuation](#) and forward-based medical facilities may also provide critical support for UW operations. In the later stages of an insurgency a forward operating base may be needed to support air operations; in such scenarios, Air Force airbase opening capabilities may require augmentation (from joint or coalition partners) depending upon the threat and organic capability of the airbase. As the situation evolves, Airmen should be prepared, if required, to deliver a variety of capabilities to support the effort and to lead some aspects of it.

## **Failed States**

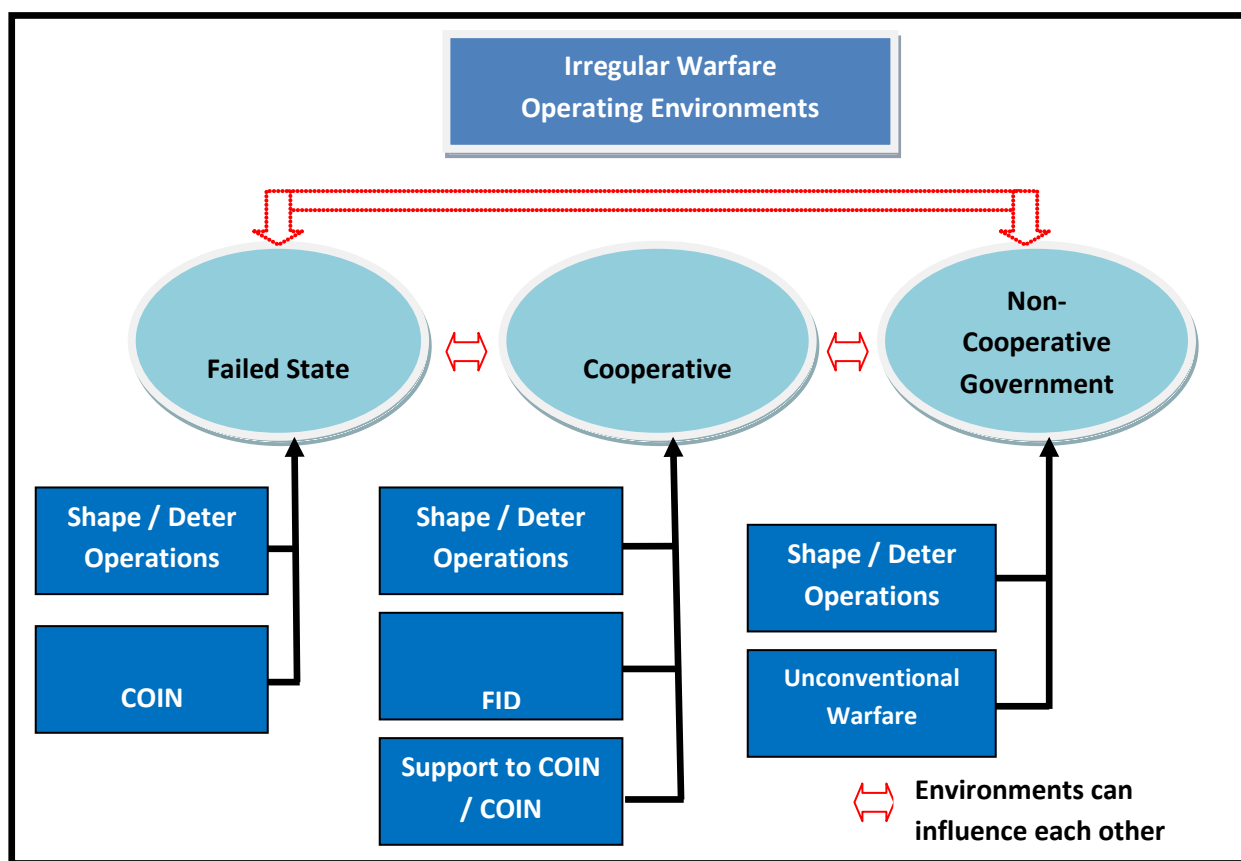
Conducting IW against non-state adversaries operating within failed states poses several unique challenges. Denied or non-governed areas may provide potential sanctuary for transnational terrorist networks and other non-state adversaries. These areas may be under the direct control of insurgents. If the failed state has a nuclear weapon or other [chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear](#) (CBRN) program, AF capabilities will be critical to support US efforts to secure or eliminate the program. In some cases, Air Force personnel may find themselves in austere locations in developing or underdeveloped countries. Furthermore, the locations from which they will work and live may not provide adequate security, health standards, and C2 networks. There may be a degree of lawlessness and disorder. Given these issues, Airmen may be responsible for their own security, communications, and well-being. In such scenarios, the United States may be the primary actor and be responsible for both



military and political actions. Thus, a large force may be necessary to bring security to such regions.

### Pitfalls

Many pitfalls in IW are the same as those associated with traditional warfare—overreach, poor planning, inadequate strategy, improper resource allocation, etc. Some pitfalls, though not unique to IW, do have a greater impact during IW activities. As operations in IW are very population-centric, planners should remember to look at objectives through the lens of the HN and the adversary, not only that of the United States. This pitfall is called mirror imaging, i.e., projecting one’s own attitudes, beliefs, cultural mores, and ideologies on the adversary and local populace. For example, actions based on Western ideologies may have dramatically different results than were



**Irregular Warfare Operating Environments**

intended when they are executed among non-Western populations. **Also, it is important for planners to avoid “templating”—assuming experiences and lessons learned in one location will automatically apply to another location.**

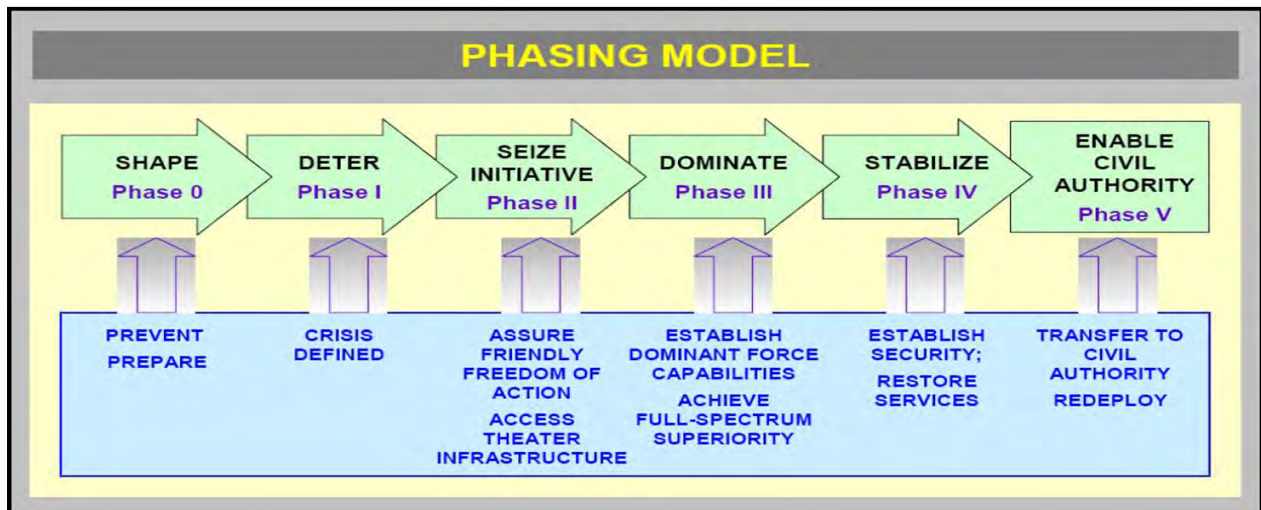
Another significant pitfall occurs because seemingly tactical actions and decisions may have strategic consequences in IW scenarios even more than in traditional war. For example, indigenous civilian casualties caused by air attack often garner more media attention than do equivalent casualties caused by ground weapons (like small arms and mortars). Since indigenous populations are normally a COG in IW operations, such

collateral damage may reduce US influence and legitimacy among relevant populations, thus impeding rather than aiding achievement of desired end states. This result is contrary to most desired objectives in IW, and it should be avoided if at all possible. A robust and integrated IO is essential to mitigate these pitfalls. A poorly executed IO campaign can exacerbate the situation.

### Operational Phases

Plans should typically outline the general phases of the operation. Phasing assists the JFC to organize operations by integrating subordinate operations and helps one to visualize and think through the entire operation or campaign. There are six planning phases: shape, deter/engage, seize the initiative, dominate/decisive operations, stabilize, and enable civil authority. Each phase represents a subdivision of the campaign's intermediate objectives during which a large portion of the forces and joint/multinational capabilities are involved in similar or mutual supporting activities. Phasing may not be as clear-cut in IW. The JFC may need to address an insurgency in something other than the shaping phase. The Air Force may find itself directly involved in phase II (seize the initiative) and phase III (dominate). JFCs should be aware that shaping operations may take place during all phases and any actions taken to win phases II and III may significantly affect subsequent phases (positively or negatively).

Therefore, the operational environment and military involvement in IW may not follow the traditional phasing model (see figure titled *Phasing Model*). Operations may solely concentrate on shaping and deterring active insurgency. Additionally, active participation in a HN's security and stability efforts may have different types of phases. Since IW campaigns are not small versions of big wars, the classic six levels of phasing an operation may not be appropriate.



Phasing Model (adapted from JP 5-0, [Joint Operation Planning](#))

### Overlap of Classic Military Phases in IW

Conventional paradigms of warfare have been significantly challenged in recent conflicts, and in pursuit of strategic imperatives toward securing US political and

national interests. IW has become the primary means of local, regional, and global politics, which may be violent or non-violent in nature. Despite IW's ancient origins it is cyclically rediscovered, redefined, and relearned by strong countries who find IW difficult to counter and exceedingly costly. Weak state and non-state actors, on the other hand, embrace IW. They see it as a viable counter to strong traditional militaries and strategies based on force-on-force advantage. Traditional military-centric approaches to deterring, dominating, and pacifying adversaries have proven to be marginally successful in population-centric, intra- and inter-state political conflicts.

### **Shaping and Deterring Actions**

Airmen may anticipate being continuously engaged in these operations that are critical in setting the stage for future operations and may prevent the emergence of an active insurgency.

Shaping and deterring operations should normally be outlined in a theater campaign plan. During shaping, US and interagency forces in concert with the HN, conduct activities to dissuade or deter potential adversaries and ensure or solidify relationships with friends and allies. Shaping operations should be designed to positively affect the targeted population's perceptions of the HN government, assist in the development of the HN's aviation enterprise, and influence the behavior of both adversaries and allies. It is critical to understand that shaping operations may occur over several years, if not decades.

Planning for these operations may be typified by persistent small unit deployments to cooperative states. These forces will most likely work with and rely on the HN for basic logistical support (billeting, basing, food, and some local security), and be supported by the COMAFFOR for those resources the HN cannot provide. Operations will tend to be long-term in duration requiring coordination for force rotations and sustainment.

Shaping and deterring operations may also include limited precision engagements. Air strikes on known adversary training camps or sanctuaries in non-cooperative states may be conducted. These operations typically have well-defined military targets and a short duration, and will most likely be planned and executed similar to traditional warfare. These types of operations often play a large role in, for example, countering terrorist organizations.

*Experience in one location cannot be assumed to apply to the environment of another. Over-emphasis on experience gained in a particular operation and environment can lead to inaccurate conclusions about the requirements and capabilities needed elsewhere, and could result in conceptual inflexibility in both hardware and general support.*

**—Air Force Manual 2-5,  
Special Air Warfare,  
10 March 1967**



ANNEX 3-2 IRREGULAR WARFARE

**AIR FORCE CAPABILITIES AND IW**

Last Updated: 15 March 2013

Many Air Force capabilities have been identified as best practices in the conduct of [irregular warfare](#) (IW). Though the following list is not all-inclusive, it represents a collection of capabilities with significant impact in IW. Planners should consider capabilities and best practices when developing IW plans for the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR).

**Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance**

IW is a very complex and dynamic environment that requires an adaptive and dedicated [Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance](#) (ISR) force. ISR operations, target development, and an understanding of the socio-economic principals by ISR personnel and commanders will provide the Airmen with the best opportunities to successfully influence the appropriate target sets and achieve appropriate effects. Joint intelligence preparation of the [operational environment](#), which builds understanding of political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure systems, as well as the cultural factors in a conflict, enable friendly forces to target for specific effects within the operational environment. Intelligence products should provide the commander with the fullest possible understanding of all entities involved in the conflict. Near-real time ISR and precision location also help build commanders' situational awareness even if they are not used directly in targeting. When working with the [host nation](#) (HN) to conduct IW, effective ISR is a critically important tool.

Accurate, relevant, and timely intelligence is critical for setting the conditions for success. Of primary importance is cultural intelligence, which may require collection and analysis through human intelligence (HUMINT) and open-source intelligence (OSINT) methods with sufficient

*The 332d Security Forces Group (SFG) at Joint Base Balad, Iraq, provided inside and outside-the-wire security to ensure force protection, dominating the base boundary to ensure successful sortie generation. The SFG coordinated closely with the battlespace owner (US Army) to ensure information sharing and the seams in the defense were covered. The SFG also integrated organic air ISR assets to aid aggressive patrolling to further enhance base defense efforts.*

*Finally, Security Forces and OSI were able to establish and leverage existing human networks to gauge US COIN efforts at various mass gatherings in and around the base boundary. The combined COIN and HUMINT efforts of the entire 332d Air Expeditionary Wing resulted in an overall decrease of indirect fire attacks against the base by more than 50 percent.*

language, regional, and culture training. It is critical to understand that cultural intelligence, sometimes referred to as “patterns of life,” may require extensive time to gather and analyze. Thus, operations are planned, executed, assessed, and adapted to influence or change relevant behaviors or reduce capabilities in order to achieve desired outcomes. Analysis requires that data from all the intelligence disciplines be brought together to the right people on a timely basis. This has proven in the past to be a substantial challenge because of technical problems associated with sharing data and security requirements. This challenge needs to be overcome during IW given the likelihood of joint, coalition, or interagency organizational integration. All-source fusion helps overcome the inherent limitations of a single source to provide adequate information. However, IW environments may require more flexibility in the use of single-source intelligence given timeliness and inaccessibility.

Air Force ISR operations in IW include the full spectrum of intelligence disciplines across air, space and cyberspace. Intelligence disciplines such as [geospatial intelligence, signals intelligence, and HUMINT](#) provide synergy to operations. Triggers for operations often rely on one of these ISR disciplines and often this intelligence is derived from non-Air Force sources. Air Force intelligence planners and operators should be deeply integrated and involved with national, joint, coalition and host nation partners; these imbedded personnel are more easily able to acquire unfiltered and current insights and interaction with HN counterparts. Air Force intelligence personnel should understand and assist with ISR plans and operations to ensure effective use of assets and focused collections. ISR collections and their associated processing, exploitation and dissemination operations can often be long duration efforts with little to no payoff, or short duration with immediate payoff. Regardless, intelligence personnel should justify this weight of effort to commanders and commanders should understand the importance and time requirements of target development.

Target development is important in effectively conducting IW. The Air Force’s capabilities are heavily leveraged to develop the target sets. ISR assets and analysts are vital in identifying enemy capabilities, centers of gravity and [command and control](#) (C2). Another important factor in IW is managing the social, political, and economic consequences of operations as well as minimizing traditional collateral damage. For every action there will be a reaction, and often in IW that reaction is not always proportional. Planners should closely examine cause and effect relationships of intended operations. Failing to anticipate popular perceptions or the potential effects of enemy propaganda can turn what appeared to be a successful mission into a strategic setback because of the loss of popular support (both in the area of responsibility (AOR) and possibly at home). Planners should attempt beforehand to understand how the intended effects will be felt throughout the operational environment. Cultural intelligence can be gathered through HUMINT and OSINT sources in and around a base boundary in order to gather perceptions of the local populace towards US actions. This information can be vital to understanding the population’s

*Only the USAF can bring to bear prompt, scalable delivery capabilities that can avoid insecure land routes and rapidly move people, equipment, and supplies into remote and dangerous areas at (relatively) low risk.*

**—Shaping the Future Air Force,  
RAND Corporation  
2006 Technical Report**

temperament, determining successful and unsuccessful counter-insurgency (COIN) efforts, quelling misconceptions, and building relationships that can help ensure effective antiterrorism/force protection and a secure environment to generate sorties. Commanders should realize the enemy is often embedded within or moving amongst the civilian population and often this direct and indirect complicity is a result of the socioeconomic factors that are affecting the populace.

Government legitimacy is often a key target in IW. If a government is unable to provide basic services (security, rule of law, basic governance, water, electricity, sanitation services, infrastructure, etc.) the population can become hostile or apathetic. This may allow hostile forces to thrive or move freely. Furthermore, it is important that intelligence planners understand the cultural dynamics throughout the operational environment. Indications of socio-economic stressors or cultural stress can be indicators of a contested operational environment. It is imperative for intelligence personnel to identify and articulate the appropriate courses of action to the commanders. For example, security might be obtained temporarily in a key area with precision lethal strikes, but might be secured in the long term by enabling social or economic improvements. Such analysis requires thorough fusion of intelligence of all types from all possible sources, especially during the prelude to operations. For a more detailed discussion of Air Force ISR, see Annex 2-0, [Global Integrated Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Operations](#).

### **Information Operations**

The effective implementation of information operations in irregular warfare is critical to achieving US military objectives. In irregular warfare, populations are central to the conflict. Information-related capabilities and activities are integrated in order to create significant impacts on adversary, neutral, and friendly populations.

Information operations are carried out in an information environment that crosses all the domains—air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace—and is constantly changing. It is crucial for planners to recognize the impact these actions can have on populations in irregular warfare and understand how information-related capabilities can be used to enable US objectives.

It is vital to keep in mind the importance of information operations across all phases of an irregular warfare operation. [Information operations](#) (IO) should be the supported capability during shaping and deterrence phases, as well as during stability and support operations. IO can be used to bolster the legitimacy, not only of US actions, but the partner nation government that is engaged in the conflict as well. Through the integration of information-related capabilities and activities, the United States can aid the partner nation in establishing internal security, defending from external aggression, and building partnerships within the region. HUMINT is key to IO in support of IW, particularly in planning and executing psychological operations, perception management and public affairs.

## Air Mobility

[Air mobility](#) is essential when conducting IW operations, supporting US ground forces, and enabling HN capabilities. Air mobility operations may increase the HN government's capacity to govern and administer through presence and persistence in otherwise inaccessible regions of the country. They also physically extend the reach of public outreach and information programs. Air mobility provides a means of rapidly transporting personnel and supplies to contested areas. Air mobility-focused Airmen, integrated with surface forces, often increase the effectiveness of air mobility and resupply operations, as well as mitigating risk in those operations.

Specifically trained [airlift](#) forces provide [airland and airdrop](#) support to [special operations](#). Since there are a limited number of airlift assets dedicated to this mission, the principle of economy of force is particularly important. When performing these missions, airlift crews normally act as integral members of a larger joint package. Because these missions routinely operate under austere conditions in hostile environments, extensive planning, coordination, and training are required to minimize risk. Airlift used in a special operations role provides commanders the capability to create specific effects, which may not be attainable through more traditional airlift practices. Commanders may also consider using indigenous aviation forces to support special operations forces in hostile or denied territory with air mobility and resupply, insertion and extraction, casualty evacuation, [personnel recovery](#), ISR, and [close air support](#) (CAS). However, commanders should also consider the capabilities, proficiency and sustainability of the HN air force, as well as adversary threats, when determining the appropriate assets to employ. Indigenous capabilities should be responsive to asymmetric or irregular threats and circumstances. Indigenous forces also benefit from the ability to be resupplied or evacuated to receive medical care. This can have a very positive effect on their morale as well as help legitimize the HN government among its own forces. For additional information, see Annex 3-17, [Air Mobility Operations](#); Annex 3-05, [Special Operations](#); and Annex 3-22, [Foreign Internal Defense](#).

### Airmen save lives in Africa with medical team visit

People lined up to receive healthcare during a Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) medical civic action program (MEDCAP) in Kenya. CJTF-HOA Service members conducted the MEDCAP in the villages of Shimbir and Balich through a partnership with the Kenyan department of defense, which provided additional medical providers and logistical support. More than 1,000 people received healthcare as part of the project.

## Combat Support

[Combat support](#) operations in IW may be designed to support US-only or multinational operations, enable HN airpower capabilities against irregular threats, or a combination thereof. Combat support may transition from an Air Force support role to the primary application of military force. The complexity and unpredictability of IW operations and activities present challenges to commanders, who should consider the different risks associated with employing combat support in IW:

- ✪ Operating in austere environments with limited infrastructure.

- ★ Increased combat readiness for surviving and operating in increased threat environments to include CBRN environments.
- ★ Increased security requirements.
- ★ Extended logistical lines.
- ★ Communications limitations.
- ★ Multiple distributed operations.
- ★ Medical operations.

Planners and leaders may be required to assess a HN's combat support capability as well as develop training and education plans to ensure full mission capability. Combat support capabilities may set the conditions for achieving the JFC's objectives by supporting non-military instruments of power during IW operations. As such, combat support should be responsive and sufficient to sustain the operational requirements of IW. For more detailed information on combat support, see Annex 4-0, [Combat Support](#).

### **Precision Engagement**

Precision engagement includes the full spectrum of capabilities that can be brought to bear to precisely achieve effects in support of the desired end state. Precision engagement in IW may be conducted by the same assets and functions used in more traditional operations. Since IW is a struggle for the population's allegiance, the effect of any engagement operation on the population should be carefully considered. In determining the appropriate capability to achieve the desired effect, planners should look at effect, duration, and consequences to ensure that not only the direct but the longer term indirect effects that may result from use of a capability are anticipated.

#### **Non-lethal Targeting**

Most are familiar with the role of airpower in kinetic strikes against insurgent leaders, as demonstrated by the takedown of Abu Musab al Zarqawi in Iraq. However, insurgent leaders can be targeted through non-kinetic means as well (e.g., MISO), and often with greater effectiveness when the leaders are captured, exploited for intelligence, or turned to support the government.

Precision engagement has unique considerations in IW scenarios. A primary objective for the United States and HN during COIN, for example, is to restore the rule of law. A second-order effect of executing strike operations is that they remind the population that this objective has not been achieved. There is potential for collateral damage from the smallest weapons, even those employed from the ground. If US forces conduct the strike, there may be the perception that the HN government is dependent for its survival on foreign forces. Combined, these may have the indirect effect of delegitimizing the HN government in the public's perception. Nevertheless, strike operations have a place in COIN, since the ability to hold targets at risk throughout the operational area helps the



United States and HN set the tempo of operations and seize the initiative from insurgent forces. The precision and lethality of airpower often provide the most discriminating application of firepower to COIN forces.

Precision engagement should be designed to employ HN airpower resources to the greatest extent possible. Properly trained and structured teams of Air Force experts, ranging from planning liaison to tactical operations personnel, offer potential for HN unilateral and US/HN combined actions against high-value targets. Use of these options serves to enhance the legitimacy of the HN government while achieving important US security objectives. Just as in traditional warfare, attacks on key nodes usually reap greater benefits than attacks on dispersed individual targets. For this reason, effective strike operations are inextricably tied to the availability of persistent ISR and are the result of detailed target systems analysis that identifies and fully characterizes the targets of interest (networks, people, objects, entities). Persistence in IW is critical since it will never be known in advance when a key node will be identified or how long it will remain in place. In IW, planners may consider more use of airborne alert than they would during traditional operations.

#### **Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (precision engagement)**

On 26 March 2006, an Air Force combat controller attached to a US Army Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha team in Afghanistan orchestrated one of numerous examples of a successful joint air-ground operation in support of the Afghan National Army. Shortly into their mission, the team made contact with a large enemy force and rapidly assessed that they were surrounded on three sides by up to one hundred anti-coalition militants. While taking heavy and accurate enemy fire, the combat controller made radio contact with numerous aircraft and quickly talked them onto enemy positions and directed precise air strikes that enabled the team to break contact. Over the next six hours, the combat controller requested, integrated, and controlled A-10, B-52, AH-64, CH-47, and Predator aircraft in support of the Afghan National Army and special operations mission. The professionalism and expertise of an embedded Airman and the precision and lethality of airpower, turned a potentially devastating blow to a maturing Afghan National Army unit into both a tactical and strategic success.

### **Cyberspace Operations**

Like air operations, [cyberspace operations](#) may strike directly at nodes of interest. For example, cyberspace operations may hinder or disrupt insurgent operations, or at least require them to expend resources defending their cyberspace assets. A HN may actually be able to employ certain capabilities more effectively than US forces, since they will not have the same language barriers and may operate under different legal restrictions. However, this does not alleviate US forces from following the [law of armed conflict](#) and the applicable [rules of engagement](#) (ROE). The HN may better understand culturally how to build an information operation campaign and may have more credibility with the population. To benefit from this arrangement, campaign planners should ensure Airmen can quickly communicate their activities and results.

## Aviation FID

Although the US aviation role in FID can be extensive, the term [aviation FID](#) (AvFID) generally refers to DOD programs for assessing, training, advising, and assisting HN aviation forces in the sustained use of airpower to help their governments deal with internal threats. Like FID, AvFID is no longer a special operation force (SOF)-only or predominant arena. General purpose force (GPF) Airmen as well as [Air Force Special Operations Forces](#) (AFSOF) conduct the AvFID core mission. This mission area delivers GPF air advisors and SOF [combat aviation advisor](#) (CAA) capabilities with specific skill sets necessary to assess, train, advise, assist, and equip HN forces to sustain an aviation force capable of military operations. For more information on AFSOF IW capabilities, refer to Annex 3-22, [Foreign Internal Defense](#). For other AFSOF considerations, refer to Annex 3-05, [Special Operations](#).

## EXECUTION

The speed, range, flexibility, versatility, and persistence of airpower allow operations over vast denied areas and provide a critical portfolio of options for dealing with the challenges across the spectrum of IW. Airpower provides a wide range of effects from minimal, discrete, and precise effects to overwhelming power as required. Due to the dynamic nature of IW, any of these effects may be required at any time. These capabilities allow JFCs to adapt to changes in the environment and respond appropriately. Airpower provides a critical joint capability which offers an asymmetric advantage over adversaries. The proper integration of airpower enables flexibility in the development of strategy, operational plans, and employment.

### El Salvador

In El Salvador during the 1980s, indigenous US-trained and equipped aviation forces gave the HN government unmatched mobility, ISR capability, and the ability to destroy drug-related cash crops that the insurgency relied upon for income.

## Host Nation Considerations

The Air Force partners with other nations' air forces to build their capability and capacity. US equipment, training, advice, and assistance contribute directly to the stability and security of partners and supports mutual national objectives. US activities may generate goodwill in a country, building trust and resulting in access and influence. Subsequently, the Air Force should continue focusing on developing key capabilities of HNs through training, advising, and assisting.

## AIRPOWER IN IRREGULAR WARFARE

On 21 January 1968 two regular force People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) divisions initiated a siege of the US Marine Corps base at Khe Sanh, in northern South Vietnam. The following day US Air Force, Marine, and Navy aircraft initiated NIAGARA, an air campaign to repulse the attackers and relieve the besieged garrison. However, the PAVN completed its encirclement of Khe Sanh within a week, and the base became totally dependent on airpower for resupply, interdiction, and reconnaissance beyond visual range of the perimeter.

On 30 January, the insurgent Viet Cong launched the so-called Tet Offensive, a nationwide irregular assault against six major South Vietnamese cities, 34 provincial capitals, and numerous US and South Vietnamese bases. Most attacks were put down within days, though fighting in the northern city of Hue continued until March. US and HN air forces supported the successful efforts to quell the widespread irregular threat while simultaneously intensifying their operations against the regular enemy formations besieging Khe Sanh.

Although enemy artillery and anti-aircraft fire soon made landing on Khe Sanh's airstrip too dangerous, air mobility assets continued to supply the base by parachute drops and in-flight, extremely low-altitude cargo delivery. During the course of the 70-day siege, two-thirds of the supplies delivered to Khe Sanh were delivered by aircraft that never touched down.

Throughout the battle for Khe Sanh fighter aircraft and B-52 bombers flew over 24,400 sorties, dropping 100,000 tons of ordnance; mobility assets delivered 12,500 tons of supplies to the base during more than 1,100 sorties. General Westmoreland, the commander of US forces in Vietnam, proclaimed that "the key to our success at Khe Sanh was...principally aerial firepower." Meanwhile, US and HN airmen continued to conduct IW operations throughout South Vietnam, demonstrating airpower's ability to respond to the wide range of threats characteristic of irregular warfare.

**Expanding US participation is not the desired end state; building HN capacity is.** If HNs recognize the seeds of rebellion, isolate the bad actors, and intervene early, the use of HN developed capabilities makes it possible to use legitimate national military units with a direct stake in the outcome to work in areas where insurgencies are forming or to prevent insurgencies altogether. For example, once indigenous [air mobility](#) is developed in HNs, their national strength augments that of the United States and may alleviate the need for increased US involvement in that nation should a conflict arise. By building capability and capacity for global partners, the United States may preclude the necessity of using its own forces to provide the sole means of security for and within HNs. Increasing partner capability and capacity allows them to defend their own territory, expand the rule of law and governance, and provide support in coalition operations, when appropriate. Direct application of US capabilities should be reserved

for those instances where employment provides the only means to produce the desired effects, for instance when HN efforts have been unsuccessful or lacking.

In conducting building partnership activities, the Air Force and its coalition partners should first assess the capability of an affected HN in order to develop an all-encompassing strategy involving all the elements of indigenous power. Assistance ranges from strategic airpower assessments that address the overall capability of a nation to apply and sustain airpower through tactical-level instruction based on established tactics, techniques, and procedures. Using this information to identify gaps in the HN's capabilities, Airmen can determine the scope and level of effort required to help the HN meet its security objectives.

Airpower may promote a wide range of lethal and nonlethal solutions that fit within the technical, financial, and professional capacity of a HN in ways that allow HN forces to ultimately assume responsibility for air operations. In those instances where a HN has an operational air force, Airmen may provide the necessary technical and professional skills to enhance operational capacity and effectiveness. In situations where an indigenous air force does not exist or is in decay, the Air Force, through US government channels and subject to fiscal law restraints, may help the HN obtain the materiel and financial support it needs to build, equip, train, and sustain a viable airpower capability. Airmen should maintain the ability not only to conduct IW operations, but to assist and train partners, enabling them to resolve internal challenges at all stages of development. The key is not finding high or low-tech answers, but the right mix of technology, training, and support that provides a HN with affordable, sustainable, and capable airpower.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Airpower in Vietnam (Disrupt Enemy Movement)**

The capability of airpower to deter the threat of conventional attack in IW was demonstrated by the example of American airpower in Vietnam. In the midst of "Vietnamization" in early 1972, indications of an imminent North Vietnamese conventional invasion of South Vietnam prompted a massive redeployment of US air assets under Operations COMMANDO FLASH and BULLET SHOT 1. In response to North Vietnamese conventional attack across the demilitarized zone on 29 March, B-52s attacked North Vietnamese base camps and troop concentrations and F-4s used laser-guided bombs to drop bridges in advance of the tanks, slowing the advance of the invasion. US airpower continued to forestall the conventional takeover of South Vietnam until May 1973.

#### **Activities in Support of IW During Major Operations and Campaigns**

At the JFC's direction, the Air Force may engage in combat operations to meet HN and US objectives. Supporting a HN's IW efforts will most likely present limitations and constraints not often found in traditional warfare. The need to maintain the HN's legitimacy and its leadership role in IW may result in less efficient tactical employment of airpower, but should ultimately be more effective (e.g., flying more sorties using HN capability rather than one US sortie). Support to IW will most likely be a long-term

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information on HN collaboration and "assess, train, advise, and assist," see Annex 3-22, [Foreign Internal Defense](#); and JP 3-22, [Foreign Internal Defense](#)

commitment and require a sustainable operations tempo as well as the appropriate force requirements. The COMAFFOR should consider the effect of sustained operations on assets and personnel. Force rotation plans should be coordinated and understood between both organizations. The level of effort may change as the conflict evolves requiring the ability to surge when and where required. Understanding that the nature of the conflict may change multiple times requires planners to continually rely on feedback and assessment in order to shape operations and modify existing plans.

### **Activities in Support of IW Not Associated with Major Operations and Campaigns**

When a HN is incapable of countering the threat, the Air Force may be tasked to provide direct support that does not commit US personnel to combat. Such support encompasses Service-funded activities that improve HN air force effectiveness without duplicating or replacing SA efforts to create or maintain HN capabilities. Air Force activities should emphasize the HN's combat role. These support activities may include:

- ★ [Command and control](#)—create a tailored AOC-like capability that integrates HN capabilities and leadership.
- ★ [Communications](#)—open channels to use Air Force communications assets.
- ★ [Positioning, navigation and timing aids](#)—provide equipment and training.
- ★ [Intelligence collection and analysis](#)—apply US ISR to identify adversary networks.
- ★ [Geospatial intelligence and cartography](#)—ensure National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) products are available to HN.
- ★ [Air mobility](#) and logistics—provide training and fly in conjunction with HN forces.
- ★ [Logistics support](#)—provide theater experts and reachback to US logistics pipeline.
- ★ [Civil-military operations](#)—civil affairs, IO, and humanitarian and civic assistance.
- ★ [Medical operations](#).

### **ASSESSMENT**

[Assessment](#) involves evaluating the integrated effects of the IW operation, the impact on various adversaries, the requirements for subsequent operations, and the influence of IW activities. These tasks include collecting information and conducting an assessment of operational effectiveness to update situational understanding and adjust future planning activities. The desired objective is the ability to measure progress toward mission accomplishment and use the results to adjust actions accordingly.

During IW operations Airmen should outthink, outperform, and adapt faster than the adversary locally, regionally, and globally in order to deny them the ability to set conditions favorable to their goals. Local commanders within the operational area should continually assess employment and support activities to determine the effects

and implications of their actions while following the JFC's overall intent. The ambiguities resident within IW require frequent adjustment of operational plans to ensure desired effects are achieved while avoiding specifically designated or unintended negative consequences.

Continuous operational assessment and adjustment are best achieved at the lowest appropriate operational level. Operations should be flexible and integrate both civil and military activities, to include the supported government and coalition partners. Significant C2 interoperability challenges in joint, interagency, and multinational operations typically involve incompatible equipment and standards, language barriers, differing C2 procedures, lack of HN experience, and inadequate HN logistics infrastructures to maintain modern communications equipment. Commanders should be fully cognizant of these limitations and structure processes for transmitting information and orders appropriately.

In most forms of IW, operational assessment will be more subjective than in traditional warfare. When there is not a large enemy fielded force and clear supporting infrastructure, there may be far fewer metrics available that can be easily quantified. Since a large part of the desired effects deal with feelings and perceptions among the local civilian populace, rather than with more conventional measures such as percentage reduction in combat power, operational assessment personnel should train to deal with more intangible metrics. Likewise, commanders should be ready to make decisions based on inputs from their assessment teams that may be subjective and incomplete. The United States should not impose its own views on the HN population. Rather, it should take HN perspectives into account and emphasize the importance of the HN taking the lead.

Again, when assessing, it is important to avoid assuming HN and adversary perspectives will be the same as the US. A detailed examination should be made of HN and adversary cultures, norms, and objectives through the lens of the HN and the adversary.

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ANNEX 3-2 IRREGULAR WARFARE

**APPENDIX: THE CONTEMPORARY WARFARE MODEL**

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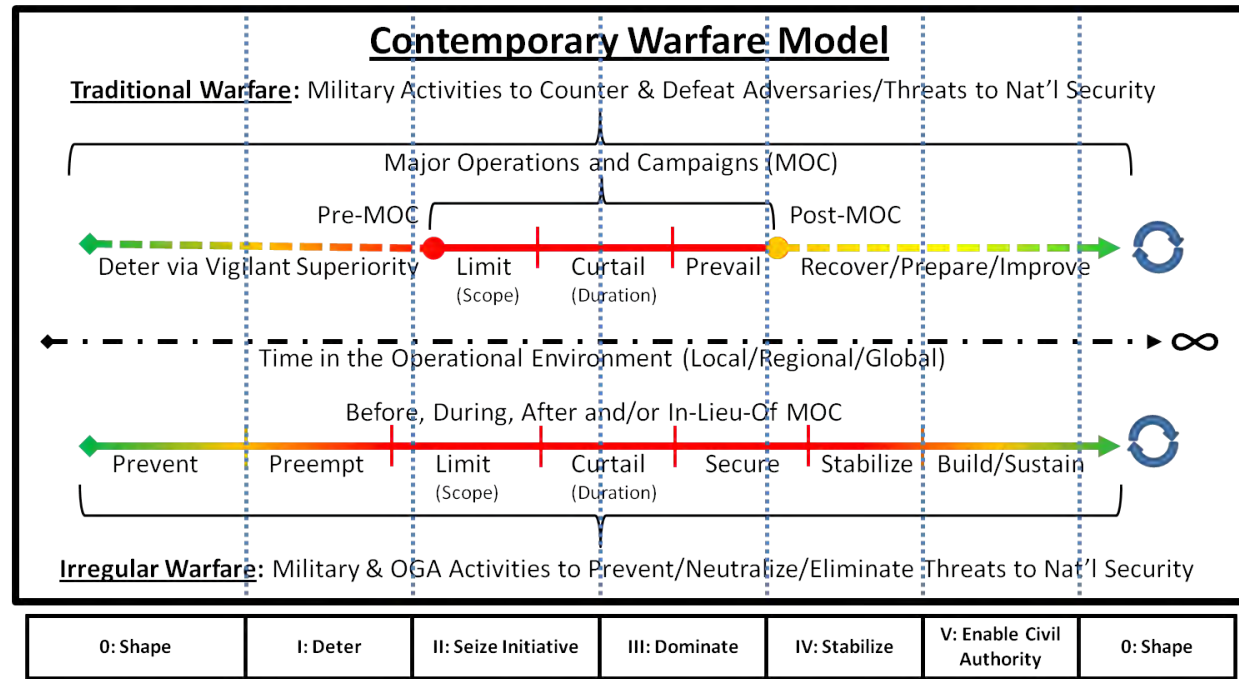
By its very nature, [irregular warfare](#) (IW) implies a counter to high-tech machinery and overwhelming combat capabilities and force. One of the primary reasons IW has been difficult for contemporary military professionals to master, has been the lack of a conceptual framework within which IW and traditional warfare become a synergistic and holistic campaign vision. The Contemporary Warfare Model (CWM) is one intellectual model that bridges the gap in the context of phases of warfare, and addresses IW and traditional warfare within one conceptual model (see figure titled *Contemporary Warfare Model*).

The CWM highlights strategic imperatives in both traditional warfare and IW, and places them in the same operational environment and notional timeline. Strategic imperatives are those lines of effort that guide military operations through all phases of warfare, whether during peacetime or the height of conflict. According to the model, the strategic imperatives in traditional warfare are: deter via vigilant superiority, limit the conflict's scope (geographic boundaries and/or level of violence), curtail the conflict's duration, prevail (win), recover, prepare, and improve. The strategic imperatives in IW are: prevent, preempt, limit the conflict's scope, curtail the conflict's duration, secure, stabilize, and build/sustain (note: as depicted in the model, the strategic imperatives may apply specifically to the local or regional [tactical] level, or generally to the conflict as a whole [strategic level]). Where traditional warfare seeks a definitive victory and rapid disengagement from the conflict, success in the IW realm of operations requires greater stamina and appreciation for the drivers of conflict at the lowest levels. The strategic imperatives of IW represent 'forward lines of effort' and necessitate direct engagements long before, and often, long after traditional warfare-focused efforts are complete.

**The Phases of War and the CWM**

The CWM's strategic imperatives are complementary to, and provide greater fidelity to the established, and widely accepted [six phases of operations](#). During phases zero and one, the traditional warfare strategic imperative of "Deter" both shapes the environment and deters peer and near-peer military adversaries. However, military superiority may not deter all irregular threats. The IW strategic imperatives "Prevent" and "Preempt" seek to bolster weak partners and address destabilizing factors such as lawlessness and civil unrest.

## Strategic Imperatives in Traditional/IW -&- Phases of War



- **Traditional Warfare:** -vs- Identifiable, demonstrated enemies (hostile nations & combative forces)
- **Irregular Warfare:** -vs- Threats/challenges that adversely effect stability, security, effective governance, and/or actions & behavior of non-friendly regimes counter to U.S. interests (inherently population-centric).

OGA: Other Government Agency

### Contemporary Warfare Model

Should prevention fail, preemption through direct engagement may be necessary. If a conflict is progressing toward major violence in the late stages of phase one, IW activities to “limit” the conflict’s scope should be conducted well before the start of major operations and campaigns. Historically, the IW strategic imperatives during phases zero and one have been a primary responsibility of special operations forces (SOF), where the traditional warfare strategic imperatives have been the focus of conventional or general purpose forces (GPF). Future engagements in phases one and two will see greater involvement of GPF in IW activities. Successes of both traditional warfare and IW imperatives during these phases can significantly limit, or even prevent major military involvement in later phases.

The traditional warfare and IW imperatives follow almost parallel focus during phases two and three, with both moving to “limit” the conflict’s scope and “curtail” its duration. However, where traditional warfare is applied to the adversary’s warfighting capability, IW takes a population-centric approach to impede the adversary’s ability to garner and sustain support from either its own population or external actors. During the later stages of phase three, the traditional warfare imperative is to “prevail” by rendering the adversary’s militarily ineffective through surrender or outright defeat. At the same time,



the IW imperative is to swiftly “secure” the political space and reconstitute salvageable governmental/civil institutions and vital infrastructure. Experience gained during the 10 years following 9/11 has shown that failure to recognize and act upon this IW imperative, even before the end of major operations and campaigns can be extremely costly and time consuming during post-major combat operations.

Phases four and five focus on post-major operations activities. The traditional warfare imperatives seek to “recover” force strengths and resources, “prepare” for future conventional conflict, and “Improve” and modernize the force. However, the IW imperatives during the same timeframes necessitate continued engagement to “stabilize” the environment; “build” effective governance, infrastructure, and popular support; then enable “sustainment” of the desired end-state. Unlike phases one and two, both GPF and SOF should be able to operate synergistically toward the IW imperatives in phases four and five, where security and stability operations require much larger force numbers than SOF alone can provide.

CCDRs and strategists should constantly weigh levels of effort toward both traditional warfare and IW imperatives throughout all phases of the six-phase joint operation construct (Phases 0-V) within their respective area of responsibilities (AOR). The CWM implies the notional levels of effort shift as a conflict progresses through the phases of war. Note that Phase 0 and Phase I require considerably less direct effort than Phase II through Phase V.

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