

Beyond Irregular Warfare: A Strategic Concept for Countering Irregular Adversaries and Engagement in Complex Security Environments

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Irregular Warfare – As quickly as I say it, a preconceived notion entered the mind of every person in this room. I can say, based on some 18 months of giving presentations on this topic that none of you are fully correct and none of you are fully mistaken.

So I'd like to open this panel with a brief update on where the evolution of our thinking has taken us in the past 18 months or so since we've established an irregular warfare Directorate at USSOCOM. It is also an undisguised attempt to get us all past the DoD term "Irregular Warfare" and get into the substance of this poorly named, but wholly valid concept.

The term itself often prompts visceral reactions. From the non-DoD side of the Inter-Agency (IA) the hue and cry is along the lines of "we don't do warfare". And I would argue that we need look no further than Iraq and Afghanistan let alone the absence of historical precedent to appreciate that comment. From the Defense side it usually centers on the word "irregular"; prompting a knee-jerk response that generally goes along the lines of "that's what SOF does". A correct assertion, but only if half right is considered correct.

When we say irregular warfare, what we're really talking about is a not so new, but newly formalized approach to dealing with challenges. It is a concept and philosophy properly considered in the strategic context that allows us to apply capabilities holistically to achieve desired effects. It's most unique characteristics are the focus on the relevant populations, support to sovereign partners and a linkage to our shared interests. It is a DoD activity not limited to SOF or dependent on a state of war.

Irregular Warfare "the concept" equips us intellectually to deal with a global environment that is characterized by broad ambiguities. These ambiguities are seen in the apolar nature of a world with multiple competitors; both state and non-state. Challenge causations that include crime, extremism and accelerating migration patterns and finally the interdependencies and interconnectivity of economies, communications and media

systems and social networks. This is, without question, a highly complex challenge set and we, must be a more capable and sophisticated actor ourselves if we expect to protect our national interests.

Irregular Warfare “the policy” is pretty neatly framed in both DODD 3000.07 and the Defense Quadrennial Roles and Missions report sent to congress in January of this year. These documents establish some key parameters for irregular warfare – as a result of the QRM process IW is now a core mission area for DOD. Additionally, the directive categorizes the primary IW activities - or those activities through which IW is operationalized as, Foreign Internal Defense, Unconventional Warfare, Counterinsurgency, Counter-terrorism, and Stability Operations. All fairly familiar terms and operational constructs for defense practitioners. There are “additional” IW activities that include but are not limited to, Civil Affairs, Psyops, Strategic Communications, Humanitarian Assistance, etc. These IW activities represent the tools available to strategists, campaign designers and planners. Their challenge is to apply the tools in a logical way informed by a strategic appreciation of the environment. Their approach must be “balanced”, accepting IW as strategically important as traditional warfare and focused on proactive steady state engagement. Their adversary sets will include both state and non-state actors and they will be challenged to work through and past long established notions like “defined end states”, “exit strategies” and even clear cut definitions of “victory”. “Enduring” and “acceptable” are words that will come into use as we splice IW into our existing planning constructs.

So what will these future challenges mean to the force – For General purpose forces, a continued leading role in both stability operations and counterinsurgency. And where appropriate, an increasing role in training and equipping partner forces during steady state engagements. For Special Operations Forces – we will continue to play the leading role in denied and politically sensitive environments and remain the sole DoD capability for unconventional warfare. We will also remain the most responsive for emergent and short fused requirements.

“Where appropriate” is also a term that will be prominent for planners determining the right force, or force mix to achieve the desired effect. In many cases, a blend of either General purpose forces enabled by SOF – or SOF enabled by GPF will be the right answer. And while we have a fairly good idea of what GPF enabled by SOF looks like – the JTF and CJSOTF relationships are good exemplars, we will be required to open the aperture on what SOF enabled by GPF really means. SOF must be supported by enablers and sustainers that only exist in GPF formations. This support must be characterized in terms of “direct support” or even by formal command relationships such as TACON or OPCON. And the types of enablers must be broadened to adequately address the challenges we confront – capabilities like vertical and horizontal construction, administrative lift, and a full range of ISR platforms have a role and must be included in the dialogue. This aspect of IW implementation may in fact present the greatest challenges with respect to breaking cultural paradigms within the department.

I often include the famous quote from President Kennedy's speech to the Military academy in 1962 in my PowerPoint presentations on this topic. I do so for a couple of reasons – it reinforces that this is not the first time we've struggled with new notions in the department and it was an important punctuation mark in a long history of our nation dealing with irregular adversaries and applying unconventional techniques. But the most important point is the cautionary tale of the price we paid when the department essentially slow rolled the Commander in Chief's guidance. A mistake we can ill afford to repeat.

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His assignment history includes a 2-1/2 year stint as the Deputy Commander of 3d Special Forces Group with three full rotations as Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force Afghanistan. He has also served as Executive Officer to the Commanding General at Army Special Operations Command, and was both a Company Commander and Battalion S-3 (Operations Officer) in 3d Special Forces Group focusing on the Mid-east and Africa. Additionally, he commanded both a Company and a Special Forces "A" Detachment in the 1st Special Forces Group focusing on the Pacific Basin.

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