# SPECIAL WARFARE

**STRATEGIC DISRUPTION:**
AN OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR
**IRREGULAR WARFARE**

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT
**IRREGULAR WARFARE**
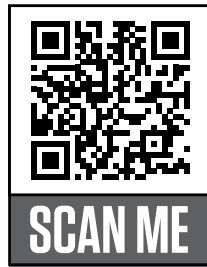HAVE WASTED U.S. INFLUENCE
IN THE SAHEL

ARSOF'S
**MAROPS**
MARITIME
OPERATIONS

## HOW ARSOF FIGHTS
### AN IRREGULAR APPROACH TO THE COMPETITION CONTINUUM

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*VERITAS ET LIBERTAS*

The U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS) at Fort Liberty, N.C., is one of the Army's premier education institutions, managing and resourcing professional growth for Soldiers in the Army's three distinct special operations branches: Special Forces, Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations. The Soldiers educated through USAJFKSWCS programs are using cultural expertise and unconventional techniques to serve their country in far-flung areas across the globe. More than anything, these Soldiers bring integrity, adaptability and regional expertise to their assignments.

On any given day, approximately 3,100 students are enrolled in USAJFKSWCS training programs. Courses range from entry-level training to advanced warfighter skills for seasoned officers and NCOs.

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## ON THE COVER

Illustration of the future ARSOF operator in a multi-domain irregular warfare battle. (Adobe Stock artwork)



SPRING 2024 | VOLUME 27 ISSUE 1

**SPECIAL WARFARE**

THE OFFICIAL PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL OF U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES



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*OPERATION BLACK DITCH*



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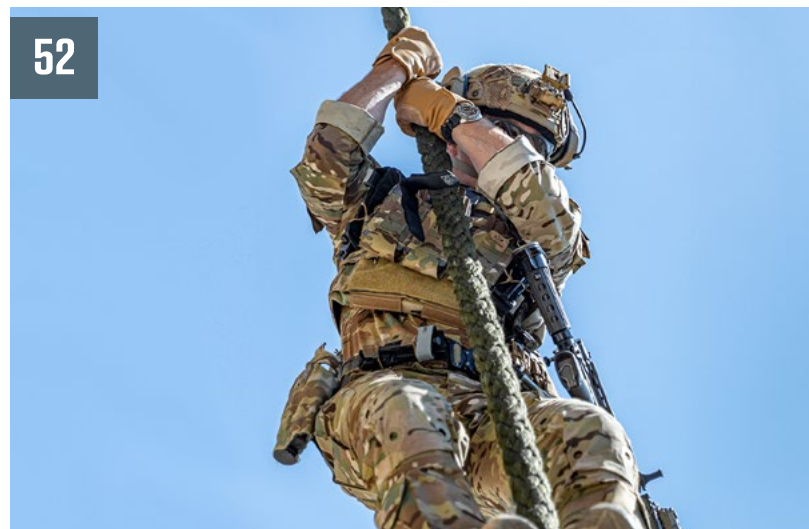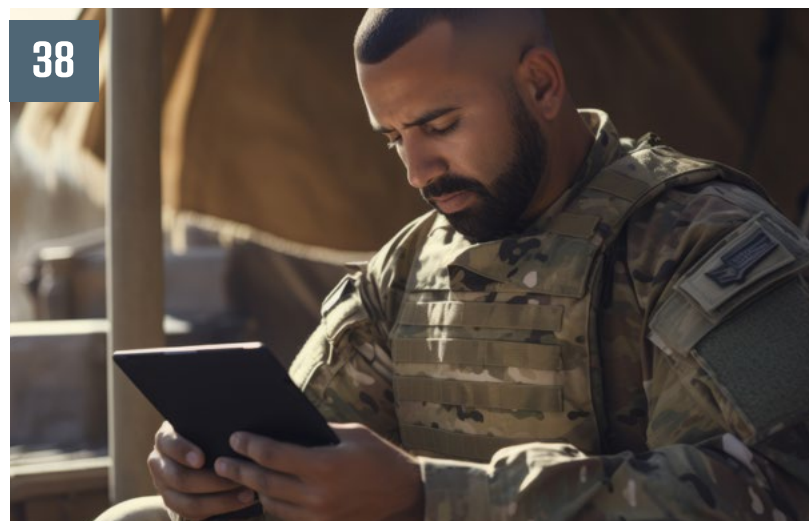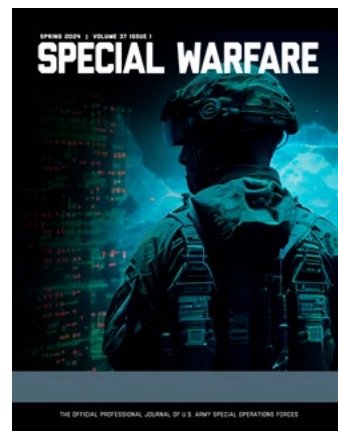
# SUBMISSIONS

### ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

Special Warfare aims to inform, educate, and bring awareness to the talented, highly effective, and instrumental skill sets of Special Operations Forces.

We welcome submissions of academic work from students, professors, and cadre of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, scholarly, independent research from members of the armed forces, security policy-makers and -shapers, defense analysts, academic specialists and civilians from the U.S. and abroad.

Manuscripts should be 500 to 1,500 words in length. Include a cover letter. Submit a complete biography with author contact information (i.e. complete mailing address, telephone, e-mail address).

Manuscripts should be submitted in plain text, double-spaced and in a digital file. Endnotes should accompany works in lieu of embedded footnotes. Please consult The Associated Press Stylebook.

Articles that require security clearance should be cleared by the author's security manager and public affairs office prior to submission. A memo of the security clearance should be forwarded with the article. If the article talks about a specific theater special operations command, the article will be forwarded to the TSOC for clearance.

### PHOTO AND GRAPHIC SUBMISSIONS

Special Warfare welcomes photo submissions featuring Civil Affairs, Psychological Operations, and/or Special Forces Soldiers. Ensure that all photographs are reviewed and released by the unit public affairs officer prior to submission.

Special Warfare accepts high-resolution (200< dpi or 2MB file size) digital photos, in the format of .jpg, .png, .tif, .pdf, and .eps. Be sure to include a caption and photographer's credit. Do not send photos within PowerPoint slides or Word documents.

Photos, graphics, tables and charts that accompany articles should be submitted in separate files from the manuscript (no embedded graphics).

### SUBMISSION REVIEW AND PUBLICATION

All submissions will be reviewed in a timely manner. Due to the volume of submissions we receive, we cannot reply to every submission. However, we do review and appreciate every submission. If your content meets the goals and requirements, we will be in touch. There is only one editor on staff and while in-edit or layout phase of the upcoming magazine, new submissions will not be reviewed until complete.

Please note that submitted content is not guaranteed to be published in Special Warfare. There are several factors that determine what content is ultimately published including time and space availability, the approved editorial outline and theme, as well as relevance to the Special Warfare target audience and mission.

Special Warfare reserves the right to edit all contributions. Special Warfare will attempt to afford authors an opportunity to review the final edited version; requests for changes must be received by the given deadline.

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, CONTACT THE SPECIAL WARFARE STAFF AT:

*Commercial:* (910) 432-5703

*DSN:* 239-5703

*E-mail:* SpecialWarfare@socom.mil

SUBMIT ARTICLES FOR CONSIDERATION TO:

*E-mail:* SpecialWarfare@socom.mil

*or via regular mail:*
USAJFKSWCS
Attn: AOJK-PAO;
Editor, Special Warfare
3004 Ardennes St., Stop A
Fort Liberty, N.C. 28310

# SPECIAL WARFARE

**U.S. ARMY JOHN F. KENNEDY
SPECIAL WARFARE CENTER AND SCHOOL**
*The Special Operations Center of Excellence*

**MISSION** To produce world - class quality ARSOF Soldiers, is our non-negotiable contract with the U.S. Army, the Nation, and the American people. There is no second place in the Profession of Arms, and anything less than exceptional is unacceptable

**GUIDING PRINCIPLES** Always strive for Excellence in all we do! Our Profession and our Nation demands it. Everything we do should be planned, organized and executed effectively and efficiently. Every success and every mistake is an opportunity to learn and improve. Serving our country carries the responsibility for unwavering Courage. Courage to do what is right and put the mission before self. This requires Trust…the Trust I have in you and your Trust in me. Trust and integrity is foundational to personal accountability and critical self-assessment. As Leaders, I expect you to empower subordinates, build Trust, build Teams, and Do What's Right – Always!

**EDITOR NOTE** Acronyms USAJFKSWCS and SWCS are used interchangeably.

# From the
# COMMANDING GENERAL

I am excited about the depth of professional dialogue on 'How ARSOF Fights' in this edition. Our irregular approach is unique to the joint force and a critical component of the National Defense Strategy. This issue of Special Warfare will inform the Army and the wider Irregular Warfare (IW) community of interest on unique, asymmetric, and indirect Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF) concepts and capabilities across the competition continuum.

It is important to remember that in our doctrine, Irregular Warfare often occurs in concert with conventional warfare and large-scale conflict. It is, therefore, imperative that IW be part of the core curriculum in all Army professional military education. We do not have the luxury of time to institutionalize IW. This is why the JFK Special Warfare Center and School is establishing the IW Academy to advance doctrine, training, and leader development for the U.S. Army Special Operations Command and the U.S. Army.

Our institution is also undertaking one of the most substantial revisions of ARSOF doctrine since 2014. The articles in this edition are directly influencing this review. With the advent of multi-domain operations as the Army's operating concept and similar domain warfighting concepts emerging in joint doctrine, our ARSOF capstone doctrine must align with multi-domain operations while adapting to the changing character of warfare in the 21st century. Field Manual 3-05 will introduce the Irregular Approach and an operational framework to fill gaps in Army and joint doctrine. Our goal is to publish this manual by the Fall of 2024.

I encourage all of you reading *Special Warfare* today to contribute to the ongoing professional dialogue with your perspective on our profession by writing about it and submitting for publication and discussion. I also invite you to write about Irregular Warfare for the upcoming special edition of Military Review set for release in September.

*– Veritas et Libertas –*

**GUILLAUME "WILL" BEAURPERE**
BRIGADIER GENERAL, U.S. ARMY
COMMANDING GENERAL

> "As we develop IW doctrine with the Army, a key point to capture is that IW occurs in concert with, or independent of, conventional warfare, but also spans the entire competition continuum. Effective IW campaigns take time, must be transregional, and cannot achieve advantage in a crisis if we have not prepared the environment."
>
> *— Brig. Gen. Guillaume "Will" Beaurpere*

# Letter from the EDITOR

Impactful moves are happening with the *Special Warfare Magazine*.

After shifting the magazine from a hardcopy publication to a web-first, mobile-friendly platform last August, we partnered with the Harding Project, an initiative driven by the Army Chief of Staff Gen. Randy George to renew professional publications and reinvest in military writing.

The Harding Project teamed with the Modern War Institute at West Point to launch its initiative in 2023. The project was named "Harding" after a talented officer in the 1930s. I couldn't have said it better; the Modern War Institute website shares the following history:

> "In 1934, the U.S. Army was racing to transform quickly enough to win the next war. Knowing successful modernization would require the full ingenuity of the service, Maj. Gen. Edward Croft, the chief of infantry, sought to revive the flagging Infantry Journal. He hoped doing so might solicit from the Army's wide base of talent—with all of the experiences, interests, and professional education within it—the ideas needed to modernize well. To pull off the revival, he named Maj. Edwin "Forrest" Harding as editors.

> Croft picked his man well. Harding had a literary mind. When they served together in China a decade before, a young George Marshall had nicknamed Harding the "poet laureate" of the 15th Infantry Regiment. Harding's literary talents paid off as Infantry Journal editor. In four short years, he more than doubled the journal's circulation and kicked off a revolution in Army writing."

The effort is led by Zachary Griffiths and Leyton Summerlin as they pave the way in revitalizing professional military journals across the Department of Army.

We sat down with Zach and Leyton in late March for a Pineland Underground Podcast episode for a deep-dive conversation on the initiative, its importance to military writing, and how it can impact the *Special Warfare Magazine*.

Here are a few bullet points from the conversation:

- Harding Project overarching goals: Updating policy to encourage modernization, educating the force on the professional publication landscape, improving archive accessibility, and empowering volunteer editors.

- It solicits ideas and encourages discourse. The *Special Warfare Magazine* combined with the Harding Project offers a platform that engages thoughtful dialogue and a look at topics from dynamic perspectives.

- Professional military journals. Like the *Special Warfare Magazine*, the Harding Project teamed with professional military journals across the branch, such as *Military Review* and the *Infantry Journal*. If an article submission doesn't fall within a theme for *Special Warfare*, the Harding Project can offer an alternate platform better suited for the author, resulting in continuing the dialogue across other platforms.

We're thrilled to be working with the Harding Project and seeing the direction *Special Warfare* is headed. We're currently accepting submissions for the fall and winter editions of *Special Warfare*, focusing on the themes "SOF Medicine (Medical, Veterinary, and Dental)" and "Innovation, Modernization, and Partnerships." For article submissions, send them to specialwarfare@socom.mil. Articles should be approximately 1,500 words in length. The earlier the submission the better.

We hope you enjoy this edition on How ARSOF Fights: An Irregular Approach to the Competition Continuum.

ELVIA KELLY
EDITOR, SPECIAL WARFARE MAGAZINE
U.S. ARMY JOHN F. KENNEDY SPECIAL WARFARE CENTER AND SCHOOL



Elvia Kelly, *Special Warfare Magazine* editor and SWCS Public Affairs officer, taking care of business on and off the field during tactical laser tag in Fayetteville, N.C., earlier this year.

If you're interested in listening the Pineland Underground Podcast episode, head over to

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# OPERATION BLACK DITCH
## (PART 2)

## Introduction of the PROBLEM

In the business world, firms will often do a '*pre-mortem*,' where they imagine all the various ways a new project could fail then examine each in turn. Another approach is requiring a team to write the press release for their new project just to get approval to spin off a new team.

In the national security circles, *fictional intelligence, or FICINT,* attempts to envision the future by examining the latest technologies and trends. All three of these require leaps of imagination, educated guesses, not necessarily on what will happen, but what may happen.

Perhaps the most famous FICINT is Ghost Fleet, the book was so good it became a verb. As the U.S. Army Special Operations Command looks at the next decade, the commanding general asked every Soldier in each town hall how they envision the future fight. 'Ghost Fleet 2.0' is out there, in the minds of the ARSOF Soldiers. A story that helps the Soldiers of every regiment visualize the various ways ARSOF is going to prevent and, if necessary, fight, World War Three — a story which sparks the imagination of ARSOF's innovative operators and enablers.

The following narrative, Operation Black Ditch, is just one vision of how a future conflict with the Chinese Community Party, or CCP, could play out. What role do you see playing in the coming conflicts? What tools do you see yourself using? What training will you need to focus on? What tools do we need to drop? What will we no longer be able to rely on? What about the future conflict with Russia? Iran? Somewhere else the National Defense Strategy isn't looking? Submit your ideas to *DL-USASOC_CAG@socom.mil.*

Editor's note: The following article is fiction. The blue text is a link, and the blacked-out text is for aesthetic purposes.

## THE LOOMING SPRING ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ PHILIPPINES)

Seven years wasn't enough to get Ukraine ready. It hasn't been half that since I was first here as a captain. Now a major, George Raleigh stood musing between his sergeant major and his Philippine Special Operations Command on the docks as the sun began to set. We needed more time. His look was dour as he surveyed the four detachments in front of him, two Philippine, two U.S., before turning to his sergeant major saying quietly, "Captain Vissel is young, barely in the company two weeks. Not sure the kid's ready."

Sergeant Major Russel "Rusty" Parkhill couldn't help but grin. "Don't recall you having a lot of miles on your legs the first time you were here in ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮." When he caught the glare from his commander it only made the old sergeant major grin more. "Sir, pretty soon every one of them is gonna have more experience than they could ever want."

"While I understand the Sergeant major's dark sense of humor, do you really think we're past the point of turning back?" asked Philippine Lt. Col. Jose Pamonag. He shared the same expression as the Maj. Raleigh, as he watched his own Philippine soldiers make final preparations of their kit. Both George and Jose had worked together in more exercises since their first joint combined exchange training (JCET) together years ago, as had the men in their units. Both commanders now shared concerns of losing these men.

Eager to shift his mood, George turned and walked over to one of the members of his headquarters detachment. Psychological Operations (PSYOP) noncommissioned officer (NCO) Sgt. 1st Class Tent Sindal was unwrapping a box full of playing card decks. "What are these?" George asked.

"What's old is new, sir. It's the old World War Two ship identification decks," he said splaying one deck out open in his hands. "We're giving them to the locals and to the teams. With over 5,000 West Philippine Sees users, it'll help us give 7th Fleet an understanding of what's going on down here. I don't expect we'll spot the Fujian, but we'll help them prioritize their resources elsewhere."

Next to him, the AOB's senior digital warrant, also known as "Hacker Chief," Chief Warrant Officer 2 Craig Parkins was opening up two lines of tough boxes. The left line held four drones each, their rotors folded neatly atop each with two skids raised above, only the skids were lined with a small, rubberized track. He began putting each through their diagnostics, then shifted over to the right row and pulled out four small black boxes brimming with small antennas almost like a tiny porcupine.

"Craig, drones I know," Raleigh offered, ... "but what the hell are those?"

"Wasn't sure they'd get here in time, sir; these are the latest chameleons." The tech savvy chief quickly inventoried them before preparing to issue out one per cell.

"Looks more like a bug than a lizard," Parkhill chimed in.

Craig held one up in his hands, the antennas bristling atop them. "These things are going to have the PLAN searching for the 7th fleet from here to Natuna. Even when they figure out they're chasing ghosts, it'll help erode their confidence in their equipment."

As each team's senior commo sergeants began to cycle by and get the new kit, they also drew a single black backpack from Master Sgt. Krivokrasov. The commo NCOs had all spent the last two months training repeatedly with the new kit. "How do you pronounce his name again?" Maj. Raleigh quietly asked his sergeant major, who blanched.

"Just call him Starlord," Craig answered. The command team shared a glance and shrugged.

"Explains the walkman morale patch on his kit," Rusty added. Inside each backpack was the latest version of the tough boxes Craig and Starlord had struggled to lug back to the truck years ago.

The kit had been reduced, replaced with mostly off the shelf parts they could acquire locally, but it still had all the power as it did when it was the size of a truck trailer. With it the teams could disrupt almost any satellite, so long as they could get under the ellipse. And because the systems were so easily produced, these kits weren't just being handed out here on the docks of Palawan. In Djibouti, along the Panama Canal, and even high up in the Line of Actual Control in India, detachments were preparing to wreak havoc on the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) satellite systems.

Lieutenant Colonel Pamonag rejoined the AOB command team on the dock, having just completed similar checks with his teams. Each of the four teams' 16 operators were broken down into further four-man cells, and then partnered with a Philippine cell. The U.S. cell leaders shook hands with a local Philippine fish captain and began loading their equipment on the small boats, to include boxes loaded with high-altitude balloons and tanks of helium. The cells were armed with one of two drones, ready to be attached to these balloons, which despite their given three-letter acronyms, the teams had taken to calling "bats" and "falcons." "Bats" were emitters, similar to the chameleon backpacks they had on their boats. These would broadcast electromagnetic signals to confuse the People's Republic of China's (PRC) sensor arrays, and had already been approved for use. The "Falcon" variety couldn't be employed without authorization, but needed to be in position now. These would dangle from their high-altitude perches and drift over the mainland, before dropping. While not as large as PrSMs or hypersonics, these incredibly accurate weapons could drift over critical logistical equipment, and guided by the PRC's own BeiDou satellites, drop precision destruction on fuel and ammo supply depots. But that also meant striking the PRC's mainland, and thus the POTUS approval required.

As the teams finished loading their gear, there wasn't any last rousing speech, or any cheers. Just a look and a nod from each cell leader to the others. Then the boats silently slipped off the dock, each to their respective missions. Major Raleigh looked to the east and saw nothing but clear skies. With tensions rising every day to the north, he found himself wishing for poor weather. The *Plum Rains* couldn't come soon enough.

Master Sergeant Matt Swann and Sergeant Major Simon Lee sat in a small truck, tucked just under the trees. They waited for another shipment to arrive at the docks. With so many jets streaking overhead these days, it wasn't safe to loiter out in the open. Simon shuddered to think how he'd grown up comforted by the sound of a fast mover overhead back in Afghanistan. No longer. There wasn't going to be anything like that kind of air superiority any time soon.

The PLAN had enacted their soft-blockade a few weeks ago, but thankfully there'd been enough of a warning that the forces on Taiwan hadn't been caught unawares. Ships could still deliver supplies to the island, but they needed a coalition escort past the PLAN ships if they wanted to arrive with their cargo unmolested. There were reports of entire cargo ships having their contents pushed overboard by blockade enforcers. Instead the military's shipments had shifted from cargo tankers to smaller craft, those too small for the PLANs attention. All the same, this would probably be the last shipment Simon could expect for a while.

They'd been stocking supplies on the island for years now – in warehouses and corners all over the bustling urban terrain that lined the west coast, and deep in bunkers and tunnels throughout the western mountains. There were even some new and novel subsurface storage designs that had been rushed into service, fabricated to be accessed by unmanned-underwater drones.

Over the last four years, the vast majority of shipments had contained just the things to keep the island alive, food and, more importantly, gas. But those hadn't been Simon's job, those were for logisticians from U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC).

His goods were of a much more devious variety. There were plenty of the old staples like shape charges, ammunition, radios. But, there were also newer, more interesting toys. The latest three-dimensional printers had been an early acquisition, with the requisite filaments to help make replacement parts from plastic or metal.

And, oh so many drones. Simple ones to see things, like the tiny drones that put on light shows instead of fireworks these days. But, also much more deadly ones. Things that made the Turkish Bayraktar look like an iPod One. And not just ones that flew, but ones that swam as well. Things designed to kill every ship and helicopter the PLA planned to use to try and cross Taiwanese Straits, or as the locals called it, "The Black Ditch."

Seeing the ship finish tying up along the dock, Master Sgt. Swann threw their small bongo truck into gear and the pair quickly drove down to get their cargo. Twenty minutes of forklift ballet later and the pair were returning up the narrow mountain road west. It was a long drive back to the other side of the island. Simon looked at the oversized Civil Affairs NCO, hunched over the wheel like the Hulk and realized, they might not be making that drive much longer. The sun set and the sky darkened quickly in the mountains, but no clouds obstructed the moon overhead.

Major Chloe MacLeod sat at her computer in the underground headquarters, clearing out her emails from the day. She'd spent the afternoon running another class of local Taiwanese citizens through first aid and how to spot and report anything they saw. The training was rewarding but also meant when she got back to the headquarters, there was a whole day of messages to catch back up on. There'd barely been a handful of computers when this had been stood up years ago, but now the hive was buzzing.

She spotted Staff Sgt. Robert Agneau talking with a team of Taiwanese and American Soldiers as they looked at a scrolling feed of social media posts. The partnership with the ████████████ ████████ had only grown over the last four years, and the team had several big wins, in particular with the mobilization messaging. No one was going to take the time to thank them, but it wouldn't have been possible to get four hundred thousand reservists organized and equipped without their work.

They'd also been working both sides of the IO fight. Crushing Chinese Communist Party (CCP) disinformation was a constant job, but Sgt. Agneau described it as "Time to make the donuts," or work they had to do every day, but not very taxing. Where he'd had less success was in messaging back across the straits. The messages they built had impact, but they were always in a race against the censors who would quickly take them down. The latest campaign, targeting the mothers whose whole family line would be lost in the bottom of the Taiwanese Strait seemed to really piss of the CCP, which meant it must work.

Chloe decided to wait on reading her emails and opened up the secure chat app.

> How's it going back there?

Major Kaitlin Daishi replied quickly, indicating she was also pulling a late night at the keyboard.

> Busy. Wanna See?

> If it means I don't have to look at 78 unread emails, yes

Her screen suddenly lit up with a map covered in icons, mostly salmon pink and light green, but a few blue ones throughout.

> You're so proud of the CIP you made 😏

Chloe sent back.

> Damn right I am

Kaitlin shot back, followed by a gif of Wonder Woman dancing in a circle. She had every reason to be impressed with herself. Across her Common Intel Picture she had thousands of open source accounts marked, each a spotter trained by one of a tier two open-source intelligence (OSINT) cadre. Those numbered in the hundreds and she had each marked with a score of one to six on their reliability in assessing and reporting their own analysis. Coupled with the machine learning script, Kaitlin could see a heat map of where she could reliably know what was going on, which meant she could focus her resources on this much smaller piece of the map.

> What's the latest projection?

Chloe asked.

> Still unclear. It's not impossible for Xi to spin all this up and then not do anything, just impose 📖 on Taiwan

The build-up certainly hadn't gone unnoticed. Analysts had been projecting 2027 as the highest tension year since the turn of the decade, but in the winter of 2025, when prices on several key commodities spiked, analysts across the Department of Defense start watching closer. Pretty soon the buildup was unmistakable. You can't marshal a million Soldiers and not have anyone notice.

> Yeah, but what do you think?

> Why does my opinion matter so much?

> You're the CJSOTF J2. Who on the 🌎 has a better 👀?

Kaitlin rolled her eyes. Even with all the intelligence systems at her finger tips, and all the OSINT that defined the present operational environment, there was lots of noise.

Five years of mapping PRC state-owned enterprises had helped. Most of Taiwan was holding up well against PRC offensive cyber operations,

whilst a few clever Cyber Command hackers had managed to worm their way into the Chinese Ferries and were currently wreaking havoc on the roll-on-roll-off system.

> I think Xi wants to go. He's just waiting till he's certain he can pull it off

> So what do we do?

> You mean beside 🙏for 🌧️ ?

> What's the latest on that?

> Plum rains are still three weeks away

> So? What do we do?

> The usual SOF thing. Devious shiii 😈
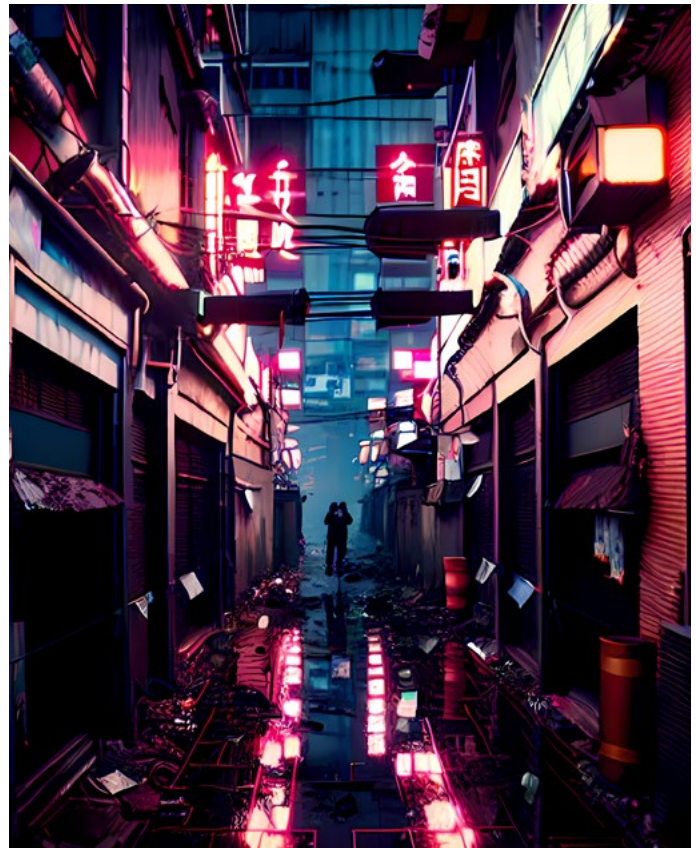


## ONE WEEK LATER (████████ TAIWAN)

Master Sergeant Simon Lee glanced over his shoulder before ducking to his left into the alley. Pausing a moment just inside, he waited to see if any curious onlookers followed, but seeing no one he continued on. He cast a glance above him, but saw nothing, neither drones nor the invisible fishing wires that randomly crossed between the two buildings. He'd first heard of the tactic on an NPR podcast, as a means to deter eagles from a chicken farm, but it had shown just as useful against quad copters in the urban jungles.

He paused to slip his smartphone into the faraday bag in his pack, before hustling to the door at the end of the alley. Briskly unlocking it and slipping inside, he hustled down the brief hallway and a flight of stairs before opening another door. He was falling forward more than walking at this point, and didn't stop to talk as he dropped his bag on the desk where Master Sgt. Matt Swann sat typing onto a laptop computer. He wordlessly entered the nearby bedroom, closed the door to complete darkness and laid down on the single bed, not bothering to take his shoes off. Exhaustion took over and he was asleep immediately.

Waking up felt like he was clawing his way to the surface of a deep black pool. He momentarily had no idea where he was, or where up was for that matter. Slowly Simon's memory kicked in and he rolled himself out of bed, opening the door.

Matt cast a glance over his shoulder, and broke into his typical wide grin. "Prefect timing," he said, hoisting the fresh pot of coffee he'd just brewed. Simon staggered over and filled his own mug before heading to the computer desk. "Take it easy, I already transferred all your data off the SD card and downloaded all the latest updates back onto it."

Simon still felt torn but finally decided 30 minutes of coffee and food was a necessary sacrifice if he was going to keep moving. "How long was I out?"

"Maybe four hours. Not enough, but all we seem to get," Matt replied as Simon pushed past him in the small kitchen to start making some ramen. "Those were good reports, and it sounds like the ROC is doing better than expected in the north."

Simon gently placed his bowl of ramen on the coffee table, then flopped back on the couch and stared at the wall sized map across from him. Neon post-its covered the north and south of the island, depicting both People's Liberation Army in pink, and Republic of China in green. Four days. It felt like longer since Xi had kicked off the invasion.

It wasn't clear what the inciting incident was. There'd been efforts on both sides to deescalate. Just as in Ukraine years earlier, Washington decided to "whistle out of the pool" all its overt forces. However, recognizing Taiwan was not Ukraine and there was no way to drive back in, SOF had been allowed to remain behind in its much smaller size under a strict advise and assist at the joint task force-level only mission. The 1st Special Forces was used to working under such restrictions over the last two decades in the Philippines, but when the PRC started their landing, the conditions of that advising changed.

The CCP wanted to capture Taiwan, not destroy it, so there hadn't been a barrage of missile strikes. Insisting this was an "internal matter" and, in an effort to keep the U.S. and its allies out of the fight, the CCP had deliberately not struck any U.S. forces, both afloat and in the first and second island chain. But the CCP certainly expected SOF on the island, and Simon and Matt both knew they were aggressively being hunted.

The threat was real, but much like in the 1950s, U.S. analysts had underestimated Taiwanese counter-intelligence capability. When the first ships loaded with Soldiers launched from Fuzhou, Beijing found thousands of their agents had been detained or killed overnight.

But the U.S. suffered their own CI failures, and found more than a couple of their cache sites had been burned. One small glimmer of hope had come from the technical shops of one of the special mission units who'd spent the last five years building all sorts of sensors and finding ever more cunning ways of miniaturizing them. These sensors went a long way toward both identifying moles in the network, and protecting critical logistics caches.

Now that the island was fully embargoed, even little logistical losses stung. Every time one of their networks was penetrated it exposed dozens of lives, but even more critically, it could cost them critical supplies and weapons. Simon found himself seething over every time

over the last five years that critical talent and knowledgeable enablers had been forced to PCS to meet arbitrary career timelines and gates. For two decades, new Special Forces NCOs had cut their teeth focused on shooting six-inch dots with nine millimeter rounds. Now that same staff sergeant was advising battalion and brigade commanders on the FLOT and how to maneuver their forces. Simon wondered if they'd prepared these young NCOs enough for the task. Had they gotten nearly as many reps?

The CCPs landings in ███ had been their largest, and had managed some small success at gaining a lodgment. Further west at ███ ██ had been a disaster, in no small part thanks to a battery worth of Palletized Field Artillery Launchers (PFALs) the task force had managed to emplace. The PLA had been so spooked by the tactic they not only avoided dockyards, but they'd also taken to shooting almost every shipping container they saw.

The ROC had fared particularly well against the PLA's air assaults. They'd allowed the initial waves to land at the airfields in the north almost uncontested. But, when the PLA's 5th Aviation Regiment came to land the second wave, they found every rooftop brimming with SHORAD. Without enough forces to expand the lodgment, the members of the 12th Group found themselves quickly overwhelmed and defeated.

Even the forces that had successfully landed in the north were unprepared for the cunning resistance the ROC had prepared. Simon wished he could have seen the face of the 31st Amphibious Armor Brigade when they abruptly found their forces coming under attack from piles of garbage and a suddenly not so innocent recycling truck.

Every single Taiwanese citizen was a sensor in the auxiliary, and thousands had been provisioned accounts on the Taiwanese Tactical Network (TTN). Bring your own device, the system was built on zero trust, but enabled forces across the island to share an ad-hoc near-real-time picture of the fight. Special operations forces provided the key mesh network backbone and kept these nodes moving, and the comms running.

The CCP had attempted to isolate the islands communications, but even that had proven to be an impossible task. Thousands of micro-satellites crisscrossed the stratosphere above them, as space forces waged a constant but invisible EW campaign to deny, disrupt, and wherever possible coopt each other's systems. Fiber lines had been cut coming off the island but, back at the turn of the decade, a special forces sergeant major and former commo sergeant, had revived the art of Near-Vertical Incidence Skywave (NVIS) shots, and several repeating stations had been setup both in Taiwan and the Ryukyus.

Connectivity off island wasn't perfect but, like all domains in this fight, contested. Everyone just had to adapt to the reduced bandwidth. SDcards got passed, and KMZs became the default instead of PPT when kilobytes became the new normal. Off-line map data was prized, but paper maps were just as invaluable.

"Based off the latest from CJSOTF, it looks like the CCP is going to make another go at expanding their foothold down in ███████," Matt offered, sitting opposite Simon.

"That'll make Chloe's work even harder," Simon replied. Major McLeod had been working the humanitarian flows and civilians pushed south from Taipei and north from Kaoishong, coordinating the evacuation in real-time to deconflict with ROC offensives.

"Speaking of which, I'm due to relive her so she can get some rack herself," Sgt. Swann stated, as he stood and gathered his own pack. "I've already pushed up the latest reports on ██████████ and the APOD down in ████. Higher said the marines were very thankful for the data, and I let them know we'll keep it coming real-time from our sources if they go ahead with their landings." At the door he stopped and turned. "Do you think they'll get the green light?"

Simon saw the doubt on his fellow NCO's normally grinning face, and worried it was reflected in his own. He paused to take a drink of coffee before replying. "There's this old Bill Donovan quote, from back before the U.S. joined World War Two. Something about how the job of the OSS was to "steal the ball, kill the umpire," all to buy the rest of the nation time. That's what we're doing right now. Buying time for the Fleet to steam west, and for Washington to decide policy." He watched Matt's face but didn't see any change.

He stood up, picking up his bowl of ramen and walking to the computer desk. "I don't know what D.C. is going to do, but I know they wouldn't be able to do anything if we weren't here. And the marines aren't going to know where to go once they land if I don't get to work."

Matt's perpetual grin was back, and he said his good-bye as he slipped out the door. Alone again in the safe house, Simon began typing up another resupply request for the CJSOTF to ferry in under the embargo with their modest UUV fleet.

## (CLARK AFB, LUZON, PHILIPPINES)

As soon as Maj. George Raleigh and Sgt. Maj. Rusty Parkhill had returned to their headquarters in Fort Magsaysay they'd gotten word the task force would be landing in Clark, so the pair had driven the two hours to meet them as they landed.

The C-17s were in short supply, and Murphy was always the least predictable but most reliable friction. Each lift had to make a series of hops from Georgia, to McChord, Washington, to Elmendorf, Alaska, to Yokota, Japan and finally down to the Philippines. A few birds had broken down along the way, and thus it'd taken almost four days for the typically swift movement to be completed. As each lift arrived after over twenty-four hours of traveling, the young Rangers staggered off the ramp in a haze.

But, in true Regimental fashion a couple senior NCOs started barking and soon the task force headquarters was up and running and the arriving Soldiers billeted. The 160th maintainers were quickly rebuilding their birds and running them through the requisite test flights. The question now was where to apply their forces.

The decision on where to send the task force had to be made quickly, as the resources to move them quickly dried up, but sitting idly was certainly not an option. As the only battalion in the Army that could activate and deploy in under a day, the question was where they could be most useful. Djibouti was floated as an early option but, in the end, the leadership in the Pentagon decided to fly the task force to the First Island Chain. They were a visible sign, part of an attempt to deter the CCP, but they also represented options.

Now Rusty and George stood around a map of the South China Sea alongside the task force leadership and their Intelligence officer. They were trying to come up with exactly that, options.

"What about Subi Reef?" offered Rusty. "You've got that close access cyber team. Why not a smash and grab?"

Major John Lisink, the task force air planner, shook his head. "290 nautical miles from the nearest airfield. That's zero room for errors. With every AFSB east of the Second Island Chain there's no bingo fields to help."

The task force commander, Col. Bob Kitchens gave an equally grim look at the map, 'Gotta be air-land. We'd be pinned to the dirt just on rolled ankles alone in an airborne drop'.

"Ain't no terrain masking out there over the ocean," added one of the 160th chiefs.

"Okay, okay, so that was a shit idea," Rusty apologized. He turned and looked at his commander, "You got any ideas?"

Major Raleigh blanched, giving his sergeant major an annoyed look. Thanks. He stared at the map, and at a loss for ideas, began laying out what he knew. "My teams are all afloat on Philippine fishing boats, spread along the coasts," drawing a line with his finger from Palawan up to the Batanes. Then an idea hit him. "We spent the last year seeding HIMARs pods across the archipelago. The idea was to support marine HIRAIN shoot and scoots, as well as disperse our supplies in case the PLA attacked the PI."

"The marines need a C-130 to put down their launchers, but you could divvy up your squads and disperse them throughout the islands pretty easily with the birds you have."

Colonel Kitchens looked at his command sergeant major, who had a skeptical look in his eye. It wasn't clear if that was because he wasn't seeing the value in the mission, or if he was worried about what trouble young Rangers could get up to on their own tropical islands. "I'm still not sold, but we'll take a look at the locations. Just get the data to my opso."

Sergeant Major Parkhill caught the fellow sergeant major's eye and, gesturing to the map, offered "Well Rangers, lead the way."

## ███████████, JAPAN)

Major Kaitlin Daishi peeled off a strip of Rip-Its, popping one capsule out and quickly swallowing it as she sat down at her desk. They were actually called Soldier Readiness Capsules, or as the military was obsessed with unpronounceable three-letter initialisms, SRCs. But, in part, as a nod to the previous two decades of deployments, and because they came in tear apart strips, everyone quickly started calling the energy pills Rip-Its.

She definitely hadn't gotten as much sleep as the CJSOTF commander was telling everyone to get, but then who was? Despite knowing better, she cracked up a can of energy drink to help wash down the pill and turned off the 'GBNT' screen-saver she'd put on earlier when she'd left the JOC for a nap.

Her system booted up and the machine learning scripts began running through her CIP, pulling in the latest open-source reporting and running preliminary deepfake scans. It wouldn't find everything, but the machine learning scripts at least weeded out the low hanging fruit. It would assign every post a Bayesian score in the upper right corner. Anything below a threshold Kaitlin set was automatically thrown out. It would ask her input on those just above it, which allowed the algo to keep refining and learning. The OSINT poisoning had become just as competitive and evolutionary as warfare itself, only at a much faster and larger scale. Both sides were in an all-out effort to deepen the fog of war.

Two clicks later she was seeing the latest inputs from her level two OSINT reporters, each again given a Bayesian score based on previous reporting and other available reports. She swiped her touch screen left and right, instantly up and down voting her sources, the algo learning from her here, as well.

She took a moment to glance around the JOC and found it roughly half-empty, GBNT screensavers dotting several screens. That was to be expected given the high op tempo of the CJSOTF. When the CCP declared their operation an 'internal matter' it'd given the surrounding nations enough space to reevaluate their commitments. As D.C. debated policy, most of the region held its breath. Singapore had been the first to move and had effectively become Switzerland, declaring they would not take part unless the conflict escalated internationally. This left the SOJTF effectively frozen in amber until US policy was set, so the CJSOTF had picked up their load.

This didn't mean there wasn't action along the periphery. The 5th Group teams were already positioned in Kyrgyzstan, and Naval

Special Warfare Command (NSW) had been given the WARNO about Djibouti. Rumor was the Indian SOLO had walked into the Minister of Defense's office and traced a line from Ladahk through Lhasa and simply asked, "Sir, where would you like the border to be?" Teams in ████████████████ it were already energizing their networks into ▮

Domestically things were progressing, but friction abounded. The TRIWTF was trying to coordinate all the counter-CCP efforts, but they were at reduced manning. Seems the PRC was paying attention back in the winter of 2022, and had learned that instead of a cyber-attack to a SCADA system, just a few rifle shots were all it took to cripple local power stations. Installations like Fort Bragg were still running, but that didn't mean Soldiers who lived in the surrounding area weren't distracted worrying about their families without power. Soldiers all over the U.S. were unleashing malware by clicking on links in emails telling them banks were over withdrawn. Ironically, it seemed the byzantine code of myPay, which seemed to barely work on a good day, was impervious to CCP cyber operators.

Kaitlin copied the algo's output OSINT report into a table and posted it into the group chat, at-ing the commander and other key staff with a quick Tweet-length executive summary. She let out a relaxing sigh at the ease of that. No more time wasted making pretty power point slide pictures. When tools like DALL-E and ChatGPT finally stopped being blocked by the DoD networks, they drove the final nails in PPTs coffin.

The AI tools also super charged the IO war. Prompt engineer became a duty title overnight and ARSOF quickly began heavily recruiting the most skilled young engineer's they could find. Where previously an IO product would take weeks to build, thousands could be generated and iterated in an hour.

Of course, it took the new commander to finally slay the PPT demon. The deputy commander had still wanted his paper copies of slides, printed one-sided of course. But when Dragon-Six actual showed up and heard the DCO refer to himself as "more of an analog kind of guy," the DCO found himself on a flight back to Washington, never to return. The new commander had introduced himself as "the first millennial brigade commander." Overnight data literacy was no longer an advantage, it was an expectation.

The COP stopped being a mega-wall in the front of the JOC. Instead, it was a pool of data that every member of the command and staff was expected to engage with through their own lenses. The AI and ML scripts helped, doing simple tasks like merging a dozen red enemy icons into a single brigade as you zoomed out, tagging it as the 124th Amphibious Mechanized Infantry Division at 62 percent strength. Once data was the principal thing being shared, instead of pictures of data on PPT, all kinds of software tools could be applied and the pace of work tripled.

Abruptly an alert popped up on Kaitlin's screen with a chirp. She heard the same chirp on every other computer in the JOC, which grabbed her attention. She and the remaining staff on the JOC floor all sat up in their seats and leaned over their screens. Major Daishi clicked the pop-up and quickly skimmed the short message. *'Holy shiii, we're doing this.'*

She turned to the battle captain next to her and barked, "Go wake everybody up." As the captain sprinted from the JOC, she next directed the battle NCO, "Tell Maj. Raleigh he's a go."

She took a glance at the half-used pack of Rip-Its on her desk and decided against it, but thought nothing of chugging down a gulp of her energy drink. "Somebody, get Singapore on the line!"

**THE END**
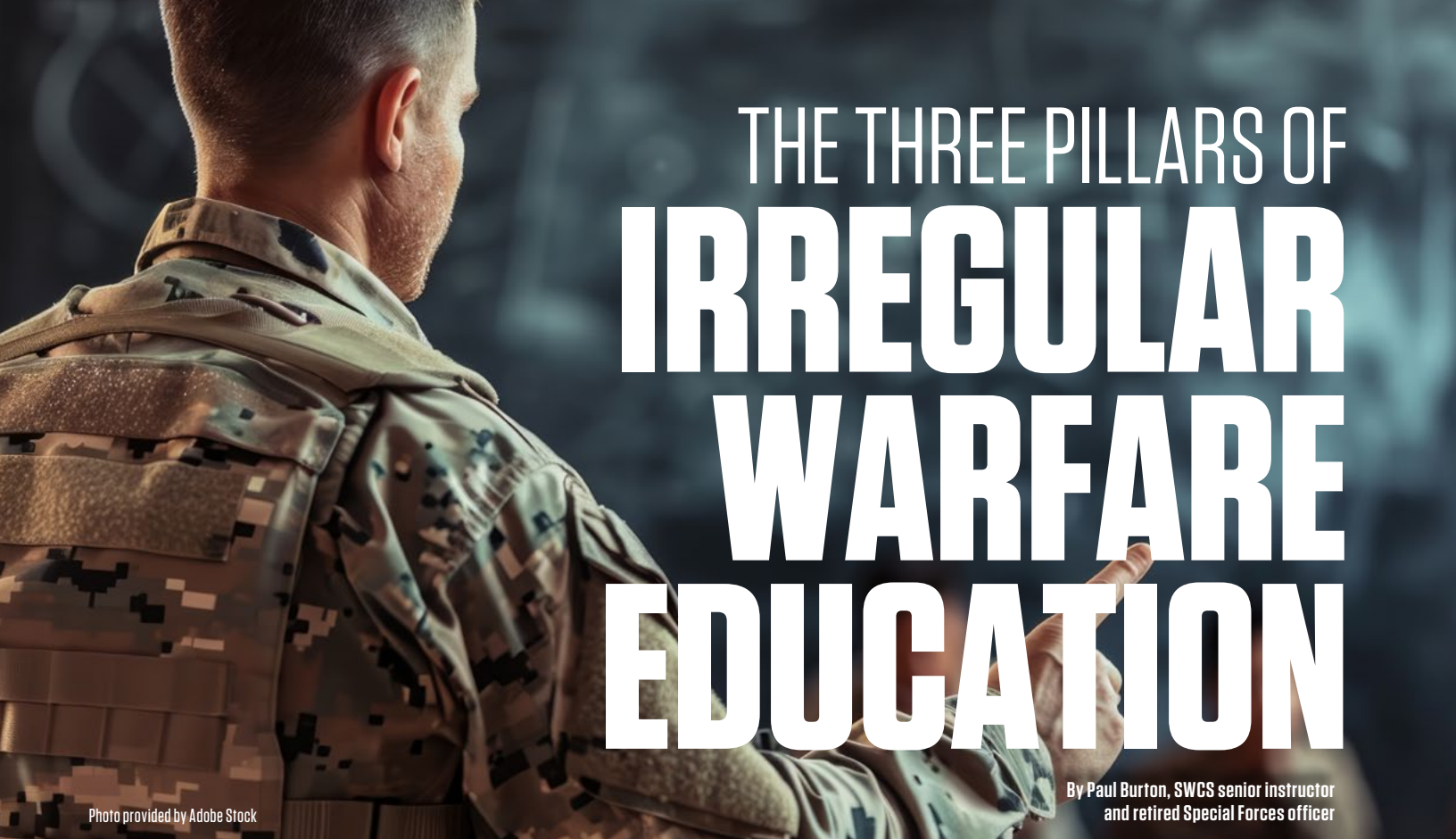
# THE THREE PILLARS OF
# IRREGULAR WARFARE EDUCATION

By Paul Burton, SWCS senior instructor and retired Special Forces officer

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Irregular Warfare education is a holistic, iterative, and lifelong learning process that has a different set of key knowledges as base requirements at certain points in an Army special operations force (ARSOF) Soldier's career. These key knowledges are represented by three pillars of Irregular Warfare education: institutional training and professional military education, personal self-study, and unit-level experiential learning. The process used to train and

## Three pillars of IRREGULAR WARFARE education:

- **Professional military education**
- **Self-study**
- **Experience learning**

educate Soldiers about Irregular Warfare —in many regards—is not unlike other education development and learning models. What is different and unique is how this education is delivered and managed.

First, we will address why Irregular Warfare education is important and answer the question: What has changed to warrant this need? Finally, we will offer recommendations on how this education might be delivered while remaining sensitive to how the addition of more training and education competes with other mandatory Soldier skills, professional development, and career schools tied to professional military education.

## WHY IS IW EDUCATION IMPORTANT?

Decades of focus on violent extremist organizations have created a dearth in intellectual thought and a similar lack of discourse with regard to lessons of counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, security force assistance, and foreign internal defense as key activities of Irregular Warfare. The repetitive nature of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq left the post–Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) special operations community and portions of the interagency at a loss to further propagate less violent and non-kinetic irregular activities. Many of our interagency counterparts lack the capability and capacity to advance Irregular Warfare education despite the value of integrated deterrence commensurate with these irregular approaches in keeping our overseas activities below the threshold of armed conflict. The execution of these interagency partnerships is essential to the ARSOF Irregular Warfare effects resident in combatant commander campaign plans. The ARSOF and interagency partnerships are integral to protracted struggles against peer and near-peer adversaries across the competition continuum. The importance of outreach to our interagency partners, shared experiences, and the establishment of a community of interest in which lessons can be shared in common symposia or forums are key features of an effective Irregular Warfare education.

As the Department of Defense returns its focus to peer competition, there is a gap in the experience level and knowledge in this thought process. An effective education program can shorten the learning curve. Policy and its interrelationship with

Irregular Warfare activities is often misconstrued to be more associated with kinetic and violent aspects of warfare instead of appreciating the nuances of irregular warfare that tend to be non-kinetic and nonviolent. Irregular Warfare is often complex and ambiguous, and these very characteristics demand an academic approach to how all the instruments of national power—when properly measured and mixed—offer outcomes well below the threshold of armed conflict. Options for Irregular Warfare training and education policy present challenges as well as opportunities, and the proper framing of the problem at an interagency and allied level is vital. Education is key.

## PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION

Presently, our peer competitors are waging Irregular Warfare against the United States and our allies. There has been a call to arms or a mobilization, of sort, in the realm of Irregular Warfare operations and activities, but there needs to be a concerted attempt to educate practitioners ranging from Soldiers to statesmen. Our whole-of-government approach must not only characterize our irregular threat, it must also capture our concerted irregular approach to engage competitively, manage crises, and avert conflict. The Department of Defense can help mitigate policy strategy disconnects by educating commissioned and noncommissioned officers during initial entry level training and professional military education at all levels. Cadre and staff at our training and educational institutions should be Irregular Warfare literate prior to delivering their instruction.

The role of professional military education is perhaps the most important pillar of Irregular Warfare education because both the instructor and the students are witness to check-on learning and documented standards to capture the learning outcomes. Both officer and noncommissioned officer levels of knowledge and proficiency align within a career model along a prescribed timeline, consistent with rank and levels of responsibility, and – most likely – follow-on assignments.

## SELF-STUDY

Most senior officers and noncommissioned officers who consider themselves Irregular Warfare literate acquired that knowledge by simply being more curious than others and through aggressive self-study. While there were some basic one-week courses at places like Hurlburt Field, courses at the Command and General Staff College and the War Colleges do not touch on the subject. There aren't a series of book called All You Need to Know to be an Irregular Warfare Expert, so reading on a broad range of topics help practitioners frame the art of Irregular Warfare in context. Successful Irregular Warfare students must develop a comprehensive understanding of its historical relationship to world events, global commerce and domestic economics, including transportation, communication, and their distribution networks and associated vulnerabilities, sociology and cultural factors, political science, especially the failures of totalitarian regimes, and logic and critical thinking. The list of subjects for becoming Irregular Warfare literate is inexhaustible; however, the important starting point is a commitment to lifelong learning and a methodical, self-study program.

Next, Irregular Warfare case studies serve as tools to portray images of the past on a screen of the future (Neustadt and May). Case studies should focus not only on the violent and warfare aspects of the incident, they should also consider the geopolitical, economic, and sociological basis upon which events occurred across a broad spectrum of time. Finally, if an Irregular Warfare operation supports a particular combatant command's theater campaign then ARSOF Soldiers must have the experiences and exposure to the conventional domains of air, land, sea, cyber, and space so they can integrate the human and information dimensions to effectively provide value to the broader campaign plan objectives. Developing a private, focused, deep reading list is one portion of this program, and it should be concentrated on the level of knowledge and skill set required for the particular pay grade and unit of assignment.

## EXPERIENCE

Experience typically would not be a pillar in an education program. For the ARSOF Soldier, the experience developed through multiple varied types of overseas deployments including partner nation and interagency integration – helps build a foundation that pays dividends during future crisis scenarios or incidents when such experience is necessary to develop credible military options. Coupled with the other pillars of Irregular Warfare education, expert training, and experience produce special operators capable of offering prudent, pragmatic plans for the proportional and precise use of the military at every echelon. After several key developmental, broadening assignments and overseas deployments not normally viewed as "ARSOF typical," the special operator will have the proper breadth and depth of experiential learning in the art and science of Irregular Warfare operations and activities.

## CONCLUSION

While Cold War plans and campaigns were developmental and adjusted across nine presidential administrations, the Cold War was bipolar. Today's challenge is multipolar and faster paced with greater complexity and considerable ambiguity. When considering what constitutes threats to our nation's security – from COVID to natural disasters and from cyber to finance – a proper Irregular Warfare education and adept application of the art are even more essential. There are no doubts that mistakes in this present peer competition will be made, but Irregular Warfare education will help mitigate their frequency and intensity. It will ultimately assist the United States in gaining the relative strategic and operational advantage.

Presently, the United States military is experiencing a resource shortfall in both manpower and dollars, and it cannot afford poor planning and execution of Irregular Warfare lines of effort in broader campaigns. Understanding Irregular Warfare at the master's degree level should be the goal of every ARSOF Soldier so that they can educate their interagency and conventional counterparts on the role of ARSOF-executed Irregular Warfare in the present peer competition. An irregular approach to peer competition, like the Cold War, will likely take decades – with peaks and valleys of operational successes. The long win will be accomplished by institutional, personal, and experiential training and educating our force in the art and science of Irregular Warfare.

# STRATEGIC DISRUPTION:
## An Operational Framework for Irregular Warfare

By Bryan L. King, National Defense University CISA student

## INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of special operations forces (SOF) in irregular warfare is hindered by the lack of a clear and structured operational-level framework tailored to irregular warfare, akin to what large-scale combat operations (LSCO) offers in conventional warfare. Whereas LSCO provides a systematic framework for planning and preparing for conventional warfare, the concept of irregular warfare lacks any such framework – irregular warfare lacks its LSCO, so to speak. The absence of this nested, operational-level concept has introduced ambiguity for Army special operations forces (ARSOF). The broader joint force community has led to varied interpretations and approaches to irregular warfare. This ambiguity complicates the understanding of irregular warfare and challenges planners to align their efforts effectively.

In response, the RAND Corporation study—Strategic Disruption by Special Operations Forces: A Concept for Proactive Campaigning Short of Traditional War—emerges as a possible solution. This article argues that strategic disruption fills the SOF irregular warfare operational framework void. It seeks to bridge the irregular warfare planning gap for strategic competition, including both cooperative and competitive environments outside of conventional warfare. The primary objective of this article is to explain strategic disruption, highlighting two core pillars (support and understand), and their roles in strategic disruption. Further, it explores the application of the strategic disruption framework in developing an operational approach for competition below armed conflict.

This article explores how strategic disruption serves as a framework for how the military instrument of national power, more specifically SOF, can effectively engage in strategic competition below the level of armed conflict. It acknowledges that strategic competition is a comprehensive endeavor involving all instruments of national power, where the military's role, specifically the role of SOF, might often be limited. However, illustrating these limitations are crucial as it realigns our expectations of the SOF role within the wider effort, and it serves to facilitate dialogue and coordination on how SOF can best contribute to overarching national objectives.

Furthermore, focusing on strategic disruption shifts the discourse from an academic debate on defining irregular warfare to actionable approaches that advance U.S. interests in environments of strategic uncertainty. By adopting strategic disruption as the primary mode for expressing the SOF value proposition, we will ensure SOF contributions are strategically aligned and operationally effective. I submit that the insights garnered from framing operations through the lens of strategic disruption will provide the additional benefit of contributing to a deeper, more intuitive understanding of irregular warfare itself. It will help clarify the how surrounding some of the ambiguous terminology currently in use.

## WHAT IS STRATEGIC DISRUPTION

Strategic disruption operations are "individual tactical actions or a series of tactical actions" conducted "as part of

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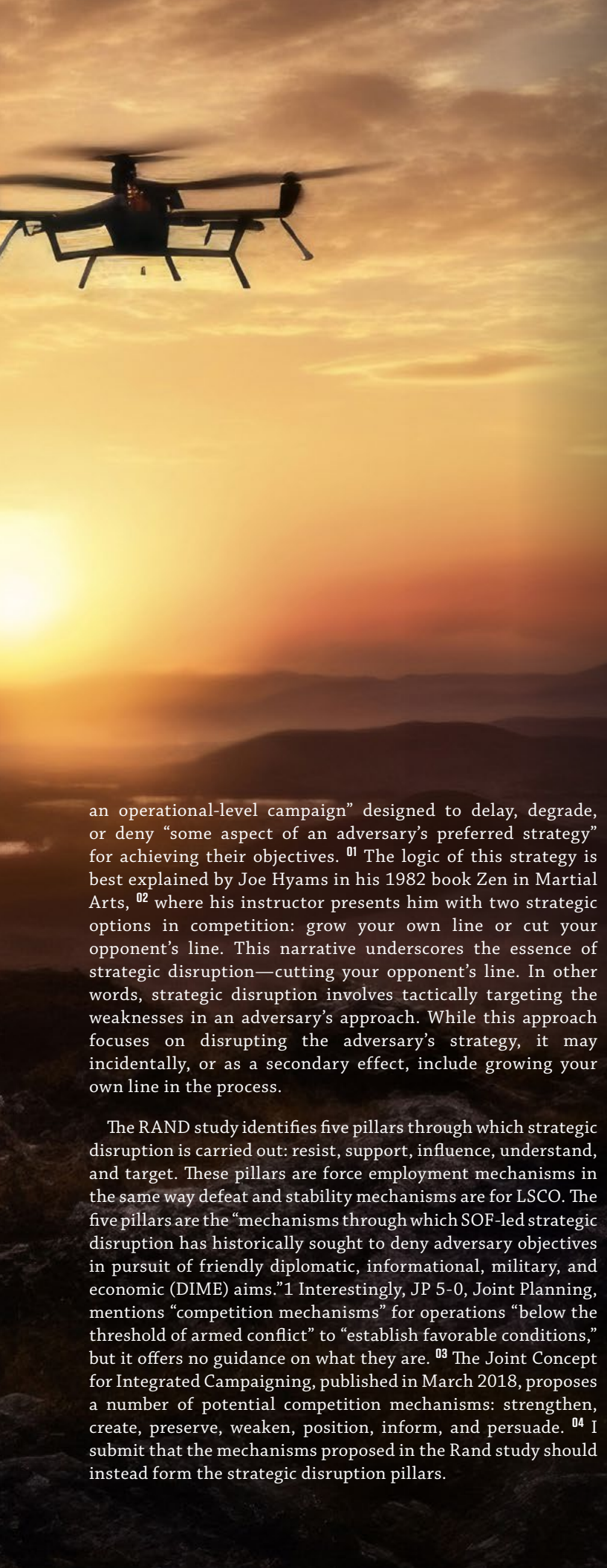
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Utilizing the strategic disruption framework and the five pillars as the competition mechanisms provide a better method for developing an operational approach. This ensures that efforts align with broader national objectives and synchronize across the diplomacy, information, military, and economics spectrum, known as DIME. In other words, in irregular warfare, strategic disruption provides the overarching operational framework while the five pillars are the specific methods employed within the framework.

It's important to note that strategic disruption operations do "not need to produce strategic effects in and of themselves." [05] Rather, it is the gradual accumulation of effects by disruptive activities that eventually produce the desired outcome. This concept mirrors the principle of self-organized criticality found in physics, where continuous small changes can lead to a critical state, resulting in significant shifts or breakdowns. The analogy of the sandpile model, introduced by Per Bak, Chao Tang, and Kurt Wiesenfeld, illustrates how incremental stress can lead to a tipping point, fundamentally destabilizing a system. [06] In the same way, strategic disruption operates on the principle that tactical actions can exert cumulative stress on an adversary's preferred strategy, progressively altering the strategic landscape. This buildup can eventually reach a tipping point, where the adversary's strategies or capabilities may suffer a significant setback or collapse. Due to the cumulative nature, the RAND study points out that "success in strategic disruption should be measured by whether such campaigns are initially able to frustrate adversary-preferred strategies" rather than on the achievement of a strategic objective. [07]

## THE FIVE PILLARS OF STRATEGIC DISRUPTION

The strategic disruption framework is underpinned by five pillars, each not only representing a specific force employment mechanism, but collectively embodying the capabilities of SOF in irregular warfare. These pillars are foundational to ARSOF's irregular approach, offering both direct, indirect, asymmetric, or unattributable strategies to support combatant commanders' campaign plans. They are delineated as follows:

**RESIST.** Efforts to enable a resistance or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power or deter an occupation.

**SUPPORT.** Efforts to build the capacity of foreign security forces and enable their own efforts to defend against internal or external threats to their security.

**INFLUENCE.** Efforts to inform and shape the attitudes, behavior, and decisions of foreign actors in support of U.S. interests.

**UNDERSTAND.** Efforts to extract strategically relevant information from politically sensitive, contested, or denied environments.

**TARGET.** Efforts to seize, destroy, disrupt, or secure key personnel, equipment, or infrastructure in politically sensitive, contested, or denied environments. [08]

Consequently, SOF's value proposition in strategic disruption is its unique ability to apply these pillars cohesively to frustrate adversary-preferred strategies, creating "time, space, and opportunities to achieve strategic objectives across major elements of national power." [09]

an operational-level campaign" designed to delay, degrade, or deny "some aspect of an adversary's preferred strategy" for achieving their objectives. [01] The logic of this strategy is best explained by Joe Hyams in his 1982 book Zen in Martial Arts, [02] where his instructor presents him with two strategic options in competition: grow your own line or cut your opponent's line. This narrative underscores the essence of strategic disruption—cutting your opponent's line. In other words, strategic disruption involves tactically targeting the weaknesses in an adversary's approach. While this approach focuses on disrupting the adversary's strategy, it may incidentally, or as a secondary effect, include growing your own line in the process.

The RAND study identifies five pillars through which strategic disruption is carried out: resist, support, influence, understand, and target. These pillars are force employment mechanisms in the same way defeat and stability mechanisms are for LSCO. The five pillars are the "mechanisms through which SOF-led strategic disruption has historically sought to deny adversary objectives in pursuit of friendly diplomatic, informational, military, and economic (DIME) aims."1 Interestingly, JP 5-0, Joint Planning, mentions "competition mechanisms" for operations "below the threshold of armed conflict" to "establish favorable conditions," but it offers no guidance on what they are. [03] The Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning, published in March 2018, proposes a number of potential competition mechanisms: strengthen, create, preserve, weaken, position, inform, and persuade. [04] I submit that the mechanisms proposed in the Rand study should instead form the strategic disruption pillars.

## THE FLEXIBILITY OF STRATEGIC DISRUPTION

There are two additional benefits to this framework. First, it is scalable and adaptive to authority, permission, and risk-tolerance constraints. In those places where policymakers or commanders want to be more provocative, they can look for targeting, resistance, or influence opportunities. Alternatively, in those places where direct intervention is less appealing, commanders can look for support, understand, and influence opportunities. This can help with expectation management for commanders and policymakers alike by better illuminating what actions can be tied to a specific competition mechanism (that is, one of the five pillars of strategic disruption). For example, in a case where a detachment is only authorized to conduct train, advise, and assist with a partner force, we should not expect contributions beyond the support pillar.

Second, the strategic disruption framework can be applied to counter varying strategies employed by the adversary across the DIME spectrum by assessing their overall objectives, core interests, and preferred course of action. As RAND points out, "SOF's foundational priority in strategic disruption should be to build consistently deeper and deeper understanding of an adversary's strategic design and preferred operational approaches." [10] We explore how strategic disruption can be applied to various strategies that an adversary may employ later in this article, but suffice to say that a key tenet of strategic disruption is understanding an adversary's likely objective and preferred course of action for achieving it.

In summary, the strategic disruption framework equips commanders with a structured approach to irregular warfare planning. By leveraging the five pillars, commanders can more methodically consider which mechanisms (or combination of mechanisms) to employ to frustrate an adversary.

## THE SUPPORT PILLAR

The support and understand pillars are pivotal because they represent the core of SOF steady state deployments: direct support and training to allies and partner nations and building awareness and understanding in territories inaccessible to other U.S. Government entities. Yet, despite being the most common form of SOF deployment, tactical SOF units are often challenged in understanding how their missions link to the broader strategic competition. The support pillar involves actions taken to build the capacity of foreign security forces. It defends against internal and external threats and is crucial for enhancing stability and security of regions critical to U.S. interests. Operations, activities, and investments within the support pillar contribute to strategic disruption in two ways:

First, this pillar serves a key role in establishing trust and reciprocity, essential for gaining important access and placement. This is crucial for enabling the successful execution of the resist, influence, understand, and target pillars. Special operations forces provide the partner nation with immediate value through military training and expertise. In fact, of the five pillars, only the support pillar focuses primarily on providing benefits to the ally and partner nations. Without providing this tangible benefit, SOF would risk diminishing its strategic influence and

would limit its ability to achieve U.S.-centric objectives. In this context, the United States should focus on further cementing its role as the premier security enabler through specialized, high-quality partnerships. In a Harvard Business Review article titled "Outsmarting Walmart," companies that outpace Walmart "carefully segment their customers and then wow the ones that matter most...they cater to targeted segments... in ways that Walmart can't." [11] Similarly, we must maintain a competitive advantage for what we offer within the security market. By leveraging our advanced space-based technologies, cyber, and special operations capabilities, we create a unique value proposition that competitors like China struggle to match. This focus also reinforces our existing alliances and positions the United States as the partner of choice for nations seeking to enhance their security apparatus.

Second, the support pillar is vital for its role in securing a foundation that enables all subsequent development and governance. Simply put, security is a prerequisite for economic growth and investment; without it, economic development is unlikely to occur. To recognize the criticality of this role, we need not look any further than our development as a nation. As Edward Bowie describes in Development of the West and the U.S. Army: "The presence of the...Army...profoundly influenced how and where the emerging economies of the Western Territories became established. Indeed, as the tangible manifestation of government, with all that implied, the Army was...the single most important and influential factor in Western American development," highlighting the army's indispensable role in shaping the economic prosperity of the West. [12]

In summary, through the support pillar, SOF is setting favorable conditions by creating pockets of stability and improved governance that facilitate other elements of national power to achieve broader strategic goals as well as maintaining the U.S. competitive advantage for security partnerships. [13]

## SYNCHRONIZED EFFORTS: THE SUPPORT PILLAR

However, one aspect of increased stability in strategic competition must be acknowledged from the outset: stability will benefit any nation seeking to invest. This duality can be exploited by our adversaries, who may leverage these stable environments for their own strategic gains, regardless of who initially fostered the stability. In fact, they would be foolish not to invest more in areas where the United States has created stability. This reality underscores the need for a more coordinated approach that involves not just military efforts to provide security and stability but also allows for active engagement from Civil Affairs, the private sector, the Department of State, and allies and partner nations. This is crucial to better capitalize on the stable environments we helped create, making them less susceptible to exploitation by competitors.

In essence, the success of the support pillar in strategic competition is not just measured by the stability it creates, but by how effectively this stability is utilized for long-term, sustainable development, countering the influence of competitors. This dynamic is crucial in shaping a holistic approach beyond military operations that encompass economic and diplomatic strategies.

## THE UNDERSTAND PILLAR

Building on the foundational aspects of the support pillar, the understand pillar serves as a critical yet underutilized component in the overarching strategy of strategic disruption. If the support pillar lays the groundwork for partnerships and capacity building, the understand pillar leverages these relationships to gain deeper insights into adversarial networks and intentions, making it an indispensable aspect of IW.

The understand pillar entails all efforts to "extract strategically relevant information from sensitive, contested, or denied environments" where other collection sources are unavailable. [14] These efforts contribute to strategic disruption by revealing the intent behind adversary actions, thereby denying them "the ability to shape the environment through preferred strategies." [15] Special operations forces provide "policymakers and diplomats information that enables them to expose malign behavior by an adversary and therefore increase the cost a competitor must pay." [16] This capability is reflected in examples like the United States Military Liaison Missions during the Cold War, where intelligence gathering was crucial in understanding Soviet intentions, reducing the risk of conflict escalation, and exposing potential malign behavior. [17]

Another exemplary instance of our intelligence capabilities was seen in the fight led by Stanley McChrystal and Task Force 714 against Al Qaeda in Iraq. The mantra "it takes a network to defeat a network" perfectly encapsulated this network-based intelligence approach. [18] Recognizing the adaptive and decentralized nature of Al Qaeda in Iraq, Task Force 714's rapid intelligence gathering, analyzing, and dissemination approach became the model then, and it remains profoundly relevant today.

Yet this example brings us to an inconvenient reality regarding our current utilization of intelligence capabilities in strategic competition. The extensive lessons learned and advanced skills in intelligence gathering and network illumination honed during the Global War on Terrorism, have yet to be fully applied to today's strategic competition challenges. The Global War on Terrorism was a proving ground for intelligence collectors, Special Forces intelligence sergeants, and analysts. The skills refined over those two decades in illuminating and disrupting networks are now vital for the understand pillar of strategic disruption. However, today's focus must shift to illuminating the networks that underpin our rivals' economic and political strategies. The focus is a shift from focusing solely on physical threats to understanding the nuances of economic statecraft and the adversary's strategy. The nodes and links within adversary supply chains—from vendors to server farms—are all potential opportunities for strategic disruption. Recognizing and deliberately gathering information about these nodes and links are crucial as they can later be exploited to frustrate and delay the adversary's strategy. With advancements like digitization and optimized force designs, like operational support in the continental United States, we are better equipped than ever to map adversary networks in the ambiguous environments of strategic competition.

## SYNCHRONIZED EFFORTS: THE UNDERSTAND PILLAR

This brings us to a critical consideration of SOF's role within the broader intelligence community. While SOF possesses unique capabilities in accessing denied areas and leveraging human intelligence, other government agencies will often be in the lead for coordinating and synchronizing collection efforts, positioning SOF in a supportive role that complements broader intelligence missions. By working in close partnership with other government agencies and the intelligence community, SOF can contribute valuable ground-level insights and fulfill specific intelligence requirements.

As with the support pillar, a benefit of the understand pillar is its adaptability based on authorities, permissions, and risk tolerances. These actions need not be overly provocative and can vary from passive to active depending upon the current situation and country. This adaptability is critical to developing a clear and actionable picture of adversary activities within the framework of strategic disruption.

Furthermore, incorporating Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations into this pillar complements traditional reconnaissance efforts and adds additional understanding of local dynamics and the effectiveness of broader national efforts. Civil Affairs teams play a pivotal role in engaging with local communities and authorities, going places that Special Forces teams may not be permitted, and providing valuable insights into the sociopolitical landscape. Civil Affairs can also assess local sentiments and government structures, again looking for synchronized effects with any support pillar stability created. Similarly, Psychological Operations is instrumental in evaluating the effectiveness of information campaigns and understanding the perception management and information warfare strategies of our adversaries. This holistic approach, combining intelligence with an understanding of local sentiments and global narratives, is vital in designing strategies to effectively counter adversarial narratives and support our broader strategic objectives.

In summary, the understand pillar is not a stand-alone component, but an integral part of the strategic disruption framework. Its effectiveness lies in its ability to inform and shape our broader strategies in IW, ensuring that our actions are not only reactive, but strategically informed and proactive. Through this pillar, we gain the necessary insights to anticipate and counter our adversaries' moves, thereby reinforcing the overall efficacy of our efforts in strategic competition.

## APPLICATION AND EXTENSION

As the strategic disruption framework outlines a comprehensive approach for SOF to navigate and influence irregular warfare landscapes, this section aims to illustrate how strategic disruption can guide the development of an operational approach tailored to counter adversaries' strategies effectively. Through an oversimplified hypothetical scenario involving the economic influence of Great Power Country X in Country Y, we explore how strategic disruption's principles can be operationalized to safeguard U.S. interests and foster a favorable strategic outcome.

**CURRENT STATE.** Country Y is experiencing growing influence from Great Power Country X, which seeks to reduce U.S. dominance through economic development aid and support. The U.S. presence, primarily through SOF engagements, aims at building partner capacity and strengthening internal security forces to combat a growing violent extremist organization threat.

**DESIRED END STATE.** Country Y maintains its sovereignty and continues to be a strategic partner of the United States with reduced influence from Country X. The economic aid provided by Country X does not undermine U.S. interests or relationships in the region.

**PROBLEM.** How can the United States counteract Country X's economic influence in Country Y without direct conflict, leveraging nonmilitary strategies to ensure U.S. interests and relationships are not diminished?

**OPERATIONAL APPROACH.** Utilize strategic disruption and the five pillars as force employment mechanisms. These include:

**SUPPORT MECHANISM.** Leverage Civil Affairs and Department of State initiatives to offer competitive economic development alternatives to Country Y, emphasizing U.S. commitment to genuine partnership and development.

**UNDERSTAND MECHANISM.** Conduct intelligence operations to illuminate Country X's strategic intentions and potential deviations from stated economic aid objectives. This involves close monitoring of projects like canal construction to ensure compliance with international agreements and prevent dual-use exploitation.

**INFLUENCE MECHANISM.** Conduct military information support operations to enhance U.S. credibility, promote emulation of democratic values, and highlight the malign intentions behind Country X's economic strategies. This includes exposing any deviation from agreed-upon economic projects that could serve dual purposes, undermining Country X's credibility.

By employing these lines of effort cohesively, the U.S. SOF and its partners can create conditions that favor the desired end state, ensuring stability, sovereignty, and continued partnership with Country Y. The operational approach emphasizes synchronized efforts across DIME spectrum, with a focus on strategic competition below the level of armed conflict.

The application of strategic disruption, illustrated through our hypothetical scenario, showcases a concrete methodology for commanders to conduct tactical actions to disrupt adversarial strategies in competition environments. By systematically leveraging the five pillars as force employment mechanisms, a commander can align and synchronize efforts across the DIME spectrum. This example not only highlights the flexibility and

depth of strategic disruption, but it also serves as a testament to its critical role in enabling SOF to proactively shape outcomes in the geopolitical arena. For a broader exploration of how each mechanism can produce outcomes across different fields of DIME, readers are encouraged to refer to the comprehensive examples provided in the RAND study.

## CONCLUSION

It is important to recognize this framework's significance in redefining the SOF's approach to irregular warfare. Strategic disruption represents a paradigm shift in irregular warfare, providing SOF with a proactive, structured approach to countering adversaries and aligning operations with broader U.S. strategic interests. Its adaptability across various operational contexts and alignment with the DIME spectrum demonstrate its practical applicability and relevance in today's complex global security environment. Although this article focused primarily on two of the five pillars of strategic disruption—support and understand—it is crucial to acknowledge that each pillar plays a key role in the comprehensive operational strategy of strategic disruption.

By exploring the support and understand pillars, we have seen strategic disruption's potential to enhance the effectiveness of irregular warfare operations and activities below the threshold of armed conflict. These pillars underscore the importance of building strong partnerships and gaining deep insight into adversary tactics, essential in strategic competition against an adversary employing many nonmilitary strategies. However, the other pillars—resist, influence, and target—also hold relative advantage and contribute equally to the framework's overall effectiveness. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the strategic disruption framework and to explore its other aspects not covered in this essay, readers are encouraged to refer to the detailed work by the RAND Corporation. The RAND study delves deeper into the five pillars, offering extensive historical examples of their application by SOF.

In summary, using strategic disruption as an operational framework provides SOF a path forward for planning, training, and executing irregular warfare irregular warfare operations and activities designed to delay, degrade, or deny an adversary's ability to achieve their objectives across the competition continuum that are scalable and adaptable to a variety of circumstances and risk levels.

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# REVISITING THE SPECIAL OPERATIONS IMPERATIVES FOR FUTURE

# IRREGULAR WAR

The successful integration of U.S. Army conventional forces and ARSOF remains a paramount factor for the joint force to achieve unified action, fight and win the nation's wars, and protect national interests.[03]

Photo provided by Adobe Stock

# FARE CONFLICTS

By Dr. Daniel W. Ross, DM, MS, NRP, 1st Special Warfare Training Group

The Special Operations Imperatives have been an essential yet little-understood and often forgotten aspect of U.S. Army special operations forces (ARSOF) organizational culture and doctrine for over three decades. These Imperatives loomed somewhat obscurely in minds of ARSOF leaders during the continuous irregular war against violent extremist organizations known as the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Over time, the Imperatives became a well-established foundation for assisting ARSOF leaders with planning, designing, and executing special operations in concert and integrated with other forces, interagency partners, and foreign organizations during these irregular warfare operations and activities. [01] Nevertheless, this important aspect of the ARSOF ethos requires sustained evaluation and discourse to ensure the intent and priorities continue to align with the overarching operational and strategic environment faced by today's military.

In the post-GWOT environment, great power competition has reemerged as the primary national security challenge for the United States. Regardless, Irregular Warfare must remain an enduring mission and core competency across the entire joint force—not just special operations forces (SOF). [02] The successful integration of U.S. Army conventional forces and ARSOF remains a paramount factor for the joint force to achieve unified action, fight and win the nation's wars, and protect national interests. [03] The conversation surrounding Irregular Warfare has continued to evolve following the perceived end of the GWOT; this rejuvenated focus opened many new avenues to explore how ARSOF fights above and below the threshold of armed conflict.

With the focus now on institutionalizing Irregular Warfare across both conventional and special operations forces, there is merit in revisiting the Special Operations Imperatives and how they not only influence the future of ARSOF, but also how they balance—and perhaps overlap—with the conventional Army imperatives. The renewed emphasis on the Special Operations Imperatives has become apparent on account of the publication of Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Operations, in October 2022, where the greater U.S. Army introduced a new set of imperatives for multidomain operations to assist all echelons of Army forces to accomplish missions, defeat enemy forces, and meet objectives. With this development in mind, it is incumbent upon the ARSOF community to invigorate the conversation concerning the role and influence of both the Army and the Special Operations Imperatives given the contemporary national security challenges the United States faces and the fluctuating character of warfare.

# IMPERATIVES

**U.S. ARMY**

- See yourself, see the enemy, and understand the operational environment.
- Account for being under constant observation and all forms of enemy contact.
- Create and exploit relative physical, information, and human advantages in pursuit of decision dominance.
- Make initial contact with the smallest element possible.
- Impose multiple dilemmas on the enemy.
- Anticipate, plan, and execute transitions.
- Designate, weight, and sustain the main effort.
- Consolidate gains continuously.
- Understand and manage the effects of operations on units and Soldiers.

**SPECIAL OPERATIONS**

- Understand the Operational Environment
- Recognize political implications
- Facilitate interorganizational cooperation
- Engage the threat discriminately
- Anticipate long-term effects
- Ensure legitimacy, credibility, and trust
- Anticipate psychological effects and the impact of information
- Operate with and through others
- Develop multiple options
- Ensure long-term engagements
- Provide sufficient intelligence
- Balance security and synchronization

Courtesy image from USASOC website

## CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

In a recently published doctoral dissertation entitled, A Phenomenological Study of U.S. Army Special Forces Senior Noncommissioned Officer Leadership Strategies during the Global War on Terror, [04] the author explored the leadership and management strategies that U.S. Army Special Forces senior noncommissioned officersused to be successful during the GWOT. The results and findings of this study were enlightening, as various themes elucidated practical leadership and management strategies that the Special Forces Regiment—a vital component of the ARSOF enterprise—can implement across all operational domains. The data from the study provided insight into two decades of leadership experiences and suggested a set of findings for the next generation of Special Forces leaders seeking imperatives to guide successful special operations activities in future irregular and conventional warfare.

The subject dissertation revealed the significance of the Special Operations Imperatives and their relevant application in future conduct of Irregular Warfare and large-scale combat operations. The following discussion addresses the overarching purpose for revisiting the importance of the Special Operations Imperatives to ARSOF doctrine and the implications of the U.S. Army's recently introduced imperatives in FM 3-0, Operations.

## REMEMBERING THE SOF IMPERATIVES

The Special Operations Imperatives entered ARSOF organizational culture 34 years ago and have changed relatively little ever since. Despite their age and recognition in Army special operations doctrine, they lack understanding and utilization across ARSOF. In their current form, the Special Operations Imperatives can be found in ADP 3-05, Special Operations. They represent the fundamental rules that guide how ARSOF leaders approach the design, planning, and conduct of special operations missions. These Imperatives inform how ARSOF leaders think about their tasks, missions, and operations to aid critical decision-making processes. [05]

The Special Operations Imperatives have permeated ARSOF's collective consciousness and have been referred to as the "ARSOF Imperatives" or merely the "SOF Imperatives" in previous doctrinal publications such as FM 3-05 (2006) and FM 3-18 (2014). From a historical standpoint, Army Doctrine Publication 305 included minor edits to the wording and intended utility of some Special Operations Imperatives. For example, "Facilitate interagency activities," was changed to "Facilitate interorganizational cooperation," and "Consider long-term effects," became "Anticipate long-term effects." Moreover, "Ensure legitimacy and credibility of special operations" was streamlined into "Ensure legitimacy, credibility, and trust" and "Anticipate and control psychological effects" evolved into "Anticipate psychological effects and the impact of information."

Slight deviations notwithstanding, the intent of the Special Operations Imperatives remains to serve as a foundation upon which ARSOF leaders plan, design, and execute a wide array of special operations with other Army units, joint forces, and allied and interagency partners. Possibly the most prominent Special Operations Imperative in ARSOF organizational

culture involves understanding one's operational environment. Understanding the operational environment entails a detailed synthesis of a myriad of factors, including political, military, economic, social, informational, infrastructure, and physical environment influences.

Imperatives two and three dictate that leaders must understand the political implications that exist concerning ARSOF actions within a country, as well as the interagency or interorganizational coordination and collaboration that must exist to support common national security goals. The fourth Imperative helps ARSOF leaders understand the proportionality of force and how to engage threats in a discriminant manner to minimize unwanted second- and third-order effects. Dovetailing from the fourth Imperative, the fifth highlights how ARSOF leaders must always be forward looking to anticipate the long-term effects of their actions. Proportionality and forward thinking allow for the sixth and seventh Imperatives to guide leaders in ways to ensure credibility, trust, and legitimacy, and to understand the potential psychological effects or impact of information due to the execution of special operations activities in a region.

Part of ensuring U.S. legitimacy, credibility, and trust hinges on the ARSOF leader's ability to execute the eighth Imperative by operating with and through foreign partners. Imperative nine expresses the necessity for adaptability and flexibility in ARSOF operations; ARSOF leaders always need to develop multiple courses of action. Moreover, Imperative 10 states the importance of long-term engagement and the development of relationships to ensure the continued success of U.S. national security interests. The final two Imperatives speak to how ARSOF leaders must apply intelligence operations and procedures and adequately balance the need for security with the need to execute special operations activities.

> To remain pertinent and optimally applied, the Special Operations Imperatives require constant, careful analysis to ensure relevance in contemporary operational and strategic environments. This means finding ways to integrate effectively with the tenets and imperatives set forth by the U.S. Army.

## FUTURE SO IMPERATIVES—ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS PERSPECTIVE

The importance of a renewed focus on the Special Operations Imperatives emerged since the publication of FM 3-0, Operations, in October 2022, where the greater U.S. Army introduced imperatives for multidomain operations as actions Army forces must take to defeat enemy forces and achieve objectives at acceptable cost. They are informed by the operational environment and the characteristics of the most capable threats Army forces can encounter. Specifically, including central aspects of the Special Operations Imperatives in the first FM 3-0 imperative, "See yourself, see the enemy, and understand

the operational environment," reinforces the relevance of the ARSOF community in the grander scheme of future U.S. Army operations and strategy. Moreover, the Army's imperative to see, sense and understand the operational provides operational linkage between the Special Operations and Army Imperatives. This nexus secures a shared understanding in the planning and conduct of multidomain operations for Army conventional and special operations forces.

In their current form, the Special Operations Imperatives provided a solid foundation for guiding modern special operations. Nonetheless, the Special Operations Imperatives need not resist change and should continue to adapt alongside continuous progress and development concerning modern warfare. Furthermore, continuing the conversation through meaningful research within the ARSOF community can help guide the future evolution of the Special Operations Imperatives.

For example, during the recent study concerning U.S. Army Special Forces senior noncommissioned officers' leadership strategies during the GWOT, [06] one of the interview questions posed to the cohort of Special Forces senior noncommissioned officers' leaders specifically explored the Special Operations Imperatives aspect of ARSOF organizational culture. The question asked participants to discuss their view on what the Special Operations Imperatives meant to senior SF leaders during the GWOT. Interestingly, three of the Special Operations Imperatives appeared equally prominent in the responses to this question. Most of the study participants discussed the first, second, and fifth Special Operations Imperatives in relation to senior Special Forces leadership during the GWOT. Thus, the major themes that arose from that question included—

- Understand the operational environment.
- Recognize political implications.
- Consider long-term effects.

Many study participants spoke to the importance of understanding the operational environment as an ARSOF leader. The participants alluded to this Imperative being of primary importance in past and future conflicts. Furthermore, participants discussed how this Imperative remains a foundational aspect of the ARSOF community's identity and organizational culture. These Imperative guide leaders and assists them in making sound decisions, and these sound decisions, in the end, help strengthen the credibility of ARSOF. Overall, these leaders referred to the first Special Operations Imperative as critical to their successful leadership and management strategies throughout their careers.

Many of the interviewed participants spoke about the importance of recognizing political implications as a leader. Some of these leaders believed that ARSOF failed to recognize political implications during the GWOT. They noted that ARSOF leaders at times looked very narrowly at tactical situations without understanding whether those efforts would meet the overarching intent.

Other vital points that arose concerning the second Special Operations Imperative related to its importance in a leader's decision-making process and how a lack of application can lead to detrimental outcomes. One leader noted that many of the failures that received the most scrutiny over the past two decades of conflict occurred due to a failure to understand the political implications of a mission, operation, or line of effort.

These ARSOF leaders also highlighted the importance of the fifth Special Operations Imperative. Many participants discussed how the consideration of long-term effects remains paramount to an ARSOF leader's decision-making process. The data further suggested that participants believed that many problems during the GWOT arose due to witting or unwitting neglect of the higher-order effects of a decision. The data indicated that a better understanding of long-term effects in the decision-making process of special operations leaders could lead to better success in how ARSOF fights and enables the Army and joint force across the competition continuum.

Interestingly, some senior leaders in the study also highlighted a handful of the Special Operations Imperatives that did not provide significant value in the conduct of previous operations, possibly require revision, or are duplicative based on the recently published Army imperatives. Overall, most of those interviewed conveyed that the list of Imperatives is too long to receive meaningful buy-in from ARSOF stakeholders. They discussed how the Special Operations Imperatives (12) make for a great poster in hallways and team rooms, but they are difficult to memorize and still do not seem to hold as prominent a role as, to use an example, the concise list of SOF Truths (5).

Additionally, a few of the interviewed leaders indicated that Imperative Nine, "Develop multiple options" was redundant, self-explanatory, and unnecessary. Developing multiple options, contingencies, adaptability, and flexibility are concepts so ingrained in ARSOF culture that leaders felt this Imperative could be combined with another or revised. Also, some senior leaders discussed how Imperative 11, "Provide sufficient intelligence," could be made more robust by reemphasizing the need to receive and generate sufficient intelligence rather than merely provide sufficient intelligence. Finally, many of the senior leaders interviewed stated that Imperative 12, "Balance security and synchronization," had no relevance because of the ambiguity behind the intended meaning; they felt that most individuals in the ARSOF community could not define this Imperative if asked. These identified Special Operations Imperatives potentially indicate the necessity for further conversations on the evolution of ARSOF's prescribed key operational requirements in conjunction with the overarching Army imperatives.

## CONCLUSIONS

The three Special Operations Imperatives that rose to the top of the data while conducting the study on U.S. Army Special Forces senior noncommissioned officers' leadership strategies during the GWOT provide intriguing discussion points for their renewed relevancy of Special Operations Imperatives and the implications of the recent release of Army imperatives in FM 3-0. Given the potential for overlap and redundancy of Army and Special Operations Imperatives, there is ample justification to relook the next generation of SO Imperatives destined for FM 3-05, Special Operations. While the purpose of this study was not to rewrite, reorder or replace the SO Imperatives, there is ample evidence to suggest that the time is right to relook the entire list of twelve, assess their utility for future SOF, and eliminate redundancy with the Army Imperatives.

The language across these definitions speaks to the importance of current and future ARSOF leaders understanding their operational environments, recognizing the political implications of these efforts, and strongly considering all long-term effects of their decisions. A renewed focus on these three Special Operations Imperatives can help ARSOF leaders be successful in the conduct of operations and activities in support of the Army and the joint force. Furthermore, constant longitudinal analysis of the Special Operations Imperatives as operational environments shift over time can lead to a beneficial evolution of ARSOF's prescribed key operational requirements in conjunction with the recently developed Army imperatives.

The advent of explicit Army Imperatives—exhibiting some notable similarity with the current Special Operations Imperatives—indicates an inflection point for ARSOF. Furthermore, constructive criticism concerning some of the other Special Operations Imperatives highlights the potential to streamline, combine, or carefully revise future renditions more in line with Army imperatives. This conversation on the Special Operations Imperatives will continue to be important in anticipation of the release of an updated FM 3-05 later this year. The future of the Special Operations Imperatives would benefit significantly from closer examination to reveal those imperatives crucial and memorable to the conduct of special operations and similarly well suited for integration with the Army imperatives.

The expected updates to the Special Operations Imperatives could potentially have wide-sweeping effects that set the tone for the future of ARSOF as the organization seeks to find balance with the Army's imperatives.

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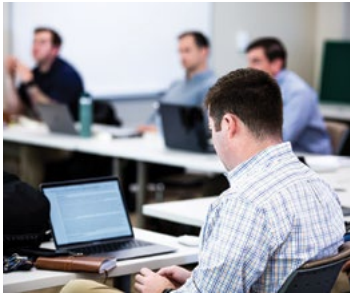**Application Deadline:** July 31, 2024

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## MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT
## IRREGULAR WARFARE
# HAVE WASTED U.S. INFLUENCE IN THE SAHEL

By Capt. Juan Quiroz, Civil Affairs Officer

## MALI • BURKINA FASO • CHAD • NIGER
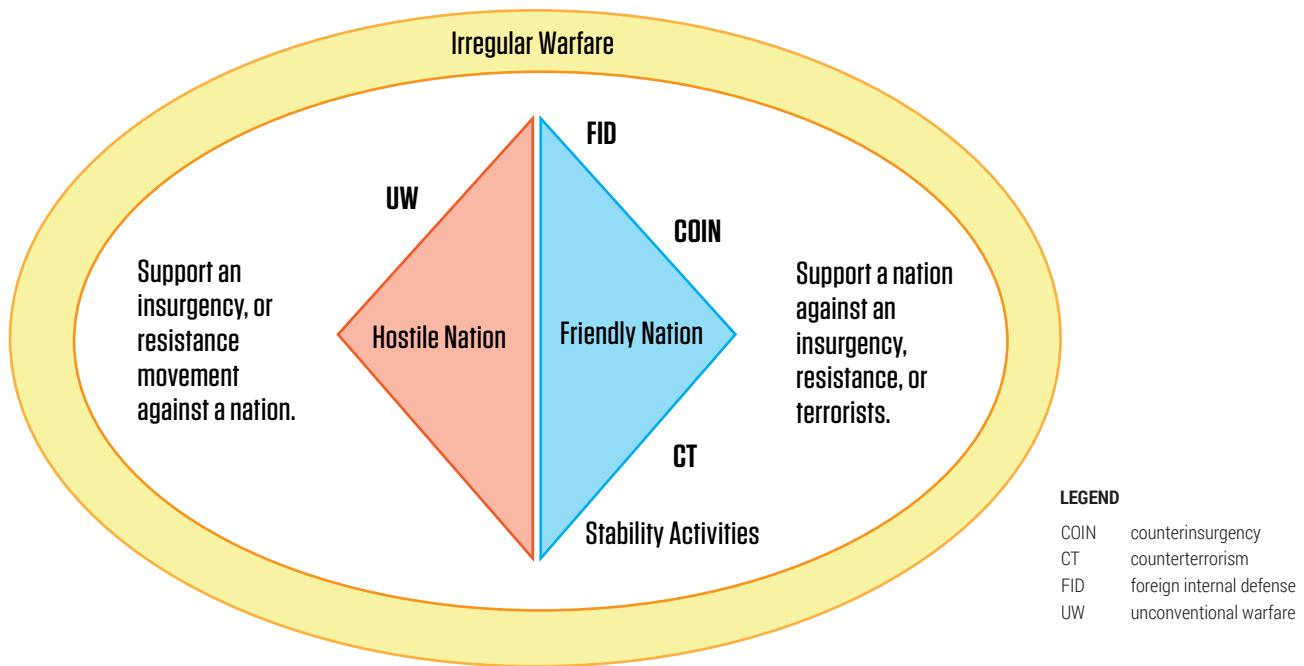
Photo provided by Adobe Stock

The number of violent episodes in the Sahel region of Africa, centered around Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, has quadrupled from 700 incidents in 2019 to over 2,800 incidents in 2022. [01] Despite providing years of training and assistance to these countries' military, U.S. Army special operations forces (ARSOF) efforts to contain the territorial expansion of violent extremist organizations have proven ineffective. This has been due largely to a one-dimensional approach to irregular warfare, whereby well-meaning outside actors, including ARSOF, attempted to root out violent extremist organizations but inadvertently reinforced central governments' misperception that their first priority was public safety, clean water, food sources, and so on. The local governments emphasized the military's focus on security over stability tasks undermined the other essential forms of support to governance. The people of the Sahel require less security and more governance – that is, the provision of clean water and a stable food source. The result has been declining U.S. influence in the region since 2020 as these states' armed forces have overthrown their democratically elected governments and turned to Russia for diplomatic support and military aid. To utilize Irregular Warfare more effectively in a whole-of-government effort, ARSOF practitioners must reexamine the purpose of Irregular Warfare and coordinate a more impactful range of operations and activities. This includes the use of interagency partners as the lead agency. The U.S. federal agencies, such as the Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development, should take the lead on this total effort. When using conventional or special operations forces, the Irregular Warfare-related activities and operations should focus more on provision of essential services and less on physical security against terrorist or criminal threats.

### REEXAMINING IRREGULAR WARFARE

The ARSOF's narrow conceptualization of how to conduct Irregular Warfare can be attributed to the lag in updating doctrine to reflect the dynamics ARSOF Soldiers encounter in the current operational environment. Field Manual 3-05, Army Special Operations, still defines Irregular Warfare as "a violent struggle among state and nonstate actors for legitimacy and influence over relevant populations." [02] The manual elaborates that influence can be exercised through "political, psychological, and economic methods," but its predominant focus is on kinetic activities such as terrorism, insurgency, criminal activity, and raids. [03] Joint Publication 3-05, Joint Doctrine for Special Operations, does not improve our understanding, and presents a reductive view of Irregular Warfare that bins different types of kinetic activities according to whether a nation is classified as friendly or hostile. [04]

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPECIAL OPERATIONS ACTIVITIES SUPPORT FOR OR AGAINST A NATION DURING IRREGULAR WARFARE



Irregular Warfare

UW

FID

COIN

Hostile Nation

Friendly Nation

CT

Stability Activities

Support an insurgency, or resistance movement against a nation.

Support a nation against an insurgency, resistance, or terrorists.

**LEGEND**

COIN  counterinsurgency
CT  counterterrorism
FID  foreign internal defense
UW  unconventional warfare

These out-of-date publications and associated figures (above) fail to convey the real reason state and non-state actors participate in conflict—failure to achieve economic, political, or social objectives through nonviolent means. Additionally, a simple fix to the above model might make "stability activities" the main effort by its position on the slide; this would reflect a preeminent role of nonkinetic versus kinetic activities. Carl von Clausewitz, a Prussian general and military theorist from the 1800s, described these objectives as "the original motive for war," and any changes to belligerents' objectives or concessions made to opponents can affect the need or desirability to continue waging war. [05] In contrast to current special operations doctrine, JP 1, Volume 1, Joint Warfighting, offers a more expansive description of Irregular Warfare as a form of warfare, where states and non-state actors campaign to "assure or coerce states or other groups through indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric activities." [06] Conventional Army doctrine has also been updated to reflect the essentially political character of IW. FM 3-0, Operations, and FM 1-02.1, Operational Terms, define Irregular Warfare as "the overt, clandestine, and covert employment of military and non-military capabilities across multiple domains by state and non-state actors through methods other than military domination of an adversary, either as the primary approach or in concert with conventional warfare." [07] In conjunction with the theory presented by Clausewitz, these new definitions grant leeway to ARSOF Soldiers to think more creatively about Irregular Warfare in terms of simultaneously assuring partners and coercing belligerents through military and nonmilitary means to accept and adhere to political settlements advantageous to U.S. interests. This new Irregular Warfare concept is especially relevant in the Sahel, where the complex web of partner and adversary objectives demonstrate that the old Irregular Warfare tug-of-war for populations' loyalties is impractical and counterproductive.

## CONFLICT DYNAMICS IN THE SAHEL

Desertification in the Sahel region has intensified historic resource competition between nomadic and sedentary tribes. Because this competition occurred far from their capitals, central governments engaged in "benign neglect," tacitly condoning the marginalization of nomadic pastoralists by sedentary communities who seek exclusive control of fertile land. [08] This inequitable arrangement caused disputes when the two sides came into contact, but government apparatuses, while limited, were usually able to mediate resolutions. This arrangement has now become so inequitable that tribal clashes are becoming larger and more violent. Central governments have done little to address the resource shortfalls due to their limited governance capability and reach into this region. To give this historical context, France, the region's former colonial power, had 89 civil servants per 1,000 inhabitants. Today, by comparison, it is estimated that Burkina Faso has only eight civil servants per 1,000 inhabitants, Mali six, and Niger three. [09]

Because these governments have little to no presence outside their capitals, military action is relied upon to project authority and act as the face of government to peripheral communities. Rather than acting as impartial security guarantors, these government forces tend to support certain tribal militias who are focused on settling tribal rivalries instead of providing any form of governance in the region. [10] This measure has backfired significantly, however, as marginalized communities prefer to align with violent extremist organizations considered to be less dangerous than government forces. [11] This local alliance and introduction of violent extremist organizations into the conflict creates a vicious cycle in which participants overinvest in temporary security at the expense of enduring governance. With most assistance coming in the form of military training

and support, which tends to gravitate toward a physical threat, these governments fail to develop a governance capacity that looks to developing essential services in tandem with military capacity. This environment, absent of the unique skillset resident in U.S. Army Civil Affairs, ultimately results in the military coup scenarios witnessed in Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Niger. [12]

In the aftermath of these coups, Russia positioned itself as the security partner by default. Playing on this contradiction, Russia leverages disinformation to turn public opinion against Western assistance and deploys Wagner mercenaries who inflame government forces' worst instincts to commit even more atrocities, which further increases support for violent extremist organizations. [13] As Sahel governments become more complicit in human rights abuses against their own people, the rift between them and former international and Western partners widens. With these governments becoming increasingly dependent upon Russia to maintain their hold on power, any plausible avenue to exert U.S. influence in the region becomes increasingly problematic.

## HOW TO WAGE IRREGULAR WARFARE IN THE SAHEL

To date, although well intended, ARSOF and U.S. interagency partners efforts through and with regional and central governments to bolster their security and governance capacity had little effect. Instead, an increase in violent extremist organizations activity in the periphery and Russian influence in the capitals persists. This unintended effect is due to wrongly equating strong central governments with stability and security. Some communities in the periphery may be wary of, or even outright hostile to, the idea of being drawn closer to central governments that ignore them in the best of times and commit atrocities against them in the worst of times. They may feel similarly about the violent extremist organizations with whom they occasionally ally. The ARSOF, which prides itself on its indigenous or irregular approach to challenges such as this, can add value by engaging directly with communities in peripheral regions. They can engage adjacent tribal groups to discover their motivation for waging war against each other, violent extremist organizations, or government forces, and establish the United States as an honest broker between belligerents. Perhaps their idea of stability is contingent on economic security or mending intercommunal relations rather than a greater government presence and the use of military force.

Once ARSOF elements have established trust with belligerents and understand their motivations, the U.S. interagency can also adopt a more indigenous and irregular approach to correct the imbalances that sparked conflict. Development and trade agencies can assure communities that violent resource competition is no longer necessary by working directly with their leaders to furnish humanitarian aid, foster commercial activity, and develop an indigenous capacity to independently sustain economic security. ARSOF could leverage ties with government and indigenous forces to deescalate tensions and, if needed, to implement stability mechanisms and target irreconcilable elements. Diplomatic personnel would have to broker power-sharing arrangements between local communities and central governments and then hold central governments accountable if they violate the agreements.

## CONCLUSION

By reframing Irregular Warfare as the shaping of partner and belligerent behavior through simultaneous assurance and coercion, ARSOF can employ a wider range of activities like foreign internal defense, stability, and Civil Affairs operations to be more effective in achieving a political settlement favorable to U.S. interests. This is especially crucial in support of integrated deterrence where ARSOF offers a military option of relative advantage. In these conflicts, ARSOF would be best employed in support of interagency and host-nation counterparts who possess the appropriate mandate to address the issues driving conflict at the local level. Their diplomatic, economic, and governance effects could change belligerents' strategic calculus concerning whether instability and conflict should persist.

If ARSOF is to be successful in the application of Irregular Warfare across the competition continuum, especially in the Sahel, ARSOF must update its special operations and associated Irregular Warfare doctrine to reflect the oversized value of the nonkinetic aspects of a whole-of-government integration of the military across the competition continuum. Violent extremist organizations and the threat that they pose are not the result of failed physical security protocols. Instead, violent extremist organizations thrive in an area where there is a real or perceived lack of water, food, and general economic security. If ARSOF were to focus more on its Civil Affairs and military information support operations and use them in support of a larger interagency effort, ARSOF would then be more successful and provide greater value to the joint force and the U.S. country team. In the ubiquitous DIME model DoD uses to explain the four elements (Diplomacy, Information, Military, and Economics) of U.S. national power, ARSOF must shrink the large M down to a small m. If ARSOF are to be successful in the Sahel and other areas like it, then ARSOF must adjust the DIME spelling to DImE. [14]

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# ECHELON OF AUTOMATION:
## The Future of Army Security Assistance

1st Lt. Jonathan Roberts, Infantry Officer

"Each piece of the battle network is indispensable, but it is often the sharing of information that is most important, and most often overlooked. Things that sense and shoot are interesting. Things that share information are not. They are unsexy."

Christian Brose, the Kill Chain

The U.S. military has an accountability problem. More specifically, the U.S. Army units tasked with executing over $34 billion in materiel aid transfers to the Ukrainian Armed Forces have an accountability problem, at least according to a 2023 Department of Defense Office of the Inspector General (DoD OIG) report. While the DoD OIG serves a larger purpose for the Department, for the context of this article, the DoD OIG is the Department's internal arm that audits Army operations to ensure the units executing those operations follow the necessary regulations to properly maintain accountability of personnel and equipment. The report successfully details problems those units face on the ground, but it misses the forest for the trees in addressing the true problem of large-scale materiel aid transfer and accountability.

This article addresses that forest by shedding light on an often-overlooked topic that will shape the future of Irregular Warfare in large-scale combat operations—that of the information systems that govern large-scale materiel aid transfers. The conflict in Ukraine is the most obvious contemporary example, but the future conduct of Irregular Warfare against near-peer adversaries will be largely constrained by the U.S. ability to transfer mass quantities of materiel aid into the hands of proxy forces on the front lines.
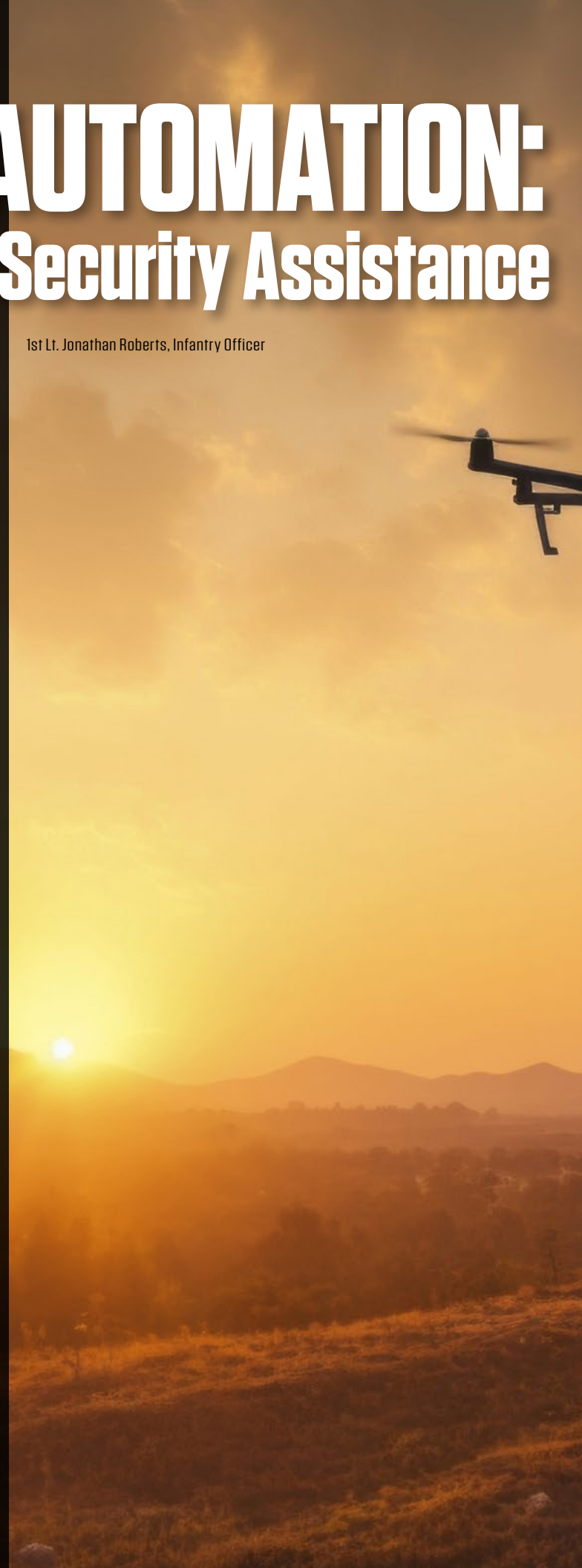
This article complements the 2023 Defense Industrial Strategy as a means to operationalize that strategy for the purposes of IW. This article will attempt to address the problems identified by the DoD OIG and offer a solution to transform this large-scale mission of emergency security assistance into an enduring capability for the conduct of Irregular Warfare in large-scale combat operations. The recommendations presented in this piece were developed over the author's experience supporting the Materiel Aid Coalition-Coordination Cell (MAC2C) mission responsible for delivering over $34 billion in domestic and international materiel aid transfers over a period of nine months.

The MAC2C served various roles, but primarily, it served as the primary tracking authority and transfer agent at the final Department of Defense (DoD) logistics node conducting the handoff to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Concisely, the DoD OIG report found that the MAC2C team "swiftly and effectively received, inspected, staged, and transferred defense items often within hours of receipt." However, the team did not consistently complete the documentation or record item quantities before transfer to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, mostly because it "could not confirm the quantities of defense items received against the quantity of items shipped for three of five shipments we observed, as the [Defense Transportation Regulation] DTR requires."

The DoD OIG concluded that the two primary reasons for the inconsistent accountability were the following:

- **The military services and defense agencies did not provide required information on shipping manifests or coordinate shipments with the U.S. Transportation Command.**

- **Standard operating procedures in Jasionka did not specify Defense Transportation Regulation-required accountability procedures and DoD personnel did not receive training or guidance on DoD policy requirements.**

The DoD OIG findings struck at the heart of the matter, but their recommendations were as limited as the scope of the investigation. The Army can absolutely solve this problem as it does so many others—with more personnel white-knuckling the issue in Excel to create more paperwork. The Army could also choose a better solution. It can address the root cause of the accountability issue and, in the process, solve several tangential problems at various echelons while laying a foundation for rapid innovation for the future IW support.

The true culprit behind the multibillion-dollar accountability disarray is the Army's many disparate Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems. An ERP system is a software system common to manufacturing and logistics industries that serves as an organization's single source of truth for the enterprise regarding its supply chain, operations, and finance. Not surprisingly, the U.S. Army has over 20 legacy sources of truth that may be unable to communicate, are often redundant, and frequently yield different results.

In a 2018 Army Sustainment article, Lt. Col. Jeffrey Lucowitz identified three separate systems just for ammunition at the theater level. Only one of the systems was even accessible below the brigade combat team, and not one of the systems accounted for coalition, interagency or host-nation forces. That lack of security partner integration is a significant oversight in sustaining large-scale combat operations—these systems are critical due to the staggering breadth of logistics necessary to fight a near-peer adversary. Without even considering other international support, U.S. donations to Ukraine alone include 24 different types of ground systems and 18 unique types of fires systems and projectiles. This is further compounded by system variants, associated basic issue items, variant-specific accessories, and maintenance and replacement parts. The complexity of this issue cannot be overstated. And the Army is not blind to that reality.

In an effort to address the accountability challenge, the U.S. Army has explored a number of initiatives, including the creation of a Contested Logistics Cross-Functional Team and conducting multinational exercises such as TALISMAN SABRE 2023, which had a decidedly complex logistics focus. The Army is also targeting connectivity and redundancy issues with the introduction of the Enterprise Business Systems-Convergence (EBS-C), which aims to effectively integrate all 24 major ERP systems by 2032.

Fortunately, the Army need not choose between status quo and a distant solution. Instead, it should seize the opportunity to rapidly develop, test, and deploy a software solution at the speed of operational relevance that will have lasting effects for the future Army. To accomplish this, the Army should direct the Artificial Intelligence Integration Center under Army Futures Command to develop a system capable of executing materiel aid tracking from point of origination to point of delivery at the company level of execution. Such a solution would solve multiple immediate problems for the Army while laying the foundation for innovation on medium- and long-term objectives.

This notional system—for purposes of this article labeled as the Materiel Aid Transfer Tracking Tactical (MTAC)—should be structured in the exact opposite manner of EBS-C, a system with the explicit goal of combining all Army ERP systems from the top-down over the course of a decade. Conversely, the new MTAC system should be limited in scope, beginning as a minimum viable

German Army Soldiers conduct tactical combat casualty care during the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center (JPMRC) rotation at Townsville Field Training Area (TFTA), Townsville, Australia, July 23, 2023. Talisman Sabre is the largest bilateral military exercise between Australia and the United States advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific by strengthening relationships and interoperability among key Allies and enhancing our collective capabilities to respond to a wide array of potential security concerns. (U.S. Army photos by Spc. Mariah Aguilar)

product (MVP) aimed at tackling problems from the bottom-up. As this new system grows and incorporates more and more ERP systems, it will be easier to seamlessly connect with the EBS-C when it reaches full operational capability.

Redundancy and connectivity challenges are not limited to automation and will not be entirely solved by programs like MTAC or EBS-C. Just as there are countless ERP systems, the DOD agency responsible for leading and managing security force assistance—the Defense Security Cooperation Agency—lists innumerable methods and authorizations for executing security assistance programs. The Army should pick one assistance program and one category of materiel when developing the MTAC MVP. In terms of the immediate Ukraine situation, the Army should choose the Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) as the program to supply all Class V—ammunition of all types, bombs, explosives, missiles, and rockets.

Beginning with the PDA makes sense. Over 50 percent of U.S. equipment provided to Ukraine was accomplished through this funding source, and it is also the funding source facing the greatest difficulties across the Army. Established under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, the President is authorized to drawdown from the inventory and resources of any agency of the U.S government in response to unforeseen military emergencies or other legislatively authorized purposes. Until recent years, the PDA saw only limited usage as a funding source outside of the Ukrainian assistance; it's use was limited to such emergencies as Moldova in 2016 and Lebanon in 2021. As a result, the relevant tracking and accountability processes never evolved to account for the massive amounts of aid witnessed with Ukraine.

Additionally, as the DoD moves to rebuild its critical munitions manufacturing capacity and shore up reserve stockpiles through multi-year munitions procurement contracts under the FY23 National Defense Authorization Act, the PDA funding method provides a uniquely convenient way to leverage those contracts. As the PDA pulls from existing stocks, the DoD can indirectly utilize those continually replenished stocks to respond to overseas contingencies and emergencies through PDA-funded materiel transfers. Beyond that, the PDA will likely continue to be a preferred funding source for security assistance because 1) the annual cap

before requiring Congressional approval was raised from $100 million to $14.5 billion per fiscal year, 2) the emergency provision of the PDA makes it incredibly adaptable, and 3) the recent announcement of $1.1 billion in aid to Taiwan and the emergency Israeli aid package using the PDA illustrates its speed and flexibility to support varied security partners—particularly when compared to the lengthy bureaucratic processes of other security cooperation funding measures. The PDA is the logical funding source to limit the scope of MTAC for MVP.

This approach has its limitations. Class V items, for example, may still be too broad in the early stages, since ammunition and projectiles can be pulled from any theater. By limiting the MVP to strictly covering the Class V munitions shipments conducted from the Army's ammunition depots managed by Army Materiel Command or an Army component under a single theater, the system could tackle enough complexity to prove its usefulness while minimizing bureaucratic friction during development. For example, the Army Materiel Command and its Army's Organic Industrial Base of government-owned, government-operated depots and manufacturing arsenals provide a wide array of munitions, including over 60 different conventional ammunition products ranging from 40 to 175 millimeters. Such arrangements would allow MTAC MVP oversight from the manufacturing assembly line to the point of impact. The advantages commander and their skilled logisticians are evident.

By limiting the scope of the MTAC MVP to the PDA funding source—and even further limiting the materiel tracked to Class V munitions falling under Army Materiel Command—the new system may begin to solve the most immediate problems of accountability and tracking across multiple commands while allowing for rapid iteration and the creation of interdepartmental relationships essential for a burgeoning software capability. However, the most crucial component for the success of this new system is generating buy-in with the Soldiers and staff tasked with using it, which is why the system should be built from the bottom-up.

Current Army ERP systems exists at the level of the brigade combat team and above, and those responsible for tracking and reporting deliveries function below that level. Any large-scale

materiel shipment to any nation will ultimately be packaged and delivered at the company level or below by junior Soldiers and officers. Unless this new system reaches down to that level, such a capability will only provide a partial solution. This was evidenced by the massive workflow difficulties at the MAC2C and subsequent higher staff units. Lack of access to those ERP systems mandates that the lower levels conduct their work under atrocious workflows with challenging spreadsheets and hand-typed reports compounding errors at every level.

The burden of bad tactical-level workflows ultimately falls on the strategic-level headquarters staff tasked with weaving together a common operating picture. Much like a tactical unit conducts an echelon of fires to attack a target, the strategic staff is the target that is bombarded with bad workflows and arcane reporting processes. However, if the MTAC MVP is built from the bottom up, beginning with the oft-disregarded workflows of the junior Soldiers and officers executing these shipments, the Army can tackle this problem with an echelon of automation. By solving the workflow problems of the lowest units and integrating the tactical, operational, and strategic units within a central data architecture, the Army can automate tasks at every level with increasing gains in efficiency that result in an information advantage for the commander.

As the MTAC capability grows and matures, the Army can continue to solve those immediate problems, but the Army can also move to generate valuable capabilities in the medium and long term. For one, the MTAC system could expand to encompass additional funding sources and classes of supply, eventually running the gamut of the security assistance authorities and becoming the single source of truth for DoD security assistance. Such a source of truth would provide greater value for the security force assistance funds by reducing logistical and legal burdens and eliminating redundancy and connectivity issues. The streamlined efforts under this single source would free the Army's units primarily charged with executing security force assistance—Special Forces, Psychological Operations, Civil Affairs, and security force assistance brigades—from the complex administrative and logistical burden of assistance, allowing freedom to maneuver and adjust policy on the ground as they continuously shape the battlefield.

Looking ahead, once the base MTAC achieves maturity and proves itself on the battlefield in Ukraine, the U.S. Army can begin to envision further potential use cases with the Army of 2040 and the Joint All-Domain Command and Control ecosystem. Army data scientists and operations research analysts can learn from cleaned and aggregated logistical data, perhaps even associating specific shipment groups or materiel with battlefield effects. From that, operations analysts could tie security assistance tracked by MTAC to the frontlines of the battlefield and generate multimodal machine learning models for what amount and type of security assistance is needed to create certain desired effects. Such insight might be capable of providing uniquely detailed planning assistance, for example, to the defense of Taiwan and help those planners in translating lessons learned from the MAC2C and Ukraine. Following the logistics path, one can also easily envision a capability that allows the U.S. Army to follow a given munition from the assembly line as it traverses the intermediate nodes on its way to the battlefield. Staffs of each node could query the central data architecture with detailed insight into the specific throughput

constraints of their node. Then, commanders of each unit could analyze a given product's path to identify and proactively alleviate chokepoints.

Accurately tracking munitions from the industrial base to the battlefield can further inform future contested logistics development efforts and industrial base policy. A detailed understanding of the challenges inherent with sustaining large-scale combat with accurate and useful datasets can greatly inform future efforts in maximizing the sustainability of the future battlefield. Combined with the latest industrial policy of the United States regarding reshoring manufacturing capabilities of various industries, MTAC could provide datasets with time-to-battlefield tables and associated battlefield effects. This information could provide the DoD with the clarity required to create novel contracting solutions for the capacity of the defense industrial base and cost-savings in surge capacity.

Building on the medium-term potential to reach for the long-term capability and the information advantage associated with AI, an MTAC-AI capability can also be envisioned for the Army of 2040 under the Joint All-Domain Command and Control ecosystem. It is possible to foresee how a 2040 theater commander watching the threat of large-scale regional combat between two actors and might look to MTAC to validate or abandon courses of action. The staff could compare the analyses for battlefield effects of similar actors supported by U.S. materiel aid in the past, generate detailed reports on potential time-to-battlefield responses for various types of materiel, use the Army's primary security force assistance units to begin shaping the battlefield immediately with automated legal compliance under the various authorizations allowed, coordinate with the integrated logistics counterparts of allies, and use this information to inform the Joint Chiefs to prepare the flexible surge capacity contracts necessary to sustain a protracted battle—all in less than a week.

Perhaps the United States and its allies have created such an impressive display of integrated deterrence that this battle never happens. If it does—given the pace of innovation of the past decades—the fusion of MTAC and replicator drones might immediately generate replacement manufacturing orders to the nearest contested logistics node at the very moment those drones are eliminated, thereby generating an even greater decision-making space for commanders and policymakers. With nearly 20 years of lead time, these capabilities are realistic if the U.S. Army acts now and lays the foundation to improve the information systems that govern materiel aid transfer. In developing a bottom-up system for materiel transfer tracking, the Army can achieve short, medium, and long-term information advantage objectives while simultaneously enhancing its transparency and accountability to taxpayers for billions of dollars of materiel aid provided to our security partners.

Note: 1st Lt. Jonathan Roberts is an infantry officer and recently selected Artificial Intelligence Scholar in the U.S. Army currently serving at the Army's Artificial Intelligence Integration Center. He was a small contributor to the larger Materiel Aid Coalition-Coordination Cell (MAC2C) mission responsible for delivering $40-plus billion in domestic and international materiel aid transfers over nine months. He holds a master's in economics and international diplomacy from Georgetown University, as well as degrees in mechanical engineering and political science from Louisiana Tech University. He is also a former research intern at the Center for Strategic and International Studies under the Defense Industrial Initiatives Group, where he contributed to research on defense contracting and acquisition.

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# JUST WAR AND IRREGULAR WARFARE

## JUS TUMULTUARIUM BELLUM, THE RIGHT TO IRREGULAR WAR

By J. David Thompson, U.S. Army Civil Affairs officer

Photo provided by Adobe Stock

Just War Tradition, also called Just War Theory, provides the ethical framework that governs when a state can resort to force (jus ad bellum), conduct during conflict (jus in bello), and ending conflict (jus post bellum). It has been used by philosophers, military practitioners, and heads of state since the times of Cicero and Saint Augustine. [01]

The resort to force ethics details who could declare a war. It provides what equals a just cause for war, ensures the war aims were proportional to the harm inflicted, requires exhausting peaceful alternatives, mandates that parties have the right intent, and necessitates that there is a reasonable chance of success. The conduct during conflict criteria are equally clear: forcing combatants to distinguish civilians from belligerents and ensuring the means of response are not excessive. The ending conflict criteria, while relatively lesser developed, detail the rights and responsibilities between parties to a conflict post hostilities. This model worked out well during the "good ol' days" of war—war was declared, one side won, the other side lost, and everyone went home. [02]

In the modern era, war emerges along a continuum of competition ranging from competition below armed conflict, crisis, and armed conflict. [03] The range of military options available to defense and policy leaders consist of less than lethal options inherent in irregular warfare activities. Irregular warfare provides opportunities of conducting operations through proxies. These opportunities contrast with more lethal traditional warfare alternative in large scale combat operations (LSCO). Despite the familiarity with irregular and conventional warfare alternatives, Just War Tradition fails to provide an adequate ethical framework for leveraging irregular warfare options. This creates an opportunity for a new ethical framework to augment Just War Tradition—jus tumultuarium bellum (right to irregular war). Ethics matter, even though ethical judgments lack the finality of a legal judgment, because ethics tell us what should be. The 2022 National Defense Strategy anchors defense strategy in partners and allies. [04] Thus, it is important to consider the ethics of our partners and allies. This paper seeks to fill the gap by providing an ethical framework on forming proxy relations in irregular warfare.

In irregular warfare, the United States works "by, with, and through regular forces, irregular forces, and individuals," [05] through "indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric activities." [06] The U.S. leverages irregular warfare activities in support of theater campaigns against competitors like China, Russia, Iran, and others. These competitors also work "by, with, and through" their own proxies. For example, China seeks military objectives through Chinese businesses. [07] Meanwhile, Russia notoriously works through Wagner and other private military and security companies. [08] And then there is Iran, who sponsors Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, the Houthis in Yemen, and other non-state armed groups in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere. [09] Despite these fairly obvious opportunities, there remains no ethical framework upon which our practitioners and theorists can model the analysis and potential employment of "by, with, and through" partners in irregular warfare.

To the benefit of our government and defense officials, this paper presents a narrow focus to renegotiate part of right to war ethics with irregular warfare's "by, with, and through." Jus ad bellum, the right to wage war, fails to delineate the ethical criteria necessary to form partnerships and supportive arrangements in war. States have found tactical and political advantages to this ethical ambiguity. States can shift some of the risks in waging war to an indigenous, non-state force. [10] There is a gap surrounding irregular warfare's "by, with, and through" indigenous, non-state actors about what rules apply, and who do they apply to? The resort to force by a state is stepping over a bright line, both legally and ethically. Supporting an irregular force or non-state actor in a pre-existing conflict presents several challenges. First, it is unclear what degree of support makes a state a party to a conflict. [11] Second, it is unclear whether the state creates an international armed conflict against a state or whether the state becomes party to a pre-existing non-international armed conflict between the state and the non-state. [12] These ambiguities provide legal and ethical loopholes for states to pursue desired policy outcomes with limited tactical and political exposure.

> "Just War Tradition, also called Just War Theory, provides the ethical framework that governs when a state can resort to force (jus ad bellum), conduct during conflict (jus in bello), and ending conflict (jus post bellum)."

To fill this ethical gap, the proposed framework is called jus tumultuarium bellum, and it seeks to augment contemporary Just War Tradition. In the jus tumultuarium bellum party, states and non-states have to fulfill the traditional resort to force criteria. The criteria includes: just authority, just cause, proportionality, exhausting peaceful alternatives, right intention, and chance of success. In addition to solely fulfilling the resort to force criteria, parties must make an ethical determination about the justness of the other's resort to force responsibilities. If the other actors fail to meet the criteria then the parties should not partner.

In addition to determining the justness of the other's resort to force responsibilities, jus tumultuarium bellum borrows from the emergent jus ad vim (just use of force) thinking that irregular warfare should not escalate the conflict. [13] If part of the intent of the irregular warfare campaign is to conduct a conflict short of LSCO then irregular warfare should not increase the probability of resorting to LSCO.

Jus tumultuarium bellum also requires that the state ensures the non-state actor has "sticking power." Deciding to wage war requires mobilizing troops, acquiring arms, raising money to fund the conflict and, ultimately, issuing orders to kill. [14] To carry the ethical burden, it is necessary that the non-state actor be able to prevail after the conflict. This requires that the non-state actor be representative of the population it is fighting for and have capabilities to provide governance. [15] This is a higher standard than that of states. States do not have to be a representative, and they barely have to be capable. Yet states are generally presumed just authorities in the international community. Despite this difference, if a state is to support a non-state in an armed conflict then the non-state should be able to survive after the conflict. [16]

Lastly, jus tumultuarium bellum recognizes that traditional notions of resort to force ethics may fall short. For example, under traditional Just War Tradition, a resort to conflict is justified only in response to unlawful aggression, pre-emption of an imminent attack, in pursuit of self-determination against a colonial or racist regime, or in support of humanitarian intervention. States, for example, are unlikely to wait for unlawful aggression to initiate irregular warfare. Large-scale combat operations are more apt to respond to unlawful aggression than focusing on "by, with, and through." Irregular warfare can also be a step in exhausting peaceful alternatives. For a state partnering with a non-state, the proportionality of harm caused by the state is less than LSCO. Continued waiting may help fulfill traditional notions of exhausting peaceful alternatives; however, it will likely increase the totality of harm should a state later face unlawful aggression. Therefore, irregular warfare's "by, with, and through" challenges just cause, necessity, proportionality, and chance of success. Thus, irregular warfare challenges traditional notions of resort to force ethics. Therefore, it is necessary that states and non-states analyze traditional notions of resort to force ethics with jus tumultuarium bellum.

The proposed ethical framework will not be without its doubters. Just War thinking has three main camps: Orthodox, Revisionists, and Neoclassical. Orthodox scholars follow the legalist position popularized by Michael Walzer, an American professor emeritus and political theorist. Revisionists seek to revisit the Orthodox's moral equivalency of combatants but have yet to develop a comprehensive framework. Neoclassical scholars turn more to the writings of Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Hugo Grotius, and others. Revisionist Just War scholars are unlikely to support the proposed jus tumultuarium bellum. Per most Revisionists, there is only a need for one framework: that of international human rights law. Revisionists, amongst other things, question the need for a separate ethical framework that solely governs armed conflict. [17] The Orthodox and Neoclassical interpretations of Just War Tradition are more apt to see the benefit that jus tumultuarium bellum can provide. Ultimately, however analyzed, Just War Tradition fails to provide an adequate vocabulary and framework to discuss irregular warfare's "by, with, and through" without jus tumultuarium bellum. The proposed framework gives philosophers, practitioners, and the public a way to explain and think about one of the realities of war.

This paper identified a shortcoming in the philosophy that seeks to govern the resort to war, conduct in war, and responsibilities when ending war. It sought to fill this gap by proposing a supplemental moral philosophy called jus tumultuarium bellum. Jus tumultuarium bellum requires both parties to fulfill individual right to war criteria. It also asks each party to make a determination of the other's justness in fulfilling its right to war responsibilities. It requires a "sticking power" for the non-state actor. Lastly, jus tumultuarium bellum recognizes that traditional notions of the right to war may fall short in irregular warfare. Therefore, it is necessary that states and non-states analyze traditional notions of resort to force ethics with jus tumultuarium bellum before deciding to enter a supportive relationship in irregular warfare's "by, with, and through."

*Note: J. David Thompson is a U.S. Army Civil Affairs officer with multiple deployments to Afghanistan, Jordan, and Iraq. He holds a Juris Doctorate from Washington and Lee University School of Law. He is a PhD Candidate at King's College London.*

**01** Bellamy, A., (10 November 2006), "Just Wars: From Cicero to Iraq."

**02** Whetham, D. G. (2016). "Are We Fighting Yet?" Can Traditional Just War Concepts Cope with Contemporary Conflict and the Changing Character of War, MONIST, 99(1), 55-69. https://doi.org/10.1093/monist/onv029.

**03** Department of the Army, (2022), "FM 3-0, Operations," 1-14.

**04** Department of Defense, (2022), "2022 National Defense Strategy," https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF, 14.

**05** 118th Congress, (2023), "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024." Congress.gov. December 22. Accessed January 1, 2024. https://www.congress.gov/118/bills/hr2670/BILLS-118hr2670enr.pdf. See also 115th Congress, (2017(, "Text - H.R.2810 - 115th Congress (2017-2018): National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018." Congress.gov. December 12. Accessed January 1, 2024. https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2810/text.

**06** Department of Defense, (2019), Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the United States. Vol. 1. Washington D.C., USA. There are multiple competing, and at times conflicting, definitions of irregular warfare. The 2024 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) defines irregular warfare as: "Department of Defense activities not involving armed conflict that support predetermined United States policy and military objectives conducted by, with, and through regular forces, irregular forces, groups, and individuals." DoD defines irregular warfare in JP 1, Vol 1: '[a] form of warfare where states and non-state actors' campaign to assure or coerce states or other groups through indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric activities." Army defines irregular warfare in FM 3-0, "[t]he overt, clandestine, and covert employment of military and non-military capabilities across multiple domains by state and non-state actors through methods other than military domination of an adversary, either as the primary approach or in concert with conventional warfare."

**07** Department of Defense, (2023), 2023 Report on the Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, 30.

**08** Rainsford, S., (27 June 2023), "Wagner mutiny: Group fully funded by Russia, says Putin," BBC, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66029382.

**09** Lane, A., (12 September 2023), "Iran's Islamist Proxies in the Middle East," Wilson Center, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/irans-islamist-proxies.

**10** Shaw, M. (2002). Risk-transfer militarism, small massacres and the historic legitimacy of war (Version 1). University of Sussex. https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.23312465.v1, 2.

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**13** Brunstetter, D. and Braun, M., (14 February 2013), "From Jus ad Bellum to Jus ad Vim: Recalibrating Our Understanding of the Moral Use of Force," Ethics in International Affairs,

**14** Gross, M., (12 January 2015) "The Ethics of Insurgency: A Critical Guide to Just Guerrilla Warfare," 37.

**15** Gross, M., (12 January 2015) "The Ethics of Insurgency: A Critical Guide to Just Guerrilla Warfare," Ch 1.

**16** For more on this, see: Gross, M., (12 January 2015) "The Ethics of Insurgency: A Critical Guide to Just Guerrilla Warfare." See also Staniland, P., (2014), "Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse."

**17** Braun, C., (2023), "Limited Force and the Fight for the Just War Tradition," 5.

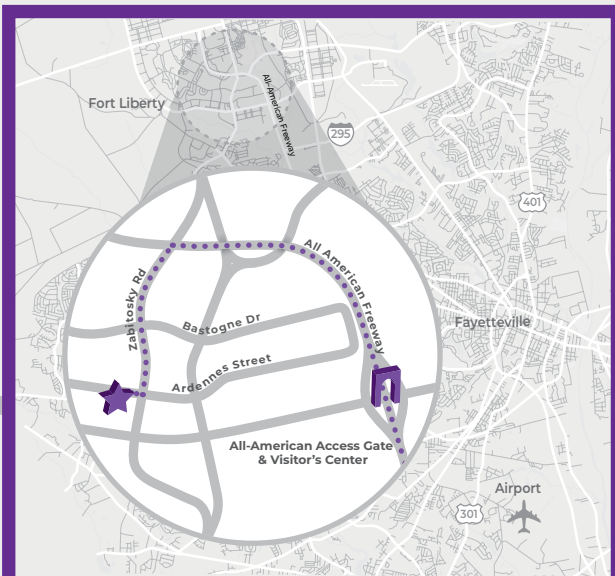# JFK SPECIAL WARFARE MUSEUM

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The competition kill-chain is constructed of basic and detailed linkages between tactical tasks and operational campaign planning. Ultimately, the kill-chain provides maneuver space for the joint force, creating positions of advantage to be exploited in large-scale combat operations (LSCO) and sets flexible response and deterrent options short of war. [07]

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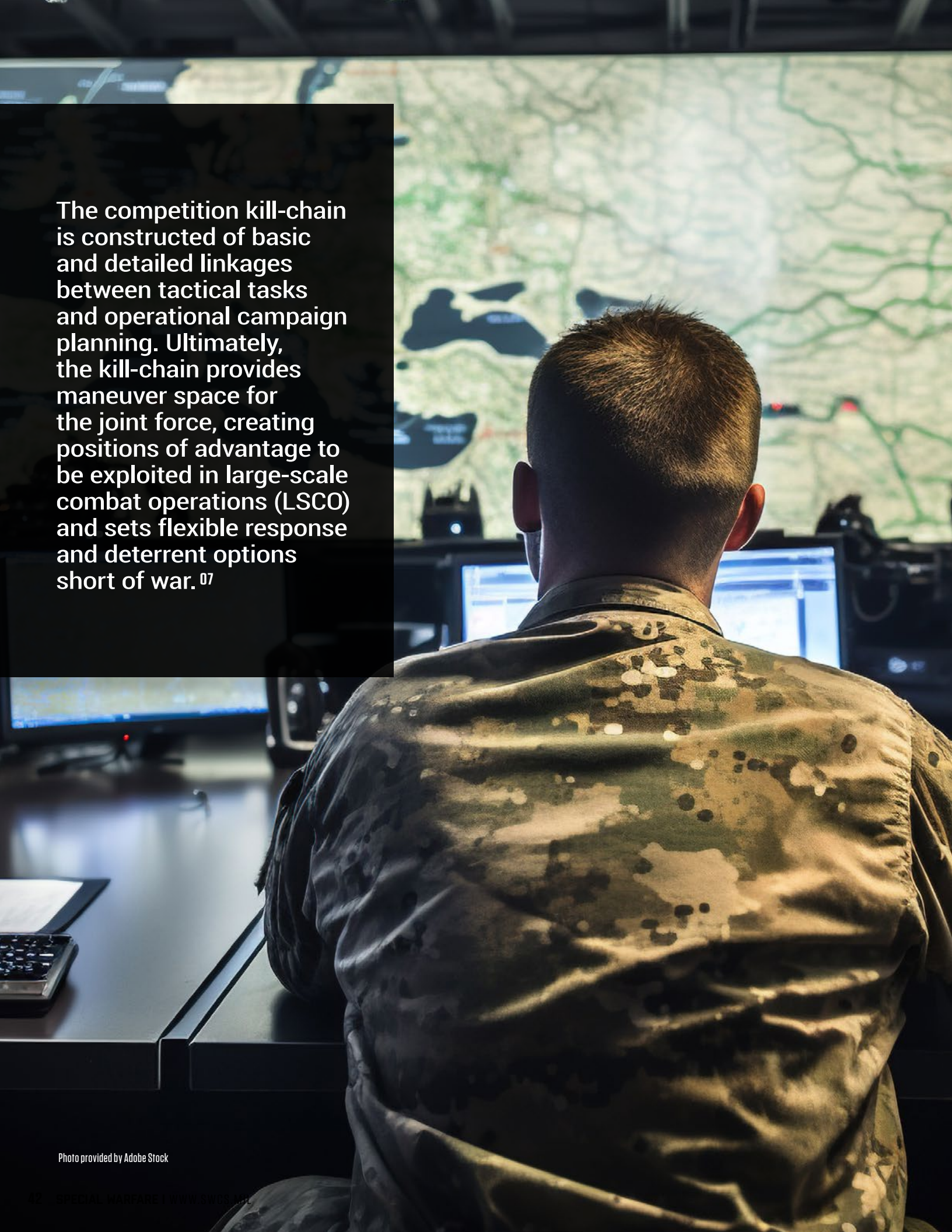
# Shortening the
# "COMPETITION KILL CHAIN"
## Integrated Irregular Warfare Campaigning

By Maj. Pat Mulholland and Capt. John Wirges, Civil Affairs officers

The U.S. war in Iraq and Afghanistan will be codified in history several ways. However, no one can deny the innovation and capacity the U.S. government brings to bear when a common enemy threatens national security.

From 2001 to 2003, wartime modernization saw the implementation of new technology and capabilities. These included a second-generation B-2 bomber, the Joint Direct Attack Munition and a reliable global communications network. The problem with this new tech and capability lay in proper implementation. [01] The "kill-chain" as it came to be known was too time-consuming, allowing high-value targets to evade targeting. This was due to convoluted processes of command and control across government agencies and echelons of military control. [02] The technology at the fingertips of forward commanders surpassed the existing approval model for proper employment.

Late in 2003, Brig. Gen. Stanley McCrystal and Lt. Col. Austin "Scott" Miller from the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) conducted a fact-finding mission to Iraq. McCrystal's assessment was that command and decision-making mechanisms were outpaced by the speed of the battlefield, reducing the effectiveness of forward units. [03]

Today, the U.S. government finds itself faced with ambiguous threats seeking to erode U.S. human, physical, and informational advantages. [04] The military will encounter challenges within the next decade like those identified by McCrystal in 2003. Adversaries may lack U.S. sustainment or command and control but are increasingly closing technological gaps. [05]

These obstacles must be reduced prior to the next conflict. The U.S. must campaign through tangible application of defeat mechanisms, flatten communications to employ all means available, and proactively seek relationships to gain and maintain relative advantage.

For Army special operations forces (ARSOF), the value proposition at all echelons is no longer just the application of special warfare and surgical strike capabilities but driving irregular warfare campaign planning from strategic to tactical levels. Modern competition requires layering of irregular warfare operational frameworks and tactical capabilities, clearly oriented to a threat, and tied to relevant defeat and stability mechanisms. [06]

It is increasingly vital to articulate irregular warfare campaign effects due to the transregional nature of our adversaries; special operations forces (SOF) investments in multiple theaters may be layered to achieve relative advantage transregionally. Creating positions of relative advantage over our adversaries must happen now; the joint force will not have time once conflict occurs. This reality reflects a need to clearly identify and shorten the "competition kill-chain."

The competition kill-chain is constructed of basic and detailed linkages between tactical tasks and operational campaign planning. Ultimately, the kill-chain provides maneuver space for the joint force, creating positions of advantage to be exploited in large-scale combat operations (LSCO) and sets flexible response and deterrent options short of war. [07] This competition kill-chain can be analyzed by reassessing how tactical actions tangibly support the application of combat power by war fighting function.

One of the largest challenges with long-term irregular warfare campaigning is the steady state environment in which it operates. The diplomatic community regards the concept of war as armed conflict, and SOF operating outside theaters of war are constrained by traditional intelligence and diplomatic primacy.

This requires SOF campaigners to be integrated with interagency partners and clearly define how the combatant command is campaigning to support political efforts. What the DoD may refer to as irregular warfare must nest with larger U.S. government competition or strategic disruption. [08]

The ultimate intent of irregular warfare is to erode political support and legitimacy for an adversary while supporting partners. [09] Therefore, it is important to the interagency and the operator that campaign plans and frameworks clearly articulate a campaign's layered defeat and stability mechanisms through supporting operations. This enables mission command and leverages full capabilities of SOF units – tactical detachments that can achieve operational effects.

Equally as important is the detachment's ability to communicate these plans to embassy colleagues in their own lexicon. Deliberate and targeted staff functions shorten the competition kill-chain. It enables units of action to proactively maintain relationships necessary for the future, seeing these otherwise convoluted operations as the precise employment of maneuver and fires supported by intelligence.

To illustrate this, a special operations task force has a Special Forces Operational Detachment – Alpha (SFOD-A) conducting security cooperation or foreign internal defense, a Tactical Psychological Operations team supporting a partner force influence operation, and a Civil Affairs team deployed under civil military engagement authorities. In many instances, those teams support each other in a "cross functional team," where the teams informally see fit, largely due to resource constraints in a semi-permissive environment.

The SFOD-A conducts bilateral training and unilateral network development activities, the team conducts influence operations under approved series, and the civil military support element (CMSE) conducts civil reconnaissance and engagement with local leaders and nongovernmental organizations. However, these operations could be layered with greater effect through a more deliberate focus on war fighting functions and deliberate planning. For example, in a littoral area, a port may be of interest due to adversary investment or utility in event of LSCO.

The dedicated maintenance of relationships with unified action partners, such as a non-governmental organization with an office in the area, provides clear placement. The port or its supporting human infrastructure is identified as a target by the special operations task force targeting cell. The Civil Affairs asset tasked with civil reconnaissance, or an SFOD-A conducting special reconnaissance, is a primary collection asset. The collection manager with sensory tasking authority should recommend taskings to the G3, Plans and Operations, for reconnaissance collection directly supporting intelligence or operational requirements. [10]

This allows a civil military support element to execute the decide-detect-deliver-assess methodology of the targeting process. The support element would conduct deliberate reconnaissance while supporting decide or detect. The civil military support element is now conducting operations to drive intelligence and enabling intelligence analysis to drive operations. The SFOD-A may then detect or deliver through the conduct of capacity building operations such as a training event with military at the port. This security cooperation is the massing of effects that exploits and creates relative advantage while the Tactical Psychological Operations team conducts anti-adversary messaging to deliver and assess fires.

Shortening the competition kill-chain requires these activities to be deliberate and supported by unified SOF mission command nodes through integrated targeting, intelligence, and operations processes. None of this happens without trust from the interagency for all actors involved. As an example, this may ring true for Aqaba, Jordan; Puerto Cortes, Honduras; or Mombasa, Kenya, showcasing the ubiquitous nature of competition.

These actions, in support of irregular warfare as a main effort, deny our adversaries access to key infrastructure, isolating the enemy, supporting a host nation, and influencing neutral actors. These actions may also provide unique context and insight to a diplomatic mission or theater army preparing multi-lateral exercises, all directly informing or supporting layered campaigning.

In the event of LSCO, this engagement may be necessary to ensure reception, staging, onward movement, and integration of the joint force. Through building relationships with in-organic units and finding linkages at echelon outside of traditional SOF structures, SOF can shorten the competition kill-chain and set conditions now for crisis and conflict.

Army special operations forces is already working to shorten the competition kill-chain through modernization efforts like force integration. These efforts have the potential to produce layered and synchronized effects. The effects would be oriented on a campaign's defeat and stability mechanisms, should commands choose to focus on synchronizing capabilities through intelligence, operations, and targeting instead of through "Special Forces, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operations."

The latter may produce biased effects lacking utility or unity of effort. This requires placing aside potential biases of SOF units in favor of truly layered effects oriented on campaign objectives. For example, Civil Affairs should not discuss value propositions merely in terms of "civil knowledge integration" but how deliberate, tasked civil reconnaissance can feed intelligence preparation of the environment. [11, 12] Proactive effects-based campaigning will ultimately shorten the competition kill-chain and set the conditions for victory wherever SOF operators exist.

**01** Kitfield, James. Twilight Warriors (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2016), 85–87.

**02** Ibid.

**03** Ibid.

**04** Jones, Seth. Three Dangerous Men: Russia, China, Iran, and the Rise of Irregular Warfare (W.W. Norton & Company, 2023).

**05** Work, Bob. "The Third U.S. Offset Strategy and its Implications for Partners and Allies." Transcript of speech delivered at Willard Hotel, Washington, D.C., January 28, 2015. https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/606641/the-third-us-offset-strategy-and-its-implications-for-partners-and-allies/

**06** The U.S. Army defines defeat mechanisms as destroy, dislocate, disintegrate, and isolate. The U.S. Army defines stability mechanisms as compel, control, influence, and support. Department of the Army. FM 3-0, Operations (Washington, DC: GPO, 2022), 3-106.

**07** Department of the Army. FM 3-0, Operations (Washington, DC: GPO, 2022), 5-15. Flexible Response and Flexible Deterrent Options are mutually supporting capabilities and constructs, involving the entire government. The development and employability of these options requires military engagement across the interagency, making the development and coordination of these options a comparative advantage for SOF.

**08** Robinson, Eric et. al. Strategic Disruption by Special Operations Forces (RAND Corporation, 2023).

**09** Department of the Army. FM 3-0, Operations (Washington, DC: GPO, 2022), 1-41

**10** Department of the Army. ATP 2-01, Collection Management (Washington, DC, GPO: 2021), 6-8.

**11** Department of the Army. ATP 3-57.30, Civil Network Development and Engagement (Washington, DC: GPO, 2023), 3-122).

**12** COL Vacha, Tony. Why Civil Affairs? (Eunomia Journal, 2023).

# MILITARY REVIEW

## CALL FOR ARTICLE SUBMISSIONS

Army University Press and the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School seek articles on Irregular Warfare (IW) from academia and the field for a collaborative special edition of Military Review. We invite you to write on one of the research questions below, current and historical case studies, or other relevant topics to grow understanding of IW.

## Irregular Warfare is:

"a form of warfare where states and non-state actors campaign to assure or coerce state or other groups through indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric activities, either as the primary approach or in concert with conventional warfare."
**- Joint Publication 1, Volume 1, Joint Warfighting (27 AUG 23)**

"the overt, clandestine, and covert employment of military and non-military capabilities across multiple domains by state and non-state actors through methods other than military domination of an adversary, either as the primary approach or in concert with conventional warfare."
**- FM 3-0: Operations (HQDA, October 2022)**

## Potential topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Examine the role of policy, doctrine, training, and education in understanding and operationalizing Irregular Warfare.
- Explore case studies of recent Irregular Warfare challenges to gain insights into contemporary issues and strategies.
- Consider future trends and the effects of the digital age on the Irregular Warfare landscape.
- Space and Cyber in Irregular Warfare.
- Civil-Military Relations and Irregular Warfare.
- Special Operations, Conventional, and Interagency convergence in Irregular Warfare.
- Military Information Support Operations (MISO): opportunities and obstacles in Irregular Warfare employment.
- Identifying Gaps and what is needed for the future Irregular Warfare fight and competition.
- Ethical and legal considerations in Irregular Warfare: Rules, norms, and human rights.
- Information Advantage in Irregular Warfare.
- Translating Human Advantage to the Physical Dimension.
- Stability Operations: the challenge of keeping the peace in an Irregular Warfare context.
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- Austere medicine: keeping the force in the fight in Irregular Warfare settings.

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# ARSOF'S MAROPS
## MARITIME OPERATIONS

By Maj. Brandon Schwartz,
Special Forces Underwater Operations commander

U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers and Navy SEALs prepare to swim long distance beneath the water's surface during the 2023 U.S. Army Special Operations Command Best Combat Diver Competition at the Special Forces Under Water Operations School at Naval Air Station Key West, Florida, on Sept. 26, 2023. The USASOC BCDC engages in friendly competition while enhancing camaraderie and esprit de corps. U.S. Army photo by Spec. Cody Williams.

## CHANGING TIDES

The *Army Warfighter Concept: 2030-2040* coined the term *air-ground-littoral zone*[01] to describe the coastal areas, brown and green waters, and near-Earth space upon which the Army and joint force operational and contingency plans rely. Through a geographic and economic lens, this term encompasses all nations' territorial waters, seventy percent of the megacities, and the column of airspace above them.[02] The converging megatrends of "rapid population growth, accelerating urbanization, littoralization (*the tendency for people and infrastructure to cluster on coastlines*), and globalization,"[03] are making these zones more unstable, networked, ripe for malign influence,[04] and thus more complex albeit essential to operate in. To this end, the United States and its rivals are engaged in a maritime arms race to gain the upper hand in influencing and projecting power into air-ground littoral zones.

Still engaged in the epilogues of the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), the U.S. military is in the unenviable position of trying to reinvigorate its maritime capabilities—*the domain most atrophied over the past two decades*—for both high-end conflict and asymmetric threats while simultaneously downsizing and adjusting to new fiscal constraints. Meanwhile, the People's Republic of China, the United States' designated pacing challenge,[05] is aggressively investing in its maritime capabilities—*anti-access, aerial denial (A2AD) systems, peer-capable naval platforms, and maritime proxy forces*—with the "stated intention of exceeding the capability of the U.S. military in the Western Pacific in the next decade."[06]

In short, mounting insecurity within and increased competition over the global littoral necessitates a shift in focus for U.S. special operations forces (SOF), who must keep pace with rival behavior and the "seismic changes in the character of war, largely driven by technology."[07] As the proponent for irregular warfare, Army special operations forces (ARSOF) must improve its maritime operations (MAROPS) baseline capabilities and develop irregular approaches to address emerging challenges. Explicitly, ARSOF must develop a MAROPS capability that can (1) enable our allies and partners to counter sources of maritime insecurity through capacity building, (2) extend U.S. influence, and (3) enable the Army and joint force to succeed in crisis and conflict in air-ground-littoral zones. ARSOF should not view this deviation from recent experience as an aberration, but rather as a *means* to see, sense, and affect this increasingly important battlefield.

## JOINT FORCE ADAPTION TO MARITIME THREATS

The U.S. military is at a strategic inflection point, repurposing the joint force to support the 2022 National Security Strategy threat prioritization and the associated need to dominate the air-ground-littoral zone. The much-discussed "Pacific Pivot" of the Obama Administration is finally underway, as evidenced by the influx of units and war stocks into United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) and emphasis on Pacific military partnerships.[08] Since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan,

the joint force executed dozens of integrated battle problems focused on solving the challenges of reception, staging, onward movement, and integration; joint forcible entry; very shallow water obstacle identification and reduction; and logistics in a peer-contested, maritime environment.[09] These exercises signal America's commitment to countering Chinese maritime investments and inform stakeholders of the ways and means the military must develop to overcome assessed gaps to ensure America can fight its preferred way of war in a theater predominately covered by ocean.

> ## LITTORAL (DOD)
> The littoral comprises two segments of operational environment:
>
> ## 1. Seaward: the area from the open ocean to the shore, which must be controlled to support operations ashore.
>
> ## 2. Landward: the area inland from the shore that can be supported and defended directly from the sea.
>
> JP 2-01.3

Although MAROPS is most associated with INDOPACOM, each combatant command is witnessing changes to its maritime environments. In United States European Command, the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in the Black Sea demonstrates a fundamental shift in how militaries "see, shoot, move, communicate, protect, and sustain"[10] in this decisive terrain. Ukrainian MAROPS, characterized by small, remote-controlled unmanned surface vessels that target enemy infrastructure and Russian naval vessels, as well as Russia's manned and unmanned countermeasures, is greatly influencing joint force wargames and capabilities development.[11] Moreover, observed Russian and Ukrainian struggles to execute wet gap operations is renewing the U.S. Army's focus on this old-but-new challenge as evidenced by the activation of multi-role bridging companies.[12] In United States Central Command, Iranian-backed Houthi drone attacks and interdiction of commercial vessels transiting the Red Sea demonstrate the impact asymmetric maritime threats can have on the global economy.[13] To date, the U.S. Navy's response to secure this strategic sea line of communication has been effective, albeit costly, while also creating opportunity costs elsewhere. Concurrently, in the global south, partner nations are increasingly requesting assistance to secure their economic exclusion zones from malign and substate maritime threats like piracy, drug trafficking, and illegal and unregulated fishing.[14] In aggregate, these actions signal a rising demand for conventional and special operations maritime solutions across each combatant command.

Adapting to this future reality, United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) drafted Directive 350-24, Maritime Infiltration (MI), as an essential step in reshaping the trajectory of joint SOF maritime capabilities. The current draft states that maritime infiltration "is a fundamental skill across all USSOCOM Components," [15] and mandates that the entire SOF enterprise increase its baseline MAROPS capabilities while becoming increasingly interoperable. This directive may shock many within ARSOF who view this as encroaching on traditional Navy SEAL and Marine Raider territory; however, increased demand for SOF MAROPS requirements will likely exceed the capacity of the United States Marine Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) and require partnered, irregular approaches that are not the forte of Naval Special Warfare (NSW).

NSW predominance in the maritime domain is well documented and respected. They are the Nation's "premier maritime SOF and are uniquely positioned to extend the fleet's reach and deliver all-domain solutions to the joint force." [16] During the twilight of the GWOT, (then) NSW Commander, Read Admiral Wyman Howard, smartly embraced a "return to sea" mentality and reoriented NSW from land-based, partnered operations through the modernization of its subsurface and surface MAROPS capabilities. The results are superb; however, this organizational orientation—focusing "on the things that only [NSW] can do for the joint force" [17]—comes with a tradeoff. Concentrating on developing a tailored Deep Blue capability left many of the "lesser" littoral maritime challenges unaccounted for. For example, NSW SEAL Delivery Vehicle Teams can conduct exquisite combat swimming operations, but they are also inextricably linked to some of the U.S. Navy's most strategic and precious platforms—like Columbia-class submarines—whose role in high-end conflict will be tightly controlled. This is not to say that NSW is no longer capable of partnered operations, but their charter is fleet support and high-end, technical maritime special operations.

Covering the SOF littoral gap created by the NSW post-GWOT pivot, MARSOC developed a new operating concept called Strategic Shaping and Reconnaissance (SSR). SSR, grounded in the Marine Corps' amphibious roots, is "focused on special reconnaissance, preparation of the environment, and the employment of kinetic and nonkinetic effects in contested, near-shore environments." [18] MARSOC is progressively developing capabilities for information and influence operations aimed at the locations where "half of the global population will live by 2050." [19] This potent irregular warfare instrument—designed to bring people into the United States' influence column—is essential during competition and may help prevent conflict from occurring. However, recognizing that the entire Marine Raider Regiment is smaller than even one of the five active duty U.S. Army Special Forces (SF) groups is an immutable reality. Marine Raiders cannot address the increasing volume of maritime partner building or littoral irregular warfare without extensive assistance. Moreover, SOF's value to the Nation is maximized when its units of action are already at the crisis point with developed flexible response options and flexible deterrence options for policymaker decisions. To this end, combining ARSOF's global presence with the SSR model provides an excellent blueprint for addressing the current limitation of USSOCOM's littoral SOF capabilities.

## BUILDING MAROPS NEXT

Building upon these recommended joint SOF component "swim lanes," ARSOF should embrace USSOCOM's directive to increase its baseline MAROPS capability to prepare for assessed requirements across the competition continuum. Specifically, ARSOF should develop a threat-informed, partner-centric capability that augments MARSOC's littoral irregular warfare and operational preparation of the environment capacity and interoperates with NSW's exquisite Deep Blue capabilities.

ARSOF should also modernize to extend its combat diving capability's operational reach to account for 21st-century standoff requirements in conflict. Moreover, ARSOF should emphasize upgrading its surface MAROPS capabilities to provide more significant opportunities for access, placement, and partnerships in strategically important air-ground-littoral zones before the crisis. Paying close attention to lessons learned in the Black Sea, ARSOF must also integrate robotics to ensure MAROPS operators are able to sense and shape the environment to increase survivability and lethality. Finally, ARSOF should partner closely with the Army to answer their hydrographic and river reconnaissance needs to enable their wet gap operations and joint logistics over-the-shore (JLOTS). Thankfully, the 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne) (SFC[A]) is committed to this cause.

SF Regimental Command and Staff are developing a new 1st SFC(A) Operating Concept to articulate its value proposition across the competition continuum, in all domains, and in every sector of the battlefield. This soon-to-be-published Operating Concept will also emphasize how Special Forces groups can leverage surface and subsurface MAROPS capabilities to extend U.S. influence into littorals during competition and provide direct and general support to the Army and joint force during a crisis or conflict.

## BENEFITS OF A NEW BASELINE

During competition, an improved ARSOF MAROPS capability creates opportunities for increased access, placement, and influence that add to the Nation's deterrence capabilities. ARSOF must enable indigenous solutions to the problems of overfishing, piracy, smuggling, crime, pollution, and threats to commerce that cost even the most developed countries like South Korea billions of dollars each year. [20] Cooperating to increase partner maritime security and conducting littoral influence and information operations can help retain these countries in the United States' corner. Should a crisis occur in the air-ground-littoral zones, and ARSOF are there, they can enable the joint force's unfettered access to bases, ports, and airspace for mission accomplishment. In addition to strategic shaping, ARSOF littoral operational preparation of the environment can help pre-position war stocks, develop human networks, and generate flexible and scalable response and deterrence options that provide U.S. policymakers innumerable means to overcome unforeseen challenges.

In crisis and conflict, ARSOF MAROPS has a role in each battlefield sector. In the close area, ARSOF and their partners can utilize surface and subsurface MAROPS to enable multidomain breach of the air-ground-littoral zone in support of joint forcible entry operations and reception, staging, onward movement, and

integration of the joint force. Tasks could include the kinetic and nonkinetic targeting of A2AD systems, hydrographic surveys to mark and reduce obstacles in very shallow waters, and military deception to enable the Army to perform joint logistics over-the-shore.

> "We must develop the tactics and technologies to dominate the Air-Ground-Littoral, which is the near-earth space, up to thousands of feet. Formations that are organized, trained, and equipped to exploit the Air-Ground-Littoral can sense and strike further and faster [...] The emergence of these formations may drive the biggest change in how [the Army] fights on land since armies learned to exploit the potential of mechanization.."
>
> Army Futures Command
> Army Warfighting Concept: 2030-2040

Once ashore, the joint force could sustain operations utilization of activated subsurface caches. ARSOF can also utilize maritime infiltration techniques to gain access to the deep area and enable joint force land component commanders to see and sense farther and shape the environment to allow ground forces to maintain operational tempo. Specifically, ARSOF targets enemy long-range precision fires, logistics, and "kill chains," [21] and conducts river reconnaissance of wet gap crossing sites. Outside the theater of armed conflict, ARSOF MAROPS can create multiple dilemmas on their peripheral or strategic flanks. Leveraging their global presence, ARSOF can hold the enemy's sea lines of communication, ports, assets, and proxies at risk to create comparative advantages for the joint force through attrition. Across all battlefield sectors, ARSOF must embrace the policy trend of remote advisement and assistance of a MAROPS-capable partner force while leveraging unmanned surface or underwater vessels to target enemy naval and littoral-based assets. In a crisis, ARSOF must provide combatant commanders and policymakers with low-cost, asymmetric solutions to counter maritime proxy forces like the Houthis. SOF maritime solutions will free up the U.S. Navy for other global requirements that bolster the Nation's strategic deterrence value, reduce the risk of horizontal escalation, and avoid the depletion of high-end war stocks.

This old-but-new vision—a nod to the Office of Strategic Services maritime playbook [22]—will guide ARSOF in the future fight and shed light on the endless albeit important role of MAROPS. However, ARSOF's institutional and operational forces must do more to realize this vision.

## NEXT STEPS

The key to advancing ARSOF surface MAROPS is greater collaboration between the operational and institutional forces to modernize existing program of instructions and develop a new training division of labor between Special Forces Underwater Operation (SFUWO) School and the SF groups. The U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare and School (USAJFKSWCS) is currently revamping SFUWO's Water Infiltration Course (WIC) to account for assessed future ARSOF MAROPS activities and threats. In support of this course redesign, SFUWO is actively pursuing SF group input to ensure "WIC 2.0" meets the customers' expectations and complements emerging operational training guidance. The richer the collaboration, the better the outputs will be. If the course redesign is approved, ideally SFUWO would exclusively teach the advanced surface MAROPS skills required to operate effectively in assessed future operational environments (for example, air-to-water insertion, mothership operations, hardshell boats, mission planning, and visit, board, search, and seizure credentialling) as early as Spring 2025.

As the only joint SOF component that does not teach MAROPS in their initial training pipeline, SF groups must assume greater responsibility for their units' foundational MAROPS skillset. Only then can SFUWO focus on developing the advanced capability required by the joint force as outlined in the USSOCOM Directive 35024 critical tasks list.

The key to modernizing ARSOF combat diving is additional resourcing and leader advocacy. Team-level innovation and pockets of excellence cannot overcome underinvestment. As demonstrated during the 2023 USASOC Combat Diver Competition, [23] SF combat divers have the human capital to outcompete Navy SEALS; however, ARSOF units' collective proficiency can only progress with additional focus. There is no getting around the unavoidable costs of MAROPS equipment, but diver propulsion and precision navigation are vital instruments for all joint SOF components' subsurface capabilities. SFUWO already revamped its Combat Diving Supervisor Course to teach seasoned divers how to echelon diver propulsion and precision navigation to accomplish advanced profiles taught in the U.S. Navy's Lead Combat Swimmer Course. However, SF dive lockers need the manning, expertise, and resourcing to allow dive teams to maintain the skillset in their pre-mission training and annual training requirements.

Concerning doctrine, the Army's creation of an entire chapter—Chapter 7: Maritime Operations—in its recently published FM 3-0, Operations, signals a requirement for ARSOF MAROPS inclusion and cascading doctrinal updates. USAJFKSWCS must continue to leverage SFUWO—its MAROPS institutional center of gravity—to nest ARSOF MAROPS with the Army's vision for maritime and riverine operations. Furthermore, USAJFKSWCS and SFUWO should codevelop MAROPS updates for its programmatic reviews of ARSOF doctrine. MAROPS detachments do not have codified expectations for training requirements for combat dive or

other specialty detachments. To this end, the institutional and operational forces must create a USASOC Regulation 350-20 equivalent for MAROPS detachments to guide the training and maintenance standard for the skillset.

SFUWO should evolve to become the MAROPS capabilities development directorate (CDD) and support USASOC's Force Modernization Center (UFMC) to ensure prudent force transformation. As a CCD-like entity, SFUWO could directly support UFMC's overhaul of ARSOF's outdated MAROPS technologies and communicate future requirements to industry partners. Moreover, if resourced as an innovation battle lab, SFUWO and its visiting units—an average of 600 personnel each year—could collaborate on complicated problems to spur new techniques, tactics, and procedures that will help accelerate ARSOF MAROPS growth and simultaneously inform senior leader modernization decisions.

Finally, MAROPS is not just a dive detachment responsibility; it is an ARSOF leader responsibility. To this end, the SF Regiment should conduct leader professional development to replenish its atrophied MAROPS intelligence quotient and overcome the heuristic that MAROPS is singularly about combat divers infiltrating to a beach landing site. A review of the SF Regiment's rich history demonstrates that our third lightning bolt was well-earned; it is worthy of continued stewardship. To that end, broadening ARSOF leader aperture to the nuances of emerging MAROPS concepts, lessons learned, new technologies, and threat capabilities will benefit the SF Regiment moving forward.

## CONCLUSION

The world's littoral populations continue to grow at an aggressive pace. Of the 513 cities having a population above 1 million in 2015, 271 (52.8 percent) were located less than 100 kilometers from a coastline. This accounts for 59.4 percent of the global urban population. [24] A failure to invest in ARSOF MAROPS capabilities ignores these clear population shifts and generates indisputable operational and mobility challenges for future ARSOF leaders.

ARSOF MAROPS needs USASOC leader advocacy to become operationally viable once again. USASOC should embrace a programmatic capability review process that encourages divestment at the same rate of investment. Although MAROPS may not achieve top billing over other ARSOF capabilities, this critical capability is well above the cut line because the risk of the status quo is too significant. USASOC should continue to build upon the 1st SFC(A) operating concept and carry their water when advising USSOCOM on how ARSOF complements the joint SOF maritime capabilities. ARSOF should strive to become interoperable with NSW capabilities to extend their reach from the Deep Blue into the air-ground-littoral zones, which are decisive to joint force contingency and operational plans. USASOC should partner closely with MARSOC to augment SSR on a global scale and validate near-identical requirements to ensure each combatant commander has enough capacity to conduct influence and information operations and be poised to respond to crises in increasingly contested littorals.

Concerning the costs of MAROPS resourcing, both USASOC and MARSOC are on the outside looking in at the exclusive relationship between NSW and USSOCOM Program Executive Office—Maritime (PEO-M).[25] If MARSOC and USASOC were to buy into PEO-M together, it would open avenues that could lessen the fiscal burden of ARSOF

institutional and operational force modernization efforts. Lastly, USASOC should adopt the Army's maritime and riverine-centric challenges as their own and collaborate through experimentation to overcome them. Doing so would signal that ARSOF recognizes the Army as the supported entity and is committed to successfully navigating its strategic inflection point across all domains. In sum, a genuinely all-domain ARSOF will enable the joint force to succeed in future contested maritime environments. And for that reason, we should "give way together."

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**SPECIAL FORCES UNDERWATER OPERATIONS**
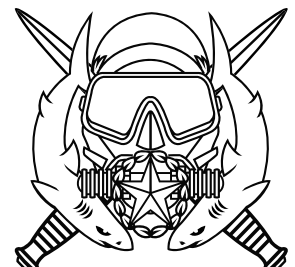PRESENTS

# USASOC BEST COMBAT DIVER COMPETITION

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# CAPEX

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# SPECIAL OPERATIONS & Counter-Occupation

By Brian Petit, Joint Special Operations University and retired Special Forces officer

Are Army special operations forces (ARSOF) capable of advising Ukrainian units who must operate deep inside Russian occupied territory? Can remote train-and-advise programs far from the line of contact genuinely provide the knowledge, skills, and training to enable partisan networks to strike deep within occupied areas? This is an exceptionally difficult undertaking for ARSOF Soldiers and their support elements. If tasked, a mission brief might sound like this:

Your mission is to enable rear-area operations via individuals and networks to organize and operate in Russian-controlled occupied areas of Ukraine. You cannot go to the front line or even into the theater of war. Most of your partners do not speak English. Most do not have military or security force backgrounds. Many have been in sustained combat for two years. The Russian occupying forces they face are a mix of conscripts, paramilitaries, criminals, and deputized collaborators. To access the areas under occupation, one must first penetrate 80 kilometers into heavily defended territory covered by artillery, air support, and pervasive electronic surveillance. What are your questions?

U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers.
U.S.Army photo

If your initial reaction is that your education, training, and experience is inadequate to fulfill this mandate, you are not alone. The U.S. military has rarely faced such a complex environment, directly or indirectly, in the modern era. Few, if any, ARSOF Soldiers have direct experience with these types of challenges. To date, U.S. policy restricts the ability to gain direct experience and inhibits observational learning; nevertheless, select ARSOF elements are engaged in this counter-occupation mission.

To counter occupation, we must better comprehend what occupation truly entails. This article is designed to strengthen that understanding in several key areas. First, a model is introduced to help visualize occupied areas. Second, a review of populace and resource control measures is discussed. Third, occupation gradients are described using the Russian occupation of Ukraine as an example. This model, simplified for brevity, shows seven gradients of the occupation environment: friendly, forward line of troops, contested, newly occupied, deep occupied, rubbled, and colonized. (This article focuses on the newly occupied and deep occupied zones.) Finally, the article examines implications for ARSOF.

To be clear, understanding and operating in such an environment requires a full suite of study and analytical rigor. As an adjunct for the Joint Special Operations University,

I provide in-stride education that prepares ARSOF to advise resistance movements. In that work, the Ukraine-Russia War exposed the limits of my own understanding of occupation. This article aims to shrink that knowledge gap and introduce nondoctrinal and training concepts that may inform future consideration in that regard.

## AN OCCUPATION TEMPLATE: SPATIAL AND SEVERITY

To clarify occupation zones, I use a visual that approximates U.S. Army doctrinal templates that illustrate depth and force arrayal. This template (figure 1) focuses on two features of an occupied area: spatial and severity. The goal is to capture the gradients of occupier control as measured by distance and depth (spatial) and by severity (occupation measures). This model has two aims. The first is to help us see beyond the dualistic enemy and friendly line of demarcation, which insufficiently characterizes occupied areas. The second is to assemble and contextualize the specifics of a particular type of occupation environment. This model cannot replace a properly staffed (and likely classified) detailed intelligence picture, but it has proven useful in nontraditional settings to share knowledge and to visually animate the peculiarities of an occupied space.
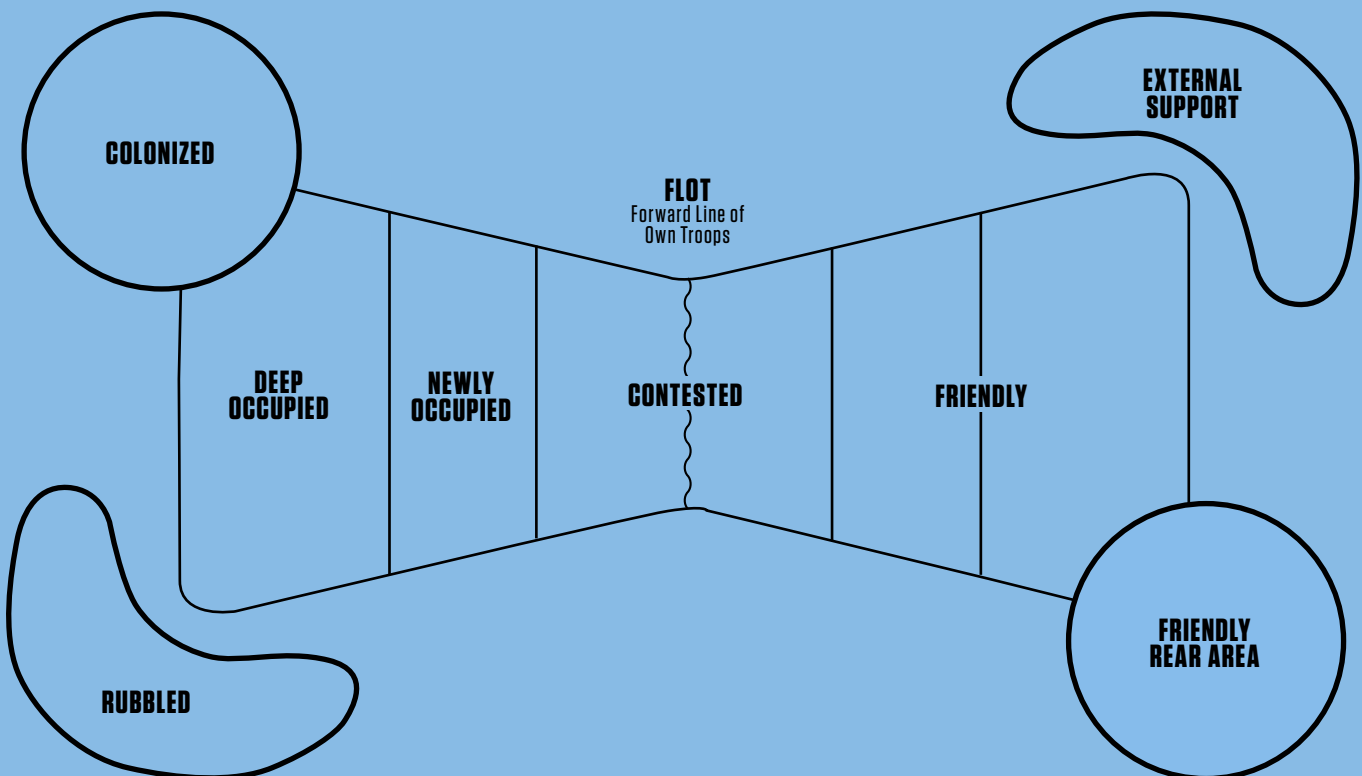
## OCCUPATION TEMPLATE: SPATIAL AND SEVERITY



Figure 1: Occupation template, by Brian Petit

Photo provided by Adobe Stock

**populace and resources control** – Operations which provide security for the populace, deny personnel and materiel to the enemy, mobilize population and materiel resources, and detect and reduce the effectiveness of enemy agents. Populace control measures include curfews, movement restrictions, travel permits, registration cards, and resettlement of civilians. Resource control measures include licensing, regulations or guidelines, checkpoints (for example, roadblocks), ration controls, amnesty programs, and inspection of facilities. Most military operations employ some type of populace and resources control measures. Also called PRC.

FM 3-57

## POPULACE AND RESOURCES CONTROL

Common to all occupied areas are populace and resource control measures. The measures are the tactics adopted by a government or occupier to monitor, regulate, and control a population and its material resources. Mapping populace and resource control measures is less an exercise in "red versus blue" force arrayal; it instead seeks to display the interactive and behavioral characteristics of a restricted area.

Tactical populace and resource control measures include outposts, checkpoints, secondary searches, identification cards, rations cards, screening methods (such as visual profiling, scraping electronics, and canines), and technical enablers. The proliferation of electronic surveillance is expanding the suite of populace and resource control tools.

Occupation zones produce unique concoctions of populace and resource control measures that dominate patterns of life, drive behavioral norms, restrict movement, track the activities of humans and machines, and catalog the signatures of signals and spectrums.

U.S. Army doctrine acknowledges populace and resource control, but it does so mostly in a scattershot manner across various publications [01]– mainly in the context of conducting counterinsurgency and stabilization operations. One excellent resource is "Who Owns the Neighborhood," a populace and resource control handbook published by the 1st Special Forces Group (Airborne) in 2008.[02] Although there are some similarities in how the United States and her adversaries might separate insurgents from the population, there are also stark differences. For example, Russian occupation behaviors employ a multitude of measures that are cruel and extrajudicial, if not outright barbaric. Thus, we must refresh our view of populace and resource control measures with the behaviors of a willful occupier with few self-limiting, ethical bounds.[03]

## OCCUPATION TEMPLATE: NEWLY OCCUPIED

### ENEMY TASK

- Consolidate control
- Seize and Stabilize
- Main effort: Clear and hunt forces

### Enemy Activity Characteristics
- **Filtrate:**
  - Screen, interrogate, and extract
  - Hunt, arrest, deport, and kill
  - Identify and empower collaborators
- **Spoils:** Loot, steal, drink, and terrorize (rape)
- **Profiteer:** Initial "occupied political economy"
- **Seize:** Infrastructure (Water, energy, roads, information technology)
- **Occupier:** Control of city hall, police, etc.
- **Prepare Defense:** Counterattacks

COLO

**Russian Forces**

RUB

## NEWLY OCCUPIED

Newly occupied areas are those areas where the invader has broken the defensive lines and seeks to consolidate control and extinguish resistance. In newly occupied areas, the occupier is only beginning to understand what it possesses, what it must investigate (clear), and how it might exert control. In this condition, occupier normative behaviors are neither established nor understood by the population. Occupying forces still have a direct combat mentality. They are less contemplative about viable occupation methods and more prone to escalate and retaliate with force if resistance is suspected or detected. Instilling fear into an occupied population is a method with limitless tactical expressions. It can also become self-defeating. This is the "occupier's dilemma."

New occupiers might be observed experimenting with what mixture of repression and coercion (sticks) versus methods of persuasion and cooperation (carrots) will be most effective. On the Eastern Front during World War II, the German Wehrmacht were faced with managing the vast, conquered lands and populations of Belorussia, Ukraine, and interior Russia. The Wehrmacht struggled to reconcile brutal repression tactics with cooperative strategies. [04] Despite its stated policy of brutal repression and widespread practice of such, some commanders sought out sensible arrangements with occupied peoples. [05] This was not a charitable gesture; it was a transactional and relational calculation on how to best effect rear-area security using fewer forces spread over vast lands.

Conceptually, but not dogmatically, the newly occupied period lasts from one day to one year. One year represents a four-season cycle of occupier inhabitation and regulation of civic life. This becomes particularly relevant in locales, where "fighting seasons" are common or in places like Ukraine that experience drastic seasonal changes. In this first year, a key task for the invader is to shift control from the military and temporary hold forces to a sustainable security and governing system. It should be noted that the U.S.-led coalitions in Iraq and Afghanistan never mastered their environments despite technological overmatch, competent forces, indigenous partners, and time (measured in decades). [06] To be sure, stabilization forces and occupying forces have different mandates, but the task list has many similarities.

For the occupied peoples, newly occupied space offers both opportunity and catastrophic risk. Before an invader can establish its governing norms and enforce its directed behaviors, the environment is unstructured and, therefore, unpredictable. This environment presents the most difficult decision for a potential resistor—should I stay, or should I go? [07] In occupied Ukraine, Russia employs thorough and brutal filtration methods to detect, detain, or kill resistance actors. Alternately, if resistors displace to a safer haven to avoid filtration, they may find later re-infiltration too difficult.

Figure 2 highlights some components of the newly occupied space in Ukraine. These categories of enemy and friendly acts and actors, when further detailed, reveal the challenges and opportunities that such an environment offers. One such example is Kherson, Ukraine. Occupied in February 2022, the Russians assessed they could govern and suppress, in tandem, enroute to full annexation of Kherson as an oblast (administrative region) of the Russian Federation. The Russian formula failed on two accounts. First, the population was given just enough space to organize and resist Russian occupation, violently and nonviolently. [08] Second, this newly occupied space teetered back into "contested space" when the Ukrainians judged, correctly, that a military operation could dislodge occupying Russian forces. [09] The Ukrainians liberated Kherson from Russian control in November 2022. [10]
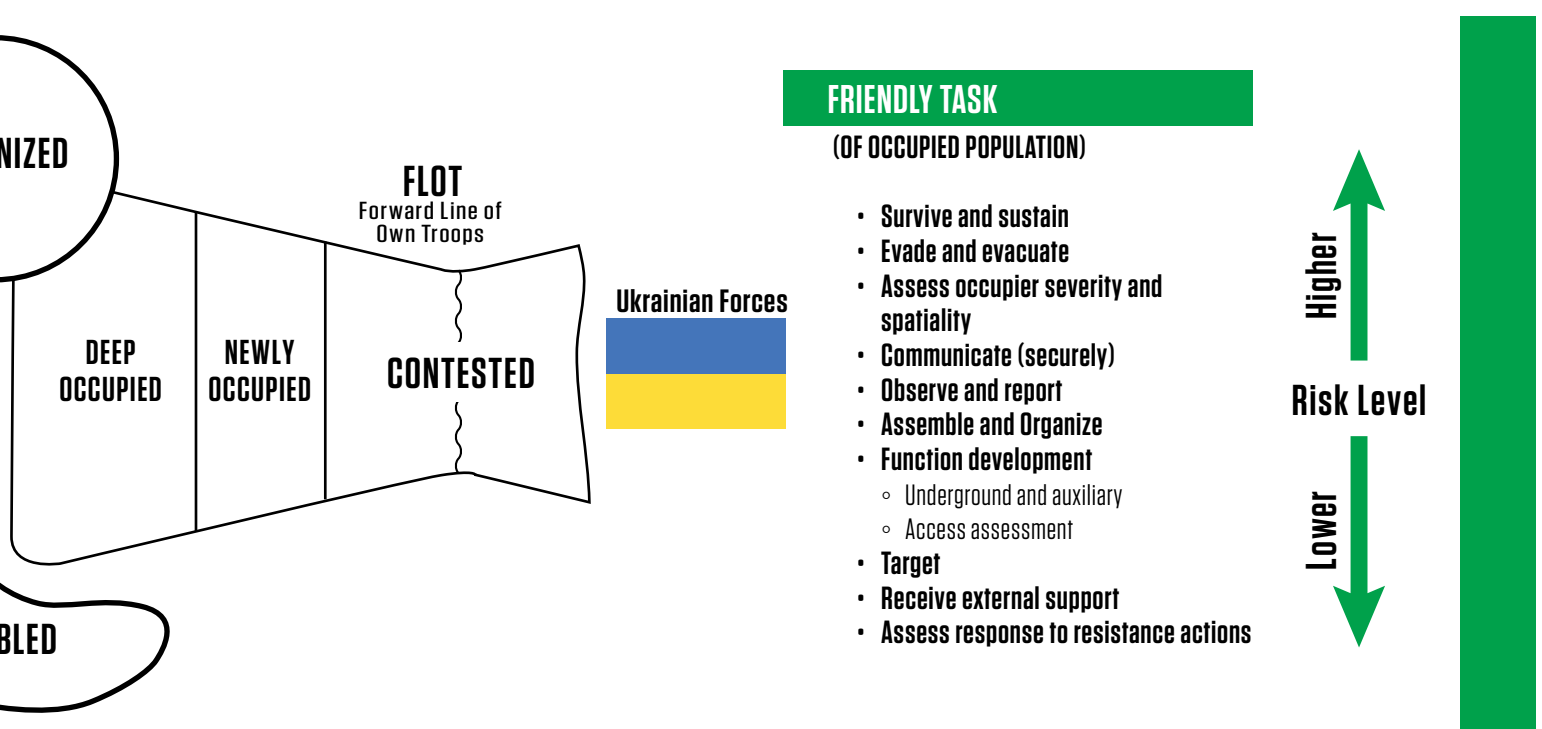


Figure 2: Newly occupation characteristics Russia in Ukraine, 2022 to 2024. By Brian Petit

**ENEMY TASK**

- Regulate and govern
- Rear-area security (Suppress resistance)
- Main effort: Hold Forces

**Enemy Activity Characteristics**
- **Score settling - "green on green"**
- **Establish (criminal) political economy**
- **Operate infrastructure (water, heat, road, etc.)**
- **Information technology functions (cellular, internet, power, etc.)**
- **Shadow government now occupation officials**
- **Military rear area operations (logistics and signal)**
- **Colonize**
  - Passports, currency, language
  - Courts, laws, property, borders
- **Prepare defense for long-term hold**

**COLONIZED**

**Russian Forces**

**DEEP OCCUPIED**

**NEW OCCU[...]**

**RUBBLED**
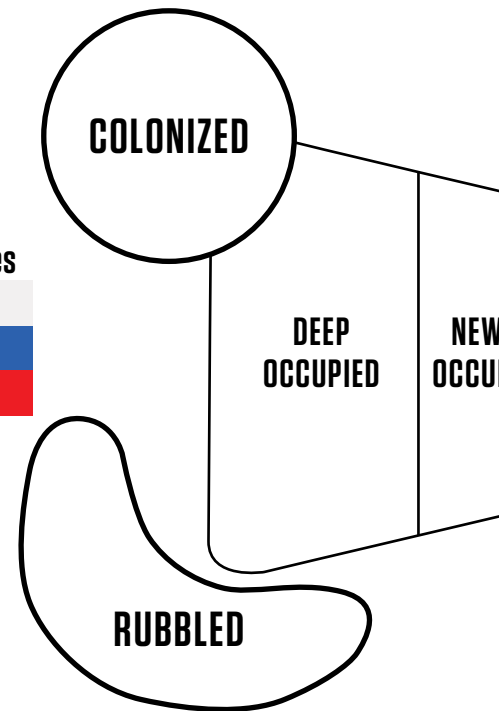
## DEEP OCCUPIED

Deep occupied space (figure 3) combines a challenging geographical distance or formidable physical barrier and a time-under-occupation period that suggests a settling normalization. One example is the Crimean Peninsula in March 2015, one year after the Russians flipped control without the use of large-scale violence. Here, the occupier is past the tipping point where large, surprise counterattacks can occur. Normalizing governance is underway. The occupier confronts an occupied citizenry, who observe the new parameters and are forced to make a choice: flee, accommodate, collaborate, bide time, or resist. After a decade under occupation, Crimea nears a colonized status with full occupier control—willfully and systemically across—social, physical, and governmental domains.

Indicators of deep occupied space include new monetary units, technological infrastructure (internet, cellular towers) installed, social services provided, passports issued, security normalized (police, constabulary), as well as taxation, and education. [11] In newly annexed regions of Ukraine, Russia even changed the clocks, an unsettling signifier that even time itself was subject to occupier control. [12] Russian forces implement these control measures rapidly, often within weeks. Initially, these markers are more a psychological tactic than an exhibition of governing prowess. They are demonstrative signals of a new master and a rearranged order. Such new rules can also divide the population,

as was the case of Ukrainian teachers who faced a stark choice between teaching a Russian curriculum in the Russian language or abandoning their students to some unknown fate. [13] Either choice was fraught with hazard, and otherwise reasonable Ukrainians found themselves in deep, even violent disagreement on this matter.

While deep occupied space suggests a less hospitable environment for resistance, the opposite may be true. Deep occupied space, with its settling normalization and routinization, may be the most fertile ground to conduct resistance operations. This is where the spatial measurements are telling. Deep areas may exist beyond the range of first-person view drones, artillery, and front-line surveillance. A different type of platform exists here: people, technology, communications, mobility, and access. The Ukrainian uptick in partisan, rear-area operations in late 2023 is illustrative. [14] With limited maneuver options available and miles of mine-laden fronts, Ukrainian attacks in rear-areas presented lingering threats for Russians in deeply occupied territory. [15]

## IMPLICATIONS FOR ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

Army special operations forces are uniquely designed, training, and equipped to support resistance movements. Without a proper understanding of the challenges facing our resistance partners, ARSOF risk misadvising on tactics, insufficiently

## FLOT
**Forward Line of Own Troops**

CONTESTED

**Ukrainian Forces**

### FRIENDLY TASK
**(OF OCCUPIED POPULATION)**

- **Survive and sustain**
- **Assess occupation severity and spatiality**
- **Communicate (securely)**
- **Observe and report**
- **Assemble and Organize**
- Function development
  - Underground and auxiliary
  - Access, logistics, safe havens
  - Network development
- **Target and attributed**
  - Violent and non-violent
- **Receive external support**
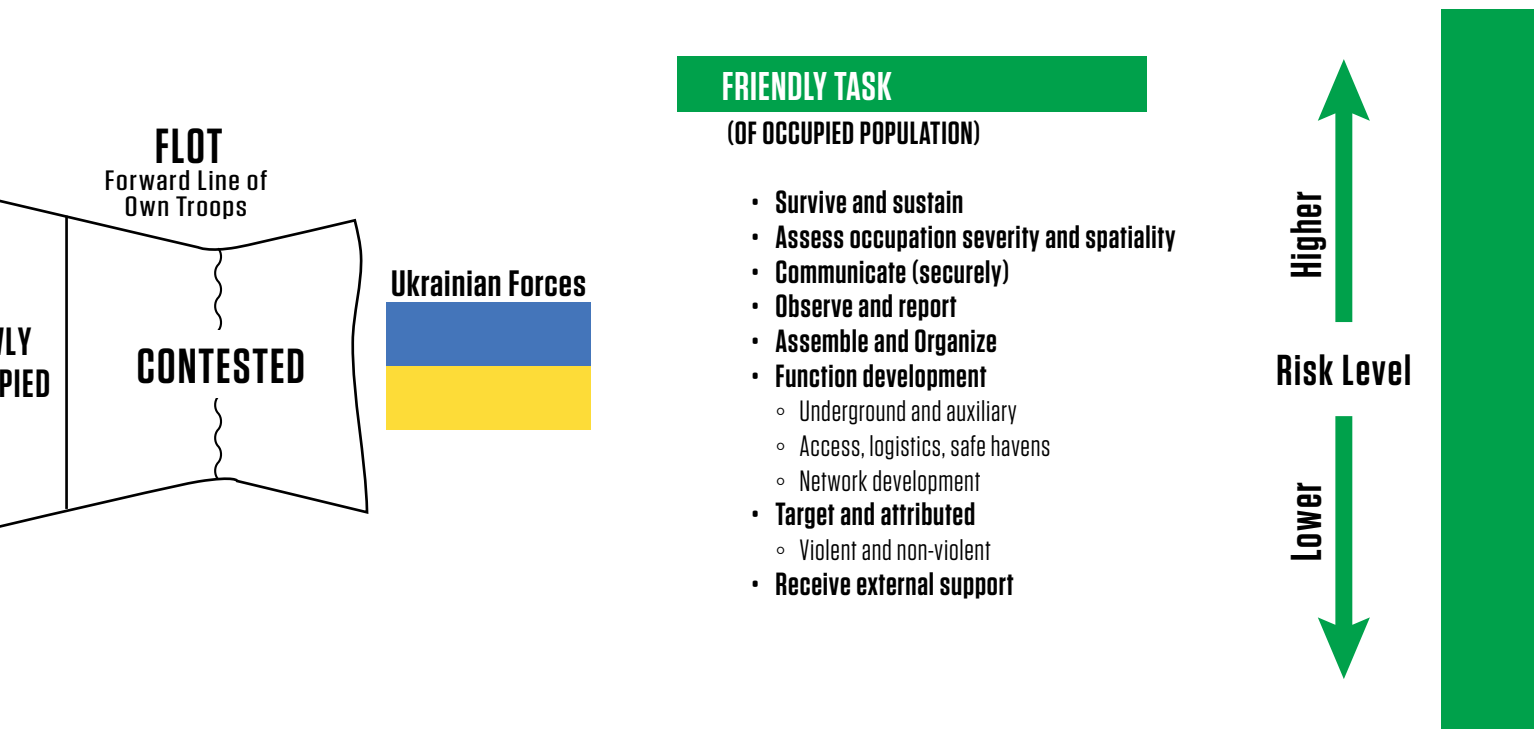
**Higher**

**Risk Level**

**Lower**

Figure 3: Deep occupation characteristics Russia in Ukraine, 2022 to 2024. By Brian Petit

organizing training, or making suboptimal procurement choices. Without regionally focused knowledge, militaries tend to toggle toward their own experiences and biases, as evidenced with the stabilization force challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan. These desert experiences provide insufficient mental models to contemplate how peer competitors occupy.

The counter-occupation mission will continue to present unique challenges for ARSOF in the decades to come. As great powers like Russia and China bring technologically advanced forces, scale, firepower, proxies, and brutality to the equation, a more complete understanding is critical to ARSOF advisory efforts during counter-occupation. The basic model presented in this article is part of the effort to shift the counter-occupation discussion from analyst cubicles to team rooms. In so doing, the force might narrow its knowledge gap, draw on its collective wisdom, and activate the creative minds of up-and-coming ARSOF leaders.

*Brian Petit is a retired U.S. Army Special Forces colonel. He teaches and consults on strategy, planning, special operations, and resistance. He is a part-time adjunct for the Joint Special Operations University.*

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# FM 3-05
## Army Special Operations

Field Manual (FM) 3-05, Army Special Operations, is being revised will soon be populating inboxes to illicit your critique and commentary. This update of Army special operations forces (ARSOF) capstone doctrine will describe the value of the force across all domains and the competition continuum as expressed in the Army's FM 3-0, Operations. FM 3-05 focuses not only on large-scale combat operations, but also offers an irregular approach to the full range of military operations and joint transregional campaigns.

To comprehend the doctrine in FM 3-05, readers must first understand the Army multidomain operations addressed in FM 3-0. In this update, the authors have adopted the Army's tenets, replaced the principles, reduced the number of imperatives while incorporating those of the Army, integrated ARSOF into the Army's operational framework, and elaborated on the roles and functions of ARSOF across the competition continuum.

While the principal audience for FM 3-05 is our commanders, staffs, and their subordinate leaders at the group, battalion, and company level, this manual informs a larger audience across the Army, joint force, and interagency of the merits of ARSOF across the competition continuum. This manual, like our separate branch keystone publications, provides the foundation for training and Army education system curricula and future capabilities development across doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities, and policy (known as DOTMLPF-P).

For specific questions about the staffing of this publication or the particulars on how to introduce changes, please reach out to Mr. David Surles, Joint Army Doctrine Division, at (910) 432-5255 or david.a.surles.civ@socom.mil.

# "WHAT IS IRREGULAR WARFARE TO YOU?"

This edition of Special Warfare Magazine focuses on Irregular Warfare and Large Scale Combat Operations as part of the overall theme for 2024 How ARSOF Fights. Irregular Warfare, a new proponent under the SWCS footprint, is part of the SWCS 2030 Strategy initiative. We asked members from the academic and SOF communities what Irregular Warfare means to them, and this is what they said.

"If we accept 'warfare' as a set of methods employed during conflict to achieve desired outcomes, then 'regular warfare' is comprised of methods that actors employ with generally identifiable formations and weapons against other actors also with recognizable formations. There, one can usually distinguish the good guys from the bad guys. Irregular warfare is different. Actors employ methods to operate among populations to mask their activities, or actors use methods to identify and separate opponents from those populations. IW methods could be used in the physical, informational, or digital domains."

**Col. Ian Rice, Retired**
**U.S. Army Special Forces**

"Irregular Warfare is a strategic tool that presents unique options for policymakers to defend and advance national interests. It involves a combination of lethal and non-lethal actions to exert influence in a broader politico-military campaign. The specific objectives of irregular warfare are not strictly military but vary between classical military ones, gaining political influence, protecting economic interests, and neutralizing specific threats. Thus, irregular warfare is an instrument that policymakers can employ to achieve grand strategic objectives in competition, crisis, and conflict."

**Lt. Col. Ben Gans, PhD**
**Visiting Faculty, The Netherlands**
**Defense Analysis Department, U.S. Naval Postgraduate School**

"Irregular warfare deals more with the art of war than the science of it. Individuals can be educated on irregular warfare and they can take training courses in various important techniques, but mastery of it can only be achieved over time by interacting with partners, competitors, and enemies. Irregular warfare is a thinking-person's game first and foremost. It is the realm in which the weak can defeat the strong, and the moral dethrone the immoral."

**Douglas A. Borer, PhD**
**Executive Director, Global ECCO Project**
**Associate Professor, Department of Defense Analysis,**
**U.S. Naval Postgraduate School**

"Irregular warfare are activities short of conventional war that directly target a country's population with the goal of exploiting divisions within a population, undermining trust between the population and the government, and weakening a country's ability to project power internally and internationally. These activities are often difficult to detect and even more difficult to attribute to an actor, making a response difficult. Irregular warfare is the principal means of strategic competition today because it offsets U.S. conventional capabilities and exploits our conventional ways of preparing for and fighting wars."

**Dr. Heather Gregg, PhD**
**Professor of Irregular Warfare and Hybrid Threats,**
**George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies**

"Irregular warfare is all about the indirect approach. Where I can apply the least amount of combat power to impose the damaging cost on my adversary? Oftentimes, it's not through the military lens, its through another instrument of national power such as economic or information."

**Maj. Kris Levy,**
**Commander Fox Company, 91st Civil Affairs Battalion**
**(Special Operations) (Airborne)**

"To me, Irregular Warfare is the intersection of at least two out of the following: One, special or non-conventional units, working in; Two, non-kinetic domains (human, informational, financial, virtual, etc.), against; or three, asymmetric threats."

**Michael Freeman,**
**Professor, Associate Chair for Instruction,**
**Defense Analysis Department, U.S. Naval Postgraduate School**

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**IRREGULAR WARFARE FORUM IN WASHINGTON, D.C., DECEMBER 2023**

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