INTRODUCTION TO IRREGULAR WARFARE

The Department of the Air Force (DAF) provides essential capabilities to the joint force across the competition continuum and range of operations. This air force doctrine publication (AFDP) provides operational level doctrinal guidance for irregular warfare (IW) and presents fundamental IW principles and core IW activities in the context of challenges to US national security. This AFDP defines IW and highlights the role of Air and Space Force forces in it. The AFDP discusses the main characteristics of IW that should be taken into account when developing IW-related strategy, plans, assessment, and command and control. This AFDP concludes with how Air Force forces are organized, presented, and employed to support IW operations.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Air and Space Force operations are often the same regardless of the type of warfare or category of mission activity. However, Service members should be able to clearly articulate how unique Service capabilities may be applied to create effects useful in an IW context. Generally, the distinction between IW and traditional warfare arises in how capabilities are applied to achieve different ends and how missions have different challenges. For example, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) demands for IW can be different from traditional warfare, requiring distinctive capabilities. Preparing for activities in IW begins with this understanding and shapes perspectives on operational execution.

The speed, range, and flexibility of airpower play a critical role in helping state and non-state actors earn and sustain legitimacy and influence with relevant populations – the primary objective of IW. Airpower can extend reach and bring rapid response and improved situational awareness. These in turn help nations establish the physical and virtual infrastructure essential for internal growth and well-being. Airpower also bolsters all instruments of national power and provides visible, practical, and effective means to consolidate governance and provide for the populace, and allows a nation to:
Provide political leaders immediate, largely unimpeded access to all operational domains (air, land, maritime, space, and cyberspace) to demonstrate governance and legitimacy by delivering goods, services, and humanitarian relief.

Support military and civil ground forces in providing security and rapid response.

Deny adversaries access to ungoverned, under-governed, and remote areas.

Patrol and help secure borders.

Promote civil sector advancement, especially in air, space, and cyberspace infrastructure.

Deter and defeat external aggression.

Inhibit hostile forces from moving openly or in large numbers without fear of detection and attack.

Strengthen internal security.

The term “irregular warfare” evolved from efforts to define those conflicts that manifest in adversarial actions, but typically lack large-force-on-force peer adversary confrontations. Irregular warfare has been an aspect of conflict throughout history and will likely continue in the foreseeable future for two primary reasons: stability challenges due to weakly governed nations, and the prohibitive cost of waging traditional war. In many cases, IW-based strategies are a function of limited capability, and are often the only option available to a weaker force.

In IW, a less powerful adversary seeks to disrupt or negate the military capabilities and advantages of a more powerful military force, which usually serves that nation’s established government. IW can apply between both state and non-state actors and across the competition continuum. Some objectives within the context of state competition might be sought through IW, such as imposing costs, gaining access and freedom of action, gaining support of key allies and partners, enhancing deterrence, or setting the environment. One example could be the conduct of a counterinsurgency between a US partner nation and an insurgent group backed by a state competitor.

Airmen have a history of conducting IW, beginning with the Carpetbagger and Air Commando operations in World War II, soon followed by the use of US Airmen advisors to the Greek government during the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) and to the Philippine government in their suppression of the Hukbalahap Rebellion (1946-1954). The Air Force gained further experience in conducting and supporting IW in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Irregular warfare has dominated the scope of conflict for US forces since 2001. While the focus of US strategy may change, the DAF will remain a key contributor.
to US IW capabilities. Today, our national strategic guidance requires the military to maintain the capability to conduct IW.

Irregular warfare is not a “lesser” form of warfare in terms of sophistication or effectiveness and may be conducted stand-alone, or alongside traditional forms of warfare. The US must maintain the capacity to not only defend against IW operations, but conduct offensive IW operations against enemies ranging from insurgents to peer adversaries across the competition continuum.
This section defines irregular warfare (IW) and describes the scope of IW operations. It also summarizes the unique challenges of IW.

**DEFINING IW AND ITS UNIQUE CHALLENGES**

Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, defines IW as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s).” IW favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will. The key distinctions between IW and traditional warfare are the context and conduct of the conflict, particularly with regard to the population. Traditional warfare regards the population as peripheral to the conflict, whereas IW considers the population as central. Therefore, traditional warfare focuses on coercing an adversary’s key political leaders or defeating an adversary’s military capability. By contrast, IW focuses on a struggle for legitimacy and influence of a relevant population. As a result, IW requires a different level of operational thought and threat comprehension.

IW is a form of warfare that is both different from and complementary to traditional warfare and should not be viewed as a subset form of major operations. Despite this difference, it is important to emphasize that contemporary warfare often combines aspects of both.
Direct IW Operations

The Department of Defense (DOD) distinguishes between direct IW operations conducted by the joint force and indirect IW activities conducted by, with, and through partner nations (PNs) to address mutual interests with the US. Each operation requires a scoping of the activity and should ensure that the proper authorities are delegated.

Direct IW Operations fall under one of the following categories: counterinsurgency (COIN), counterterrorism (CT), foreign internal defense (FID), stability operations, and unconventional warfare (UW). The figure, “Joint Force Irregular Warfare Operations,” displays the five recognized core IW activities as discussed in DOD policy.

**Counterinsurgency** is defined as the comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes. The purpose of an insurgency is to overthrow and replace an established government or societal structure, or to compel a change in behavior or policy by the government or societal structure.

COIN operations require commitments of assets and personnel. The US normally conducts COIN operations when its mutual strategic interests with a PN are at stake and the PN is incapable of conducting any substantial operations, the situation has...
deteriorated significantly (approaching a failed state environment), or when there is no effective government in power (i.e., a failed state).

An insurgency may extend beyond the borders of a single threatened state. Non-state actors such as transnational terrorist and criminal organizations often represent a security threat beyond areas they inhabit. Some pose a direct concern for the US and its partners. Non-state actors often team with insurgents to profit from a conflict. Insurgencies can expand to include local, regional, and global entities. In certain circumstances dictated by law and policy the US may employ forces not only to help defeat an insurgency in a single country, but also to defeat non-state adversaries operating in other countries or ungoverned areas. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction\(^1\) and related dual-use technologies, as well as the ability to affect international commerce, give small, non-state organizations potentially disproportionate capabilities. For more information, see JP 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*.

**Counterterrorism**\(^2\) activities and operations seek to neutralize terrorists and their organizations and networks by rendering them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals. Successful CT necessitates stable, protracted engagement that leads to familiarization with the operating environments and facilitates security and stability for key populations. It requires a coordinated use of the **instruments of national power** to negate the terrorist network’s physical or psychological violence and undermine its power, will, credibility, and legitimacy among the population. Security is of the utmost importance. In its absence, terrorist networks are able to exacerbate or exploit a population’s grievances and gain influence. For more information see JP 3-26, *Joint Combating Terrorism*\(^3\).

**Foreign internal defense** is defined as participation by civilian agencies and military forces of a government or “international organization in any of the programs or activities undertaken by a host nation (HN) government to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, violent extremism, terrorism, and other threats to its security” (JP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*). FID is often conducted in conjunction with COIN, CT, special operations, etc., in support of a PN. However, it is not solely a military function. The diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments of national power are keys to successful FID. **Special operations forces** and general purpose forces both play critical roles in preparing for and executing FID activities to include assessing, advising, training, assisting, and equipping IW partner forces. For more information, see AFDP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*.

**Stability Activities** are various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the US in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, and to provide essential governmental services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief. For more information, see JP 3-07, *Stability*.

\(^{1,2,3}\) Common access card required.
**Unconventional warfare**[^4] is defined as “activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area” (JP 3-05, *Joint Doctrine for Special Operations*[^5]). UW operations can be used to exploit a hostile power’s political, military, economic, and psychological vulnerability by developing and sustaining indigenous resistance forces to accomplish US and coalition strategic objectives. UW can include a broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominantly conducted by, with, and through indigenous or surrogate forces that are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source. It includes, but is not limited to, guerrilla warfare, subversion, sabotage, intelligence activities, and unconventional assisted recovery.

US Special Operations Command is the lead DOD component for UW, although in some cases general purpose forces support is required. UW operations are usually conducted in enemy-held, enemy-controlled, or politically sensitive territory. For more information see JP 3-05, *Joint Doctrine for Special Operations*[^6].

**Indirect IW Activities**

In general, conducting indirect IW by, with, and through partner nations is preferable to conducting direct IW operations. This mostly entails enabling partner nations to conduct effective IW operations.

Under the umbrella of security cooperation programs, the DOD is involved in a variety of activities, as part of the whole of government concept, by, with, and through PNs to build partner capacity and assist with internal defense and development. This may include things such as education, bilateral agreements, and foreign military sales. The DOD is also prepared to employ joint forces in support of executing security assistance initiatives through joint missions in both combat and non-combat environments. The DOD conducts security force assistance (SFA) to provide expertise to support the development of capacity and capability of foreign security forces and other PN governmental institutions.

The US engages with PNs in various activities to support the PN’s government legitimacy and help develop internal defense and development strategies to meet both US and PN objectives.

**Security Cooperation (SC)**[^6] is defined as “All DOD interactions with foreign security establishments to build security relationships that promote specific US security interests, develop allied and partner nation military and security capabilities for self-

[^4]: For official use only; common access card required.
[^5]: For official use only; common access card required.
[^6]: For official use only; common access card required.
defense and multinational operations, and provide United States forces with peacetime and contingency access to allied and partner nations" (JP 3-20, Security Cooperation).

**Security Assistance (SA)** is defined as a "group of programs authorized by the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended; the Arms Export Control Act of 1976, as amended; or other related statutes by which the US provides defense articles, military training, and other defense-related services by grant, lease, loan, credit, or cash sales in furtherance of national policies and objectives, and those that are funded and authorized through the Department of State to be administered by Department of Defense / Defense Security Cooperation Agency are considered part of security cooperation" (JP 3-20). SA fosters interoperability between US forces and our allies. Within applicable legal and policy constraints, Air Force personnel can train and equip friendly foreign forces. Staffs should consider this requirement during planning to ensure appropriate coordination within the joint force. The DOD and other government agencies train foreign militaries and law enforcement personnel through several different programs, some funded by accounts within the DOD budget and others by the Department of State-administered foreign aid budget. SA is designed to help selected countries meet their internal defense needs and to promote sustainable development and growth of responsive institutions. The joint force commander should distinguish between personnel assigned to a combatant command performing a train-and-advise mission and military personnel training host nation forces pursuant to authorities under Title 22, United States Code, Foreign Relations and Intercourse, and who fall under the authority of the country’s Chief of Mission. Those personnel performing a Title 22 security assistance mission, by law, are restricted from performing duties of a combatant nature. If the military personnel are performing a Title 22 security assistance mission of a non-combat nature in a host nation with a security environment akin to a combat zone, the Chief of Mission may delegate or defer the responsibility for force protection to the combatant commander. Iraq is an example where there is a mix of Title 22 foreign military sales cases and Title 10 training occurring simultaneously.

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

**Security Sector Assistance (SSA)**. United States SSA policy is aimed at strengthening the ability of the US to help allies and PNs build their security capacity, consistent with the principles of good governance and rule of law. SSA is mandated by Presidential Policy Directive 23, Security Sector Assistance. SSA refers to the policies, programs, and activities the US uses to:

- Engage with foreign partners and help shape their policies and actions in the security sector.
Help foreign partners build and sustain the capacity and effectiveness of legitimate institutions to provide security, safety, and justice for their people.

Enable foreign partners to contribute to efforts that address common security challenges.

Build PN’s medical capacity and capability to respond and take care of its citizens.

DOD programs should be conducted to achieve four SSA goals:

Help PNs build sustainable capacity to address common security challenges, to disrupt and defeat transnational threats; sustain legitimate and effective public safety, security, and justice sector institutions; support legitimate self-defense; contribute to US or partner military operations which may have urgent requirements; maintain control of their territory and jurisdiction waters including air, land, and sea borders; and help indigenous forces assume greater responsibility for operations where US military forces are present.

Promote partner support for US interests through cooperation on national, regional, and global priorities. Priorities include military access to airspace and basing rights; improved interoperability and training opportunities; cooperation on law enforcement, counterterrorism, counternarcotic, combating organized crime and arms trafficking; countering weapons of mass destruction proliferation, and terrorism; and intelligence, peacekeeping, and humanitarian efforts.

Promote universal values, such as good governance, transparent and accountable oversight of security forces, rule of law, transparency, accountability, delivery of fair and effective justice, and respect for human rights.

Strengthen collective security and multinational defense arrangements and organizations, including helping to build the capacity of troop- and police-contributing nations to United Nations and other multilateral peacekeeping missions, as well as through regional exercises, expert exchanges, and coordination of regional intelligence and law enforcement information exchanges.

Security Force Assistance (SFA) is defined as “the DOD activities that support the development of the capacity and capability of FSF [foreign security forces] and their supporting institutions” (JP 3-20) SFA is conducted to assist PNs in their efforts to defend against transnational and internal threats to stability. SFA spans the range of military operations and includes military engagement, security cooperation, crisis response, and contingency operations. It can even be accomplished during major operations and campaigns in support of US national strategic objectives. SFA should be closely coordinated with relevant US Government agencies. FID and SFA are similar at the tactical level, where advisory skills are applicable to both. At the operational and
strategic levels, both FID and SFA focus on preparing foreign security forces (FSF) to combat lawlessness, subversion, insurgency, terrorism, and other internal threats to their security. However, SFA also prepares FSF to defend against external threats and to perform as part of an international force. For more information see JP 3-20, Security Cooperation, and JP 3-22, Foreign Internal Defense.
Every irregular warfare (IW) engagement is unique to each situation and requires a unique strategy. Each scenario requires a balance of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic instruments to achieve national objectives. IW strategies should enhance and protect a partner nation (PN) and the US’s legitimacy and influence, while eroding an adversary’s legitimacy.

The conduct of IW demands a thorough understanding of the operational environment and the human terrain. It is essential to understand the geopolitical environment in the PN and region in question thoroughly. Factors range from basing locations and regional environmental concerns to the political climate of the host nation, PNs, and surrounding states. They also include the influence of the adversary among both the PN government and the local population. Planners should consider the human aspect of military operations.

One of the primary ways to influence a relevant population when supporting a PN is to identify, assess, and resolve underlying grievances. If the PN’s government fails to address grievances perceived by the population in a timely manner, the population will continue to be disaffected. Alienated factions within a population erode support for a legitimate government and may become motivated to provide support to an insurgency operating among the general population. An external adversary may attempt to fill the void left by a government that does not adequately address the population’s grievances.

Planners should consider the constructive effects that air and space forces enable to contain or prevent irregular challenges. Outright defeat of enemy forces is very difficult in IW. Strategists and planners should use airpower to isolate the adversary from the populace, and enhance the relationship between the friendly partner and the populace.

Finally, any strategy should account for the fact that the population may not be homogeneous in all areas of the PN. Cultural, geographical, religious, and economic differences within a state or region may motivate different parts of the population
differently. Thus, different strategies may be needed within a single operation to achieve US and joint force objectives.

OPERATIONAL DESIGN AND PLANNING

A Whole of Government Effort

IW activities are often part of the Department of Defense's (DOD) contribution to a broad whole-of-government approach in competition short of armed conflict or to assist partner nations in pursuit of the national strategy. Within the competition continuum, many activities will not have the DOD as the lead agency; therefore, IW strategy and planning should complement the whole-of-government effort. Unified action that includes all relevant agencies (US Government, PN, multinational, and nongovernmental) leverages skill sets and capabilities not resident in the armed forces and is essential for successfully dealing with IW challenges. Effective working relationships between the interagency and the military have repeatedly proven key to DOD’s success in IW.

Indirect IW activities may include Department of State funded activities administered by the DOD and occurs in close cooperation and coordination with other government agencies. Numerous laws and policies must be adhered to when drafting indirect IW strategy and plans to assist PN in building capacity and capabilities. For example, many of the congressional authorities tied to relevant funding often have restrictions on both how the funding is used and for how long it can be used. In addition, there are often restrictions on what technology and capabilities can be shared with PN. In terms of developing a planning timeframe, gaining approval can often take significant time. See JP 3-20, Security Cooperation, for further information.

Long-term, Persistent Political and Military Commitment

The protracted approach that adversaries may use in IW requires a long-term strategy to achieve continuing advantage. Winning a protracted conflict requires winning the struggle of ideas, undermining the legitimacy of a competing ideology, addressing grievances perceived by the population to be valid, reducing an enemy’s influence, and depriving the enemy of the support of the people. It requires a “crawl, walk, run” mentality when developing PN infrastructure and security. IW requires patience and adaptation. This has a significant impact on personnel rotations, equipment wear and tear, and the impact on training and education early in the design process.

Persistence is intrinsic to effective IW strategy, planning, and operations. The joint force should use its long-term regional engagement strategy to shape the operational environment and influence adversaries. Episodic short-duration deployments to at-risk states may be an inadequate operational approach, because the short-term results of these deployments may be overcome by adversary countermeasures and by the inertia
that is common in failed and failing states. Continuity of effort hinges upon the ability of joint force members to establish and maintain long-term interpersonal relationships with their counterparts in US missions and with foreign governments, traditional political authorities, and security forces. The effect of IW strategy and plans may not be readily apparent, requiring years and even decades before tangible results are evident and can be assessed.

Planners should be sensitive to the political, and fiscal realities on both sides that may cause engagement to be episodic. Where appropriate, Airmen should attempt to apply vision and advocacy as a counterforce. Episodic engagement often is insufficient to lead to lasting change or capability development. Individual episodes of capacity building often rapidly decay as individuals leave, focus shifts, authorities expire, or there is a lack of a supporting framework of training and evaluation. Interpersonal trust and cultural, political, and bureaucratic complexities often require significant time to understand to be effective.

**IW Planning Process**

IW is conducted throughout the competition continuum. This presents a challenge to the IW planner because the joint planning process has significant differences on either end of this continuum. For steady-state operations, the planning construct at the operational level includes campaign plans and subordinate posture plans, regional plans, and individual country plans. For contingency planning, the construct includes operation plans and orders, concept plans, base plans, and commander's estimates. Within the Air Force component, the IW planner should mirror the planning construct used by the respective combatant command, either steady-state or contingency. It is imperative that the IW planner is represented in the combatant command's strategy development and planning processes, ensuring Air Force capabilities are incorporated into the joint plan from the initial stages.

Air and Space Force forces should be prepared to conduct irregular and traditional warfare operations simultaneously. The nature of a single conflict can easily shift between types of warfare. Failure to understand or anticipate shifts often leads to fighting the wrong type of conflict, or focusing on the wrong effects for a given conflict. IW and traditional warfare are not mutually exclusive, and both are often present in the same conflict. Service forces designed for conventional combat have the added advantage of creating theater deterrence effects when used in IW roles. While these assets may often have capabilities in excess of the specific requirements for IW, they can limit the nature and amount of third party interference with the IW partner. Finding a critical balance in capabilities is essential to overall success in both types of conflicts.
If the combatant commander uses a campaign plan to address IW activities, the Air Force forces (AFFOR) staff (typically the A5) leads component planning that results in a component campaign support plan and individual country plans. The air operations center (AOC) should support the AFFOR staff in this effort. If the combatant commander uses a contingency planning construct, the AOC (typically the strategy division) normally leads component planning that results in a joint air operations plan. The AFFOR staff supports this planning effort, as only the AFFOR staff can complete the plan with respect to administrative control and Service-unique responsibilities.

**Long-Term Political and Military Commitments**

Long-term commitments often consist of efforts to increase partnership capacity by building or rebuilding infrastructure. Airmen can positively affect construction and reconstruction efforts, create government legitimacy, and reinforce citizenship principles by involving the local population during all aspects of the building or rebuilding process. It is important that construction efforts intended for use by the local population are planned, designed, and constructed by local nationals. Regional building standards should be accompanied by long-term maintenance plans that do not include external financial or technical aid for maintenance or operations.

- Infrastructure Training & Advisory Team, Southern Afghanistan

**Command and Control (C2) Relationships**

It is important for the air component commander and staff to understand some unique considerations in the conduct of IW. Application of the airpower tenet of centralized control and decentralized execution is accomplished at subordinate levels to support decentralized execution. It is vital to engage with the PN population; therefore, several small forward operating locations may be required. It is common for many of these bases to be operated by other Services with collocated Air Force elements. In such situations, the air component commander should take special care to ensure proper administrative control support for Airmen attached to, or collocated with, non-Air Force organizations.
IW Mission Analysis
Considerations

Many planning considerations in IW are the same as those associated with traditional warfare. Some considerations, though not unique to IW, have a greater impact during IW activities. As operations in IW are very population-centric, planners should consider objectives through the lens of the PN and the adversary, not only that of the US. Mirror imaging, i.e., projecting one’s own attitudes, beliefs, cultural mores, and ideologies on the adversary and local populace, is a common mistake in planning. Mirror-imaging and “templating” ignore the fact that actions based on Western ideologies may have dramatically different results than are intended when employed among non-Western populations. An example might also include superimposing doctrinal models while building partner military capabilities. Hierarchy and communication structures may not apply to different cultures.

During planning, consider that tactical actions and decisions may have strategic consequences in IW scenarios even more than in traditional war. For example, civilian casualties caused by air attack often garner more media attention than do equivalent casualties caused by ground weapons (like small arms and mortars). Since the relevant populations are normally a center of gravity in IW operations, such collateral casualties may reduce US influence and legitimacy among relevant populations, thus impeding rather than aiding achievement of desired end states. This result is contrary to most desired objectives in IW, and should be avoided if possible. Robust and integrated information operations (IO) are essential to mitigate these pitfalls. Poorly executed IO can exacerbate the situation.

Focus on Stability

A key aspect of earning legitimacy from the population is the ability of a PN to achieve and maintain stability. The legitimate local government, the US Government, and international agencies, as well as nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations cannot effectively work in an area until it is secure. If a national government is weak, corrupt, or incompetent, or if the governing authority is absent, a triggering shock can exacerbate an already difficult situation. This shock can produce widespread suffering, grow popular dissatisfaction, and result in civil unrest—all of which can be intensified by several interrelated factors. The absence of key government
functions, competing ideologies, widespread lawlessness, poor economic performance, pronounced economic disparities, and in some cases, a serious external threat, all influence the strategic context of any operation. In the specific case of unconventional warfare (UW), the external supporters of insurgent forces may create or leverage instability as a means to delegitimize and demoralize a government or occupying power with a goal of disrupting, defeating, or overthrowing it.

**Unconventional Warfare**

Most IW from the US perspective is conducted in support of a PN against common IW adversaries such as insurgents or terrorists operating within that nation. However, sometimes IW is conducted against or within a non-cooperative state. Traditionally, this has been accomplished with special operations forces (SOF) conducting UW to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow the non-cooperative state through or with an underground auxiliary, or a guerilla force in a denied area. While UW has been a traditional core mission of SOF, the use of conventional forces in UW is possible. This will require extensive coordination between SOF and conventional forces. In addition, UW has traditionally confined itself to operations against a single hostile state or occupying power. Many of the activities take place either within the hostile or occupied state or in neighboring countries that either directly or tacitly supported efforts against the hostile state. This construct is changing as non-cooperative states have increasing global connections and interests. The increasingly trans-regional nature of IW may require joint forces to act against an adversary’s vital interests that may reside outside traditional borders.

**Failed or Under-Governed States**

Conducting IW against non-state adversaries operating within failed states poses several unique challenges. Denied or non-governed areas may provide potential sanctuary for transnational terrorist networks and other non-state adversaries. These areas may be under the direct control of insurgents. If the failed state has a nuclear weapon or other chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear program, Air and Space Force capabilities may be critical to support US efforts to control, defeat, disable, or dispose of the program. In some cases, US personnel may find themselves in austere locations in underdeveloped countries. Furthermore, the locations from which they will work and live may not provide adequate security, health standards, and communication infrastructure. There may be a degree of lawlessness and disorder.

**Partner Nation Fragmentation**

Nations susceptible to subversion, lawlessness, insurgency, terrorism, and other threats to their security may be characterized by various forms of social, economic, and political fragmentation and by a lack of a unifying national identity within population

---

7 Common access card required.
groups who resist or are denied integration into the national community. Some factors which contribute to this fragmentation include religion, political and ethnic alienation, separatism, lack of accessibility to government resources by certain groups, poor income distribution among social classes, poor economic opportunities, and disenfranchisement or lack of other political rights. Situations most likely to involve Air Force IW activities are prevalent in developing nations where public services, industrial infrastructures, and aviation infrastructure are relatively undeveloped by Western standards. For additional information, see AFDP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*.

**Operational Capabilities**

**Operating From Remote Locations**

Airpower's speed and flexibility allow US forces to surmount many geographic hurdles. However, in IW, proper operating locations are paramount to enable the reach and capacity in order to achieve the objectives and present the air component commander with the best access and engagement opportunities. The decentralized nature of operations is particularly challenging as the air component commander provides critical support to both air and surface forces throughout the theater. For example, air mobility and combat support may enable the joint force to maintain and sustain their forward operating sites when overland resupply is not practical due to geographic constraints or enemy surface threats.

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

Major environmental factors affecting planning and execution include physical and psychological pressures from hostile elements, exposure to extensive human suffering, social fragmentation, political instability, and economic impoverishment. Difficult terrain, physical isolation of population groups, and poorly developed infrastructures often impede counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations.

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

**IW Airpower Operations across the Competition Continuum**

Airpower in IW can leverage effects outside of combat operations. Effects of airpower can include infrastructure construction that enable essential services and corresponding jobs for a population. Food, water, shelter, medical, justice, and policing capabilities enhance legitimacy. Personnel should proactively advocate and highlight airpower’s contribution to these goals early in operational design and joint planning. Humanitarian aspects of military operations can also be important in any operation; they form an essential and sometimes primary arsenal of airpower effects in IW. For example, medical engagements may enhance access and expand the PN government’s sphere of influence within its borders. Addressing a PN’s medical capacity and capability to respond and take care of its citizen builds the government’s and institution’s legitimacy.

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

All operations should be integrated to promote governmental legitimacy. Most actions regardless of the actor have an impact on the information environment, therefore a whole-of-government approach is essential. This ensures that the cumulative psychological effect of operations works towards defeating the ideologies of a government’s opponents and does not send conflicting messages to the populace or fuel the adversary’s disinformation and propaganda operations.

**Aviation Enterprise Development**

Assisting partner nations in building capability and capacity can achieve operational and tactical success. However, developing the aviation enterprise of partner nations can be significant from a strategic perspective.

While the Services do not lead US Government efforts and decisions concerning global aviation enterprise development, they do have a stake in them. The Services help enable PNs to effectively address mutual national interests as well as gain access to capabilities needed to conduct operations in support of US national interests. Service aid also helps shape the global environment into the future. Therefore, when personnel
plan and execute strategy and operations related to IW, they should keep these strategic viewpoints in mind and advocate this perspective to ensure:

- PNs have the aviation resources to achieve internal security and to contribute to regional stability.
- The international community can effectively respond to crises anywhere in the world.
- The global aviation enterprise is safely operated, secure, and well-supported.
- The US becomes the aviation security partner of choice to nations with emerging aviation enterprises whose stability against irregular threats supports US national security interests.

**IW Assessment**

**Assessment** involves evaluating the integrated effects of the IW operation, the impact on various adversaries, the requirements for subsequent operations, and the influence IW activities are having on relevant populations. These tasks include collecting information and conducting assessment of operational effectiveness to update situational understanding and adjust future planning activities. The desired objective is to be able to measure progress toward mission accomplishment and use the results to adjust actions accordingly.

Local commanders within the operational area should continually assess employment and support activities to determine the effects and implications of their actions while nesting within the JFC’s overall intent. The ambiguities resident within IW require frequent adjustment of operational plans to ensure desired effects are achieved while avoiding specifically designated or unintended negative consequences.

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

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

Lessons learned have proven operational effectiveness can be very difficult to measure; thus, feedback through a strong operations assessment and lessons learned process is essential to strategic success. Complex localized conditions and issues require an adaptive strategy and assessment process. Measuring lethal and non-lethal effects in an operation is challenging. Determining which operations are effective and modifying those that are not is critical to adjusting strategy. As part of the assessment process, Airmen and other US military members should bear in mind the long-term implications of their experiences. They should document and share significant lessons and best practices that could be useful to future planners, operators, and decision makers (for example, using tools such as the Global Theater Security Cooperation Management System and Joint Lessons Learned Information System).

8,9 Common access card required.
The Department of the Air Force (DAF) executes many functions in irregular warfare (IW). Planners should consider available capabilities and best practices when developing IW plans for the air component commander, either as a joint force air component commander (JFACC) during contingencies, or as a commander, Air Force Forces (COMAFFOR) to a combatant commander when designing and planning steady-state theater strategy.

Appreciating Airpower’s Reach

Airpower is more than dropping bombs, strafing targets, firing missiles, providing precision navigation and timing, or protecting networks. It is also a way of influencing world situations in ways which support national objectives.... Through careful building of partnerships, Air Force forces can favorably shape the strategic environment by assessing, advising, training, and assisting host nation air forces in their efforts to counter internal or external threats.

Volume 1, Basic Doctrine
DAF CAPABILITIES

The Services should assume that a partner nation (PN) cannot always independently execute military operations when US interests are at stake, yet avoid unilateral operations wherever possible. DAF asymmetric IW capability lies with collaboration. Relationships, cultural understanding, and the ability to integrate capabilities with other military and non-military organizations are key for success.

Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

IW is a very complex and dynamic environment that requires an adaptive and dedicated intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) force. ISR operations in IW differ from those in traditional warfare. In IW, ISR often seeks small, dispersed, concealed targets versus large targets in the open. Successful prosecution of such targets, as well as self-defense and force protection, is significantly improved through the application of advanced ISR technologies. ISR relies heavily on human intelligence (HUMINT) and counterintelligence (CI) collection operations as PN personnel can more readily engage the population, survey and help to shape the human terrain, and collect information about the adversary. Air Force HUMINT personnel or linguists with the appropriate language abilities may be available for use, however, the air component commander should employ PN assets first. Other Services/agencies may have available HUMINT elements as well. Identifying, finding, and separating individual adversaries and networks from the general population is difficult in counterinsurgency (COIN) and counterterrorism. Air Force Office of Special Investigation personnel can aid ISR operations in this effort through CI activities intended to find, fix, and track adversaries. In addition, depending on the location nature of the target, the desired effects are often non-kinetic in nature.

ISR operations, target development, and an understanding of the socioeconomic principles by ISR personnel and commanders provide the Services with the best opportunities to successfully achieve appropriate effects. Joint intelligence preparation of the operational environment builds understanding of political, military, economic, social, information, and infrastructure systems, as well as the cultural factors in a conflict that enable friendly forces to target for specific effects within the operational environment. Intelligence products should provide the commander with the fullest possible understanding of all entities involved in the conflict. Near-real time ISR and precision location also help build commanders’ situational awareness even if they are not used directly in targeting. When working with the IW partner, effective ISR is a critically important tool.

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

The Joint Force heavily leverages the DAF capabilities to develop the target sets. ISR assets and analysts are vital in identifying enemy capabilities, centers of gravity, and command and control (C2). An important factor in IW is managing the social, political, and economic consequences of operations as well as minimizing traditional collateral damage. For every action, there will be a reaction, and often in IW the local populace’s reaction may seem irrational or unwarranted. Planners should closely examine cause and effect relationships of operations. Failing to anticipate popular perceptions or the potential effects of enemy propaganda can turn a successful mission into a strategic setback because of the loss of popular support (both in the area of responsibility [AOR] and possibly at home).

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

**Strike Planning**

Strike planning includes the full spectrum of capabilities that can be brought to bear to precisely achieve effects in support of the desired end state. Since IW is a struggle for the population’s allegiance, the effect of any engagement on the population should be carefully considered. In determining the appropriate capability to create the desired effect, planners should look at effect, duration, and consequences to ensure direct and
longer-term indirect effects are anticipated. Targeting opportunities, when they emerge, may be time sensitive, and collateral damage restrictions can be challenging.

Strike planning has unique considerations in IW scenarios. A primary objective for the US and PN during COIN, for example, is to restore the rule of law. A second-order effect of executing strike operations is that they remind the population that this objective has not been achieved. There is potential for collateral damage from any weapon. If US forces conduct the strike, there may be the perception that the PN government is dependent for its survival on foreign forces. Combined, these may have the indirect effect of delegitimizing the PN government in the public’s perception. Nevertheless, strike operations have a place in COIN, since the ability to hold targets at risk throughout the operational area helps the US and PN set the tempo of operations and seize the initiative from insurgent forces. The precision and lethality of airpower often provide the most discriminating application of firepower to COIN forces.

**Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (Strike Operations)**

On 26 March 2006, an Air Force combat controller attached to a US Army Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha team in Afghanistan orchestrated one of numerous examples of a successful joint air-ground operation in support of the Afghan National Army. Shortly into their mission, the team made contact with a large enemy force and rapidly assessed that they were surrounded on three sides by up to one hundred anti-coalition militants. While taking heavy and accurate enemy fire, the combat controller made radio contact with numerous aircraft and quickly talked them onto enemy positions and directed precise air strikes that enabled the team to break contact. Over the next six hours, the combat controller requested, integrated, and controlled A-10, B-52, AH-64, CH-47, and MQ-1 aircraft in support of the Afghan National Army and special operations mission. The professionalism and expertise of an embedded Airman and the precision and lethality of airpower, turned a potentially devastating blow to a maturing Afghan National Army unit into a tactical success.

Strike planning should employ PN airpower resources to the greatest extent possible. Teams of DAF experts, ranging from planning liaisons to tactical operations personnel, offer potential for PN unilateral and US-PN combined actions against high-value targets. Use of these options serves to enhance the legitimacy of the PN government while achieving important US security objectives. Just as in traditional warfare, attacks on key nodes usually reap greater benefits than attacks on dispersed individual targets. For this reason, effective strike operations are inextricably tied to the availability of persistent ISR, and are the result of detailed target systems analysis that identifies and fully characterizes the targets of interest (networks, people, objects, and entities).
Persistence in IW is critical since there is little to no notice for target opportunities. IW planners may want to consider more use of airborne alert than they would during traditional operations.

**Information Operations (IO)**

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

The rapid flow of information from news, blogs, social networking, and text messaging has changed the world. The ability of social networks in cyberspace to incite popular support, organize protests, and spread ideology is not limited by geography or time. The continued proliferation of information technology assets, especially mobile platforms, have profound implications for US forces and PNs during IW operations. Commanders at all levels should consider the ability of neutral and hostile forces to shape the battlespace due to the speed, availability, and low access barriers to information pathways.

It is vital to keep in mind the importance of IO across all phases of an IW operation. IO should be the supported capability during shaping and deterrence activities, as well as during stability and support actions. IO can be used to bolster the legitimacy not only of US actions, but of the PN government that is engaged in the conflict as well. Through the integration of information capabilities and activities, the US can aid the PN in establishing internal security, defending from external aggression, and building partnerships within the region. HUMINT and CI activities are key to IO in support of IW, particularly in planning and executing military information support operations, perception management, and public affairs, especially since the enemy can conduct IO as part of their strategy.
During Operation ALLIED FORCE (OAF), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) recognized the need to counter Serbian propaganda apparatus. The Serbians were using a radio relay station next to St Mark’s Cathedral in Belgrade to pass propaganda within Serbia and neighboring countries.

NATO used a kinetic option to destroy the relay station in order to deny the Serbians the use of this asset for propaganda.

As seen in the images below, precision bombing resulted in a tactical success; however, it was also successfully exploited by Serbian propaganda. The kinetic option caused civilian casualties and within three hours the relay station was operational and feeding the Serbian propaganda machine.

Allegations concerning the legality of the strike were considered by the Prosecutor to the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY), who established a committee to assess the allegations. The Committee ultimately recommended that the Prosecutor not commence an investigation into the strike.

From an IW IO perspective, the kinetic option employed caused the US and NATO operational and strategic harm, and required significant diplomatic efforts with the ICTY.

-- Various Sources
Conventional Forces Supporting IW Operations

At the JFC’s direction, the DAF forces may engage in combat operations to meet PN and US objectives. Supporting a PN’s IW efforts will likely present limitations and constraints not often found in traditional warfare. The need to maintain the PN’s legitimacy and its leadership role in IW may result in less efficient employment of airpower, but should ultimately be more effective (e.g., flying more sorties using PN capability rather than one US sortie). Support to IW will most likely be a long-term commitment and require a sustainable operations tempo as well as the appropriate force requirements. The air component commander should consider the effect of sustained operations on assets and personnel. Force rotation plans should be coordinated and understood between both organizations. The level of effort may change as the conflict evolves requiring the ability to surge when and where required. Understanding that the nature of the conflict may change several times requires planners to continually rely on feedback and assessment in order to shape operations and modify existing plans.

When an IW partner is incapable of countering the threat, the air and space capabilities may be tasked to provide direct support that does not commit US personnel to combat. Such support encompasses Service-funded activities that improve PN effectiveness without duplicating or replacing efforts to create or maintain PN capabilities. Support activities should emphasize the PN’s combat role. These support activities may include:

- **Command and control**—create a tailored air operations center-like capability that integrates PN capabilities and leadership.
- **Communications**—open channels to use communications assets.
- **Positioning, navigation, and timing aids**—provide equipment and training.
- **Intelligence collection and analysis**.
- **Geospatial intelligence and cartography**—ensure National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) products are available to PN.
- **Air mobility** and logistics—provide training and fly in conjunction with PN forces.
- **Logistics support**—provide theater experts and reachback to US logistics pipeline.
- **Civil-military operations**—civil affairs, IO, and humanitarian and civic assistance.
- **Medical operations**.
- **Security operations**.
Combat Support

Combat support operations in IW may be designed to support US-only or multinational operations, and enable PN airpower capabilities against irregular threats. Combat sustainment of forces entails transporting materiel, supplies, and personnel to reinforce units engaged in combat within the operational area. Combat support may transition from a Service support role to the primary application of military force. The complexity and unpredictability of IW operations and activities present challenges to commanders, who should consider the different risks associated with employing combat support in IW:

- Operating in austere environments with limited infrastructure.
- Increased combat readiness for surviving and operating in increased threat environments to include chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear environments.
- Increased security requirements.
- Extended logistical lines.
- Communications limitations.
- Multiple distributed operations.
- Medical operations.

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

Partner Nation Support with Air Mobility

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

Specifically trained airlift forces provide airland delivery and airdrop support to special operations. Since there are a limited number of airlift assets dedicated to this mission, the principle of economy of force is particularly important. When performing these missions, airlift crews normally act as integral members of a team.

US air advisors train with Djiboutian airmen, gaining key airlift and air transportation capabilities.
larger joint package. Because these missions routinely operate under austere conditions in hostile environments, extensive planning, coordination, and training are required to minimize risk. Airlift used in a special operations role provides commanders the capability to create specific effects, which may not be attainable through traditional airlift practices. Commanders may also consider using indigenous aviation forces to support special operations forces in hostile or denied territory with air mobility and resupply, insertion and extraction, casualty evacuation, personnel recovery, ISR, and close air support (CAS). However, commanders should also consider the capabilities, proficiency and sustainability of the PN air force, as well as adversary threats, when determining the appropriate assets to employ. Indigenous capabilities should be responsive to asymmetric or irregular threats and circumstances. Indigenous forces also benefit from the ability to be resupplied or evacuated to receive medical care. This can have a very positive effect on their morale as well as help legitimize the PN government among its own forces. For additional information, see AFDP 3-17, Air Mobility Operations; AFDP 3-05, Special Operations; and AFDP 3-22, Foreign Internal Defense.

TRAINING, ADVISING AND ASSISTING PARTNERS

Aviation Foreign Internal Defense

Although the US aviation role in foreign internal defense (FID) can be extensive, the term aviation FID (AvFID) generally refers to DOD programs for assessing, training, advising, and assisting PN aviation forces in the sustained use of airpower to help their governments deal with internal threats. FID is no longer a special operations force (SOF)-only or predominant arena. Security Force Assistance authorities are another means through which this can be accomplished. General purpose force (GPF) Service members as well as Air Force special operations forces (AFSOF) conduct the AvFID mission function. This mission area delivers GPF air advisors and SOF combat aviation advisor capabilities with specific skill sets necessary to assess, train, advise, assist, and equip PN forces to sustain an aviation force capable of military operations. For more information on AFSOF IW capabilities, refer to AFDP 3-22, Foreign Internal Defense.

National Guard State Partnerships

The National Guard Bureau’s State Partnership Program has developed partnerships between nearly every state’s Guard Bureau (including Air National Guard units) and one or more nations throughout the world. State Partnership Program events are often
subject-matter exchanges, demonstrations of capabilities, or senior leader visits, usually involving the following areas:

- Disaster management and disaster relief activities.
- Military education.
- Noncommissioned officer development.
- Command and control.
- Border operations.
- Military medicine.
- Port security.
- Search and rescue.
- Military justice.

**Air Advisors**

Air advisors are personnel who communicate professional knowledge and skills to PN aviation personnel in order to improve PN airpower capabilities. Air advising is comprised of five core functions: assess, train, advise, assist, and equip. These activities are conducted “by, with, and through” the PN counterpart and can be accomplished at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. While these functions can be performed across the range of operations, they are often used to help shape the environment and deter future aggression. Air advising has historically been associated with SOF conducting aviation FID. As IW scenarios have become more common in Iraq and Afghanistan, the demand on SOF assets has significantly increased, and conventional forces (CF) are more frequently used as air advisors. In addition to full-
time air advisors, the DAF employs numerous personnel to perform the five air advising activities on a part-time or as needed basis. Combat aviation advisors (CAAs) are responsible for the conduct of special operations activities by, with, and through foreign aviation forces. They are a standing Air Force Special Operations Command force organized, trained, and equipped to conduct FID, unconventional warfare (UW), and security force assistance. In addition to maintaining the ability to assess, advise, train, assist, and accompany foreign aviation forces, CAAs specialize in integrating partnered aviation capabilities into larger special operations and conventional efforts. Specifically, CAA units are tasked with maintaining expertise in the application of SOF mobility, ISR, light strike, and combat support functions. These personnel are deployed to nations as part of mobile training teams, extended training service specialists, etc. For further information and C2 specifics on SOF CAAs and CF air advisors, see AFDP 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense* and Air Force Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures 3-4.5, *Air Advising*.10

**AFSOF CONSIDERATIONS**

Before the attacks of 9/11, SOF and GPF normally operated in separate operational areas independent of one another. The Global War on Terror and associated IW activities expanded, demanding more than SOF was capable of supporting. SOF and GPF found themselves operating in close proximity, increasingly dependent upon each other for mutual support. To achieve mission success, SOF and GPF should continue to pursue interoperability, integrate operations when able, and provide mutual support when required. While both the commander, Air Force special operations air component, and the COMAFFOR are responsible for supporting the theater security cooperation planning efforts through their respective components, the joint special operations air component commander and the JFACC should continue to cooperate to achieve specific theater operational objectives.

10 For Official Use Only; common access card required.
AFSOF Capabilities

AFSOF are prepared to deliver SOF airpower capabilities across the competition continuum in support of joint operations. Because of inherent capabilities, characteristics, and specialized training, SOF are ideally suited to participate in US efforts to counter IW adversaries and threats and to conduct operations which promote stability and security.

ISR

Historically, IW efforts have proven to be ISR-intensive. AFSOF ISR capabilities focus on adversary “pattern of life” activities which provide critical intelligence for IW requirements.

Specialized Mobility

AFSOF specialized mobility personnel and assets provide essential movement of US and PN forces to remote and austere locations characterized by poor infrastructure and unimproved landing zones. AFSOF aircrews can also conduct personnel recovery operations. Certain aircrews are specially trained to support UW operations and support.

Precision Strike

AFSOF manned and unmanned precision strike capabilities are particularly suited to conduct discreet and precise strikes with limited collateral damage. When required, AFSOF assets can conduct operations in urban environments.

Special Tactics Teams

Special tactics teams (STT) can be called upon to assist when the US Government wants to limit US ground personnel but is willing to place joint terminal attack controllers forward to direct US airpower. STT can also be used to control air operations in urban environments and limit collateral damage. STT can also conduct virtual operations from remote locations. Finally, STT may also be used to support UW operations and train indigenous forces.

Aviation FID

AvFID personnel can assist PNs’ development of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism capabilities. They can also assist with general aviation enterprise development. If UW is embraced as a strategic option, CAAs may also be called upon to assist with UW operations and support.
For more information refer to AFDPs 3-05, *Special Operations*, and 3-22, *Foreign Internal Defense*. 
Irregular warfare (IW) requires carefully conceived command and control (C2) structures and command relationships. In a theater-wide contingency, Department of the Air Force (DAF) forces may be limited and dispersed throughout the joint force commander’s (JFC’s) operational area with additional capabilities provided through reachback to functional commands outside the area of responsibility (AOR) (e.g., space support, air mobility, and cyberspace support). Since friendly surface forces are geographically dispersed, the need to carefully balance centralized control with the demands of decentralized execution makes planning critical.

The air expeditionary task force (AETF) model in AFDP 3-30, Command and Control, applies during IW. To properly integrate airpower across a joint force, the commander, Air Force forces (COMAFFOR), normally in the joint force air component commander (JFACC) role, may distribute liaisons and joint air component coordination elements (JACCE) as necessary to provide two-way interface with appropriate joint force elements involved in planning and execution. In some cases, subordinate AETFs may be established and placed in direct support of other joint force elements.

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

Command relationships between the air and surface components may be established in a manner that provides the desired degree of control by the supported forces without sacrificing centralized control. This is normally done by the air component commander in the COMAFFOR role, exercising operational control (OPCON) over Air Force
component forces. This authority is delegated to the air component commander by the JFC. The retention of OPCON allows the air component commander to re-task forces, based upon JFC or combatant commander (CCDR) priorities, if the situation dictates. The establishment of effective command relationships necessitates continuing dialogue between the respective joint and Service component commanders and their common superior commander.

DESIGN OF DAF C2 STRUCTURES IN IW

DAF commanders and planners should design their C2 structures to best balance limited resources with the requirements of ground forces that plan “bottom up” with very short response times. Commanders should establish relationships that encourage early consideration of airpower in operational plans. To the greatest extent possible, designers of DAF command arrangements should seek to create stable allocations of air by assignment or allocation of forces so that airpower becomes predictable and establishes a sense of trust and ownership at subordinate levels that encourages the early consideration of airpower effects in plans. Personnel at all levels should be adept at explaining that key assets such as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); special operations forces (SOF); and other low density, but high demand systems are prioritized against the CCDR’s or JFC’s strategic objectives, requiring centralized planning and allocation at the theater level. The complex operating environment of IW requires rapid, adaptive application of capabilities at the operational and tactical levels. Conducting multiple, separate operations against different IW adversaries in a single theater may require the CCDR to establish multiple joint task forces (JTFs).

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

Each IW scenario is unique, and command arrangements should be tailored to meet the requirements. To better integrate the capabilities that airpower provides, the air component should have a robust presence on the JTF staff. The air component commander and staff identify the issues and challenges and match capabilities to meet mission requirements. In most IW scenarios, ground forces push planning and decision-
making to lower echelons, which may require more Air Force component liaisons at lower levels. When designing an air component C2 structure, the air component commander may also need to include appropriate elements from the whole of US Government, coalition partners, and IW partners. During IW scenarios, DAF personnel may operate with numerous different forces which have varying C2 and other communications and mission systems. These forces often leverage commercial off-the-shelf technology to accomplish missions. To be effective, they should be as interoperable as possible. The challenge is that the DAF must be able to develop, obtain, and rapidly field solutions that enable special operations and conventional collaboration with foreign partners. Air Force SOF (AFSOF) should be able to purchase and use commercial or military systems faster than traditional acquisition methods permit to support the IW mission. Some of these systems should be with low attribution. Airmen should incorporate cyberspace risk analysis in their overall risk management process to determine the risks associated with leveraging military and commercial technologies quickly with foreign partners.

**Supporting and Supported Relationships**

Intertheater airlift and air refueling enable the US to conduct IW operations across the globe. In some cases, cyberspace and space-based capabilities allow US forces to conduct global operations without leaving their permanent base, while global strike operations may be generated from and return to continental US bases. These interregional capabilities are available simultaneously to multiple CCDRs. As such, prioritizing these capabilities is increasingly important. In order to provide effective and timely support to the CCDR, these capabilities are presented through the air component commander. The high demand for these capabilities amplifies the need to establish clearly defined supporting/supported relationships.

**Distributed and Split Operations**

Distributed operations, split operations and reachback are relevant to IW activities. Distributed operations involve conducting operations from independent or interdependent nodes in a teaming manner. Some operational planning or decision making may occur from outside the JOA. Split operations are a type of distributed operations conducted by a single C2 entity separated between two or more geographic locations. A single commander should have oversight of all aspects of a split C2 operation. Reachback, which can be applied to both distributed and split operations, is the process of obtaining products, services, and applications of forces, equipment, or materiel from organizations that are not forward deployed.

The decision to establish distributed or split operations invokes several tradeoffs. When mission needs dictate, the air component commander may empower commanders at subordinate echelons to provide support to ground forces with reduced coordination considerations.
General Purpose Forces-Special Operations Forces Relationships

C2 of SOF is normally executed within a SOF chain of command. The C2 structure for SOF depends on objectives, security requirements, and the operational environment. In complex environments SOF have found supporting to supported command relationships are extremely agile and beneficial to both SOF and general purpose forces (GPF). AFSOF are under the operational control of the theater special operations command (TSOC). TSOCs are the primary theater special operations (SO) organization capable of performing synchronized, continuous SO activities. The TSOC plans and conducts operations in support of a combatant commander across the competition continuum. Depending on mission requirements, TSOCs may form the appropriate C2 organization such as a joint force special operations component command, a special operations joint task force, or a joint special operations task force. To ensure the proper planning and execution of theater-wide SO aviation missions, unity of command provides the most effective employment of limited SO aviation assets. AFSOF are normally placed under the OPCON of a joint special operations air component commander (JSOACC). SOF may also require air component commander support, to reduce risk to SOF mission success by providing air superiority in the joint special operations area. By gaining and maintaining freedom of movement and freedom from attack, the air component commander provides an umbrella of protection that facilitates and enables the success of SOF missions. This support requires detailed integration and is normally coordinated through the special operations liaison element (SOLE) in the theater air operations center. For more information on SOF C2, see JP 3-05, *Special Operations*¹¹, and AFDP 3-05, *Special Operations*.

Embassy Relationships

A whole of government approach is prudent in any scenario to best apply the full range of instruments of national power in support of national security strategy. However, in IW it is especially important for military operations conducted outside of declared combat theaters where the Department of State’s (DOS’s) Chief of Mission is the approving authority on military action. Each party may have distinct roles based on the respective legal authorities delineated by US law. Therefore, it is important to understand what limitations exist and that a collaborative relationship necessary to exercise the relevant instruments of power is established.

**AIR COMPONENT SUPPORT OF IW OBJECTIVES**

The objective of IW is to assist a partner nation (PN) to gain legitimacy and influence over the relevant population to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will. The process by which the air component commander arrives at a C2 architecture is the same for any activity within the range of military operations. In addition to decentralized execution considerations, the potential significance of theater air control system (TACS)

¹¹Common Access Card Required
elements, combat support elements, public affairs, base operating support, distributed communications, and military information support operations at forward operating locations should not be overlooked.

The Air Force's basic philosophy for decentralized execution:

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

In addition, not all IW activities are conducted through the air operations center (AOC). Some activities, such as DAF support to reconstruction, joint expeditionary tasking elements, etc., are best directed by the air component commander through the A-Staff functions.

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

**Integration with Other DOD-Partner Nation Efforts**

Both traditional warfare and IW use elements of security cooperation (SC) to help a PN eventually become self-sufficient and take care of its own challenges with organic resources. These activities permeate all operating environments and can occur during all phases of conflict. SC initiatives are established jointly by the CCDR and the US ambassador (and country team) assigned to a particular PN. Therefore, the command and organization for SC includes input and planning with the DOS and can include other governmental and nongovernmental organizations.

**Integration with Other Instruments of National Power**

The conduct of IW often requires whole-of-government cooperation for success. The air component commander should be prepared to integrate military activities with the other nonmilitary elements of national power: diplomatic, informational, and economic. Proper integration of all instruments of national power leverages the capabilities of all participants to achieve US objectives. In addition to the military elements of power, the
air component commander contributes to the CCDR’s effort to shape the AOR with the diplomatic element of national power before, during, and after IW.

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

**Afghan Special Mission Wing (SMW)**

*Integrated with the Afghan SMW, AFSOC combat aviation advisors (CAA) alongside joint and combined SOF counterparts introduced and integrated fixed wing capabilities that continue to revolutionize how Afghan special operations forces fight. Armed with the right authorities, in the first year alone, CAAs accompanied Afghan counterparts on over 120 combat operations totaling in excess of 3000 flight hours; unilaterally conducted casualty evacuations, saving Afghan lives; and conducted fires coordination with Afghan ground and helicopter assault forces. To date, CAA have enabled the SMW crews to conduct night vision device (NVG) take offs and landings at remote airfields. In less than two years, CAA have qualified, trained, accompanied, and integrated unilateral NVG Afghan aircrews and aircraft, resulting in Afghan-only counterterrorism operations.*

- 492d Special Operations Wing

**Support to Partner Nations**

Service forces should be tailored to support the PN government’s ability to bolster its legitimacy and influence over the relevant population. These activities include, but are not limited to, foreign internal defense (FID), CT, COIN, stability operations, and unconventional warfare (UW). Forces should be tailored to support the PN government’s internal defense and development plan by providing capabilities that can address deficiencies in security and governance. If the security situation in the PN is particularly dire and PN capabilities are lacking or inadequate, US forces may be required to assume the lead for IW activities during certain times and locations; this will most likely require the deployment of a larger US force. A larger US military presence in
the PN creates a more significant logistical, political, and cultural footprint. Consideration should be given to basing forces outside the PN.

Expect minimal PN support from a nation where the government is unable to conduct its own operations, requiring an AETF to possess robust capabilities for self-sustainment, combat support, reachback, and force protection. In such cases, operations from theater bases may be warranted. However, political sensitivity or operational considerations may impose limits on the overall size of an AETF’s in-region footprint, which may require that some Air Force forces operate from outside the region.