



UNDERSTANDING THE OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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The [operational environment](#) is the composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander. The political, economic, and physical terrains of host nations (HNs) present significant challenges to both US and HN air forces.

The greatest [foreign internal defense](#) (FID) environmental challenge is understanding the nature of irregular conflicts that can impact US national security interests and the security interests of important friends and partners.

The first step should be to identify the nature of the threat, the administrative and financial mechanisms that power them, and the relevant beliefs and ideologies. The way insurgency is fought has an enormous influence on the types of forces and weapon systems that can be successfully employed.

The global information environment contributes to the efficacy of these concepts. Commanders should apply as much effort to [information operations](#) as other FID initiatives since these activities, as part of a broader strategic communication plan, can be a force multiplier. Strategic communication shapes perceptions at the global, regional and national levels. Air Force operations can play a significant supporting role in the US Government to communicate policy and demonstrate US commitment.

The lessons derived from the classic models, or paradigms, of insurgency, small wars, and terrorism are crucial for recognizing and analyzing conflicts. Subjects should include political, economic, and military imperatives governing [internal defense and development](#) (IDAD) strategies as well as the basic concepts of [insurgency](#).

Commanders should carefully examine the operational environment. Studies and analyses should address the characteristics of current and emerging insurgency threats. Insurgency models are not entirely sufficient to describe the impact when a local or regional insurgency is exported on a global scale against established or emerging governments that foster, sponsor, or accommodate forces of change and modernization.

SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

Major environmental factors affecting FID planning and execution include physical and psychological pressures from hostile elements, social fragmentation, political instability, and economic impoverishment. Difficult terrain, physical isolation of population groups, and poorly developed infrastructures often impede counterinsurgency and FID operations. Airpower, because of its inherent flexibility, can overcome many of these obstacles.

Nations most susceptible to lawlessness, subversion, terrorism, and insurgency, and other threats to internal security are characterized by social, economic, and political fragmentation and a lack of national identity within population groups who resist, or are denied, integration into the national community. Political and ethnic alienation, separatism, and lack of accessibility to government resources by certain groups, poor income distribution among social classes, and disenfranchisement or lack of other political rights contribute to fragmentation. Situations most likely to involve Air Force FID activities are prevalent in developing nations where public services, industrial infrastructures, and air support facilities are relatively underdeveloped by Western standards.

Terrain, seasonal weather patterns, physical isolation of population groups, and poorly developed physical infrastructures often impede military operations. Rugged or austere terrain, adverse climate, and the scarcity of improved airfields affect the tempo, scale, and character of air operations and restrict the types of aircraft that can be employed. Such obstacles also provide opportunities to effectively employ airpower. In some operational environments, Airpower offers significant advantages in rural administration, logistics, and tactical mobility.
