CAPABILITIES AND IW EXECUTION

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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.

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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 Annex 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 Annex 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

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 Annex 3-17, Air Mobility Operations; Annex 3-05, Special Operations; and Annex 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 Annex 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-

The Alabama National Guard (ALNG) and the country of Romania entered into a partnership July 1993. For more than two decades, the ALNG has fostered a solid relationship and continues to be a viable enabler in building capacity in Romania. The ALNG has conducted over 140 engagements since partnership inception focused on NATO interoperability, promoting political stability, assisting in the development of democratic institutions and open market economies, demonstrating military subordination and support to civil authorities, projecting US humanitarian values and providing support to deploying troops in support of the current war fight.

- Alabama National Guard home page
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 Annex 3-22, Foreign Internal Defense and Air Force Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures 3-4.5, Air Advising.¹

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.

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AFSO Capabilities

AFSO 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

AFSO 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

AFSO 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 Annex 3-05, Special Operations, and 3-22, Foreign Internal Defense.