OPERATIONS AND WAR

Not all military operations involve war, but war underpins the existence of all military Services, so doctrine should include an understanding of war and its consequences.

The most fundamental and important purpose of military forces is their employment as *instruments of national power* to deter or win wars.

War is a violent struggle between rival parties to attain competing objectives—also described as “socially sanctioned violence to achieve a political purpose” (Joint Publication (JP) 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*).

War has been deeply-rooted in human experience since the earliest times.

War remains an instrument of policy used by nation states, sub-national entities, or supra-national groups to achieve disputed aims.

For the complete discussion of this topic, click here.

### Traditional and Irregular Warfare

- Typically, US military doctrine frames warfare as “traditional” or “irregular.”

  - “Traditional warfare" is characterized as a violent struggle for domination between nation-states or coalitions and alliances of nation-states (JP 1).

  - Traditional warfare typically involves force-on-force military operations in which adversaries employ a variety of conventional military capabilities against each other in the air, land, maritime, space, and cyberspace domains.

  - Objectives in traditional warfare may be to coerce key military or political decision makers, defeat an adversary’s armed forces, destroy an adversary's war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in an adversary’s government or policies.

  - “Irregular warfare” (IW) is a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). Irregular warfare 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 (JP 1).

- The focus of IW is not on large-scale combat or the destructive capability of an adversary’s military forces. Typically, a less powerful adversary seeks to disrupt or negate the military advantage of a more powerful foe, often an established regime, through small engagements intended to demoralize the foe’s military, or attacks on nonmilitary targets in order to influence or control a local populace.

- **IW is not a lesser-included form of traditional warfare.** IW encompasses a variety of operations where the nature and characteristics are significantly different from traditional war.

- IW consists of five principle activities or operations undertaken in sequence, in parallel, or in blended form in coherent campaigns to address irregular threats: counterterrorism, unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, counterinsurgency, and stability operations.

- **Traditional warfare and irregular warfare are not mutually exclusive;** both forms of warfare may be present in a given conflict. Airmen should understand that the character of war may often change in the course of a conflict. This is especially true in irregular warfare where the conflict is often protracted and varies in intensity.

- Traditional warfare can rapidly evolve into an irregular war and vice versa, requiring the military force to adapt from one form to the other.

- Military forces should be prepared to conduct operations across the range of military operations (ROMO), but they are ultimately tested by their ability to prevail in war.

- The advent of air forces revolutionized many aspects of armed conflict, but did not fundamentally change the nature of war or the enduring insights guiding strategy.

- The opening of space and cyberspace domains to military action has not fundamentally changed these insights either, even though it increased complexity of-and opportunities available through-military operations.

- *For the complete discussion of this topic, click here.*