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INCORPORATING IRREGULAR WARFARE TACTICS ON LARGE SCALE OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS

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Exercise Solo Flight

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INCORPORATING IRREGULAR WARFARE TACTICS ON LARGE SCALE OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The history of Irregular Warfare (IW) seems to present itself as almost always being somewhat of a low to mid-intensity conflict conducted in very simple terms by either a group of guerillas or insurgents rebelling against a government or fighting an occupying force. Although the term IW is relatively new in our current military vocabulary, it appears to have been first used “in the 1986 English edition of "Modern Irregular Warfare in Defense Policy and as a Military Phenomenon" by Friedrich August Freiherr von der Heydte.”¹ However, IW as a type of warfare can trace itself back to at least the Late Antiquity and Medieval periods when formed armies fought barbarian invaders – the methods used by, for example: the Huns, Vandals, or Visigoths, etc. can be considered the IW of their era. In more modern times, from the Industrial Revolution onwards there have been many uprisings or small wars which can be deemed as having been fought by one side using IW methods. From the *Canadiens* fighting the British regulars in British North America to the partisan battling Napoleon to the Boers in South Africa and moving to the Chinese Civil War, the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnam War and now the war against the Islamic State, just to name a few, IW has been omnipresent throughout recent history. It would appear that the forces waging IW are almost always small groups, loosely organized groups, or organizations fighting large, well organized government forces. But, should it always be that way? Can large coalitions under NATO or other organizations not wage war using irregular methods? Or would large scale

¹ Wikipedia. Irregular Warfare. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irregular_warfare

offensive IW against an irregular opponent or enemy be inconceivable? This paper argues that a large invading force cannot succeed in offensive operations using solely IW methods and must rely on a combination of conventional and irregular methods in order to achieve success.

Due mainly to the vast amount of American material related to the subject matter and the US expertise in the area, the viewpoint of this paper is slanted heavily on a US based opinion.

UNDERSTANDING IRREGULAR WARFARE

“We don’t do IW; IW is what the enemy does to us”

- Unknown source, recorded by Colonel Daniel Kelly

Defining IW

Before launching into how IW is employed, it would be beneficial to be exposed to some definitions of what it may actually be. United States “Joint Publication 1-02 describes irregular warfare as: “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations. Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will.”² The US Department of Defense summarizes IW as: “A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s)”³; however, it further defines irregular forces as being “armed individuals or groups who are not members of

² Department of Defense. Irregular Warfare: Countering Irregular Threats. Joint Operating Concept. (Washington D.C. Version 2.0, 17 My 2010). http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/concepts/joint_concepts/joc_iw_v2.pdf

³ Department of Defense Directive number 3000.07. *Irregular Warfare (IW)*. (Washington, DC. August 28, 2014), 14. <http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/300007p.pdf>

the regular armed forces, police, or other internal security forces.”⁴ It is this second definition that poses a problem when considering how a country, coalition or other organization would consider employing IW tactics on large scale offensive, or rather invading force operations. Another important definition describes what in fact is irregular; the DoD states that it is the “characterization used to describe a deviation from the traditional form of warfare where actors may use non-traditional methods such as guerrilla warfare, terrorism, sabotage, subversion, criminal activities, and insurgency for control of relevant populations.”⁵ From this definition, one may derive the types of groups that are involved in the above mentioned activities, such as the Viet Cong or the Cuban revolutionaries, Al-Qaeda, the Columbian FARC, violent criminal organizations such as the Italian or Russian Mafias, and the Taliban just to name a few. These groups all conduct their particular brand of IW against larger more powerful forces, regimes or governments who reply via mainly conventional methods. Large global, regional powers and countries such as the US, Russia, Great Britain, France, and China must contend with IW threats. The key word is that of the “threat” which is posed by these relatively small groups of largely non-state actors. In yet another US military definition, one can assume that a nation must use IW methods to counter an IW force. The following definition has been taken from the DoD’s Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report:

Irregular Warfare encompasses operations in which the joint force conducts protracted regional and global campaigns against state and non-state adversaries to subvert, coerce, attrite, and exhaust adversaries rather than defeat them through direct conventional military confrontation. Irregular warfare emphasizes winning the support of the relevant

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

populations, promoting friendly political authority, and eroding adversary control, influence, and support.⁶

Reacting to the threat of IW

The notion of IW as being a threat is repeated in multiple US sources, such as the Army Strategic Planning Guidance of 2012, APD 3-0, Unified Land Operations (2011), and The Operational Environments to 2028. Because IW is largely viewed as a threat that must be countered, five core military activities have been defined as those which will be used to counter the threat, such as “unconventional warfare (UW), counter-insurgency (COIN), counter-terrorism (CT), foreign internal defense (FID), and Stability and Security Operations (SSO).”⁷ There are many other activities within the five core ones that can occur as sub-sets which can be conducted simultaneously or individually depending on the situation in order to enhance the effects desired against a particular opponent/enemy. These secondary activities include for example; CIMIC, PsyOps, and IO. One can thus derive from the five core activities that the Western, or US version of IW is conducted primarily in the defensive sense of operations just by interpreting the terms “counter”, “defense” and “stability and security”, words that possess a lesser importance when on the offense. In order to wage war against irregular forces, Western armies must employ the activities listed above by using a combination of conventional and special operations forces (SOF). While conventional forces can cover virtually all of the core and secondary activities, certain more specialized activities will be the focus of SOF, such as UW, CT and COIN. Although the focus of countering an irregular enemy

⁶ Department of Defense. Quadrennial Roles and Missions Review Report. (Washington D.C., January 2009), 5. http://www.defense.gov/news/Jan2009/QRMFinalReport_v26Jan.pdf

⁷ Department of Defense. Irregular Warfare: Countering Irregular Threats . . . 5.

falls mainly in the realm of ground based forces, one must not discount a naval or air approach to IW.

Both the US Navy (USN) and the US Air Force (USAF) have developed doctrine addressing IW which strives to demonstrate that their components must not be left out of the IW fight, that their components can have a significant impact on the battlefield if employed efficiently. The USN has, in its doctrine, defined a comprehensive vision statement as to how its component will defeat the IW threat:

The U.S. Navy will meet irregular challenges through a flexible, agile, and broad array of multi-mission capabilities. We will emphasize Cooperative Security as part of a comprehensive government approach to mitigate the causes of insecurity and instability. We will operate in and from the maritime domain with joint and international partners to enhance regional security and stability, and to dissuade, deter, and when necessary, defeat irregular threat.⁸

Here again, the notion of a threat is prevalent. While the USAF does not specifically address IW as uniquely being a threat, it makes a bold assumption that IW is primarily a COIN based operation which needs to be countered, as it states that “IW encompasses a multitude of activities covering a broad range, but at its core lies insurgency and COIN.”⁹ Therefore by virtue of interpreting what COIN operations entail, the USAF views COIN as a threat which must be countered.

Current IW Threats

Today’s world is rife with IW threats originating from non-state or state supported organizations of varying sizes and influence, operating on virtually all continents of our globe. As defined above, the IW threats are varied and disparate, some operating within

⁸ Ronald O’Rourke. Navy Irregular Warfare and Counterterrorism Operations: *Background and Issues for Congress*. Congressional Research Service. (Washington, DC. March 4, 2015), 11. <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22373.pdf>

⁹ Department of Defense. Irregular Warfare. Air Force Doctrine document 2-3. United States Air Force. (Washington DC. 1 August 2007). <http://fas.org/irp/doddir/usaf/afdd2-3.pdf>

the borders of sovereign states others across one or more borders and yet others operating globally. Certain organizations have a strong desire to have their brand known and via their bold, violent and often shocking acts have been the focus of international efforts against them. The current threat is from Islamic extremists seeking to impose their own interpretation of Islam upon the countries in which they operate and/or those in the immediate vicinity. Groups such as Boko Haram in Africa, specifically in Nigeria use all of the tactics associated with IW in their struggle to overthrow the government. Now associated with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) also referred to as the Islamic State (IS) they meet out a violent brand of terrorism or warfare and have also resorted to kidnappings followed by extortion as a way of frightening the local populations into submission. IS has quickly become the leading villain of the current era surpassing by far Al-Qaeda on the world stage. “The Islamic State has taken the precedents of irregular warfare to hitherto unprecedented extremes, utilizing genocide, terror, and horror as part of their war arsenal.”¹⁰ To a limited extent, they have also used conventional means to achieve certain large scale objectives, such the taking of certain cities, the “IS owns and operates enough artillery and armor to mass for an attack”¹¹ especially prior to the intervention of the US and its allies in the region. Their shock value comes from the mass killings and beheadings that have given an unsurpassed level of infamy, especially via social media. The Taliban is yet another group which operates mainly across the borders of two states, namely Afghanistan and Pakistan; however, it relies almost exclusively on IW methods. Al Qaeda, although much less prominent as of

¹⁰ Andrew Arnett. Islamic State: The New Breed of War Machine, part II. (The Medium, Aug 23, 2014). <https://medium.com/clouds-taste-metallic/islamic-state-the-new-breed-of-war-machine-part-2-dbf19e3e7f18>

¹¹ Unattributed author. Islamic State Flips Script: Irregular Warfare Redux. (The ISIS Study Group, September 25, 2014). <http://isisstudygroup.com/?p=2101>

late, still poses a threat to the Western world as it is still one of the few terror organizations enjoying a global reach. Backed by Russia, insurgents in Eastern Ukraine have been fighting the government for over a year using primarily IW tactics; however, through their support from Russia, they have been able to mount conventional operations, confronting the Ukrainian Army head on. These are but a few organizations using IW on a regional or global scale, which have ultimately gained notoriety through well-orchestrated information operations (IO). They are the groups that dominate Foreign Policy decisions of most Western governments and consume large amounts of their budgets in various attempts to halt their operations. In a nutshell, “irregular warfare (IW) has become the “warfare of choice” for our adversaries.”¹²

Addressing IW Threats

Groups and organizations relying on IW do so because they have not yet achieved enough success and riches to transform themselves into self-sufficient, strong nations. In rare occurrences, we have seen such examples such as Mao Zedong’s Long March, in which IW tactics were initially used until enough power was amassed, allowing him and his forces to become a major power within China. China today relies on its conventional forces to wield military influence in its region. When considering the threats detailed above, it is fair to state that:

Our adversaries are unconventional [irregular], and so our approach for defeating them must be unconventional [or irregular] as well. We cannot defeat them solely by force; we must use a blend of political, informational, military, economic, and socio-cultural approaches, in combination with foreign governments, security forces, and populations.¹³

¹² Kenneth, C. Coons and Glenn Harned. *Irregular Warfare is Warfare*. Irregular Warfare, a SOF Perspective. Newsletter, Center for Army Lessons Learned. (Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 11-34, June 2011), 9. <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/call/docs/11-34/11-34.pdf>

¹³ *Ibid.*

In order to achieve this, the approach that must be taken must be one of the Joint Interagency Multi-national and Public (JIMP) type. By way of Joint, the different components must truly use each other's strengths so that they forces can succeed. A well-coordinated effort using SOF in mainly the irregular role, and conventional ground, air and naval forces relentlessly pursuing opposing forces is what is required to achieve any degree of success, as demonstrated at the beginning of the war in Afghanistan at the onset in November 2001 through 2002. The effort also must embrace the Interagency aspect by deploying not only a military force, but one which incorporates Other Government Departments (OGD) and Agencies (OGA), which should make every effort to establish strong political bonds and assist in the planning for transition from war to stability and reconstruction, providing a stable and secure environment for the local population. The current emphasis on IW has brought with it the benefit of attention "to developing a Whole of Government approach to conducting complex operations."¹⁴ The Public piece of JIMP must ensure that not only is the media used in a manner to meet friendly forces objectives, the IO campaign should also be coordinated in such a manner as to focus on the local nationals, "influencing the relevant populations [and] understanding the social dynamics that influence local politics, networks, and religious and cultural."¹⁵

In today's world, no large scale conflict can be waged by one country alone, small scale regional wars can and are conducted by individual nations; however, with the exception of Russia dealing with internal issues against the Chechens, even those are becoming rare. To achieve economies of effort and scale, coalitions must be formed to

¹⁴ Col. Daniel Kelly. A view of Irregular Warfare – A Work in Progress (Draft). (Small Wars Journal), 4.

<http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/107-kelly.pdf?q=mag/docs-temp/107-kelly.pdf>

¹⁵ Department of Defense. Irregular Warfare. Air Force Doctrine . . . 1 August 2007.

counter the irregular threats posed by the most dubious non-state actors. Unfortunately, leadership of such coalitions has become the domain of the US, not so much by desire, but by necessity, as it is the world's only remaining superpower. Although NATO has taken up a more prominent role as the world's police force and the UN has become marginalized, neither organization has the resources or the doctrine to operate effectively in an IW environment. For example: "Russia's recent annexation of Crimea and forays into Eastern Ukraine [have] demonstrated NATO's inability to conduct a coalition IW Campaign . . . [presently] there is no existing NATO doctrine describing IW."¹⁶ The same is true for the operations which are ongoing in Iraq and Syria against the IS, whereas the US has taken a leading role on the ground, on the sea and in the air. While the US approach to almost all of the recent wars in which it has been involved is to *go in big*, "the 'British way' in irregular warfare has always been upheld by the principle of minimum force to achieve the stated aim."¹⁷ The solution in addressing IW threats must be found somewhere in between. "Assuming that conventional warfare focuses on defeating an enemy's military while irregular warfare focuses on the relevant population, any operation or campaign should consider *both* the enemy *and* the relevant population."¹⁸

The lead nation in any coalition fighting an adversary skilled in IW must recognize the operating environment for what it is, having conducted a thorough Joint Operational Planning Process (JOPP) and ensuring that the desired End State is one that

¹⁶ Cdr. Jae Hun Lee, Maj Peter S. Pedersen, and Maj Chad M. Pillai. Countering 21st Century Threats: *The Need for an Increased Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental and Multinational (JIIM) Approach to Irregular Warfare*. Joint Forces Staff College. (Washington D.C. 10 November 2014), 17.

¹⁷ David Benest. British Leaders and Irregular Warfare. (The Defence Academy Journal, December 2007), 6. <http://www.da.mod.uk/Research-Publications/category/70/british-leaders-and-irregular-warfare-11326>

¹⁸ Col. Daniel Kelly. A view of Irregular Warfare . . . , 3.

can be achieved. For that to happen, coalition partners must be willing to comply with and be fully participative in the process as well as being able to carry the requisite roles and responsibilities associated with the mission and the tasks involved. It is here that non-state actors and criminal groups conducting IW have the upper hand as they do not have to negotiate between national jurisdictions, make compromises or navigate through political red tape and quagmires. Once full compliance is achieved, the Combatant Commander must have full control of the forces relegated to his command so that he can achieve the desired end state outlined by the JOPP. He must be enabled to use his forces when and where required thus allowing him to “conduct traditional warfare during the initial phases of an operation and shift to IW during the later phases.”¹⁹ The commander must be able to use the IW activities, i.e. COIN, CT, FID, etc. at his own discretion and to also conduct a mix of SOF and conventional forces under one single, unified command. The commander decides “when operational environments dictate that the joint force presence remains unobtrusive, SOF will play a leading role. [Conventional forces] will continue to play a leading role in operational environments where a large-scale presence is warranted to provide security to a population.”²⁰

CONCLUSION

“The irregular warfare struggle will be a long one. The battlefield remains a global one.”

- Seth G. Jones

¹⁹ US Army Irregular Warfare Centre. Irregular Warfare: A Clear Picture of a Fuzzy Objective. Small Wars Journal. October 22, 2013, 3. <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/irregular-warfare-a-clear-picture-of-a-fuzzy-objective>

²⁰ Department of Defense. Quadrennial Roles and Missions . . . , 12.

Overall, IW is treated mainly as a threat that must be countered, a menace waged by non-state actors seeking to gain power and/or overthrow a government which is in disagreement with their beliefs and values. Much discussion on the way to counter an IW threat is to wage an offensive IW campaign directly against those groups or organizations employing such tactics. This paper argued that an invading force cannot succeed in offensive operations that are conducted by the sole use of IW methods; it must employ a combination of conventional and irregular methods in order to achieve success. Irregular methods must include the use of SOF assets, ground, air, and sea based, the conducting of the five principal irregular activities outlined in the US joint Operating Concept, as well as the sub-activities as defined. Conventional forces also have a part in the IW fight and, aside from amassing large numbers of infantry, armoured, artillery, air and sea based assets, conventional forces contribute to the five IW activities and sub-activities. Coordination between all elements is key to success, as is the inclusion of OGDs and allied forces; the overall JIMP aspect is a vital requirement to any action on the modern battlefield. All participants who join the fight against an IW foe must also be aware of the fact that, as with COIN operations, the IW battle is a long and arduous one; it will be spread out over many, many years, even decades and only the greatest commitment of manpower and wealth will enable victory against the enemy.

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