



DOD's Irregular Warfare Center: *Building Partnerships by Opening Up the Tent*

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In the three short months since the Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) “opened its doors,” to begin addressing the implications of “[struggle among state and non-state actors](#)” for legitimacy and influence over relevant populations,” it has been using its broad range of [authorities](#) to reach out and begin creating partnerships and collaborations to ensure it fully addresses strategic competition below the threshold of military conflict. Those non-military challenges to international stability and security are political, economic, legal, informational, cyber, sociological, and so much more; areas where the Department of Defense knows it must reach out to partners with the knowledge, experience, and philosophies that are outside its core capabilities.

In the process of designing what is now a unique functional Center alongside the DOD’s established regional centers, Congress gave the IWC the authority to “[enter into partnerships and resource agreements with academic institutions](#).” So, while the IWC began with already close relationships with National Defense University’s College of International Security Affairs, the Naval Postgraduate School, and the Joint Special Operations University, the team helping to stand up the IWC added its existing relationships to and experiences with civilian universities, both in the US and internationally, as well as bringing key people onto the team who maintain affiliations with civilian colleges and universities. That team is now beginning to invite civilian universities having respected and far-reaching programs addressing irregular activities and strategic competition to participate in the IWC’s future programs.

Congress’s initial guidance to place the IWC alongside the [regional centers](#) and under Defense Security Cooperation Agency in Washington, DC, turned out to be a brilliant stroke because of the broad and innovative connections it empowered. The first, easy, step was to create a venue within DOD for the military services’ organizations and educational institutions that were already addressing irregular warfare to better collaborate with U.S. Special Operations Command, the Joint Staff, and DOD agencies. At the same time, the IWC team began reaching out to other government agencies, international partners, and the regional centers to explore near-term and future areas for

interaction and collaboration. In the spirit of building while doing, the IWC should soon be sharing its plan to bring the aforementioned academic institutions together with others in the IWC community of interest to create a comprehensive research, education, and outreach plan that will capitalize on the strengths each has to offer. That plan will provide a means for partners and stakeholders from across academia, the interagency, non-governmental institutions, and elsewhere to operationalize their aspirations. The IWC is raising the “big tent” that Congress envisioned from the start.

When the IWC reaches its full operational capability – within about nine months – it will have created a broad consortium that will not be defined by any one participating agency, military service, or institution. That broad and inclusive ethos, intentionally bringing together valued, but often-overlooked, partners that are addressing irregular security challenges, will be the IWC’s “superpower.” Once the IWC reaches full capability, the nation and our broad array of partners will finally have an open-minded and inclusive forum where the communities of interest, scholarship, and practice may explore and create opportunities for engagement, collaboration, and understanding, free from parochial concerns – something that has never existed in the US.

The confident sense of optimism that pervades is not without basis. Yes, the IWC is only three months old. The staff and faculty that has been assembled, however, are working tirelessly to create relationships, processes, and products that will exceed Congress’s vision and expectations. It is no secret that the irregular threats to international stability and security are real, dynamic, and growing. By creating favorable opportunities for working closely with those civilian academic institutions who bring unique perspectives regarding the irregular threats facing the nation, the IWC will become a leading force for global security and stability. We welcome all into that “big tent,” that is, the consortium of scholars, statesmen, thinkers, and practitioners able, willing, and ready to address the challenges of irregular competition.

