



IRREGULAR WARFARE CENTER

SPOTLIGHT

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The Irregular Warfare Center & Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security Host the Second Intelligence Support to IW Symposium



Rowena Ormiston, Director of HUMINT & Sensitive Activities, OUSD(I&S), delivers keynote remarks at the Intelligence Support to Irregular Warfare Symposium, Washington, D.C.

The Department of Defense (DoD)’s Irregular Warfare Center (IWC), in partnership with the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security (OUSD(I&S)), hosted the second iteration of the Intelligence Support to Irregular Warfare Symposium. Held 23-25 June 2025 at the Ronald Reagan Building & International Trade Center, the symposium showed the continuation of the Center’s initiative to examine the U.S. Intelligence Community’s capability to address emerging global threats.

The event opened with welcoming remarks from IWC Director Dr. Dennis Walters, followed by Rowena Ormiston, Director of HUMINT & Sensitive Activities at OUSD(I&S), who set the tone for two days of focused discussion on the convergence of transnational criminal organizations and state-sponsored operations. “Maximizing deterrence and response options, intelligence support must be capable of enabling simultaneous offensive and defensive effects to detect adversarial intent left of crisis and deter, disrupt, and/or degrade adversarial actions left of launch,” explained Ormiston.

Participants heard keynote addresses from former Acting Secretary of Defense Christopher Miller and former Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Mission Integration Beth Sanner, both of whom emphasized the growing complexity of the threat landscape and the need for persistent, integrated intelligence solutions. “Our way of war, and specifically our way of intelligence, is not geared for efforts in the gray zone,” said Sanner.

A panel discussion in the afternoon explored resilience as a critical function in irregular warfare environments, followed by a fireside chat on societal resilience and preparedness with Mr. Andrew Borene and featuring Justin Brown, Deputy Director of the Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA).

Breakout sessions provided attendees with an opportunity to engage in focused conversations on key areas of relevance, including intelligence training and education for the next generation and the role of artificial intelligence in the intelligence process. Throughout the day, BG (Ret.) Chris Burns, IWC Senior Advisor & Deputy Advisor for the Northern Hemisphere & Homeland Defense (Valens Global Contractor) and Anthony Gilgis (OUSD(I&S)) helped frame key discussions, highlighting persistent intelligence in navigating today’s irregular challenges.

“One of the IWC’s strengths is its ability to bring people together—from operators and analysts to academics and policymakers,” said Dr. Lori Leffler, IWC Deputy Director & Chief of Staff. “That diversity of perspective is what makes our efforts more impactful across the irregular warfare community.”

The second day of the symposium began with a strategic look at the accelerating convergence of criminality and statecraft in the gray zone. David Luna, representing the International Coalition Against Illicit Economies (ICAIE), delivered a keynote address on the evolution of criminal threat convergence, highlighting how traditional transnational criminal organizations are increasingly partnering with state actors, embedding themselves into global logistics, financial systems, and supply chains.

A fireside chat, hosted by Cleo Paskal of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD) and featuring Ambassador Roxanne Cabral of the National Defense University (NDU), explored how authoritarian states are leveraging criminal proxies to conduct gray zone operations at scale and with plausible deniability. This was followed by an in-depth discussion between Renee Novakoff (OUSD(I&S)) and Dr. Louise Shelley (George Mason University), who examined how countries like Russia, China, and Iran exploit illicit networks for geopolitical influence, drawing on disinformation, cybercrime, narcotics, and human trafficking to shape global power dynamics. These sessions laid an analytical foundation for detecting and countering the hybrid behaviors redefining modern irregular competition.

The afternoon featured a conversation on the evolution of transnational financial networks, led by Jack Gaines and Louis De Tito (Chenega), which highlighted how illicit finance is becoming more adaptive and more closely intertwined with state interests. The subsequent panel, moderated by Doug Livermore (Irregular Warfare Initiative/Special Operations Association of America), focused on expanding access vectors to the U.S. homeland, particularly through maritime routes and transit corridors in Central and South America. Andrew Johnson (TRADOC) closed the session with a presentation on identifying vulnerabilities within societal-based networks.

“We’re here to ensure that intelligence is built for the realities operators face in the field. This symposium brings together the voices and expertise needed to do that,” said Erik Herr, IWC Chief of Operations. “The IWC is here to help the force adapt by staying ahead of emerging threats, whether that’s through training, planning, or building new partnerships around the world.”

A select group of participants convened for the third and final day of the symposium at the Pentagon Library Conference Room. This high-level session featured keynote remarks from Theresa Whelan, Director for Defense Intelligence Collections and Special Programs, and Lieutenant General Francis L. Donovan, Vice Commander of the United States Special Operations Command.

The 2025 Intelligence Support to Irregular Warfare Symposium reinforced the need for integrated, cutting-edge intelligence approaches to deter, defend, and defeat threats to the United States, and our allies and partners.

Director’s Corner



Dr. Dennis Walters, IWC Director



Defending the Homeland

The security challenges facing our homeland demand innovative approaches that transcend traditional organizational boundaries. The Irregular Warfare Center stands at the forefront of this effort, building bridges across the defense, intelligence, and law enforcement communities to address the complex threats of the 21st century.

Convening Critical Stakeholders

Central to our homeland defense mission is the Defense of the Homeland Working Group. This forum brings together stakeholders from across the interagency, fostering collaboration between defense, intelligence, and law enforcement partners who share responsibility for protecting our nation. The working group extends beyond domestic agencies, drawing in international partners who understand that homeland security is increasingly a shared challenge requiring coordinated responses.

The group’s mandate encompasses some of our most pressing security concerns to the homeland, including efforts to counter both narcotics and human trafficking flows across our borders. By addressing these interconnected threats through an irregular warfare lens, we’re developing more comprehensive approaches to securing U.S. borders while disrupting the networks that exploit vulnerabilities in the security architecture.

Intelligence Integration and Law Enforcement Partnership

In June, we co-hosted the landmark Intelligence Support to Irregular Warfare Symposium with the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence & Security. This three-day gathering in Washington brought together DoD, interagency, and industry partners to illuminate critical intelligence requirements for deterring adversary irregular warfare activities against the homeland. The symposium represented a significant step forward in developing integrated approaches to emerging irregular threats.

Our engagement with law enforcement has been equally impactful. At the FBI National Academy, we briefed over 100 domestic and international law enforcement leaders on hybrid threats and their implications for homeland security. This presentation, which included representatives from Germany, Belgium, Taiwan, and Timor Leste, helped establish new relationships with multiple fusion centers—critical nodes in our nation’s intelligence sharing network.

Exposing Strategic Threats

The IWC is preparing to release groundbreaking publications that will highlight the extent to which the People’s Republic of China actively encourages drug trafficking across our southern border and within the United States. These forthcoming analyses will illuminate how PRC actions directly undermine American security by fueling the opioid crisis and strengthening transnational criminal networks that threaten our communities.

A Unified Defense

These efforts represent more than isolated initiatives—they form a cohesive strategy to defend the homeland against irregular threats. By convening diverse stakeholders, integrating intelligence capabilities, partnering with law enforcement, and exposing adversary activities, the IWC is helping build the comprehensive defense the U.S. requires. In an era where threats respect no boundaries, neither can responses.

Stay tuned for more great things!
Dr. Dennis Walters, IWC Director



IWC Director Dr. Dennis Walters and former Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Mission Integration Beth Sanner at the Intelligence Support to Irregular Warfare Symposium in Washington, D.C.

PRISM: Call For Manuscripts

The IWC is seeking Manuscripts for an upcoming special edition of PRISM!

Submit today!



Media Highlights

“The Economy as Battlefield: The 21st Century Sino-American Cold War”

By Glenn Chafetz – Director – 2430 Group

<https://irregularwarfarecenter.org/publications/perspectives/the-economy-as-battlefield-the-21st-century-sino-american-cold-war/>

“What is Irregular Warfare?”

<https://irregularwarfarecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/IW-Quick-Reference-1-pager.pdf>



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Tabletop Exercise Expands IWC Collaboration in Iceland

Today’s interconnected world has made the financial sector not only an economic pillar but also a strategic target. In collaboration with the European Centre of Excellence, U.S. Department of State, the Iceland Central Bank, and the Icelandic Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the IWC sponsored a tabletop exercise (TTX) that brought together government practitioners, policy experts, and decision-makers from eight countries and the European Union to explore the evolving challenges to trans-Atlantic security.

Organized in Reykjavik, the conference addressed the urgent need to safeguard economic systems against emerging threats, particularly those posed by state actors such as Russia and China, fostered a deeper understanding of vulnerabilities within the financial domain, and promoted the development of comprehensive approaches to mitigate the impacts of hybrid threat activities.

On the second day, the event transitioned to a TTX designed to explore responses to coercive hybrid threat activities. Participants shared experiences and strategies to strengthen defenses and ensure national resilience. The exercise further explored existing policies and procedures, enhancing overall readiness to effectively respond to potential hybrid threat incidents, including foreign direct investment, cybersecurity breaches, and infrastructure damage, and explored topics such as weaponizing tourism and cryptocurrency. “This collaborative effort is crucial for enhancing our collective readiness and resilience among all government sectors, including Finance Ministries and Central Banks,” said Shihō Rybski, Director of Training and Exercise at Hybrid CoE and IWC representative to the Centre.

IWC and its Counter Threat Finance FAN plan to continue to contribute to this important work over the course of the next year. The next TTX is tentatively scheduled for the week of 15 December 2025 in Berlin, Germany. For more information, please contact fan@irregularwarfarecenter.org.

IWC in South America

On 24-25 June 2025, Dr. Mark Grzegorzewski, former IWC Deputy Regional Adviser to USSOUTHCOM (Morgan 6 Contractor), traveled to São Paulo, Brazil, to attend the “Organized Crime and Illicit Markets” conference at the University of São Paulo. As Deputy Regional Adviser to USSOUTHCOM, this trip was not just timely, it was strategic. Brazil, South America’s largest economy, military, and population center, is at the center of both regional stability and the IWC’s ability to advance the Defense of the Homeland mission. The conference focused on transnational organized crime (TCOs), cybercrime, criminal governance, and the PCC (Primeiro Comando da Capital), the largest organized crime group in Brazil. With continued engagement through events, publications, and working groups, the Center can build relationships throughout the Americas.



Dr. Mark Grzegorzewski, former IWC Deputy Regional Adviser to USSOUTHCOM (Morgan 6 Contractor), at the “Organized Crime and Illicit Markets” conference at the University of São Paulo, Brazil.

The Center Strengthens Indo-Pacific Partnerships Through June Engagements

The IWC advanced critical partnerships across the Indo-Pacific region this June through two major engagements that directly support DoD priorities for deterring malign influence and building regional resilience.

From 1-5 June 2025, IWC Director Dennis Walters and IWC Deputy Regional Advisor (Morgan 6 Contractor) Joshua Hasteley conducted an extensive Key Leader Engagement trip to Honolulu, meeting with leadership from seven key organizations including United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) J5 Strategic Planning and Policy Directorate, Joint Interagency Task Force West (JIATF-West), United States Army Pacific (USARPAC) Future Plans & Concepts, 18th Medical Command, 8th Theater Sustainment Command (8th TSC), Special Operations Command Pacific (SOCAP), and the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS). The meetings established IWC as the “go-to” office for irregular warfare challenges, with particularly strong commitments from APCSS, JIATF-West, and 8th TSC for future collaboration.

Later in June, IWC representatives returned to APCSS to support the Whole of Society Resilience Workshop from 23-27 June 2025. The workshop brought together 40 participants from across the region to develop strategies for deterring PRC malign influence through enhanced societal resilience. IWC’s Joshua Hasteley (Morgan 6 Contractor) moderated panels and facilitated exercises, while Senior Advisor Ed Dorman (Valens Global Contractor) presented on resilience in contested environments.

The workshop produced valuable connections with Taiwan’s National Security Council and Ministry of Interior officials, regional civil society organizations including Forward Alliance, and academic partners. These relationships will be integrated into IWC’s Functional Area Networks and support upcoming regional engagements.

Both initiatives directly advance INDOPACOM priorities for deterring aggression and building partner capacity to resist coercion. By establishing IWC as a trusted resource for irregular warfare expertise and fostering whole-of-society approaches to resilience, these June engagements strengthen the foundation for long-term security cooperation across the Indo-Pacific theater.

IWC Supports the George C. Marshall Center

On 16 June 2025, IWC supported the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies’ flagship Seminar for Irregular Warfare and Hybrid Threats (SIWHT) program by facilitating a panel discussion entitled “China in Europe: The Cognitive Warfare Dimension.” The panel included the Vice-Minister of Culture of Lithuania, the China Team Lead at the Czech Association for International Affairs, and the lead analyst at the U.S. Air University’s China Aerospace Studies Institute. The SIWHT had 90 participants from 55 countries this year.

Current Initiatives, Upcoming Events & IW Educational Offerings

The Department of Defense’s Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) is excited to add *PRISM: The Journal of Complex Operations* to our robust publication offerings!

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The Department of Defense’s Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) is extremely proud to announce the Center will assume publishing duties and responsibilities of *PRISM: The Journal of Complex Operations*.

Since July 2011, *PRISM* has been a premiere journal offering provocative articles relating to national and international security affairs. By reaching out to thought leaders from the national and international security policy-maker, practitioner, and academic communities the quarterly publication has established a reputation for offering keen insight into the evolving global threat environment.

For authors interested in publishing in *PRISM*, the Center encourages submissions of original manuscripts that are informative, insightful, and provocative while addressing the full range of factors contributing to global security. Manuscripts should be sent to PRISM@irregularwarfarecenter.org with a subject line of “Manuscript.”

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The Irregular Warfare Center’s OIE (Operations in the Information Environment) Functional Area Network (FAN) Tab D bi-weekly newsletter!

This newsletter employs expert analytic research techniques, bolstered by machine learning and original-language, open-source information, to pinpoint vulnerabilities in the current narrative of global competitors, thereby empowering the U.S. with informational advantages. Serving as a potent force multiplier, the OIE FAN facilitates education and problem-solving within the realm of information operations.

For those interested in receiving the IWC’s Tab D newsletter, please reach out via email at fan@irregularwarfarecenter.org.

What is Irregular Warfare?

...and why does it matter?

Irregular warfare (IW) is defined in several key U.S. government sources, each emphasizing distinct but complementary aspects. The list below offers a sampling of the IW definitions and just like IW itself, even defining it is a struggle:

Joint Publication-1 defines irregular warfare as “a form of warfare where states and nonstate actors campaign to assure or coerce states or other groups through indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric activities, either as the primary approach or in concert with conventional warfare.”

The **2020 Irregular Warfare Annex** describes it as “a struggle among state and non-state actors to influence populations and affect legitimacy. 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.”

Congress, in statute, defines irregular warfare as “Department of Defense activities not involving armed conflict that support predetermined United States policy and military objectives conducted by, with, and through regular forces, irregular forces, groups, and individuals.”

Congress also defined irregular warfare in **Section 1202 of the FY2018 NDAA** as “provid[ing] support to foreign forces, irregular forces, groups, or individuals engaged in supporting or facilitating authorized ongoing military operations by United States special operations forces.”

The Irregular Warfare Center does not seek to revise or add to these definitions. Instead, it works with them and identifies the common ground:

Each definition—explicitly or implicitly—acknowledges that IW involves a wide range of actors: states, non-state groups (such as insurgents, militias, and proxies), and individuals. This reflects the reality that IW operates across formal and informal networks, making it inherently complex and dynamic.

Each definition centers on influence—shaping behavior, perceptions, and legitimacy—rather than conventional military victory. This distinction is critical: IW is defined not by the presence of combat, but by its strategic effects, often achieved without kinetic force.

All definitions highlight the use of indirect, unconventional, or asymmetric methods. Activities such as information operation and cyberspace activities are central to IW and set it apart from traditional warfare.

Terms Associated with IW

Similar to the term “irregular warfare,” these terms have varying definitions among U.S. and international organizations.

Hybrid Warfare: “an interplay or fusion of conventional as well as unconventional instruments of power and tools of subversion. The instruments or tools are blended in a synchronized manner to exploit the vulnerabilities of an antagonist and achieve synergistic effects.” (NATO)

Gray Zone: “a realm of international relations between peaceful interstate diplomacy, economic activity, and people-to-people contact on one end of the spectrum and armed conflict on the other, and gray zone activities as coercive or subversive actions to achieve objectives at the expense of others in contravention of the absence of international norms.” (CDN)

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