



Irregular Warfare Center Spotlight

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The IW Scholars Network Shapes the Future of Irregular Warfare Scholarship

By: Pedro A. Rodriguez, IWC Public Affairs, CTR



ARLINGTON, VA — As the landscape of global security shifts from traditional battlefields to the “gray zone,” a new generation of thinkers is stepping into the light. At the heart of this intellectual mobilization is the Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) IW Scholars Network, a specialized Functional Area Network (FAN) designed to bridge the gap between classroom theory and frontline reality. For decades, Irregular Warfare (IW) was often treated as a secondary discipline, but today it has emerged as the primary arena of strategic competition. The IWC IW Scholars Network is supporting the United States and its allies to participate in this space and lead it through rigorous academic inquiry and professional development.

The network serves as a collaborative ecosystem for a diverse “whole-of-society” cohort, including seasoned academics, undergraduate or graduate students, and early-career professionals. By connecting these emerging voices with senior defense experts, the network transforms isolated research into actionable national security insights. This mission provides usable and actionable IW-related research to practitioners while building a comprehensive repository of information that supports the broader defense community.

“IWC’s work with the IW Scholars network provides the Department an opportunity to engage with the future of the IW workforce to gather fresh ideas while giving participants a chance to extend their professional network and receive invaluable feedback and guidance on their research,” said Deputy Regional Advisor for U.S. European Command and U.S. Africa and Functional Area Networks, Dr. Sandor Fabian, Ctr.

The crown jewel of the network’s educational mission is the annual Scholars Colloquium, which this year will be held from September 15-16 in Washington, D.C. This highly selective event acts as a professional “battle lab” for ideas, where selected scholars present original research on a broad range of topics potentially ranging from information operations and threat finance to the role of emerging AI in asymmetric conflict. The IWC is currently accepting submissions, due by June 01, for the 2026 Colloquium focused on “Irregular Warfare’s Impact on Homeland Defense.” Participants with papers focused on IW and homeland defense either in the United States or lessons learned from abroad are encouraged to apply. Participants, who may be students or early career professionals, do not just speak to a

void; they receive direct, critical feedback from senior practitioners who understand how these theories apply in contested environments. For many participants, the colloquium shapes how they view the field and provides direction to their interest in IW.

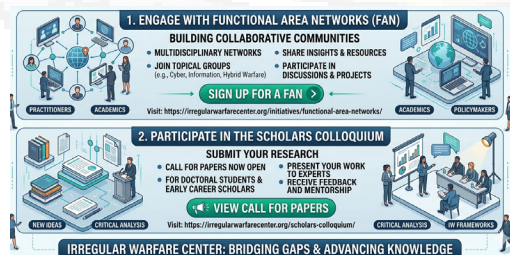
“My career as a student of irregular warfare reached a full-circle moment at the colloquium, where my Medical Humanities undergraduate degree and my graduate studies in irregular warfare at Arizona State University converged into the presentation of my research, *Trust Under Pressure: Information Control, Institutional Legitimacy, and National Resilience in Public Health Crises*,” said Jocelyn Garcia, Master’s Candidate in Global Security (Irregular Warfare) at Arizona State University. “The IWC colloquium is a prudent reminder that irregular and political warfare are inherently human-centric and collaborative endeavors where no one person, entity, or institution has all the tools and capabilities necessary to tackle these deeply interconnected and often wicked problems.”

Beyond the annual colloquium, the IW Scholars Network provides a year-round platform for collaborative research and the development of innovative approaches to modern conflict. By fostering partnerships across global universities, the network explores evolving challenges in healthcare support, maritime security, and cyber resilience. By investing in the education of today’s scholars, the network is effectively securing the innovators of tomorrow’s defense.

According to Dr. Fabian, “IW scholarship requires collaboration and the testing of new ideas, something that both the IW Scholars Colloquium and the IW Scholars FAN can provide. I would encourage any current student or early career professional to consider submitting their research for the scholar colloquium and signing up for the Student Scholars FAN.”

Instructions for signing up for a FAN can be found at: <https://irregularwarfarecenter.org/initiatives/functional-area-networks/>

The Scholars Colloquium call for papers is available here: <https://irregularwarfarecenter.org/scholars-colloquium/>.



Director’s Corner



Dr. Dennis Walters, IWC Director



Director’s Corner: Medicine as a Critical Front in Modern Security

Welcome to another issue of the Director’s Corner. This month, I want to focus on a critical but often overlooked front in modern security: the intersection of irregular warfare (IW) and medicine, and the vital role medical practitioners play in our national defense.

Recently, I had the privilege of speaking at the Summit: Medical Strategies for Modern Conflict, hosted by Mayo Clinic Military Medicine and proudly co-sponsored by the Irregular Warfare Center. My message to the medical professionals in attendance was twofold: irregular threats are real, and the healthcare sector must proactively prepare for their impact. I also echoed Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict Tilley’s call to bolster the resilience of our medical supply networks. In order for healthcare to effectively contribute to the Force, it needs to be prepared for the IW threats that may target healthcare institutions far from the front lines during times of conflict.

In today’s interconnected world, adversaries do not respect the traditional boundaries between the battlefield and the homeland. Threat actors increasingly use indirect, asymmetric tactics to exploit vulnerabilities, disrupt care, and undermine our societal resilience. Whether through state-backed ransomware paralyzing hospital systems, cyberattacks targeting medical device manufacturers, or physical sabotage against emergency infrastructure, our medical systems are actively in the crosshairs. These irregular threats blur the lines between the front and the rear, meaning that both civilian and military medical practitioners must be equipped to operate in continuously contested environments.

The IWC plays a key role in enabling the medical community to address these evolving threats. Through our Medical Support to Irregular Warfare Functional Area Network (FAN) and our globally accessible educational programs, we bring together subject matter experts, civilian practitioners, and military leaders. Together, we are designing systems that are resilient not just to daily demands, but to the deliberate disruptions of irregular warfare.

A standout effort in this space—and a major focus of our breakout sessions at the recent Summit—is the development of a Medical Annex to the Resistance Operating Concept (ROC). This foundational framework will define how military-civilian partnerships can ensure whole-of-society medical support during times of crisis, ensuring we can sustain both our warfighters and our citizens.

Medical preparedness is a critical pillar of our strategic deterrence. We all have a role to play in building this resilience, and the IWC is proud to lead the charge in facilitating the critical skill-building necessary to empower our medical professionals for the challenges of modern conflict.

Until next time,

DW

PRISM

The Spring 2026 issue of PRISM is officially out, and it’s a deep dive into the center of 21st-century strategic competition. From the weaponization of agriculture to the ethical frontier of military AI, this issue explores the “porous” boundaries defining today’s security landscape. Featured Topics include:

- Cognitive Warfare;
- Strategic State-Sponsored Criminality;
- Agricultural Security



Scan the QR Code to read the Spring 2026 issue!

Media Highlights

Golden Dome Will Protect Homeland, Provide Layered Defense, Leaders Say
by: David Vergun, Pentagon News

Readout of Secretary of War Pete Hegseth’s Meeting with Indonesian Minister of Defense Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin
by: Chief Pentagon Spokesman, Sean Parnell



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IWC Engagements



IWC Engagement in Arctic Edge 2026 C-UAS Tabletop Exercise

During March 9-13, representatives from the Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) participated in the Ted Stevens Center-led Arctic Edge 2026 Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (C-UAS) Academic Tabletop Exercise at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. This critical event brought together experts from government, military, and research institutions including The Homeland Defense Institute at the U.S. Air Force Academy and the University of Alaska Fairbanks to examine emerging drone threats within the unique challenges of the Arctic operating environment. During the exercise, the IWC contributed vital insights on global drone warfare trends and irregular warfare perspectives, drawing on lessons from contemporary conflicts involving both state and non-state actors. By exploring issues like sensor integration and detection in harsh climates, the exchange highlighted the essential collaboration between organizations like the Alaska Center for Unmanned Aircraft Systems Institute and the IWC's academic partners to strengthen homeland defense and Arctic domain awareness. The IWC looks forward to continued engagement with our partners across government and industry to address these rapidly evolving security challenges.

IWC made its presence felt in the Africa Land Force Summit

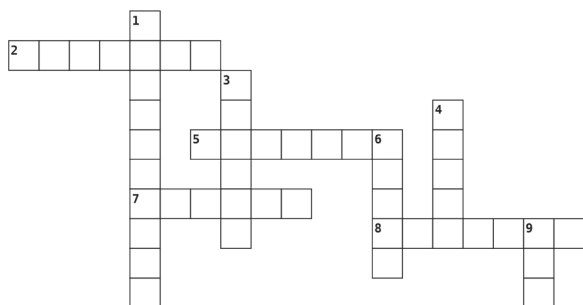
Dr. Sandor Fabian, IWC Deputy Regional Advisor for Africa and Europe, CTR, participated as a panelist at the Africa Land Forces Summit in Rome hosted by Southern European Task Force, Africa, March 22-24. He connected with African partners and participated on the Technological Innovation: Drone use and Counter Use panel. A great opportunity to collaborate and introduce the IWC to numerous key stakeholders. Under the theme "Empowering shared security through intelligence, innovation, and industry," the summit is designed to bridge the gap between defense institutions and the private sector, moving beyond traditional procurement to emphasize dual-use technologies and non-traditional partnerships.

Beyond the Missiles: Redefining the "Taiwan Problem Set"

Most wargames end when the missiles stop flying, but from March 30 to April 2, 2026, the Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) proved that is exactly where the real challenge begins. During "The First Island Chained: Wargame & Workshop," the IWC conducted a high-stakes "beta test" that shifted the focus from traditional force-on-force math to the messy, human reality of the Taiwan problem set. While standard simulations obsess over ship counts, this intensive four-day exercise dove deep into the shadows of legitimacy, identity, and long-term resistance, effectively simulating an occupation rather than just an invasion.

This wasn't just a game; it was a blueprint for the future of national security education that prioritized strategic complexity over simple attrition. By exploring the true human and political friction of modern conflict, the IWC is providing leaders with the tools to understand how a society actually survives in the "gray zone." The IWC is now looking to scale this model and invites organizations ready to move beyond conventional "force-on-force" metrics to help stress-test and define the future of irregular warfare.

Irregular Warfare Crossword



Across

- 2. The Turkish city that recently hosted the Diplomacy Forum, where global leaders gathered to discuss "Mapping Tomorrow."
- 5. A major point of contention in the newly signed Australia-EU free trade deal after eight years of negotiation.
- 7. The strategic waterway whose closure has dominated the IMF's latest Spring Meeting economic warnings.
- 8. Name of the mission that just concluded its historic lunar journey with a successful splashdown. This is a huge milestone for NASA as they prepare for a moon landing in 2028.

Down

- 1. The China-linked threat group that the FBI recently confirmed has maintained "deep, persistent access" to U.S. telecom providers like AT&T and Verizon.
- 3. The tech giant currently making headlines for the launch of its 17 Ultra, which features a controversial but powerful Leica-tuned lens system.
- 4. A type of "fleet" or "ship" often used to bypass the current U.S. naval blockade in the Gulf.
- 6. Along with Ukraine and Gaza, one of the primary conflict zones cited in recent reports on surging global defense spending.
- 9. The organization currently holding its Spring Meetings in D.C., reporting a downgrade in global growth to 3.1%.

Current Initiatives, Upcoming Events & IW Educational Offerings

Don't forget to checkout The Department of War's Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) *PRISM: The Journal of Complex Operations*. Follow the link for the latest issue!

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Subscribe Today!

The Department of Defense Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) is currently proud to announce the Center's latest publishing effort and companion to its PRISM: The Journal of Complex Operations.

Since July 2011, PRISM has been a quarterly journal offering practitioners, scholars, and students alike a platform to discuss and analyze the complex and ever-evolving nature of irregular warfare. The journal and its companion website provide a unique and timely perspective on the challenges of irregular warfare and the role of the IWC in addressing these challenges.

For authors interested in publishing in PRISM, the Center encourages submissions of original research, analysis, and practical insights. Submissions should be sent to: prism@iwcenter.org. For more information, please visit our website at www.iwcenter.org.

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Crossword answers: 1. Alt Typhoon 2. Antalya 3. Xiaomi 4. Ghost 5. Tariffs 6. Sudan 7. Hormuz 8. Artemis 9. IMF

This Month in the History of Irregular Warfare

April's history of irregular warfare highlights the critical evolution of the craft, spanning from the tactical ingenuity of Revolutionary War partisans and WWII jungle guerrillas to the institutional failures and subsequent reforms that birthed modern special operations.

-April 19, 1775 – Battles of Lexington and Concord: The "shot heard 'round the world" began a conflict where American Patriots utilized "Indian-style" tactics. As the British retreated, they were harassed by marksmen firing from behind trees and stone walls; a foundational example of irregular tactics defeating a superior conventional force.

-April 9, 1942 – Surrender at Bataan & The Stay-Behind Movement: While the surrender led to the Bataan Death March, it also birthed a massive guerrilla movement in the Philippines. Officers like Wendell Fertig and Russell Volckmann refused to surrender, disappearing into the jungle to organize thousands of Filipinos into effective irregular forces that harassed Japanese occupiers for three years.

-April 17, 1961 – Bay of Pigs Invasion: A quintessential example of a failed paramilitary operation. The CIA-sponsored attempt by Cuban exiles to overthrow the government highlighted the extreme risks and complexities of "deniable" irregular operations.

-April 10, 1966 – Operation Jackstay: In Vietnam, the U.S. Navy and Marines began large-scale riverine operations in the Rung Sat Special Zone. This was a critical shift in countering Viet Cong guerrillas using the complex waterways of the Mekong Delta.

-April 2004 – The First Battle of Fallujah: Operation Vigilant Resolve began this month. It serves as a modern case study in Urban Irregular Warfare, where conventional forces had to adapt rapidly to an entrenched insurgency in a dense "human jungle."

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