



Irregular Warfare Center Spotlight

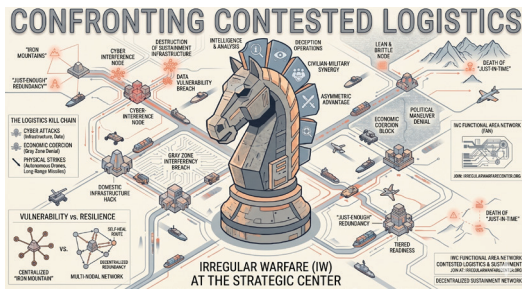
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Confronting the Reality of Contested Logistics with IW at the Center

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



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ARLINGTON, VA — For the better part of three decades, the United States military operated with a luxury it can no longer afford: the assumption of logistical sanctuary. During the conflicts of the early 21st century, supply lines were largely seen as secure “pipes” that moved equipment from a safe industrial base in the U.S. to protected forward operating bases. The challenge was one of efficiency, not survival. Today, that paradigm has shifted entirely. At the Irregular Warfare Center (IWC), the Contested Logistics & Sustainment Functional Area Network (FAN) is sounding the alarm: in modern conflict, the “rear area” has vanished, and the supply chain itself is now a primary target.

The network identifies a fundamental transformation in how adversaries approach warfare. Near-peer competitors and non-state actors alike have observed decades of American power projection and reached a single conclusion: the most effective way to defeat a superior military is to ensure it never reaches the fight. This has given rise to the concept of the “Logistics Kill Chain.”

Modern adversaries no longer wait for a ship to dock or a plane to land to begin their assault. Instead, they target the entire sustainment lifecycle. This interference begins with cyber-attacks on domestic infrastructure, such as power grids and port management systems within the United States. It extends to the “gray zone,” where economic coercion and political maneuvers are used to deny the U.S. access to vital overseas hubs. Finally, it culminates in the physical domain, where long-range precision missiles and autonomous “kamikaze” drones are designed to hunt and destroy fuel tankers and maintenance depots. The network’s core mission is to highlight how every link in this chain is under constant, multi-domain pressure from IW threats.

IWC events highlight three critical problem sets that military planning is now forced to

reconcile. First is the death of “Just-in-Time” logistics. For years, the military adopted corporate lean-supply models to save costs. When a single missile strike can take out a centralized distribution hub, a lean supply chain becomes a brittle one. The FAN advocates for a shift toward “Just-Enough” logistics, a model that prioritizes tiered readiness and localized redundancy over centralized efficiency.

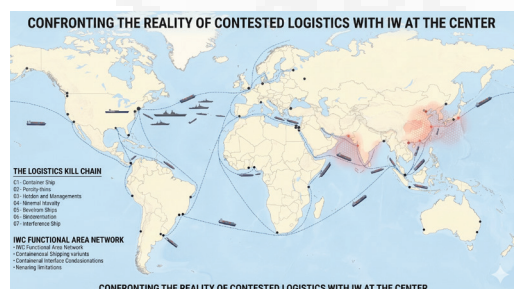
Second is the vulnerability of data. Modern logistics “wins wars when data leads the fight,” but that data is a double-edged sword. Every digital manifest and tracking beacon are a signal that an adversary can intercept.

Third is the civilian-military overlap. Unlike traditional battlefields, contested logistics often plays out in civilian spaces, commercial ports, private rail lines, and international waters. The network can act as a bridge, bringing together Department of War (DoW) planners with private sector leaders and academic researchers to ensure that the “whole-of-society” backbone remains resilient against sabotage and subversion.

It isn’t just about building faster trucks or bigger ships; it’s about a cultural shift in how the mission is viewed. It involves moving from centralized, vulnerable “iron mountains” of supplies to decentralized, multi-nodal networks that can “self-heal.” If one port is closed by a cyber-attack or a physical strike, the system must be intelligent enough to automatically reroute resources through smaller, less conventional paths.

Anyone with an interest in these issues should consider joining the Contested Logistics & Sustainment FAN to stay connected to IWC’s expanding work on Contested Logistics.

More information about the FAN and how to join can be found at: <https://irregularwarfarecenter.org/initiatives/functional-area-networks/>.



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Director’s Corner

Dr. Dennis Walters, IWC Director



Director’s Corner: Welcome to this month’s Director’s Corner. As I reflect on the current state of irregular warfare (IW), it is increasingly clear that the character of strategic competition is shifting rapidly. Irregular warfare is no longer exclusively an expeditionary effort waged in distant theaters (if it ever was just that); it is a persistent, global reality.

This evolution was brought into sharp focus by two recent articles that have heavily inspired my thinking on this subject. First, Craig Byrne’s insightful piece, “Irregular Warfare in the Homeland,” highlights a critical truth: our adversaries are executing irregular campaigns not just overseas, but directly within our borders. From cyber influence operations to the exploitation of legal and jurisdictional seams, the homeland is now an active domain of irregular competition.

Yet, as we face these evolving, asymmetric threats, we must ask ourselves if we are structurally prepared to meet them. In “Designed to Lose: The Institutional Features that Undermines US Irregular Warfare,” Andrew Rolander diagnoses a deeply entrenched problem. The current institutional incentives within the Department foster an unfortunate “learn-forget cycle” that prioritizes short-term metrics, decisive battles, and major platforms. Irregular warfare, conversely, demands long timelines, dedicated relationship-building, and influence—strategic elements that represent an opportunity to evolve how we measure and recognize success.

Adapting to these modern realities requires profound, actionable changes rather than mere rhetorical shifts. We must pursue comprehensive bureaucratic and cultural transformation. For policymakers and institutional leaders, this means implementing concrete reforms. First, we must revise personnel management and promotion board criteria to explicitly value and reward long-term advisory roles, regional language expertise, and influence operations on par with traditional kinetic commands. The newly established Theatre Information Advantage Detachments (TIAD) is a great start, but it remains to be seen whether promotion boards will sufficiently value postings there. Second, we must establish sustained, dedicated funding lines earmarked for security cooperation and partner capacity building, insulating them from the volatility of standard budget cycles, while simultaneously embedding IW principles into Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) as core curriculum rather than an elective.

The Irregular Warfare Center is dedicated to driving these institutional changes and ensuring our forces are prepared for the future. However, we cannot achieve this in a vacuum. This requires advocates and partners across the US Government, academia, and the joint force to help champion these structural reforms.

I invite you to join us in this critical effort. I look forward to continuing this conversation and building these vital partnerships at the upcoming IW Symposium in Washington, DC, on August 4-6. Together, we can forge the culture and architecture necessary to secure our strategic advantage.

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

[America’s aging Minuteman III nuclear missiles are getting replaced. We got an inside look.](#)

by: Ian Lee, CBS News

[US to lift Eritrea sanctions as Red Sea tensions reshape alliances, document says](#)

by: Giulia Paravacini, Reuters



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SPOTLIGHT

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IWC Engagements



IWC Partners with Mayo Clinic for Strategic Medical Readiness

The Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) and Mayo Clinic Military Medicine and the National Institute for Defense Health Cooperation co-sponsored the Medical Strategies for Modern Conflict Summit in Rochester, Minnesota, April 16, 2026. IWC Director Dr. Dennis Walters spoke on the importance of medical resiliency, the threat irregular warfare poses to the medical sector, and challenged participants to prepare to meet the threat. Following remarks by Dr. Walters and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of War for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict Dr. Richard Tilley, participants engaged in two days of plenary and breakout sessions to explore the evolving role of military and civilian medicine as irregular warfare tactics reshape modern conflict.



IWC Building Global Networks at SCETWGs

In April, Denise Cooper, Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) program manager, took the global stage to represent the Center at the joint European Command (EUCOM) and Africa Command (AFRICOM) Security Cooperation Education and Training Working Group in Garmisch, Germany. Briefing an impressive coalition of 67 partner nations, Cooper championed the IWC's core mission, showcasing exactly how we actively "advance IW knowledge" across the globe.

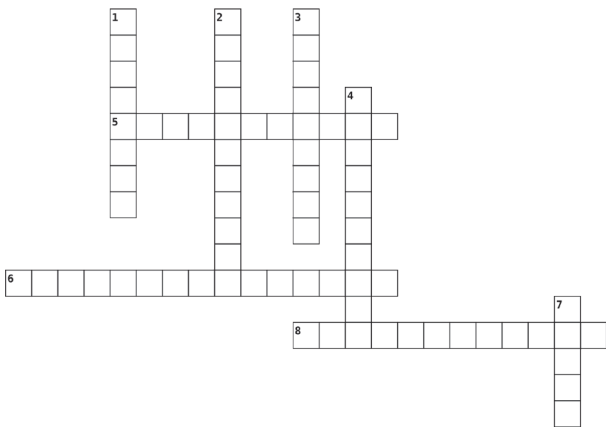
Why are events like SCETWGs so critical to our mission? These high-impact working groups serve as the engine for international security assistance. By synchronizing our global programs, we ensure that specialized training directly aligns with allied defense needs. This strategic alignment drives essential burden sharing—empowering our partners to take on shared security responsibilities, multiplying our collective capabilities, and ultimately forging an unbreakable global network of security professionals.



Strengthening Partnerships at Ridge Runner

Along with other key leaders, Director, Irregular Warfare Center Dr. Dennis Walters delivered opening remarks during the Ridge Runner Distinguished Visitors (DV) Day, April 22. The West Virginia National Guard Ridge Runner Irregular Warfare Exercise (RR IWX) is a flexible, adaptable, and scalable IW exercise platform built to prepare U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF), partners, and communities of interest for the complexities of operating in permissive, contested, and denied areas, often within civilian populations.

Irregular Warfare Crossword



Across

- 5. May holiday honoring those who died in service.
- 6. Large copper gift from France in NYC harbor.
- 8. The document starting with "We the People."

Down

- 1. The mountain featuring four presidential faces.
- 2. Famous bell in Philadelphia with a crack.
- 3. Ship that brought the Pilgrims in 1620.
- 4. The "Father of his Country."
- 7. The red flower worn to remember the fallen.

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!

This Month in the History of Irregular Warfare

The history of irregular warfare in May illustrates a shift from communist-inspired guerrilla theories to the sophisticated precision strike and information operations of the 21st century. This month marks the institutional birth of key special operations commands and the tactical execution of missions that define the modern era of clandestine conflict.

-May 15, 1756 – The formal start of the Seven Years' War (French and Indian War). This conflict was a foundational period for "irregular" tactics, as colonial rangers and Native American tribes utilized woodland scouting and hit-and-run maneuvers that contrasted sharply with European linear tactics.

-May 30, 1868 – The first official Decoration Day (now Memorial Day) was held to honor those who died in the American Civil War. The war itself featured extensive partisan operations and unconventional warfare behind the front lines, particularly in border states.

-May 28, 1918 – The first major American offensive of WWI. While conventional in execution, it served as a precursor to modern expeditionary and advisory roles, establishing the framework for how professional forces operate in foreign theaters alongside partner nations.

-May 22, 1990 – Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC) was officially activated at Hurlburt Field. This institutionalized the specialized airpower from AC-130 gunships to clandestine infiltration, required to support unconventional warfare on a global scale.

-May 2, 2011 – U.S. Special Operations Forces conducted a clandestine raid in Abbottabad, Pakistan, resulting in the death of Osama bin Laden. The mission highlighted the modern IW pillars of precise intelligence, sensitive site exploitation, and global strike capability.

Spotlight Team

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Crossword answers: 1. Rushmore 2. Liberty Bell 3. Mayflower 4. Washington 5. Memorial Day 6. Statue of Liberty 7. Poppy 8. Constitution

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