



Irregular Warfare Center

Spotlight

Amplify | Illuminate | Address Vol. 5 Ed. 8 | August 2026 Deter | Defend | Defeat

Cyber, Critical Minerals, and Sabotage: Top Officials Sound the Alarm on Homeland Vulnerabilities at the 2026 Annual IW Symposium

Story by: Pedro A. Rodriguez, IWC PAO Ctr.



ARLINGTON, Va. — Top defense officials, intelligence leaders, academic researchers, and private sector executives gathered from August 4 to August 6, 2026, for the Irregular Warfare Center’s (IWC) Annual Symposium to confront growing irregular warfare threats targeting the U.S. homeland. Themed “Irregular Warfare in the Homeland: Adapting for a Secure Future,” the three-day summit focused on hardening domestic critical infrastructure, countering foreign adversary operations within American borders, and establishing a unified, whole-of-society defense.

Convening under the strategic direction of the National Defense Strategy (NDS), the symposium emphasized leveraging all elements of national power across the interagency, state and local governments, law enforcement, industry, and academia. IWC Director Dr. Dennis Walters opened the symposium alongside Carlton A. Griffin, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of War and Director of the Secretariat for Special Operations, who delivered the opening keynote on the imperative of irregular warfare in modern homeland defense.

The opening day evaluated vulnerabilities across vital domestic systems, featuring discussions on cyber-defense operations, contested logistics in homeland defense, and the security of critical mineral supply chains. Senior leaders and experts including representatives from the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA), U.S. Army Transportation Command, the National Guard Bureau, Microsoft, and the UK Ministry of Defence examined the convergence between civilian and defense critical infrastructure. Additional breakout panels addressed aviation security, public health preparedness, food and water supply resilience, and communications infrastructure.

The second phase of the conference shifted focus to the specific tactics and methods employed by foreign adversaries inside U.S. borders. Industry panels explored foreign malign influence, defense industrial base vulnerabilities, and supply chain exposure, while academic security specialists addressed intellectual prop-

erty protection and threats facing higher education institutions. Geographic focus sessions examined distinct frontier vulnerabilities, including irregular challenges in the Arctic and High North, border security dynamics, and strategic posture in the Pacific theater involving regional partners.

The symposium concluded with strategic foresight and resilience sessions, highlighted by keynote remarks from Senior Advisor Brad Strausbaugh and a discussion on defense infrastructure with former Assistant Secretary of Defense Dr. Paul N. Stockton. Panels detailed the essential role of law enforcement intelligence integration and highlighted local community defense through emergency management leaders from Asheville, N.C., and the Appalachian Regional Coordination Cell (ARCC).

The symposium featured participation and sponsorship from specialized research and intelligence organizations, including Arizona State University, the National Strategic Research Institute (NSRI) at the University of Nebraska, Bilbo Technologies Inc., D3: Design, Data, Decisions, Fraym, TRM Labs, and WireScreen.



Director’s Corner



Dr. Dennis Walters, IWC Director



Director’s Corner: Securing the Homeland and Sustaining Resistance

Welcome to the August edition of the Director’s Corner. This month, we are focusing on two critical lines of effort that demonstrate how the Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) is actively addressing emerging threats and closing critical operational gaps: our recent Annual Symposium and the ongoing development of the Medical Annex to the Resistance Operating Concept (ROC).

Addressing IW Threats to the Homeland

From August 4th to 6th, the IWC hosted our Annual Symposium in Arlington, VA, convening nearly 300 national security professionals across the U.S. Government, industry, and academia. This year’s focus was squarely on Irregular Warfare threats to the Homeland.

Defending the homeland remains the Department’s top priority under the National Defense Strategy (NDS). The symposium tackled this imperative head-on, addressing vulnerabilities ranging from critical minerals and transportation networks to People’s Republic of China threats to academic research and our homeland in the Pacific. By bringing together diverse stakeholders to dissect these multi-domain challenges, the IWC is directly supporting the National Security Strategy’s (NSS) mandate to build a resilient and secure domestic foundation against pacing challenges and strategic competitors.

Plugging the Gap: The Resistance Operating Concept (ROC) Medical Annex

While identifying threats is critical, we must also equip our forces and partners with the tools to withstand and actively resist them. This brings me to our central focus for this month: The Medical Annex to the ROC.

The Medical Annex originated with the Special Operations Medical Association’s (SOMA) Medical Support to Irregular Warfare (MSIW) committee, which rightly recognized a significant lack of medical content within the existing ROC. Recognizing the strategic importance of this shortfall, the IWC acquired the project earlier this year via the IWC’s MSIW Functional Area Network (FAN).

In April, we took a major step forward by co-sponsoring the “Medicine in Modern Conflict” summit at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester. This event featured a keynote address by myself and hosted dedicated breakout sessions for key annex stakeholders to chart the path forward.

Since the summit, the IWC has organized a dedicated group of stakeholders within the MSIW community who are generously volunteering their time and expertise to review sections of the annex as it is drafted. This effort has exemplified the collaboration between FAN volunteers and IWC contractors that the FAN concept strives for.

Remote workshops and drafting are currently ongoing. The annex will undergo rigorous peer review before being published by the IWC. Ultimately, this annex aims to support U.S. forces, partners, and allies by codifying what we already know to be true: medicine plays a central, undeniable role in enabling and sustaining resistance. I look forward to sharing more updates as this vital document moves toward publication.

-DW

PRISM



The Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) is pleased to announce the launch of the PRISM publications program, unifying its editorial portfolio under a single, trusted brand. Going forward, the Center’s flagship journal, PRISM, will be joined by PRISM Insights and PRISM Perspectives, creating a cohesive family of publications dedicated to advancing thought and dialogue on irregular warfare.

Media Highlights

Macron hosts Saudi’s MBS for visit ranging from esports to Mideast
by: Agence France-Presse

Two U.S. tanker aircraft leave Bulgaria a month after deployment upset Iran
by: Reuters



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IWC Engagements

IWC Leads Offensive Cognitive Warfare Exercises at Global Information Summit Australia

Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) subject matter experts contractors Michael Miklaucic and Matthew Heidel supported the multinational Global Information Summit Australia (GISA), delivering two iterations of the “Fight Forward” exercise to approximately 80 international delegates. Over a five-part operational sequence, participants drafted, red-teamed, and briefed offensive information warfare concepts aimed at imposing strategic costs on the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Working groups identified and targeted specific vulnerabilities, including structural frictions, shifting domestic cultural attitudes like the “lying flat” movement, socioeconomic divides, and opportunities to engage PRC nationals living abroad.

While the broader summit largely centered on defensive measures such as disinformation detection, social resilience, and the role of artificial intelligence the IWC exercise served as the event’s only dedicated venue for exploring offensive cognitive warfare and deterrence by punishment. Throughout the summit, Miklaucic and Heidel also delivered organizational briefings and networked with international delegates, raising awareness of the Center’s mission and promoting key initiatives like the Operations in the Information Environment Functional Area Network and Startegic Communications workshops among PACOM and Australian Defence Force stakeholders.

IWC Provides Drone Warfare and Resilience Expertise at Vigilant Guard 2027 Foundation Day

Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) subject matter expert, contractor and field researcher Nolan Peterson represented the Center at the Vigilant Guard 2027 Foundation Day in Carson City, Nevada, on August 5. Jointly hosted by the Nevada National Guard and the Nevada Office of Emergency Management in coordination with USNORTHCOM and NORAD, the event served as a preparatory milestone for the upcoming Vigilant Guard 2027 exercise. Peterson engaged an audience of approximately 150 in-person and remote participants, including military personnel, state and local inter-agency partners, and key civilian leaders.

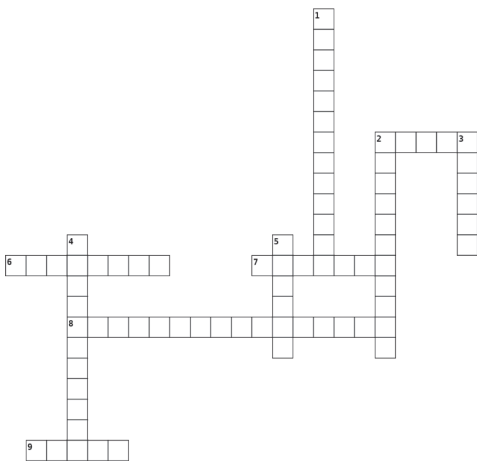
During the event, Peterson participated in a one-hour panel focused on civilian resistance and national resilience moderated by U.S. Army Lt. Col. Sarah Salvo. He also delivered a dedicated one-hour briefing examining emerging drone warfare threats to the U.S. homeland, drawing directly from his ongoing field research on the conflict in Ukraine as well as broader global advancements in unmanned warfare tactics and technologies.

IWC Africa Team Briefs Foreign Service Officers on Irregular Warfare in Sub-Saharan Africa

The Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) Africa regional team delivered a specialized lecture for Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) and an AFRICOM participant during the Foreign Service Institute’s “ASAF101: Sub-Saharan Africa Overview” course. Invited by the National Foreign Affairs Training Center Africa Deputy Chair Ashford Njogu, this engagement marked the second time the IWC team addressed an NFATC cohort. The course prepared 12 diplomats slated for postings across Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, Malawi, Cameroon, Chad, Angola, Ethiopia, and Nigeria alongside guest speakers from the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) and the National Guard Bureau.

Led by IWC Analyst, Contractor Matthew Heidel, the session focused on whether irregular warfare serves as an effective operational concept for navigating the contemporary African security landscape. Drawing on the IWC’s African Conceptualization study, Heidel examined U.S., allied, and African partner perspectives on irregular warfare, illustrating these frameworks through real-world dynamics across the continent. The discussion analyzed primary case studies on terrorism, state-sponsored mercenaries, and information operations in West Africa, concluding with an examination of the M23 conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Irregular Warfare Crossword



Across

- 2. Emerging economies bloc that expanded its membership.
- 6. Capital that saw the fall of the Assad regime in late 2024.
- 7. Strategic waterway connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
- 8. Arctic ocean corridor seeing increased competition as polar ice recedes.
- 9. African nation gripped by conflict between the SAF and RSF.

Down

- 1. Disputed waterway seeing frequent Coast Guard stand-offs.
- 2. Vital Red Sea strait targeted by Houthi maritime attacks
- 3. Nordic island nation that became the 32nd NATO member.
- 4. Baltic exclave heavily militarized by Russia.
- 5. Strategic strait between mainland China and Taipei.

Current Initiatives, Upcoming Events & IW Educational Offerings

***September 1-2, 2026- The IWC is hosting the 4th annual scholars colloquium on September 1st and 2nd at Ft. McNair in DC focused on “Irregular Warfare’s Impact on Homeland Defense.” The event brings together 10 junior scholars chosen on the strength of submitted papers who have written on operations in the information environment (OIE), medicine and irregular warfare (IW), counter threat finance, emerging technology, and IW strategy. Senior Scholars mentor our junior scholars over two days and have the opportunity to help shape the next generation of IW scholars.

***September 28-29, 2026 - Save the Date! The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security in partnership with the Irregular Warfare Center (IWC), is excited to host our next IWC Intelligence Support to Irregular Warfare Symposium. The series of Symposiums look at our existing capabilities within the Intelligence Community. For more details follow us on Linked In and X.

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Crossword answers: 1. South China Sea 2. Babelmandeb 3. Sweeden 4. Kalinigrad 5. Taiwan 6. Damascus 7. Malacca 8. Northern Sea Route 9. Sudan

This Month in the History of Irregular Warfare

August’s historical footprint in irregular warfare highlights how unconventional resistance, covert deception, and specialized raiding operations consistently disrupted conventional power dynamics across modern military history.

-August 19, 1779 – Battle of Paulus Hook: Major Henry “Light-Horse Harry” Lee led a surprise partisan raid against a fortified British outpost in New Jersey, demonstrating the potency of rapid, decentralized hit-and-run tactics during the American Revolution.

-August 21, 1863 – Lawrence Raid & Border Partisan Warfare: Confederate irregular leader William Quantrill carried out a devastating guerrilla attack on Lawrence, Kansas, highlighting the brutal nature and destabilizing impact of partisan “bushwhacker” networks during the Civil War.

-August 31, 1939 – The Gleiwitz Incident: Nazi covert operatives staged a false-flag attack on a German radio station, serving as a classic case study in information manipulation and covert irregular pretexts to justify conventional invasion.

-August 17–18, 1942 – The Makin Island Raid: Carlson’s 2nd Marine Raider Battalion launched a submarine-borne commando raid against Japanese forces in the Pacific, pioneering modern amphibious special operations and diversionary raid doctrine.

-August 1, 1944 – The Warsaw Uprising Begins: The Polish Home Army (Armia Krajowa) launched the largest single military effort taken by any European resistance movement during WWII, executing intense urban guerrilla warfare against occupying German forces for 63 days.

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