



Irregular Warfare Center

Spotlight

Amplify | Illuminate | Address Vol. 5 Ed. 10 | October 2026 Deter | Defend | Defeat

Intelligence Leaders Target Adversary Hybrid Threats Below the Threshold of War

Story by: Pedro A. Rodriguez, IWC Public Affairs Official, Contractor

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Defense strategists, intelligence officials, and security leaders gathered for the Intelligence Support to Gray Zone Activities & Irregular Warfare Symposium, confronting multi-domain adversarial tactics operating short of open conflict. Hosted by the Office of the Under Secretary of War for Intelligence and Security in partnership with the Irregular Warfare Center (IWC), the unclassified sessions focused on the urgent requirement to detect, deter, disrupt, and degrade hybrid threats across the global operating environment.

Opening the event, IWC Director Dr. Dennis Walters and senior defense leaders established that modern competition increasingly unfolds prior to formal crises, within the human and



economic environments. Participants examined how nation-states leverage lawfare, economic coercion, unacknowledged military operations, and proxy actions to erode Western legitimacy. Keynote addresses and panels emphasized leveraging specialized intelligence authorities, adapting professional education curriculum, and forming deeper partnerships with industry to counter economic and gray zone maneuvering.

The symposium progressed into detailed breakdowns of strategic competitor playbooks, specifically evaluating Chinese and Russian approaches to hybrid warfare. Expert sessions dissected China’s concept of “Three Warfares” and methods for winning without fighting, alongside Russian “New Generation Warfare” frameworks focused on penetration and disruption. Attendees analyzed adversary operations to pinpoint vulnerabilities and explore how the

Defense Intelligence and Security Enterprise can counter coordinated, asymmetric activities across the diplomatic, informational, military, and economic spectrums.



Director’s Corner

Dr. Dennis Walters, IWC Director



A New Fiscal Year of Opportunity and Expansion

Welcome to the October edition of the Director’s Corner. As we enter a new fiscal year, I am energized by the opportunities ahead for the Irregular Warfare Center (IWC). Looking forward, two major initiatives encapsulate our trajectory: enhancing intelligence support in the gray zone and expanding our educational roadmap.

Advancing Intelligence Support to Irregular Warfare

To effectively compete today, our intelligence apparatus must align against adversarial gray zone challenges. From September 28–30, the IWC partnered with the Office of the Under Secretary of War for Intelligence and Security to host the Intelligence Support to Gray Zone Activities & Irregular Warfare Symposium.

This critical event yielded three foundational outcomes. First, participants aligned Department efforts to shape the human environment and leverage industry partners in the economic space. Second, we established a unified understanding of hybrid warfare tactics, empowering the Defense Intelligence and Security Enterprise and the Intelligence Community to actively counter gray zone operations. Finally, attendees formulated concepts designed to impose operational dilemmas on adversaries and secure a lasting cognitive advantage.

Scaling Our Educational Impact

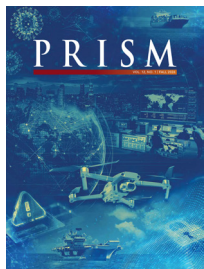
Preparing practitioners for future threats requires a robust curriculum. Over the coming fiscal year, the IWC is executing an ambitious plan to develop and field 20 new courses, providing comprehensive learning pathways for national security professionals.

A cornerstone of this effort is the Future Threats Certificate pathway. We will sequentially field courses IW 121 through IW 126, culminating in IW 127—an interactive decision scenario testing students against complex crises. Furthermore, the Center is partnering with National Defense University’s College of International Security Affairs (CISA) to build a new Homeland Defense degree, bridging the gap between irregular warfare concepts and domestic security.

The new fiscal year is off to a fast start, and the IWC remains positioned to turn strategic concepts into concrete capabilities. Thank you for your continued dedication to the mission.

-DW

PRISM



The latest issue (12.1, fall 2026) of PRISM: The Journal of Emerging Threats | Complex Statecraft is now available in the Irregular Warfare Center’s Publications Tab, under PRISM.

Media Highlights

Egypt’s Defense Chiefs Pledge to Support Saudi Arabia After Houthi Attacks
Euan Ward New York Times

Venezuela Opposition Alliance Reaffirms Nobel Laureate Machado as Leader
Agence France-Presse



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IWC Engagements

IWC Insights Are Shaping the Future of Drone and Counter-Cartel Operations

At the Magnolia Crucible UAS/C-UAS Forum and Exercise at Camp Shelby, Miss., Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) Subject Matter Expert, Contractor Nolan Peterson evaluated the readiness of U.S. military, federal law enforcement, and industry leaders against evolving drone threats. During tabletop exercises simulating attacks on domestic military installations, Peterson noted areas of improvement to identify how state adversaries integrate commercial and one-way attack systems into broader irregular warfare campaigns. Moving forward, Peterson recommends leveraging Camp Shelby’s testing facilities, collaborating with academic institutions on strategic bombing research, and applying IWC doctrine to help homeland defense stakeholders anticipate and mitigate peer-state UAS operations.

Southern Dagger: Aligning Inter-agency Strategy Against Transnational Cartels

During the inaugural Southern Dagger Wargame at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Cal., IWC Deputy Regional Advisor for U.S. Central Command and U.S. Southern Command, Contractor Tom Searle assessed interagency targeting methodologies employed against Mexican drug cartels with key-participants including NORTHCOM, SOCNORTH, and the newly established Joint Integration Coordination Center Mexico. The games identified ways to enhance interoperativity between agencies. Searle identified immediate opportunities for the IWC to provide Counter Threat Finance (CTF) analytical support via its functional academic network, while recommending foundational research to help the Department of War establish clear metrics and unify interagency operations under homeland defense priorities.

IWC Advances Tactical Drone Innovation in Arizona Field Trial

Advancing its mission to bridge academic research with frontline operational readiness, an Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) delegation led by Director Dr. Dennis Walters evaluated pioneering, drone innovation project in Arizona. Technical trials at the Mesa Field Study Site focused on evaluating non-normative drone systems in constrained environments, testing five core design principles. During the live demonstrations, multi-role drone fleets executed tactical directives including precision payload delivery and defensive denial. To further IWC lines of effort with these frontline operations, the delegation integrated IWC Colloquium Scholars as active observers of the trials to study how academic unmanned aerial systems (UAS) research aligns with Joint Force requirements. In parallel, IWC leadership met with senior-level personnel from the Center for Army Learning Innovation to align these findings directly with operational military training.

Irregular Warfare Crossword Navy’s Birthday Edition



- Across**
4. Revolutionary War naval captain John Paul ___, famous for declaring, “I have not yet begun to fight!” aboard the Bonhomme Richard in 1779.
6. Second-class battleship whose mysterious explosion in Havana Harbor in February 1898 catalyzed the outbreak of the Spanish–American War.
7. Civil War Union iron clad designed by John Ericsson featuring a revolutionary revolving gun turret; fought the CSS Virginia at the Battle of Hampton Roads (1862).
9. David ___, the Civil War flag officer who became the U.S. Navy’s first full Admiral; best remembered for the order paraphrased as “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!” at Mobile Bay (1864).
- Down**
1. Acronym for Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service.
2. Chester W. ___, the Fleet Admiral who served as Commander in Chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet throughout World War II.
3. Oliver Hazard ___, naval hero of the Battle of Lake Erie who flew the flag reading “Don’t Give Up the Ship.”
5. Month in 1775 when the Continental Congress established what is the U.S. Navy.
7. Decisive June 1942 naval battle in the Pacific where U.S. carrier aircraft sank four Japanese fleet carriers.
8. The world’s first nuclear-powered submarine (SSN-571), which transmitted the famous signal “Underway on nuclear power.”

Current Initiatives, Upcoming Events & IW Educational Offerings

*** The Irregular Warfare Center (IWC) is pleased to announce a podcast on a question that is both timely and difficult: how can, or should, Operations in the Information Environment (OIE), including PSYOP, be used in defense of the Homeland? Featuring: Shawn Chenoweth, Director of Cognitive Advantage at the U.S. National Security Council, and Adjunct Senior Information Scientist for RAND, Corp. Rand Waltzman. The conversation will include live Q&A and will be open to everyone through the registration link provided on the IWC’s Linked In events announcement.

***The IWC will be launching the IWC Future Threats Certificate, an eight-course learning pathway consisting in the following e-Learning courses launching on the following dates: IW-121 (Oct. 26-30), IW 122 (Nov. 16-20), IW 123 (Nov. 23-27), IW 124 (Dec. 14-18), IW 125 (Jan. 18-22), IW 126 (Jan. 25-29) and IW 127 (March 1-5).

Spotlight Team

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Crossword answers: 1. W.A.V.E.S. 2. Nimitz 3. Perry 4. Jones 5. October 6. Maine 7. Midway, Monitor 8. Nautilus 9. Farragut

This Month in the History of Irregular Warfare

The historical milestones of October demonstrate how irregular warfare spans asymmetric urban combat, deep-penetration special operations, and the decisive attrition of conventional forces by partisan resistance. These operations highlight the enduring operational necessity of indigenous partnerships, human terrain mastery, and adaptive command structures in non-permissive environments.

-October 30, 1944 - The Liberation of Athens and the Greek Partisan Culmination: In late October 1944, British forces and Greek resistance elements fully liberated Athens as German forces withdrew northward through the Balkans.

-October 7, 1967 - Capture of Ernesto “Che” Guevara: Ernesto “Che” Guevara was captured in the Yuro Ravine by a CIA-advised battalion of Bolivian Army Rangers, and executed the following day in La Higuera.

-October 3–4, 1993 - Battle of Mogadishu: Task Force Ranger (elements of the 75th Ranger Regiment, 1st SFOD-D, and the 160th SOAR) launched an assault into central Mogadishu, Somalia, to capture key lieutenants of warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid.

-October 7, 2001 - Launch of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF): Following the September 11 attacks, the United States launched operations in Afghanistan, initiating one of the most successful unconventional warfare campaigns in modern military history.

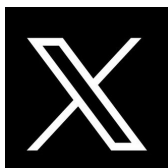
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