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JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL



Traditional and Irregular Warfare
A Flawed Concept for Categorizing Conflict

by

James W. Purvis

Colonel, Joint Forces Staff College

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

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Thesis Advisor: Doctor Nesmith, JFSC

Abstract

The use of “irregular,” “irregulars,” “regulars,” etc. has not changed dramatically until recent United States (U.S.) Department of Defense (DOD) strategy documents started using the terms to describe “emerging challenges” and “forms of warfare.” The *2005 National Defense Strategy* started a four-year attempt at defining and categorizing warfare into two categories: “traditional warfare” and “irregular warfare.” This artificial division of warfare adds no value and establishes an intellectual framework that may conceptually limit U.S. approaches to future national challenges.

“Irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare” are poor terms for a fundamentally flawed concept that will limit the U.S. Government’s ability to shape effectively the international environment without high costs militarily, economically, and politically.

To prove this assertion this paper reviews recent developments in terminology, concepts, and categorization of warfare focusing on “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare” found in official U.S. documents published over the last 5 years. Clausewitz, SunTzu, Thucydides, T.E. Lawrence, and Mao Tse-tung are used to investigate key constructs within the current “irregular warfare” concept and the recent categorization of warfare. An analysis of the major flaws in the recent “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare” policy and concept development is offered for consideration. These flaws include attempting to categorize warfare into two main parts, poor terminology, the wrong focus of effort, and militarization of U.S. National Strategy.

The paper concludes with the recommendation that the U.S. should discontinue the official use of “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare” as they relate to actions taken by the U.S. Government and the Armed Forces of the U.S.

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I. Introduction

Nothing of real importance changes: Modern history is not modern.

--Colin S. Gray, *Fighting Talk: Forty Maximums on War, Peace, and Strategy*

There is enormous value for institutions to study the history of human conflict in the context of current and expected future challenges. This helps provide a realistic framework for development of national policies, strategy, and military planning. If done correctly, this study provides adequate tools and an intellectual framework that future leaders can use to meet the challenges confronting them. These efforts are difficult because they require an accurate interpretation of past events and some divination to develop future concepts that are useful to policy makers and strategists. Despite the difficulty of this task, the United States (U.S.) Government should develop new concepts incorporating new and emerging technologies wisely using available resources to “. . . provide for the common defense. . .”¹ The U.S. Government should carefully analyze all new concepts against historical truths and ensure they do not establish intuitional paradigms that intellectually limit the options of future leaders.

“Irregular Warfare” is a concept in a string of “new ideas” produced by U.S. defense intellectuals attempting to develop policies and strategies to meet the current and envisioned challenges of the strategic environment. The U.S. defense establishment is incorporating “irregular warfare” and its current antithesis “traditional warfare” into its

¹ U.S. Constitution, preamble

parlance, and the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) is formally establishing these terms as new categories of warfare in policy and doctrine.

This paper's thesis is the artificial bifurcation of warfare into "traditional" and "irregular" adds no value and establishes an intellectual framework that may conceptually limit U.S. approaches to future national challenges.

This paper uses official U.S. DOD documents to review recent developments in terminology, concepts, and categorization of warfare focusing on "irregular warfare" and "traditional warfare." Then it outlines portions of some noteworthy warfare theory classics related to key constructs within the current irregular warfare concept and the recent categorization of warfare. An analysis of the major flaws in the recent irregular warfare conceptual developments is offered for consideration. The flaws with this concept include: attempting to categorize warfare into two main parts, poor terminology, the wrong focus of effort, and militarization of U.S. National Strategy.

The division of "irregular warfare" and "traditional warfare" is a flawed concept of describing warfare. Even though the term and understanding of "irregular" in the context of warfare is not new, this latest recycling of "irregular warfare" may prove harmful by building a paradigm that limits U.S. strategic thought. If DOD fully implements this concept without addressing the underlying logic errors, there may be significant problems integrating it as part of an effective national strategy. This will limit the U.S. Government's ability to shape the international environment without high costs - - militarily, economically, and in the end, politically.

The U.S. DOD should not categorize warfare into "irregular warfare" and "traditional warfare," and it should discontinue the official use of "irregular warfare."

II. Recent Official Documents and Directives

The Strategic ‘Concept Du Jour’ will be tomorrow’s stale left-over, until it is rediscovered, recycled, and revealed as a new truth.

--Colin S. Gray, *Fighting Talk: Forty Maximums on War, Peace, and Strategy*

The use of “irregular,” “irregulars,” “regulars,” etc. had not changed dramatically until recent U.S. strategy documents starting using the term to describe “emerging challenges” or “forms of warfare.” The development of these terms and their descriptions have evolved in various recent documents starting with the March 2005, *National Defense Strategy*.¹ The 2005 *National Defense Strategy* appears to have started the latest attempt at categorizing warfare that has led to the bifurcation of warfare into two main categories in joint doctrine: “traditional warfare” and “irregular warfare.”²

There are many recent, formal U.S. DOD and military documents using the terms “irregular warfare” and “traditional” or “conventional warfare.” As the U.S. DOD continued to publish official documents the concept of “irregular warfare” and its antithesis, “traditional warfare,” continued to mature. The latest official document that uses this artificial division of warfare is DOD Directive: 3000.07, Subject: *Irregular*

¹ U.S. Department of Defense, *The National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*. (Washington, DC, March 2005).

² U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, As amended through 20 March 2009 (Washington, DC, 14 May 2007) [website on line]; available from Joint Electronic Library at http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/new_pubs/jp1.pdf. I-6, I-7.

Warfare.³ Even after four years of working on this construct, the idea of “irregular warfare” is not well understood, or agreed upon uniformly throughout the U.S. Military. This is despite an approved DOD definition and joint doctrine, as well as an approved detailed joint concept and DOD policy.

The following descriptions of “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare” provide as a frame of reference for the review of official documents and directives in this chapter. The approved DOD definition for irregular warfare is, “A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will.”⁴ The term “traditional warfare” is not formally defined, but Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* describes it as follows:

Traditional war is characterized as a confrontation between nation-states or coalitions/alliances of nation-states. This confrontation typically involves small-scale to large-scale, force-on-force military operations in which adversaries employ a variety of conventional military capabilities against each other in the air, land, maritime, and space physical domains and the information environment. The objective is to defeat an adversary’s armed forces, destroy an adversary’s war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in an adversary’s government or policies. Military operations in traditional war normally focus on an adversary’s armed forces to ultimately influence the adversary’s government. It generally assumes that the people indigenous to the operational area are non-belligerents and will accept whatever political outcome the belligerent governments impose, arbitrate, or negotiate. A fundamental military objective is to minimize civilian interference in those operations. The near-term results of traditional war are often evident, with the conflict ending in victory for one side and defeat for the other or in stalemate.⁵

³ U.S. Department of Defense, Directive Number 3000.07, Subject: IW [Irregular Warfare] (Washington, DC, 1 December 2008).

⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, As amended through 17 October 2008 (Washington, DC, 12 April 2001) [website on line]; available from Joint Electronic Library at <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict>

⁵ JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, I-6.

National Defense Strategy

The *2005 National Defense Strategy* was the first formal U.S. Defense document to use the term “irregular warfare.”⁶ It also used “irregular” as a descriptor for forces, methods, and conflict, but its main use was to describe a type of challenge facing the U.S.

The *2005 National Defense Strategy* describes the changing security environment using four challenges: Traditional, Irregular, Catastrophic, and Disruptive. The outline from the *2005 National Defense Strategy* follows:

- **Traditional** challenges are posed by states employing recognized military capabilities and forces in well understood forms of military competition and conflict.
- **Irregular** challenges come from those employing "unconventional" methods to counter the traditional advantages of stronger opponents.
- **Catastrophic** challenges involve the acquisition, possession, and use of WMD [weapons of mass destruction] or methods producing WMD like effects.
- **Disruptive** challenges may come from adversaries who develop and use breakthrough technologies to negate current U.S. advantages in key operational domains.⁷

The *2005 National Defense Strategy* adds to the description of irregular challenges and provides some examples:

Increasingly sophisticated *irregular* methods e.g., terrorism and insurgency challenge U.S. security interests. Adversaries employing irregular methods aim to erode U.S. influence, patience, and political will. Irregular opponents often take a long term approach, attempting to impose prohibitive human, material, financial, and political costs on the U.S. to compel strategic retreat from a key region or course of action.⁸

⁶ *2005 National Defense Strategy*.

⁷ *2005 National Defense Strategy*, 2.

⁸ *2005 National Defense Strategy*, 3.

The *2005 National Defense Strategy* also introduces these challenges as forms of warfare. “Finally, in the future, the most capable opponents may seek to combine truly disruptive capacity with *traditional, irregular, or catastrophic* forms of warfare.”⁹ The *2005 National Defense Strategy* also uses “irregular methods,” “irregular conflict,” and “irregular forces” in the context of “irregular challenges.” In essence the *2005 National Defense Strategy* attempts to categorize challenges and warfare, but in a way that many people may find confusing by mixing terms and ideas in a way that is not clear. This lexicon and taxonomy of concepts continues to change and is refined in various documents that follow the publishing of the *2005 National Defense Strategy*.

The *2008 National Defense Strategy* continues the direction to develop irregular warfare capabilities within the U.S. military. It places a lot of emphasis on developing capabilities to conduct irregular warfare by stating, “. . . we must display a mastery of irregular warfare comparable to that which we possess in conventional combat.”¹⁰ It attempts to balance the need to prepare for irregular warfare by adding “Although improving the U.S. Armed Forces’ proficiency in irregular warfare is the Defense Department’s top priority, the U.S. does not have the luxury of preparing exclusively for such challenges.”¹¹ The *2008 National Defense Strategy* continues to use “traditional warfare,” but also uses “conventional warfare” in the same context as well.

The *2008 National Defense Strategy* uses “irregular” to describe capabilities, challenges, and campaigns. Like the *2005 National Defense Strategy*, the *2008 National*

⁹ *2005 National Defense Strategy*, 2.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, *National Defense Strategy* (Washington, DC, June 2008), 4.

¹¹ *2008 National Defense Strategy*, 13.

Defense Strategy attempts to categorize challenges and warfare in a way that is confusing by mixing terms and ideas. The *2008 National Defense Strategy* also states:

These modes of warfare may appear individually or in combination, spanning the spectrum of warfare and intertwining hard and soft power. In some instances, we may not learn that a conflict is underway until it is well advanced and our options limited. We must develop better intelligence capabilities to detect, recognize, and analyze new forms of warfare as well as explore joint approaches and strategies to counter them.¹²

This is a very interesting paragraph in the *National Defense Strategy* in that it directs the department to “develop better intelligence capabilities to detect, recognize, and analyze new forms of warfare.” It does this, but it does not identify the different “modes (or forms) of warfare,” nor does it give examples. It may mean conventional and irregular warfare from the previous paragraph.¹³ It may also include “forms of warfare” such as terrorism, electronic, and cyber in a later paragraph.¹⁴ The *2008 National Defense Strategy* mentions the term “spectrum of warfare,” but does not expand on this idea either. It is difficult to determine what the real task is from this confusing discussion.

The *2008 National Defense Strategy* discusses a lot of challenges and provides some direction on improving “irregular warfare” and “conventional warfare” capabilities, but it is difficult to understand what exactly is to be improved.

Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report

The second official document that appears using “irregular” in various forms is the *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* in early 2006.¹⁵ This document continues to use

¹² *2008 National Defense Strategy*, 4.

¹³ *2008 National Defense Strategy*, 4.

¹⁴ *2008 National Defense Strategy*, 11.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, DC, 6 February 2006).

“irregular challenges,” and adds “irregular operations,” and “irregular campaign.” It also greatly expands the use of “irregular warfare,” and describes “irregular warfare” within the text in an attempt to better convey the idea. The *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review* describes irregular warfare as “*conflicts* in which enemy combatants are not regular forces of nation states” [italics mine]¹⁶ in one section and as “*operations* in which enemy combatants are not regular forces of nation states” [italics mine]¹⁷ in another section. The only difference in these descriptors is italicized words conflicts and operations. In this report the *description* of “irregular warfare” is consistent with the general historical context of the term, that is something done by “irregulars” or “irregular forces.” Even though the description of “irregular warfare” is consistent with the historical use, the report does start using the term incorrectly and inconsistently.

The *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review* starts to deviate from previous norms that irregular forces conduct irregular warfare in several areas and this starts the expansion and improper use of “irregular warfare.” The *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review* includes terrorism, insurgency, and guerrilla warfare as parts of irregular warfare, and this is where DOD documents start to classify “irregular warfare” as a separate category of warfare.¹⁸ The *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review* calls for U.S. Joint Forces, specifically joint ground forces (U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps) to increase their capability and capacity to conduct “irregular operations,” which starts another flaw in the emerging conceptual framework.¹⁹ The document established “irregular warfare” as something

¹⁶ *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review*, 3.

¹⁷ *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review*, 11.

¹⁸ *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review*, 19, 42.

¹⁹ *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review*, 42.

done by “. . . enemy combatants [that] are not regular forces of nation states;” then it directs the Armed Forces of the U.S. or “regulars” to perform something that we are fighting against, “terrorism.”²⁰ This is not a logical framework upon which to start a new concept. Finally the *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review* directs a follow-on roadmap for areas of particular emphasis including “irregular warfare” that will expand this illogical framework still further.

Quadrennial Defense Review Execution Roadmap for Irregular Warfare

As directed in the *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review*, an irregular warfare roadmap was developed and published on 26 April 2006.²¹ This document continues the “irregular warfare” themes of the *2005 National Defense Strategy* and the *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review*. This roadmap provides specific tasks to various organizations within DOD to improve the U.S. military’s ability to conduct irregular warfare. This *Quadrennial Defense Review Execution Roadmap* is the first official document to provide a working definition of “irregular warfare.” Deputy Secretary of Defense, Gordon England, approved the following working definition on 17 April 2006:

Irregular warfare is a form of warfare that has as its objective the credibility and/or legitimacy of the relevant political authority with the goal of undermining or supporting that authority. Irregular warfare favors indirect approaches, through it may employ the full range of military and other capabilities to seek asymmetric approaches, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will.²²

²⁰ *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review*, 3, 11, 19, 42.

²¹ U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Execution Roadmap for Irregular Warfare* (Washington, DC, 26 April 2006).

²² *Quadrennial Defense Review Execution Roadmap for Irregular Warfare*, 3.

This definition will change several more times before it is included in joint doctrine and the DOD dictionary. The main difference with this working definition and the current approved one is the objective and focus. This working definition has “as its objective the credibility and/or legitimacy of the relevant political authority with the goal of undermining or supporting that authority.” The current definition has “. . . legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s)”²³ as the focus of effort. This is a major shift in focus of effort between these two definitions. This shift in effort could have a significant impact on the national elements of power required to actually accomplish these two very different objectives.

The *Execution Roadmap for Irregular Warfare* provides an illustrative list of what it considers “irregular warfare” activities, and states:

Many IW [irregular warfare] activities are not specifically military in nature – they are best performed by other government agencies, or by partner nations or organizations. Some IW [irregular warfare] activities listed below, such as terrorism and transnational criminal activities violate international law. Agencies of the United States government do not conduct such activities as a matter of U.S. national policy or law. However, since our adversaries conduct these activities, they are, included in the illustrative list below. This list is not exhaustive:

- Insurgency and counterinsurgency (COIN)
- Terrorism and counterterrorism (CT)
- Unconventional Warfare (UW)
- Foreign Internal Defense (FID)
- Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations
- Transnational criminal activities that support or sustain irregular warfare and the law enforcement activities to counter them.
- Psychological Operations (PSYOP)
- Information Operations (IO)
- Intelligence and Counterintelligence Operations²⁴

²³ JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 282.

²⁴ *Quadrennial Defense Review Execution Roadmap for Irregular Warfare*, 4.

“IW [irregular warfare] extends beyond the military domain. It incorporates political, psychological, informational, and economic methods, which are enabled and supported by the actions of military and other security forces, or of irregular forces.”²⁵

This idea that many of these irregular warfare activities cannot or should not be done by the U.S. military or any U.S. government agency proves to be very awkward as the community develops the irregular warfare concepts. It also makes explaining what part of irregular warfare the U.S. will engage in and what it will not problematic as well. The *Execution Roadmap for Irregular Warfare* also directs the development of a Joint Operating Concept for irregular warfare, which is discussed next.

The Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept

The *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, Version 1.0 was the first Joint Concept on “irregular warfare,” and is the largest single official DOD publication on the idea of “irregular warfare.”²⁶ It outlines a large volume of information about what the U.S. military currently thinks about “irregular warfare” and its impact on future joint operations. It also attempts to deal with the difficulty in categorizing “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare.”

This document provides several pages dealing with the difficulty in defining “irregular warfare” and starts this discussion with the following:

IW [irregular warfare] is a complex, “messy,” and ambiguous social phenomenon that does not lend itself to clean, neat, concise, or precise definition. This JOC [Joint Operating Concept] uses the term in two contexts. First, IW [irregular warfare] is a form of armed conflict. As such, it replaces the term “low-

²⁵ *Quadrennial Defense Review Execution Roadmap for Irregular Warfare*, 3.

²⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, *Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept (JOC)*, Version 1.0 (Washington, DC, 11 September 2007).

intensity conflict.” Second, IW [irregular warfare] is a form of warfare. As such, it encompasses insurgency, counterinsurgency, terrorism, and counterterrorism, raising them above the perception that they are somehow a lesser form of conflict below the threshold of warfare.²⁷

The concept document goes on to state, “. . . a precise IW [irregular warfare] definition is hampered by two major factors: A) the role of IW [irregular warfare] at different levels of war [and] B) the methods used to define IW [irregular warfare].”²⁸ A summary of the issue with levels of war is, “IW [irregular warfare] is contextually different at each level of war and as such will be applied differently by those operating at each level of war.”²⁹ It outlines the problem of methods to define “irregular warfare” as, “who conducts it (actors), how they conduct it (methods), or why they conduct it (strategic purpose).”³⁰ This appears to be a lot of difficulty in defining one term. If DOD has this much difficulty internally understanding this construct, how much more difficult will it be for those outside DOD to comprehend?

The *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* attempts to differentiate “irregular warfare” from “traditional warfare” by using the “focus” of each type of warfare. The following discussion outlines those focus areas for each type of warfare:

Conventional or “traditional” warfare is a form of warfare between states that employs direct military confrontation to defeat an adversary’s armed forces, destroy an adversary’s war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in an adversary’s government or policies. The focus of conventional military operations is normally an adversary’s armed forces with the objective of influencing the adversary’s government. It generally assumes that the indigenous populations within the operational area are non-belligerents and will accept whatever political outcome the belligerent governments impose, arbitrate, or negotiate. A fundamental military objective in conventional military operations is to minimize civilian interference in those operations.

²⁷ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 6.

²⁸ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 6.

²⁹ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 7.

³⁰ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 7.

In contrast, IW [irregular warfare] focuses on the control or influence of populations, not on the control of an adversary's forces or territory. Ultimately, IW [irregular warfare] is a political struggle with violent and non-violent components. The struggle is for control or influence over, and the support of, a relevant population. The foundation for IW [irregular warfare] is the centrality of the relevant populations to the nature of the conflict. The parties to the conflict, whether states or armed groups, seek to undermine their adversaries' legitimacy and credibility and to isolate their adversaries from the relevant populations and their external supporters, physically as well as psychologically. At the same time, they also seek to bolster their own legitimacy and credibility to exercise authority over that same population.³¹

Despite the difficulty in defining irregular warfare, the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* uses this "focus" to define irregular warfare as, "A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary's power, influence, and will."³² This definition is different than the working definition found in the roadmap, but is consistent with the current approved definition in the Joint Publication 1-02.³³

The *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* also describes "conventional" or "traditional warfare" as "a form of warfare between states that employs direct military confrontation to defeat an adversary's armed forces, destroy an adversary's war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in an adversary's government or policies."³⁴ Further, the document summarizes problems with the term "traditional" with regard to warfare as follows:

³¹ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 7-8.

³² *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 6.

³³ JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 282.

³⁴ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 7.

The problem with using the term “traditional” to describe these types of forces and operations and this form of warfare is that these traditions stem from European-style armed forces of the Industrial Age, whereas most military historians would describe “traditional” warfare as being non-Western and pre-industrial in its origins – in other words, as irregular warfare.³⁵

It then goes on to state that in practical terms “conventional” and “traditional” are interchangeable and that the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* will use “traditional warfare” to remain consistent with the *2005 National Defense Strategy* and *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review* descriptions. This only alludes to the problems with terminology and the frame work established in the *2005 National Defense Strategy*.

Department of Defense Directives

Department of Defense Directive 3000.05, Subject: *Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations* established DOD policy for “Stability Operations.”³⁶ This directive states:

Stability operations are a core U.S. military mission that the Department of Defense shall be prepared to conduct and support. They shall be given priority comparable to combat operations and be explicitly addressed and integrated across all DoD activities including doctrine, organizations, training, education, exercises, materiel, leadership, personnel, facilities, and planning.³⁷

This directive does not mention “irregular warfare” even though the Stability Operations directive was signed out eight months after the *2005 National Defense Strategy* introduced the “irregular warfare” term. There are a lot of activities and

³⁵ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 7, n8.

³⁶ U.S., Department of Defense, Directive Number 3000.05, Subject: Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations (Washington, DC, 28 November 2005).

³⁷ Department of Defense Directive 3000.05, *Military Support for Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction (SSTR) Operations*, 2.

functions that are part of stability operations in this directive that overlap with those described as part of “irregular warfare” in the *2005 National Defense Strategy*.

The Deputy Secretary of Defense signed out Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, Subject: *Irregular Warfare* on 1 December 2008.³⁸ This directive “Establishes policy and assigns responsibilities for DoD conduct of IW [irregular warfare] and development of capabilities to address irregular challenges to national security. . .”³⁹ This directive used the approved definition of “irregular warfare,” and provided a definition for “traditional warfare” that is consistent with Joint Publication 1 discussion. This “traditional warfare” definition is not in the DOD Dictionary and is only for use in this directive. It defines “traditional warfare” as:

A form of warfare between the regulated militaries of states, or alliances of states, in which the objective is to defeat an adversary’s armed forces, destroy an adversary’s war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in an adversary’s government or policies.⁴⁰

The directive states:

It is DoD policy to:

- a. Recognize that IW [irregular warfare] is as strategically important as traditional warfare. Many of the capabilities and skills required for IW [irregular warfare] are applicable to traditional warfare, but their role in IW [irregular warfare] can be proportionally greater than in traditional warfare.
- b. Improve DoD proficiency for IW [irregular warfare], which also enhances its conduct of stability operations.⁴¹

This firmly establishes U.S. DOD policy for U.S. military forces to conduct “irregular warfare.” This is despite the problems within the concept of “irregular warfare” and its separation from “traditional warfare.” It also skirts the inconsistency with the

³⁸ Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare*.

³⁹ Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare*, 1.

⁴⁰ Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare*, 11.

⁴¹ Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare*, 2.

Stability Operations policy directive by stating that “irregular warfare” enhances the conduct of stability operations.

Joint Operating Environment

The December 2007 version of the *Joint Operating Environment* uses “irregular” very sparingly (three times) and does not use the terms “irregular warfare” or “traditional warfare” at all.⁴² It does use “irregular methods of warfare” once to help describe ways state and non-state actors will attempt to offset the military power of the U.S. This is done when describing the concept of “Fourth Generation Warfare” and how other actors will attempt to “degrade and destroy America’s political will.”⁴³ The main theme of this section in the 2007 *Joint Operating Environment* is that other actors will use irregular methods to influence the population of the U.S.

The 2007 *Joint Operating Environment* discusses items that are part of the “irregular warfare” definition, such as, influencing the will of people and populations. This is within the context of describing the operating environment and the way joint operations may or may not influence populations. This discussion appears to be a relatively straight forward discussion as it relates to human conflict. This document is relatively clear about the need to influence or protect the attitudes of various populations. It also discusses the many factors which can influence the attitudes within groups of people. Just a few of these influencers include cultures, religious beliefs, economic conditions, available resources, wealth and poverty, access to information, levels and

⁴² U.S. Joint Forces Command, *Joint Operating Environment* (Suffolk, VA, December 2007).

⁴³ 2007 *Joint Operating Environment*, 45.

types of education, and security. An implication of this is that most of what normally influences the attitude of a population lies outside the ability of the military to affect.

The *2008 Joint Operating Environment* is much more aggressive in its use of “irregular” than the *2007 Joint Operating Environment*.⁴⁴ The theme of irregular warfare is very heavy in the *2008 Joint Operating Environment* and it uses ideas similar to other recent irregular warfare related DOD documents. Although the *2008 Joint Operating Environment* uses “irregular warfare” themes it is not internally consistent in terminology, nor is it consistent with terminology used in other recent official DOD documents. For example, the *2008 Joint Operating Environment* uses “irregular warfare” only twice, it uses “irregular war” nine times, and it does not use the terms “traditional warfare” or “conventional warfare” at all.

The *2008 Joint Operating Environment* admits there is really no clear distinction in types of warfare and that they will likely be “hybrid” wars, like many other recent DOD documents. A good example of this disclaimer is:

While we continue to bin the various modes of war into neat and convenient categories, it should be recognized that future adversaries do not have the same lens or adhere to our Western conventions of war. In fact, there is a great amount of granularity across the spectrum of conflict, and a greater potential for “hybrid” types of war. This assessment acknowledges the blending of regular and irregular forms of warfare.⁴⁵

Despite this disclaimer above, the *2008 Joint Operating Environment* still artificially divides war into two main categories, “regular” and “irregular.”

⁴⁴ U.S. Joint Forces Command, *Joint Operating Environment* (Suffolk, VA, 25 November 2008).

⁴⁵ *2008 Joint Operating Environment*, 45.

Capstone Concept for Joint Operations

General Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, approved Version 2.0 of the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations* in August 2005.⁴⁶ It is relatively consistent with the *2005 National Defense Strategy* in the use of “irregular” as it relates to challenges, methods, opponents, and threats. It discusses the four main challenges outlined in the *2005 National Defense Strategy* as “traditional, irregular, disruptive, and catastrophic.”⁴⁷ One specific area where these two documents differ is that the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations Version 2.0* never uses the term “irregular warfare.” It appears that this document purposefully avoids the term “irregular warfare” or alluding to an idea that the U.S. Military would conduct “irregular warfare.”

Admiral Michael G. Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, signed Version 3.0 of *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations* on 15 January 2009.⁴⁸ The document exhibits the same awkwardness with the idea of separating “irregular” and “traditional warfare.” In fact this document does not use the term “traditional warfare,” but instead uses the term “conventional warfare.” The document uses the term “irregular warfare,” but generally not in the same context outlined in other DOD documents. Most often it “combines” irregular with other words that are more historically consistent and understandable, such as irregular methods, forces, enemy, adversary, or threats.

Version 3.0 opens its discussion of “irregular warfare” and “conventional warfare” as follows:

⁴⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, Version 2.0 (Washington, DC, August 2005).

⁴⁷ *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, Version 2.0, 6.

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, Version 3.0 (Washington, DC, 15 January 2009).

Warfare against the regular forces of a sovereign state using orthodox means and methods can be called *conventional or regular warfare*, while warfare against predominantly irregular forces can be called *irregular warfare*. The latter tends to be protracted, favors working through partners, and revolves around the support of the population rather than solely the defeat of enemy fighting forces.⁴⁹

This is somewhat in line with the approved definition of “irregular warfare,” but not entirely because of its mention of “enemy forces.”

In the same paragraph, the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations Version 3.0* starts to explain that warfare is neither purely regular nor irregular by nature, and that warfare’s character is so complex it defies even simple categorization. “These clean distinctions will rarely exist in reality; however, as often in the past, future conflicts will appear as hybrids comprising diverse, dynamic, and simultaneous combinations of organizations, technologies, and techniques that defy categorization.”⁵⁰

The next section in the paragraph states another truism in all conflict. That opposing sides will seek and use any advantage possible to prevail in a conflict.

Likely adversaries can be expected to pursue and adopt any methods and means that confer an advantage relative to U.S. military power -- including methods that violate widely accepted laws and conventions of war. Even an advanced military power can be expected to adopt some methods considered “irregular” by Western standards, while nonstate actors increasingly are acquiring and employing “regular” military capabilities.⁵¹

Although the concept stops short of stating the U.S. should conduct “irregular warfare.” It does state, “U.S forces will require the same level of expertise in irregular warfare that they have developed for conventional warfare.”⁵² This makes sure the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations Version 3.0* complies with DOD Directive

⁴⁹ *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, Version 3.0, 8.

⁵⁰ *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, Version 3.0, 8.

⁵¹ *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, Version 3.0, 8.

⁵² *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, Version 3.0, 30.

3000.07, Subject: *Irregular Warfare* directing the Chairman to include Irregular Warfare in concept development.⁵³ Even though the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations Version 3.0* is technically in compliance with DOD Directive 3000.07, the authors of Version 3.0 do not appear convinced of the utility of categorizing warfare into “irregular” and “conventional.” This is evident in a discussion outlined in endnote 5 of *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations Version 3.0*.⁵⁴

This interesting endnote in *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations Version 3.0* is directly related to the difficulty of categorizing warfare. The discussion in the endnote starts out with the relatively simple idea and use of “conventional warfare” then adds the approved definition of conventional forces. Then it states that “Based on this definition, conventional warfare thus would include irregular warfare not conducted by special operations forces.”⁵⁵ It goes on to discuss the use of traditional war and warfare and the problems associated with these terms. Then it discusses issues with the term “regular warfare” and that “one would be hard-pressed to find an historical example of a completely regular war.”⁵⁶ Following that, it provides current approved definitions of “irregular forces” and “irregular warfare,” and then concludes with “All of which points to the ultimate futility of trying to describe warfare in terms of definitive categories.”⁵⁷ This highlights the difficulty concept and doctrine developers are having in their attempts to construct a logical framework and discussion on an illogical bifurcation of warfare

⁵³ Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare*, 8.

⁵⁴ *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, Version 3.0, 38n5.

⁵⁵ *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, Version 3.0, 38n5.

⁵⁶ *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, Version 3.0, 38n5.

⁵⁷ *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, Version 3.0, 38n5.

(See footnote 58 below for the complete endnote text from the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*).

It is interesting that the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations Version 3.0* was widely staffed, submitted by the Commander of U.S. Joint Forces Command, and approved by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff with this clearly worded argument against categorizing warfare.

United States Military Doctrine

Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* dated 14 May 2007 defines irregular warfare the same as the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating*

⁵⁸ Several terms are used to refer to the type of warfare generally waged between standing state militaries. *Conventional warfare*, perhaps the most commonly used term, suggests warfare according to established conventions, which is generally accurate. Conventional warfare is not defined in doctrine, however, although conventional *forces* are: “**conventional forces**—1. Those forces capable of conducting operations using nonnuclear weapons. 2. Those forces other than designated special operations forces.” *DOD Dictionary of Military Terms*, <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict/> [accessed 8 October 2008]. Based on this definition, conventional warfare thus would include irregular warfare not conducted by special operations forces. Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, uses the term *traditional war*, which “is characterized as a confrontation between nation-states or coalitions/alliances of nation-states. This confrontation typically involves small-scale to largescale, force-on-force military operations in which adversaries employ a variety of conventional military capabilities against each other in the air, land, maritime, and space physical domains and the information environment. The objective is to defeat an adversary’s armed forces, destroy an adversary’s war-making capacity, or seize or retain territory in order to force a change in an adversary’s government or policies.” (Washington: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 14 May 2007), p. I-6. *Traditional warfare*, however, implies military methods based on time-honored cultural history, which routinely has included irregular warfare and which may have little in common with future warfare between regular military forces. The logical alternative to irregular warfare is *regular warfare*, which suggests warfare between regular, uniformed state militaries -- although one would be hard-pressed to find an historical example of a completely regular war. “Regular” is defined as “of, relating to, or constituting the permanent standing military force of a state <the *regular army*> <*regular soldiers*>.” *Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com> [accessed 8Oct08]. Compare all these to: “**irregular forces** -- Armed individuals or groups who are not members of the regular armed forces, police, or other internal security forces.” [*DOD Dictionary*, accessed 8Oct08.] And: “**irregular warfare** -- A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s). Irregular warfare favors indirect and asymmetric approaches, though it may employ the full range of military and other capacities, in order to erode an adversary’s power, influence, and will. Also called IW.” [*DOD Dictionary*, accessed 2 October 2008]. All of which points to the ultimate futility of trying to describe warfare in terms of definitive categories.

Concept.⁵⁹ It also describes traditional warfare similar to the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*. Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, change 1 dated 13 February 2008 includes the Joint Publication 1 discussion of “irregular” and “traditional warfare.”⁶⁰ The previous version of Joint Publication 3-0 dated 17 September 2006 did not include the definitions or discussions of “irregular” and “traditional warfare.”⁶¹

There was a large volume of established joint doctrine addressing most of the elements of “irregular warfare” before this new concept started to take a firm root in the *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review*. This joint doctrine was developed and promulgated absent the idea of “irregular warfare” as an umbrella term for them. This poses the question, what problem was the irregular warfare concept trying to solve? The *Irregular Warfare Special Study* published in 2006 answered this question with,

There is no doctrinal value to arbitrarily grouping activities that are loosely related. Unless there are underlying principles common to all activities, grouping them serves no purpose. . . . While we have immutable principles of war, and enduring fundamental elements operational design, which apply to the entire range of military operations, **it is difficult to imagine a new set of principles or elements that are unique to any construct of IW** [irregular warfare]. This analysis has not shown any value added by creating an IW [irregular warfare] construct. [bold in original]⁶²

A specific example of this issue is the tremendous amount of overlap between “irregular warfare” concept and joint doctrine for peace operations found in Joint Publication 3-07.3, *Peace Operations*.⁶³ Yet none of the key documents establishing or

⁵⁹ JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*.

⁶⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, Incorporating Change 1, 13 February 2008 (Washington, DC, 17 September 2006).

⁶¹ U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC, 17 September 2006).

⁶² U.S. Joint Forces Command, *Irregular Warfare Special Study* (Suffolk, VA, 4 August 2006), III-2.

⁶³ U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication, 3-07.3, *Peace Operations* (Washington, DC, 17 October 2007).

developing “irregular warfare” discussed in this chapter mention “peace operations,” nor do they discuss where or if peace operations fit with “irregular warfare.” Additionally, the 2007 version of Joint Publication 3-07.3 does not mention “irregular warfare.” Joint Publication 3-07.3, *Peace Operations* does use the term “irregulars.” This demonstrates a lack of understanding of established joint doctrine by those who developed the new DOD policies for irregular warfare.

This chapter highlighted many problems with the concept of dividing warfare into “irregular” and “traditional.” These logic errors and inconsistencies with other joint doctrine were identified as early as 2006 in the *Irregular Warfare Special Study*. These problems were also identified in *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* and again in the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations Version 3.0*. It is difficult to understand why a concept that has internal logic errors that are acknowledged formally, at least in some small part within official DOD documents, continues to be pushed forward. The next chapter attempts to look at categorizing war from the perspective of several classical war theorists.

III. Historical Use of Irregular and Influencing Populations in Warfare

If Thucydides, Sun-tzu, and Clausewitz did not say it, it probably is not worth saying.

--Colin S. Gray, *Fighting Talk: Forty Maximums on War, Peace, and Strategy*

The term “irregular” in military lexicon is by no means new in military strategy or warfare theory, nor is the idea of influencing populations. “Irregular” was generally used to describe the type of forces that are fighting (irregulars) and was normally contrasted with regular military forces (regulars) as seen in Merriam-Webster’s dictionary (Irregular - one that is irregular: as a soldier who is not a member of a regular military force).¹ Irregulars can and have fought alongside regulars, but often irregulars use irregular tactics as seen throughout human history. Another way of stating this is:

. . . IW [Irregular warfare] is used loosely as a synonym for unconventional warfare, asymmetric warfare, guerrilla warfare, partisan warfare, nontraditional warfare, low intensity conflict, insurgency, rebellion, revolt, civil war, insurrection, revolutionary warfare, internal war, counter insurgency, subversive war, war within a population, intrastate war, internal development, internal security, internal defense, stability, law and order, nation building, state building, small war, peacemaking, peacekeeping, fourth generation warfare (4GW), and global war on terror (GWOT).²

Controlling or influencing populations has been a factor in war for centuries.

¹ Irregular, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/irregular>, Retrieved October 27, 2008.

² *Irregular Warfare Special Study*, II-3.

Thucydides and even Carl Von Clausewitz wrote of the importance of using or controlling various populations in the conduct of war. Sun Tzu also discusses the importance of leaders influencing populations to help achieve military objectives. None of these classical warfare theorists link the idea of irregular, unorthodox, unconventional, asymmetrical, or any other synonym with controlling or influencing populations.

The use of the term “irregulars” continued to be used in military lexicon to describe any personnel that were not regular military members. Terms that may be considered synonyms of irregulars are freedom fighter, guerrilla, insurgent, partisan, paramilitary, revolutionary, mercenaries, or terrorist. Each of these terms can elicit support or opposition depending on one’s point of view. As has often been stated, one person’s patriot is another person’s terrorist. The U.S. War for Independence or Revolutionary War is an example. Irregular or guerrilla forces have proven very effective in fighting wars throughout history. More recent examples can be found in T.E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* ³ and Mao Tse-tung’s *On Guerrilla Warfare*.⁴ When looking at both works, each author preferred specific terms. Lawrence favors the use of “irregular” although it is used interchangeably with “guerilla” (U.S. spelling is guerrilla). Mao uses guerrilla, but does not use the terms “irregular” or “unorthodox.”

It is also possible for combatant forces to cross the line from irregular or guerrilla forces to regular forces and the reverse. Samuel B. Griffith explains this transition in types of forces in his translation of Mao Tse-tung’s *On Guerrilla Warfare*. Griffith states, “Following Phase I (organization, consolidation, and preservation) and Phase II

³ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926; repr., London: Penguin Group, 1962).

⁴ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II (1961; repr., Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

(progressive expansion) comes Phase III: decision, or destruction of the enemy.”⁵ This is an example of moving from an irregular or guerrilla force to a regular force as a conflict progresses. The U.S. Special Forces is an example of regular military organizations using irregular military or guerrilla tactics. The doctrine manuals of U.S. Special Operations Forces are replete with examples of U.S. Special Forces using guerrilla tactics. Joint Publication 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations* provides numerous examples.⁶

Art of War – Sun Tzu

The *Art of War* written by Sun Tzu is a widely known and often quoted ancient Chinese work on military strategy. Even today many people use *Art of War* because it provides timeless thought on strategy. It provides good insights on how the military relates to public administration, diplomacy, politics, and leaders, both military and civilian in order to formulate policy and strategy. There is still some debate on exactly when the *Art of War* was written and who wrote it. This important Chinese work is generally attributed to Sun Tzu who wrote it sometime between 400 and 320 B.C.⁷ Regardless of who wrote the *Art of War* and when it was written, it provides some valuable guidance in how this respected Chinese work deals with key themes found in the “irregular” and “traditional” warfare concepts.

Some theorists and historians, such as Roger T. Ames, attribute the idea of

⁵ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 21.

⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations* (Washington, DC, 17 December 2003).

⁷ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel Griffith (1963; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 11.

“irregular” to Sun Tzu and his work in *Art of War*.⁸ Ames translates the Chinese terms *ch’i* and *cheng* as irregular and regular respectively. This translation does not appear to be an accurate interpretation of the idea being conveyed by Sun Tzu, especially when compared to other translations available today. Samuel B. Griffith provides another view interpreting *ch’i* as extraordinary or indirect, and interpreting *cheng* as normal or direct.⁹ Ralph D. Sawyer interprets Sun Tzu’s use of *ch’i* as unorthodox and *cheng* as orthodox.¹⁰ Sawyer’s interpretation appears to more accurately capture Sun Tzu’s intent.¹¹ Sun Tzu uses unorthodox (*ch’i*) and orthodox (*cheng*) in various parts of *Art of War*.¹²

A specific section in Chapter 5, Strategic Military Power uses and describes unorthodox (*ch’i*) and orthodox (*cheng*). This section is highlighted below.¹³

In general, in battle one engages with the orthodox and gains victory through the unorthodox. Thus one who excels at sending forth the unorthodox is as inexhaustible as the Heaven, and as unlimited as the Yangtze and Yellow rivers. What reach an end and begin again are the sun and the moon. What die and are reborn are the four seasons.

The notes do not exceed five, but the changes of the five notes can never be fully heard. The colors do not exceed five, but the changes of the five colors can never be completely seen. The flavors do not exceed five, but the changes in the five flavors can never be completely tasted. In warfare the strategic configuration of power (*shih*) do not exceed the unorthodox and the orthodox, but the changes of the unorthodox and orthodox can never be completely exhausted. The unorthodox and orthodox mutually produce each other, just like an endless cycle. Who can exhaust them?¹⁴

Sun Tzu’s discussion of unorthodox and orthodox is focused on the unlimited use of

⁸ Roger Ames, *The Art of Rulership*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983), 68.

⁹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel Griffith, 91.

¹⁰ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer (Boulder, CO: Westview Press 1994), 187.

¹¹ This assessment is based on Taoism, a Chinese philosophy that was becoming popular at about the time *Art of War* was written. Sun Tzu uses Tao (The Way) in several passages. An example is in the opening lines of *The Art of War* as follows, “Warfare is the greatest affair of the state, the basis of life and death, the Way (Tao) to survival and extinction.” Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer, 167.

¹² Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer.

¹³ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer, 187.

¹⁴ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer, 187

imagination in formulating and engaging in battle and war.

The uses of unorthodox and orthodox are also tied to deception which is a continuous theme throughout the *Art of War*. “Warfare is the Way (Tao) of deception.”¹⁵ Present the enemy with formations and tactics he expects to see (orthodox) then defeat him using tactics he does not expect (unorthodox). The following section from “Initial Estimations” provides an example, “Thus although [you are] capable, display incapability to them. When committed to employing your forces, feign inactivity. When [your objective] is nearby, make it appear as is distant; when far away, create the illusion of being nearby.”¹⁶

The crux of the current irregular warfare definition is the focus on influencing the relevant population.¹⁷ Sun Tzu does not link unorthodox (ch’i) with influencing or controlling populations or indigenous people. Sun Tzu discusses the idea of influencing populations and using populations as a normal part of politics and war. Sun Tzu also discusses the need to influence and interact with populations and local leaders to develop alliances to assist the commander in accomplishing his mission. Sun Tzu did not consider this irregular or unorthodox, nor does he link the idea of influencing populations with unorthodox, irregular, or indirect. The choice of translation of Sun Tzu’s work does not change the fact that Sun Tzu does not establish a linkage between unorthodox (irregular) and influencing populations.

Influencing or controlling populations was a normal part of warfare and something that must clearly be part of the general’s abilities as commander. The

¹⁵ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer, 168

¹⁶ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer, 168

¹⁷ JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 282.

following quotes from the *Art of War* are some examples used by Sun Tzu to convey this theme. “Thus one who does not know the plans of the feudal lords cannot prepare alliances beforehand.”¹⁸ “One who commands an army but does not know the techniques for the nine changes, even though he is familiar with the five advantages, will not be able to control men. ... Accordingly, subjugate the feudal lords with potential harm; labor the feudal lords with numerous affairs; and have the feudal lords race after profits.”¹⁹ These examples should provide little doubt that Sun Tzu thought commanders should think about and influence the population as a normal part of conflict. “If orders are consistently implemented to instruct the people, then the people will submit. If orders are not consistently implemented to instruct the people, then the people will not submit. One whose orders are consistently carried out has established a mutual relationship with the people.”²⁰ In this last example, Sun Tzu emphasizes using local leaders and providing instructions or information to populations (influencing them) to accomplish this important leader task during conflict.

Sawyer discusses the issue with interpreting *ch'i* as “irregular” as done by Ames in *The Art of Rulership*.²¹ Sawyer summarizes the issue he has with the translation this way, “. . . Roger T. Ames conceptually translates the terms as ‘irregular deployments’ and ‘regular deployments.’ However, ‘irregular’ is perhaps an unfortunate choice, being inherently burdened with adverse military connotations. Extreme order and control are of course necessary to employ forces in *ch'i* maneuvers. . .”²² Sawyer does well

¹⁸ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer, 197

¹⁹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer, 203

²⁰ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer, 210

²¹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer, 150

²² Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer, 149

summarizing some of the problems with several theorists interpretation and expansion of Sun Tzu's use of unorthodox and orthodox. "There is nothing mysterious or mystical about ch'i or cheng and their mutually productive relationship, yet later commentators and strategists sometimes become seriously confused. Under such circumstances, a useful tactical conceptualization becomes an unnecessary obstacle to clear strategic thinking."²³ U.S. civilian and military leaders should avoid introducing anything into our policies, strategies, or future concepts that might be an obstacle to clear strategic thinking.

History of the Peloponnesian War - Thucydides

Within 100 years of Sun Tzu's writing of *Art of War*, an Athenian General by the name of Thucydides wrote the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. The *History of the Peloponnesian War* is considered an early historical classic in the documentation of politics, human conflict, and war.²⁴ Thucydides does a superb job of accurately documenting a long war that started in 431 B.C. between Athens and Sparta and engulfed the entire Mediterranean. The *History of the Peloponnesian War* is considered a great work because Thucydides goes well beyond just capturing the basic facts of various battles and engagements.

Thucydides documents the essence of this twenty-seven year conflict that eventually brought an end to the Athenian empire. He captures the motives, reasoning, passions, politics, and methods of various leaders, warriors, and people. He provides insight to the political maneuvering and discussions leading into the war, the events and

²³ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph Sawyer, 149.

²⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (1954. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 1972).

strategy changes that occurred during the war, and the results of the conflicts and the aftermath. Thucydides is able to do this because he took part in the conflict, and lived several years after the war. He took a lot of time in interviewing participants and cross-checking these interviews to ensure accuracy of his information.²⁵ The lessons Thucydides captures about the nature of human conflict and war in this classic are enduring and are applicable to understanding the nature of war, even in today's complex strategic environment.

What makes the *History of the Peloponnesian War* even more interesting is the social and cultural changes that were occurring in the Mediterranean area at the time Thucydides wrote it. Thucydides described political leaders, generals, and ordinary men debating various social matters that were of great importance at the time. Kings were not dictating matters of life and death, war and peace, crime and punishment. This was generally a matter of public debate, discourse, and collaborative decisions of the body politic. There were people who openly challenged beliefs about the nature of the universe. Some even challenged the role of religion and the various gods of the time. This was an era when people would gather to accomplish various objectives as they saw fit to pursue them. There appears to be a lot of similarities between the civilizations and people around the Mediterranean and the global environment today. Analyzing these similarities can help in understanding the enduring nature of human conflict and war.

Thucydides thoroughly documented the violent struggles among nation states and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over relevant populations, which is the essence of the irregular warfare definition. He records various attempts to “erode an

²⁵ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 11- 12.

adversary's power, influence, and will"²⁶ before and throughout the 27 years of the war, and nowhere in the text of his book did he record or make an observation that this was peculiar or irregular. This is because he may have considered this the normal relationship between people, politics and war. In Rex Warner's translation, Thucydides did not use the terms "irregular war" or "irregular warfare" anywhere in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*.²⁷ Examples of what would be considered "irregular warfare" abound in Thucydides works. This paper looks at a few of those examples to help analyze the concept of "irregular warfare."

In Book One, Thucydides describes the general conditions in the Mediterranean and the changes taking place prior to the major confrontation between Sparta and Athens. Thucydides attempted to determine the main cause of the Peloponnesian War and the contributing factors that led to this long conflict. As he collected and studied the information, he commented on the moral issues that were essential elements of the politics that led to and guided each participant into the war. Thucydides surmised the root cause of the war ". . . was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta."²⁸ The growth in Athenian power is attributed to their efforts to protect themselves during and immediately following the Persian War by gaining allies, economic access, as well as developing a substantial military.

The arguments for going to war are captured in the deliberations in Sparta prior to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. Corinth asked its allies to send delegates to Sparta to discuss various Athenian offenses. The "Spartans also issued an invitation to

²⁶ This is part of the Irregular Warfare Definition, *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 6.

²⁷ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner.

²⁸ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 49.

their own allies and to anyone else who claimed to have suffered from Athenian aggression.”²⁹ The Athenians were represented by business envoys who were there for other negotiations and upon hearing the allegations against Athens requested they be allowed to speak on behalf of Athens. This debate included representatives from Athens, Sparta, Corinth, Potidaea, Aegina, and Megara.

The list of grievances against Athens were numerous and included blocking access to shipping ports, collecting excessive tribute (taxes), depriving states of freedom, preparing for war, taking Corcyra by force, and the gradual encroachment on its neighbors .³⁰ Athens claimed that the Peloponnesians had supported a revolt in Potidaea which took away tribute they were paying to Athens.

The participants of this debate vigorously justified the legitimacy of their actions (a major element of the irregular warfare definition). The claim by Athens against the Peloponnesians’ support of the Potidaea revolt is an example of influencing the population (a major element of irregular warfare), but this was not considered irregular or unorthodox by Thucydides. This was a normal political act to help change an alliance and the balance of economic power and in turn military potential.

The Athenian representatives provided legitimacy of their city’s actions and the power that the city-state achieved through examples of their efforts during the Persian War. They stated, “We did not gain this empire by force.”³¹ They reinforced this argument with, “our allies came to us of their own accord and begged us to lead them.”³²

²⁹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 73.

³⁰ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 74.

³¹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 79.

³² Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 80.

They “. . . increased our power to its present extent: fear of Persia was our chief motive, though afterwards we thought too, of our honor and our own interest.”³³ The Athenian representatives go on to legitimize their current actions in order to hold onto their allies as self defense and that “. . . any allies that left us would go to you,” referring to the Spartans.³⁴ They then stated, “Three very powerful motives prevent us from doing so – security, honor, and self-interest.”³⁵ They talked about treating allies fairly or even putting Athenians at a disadvantage in Athenian courts to gain good will from their allies and the population. They cautioned against war and warned how war is unpredictable, especially long wars. They concluded with the reminder of the current treaty between them and talked about how they should settle their differences through arbitration as provided for in the treaty. This is a great example of establishing legitimacy of actions and influencing populations prior to the start of the war, but again this was not considered “irregular” or “unorthodox.”

Another example of what might be considered “irregular warfare” from Thucydides work is the revolutions that are described throughout the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. These revolutions are an insurgency in today’s popular military vernacular and describe the heart of the current DOD “irregular warfare” definition and concept. It is interesting there are many examples of civil unrest, revolts, and civil war that were active and persistent throughout the Peloponnesian War. Both states and non-state actors instigated each of these for various reasons. Some actions were started to gain an advantage and hinder an opponent, but some were purely for personal gain, criminal

³³ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 80.

³⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 80.

³⁵ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 80.

activity, religious, ethnic, and economic benefit. Although Thucydides found the character of the revolts disturbing based on the depravity to which he saw the civilizations devolve, he did not describe them as irregular or unorthodox. Specific examples of revolts or civil wars mentioned by Thucydides include Mitylene, Ionia, Euboea, and Corcyra to name only a few.³⁶ Corcyra is very interesting because Thucydides describes in detail the mechanics of how this particular revolt developed into a full-scale civil war that lasted three years.³⁷

Former prisoners instigated the revolt of Corcyra, which was the first civil war in the Peloponnesian War. The Corinthians captured these prisoners in naval engagements off the coast of Epidamnus and returned them to Corcyra. The goal of the Corinthians and the former prisoners was to get Corcyra to break their alliance with Athens and side with Corinth. The prisoners took several approaches to achieve their goal starting with political maneuvering by talking directly with the citizens of Corcyra. When this failed the prisoner's next political move was to use the established judicial system in Corcyra to drive a wedge between Corcyra and Athens. The prisoners also established themselves as a political party. Thucydides stated, "These parties were not formed to enjoy the benefits of the established laws, but to acquire power by overthrowing the existing regime; and the members of these parties felt confidence in each other not because of any fellowship in a religious communion, but because they were partners in crime."³⁸

When the political moves by the returned prisoners failed to push the Corcyra

³⁶ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 194 (Mitylene), 545 (Ionia), 597 (Euboea), 236 (Corcyra).

³⁷ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 236-245, 292-294.

³⁸ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 243.

citizens closer to Corinth, they turned to violence where “Revenge was more important than self-preservation.”³⁹ Each side in the revolt killed for reasons that had nothing to do with the revolt. “Their victims were accused of conspiring to overthrow the democracy, but in fact men were often killed on grounds of personal hatred or else by their debtors because of the money that they owed.”⁴⁰ As the revolt continued, both Athenian and Peloponnesian forces were also involved. The civil war in Corcyra basically ran for two years and finally ended when Athenians landed with enough forces to stop the civil war.

Thucydides described how these revolutions broke out from city to city and their results as “. . . a general deterioration of character throughout the Greek world.”⁴¹ He accurately described the character of these civil wars and the motivations that caused them in a manner that is valid today. “Love of power, operating through greed and through personal ambition, was the cause of all these evils. This must be added the violent fanaticism which came into play once the struggle had broken out.”⁴²

“As for the citizens who held moderate views, they were destroyed by both the extreme parties, either for not taking part in the struggle or in envy at the possibility that they might survive.”⁴³ “As a rule those who were least remarkable for intelligence showed the greater powers of survival.”⁴⁴

All of this is part of both “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare.” Some recent military writers are calling this “hybrid warfare,” saying there are no pure

³⁹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 243.

⁴⁰ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 241.

⁴¹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 292-294.

⁴² Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 243.

⁴³ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 244.

⁴⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 244.

“irregular” or “traditional” forms of warfare.⁴⁵ This more accurately reflects the description of warfare throughout history, to include the main historical works discussed in this paper. If the current description of hybrid warfare is accurate and all wars have been and will be hybrid, why do we need the terms irregular, traditional, and hybrid? Their nature is enduring because they reflect human nature and the human condition. “But war is a stern teacher...”⁴⁶ and humans are always working to gain an advantage to improve their circumstances by any means available. If they have overwhelming power they will use it. If they are at a disadvantage they will look for ways to reduce the power of their opponent or find a weakness to exploit in order to gain an advantage. This main avenue usually is done through political maneuvering and the use of violence if needed to meet their objectives.

On War – Carl von Clausewitz

On War, by Carl von Clausewitz, is considered a classic on theories of war even though it is an unfinished work.⁴⁷ Clausewitz wrote *On War* between 1816 and 1830, just after the end of the Napoleonic wars, and it appears he was in the process of revising the manuscripts when he died in 1831.⁴⁸ Clausewitz’s wife collected her husband’s papers and had them published in 1832 in a single volume titled *Vom Kriege* in the original German language. *On War* is considered a classic work on strategy because Clausewitz ventured beyond military strategy and tactics into the main factors that drive conflict and

⁴⁵ John McCuen, “Hybrid Wars,” *Military Review* 88, 2 (March-April 2008): 107-113.

⁴⁶ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 242.

⁴⁷ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976).

⁴⁸ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, xi, 24.

the course of wars. The way Clausewitz links factors driving conflict, such as economic, social, and ultimately, politics to the conduct of war is what sets his work apart from other war theorists.

Clausewitz's personal experiences during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars obviously influenced his theories, but his analysis and observations on the nature of conflict go beyond personal experiences. His work references a great many more conflicts and his knowledge of these previous wars helps provide a rich historical depth to justify his theories. Clausewitz's focus extended past the state versus state conflicts that included large military formations, for which the Napoleonic Wars are known. His manuscripts include references to many different wars that included civil wars, revolts, insurrections, and rebellions which are included in the irregular warfare concept. Wars of Alexander the Great, Wars of Rome, Wars of the Middle Ages, Wars of the Tartars, and the Spanish War of Liberation are only a few examples of the depth of his research and background for his theories.⁴⁹

In Clausewitz's opening sentence of *On War*, he gets right at the heart of this paper's issue, categorizing various parts of war; more importantly categorizing war in ways that are helpful in understanding and applying the lessons of history or theories to future conflicts. In this first sentence he states, "I propose to consider first the various elements of the subject, next its various parts or sections, and finally the whole in its internal structure."⁵⁰ Clausewitz explains that he will look at what he considers to be parts or sections that make up war, and look at the whole of war to help convey its nature.

⁴⁹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 723.

⁵⁰ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 75.

Based on Clausewitz's opening intent, to look at various parts of war, and the volume of his work we should be able to infer that if he thought there was value in separating warfare into two different categories he would have done so. Clausewitz does not separate warfare into two categories similar to the "traditional" and "irregular warfare" constructs found in current U.S. military documents.

Clausewitz studied and referenced a great number of conflicts and specifically addressed the relationship of politics and war. Yet, this great theorist of conflict provides no reference that indicates he would consider influencing populations or insurgencies as irregular or unorthodox. Clausewitz did not use the terms irregular war or irregular warfare throughout *On War*. Again this theorist, like Sun Tzu and Thucydides, considered politics, support of the people, and influencing populations as a normal part of war.

Clausewitz repeatedly writes about the importance of popular support or support of the population in war and as part of good strategy. This is introduced by Clausewitz in the first chapter of the first book and continues throughout *On War*. The following section of the first book offers a glimpse of why he thinks this is important:

Besides, the very nature of those resources and of their employment means they cannot all be deployed at the same moment. The resources in question are the fighting forces proper, the country, with its physical features and population, and its allies.

The country – its physical features and population – is more than just the source of all armed forces proper; it is in itself an integral element among the factors at work in war – though only that part which is the actual theater of operations or has a notable influence on it.⁵¹

In the last paragraph above, Clausewitz recognizes the importance of the population for

⁵¹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 79.

providing resources to the armed forces. It also directly links the population with the physical features of the country they occupy. Above the population's material and manpower contributions to war, Clausewitz recognizes the importance of populations as "integral element among the factors at work in war."⁵² This statement applies to all wars and acknowledges that populations outside a theater of operations can influence actions within the theater. This also suggests that populations cannot be readily separated from the land they occupy, nor can they be separated from war as described in the discussion of "traditional warfare" in the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*.⁵³

In Book Six, Chapter Three, Clausewitz examines "the factors that assure strategic success." He then states "popular support" is one of six "main factors in strategic effectiveness."⁵⁴ In Chapter Six of the same book he lists "support of the populace" among six factors that are an advantage in the defense and "determine tactical and strategic success."⁵⁵ Further, Clausewitz provides a detailed explanation on why he views the popular support of the people is an important factor in war. One excerpt from this chapter provides a very good example of this rational:

Let us mention just one example, which is of great importance for the conduct of operation: Information. We refer not so much to the single outstandingly significant report, but to the countless minor contacts brought about by the daily activities of our army. Here the defender's close relations with the population give him a general superiority. The smallest patrol, every picket, every sentry, every officer on a mission, all have to turn to the local inhabitants for news of friend or foe.⁵⁶

Finally, in "The Culminating Point of Victory," Clausewitz again emphasizes the

⁵² Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 79.

⁵³ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 8.

⁵⁴ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 363.

⁵⁵ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 372.

⁵⁶ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 373.

importance of the support of the population in war:

The superiority that I have attributed to the defensive from of warfare rests on the following:

1. The utilization of the terrain
2. The possession of an organized theater of operations
3. *The support of the population* [italics mine]
4. The advantage of being on the waiting side.⁵⁷

Clausewitz makes a point of emphasizing the importance of the population's actions and support of the people throughout *On War*. He outlines the importance of populations directly resisting military force by way of revolts, insurrections, and resistance movements in the face of an invading army. In Chapter 26 of Book Six, *The People in Arms*, Clausewitz provides insights on using indigenous populations to fight a war. He states this means of conducting war was controversial and then goes on to generally dismiss the objections to this means of war.

He describes resistance of armed populations as not being separate, but another means of fighting an enemy force in this comment, "here we consider a general insurrection as simply another means of war – in its relation, therefore, to the enemy."⁵⁸ His rationale for including this as a valid means was, "a popular uprising should, in general, be considered as an outgrowth of the way in which conventional barriers have been swept away in our lifetime by the elemental violence of war. It is, in fact, a broadening and intensification of the fermentation process known as war."⁵⁹ One could argue that these conventional barriers never truly existed and if they did, it is purely an artificial barrier. This is similar to the artificial barrier being constructed today with

⁵⁷ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 571.

⁵⁸ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 479.

⁵⁹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 479.

“irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare.” Clausewitz generally explains that each belligerent attempts to gain an advantage and will change the methods with whatever means are available to achieve their political goals. “That will also hold true of the people’s war. Any nation that uses it intelligently will, as a rule, gain some superiority over those who disdain its use.”⁶⁰

Clausewitz provides a list of the “only conditions under which a general uprising can be effective:

1. The war must be fought in the interior of the country.
2. It must not be decided by a single stroke.
3. The theater of operations must be fairly large.
4. The national character must be suited to that type of war.
5. The country must be rough and inaccessible, because of the mountains, or forests, marshes, or the local methods of cultivation.⁶¹

Clausewitz provides additional information on how each of these conditions can be used together to form an effective resistance that can drive out an occupying enemy force.

Clausewitz provides several examples on “the national character” that is conducive to an insurgency or armed resistance. “The national character” or culture of a society is directly related to the ability to influence the people. “The national character” he writes about here includes both the people and the government. Favorable characteristics of the people include: experienced in “strenuous work and privation,” having and being able to use weapons, ability to work without “a special plan,” “courage,” and an “appetite for fighting.”⁶² The character of the government that is conducive to successfully carrying out a resistance is one that generally understands war,

⁶⁰ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 479.

⁶¹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 480.

⁶² Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 480-481.

to include all means and methods available to carry it out. Some examples of Clausewitz's insight on governmental character follow.

A government must never assume that its country's fate, its whole existence, hangs on the outcome of one battle, no matter how decisive. Even after a defeat, there is always the possibility that a turn of fortune can be brought about by developing new sources of internal strength or through the natural decimation all offensives suffer in the long run or by means of help from abroad....

...No matter how small or weak a state may be in comparison with its enemy, it must not forgo these last efforts, or one would conclude that its soul is dead.... A government that after having lost a major battle, is only interested in letting its people go back to sleep in peace as soon as possible, and overwhelmed by feelings of failure and disappointment, lacks the courage and desire to put forth a final effort, is, because of its weakness, involved in a major inconsistency in any case. It shows that it did not deserve to win, and, possibly for that very reason was unable to.⁶³

The efforts of resistance forces are directed at wearing down the enemy through continuous small actions that form a general resistance. "The element of resistance will exist everywhere and nowhere."⁶⁴ These small actions continually pick at the enemy's weak points avoiding any major engagements. "Militia and bands of armed civilians cannot and should not be employed against the main enemy force or indeed against any sizable enemy force."⁶⁵ He advises resistance forces to operate from the flanks and to stay out of reach of any main body until "... a general conflagration closes in on the enemy, driving him out of the country before he is faced with total destruction."⁶⁶ "Then a well placed blow on the attacker in his difficult situation will be enough to shake him."⁶⁷ In this chapter, Clausewitz provides much guidance on the conditions, character, and methods of a successful insurgency or resistance. In all of this discussion, Clausewitz

⁶³ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 483.

⁶⁴ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 480.

⁶⁵ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 480.

⁶⁶ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 480.

⁶⁷ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 483.

does not allude to the idea of “People in Arms” as an irregular method of warfare.

The Character of Contemporary Warfare, Chapter of Book Three is very interesting and directly relates to the use of populations, a key part of the irregular warfare concept.⁶⁸ Here, Clausewitz opens with “All planning, particularly strategic planning, must pay attention to the character of contemporary warfare.”⁶⁹ He discusses the power of armed populations against major military forces, the difficulty of controlling large amounts of terrain, and the value of militias with standing armies. He cites as examples the Spanish resistance from 1701 to 1713, Napoleon’s Russian campaign of 1812, and the Prussian use of militia in 1813 as examples of the strength of populations to resist occupation through various methods.

The lessons Clausewitz provided with respect to “contemporary warfare” are many. “. . .The prospect of eventual success does not always decrease in proportion to lost battles, captured capitals, and occupied provinces, which is something that diplomats used to regard as dogma, and made them always ready to conclude a peace however bad.”⁷⁰ This has been true throughout the ages and is just as applicable today. There is much more to war than using large and capable military forces as stated in the following:

All these cases have shown what an enormous contribution the heart and temper a nation can make to the sum total of its politics, war potential, and fighting strength. Now that governments have become conscious of these resources, we cannot expect them to remain unused in the future, whether the war is fought in self-defense or in order to satisfy intense ambition.⁷¹

Clausewitz never attempts to separate warfare into two categories. Additionally,

⁶⁸ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 220.

⁶⁹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 220.

⁷⁰ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 220.

⁷¹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 220.

populations heavily influence the strategic plans he discusses. He never considers influencing or controlling populations as an irregular or unorthodox element of war.

Seven Pillars of Wisdom – T. E. Lawrence

T.E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* will be discussed next, not to put him on par with Sun Tzu, Thucydides, or Clausewitz, but because Lawrence is often quoted when discussing modern insurgency, guerrilla or irregular warfare. The phrase "war upon rebellion was messy and slow, like eating soup with a knife" when describing insurgencies comes from *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.⁷² For example, John A. Nagl uses this quote in the title of his widely read book *Learning to eat soup with a knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*.⁷³ Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* documents his escapades and observations as a British officer on the Arabian Peninsula during World War I. The British supported the Arab revolt against the Turks who were allied with Germany during World War I. Lawrence worked with Arabs to keep the Turks occupied with the revolt, prevent the Turks from gaining control of the area and, in turn, help reduce Turkish assistance to Germany.

Lawrence mostly writes about his exploits and observations and there is very little analysis of warfare theories. At one point, Lawrence describes being very sick after a long ride from Wejh to Wadi Ais delivering a message to an Arab tribal leader, Sherif Abdulla.⁷⁴ He was immobile for at least 10 days and could not ride to help coordinate the

⁷² T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 198.

⁷³ John Nagl, *Learning to eat soup with a knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002).

⁷⁴ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 192.

actions of the Arab irregulars. During this time, Lawrence does reflect on war theories and strategy comparing them to his observations and his understanding of British, Arab, Turkish, and German aims in the region. He recalls his reading of Clausewitz, Napoleon, Moltke, Jomini, and others. Lawrence makes this comment on the theorists he recalls:

Clausewitz was intellectually so much the master of them, and his book so logical and fascinating, that unconsciously I accepted his finality, until a comparison of Kuhne and Foch disgusted me with soldiers, wearied me of their officious glory, making me critical of all their light. In any case, my interest had been abstract, concerned with the theory and philosophy of warfare especially from the metaphysical side.⁷⁵

As Lawrence develops what he believes will be a workable strategy in Book Three, he describes in general terms those items that make up strategy: ends, ways, and means. For example, he describes the Arab ends as “their peace ideal of liberty. . .”⁷⁶ The way the Arabs would attain this ideal was “. . . to extrude the Turk from all Arabic-speaking lands in Asia.”⁷⁷ The means they had were “. . . a friendly population, of which some two [people] in the hundred were active, and the rest quietly sympathetic to the point of not betraying the movements of the minority.”⁷⁸ Lawrence thinks about other factors such as the British assistance to the Arabs, the need for intelligence, the Turkish and German doctrines for fighting, and his estimate on how many Turks it would take to control a rebellion. He describes an interesting comment on religious motivations in the conflict from one of the Arabs. Lawrence quotes the Arab saying, “. . . that talk of Turkish heresy, or the immoral doctrine of *Yeni-Turan*, or the illegitimate Caliphate was

⁷⁵ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 193.

⁷⁶ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 196.

⁷⁷ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 196.

⁷⁸ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 202.

beside the point”⁷⁹ or in other words, it was not a relevant motivation for the conflict. “It was Arab country, and the Turks were in it: that was the one issue.”⁸⁰

One factor Lawrence introduces that is very important or “more than half the battle”⁸¹ is the minds of the various participants and other interested observers. He states, “We must also arrange the minds of the enemy, so far as we could reach them; then those other minds of the nation supporting us behind the firing line, since more than half the battle passed there in the back; then the minds of the enemy nation waiting the verdict; and of the neutrals looking on; circle beyond circle.”⁸² This attempt to “arrange the minds” or influence populations is not included in what Lawrence describes as irregular war. Influencing populations is a key aspect of the current irregular warfare concept.

The use of “irregular” and numerous variations of the word can be seen throughout the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. Lawrence used variations of the word “irregular” numerous times in this book, but he never used the term “irregular warfare” and he only used “irregular war” four times.⁸³ When he used “irregular war” it was in reference to the local fighting or tactics used by “irregular forces” or “irregulars.”⁸⁴ A prime example of Lawrence’s use of “irregular war” is in Book Three:

All this programme was what I had believed necessary for the further progress of the Arab Revolt when we took Wejh. I had planned and arranged some of it myself. But now, since that happy fever and dysentery in Abdulla's camp had given me leisure to meditate upon the strategy and tactics of *irregular war* [italics mine], it seemed that not merely the details but the essence of this plan were wrong. It

⁷⁹ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 197.

⁸⁰ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 197.

⁸¹ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 201.

⁸² T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 201.

⁸³ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 67, 231, 348, 388.

⁸⁴ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 228-233.

therefore became my business to explain my changed ideas, and if possible to persuade my chiefs to follow me into the new theory.

So I began with three propositions. Firstly, that irregulars would not attack places, and so remained incapable of forcing a decision. Secondly, that they were as unable to defend a line or point as they were to attack it. Thirdly, that their virtue lay in depth, not in face.⁸⁵

Most of Lawrence's uses of "irregular" were to describe his observations of things that were not normal in form, shape, or routine. He used the term "irregulars" thirteen times to describe the personnel making up a force contrasting them to the regular military personnel. Lawrence also used "guerilla" interchangeably with "irregular" when talking about forces or tactics, although it appears he favored the use of "irregulars" in his writings.

In *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence does not attempt to establish "irregular war" as a type of warfare. He only attempts to investigate the uses of irregular forces and various tactics that can best exploit the abilities of the Arabs he is working with during World War I.

On Guerrilla Warfare – Mao Tse-tung

Mao Tse-tung wrote *On Guerrilla Warfare* in 1937 as part of his observations on China's struggle against the Japanese occupation of China.⁸⁶ Mao provides many of his theories on guerrilla warfare in this document. He uses many of these theories later to fight Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Party during the Chinese Revolution. Many warfare theorists read and use this book. This may be due to the author becoming a recognized military leader and the first Chairman of the Peoples Republic of China.

⁸⁵ T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 231.

⁸⁶ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 39.

On Guerrilla Warfare may also be used because it captures more than just the military aspects of war. Like Sun Tzu, Thucydides, and Clausewitz, Mao fully develops political and social aspects of war along with military considerations. Mao never loses sight of the importance of the people in *On Guerrilla Warfare*, but it does not appear he considers influencing the people abnormal or irregular. He also uses other historical conflicts to help justify his theories of guerrilla warfare and war in general, to include the Russian actions against Napoleon's invasion in 1812 and the Russian Revolution.

Similar to Clausewitz, Mao opens *On Guerrilla Warfare* with a comment on categorizing warfare that helps us understand his perspective of where guerrilla operations fit in the larger context of war. Mao states, "In a war of revolutionary character, guerrilla operations are a necessary part."⁸⁷ In the second paragraph he further amplifies his position with, "These guerrilla operations must not be considered as an independent form of warfare. They are but one step in the total war, one aspect of the revolutionary struggle. They are the inevitable result of the clash between oppressor and oppressed when the latter reach the limits of their endurance."⁸⁸ In this opening of *On Guerrilla Warfare*, Mao Tse-tung firmly establishes that guerrilla operations are a part of war, but he goes on to emphatically state that they are not an independent form or category of warfare. He states this view point again this way, "We consider guerrilla operations as but one aspect of our total or mass war because they, lacking the quality of independence, are of themselves incapable of providing a solution to the struggle."⁸⁹ This

⁸⁷ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 41.

⁸⁸ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 41.

⁸⁹ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 42.

theme is carried throughout Mao's treatise on guerrilla warfare. He also continues to highlight the need to integrate the operations of guerrilla forces with regular army forces.

Although Mao emphatically states guerrilla operations are not an independent form of warfare, he also states guerrilla operations are different than regular operations. Mao acknowledges there are differences between guerrilla operations and what he calls orthodox operations of regular forces. As Mao acknowledges the difference he warns us not to view them as having a large separation between them in these statements:

While it is improper to confuse orthodox with guerrilla operations, it is equally improper to consider that there is a chasm between the two. While differences do exist, similarities appear under certain conditions, and this fact must be appreciated if we wish to establish clearly the relationship between the two. If we consider both types of warfare as a single subject, or if we confuse guerrilla warfare with the mobile operations of orthodox war, we fall into this error: We exaggerate the function of guerrillas and minimize that of the regular armies. . . .

. . . The concept that guerrilla warfare is an end in itself and that guerrilla activities can be divorced from those of the regular forces is incorrect. If we assume that guerrilla warfare does not progress from beginning to end beyond its elementary forms, we have failed to recognize the fact that guerrilla hostilities can, under specific conditions, develop and assume orthodox characteristics. An opinion that admits the existence of guerrilla war, but isolates it, is one that does not properly estimate the potentialities of such war.⁹⁰

Mao repeats the idea that guerrilla and orthodox operations should not be separated in the conduct or theory of warfare, but acknowledges differences in tactics between guerrilla and orthodox operations. This is explained in the following statements:

The strategy of guerrilla warfare is manifestly unlike that employed in orthodox operations, as the basic tactic of the former is constant activity and movement. There is in guerrilla warfare no such thing as a decisive battle; there is nothing comparable to the fixed, passive defense that characterizes orthodox war.⁹¹

Though the strategy of guerrillas is inseparable from war strategy as a whole, the actual conduct of these hostilities differs from the conduct of orthodox operations. Each type of warfare has methods peculiar to itself, and methods suitable to regular

⁹⁰ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 54-56.

⁹¹ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 50.

warfare cannot be applied with success to the special situations that confront guerrillas.⁹²

So how does Mao reconcile statements that the tactics of orthodox and guerrilla operations are different, and at the same time not consider them separate from each other? He recommends considering the context in which each conflict occurs. Mao quotes Clausewitz and Lenin to help justify his views on forms and theories of war when he states:

Clausewitz wrote, in *On War*: ‘Wars in every period have independent forms and independent conditions, and, therefore, every period must have its independent theory of war.’ Lenin, in *On Guerrilla Warfare*, said: ‘As regards the form of fighting, it is unconditionally requisite that history be investigated in order to discover the conditions of environment, the state of economic progress, and the political ideas that obtained, the national characteristics, customs, and degree of civilization.’⁹³

Here Mao highlights the idea of analyzing each theory of warfare in the context of the conflict at the time. He emphasizes this point by stating, “It is necessary to be completely unsympathetic to abstract formulas and rules and to study with sympathy the conditions of the actual fighting, for these will change in accordance with the political and economic situations and the realization of the people’s aspirations.”⁹⁴ This is probably sage advice and focuses on the real issue of the conduct of war. That each belligerent will attempt to use whatever means available at the time to gain an advantage in achieving their aims.

The importance of the indigenous people in supporting guerrilla operations and how to influence populations is a constant theme throughout *On Guerrilla Warfare*. Mao emphasizes the importance of establishing a political goal and developing policies that will attain those political goals consistent with the desires of the people. As an example,

⁹² Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 95.

⁹³ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 49.

⁹⁴ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 49.

in the following section Mao states his interpretation of the Chinese political goal and lays out the main objectives to push Japanese forces off the Chinese mainland:

This policy we pursue in order to gain our political goal, which is the complete emancipation of the Chinese people. There are certain fundamental steps necessary in the realization of this policy, to wit:

1. Arousing and organizing the people.
2. Achieving internal unification politically.
3. Establishing bases.
4. Equipping forces.
5. Recovering national strength.
6. Destroying enemy's national strength.
7. Regaining lost territories.⁹⁵

Mao conveys the importance of aligning the political goal and objective with the peoples' interests in pursuing guerrilla warfare with the following: "Without a political goal, guerrilla warfare must fail, as it must if its political objectives do not coincide with the aspirations of the people and their sympathy, cooperation, and assistance cannot be gained."⁹⁶ Mao goes on to state that powerful political leaders are needed to ensure the close alignment of political goals, objectives and the interests of the people. This is highlighted in the following: "Principal among them is the fact that guerrilla success largely depends upon powerful political leaders who work unceasingly to bring about internal unification. Such leaders must work with the people; they must have a correct conception of the policy to be adopted as regards both the people and the enemy."⁹⁷

When the political goal and objectives are aligned and the necessary political leaders are in place then "the political goal must be clearly and precisely indicated to inhabitants of guerrilla zones and their national consciousness awakened."⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 43.

⁹⁶ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 43.

⁹⁷ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 63.

⁹⁸ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 89.

Accomplishing all these steps is necessary to help influence the population to a level required to successfully support a conflict. If these steps are not done then the necessary cohesion military and the population is absent. Mao highlights this by stating, “If we lack national organization, we will lack the essential unity that should exist between the soldiers and the people.”⁹⁹

Mao provides guidance to help gain the unity he says is needed between the military and the people. One aspect was “The people must be inspired to cooperate voluntarily. We must not force them, for if we do, it will be ineffectual.”¹⁰⁰ Further, Mao states, “There is also a unity of spirit that should exist between troops and local inhabitants.”¹⁰¹ He then provides a specific example of rules proven to maintain this cooperative effort. This example follows:

The Eighth Route Army put into practice a code known as ‘The Three Rules and the Eight Remarks,’ which we list here:

Rules:

1. All actions are subject to command.
2. Do not steal from the people.
3. Be neither selfish nor unjust.

Remarks:

1. Replace the door when you leave the house.
2. Roll up the bedding on which you have slept.
3. Be courteous.
4. Be honest in your transactions.
5. Return what you borrow.
6. Replace what you break.
7. Do not bathe in the presence of women.
8. Do not without authority search the pocketbooks of those you arrest.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 89.

¹⁰⁰ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 82.

¹⁰¹ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 92.

¹⁰² Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 92.

Mao outlines a formula for influencing populations which includes aligning political goals and objectives, having the correct political leadership in place, and unity between the military and the people. With these prerequisites in place Mao believes together they can even influence populations beyond the zone of guerrilla operations and can ultimately lead to one side winning and one losing. Mao says,

The Japanese are waging a barbaric war along uncivilized lines. For that reason, Japanese of all classes oppose the policies of their government, as do vast international groups. On the other hand, because China's cause is righteous, our countrymen of all classes and parties are united to oppose the invader; we have sympathy in many foreign countries, including even Japan itself. This is perhaps the most important reason why Japan will lose and China will win.¹⁰³

With this last statement there should be little doubt Mao firmly believes the attitude of various populations is a very important aspect of war. At the same time he does not separate influencing populations into its own category of warfare.

This chapter focused on sections of warfare theory related to key aspects of the concept of irregular warfare and dividing warfare into two categories. It also looked at influencing populations, political and policy linkage to war, understanding the circumstances that may lead to violent conflict, the importance of a population's relationship to terrain, and the character of a nation or group that would facilitate resistance of an occupying military force. The next chapter will analyze four key problem areas in the "irregular warfare" and "traditional warfare" concept using available DOD documents and the theorist covered in this chapter.

¹⁰³ Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, trans. Samuel Griffith II, 69-70.

IV. Analysis

History can be misused to “prove” anything, but it is all that we have as a guide to the future.

--Colin S. Gray, *Fighting Talk: Forty Maximums on War, Peace, and Strategy*

The current idea of “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare” has evolved and expanded over the last four years within the U.S. defense establishment. It started as a description of possible challenges facing the U.S. The *2005 National Defense Strategy* described those challenges as irregular, traditional, catastrophic, and disruptive.¹ “The U.S. government’s civilian authorities did not force its military authorities to take the logic trail from ‘irregular threats’ (a challenge) to ‘irregular warfare’ (a phenomenon) and then to ‘irregular warfare’ (a mission and capability category for U.S. forces).”² This faulty logic trail creates problems in development and application of the “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare” concept.

Throughout the development of “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare” concept, the fundamental flaws with the idea have not been resolved. This analysis will focus on those fundamental flaws when compared to the theorists outlined in Chapter III of this document.

¹ *2005 National Defense Strategy*.

² Huba Wass de Czege, “A Reflection on the Illogic of New Military Concepts,” *Army Magazine* 58, no. 5 (May 2008): 22.

The first flaw is the lack of utility in categorizing warfare into two parts and defining them in ways that may be considered mutually exclusive. Another issue is how the terminology in the concepts and policy documents create confusion and possible barriers in application. The next difficulty with the “irregular warfare” definition is the stated focus of “legitimacy and influence over the relevant population.”³ The final problem is how this traditional and irregular construct might militarize national policy and strategy development, which in turn may negatively impact U.S. diplomatic efforts.

Categorization of Warfare

I propose to consider first the various elements of the subject, next its various parts or sections, and finally the whole in its internal structure. In other words, I shall proceed from the simple to the complex. But in war more than any other subject we must begin by looking at the nature of the whole; for here more than elsewhere the part and the whole must always be thought of together.⁴

The opening paragraph of *On War* by Clausewitz gets right at the heart of the matter, categorizing. It helps to understand the complex if it is broken into components, but we can never lose sight of the whole. In attempting to break down the whole into parts, it helps if like items are grouped together and only categorize things when it makes sense. This can be done based on various rationales such as purpose, function, characteristics, environments, cultures, languages, etc.

The most important limitation of artificially dividing warfare is that it causes many people to automatically attempt to classify a type of conflict by the military forces and tactics used in the conflict. Then after the conflict is put into the correct warfare bin,

³ JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, 282.

⁴ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 75.

the attempt to apply the right “check list” for the type of warfare ensues. This “check list” mentality limits one’s ability to understand and think through the real problems at the root of the conflict and truly understand the nature of the participants and reasons for the hostilities.

Policy makers should first think through the motives of each participant in a conflict, what resources they have available to reach their goals, and what conditions are causing the conflict. This is a fundamental part of understanding the strategic problem, which is the essence of the overused, but misunderstood Clausewitz quote:

First, therefore, it is clear that war should never be thought of as *something autonomous* but always as an *instrument of policy*; otherwise the entire history of war would contradict us. Only this approach will enable us to penetrate the problem intelligently. *Second*, this way of looking at it will show us how wars must vary with the nature of their motives and the situation which gave rise to them.

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish *by that test* [italics mine] the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature. This is the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive.⁵

Many people focus on the second paragraph as they discuss types of warfare and military operations. Focusing on the second paragraph without understanding “by that test” refers to the first paragraph can mislead many into narrowly focusing on the military aspects of a conflict. The second paragraph is quoted in the current Army Field Manual 3-0, and in the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*.⁶ However, both leave out “by that test” in their quotes. When looking at the first paragraph Clausewitz is clearly looking at a much broader concept than the protagonist’s forces available and their

⁵ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 88-89.

⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC, February 2008), 6-1; *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 27.

normal tactics. He is looking at the larger political aspects, policy issues, motives of each participant, and the conditions that are causing the potential for violence. In other words, Clausewitz is taking this larger test to help properly frame the problem. All military actions must fit within this larger strategic context “to penetrate the problem intelligently”⁷ or to properly define the problem.

In today’s U.S. Military culture there is a strong tendency to over classify everything. As seen in Chapter III, the great theorists did not over classify. They looked for enduring themes and then described them in broad durable terms. Sun Tzu split warfare into orthodox and unorthodox. In doing so, he did not limit the utility of this valuable concept by defining them using transitory terms or in a context that may not be relevant beyond the present challenges facing leaders, both civilian and military.

The concept writers for the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* Version 1.0 and the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations* Version 3.0 appear to have difficulty in reconciling the “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare” categorization with other competing categorical frameworks as well. Both documents provide caveats or discuss issues with the two categories and the exceptions with “irregular warfare” activities listed in the *Execution Roadmap for Irregular Warfare*.

Terminology – Words Matter

Using clear and unambiguous terms is essential to effectively communicate complex ideas to others; the choice of words matter. This is the heart of the Principle of

⁷ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 88-89.

War titled “Simplicity.” Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations*, provides the following on “simplicity:”

The purpose of simplicity is to prepare clear, uncomplicated plans and concise orders to ensure thorough understanding.

Simplicity contributes to successful operations. Simple plans and clear, concise orders minimize misunderstanding and confusion. When other factors are equal, the simplest plan is preferable. Simplicity in plans allows better understanding and execution planning at all echelons. Simplicity and clarity of expression greatly facilitate mission execution in the stress, fatigue, and other complexities of modern combat and are especially critical to success in multinational operations.⁸

Although the focus of this principle is on military operations, it applies equally to all levels of war and all functions. This includes policy and strategy development within a single government, as well as, with other nations and interest groups. The more overlapping of similar terms, the greater the complexity of categorization, and the more specialized terminology becomes, the more difficult it is to communicate across different organizations.

Harmonization of U.S. Military terms within this artificial “irregular” and “traditional” framework is a challenge within DOD. Reviewing the current DOD Dictionary (Joint Publication 1-02) there are at least 35 different approved variations of “warfare” that are not listed as irregular warfare activities in the irregular warfare roadmap such as, nuclear warfare, biological warfare, mine warfare, integrated warfare, multinational warfare, and partisan warfare.⁹ Very few of these warfare terms have been reconciled within this new “traditional warfare” and “irregular warfare” framework. It appears there are already too many “warfare” terms in the DOD Dictionary.

⁸ JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*, A-3.

⁹ JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*.

There was already a wealth of specific U.S. Military terms and joint doctrine related to items in “irregular warfare” before the 2005 National Defense Strategy re-minted the term “irregular warfare.” Peace Operations is an example of a major area that has not been reconciled with the new irregular warfare framework. The definition of peace operations is

A broad term that encompasses multiagency and multinational crisis response and limited contingency operations involving all instruments of national power with military missions to contain conflict, redress the peace, and shape the environment to support reconciliation and rebuilding and facilitate the transition to legitimate governance. Peace operations include peacekeeping, peace enforcement, peacemaking, peace building, and conflict prevention efforts.¹⁰

This definition and the discussion of peace operations are very similar to the many themes in the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*.¹¹ Even with this large overlap in terms, goals, and supporting ideas, the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* does not mention “peace operations.” The *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* does show “peacekeeping operations” as part of *Stabilization, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction Operations Joint Operating Concept* in one figure, but does not expand or explain this relationship in the text.¹² This overlap of U.S. military terms and concepts is difficult, but pales in comparison to interagency and multinational challenges.

It is even more important to be clear and use commonly understood terminology when dealing with personnel outside a specific agency and especially with “partners” who speak other languages. This is another logic breakdown with the term and

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-07.3, *Peace Operations*, (Washington, DC, October 2007), GL-5.

¹¹ The components of peace operations are peacekeeping, peace enforcement, peacemaking, peace building, and conflict prevention efforts as outlined in the peace operations definition and in JP 3-07.3, *Peace Operations*.

¹² *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 15.

overarching concept of “irregular warfare” and the guidance for its implementation. An example of this confusion with the interagency follows, “It is very difficult to talk about conflict prevention in the context of irregular warfare.”¹³

The same DOD documents directing the development of “irregular warfare” also direct improving DOD coordination and collaboration with interagency and multinational partners. The DOD Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare* policy directs DOD agencies to, “Synchronize appropriate DoD IW [irregular warfare]-related activities with the efforts of other U.S. Government agencies, foreign security partners, and selected international organizations. . .”¹⁴ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* states, “IW [irregular warfare] demands that JFCs [joint force commanders] and their staffs work closely with IA [interagency] and multinational counterparts at all stages of planning and execution.”¹⁵

Usually, these interagency and multinational “partners” are not familiar with U.S. Military jargon and don’t understand it. Most importantly they usually do not have time to learn it in the middle of a crisis. Additionally, they might not be willing to coordinate their activities with the U.S. Military if they thought they would be part of an “irregular warfare” strategy as listed in the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*.¹⁶ For example, “Lots of folks will help under stability [operations] that do not want to be lumped into some special operations, direct action, [or] irregular warfare project.”¹⁷

¹³ Sebastian Sprenger, "Draft Irregular Warfare Directive Sparks Controversy at DOD," Inside the Pentagon (26 June 2008), http://insidedefense.com/secure/display.asp?docnum=PENTAGON-24-26-1&f=defense_2002.ask (accessed 24 November 2008).

¹⁴ Department of Defense Directive 3000.07, *Irregular Warfare*, 3.

¹⁵ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 21.

¹⁶ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 9.

¹⁷ Sebastian Sprenger, "Draft Irregular Warfare Directive Sparks Controversy at DOD."

These very complex constructs and overlapping terms within the “irregular warfare” framework is difficult for U.S. Military members to comprehend and communicate. This exacerbates the challenges to effectively working with those outside the U.S. DOD and becomes a barrier to success. This will make the coordination needed for U.S. efforts to succeed in irregular warfare, as currently defined, very difficult to achieve.

An Improper Focus

The *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* uses “focus” to help describe the difference between “traditional warfare” and “irregular warfare” It stated,

The focus of conventional military operations is normally an adversary’s armed forces with the objective of influencing the adversary’s government. It generally assumes that the indigenous populations within the operational area are non-belligerents and will accept whatever political outcome the belligerent governments impose, arbitrate, or negotiate. . . .

In contrast, IW focuses on the control or influence of populations, not on the control of an adversary’s forces or territory. . . . The struggle is for control or influence over, and the support of, a relevant population.¹⁸

Although the use of “focus” may help justify the difference between “irregular” and “traditional warfare” within the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, it is not supported by the theorists in Chapter III. Each theorist fully acknowledges the importance of populations in war, but all of them generally stated the focus is the adversary. Populations, economies, natural resources, allies, geography, culture, religion, and a great many other factors make up the strategic environment and conditions for conflict. These elements are not the focus of war. The focus is the adversary and the

¹⁸ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 8.

political motivations of the adversary. Thucydides stated these motivations in very simple yet enduring terms, “security, honor, and self-interest.”¹⁹

“Ultimately, IW [irregular warfare] is a political struggle with violent and non-violent components.”²⁰ This statement from the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* is not only difficult to understand, it is in direct conflict with the theorists discussed in Chapter III. All war is about political struggle and war is the violent extension of the political discourse between humans. Clausewitz may have stated it best, “We see, therefore, that war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.”²¹ This relationship between war and politics exists in all wars and is not unique to “irregular warfare.”

Much of what influences people (friendly, adversary, and neutral) extends well past the U.S. Military’s abilities. Both the *Execution Roadmap for Irregular Warfare* and *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* outlined requirements or expectations that are beyond the military’s current and future capacity. Those activities that make counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations successful are largely within the diplomatic, economic, law enforcement, and developmental assistance areas of most governments. Many could view U.S. Military attempts to expand into these areas as militarizing U.S. diplomacy. An example is, “Critics contend including the stability operations mission area under the new irregular warfare label would cast stabilization

¹⁹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 80.

²⁰ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 8.

²¹ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 87.

operations, in which help from civilian government agencies and non-government organizations is crucial, in too militaristic a light.”²²

The perception of a population is largely based on its culture. This perception does not easily or quickly change since it develops over long periods. This “time” aspect of influencing a population must be considered and is another limiting factor. The length of time required to change the perceptions of a culture are significant. The length of time required to accomplish this task puts into question the utility of using military power to accomplish such a task.

Influencing populations and generating support for war efforts is not limited to “irregular warfare.” Another way to look at this is, “‘Warfare that focuses on defeating an adversary militarily’ and merely isolates the population from the conflict is waged by incompetents.”²³ World War II was a traditional war using the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* descriptions. Yet, in this “traditional war” that engulfed the world, there were numerous government actions directed at influencing many different populations.

The *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* makes seizing and holding terrain an aspect of “traditional warfare.”²⁴ Seizing and holding terrain would have huge implications on populations within that geographic area and those adjacent to it. It does not make sense to separate the geography from the influence of the indigenous populations. All of the theorists studied cite the use of geography and the indigenous people’s link to their land as a large aspect of a successful insurgency against an

²² Sebastian Sprenger, “Draft Irregular Warfare Directive Sparks Controversy at DOD.”

²³ Huba Wass de Czege, “A Reflection on the Illogic of New Military Concepts,” 23.

²⁴ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 8.

occupying force. If “traditional warfare” seizes and retains terrain then it must be concerned with the populations of that area. This is another reason why the “irregular warfare” concept does not work.

Militarizing National Strategy

The *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* provides the following as the concepts central idea:

The joint force will conduct protracted regional and global campaigns against state and non-state adversaries to subvert, coerce, attrite, and exhaust adversaries rather than defeating them through direct conventional military confrontation. IW [irregular warfare] emphasizes winning the support of the relevant populations, promoting friendly political authority, and eroding adversary control, influence, and support. Unified action by the USG and its strategic partners is essential to winning an irregular war or campaign. While the direct application of military power may not be the primary means of winning IW [irregular warfare], joint forces will often be required to support non-military instruments of power and set the conditions for strategic success.²⁵

This central idea is the foundation for an effective strategy with any organization or nation and is certainly not limited to “irregular warfare.” It is hazardous for U.S. Military or civilian strategists to think of this aspect of political engagement as “irregular warfare.” The key ideas in this section are not “irregular” or “warfare.” It is the normal discourse of political organizations to achieve their political objectives. Defining this as a type of warfare “militarizes” key diplomatic, economic, and informational aspects of U.S. international engagement. “Some . . . operations proposed in the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* are warlike; others are not. Covering them all with the ‘irregular warfare’ blanket is illogical and self-defeating.”²⁶ This type of categorization limits the

²⁵ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 19.

²⁶ Huba Wass de Czege, “Reflection on the Illogic of New Military Concepts,” 22.

ability to effectively develop viable options for accomplishing national objectives without military involvement.

“... to subvert, coerce, attrite, and exhaust adversaries rather than defeating them through direct conventional military confrontation,”²⁷ is effective strategy as envisioned by Sun Tzu; to achieve one’s goals without war. Sun Tzu says, “For to win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.”²⁸

There are many reasons to avoid direct military combat. One that Thucydides provides is the shear cost of conducting military operations, especially protracted confrontation. “And war is not so much a matter of armaments as of the money which makes armaments effective. . .”²⁹ Another, and possibly more important is chance as seen in this Clausewitz quote, “War is the realm of chance. No other human activity gives it greater scope: no other has such incessant and varied dealings with this intruder. Chance makes everything more uncertain and interferes with the whole course of events.”³⁰ The cost coupled with chance should make war an avenue of last resort. “Before committing to military action, political and military leaders must always measure what they might gain by what they might lose.”³¹

“IW [irregular warfare] emphasizes winning the support of the relevant populations, promoting friendly political authority, and eroding adversary control,

²⁷ *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 19.

²⁸ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel Griffith, 91.

²⁹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner, 84.

³⁰ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, 101.

³¹ Douglas MacGregor, “Refusing Battle: The alternative to persistent warfare,” *Armed Forces Journal* 145, no 9 (April 2009): 13.

influence, and support.”³² This sentence is another area that is not limited to “irregular warfare,” and applies to all international political engagements. For that matter, it applies to any type of political contest. War is an extension of politics, not the definition of political activity as the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept* seems to continuously imply. Thinking this way severely limits the options of U.S. national leaders and may cause the overuse of military options when other means would be arguably more effective.

This section of the paper analyzed four main areas of the “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare” constructs using classical warfare theorists and recent DOD documents related to the concept of “irregular warfare.” The four main areas of this analysis included categorizing warfare, terminology, focus in the types of warfare, and militarizing national strategy. The final chapter of this paper provides some concluding thoughts and recommendations.

³² *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*, 19.

VI. Conclusion

Strategy is not wholly military.

--Colin S. Gray, *Fighting Talk: Forty Maximums on War, Peace, and Strategy*

The recent use of “irregular” and “traditional” to define and categorize warfare has limited utility and many logic problems that DOD has not adequately addressed. These limitations may prove harmful to integrating U.S. security efforts and could intellectually restrict U.S. strategic options to meet the future challenges.

One of the logic problems with this new “irregular warfare” construct is artificially categorizing warfare itself. None of the classic theorists categorized warfare the way DOD has recently done. Each classic theorist used in this paper stressed the ever-changing character of warfare based on the endless combinations of conditions that give rise to conflict. Even Chairman Mao Tse-tung and T.E. Lawrence, who are often used as recent examples of irregular warfare theorists, fail to make the distinction in types of warfare the way recent DOD policy has established. “By drawing artificial distinctions among military challenges, we thus grant our enemies a freedom to dictate the conditions of battle that their own intrinsic capabilities otherwise wouldn’t permit.”¹

Terminology is another area of nuisance with the recent classification of warfare. The recent policy and concept documents use compound terms with difficult and

¹ Sinnreich, Richard, “Categorizing War is an Invitation to Defeat,” *Army Magazine* 55, no 4 (April 2005): 12.

confusing meanings that overlap or are duplicative with other U.S. Military terms. These new terms are not readily understood within the U.S. Military and the terms are limiting effective communication with other external organizations. Although this may seem like a trivial matter, it is not. In fact, words do matter, especially in the arena of international politics and national strategy. Communication is essential to effectively develop, coordinate, and implement national policy and strategy. National level policy makers and strategists should use clear, simple, and concise terms to effectively communicate to a wide variety of audiences at the strategic level.

An additional problem area with “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare” is the erroneous focus of effort ascribed to them in the *Irregular Warfare Joint Operating Concept*. The focus of “traditional warfare” is the adversary’s armed forces and the focus of “irregular warfare” is control or influence over populations. None of the theorists used in this paper share this view; they all directed the focus of effort in war against the adversary. Another discrepancy in the focus issue is ascribing the seizing and holding of territory as a traditional form of warfare and somehow separating this from control over populations which is “irregular warfare” in this concept. It is impossible to hold territory without dealing with the indigenous populations in that territory.

The last problem addressed is the use of “irregular warfare” to replace non-military aspects of effective national strategy. Much of what is described as “irregular warfare” are actually economic, informational, and diplomatic elements of effective international political strategy. War is an extension of politics, not the definition of political activity as the current irregular warfare theory seems to constantly imply. This

irregular warfare concept may lead to militarizing U.S. diplomacy and overextending the U.S. in unnecessary military engagements.

Understanding and continually reassessing the motivation of the belligerents in the conflict, the resources available, social norms, geography, etc. are all important to developing sound policy and strategy. The ever changing nature of human conflict requires the constant adjustment of both policy and strategy. This core issue must be understood before military commanders direct planning for employment of forces. Attempting to classify a conflict as a type of warfare adds no value to the discussion and may mentally limit other national options to our own detriment. “. . . The greatest danger to the future security of the U.S. is Washington’s inclination to impose political solutions with the use of American military power in many parts of the world where Washington’s solutions are unneeded and unsustainable.”²

“Irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare” are a poor choice of words for a fundamentally flawed concept of dividing and describing warfare. If the policy for “irregular warfare” is fully implemented without addressing the underlying logic errors with the concept, there may be major problems integrating it with other instruments of national strategy. This will limit the U.S. Government’s ability to shape effectively the international environment without high costs - - militarily, economically, and in the end, politically. The U.S. DOD should not categorize warfare into “irregular warfare” and “traditional warfare,” and it should discontinue the official use of “irregular warfare.”

² Douglas MacGregor, “Refusing Battle: The alternative to persistent warfare,” 10.

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Vita

Colonel Jim Purvis was born on 23 May 1962 in Sarasota Florida. Colonel Purvis is married to the former Miss Lorraine Eileen Wilk and they have two daughters, Rebecca and Christina.

Colonel Purvis received an associate's degree from Marion Military Institute and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the US Army Reserves on 15 May 1982. He served as an Artillery Fire Support Officer in the Florida Army National Guard while attending college at the University of South Florida. Colonel Purvis also holds a Bachelor of Arts in Management Information Systems from the University of South Florida and a Masters of Science in Business Management from Troy State University.

Colonel Purvis entered active duty in September 1984. Colonel Purvis' military schools include Air Assault School, Airborne Course, Armor Officer Basic Course (Cavalry), Initial Entry Rotary Wing Course (Aero Scout Track), Aviation Officer Advanced Course, Combined Arms and Services Staff School, US Army Command and General Staff College, and the Joint and Combined Warfighting School. He is qualified in the UH-1H Huey, AH-1F/S Cobra, OH-58A/C Kiowa, UH-60A/L Blackhawk, and OH-58D Kiowa Warrior.

Colonel Purvis' previous duty stations include Fort Knox, Kentucky; Fort Rucker, Alabama; Camp Gary Owen, Korea; Fort Carson, Colorado; Grafenwoehr, Germany; Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida; Fort Hood, Texas; Ft Monroe, Virginia; Suffolk, Virginia; and Baghdad, Iraq.

Colonel Purvis is being assigned as the Chief, G5 Plans, Headquarters Eight U.S. Army, Seoul, South Korea.