



## Development of US Irregular Warfare Capabilities

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### Introduction

It is clear to many civil and military leaders that Irregular Warfare (IW) is not simply a subject of interest in the current Global War on Terrorism. Instead, it is a generational post-Cold war challenge that U.S. and Coalition militaries must acknowledge. U.S. conventional forces are traditionally organized, trained and equipped to face a similarly structured conventional military force with recognizable military objectives. Consequently IW, and counterinsurgency (COIN) in particular, is especially difficult for our military to fight against successfully when the insurgency consists of amorphous players, albeit with coherent political aims.<sup>i</sup>

Historically, U.S. and Coalition forces have done poorly adapting their efforts to COIN early in a conflict. Efforts to win legitimacy amongst the local population, establish functional security forces and justice systems and demonstrating the at-risk government's legitimacy in an enduring manner are difficult tasks. Current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan prove we still struggle with these challenges.

It has been theorized that the USAF goes through a recognizable IW "Phoenix Cycle," named after the mythological bird that dies and is continually reborn. This includes getting involved in an irregular war and recognizing the major changes that need to be made while resisting that change. Then, reluctantly, the military is forced to redevelop lost IW capability and when the operation is over, it is declared a "one time event" whereby the capability is reduced or eliminated; only to have to be resurrected in the future.<sup>ii</sup> Since U.S. and Coalition military strength will continue to inspire non-traditional threats, there is an unprecedented urgency for the USAF to break out of the Phoenix Cycle and establish an enduring IW capability.

The aim of this article is to highlight the existing shortfalls experienced by the U.S. military, specifically the USAF, in IW capabilities. Further, it will briefly explain ongoing efforts by the U.S. military to address this deficit in preparation for the future.

### IW Capability Gap

In today's conflict environment, our airmen must be prepared to operate across the entire spectrum of war. Our General Purpose Forces (GPF) typically receive annual conventional training to include chemical warfare and small arms training, and constantly hone technical skills specific to individual career fields. Few personnel outside of the Special Operations Forces (SOF) community, however, are educated in IW and COIN, or receive cultural awareness training.

Conventional and IW training must be taught side-by-side at all levels of professional development. Airmen should be as comfortable with the concepts of the human side of warfare as they are about instruments of conventional war.

The SOF adage "Humans are more important than hardware," finds special importance here. The importance of the human dimension is also evident in the 10-point COIN priority list published by U.S. Army General David Petraeus, Commanding General, Multi-National Forces-Iraq. This list places high emphasis on the importance of the Iraqi population and the legitimacy of the Iraqi Government. Although these concepts are taught at the Joint Special Operations University and USAF Special Operations School at Hurlburt Field, Florida, they have not been fully embraced by the conventional air force.

The USAF does have some organic capability to aid foreign governments. The 6th Special Operations Squadron (6 SOS) is a combat aviation advisory unit that specializes in training foreign air forces to defend against internal security threats. While the 6 SOS is heavily tasked, there are opportunities for the GPF to contribute expertise in areas that do not demand specific SOF capabilities. Unfortunately the GPF is not trained or employed in this manner unless they are tasked as individual members of a training or transition team, as in OIF/OEF.

Conceptually, we at the CWIC believe combating insurgencies can be accomplished in one of three approaches as depicted in the following COIN Pursuit Curve (Figure I). To “lead turn” or minimize possible insurgencies, the USAF uses Foreign Internal Defense (FID), Building Partnership Capacity, Civil Military Operations and Influence Operations to create a favorable environment to support troubled nations. “Pure pursuit” reflects operations that could turn into full-blown insurgencies in the short-term; this approach increases the costs involved but keeps the operation in our line of sight. Post-insurgency, the “lag pursuit” curve portrays a reactive scenario where a full-blown insurgency is underway. This last scenario needs to consider Stabilization, Security, Transition and Reconstruction Operations (SSTRO) in addition to all other operations, and the associated high costs in personnel and resources. Using these proactive approaches to COIN, the USAF can significantly contribute to IW by shaping the strategic environment to impede the activities of potential terrorists and insurgents. For this to occur, IW doctrine must quickly mature in order to guide air power efforts.

## Pursuit Curves and COIN

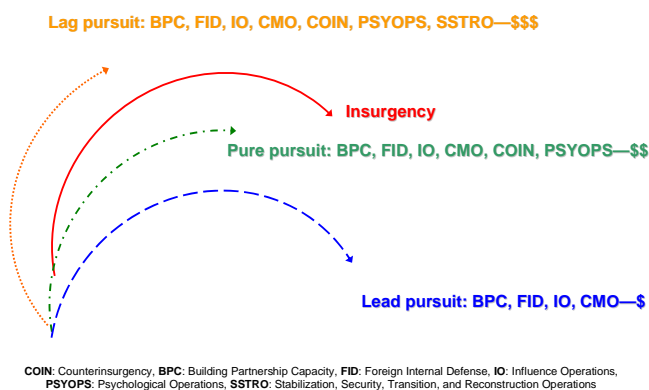


Figure I. USAF CIWC Pursuit Curves

Field Manual 3-24—Counterinsurgency is the U.S. Army and Marine Corps recently published doctrine that coalesces counterinsurgency doctrine into one document. In an effort to better articulate what the USAF can offer to COIN, Major General Peck, Commander Headquarters Air Force Doctrine Center, is currently revising Air Force Doctrine Document 2-3—Irregular Warfare.

According to General Peck, AFDD 2-3 will “codify how the Air Force approaches IW, including its capabilities and contributions to counterinsurgency operations.”<sup>iii</sup> While the document is essential in guiding USAF efforts against IW, progress is dependent upon the USAF’s ability to modify its war-fighting culture. The USAF must evolve further to become a “learning organization;” it needs the ability to quickly incorporate evolving tactics into doctrine, which is critical to long-term success.<sup>iv</sup>

## IW Centers

The intent for newly developed IW centers is to help further the evolution of the US Department of Defence (DoD) as a learning organization. The IW centers are recovering lost ground; rediscovering lessons from past operations for current application. They aim to aid current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan by providing operational level expertise on IW. Importantly, they seek to ensure that current experience with IW is not lost; that IW proficiency becomes an enduring capability.

Through the 2006 Quadrennial Defence Review, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force recognized the gap in IW capability and directed the establishment of the USAF Coalition and Irregular Warfare Center of Excellence (CIWC). The organization stood up at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, under the USAF Warfare Center in July 2006. The CIWC’s charter is to facilitate the development of innovative applications of air power in IW. Additionally, the CIWC is responsible for facilitating the development of relevant airpower capabilities in partner nations.



Picture I. USAF CIWC Colombia Air Assessment Team

There are three other centers performing similar missions in focusing leadership and efforts on IW and COIN. The United States Marine Corps Center for Irregular Warfare (USMC CIW) is the USMC’s central agency for identifying, coordinating and implementing irregular warfare capability development initiatives. Its aim is to improve USMC IW and related capabilities across the entire operational spectrum.

Significantly, the CIW conducts outreach to other military and civilian entities with a shared interest in irregular warfare and non-kinetic effects operations.

The US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Center is an integrator for COIN efforts established by Gen Petraeus and Lt Gen Mattis in 2006 at Ft Leavenworth, KS. It provides COIN workshops for training facilities, organizations and units to focus leaders on a war-fighting philosophy that enables full-spectrum COIN operations. The COIN Center conducts regular conferences and video teleconferences with training centers, deployed units and educational centers to rapidly share and assist with the dissemination of COIN knowledge.

The Center on Terrorism and Irregular Warfare (CTIW) at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) is an IW research activity associated with the Department of Defense Analysis, sponsored by Special Operations Command. The CTIW produces timely, innovative, interdisciplinary analysis on IW relevant to both policy and operations. Its researchers use formal modeling, as well as detailed case studies in their research. CTIW works closely with the DoD Information Operations Center of Excellence, also located at NPS.

These centers and others are being developed to deal with current and future IW challenges. They represent a concerted attempt to break out of the “Phoenix Cycle” of IW capability.

## Conclusion

IW and COIN are not short-term challenges, and must not be treated as such: they are concepts that require U.S. military and Coalition partner attention in the short and, more importantly, the long-term. The USAF and sister Services have established centers of excellence to expand the understanding and implementation of IW concepts. The centers exist to educate and prepare our forces through proactively embracing IW and COIN concepts and promoting a learning institution both within, and with Coalition partners. These centers are poised to lead U.S. forces as they face evolving IW challenges by rediscovering lessons learnt, aiding in current operations and developing an enduring IW capability that is part of the wider spectrum of warfare.

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<sup>i</sup> Gray, C.S. *Irregular Warfare: One Nature, Many Characters*, Air Force Symposium 2007: Counterinsurgency, 24 April, 2007, 12.

<sup>ii</sup> Monroe, George. “Breaking the USAF’s Phoenix Cycle: Ending the Repeated Construction and Destruction of USAF Irregular Warfare Capability.” PowerPoint Slide Presentation, USAF/A8XZ. 13 Sep, 2006.

<sup>iii</sup> Peck, Allen G., *Airpower’s Crucial Role in Irregular Warfare*, Air & Space Power Journal, summer 2007.

<sup>iv</sup> Nagl, J.A. *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005, 223.