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Assessing Irregular Warfare

A Framework for Intelligence Analysis

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Summary

The aim of this study was to assist the Department of the Army's National Ground Intelligence Center (NGIC) in better understanding the intelligence analytic requirements of irregular warfare (IW). To do this, we were to develop an analytic framework for IW that could be used as the basis for an educational and training curriculum that would enhance NGIC analysts' capabilities for assessing IW situations.

In December 2006, after considering a number of alternative definitions for *irregular warfare* and acknowledging the many conceptual and other challenges associated with trying to define this term with precision, the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the following definition:

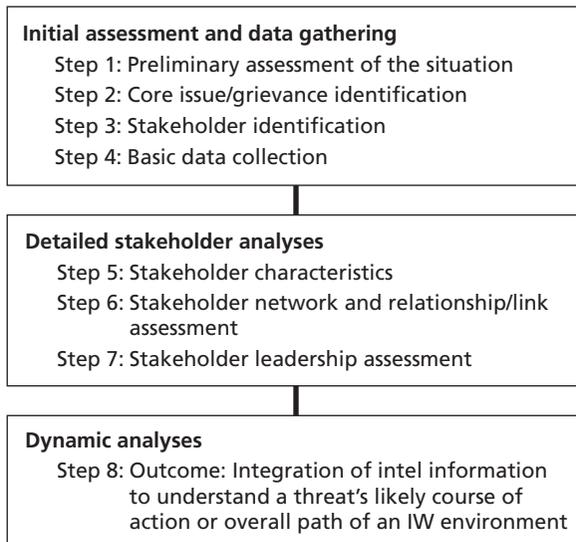
A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population.

Definitions aside, large numbers of academic, doctrinal, and other publications stress that the outcomes of IW situations depend on both the level of one's understanding of the population and the deftness with which non-military and indirect means are employed to influence and build legitimacy. Accordingly, the study team's principal efforts were devoted to developing an analytic framework for understanding IW situations, whether population-centric (such as counterinsurgency) or counterterrorism, that focused on "irregular features" of the operating environment—that is, the central environmental and operational variables whose interplay determines the overall trajectory of an irregular conflict toward either success or failure.

The central idea of the framework is that it is an analytic procedure by which an analyst, beginning with a generic and broad understanding of a conflict and its environment and then engaging in successively more-focused and more-detailed analyses of selective topics, can develop an understanding of the conflict and can uncover the key drivers behind such phenomena as orientation toward principal protagonists in the conflict, mobilization, and recruitment, and choice of political bargaining or violence. Put another way, the framework allows the analyst to efficiently decompose and understand the features of IW situations—whether they are of the population-centric or the counterterrorism variety—by illuminating areas in which additional detailed analysis could matter and areas in which it probably will not matter. This analytic procedure involves three main activities and eight discrete steps, as shown in Figure S.1.

In the first activity, *initial assessment and data gathering*, the analyst focuses on developing background information on the IW operating environment. Step 1 provides the necessary background and

Figure S.1
Analytic Framework for IW Analysis



context for understanding the situation; step 2 identifies core issues or grievances that need to be mitigated or resolved if the sources of conflict are to be eliminated; step 3 identifies key stakeholders who will seek to influence the outcome of the situation; step 4 focuses on compiling demographic, economic, attitude, and other quantitative data.

In the second activity, *detailed stakeholder analyses*, the analyst conducts a more intensive analysis of each stakeholder. Step 5 is an assessment of each stakeholder's aims, characteristics, and capabilities, both military and non-military; step 6 is an analysis of leaders, factions, and/or networks within each stakeholder group, as well as connections to other stakeholder groups and their leaders; step 7 is an analysis of key leaders identified in step 6.

In the third activity, *dynamic analyses*, the aim is to make sense of the data and insights collected in the previous steps. Much like what occurs in the intelligence preparation of the battlefield (IPB) process, step 8 consists of integrating intelligence information to determine various stakeholder groups' likely courses of action (COAs) and develop an understanding of the situation's possible trajectory. Dynamic analyses can include a wide variety of activities—for instance, trend analyses of significant activities data, content analysis of leadership statements and media, and analysis of attitude data from public opinion surveys, as well as the use of models and other diagnostic or predictive tools.

Although most of our effort focused on population-centric IW situations, available doctrine for intelligence analysis of IW suggests few distinctions between the intelligence analytic requirements of counterinsurgency and those of counterterrorism. Likewise, our analytic framework can be used for intelligence analysis in support of either population-centric IW situations, such as counterinsurgency, or counterterrorism. For example, at the tactical and operational level, terrorist organizations can be viewed as a unique class of stakeholder group or network that can be subjected to link analyses, assessments of military and non-military capabilities, leadership analyses, and other analytic activities envisioned in our framework. And when such groups are viewed as a global counterinsurgency involving transnational jihadist networks, such as the Al Qaeda organization, the distinctions between counterinsurgency and counterterrorism diminish further.

Our review of military doctrine related to IPB and IW intelligence analysis also suggests that our framework is generally compatible with the IPB process and with specific approaches, techniques, and tools advocated in existing doctrine. Incorporation of our framework—in part or in its totality—into existing intelligence analytic processes and educational and training curricula should therefore be relatively easy. In consequence, our analytic framework might best be viewed not as an alternative or competitor to IPB, but as providing an efficient analytic protocol for IW IPB analysis, one able to accent irregular features at the strategic and operational levels that are important determinants of IW outcomes.