



An American Way of Political Warfare

A Proposal

Charles T. Cleveland, Ryan Crocker, Daniel Egel, Andrew M. Liepman, David Maxwell

American combat experiences since 2001 have revealed stunning military capabilities and repeated tactical successes. Yet the United States has failed to achieve acceptable and durable political arrangements that serve and protect U.S. interests, suggesting that there are fundamental flaws in its approach to modern warfare.

The U.S. approach has emphasized existing and largely conventional models and tools, making little accommodation for a changing adversary and its evolution toward nonconventional means.¹ The consequence has been troubled campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq; against the Islamic State; and against various irregular forces in Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and elsewhere. And the United States is unprepared to contest the nonconventional means being employed by revisionist, revolutionary, and rogue powers, which the U.S. National Security Strategy recognizes as engaged in “fundamentally political contests” employing a blend of political, economic, cyber, and military tools.²

It is time for the United States to seriously consider developing a capability to orchestrate all relevant elements of U.S. national power in response to these nonconventional threats. An effective response is necessarily a whole-of-government effort and would augment the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) irregular warfare capability, with vital roles for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), U.S. Department of State (DoS), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and other interagency partners. And such a capability must be able to operate in both war and in peace, with the lead agency dictated by the context.

We propose the establishment of an American *political warfare* capability, with the authorities and knowledge to synchronize all elements of national power in contests with and without armed conflict. The term *political warfare* is perhaps not ideal, but there is no better, simple term to describe the capability that the United States requires.³ This American way of political warfare would include both the Cold War version of political warfare, with a focus on the mobilization of all elements of national power in contests

short of military warfare,⁴ and the Clausewitz version, which maintains that all military warfare is in fact political warfare. Yet political warfare must go beyond even these conceptualizations, because it must include capabilities that reflect the rapid technological developments that have led to the emergence of warfare in the cyber domain.

Given political warfare's deliberate whole-of-government nature, the establishment of this capability would require support from both the President and Congress, likely including legislation parallel to that establishing the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC).⁵ And we believe that this capability must be jointly funded and supported by both DoD and DoS, because of the requirement to operate in contests with and without armed conflict. The support and participation of the Intelligence Community and USAID would be critical for the capability's success.

Critical to the success of this capability is the establishment, alongside the requirement for the capability itself, of a national political warfare center (NPWC) for studying, understanding, and developing whole-of-government concepts of action (policy, strategy, and campaigns) for responding to nonconventional threats. There is currently no U.S. government organization, U.S. nongovernmental organization, or U.S. academic institution that focuses on the full range of unconventional, irregular, political, informational, diplomatic, and economic threats and activities employed by adversary powers. This center would fill this gap, developing the concepts needed to effectively address these threats and providing analysis, instruction, and expertise to support this American way of political warfare. DoD and DoS would share responsibility for this center—given its mandate to support contests with and without

armed conflict—with both agencies assigned permanent leadership positions on its board.⁶

Requirement for a U.S. Political Warfare Capability

The United States has proven to be ill-equipped to address the use of nonconventional means by revisionist, revolutionary, and rogue powers. The United States is seemingly impotent against cyberattacks targeting U.S. government agencies,⁷ Russia's influence campaigns designed to destabilize the United States, Russia's penetration of the U.S. electricity grid, and North Korea's nuclear posturing. The wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria have maimed and killed thousands of Americans; consumed trillions of dollars of resources; deepened the already burgeoning U.S. national debt; and disrupted Americans' way of life at home, compelling the U.S. government to curtail civil liberties of citizens in the name of security. The United States prevented another spectacular attack against the homeland, but it has failed to defeat al-Qaeda and prevent the emergence of other organizations (e.g., the Islamic State) that threaten Americans or their allies at home or overseas.⁸

Although U.S. adversaries have developed specialized capabilities to operate in this domain, the United States has been frequently caught flat-footed, because it does not have a structure for effectively orchestrating a response. The United States continues to rely heavily on conventional military capabilities—typically focused on destroying the enemy and occupying its terrain—in contests where adversaries instead compete for influence and legitimacy among the populations. Despite the United States' demonstrated capability to capture or kill terrorists on a global scale, neither this specialized capability nor the dominance of the United States in conventional

The United States should develop a 21st-century political warfare capability. The central mandate would be to go on the offensive in the broad range of contests that the country faces today. . . . The need to develop this political warfare capability is urgent, because U.S. adversaries are already on the offensive.

warfare has proven effective in these political warfare contests. Therefore, U.S. successes have too often been short term and limited to those cases in which adversaries engage in traditional warfare—e.g., the Islamic State’s collapse in Syria was foretold after defining territorial control as a core tenet of its success.

Far too often, U.S. planning and execution of operations have failed to win political will in locations where the United States operates,⁹ as its concepts and tools are ill-suited for achieving this goal. Critical decisions at the policy and strategic levels are frequently made without a full understanding of potentially deleterious long-term implications—e.g., disbanding the Iraqi Army and de-Baathification were likely strategic errors,¹⁰ and conventionalization of the war in Afghanistan arguably contributed to the failure to prevent the reemergence of the Taliban.¹¹ The U.S. approach frequently relies heavily on the conventional use of military force, and coordination with U.S. development and diplomatic professionals is inadequate.¹²

The frequent reliance on conventional superiority to address threats, in addition to being ineffective, has negatively affected the readiness of U.S. military forces. This has left the United States potentially ill-equipped to respond to real conventional threats and contributed to a loss of its conventional edge, including against possible future existential threats.¹³ U.S. adversaries who recognized U.S. dominance in traditional warfare can chalk up a major

success. They have spent at least a decade fine-tuning their ability to affect U.S. influence and interests through nonconventional means—and it is paying off.

Importantly, the United States does not always get the political dimension of warfare wrong. The United States has been successful in these types of contests in some instances, including in Bosnia, Colombia, El Salvador, Kosovo, and the Philippines and against the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda and its neighbors. Although each case and context is different, these engagements share several core similarities: The U.S. military approach relied heavily on nonconventional approaches, forged meaningful partnerships across the different elements of U.S. national power, and relied on strategy and goals that reflected the complexity of the context. Critically, these successes should be studied to understand how and why the United States was successful—and less successful elsewhere.

These successes and failures argue that the United States should develop a 21st-century political warfare capability. The central mandate would be to go on the offensive in the broad range of contests that the country faces today, by studying these contests—past and present—and then orchestrating all relevant elements of U.S. national power (military force, covert action, cyber, diplomacy, and economic tools) in response.

The need to develop this political warfare capability is urgent, because U.S. adversaries are already on the offensive. The Chinese—

who synchronize their national power via their “three warfares,” employing psychological, media, and legal warfare to project their national will—have a proven proficiency in controlling public opinion and countering propaganda and may surpass the United States in the use of international law to support their national security goals.¹⁴ The Kremlin also has extensive experience with public opinion and propaganda on the domestic front, with its decision to take over Crimea a textbook example of what has been called *new generation warfare*, relying on unacknowledged military units—social clubs and crime organizations—synchronized with the movement of the conventional Russian military.¹⁵ And the United States has learned through its own failures that it does not have effective counters for the playbooks of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, the so-called Iran Action Network,¹⁶ and the blend of unconventional and political warfare wielded by North Korea. The American way of political warfare should not, and indeed cannot, mimic these capabilities—adversaries’ approaches are frequently incompatible with the United States’ progressive democracy—but needs to be able to contest them.

The 2018 U.S. National Security Strategy is clear that the nonconventional means of both state and nonstate actors—which include economic and information tools and covert military operations—are among the key security challenges the United States faces.¹⁷ Congress acknowledged this in 2016, when it required the Secretary of Defense to develop a strategy to counter the unconventional warfare capabilities of U.S. adversaries.¹⁸ As of spring 2018, that congressional requirement remains unanswered.¹⁹

What Might This 21st-Century U.S. Political Warfare Capability Look Like?

The U.S. approach to contesting revisionist, revolutionary, and rogue powers has relied almost exclusively on conventional capabilities. In U.S. contests with other state actors, DoS has typically taken the lead—exerting pressure through traditional tools of diplomacy and sanctions—with DoD providing defense and deterrence and with the Intelligence Community providing intelligence. And the U.S. response to nonstate actors has been dominated by conventional DoD capabilities, enabled by DoS and the Intelligence Community. Strikingly—despite the successes of the indigenous-centric U.S. irregular warfare capability against these threats, particularly when supported by comparable interagency capabilities—DoD does not yet have the organizational structures for its irregular warfare capability to lead such a response.

We anticipate that an effective political warfare capability would require developing and synchronizing three core types of functional activities:

- **Irregular warfare:** DoD would remain the proponent for U.S. irregular warfare, which involves activities “in support of predetermined United States policy and military objectives conducted by, with, and through regular forces, irregular forces, groups, and individuals participating in competition between state and non-state actors short of traditional armed conflict.”²⁰ This would include unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and stability operations.

- **Expeditionary diplomacy:** DoS and USAID would become the proponents for expeditionary diplomacy, which would entail diplomats working in “fluid situations without a strong central host government or U.S. embassy infrastructure to promote the local government’s rule of law, reconstruction and economic development, and delivery of services.”²¹ This would include support to military forces during military operations and as part of a whole-of-government approach in preconflict or postconflict settings,²² functioning as a “form of asymmetric warfare in crisis countries, particularly those with crumbling regimes or new unstable governments.”²³
- **Covert political action:** The Intelligence Community would become the proponent for covert political action, which would cause “economic dislocation, distortion of political processes or manipulation of information.”²⁴ In addition, the Intelligence Community would continue to provide intelligence to support operations in situations short of armed conflict; however, this intelligence collection and analysis may become increasingly focused on understanding how civilian populations and partner forces may be influenced using nonlethal means.²⁵

Effectively orchestrating these different elements of U.S. national power would require new capabilities. Although there have been productive in-country interagency partnerships against non-conventional threats in recent years, it is widely agreed that there is a long way to go in strengthening the United States’ ability to develop

and execute plans that harness its diverse capabilities.²⁶ The U.S. experience in Pakistan is illustrative of this challenge—although the U.S. embassy was able to make significant progress in degrading safe havens in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) through a coordinated approach that included the CIA, DoD, DoS, and USAID, there was never a “Washington-supported, comprehensive plan to combat terrorism and close the terrorist safe haven in the FATA.”²⁷ The experience of the NCTC can provide valuable lessons for designing such a U.S. organizational capability, given both the center’s successes (e.g., attracting the right personnel) and its challenges (e.g., bureaucratic resistance to coherent government), but this coordination would require senior-level support in the executive branch (e.g., the National Security Advisor); buy-in from within DoD, DoS, and other potential partners; and political and resource assistance from Congress.²⁸

Given its deliberate whole-of-government structure, the political warfare capability would need some level of political support from both the President and Congress. The NCTC experience is instructive in the value of this support, because bipartisan support within Congress was critical for overcoming resistance to synchronization from both within the Intelligence Community (where the NCTC was housed) and across the relevant elements of U.S. national power. And we believe that DoD and DoS must jointly support this capability for it to be successful, given the requirement to operate in contests with and without armed conflict, but the lessons of the NCTC likely still apply.

DoD and DoS must jointly support this capability for it to be successful, given the requirement to operate in contests with and without armed conflict.

The Need for a National Political Warfare Center

The establishment of the NPWC alongside the requirement for a political warfare capability is critical. The theories, practices, and science behind conventional development, diplomacy, and warfare—while still critical for the defense of the nation—are very different from what is needed to defeat these adversaries. The U.S. government and, in particular, the military have a long history of studying the complex threats of the time.²⁹ Yet, despite the diverse set of organizations that touch on aspects of political warfare, there are no centers dedicated to developing the requisite political warfare capabilities detailed above, let alone the coordination across these different capabilities.³⁰ As an important example, there is no systematic study of the successes of the Cold War, in which the United States deployed political warfare capabilities against threats similar to those it faces today, differing only in the tools (e.g., cyber) available to both the United States and its adversaries. Further, practitioners must learn through either experiential learning (which can prove fatal) or self-study, because lessons of previous conflicts are not systematically and objectively incorporated into professional education programs.

The initial mandate of this NPWC would be to define, in a consultative process with professionals representing the myriad elements of U.S. national power, the requirements of a U.S. political warfare capability and its constituent components (e.g., irregular warfare, expeditionary diplomacy, covert political action). The goal of the center would not be to generate specific requirements for each component—e.g., the Intelligence Community would be required to develop the specific covert-political-action capabilities needed, consulting with others only as needed and appropriate—or to coordinate them but rather to provide the intellectual foundation and education needed to develop and synchronize the capabilities.

The NPWC would be structured to meet both the short-term necessity of refining the requirements of a U.S. political warfare capability and the long-term need to provide analysis and education to support the development of this capability. The NPWC would, at least initially, be the synchronization node for three interconnected centers focused on the three major components of political warfare—specifically, a DoD center focused on irregular warfare, a DoS center for expeditionary diplomacy, and a comparable center within the Intelligence Community.³¹ If appropriate, the studying and training responsibilities for each component of political warfare might also be separated—e.g., within DoD, the National Defense University could be tasked to study irregular warfare, and U.S. Special Operations Command could be directed to assume responsibility for the education of the force.³²

Some core tasks of our proposed center are detailed in the table (on the next page). Most of these tasks have convening as a central component, bringing together practitioners, scholars, policymakers, congressional staff, journalists, strategists, and campaign planners to meet and discuss on a regular basis. Targeted working groups would develop policy, strategy, and planning for specific threats, and small groups would meet bimonthly and annually for discussions with a broader outreach component. Education of practitioners—including executive education and possibly mobile educational teams—would also be a persistent and ongoing requirement.

The success of this NPWC—for which DoD and DoS would jointly share responsibility, both with assigned permanent leadership positions on its board—would depend on the strength of congressional support for the political warfare capability itself. This support would be required to ensure that the NPWC had the needed access

NPWC Core Tasks

Core Task	Description
Policy, strategy, and plans	Assemble expert practitioners and scholars to examine and analyze U.S. policies, strategies, and campaign plans from a U.S. perspective for feasibility, acceptability, and suitability—and also from an adversary’s (Red team’s) perspective. Conduct premortem and postmortem studies of policies and strategies.
Network	Develop and manage a network of development, diplomatic, intelligence, and security practitioners and scholars.
Education	Provide analysis and recommendations for educating each component element of political warfare (e.g., irregular warfare, expeditionary diplomacy, irregular warfare) and coordination nodes. Educate Congress on political warfare on an ongoing basis.
Community of interest	Serve as a focal point for all military and other government organizations that are connected to the study and execution of irregular warfare.
Analysis and modeling	Analyze adversarial capabilities and the conditions that influence their success. Provide reports to appropriate agencies and organizations. Publicly publish reports to inform the community of interest and general public.
Experimentation	Explore new concepts and constructs for whole-of-government and, perhaps, whole-of-nation approaches for contesting nonconventional threats.
Legal issues	Coordinate legal experts to propose needed changes to existing standards and statutes to allow the new capability.
Pool of expertise	Provide experts to respond to Congress. Engage with academia, private industry, governmental and nongovernmental organizations, and the media to inform, educate, and (when appropriate) advocate.

and support from within DoD and DoS and across the U.S. government (e.g., the NPWC would likely require fellows from across all relevant agencies to be effective). However, although the NPWC would require significant political support, the initial financial requirements are anticipated to be modest.³³ It could be established within an existing think tank or as a stand-alone institution, perhaps following the United States Institute of Peace model.

Next Steps

Confusion reigns among policymakers, strategists, political leaders, and the general public over how to effectively respond to the threats that the United States faces. The development of a U.S. political warfare capability would give the United States the ability to defend

against the approaches used by revisionist, revolutionary, and rogue powers and orchestrate all relevant elements of national power in pursuing U.S. interests. Establishing the proposed center would provide the United States a venue to study and prepare for warfare in this space between peace and war, in which the United States must compete but in which it today finds itself ill-equipped to succeed.

Development of the world-class political warfare capability that is needed to compete against state and nonstate adversaries would require support from both the President and Congress, possibly including legislation analogous to that for the NCTC. In addition, an NPWC is critical to the development and maturation of this capability, synchronizing the necessary analysis and education, both initially and on an ongoing basis.

Notes

¹The term *nonconventional means* in this context refers to everything other than combat operations, from low-intensity conflict, to military operations other than war, to hybrid warfare, and still others. For a discussion of the challenges that this proliferation of terminology has created, see David Maxwell, “Threats and the Words We Use: A Thought Experiment,” *War on the Rocks*, November 8, 2013.

²White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., December 2017, p. 25.

³For a discussion of the myriad, and sometimes contradictory, definitions of *political warfare*, see Linda Robinson, Todd C. Helmus, Raphael S. Cohen, Alireza Nader, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, and Katya Migacheva, *Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1772-A, 2018, pp. 2–6.

⁴In 1948, George F. Kennan wrote in a DoS policy memorandum: “In broadest definition, political warfare is the employment of all the means at a nation’s command, short of war, to achieve its national objectives. Such operations are both overt and covert. They range from such overt actions as political alliances, economic measures (as ERP [the Marshall Plan]), and ‘white’ propaganda to such covert operations as clandestine support of ‘friendly’ foreign elements, ‘black’ psychological warfare and even encouragement of underground resistance in hostile states” (George F. Kennan, “Policy Planning Staff Memorandum,” in C. Thomas Thorne, Jr., and David S. Patterson, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945–1950, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, Document 269, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996).

⁵Pub. L. 108-458, Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, Section 1021, December 17, 2004.

⁶This proposed structure is comparable to that of the United States Institute of Peace, where the secretaries of defense and state are permanent voting members of the board (Pub. L. 98-525, United States Institute of Peace Act, October 19, 1984 [updated October 2008], p. 5).

⁷For example, Chinese hackers were suspected in a 2014 attack against the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, discovered in 2015, that compromised the personnel records of millions of U.S. government employees and contractors.

⁸For an assessment of operations against al-Qaeda, see Julia McQuaid, Jonathan Schroden, Pamela G. Faber, P. Kathleen Hammerberg, Alexander Powell, Zack Gold, David Knoll, and William Rosenau, *Independent Assessment of U.S. Government Efforts Against al-Qaeda*, Arlington, Va.: CNA, October 2017.

⁹For an in-depth discussion of this challenge focused on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, see Christopher J. Lamb and Megan Franco, “National-Level Coordination and Implementation: How System Attributes Trumped Leadership,” in Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins, eds., *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, Washington, D.C.: National University Press, 2015.

¹⁰See, e.g., James A. Pfiffner, “US Blunders in Iraq: De-Baathification and Disbanding the Army,” *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2010.

¹¹See, e.g., Anna Simons and David Tucker, “SOF and the War on Terrorism,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring 2003; John R. Dyke and John R. Crisafulli, *Unconventional Counter-Insurgency in Afghanistan*, Monterey, Calif.: Naval Postgraduate School, thesis, June 2006. Note that the United States did learn from this challenge, and subsequent deployments of conventional forces following a counterinsurgency approach were critical for preventing the Taliban from regaining control of the country (see, e.g., Stephen Biddle, “Afghanistan’s Legacy: Emerging Lessons of an Ongoing War,” *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2014).

¹²For a general discussion, see Robert Egnell, “Civil–Military Coordination for Operational Effectiveness: Towards a Measured Approach,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2013. Even the provincial reconstruction teams in Afghanistan, which have been lauded for their success in coordinating the military’s relationships with development professionals, faced significant challenges (see Conor Keane and Steve Wood, “Bureaucratic Politics, Role Conflict, and the Internal Dynamics of US Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan,” *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2016).

¹³Even analysts who argue that U.S. military readiness has *not* been significantly affected on net do agree that U.S. armed forces “remain better prepared for counterinsurgency and stabilization missions than for high-end warfare” (Michael O’Hanlon, “The State of U.S. Military Readiness,” Brookings, August 15, 2016).

¹⁴Larry M. Wortzel, *The Chinese People’s Liberation Army and Information Warfare*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College Press, 2014, p. 47.

¹⁵See, e.g., Chris Chivvis, “Understanding Russian ‘Hybrid Warfare’: And What Can Be Done About It,” testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, CT-468, March 22, 2017; Collins D. Cockrell, “Russian Actions and Methods Against the United States and NATO,” *Military Review*, September 22, 2017.

¹⁶The Iran Action Network has been defined as the network of government and nongovernment organizations “involved in crafting and implementing the covert elements of Iran’s foreign policy agenda, from terrorism, political, economic and social subversion; to illicit finance, weapons and narcotics trafficking; and

nuclear procurement and proliferation” (Scott Model and David Asher, *Pushback: Countering the Iran Action Network*, Washington, D.C.: Center for New American Security, September 2013).

¹⁷ White House, 2017, pp. 2–3.

¹⁸ Section 1097 of the 2016 NDAA requires that the “[t]he Secretary of Defense shall, in consultation with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the heads of other appropriate departments and agencies of the United States Government, develop a strategy for the Department of Defense to counter unconventional warfare threats posed by adversarial state and non-state actors” (Pub. L. 114-92, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016, Section 1097, November 25, 2015). See further discussion in David S. Maxwell, “Congress Has Embraced Unconventional Warfare: Will the US Military and the Rest of the US Government?” *Small Wars Journal*, December 2015.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Jen Judson, “Countering ‘Little Green Men’: Pentagon Special Ops Studies Russia ‘Gray Zone’ Conflict,” *Defense News*, May 15, 2017.

²⁰ This definition was promulgated by Congress in the 2018 NDAA; see Pub. L. 115-91, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, Section 1202, December 12, 2017. DoD defined *irregular warfare* in 2007 as the “violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations” and is the DoD component of political warfare; see DoD, *Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept (JOC)*, Version 1.0, Washington, D.C., September 2007, p. 1.

²¹ This is not a formal definition but rather a description of the skills required of an expeditionary diplomat provided by the president of the American Foreign Service Association in 2014; see Robert J. Silverman, “Talking About Foreign Service Advocacy,” *Foreign Service Journal*, September 2014. Other former diplomats have similarly advocated for the development of these expeditionary diplomats; see, e.g., Marc Grossman, “Diplomacy Before and After Conflict,” *Prism*, Vol. 1, No. 4, September 2012.

²² The modern iteration of expeditionary diplomacy, which was focused on making “the State Department better prepared and more effective in working together with military forces in large-scale operations such as Iraq and Afghanistan,” reportedly began during the George W. Bush administration; see James R. Bullington, “Expeditionary Diplomacy and the Casamance Conflict,” remarks presented in Dakar, Senegal, U.S. Department of State, September 9, 2013. However, this concept has long been central to the work of DoS, including in Vietnam, Latin America, and the Middle East before September 11, 2001; see, e.g., James F. Creagan, “Diplomats in the Field,” *American Diplomacy*, February 2013.

²³ Anthony H. Cordesman, “The Death of Ambassador Chris Stevens, the Need for ‘Expeditionary Diplomacy,’ and the Real Lessons for U.S. Diplomacy,” Center for Strategic & International Studies, October 11, 2012. Cordesman notes that this type of diplomacy would necessarily involve risks to personnel, because the ability of U.S. diplomats to engage with people in these countries to have influence and effect change is essential.

²⁴ James A. Barry, “Managing the Covert Political Action: Guideposts from Just War Theory,” *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 36, No. 5, 1992. Note that the act of influencing elections and public opinion was far more controversial than targeted killing during the previous two presidential administrations, and this covert political action capability would require a new legal framework.

²⁵ For a discussion of the intelligence considerations regarding supporting irregular warfare, see Jeffrey B. White, “A Different Kind of Threat: Some Thoughts on Irregular Warfare,” *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 39, No. 5, 1996. However, collecting this type of intelligence is inherently difficult (see, e.g., CIA, *Operational Support for Future Unconventional Warfare*, Washington, D.C., April 1983 [approved for release on July 24, 2007]).

²⁶ This coordination, in addition to allowing more-effective solutions, can also prevent the types of distortions that are sometimes caused by an overly large or inappropriately designed presence. Indeed, in some cases, a small-footprint, multi-agency approach with lower expectations and a longer operational time frame may prove the most effective; see Hy S. Rothstein, “Less Is More: The Problematic Future of Irregular Warfare in an Era of Collapsing States,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2007.

²⁷ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Combating Terrorism: The United States Lacks Comprehensive Plan to Destroy the Terrorist Threat and Close the Safe Haven in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas*, Washington, D.C., GAO-08-622, 2008.

²⁸ The support of Senator Susan Collins and then-Senator Joe Lieberman and the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 were critical to the efficacy of the NCTC.

²⁹ Examples include President Eisenhower’s Solarium Project (see, e.g., Tyler Nottberg, “Once and Future Policy Planning: Solarium for Today,” The Eisenhower Institute at Gettysburg College, undated), the Special Operations Research Office (see, e.g., Joy Rhode, *Armed with Expertise: The Militarization of American Social Research During the Cold War*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013), and the Active Measures Working Group (see, e.g., Fletcher Schoen and Christopher J. Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made a Major Difference*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2012).

³⁰The lack of a dedicated center to study and train the practitioners of irregular warfare is perhaps the most remarkable, given the multitude of organizations that touch on some aspects of irregular warfare (e.g., the Navy's Irregular Warfare Center; the Marine Corps' Irregular Warfare Center; the Air Force's Special Operations School; the Army's Asymmetric Warfare Group; the Simons Center for Interagency Cooperation at West Point's Combating Terrorism Center; U.S. Special Operations Command's Joint Special Operations University; and the Combating Terrorism Technical Support Office's College of International Security Affairs, established by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict).

³¹These three core centers might be supplemented by two additional centers, one focused on irregular strategy and one on information and influence operations.

³²Alternatively, this educational role might be assigned to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict, which has been assigned responsibility for both irregular warfare and professional military education of special operations (Pub. L. 114-328, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Section 922, December 23, 2016).

³³The experience of the United States Institute of Peace suggests that initial annual operational requirements might be as low as \$1 million—indeed, the initial operations budget for the institute in fiscal year 1985, exclusive of disbursements to grantees, was only \$300,000 (equivalent to roughly \$700,000 in 2018 dollars); see United States Institute of Peace, *Biennial Report of the United States Institute of Peace*, Washington, D.C., 1987, p. 36.

References

Barry, James A., "Managing the Covert Political Action: Guideposts from Just War Theory," *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 36, No. 5, 1992, pp. 19–31.

Biddle, Stephen, "Afghanistan's Legacy: Emerging Lessons of an Ongoing War," *Washington Quarterly*, Volume 37, No. 2, 2014, pp. 73–86.

Bullington, James R., "Expeditionary Diplomacy and the Casamance Conflict," remarks presented in Dakar, Senegal, U.S. Department of State, September 9, 2013. As of April 23, 2018:
<https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/cso/releases/remarks/2013/214373.htm>

Central Intelligence Agency, *Operational Support for Future Unconventional Warfare*, Washington, D.C., April 1983 (approved for release on July 24, 2007). As of March 16, 2018:
<https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp85t00153r000200050051-9>

Chivvis, Chris, "Understanding Russian 'Hybrid Warfare': And What Can Be Done About It," testimony presented before the House Armed Services Committee, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, CT-468, March 22, 2017. As of March 16, 2018:
<https://www.rand.org/pubs/testimonies/CT468.html>

CIA—See Central Intelligence Agency.

Cockrell, Collins D., "Russian Actions and Methods Against the United States and NATO," *Military Review*, September 22, 2017.

Cordesman, Anthony H., "The Death of Ambassador Chris Stevens, the Need for 'Expeditionary Diplomacy,' and the Real Lessons for U.S. Diplomacy," Center for Strategic & International Studies, October 11, 2012. As of April 23, 2018:
<https://www.csis.org/analysis/death-ambassador-chris-stevens-need-expeditionary-diplomacy-and-real-lessons-us-diplomacy>

Creagan, James F., "Diplomats in the Field," *American Diplomacy*, February 2013. As of April 23, 2018:
http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/item/2013/0105/fsl/creagan_field.html

DoD—See U.S. Department of Defense.

Dyke, John R., and John R. Crisafulli, *Unconventional Counter-Insurgency in Afghanistan*, Monterey, Calif.: Naval Postgraduate School, thesis, June 2006.

Egnell, Robert, "Civil–Military Coordination for Operational Effectiveness: Towards a Measured Approach," *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2013, pp. 237–256.

Grossman, Marc, "Diplomacy Before and After Conflict," *Prism*, Vol. 1, No. 4, September 2012.

Judson, Jen, "Countering 'Little Green Men': Pentagon Special Ops Studies Russia 'Gray Zone' Conflict," *Defense News*, May 15, 2017. As of March 24, 2018:
<https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/sofic/2017/05/15/countering-little-green-men-pentagon-special-ops-studies-russia-gray-zone-conflict/>

Keane, Conor, and Steve Wood, "Bureaucratic Politics, Role Conflict, and the Internal Dynamics of US Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan," *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2016, pp. 99–118.

Kennan, George F., "Policy Planning Staff Memorandum," in C. Thomas Thorne, Jr., and David S. Patterson, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945–1950, Emergence of the Intelligence Establishment*, Document 269, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996. As of March 16, 2018:
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1945-50Intel/d269>

Lamb, Christopher J., and Megan Franco, “National-Level Coordination and Implementation: How System Attributes Trumped Leadership,” in Richard D. Hooker, Jr., and Joseph J. Collins, eds., *Lessons Encountered: Learning from the Long War*, Washington, D.C.: National University Press, 2015.

Maxwell, David, “Threats and the Words We Use: A Thought Experiment,” *War on the Rocks*, November 8, 2013. As of March 24, 2018: <https://warontherocks.com/2013/11/threats-and-the-words-we-use-a-thought-experiment/>

———, “Congress Has Embraced Unconventional Warfare: Will the US Military and the Rest of the US Government?” *Small Wars Journal*, December 2015. As of March 14, 2018: <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrn/art/congress-has-embraced-unconventional-warfare-will-the-us-military-and-the-rest-of-the-us-go>

McQuaid, Julia, Jonathan Schroden, Pamela G. Faber, P. Kathleen Hammerberg, Alexander Powell, Zack Gold, David Knoll, and William Rosenau, *Independent Assessment of U.S. Government Efforts Against al-Qaeda*, Arlington, Va.: CNA, October 2017.

Model, Scott, and David Asher, *Pushback: Countering the Iran Action Network*, Washington, D.C.: Center for New American Security, September 2013.

Nottberg, Tyler, “Once and Future Policy Planning: Solarium for Today,” The Eisenhower Institute at Gettysburg College, undated. As of March 16, 2018: http://www.eisenhowerinstitute.org/about/living_history/solarium_for_today.dot

O’Hanlon, Michael, “The State of U.S. Military Readiness,” Brookings, August 15, 2016. As of March 11, 2018: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/08/15/the-state-of-u-s-military-readiness/>

Pfiffner, James A., “US Blunders in Iraq: De-Baathification and Disbanding the Army,” *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2010, pp. 76–85.

Public Law 98-525, United States Institute of Peace Act, October 19, 1984 (updated October 2008).

Public Law 108-458, Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, Section 1021, December 17, 2004.

Public Law 114-92, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016, Section 1097, November 25, 2015.

Public Law 114-328, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Section 922, December 23, 2016.

Public Law 115-91, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, Section 1202, December 12, 2017.

Rhode, Joy, *Armed with Expertise: The Militarization of American Social Research During the Cold War*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2013.

Robinson, Linda, Todd C. Helmus, Raphael S. Cohen, Alireza Nader, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, and Katya Migacheva, *Modern Political Warfare: Current Practices and Possible Responses*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-1772-A, 2018. As of June 1, 2018: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1772.html

Rothstein, Hy S., “Less Is More: The Problematic Future of Irregular Warfare in an Era of Collapsing States,” *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 2, 2007, pp. 275–294.

Schoen, Fletcher, and Christopher J. Lamb, *Deception, Disinformation, and Strategic Communications: How One Interagency Group Made a Major Difference*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2012.

Silverman, Robert J., “Talking About Foreign Service Advocacy,” *Foreign Service Journal*, September 2014, p. 7.

Simons, Anna, and David Tucker, “SOF and the War on Terrorism,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring 2003, pp. 77–91.

United States Institute of Peace, *Biennial Report of the United States Institute of Peace*, Washington, D.C., 1987.

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

U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Combating Terrorism: The United States Lacks Comprehensive Plan to Destroy the Terrorist Threat and Close the Safe Haven in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Areas*, Washington, D.C., GAO-08-622, 2008.

White, Jeffrey B., “A Different Kind of Threat: Some Thoughts on Irregular Warfare,” *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 39, No. 5, 1996.

White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, D.C., December 2017. As of March 14, 2018: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

Wortzel, Larry M., *The Chinese People’s Liberation Army and Information Warfare*, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: U.S. Army War College Press, 2014.

About This Perspective

This research was sponsored by the Smith Richardson Foundation and conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Security Research Division (NSRD). NSRD conducts research and analysis for the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the defense agencies, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. Intelligence Community, allied foreign governments, and foundations.

For more information on the RAND International Security and Defense Policy Center, see www.rand.org/nsrd/ndri/centers/isdp or contact the center director (contact information provided on the webpage).

About the Authors

Lieutenant General (Ret.) **Charles T. Cleveland** retired as commanding general, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, in 2015. Cleveland spent more than 30 years of his 37-year career in the U.S. Army serving with special operations, including command of 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne), the Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force–North during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Special Operations Command South, and Special Operations Command Central.

Ambassador (Ret.) **Ryan Crocker** is a former career ambassador within the U.S. Foreign Service and a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He has served as U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Kuwait, and Lebanon.

Daniel Egel is an economist at RAND who focuses on U.S. policymaking at the nexus of development and stability. His research uses both qualitative and quantitative methods to study the effectiveness of counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, foreign internal defense, humanitarian assistance, and stabilization efforts.

Andrew M. Liepman is a former principal deputy director of the National Counterterrorism Center (2006–2012) and a 30-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency. He is currently an adjunct researcher at RAND and a member of the Defense Science Board Task Force on Homeland Defense.

David Maxwell is a 30-year veteran of the U.S. Army, retiring as a special forces colonel. His final assignment was serving on the military faculty teaching national security at the National War College. He spent the majority of his military service overseas, with more than 20 years in Asia, primarily in Korea, Japan, and the Philippines, including leading from the A-Team to the Joint Special Operations Task Force Level.

Limited Print and Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law. This representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for noncommercial use only. Unauthorized posting of this publication online is prohibited. Permission is given to duplicate this document for personal use only, as long as it is unaltered and complete. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please visit www.rand.org/pubs/permissions.html.

The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest.

RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. **RAND**® is a registered trademark.

For more information on this publication, visit www.rand.org/t/PE304.



www.rand.org