

**COMMENTARY**

## **Educating the Irregular Warfare Practitioner**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article addresses the challenges faced by the United States in maintaining a consistent approach to irregular warfare (IW), which has historically been characterized by a "boom and bust" cycle of investment and focus. Despite recent advances, such as the establishment of a Department of Defense (DoD) Irregular Warfare Center and the development of curriculum guidance, the U.S. risks under-preparing IW practitioners. The article emphasizes that IW practitioners are not limited to military personnel but include a broader spectrum of professionals across diplomacy, intelligence, law enforcement, and the private sector. It explores key concepts and knowledge areas that IW practitioners need, which are often excluded from traditional military education. These include the historical context of IW, social science theories such as identity theory, regime typology, resource mobilization, and the role of nonviolent action in gaining legitimacy. The article concludes by recommending measures to integrate history, social sciences, and practical IW lessons into more comprehensive education programs for this diverse group of practitioners, breaking the cycle of neglect in IW education.

### **KEYWORDS**

irregular warfare;  
professional military  
education (PME);  
competitive statecraft;  
identity; resource  
mobilization;  
selectorate theory;  
non-violent action

### **Introduction**

Military scholars and practitioners often speak of a "boom and bust" cycle that characterizes the U.S. approach to and investment in irregular warfare (IW).<sup>1</sup> "Boom and bust" refers to the notion that the United States and its military have found themselves involved in warfare characterized as 'irregular' throughout history. When one generation begins to develop knowledge, expertise, and capability in fighting irregular conflicts, political, strategic, and budgetary pressures shift the focus back to conventional or traditional warfare. As a result, valuable lessons learned are removed from curricula and relegated to the archives—or so the narrative goes.

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Over the last five years, however, there have been reasons to think that the country and the Department of Defense (DOD) might have taken measures to break this cycle. There is undoubtedly a renewed focus on conventional warfighting capability in the wake of the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other conflicts once associated with the “Global War on Terror.”<sup>2</sup> However, there are also encouraging signs for IW, including the establishment of a DOD Irregular Warfare Center (IWC), a recognition of IW’s importance in recent defense strategies and other documents, and even the creation of a “Curriculum Guide” on IW for professional military education (PME).<sup>3</sup> Despite these efforts, the United States is still at risk of failing to maximize its potential for competing and campaigning through IW. Two related reasons for this risk stand out: first, a failure to correctly identify IW practitioners, and second, a failure to educate them in a way that imparts the concepts, perspectives, and wisdom needed to be effective.

This article explains who IW practitioners are and what key concepts they should be taught to make them better equipped to develop strategic and operational approaches to irregular conflict. The answers to both questions may surprise even those active in the IW community of interest. Here’s a hint: The IW practitioner is not necessarily the soldier or even the special operator. Here’s another hint: The concepts that need to be taught and learned are not featured in DoD’s IW Curriculum Guide, though some of them can be found in NATO’s new *Hybrid Threats and Hybrid Warfare Reference Curriculum*.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, before these two big questions can be addressed, one must understand the definitions of IW and the controversy surrounding the different schools of thought. The first section explains the definitional controversy and uses that discussion to answer who IW practitioners are. The second section provides a perspective on what subjects and concepts these practitioners need to understand. The concluding section offers some thoughts on corrective action.

### **Identifying IW Practitioners: Definitions of IW**

For those of us involved in IW education and research, we are a bit weary of this ongoing discourse. IW, as a term, has a long and contentious history.<sup>5</sup> Our NATO partners do not seem to like the term and have preferred substitutes such as “hybrid threats” and “hybrid warfare,” though admittedly the overlap is not perfect.<sup>6</sup> Still, other scholars would prefer the broader, less militarized term “competitive statecraft.”<sup>7</sup> While the definition of competitive statecraft doesn’t exactly match those of IW, the overlap is significant. Other scholars have even questioned the “categorical confusion” that arises from classifying activities or threats as “irregular.”<sup>8</sup> Last year, the DoD updated the joint definition of IW, which had been mostly unchanged since 2008. However, that did not stop others from offering their own definitions, including the Army, whose current definition still differs from the joint definition. A sample of these definitions is listed in Table 1, with keywords highlighted for convenience.

Source	IW definition
DOD Dictionary 2023 <sup>9</sup>	A form of warfare where states and non-state actors campaign to assure or coerce states or other groups through indirect, non-attributable, or asymmetric activities.
JP 1-02 (2008–2023) <sup>10</sup>	A violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant population(s).
Army <sup>11</sup>	The overt, clandestine, and covert employment of military and non-military capabilities across multiple domains by state and non-state actors through methods other than military domination of an adversary, either as the primary approach or in concert with conventional warfare.
Marks and Ucko <sup>12</sup>	A coercive struggle that erodes or builds legitimacy for the purpose of political power. It blends disparate lines of effort to create an integrated attack on societies and their political institutions. It weaponizes frames and narratives to affect credibility and resolve, and it exploits societal vulnerabilities to fuel political change. As such, states engaged in or confronted with irregular warfare, must bring all elements of power to bear under their national political leadership.
Seth Jones <sup>13</sup>	Activities short of conventional or nuclear warfare that are designed to expand a country's influence and legitimacy, as well as weaken its adversaries.

**Table 1: Sample IW Definitions**

The competing definitions make it difficult to determine *who* conducts IW, what *activities* they are engaging in, and what *objectives* they are fighting over. Some definitions focus on forces and actors—the “who.” Others focus on the character of actions or activities (covert, non-attributable, asymmetric, etc.). Still, other definitions, such as Seth Jones’ definition, emphasize thresholds of conflict, i.e., avoiding escalation and focusing on activities that improve one’s position without provoking conventional or nuclear warfare, commonly referred to as the “grey zone.” However, the most useful and foundational definitions are those, such as Marks and Ucko’s, that focus on IW as an alternative *theory of victory*. In other words, rather than aiming to defeat an opposing armed force to achieve victory, coercion and influence are used to gain legitimacy with relevant populations, achieving victory through political power. These definitions (or the parts of definitions) are much more helpful in informing us about who conducts IW and what they should learn.

A key problem in defining IW is the word “warfare.” The new DoD definition makes the cringe-worthy tautological error of using part of a word to define itself. Surely, “warfare” implies violence, or at least the threat of violence. That is often the presumption of any group of military professionals attempting to define IW. Yet the military’s understandable obsession with violence, far from being foundational in the definitional debate, is perhaps the biggest hindrance to a deeper understanding of operational

approaches. Irregular warfare does *not* need to be violent, though it certainly can be and often is. It is probably coercive, though it need not be exclusively so. The essence of IW is not necessarily in the activities themselves; it is in relevant populations, influence, and legitimacy. Coercion and violence are just important parts of the mix, characteristics of activities that become part of something based on why it is being done. They may be necessary, but they are rarely sufficient to characterize an approach or activity as IW. In IW, the distinction between what is politics and what is warfare is non-existent. Insert your favorite Clausewitz quote here. If violence and coercion were both necessary and sufficient, we would be talking about conventional or traditional warfare and wouldn't need IW.

The definitions of IW, as well as the current authoritative DoD texts, reflect this. The Army (the service closest to IW activities) emphasizes “non-military capabilities” and “methods other than military domination” in its definition. Marks and Ucko, two prominent IW scholars, emphasize “political power,” “political institutions,” “societal vulnerabilities,” and “political change.” Even DoD’s Curriculum Guide dances around this reality, leaving a lot of signals in the noise. that IW is conducted “primarily in collaboration with interagency and other inter-organizational efforts” and dedicates an entire section to the need for “seamless integration of multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, military, etc.”

The guide even acknowledges that the military is rarely the main effort: “*DoD is not often the supported element in IW; rather, it is usually a supporting element in an ad hoc relationship coordinated between the various USG allies and partners. Interagency partners have different capabilities to apply to competition.*”<sup>14</sup>

If IW is not characterized exclusively, or even primarily, by violence; if influence and legitimacy among relevant populations (as opposed to coercion) are the near objectives and political power the main objective; and if departments and organizations other than DoD and the military are the main effort, then we have an answer to the first question: Who are IW practitioners?

Military personnel can and should certainly be included in the group, but they are just a small fraction—of some significance, though often overestimated. The real IW practitioners are those who work in intelligence, covert operations, diplomacy, foreign aid, law enforcement, the private sector, the media, etc. And yes, some military folks too. IW is more than an interagency effort; it is an inter- (and intra-) society endeavor.

### **What Should IW Practitioners Learn**

If we begin with the new premise that the IW practitioner is not exclusively, or even primarily, a soldier or military officer, then it becomes easier to design curricula for IW at different levels. Even a DoD-centric curriculum guide or reference should start with theories and concepts that build a common framework for understanding societies, institutions, political power, influence, and legitimacy. The DoD Curriculum Guide, however, begins with DoD’s 12 “IW activities” and lists learning objectives such as “Describe the character of IW, its core missions and enabling activities, and its impact on

Service missions.” A more appropriate curriculum guide would start by identifying (1) the use of history through historical case studies and themes and (2) social science concepts that might be most valuable for understanding how state and non-state actors use coercion, influence, and legitimacy to pursue political power through relevant populations.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Use and Abuse of IW History**

When it comes to the history portion of an IW curriculum, curriculum designers already have the benefit of the guidance that Sir Michael Howard provided in 1961 for military professionals studying war. Howard’s advice for the study of conventional war is equally applicable to the study of just about any other profession related to security, whether it be diplomacy, finance, or policing. IW practitioners should follow Howard’s advice and study IW in *width, depth, and context*.<sup>16</sup> To study IW in width, the practitioner must quickly dispel any juvenile notion that IW is a new phenomenon and observe how IW has developed over a long historical period. For, as Howard said about warfare in general, “only by seeing what does change can one deduce what does not.” *There are continuities and discontinuities to be observed between deep studies of the counterrevolutionary rebellions in the Vendée (France) in 1793 and the formation and activities of the Ku Klux Klan in the Southern U.S., circa 1867, where relevant populations, instilled with narratives of relative deprivation, organized and mobilized resources to conduct both violent and nonviolent activities in pursuit of political power.*

As such, there is also value in studying the history of IW in depth, where IW practitioners might take a single campaign and examine it thoroughly, not just through official histories but from the many angles and perspectives provided by primary sources. It is valuable to read Alistair Horne’s *A Savage War of Peace*,<sup>17</sup> but it is far more valuable to supplement it with Remy Mauduit’s *The Insurgent Among Us* and perhaps the letters, correspondence, and records of some of those Algerians who made up the relevant populations and the source of political power.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, just as Howard advised military practitioners, IW practitioners must study IW history in *context*.<sup>19</sup> IW campaigns, even more so than conventional campaigns and battles, are not like games or sports matches. They cannot be detached from their political, social, and cultural contexts. In IW, these contexts do not just “influence” the battlefield, as they do in conventional warfare—these elements of context define the battlefields. To explain the collapse of the Soviet Union and other communist regimes in the late 20th century, or to understand modern “color revolutions,” one must dive deep into the narratives, organization, communications, resource mobilization, and external support of opposition groups as they sought political power by eroding the legitimacy of regimes and their political leaders.

### **Just a Little Social Science**

If only history were enough. The inductive nature of historical inquiry is of immense value to the IW practitioner. However, most of those who need to be educated about IW approaches require the deductive tools of the social sciences to provide frameworks for understanding. The list of social science concepts and theories valuable to the IW

practitioner is likely too extensive for this brief essay, but a few topic areas stand out—especially given the definitions of IW described in the first section. Unsurprisingly, none of them are found in DoD’s IW Curriculum Guide, though a few of them (thankfully) are alluded to in NATO’s reference curriculum.<sup>20</sup> Any serious IW education that intends to focus on the diverse group of IW practitioners must address theories and subjects that are neglected in most PME while simultaneously being of immense value in IW campaigns. For simplicity, I label these topic areas as (1) Identity theory, (2) Regime typology and dynamics, (3) Resource mobilization, and (4) Legitimacy and nonviolent action. I will discuss each of these four areas, describing key theories and highlighting scholarly works while also identifying and describing both real and hypothetical situations where understanding these areas might aid (or have aided) the operational-level IW practitioner. Additionally, I will offer, where necessary, words of caution on the limitations of social science in general and the specific theories within these topic areas.

### **Identity (Who are you? Who are ‘they’?)**

All IW definitions refer—explicitly or implicitly—to “groups” or “relevant populations,” and most emphasize the importance of influence. Before the IW practitioner can hope to design strategies and operational approaches, she must understand the relevant population(s), groups, or other actors. Understanding and defining such populations or groups in any context requires a foundational understanding of identity and, more importantly, collective identity. Who people are is based on how they define themselves and how others define them.

The social sciences have much to teach us about collective identity, and without the benefit of such foundational knowledge, IW practitioners are likely to make the same kind of unforced errors that U.S. forces made in the early days of the Iraq War, where supposed intelligence professionals, trained in enemy orders of battle and conventional force doctrine, decided to define a complex and multifaceted insurgency with the useless and intellectually lazy aggregation “Anti-Iraqi Forces.”<sup>21</sup>

Teaching concepts of identity to IW practitioners should begin with introductions to foundational works of social identity theory<sup>22</sup>, self-categorization theory<sup>23</sup>, and collective identity theory.<sup>24</sup> IW practitioners don’t need to be graduate-level experts on these topics, but even a cursory understanding is enough to provide them with the mental models and vocabulary they need to consult with experts and explore the literature through self-study. Once they understand the basics of how people collectively identify with each other, they can begin to grasp the importance of narratives and stories for those identities and then start to develop a framework for understanding the directly practical concepts of narrative and cognitive warfare.<sup>25</sup> Just as importantly, the IW practitioner begins to understand that individuals and groups may have complex identity hierarchies and must cope with their own intersectionality of identities. Furthermore, budding IW practitioners begin to see that identity is socially constructed and, therefore, can, with concerted effort and time, be changed.

While the sheer volume of excellent works on this topic is too great to list, two stand out for their ease of reading and suitability for academic environments. The first is a much-

overlooked textbook by John M. Collins, *Military Geography: For Professionals and the Public*. Though this essay began with the argument that soldiers do not make up the bulk of IW practitioners, Collins' book on "military" geography has as much to say about identity, influence, and relevant populations as it does about physical terrain and maneuver. While part one of the book concentrates on physical geography as it might be relevant to the cavalry commander, parts two and three focus on cultural and political-military geography, respectively.<sup>26</sup> The book needs an update but remains valuable for bringing military and non-military IW practitioners together with a common understanding and vocabulary for both conventional and irregular campaigns.

A second book worth reading in its entirety and serving as a basis for discussion is Benedict Anderson's classic, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.<sup>27</sup> Too many budding IW practitioners fall into the unfair trap of misusing the word "nation" in the IW context. Our entire national security and international relations discourse works against them. Students are often surprised to realize that a "nation," in its purest definition, is not a geographic or even geopolitical entity. We often use it as shorthand for the idyllic concept of the "nation-state." DoD and other agencies use the clumsy term "Partner Nation" to refer to the governments and administrations of foreign countries with whom they work. Yet, fundamentally, a nation is a group of people that share a socially constructed collective identity that can be, and often is, extremely fragile. Like all social constructions, nations require maintenance and reinforcement through narratives that build (or erode) their legitimacy. Grasping this concept and its dynamics can be critical to understanding more advanced IW topics, including resistance and resilience.<sup>28</sup>

### **Regime Typology (The Logic(s) of Politics)**

Most budding IW practitioners have an underdeveloped understanding of political power within states (not necessarily nations). The same can be said for their grasp of the incredibly large and diverse concept of so-called "non-state actors." There is value in helping students understand the distinctions between terms such as state, country, nation, government, administration, and regime.<sup>29</sup> Of these key terms, *regime* is probably the most important. In political science, a regime refers to the formal and informal structures and characteristics of political power or, more simply, the set of rules and norms that determine political power. States and non-state actors are organized and governed by leaders who emerge through some type of political regime. IW practitioners will struggle to develop successful IW approaches without a foundational understanding of the sources and distribution of political power in the countries and societies they wish to affect. Yet neither the DoD Curriculum Guide nor the NATO curriculum reference says much about how students might understand political power and influence.

There are several valuable books, references, and theories for observing, framing, and understanding political power and influence. One excellent place to start is with the foundational framework of comparative politics known as selectorate theory or the logic of political survival. Selectorate theory, developed by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and colleagues, is especially helpful for the IW practitioner as it provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of power and legitimacy in different political systems.

Selectorate theory posits that the stability and policies of a regime are heavily influenced by the size and composition of its "selectorate" (those with a say in choosing the leader) and "winning coalition" (the subset whose support is essential for the leader's survival). Even dictators like Kim Jong-un have a selectorate and a winning coalition, and they must appease and reward them to survive.

In IW, understanding the selectorate can help practitioners identify key power brokers and potential allies or adversaries, thus enabling more effective approaches to influence while reinforcing or destabilizing the regime. Furthermore, the logic of political survival emphasizes that leaders prioritize their own political survival over national interest, often engaging in policies that favor their winning coalition to maintain power. This insight is valuable in IW, as it helps practitioners anticipate and exploit the vulnerabilities and motivations of adversary or proxy leaders. By understanding that leaders may prioritize the demands of their winning coalition over broader public welfare, practitioners can design approaches that create political pressure or offer incentives to shift loyalties within the coalition. This knowledge can lead to a more nuanced and effective engagement in IW scenarios, where winning the right hearts and minds and influencing power dynamics are as critical as military victories.

There are certainly pitfalls to overreliance on this singular framework. Its simplicity and generalizability make it an attractive and helpful explanatory and exploratory theory. However, the IW practitioner must be cautioned to explore the cultural dynamics of such relationships and avoid the temptation of simplistic authoritarian teleology, where every decision of a dictator or single-party system is assumed to be purely about survival and self-preservation.<sup>30</sup>

### **Resource Mobilization (> Than Relative Deprivation)**

Another critical topic area for which social science provides tools to help explain and explore causality is the why and how of social movements. Social movement theory attempts to answer the complex questions of why and how people rebel and why some organizations or movements succeed while others do not. It's unsettling to find someone working in the IW space who has never heard of Ted Robert Gurr and his theories of relative deprivation, but it is even more frustrating when such would-be practitioners have no understanding of the critical importance of resource mobilization. Resource mobilization theory asserts that all social movements (violent and nonviolent) form when people who share grievances or other strong motivations can mobilize resources and act for political power and influence. When we say resources, we are not exclusively talking about raw materials, but rather all the things—tangible and intangible—that are necessary for success. Non-state actors need many of the same resources that state actors require. People are almost always the most important resource, but money is probably a close second because it can purchase other resources such as weapons, ammunition, transportation, food, etc. (including people). There are other intangibles like training, knowledge, communications, and intelligence. Depending on the context and the political opportunity space, non-state actors might also need sanctuary or diplomatic support for international legitimacy. While context determines what resources actors need, it is the nature of IW that resources and resource mobilization are always critical to the success or

failure of IW approaches. The reason many counterinsurgency theorists emphasize separating insurgents from the population is because of the resources (human and otherwise) that the population provides. However, even if insurgents are separated from the population, an insurgency can still succeed if it mobilizes resources from abroad across a porous border.

Once practitioners understand the critical importance of resource mobilization to non-state actors, the world of IW opens. Practitioners suddenly and profoundly recognize the importance of financial intelligence and counter-threat finance to IW.<sup>31</sup> Far from being one activity among many, these activities become central to approaches to both proxies and threat organizations. Additionally, the study of proxy warfare becomes much more complicated and nuanced. Both the type and quantity of resources provided to non-state actors from external state and non-state sources become critical to success. Unfortunately, there isn't enough literature on this topic geared specifically toward the IW practitioner. This is partly because IW practitioners have often been misidentified as primarily military personnel and perhaps because the apolitical (or non-partisan) ethos of civil-military relations has made the study of highly political social movement theory somewhat taboo.

Nevertheless, two useful works can illuminate the importance of resource mobilization and social movement theory for IW practitioners. The first is McCarthy and Zald's famous article from the *American Journal of Sociology*, "Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory." This article was critical in focusing the field of sociology on resource mobilization and compelling scholars to disaggregate social movement sectors into industries and organizations to better understand why some groups succeed or fail.<sup>32</sup> The same logic is powerful in framing violent non-state actors, movements, and organizations employing both violent and nonviolent approaches. If sociology is a bit too advanced for students at certain levels, Marks and Ucko's free publication, *Crafting Strategies for Irregular Warfare*, provides valuable insights into political opportunity space and the quest for key resources in IW strategies.<sup>33</sup> Although the book is written for PME, it excels in emphasizing whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches while highlighting the importance of political opportunity structures in determining the feasibility and suitability of IW approaches.

### **Legitimacy and the Efficacy of Non-Violent Action**

Finally, there is the social science behind the concepts of legitimacy and nonviolence. Legitimacy itself is a concept that deserves more attention in the social sciences in general and as it relates to IW in particular. In social sciences, legitimacy is commonly defined as the belief that a rule, institution, or leader has the right to govern.<sup>34</sup>

There is a close relationship between non-violence and legitimacy. There is a close relationship between nonviolence and legitimacy. For most modern humans, this seems intuitive, and the body of scholarly research supports it.<sup>35</sup> Nonviolent approaches within IW not only have a legitimacy advantage, but they also have a resource mobilization advantage. Studies of nonviolent social movements show that nonviolent resistance presents fewer obstacles to moral and physical involvement, information and education, and participatory commitment.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, the military's understandable focus on

violence and coercion in defining IW has caused an intellectual diversion away from the most effective group of IW tools.

Educating the IW practitioner on the theory and tools of nonviolence isn't difficult. The literature is well-known. The research of Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan is comprehensive, and their book, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, has become a powerful resource for both researchers and activists. Military students of IW might feel a bit out of place in a classroom studying these concepts, but recognizing the greater utility of non-military approaches is likely to build knowledge and wisdom valuable for encouraging strategic restraint and for developing better estimations of the risks of violent approaches. Military students might also find inspiration and enlightenment in Thomas Ricks' *Waging a Good War: A Military History of the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968*. The book highlights the challenges of waging an IW campaign aimed at eroding the legitimacy of an adversary in the eyes of relevant populations for the purpose of political power. Identity, regime typology, resource mobilization, and the efficacy of nonviolence in achieving legitimacy are all central themes, even though Ricks might not frame them in those terms.<sup>37</sup> Chenoweth and Stephan have also conducted groundbreaking work on understanding external support for civil resistance, which clarifies issues related to supporting nonviolent proxy efforts.<sup>38</sup> There are also valuable works of prescriptive theory, such as Gene Sharp's classic *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, which has served as a guide for many organizations and leaders trying to mobilize resources to erode or build legitimacy in the eyes of relevant populations for the purpose of political power.<sup>39</sup>

### **What Is To Be Done?**

The U.S., in general, and the DoD, in particular, have already made impressive strides to break the "boom and bust" cycle of IW education and investment. Several boutique PME programs go beyond merely teaching about IW activities and delve into theory and history. The College of International Security Affairs (CISA) at the National Defense University (NDU) stands out for its curriculum and specific programs, as do some courses and programs at advanced service schools for operational planners. These programs include a smattering of non-military students but primarily exist for military practitioners—not the broader population of IW practitioners as defined here.

Thus, while much has been done, there is still much more to do. The U.S. government and its allies could make two broad categories of changes. First, they could focus on the real practitioners of IW, including interagency and whole-of-society actors. Second, they could advance education and build IW curricula based more on history and social science rather than on activities. Recognizing that the real IW practitioners are not necessarily soldiers is difficult. If making that recognition requires rebranding "irregular warfare" with a new name and adjusted definition, then perhaps that is necessary.<sup>40</sup> The term "competitive statecraft" is a good start because it implies efforts beyond military power and violence. Irregular warfare could then refer specifically to those activities led by the military within the broader framework of competitive statecraft.

To achieve this, the U.S. government could redirect funding from the Department of Defense's (DoD) Irregular Warfare Center (or change its mission) to an interagency and whole-of-society center that prioritizes research, education, and training for a much broader range of practitioners.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, the DoD could reform its PME enterprise by outsourcing more of its degree programs to civilian institutions in joint ventures with other agencies and the private sector.

Once the country is focused on the right group of practitioners, the IW (or newly named) center should develop a curriculum guide that is neither military nor activity-centric but instead focused on the history and social science of IW and the societies where it is waged. This curriculum should include topics such as identity theory, regime typology, resource mobilization, legitimacy, and nonviolent action, providing a common IW vocabulary across the diverse groups implementing such approaches.

In particular, the curriculum should enable IW practitioners to study the history of IW in width, depth, and context, using historical case studies and incorporating social science concepts to understand the complex dynamics of IW. This includes understanding the importance of influence and legitimacy among relevant populations, as well as the role of non-state actors and proxy warfare. By adopting a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to IW education, we can ensure that practitioners are equipped to develop effective strategies and operational approaches that account for the complexities of IW.

Ultimately, breaking the "boom and bust" cycle of IW education and investment requires a commitment to building a more comprehensive and effective approach to IW that incorporates the expertise and perspectives of a broader range of practitioners. By redirecting funding, building a more inclusive curriculum, and, if necessary, renaming IW, we can ensure that practitioners are prepared to succeed in this complex and dynamic field.

## Endnotes

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