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Crafting Strategy for Irregular Warfare: A Framework for Analysis and Action

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The 2018 National Defense Strategy calls to downgrade terrorism as a national security priority in favor of

“inter-state strategic competition.” Many interpreted the statement as signifying a return to “conventional combat,” yet a closer reading suggests that even state-based competition is likely to be “irregular.” The effort to understand this approach has generated new jargon—“hybrid war,” “the gray zone”—yet the United States and the West in general struggle to overcome their entrenched presumptions about war. Such confusion constitutes an upstream source of analytical friction with implications for how strategy is conceived and implemented. This paper presents an analytical framework to assess and respond to irregular threats. Though terminological precision and analytical frameworks are no panacea for the malaise facing Western strategy, it is an indispensable starting point for all that must follow.



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DC: DOD, 2012), 1–11, available at <www.hsdl.org/?view&did=715470>; DOD Instruction (DODI) 2000.21, *DOD Support to International Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear (CBRN) Incidents* (Washington, DC: DOD, 2017), 1–13, available at <www.hsdl.org/?view&did=800803>; DODI 3025.24, *DOD Public Health and Medical Services in Support of Civil Authorities* (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, 2017), 1–16, available at <www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/302524_dodi_2017.pdf>; DODI 6200.03, *Public Health Emergency Management Within the Department of Defense* (Washington, DC: DOD, 2012), 1–42, available at <www.hsdl.org/?view&did=714594>.

⁵ Italo Subbaro et al., “A Consensus-Based Educational Framework and Competency Set for the Discipline of Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness,” *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* 2, no. 1 (April 2008), 57–68; Lauren Walsh et al., “Core Competencies for Disaster Medicine and Public Health,” *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* 6, no. 1 (March 2012), 44–52.

⁶ *Department of Defense Support to Foreign Disaster Relief (Handbook for JTF Commanders and Below)* (Washington, DC: DOD, 2011).

⁷ Paul Reed, Jaimie Laib, Kandra Strauss-Riggs, and Thomas D. Kirsch, “Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Competencies and Training Pertinent to the Military Health

System,” *Journal of Military Learning* (April 2020), 19–35, available at <www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Journal-of-Military-Learning/Journal-of-Military-Learning-Archives/Journal-of-Military-Learning-Archives/April-2020/Reed-Mil-Health-System/>.

⁸ DOD Directive 5100.46, 1–11; DODI 2000.21, 1–13.

⁹ *United States Government Global Health Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2019), 1–32, available at <www.hsdl.org/?view&did=825023>.

¹⁰ DiGiovanni, “A Way Ahead for DOD Disaster Preparedness,” 47–53.

¹¹ Air Force Instruction 10-2519, *Public Health Emergencies and Incidents of Public Health Concern* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Air Force, June 26, 2015), 1–3, available at <<https://fas.org/irp/doddir/usaf/afi10-2519.pdf>>; DODI 6200.03, 1–42; Department of the Navy, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery Instruction 6200.17A, *Public Health Emergency Officers* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Navy, March 7, 2011); Army Regulation 525-27, *Army Emergency Management Program* (Washington, DC: Headquarters Department of the Army, March 29, 2019), 1–31, available at <https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/pdf/web/ARN4163_AR525-27_FINAL.pdf>.

¹² *Joint DOTMLPF Change Recommendation for Joint Force Health Protection Emerging Mission Sets* (Washington, DC: The Joint Staff, 2011), 1–100.