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Introduction

Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you very much for inviting me to testify today on the irregular warfare challenges that my colleague, Jeffrey Cozzens, and I have observed since 2001. My testimony focuses on framing some of principal IW challenges that have crystallized since 2001—problems that will continue to demand persistence, unconventional thinking and the full commitment of our defense and intelligence communities to address. I will close with some thoughts concerning the maintenance and improvement of our national IW proficiencies as we seek to meet future challenges.

Our written response to the Committee's queries and my testimony today is rooted in my experience as an Africanist and former special operations and OSD policy professional, and Mr. Cozzens' background as a terrorism researcher and alternative assessments specialist. We have both been involved with the conceptualization and planning of IW activities in Africa, the Middle East and elsewhere, and continue to advise the US Government on matters of cultural intelligence, counter-terrorism and other activities germane to IW through our small business, White Mountain Research.

About White Mountain Research LLC
White Mountain Research (WMR) is a Virginia-based small business providing tailored international security solutions to U.S. Government and commercial clients. Jeffrey Cozzens and I lead WMR, supported by an international contingent of former special operations professionals, terrorism subject matter experts and some of the world's foremost Africa analysts. We deliver maximum value to our clients by fusing practical operational know-how, creative approaches to cultural and human intelligence and global interdisciplinary academic expertise.

Before I begin, let me say that we recognize that technology plays an important role in IW; however, we believe it is *subordinate* in importance to IW's human ways and means. My testimony therefore highlights the imperative of understanding the humanity, thought and behavior of our non-Western allies and adversaries while emphasizing the centrality of human intelligence (HUMINT) in IW. Eroding irregular adversaries' ideological and social centers of gravity and wielding the influence required to win at war's moral level—critical in an age where social media turns tactical missteps into strategic conundrums—can only be achieved through the access, dexterity and context afforded by properly equipped warriors and analysts. Technology, while it can assist in this process, cannot take their place.

Definitions
For our purposes, irregular warfare (IW) can be defined as warfare that involves one or more irregular forces—especially non-state actors—and favors asymmetric and indirect approaches designed to win legitimacy and influence while eroding an adversary's. Some of the more common contemporary manifestations of IW include terrorism and counter-terrorism (CT), forms of transnational criminality, insurgency and counter-insurgency (COIN), foreign internal defense (FID) and so forth.

IW challenges and lessons-learned since 2001

Allow me to outline some of the challenges and lessons-learned of the past 12 years that we find most striking:

Challenge 1: Understanding non-Western friends and foes

Perhaps the greatest challenge to IW observed since the 9/11 attacks is our inability to accurately understand and therefore project how and why non-state allies and adversaries—including those inspired by militant strands of political Islam—think, organize and operate. Part of this problem set arises from of our institutional tendency towards mirror-imaging—that is, thinking like professional soldiers, analysts and policy-makers rather than non-Western activists, bureaucrats or militants, motivated as much by identity, belief or cultural imperatives as they are by traditional notions of strategy. Our struggles in this respect are related to or have birthed a subset of challenges, each of which deserves more attention than this paper can afford. These include:

- The obvious but monumental complexities associated with combatting virulent ideologies that are associated with a major monotheistic religion or are an offshoot of a legitimate social movement.[1] Challenging extremist ideologies across changing national boundaries, socio-cultural contexts and legal environments naturally adds to the density and scope of the problem.
- Consistently and accurately understanding adversaries'—or for that matter, partner states' or tribes'—victory metrics[2], negotiating strategies and decision-making.
- Turning allies into enemies because our planning has, in some instances, not thoroughly and accurately accounted for the strategic impact of tactical errors that have offended codes of faith, honor and dignity. Globalized technologies like social media instantaneously amplify these errors and feed the recruitment narratives of irregular foes, which thrive like parasites on perceived victimization and perceptions of American hypocrisy.

Challenge 2: Overreliance on technology

Despite recognition since 9/11 of the importance of socio-cultural understanding, the reality of our approach to IW remains focused on 'zeroes' and 'ones'; we continue to rely increasingly on intelligence derived from technical sources and less on HUMINT. Context derived from understanding and thinking like 'others' takes a backseat to information. Beyond the monetary burden associated with overreliance on war-fighting technologies, our ability to grasp and contend with complex socio-cultural issues is gradually eroded. The cost beyond billions of dollars is misunderstanding (or missing altogether) important underlying factors of conflict, potential alliances and opportunities to pursue long-term, effective direct

[1] See Jeffrey B. Cozzens, "The Culture of Global Jihad: Character, Future Challenges and Recommendations," *Future Actions Series*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalization, King's College London (April 2009).
[2] Jeffrey B. Cozzens, "Victory—From the Prism of Jihadi Culture," *Joint Force Quarterly* (January 2009).

and indirect solutions to irregular challenges. The role of the MNLA in Mali is, in our view, a case in point.[3]

Further, since the first Gulf War, we have developed high-tech solutions that lend warfighters the ability to quickly find, fix and finish enemy targets. Our soldiers have grown accustomed to possessing enormous amounts of intelligence data at their fingertips that provide answers to almost every question arising within the operating environment. But whether the financial resources required to sustain this technology will be there in the coming lean years is unknown. If the economists are correct, SOF units will have to return to more traditional modes of working as small units conducting operations "by, with and through" local military liaison forces and other local surrogates and, in extremis, as independent units working from commander's intent with little support from either US or friendly local forces. Although advanced technologies will certainly play a role in these cases, these small units will succeed or fail based on their ability to analyze, fight and navigate within the local environment. Their ability to understand cultural context is essential to finding victory in such limited operations. The question is whether we are doing enough institutionally to prepare them.

Challenge 3: Defining the political outcomes of IW

It is a well-known maxim that war is 'politics by other means'. Agreeing here with Clausewitz, a clear understanding of our objectives and strategies in waging IW is essential, especially given the primacy of influence and winning at war's moral level. Further, the clear articulation of these objectives—basically, our desired 'end-state'—to the American public is also key, given the necessity to generate Americans' support for the long-term operations and patience that characterize effective irregular warfare. Without a clear articulation of our desired ends, how can we measure effective means? We do not believe that this question has been asked enough in the halls of the Pentagon since 2001. Irregular warfare has often appeared as an end in itself.

Challenge 4: Limited SME immersion

Another apparent challenge in combatting irregular and geographically dispersed threats is a lack of reliable subject matter expertise. Generating a meaningful understanding of a country or region's socio-cultural issues requires years of immersion. It has been our observation that, when DoD reacts to a new issue, it often reaches out to academia for answers. However, it is often the case that academic advisors have limited understanding of ground-truth socio-cultural context because their 'expertise' is gleaned from desktop research or a couple trips to a distant capital. Instead of turning to individuals who have spent meaningful time on the ground conducting fieldwork and developing objective qualitative

[3] Rudolph Atallah, testimony on security in the Sahel and West Africa before the US House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs (21 May 2013), at: http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA16/20130521/100886/HHRG-113-FA16-Wstate-AtallahR-20130521.pdf

perspectives on the challenges at hand, DoD too often invests in shallow and often biased 'expert' opinions. The result is a poor, often skewed understanding of both the problem-set and the environment that is nevertheless translated into IW planning.

Of course, another principal secondary challenge within the problem of expertise is one of scope and timeliness—scope because IW problem-sets evolve and disperse so quickly, and time because the bureaucratic and vetting mechanisms required to find and place credentialed experts (or develop them from within DoD) produce huge opportunity costs. Again we turn to the crisis in Mali for an example.

Challenge 5: Negating the advantages of suicide operations
Suicide tactics—whether through an improvised explosives device, a small unit like the Mumbai attackers, or an individual gunmen—and the innovation and commitment that drives their effectiveness are some of the primary operational challenges of our age. In crafting effective IW, negating the operational, cultural, and even spiritual advantages of suicide bombing must remain a consideration, as this method will continue to remain a preferred weapon of mass effect for irregular combatants.

Many of the advantages of suicide bombing operations are well know, but merit listing here to showcase the human element:

- The function of the suicide bomber as a 'smart bomb', who operates flexibly at both a strategic and tactical level to hit targets of mass effect commensurate with the 'intent' of his movement or commander.
- The demonstrative element of suicide bombing, enflamed by the prominent media (and social media) coverage it receives, aiding not only in publicizing a terrorist's cause but also in 'striking fear'—a primary objective.
- The ability of suicide operatives to dismiss the traditional pillars of Western Cold War strategic theory: deterrence, pre-emption and early warning.
- The attractiveness of martyrdom as a reward for the operative and his/her cause, whether politically, social and/or religious in nature, which compels the operative(s) to complete their mission;
- The attractiveness of the act as an end in itself for some militants.
- The fact that suicide operatives waste little time deliberating about how to evade authorities after an attack or face interrogators; and
- The low cost and technical simplicity of most suicide IEDs and operations.

Challenge 6: Improvised explosive devices (IEDs)
Finally—and related to the above point on suicide tactics—is the challenge posed by IEDs and their continued use and improvement. From Afghanistan, to Iraq, to Boston, the IED remains a weapon of choice for the weak owing to its simplicity to construct, its globalized and highly replicable nature and its potential to generate surprise, mass casualties and strategic impact. Terrorists and insurgents are continually upgrading or even simplifying their designs in a bid to overcome our

sophisticated and costly defenses. They still too often succeed. While a host of DoD entities have made tremendous progress in IED detection, defeat and various other counter-measures, the threat persists and will continue into the foreseeable future.

Recommendations

The last 12 years have been defined by an evolving spectrum of irregular threats and asymmetric methods. Much of our global contest with movements like al-Qaeda and its transnational contemporaries have been waged in unfamiliar and high-context areas that test not only our financial wherewithal but also our human capital. In agreement with most on this panel, we believe this pattern will continue.

On this point, we offer several parting thoughts for improvement as we look to the next 12 years of IW:

First, we need to expand our HUMINT capabilities. As American war-fighters, we will always have the ability to do 'something', but having good intelligence coupled with solid context allows us to do the right thing.

Second, we need to couple an expanded HUMINT capability with new methods of socio-cultural training and alternative analysis programs that promote viewing the environment through the eyes of non-Westerners. Years ago, the Air Force began a new career path for its officers in which they were required to focus on a region with an aim to learn the culture and an associated language. The goal was to groom officers with socio-cultural skills and knowledge so they can become more effective diplomat-warriors in the future. This program exemplified the forward thinking that needs to be encouraged as we prepare for future IW. The Marine Corps and Army have offered many similar programs, although some like the Army Directed Studies Office have, unfortunately, fallen by the wayside just when they are needed most.

Third, **continued private sector partnerships are essential for DoD. Businesses like White Mountain Research that work overseas have a great deal to offer, as the market forces us to stay in-tune with foreign political and socio-cultural issues in order to compete.** As we conduct our peer-to-peer research and keep pace with local politics in foreign countries, DoD can gain richly from our experiences.

Fourth, interagency best practices for planning kinetic operations should also be used in non-kinetic planning. We know how to work together to identify and pursue targets. However, we do not typically follow the same principles and patterns when dealing with non-kinetic challenges.

Fifth, we must bear in mind that everything has an economic limitation. Based on this, at the political level, we should determine what we want our objectives to look like and define and calibrate appropriate IW resources to meet it. At the grand

strategic level, we must also recall that national culture is a powerful instrument that could be leveraged more effectively than it has.

Sixth, IEDs have been around from the inception of gunpowder. We should keep organizations like JEIDDO open because this problem will never go away. The Boston bombing is a case in point. Our ability to minimize, defeat, prevent IED attacks is an important part of our IW capability.

Seventh, the lack of continuity in DoD must be addressed. Most soldiers never exceed more than two or three years in an overseas country assignment. Unfortunately, with each rotation, their replacement has to learn local issues from the start, even when the institutional knowledge is there. This does not allow for the sustained familiarity with the host country that is so crucial in IW. To be more effective, DoD should allow a soldier to focus on a region (a group of countries sharing a common border) for a minimum of five years and include a yearlong overlap with the inbound soldier. This will provide the opportunity to develop meaningful local networks more quickly and transition critical knowledge. This is why programs like AFPAK Hands[4] must be continued and expanded to other regions of the world. These programs can dovetail well with regional centers of excellence like the Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) or the George C. Marshall Center.

Eighth, in combat zones, soldiers are too often restricted to secure locations, negating important opportunities for cultural immersion. This has the potential to taint soldiers' perspectives and can create an "us versus them" mentality with strategic consequences. We know that effectiveness typically increases for Special Operators who dismount vehicles and engage with the local populations. Most will tell you that they garner important cultural signals this way, making them vastly more efficient and empowered war-fighters. Their lessons-learned should be applied in a wide swathe across DoD.

Finally, more effective and systematic screening procedures should be instituted for academic advisors. These should be vetted for not only their subject matter knowledge, but also their objectivity. When advising on far-flung places like Mali or Nigeria, extensive on the ground experience should also be a prerequisite before they are put in a position to educate our warfighters. We have witnessed too many times the unfortunate consequences of unprepared and/or biased advisors hired to provide direction to crucial DoD initiatives.

[4] See http://www.jcs.mil/page.aspx?id=52