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Complex Irregular Warfare: The Next Revolution in Military Affairs

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Abstract

At the time of the 9/11 attacks, Washington was embarking on a defense transformation emphasizing missile defense, space assets, precision weaponry, and information technology. This transformation proved irrelevant to the national security threats we now face, with the emergence of nontraditional adversaries pursuing "complex irregular warfare." U.S. forces will have to assume a much more expeditionary character to successfully deal with Islamists' complex irregular warfare. The March 2005 U.S. National Defense Strategy provides a balance to the longstanding American military emphasis on major-theater war, but it remains to be seen whether the military's new interest in operations other than conventional, major-combat operations will last or if it will diminish as soon as a new peer competitor rises, allowing the Pentagon to return to its more familiar paradigm.



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