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Preparing Leaders to Thrive in a Complex World



Table of Contents



2015 PSOTEW, The Peace and Stability Operations Training and Education Workshop Background **2**



Workgroup 1: Developing a Civilian-Military Relations Course **15**



Workgroup 2: Determining True Demand Signal for Non-Lethal Capabilities **19**



Workgroup 3: Confronting Illicit Power through Enhanced Professional Military Education **21**



Workgroup 4: Facilitating Cross-Sector Support to Economic Stabilization in Post-Conflict and Fragile States **24**



Workgroup 5: Findings from the Transitional Public Working Group **27**



Workgroup 6: Develop PME For Non-Civil Affairs (CA) Officers On "Military Support To Governance" **30**



Workgroup 7: Strengthening Security Force Assistance Joint Force Management Processes and Procedures **32**

1 Director's Corner

7 Intern's Corner

10 News

14 Events

[brings you back to this page](#)



PSOTEW

Work Group 3



Minerva Working Group Scopes Out How the Joint Force Can Better Confront Illicit Power through Enhanced Professional Military Education

by Col. (ret.) Christopher Holshek



The PSOTEW's third working group, Transforming Ideas into Operations: The Minerva Project on Operationalizing Social Science Research for Defense Users, tackled the issue of confronting what may be the Joint Force's most nettlesome challenge for years to come.

Due to an increasingly complex security environment, this situation presents DoD and the Joint Force a need for greater understanding of the social, cultural, behavioral, and political forces that drive conflict and influence stability. The Center for Complex Operations (CCO), on behalf of the U.S. Department of Defense Minerva Grants Initiative is looking to identify, develop, and map pathways that most effectively convey social science research insights to Joint and Service professional military education (PME) and leader development. Through a book and a related project, it is looking to address an often misunderstood and misdiagnosed catalyst of de-stabilization: illicit power structures.

The results will be published as a book titled, *Impunity: Countering Illicit Structures in War and Transition*, co-edited by Michael Miklaucic, Director of Research and PRISM Editor

at the NDU-CCO, who is also the Minerva project leader, and Michelle Hughes, who is the Senior Analyst for the project. The theory of the book is that international interventions are directly undermined by the presence of criminal networks, militias, and other illicit groups that enrich themselves through trafficking, exploitation of national resources, and the capture of state institutions. These groups perpetuate underlying drivers of conflict and a culture of impunity. Ultimately, their presence and power precludes achievement of our national security objectives. Experience has shown that unless we recognize and address this complex threat as part of our collective response to conflict and instability, prospects for sustainable peace and conflict resolution are significantly diminished.

The Minerva Initiative is a DoD-sponsored, university-based social science research initiative launched by the Secretary of Defense in 2008 focusing on areas of strategic importance to U.S. national security policy. The goal of the Minerva Initiative is to improve DoD's basic understanding of the social, cultural, behavioral, and political forces that shape regions of the world of strategic importance to the U.S.



The NDU project team – comprised of Hughes, David Gordon as Senior Concept & Courseware Developer and Christopher Holshek as Senior Project Development Assistant – is tasked with reviewing the processes, means and methods for incorporating social science research to address this imperative into leader development, in collaboration with DoD stakeholders, and outside educators, researchers, and policy makers.

The project will then identify, develop, and map these pathways as well as offer plug-and-play modular courseware, based on Impunity. A follow-up to the Convergence book presented at the PSOTTEW, Impunity is designed to serve as a basis for education and leader development based on case studies taken from recent interventions such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and lesser known examples from Sierra Leone, the Philippines, Liberia and Haiti, among others. The book also introduces its readers to a range of tools, processes, and methods for dealing with the problem of illicit power in an international setting.

As part of that process until the end of September, in cooperation with PKSOI and many other partner and stakeholder organizations, the team has been conducting interviews and expert consultation meetings, for which the PSOTTEW Working Group 3 has served as the first. The workshop:

- Introduced the Minerva Initiative and Impunity-based project to partners and stakeholders to improve partner/stakeholder understanding;
- Co-identified challenges and best practices in DoD bureaucratic programs and processes for integration of social science innovations for PME for countering illicit power;
- Co-identified challenges and best practices in rapid development of quality and relevant courseware that leverages social science innovations for PME for countering illicit power;
- Gathered stakeholder as well as partner recommendations on both policy and doctrine to improve PME operational effectiveness with reference to this project; and
- Determined the scope and objectives for second expert consultation.

Thanks to the active engagement and intense discussion among over 20 participants among PME institutions and the many and valued partners and stakeholders outside of DoD, the second largest of the PSOTTEW working groups was able to generate many outputs, among them:

- First and most importantly, they were able to validate the requirement as well as the approaches of both the Minerva-funded project to help PME institutions leverage social science research and innovations into curriculum designed to help leaders combat illicit structures, as well as the Impunity book as a courseware source in support of that effort.
- Second, they established a nascent community of interest and practice in this endeavor. The quality of substantive inputs and advice given was impressive – in particular: the idea of using many entry points to socialize social science approaches in the PME; persistently engaging institutions and partners with a clear and consistent message; and, developing and distributing adaptable, modular plug-and-play courseware.
- Third, they identified a clear way ahead to focus on “operational approach” or design methodology that helps bridge the gaps to operationalize the methods and the material.

The third outcome in particular teed up the second expert consultation meeting on the 16th of June at NDU, and consisted of many of the same group members from the PSOTTEW meeting. This meeting reviewed the courseware developed by David Gordon and shaped the recommendations the project will provide the Office of the Secretary of Defense on the Minerva Initiative in its final report.

Early confidence in the project is reflected in the willingness of numerous institutions of military learning and leadership – including the National Defense University, the Joint Forces Staff College, the Air University, Naval War College, Naval Postgraduate School, the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and the U.S. Army Special Warfare Center & School – to consider working some of the Impunity-based courseware into their curricula as early as the upcoming academic/fiscal year.

Single or bulk copies of Impunity can be ordered by emailing impunity@ndu.edu. For more on the Minerva-Impunity project, as well as to download the courseware, which will be posted no later than September, go to: <http://cco.dodlive.mil/minerva-project/>.

