

August 31, 1990

## **PREPARING AMERICA TO WIN LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICTS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

**With a speed unprecedented in world history, the United States is deploying a massive military force to Saudi Arabia to block Iraqi aggression. There will be many lessons to be drawn from this confrontation with Iraq. One important lesson is: the clash with Iraq is not likely to be the paradigm of American military challenges in the post-Cold War world. Few nations boast armed forces the size of Iraq's. Ironically, therefore, while America may be ready to fight the Soviets in Europe or Iraqi forces in the Persian Gulf, this does not mean that America is ready to fight the much more limited battles against what is sure to be more typical threats of this decade: international terrorists, narcotics traffickers, revolutionary groups operating in the Third World, and assorted anti-American dictators.**

**Most of these threats will take the form of what national security experts call low-intensity conflict (LIC – pronounced "lick"), or hostile and frequently armed struggles ranging from psychological warfare and terrorist attacks to small scale wars. Though this danger grows, America lacks the manpower, equipment, organization, and has lacked the will to meet it.**

**Progress and Problems.** To be sure, some progress was made on LICs in the 1980s. This was spurred by the Reagan Doctrine, which committed the U.S. to aiding freedom fighters against Soviet or communist regimes and to shoring up America's friends and allies against Soviet- and Cuban-backed insurgencies. LIC funding was boosted somewhat, and some organizational problems were fixed. Enormous problems, however, remain. One of the most serious is that the National Security Council (NSC), and the Defense, Justice, State, and Treasury Departments continue to direct their efforts almost ex-

clusively on U.S.-Soviet issues, at the expense of programs designed to combat LIC threats. Another problem is that as tank and mechanized divisions best suited for large-scale wars are cut back, there is little agreement within the Bush Administration or Congress on how best to field the highly-trained, specially-equipped and mobile forces needed to win low-intensity conflicts.

Low-intensity warfare, moreover, is not fought with military forces alone. It often has economic, social, ideological, and political dimensions. For this reason a comprehensive LIC policy must coordinate the efforts of the Departments of Defense, Justice, State, Treasury, the intelligence services, and other appropriate agencies. If there is to be such a comprehensive LIC policy to prepare America to fight the dictators, terrorists, and drug lords who in the coming decade are likely to pose a growing threat to U.S. global interests, then George Bush should:

◆ ◆ **Form a "Wisemen Commission" to develop a post-Cold War strategy for the U.S.**<sup>1</sup> The longstanding U.S. strategy of containment, while successful, is obsolete. A new strategy is needed to replace it. This new strategy should concentrate on the larger role low-intensity conflict will play in U.S. national security policy.

◆ ◆ **Adopt a "Nation-Building" strategy to defeat insurgencies.** This is a comprehensive approach mobilizing military, economic, political, and social assistance to help vulnerable nations protect themselves against internal revolutionary threats and outside powers. It is designed to address the basic economic, political, and social problems that can fuel insurgencies, and then take measures to defeat insurgents on the battlefield.

◆ ◆ **Lead on LIC issues.** Only explicit direction and directives from the President can overcome the bureaucratic obstacles to an effective LIC effort erected by the National Security Council, Pentagon, State Department, and other agencies.

◆ ◆ **Appoint a Deputy Assistant to the President for Low-Intensity Conflict at the National Security Council, as suggested by Congress.** The 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act suggests that the President appoint a Deputy Special Assistant for Low-Intensity Conflict on the NSC staff to act, in effect, as a LIC "czar," to initiate and coordinate LIC policy among the federal agencies. Bush has not done so.

◆ ◆ **Strengthen the Pentagon's Special Operations Policy Advisory Group (SOPAG).** This group of retired military officers and LIC specialists advises the Pentagon on special operations policy. SOPAG now meets only two to four times annually. It should meet at least every two months. Its retired of-

---

<sup>1</sup> See Kim R. Holmes and James A. Phillips, "A Wisemen Commission to Craft America's Post-Cold War Foreign and Defense Policy," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounders* No. 767, May 2, 1990.

ficers should be barred from serving more than three years after retirement, to keep membership up to date on fast-changing LIC issues.

◆ ◆ **Increase the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) budget.** SOCOM is the military command that carries out the type of “special operations” often used in low-intensity conflict. Examples: hostage rescue and counter-terrorism. SOCOM is to receive \$2.4 billion this year, or less than one percent of the Pentagon’s budget. SOCOM needs \$350 million more for special operations equipment, maintenance of existing equipment and programs, and training, particularly in the skills required for “nation-building,” such as foreign language abilities.

◆ ◆ **Upgrade Special Operations Forces (SOF) equipment.** SOFs need special equipment to conduct unconventional warfare. Examples include advanced lightweight backpack radio systems and such aircraft as the V-22 *Osprey*, which takes off and lands like a helicopter but flies like a plane. The V-22 can fly long distances without refueling and slip unnoticed into hostile territory.

◆ ◆ **Ensure that State Department and Pentagon officials and other agency representatives in American embassies work together on LIC issues.** Such agency representatives at American embassies in foreign countries often operate at cross purposes. A LIC “czar” at the NSC should be empowered to enforce cooperation between the various U.S. agencies responsible for carrying out U.S. policy on LIC.

◆ ◆ **Raise funding for manpower, equipment, and training for intelligence activities in the Third World, and expand the range of U.S. intelligence activities.** American intelligence services need more and better resources to collect intelligence in the Third World. Bush should ask Congress to increase funding for more manpower and equipment and better training for intelligence agents. Bush also should issue a Presidential Directive enabling the CIA to carry out – only with presidential and congressional authority – such rarely discussed, but occasionally necessary, paramilitary operations as actions to kill or overthrow foreign leaders who pose an extreme and direct security threat to the U.S.

## WHAT IS LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT?

Low-intensity conflict has been defined many ways. The White House defines it sparingly as “...conflict [that] involves the struggle of competing principles and ideologies below the level of conventional war. Poverty and the lack of political freedoms contribute to the instability that breeds such conflict.”<sup>2</sup>

---

2 The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, March 1990.

A Reagan-era White House definition was more comprehensive: "low-intensity conflicts may be waged by a combination of means, including the use of political, economic, informational, and military instruments....Major causes of low-intensity conflict are instability and lack of political and economic development in the Third World. These conditions provide fertile ground for unrest and for groups and nations wishing to exploit unrest for their own purposes....An effective U.S. response to this form of warfare requires...the use of a variety of policy instruments among U.S. government agencies and internationally. Responses may draw on economic, political, and informational tools as well as military assistance."<sup>3</sup>

**Pentagon Definition.** The Joint Chiefs of Staff of the military services define LIC as "political-military confrontation between contending states or groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states. It frequently involves protracted struggles of competing principles and ideologies. Low-intensity conflict ranges from subversion to the use of armed force. It is waged by a combination of means employing political, economic, informational, and military instruments. Low-intensity conflicts are often localized, generally in the Third World, but contain regional and global security implications."<sup>4</sup>

The latter two definitions highlight important common points:

- ◆ the prevalence of LIC in the Third World;
- ◆ the importance of social, economic, and political factors in LIC; and
- ◆ the variety of informational, military, and economic tools that can be used to defeat an adversary in a LIC situation.

But these definitions also are lacking. LIC does not necessarily entail armed conflict. It can mean simply political maneuvering and psychological warfare. It can be waged in the industrial as well as the Third World, as evidenced by such European terror groups as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Basque Fatherland and Liberty group (ETA) in Spain.

Without a common definition accepted by all the relevant military and civilian U.S. agencies responsible for LIC, the U.S. will not be able to craft a credible LIC force.

---

<sup>3</sup> The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States 1987*, p. 32-34. See also, Richard H. Shultz, "Discriminate Deterrence and Low-Intensity Conflict: The Unintentional Legacy of the Reagan Administration," *Conflict*, Vol. 9 (1989), p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Doctrine for Joint Operations in Low-Intensity Conflict*, January 1990, p. xvii.

## TOWARD A BETTER DEFINITION

Military experts speak of a "conflict spectrum." By this they mean a continuous range of hostilities extending from espionage and economic sanctions at the lower end to nuclear war in the high intensity zone.<sup>5</sup> The intensity of a particular kind of conflict is defined by the degree of violence employed by its participants.

The boundaries of LIC on the conflict spectrum are ambiguous. LIC's upper boundary borders on mid-intensity conflict; this includes the conventional phase of insurgencies as well as limited nuclear and conventional warfare. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait is a mid-intensity conflict. LIC's lower boundary borders on normal peacetime competition; this includes competitive but non-hostile actions between nations such as taking advantage of loopholes in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

**Limited Violence, Limited Objectives.** Low-intensity conflict is defined not only by a relatively limited level of violence, but by the more limited objectives for which combatants generally vie. Limited objectives can range from occupying a small parcel of disputed land to trying to subvert an enemy economically. Nevertheless, low-intensity conflict can be fierce and can aim for the eventual complete destruction of an enemy. The most familiar forms of low-intensity conflict are terrorism, insurgency, international narcotics trafficking, *coups d'etat*, and minor conventional wars involving limited numbers of forces. But there are others. Simply mobilizing a large armed force armed with nuclear weapons, not to attack but to intimidate, is a type of low-intensity conflict. So, too, is the use of a large army to fight in a limited way, for limited gains, as with U.S. forces in Grenada in 1983. A naval blockade, as that against Iraq, is also a form of low-intensity conflict.

"Special Operations" are irregular or unconventional missions, usually carried out by military forces. These can include hostage rescue, deep reconnaissance in enemy territory, counter-terrorism, and small-scale offensive actions. These operations characteristically are directed at political and military targets of high value to an enemy, and are carried out by small, highly trained units. Because of their focused nature, Special Operations cannot substitute for such long-term efforts as "nation-building" in defeating an insurgency. Yet they often are an important part of a military campaign to defeat an adversary engaged in LIC.

**Types of Weapons.** LIC instruments of coercion are not all military. "Non-violent" LIC weapons include political manipulation, such as the Sandinista rigging of Nicaragua's 1984 elections, or the repeated election fraud of

---

<sup>5</sup> The conflict spectrum is a tool used by strategists to determine the level of intensity of a given type of warfare which in turn determines the kinds of responses, military or non-military, which are most appropriate.

## Typical Type Conflicts

Conflict Intensity <sup>1</sup>		
Low <sup>2</sup>	Mid <sup>2</sup>	High <sup>2</sup>
<b>VIOLENT CONFLICTS</b> Insurgency (Phases I,II) Counterinsurgency Coup d'etat Transnational Terrorism Anti/Counterterrorism Narco Conflict Conventional War(Minor) <b>NONVIOLENT CONFLICTS</b> Political Warfare Economic Warfare Technological Warfare Psychological Warfare Peacekeeping	<b>LIMITED WARS</b> Nuclear Conventional <b>INSURGENCY (Phase III)</b>	<b>NUCLEAR WARS</b> Global Regional <b>CONVENTIONAL WAR (Major)</b>

1. Chemical and biological warfare may augment nuclear and/or conventional capabilities at any conflict level, but do not constitute a separate type.
2. Phase I and II insurgencies include undergrounds and guerrillas. They exclude employment of large paramilitary formations, which supplement undergrounds and guerrillas during Phase III.

Source: John Collins, "U.S. Low-Intensity Conflicts, 1899-1990" (Washington, D.C., Congressional Research Service, May 1990).

Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines. Broadcast and other media can be used for political ends, as in the use of Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe to counter state-controlled media in communist countries. Economic weapons include cutting off trade, such as occurred during the Arab oil embargo of 1973 and 1974, and freezing foreign assets, as the U.S. has done to Iran since 1979. Technological means also figure in non-violent, low-intensity conflict. An example is the deployment of spy satellites to monitor opponent's military preparations. Psychological weapons include media campaigns to discredit an enemy. This surely was the KGB's intent in the 1980s when it spread rumors that U.S. scientists had developed the AIDS virus to kill millions in the Third World.

Military weapons used in violent low-intensity conflicts include nuclear, chemical, and biological systems — although these would have to be used in limited ways, for example, as a threat, to be considered "low-intensity." More commonly, LIC is fought with such prosaic small arms as machine guns, grenades, and mortars. Combatants are more apt to move around the bat-

tlefield in jeeps and trucks than in tanks. Cargo and gunship aircraft such as helicopters are more prevalent than such modern jet fighters as F-15 *Eagles*.

**Where Low-Intensity Conflicts Occur.** Low-intensity conflicts generally are fought in the Third World but can erupt anywhere, including in the U.S. and Europe. The violent actions of the so-called Weather Underground and the Puerto Rican National Liberation Force in the 1960s and early 1970s in America are examples of past LIC problems. Still, most low-intensity conflicts are in the Third World or connected with events there. Currently, violent insurgencies are underway in Colombia, El Salvador, India, Mozambique, Peru, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and a number of other countries. In some of these conflicts Washington provides military and humanitarian assistance and training in support of friendly governments. In the case of such anti-communist movements as UNITA in Angola, and the *mujahideen* Freedom Fighters in Afghanistan, the U.S. is supporting insurgencies against governments hostile to the U.S.

## LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT THREATS TO U.S. SECURITY

America continues to face many threats to its security and interests around the world. Though the Cold War is winding down, such dangers as international drug trafficking and insurgency warfare will continue, and most of them will arise in the Third World.

### Latin America

The U.S. has recognized Latin America as a vital security interest since proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, which warned the European powers not to interfere in the affairs of the Western Hemisphere. Today, it is less the interference of outside hostile powers than narcotics production and trafficking that creates problems for the U.S. in Latin America. Two-thirds of the total illicit U.S. drug supply comes from Latin America, particularly from Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru.<sup>6</sup> The production and flow of drugs, of course, not only damages American society, but can destabilize democratic governments through narco-terrorism (such as the random bombings by the Medellin drug cartel in Colombia) and related corruption. The laundering of illegal drug profits by legitimate banks further feeds corruption by making more funds available to the traffickers on both sides of the border.

Such Marxist guerrilla groups as the *Farabundo Marti Liberation Front* (FMLN) in El Salvador and Peru's *Shining Path* threaten their countries' democratically elected governments as well as U.S. political interests. The *Shining Path* has destabilized the government of Peru through terrorism and

---

<sup>6</sup> Fred Woerner, "The Strategic Imperatives for the U.S. in Latin America," *Military Review*, February 1989, p. 20.

political assassination, and has forged links with coca growers, who supply the raw material for the manufacture of cocaine. The FMLN, which launched a major offensive against the Salvadoran government last winter, has unleashed waves of terror driving hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans out of their country.

Regional instability caused by insurgencies, terrorism, high national debts, inflation, and widespread poverty risks U.S. access to strategic minerals and markets in Latin America as well as thwarting U.S. attempts to promote democracy. Latin America's export of strategic materials to the U.S. include oil, bauxite (used to make aluminum) and antimony (important for making advanced metal alloys). The U.S. traded about \$122 billion worth of goods with its Latin American neighbors in 1988.<sup>7</sup>

Much of this trade passes not only through the Panama Canal, but also through the Caribbean Sea, which is potentially threatened by Cuba.

### **Asia**

Asia's greatest value to the U.S. is as a trading partner. Asia-U.S. trade in 1988 totaled over \$280 billion.<sup>8</sup> This includes raw materials that drive both Asian and U.S. industry as well as agricultural goods and such high-technology items as computer chips and electronics. Important U.S. allies in Asia are directly threatened either by the Soviet Union, by other communist regimes or by insurgencies. South Korea, of course, confronts North Korea; Thailand borders on Cambodia, whose regime is sponsored by a hostile Vietnam; the U.S. backed *mujahideen* is at war with Moscow's allies in Afghanistan. In the Philippines, home to the most important U.S. military bases in Asia — Clark Air Base and the Subic Bay Naval Base — the pro-U.S. government of Corazon Aquino is under attack from communist guerrillas.

Drug trafficking is a major problem across Asia. For one thing, it creates instability by corrupting governments and societies. For another, an increasing amount of opium entering the U.S. comes from the "Golden Triangle," formed by Burma, Laos, and Thailand, and from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Regional conflicts among Asian powers are another source of instability. The long simmering border conflict between Pakistan and India over the Kashmir region yet again is heating up. Growing Indian power is a threat to the traditional U.S. ally, Pakistan, which has served as the major conduit for U.S. supplies to the Afghan *mujahideen*. A potential danger in Asia is rising Muslim fundamentalism. In Indonesia, which controls the sea lanes through which

---

<sup>7</sup> *U.S. Foreign Trade Highlights 1988*, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C., July 1989. These are the latest aggregate trade figures available from the Commerce Department.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas J. Timmons, ed., *U.S. and Asia Statistical Handbook* (Washington, D.C., The Heritage Foundation: 1989).



flows Middle East oil on its way to Japan and the other industrial powers of East Asia, a fundamentalist-based mutiny was crushed this spring.

### **The Middle East**

As the Iraq-Kuwait crisis shows, the main U.S. interest in the Middle East is to assure a steady flow of oil to the industrialized world. Middle East oil accounted for 24.6 percent of total U.S. oil imports this March.<sup>9</sup> Middle East oil is even more important for U.S. allies in Europe and Asia. The total value of U.S. trade with the Middle East in 1988 was about \$21 billion.<sup>10</sup> Other major American interests in the area include the preservation of moderate, pro-Western states such as Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey as a hedge against the expansionary aims of Muslim fundamentalism and radical leaders like Iraq's Saddam Hussein. The U.S. also seeks to curtail the spread of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons and missile technology, eradicate terrorist groups, and halt the flow of opium and hashish from Lebanon.

### **Africa**

Though the U.S. traded only \$15 billion worth of goods with Africa in 1988,<sup>11</sup> the U.S. depends on Africa for over 85 percent of such critically important strategic metals as cobalt, chromium, and platinum group ores. These metals are used in jet engines and other high technology items and are needed to maintain America's technological and military superiority over the Soviet Union and other political adversaries. Africa controls such sea lanes as the Cape of Good Hope and the Horn of Africa, around which pass most oil shipments from the Middle East to America and Europe. Africa is also an area of clashing interests with the U.S.S.R., which provides an estimated \$800 million annually in economic and military aid each to Angola and Ethiopia. The Soviet Union still deploys up to 4,000 military advisers in Sub-Saharan Africa. Current violent conflicts in Africa include: Angola, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Sudan, Somalia, South Africa, Uganda, and Western Sahara.

## **LOW- INTENSITY CONFLICT IN U.S. HISTORY**

The first conflicts fought between American Indians and European settlers were low-intensity conflicts. So were the Boston Massacre in 1770 and the Boston Tea Party in 1773. The young U.S. dispatched Marines on Navy ships to what is today Tripoli, Libya in 1804-1805, to protect American shipping from Barbary pirates and to rescue hostages. The last century's battles with American Indians employed what has been a familiar Soviet 20th Century LIC technique: uprooting hostile populations to prevent them from aiding

---

9 Department of Energy, Public Affairs Office, author's interview, August 1990.

10 *U.S. Foreign Trade Highlights 1988*.

11 *Ibid.*

and abetting their forces in combat. This was the essence of the policy of Indian reservations.

**Sixty LICs This Century.** Counter-insurgency operations in the Philippines from 1899 to 1913 against Filipino nationalist forces gave American troops their first taste of major jungle warfare. America has engaged in gunboat diplomacy, covert actions, direct assistance, occupation, and peacemaking actions throughout Latin America – in Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, the Falkland Islands, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama – and have kept European powers out of the Western Hemisphere in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Even during such high-intensity wars as World War II, the U.S. conducted irregular operations against the Germans and Japanese, including the creation of intelligence networks, guerrilla armies, and resistance groups in occupied France and Poland and the Philippines. Paramilitary covert action was carried out by U.S. Special Forces and the CIA against communist forces in Laos during the 1960s. Operation “Just Cause” in Panama last December is the most recent example of U.S. military involvement in LIC. A study published this May by the Congressional Research Service counts U.S. involvement in 60 LICs since 1899.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, the U.S. has greater incidental experience with LIC than with large-scale conventional warfare. Moreover, America has needed forces to respond to low-intensity conflicts throughout its history.

**Policy failures.** With its history of involvement in LIC, the U.S. should be well prepared to deal with it today. But resistance to fighting LIC or adopting an effective LIC policy exists throughout the federal bureaucracy. The focus of U.S. policy has always been elsewhere, particularly Western Europe, which seemed to pose the most overwhelming threat to U.S. interests. U.S. military and political strategies flowed from this assumption. Post-World War II U.S. defense policy was based on four requirements, all stemming from the Soviet threat:

- 1) deterrence based on nuclear and conventional strength;
- 2) forward deployment of U.S. military might on foreign territory;
- 3) alliances such as NATO; and
- 4) large standing and reserve forces.<sup>13</sup> These have succeeded in winning the Cold War but have failed to address the problems of LIC.

---

<sup>12</sup> John Collins, *U.S. Low-Intensity Conflict, 1899-1990* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, May 1990).

<sup>13</sup> Robert Goldich and Stephen Daggett, "Defense goals in the 1990s," Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., May 22, 1990, p. 2-3.

## ATTEMPTS AT LIC REFORM

After a series of LIC failures, including Vietnam and particularly Jimmy Carter's April 1980 failed "Desert One" hostage rescue mission in Iran, momentum grew in Congress to address American deficiencies in Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict (often combined into the single acronym SOLIC).

The first attempt to do so was the 1982 establishment of the Army Special Operations Command (SOCOM), combining under one roof all Army Special Operations troops. These included Special Forces (Green Berets), Rangers, civil affairs and psychological operations (or "psyops") troops. Army SOCOM was directed to work closely with the Air Force's Special Operations Wing (SOW) which provides ground forces with transport and gunship aircraft. Naval special forces provide sea-based strike forces and counter-terrorism teams known as SEALs (for Sea, Air, Land forces). Created also in 1982, was the Joint Special Operations Command with control over the counter-terrorism units known as Army Delta Force and Navy SEAL Team Six. These groups were all subsumed under the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) in 1987.

In 1984, the Pentagon established the Joint Special Operations Agency to oversee, plan and coordinate all aspects of special operations within the military. That year also, the Special Operations Policy Advisory Group, composed of retired officers and LIC experts, was established to advise the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense on SOLIC issues. As a result of congressional efforts to improve SOLIC capabilities, along with some high level political support for SOLIC within the Reagan Administration, the Special Operations Forces readiness and equipment have been improved. For example, additional Army Special Forces Groups were created, most recently this spring,

### GLOSSARY OF ACROMYMS

**SOF: Special Operations Forces.** Includes Army Green Berets, Rangers, civil affairs units, psychological operations units, special aviation units, counter-terrorist teams, and other units; Navy SEAL and SEAL Delivery Teams; Air Force special aviation units and forward observer and meteorological units.

**SOCOM: Special Operations Command.** Trains, equips, and provides doctrine for Special Operations Forces. Located at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.

**SEAL: Sea, Air, Land.** Navy special forces units.

**SOLIC: Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict.** The Pentagon department dealing with special operations and low-intensity conflict. Also refers to a type of mission to fight a low-intensity conflict.

and long range helicopters such as the MH-53 *Pave Low* were acquired since the beginning of SOCOM.

**Lacking Clout.** These have been useful improvements in LIC capabilities. Yet very significant problems remained. Despite their impressive names, for example, the Joint Special Operations Agency and the Special Operations Policy Advisory Group have lacked the clout to affect a system biased against elite forces and unconventional warfare. This was proved by the fact that until recently Green Berets had difficulty advancing in the Army ranks – only in the last decade did they receive their own military occupational specialty (M.O.S.) “career track.” Neither the Secretary of Defense nor the White House, meanwhile, have made clear the importance of LIC.<sup>14</sup>

In response to continued shortcomings in the performance of SOLIC forces, Congress mandated further changes in 1986. The result was Public Law 99-661. This sought to establish a coordinating, advisory board for LIC within the National Security Council, an Assistant Secretary of Defense for SOLIC to manage LIC issues at the Pentagon, a U.S. Special Operations Command to which the Special Operations Forces of all the services would be assigned, and a separate budget category for SOCOM within the overall Pentagon budget. Further, Congress suggested that the President establish the position of Deputy Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs-Low-Intensity Conflict within the NSC.

One shortcoming in the legislation, however, is that the SOCOM commander is subordinate to the five regional Commanders in Chiefs (CINCs) – the U.S. military commanders for the Atlantic, Central (Middle East), Europe, Pacific, and Southern (Latin America) regions – unless otherwise directed by the President or Secretary of Defense.<sup>15</sup> This is a shortcoming because regional CINCs mainly view Special Operations Forces as useful adjuncts to conventional troops in wartime – as saboteurs, for example – possibly preventing them from engaging in other types of missions.

**Special Operations Responsibilities.** The legislation also drew up a list of command and planning responsibilities for Special Operations Command. These include: civil affairs (military government administration in a war zone), counter-terrorism (hostage rescue and action against terrorists), behind-the-lines sabotage or “direct action,” foreign internal defense (training foreign military forces), humanitarian assistance (a large element of nation-building including public health programs and deliveries of food and clothes), “psyops” (psychological operations to break enemy morale), strategic recon-

---

<sup>14</sup> Shultz, *op. cit.*, p. 35-37.

<sup>15</sup> James Nichol, “Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict: U.S. Progress and Problems,” Congressional Research Service, Washington, D.C., 1990, p. 2.

naissance (deep penetration of hostile territory to collect information), theater search and rescue (rescuing downed pilots), unconventional warfare (leading guerrilla troops behind enemy lines) and other activities as directed by the President or the Secretary of Defense.<sup>16</sup>

## AFTER THE REFORM

**Problems at the National Security Council.** Despite the legislation to improve American SOLIC capabilities, progress has been slow. Typical has been the fate of the LIC Board at the National Security Council. In 1986 it was comprised of several inter-agency groups that included representatives from the Departments of Commerce, Defense, Justice, State, and Treasury, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and U.S. Information Agency. These interagency groups extended down to the action officer level and included four sub-working groups.

The LIC board, however, has been reorganized by Bush National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft; he abolished all but its Assistant Secretary-level and Deputy Assistant Secretary-level working groups, the latter of which meets weekly. This effectively eliminates all interagency contact between the key lower level officials who were responsible for making and carrying out LIC policy day-to-day. This LIC board is due to produce its first global policy paper, a definition of future U.S. LIC policy, in 1991. Scowcroft also gave LIC responsibility to the International Programs Directorate of the NSC, which includes only one military officer specializing in LIC, is understaffed, and has less clout than most other NSC groups. Most damning, perhaps is that there still is no Deputy Assistant to the President for LIC within the NSC, as requested by Congress in 1986. One possible reason why LIC has been neglected by the NSC is that Scowcroft and his deputy, Robert Gates, are Soviet strategic specialists by training, and therefore focus mainly on East-West issues, which were preeminent during the Cold War.

**Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict.** The position of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD/SOLIC) was filled in 1988, almost two years after it was mandated by Congress. This delay was bad enough. To make matters worse, the military staff assigned to this office have been rotated very frequently. The result: little of the expertise needed to formulate effective SOLIC policy has been retained. The effectiveness of LIC policy also has been hurt by competition for control over humanitarian assistance programs between the Pentagon's office of International Security Affairs,

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3. For definitions of these terms see John Collins, "U.S. and Soviet Special Operations," Congressional Research Service, Washington, D.C., 1986

responsible for Third World issues, and the new Assistant Secretary for SOLIC.

**Improvements of Special Operations Command.** The Special Operations Command was activated at MacDill Air Force Base in April 1987. The current commander, General Carl Stiner, has extensive special operations experience, as did his predecessor General James Lindsay. SOCOM also has offices at the Pentagon and representatives at all of the major regional commands. Its current makeup includes Army Green Berets, Rangers, civil affairs, psychological operations and special operations aviation units; Navy SEALs and SEAL Delivery Vehicle teams to bring them ashore; and Air Force units that fly special operations forces to and from their targets, provide firepower from AC-130 gunships, conduct aerial refueling missions, and provide special operations weather and combat control teams. SOCOM unifies under one command all of the special operations forces of the military services except the Marines.

SOCOM's success has led to improvements in standardizing equipment and doctrine among the Special Operations Forces, more aircraft for special operations airlift (such as long-range helicopters), a needed boost in staff, improved intelligence capabilities, and progress in joint training among the services.

**Hindering Planning.** Remaining problems include a shortage of personnel to run budgeting and acquisition programs. This causes unnecessary administrative delays in filling equipment and manpower needs. Another problem is that SOCOM's Joint Mission Directorate has not produced the requested study of potential global missions that SOCOM will have to face. The lack of this mission requirements study hinders planning for SOCOM readiness forcing SOCOM to respond to events in *ad hoc* fashion.

The dependency on such helicopters as the MH-53 and MH-47 *Pave Low* series to provide SOCOM's airlift, meanwhile, limits the range at which special operations can be carried out. Despite the modifications to these aircraft that improve flight systems and that add aerial refueling capability, the airframe is outdated and is probably incapable of being upgraded further.

The SEALs are in urgent need of new high speed patrol boats to provide them with a quick covert-entry capability. Without this, SEAL teams are more vulnerable to enemy detection and interception. And the MC-130 *Combat Talon* fixed-wing aircraft is behind schedule. This plane's advanced electronic jamming and navigational systems will allow special forces to infiltrate into and be resupplied inside hostile territory without being detected. Until the plane is delivered, the range of missions for special forces will be limited.

**Still a Meager Budget.** The creation of a separate budget category for SOCOM within the overall Pentagon budget has been the most effective means of providing autonomy for SOCOM. This permits SOCOM to make personnel, training, and equipment decisions as it sees fit. Yet, other com-

mands and agencies still control many issues bearing directly on SOCOM.<sup>17</sup> Example: SOCOM was to use the V-22 *Osprey* tilt-rotor airplane, which was to have been acquired for the Air Force and Marines. But because the Air Force did not back the program strongly and because the Secretary of Defense refused to request funds for the V-22, SOCOM does not have the use of these advanced aircraft.

**Other Agencies.** Congress has focused its efforts to reform low-intensity conflict policy-making on the Pentagon and the National Security Council, while ignoring the shortcomings of other agencies such as the State Department, whose desire to avoid involvement in LIC is so great it has assigned only one official, a military officer on loan from the Pentagon, to serve in its LIC office. Since LIC is political as well as military, other elements of the executive branch have a role in formulating LIC strategy and in LIC operations.

Because of its analytical and operational capabilities, the CIA is the agency that can deal most comprehensively with LIC on various levels, from paramilitary covert action to political warfare. In fact, the CIA was the lead agency for LIC throughout the 1950s and 1960s. It gave up this role only because its reputation was damaged during the Vietnam War. The Carter Administration, to make matters worse, changed the CIA's focus from relying on human sources to such technical ones as satellites and ground-based listening stations for gathering information.<sup>18</sup> These events led the senior leadership of the CIA to shy away from LIC involvement, especially covert action, in the 1970s and 1980s.

This attitude began to change after the late William Casey became Director of Central Intelligence in 1981. But the CIA was bruised again by the fallout from the Iran-Contra affair. According to LIC expert Richard Shultz, Professor at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, "...similar opposition to LIC missions exists in other civilian departments and agencies. This was true at the State Department, the Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Information Agency, among others. Since no senior coordinating structure exists within the White House to marshal these different bureaucratic elements behind a coherent LIC policy, the result was an ad hoc and disjointed approach that persisted through 1986."<sup>19</sup>

This remains true in 1990 because there has been no overhaul of the bureaucracies' capabilities or viewpoint, which continues to focus on the Soviet threat.

---

17 Nichol, *op. cit.*, p. 5-14.

18 Shultz, *op. cit.*, p. 31

19 *Ibid.*, p. 32

**Nation-Building.** Despite progress, the U.S. approach to LIC remains *ad hoc*. This is particularly true in the case of combatting communist insurgencies, such as those now engulfing El Salvador and the Philippines. A comprehensive approach to defeating insurgencies would entail a government-wide effort to employ a strategy known as “nation-building.”

“Nation-building” is a comprehensive effort to provide military, economic, political, and social assistance to help vulnerable nations protect themselves against internal revolutionary threats and outside powers. It is designed to address the basic economic, political, and social problems that can fuel insurgencies, in addition to taking measures to defeat insurgents on the battlefield. A successful strategy of nation building requires the cooperation and close coordination of numerous government bureaucracies, including the State, Defense and Justice Departments, as well as smaller agencies like the CIA. Such cooperation does not exist in the U.S. government. Though Washington sends advisers, equipment, and money to nations fighting insurgencies, there is no master plan to direct them toward victory. A key example is El Salvador, where military and civil assistance has unsuccessfully masqueraded as nation building, failing to coordinate U.S. government actions and not generating the support of the El Salvadoran Armed Forces, since the mid-1980s.

## **FORGING A NEW POLICY TOWARD LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICTS**

America faces serious challenges to its interests worldwide despite a weakened Soviet threat in Europe. These are not likely to subside in a world of nations divided by race and religion, led in many cases by heavily armed dictatorial regimes and suffering still from the effects of the decades long Soviet effort to undermine global peace and stability. Rather, threats to America from low-intensity conflicts are apt to increase. Washington must reassess thoroughly its policy toward LIC if it is to deal with what is likely to be the most pervasive and frequent threat to American interests in the 1990s. To do this, George Bush should:

◆ ◆ Form a “Wisemen Commission” to develop a new post-Cold War strategy for the U.S.<sup>20</sup>

The longstanding American strategic policy of containment has succeeded; it now, however, is obsolete. A new strategy is needed to replace it. This new strategy should concentrate on the larger role low-intensity conflict will play in U.S. national security policy. LIC strategy should build on the work of Ronald Reagan’s Commission on Integrated Long Term Strategy, whose 1988 report called *Discriminate Deterrence* identified six essential LIC elements for future U.S. strategy: supporting friendly governments against insurgent threats, ameliorating the root causes of global instability, supporting selected

---

<sup>20</sup> Holmes and Phillips, *op. cit.*



anti-communist resistance movements, discouraging Soviet and other government support of terrorism and insurgency, suppressing narcotics traffic, and deterring and combating international terrorism. These six remain valid today, but new strategies for achieving them need to be formulated in light of evolving threats and declining Soviet power. They include: new multilateral diplomatic efforts to achieve an international consensus on terrorism, full employment of U.S. technical sophistication to track drug couriers, and the use of nation-building strategies.

◆ ◆ Adopt a strategy of "nation-building."

"Nation-building" brings political and economic stability to a threatened country by providing military, economic, political, and social assistance. Working to solve some of the problems that fuel insurgencies often can prevent conflict from starting, and can help defeat insurgencies once they are underway.

"Nation-building" activities are carried out by U.S. military and civilian advisers in close cooperation with host government personnel. Activities include: helping to build roads, ports, and airports; making potable water and immunization programs available to civilians; training police, military intelligence groups, and other security forces to function more effectively while respecting human rights; and providing expertise to shift to free market agriculture so that peasants have incentives to increase output. These programs to some extent should be modeled on America's Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program in Vietnam, in which a special ambassador organized a comprehensive, multi-agency "nation-building" initiative in South Vietnam. Although it was started too late, in 1967, and received little funding, CORDS built strong support for the South Vietnamese government among large segments of the population.

◆ ◆ Lead on LIC issues.

Only strong presidential leadership on the issue can overcome bureaucratic obstacles within the National Security Council, the Pentagon, the State Department, and other agencies to forging an effective LIC policy. A common approach for LIC must replace the current competing views held and policies practiced by these agencies. Only the White House can do this. Bush should say that a threat exists, that it will take the combined talents of all agencies to meet this threat, and that petty turf battles must give way to a uniform approach. By speaking publicly about the dangers of low-intensity conflict, while pressing Congress for funding increases for LIC weapons programs and training, Bush can ensure that the U.S. is prepared for low-intensity conflicts.

**◆ ◆ Appoint a Deputy Assistant to the President for Low-Intensity Conflict at the National Security Council, as suggested by Congress.**

The 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act suggests the President appoint a Deputy Special Assistant for Low-Intensity Conflict on the NSC staff to act, in effect, as a LIC "czar," to initiate and coordinate LIC policy among the federal agencies. Bush has failed to do so. Planning adequately for low-intensity conflict requires the participation and coordination of the Departments of Defense, Justice, State, and Treasury, plus the intelligence services. Only a LIC "czar" in the White House, operating with the full support of the President, can achieve this. The LIC czar should be given a small staff of experts who have practical, academic, and policy experience. This new staff is necessary to meet changing national security requirements, and should be offset by cutbacks elsewhere on the NSC to prevent the NSC bureaucracy from growing bloated and unwieldy. Regular interagency meetings among lower level officials who deal with LIC policy day-to-day, which have been cancelled by Brent Scowcroft, should be reinstated.

**◆ ◆ Reinvigorate the Special Operations Policy Advisory Group (SOPAG).**

This group of retired officers and LIC specialists advises the Pentagon on policy for special operations. The SOPAG should meet at least every two months rather than quarterly or semi-annually as it has been. These military men have the expertise, and now the freedom, to dissent with established Pentagon views. Its retired military members should be barred from serving more than three years after retirement to keep membership up to date on fast-changing LIC issues.

**◆ ◆ Increase the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) budget by \$350 million.** SOCOM is the military command that carries out the "special operations" often used in low-intensity conflict. Examples: hostage rescue and counter-terrorism. SOCOM, which is to receive \$2.4 billion this year, or less than one percent of the Pentagon's budget, needs greater funding for special operations equipment and training, particularly in the skills required for "nation-building," such as foreign languages.

**◆ ◆ Upgrade Special Operations Forces equipment.**

Equipment should be designed specifically for the special operations often required to fight low-intensity conflicts. Examples include advanced lightweight backpack radio systems such as the Joint Advanced Special Operations Radio System, which will be fielded in the mid-1990s. This radio will provide portable, long distance communication that cannot be intercepted by an enemy. Another system needed is a lightweight, electronic eavesdropping and detection device, now under development to provide clandestine intelligence gathering capabilities to military commanders.

Another priority is the V-22 *Osprey*, which the Pentagon has cut from its budget, but which could bring special operations forces to battlefields quickly and over long ranges without the need of refueling or runways. Bush should reinstate the V-22 program, requesting \$1 billion from Congress for 55 V-22s for SOCOM and \$100 billion for the 550 requested by the Marines. Navy SEALs need submarines that permit their combat teams to enter enemy waters covertly, enter their ship-to-shore vehicles and mount an attack without the submarine having to surface. Army Rangers need such basic equipment as a new four wheel drive "all terrain" vehicle which outperforms, and is more readily transported, than the current "jeep." In addition, the number of special operation troops, especially those dedicated to "nation-building," such as civil affairs, psychological operations (90 percent of which are in the reserves), and Special Forces Groups (Green Berets) should be increased from approximately 20,000 active duty troops to 22,000 active duty troops. This would add enough troops for an additional special forces group and an additional battalion each for the civil affairs and psychological operations units. Their ability to sustain themselves in combat can be improved by increasing such logistical resources as the Joint Special Operations Stocks, which provide pre-packaged containers of rifles, grenades, ammunition, fuel and other supplies and equipment for special operations forces.

◆ ◆ Ensure that the State Department, Pentagon and other agencies represented in U.S. embassies cooperate on LIC issues.

Often, special representatives of the Pentagon, State Department, CIA and Defense Intelligence Agency at U.S. embassies fail to exchange information and coordinate efforts. This was the case, for example, during last December's "Operation Just Cause" in Panama, when the Pentagon's representatives in the U.S. Embassy in Panama City excluded the State Department staff at the embassy from planning because the State Department staff was not trusted. To correct this, the LIC "czar" on the NSC staff should be empowered to monitor cooperation among agencies responsible for interdicting drug couriers or fighting insurgents. Further, smaller federal agencies, such as FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, Customs Service, and Internal Revenue Service should be used more vigorously to support U.S. policy in combatting low-intensity conflicts, particularly in combatting drug traffic. Example: denying narco-traffickers access to bank accounts containing drug money. Finally, the NSC, as the lead agency for LIC, should mandate and oversee cooperation between these agencies, the Pentagon, and others that typically deal with LIC affairs.

**◆ ◆ Raise funding for manpower for intelligence activities in the Third World, and expand the range of U.S. intelligence activities.**

U.S. intelligence services need more resources to improve their capability to collect intelligence in the Third World. Bush, should ask Congress to increase funding for manpower and equipment and better training for intelligence agents.<sup>21</sup> He also should issue a Presidential Directive enabling the CIA to carry out – only with presidential and congressional authority – such rarely discussed but occasionally necessary paramilitary operations as killing or overthrowing foreign leaders who pose an extreme and direct security threat to the U.S.

## CONCLUSION

America is ill prepared to deal with the low-intensity conflict threats to its global interests. Civilian and military leaders remain wedded to a war-planning and policy world view focused on East-West conflict in Europe, even as the Soviet military threat declines. This has hindered America's ability to tailor its resources to combat the threats to its security from those low-intensity conflicts like insurgency, terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and other types of limited warfare.

Despite the gains of the past decade, deficiencies remain in how America approaches LIC. Successfully defeating LIC threats to American security requires a coordinated effort among a host of federal agencies, including the Departments of Defense, State, and Justice, and such smaller agencies as the CIA and the Drug Enforcement Agency. The most effective strategy for defeating insurgency threats is known as "nation-building," which addresses the underlying economic and political causes of low-intensity conflicts.

**Presidential Leadership.** To increase America's ability to fight and win low-intensity conflicts, George Bush's leadership and attention will be required. For a start, he should appoint a commission of "wisemen," with broad foreign policy experience, to reevaluate American strategy in the post-Cold War world and prepare the America to face future LICs. In addition, he should appoint a Special Assistant for Low-Intensity Conflict on the National Security Council staff as suggested by Congress in the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act.

Further, Bush should reinvigorate the Special Operations Advisory Board, which advises the Pentagon on LIC issues, and go to bat for higher budgets for the Special Operations Command, the unified military command responsible for carrying out such missions as hostage rescue, counter-terrorism, and sabotage. Bush also should instruct the Pentagon to improve training for special operations forces, particularly in foreign languages, and to purchase bet-

---

<sup>21</sup> The CIA should develop its own in-house paramilitary units to perform low-level armed operations.

ter specialized equipment for U.S. special operations forces, such as special patrol boats for high speed coastal raids by Navy SEALs. He should expand the manpower, equipment, and training available to the CIA and other intelligence services to improve their capability to collect information in the Third World. And he should direct greater CIA involvement in planning and carrying out LIC operations. This would permit the CIA's wide range of skills and political sensitivity, to quickly and accurately attack LIC problems.

**Meeting the Challenge.** America will continue to face severe challenges to its interests globally despite the improved relations with the Soviet Union. Most of these challenges will not be from large military forces, as those massed by Iraq on the Saudi border, but from low-intensity conflicts. America must be prepared to meet this LIC challenge. By defusing potential low-intensity conflicts before they break into armed warfare, and to meet them with military resistance if they do, America will not only protect its own interests, but enhance regional stability around the globe.

David Silverstein  
Policy Analyst

*All Heritage Foundation papers are now available electronically to subscribers of the "NEXIS" on-line data retrieval service. The Heritage Foundation's Reports (HFRPTS) can be found in the OMNI, CURRNT, NWLTRS, and GVT group files of the NEXIS library and in the GOVT and OMNI group files of the GOVNWS library.*