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**JOINT LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT PROJECT
FINAL REPORT**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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JOINT LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT PROJECT
FINAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Much has been written about low-intensity warfare, but it remains an open question how much is understood. Of greater certainty is the fact that little of what is understood has been applied effectively.

Caspar W. Weinberger
Secretary of Defense
14 January 1986

Low-intensity conflict is the prime challenge we will face, at least through the remainder of this century. The future of peace and freedom may well depend on how effectively we meet it.

George P. Shultz
Secretary of State
15 January 1986

GENERAL

This report addresses a major United States foreign policy and defense issue: how to defend threatened United States interests in conflict environments short of conventional war. Increasingly, our adversaries are confronting us with political violence short of conventional war to achieve their goals. If most forecasts are correct, this is precisely the form of conflict that will confront us in the years ahead.

Numerous senior leaders have expressed concern that we do not understand low-intensity conflict; that we are unable to fully use United States capabilities in this form of conflict; that we are not adequately organized to cope; and that our current efforts fall short of what is required for a prudent national defense. Paraphrasing former UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, we are engaged in a struggle against our will, a struggle for which we are perfectly ill-suited.

On 1 July 1985, the Army Chief of Staff directed the establishment of the Joint Low-Intensity Conflict Project to examine this issue. Although the project team was primarily military, it sought and received the support and participation of the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Central Intelligence Agency, and numerous organizations in and out of government. Two products resulted

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from this effort--the Joint Low-Intensity Conflict Project Final Report and the Joint Low-Intensity Conflict Project Resource Data Base. The latter is described in the preface to Volume I of the final report.

The organization of the report reflects the methodology used to address this complex issue. The initial chapters of Volume I (Chapters 1-3) describe the factors affecting this unique form of conflict: environment, threat, and current United States policy and strategy. Within that framework, current and historical operations were reviewed. That examination drove the development of operational concepts for the specific activities of insurgency/counterinsurgency, terrorism counteraction, peacetime contingency, and peace-keeping operations (Chapters 4-7). Those activities were analyzed in terms of eight critical functions, for example, development and tactical operations. Those functions are discussed in Chapters 8-15, and are the basis for identifying issues and developing recommendations. The functional issues were integrated to form the project's findings and conclusions (Chapter 16). Specific issue papers with recommendations comprise Volume II of the report. Findings focus on the civil-military nature of low-intensity conflict, as well as the military aspects of numerous issues.

Four themes prevail throughout the report: As a nation, we do not understand low-intensity conflict; we respond without unity of effort; we execute our activities poorly; and we lack the ability to sustain operations. The findings of the project are summarized within these themes.

UNDERSTANDING

Ironically, our concentration on the need to deter nuclear and conventional war has given rise to a lack of focus on low-intensity conflicts around the globe. Our adversaries have consciously turned to political violence to advance their political objectives.

Examining United States involvement in insurgency or other forms of conflict at the lower end of the conflict spectrum is often an exercise in ambiguity. The peculiar nature of low-intensity conflict, the diversity and murkiness of the individual and collective threats, the uncertainty as to our own role and purpose, and conflicting views and varied institutional interests create an atmosphere that encourages confusion and inaction at best, mistake and blunder at worst.

Many government departments and agencies of the United States fail to comprehend the nature of this type of conflict. They do not understand the special socioeconomic environment

in which it occurs; the strategy employed by our adversaries; the relationship of political violence to other forms of violence; and the futility of reacting with policy and instruments developed for other forms of conflict.

Among the factors contributing to this lack of understanding are our perceptions that the nation and the world are either at war or at peace, with the latter being the normal state; and the existence of a well-resourced campaign by our adversaries to create and support misunderstanding of the means and ends of this confrontation. However, the greatest obstacle to an institutionalized understanding is our tendency to think and act in a manner appropriate to more traditional forms of conflict. We attempt to make the various forms of low-intensity conflict fit the same successful prescriptions we use to deter conventional and nuclear war. Our reliance upon these traditional structures and solutions impedes the development of specific policies and policy instruments.

How does one begin to bring understanding to this complex issue? Where does one start? How, in a world that is crowded with demands on our limited personal and national resources, a world of rival priorities, does one strike the balance that will provide the requisite defense? One of the project's major goals was to demonstrate that this ambiguous form of warfare can, in fact, be understood. It began by tackling the contentious issue of defining the term "low-intensity conflict."

During the conduct of the project, JCS approved the following definition. While the definition does not specifically mention military objectives, it does provide a foundation to focus on both civil and military activities, to include the employment of special forces and tailored conventional forces in low-intensity conflict.

Low-intensity conflict is a limited politico-military struggle to achieve political, social, economic, or psychological objectives. It is often protracted and ranges from diplomatic, economic, and psychosocial pressures through terrorism and insurgency. Low-intensity conflict is generally confined to a geographic area and is often characterized by constraints on the weaponry, tactics, and level of violence.

Low-intensity conflict is not an operation or an activity that one or more of the departments of the United States government can conduct. Rather, it is, first, an environment in which conflict occurs and, second, a series of diverse civil-military activities and operations which are conducted in that environment. While low-intensity conflict may be ambiguous,

the specific activities are not. Despite their diversity, these activities, which fall outside the realm of conventional combat, share significant commonalities in their operational environment.

The project found that the low-intensity conflict activities could be identified and grouped into four distinct categories: insurgency/counterinsurgency, terrorism counteraction, peacetime contingency, and peacekeeping operations. Through these activities the United States can provide the following capabilities: diplomatic, economic, and military support for either a government under attack by insurgents or an insurgent force seeking freedom from an adversary government; in cooperation with our allies, protection of personnel, property, and institutions from terrorism; military presence, humanitarian assistance, noncombatant emergency evacuation, limited strike, and similar operations; and support or participation in peacekeeping operations.

The report provides the basis for responding to various threats by detailing how the above categories of activity, as well as their subordinate functions (for example, command and control and intelligence), ought to be accomplished. What is significant to note here is that the specific categories and functions can be identified and conceptually developed to provide the United States government the capability to defend interests threatened by this political violence.

This is only a beginning. Achieving full understanding requires serious and continuous evaluation of the peculiarities of the concepts and of each separate involvement. It requires sensitivity to both the political and military nature of the question. It also needs to incorporate the influence of the domestic environment--United States public opinion and institutional orientation, role, and capability--and it must consider the role of a variety of constraints.

In order to promote a broad understanding of the issues involved, a carefully created, sophisticated, and ongoing public diplomacy effort is necessary. The nature of the conflict is such that its principles are not often understood by the public or the agencies charged to deal with it. A sustained effort is needed to devise programs to teach what low-intensity conflict is all about.

UNITY OF EFFORT

Second only to our lack of understanding is our lack of unity in responding to the threats to our interests. Our adversaries combine a substantial collection of military, diplomatic, economic, and psychological forces to inspire

and support low-intensity conflict. Therefore, we must counter ideas with ideas, force with force, diplomacy with diplomacy, and all must flow from a strategy implemented through a strong national unity of effort. Nevertheless, a degree of unity exists only at the individual country level. At the national level and on a regional basis, unity is lacking.

Regional and national unity is dependent on clearly stated policy and well-established strategy. While there are policy documents, except for combating terrorism, such policy is certainly not well known. It is not fully implemented with requisite national strategy documents, and the respective roles and missions for the departments and agencies are not adequately understood. A national strategy must be explicit and be understood to unify the numerous activities required of diverse government departments and agencies that must deal with different aspects of this threat.

Such strategy, clearly detailed for traditional warfare, is conspicuously absent in our response to various low-intensity conflicts. Who, for example, is responsible for a national effort in Central America? Ambassadors of specific countries? The unified commander responsible for the land mass? The unified commander responsible for the islands and oceans? The regional Assistant Secretary of State? The ad hoc interdepartmental task force? The National Security Council? Our responses to this threat are often piecemeal, disjointed, short ranged, and focused on a single event as opposed to the larger whole.

Without national direction it is futile to expect unity of effort. Lack of unity at the national and regional levels hampers every effort to defend threatened interests in the low-intensity conflict environment. A strong, synchronized civil-military effort is essential. The debilitating results of its absence are far-reaching: insufficient overall direction; preeminence of ad hoc organizations and responses; poor interagency/interservice coordination; inappropriate support systems and materiel; complex and cumbersome regulatory systems; grave institutional resistance to change; few dedicated resources; peacetime-oriented security assistance programs; inadequate national and regional coordination; and lack of joint doctrine and training. In sum, legitimate and dedicated guidance and support for low-intensity conflict activities are needed.

A comprehensive civil-military strategy must be developed to defend our interests threatened by the series of low-intensity conflicts around the globe. It must be crafted in

comprehensive terms, not focused on a single conflict or on a single department. It must integrate all the national resources at our disposal, military and nonmilitary, lethal and nonlethal.

EXECUTION

Individual services and organizations lack procedures and doctrine to guide their efforts in the low-intensity conflict environment as tasked by the national command authority. Organizations and forces attempting to conduct such activities are left to modify a body of procedures developed for other types of conflict. Regardless of function (for example, logistics, intelligence, command and control), the operational experience of those tasked to conduct operations in the low-intensity conflict environment shows conclusively that existing doctrine is inadequate. More is needed than amending doctrine developed for other forms of conflict. The threat, the environment, and the required United States activities are often unique. Organizations operating in this environment need guiding principles and prescriptions.

Successful operations and activities have been conducted by the United States in various low-intensity conflicts. However, these limited successes are primarily the result of dedicated individuals and organizations achieving success not because of, but in spite of, the absence of a clearly defined low-intensity conflict strategy. While these successful efforts merit our highest commendation, they should not be construed as acceptable substitutes for institutionalized programs that are so desperately needed. The day of reckoning for American interests is at hand in the Philippines, in Central America, and in the Middle East; soon it may come in Southwest Asia.

Both joint and combined doctrine are necessary to efficiently employ and integrate our various policy instruments. This need is as great as, if not greater than, the acknowledged need for joint and combined doctrine for fighting conventional and nuclear war.

A closely related issue is the lack of training, organizations, and materiel specifically designed for low-intensity conflict operations. Doctrine normally drives the development of military training, force structure, and materiel. The focus of the report, then, is to provide the basis for that doctrine and to supplement it with numerous nondoctrinal fixes which are identified in the sections of Volume II (for example, replacing ad hoc organizations with institutionalized organizations; integrating communications among agencies and services; increasing human intelligence capability; enhancing special operations forces).

SUSTAINMENT

The final theme of the report addresses two forms of sustainment: physical and moral. Logistical and programmatic support is lacking for both United States forces conducting the various low-intensity conflict activities and for threatened allied third world organizations and governments.

One of the major difficulties the United States has in supporting third world forces, for example, is an equipment inventory that is ill-suited to the local government because it is too complex, too expensive, or inappropriate. Nowhere is this more evident than in the need for a simple reconnaissance air platform for counterinsurgency.

Often the primary United States role is providing support to an ally in his struggle. Since this means indirect United States involvement, it requires an effective program of assistance in the form of training, materiel, and other support. The unique requirements and the diversity of host governments and organizations require that a dedicated research, development, and acquisition (RDA) program be developed to enhance our assistance efforts. Failure to provide the requisite support increases the probability that combat forces will be needed to protect our threatened interests.

Current legislation greatly restricts our ability to effectively assist developing nations. Restrictions that require review include providing aid to nations which are in arrears in debts owed to the United States; assistance to indigenous police and internal security forces; and military authority to conduct civic action and humanitarian assistance programs.

Our forces are inadequately supported. Our RDA and sustainment efforts focus on supporting large combat formations on the battlefields of conventional and nuclear war. This is not wrong, but it is insufficient. A similar effort is required for low-intensity conflict.

In many cases, our whole sustainment philosophy of support needs to be reversed. Our logisticians, engineers, and medical personnel, for example, often become the nose, not the tail, of any direct United States involvement. Great ingenuity and nontraditional thinking are required to develop the doctrine and capability to "attack" with our traditional sustaining organizations.

Our involvements will often require perseverance and a long-term commitment. We must demonstrate to ourselves and to our allies the staying power to support those fighting for the very freedoms this nation was built upon and remains committed to

today. We should approach the task of helping others help themselves with enthusiasm, not hesitancy. In the final analysis, this nation's own freedoms, our very freedom of movement, depend upon a world that largely supports these goals. Our unwillingness to support others in their fight only causes us to live in an increasingly dangerous world, with fewer and fewer options to defend our own society.

SUMMARY

Low-intensity conflict is one of the most important challenges facing the United States. Our interests are being threatened with alarming frequency by various forms of political violence subsumed under the heading of low-intensity conflict. The national command authority will continue to task government departments and agencies to intervene, short of conventional or nuclear war, to protect those interests.

Our current defense posture reflects our inability to understand the form and substance of this direct challenge to our interests. Our lack of understanding is manifested in a lack of unity of effort; lack of doctrine, training, organizations, and materiel to execute operations; and lack of a sustaining support system. Short of war, we have no strategy or comprehensive plan to address the challenges of political violence.

After a recent department-level low-intensity warfare conference, a senior Central American military officer stated, "I hope I am incorrect in my assumption that, from what I've heard here today, the United States doesn't have a comprehensive strategic plan to deal with this threat that we confront today. If that is in fact the case...you don't have much time left." It is ironic that the essence of the problem can be so succinctly summarized by a foreign ally--an ally looking to the United States for help in combating insurgency and terrorism that threaten the survival of his country and our own national interests.

This report represents an initial effort at making a critical, civil-military analysis of our national capability to protect interests threatened by political violence associated with low-intensity conflict. It establishes a start point for the joint, combined, and multiagency approach necessary to understand and cope with this form of conflict. It was not designed to examine the range of government and national activity and to recommend those few relevant "fixes" that would settle this bothersome problem once and for all. As such, the project is not a blueprint but a dialogue. Its success cannot be measured by whether or not, as a single document, it tells us now and forever what to do. Although it contains over sixty specific recommendations on a range of issues, it is not the

final chapter. The effort to respond to this conflict cannot end with these pages. If the project invites enlightened debate, sustained concern, and serious effort then it will, in part, have succeeded. In this sense, the project is not a prescription but an invitation.

For more than thirty years our shortcomings in low-intensity conflict have persisted. We should not expect the findings of this ad hoc, short-term project to solve all our problems. But our chance at arriving at a practical answer that capitalizes upon our political and military assets is much greater now that we have demonstrated our will and our ability to directly address this difficult issue. Action must follow. We will need both the courage to depart from conventional institutional norms and the vision to maintain a pragmatic defense posture increasingly relevant to a world characterized by neither war nor peace.