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The Vietnam War profoundly conditioned the thinking of military and civilian leaders toward the use of force as an instrument of U.S. power in so-called Low Intensity Conflicts (LIC). The U.S. Congress and military establishment have in various ways sought to limit Presidential war powers to ensure that another Vietnam tragedy never happens again. In the process, however, authority over U.S. foreign policy has been seriously fragmented, and we have undermined our own credibility as a world power. Both the War Powers Resolution and the Weinberger doctrine directly undermine U.S. national security

interests. Dealing effectively with LICs requires that we maintain a credible deterrence across the entire spectrum of conflict, and do not publicly rule out the option of using military force as a last resort, that we restore an element of consensus in the foreign policy process, and that we allocate much greater resources to address LICs before they reach proportions that threaten our vital interests.

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MILITARY POWER AND LOW INTENSITY CONFLICTS-- CAN LICs BE LICKED WITHOUT THE USE OF THREAT OR FORCE?

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT
INTENDED FOR PUBLICATION
by

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ABSTRACT

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The Vietnam War profoundly conditioned the thinking of military and civilian leaders toward the use of force as an instrument of U.S. power in so-called Low Intensity Conflicts (LIC). The U.S. Congress and military establishment have in various ways sought to limit Presidential war powers to ensure that another Vietnam tragedy never happens again. In the process, however, authority over U.S. foreign policy has been seriously fragmented, and we have undermined our own credibility as a world power. Both the War Powers Resolution and the Weinberger doctrine directly undermine U.S. national security interests. Dealing effectively with LICs requires that we maintain a credible deterrence across the entire spectrum of conflict, and do not publicly rule out the option of using military force as a last resort, that we restore an element of consensus in the foreign policy process, and that we allocate much greater resources to address LICs before they reach proportions that threaten our vital interests.

LIMITS OF MILITARY POWER

A fundamental issue that U.S. political and military leaders have to grapple with when planning for how to deal with various Low Intensity Conflict (LIC)1 scenarios is the role and utility of military force as an instrument of power. Under what circumstances, short of protecting the survival of the U.S. and its allies against conventional and nuclear attack, should we engage in direct military intervention abroad to support our political interests? Have not the experiences of the U.S. in Vietnam, and the Soviet Union in Afghanistan clearly demonstrated that military intervention by a superpower is doomed to ultimate failure? Victory would appear virtually unattainable in insurgency/counterinsurgency environments where the superpower is restrained by domestic and international opinion from using maximum force and achieving quick victory, and where, in any event, military power of almost any intensity may prove futile against popular nationalist forces supported with arms from the outside. As Michael Handel has observed "... a rational cost-benefit type of analysis leads one to conclude that the days of direct use of power by the superpowers have almost come to an end."2

Indeed, we seem to have reached a point where successful use of force by the U.S. against a weaker state is limited to preemptive or retaliatory counter-terrorism operations (Libya), short, no risk, popular "quickies and cheapies" peace-time contingency operations where the outcome is a foregone conclusion and U.S. casualties are expected to be low (Grenada), and peace-keeping operations. The preferred approach for dealing with future counter-insurgency situations is to apply a combination of political, economic and indirect military instruments to boost the ability of local governments (or opposition groups, whichever we support) to themselves defend their cause without the need to engage U.S. forces (the Nixon doctrine.)

The traumatic Vietnam experience has conditioned to a great extent current thinking among civilian and military leaders toward the use of force. Congress and the military have sought in various ways to restrict Presidential war powers to ensure another Vietnam does not happen again. Congress, in addition to legislating on war powers, has inserted itself much more actively into the foreign policy process since Vietnam, with policy paralysis sometimes the result. The military, which ultimately pays the highest price for our military engagements, wants to rule out force by subjecting every potential military operation to a rigid test (the Weinberger doctrine.) The American public, it is widely assumed, would not tolerate sustained U.S. military

engagements entailing heavy losses of American lives.

IMPLICATIONS OF RELUCTANCE TO USE FORCE POSTURE

While considerable attention has been focused on what went wrong in Vietnam and why, and how to prevent something similar from occurring in the future, not nearly the same amount of attention has been devoted to analyzing what the implications are for the world community as a whole of a public U.S. posture excluding the use of force in certain LICs. It is worth considering at least the following questions:

(1) Can diplomacy not backed by strength be effective?

(2) How does declared unwillingness to apply force affect our alliance relationships, our credibility as a world power?

(3) Are we playing into the hands of the adversary and prolonging, perhaps even encouraging, conflicts rather than resolving them?

(4) What is the real public opinion on the use of force, and can Presidential leadership change, lead, shape such public attitudes?

(5) Is the indirect approach really more cost-effective than military intervention?

(6) Is the military preparing for the wrong war?

Before addressing these issues, a more detailed review of the three key initiatives designed to restrict Presidential powers to employ U.S. military forces overseas, is in order: the Nixon doctrine, the War Powers Resolution and the Weinberger doctrine.

1. The Nixon doctrine

This doctrine, spelled out by President Nixon in 1969, was a direct outgrowth of events in Vietnam. The doctrine established, in essence, that henceforth it would be up to the threatened friendly nation to bear the primary manpower burden for its own defense, with the United States playing a support role by furnishing the political, economic and military support necessary for the task. The thinking embodied in the doctrine reflected a sense that the failure in Vietnam was in large part a result of lack of will by the South Vietnamese themselves to win the war, and that absent such a will, there was little the United States could or should do by way of direct military involvement to win the war for them. The Nixon doctrine was put into practice in Vietnam through the "vietnamization" program, which in the end was not enough to repel the North Vietnamese onslaught. With the Vietnam experience behind us, the question

is under what circumstances can it cannot the Nixon doctrine work?

A serious assessment of the Nixon doctrine's chances to succeed in any one situation would require a thorough analysis of political, economic and social factors unique to each case. However, very generally, it would appear that some basic requirements are necessary for the doctrine to have any prospects for success.

o There must be indigenous military and civilian elements with real or potential strength and will to undertake the task of defending their own interests backed by U.S. indirect support. (The South Vietnamese had the military wherewithal but lacked the commitment, or the Vietcong's resolve was greater.)

o There must be enough time to train and equip indigenous forces to undertake the task of self-defense, or offense, whichever might be the case. If the enemy is about to wipe out the forces we support, indirect U.S. military aid may be too late. Ideally we anticipate the trouble ahead of time and prop up our allies before they face overwhelming odds. Historically, however, we have tended to ignore third world instability until it has reach proportions that we no longer can disregard (Central America.)

- There must be sustained U.S. political and ... support for not just military programs, but structural reforms that may take decades or more to complete. Since Third World revolutionary environments are usually products of pervasive economic, political and social injustices, the long-term solutions require nation-building more than military force. Congressional consensus to keep the funds flowing over long periods of time is a must for the self-help approach to work. (dependable with Israel and Egypt, erratic in Latin America.)

An ongoing test case of the Nixon doctrine at work is El Salvador, where for nine years the U.S. has supported with a combination of political, economic and military instruments, the democratically elected government's efforts to consolidate constitutional government against the armed resistance of a marxist/leninist guerrilla. The Salvadoran experiment has led to substantial progress in many areas thanks in large measure to the resilience of democratic forces, and U.S. Congressional consensus to maintain the support. However, the struggle to consolidate democracy is not over, and it could take several more generations before the democratic process in El Salvador can be declared irreversible. One of the consequences of the Nixon doctrine that is not always appreciated is the incompatibility between building up a large local military force while seeking to

bolster civilian authority and democratic rule. How to [illegible] powerful armed force while consolidating democratic governance is one of the major post-war challenges that a country like El Salvador faces.

2. The War Powers Resolution

An underlying assumption of Congress since Vietnam has been that future Presidents will commit the same errors as their predecessors unless restrained by law. Congressional concerns about the dangers and costs inherent in any direct U.S. military intervention abroad, led to the adoption in November 1973 of the War Powers Resolution.3 The resolution stipulates that the President must consult with Congress in "every possible instance" before introducing armed forces into "hostilities or into situations where imminent involvement in hostilities is clearly indicated by the circumstances." The President must submit within 48 hours to Congress a written report setting forth the "circumstances necessitating the introduction of U.S. forces, the constitutional and legislative authority under with the introduction took place, and the estimated scope and duration of the hostilities or involvement." The President is required to withdraw such troops within sixty to ninety days unless Congress authorizes their continued deployment. No other country has adopted legislation similar to the War Powers Resolution.

The constitutionality of the War Powers Resolution has been questioned. The Constitution is vague in assigning responsibility for war powers. Congress, on the one hand, has the power to declare war, while the President is designated Commander in Chief of the armed forces. Scenarios short of declared war are not addressed in the Constitution. Although every President since the Vietnam war has questioned the constitutionality of the War Powers resolution, no one has subjected it to a Supreme Court ruling. In fact, Presidents appear to have acknowledged the necessity of consulting with at least senior Congressional leaders before engaging U.S. forces, and have in several instances4 filed reports as called for in the War Powers Resolution. Since Vietnam, U.S. combat troops have not been engaged in actions lasting more than 90 days, and thus the provision mandating a withdrawal of troops after at the most 90 days, unless otherwise determined by Congress, has not been invoked.

3. The Weinberger Doctrine

Former Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger expressed the military viewpoint on the use of force in a now famous November 1984 speech to the National Press Club entitled "On the Use of Military Power."5 The speech, better known as the Weinberger doctrine, outlined the following six major criteria that would have to be met before the U.S. commits combat troops overseas:

o vital interests of the U.S. or its allies must be at stake

o we must be willing to commit enough forces to achieve our objectives

o we must have clearly defined political and military objectives

o we must subject our involvement to continuous reassessment

o prior to deployment of troops, there must be reasonable assurances of public support

o the use of combat power should be a last resort

Weinberger added, as if anticipating his critics, that the test should not be construed as an abdication of U.S. responsibilities to its own people or its allies, nor "as a signal that this country or this administration is unwilling to commit forces to combat overseas." The main purpose of the test, according to Weinberger, was be to prevent the U.S. from being gradually sucked into a combat role in places like Central America.

Strict adherence to the Weinberger criteria would [illegible] not only preclude U.S. military involvement in Central America but rule out large-scale military intervention altogether as a U.S. policy instrument for LIC. That in turn raises the question of why we should spend such enormous amounts of money on military forces, if they will never be used? Before elaborating on that and other implications of the doctrine, let us go over point by point the six criteria.

a. Vital interest

It is unclear what exactly is meant by vital interest in the doctrine, and who defines those interests. Do vital interests equal survival interests or are they lower on the scale? National security interests are often defined as survival, vital, major or peripheral, with the assumption that survival interests will a priori be defended by military force, whereas vital interests may or may not. Most would agree on the survival interests, but the vital ones? Tough to do. Some people are isolationists, others are interventionists. Is Weinberger suggesting we have too many vital interests, or perhaps the wrong ones? What about Vietnam?

In the beginning of the Vietnam war both political and military leaders agreed it was a vital national security interest to save Vietnam from communism. Did Vietnam cease to be a vital

interest when things turned sour, or was it not a vital interest to begin with? Or was it vital, but not vital enough to justify such enormous U.S. casualties? Since both civilian and military leaders agreed at the time that Vietnam was vital, how could a doctrine requiring only vital interests to be defended militarily have prevented Vietnam? It could not have. What about the future? Unlikely. Who in their right mind would commit U.S. forces on a large scale without considering it a vital interest? Unless Weinberger can convince the body politic of a universally acceptable definition of "vital", it will remain a political judgment call that he and the military may or may not agree with.

Was liberating Grenada and rescuing our students by military force "vital interests at stake", or a politically expedient "quicky and cheapy," or maybe both? If Central America, in Weinberger's view is not of sufficient national security importance to ever warrant direct U.S. military intervention, how could Grenada, which Weinberger and the military supported, possibly have qualified? The civilian side has been more consistent in arguing Grenada was a vital interest, and not categorically ruling out military intervention in Central America.

Perhaps the relevant issue is not whether Vietnam or Grenada were of vital national security interest or not, but how do we

pursue most effectively our interests in different parts of the world to avoid having to resort to military force? El Salvador, for example, does not necessarily drop from vital to peripheral just because we do not send our troops there. Instead we have learned, undoubtedly in large part because of Vietnam, that the indirect approach might offer better prospect for success than U.S. force. (This does not mean we should go along with Weinberger and rule out forever the military option should the indirect approach not work.) No one wants another Vietnam. But instead of arguing what is vital interest, which will always be debatable, a more constructive approach is to focus on improving our non-military techniques to address LICs so that large-scale military force is no longer NEEDED.

b. Enough forces to achieve objectives

Who decides and how do you figure out in advance just how much force is "enough" to accomplish the task? Civilians, who control the purse strings would be inclined to keep costs down and commit just enough resources to get the job done. In addition, civilians, for political reasons, often want to decide what type of weaponry to be used and what targets to strike. It is this civilian "interference" in the war itself, that the military is blaming for the failure of Vietnam. The military as the fighting force interested in quick victory and minimal casualties, wants as unrestricted access to manpower and

equipment as possible, and to essentially be in charge of how the war is fought once the political leadership has given the go ahead. Although the military should be given the assets to maximize chances of quick accomplishment of goals, what the military believes is operationally necessary and what the civilians think is politically and economically feasible is never the same, as Vietnam illustrated. In their book "The Irony of Vietnam, the System Worked," Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts review some of the difficulties that Presidents encountered in trying to cope with the trade-offs between the "minimum necessary" and the "maximum feasible" in Vietnam.6 What is "enough forces" cannot be unambiguously established in many cases and any LIC could flunk the Weinberger test on this basis.

c. Clearly defined objectives

Yes, we should have clearly defined political and military objectives, but again, what does that really mean, and clear in whose opinion? Does our political system allow for clear objectives given the lack in recent years of consensus on foreign policy? The President may have one set of objectives that might be very clear, but he may be undercut by Congress with a different set of equally clear but different objectives. Those opposed to military intervention could always argue that the objectives are unclear, those in favor would argue the

opposite. What is to say? Is our decision-making process so perfect that it can always produce clear objectives? And are crises always perfectly predictable so that you can just sit down and write crystal clear objectives that everyone interprets in the same way? The real world is imperfect and does not always produce clarity in goals. The third world, in particular, is filled with contradictions and uncertainty and objectives have to be continuously adjusted. The military does not like all this uncertainty which rattles their traditional view on war and conflict, or to quote General Galvin on military attitudes toward LIC: "Military men, however, feel uncomfortable with warfare's societal dimension and tend to ignore its implications. Societies are hard to understand -- let alone predict -- and difficult to control. Conflict on this plane does not fit our current beliefs about military success or failure; therefore, it is not a subject that we are, for the most part, anxious to pursue." 7

d. Reassess involvement

This is another fuzzy criteria that could be endlessly debated. What does "continuous reassessment of involvement" mean? Does it suggest that if things do not go well, we withdraw, we add forces, we change tactics, what? Of course we should continuously reassess our involvement, but at the same time does it not put into question our commitment to begin with

if we continuously must reassess? What signals does this send to friends and foes? Although Weinberger does not directly say so, there is an underlying notion here that success is necessary for continued U.S. involvement, and that we are not prepared to sacrifice in the short term for long term gains. The next question then is what is success, how much is needed for us to stay in etc.? We get into more and more obscure territory.

e. Reasonable assurances of public support

Can one reasonably assure oneself of public support for military intervention, and how do you go about maintaining support for a prolonged military commitment? Who defines "reasonable assurances?" Some would argue in the wake of Vietnam that prolonged U.S. military intervention abroad is impossible because the American public would not stand for it. If this is true, does it follow that we should never intervene unless the operation is guaranteed to be very short and successful? If the President deems it in the national interest to engage U.S. combat forces knowing that the involvement may be prolonged, should he abstain from engagement anticipating public opposition, or engage in the hope of being able to mobilize public support later? The issue of public support and its role in decision making is discussed at greater length in a separate section. It is enough to note here that "reasonable assurances of public support,"

like the rest of Weinberger's criteria is subject to a wide range of interpretations.

f. Combat force as last resort

Although most people would certainly agree that military force should be used only as a last resort, this criteria in reality is no more clear than the others. Who decides when all diplomatic and other peaceful avenues have been fully exhausted? It seems that one could always make the case that there are more non-military options that could be tried out. Like "vital interest", "last resort" is a judgment call based on political perception and does not lend itself to universal definition.

If you adhere strictly to the Weinberger criteria it is hard to envision any LIC that would pass every or any criteria of the test. The doctrine fails to provide any realistic guidance for any of its criteria. If abiding by the doctrine therefore eliminates the use of military force in all but quick and cheap scenarios, how can the military justify the current levels of defense expenditures, including those allocated to beef up the capabilities to combat low intensity conflicts? Why spend the money if the forces are never to be used? Would it not then be far more cost-effective to transfer funds from the defense budget to economic development and other non-military nation-building programs? This type of reasoning is likely not to get

much support in the Pentagon, but it is actually a logical conclusion of what the Weinberger doctrine is advocating.

Let us now look at some of the broader implications of the Nixon doctrine, the War Powers Resolution and the Weinberger doctrine on U.S. ability to effectively pursue its national security interests.

DIPLOMACY WITHOUT STRENGTH?

Because the U.S. is a global power (despite what the analysis so far might suggest), whether and when it gets involved militarily in another country or region has profound implications for world peace and stability. A key question is whether the U.S. can conduct effective diplomacy (and thus retain its influence as a great power) if it signals a growing reluctance to resort to force to protect its interests? At issue is not whether the U.S. actually uses force, but the intent that it conveys to the rest of the world, and how that is interpreted. Perception could be more important than reality.

Former Secretary of State George Shultz in reacting to the Weinberger doctrine, argued that U.S. diplomacy not backed by a credible military threat is ineffective. In a December 1984 speech at Yeshiva University in New York8, Shultz parted company

with Weinberger by contending that military power and diplomacy are inexorably intertwined and that "diplomacy not backed by strength will always be ineffective at best, dangerous at worse." Viewing diplomacy and power as alternatives, Shultz observed, reflects a fundamental misunderstanding, since "...power and diplomacy must always go together."

In Shultz's opinion, the U.S. is a great power responsible not only for its own survival, but for the protection of international peace, and it "cannot free itself so easily from the burden of choice," i.e. the use of force. "It must bear responsibility for the consequences of its inaction as well as for the consequences of its action." Statesmanship is the moral strength to act in difficult situations, Shultz stated. He gave three circumstances when the use of military force is legitimate on moral grounds:

(1) when it is applied "to help liberate a people or support the yearning for freedom"

(2) when it "prevents others from abusing their power through aggression or oppression", and

(3) when applied "with the greatest efforts to avoid unnecessary casualties and with a conscience troubled by the pain unavoidably

inflicted."

Although agreeing with Weinberger that force should be a last resort and that the military, once engaged, should be given adequate resources to achieve the objective, Shultz's view of the legitimacy of force and "last resort" is clearly vastly different from that expressed by Weinberger. The thinking of the two flow from entirely different philosophical outlooks. Shultz is motivated by a sense of idealism and obligation to assist people struggling for the same values that we stand for. Weinberger comes across as a harsh realist and a "we will make mistakes, therefore we must avoid actions" mentality. Weinberger is preoccupied with domestic and Shultz with foreign considerations. The implications of the two viewpoints are also vastly different. Shultz's view aims as retaining U.S. leadership and influence in the world, Weinberger's to a contraction in U.S. power.

The implications of the Weinberger and Shultz positions are summarized in the following table:

	WEINBERGER	SHULTZ
"philosophical" assumption	realism pessimism	idealism optimism
domestic versus foreign policy	primacy of domestic policy	primacy of foreign policy
strategy/ psychology	caution, success, minimum action, passive	accept calculated risk, lead, active
isolationist/ interventionist	minimize involvement in world affairs	maintain or expand U.S. role
CONSEQUENCES	"contraction" loss of influence	retain leadership and influence
Allies	minimize commitments	commitments to other nations U.S. dependable ally
Adversaries	lower deterrence invites enemy to test U.S. resolve	higher deterrence puts enemy on notice

VIEWS ON FORCE AS A FUNCTION OF BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS

The Weinberger and Shultz positions highlight traditional differences between civilian policy-makers and military leaders on the application of force. Views on force are basically functions of bureaucratic politics, as Richard Betts has demonstrated in his study on the nature and influence of military advise on the use of force since the Cold War. Betts concludes that military leaders have tended to be less prone than their civilian counterparts to recommend the use of force in resolving crisis.9 However, once forces have been committed, the military is more inclined to support a build-up than are the civilians. Betts notes that "...military professionals rarely have dominated decisions on the use of force"10, and that "military advise has been most persuasive as a veto of use of force and least potent when it favored force."11

The Weinberger doctrine should be viewed both in the context of Vietnam (where in fact the military was more aggressive throughout in favoring force than civilians), and a longstanding tradition to be somewhat less prone than civilians to intervene militarily abroad. Betts touches on some of the factors that produce distinctly different civilian and military perspectives on force. Soldiers are the ones who have to fight and die. They acknowledge the authority of civilians to decide

whether to intervene, but believe how to fight should be left to the military to decide. Operational planning necessitates as much advance notice as possible before military action commences. The military views itself as professional and objective, whereas civilians are regarded as incompetent amateurs in authority. The military is more concerned about enemy capabilities than intentions. Either there should be a massive commitment to win, or no military action.

Vietnam capped military frustrations with civilian leadership. Although the military is willing to concede to some tactical and operational mistakes in Vietnam, the outcome of the conflict is generally blamed on civilian, not military, ineptitude. The military community attributes the Vietnam failure primarily to a lack of clear strategic vision by Washington policy-makers and numerous civilian-imposed restrictions that tied the hands of the armed forces and prevented them from effectively executing the war. Looked at in this light, the Weinberger doctrine is a manifestation of deep-seated military distrust in civilian judgment, and a legitimate effort to prevent past civilian mistakes from being committed again.

However, as a guide for the future the doctrine fails because its criteria are hopelessly unworkable and the doctrine as a whole, by creating at least a perception of an unwillingness to back up commitments by armed force, invites rather than

discourages adversaries [illegible] our resolve. There is a conspicuous absence in the doctrine of any criteria that the military would have to subject itself prior to going into future conflicts, i.e. how such conflicts should be fought to win. In all fairness, one might have added for instance: a clear understanding in the armed forces of the nature of counter-insurgency warfare and how to conduct it. The military should not get away with placing all the blame for Vietnam on the civilians. There is enough blame to go around for everyone. An unconventional war was fought conventionally and that was surely part, if not all, of the problem. Moreover, most of the restrictions placed on the military were removed at the later stages of the war. Maybe what Weinberger is really saying is that the military does not want to fight wars it does not know how to win.

Diplomats are driven by different considerations than soldiers. They want to maximize flexibility and choices. Conflict resolution is pursued through negotiation, military threats, or what is also called coercive diplomacy, are needed to back up diplomacy, and decisions on force are ideally avoided until the last minute. The strategy of coercive diplomacy, according to Alexander George "focusses upon affecting the enemy's will rather than on negating his capabilities," and "has a signalling, bargaining, negotiating character that is built into the conceptualization and conduct of military operations, a

feature that is absent in the traditional military strategy."12

Diplomats seek instinctively to avoid committing the government to force before other options have been considered, even when force is the likely final outcome. Military and diplomatic planning are inherently different, Betts points out, with the latter being more "ambiguous, inconstant and uncertain"13. From a diplomat's perspective, therefore, an initiative such as the Weinberger doctrine, in its efforts to apply such subjective and variable concepts as "vital interest", "enough forces to win", "clearly defined political/military objectives", "reasonable assurance of public support", run counter to the essence of diplomacy which relies on maximum flexibility in responding to constantly changing international challenges and circumstances. In other words, the doctrine represents a parochial, and domestically driven military view on force, but fails to adequately grasp broader U.S. national security considerations that must guide our foreign policy, and does not comprehend the dynamic nature of low intensity conflict. If the military does not know how to fight unconventional warfare it should learn.

U.S. CREDIBILITY AS A GLOBAL POWER AND WITH OUR ALLIES

Since the U.S. derives its global influence in large measure from its military might, it follows that when and how we use our

military force will influence our credibility as a world power. Presumably, if we declared we will never employ force, and were believed, we would lose both influence and credibility. Handel argues that for a superpower "... in the modern world, the safest, least costly, and most rational way to maximize power is by conserving it."14 That is true. However, there is no contradiction between using military force sparingly and yet be WILLING to threaten to use it extensively IF NECESSARY. The problem with the Weinberger doctrine and War Powers Resolution, is that they, in seeking to reduce the use of force, send a confusing message to the rest of the world about U.S. willingness to use force to protect our own and our allies' interests. Since our credibility rests to a great extent, not on actual use of force, but on the threat of using it, the Weinberger doctrine and War Powers Act actually undermine U.S. credibility, and encourage rather than discourage conflicts. Paradoxically, the demonstration of readiness to use force may prevent the need to do so. Also, at times if you are not ready to protect (at a lower cost) less than vital interests, you may give the impression that you might not defend the vital ones.

The message to our allies must be particularly troubling. Questions that any ally must ask itself is whether the U.S. can be counted upon to fulfill its alliance obligations if they involve force, and who is really calling the shots in the U.S. on employing military forces: The President? The Secretary of

Defense? The Secretary of State? Congress? The American public? To a foreign government counting on U.S. military intervention on its behalf, the mixed signals sent by different branches of the U.S. government must be unsettling to say the least. Reliability and predictability are the essence of strong alliances. Uncertainty as to the resolve of an ally can be extremely destabilizing, as the ally begins to search for other alternatives to protect its interests.

It is perhaps at the lower end of the spectrum of conflict where U.S. signalling is most confusing. Where our survival interests are at stake, we will presumably not hesitate to employ military force of any intensity, and we go on record stating so. But below the level of survival interest, we seem to have "vital" interests that we may or may not defend by force, and "vital,vital" interests that we will defend by force. Is Central America just "vital" or "vital,vital?" When you do not have to or cannot fight over vital interests (e.g. Nato central front or nuclear war) secondary interests which can be challenged actually become the vital ones! If the situation suddenly deteriorated significantly in El Salvador, would we intervene militarily? A typical diplomatic response might be that our actions would have to depend on the circumstances at the time, but we could not entirely rule out some form of direct U.S. military action. This is not a very satisfactory answer to the military which wonders if the civilian political leadership cannot agree on what

is worth defending by force [illegible] they expect the [illegible] to plan for the right wars? Yes, in LIC environments such an answer is the only appropriate one. El Salvador may actually be a secondary interest, but if we fail there, revolutionaries in Mexico, Nicaragua and elsewhere will conclude that we are impotent and eventually our vital interests will be undermined. Sometimes the well-being of our vital interests is a function of how we handle our lesser interests.

U.S. interests are often best served by leaving our position on force ambiguous in LICs. Thomas C. Schelling calls it "the threat that leaves something to chance" which means "I may or may not (use force), and even I can't be altogether sure."15 Schelling's argument is that crises are inherently unpredictable and there is always an uncontrolled element. "A government never knows just how committed it is to action until the occasion when its commitment is challenged. Nations, like people, are continually engaged in demonstrations of resolve, tests of nerve, and explorations for understandings and misunderstandings."16

Thus, in the same way that we should not declare, like Weinberger, that force will not be used unless the situation passes a particular test, our interests are not always served by publicly announcing that we will definitively resort to force in a LIC. In fact, to use El Salvador again as an example, we may be best served by deliberate ambiguity, leaving the government

in doubt about whether we might eventually step in (thus encouraging a more vigorous effort by local forces), yet send a different signal to the leftist guerrillas that we might indeed intervene (even though we may not) should other means to end the war fail.

Gelb concludes that "The need for pragmatism more than doctrines, formulas, and ideologies is the basic lesson of the Vietnam War."17 He borrows the following quote by Stanley Hoffman to illustrate the point: "The tendency to analyze issues in terms of set formulas or analogies instead of tackling them on their merits encourages the continuance of policies long after they have outlived their usefulness, and then a rather abrupt dismissal of them once their counter-productiveness has become damaging (at which point they are replaced with new dogmas that have the same effect); hence the alternation of rigidity and radical change noted by observers." 18

RULING OUT FORCE - AIDING THE ENEMY?

What does it tell our opponents when the Secretary of Defense of the U.S. goes on record as all but striking from the repertoire of U.S. responses, direct military action? Hopefully, it does not suggest a weakening resolve to defend our survival and most vital interests. But it might be more damaging to our interests in the protracted LIC conflicts we confront in the

Third World. We know from captured guerrilla documents in El Salvador that the level of U.S. commitment to the democratic process is a major guerrilla preoccupation and is constantly analyzed as part of long-term guerrilla strategy. Any sign of weakened U.S. resolve reinforces guerrilla hopes of eventual victory if they can only hang in there longer than we. And any chance is taken by the guerrilla to further fuel to its advantage whatever divisiveness that may exist between Congress and the Administration. A similar situation applies to the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. Because of cases like El Salvador and Nicaragua, pronouncements such as the Weinberger doctrine are irresponsible. They send the wrong signal and are self-defeating. What we need is a credible threat across the entire spectrum of conflict. Our adversaries should be left either certain that we will strike, or in doubt about our intent. Any decision not to employ force should be kept to ourselves. That is also the conclusion of the Working Group on Regional Conflicts chaired by General (ret) Paul Gorman. The group stated in a June 1988 report to the Commission on Integrated Long-term Strategy that: "declaratory policies of 'no use' or 'never' could have the effect of lowering deterrence, of inviting would-be attackers to believe that no matter what they did, the United States would not act militarily against them."19 Perhaps if the US appeared more ready to use force than it really is, it might need to do so less often.

PUBLIC OPINION ON FORCE AND A LEADER'S RESPONSIBILITY

What is public opinion on the use of force, and to what extent should the policy-makers be guided by public opinion in decisions on the use of military force? It is quite obvious that the American public would not accept another foreign intervention like Vietnam. But judging from the favorable public reaction to for example the 1983 Grenada invasion and the 1986 air attack on Libya, rescuing American citizens and preemptive strikes against terrorists appear to be within the limits of the acceptable. (The 1983 marine expedition to Lebanon, for obvious reasons, came under great criticism.) It seems the American people is not against the use of force per se, but will support military action as long as the operation is short, successful, supports a "popular" cause, and entails limited American casualties. In the more protracted counter-insurgency situations, what this suggests is that public opinion would at the most accept short, surgical U.S. strike operations to support the main effort undertaken by local forces. From the enemy's perspective this requires a strategy to show engagement will be so costly for us that we must refrain.

But should the U.S. apply military force only when there are "reasonable assurances of public support", as Weinberger suggests? Do we have to take a poll in advance to find out how the public is likely to react? What if the poll indicates little

public support, but the question is still [illegible] the political decisionmakers for U.S. national security interests? The issue ultimately is a moral one: should an elected official do what he/she believes is right, or what he/she thinks the public wants? One could argue, that in a democratic system, the ultimate judge is in any event the people who can vote out its leaders if they exceed what the public believes is right.

The problem of relying on public opinion to the degree of actually making a military action contingent on public support, is that the vast majority of the American public have little interest in foreign affairs, and indeed display enormous ignorance on the subject. According to polls, large numbers of Americans cannot place Central America in relation to the United States, and believe the Nicaraguan contras are fighting in the Middle East. Is ignorance a responsible basis for formulating foreign policy?

Attention has been focussed for example on the odd fact that, according to polls, the American public, has been strongly supportive of U.S. aid to the mudjaheddin rebels in Afghanistan while showing no such sympathy for the contras in Nicaragua, i.e. the public seems to say it is OK to help fight repressive communism in far away Afghanistan, but not in our own back yard. Is this the media's "fault" or a public diplomacy failure by the

White House and State Department, or both? How to effectively mobilize public opinion? Shultz and many others have recognized the importance of explaining more clearly and coherently U.S. foreign policy objectives to the American public. The ability to articulate persuasively to the American public and to Congress foreign policy objectives, has always been one of the most essential skills of an effective diplomat. Despite the President himself taking the lead on the contra issue, the public remained unconvinced. (In reality, the public is probably more sympathetic toward the Afghan situation because we are not directly involved, there is no fear of escalation like in Latin America, it is relatively cheap, and there is no anti-Afghanistan lobby.)

Hans Morgenthau, in "Politics Among Nations" argues that public opinion should never determine foreign policy. He says "the rational requirements of good foreign policy cannot from the outset count upon the support of public opinion whose preferences are emotional rather than rational."20 The popular mind will sacrifice long-term benefits for apparent short-term advantages, but governments "must resist the temptation to sacrifice what it considers good policy upon the altar of public opinion, abdicating leadership and exchanging short-lived political advantage for the permanent interests of the country."21. Morgenthau's prescription for governments is to a) recognize that the conflict between good foreign policy and public opinion is

unavoidable and can never be fully bridged by [illegible] domestic opposition, b) realize that the government is the leader and not the slave of public opinion and has a responsibility in shaping it, and c) distinguish between what is vital and merely essential in foreign policy and "fight even at the risk of its own good fortunes for the irreducible minimum of good foreign policy."22 Morgenthau concludes that the statesman "is allowed neither to surrender to popular passions nor disregard them. He must strike a prudent balance between adapting himself to them and marshaling them to the support of his policies. In one word, he must lead."23

COST EFFECTIVENESS

It has been argued by Handel among others, that one reason military force is no longer rational for a superpower to use in combatting LICs is because of the costliness in terms of human lives and dollars, and that therefore the indirect approach is preferable24. One could, of course, argue that maybe Vietnam and Afghanistan could have been both cost-effective and winnable had it not been for the inability of the U.S. and USSR to conduct unconventional warfare. As matters turned out, the two adventures indeed demonstrated the costly nature of superpower military intervention in protracted warfare. It does not follow, however, that the indirect method is any less expensive, other than in transferring human casualties to the indigenous forces.

In the short and long term which approach is more cost effective? The most expensive venture in the short to medium term would seem to be a protracted military intervention that fails, like Vietnam. In the long run of course, it might be cheap since the other side has to pick up the tab. Nation-building can be costly over a long period of time, especially if the process is constantly disrupted by an insurgent force (the destruction of economic infrastructure by the FMLN guerrilla in El Salvador roughly equals all U.S. economic assistance to that country in the past five years!) If the nation-building process succeeds to gradually undermine the support base for an insurgency, and leads to permanent peace on acceptable terms, long-term costs should go down. The most cost-effective in the short and long-term might be to strike militarily at an insurgency to cripple it sufficiently (assuming we know how) so that the nation-building process can proceed more uninterrupted. There are no cheap short-term solutions other than to ignore the problem, and that in turn, almost guarantees a bigger headache and a more expensive cure later on.

El Salvador illustrates the cost dilemma. In the past nine years the U.S. government has provided about 3 billion dollars in economic and military assistance to finance the government's struggle against the FMLN guerrilla. What have we received in return for this money? Critics would argue that the war has not

[illegible] reemerging, and despite U.S. efforts to promote a [illegible] center, the extreme right won the March 20, 1988 Presidential elections. The truth is of course, that U.S. efforts to address simultaneously the root social causes of the civil war (economic inequity, human rights etc.) and help the Salvadoran military defeat the guerrilla, have produced remarkable results. The democratic process has been strengthened through five open elections since 1982, the military is beginning to accept the concept of civilian rule, and human rights violations tied to the government have shown a dramatic drop. Perhaps the best indication that the overall trend is positive, is the guerrillas' recent intensified efforts to offer a political settlement. The point is, however, that despite an enormous influx of U.S. money, the El Salvador "problem" has not gone away, and may not go away for several more generations.

One of the lessons from El Salvador is that if U.S. military intervention does not work neither does necessarily the indirect approach, and to the extent that it works, it is an agonizingly slow and expensive process. The lack of instant return for their money is hard for many Americans to accept. Thus, although Congress so far has been fairly united behind our efforts in El Salvador, a rare phenomenon these days, a sense of fatigue is beginning to set in. There could be increased pressures for a negotiated settlement that may not adequately protect the

democratic process in the long run but would only [illegible] problems into the future. It is also too early to gauge the performance of the newly elected Cristiani government, but any significant increase in right-wing human rights abuses would certainly trigger initiatives in Congress to reduce U.S. assistance. A reduction in aid would in turn play directly into the hands of the guerrillas whom we want to defeat. It is no simple matter to keep all of our objectives moving in the right direction at the same time. Maybe we set for ourselves impossible goals.

This is not to suggest that direct military intervention in El Salvador was or is the solution. The point is merely that in the same way that military intervention has its limits, there is a limit to what money and Nixon doctrine can buy, and no one, least of all the American public should be led to believe that the "nation-building" approach is cheap or easy. It is precisely because it is so expensive and frustrating that it is so difficult to sustain. And without sustainment, we lose the LIC irrespective of which approach we apply. Then what is more cost-effective? Moreover, the indirect approach has at least as great potential as direct military intervention to divide our political leadership and American public. The on-again-off-again support to the Nicaraguan contras illustrates that just because we refrain from military intervention does not mean we have greater political consensus. And if there is no public support

for armed intervention. We should not assume greater public support for the long-term financial commitment that indirect support entails. In either case, policy-makers have a formidable public relations task on their hands. In the end, the most cost-effective tool in LIC would probably be covert operations, if it was not for the legal and moral obstacles that we have placed in their way.

MILITARY PLANNING FOR WRONG WAR?

How does the military view the use of force in LICs and how does this affect their planning and doctrine? In it efforts to restrict civilian leadership on the use of force, the Weinberger doctrine appears to accurately reflect the thinking of the current senior officer corps, many of whom fought in Vietnam. Because of its experience, this generation of officers is understandably extra sensitive to the issue of military force, and is probably more suspicious, even resentful toward civilian policy-makers than previous generations. This is reflected in the way in which the military has approached doctrine and operational planning for LIC.

To a civilian, military attitudes and planning for LIC are filled with contradictions. While virtually everyone agrees that we are more likely to be engaged in LIC warfare than conventional or nuclear war, the military continues to be

focussed on the "Big War" and "LIEers" specializing in [illegible] areas as intelligence, psychological operations and civic [illegible] are held in lower esteem than "combatants." There are no Pattons or Rommels in LIC. LIC is a buzz word. Conventional war is more fun. Military planning and procurement is mainly for a war on the Central front in Europe that will never happen. General Galvin describes the military view on LIC in unflattering terms: "Surrogate wars, general violence, subversive activity, multiplication of small wars, widespread training of terrorists- each of these has intruded on our vision of war. As they have become more noticeable, however, we have tended to view them as being on the periphery of warfighting, at the limits of our set of beliefs about the nature of conflicts. They do not fit into our image of war, so we search for ways to categorize and then dismiss or relegate them to theoretical pigeonholes where they can be dealt with, hopefully by someone else, while we fight the main battles."25

Depending on who one talks to, the U.S. may or may not have an unconventional warfighting capability superior to that displayed in Vietnam. To complicate matters further, some military LIC authorities26 argue that a conflict automatically becomes mid-intensity and conventional when U.S. combat forces are introduced, thus excluding for example Vietnam and Grenada from the LIC category. But was it not precisely because we dealt with Vietnam as a conventional conflict that things did not work?

The issue of to what extent and in what particular [illegible] of direct U.S. combat power should be covered is [illegible] subject to a debate in the military community, with some arguing that LIC doctrine must deal more comprehensively with such scenarios, while others contend conventional war doctrine is adequate for this purpose.

The military has focussed a great deal on "institutionalizing" LIC by creating a bureaucratic infrastructure in the Department of Defense to perform liaison with the State Department and the newly created NSC office on LIC matters. There is a need for more LIC advocates in the bureaucracy, but there is also a risk of unnecessary bureaucratization. One can create all the bureaucracies one wants and coordinate endlessly between them, but nothing much will change unless attitudes and priorities change. It is indicative of current U.S. priorities that one of the world's leading LIC victims, Latin America, receives less than 4 percent of our global security assistance allocations.

CONCLUSIONS

What does all of this mean in terms of our capabilities to deal effectively with LICs? The War Powers Resolution and the Weinberger Doctrine are genuine expressions by important segments of society that we have not applied force with sufficient caution

and skill in the past, causing traumatic experiences [illegible] Vietnam. We cannot dismiss these expressions of concern. We in dealing with future conflicts, we need to maintain credibility, be able to back up our diplomacy with strength to deal with LICs. That requires at least two things: a credible military threat across the entire spectrum of conflict, and consistent and unified foreign policy.

How do we achieve this? First, we should acknowledge, as we clearly have, the limits of military force in low intensity conflicts. But we should also recognize that we best deal with LICs by maintaining a capability to apply force as a last resort, and not deliberately weaken our deterrence. That means that even if we never anticipate its use, we should have a capability to fight effectively not only "quickies and cheapies" but potential counter-insurgency situations as well. If we cannot fight such a scenario ourselves, how can we teach others?

Secondly, we must get away from the past fragmentation of our foreign policy. We cannot be effective with so many self-appointed Secretaries of State in Congress. What is a Central American ally supposed to do when inundated with peace plan proposals from individual Congressmen competing with the administration? We cannot afford that kind of silliness. President Bush has taken the initiative for a comprehensive foreign policy dialogue with Congress for the purpose of

consensus building. There are some modest signs that [illegible], this olive branch might net some positive results. In the interest of strengthening executive authority over foreign policy, Bush has also suggested the repeal of the War Powers Act. That would be a significant beginning. Maybe we can look forward to an era of greater unity in our foreign policy execution, but then again that might be just wishful thinking.

Finally, we continue to need a significant increase in the resources we devote to the non-military instruments of addressing LICs. We need much more money for economic assistance programs tailored to deal with economic and political instability before it reaches a point where military intervention might be necessary. Driven to its logical conclusion, the Weinberger doctrine is saying that a resource transfer is in order from the military budget to the civilian foreign assistance account. If we are not going to lick LICs with force, then let us use the money more cost-effectively on peaceful programs. Those who want to end the use of force should take the lead on this issue.

ENDNOTES

1. Low intensity conflict is defined here 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."

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3. Public Law 93-148, 93rd Congress, J.J.. Res 542, November 7, 1973.

4. Both the Grenada mission in 1983 and the strike on Libya in 1986 were reported.

5. Caspar Weinberger, The Uses of Military Power, Defense , January 1985, pp. 2-11.

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8. Department of State Bulletin, February 1985.

9. Richard K. Betts, Soldiers, Statesmen and Cold War Crises, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1977.

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12. Alexander L. George, David K. Hall, William E. Simons, The Limits of Coercive Diplomacy, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1971, p. 18.

13. Betts, p. 157.

14. Handel, p. 438

15. Thomas C. Schelling, The Strategy of Conflicts, Cambridge, Mass., 1960, pp. 188-203

16. Thomas C. Schelling, Arms and Influence, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1966, p. 93.

17. Gelb, p. 368.

18. Stanley Hoffman, Gulliver's Troubles, or the setting of American Foreign Policy, McGraw Hill for the Council on Foreign Relations, 1968, p. 140.

19. Supporting U.S. Strategy for Third World Conflict: Report by the Regional Conflict Working Group submitted to the Commission on Integrated Long-term Strategy, June 1988, p. 22-23.

20. Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations, The Struggle for Power and Peace, Fifth Edition, Revised, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1973, p. 558.

21. Ibid., p. 153.

22. Ibid., pp.153-54.

23. Ibid., p. 558.

24. Handel, pp. 432-434.

25. Galvin, p. 5.

26. General (ret) Paul F. Gorman, testimony before the Armed Services Committee, January 28, 1987.