
SECURITY ASSISTANCE PERSPECTIVES

Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict

By

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[The following is a reprint of remarks prepared for delivery by Secretary Whitehouse at the Defense Intelligence College, Bolling Air Force Base, Washington, D.C. on 24 January 1989. The remarks were initially published in *Defense Issues*, Vol. 4, No. 6.]

I want to welcome you on behalf of my office and the Defense Intelligence College.

This is the first conference designed to bring together the diverse U.S. government schools and colleges to capture the lessons of the past, assess current activities, and integrate low-intensity conflict (or LIC) more effectively into our educational process. Your efforts to date to develop an LIC curriculum have made an important contribution to the evolution of a comprehensive national program. It is now time, however, to pool our resources to build a long-term consensus on how to respond to LIC.

While there are remarkable developments on the international scene, U.S.-Soviet rapprochement and negotiated settlements in the Persian Gulf, southern Africa, Cambodia and elsewhere, will not resolve serious long-term problems in the Third World. Narcotrafficking, insurgency, terrorism, and debt will persist and will have a direct impact on U.S. interests. Of necessity, they will require a sustained, effective U.S. response.

These threats are subsumed under the rubric of LIC, an environment in which we face a major challenge in developing the most fundamental skills and knowledge. You, as the educators of our future leaders, therefore, have an important role to play, and this conference thus takes on special significance.

This gathering affords a unique opportunity to establish direct links with our schools and colleges; share information and techniques; work toward a common or core curriculum; and explore ways to expand instruction time. As you spend the next few days examining LIC issues, you should have as your ultimate goal developing the courses and instructional materials that will sharpen the issues, developing greater awareness, promoting consistent approaches and unity of effort, and producing individuals more attuned to the political and military realities of LIC.

THE ENVIRONMENT

For years, we suffered from a "hangover" after Vietnam, simply refusing to admit that the threat persisted. Even in the absence of our experience in Southeast Asia, we have historically found it difficult to recognize a threat that is protracted, ambiguous, and cumulative. We have also tended to view problems in the Third World through the prism of U.S.-Soviet rivalry. The current warming in relations may, in part, remove that distorting prism. Overlaying these perceptual difficulties are "turf" issues and a business-as-usual approach that impede innovation and timely response.

In addressing the world scene, Robert Gates, the new deputy national security advisor, recently noted that "the experience of the last 10 years would suggest that in many of these cases, diplomacy alone is not an effective instrument." He went on to say that:

Experience also would show that in many of these instances overt military action by the United States is either not appropriate or would not be supported by the American people or the Congress. At that point, the United States has two options. It can develop other instruments by which to . . . protect its interests, or it can turn and walk away.

We cannot afford to "walk away." It is clear that the problems will not allow us to do so. We must respond, and our responses must be as cogent and effective as possible.

LIC is not well understood, nor is the need for sustained, patient response. To address the threat, we must develop the right personnel, equipment, concepts and institutional structures. Our response cannot be limited to, or dominated by, military action. Rather, we must develop the full range of political, informational, economic, and military tools with which to assist others in achieving a just and enduring stability.

We must also remember that low-intensity conflict and special operations are not interchangeable terms. Low intensity conflict is an environment in which we must use a tailored blend of the instruments of our national power. Special operations forces, on the other hand, are only one of those instruments. They are a small, if important, part of our overall military capability, but we must also rely on conventional forces for peacetime contingency response, peacekeeping operations, and medical, logistic, and engineer support, as well as deterrence.

THE RESPONSE

If we are to deal effectively with low-intensity conflict, we must have a reliable, flexible, and enduring security assistance program. We must develop better understanding, improve inter-agency coordination, build a sustainable consensus, and press for more flexible laws and additional funding. The consequences of failure will not be immediate, but the cumulative effect of indifference or inconsistency will ultimately be a weakened United States.

Our second task is to preserve the gains already made in special operations revitalization, complete the revitalization process, and maintain a highly ready force through the 1990s and beyond. This will require the sustained attention of both the Legislative and Executive branches of Government.

Third, we must develop a coordinated response, recognizing that a business-as-usual approach does not adequately address the problems encountered in LIC. Preparedness for a "big war" simply does not constitute preparedness for a "small" one.

Fourth, we must build a national consensus. We must make clear to the American people the reality of the threat and the need for a consistent and sustained response. And we in government must reach consensus on the cooperation essential to an effective response.

THE CHALLENGE

Those are the broad goals. Let me now turn to the specifics and outline for you what I think we are trying to accomplish through this conference.

One of the fundamentals of our country's participation in foreign irregular warfare is that the number of Americans will be very small. And what does this mean? It means that they have to be good. They have to be knowledgeable, They have to be persuasive. They have to have a high degree of professional competence.

The history of low-intensity conflict reveals again and again the important--indeed overriding--role that one man can play; Col. Ed Landsdale in the Philippines, Brigadier Orde Wingate in Burma, Col. T. E. Lawrence in Arabia. I think also of Col Frank Merrill of Merrill's Marauders in Burma and his associate, Col Philip Cochran, the Flip Corkin of *Terry and the Pirates*.

Men like these brought imagination and courage and the ability to improvise into different forms of low-intensity conflict. All of these men played remarkable individual roles. One of the things I hope will be achieved by this conference is an understanding of this factor. One has to pick the right man, and that man has to be well-prepared.

So one of our jobs is to prepare officers to be the Lawrences or the Landsdales of some future conflict somewhere in the world. But behind such a point man is the need to prepare the staff officers and advisers who will work in the field or in the supporting headquarters or, indeed, back in Washington, so that they, too, understand how complex our efforts are and can anticipate and solve the problems that emerge.

None of this is easy. Our armed forces have, understandably, been maintained in a high state of readiness for a big war--for a worst-case scenario. The role of advisor to foreign troops is seldom perceived as being career-enhancing. Recognition of the importance of language and area expertise has been a sometime thing in personnel management, and many gifted officers have feared getting stuck in a blind alley if they learned Chinese or Urdu or some other difficult language, or if they become experts on the passes through the Hindu Kush or all about the river network of some faraway land. So I am calling on you to help bring about a cultural change in the Services and to sensitize your students to the challenges of a particularly difficult form of warfare.

I repeat that while we may hope to prepare tomorrow's T. E. Lawrence, we are also looking at the military skills that are needed to make many officers in our armed forces effective in this field. And, of course, the first skill is that of understanding one's enemy as well as understanding one's ally. Intelligence is the key to irregular warfare. Without good intelligence, one is no place. But the kind of intelligence needed can be quite different from that needed in conventional warfare.

Doubtless, some of you had experience in the irregular program in Vietnam. I did. And I learned there how difficult it is to find out what you need to know and how difficult it is to analyze information intelligently once one is dealing with a craft that goes beyond conventional order of battle. Training people to handle intelligence in the environment of low-intensity conflict will be a real challenge.

I remember how General (Creighton) Abrams used to stress the importance of working on what he called the enemy system--their intelligence, their logistics, their finance, their communications, their often apparently confusing command structure. He saw how important this was.

Another wide-open field is tactics. It may seem odd for a civilian to get into this, but it has been my experience that we are not crafty as a nation. In nearly two years at II Field Force, I could count on the fingers of one hand the number of operations I saw planning in which deception and stealth and guile were serious ingredients.

In low-intensity conflict, the other side is usually crafty and full of guile. Our young officers must learn to think that way and must learn to plan operations that do not depend on overwhelming fire power or massive support. Low-intensity conflict is a cat-and-mouse game, usually with a small number of military players. Our people must know that game.

Logistics and supply problems are different in low-intensity conflict. Again, one is usually dealing in small numbers of beans, bullets, and Band-Aids, but they must be the right ones, and they must reach the people we are supporting promptly. As a lot of you know, this can be a lot more difficult than stuffing large numbers of consumables into a pipeline.

There is also a wide field of necessary research to be performed for LIC. You know, and I know, what causes most casualties in this kind of warfare. Mines and booby traps. We saw that in Vietnam and Laos. We are seeing it in Afghanistan. We are seeing it in El Salvador.

I was at a command briefing some time ago when an officer commented that one could always drive cattle through a minefield. That really is not helpful in countries where farmers are desperately poor--where cattle, or even a single cow, may represent both livelihood and food.

Thus, coping with mines and booby traps in a Third World environment should be a very-high-priority program.

In many ways, a lot of the big-ticket items which the Services have acquired for a big war are ill-suited to low-intensity conflict. We have, as a nation, a tendency to think in terms of high-tech weapons systems and to believe that technology can solve many problems. I don't deny the need for improvement in our communications gear or sensors or in other systems, but in low-intensity conflict, we need things that are simple and reliable.

One of my favorite projects is to establish a requirement for what I call the "follow-on DC-3." Helicopters are expensive and hard to maintain. In my view, there is a real need for a rugged adaptable transport plane to do the many things the "gooney bird" did so well for so many years. [For additional discussion of this topic, see the article "Providing Tools for Victory in the Third World" which follows in this issue.]

A final crucial area for you as educators is the "art" of low-intensity conflict. That art is by no means new. *Sun Tzu* understood it well six centuries before Christ. However, as warfare evolved from Roman Squares, to heavy battalions, to trench warfare, to saturation bombing, we, especially in the West, lost sight of many of those ancient realities. Recently, others--Mao and Ho Chi Minh among them--nurtured the "art" in the context of their peculiar circumstances.

Mao had only three rules that governed relations between his guerrillas and the Chinese people: (1) All actions are subject to command, (2) Do not steal from the people, and (3) Be neither selfish or unjust. Simple, yet effective, and the kind of "art" that makes low-intensity conflict work. Clausewitz, in these cases, is not enough.

As I mentioned a moment ago, we, despite our revolutionary beginnings, forgot these lessons and we focused our attention on "big" wars. It has been nearly 50 years since the Marine Corps issued the *Small Wars Manual*. I recommend it to those of you who have not studied it. The lessons are still there for the taking.

Perhaps, it is time, however, for a new *Small Wars Manual*. Here I am not talking about a collection of the bureaucratic dicta that consume so much of our time "inside the beltway." Rather, we need a sleeves-rolled-up, mud-on-the-boots volume that speaks to this "art" and leads to a mindset foreign to most Americans.

There is a prophetic passage in the *Small Wars Manual*. It goes this way: "If Marines have become accustomed to easy victories over irregulars in the past, they must now prepare themselves for the increased effort which will be necessary to insure victory in the future." There is a warning here for all of us. The threat today is no less real and the problems of responding no less daunting. If, however, you succeed in the enterprise we are undertaking today, you will make a valuable difference.