

Low Intensity Conflict

[The following has been extracted from President Reagan's *National Security Strategy of the United States*, January 1987, pp. 32-34. This new document reflects the Administration's effort to articulate the essential objectives and elements of U.S. foreign and defense policy, and the national security strategy which guides those policies and serves to advance U.S. interests throughout the world. The discussion of Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) below reflects the growing attention which defense planners and policy makers have been giving to this subject in recent years. Of special interest is the statement that, "The principal military instrument in Low Intensity Conflict . . . is security assistance." For additional information, see the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Field Circular (FC) 100-20, *Low Intensity Conflict*, 16 July 1986.]

Conflict in the Third World can pose serious threats to U.S. security interests. Low Intensity Conflicts, which take place at levels below conventional war but above the routine, peaceful competition among states, can be particularly troublesome. They often involve a protracted struggle of competing principles and ideologies. Low Intensity Conflicts may be waged by a combination of means, including the use of political, economic, informational, and military instruments. They are often localized, but can have significant regional and global security implications.

Major causes of Low Intensity Conflict are instability and lack of political and economic development in the Third World (though Low Intensity Conflict can occur in areas outside the Third World as well). These conditions provide fertile ground for unrest and for groups and nations wishing to exploit unrest for their own purposes. The resulting conflicts are of concern to the United States when they assault U.S. national interests and the security, values, or political foundations of the United States, our friends, and allies. Low Intensity Conflict can gradually isolate the United States, its allies, and major trading partners from the Third World and from each other. This isolation can be manifest in economic, political, and military terms.

Specifically, Low Intensity Conflict can lead to:

- Interruption of Western access to vital resources.
- Gradual loss of U.S. military basing and access rights.
- Expanded threats to key sea lines of communication.
- Gradual shifting of allies and trading partners away from the United States into positions of accommodation with hostile interests.
- Expanded opportunities for Soviet political and military gains.

An effective U.S. response to this form of warfare requires the national will to sustain long-term commitments. The United States has addressed the manifestations of Low Intensity Conflict through a tough counter-terrorism policy; support for democratic resistance movements; and political, economic, and military assistance to developing nations to help them prevent or combat low intensity challenges.

U.S. policy for dealing with Low Intensity Conflict situations may be summarized as follows: *When it is in the U.S. interest to do so, the United States:*

- Will take measures to strengthen friendly nations facing internal or external threats to their independence and stability by systematically employing, in coordination with friends and allies, the full range of political, economic, informational, and military

instruments of power. Where possible, action will be taken before instability leads to violence.

- Will work to ameliorate the underlying causes of instability and conflict in the Third World by pursuing foreign assistance, trade, and investment programs that promote economic development and the growth of democratic social and political orders.
- May support selected resistance movements acting in opposition to regimes working against U.S. interests. Such support will be coordinated with friends and allies and may contain political, informational, economic, and military elements.
- Will take steps to discourage Soviet and other state-sponsored adventurism, and increase the costs to those who use proxies or terrorists and subversive forces to exploit instability in the Third World.

The Low Intensity Conflict strategies that support these policies must coordinate the use of a variety of policy instruments among U.S. Government agencies and internationally. Responses may draw on economic, political, and informational tools, as well as military assistance.

Economic Policy and Low Intensity Conflict. U.S. policy for Low Intensity Conflict recognizes that long-term political and economic development will reduce the underlying causes of instability of the Third World, help undermine the attractiveness of totalitarian regimes, and eventually lead to conditions favorable to U.S. and Western interests. Therefore, we will encourage expansion of free trade, the development of private enterprise, and the expansion and independence of local economies. U.S. development assistance and economic aid programs facilitate these policies. In addition, we will encourage private investment in the Third World when that investment supports balanced economic growth.

Informational Policy and Low Intensity Conflict. Low Intensity Conflict is a political struggle in which ideas may be as important as arms. We hold significant advantages over our adversaries in this area. In contrast to our adversaries, we have an open political system that thrives on communication and truth. We must ensure, however, that accurate information concerning American ideals and objectives is available throughout the Third World; and that the resources needed to accomplish this are available.

Political Instruments and Low Intensity Conflict. We recognize that other nations may not necessarily develop along democratic lines identical to ours. Nevertheless, we seek to encourage the development of political systems that protect the rights of the individual and provide for representative government, free institutions, and an environment in which human dignity can flourish. We do this partially by example, and by defending our own ideals when they are challenged. We can also promote development of humane social orders by helping eliminate security threats and the underlying economic causes of unrest and instability.

Military Instruments in Low Intensity Conflict. The fundamental tenet of U.S. strategy for dealing with Low Intensity Conflict directed against our friends and allies is that military institutions in threatened states must become able to provide security for their citizens and governments. U.S. Low Intensity Conflict policy, therefore, recognizes that indirect--rather than direct--applications of U.S. military power are the most appropriate and cost effective ways to achieve national goals. The principal military instrument in Low Intensity Conflict, therefore, is security assistance.

The primary role for U.S. armed forces in Low Intensity Conflict is to support and facilitate the security assistance program. The military services must also stand ready to provide more direct forms of military assistance when called upon. Usually, this assistance will consist of technical

training and logistical support. The services and the Unified Commands must also be prepared for the effective execution of contingency and peacekeeping operations when such operations are required to protect national interests. U.S. combat forces will be introduced into Low Intensity Conflict situations only as a last resort and when vital national interests cannot otherwise be adequately protected.

Narcotics Trafficking and Low Intensity Conflict. Narcotics trafficking can breed violence, fuel instability, and threaten governing institutions wherever it is found. The vast revenues produced by illegal narcotics sales, and concomitant use of international financial networks to launder the proceeds of these transactions, can promote the type of instability that becomes a breeding ground for Low Intensity Conflict. For these reasons, our policies for dealing with drug trafficking provide important support for our efforts to deal with Low Intensity Conflict.

Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict. Under some circumstances, terrorism can be an important aspect of Low Intensity Conflict. This Administration has taken significant steps to define and implement policies to counter international terrorism. These policies focus on deterring, pre-empting, and effectively reacting to international terrorist incidents. Low Intensity Conflict policy goes beyond this, however, and deals with the broader problem of supporting groups and governments against which terrorism is being used as a subversive weapon.

We must realize that Low Intensity Conflicts are frequently protracted struggles. In addition, most of the instruments of power that we can bring to bear on them work indirectly and over a long period of time. Therefore, we must be patient in such struggles. It is important that we prevail, but especially important that we recognize that we often cannot do so easily or quickly. On the other hand, we do hold important advantages. We represent a model of political and economic development that promises freedom from political domination and economic privation. If we can protect our own security and maintain an environment of reasonable stability and open trade and communication throughout the Third World, political, economic, and social forces will eventually work to our advantage.