

1984

Intelligence and Low-Intensity Conflict

John M. Oseth
U.S. Army

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Oseth, John M. (1984) "Intelligence and Low-Intensity Conflict," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 37 : No. 6 , Article 5.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol37/iss6/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

Intelligence and Low-Intensity Conflict

Lieutenant Colonel John M. Oseth, US Army

The term “low-intensity conflict” has eluded precise definition for as long as analysts have used it.¹ In common parlance, however, it denotes a wide variety of unconventional military or semi-military activities on both sides of the traditional distinction between peace and war: coercive diplomacy, security assistance missions in relatively benign and varying degrees of hostile environments, insurgency and counterinsurgency operations, terrorism and counterterrorism, surgical direct action military operations, psychological warfare, and even operations by conventional or general-purpose forces in which ends and means are circumscribed by national policy.

No doubt in part because it embraces such a diverse array of contingencies, low-intensity conflict as a concept has not had much staying power in academic or governmental circles. Certainly in America the scenarios it conjures up have never attracted the same degree of attention as those involving the more violent and more obviously dangerous modes of warfare. But there is now growing recognition that they are likely to be the most prevalent form of conflict confronting the nations of the world in the remainder of this century.²

The outlines of this analysis are easily sketched. As long as a military balance of sorts obtains between East and West, full-scale war between the blocs is unlikely. Moreover, fear of superpower confrontation and escalation to nuclear catastrophe will tend to limit regional conflicts where Soviet and American interests are clearly implicated. But in the Third or developing world there are different, more combustible forces at work. High rates of population growth, the introduction of new technologies and associated alien values and modes of behavior, and the inevitably dislocating effects of economic, sociological, and political change have vastly increased internal pressures on immature governing institutions. Regional interactions are complicated by ancient hatreds, hegemonism, and irredentist designs. The Soviet Union and its surrogates continue to seek international advantage in those circumstances by encouraging and manipulating revolution and regional strife. And our own desire to thwart Soviet opportunism, and our intent to work peacefully toward a world in which American values can flourish and the

Holder of Ph.D. and law degrees from Columbia University, Lt.Col. Oseth is the 1984-1985 Army Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University.

aspirations of others can be realized, have pressed us toward international involvements that have ambivalent consequences. Even our most benevolent economic connections with the developing world can be viewed, or described by our adversaries, as exploitative. The political relationships we develop are often seen as overbearing or insensitive, and security assistance relationships mark us all too often as defenders of an undesirable *status quo*.

It may be true that not all of this inflammable instability will impact directly and adversely upon American interests.³ But it is equally clear that some foreseeable regional instability and localized confrontations will implicate American interests in ways that raise unarguable security concerns. The growing threat of international terrorism alone is grounds for vigilance, and for preparation to deal with isolated and remote outbreaks of violence. More generally, the global reach of American economic and political interests and presence brings the effects of distant conflicts home to many individual citizens. Many outbreaks of violence will not be immediately nation-threatening for the United States, to be sure. Individual incidents and even local wars may be tolerable, their consequences absorbable, without grievous effect on aggregate national interests. But at some point the security responsibilities and capabilities of the US Government will be challenged, even

“The challenge in low-intensity conflict is to monitor an enemy not yet conducting continuous or even frequent combat operations, not yet organized into easily identifiable military formations, whose sustenance depends . . . on diverse socio-economic factors”

if those responsibilities are conceived in the narrowest terms of protecting citizens' lives and property. Furthermore, although more expansive rationales for US preparedness for low-intensity conflict are contentious in some quarters, many believe that the United States should actively help foreign societies preserve security while they deal with the challenges of development, regional instability, and external intrigues and aggression.⁴

That, in any event, is the Reagan administration's view. Secretary of Defense Weinberger's Fiscal Year 1985 *Annual Report to the Congress* emphasized the need for increased American attention to the Third World, in light of expanded US interests and multiplying conflicts there.⁵ He worried, in particular, about recurrence of unforeseen contingencies like the rescue mission in Grenada, and about enhancing US capabilities to respond to a wide range of low-intensity threats without impairing the readiness of forward-deployed forces elsewhere.⁶ He also observed that increasing Soviet activity in the Third World—in the Mideast via support for Syrian forces, in Africa (Angola and Ethiopia), in Southeast Asia (Kampuchea), in Southwest Asia (Afghanistan), and in Central America (Grenada and Nicaragua)—has overlaid localized events in remote areas with significant strategic implications

for the United States: "Buttressed by their massive buildup of strategic and conventional forces, the Soviets have undertaken—directly and through surrogates—a global campaign of destabilization, focused on the Third World, that seeks to achieve their objectives without direct confrontation with the United States. This is, and will continue to be for some time, the most prominent direct threat to U.S. national security interests."⁷

Accordingly, the Administration has worked to revitalize US Special Operations Forces (SOF) uniquely suited to meet that threat. New units have been added to the defense structure—an Army Special Forces Group, Navy SEAL teams, and a Special Operations Aviation Task Force. Their equipment (especially aviation and communications) and training (especially language and area specialization) have received new attention, and command and control problems have been addressed (as in the formation of the Joint Special Operations Agency in the Pentagon on 1 January 1984).

Secretary Weinberger outlined three general situations in which SOF can be used to advance US interests:

First, their participation in security assistance programs, training foreign armed forces to deal with instability and aggression, enhances our friends' abilities to cope with Soviet expansionism, reduces the likelihood that American armed forces might be involved in those foreign struggles, and demonstrates U.S. determination to live up to its commitments. They also help to build good will between the United States and the assisted nations (currently about 15, around the globe). These are, essentially 'peacetime' functions in the sense that United States forces are not engaged in conflict as combatants—though in some circumstances their training activities may make them vulnerable to attack by terrorists or other anti-government forces.

Secondly, in crises, SOF provide decisionmakers an alternative tailored for situations where conventional forces are not appropriate. They might be used, for instance, where the safety of U.S. citizens or the security of American facilities abroad has been threatened (the Grenada situation is illustrative). They might also be useful in helping to cap crises or conflicts at relatively low levels of tension or violence.

Thirdly, committed in a major conflict, SOF would augment conventional capabilities, employed in a variety of roles: unconventional warfare, counterterrorist operations, security assistance, psychological operations, and intelligence missions, to name a few.⁸

The new emphasis on more flexible forces for use in subconventional conflicts and security assistance missions responds directly to the criticism that arose in the last few years of the US military's fixation on mid to high-intensity contingencies involving mobile armored combat in Europe. This focus, many argued, had neglected preparations both for conventional contingencies in vital areas outside Europe⁹ and for subconventional, limited missions short of

the conflicts for which most US forces are structured, outfitted, and trained.¹⁰ The SOF approach in the Reagan administration has extended concern for “defense modernization” to low-intensity capabilities which the military establishment itself had not emphasized for many years.

With all this renewed interest in readiness for a variety of unconventional contingencies, discussion of improved capabilities has focused mainly on what kinds of *forces* the United States should have, and also on how they should be structured, equipped, trained, and employed when committed. There has been relatively little attention devoted, at least in the public discussion, to the kind of intelligence support those forces would need both prior to and during their commitment.¹¹ The American literature on counterinsurgency operations, for instance, has never been large, and has not focused at length on the intelligence aspects of the problem. Such discussions of the intelligence challenge as do exist have been very generalized, amounting mainly to specification of the ingredients of insurgency, and general guidelines for monitoring them.¹² Foreign analysts, by contrast, have been more explicitly concerned with the intelligence problem, in some cases because of their own extensive personal experiences in limited, low-intensity wars.¹³

If hands-on experience leads to pressure for better preparation, recent events in the Middle East and Central America may prove to be the catalyst for change in American approaches. A former commander of American security assistance forces in El Salvador has now argued publicly that US policy goals there are within reach, if host country intelligence capabilities (as well as certain operational skills) can be improved or augmented with US help.¹⁴ And the report prepared by the “Long Commission” on the 23 October 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon concludes pointedly that correctable deficiencies in intelligence support were partly responsible for that tragedy.¹⁵ In their view, the time is past when preparation for the intelligence problem encountered in unconventional operations can be “accomplished” after the fact.

The Intelligence Challenge

Military forces depend upon strategic and tactical intelligence for two basic services: (1) collection of information on the capabilities, intentions, and activities of foreign powers, organizations, and persons, and (2) counterintelligence support, or the gathering of information and conduct of activities to protect against espionage, sabotage, assassinations, and international terrorist activities.¹⁶ Though these two functions are clearly and closely related, they are regarded as separate professional disciplines within the intelligence community—each has its own personnel, organizations, and modes of operation. We need also to note here, for purposes of our later discussion, that in the American practice both these efforts are sharply distinguished from law

enforcement or police functions. As a result, intelligence and counterintelligence operations, serving national security interests, are governed by rules and procedures which permit more operational latitude, and which are contentious among many civil libertarians.¹⁷

There are three kinds of situations in which low-intensity conflict forces need support from these capabilities. First, they need strategic intelligence monitoring, prior to US military involvement, of situations which might require their deployment. Secondly, during their involvement in security assistance missions, they need support from all US and host country resources capable of assessing and countering threats. Finally, during crises or combat, they need support which draws battlefield and threat-relevant information from all sources and focuses specifically on the needs of operational forces—combat commanders.

Pre-Commitment Support. Properly directed and executed, the strategic intelligence effort helps Washington policymakers understand what US international interests are, how they may be affected by what kinds of events abroad, and what tools of policy may (or may not) be appropriate to deal with those challenges.¹⁸ Additionally, the strategic intelligence apparatus provides the data which enables military commanders and planners both to advise about and to prepare for their employment.¹⁹ In fact, it is the requirements of these “consumers” of information which are supposed to drive the intelligence community’s operations.²⁰ Various categories of information are important for this: surveys of the political, sociological, and economic (or other) features of foreign countries and regions; identification of central causes and characteristics of strife or instability, both internal and external; and assessments of the capacities of governments to maintain security and internal order, to name just a few. With community-wide collection and production fully orchestrated, all the nation’s intelligence resources can theoretically contribute to a comprehensive library of data, in order to help both national-level policymakers and those who execute policy decisions understand and address the problem.

And this is a central point: tactical military units which we have earmarked for low-intensity conflict have great interest in the ongoing strategic intelligence function managed at the national level. The forces which will be at the “cutting edge” of policy need to know what the policymakers know—and *even more*, because they must have and assimilate details about the operating environment which national decisionmakers do not need. The strategic effort, then, must look beyond the needs of Washington policy councils to take cognizance of the special interests of the operators, and there must be institutions and mechanisms which facilitate communication of requirements and information between the strategic and tactical levels of command and of intelligence. All this must occur even though the areas and issues monitored may not present critical policy problems at any particular time.

Support for Security Assistance Missions. Elements of the armed forces which may be called upon to perform security assistance missions in foreign countries include any or a combination of the following:

(a) Military Assistance and Advisory Groups (MAAG) may be formed to administer U.S. military assistance programs in foreign countries—and in conflict situations they may be called upon to assist host country armed forces with internal defense and development programs ranging from intelligence efforts to tactical operations against guerrillas.

(b) Security Assistance Teams of various kinds may be tailored to specific needs of particular countries. Mobile training teams, for instance, may be constituted to train indigenous personnel in needed technical, administrative, or operational skills, so that they in turn might train others.

(c) Security Assistance Forces employing a number of mobile training teams and small detachments may be used to augment the capability of a MAAG in advising and training indigenous armed forces. Where assistance to ground forces is the focus of U.S. efforts, Army Special Forces provide the nucleus of the organization. They maintain area, cultural, and language proficiency, in addition to military and training skills, that make them uniquely qualified for such missions.²¹

The activities of the 80-man US military mission assigned to train the Lebanese Army (LA) during the recent strife there are illustrative of this kind of use of the American military. Despite the collapse of several LA units under increasing battlefield pressure, and despite the sporadic attacks upon US Marines assigned to the multinational peacekeeping force, this training contingent, composed mostly of Green Berets, continues its effort to conduct basic and advanced infantry training, artillery training, and development and expansion of Lebanese regular and Ranger forces. No trainers are involved in planning military operations, in combat situations, or in artillery support of the LA. They do not go on combat operations.²² Nor can they be sure that their efforts will have appreciable effect on the outcome of the conflict in that country, since they can address only one aspect of the causes of social unrest there. But the Administration remains committed to this security assistance as an important tool of US policy in Lebanon.

The security assistance effort elsewhere is adjusted to particular situations “on-the-ground,” and US military presence and activities will differ in each case. But there is one constant: US military units are present, in-country, and associated with a government whose security forces need improvement and whose stability may in some cases be threatened or even precarious. The Americans’ role is that of trainers, not of operators. They provide advisory and other assistance to foreign regular, paramilitary, or irregular armed forces and government agencies, and it is those forces which carry the main operational burden in the event of hostilities. But they are nevertheless

vulnerable to the same security threats that face the troops they advise or assist.

In this environment the distinctions between strategic and tactical intelligence, and between intelligence and CI, become blurred. Commanders and trainers must operate tactically in the situation previously described to them by US "strategic" sources. Because of the nature of the security assistance mission, and the nature of the internal security problem faced by the assisted government, the tactical intelligence interests of US forces extend beyond data on hostile military forces (there may, after all, be none of these) to information on fundamental causes of internal unrest, on any external connections to that unrest, and on the general capability and competence of the host authorities. And especially with the rise of sabotage, terrorist, or subversive activity, US intelligence interests will focus on "security" threats and on problems that the host regime in all probability regards as law and order or police matters.

There is also a premium on coordination and integration of all sources of information and all analytical expertise—both American and indigenous (civil and military). Whether United States forces conduct intelligence operations in-country will depend upon the level of US military support being provided. But there will be inevitably some unilateral operational and analytical requirements on both sides, necessitating independent action by both civil and military authorities. Close cooperation and planning will be required in order to maximize the information available to US and indigenous forces, and to ensure that actions are complementary.

Intelligence, whether host country or American, must be concerned with a wide range of information on the security situation in the country, particularly in cases of incipient or emergent insurgency. Cadres and cadre recruiters must be identified; insurgent cells must be located and penetrated; counter guerrilla forces must be formed; and host country capabilities to do these things must be improved. In the case of more mature insurgent movements, attention expands to such activity as locating safe houses and base areas, discovering supply sources and routes, and developing informant networks in potential guerrilla operating areas. When guerrilla forces become "operational," in the sense that they appear in small formations to conduct organized military operations, intelligence efforts widen in an effort to identify, locate, and describe those forces, while also maintaining the operations instituted earlier to neutralize or manipulate the insurgents' leadership and logistical infrastructure. Population controls may also be instituted. As guerrilla units grow larger and more competent in the conventional sense, collection on military data is expanded. Meanwhile, the effort to understand political factors underlying the rebel movement also continues.

Not all security assistance missions occur in a context of insurgency as described here. But this progression of concerns and missions nevertheless

outlines the range of intelligence activity which the general security assistance mission must anticipate.

Support to US Forces Engaged in Combat. In this scenario the United States may continue its security assistance projects—training and advice—with the host country, but American forces also conduct, or are authorized to conduct, combat operations. There may well be restrictions placed on the kinds of operations American forces may conduct, or on the techniques they are permitted to use. For instance, they might be called upon to secure areas or population centers and respond to attacks, rather than to seek out and engage enemy units. But the distinguishing characteristic here is that US forces have been deployed to fight in support of the assisted government, or in defense of US citizens or property, not just to outfit host country forces to fight.

The intelligence challenge here has all the elements surveyed in the previous scenarios—a need for integration of strategic and tactical efforts, a need to coordinate information and activities with host country authorities; a concern for “non-military” data on societal factors tending to sustain the insurgents; and the merging of security or counterintelligence concerns with information collection concerns (the “enemy” may merge with the population when he is not operating as an identifiable combatant). But there is, additionally, a need to prepare to support a variety of US units, conventional and unconventional, whose vulnerability has increased as the size and visibility of the US presence have increased, and as the American troops increasingly assume the status (or perceived status) of belligerents. As the investigation of the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon pointed out, the popular perception—which grew over time—of the Marines as belligerents was itself enough to raise the threat to them, and the resulting intelligence challenge, to a more critical level. Ultimately the threat to them was not a function of their understanding of their mission, but of others’ understanding of it.

In some cases, furthermore, where SOF are deployed, they may themselves be used as intelligence assets, augmenting the capabilities of US or host country forces that operate against opposing military units. They can be sent on missions to gather order-of-battle information on enemy forces, to locate targets behind enemy lines or in their base areas, to conduct post-strike damage assessments, to gather information on political/social/economic indicators of insurgency, or to identify and locate indigenous collaborators. Elements of US forces can thus become important resources for meeting the larger intelligence challenge.²³

Impediments to Meeting the Challenge

A number of factors make it difficult for the intelligence community to provide the kind of support just described. The survey here is not intended to be

exhaustive, but only to identify main attitudinal and organizational problems.

One has to do with what James Rosenau has called the "belief systems" of national leaders.²⁴ These perspectival lenses lead some to focus on the Soviet Union as the main threat to the United States, and (inter alia) on the need to respond, with force if necessary, to Soviet expansionism wherever it appears. Others, by contrast, may understand the USSR as a country with great disabilities outside the military sphere, and they seek ways to move toward world order without confrontation. Still others may believe that the United States has limited capacity for leadership and military excursions abroad, and they work toward minimizing foreign involvement and commitments.

These are, of course, general "types" of attitudinal orientations. In reality, individual perspectives might combine beliefs that are separated here into different systems. One can, for instance, believe the Soviet Union is the main threat to peace but accord Third World regions a relatively low priority in the range of US global interests even if the Soviets are active there.²⁵ But the point is this: that identifiable, pre-existing perspectives of the national leadership will filter the information provided them in what we have called the "pre-commitment" stage of US preparations for low-intensity conflict. For some, information about contingencies in the Third World will simply not seem particularly relevant, and they, on their own motion, are unlikely to energize the intelligence community to serve the interests of military forces charged to be ready for employment in those contingencies. The most reliable impetus for monitoring of low-intensity conflict situations must ultimately come from below, from the forces themselves, and from their spokespersons in the national intelligence and policymaking establishments.

A related phenomenon is the American tendency to treat low-intensity conflict as a "lesser-included-case" of conventional war.²⁶ At times we have assumed that the forces, equipment, training, and tactics which prepare the armed forces for conventional battlefields also serve to prepare them for operations at lower levels of violence.²⁷ Low-intensity conflict may be conceived in that sense as a kind of lazy or slow-motion version of "normal" combat. This may reflect a wealth of confidence in the efficacy of standard modes of operation.²⁸ Or it may result from traditional aversion to creating "special formations" markedly distinct in structure and capability from the rest of our forces.²⁹ But in any case that mindset is profoundly disabling. Low-intensity conflict—most fundamentally, the nature of the "low-intensity" enemy, his tactics, his sources of strength and support—is *sui generis*. Preparedness for finding, describing, and assessing a conventional military foe is not preparedness for intelligence functions in unconventional war. Where this lesser-included case thinking prevails in the national security establishment, it will skew not only operational doctrine, force structures, and materiel procurement for fighting forces, but also the preparedness of intelligence

officers, who are not brought up in the SOF tradition—to understand the strategic and tactical problem, the unconventional enemy, and the resources needed to support their commanders well in low-intensity conflict.

The US Army's doctrinal description of the expected enemy in "modern battle" illustrates this point well,³⁰ focusing on cardinal concepts of Soviet military doctrine such as Mass and Momentum. It prepares intelligence officers well for finding massed and mobile forces in the field. But this image of the enemy and his tactics is hardly appropriate for most low-intensity conflict contingencies. To be sure, a special doctrine has been written for them, focused mainly on counterinsurgency, and intelligence responsibilities are outlined at least in general terms there. But it does not reach far enough into the mainstream of military intelligence, which remains preoccupied with the Soviet-style conventional threat.

Another difficulty has to do with the position of the human intelligence (HUMINT) discipline within the intelligence community, and within the military services. Practitioners of this specialty have long argued that their capabilities must be fully exercised if the United States hopes to maximize its appreciation of plans and intentions of potential adversaries, and its understanding of developments in Third World countries. Technical means of collection (interception of communications and other electronic signals, and photographic and other imaging techniques) are well-suited to collect data on observable indicators of military strength and on the structure of enemy units—on military capabilities, in other words. HUMINT, by contrast, has the capability to help determine what kinds of people are at the helm of foreign governments or armed forces, what they care about as individuals and as a group, and what they may be planning to do. Additionally, HUMINT is singularly important for monitoring developments in Third World or underdeveloped societies which do not have large, observable military formations, and which are not so technically sophisticated that their military communications are fruitful sources of information. Human resources can also monitor indicia of strength—such as political cohesion—for which the technical means of collection, in their focus on observable data and objects, are unsuited.³¹

HUMINT fell on hard times, however, in the 1970s: eclipsed by a fascination with technical collection sources; neglected in the budgeting process; tainted by spectacular revelations and allegations about operational excesses (e.g., assassination plots); and, in the view of some, decapitated by wholesale firings of experienced personnel in the Carter administration.³² Meanwhile, collection systems tailored for detection of observable indicators military strength were considerably upgraded, because of rightful concern about increasing Soviet military power. This in effect constricted America's operational inventory and rendered the intelligence community less able to identify and monitor threats outside the East-West axis.

Within the military services, moreover, there have been additional disabilities. The espionage specialty has always been understood mainly as a strategic effort, not directly related or responsive to mainstream tactical concerns. Accordingly, there has been no great effort to develop and reward expertise in it. In tactical intelligence, as in the national intelligence community, there has tended to be much greater concern for developing technical—and technology dependent—collection systems appropriate for direct observation, sensing, or listening.

Insofar as the military has engaged in HUMINT activities, it has been focused at the national level on collection of *military* information. This is a function of “turf” divisions among intelligence agencies in Washington,³³ and in that sense a student of bureaucratic politics would hardly be surprised by it. But in low-intensity conflict situations it makes little sense to distinguish between political and military data. Institutional relegation of the military intelligence effort to military subjects narrows it to a very small part of the low-intensity conflict problem. The turf division applies as well to *analytical* responsibilities—military agencies assess military capabilities; nonmilitary agencies assess political and other factors. And talents and expertise are accordingly narrowed.

At the tactical level, military HUMINT is conceived mainly as a small, adjunct enterprise conducted by long-range patrols and debriefers of refugees and prisoners. The same can be said for the military counterintelligence effort, though the Army at least in the last few years has emphasized “operational security” as a way to amplify combat capability.

The institutionalized distinction between civilian and military intelligence agencies’ missions—and ultimately areas of expertise—is worth expanded discussion as an impediment in its own right. Because of it, military officers raised in the conventional war tradition have little opportunity or incentive to develop competence in the grey areas of political-military assessment so important in low-intensity conflict. They know how to use battlefield collection resources to find an enemy’s combat formations and logistical networks. They know how to make educated guesses about what enemy forces will do, based upon knowledge of standard operational doctrine and force structures. They know how to depict that array of forces and likely actions so that US commanders can plan to engage them. They know how to do this at all levels of command. But these are *wartime*, combat functions, and classical ones at that. The challenge in low-intensity conflict is to monitor an enemy not yet conducting continuous or even frequent combat operations, not yet organized into easily identifiable military formations, whose sustenance depends not at all on battlefield success but on diverse socio-economic-political factors which cannot be photographed or electronically tracked. Performing intelligence functions well in that environment requires area knowledge, cultural sensitivities, ability to make use of diverse HUMINT collection and CI

capabilities, and capacities for sophisticated political-military analysis that are not widely available in the military.

It is true, of course, that the smaller SOF units do attempt to maintain and exercise these skills. But in the larger military establishment, and at higher levels of military intelligence the pre-occupation is with the mainstream, conventional intelligence resources, skills and missions. As a result, to the extent that incipient low-intensity conflict situations are monitored and understood in Washington, as a rule it will be the *non*-military agencies which do it and which develop the necessary skills for it.

The interagency process for producing national intelligence estimates of course gives the military perspective an opportunity to participate and to widen its focus and influence beyond descriptions of military forces and aggregate assessments of national power. But this does not alter the fundamental orientation of the intelligence center-of-mass in the military, nor does it expand military roles and functions at the national level. What this means, in the end, is that the military elements of the strategic intelligence establishment most responsive to the tactical intelligence needs of operational commanders are *least* comfortable with low-intensity subjects. And the civilian elements most comfortable with low-intensity subjects are preoccupied with supporting larger foreign policy interests—and, for areas of DoD policy interest, with socio-economic-political analysis of major adversaries (and friends). What begins as a formal division of labor between civilian and military subjects ends in a bifurcation of organization, functions, and expertise that draws each effort away from the agreed boundaries toward central missions. But it is precisely at those boundaries that the low-intensity conflict phenomenon demands coordination, concentration, expertise, and regularized attention.

Moreover, even within the sphere to which military analysis has been consigned at the national level, there has been a good deal of concern about its quality.³⁴ Two sets of observations tend to recur. First, it has been observed that the military personnel assigned to the Defense Intelligence Agency, the joint intelligence arm of the Department of Defense, cannot and do not forget what color their uniforms are, and their analysis inevitably reflects service-oriented perspectives about war, about enemies, and about peacetime preparedness. The services do not send them out to *colonize* the joint intelligence arena, but the effect is the same: pursuit of service policy interests in the guise of intelligence assessment. This complicates the problem of focusing on the most critical problems (low-intensity or other), because the services each are interested in diverse threats most relevant to their own central missions.

A second criticism notes that most of these analysts spend only short tours of duty at the strategic analytical level and they generally are quite new, when they arrive, to that business. Few, in any event, have had exposure to low-intensity conflict concerns at the tactical level. Perhaps most importantly,

moreover, a tour in the strategic intelligence establishment may not be regarded as particularly career-enhancing because of service emphases on career patterns centered around field duty. Ambitious and talented officers, as a result, do not vie for jobs at the national level. The result, the argument runs, is second-rate analysis done by nonspecialists working temporarily in unfamiliar positions that are not appreciated by their services. This, combined with incapacity in political-military analysis of non-hardware, non-order-of-battle data, means that there is little constituency or competence in military intelligence for monitoring low-intensity conflict situations. The impetus and talent for that has to come, if at all, from other institutions in the intelligence community.

Another major difficulty is the distinction we Americans have carefully drawn between counterintelligence and police functions. That distinction is a product of important American political values and an abiding suspicion of government power.³⁵ It results in application of full constitutional constraints to law enforcement activities, but a wider operational sphere for national security operations. It also results in development of entirely separate civil and military organizations and professional disciplines for each specialty. This may make perfect sense within our own society but when transported to other societies afflicted by internal instabilities of mixed domestic and foreign origin, it may make no sense at all. What we term a “peacetime” security assistance situation is for them, in many cases, a law-and-order problem requiring a blending of intelligence and police expertise and also a merging of internal and external security functions and forces. US military personnel assisting or cooperating with foreign security forces can find themselves dealing, or requested to deal, with missions which in our own society belong to the civilian police (or to nonmilitary intelligence authorities), and for which they have little background. While we have neatly divided up responsibilities for coping with internal and external security functions, the nations we assist probably will not have made similar differentiations.

There is an even larger point to be made here, too. In view of the low-intensity threat—especially the terrorist threat—and also remembering that other societies do not apply the same restraints to government powers as we do, it is foreseeable that beleaguered regimes may try to cope with those threats in ways that most Americans would consider unacceptable.³⁶ Further, we must expect to encounter a home of generalized concern about association with repressive regimes and more specific fears about American forces’ involvement in abusive activities.³⁷ That sentiment has, in fact, already been manifested in national policy. Section 660 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended in the Foreign Assistance Act of 1974, prohibits the use of US funds “to provide training or advice, or provide any financial support, for police, prisons, or other law enforcement forces for any foreign government.” The former commander of US military advisers in El Salvador has already complained that

this is too restrictive, preventing American personnel from working with police forces or other agencies that have internal security missions vital to US policy goals.³⁸ While the purpose of that statute may have been to prevent US involvement or implication in inhumane practices, in actuality it diminishes American leverage on supported regimes, and prevents American advisers from attempting to professionalize and humanize indigenous security forces. It works, in the end, *against* the interests of human rights.³⁹

The difficulty, then, is twofold. On the one hand we segregate our own relevant skills in a way that carves law-and-order concerns out of the intelligence or national security sphere, limiting our own ability to operate in the low-intensity environment. And on the other hand we have excluded law enforcement skills from the inventory of security assistance resources available to friendly governments. Both strictures spring from central values within our society, and may be difficult to undo. But both, it must be recognized, are important factors undermining the effectiveness of American forces in low-intensity conflict, and reducing their ability to keep indigenous actions within established bounds of decency.

Some General Prescriptions

Some of the disabilities just surveyed cannot be managed or restructured away, and the most we can do is remain sensitive to them and attempt to moderate their effects. For example, leaders will always see the world through special, idiosyncratic prisms that color their appreciations of incoming data. And national-level security policy concerns will continue to focus on contingencies that seem directly nation-threatening, while events "at the margins" will receive less attention, fewer resources, and limited monitoring impetus. But even with these as parameters, there are steps we can take to enhance our intelligence capabilities in the smaller, peripheral contingencies.

First, the HUMINT discipline must be revitalized, especially in the intelligence arms of the military services. The Reagan administration has been moving in this direction for some time, seeking a better community-wide balance between technical and human source collection. The Long Commission's recommendations may provide more specific pressure for accomplishing that in the armed forces. In part this will require a thorough renovation of attitudes, to accord HUMINT its place as a collection tool of special value, and seeking to exercise it vigorously and to use its contributions. In part it is also a matter of budgeting, of allocating sufficient resources to sustain operations over considerable periods of time. But it also will require structural initiatives designed to make the specialty more attractive for intelligence officers in all agencies. In the military this means that there should be increased attention to development of viable career tracks for HUMINT (and CI) specialists, even though these people may be diverted for long periods of time from the duty

with field troops so important to advancement in the mainstream. There is also a need for expanded interagency cooperation at national and operational levels between military and civilian specialists—for cultivation of mutual confidence and respect, as well as coordination of specific operations and goals.

Secondly, the product of the HUMINT effort—much of which will come from nonmilitary collectors—must be fused with data from other sources in analytical products useful both to leaders in Washington and to commanders of units having low-intensity missions. This, too, was a recommendation of the Long Commission. While on its face it speaks only to the analytical process, in reality the true tactical-responsive fusion of data presumes full integration of the total intelligence effort, from announcement of information needs to satisfaction of them, among military and nonmilitary agencies. And it also presumes that the needs of operational commanders will be placed in the forefront of the collection and analytical effort. It requires, in other words, mechanisms which can transcend the boundaries between strategic and tactical information needs and systematically focus on the needs of operators. Initiatives already underway to this end need continuing emphasis.⁴⁰

The fusion imperative has certain other implications pertaining to development of talent. Fusion of data cannot be accomplished without analysts who are sensitive to the strengths and weaknesses of the several collection disciplines, and who are expert in the regions or subjects for which they are responsible. Such expertise takes years to develop. Whether the military services have the inclination or capacity to develop and retain such persons is, as many have noted, problematical. But it seems likely that little can be expected in the way of improved intelligence for low-intensity contingencies without some more systematic efforts in that direction.

Third, the elevation of HUMINT and fusion, and their connection to low-intensity missions, must be given an institutional expression—an organizational home—in the intelligence community. Without that, the initiatives will not survive, as they are distinctly counterculture in the national security establishment. At the national level, at the regional level (perhaps in the unified commands, or in the newly established Special Operations Forces command channels), at the operational units both in garrison and during missions, and on country teams abroad there should be offices responsible for monitoring low-intensity conflict situations: identifying information needs, energizing the apparatus which can satisfy those needs, collating and evaluating information, and distributing it on a continuing basis to concerned operational commanders. The armed forces should actively seek to place military persons in that analytical infrastructure, wherever it is located.

A fourth and very sensitive area involves minimizing the constraints on cooperation with security forces of other nations. American concern for promotion of decent, humane behavior abroad ought to work for *more*, not less, influence over governments whose security interests align with ours. But, as

the Kissinger Commission and practitioners alike have now testified, statutory limitations on such cooperation now have the opposite effect. They amount, as well, to substantial operational handicaps in the intelligence arena so critical to the success of security assistance missions. They diminish the ability of our security assistance forces to help cap incipient threats before they reach the crisis stage when the United States must face decisions about enlarging its military roles or aid commitments. It is no doubt wise, indeed necessary, to promulgate standards for US assistance to internal security forces. But a flat prohibition now seems most unwise, and reexamination of it would seem to be in the best interests both of the nation and of the forces we maintain to deal with low-intensity conflict.

These four initiatives—perhaps more accurately, policy orientations—would hardly be a panacea for the entirety of the intelligence challenge. But taken together, and properly understood, they point in fruitful directions, and they suggest some initial steps toward resolving critical problems. At bottom, however, we must be concerned primarily with finding practical ways to transcend concepts, and distinctions among concepts, that govern our preparations for conventional conflicts. We must search out and set aside the debilitating organizational, functional, and operational consequences of the peace/war distinction, the strategic/tactical distinction, the civilian/military distinction, and—without compromising central values within our own society—the counterintelligence/law enforcement distinction. It is also true that we must deal with a persistent and probably intractable, paradox—that low-intensity conflict arenas must be a lively intelligence concern even when they are not a pressing policy concern. How well we deal with these general challenges will importantly affect US interests, and our national position, in much of the world throughout the remainder of this century.

Notes

1. The definitional problem as seen by a group of scholars is surveyed in Sam C. Sarkesian, "American Policy and Low-Intensity Conflict: An Overview," in Sam C. Sarkesian and William L. Scully, eds., *U.S. Policy and Low-Intensity Conflict: Potentials for Military Struggles in the 1980s* (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books, 1981), pp. 2-5.

2. See Bruce Russett, "Security and the Resources Scramble: Will 1984 Be Like 1914?" *International Affairs*, Winter 1981-1982, p. 42; Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), pp. 530-533; William J. Taylor, Jr., *The Future of Conflict: U.S. Interests* (New York: Praeger, 1983) (*The Washington Papers/94*), pp. 39-58.

3. For several formulations of this perspective, arguing especially against a policy of "global containment," see George C. Herring, "The Vietnam Syndrome and American Foreign Policy," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, Autumn 1981, p. 594; Robert E. Osgood, "American Grand Strategy: Patterns Problems, and Prescriptions," *Naval War College Review*, September-October 1983, p. 5; and Norman A. Graebner, "Coming to Terms with Reality," *Naval War College Review*, September-October 1983, p. 91. See also Gregory D. Foster, "On Selective Intervention," *Strategic Review*, Fall 1983, p. 48.

4. See, for example, the "Kissinger Commission" Report, *Report of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*, Washington, D.C., January 1984; and John M. Weinstein, "The Effect of the Third World Poverty on U.S. Security," *Parameters: Journal of the U.S. Army War College*, December 1983, p. 8.

5. US Department of Defense, *Report of the Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger to the Congress on the FY 1985 Budget, FY 1986 Authorization Request and FY 1985-1989 Defense Programs*, 1 February 1984 (Washington: US Govt. Print. Off., 1984), pp. 18-19.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 276. Not all observers give Soviet military activity (and therefore US military tools) such a large place in the rationale for US action to assist developing nations. But many do. Compare the views, for instance, in Richard Ullman, "At War With Nicaragua," *Foreign Affairs*, Fall 1983, p. 39; and Walter La Feber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York and London: Norton, 1983) with the perspective in Frank N. Trager and William L. Scully, "Low-Intensity Conflict: The U.S. Response," in Sarkesian and Scully, p. 175; and with Thomas T. Hammond, *Red Flag Over Afghanistan* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1984), pp. 224, 225.

8. *FY 1985 Annual Report to the Congress*, p. 54. More elaborate discussion of roles, missions, organization, and modes of operation for these forces can be found in several of the US Army's doctrinal manuals, notably: US Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-20, *Low-Intensity Conflict*, Washington, DC, 16 January 1981; and US Department of the Army, Field Manual 31-22, *Command, Control, and Support of Special Forces Operations*, Washington, DC, 23 December 1981. See also David J. Baratto, "Special Forces in the 1980s: A Strategic Reorientation," *Military Review*, March 1983, p. 2.

9. See, e.g., Samuel F. Wells, Jr., "Limits on the Use of American Military Power," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Winter 1983, p. 121. See also the analysis of the US Army's newly revised operational doctrine in an article written by the main authors of the revision: Huba Wass de Czege and L.D. Holder, "The New FM 100-5," *Military Review*, July 1982, p. 53.

10. See Edward Luttwak, "Notes on Low-Intensity Warfare," *Parameters: Journal of the U.S. Army War College*, December 1983, p. 11. See also the earlier views of serving military officers in Donald B. Vought, "Preparing for the Wrong War," *Military Review*, May 1977, p. 16; John M. Oseth, "FM-100-5: A Need for Better Foundation Concepts?" *Military Review*, March 1980, p. 13; and George K. Osborn and William J. Taylor, Jr., "The Employment of Force: Political-Military Considerations," in Sarkesian and Scully, p. 17.

11. One observer has argued that, in general, the intelligence community has devoted too little attention to wartime requirements. Angelo Codevilla, "Wartime Collection Requirements," in Roy Godson, ed., *Intelligence Requirements for the 1980s: Clandestine Collection* (Washington, DC: National Strategy Information Center, 1982), p. 129. But see US Department of Defense, *Report of the Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger to the Congress on the FY 1984 Budget, FY 1985 Authorization Request and FY 1984-1988 Defense Program, February 1, 1983*, suggesting that the Defense Intelligence Agency has established an office to facilitate such planning, p. 258.

12. Probably the best American treatments of the limited war intelligence problem are Maj. (now Lieutenant General) John S. Pustay, *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), pp. 158-181; and Theodore Shackley, *The Third Option: An American View of Counterinsurgency Operations* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981). See also John J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War: The Strategy of Counter-Insurgency* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1966), pp. 113-118. The US Army's Field Manual 100-20, *Low Intensity Conflict*, lists the items of information needed by American and Allied counterinsurgency forces (pp. 284-296), and this may be the most rigorous official attempt of its kind.

13. Frank Kitson's classic work, *Low-Intensity Operations: Subversion, Insurgency and Peacekeeping* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1971) includes an extended treatment of "the handling of information."

14. Alvin H. Bernstein and John D. Waghelstein, "How to Win in El Salvador," *Policy Review*, Winter 1984, p. 50.

15. US Department of Defense, *Report of the DOD Commission on Beirut International Airport Terrorist Act, October 23, 1983* (Washington, DC: 20 December 1983), pp. 63-66; 130-133 (hereafter cited as the *Long Commission Report*).

16. For definitions of these operational functions, see US President, Executive Order 12333, "United States Intelligence Activities," *Federal Register* 46, No. 235, 8 December 1981, p. 59943, paragraphs 3.4(a) and (d).

17. The rounds for the distinction lie in the different purposes of the two kinds of operations. The ultimate punitive purpose of law enforcement operations is said to set the right of individual privacy against the security needs of society, necessitating special protections for the former from intrusive government activity. In intelligence operations, by contrast, there is no such punitive purpose—the interests of the individual and of society in the aggregate are not at odds. See the discussion in Arnold Beichman, "Can Counterintelligence Come In From the Cold?" *Policy Review*, Winter 1981, pp. 93-101.

18. See the discussion in Adda B. Bozeman, "Covert Action and Foreign Policy," in Roy Godson, ed., *Intelligence Requirements for the 1980s: Covert Action* (Washington, D.C.: National Strategy Information Center, 1981), pp. 15, 70-73. See also Pustay, p. 181.

19. As Harry Summers has pointed out, the failure to understand the true nature of the conflict in Vietnam effectively disabled all thinking—strategic or tactical—about how to deal with it. Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context* (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 1981), pp. 53-57.

20. The intelligence production process is often conceived as a "cycle" which begins with the announcement of decisionmakers' needs, and proceeds through stages of tasking collection resources,

36 Naval War College Review

conducting collection operations, analyzing the data collected, and disseminating responsive products that satisfy the original requirements. See US Congress, Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report: Book I, Foreign and Military Intelligence*, S. Rept. No. 94-755, 94th Cong., 2d sess., 1976, pp. 17-18, 83-92. See also Robert E. Hunter, *Presidential Control of Foreign Policy: Management or Mishap* (New York: Praeger, 1982) (The Washington Papers #91), pp. 37-38.

21. Special Forces capabilities are outlined in Field Manual 31-22, *Command, Control, and Support of Special Forces Operations*. See also the discussion in Howard D. Graves, "U.S. Capabilities for Military Intervention," in Sarkesian and Scully, pp. 69, 72-76.

22. The commander of the US military advisers described their missions and activities in David B. Ottaway, "U.S. Resumes Training Shaky Lebanese Army," *The Washington Post*, 1 March 1984, p. A21.

23. *Long Commission Report*, pp. 39-41, 57.

24. James N. Rosenau, "Fragmegrative Challenges to National Strategy," in Terry Heynes, *Understanding U.S. Strategy: A Reader* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1983), pp. 65, 75.

25. See the analysis in Donald E. Nuechterlein, "National Interests and National Strategy: The Need for Priority," in Heynes, p. 35.

26. Luttwak, pp. 11 ff.

27. The Army's capstone manual of tactical doctrine in 1976 (it has since been revised) said that it was written with high-technology, mobile armored warfare in Europe in mind, but that "the principles set forth in this manual. . . apply also to military operations anywhere in the world." US Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-5, *Operations*, Washington, DC, 1 July 1976.

28. Summers, p. 95.

29. Trager and Scully, "Low-Intensity Conflict: The U.S. Response," in Sarkesian and Scully, pp. 175-180. See also the remarks of Noel C. Koch, Principal Deputy Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, printed in *Congressional Record-Senate*, 3 April 1984, p. S3660.

30. US Department of the Army, Field Manual 34-10, *Military Intelligence Battalion*, 3 July 1981, p. 1-2.

31. William J. Barnds, "Intelligence Functions," in U.S. Commission on the Organization of Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy (the "Murphy Commission"), *Report of the Commission, Appendix U: Intelligence Functions Analyses* (Washington, DC: US Govt. Print. Off., 1975), pp. 7, 15; Herbert Scoville, "Is Espionage Necessary for Our Security?" *Foreign Affairs*, April 1976, pp. 482, 484. See also the Senate testimony of former CIA Directors George Bush, William Colby, and Richard Helms, in US Senate, Select Committee on Intelligence, *National Reorganization and Reform Act of 1978, Hearings Before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on S. 2525*, 95th Cong., 2d sess., 1978, pp. 59-60, 60-61, and 210, respectively.

32. See the discussion in Shackley, pp. 158-159.

33. EO 12333, paragraph 1.12(d) focuses armed services' intelligence elements on "military and military-related" information (though their capabilities can be activated on wider subjects at the instance of requirements from the DCI). See also the similar provisions for the Defense Intelligence Agency (paragraph 1.12(a)). The CIA's charter is much broader, covering the whole field of intelligence interests and activity (paragraphs 1.8 and 3.4(d)).

34. See e.g., John M. Collins, *U.S. Defense Planning: A Critique* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982), pp. 128-129; Davis B. Bobrow, "Security Futures: Intelligence and Intelligence," in Philip S. Kronenburg, ed., *Planning U.S. Security* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1981), p. 55.

35. The Senate Committee investigating intelligence abuses in 1975-1976 wrote in its *Final Report* that "The natural tendency of Government is toward abuse of power. Men entrusted with power, even those aware of its dangers, tend, particularly when pressured, to slight liberty." US Senate, Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations With Respect to Intelligence Activities, *Final Report, Book II: Intelligence Activities and the Rights of Americans*, S. Rep. No. 94-755, 94th Cong., 2d sess., 1976.

36. As F.O. Miksche observed, the business of countering conspiracy, subversion, terrorism, and sabotage is not a chivalrous exercise. Ferdinand O. Miksche, *Secret Forces: The Techniques of Underground Movements* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1950), pp. 159-160.

37. There is a small segment of the professional military literature which has worried about this problem. See Roger A. Beaumont, "Preventing Atrocity in Low-Intensity Conflict," *Military Review*, November 1983, p. 65; James M. Dubik, "FM 100-5 and Counterinsurgency Warfare," *Military Review*, November 1983, p. 41; and John M. Gates, "Indians and Insurrectos: The U.S. Army's Experience With Insurgency," *Parameters: Journal of the U.S. Army War College*, March 1983, pp. 59, 66-67.

38. Bernstein and Waghelstein, p. 52. See also the *Kissinger Commission Report*, pp. 96-97.

39. *Ibid.*

40. For some time the Department of Defense has been concerned about devising mechanisms that will permit operational commanders to use and benefit from the "strategic" resources (satellites, "all-source" analytical facilities, etc.) managed at the national level and normally devoted to the needs of Washington policymakers. See Secretary Weinberger's FY 1984 *Annual Report to the Congress*, pp. 257-258.