

June 15, 1987

NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION  
DIRECTIVE NUMBER 277National Policy and Strategy for  
Low Intensity Conflict (U)OBJECTIVE:

This National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) promulgates a national policy and strategy for Low Intensity Conflict, identifies resources for implementing the strategy, and defines a consistent and lasting approach for interagency planning and coordination. (C)

Scope and Threat: Low Intensity Conflict is political-military confrontation between contending states or groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states. It 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. (U)

Low Intensity Conflict is of primary concern to the United States when its elements are used to assault the national interests, values, and political foundations of the U.S., its friends, and allies. The strategic consequences of Low Intensity Conflict isolate the U.S. from its allies and major trading partners and weaken the political and economic institutions of the free world. The U.S. response to this form of warfare requires the national will to sustain long-term commitments. The U.S. has responded to Low Intensity Conflict through a counter-terrorism policy, support for resistance movements, political and economic support of developing nations, helping governments combat low intensity aggression, contingency operations, suppression of illegal drug trafficking, and peacekeeping operations. (U)

The principal threat to U.S. interests posed by Low Intensity Conflict lies in its cumulative nature. Unfavorable Low Intensity Conflict outcomes can gradually isolate the U.S., its allies, and major trading partners from the Third World and from

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each other. Such conflicts can lead to loss of access to strategic minerals and energy sources; loss of military basing, transit, and access rights; expanded threats to sea lines of communication; gradual shifting of friends and allies into positions of accommodation with interests hostile to the U.S.; assaults on democratic principles; and advantages for the Soviet Union in a world increasingly hostile to U.S. interests. (U)

Threats to supported governments include overt and covert low intensity aggression, which may be instigated by indigenous or externally sponsored groups. Weapons employed by the antagonists include information, subversion, restriction of resources, terrorism, guerrilla warfare, and invasion. The upper boundary of Low Intensity Conflict is crossed when opposing conventional forces employ standard doctrines of offense and defense. (U)

U.S. involvement in Low Intensity Conflict also includes supporting selected resistance groups. Further, illegal drug trafficking, the substantial revenues produced, and the concomitant exploitation of international financial networks are peripheral to but facilitate instability and must be dealt with as integral elements of Low Intensity Conflict strategy. (U)

POLICY:

U.S. responses to Low Intensity Conflict situations must be based on established criteria: strategic interests, freedom and democratic values, opposition to Soviet expansionism/adventurism, and the supported group's or government's depth of commitment to the struggle. The U.S. must also recognize the long-term nature of Low Intensity Conflict and that Congressional participation and a national and international climate of support are often the ultimate determinants of success. Finally, our policy with regard to Low Intensity Conflict must be implemented in accordance with United States law, and also framed and defined by accepted principles of international law. These principles affirm the inherent right of states to use force in individual or collective self-defense against armed attack, and also to assist one another to help maintain internal order against insurgency, revolution, guerilla activity, terrorism, and the like, which are characteristic of Low Intensity Conflict. When in the national interest, the U.S. shall: (U)

- Take measures to strengthen selected nations facing threats to their independence and stability by applying, in coordination with friends and allies, the full range of political, economic, informational, and military instruments of power. Action should be taken before instability leads to violence. (U)

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- Work to ameliorate the causes of instability and conflict in the Third World by pursuing policies and programs that promote economic development and the growth of humane social and political orders. (U)
- In accordance with international law, to support selected resistance movements seeking freedom or self-determination that are acting in opposition to regimes working against U.S. interests. (U)
- Take steps to discourage and increase the costs of terrorism and adventurism sponsored by the Soviets and other hostile powers. (U)

STRATEGY:

Support for Third World Governments: The U.S. must help supported governments establish a comprehensive strategy for isolating anti-democratic, destabilizing elements and for developing meaningful economic, political, and security goals. U.S. assistance programs should be adapted to meet the demands of this strategy, within the framework of overall U.S. foreign policy and other foreign assistance objectives. This requires extensive interagency coordination. Guidelines for U.S. strategy include: (C)

- Promoting appropriate strategies to help governments meet the basic requirements of economic, social, and political justice. Strategies shall be structured to achieve balanced, self-sustaining economic development; improve political infrastructure; aid judicial reform; and promote education. U.S. security assistance should encourage the development of professional security and civilian law enforcement forces. (S)
- Minimizing the possibility of direct U.S. involvement by applying assistance programs prior to or during the early stages of a conflict. (S)
- Ensuring the host nation's military strategy complements social, economic, informational, and political initiatives. (S)
- Ensuring U.S. assistance programs are within the financial and technological capacities of the recipient. (S)

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- Recognizing that U.S. military capabilities may be required to provide limited direct support or assistance when the host military cannot acquire certain capabilities. The U.S. can furnish support in such areas as logistics, airlift, medical support, engineering support, and intelligence collection and analysis. (S)
- Considering the need to help develop national and private information programs for the supported nation. (S)
- Encouraging the development of professional intelligence agencies and an integrated intelligence system within the supported government.

[REDACTED] (S)

1.5(c)  
1.5(d)

Support for Resistance Movements:

[REDACTED]

1.5(c)  
1.5(d)

Guidelines for U.S. strategy include: (S)

- Taking advantage of selected resistance movements to gain leverage against hostile regimes. (S)
- Avoiding "Americanizing" resistance movements and tailoring programs to their absorptive capacity. Resistance movements must not become permanently dependent on external support. (S)
- Designing comprehensive programs that emphasize the long-range development of the movement's infrastructures and military capabilities to enhance its nation building prospects. (S)
- Conveying to movements and their adversaries that the U.S. has a long-term commitment to achieving a favorable outcome. (S)
- Tailoring programs to the specific needs of each resistance movement and allowing for support of groups with diverse political programs. (S)
- Integrating information programs early in the planning to strengthen support for these movements. (S)

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The Role of Narcotics Trafficking and Exploitation of the International Financial Network: Established policy, strategy and mandated responsibilities of the National Drug Policy Board and related interagency narcotics programs [REDACTED] will be maintained. However, there must be sufficient planning and coordination between the Drug Policy Board and Low Intensity Conflict Board to ensure that U.S. policies are consistent. (S)

1.5(d)

Counter-Terrorism Policy and Strategy: The existing interagency counter-terrorism structures--to include covert programs--will continue to be appropriate fora for dealing with terrorism. There must be sufficient dialogue between established counter-terrorism structures and the Board for Low Intensity Conflict to ensure that U.S. policies are consistent. (S)

Direct Use of U.S. Military Forces in a Combat Role: Use of U.S. forces shall be in accordance with NSDD-238. (S)

ACTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION:

A process must be established to ensure that Low Intensity Conflict situations are recognized early. Ways must also be found to ensure that the U.S. can effectively and consistently deal with such situations. Recognizing the need for policy planning and coordination mechanisms, Congress amended the National Security Act of 1947 directing the President "to establish within the National Security Council a board to be known as the Board for Low Intensity Conflict." (U)

To meet these requirements, the Senior Review Group (SRG) -- as established by NSDD 276 -- shall meet as the Board for Low Intensity Conflict when considering matters dealing with the coordination of policy or strategy for Low Intensity Conflict. In addition to the members of the SRG, the Attorney General, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Secretary of Commerce, and the Director of the United States Information Agency shall attend meetings of the Board. The National Security Advisor shall chair the Board, which shall meet at his request or the request of its members. As chair for the Board, the National Security Advisor, may create a Senior/Interagency Group and Interagency Group as needed to accomplish its purpose. (U)

In accordance with NSDD 266, execution and implementation of Presidentially approved policies with respect to Low Intensity Conflict shall not be the responsibility of the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs or the NSC staff except as the President specifically directs. (U)

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As a first priority, the Board will address: (U)

- Interagency preparation and coordination of the President's report to the Congress on Low Intensity Conflict and Special Forces. (U)
- Foreign assistance as it relates to Low Intensity Conflict. (U)
- Intelligence requirements relating to Low Intensity Conflict. (U)

The Board shall also address: (U)

- How technological innovations and competitive strategies can improve the capability of the U.S. or supported groups or nations to implement effective Low Intensity Conflict strategies. (S)
- How to promote improved communications interoperability. (S)
- How the Low Intensity Conflict structure should work with regional and country specific policy planning and coordination mechanisms. (S)
- How interfaces between intelligence and other aspects of Low Intensity Conflict strategy might be improved. (S)
- Whether adequate capabilities exist for executing the strategy elements contained in this NSDD and what should be done to eliminate shortfalls. (S)

A work plan with appropriate schedules and milestones will be developed and reviewed by the Board within 90 days of issuance of this NSDD. The issue papers and definitions of terms developed to support drafting of this NSDD shall serve as guidance for the Board. (U)

REVIEW DATE:

The Board should review the status of this NSDD and its implementation six months after its issuance. (U)

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