

Remarks of Robert M. Gates
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Low Intensity Conflict:
War By Another Name

I want to thank AFCEA for inviting me to address this conference on Intelligence Support for Low Intensity Conflict. The Director of Central Intelligence and I, as you may know, coordinate the national level activities and budgets of all the elements of the US Intelligence Community -- including the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the National Security Agency (NSA), CIA, and the foreign intelligence elements of the FBI, the Departments of Energy, State and Treasury and the military services. It is in the context of our overall Intelligence Community responsibilities that I speak today, for the critical role of intelligence in the American conduct of Low Intensity Warfare transcends the capabilities of any single agency. Indeed, bureaucratic parochialism and turf battles -- within and among policy and intelligence agencies -- have in the past been an obstacle to US conduct of war against subversion, insurgency, terrorism and narcotics.

In January of this year, Secretary Shultz said "low intensity conflict is the prime challenge we will face, at least through the remainder of this century. The future of peace and freedom may well depend on how effectively we meet it." The same month, Secretary Weinberger said, "much has been

written about low intensity warfare, but it remains an open question how much is understood. Of greater certainty is the fact that little of what is understood has been applied effectively."

In my confirmation hearings last spring I said that "I believe that we face a very complicated international environment. Resistance movements are fighting Soviet aggression in their country. There are groups resisting the imposition of Marxist-Leninist regimes supported by the Soviet Union, Cuba and Vietnam in their countries. The Soviets have a very active covert action program aimed at political destabilization that we estimate broadly is costing them on the order of \$4 billion a year. We are confronting problems in the world of narcotics, terrorism, proliferation of chemical and biological weapons, and a host of other problems. I think that the experience of the last 10 years would suggest that in many of these cases, diplomacy alone is not an effective instrument. I think 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 carry out its policy and to try and protect its interests, or it can turn and walk away." This conference and others like it contribute to developing the other instruments for waging low intensity conflict. We cannot and must not walk away.

Low Intensity Conflict: What Is It?

Low intensity conflict presents us with a major emerging national security challenge. We are only beginning to come to grips with defining the issue coherently, attacking it analytically and countering it operationally. And, while many parts of our national security machinery are -- or soon will have to become -- involved in confronting the threats posed by low intensity conflict, the foundation of our efforts to meet these threats lies in intelligence -- in understanding the problem, collecting information and analyzing it, in providing the decisionmaker with a framework and, increasingly often, the means for combatting it.

While we in the intelligence business still view insurgencies and the political penetration of national liberation movements by Marxist-Leninist groups as a primary element in defining low intensity conflict, we also include traditional law enforcement issues like terrorism and narcotics under the low intensity conflict heading -- particularly when the foreign purveyors of such actions conspire together or with insurgent groups for broader mutual benefit.

Terrorists, and especially those States which support them, are carrying out low intensity conflict. Shia extremists in Lebanon are a good example -- in their self-styled war against

Israel and Western influence, they've combined guerrilla attacks and terrorism, much of it under the sponsorship of Iran and Syria. Drug runners who gain the protection of insurgents become more than a law enforcement problem; in some cases, they gain the potential clout to threaten a government allied to the US, such as in Colombia. Insurgents who ply the drug trade to fill their coffers and add to their foes' problems, and even governments, such as Cuba and Nicaragua, which are involved in moving drugs to earn hard currency and to undermine their enemies are also engaging in low intensity conflict.

Low intensity conflict is the "weapon of choice" in the Third World, and its many manifestations constitute the slings and arrows of availability and economy against larger, more developed powers whose defenses are designed primarily for nuclear and conventional military conflicts and whose strengths are in economic development and democratic values. It is a classic case of the capacity to destroy arrayed against the capacity to build.

Moreover, since low intensity conflict is the great equalizer for those who operate below the margins of nuclear power and conventional armies, it has a definite allure for Moscow in its global competition with the US. In a world where the nuclear and conventional balance changes slowly and where Soviet economic, political and ideological power is stunted, the opportunities in low intensity conflict provide the Soviets

one of their few good lines of attack against the West. It has not been lost on the Soviets that the practitioners of low intensity conflict who score spectacular successes against the West by bending or defining the rules -- like the Iranian takeover of our embassy -- are finding ways past the West's defenses, both physical and psychological.

All of this brings me back to Secretary Shultz's statement that low intensity conflict is our primary challenge through the rest of this century. It also brings me to the focus of my remarks here -- the role of intelligence in support of our efforts to manage low intensity conflict.

The Role of Intelligence

The Intelligence Community once allocated almost all of its resources against the Soviet Union and China, but this has changed dramatically over the last decade. As the challenges of low intensity conflict have grown over the last several years, the Intelligence Community has responded. The Community started an aggressive rebuilding program in the early '80s that has come to include, to a great degree, the intelligence ingredients of low intensity conflict support. We have added to our agencies a sizeable number of operations officers, attaches and analysts in the Third World, and greatly expanded our information base on the Third World. We've established the Central America Joint Intelligence Team, a joint terrorist

center, and built a Community terrorist data base. We've developed better and quicker ways to deliver SIGINT and imagery support to the field. We're now working to strengthen the Intelligence Community's contribution to the war on overseas narcotics production and networks. In Grenada, El Salvador, Lebanon, the Achille Lauro, and Bolivia we have made a tremendous contribution to successful US actions and policies, and at the same time, used each experience to strengthen our capabilities even more.

Low intensity conflict targets are more difficult for the Intelligence Community to address than the traditional Soviet intelligence target. Specific threats are all too often very difficult to forecast. They are rarely foreseen in time to have any impact on scheduled programmatic actions, and frequently they occur in areas where we have little or no intelligence infrastructure. Low intensity conflicts are often less susceptible to national technical means and demand dependence as well on traditional Humint, tactical signals and reconnaissance means, and analysis. Making matters still worse, access to the local country may be denied to us and often there may be no official US presence of any kind -- Angola is a good example. When we have not adequately anticipated a low intensity conflict situation, we often must quickly develop an adequate intelligence infrastructure.

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Management

Let me comment briefly on the management impact of all this. Much of the management problem relates to the issues that I mentioned just a moment ago of setting priorities and allocating resources. Here is an area where we can use your help.

I think we'd all agree that the Intelligence Community needs to place special focus, on a Community-wide basis, on low intensity conflict intelligence support issues, at least to assure that we understand low intensity conflict and can improve intelligence support. This symposium and its DoD and DIA predecessors are doing just that. But we must also remember that intelligence is a supporting community and not a policymaking organization. No major shifts of resources or priorities can be sustained without a policy consensus. We are seeing such a consensus develop around counterterrorism and drug enforcement.

We need sharply focused management in the field as well as a Washington-level intelligence resource and policy forum that includes all participants at national and theater level. For

excellent model. A similarly useful role is played by the

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Terrorist Incident Working Group and its Operations Support Group.

The management of our collection assets is another issue that cuts across priorities in allocating and melding resources. There is no question but that our classic collectors do a terrific job collecting against low intensity conflict targets and that they will continue to be tasked. At the same time the old "keep it simple" rule is unquestionably essential to low intensity conflict collection. This is



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country. Here is another place where technology -- particularly low cost, simple to operate and maintain technology -- can help.

Another challenge we, as managers, confront is the difficulty of anticipating the next hot spot and committing resources.



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constraints. Who could have anticipated in 1980 that Grenada would become the focus of US military action? Mexico, the Philippines, Southern Africa and others are comparatively easy to plan resources for. But how can we allocate resources well in advance to be ready for crises in Suriname, Haiti, New Caledonia, Chad, North Yemen, or countless others?

This places a premium on surge capabilities that can depend on already existing data bases, and specialists on the general art of combating or waging insurgencies, of countering and thwarting terrorism, of tackling narcotics networks. We need a core of experts -- still thin and fragile -- in each area to ensure that new tactics, new information and old and new experience are adequately integrated. This often will require bureaucratic flexibility to create new organizations as they are needed, as well as the innovativeness to identify ways in which American strengths -- economic, political, technological -- can be brought to bear. And it puts a premium on protecting expertise even on small, currently or seemingly unimportant countries.

Finally, let me address a critically important aspect of intelligence support. For far too long, we have been content to be passive participants in low intensity conflict. We collect information, we analyze it, and we send reports to policy agencies and officials. Yet, we know -- as I said before -- that traditional diplomacy and military measures are usually not effective against low intensity conflict -- especially insurgencies, counterinsurgencies, terrorism and subversion. Often the most effective offensive weapons available are those either in intelligence or are deeply dependent upon the aggressive use of intelligence. We in



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intelligence can help combat low intensity conflict effectively. But we can no longer think or behave as passive observers. We in intelligence are the shock troops of low intensity conflict. Managers must lead this change in attitude and priority.

Low Intensity Conflict: War Between Nations

Let me close with a personal observation about low intensity conflict. Too often we are preoccupied by tactics and fail to achieve a strategic understanding of disparate events and developments that we associate with low intensity conflict. It is essential to appreciate that low intensity conflict is preeminently still war between nations -- wars without declaration, without mobilization, without massive armies. It is that long twilight war described a quarter century ago by President Kennedy.

In the Third World, the Soviet Union has been conducting for decades a war against the West. It has affixed itself like a parasite to legitimate nationalist, anti-colonial movements or to those who have overthrown repressive or incompetent regimes and tried wherever possible to convert or consolidate them into Marxist-Leninist dictatorships as in Nicaragua, Angola and Ethiopia. It has worked to destabilize governments in the hope of displacing them with others of its own choosing as in the Congo, Ghana, Chile, Grenada, Pakistan, and the Yemens. It has, directly and indirectly, supported insurgencies in El Salvador, South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, the Congo, Rhodesia, South Africa, and many others. Other measures to secure control in Afghanistan having failed, it invaded.

It has directly and indirectly trained, funded, armed, and even operationally assisted terrorist organizations such as Fatah, Abu Nidal, and others. In all these areas, it has been helped by its clients or dependents Cuba, Libya, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and the East Europeans. Thus, as we reflect on the last forty years of violence and instability in the Third World, the Soviet Union and its surrogates have played a major role. Their participation is a common feature of low intensity conflict as is their ability relentlessly to sustain their involvement over many years.

Outside of Europe, it is hard to find terrorist organizations that in some way or another do not enjoy the protection of Syria, Libya, Iran, Cuba or Nicaragua. While not all terrorist acts or groups are state sponsored, these governments -- and others in Eastern Europe and elsewhere -- provide protection, facilities, funding, arms and political support that makes it possible for most terrorist organizations to operate and survive.

Thus, as we consider low intensity conflict and how to deal with it, it is imperative to remember that the sources, the wellsprings of such conflict usually are still governments. And so I return to my original premise: We are at war. And, I further submit to you that, as in the past forty years, these political-military wars will dominate our foreign policy and preoccupy our leaders as far into the future as we can see. If we deny or simply fail to recognize that most low intensity conflict is war and is being conducted or sustained by states hostile to us, we will underestimate its durability, its danger to us, and its scope. Similarly, we will deny ourselves both weapons and opportunities appropriate for use against nations. We can no longer allow our adversaries to say "what's mine is mine and what is yours is negotiable" or subject to subversion, attack or terror.

I set forth these propositions and analysis because too many treat low intensity conflict as a new and narrowly viewed phenomenon, the latest fad -- the newest bandwagon bureaucracies and contractors alike are climbing aboard because it's perceived to be where the action and the dollars are. If we fail to see the larger strategic picture, if we ignore the lessons we can learn from our past experience in these conflicts, if we regard low intensity conflict as a transitory phenomenon rather than a dominant and enduring element of the international environment to be strategically managed, then we will constantly be on the defensive, we will be reacting -- dancing to the tune of Marxist-Leninist subversion and aggression, of terrorists and drug dealers. As a country, as corporate executives, and as government officials, we must develop realistic policies, public support for those policies and make the long term investment in resources, technology and information essential to overcoming or winning low intensity conflicts.