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# Preparing for Irregular Warfare

By F. Andy Messing Jr.

FALLS CHURCH, Va. — In spite of apocalyptic warnings, the decade ahead will not bring a global nuclear or major conventional war between the superpowers. However, there will be conflicts on a lower level of intensity: unconventional wars, limited conventional actions and reactions, and terrorism. They will be started for a variety of social, economic, and political reasons. No matter how they are labeled, they will amount to irregular warfare.

One can envision involuntary or voluntary American involvement because of our immediate need to protect our interests — our citizens abroad, raw-material sources, United States facilities, strategic geographic areas. How President Reagan responded would affect the frequency of these problems and other countries' perceptions of our strength.

World political authority has been diffusing and becoming increasingly volatile. While this may not appear to affect America, the probability of conflict has taken a quantum jump. The "wild card" of terrorists' accessibility to chemical, biological, and nuclear devices, and to other advanced weapons, makes serious conflict-situations an eventuality. Responsible nations must take steps to minimize or prevent potential situations of conflict.

Understanding the nature of warfare in the 80's is important; undertaking the arduous task of preparing for it is essential. But, we must recognize that such preparation is useless without Presidential resolve to act. As Karl von Clausewitz, the Prussian general, pointed out, the battlefield is an extension of politics. Not being able to operate effectively in an irregular-warfare situation limits a President's political options. It forces him into inaction or, worse yet, action at a higher level of intensity: conventional-force and nuclear-force alerts or actions. To have a policy and an organized capability to meet this challenge would increase our latitude in political and military responses — responses that could be overt or covert.

The Soviet Union understands the effectiveness and economy of this mode of warfare. It understands that by using irregular warfare it can tiptoe around the nuclear trip-wire. Instead of appreciating this, the United States has reduced its military advisory force to third-world nations to about 700 men. The Soviet Union has more than 8,100 in the Middle East and Africa alone. Furthermore, because of drastic reduc-

tions in funding, America has reduced its active-duty irregular-warfare force to about 4,500 men — the Army's Special Forces were reduced, by President Carter's cutback in October, to their lowest level since the 50's. The Soviet Union has an area-oriented, language-qualified, active-duty irregular force of nearly 20,000 men. And this figure includes neither the Soviet irregular-warfare specialists in reserve, nor the irregular forces of the Warsaw Pact, nor Cuban irregular forces; nor does it include the coordinated Soviet-bloc intelligence operations that complement its irregular forces. In contrast, the readiness and strength upon mobilization of America's 4,500 irregular-warfare reservists is questionable. Because of fluctuating political circumstances, America cannot even count on allied irregular forces and intelligence assets.

Seeing America dwarfed in this area, Mr. Reagan must revitalize all elements associated with irregular warfare and not just rely on the parochial Rapid Deployment Force to fill the gap. This action, less expensive and faster than enhancing our conventional and nuclear capabilities, would expand our political and military options, and influence. It would give us time to rebuild our conventional and nuclear forces and to accomplish a "technological bypass" that would give us — to use Mr. Reagan's phrase — a "margin of safety."

Then Mr. Reagan must correctly use these forces. Ideally, a permanent, career-enhancing organization with a



short chain of command should be established and cloaked in secrecy. It should have appropriate military and civil elements, from such agencies as the Defense Department, Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the State and Treasury Departments. Its mission

would be to plan for, and meet, any low-intensity-conflict situation.

The prevailing national view must be considered in creating this force. America should be able to respond to any crisis, domestic or foreign. There should be a narrow definition of domestic responsibilities; one mission could be to fight certain types of crime — drug-smuggling, for example. With this in mind, Congress must modify laws that exclude the military from fighting crime. In the foreign arena, the force's existence would deter low-intensity conflict, but, more importantly, it would manifest our ability to use the stick when necessary.

Irregular warfare has not been given the degree of attention it merits. The time is now to develop the flexibility America needs to regain respect and ensure peace.

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