

CHAPTER 1

Fundamentals of Low Intensity Conflict

The political object, as the original motive of the war, should be the standard for determining both the aim of the military force and also the amount of effort to be made.

Carl von Clausewitz

What is important is to understand the role of military force and the role of other responses and how these fit together.

Caspar Weinberger

This chapter outlines the role of military operations in low intensity conflict (LIC). It describes the environment of LIC and identifies imperatives which the military planner must consider. It describes the four major LIC operational categories—support for insurgencies and counterinsurgencies; combatting terrorism; peacekeeping operations; and peacetime contingency operations. It also provides general guidance for campaign planning, and presents perspectives which are useful at the operational level. Subsequent chapters address the four major operational categories in detail.

DEFINITION

Low intensity conflict is a political-military confrontation between contending states or groups below conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states. It frequently 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.

Nuclear parity, the dynamics of modern revolutionary warfare, and economic interdependence have significantly reshaped the international arena over the last four decades. In this environment, LIC poses complex challenges to US global interests. Unfavorable outcomes of LIC may gradually isolate the United States, its allies, and its global trading partners from each other and from the world community. Unfavorable outcomes of LIC may also cause—

- The loss of US access to strategic energy reserves and other natural resources.
- The loss of US military basing, transit, and access rights.
- The movement of US friends and allies to positions of accommodation with hostile groups.
- The gain of long-term advantages for US adversaries.

Conversely, successful LIC operations, consistent with US interests and laws, can advance US international goals such as the growth of freedom, democratic institutions, and free market economies.

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US policy recognizes that indirect, rather than direct, applications of US military power are the most appropriate and cost-effective ways to achieve national goals in a LIC environment. The principal US military instrument in LIC is security assistance in the form of training, equipment, services and combat support. When LIC threatens friends and allies, the aim of security assistance is to ensure that their military institutions can provide security for their citizens and government. (A discussion of the role of security assistance in the context of overall foreign assistance and programs is at Appendix A.)

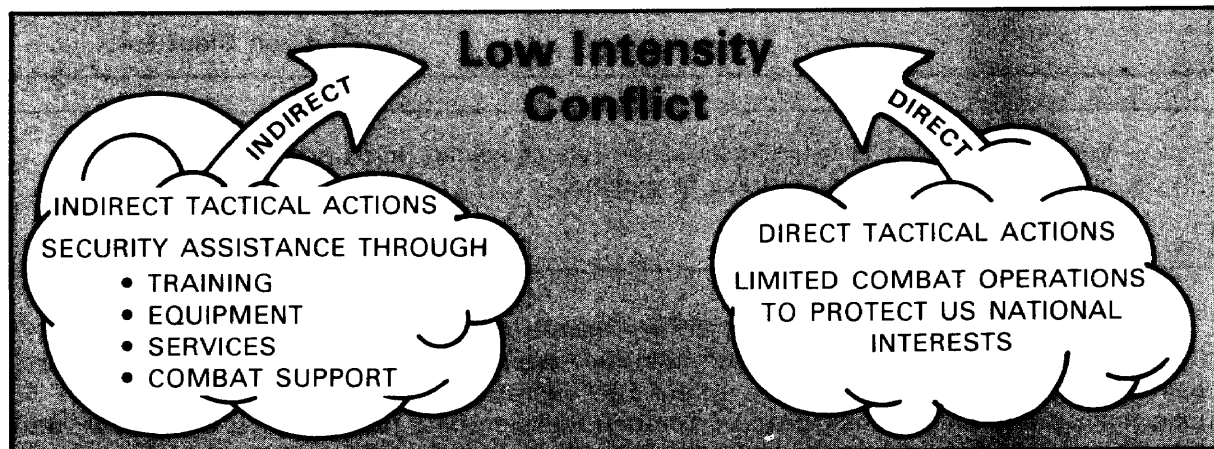


Figure 1-1. Indirect versus Direct Applications

The United States will also employ combat operations in exceptional circumstances when it cannot protect its national interests by other means. When a US response is called for, it must be in accordance with the principles of international and domestic law. These principles affirm the inherent right of states to use force in individual or collective self-defense against armed attack. (Appendix B provides an overview of the laws relevant to military operations in LIC.)

UNDERSTANDING THE ENVIRONMENT

To confront the challenge of LIC effectively, the military planner must understand its dynamics. He must put LIC dynamics into a historical context to understand how a complex group of players manipulate the LIC environment to advance their interests.

LIC Dynamics

Chief among the dynamic forces that contribute to LIC are change, discontent, poverty, violence, and instability. These interact to create an environment conducive to LIC.

Change can cause great stress in a society and often produces discontent. Governments or social systems must accommodate innovation or the sudden impact of external social influences. They may not successfully incorporate these changes within their traditional cultural value system. Addressing the problems posed by change requires considerable time and resources. The impatience of key groups and limits on resources make it difficult to respond fully to these problems.

When people sense injustice, they become discontented. Groups may form around specific issues of discontent. People may support or join groups committed to achieving

social or political change through violent means. The intensity of their sense of injustice often determines the degree to which they participate in violence.

Change brought about through violence may produce instability, but not all instability is detrimental. The United States itself was the product of change through revolution. It subsequently developed a form of government which allows social and occupational mobility through individual achievement and growth. The United States is not opposed to this sort of evolution in other nations. Its interests are not rigidly tied to the status quo. Indeed, long-term US interests may be put at risk when political groups with authoritarian, totalitarian, or other objectives impede revolutionary change and exploit instability. In fact, the threat to the United States in LIC is the exploitation of instability by groups opposed to US goals.

A Historical Perspective

Since the end of World War II, a host of groups and states have pursued their interests in the LIC environment. Many international wars and insurgences have taken a heavy toll of lives and treasure. Most of them have occurred in the Third World and they have changed the international environment. Many Third World conflicts originated in the struggle to end the system of European empires. As nations achieved this goal, clashes among more or less conventional military forces sought to rectify artificially imposed relationships among newly independent states. This type of conflict continues. More frequently, insurgents have sought to alter the political, social and economic organization of these states, bringing about internal conflicts. These conflicts are also continuing. However, the means by which groups and nations conduct these conflicts have changed significantly, increasing the risks in the LIC environment.

Nuclear parity, the success of deterrence, and an increasingly interdependent world have created a period of transition in superpower relationships. Regional powers have developed, diffusing the international balance of power. Although the absolute strength of the superpowers has not declined, their relative strength in the world is less than it was two decades ago. Lesser powers have proliferated and have their own interests to pursue. Their independent actions provide many new possibilities for conflict, irrespective of relations among the superpowers.

Taken together, these factors reveal a world with a high potential for violent conflict. Mutual deterrence of war between the superpowers suggests that conflicts will occur in the Third World, where the interests of regional powers and those of the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics meet and interact. The United States and its armed forces can expect to be involved in LIC and operations to prevent LIC for the foreseeable future.

Trends

Technological advances have also created an environment favorable to LIC. Established societies have become more vulnerable because technology has made more advanced weapons available to insurgent or terrorist groups. Large urban industrial and commercial areas present attractive targets. They depend on support facilities such as telecommunication and automation centers for their existence. These are easily sabotaged. In addition, advanced electronic communications media bring the full impact of political violence into homes worldwide. The result is instant recognition for formerly unknown or little-known insurgent or terrorist groups. Insurgents and terrorists recognize the importance of the public affairs arena to their struggles.

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The possible use of nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons is potentially a serious problem in LIC. The proliferation of NBC weapons and the threat of their use vastly increase the terror potential of a nation or group with this capability.

An interdependent world and mass communications make external material support easily accessible to groups and states involved in LIC. Sources of external support are not limited just to the superpowers. All countries can, and many do, provide active or passive, material and moral support.

The Players

Increasingly in the last two decades, new players have begun to take advantage of LIC as a means of advancing their foreign policy objectives. Frequently, their activities run counter to US interests and complicate the task of US planners and policy makers.

Urban guerrillas are increasingly active players in this contemporary conflict. The conflict in Northern Ireland, the civil war in Lebanon, and guerrilla warfare in the urban areas of Latin America provide examples. Increasing urbanization in the Third World generates the social and political forces which will lead to the spread of urban guerrilla warfare.

Anti-Marxist insurgents are relatively new players in the LIC environment. They illustrate that LIC can threaten not just US global interests, but those of the USSR and other powers as well.

The appearance of vigilante groups, including death squads, also threatens political stability. These vigilante groups often believe they are performing security or political tasks, even if illegal, which their government is unwilling or unable to do. They have become a prominent feature in some insurgences. They are uncontrolled—or sometimes secretly controlled—by various factions in and out of the government. Their actions can alienate the very populace whose support their government or group is trying to win or maintain.

The development of professional, full-time revolutionaries and terrorists, some of whom are mercenaries available for hire, makes the political environment more dangerous and the response to terrorism more difficult. These individuals often receive arms, logistics, and training support through an international black market.

Some insurgent and terrorist groups finance their activities through illicit narcotics sales or through funds provided by drug dealers for protection of their trade. Political and practical constraints often limit the ability of Third World governments to institute drug control programs and vigorously prosecute them. Poor economic performance, challenges from insurgents, and the problem of staying in power in a volatile political environment compete for the attention of national leaders in the major narcotics growing and trafficking countries. Consequently, leaders of these countries may place a low priority on suppression of drug trafficking. In some cases, they may hesitate to introduce eradication programs that will eliminate a lucrative, if illegal, cash crop. They fear this action may bring appeals for aid from already tight governmental budgets, and possibly create a disaffected rural population susceptible to insurgent propaganda. At the same time, drug traffickers use their profits to undermine government actions against them by corrupting or intimidating civilian and military officials. They also protect their interests by acts of terrorism and subversion. Thus, these criminals or groups of criminals obtain and hold political power far beyond the strength of their numbers.

US and Soviet interests also impact on what would otherwise be local conflicts or power shifts. The Soviets are not responsible for all conflicts in the world, but they can and do exploit otherwise internal conflicts to implement their global strategy. Soviet surrogates and client states play an important role in this effort. They have followed a basically opportunistic and pragmatic strategy, but are displaying an increasingly sophisticated approach. This approach now includes techniques for creating instability where none existed previously. The Soviets tailor military assistance not only to appeal to their client but also to create a dependency that is costly to break. The government receiving Soviet assistance comes to rely on the USSR for training, technical advice, logistics support, spare parts, and repairs. It then finds itself in a double bind: on the one hand, it depends on the Soviets for its existence; but, on the other hand, the dependence on the Soviets (or any other nation) undermines that government's legitimacy.

Soviet advisors can influence the military and foreign policies of their client states by providing personal and interservice links that complement and shape overt ties. They recruit talented individuals for special instruction in the USSR. Soviet training of Third World nationals includes indoctrination in Marxist-Leninist ideology. The umbrella of Soviet military aid can also include the use of third country surrogates for security functions, training, overseeing of combat operations, and employment of combat forces.

LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT IMPERATIVES

Success in LIC requires planning and conducting operations based on the following imperatives:

- Political dominance.
- Unity of effort.
- Adaptability.
- Legitimacy.
- Perseverance.

These imperatives apply in all four LIC operational categories.

Political Dominance

In LIC operations, political objectives drive military decisions at every level from the strategic to the tactical. All commanders and staff officers must understand these political objectives and the impact of military operations on them. They must adopt courses of action which legally support those objectives even if the courses of action appear to be unorthodox or outside what traditional doctrine had contemplated.

Unity of Effort

Military leaders must integrate their efforts with other governmental agencies to gain a mutual advantage in LIC. Military planners must consider how their actions contribute to initiatives which are also political, economic, and psychological in nature. Unity of effort calls for interagency integration and coordination to permit effective action within the framework of our governmental system. Commanders may answer to civilian chiefs or may themselves employ the resources of civilian agencies.

Adaptability

Adaptability is the skill and willingness to change or modify structures or methods to accommodate different situations. It requires careful mission analysis, comprehensive intelligence, and regional expertise. Adaptability is more than just tailoring or flexibility both of which imply the use of the same techniques or structures in many different

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situations. Successful military operations in LIC will require the armed forces to use adaptability not only to modify existing methods and structures, but to develop new ones appropriate to each situation.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is the willing acceptance of the right of a government to govern or of a group or agency to make and enforce decisions. Legitimacy is not tangible, nor easily quantifiable. Popular votes do not always confer or reflect legitimacy. Legitimacy derives from the perception that authority is genuine and effective and uses proper agencies for reasonable purposes. No group or force can create legitimacy for itself, but it can encourage and sustain legitimacy by its actions. Legitimacy is the central concern of all parties directly involved in a conflict. It is also important to other parties who may be involved even indirectly.

Perseverance

Low intensity conflicts rarely have a clear beginning or end marked by decisive actions culminating in victory. They are, by nature, protracted struggles. Even those short, sharp contingency encounters which do occur are better assessed in the context of their contribution to long-term objectives. Perseverance is the patient, resolute, persistent pursuit of national goals and objectives for as long as necessary to achieve them. Perseverance does not preclude taking decisive action. However, it does require careful, informed analysis to select the right time and place for that action. While it is important to succeed, it is equally important to recognize that in the LIC environment success will generally not come easily or quickly. Developing an attitude of disciplined, focused perseverance will help commanders reject short-term successes in favor of actions which are designed to accomplish long-term goals.

OPERATIONAL CATEGORIES

US military operations in LIC fall into four broad categories. The categories are—

- Support for insurgency and counterinsurgency.
- Combatting terrorism.
- Peacekeeping operations.
- Peacetime contingency operations.

LIC operations may involve two or more of these categories. Understanding the similarities and differences between the operational categories helps the military planner establish priorities in actual situations.

Support for Insurgency and Counterinsurgency

US security interests may lie with an incumbent government or with an insurgency. Both insurgencies and counterinsurgencies are concerned with mobilizing the support of the people. How they distribute their efforts between building support for themselves and undermining the support and legitimacy of their opponents is perhaps the central dilemma for both the insurgent and counterinsurgent.

Combatting Terrorism

The aim of combatting terrorism is to protect installations, units, and individuals from the threat of terrorism. Combatting terrorism includes both antiterrorism (AT) and counterterrorism (CT) actions, throughout the entire spectrum of conflict. The combatting

terrorism program is designed to provide coordinated action before, during, and after terrorist incidents.

Peacekeeping Operations

Peacekeeping operations are military operations which maintain peace already obtained through diplomatic efforts. A peacekeeping force supervises and implements a negotiated truce to which belligerent parties have agreed. The force operates strictly within the parameters of its terms of reference (TOR), doing neither more nor less than its mandate prescribes. A distinguishing feature of these operations is that the peacekeeping force is normally forbidden to use violence to accomplish its mission. In most cases, it can use force only for self-defense.

Peacetime Contingency Operations

Peacetime contingency operations include such diverse actions as disaster relief, certain types of counter-drug operations, and land, sea and air strikes. The unifying feature of these actions is the rapid mobilization of effort to focus on a specific problem, usually in a crisis and guided, at the national level, by the crisis action system (see JCS Pub 5-02.4). Frequently, these operations take place away from customary facilities, requiring deep penetration and temporary establishment of long lines of communication (LOC) in a hostile environment. Peacetime contingency operations may require the exercise of restraint and the selective use of force or concentrated violent actions.

OPERATIONAL PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Long-range planning for LIC uses the same logic process commanders use in campaign planning during conventional war. The military leader must address these central questions:

- What conditions must be produced to achieve the strategic goal?
- What sequence of events will most likely result in the desired conditions?
- How should resources be applied to produce that sequence of events?

In LIC, the military leader cannot define the conditions he seeks to achieve in military terms alone; in many cases, they also are political, economic, or social. The sequence of events in an operation, the resources, and the control of resources may not translate easily into military terms. Thus, the Department of State, the Department of Treasury, or even the international banking industry may participate in actions associated with an operation in LIC.

The Conditions

Campaign planning for LIC will reflect the highly political environment in which the military conducts its operations. The military planner's first step is to determine the desired end state, or goal. What does he want to do? What conditions constitute success? What is the enemy's center of gravity? What is the enemy's objective and how can it be countered? The situation in LIC is often ambiguous. Mission analysis may be difficult; the analyst must understand the mission and the commander's intent in detail. Goals may change with changes in US national objectives, local conditions, or conditions elsewhere in the world. The analyst must consider the political, economic, informational, and military components of the end state. He must analyze each component to determine how to apply military resources to achieve the goal.

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A deep understanding of host nation culture is indispensable to making effective decisions and avoiding costly mistakes in LIC situations. National and subnational cultures have specific expectations of the government, priorities of concerns, and effective symbols that may prove crucial to progress. Without a thorough understanding of their culture, a commander could expect people and societies to hold the same values and expectations that he considers normal solely from his perspective, and this could prove counterproductive.

Sequencing Events

The military planner must identify all steps necessary to achieve his goal. He must anticipate contingencies. He must synchronize use of the military instrument with agencies employing the other instruments of national power in order to design programs which promote unity of effort. Planning must provide methods to resolve disagreements among the cooperating agencies. Domestic and international law, internal US politics, or US public opinion may impose constraints and restrictions. Without this coordination, military efforts may prove useless or even counterproductive.

The planner should evaluate the completed military plan in the context of the national or international campaign plan which directs the total effort. He should also assess the effects of the military and other plans on related situations in the region or in the world at large.

Applying Resources

The operational-level planner spends much of his time marshalling and synchronizing available resources and setting priorities for their use. He may have to act through an agency other than his own. To achieve unity of effort, he may have to depend more on persuasion and cooperation than on the direct exercise of authority. He must adapt military resources to fit the circumstances. Success in low intensity conflict requires the synchronized use of all elements of national power, and detailed interagency and allied cooperation.

ESSENTIAL PERSPECTIVES

When engaging in LIC operations, Army and Air Force officers may face challenges to their ethics, morality, and leadership. They will confront complex roles and missions. Some perspectives on these issues follow.

The Ethical and Moral Dilemma

Low intensity conflict, more than war, will often present the United States and its armed forces with difficult ethical and moral challenges. The type of aggression encountered in LIC is not as blatant as that in war. Subversion, sabotage, assassination, and guerrilla operations encountered in another country may pose a threat to US interests, but the threat to national survival may be neither imminent nor obvious. The US response to this threat must be consistent with US and international law and US national values. The response of the United States to these threats may be controversial because there may be legitimate grievances that provoke them. Nonetheless, the decision to stand aside is as profound in its effect as the decision to become involved.

The decision to act in any of the four LIC operational categories is essentially a political one. International law and custom presume that an incumbent government is legitimate and legally constituted. A policy of involvement by an outside power must

demonstrate its legitimacy. The basis for the international use of force is self-defense or the defense of others.

The inevitable ambiguity of the proper employment of force demands that weight be given to other considerations. One is feasibility. However reprehensible the conduct of a government or group deep in the interior of a distant continent, military intervention may not be within US capabilities. Other factors besides time and distance may also make US action inappropriate. For example, the presence or extent of US national interests is also bound up with the basic idea of self-defense and collective defense. Where US interests are absent or minor, the United States may not expect international or domestic approval of its involvement. Limited national interests, the presumption against intervention, and lack of feasibility help explain apparent US tolerance of some undesirable situations.

On the other hand, noninvolvement accepts the piecemeal degradation of security interests and tolerates unnecessary human suffering, both of which might be prevented or alleviated by a more active, if necessarily selective, approach.

Leadership

Military leaders have two distinct, yet related, sets of responsibilities in the LIC environment. The first is their traditional responsibility to their military mission and their troops. But, in addition to simply capturing ground or destroying the enemy, they must also exercise a constructive influence to achieve larger political and psychological objectives.

In their traditional leadership role, commanders at all levels must take positive action to ensure the security of their force. This includes measures to provide for the physical protection of the force and the safeguarding of their supplies and equipment. Rules of engagement (ROE) and legal restrictions on the use of force by US military personnel must be agreed upon and clearly stated before commitment of the force. The commander must continually monitor and re-evaluate these rules and restrictions and take appropriate action throughout the operation. Predeployment training must be consistent with allowable measures of force protection in each situation.

In order to accomplish their larger objectives in LIC, military leaders must consider the effect of all their actions on public opinion. The legitimacy of the actions of an armed force, or even individual members of the force can have far-reaching effects on the legitimacy of the political system that the force supports. The leader must ensure that his troops understand that a tactically successful operation can also be strategically counterproductive because of the way in which they executed it and how the people perceived its execution.

The ambiguity of the LIC environment enhances the importance of the concepts of vision and commander's intent. Leaders must formulate a vision of success and communicate it to their subordinates. That vision must include political and psychological end states, as well as military objectives. The military leader must recognize the moral dilemma posed to his troops by the lack of a clear distinction between enemy combatants and noncombatants. He must convey to his subordinates a clear understanding of who the enemy is and, equally important, who he is not.

The military leader's responsibility to influence the larger community requires him to inspire action by persuasion in circumstances in which he lacks the authority to command. In the country teams and other interagency and international organizations,

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and in his role as advisor, his voice is only one among several. He must be able to produce constructive results by the force of his argument and his example.

The military leader must have integrity, courage, and competence. He must act correctly without direct supervision, assistance, or advice. He must inspire those qualities among his subordinates and counterparts and give them his trust and support.

The Army and Air Force Role

Army and Air Force support to military operations in LIC ranges from military-to-military exchanges and security assistance, to overt military operations. The Army and Air Force provide forces to the unified commanders-in-chief (CINCs), trained, equipped, and prepared for military operations in LIC. At the direction of the Department of Defense, they also provide other military resources (individuals, units, and materiel) through the unified CINCs to ambassadors and country teams to support security assistance programs and other interagency activities. Army and Air Force members of each US country team advise the ambassador, interagency representatives, and foreign officials on LIC strategy and operational art. The relationships between the services, the CINC, and the ambassadors is situation-dependent. In general, the ambassador controls the activities of all departments in a given country.

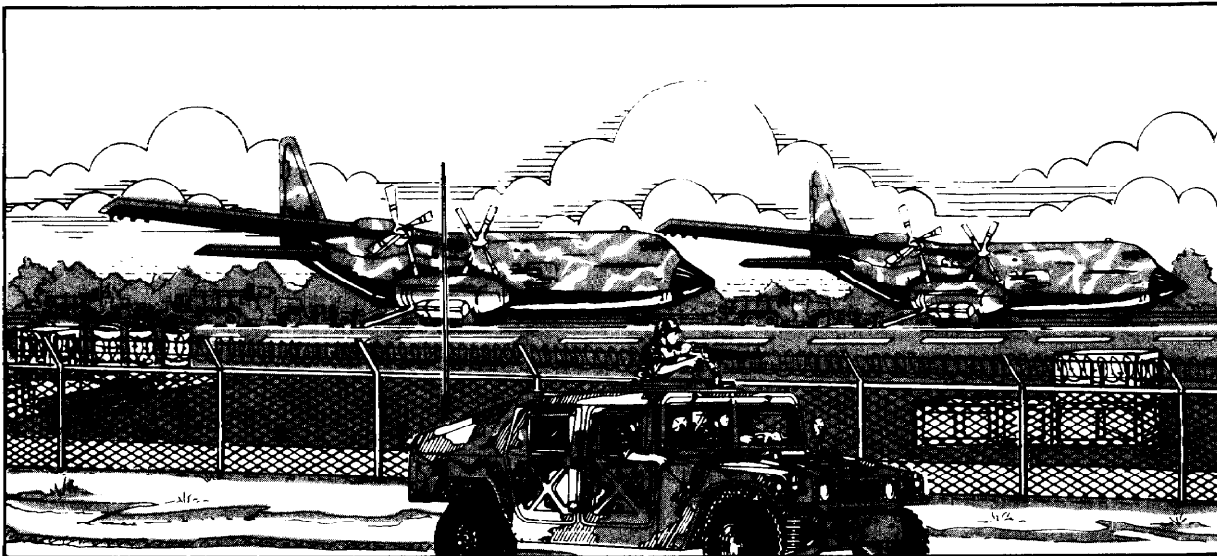


Figure 1-2 Army and Air Force Assistance

Reserve Component forces of the Army and the Air Force have proven their effectiveness in operations in LIC. The employment of Reserve Component units and individuals in these operations often requires unique support arrangements. The providing and receiving commanders in both the Active and Reserve Components must understand and respond to these requirements. For example, due to the rapid rotation of Reserve Component units, it is normally necessary for an Active Component element to provide their intelligence support. This ensures consistency and continuity in the collection and analysis of intelligence on threats to the force. In addition, Active and Reserve Component organizations, both providing and receiving, should exchange lessons learned to maintain continuity in the operation.

Security assistance organizations (SAOs), from department-level to elements in the recipient country, execute the transfer of military materiel and services. Army and Air Force personnel assist the friendly government or group with force development and provide training through schools, mobile training teams (MTTs), and combined exercises. Army and Air Force combat support (CS) and Army combat service support (CSS) units support friendly military organizations. When authorized, they assist civilian agencies of the friendly government or group and the private sector, often in cooperation with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other official or private US organizations.

Special operations forces (SOF) have significant utility in the LIC context. SOF may plan and conduct insurgency and counterinsurgency, foreign internal defense (FID), direct action, special reconnaissance, and counterterrorism operations. SOF provide senior decision makers with options for discriminate engagement, precluding or limiting the need to employ large, conventional, combat formations. SOF can provide training to indigenous forces, helping governments to help themselves. The regional orientation of SOF units and their wide variety of skills ensure that the National Command Authorities (NCA) and CINCs maintain a constant source of culturally acclimated, linguistically qualified, highly trained individuals and teams ready for immediate deployment.

US combat forces conduct strikes, raids, demonstrations, and shows of force to protect US interests, give warning to hostile groups, and encourage friendly groups. Combat operations in LIC are conducted primarily for their psychological effects. When required, US forces may engage and defeat the enemy or provide the opportunity for friendly forces to develop the capability to do the job themselves. However, US forces will not normally be committed to combat, particularly in a counterinsurgency. The principal function of US forces must be to assist the host nation, but the host nation must ultimately defeat the insurgency and eliminate the internal conditions which bred it.
