Guerrilla Warfare & Counter-insurgency

U.S.–Soviet Policy in the Third World

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Lexington Books
D.C. Heath and Company/Lexington, Massachusetts/Toronto

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Guerrilla warfare and counterinsurgency : U.S. Soviet policy in the Third World / edited by Richard H. Shultz ... [et al.].
p. cm.
ISBN 0-669-19934-6 (alk. paper)
1. Low-intensity conflicts (Military science). 2. United States—Military relations—Developing countries. 3. Soviet Union—Military relations—Developing countries. 4. Developing countries—Military relations—United States. 5. Developing countries—Military relations—Soviet Union. I. Shultz, Richard H., 1947-

U240.G8239 1989 88-13380
355'.0218—dc19

Published simultaneously in Canada
Printed in the United States of America
International Standard Book Number: 0-669-19934-6
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 88-13380

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984. ♾™

88 89 90 91 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10

Preface

As the United States approaches the 1990s, it confronts challenges across a broad spectrum of security issues, ranging from the maintenance of a strategic nuclear deterrent posture to the complex conflict environments of the Third World. Threats to the vital interests of the United States and its allies have become varied during the past generation, especially within what has become known as low intensity conflict or protracted warfare. The ability of the United States to cope effectively with low intensity conflict threats is influenced and constrained by several factors, including domestic politics, bureaucratic resistance within the national security community, intra-alliance discord on the conduct of policy in the Third World, and the Soviet Union's active role (together with its allies and surrogates) in destabilizing countries and regions deemed critical to the preservation of U.S. politico-military and socioeconomic interests.

It has been argued that the very term *low intensity conflict* (LIC) is ambiguous and covers a form of conflict difficult to define accurately. Certainly it cannot be characterized simply as conflict below the conventional level, for it is infinitely more complex and varied. LIC consists of protracted struggles that are characterized by competing ideologies, a combination of psychological-political tactics, internal stresses, and paramilitary means. Generally it embraces insurgency, counterinsurgency, resistance to the imposition of totalitarian regimes, terrorism, and covert operations, as well as peacetime contingencies and peacekeeping operations. This book focuses on two major aspects of LIC as they relate to U.S. and Soviet policy: promoting or countering revolutionary insurgency and resistance movements.

During the spring of 1987, the International Security Studies Program of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, together with the U.S. Army War College and the National Defense University, cosponsored a major conference, "Protracted Warfare—The Third World Arena: A Dimension of U.S.-Soviet Conflict." Research papers were presented by leading specialists, civilian and military, on LIC and protracted warfare from the U.S. government, distinguished academic and public policy analysts, as

well as journalists and members of the corporate community. Following the conference, the papers were revised and edited for this book.

The study concentrates on the insurgency and resistance-counterinsurgency aspects of LIC, the objectives and fundamental constraints evident in U.S. and Soviet policymaking processes, and the political, psychological, and military dimensions of efforts to implement effective strategies. The book is divided into five parts: (1) the U.S. and Soviet approaches to Third World conflicts, the broad objectives they pursue, and the constraints confronting the two superpowers; (2) the specific doctrines and strategies they have developed to deal with LIC; (3) the force structures, C^3 (command, control, and communications), and technologies associated with protracted warfare; (4) its political and psychological dimensions; and (5) case studies of ongoing insurgency and counterinsurgency campaigns in which the United States and the Soviet Union are involved, among them, Afghanistan, El Salvador, the Philippines, and Nicaragua, as well as the Horn and southern Africa.

The chapter authors address the operational principles associated with LIC in order to comprehend better the parameters of insurgency and counterinsurgency as approached, respectively, by the United States and the Soviet Union. It will be apparent to readers that there are significant differences in U.S. and Soviet policies with regard to both objectives and constraints.

From the U.S. perspective, LIC, despite the experience gained in Vietnam, is a phenomenon that remains difficult to grasp, especially from the point of view of the military establishment. Doctrinally the conventional forces approach continues to dominate U.S. armed forces; as a result, a comprehensive doctrine for low intensity operations has yet to be developed. Furthermore, from a strategic and tactical perspective, the United States lacks civilian institutional memory and experience when compared to the Soviet Union, which, since the early days of communist rule, has developed and employed the theoretical and operational dimensions of protracted warfare. In addition to the absence of adequate doctrine and capabilities to cope with LIC, the United States also confronts other constraints. For example, congressional policy on this issue is frequently ambiguous and contradictory. On the one hand, the opposition in Congress to support for paramilitary operations makes it difficult for the United States to assist resistance movements over a long-term period. This is also true of counterinsurgency efforts. In El Salvador, one of the main problems that has surfaced is the degree to which the entire policy has been shaped by U.S. domestic politics and congressional restrictions. On the other hand, as part of its military reform legislation, Congress has mandated the creation of special military and civilian organizations to respond more effectively to situations like those in El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Nevertheless, the obstacles confronting the United States in conducting low intensity operations cannot be blamed solely on the inadequacies of the civilian bureaucracies, the involvement of Congress, or the intrusiveness of the

domestic political process. The tailoring of force structures to carry out special operations has been downplayed, largely due to institutional U.S. military bias against special forces and the tendency to rely on conventional forces even for highly skilled and specialized tasks. Doctrinally the U.S. military still relies heavily on mass operational principles, dependence on air cover, heavy artillery, and the use of armored units. These doctrinal principles, weapons systems, and strategies have proved generally inappropriate for conducting LIC operations.

The nature of these conflicts is such that military means, even when appropriate, are insufficient to address the threat. Revolutionary insurgency includes the application of political and psychological warfare, the penetration of political parties, the formation of revolutionary cells and fronts, ideological education programs, and the cultivation of local elites in order to achieve a set of objectives over the long term. The Soviet experience in and strategies relating to the promotion of revolutionary insurgency reflect this understanding. Its experience in this form of LIC was quite evident during the 1970s when a number of movements receiving Soviet support came to power. However, as a result of these successes, the Soviet Union now is confronted with a series of insurgencies or resistance challenges directed against its own allies and surrogates in Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Angola, and elsewhere. Although the Soviet leadership faces difficulties in the conduct of LIC in the Third World, these setbacks have not deterred it from supporting revolutionary insurgent movements and cultivating Marxist-Leninist regimes that can hold power even in the face of resistance challenges. Whether this commitment will remain in the future is not, in the opinion of several of the contributors, clear at this time.

Although the participants in the conference may disagree over the future course of Soviet protracted conflict policy, there was general agreement that, over the last three decades, Moscow's involvement in low intensity confrontations has varied from providing a wide range of political, logistical, paramilitary, and advisory assistance to direct military intervention. A great deal of emphasis has been placed on developing appropriate political and psychological warfare capabilities, advisory support, centralized C^3, and continued political commitment once the Soviet Union becomes engaged in assisting a revolutionary insurgency. On the counterinsurgency side, Soviet experience during the last decade, either directly or through allies and surrogates, reflects the following operational principles: gaining control of the cities through massive concentration of forces, pacification of the rural zones once the cities have been secured, forced resettlement and political indoctrination (particularly for the young) as a means of controlling the population at large, the use of force on a graduated level, and implementation of massive agitation and propaganda operations. In both insurgency and counterinsurgency efforts, Moscow has been able to augment its own capabilities with those

of its East European bloc, Cuban, Nicaraguan, South Yemeni, and other surrogates.

Beyond strategy and tactics, the contrasting approaches of the two superpowers to LIC can be seen in the degree to which domestic political constraints influence each power's conduct of protracted warfare. A number of conference participants argued that the Soviet Union could maintain indefinitely its counterinsurgency effort in Afghanistan; others saw signs of Soviet war weariness.

In the United States, executive policies are constrained by congressional restrictions and public uncertainty about LIC challenges. For instance, aid to the Nicaraguan resistance is affected by the "on again, off again" commitment of the legislators. And aid to El Salvador is affected by questions of human rights, democratization, and pluralistic decision making. These policies distinguish totalitarian from democratic approaches to LIC.

While the authors of the chapters in this book hold different views on several specific issues and developments in U.S.-Soviet protracted conflict policies, a consensus was reached on the requirements and parameters of an effective low intensity strategy for the United States in the years ahead. Broadly this will depend on a combination of policy coordination, sustained political leadership and support, and the integration of appropriate military and nonmilitary capabilities. Among the specific policy recommendations that emerged from the conference are the following:

> The need for better education of key decision makers on the multiple political-military dimensions of protracted warfare and the fostering of greater intra-agency coordination, particularly among the Department of State, Department of Defense, Agency for International Development (AID), United States Information Agency (USIA), CIA, National Security Council (NSC) staff, and the military establishment.
>
> A balancing of policy objectives with the necessary resources, including force structures, psychological operations capabilities, C^3 and intelligence assets, development of weapons systems for LIC, and training of existing special operations forces so that, when called for, their missions can be achieved expeditiously and effectively.
>
> The establishment of priorities for future U.S. involvement in low intensity conflicts. Which LIC threats will most directly affect U.S. interests and, once committed to assisting a friendly state or movement, how can this commitment and support be maintained over the long term? Success in protracted conflict is not achieved quickly. Recognition of this fact must inform and underlie the development of policy and goals.

The early identification of emerging threats in key regions of the Third World so that countermeasures can be implemented prior to the commitment of significant U.S. resources. This requires improvements in strategic human intelligence collection and assessment of areas of the world where our past record of comprehending the situation has been poor. Collection tasking and personnel are in need of restructuring.

Strengthening of existing programs so that security, economic aid, and other kinds of assistance can be provided to allies well before a revolutionary insurgency becomes a critical threat to the stability of a friendly government. For example, the International Military Education Training assistance provides a relatively economical means of developing an infrastructure in a host country for coping with counterinsurgency. Early development assistance contributes to this process.

If the United States is to continue to be involved with insurgent and resistance movements, it will need to develop the means to assist them in establishing political-military structures and strategies that can effectively prosecute a protracted political-military strategy. The United States does not have a corps of experts on resistance strategies. Such a group of specialists is a prerequisite if the United States is to develop doctrine, strategy, and assistance programs for providing political-military training and advice. The goal must be to aid these movements in evolving into a legitimate and pluralistic alternative.

In sum, the development of appropriate doctrinal, strategic, operational, and leadership programs within the military services and civilian agencies must evolve if policy is to be implemented. The inability to achieve this goal has plagued successive administrations since President Kennedy's time.

LIC will continue to pose a fundamental threat to U.S. interests well beyond the year 2000. Active Soviet and surrogate support of terrorist organizations, revolutionary insurgencies, and political destabilization campaigns is likely to continue at existing levels and contribute to the LIC challenges to the United States. Moscow will also face the counterinsurgency problems that threaten several of its allies and surrogates. The United States has the resources to develop and conduct a successful LIC policy. A central problem is how to address the constraints identified in this book. Until these are resolved, the United States is likely to continue to respond to LIC challenges in a fragmented, indecisive, and less than satisfactory manner.

Contents

Part I
U.S. and Soviet Involvement in the Third World: Objectives and Constraints

In this opening section, two groups of specialists, respectively on U.S. and Soviet activities in the Third World, assess superpower policy toward insurgency and counterinsurgency conflicts. Each author was asked to consider the broad objectives pursued by Washington and Moscow over the last decade. What successes have been achieved and at what costs? What are the constraints on superpower involvement in these protracted and low intensity conflicts?

Although each of the participants addressing U.S. policy agreed that U.S. interests are affected by protracted warfare threats, they differed over how and to what extent the nation should respond, given specific constraints. Former United Nations ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick argues that support to resistance movements challenging Soviet-backed Marxist-Leninist regimes in the Third World—the Reagan Doctrine—should remain a key part of U.S. protracted conflict policy. Surveying developments over the last two decades, she points to Soviet gains in Angola, Mozambique, South Yemen, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and elsewhere in the developing world. Some of these new regimes serve as bases from which the Soviet Union and its allies and surrogates seek to encourage regional instability. Thus Kirkpatrick defends the Reagan Doctrine as a means for containing, and possibly reversing, the spread of pro-Soviet and Marxist-Leninist regimes in the Third World.

William Olson states that the most important U.S. objectives should be to support democracy and to oppose totalitarianism. Therefore the United States should aid resistance movements committed to these objectives. Equally important in Olson's estimation is the need to provide material and moral support to allies and friends threatened by revolutionary insurgency. El Salvador and the Philippines provide cases in point. For this purpose, he develops a set of goals. Most important, a consensus for such a policy has to be forged within the American body politic. Then a workable infrastructure of military and nonmilitary capabilities should be established in the U.S. national security and foreign policy bureaucracy to implement the policy.

The latter requirement, according to Noel C. Koch, constitutes a major constraint on U.S. policy, a factor especially troublesome within the Pentagon. In his estimation, the military is best prepared for the least likely threats (nuclear and conventional war) and least prepared to respond to the forms of conflict that are most likely to threaten U.S. interests in the years ahead (protracted and low intensity warfare). Koch notes that during his tenure in the Department of Defense, he observed opposition by the armed services to upgrading special operations forces although the President and Congress supported and even mandated the need for improvement.

David Ottaway, an authority on sub-Saharan Africa, presents a thoughtful critique of the Reagan Doctrine. The primary limitation of this policy, he states, results from the inability of the Reagan administration to justify and build a long-term consensus for U.S. involvement in these conflicts. He believes that this will continue to be the case, in part because the Soviet Union disguises its own involvement through the use of proxies. Consequently it is difficult for the public to understand the true nature of conflicts like those in Nicaragua and Angola. Evidence of this problem can be seen in the fact that the only resistance movement to receive overwhelming and bipartisan support is the one in Afghanistan, where the Soviet Union is directly involved. In addition to limitations imposed by domestic public opinion and Congress, Ottaway identifies several other constraints on U.S. policy. He concludes by raising the moral question of whether the United States should support an insurgency and in so doing further tear apart the internal fabric of a country.

The participants concerned with Soviet policy all agreed that during the 1970s, the Soviet Union achieved substantial gains in the Third World, but these advances were not cost free. Uri Ra'anan argues that Soviet objectives with regard to protracted conflict in the Third World should be seen within the context of the dialectic. The Kremlin leadership views history as dynamic, and forward movement (the offensive) is an intrinsic part of conflict between competing social systems. The changing nature of Soviet policy follows this logic in many respects. Consequently in the 1950s, Soviet actions shifted from defense and diversion to expansion through the exploitation of Third World instability. By the 1970s, as the correlation of forces shifted apparently in favor of the East, objectives were pursued through the use of an array of surrogate forces, initially from North Korea, Cuba, and Vietnam, and subsequently from Eastern Europe. Additionally Moscow employs active measures or political and psychological operations to promote the cause of insurgent movements while attempting to delegitimize friends and allies of the United States. This is intended to make it increasingly difficult for the West to provide meaningful assistance. Although Moscow has achieved important gains over the last two decades, Ra'anan notes that these are not necessarily irreversible. He points specifically to instability and unrest within the territory of several of the Soviet Union's newer, as well as long-time, allies and surrogates.

Stephen Hosmer examines the Soviet record in carrying out both an offensive and defensive protracted warfare policy. He asserts that the Soviet bloc is well suited for assisting revolutionary insurgent movements and has achieved considerable success in helping to establish pro-Soviet and Marxist-Leninist regimes in different regions of the Third World. However, once they are in power, Moscow has had only limited success in defending these client regimes against protracted warfare. Among the reasons, Hosmer identifies the following factors: the inability of local forces, with Soviet bloc assistance, to adapt to counterinsurgency methods; a refusal by these new regimes to address the basic or root causes of the opposition; and the availability of external support and sanctuaries for resistance forces. This being said, Hosmer cautions that such a lack of success does not necessarily result in victory for resistance movements. Large amounts of military and intelligence support provided by the Soviet bloc, in conjunction with the ability of closed societies to bear significant costs, results in considerable staying power on the part of new Marxist-Leninist regimes.

Roger Kanet expands on Hosmer's observation concerning the inability of Marxist-Leninist regimes established during the 1970s (in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Kampuchea, Nicaragua, and Afghanistan) to achieve political stability and internal security. He believes the Soviet leaders will continue to face serious limitations in transforming short-term victories in these countries into stable, long-term relationships. One reason has to do with limitations on the transferability of the Soviet model of authoritarian rule. Centralized mechanisms of control ignore the tribal character and ethnic diversity of many of these societies, thereby generating social unrest and resistance. Second, Moscow cannot provide the kinds of economic assistance needed to establish stable regimes in these states. Although the Soviet model is attractive to movements seeking power, it is less relevant to regimes facing problems of economic welfare and growth. Therefore, Kanet concludes, Kremlin leaders have recognized the limited success and high cost of their efforts to establish stable allies. Consequently they appear to have downgraded the place of the Third World in Soviet foreign policy, at least in comparison to the Brezhnev period. However, Kanet does not believe that this means Moscow will abandon its existing commitments to such regions, although it may be reticent to take on new obligations.

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Protracted Conflict and U.S. Policy

Jeane Kirkpatrick

I am convinced of the centrality of the topic of protracted (low intensity) warfare and of its continued significance at least for the next decade. Nothing that is predictable in U.S.-Soviet relations is likely to diminish the problems posed by continued Soviet efforts at expansion in the Third World, which is to say that nothing is likely to diminish the incidence of low intensity conflict.

Probably the greatest difficulty encountered by U.S. administrations in coping with this challenge concerns institutional memory: remembering what we have already learned. And we have learned quite a lot; our cumulative knowledge of what we are now calling low intensity conflict is considerable.

Arms control agreements certainly do not provide any ground for anticipating a reduction in Third World conflict or a reduction in Soviet efforts at expansion. Quite the contrary; we know, as Samuel Huntington has pointed out (in his article in *National Interest*), that it is precisely periods of détente, characterized by arms control and, even in some cases, temporary reduction in the production and deployment of heavy weapons, that have witnessed Soviet expansion efforts in the Third World.[1] That is a phenomenon on which there is a great deal of consensus, and it should be borne in mind. To put it another way, there is no positive correlation among the incidence of low intensity conflict, Soviet expansion, and a period of détente. We may be on the verge of at least one major arms control agreement and quite possibly more. I see not a scintilla of evidence to suggest that there will be any lessening of the Soviet outward thrust.

Among the data that I bring to bear on this hypothesis are the contents of conversations with Mikhail Gorbachev, some of which I engaged in myself and others concerning which I heard reports from friends who were in Moscow with the Secretary of State. Again and again it is suggested that the Soviet leaders, given their new approach to economic organization, and the modernization of production and price setting, might apply new thinking to their basic position in the world or to the nature of the world in which we are living. Unfortunately, no new thinking is evident in Moscow about the proposition