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Marketing the new U.S. Army Lite —wastes great, less killing

By Eric Nelson

When President George Bush dispatched 1,900 additional troops to Panama on May 11 to turn up the heat on Gen. Manuel Noriega, 890 soldiers of the 7th Light Infantry Division based at Fort Ord, Calif., didn't need much preparation. The base was sealed off and the battalion designated Division Force Ready One—on two-hour recall to the base at all times—was assembled. Taking little more than their packs and rifles, they formed a convoy to Travis Air Force Base near Sacramento, Calif., where their equipment was already loaded onto C-141 transports. Within 24 hours of first notice, the battalion was arriving in Panama.

The 7th is one of five new light infantry divisions (LIDs) formed within the last five years as part of the Pentagon's preparations to fight low- to mid-intensity "brush fire" wars around the world. Specifically trained to combat Third World armies like the Panamanian Defense Force, as well as internal insurgencies that threaten friendly regimes, the LIDs have become the newest hair-trigger weapon of U.S. "gunboat" diplomacy.

They represent the current leaner trend in intervention—the military equivalent of lite beer and low-fat food. In the wake of Pentagon budget cuts, *glasnost* and the current focus on "low-intensity conflict," the LIDs are politically appealing for the moment. But so far nothing suggests that they will prove any more successful in their attempts to rearrange other people's history than have

previous interventionary formations.

The "Light Fighters" like to think of themselves as "swift, silent and deadly." A recent 7th Infantry press release boasts, "It can put the right stuff in the right place at the right time." The LIDs are called the key to a "proactive" strategic doctrine of quelling regional conflicts before they become high-intensity shooting wars. Former Army Chief of Staff Gen. John Wickham, the principal designer of the LIDs, claims the force can "defuse a crisis prior to hostilities and provide a capable combat force early, should hostilities ensue."

Not surprisingly, the rhetoric surrounding the LIDs is that of peace. (For example, they are the troops chosen to participate in U.N. peacekeeping operations.) Yet their very existence creates an imperative for sudden military action. As Stephen D. Goose, a former analyst at the Center for Defense Information, noted in *Low Intensity Warfare*, "The Army's approach to the LIDs seems to be: let's get there fast and ask questions later."

The military dentality: Light infantry troops' main weapons are their feet and their rifles. Trained to patrol all types of terrain—primarily at night, they have no tanks, armored personnel carriers or large-scale support equipment that make heavy divisions slow to arrive in combat, expensive to maintain and ineffective in mountains, cities and jungles. Because an LID requires less support personnel, it has what the Army calls a greater "tooth-to-tail ratio," or more combat troops for a bigger "bite."

On a recent training exercise at Fort Hunter Liggett, the 7th's training base on the California coast, Brig. Gen. Philip Brownell explained the purpose of the LIDs. "Our commitments internationally are diverse," he said. "We have NATO, Central America, the Middle East and Asia. They are all economic and strategic interests of the U.S." Brownell is the former assistant divisional commander for maneuver in charge of the 7th's extensive training exercises. "The light forces play into this in several ways. In Europe they could be used for urban warfare and for night disruption. In Central America, it's obvious. You can't take a mechanized division into the jungle."

The Army has a highly evolved apparatus for rapid deployment. On orders from the president and his military advisers, the Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base, Fla., can immediately place more than 300,000 soldiers, sailors and fliers at its disposal. The smaller size of an LID (11,000 troops, rather than the 18,000 in an armored division) and its small all-terrain vehicles and transportable helicopters mean that an entire LID can be airlifted in 250 plane loads. Armored divisions require 1,500, and also use larger C-5A transports which need long runways.

If the objective is Central America, a brigade, or about 2,250 fully armed troops, can hit the ground within 48 hours of first notice.

Last week's deployment to Panama is not the first time light forces were dispatched to Central America. In March 1988 two battalions, or about 1,500 troops, from the 7th were sent to Honduras along with units of the 82nd Airborne as a show of force when the Nicaraguan army re-

portedly chased retreating contra guerrillas across the Honduran border. On the deployment, called "Operation Golden Pheasant," U.S. troops never engaged the Nicaraguans, although they did conduct live-fire exercises, and may have left supplies for the destitute contras.

These operations allow the army to fine-tune its deployment procedures. One 7th Light battalion commander recalled, "We were deployed to an area [in Honduras] where it was 115 degrees and extremely arid. In that kind of heat your body collapses in the first four days. So my SIOP [Single Integrated Operational Plan] calls for over-hydration as soon as we get called up."

Problem proxies: The buildup of interventionary forces, right down to physiological planning, inevitably raises the specter of Vietnam. Today's LIDs descend directly from U.S. tactics in Vietnam. But that war proved limitless, and the U.S. resorted to massive escalation in both troops and firepower which devastated Vietnam, added to dissension at home and merely postponed U.S. defeat.

The '70s strategy of proxy wars as a main instrument of Third World policy promulgated by Henry Kissinger and known as the "Nixon doctrine," was a reaction to Vietnam's high toll in lives, money and social unrest. The problem is that the proxies selected by the U.S. have either been ineffective, such as the Nicaraguan contras, or uncontrollable, such as the Afghan mujahedin. As an answer, the Pentagon has again decided to fight its own wars—even if on the cheap.

Last year a blue-ribbon Pentagon panel called for a paring down of the U.S. commitment to NATO and the use of "discriminate deterrence" in the Third World. This new strategy calls for "more mobile and versatile forces that can deter aggression by their ability to respond to a wide range of attacks."

Lite fears: Despite the evolved deployment mechanism for sending in our own boys, which includes an armada

INSIDE STORY

of pre-positioned supply ships, the LIDs have become stuck in their own doctrinal quagmire. Even military leaders are concerned that the LIDs are too light to protect themselves against forces with superior armor, like the Nicaraguan, Syrian or Iranian armies. Clearly sensitive to this issue, Gen. Brownell claims "some tweeking can be done" by adding additional "corps plugs" of armor and artillery as they are deemed necessary.

"Impressions linger that the military forces of the Third World are lightly armed and poorly trained," wrote Michael Crutchley in *Military Technology*. "That is no longer the case." Underdeveloped nations can now buy an array of cheap and deadly hardware like shoulder-launched anti-air missiles. This could pose a problem for the LIDs, which rely so heavily on helicopter support.

The high cost of such combat becomes apparent in training exercises. After a mock assault on a command post defended by troops using Soviet tactics, one 7th Light platoon leader said, "I started out with 24 bodies and ended up with six. We got wiped out."

A 7th officer who fought in Vietnam explained that he was the last of a generation of active-duty officers to experience combat. "Out here, we're developing a new generation of combat-tested soldier, except nobody has died. The blood isn't real."

For Bush, the rapid deployment mission to Panama, dubbed "Operation Nimrod Dancer," is an expedient political tool to demonstrate resolve against Manuel Noriega, an uppity U.S.-trained dictator who has turned on his master. Yet it is unlikely that 2,000 troops, added to the 10,000 already there, will intimidate Noriega.

Meanwhile, there remains the likelihood that one day "discriminate deterrence" will land an LID in a war from which it cannot extricate itself, much less win, and the blood will be all too real.

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By John B. Judis

WASHINGTON

IN THE WAKE OF MICHAEL DUKAKIS' DEFEAT, Democrats have groped for a strategy that will preserve their congressional majority and win back the White House in 1992.

One alternative, advocated by the centrist Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), consists of positioning Democrats as tough on crime, vigorous on defense and strong on citizenship (see *In These Times*, March 22).

But a new liberal alternative has emerged from papers by pollsters Stanley Greenberg and Celinda Lake and from a manifesto published in the current *World Policy Journal*, a foreign affairs quarterly. This alternative consists of identifying the Democrats as a "populist" party that undertakes new government economic investment largely through resources freed by dismantling the Cold War national security state.

Unlike the DLC alternative, this liberal one clearly takes into account changes in the world situation that are rendering hard-line attitudes on defense and the Soviet Union obsolete (see *In These Times*, April 26). But the framers of this new alternative underestimate the political and ideological obstacles that their program will face.

New priorities: The *World Policy Journal's* manifesto was endorsed by 13 prominent liberal intellectuals, including Richard Barnet of the Institute for Policy Studies, former State Department official Hodding Carter III, Jeff Faux of the Economic Policy Institute, nuclear freeze founder Randall Forsberg and Kennedy School professor Robert Reich. It focuses on changing federal budgetary priorities.

The statement assumes what is widely believed on Wall Street and Main Street: that in spite of increased employment and reduced inflation, the American economy has gone downhill during the Reagan years. But contrary to the Wall Street point of view, the manifesto blames economic decline not only on a budget deficit, but also on an "investment deficit—a backlog of urgent public investment needs."

According to *World Policy*, "In today's increasingly skill- and information-based world economy, we cannot improve our productivity growth with a hollowed-out public sector—with an inadequately trained labor force, low levels of civilian research and development, collapsing roads and bridges, and a less-than-modern telecommunications infrastructure."

The manifesto estimates that to provide an effective public sector, government would have to spend \$2 trillion more over the next decade than is currently projected. To get these funds, *World Policy* would reduce drastically the current military budget.

In President Bush's budget proposal for fiscal year 1990, military spending is \$309 billion, 28 percent of all federal spending, and 48 percent of discretionary spending—all spending except Social Security and debt payment. *World Policy* would cut \$500 billion from the military budget over the next five years, and \$1.3 trillion over the next decade.

The manifesto argues that the current military budget is not directed toward national defense but toward pursuing an increasingly unnecessary Cold War battle with the Soviet Union.

The journal estimates that about half the military budget is directed toward fighting

Proposing a new politics for a post-Cold War U.S.

a conventional and nuclear war in Europe and about a fifth toward intervening in regional conflicts in the Third World (see story on page 2). *World Policy* argues that the threat to Europe has largely been removed, and that in the Third World "diplomacy often works where unilateral demands and confrontation do not."

World Policy would come up with the remaining funds for domestic investment by increasing taxes on the wealthy and on business. The journal suggests introducing new upper-income tax brackets, increasing the minimum tax for corporations and the wealthy, removing the ceiling on Social Security taxes and reducing deductions for business meals and advertising. Altogether these

The DEMOCRATS:

Planning a party

changes would mean an estimated \$125 billion annually.

While *World Policy's* estimates of military and tax savings are probably overly optimistic, these measures would certainly defray part of the costs of new domestic investment. Where the manifesto is lacking is in any estimation of whether such radical budgetary proposals are politically feasible. If they are not, the *World Policy* statement represents nothing more than a personal statement by a few liberal intellectuals, rather than the basis for a new liberal or progressive politics. Greenberg and Lake's papers explore whether a potential majority exists for the kind of program *World Policy* advocates.

Populist liberalism: Greenberg, a signatory of the *World Policy* manifesto, has earned a deserved reputation as an innovative pollster and political analyst. In two papers issued this year, "Liberalism Reconstructed," written with his associate Lake, and "The Democratic Party: America's Team," he has tried to show how Democrats can win in the '90s.

Like the DLC, and unlike many of the Democrats identified with Jesse Jackson, Greenberg and Lake argue that to win, Democrats must concentrate on winning back middle-class independents and conservative Democrats (see story on page 12). But unlike the DLC, Greenberg and Lake argue that Democrats can win back the middle class by espousing a variant of liberalism.

Greenberg and Lake's paper on liberalism is a somewhat jumbled collection of data and observation, but it is possible to construct a clear analysis by putting the two papers together. Greenberg and Lake reject the DLC view that Democrats must emphasize defense and national security issues. "Voters believe now that our security rests more with 'economic power' than 'military,' and Democrats need to force that choice and shift in favor of investment," Greenberg writes. "Let the Republicans languish in weaponry, silent on America's future."

According to Greenberg and Lake, there is a broad politics, generally named liberalism or progressivism, that contains different parts. Liberalism means populist opposition to corporate greed and irresponsibility. But it can also mean support for tax increases, abortion and affirmative action. Bush won in 1988 because he defined Dukakis' liberalism in terms of "heightened concerns about race and taxes," while Dukakis was not able to counter this definition by sufficiently emphasizing the populist side of liberalism. "Liberals cannot win without underlining the populist current of their message," Greenberg and Lake write.

Fear of taxes: In stressing economic rather than military security, Greenberg and Lake's political prescriptions square perfectly with the kind of policies advocated by the *World Policy Journal*. Greenberg and Lake also suggest the kind of liberalism they describe commands a political majority.

But their own polling on public attitudes toward liberalism belies this optimism and suggest that *World Policy's* program could run into significant political obstacles. There is considerable public support for a "negative populism" that attacks corporations, the wealthy and foreign competitors. But there is less backing for the kind of liberal government intervention envisaged by *World Policy* and by Greenberg and Lake.

In their polling of over 1,500 voters, Greenberg and Lake found strong support among conservative and moderate Democrats for tough trade policies and for taxing the wealthy and corporations and enforcing environmental regulations against corporate polluters, but they also found resistance to any program that requires new expenditures and that might lead to new taxes. According to Greenberg and Lake, "a majority of the Reagan Democrats turned against [liberal

programs] rather than risk higher taxes."

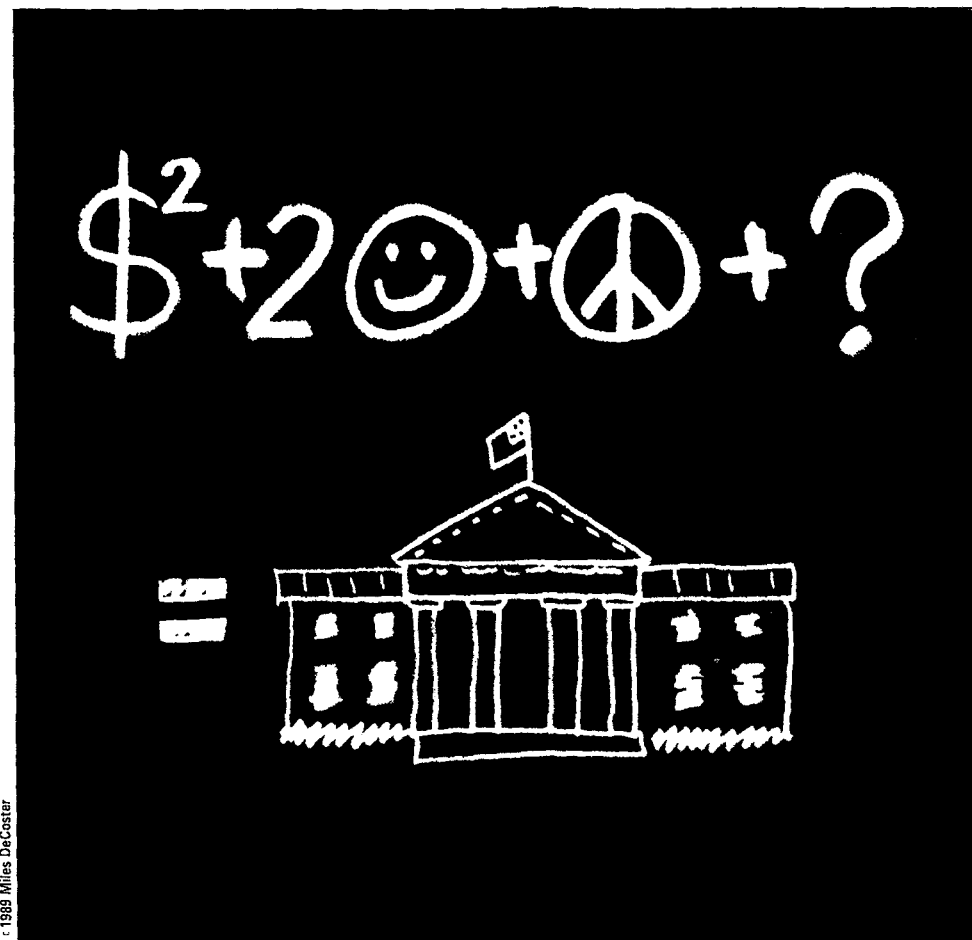
The two pollsters report that middle-class Democrats reject liberal programs both out of a fear of new taxes and because they believe that the programs will benefit not them, but only minorities and the poor.

These findings suggest significantly less than majority support for an active-government liberalism. In terms of the *World Policy* manifesto, moderate and conservative Democrats might support spending \$9 billion to expand Superfund to clean up more waste dumps, but they would reject spending \$16 billion on compensatory, handicapped, and bilingual education or \$5 billion on Head Start.

The *World Policy* signatories could argue, of course, that by freeing up funds formerly used for the Cold War, Democrats could ease middle-class anxieties about paying for "investment" programs that help minorities and the poor, such as inner-city education and rapid transit. But Americans' qualms about active-government liberalism predate and will survive the Cold War, and, as Greenberg and Lake show, moderate and conservative Democrats are not yet convinced that military spending should be significantly reduced.

Greenberg, Lake and the *World Policy* signatories represent only a minority within the Democratic Party and the country. Democrats themselves are divided over what liberalism means. They disagree sharply about trade policy, military spending and corporate regulation. There are also significant strains between Democratic constituencies.

The real question about *World Policy's* program is not whether it represents a majority, but whether the conditions exist, over the next decade or even two, for creating such a majority. Certainly, the change in Soviet-American relations and American economic decline provide a basis for the kind of program that *World Policy* advocates. But significant political obstacles persist, and pollsters can't answer whether they will be overcome. That can be done only through a concerted effort at organization, education and agitation. □



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