
Psychological Operations in Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Urban Freedom

by Col. Jeffrey B. Jones

Pychological operations did not win the Gulf War, but like brilliant planning, superior technology, massive firepower, logistics and well-trained forces, they played a significant part.

By encouraging coalition solidarity, reducing enemy combat power and deceiving the enemy about allied intentions, PSYOP contributed to the success of coalition operations and saved tens of thousands of lives on both sides. An examination of the war's PSYOP reveals lessons that will assist soldiers and their leaders in planning and conducting future crisis-response operations.

Before the Gulf War, during combat operations, and in the aftermath, approximately 650 soldiers from the 4th Psychological Operations Group and from reserve-component PSYOP units contributed to the coalition efforts. They provided radio and TV support, broadcast tactical loudspeaker messages and produced 29 million leaflets. The leaflets were delivered by everything from balloons to B-52s; some were even smuggled into Baghdad itself! PSYOP messages persuaded approximately 44 percent of the Iraqi army to desert, more than 17,000 to defect, and more than 87,000 to surrender. Integrating their efforts with those of the U.S. Central Command, 21 PSYOP soldiers, working with their Turkish counterparts in Joint Task Force Proven Force in southern Turkey and using radio broad-

casts and leaflets, helped cause the defection, desertion and surrender of some 40,000 Iraqis — all without firing a shot. During the critical weeks following the war, PSYOP soldiers assisted the newly liberated Kuwaiti people. Others remained in northern Iraq for six months, supporting coalition humanitarian-assistance operations with the Kurds.

Months before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, specialists from the 4th PSYOP Group were already in the region, working for U.S. defense attachés in Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Djibouti, Yemen and Pakistan; for the United States Military Training Mission to Saudi Arabia; and in the Sinai with the Multinational Force and Observers. The cultural, linguistic and military experience these soldiers gained proved invaluable to the overall PSYOP effort in the Gulf.

With the Iraqi invasion, additional PSYOP soldiers deployed to the region with the initial elements of the 82nd Airborne Division, followed shortly by a PSYOP staff officer with the advance party from Special Operations Command, Central Command, or SOCCENT. A team of military and civilian specialists from the 4th PSYOP Group deployed almost immediately to USCENTCOM headquarters in Tampa, Fla., to prepare a strategic PSYOP plan. Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf approved the plan in late August, and it was forwarded to Washington for intera-

agency implementation. The 4th PSYOP Group also developed a theater PSYOP plan with details down to the tactical level. PSYOP units began predeployment preparations as the scope of the operation evolved.

Mission and objectives

The mission of the PSYOP Task Force was threefold: Phase I demonstrated U.S. resolve, consolidated support, dissuaded regional Iraqi support, deterred hostilities and promoted combined and multinational interoperability. Phase II reinforced U.S. and allied defensive efforts and persuaded Iraq to discontinue hostilities. Phase III supported offensive operations and promoted and maintained local, regional and international understanding and support.

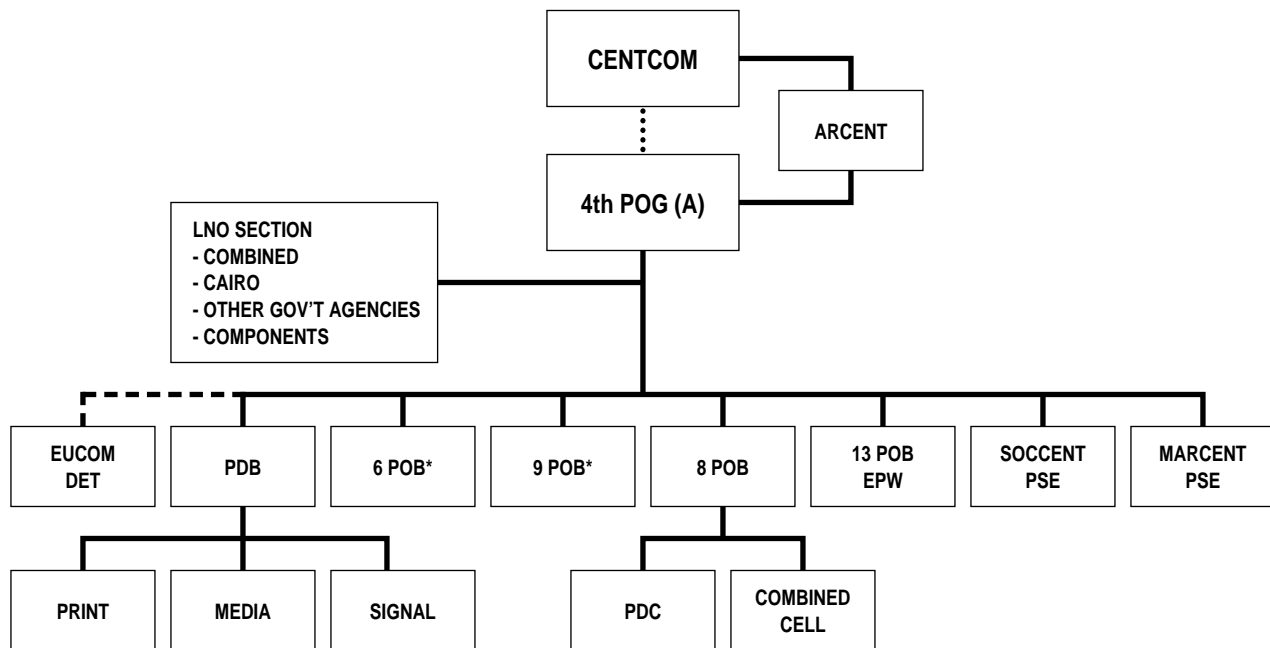
As approved by the commander in chief of USCENTCOM, task-force objectives were to:

- Gain acceptance and support for U.S. operations.
- Intimidate Iraqi forces.
- Encourage Iraqi discord, alienation, malingering, loss of confidence, resistance, desertion and defection.
- Create doubt and fissures in the Iraqi leadership.
- Strengthen the confidence and determination of friendly states to resist aggression.
- Project the U.S. as a credible deterrent and a capable force.

Organization

The PSYOP organization for combat, along with U.S. and coalition forces, evolved into a multitheater, joint and combined effort. Working as an echelons-above-corps element of U.S. Army Forces, Central Command, or USARCENT, the PSYOP Task Force initially consisted of

Organization of PSYOP Task Force in Desert Storm



Legend

- Operational Control
- - - - - Tactical Control
- * - Supported XVIII ABN and VII Corps
- PSE - PSYOP Support Element

half the U.S. Air Force's 193rd Special Operations Group (providing two EC-130 Volant Solo aircraft for aerial dissemination) and elements of the 4th PSYOP Group, including the Middle East-oriented 8th PSYOP Battalion, the 9th PSYOP Battalion, a tactical unit supporting the XVIII Airborne Corps and the SOCCENT, and the PSYOP Dissemination Battalion with print and media. In response to the president's decision to double the size of the U.S. force, the PSYOP Task Force expanded with the addition of a tactical battalion to support the VII Corps, tactical elements to support U. S. Marine Forces, (including loudspeaker teams from four reserve-component PSYOP companies), a reserve-component battalion to support enemy-prisoner-of-war operations, a PSYOP element in Turkey with JTF Proven Force, and a liaison element in Cairo. All were in place before the air war began in January 1991. On Feb. 27, a separate task force under the operational control of SOCCENT deployed to Kuwait City to support liberation and consolidation operations.

The PSYOP Task Force received guidance from three levels: the strategic level (Washington and the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, the National Security Council, and the interagency Public Diplomacy Coordinating Committee), the operational level (senior U.S. and Saudi commanders, Generals Schwarzkopf and Khalid), and the tactical level (ground

combat commanders).

Although the commander in chief of USCENTCOM approved the theater PSYOP plan, the interagency-approval process, mandated by DoD Directive 3321.1, was slow, and the PSYOP Task Force did not receive execution authority until December. Months of potential psychological preparation of the battlefield were lost, but once both U.S. and host-nation approval was granted, PSYOP dissemination began almost immediately. Had the Saudis not requested U.S. support to encourage Iraqi desertion and defection, PSYOP might not have been allowed to play an active role in the war at all.

Theater support

Initially, theater PSYOP efforts in support of USCENTCOM were directed toward unifying the disparate elements of the multinational force. The POTF created, developed and produced a regionally oriented videotape, "Nations of the World Take a Stand." Distributed throughout the Middle East and Southwest Asia as a product of the United States Information Agency, the videotape presented the coalition as a formidable force unified under a common cause in support of the wishes of the world. Produced in four languages, the tape was played continuously throughout the region. Its effectiveness was heralded throughout the U.S. State Department and the Department of Defense.

PSYOP leaflets had a succession of themes designed to intensify by increments: In late December they were "Peace not war," "Arab brotherhood," "Time is running out," "The world is allied against aggression," and "Saddam has betrayed you." As the United Nations deadline approached, the primary theme became "Coalition technological superiority and the inevitability of defeat."

Once hostilities began on Jan. 17, 1991, the pace of PSYOP support increased greatly, particularly when intelligence sources began reporting the effectiveness of leaflet, loudspeaker and radio campaigns against enemy forces in Kuwait and Iraq. The coalition later opened a sec-

Soldiers of the PSYOP Task Force load a leaflet bomb during Operation Desert Storm.



U.S. Army photo

ond PSYOP front targeted at northern Iraqi cities and military sites. Radio and leaflet operations were staged out of southern Turkey by the U.S. European Command's JTF Proven Force.

Within the overall operational environment, PSYOP support to the unified and component commands took several forms:

- USCENTCOM-approved regional radio broadcasts out of Egypt and Turkey were designed to strengthen U.S. and coalition ties while providing the enemy with factual, current information on the progress of the war.

- A strategic leaflet campaign against Baghdad, air bases deep in Iraq, and Republican Guards units in northern Kuwait and southern Iraq stressed the magnitude of the allied effort, the error of Saddam Hussein's political position and the futility of standing against the strength of the coalition forces.

- Several USCINCCENT-directed leaflet missions designed to degrade the enemy's morale and will to fight resulted in significant numbers of desertions, defections and surrenders before the ground offensive began.

USARCENT support

PSYOP supported USARCENT by enhancing deception operations, by supporting operations with loudspeaker surrender appeals and by broadcasting "Voice of the Gulf" radio programs from two ground stations, Qaysumah and Abu Ali, as well as from the 193rd SOG's Volant Solo aircraft. Sixty-six loudspeaker teams provided direct support, down to division level, across the entire coalition front.

The 8th POTF also provided tactical leaflet dissemination, using 155mm leaflet artillery rounds and F-16 aircraft carrying M-129A1 leaflet bombs. Leaflet operations at this level were designed to support deception and offensive operations. Leaflets overprinted with the VII and XVIII corps logos were dropped along the central Kuwait-Saudi Arabian border. They were so successful in implying that the main U.S. advance would occur inside Kuwait that the USCENTCOM comman-

der canceled subsequent missions because of the significant Iraqi buildup in front of the Arab Corps.

The combination of massive air power and leaflet and loudspeaker operations created a PSYOP environment that produced large numbers of desertions, defections and surrenders, including the capitulation of an entire battalion-sized unit, before the ground campaign began. The pervasive Iraqi belief in coalition supremacy led to massive surrenders throughout the ground campaign. The 8th POTF also provided extensive PSYOP support to the overall theater EPW program. PSYOP elements deployed in theater to pacify and exploit EPWs at both USARCENT EPW camps.

The purpose behind the exploitation

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program was to interview volunteer Iraqi prisoners and obtain information for loudspeaker and broadcast messages that would be transmitted to their fellow Iraqi soldiers. These appeals contributed to the large number of EPWs taken with little or no hostile fire. Finally, the 8th POTF provided support to Urban Freedom, USSOCENT's liberation of Kuwait City, and to Task Force Freedom, the USARCENT-directed consolidation operation in Kuwait, with the mission of re-establishing radio and print activities to support repatriation and settlement of the capital.

Other support

PSYOP support to the Air Force component of Central Command, USCENTAF, occurred primarily during the preparation phase, with the development of a downed

flier “pointy-talky,” a multilingual blood chit displaying an American flag and promising a reward to anyone who assisted the bearer. PSYOP forces also made broadcasts to support search-and-rescue operations. These products were not restricted to USCENTAF efforts; they supported all pilots and crews in theater. Initially, the 193rd SOG’s Volant Solo aircraft monitored Iraqi radio transmissions and rebroadcast the Voice of America. Once the task force received dissemination approval, these aircraft became the primary aerial conduits for the POTF’s “Voice of the Gulf.” In the later phases of the war, PSYOP also prepared, developed and executed, on a small scale, a campaign aimed at persuading Iraqi pilots to defect, with

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their aircraft, to Saudi airspace rather than to Iran.

PSYOP support to the Marine Corps forces of Central Command, USMARCENT, was similar to that provided to USARCENT. Support consisted of 25 loudspeaker teams, leaflet artillery rounds, M-129A1 leaflet bombs dropped by MARCENT F/A-18 aircraft, and EPW exploitation teams. Marine pilots, like their Army, Air Force and Navy counterparts, were also issued the multilingual blood chits. The Marines were enthusiastic about using tactical PSYOP to support all phases of their operations. Through MARCENT-wide application of PSYOP, the Marines were effective in taking prisoners and influencing enemy action through loudspeaker teams and leaflet drops. PSYOP supported the MARCENT deception plan by disseminating leaflets, floated to the beach in plastic water bot-

ties, designed to convince Iraqis in Kuwait that an amphibious assault was imminent. Intelligence gathered after cessation of hostilities indicated that this campaign was highly successful.

PSYOP efforts to support U.S. Navy Forces, Central Command, or USNAVCENT, were limited to a leaflet drop supporting deception operations and a MARCENT loudspeaker operation on Faylaka Island. As a result of the loudspeaker operation, 1,405 Iraqi soldiers surrendered to a significantly smaller U.S. Marine force without firing a shot.

USSOCCENT PSYOP support during Desert Storm was limited to leaflet dissemination, three loudspeaker teams and tactical leaflet support using deception and intimidation themes. During Urban Freedom, the SOCCENT operation to clear Kuwait City, the 8th POTF was reconstituted with print, media, propaganda-development and loudspeaker assets.

Milestones

During Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Urban Freedom, the PSYOP Task Force met the following milestones:

- 342,000 leaflets disseminated by balloon, waterborne and manpack operations.
- 18.7 million leaflets disseminated by high-altitude MC-130 aircraft.
- 3.3 million leaflets disseminated by F-16 aircraft, spanning 36 missions, using M-129A1 leaflet bombs.
- 2.2 million leaflets disseminated by B-52 aircraft, spanning 20 missions, using M-129A1 leaflet bombs.
- 1.1 million leaflets, public-service posters and handbills disseminated in Kuwait City.
- A videotape, “Nations of the World Take a Stand,” was distributed in multiple languages to each regional capital in the Middle East and Southwest Asia. Two hundred copies were disseminated in Baghdad.
- An audiotape, “Iraq the Betrayed,” designed to foment anti-Saddam sentiment, was broadcast from EC-130 Volant Solos, and copies were also smuggled into Baghdad.
- The radio program “Voice of the

Gulf” broadcast 18 hours a day for 40 days from two ground stations and an aerial platform over Saudi Arabia and from two additional ground stations and a Volant Solo aerial platform over Turkey. A combined Saudi, U.S., Egyptian, Kuwaiti and British propaganda-development cell developed the tapes and scripts. Broadcasting included 3,250 news items, 13 Iraqi EPW interviews, 40 press releases and interviews, and 189 PSYOP messages.

- PSYOP soldiers supported EPW operations at two EPW camps, three corps collection points and numerous divisional collection points.

- Individual and combined loudspeaker operations persuaded thousands of Iraqi soldiers to surrender without friendly forces having to fire a shot or maneuver into harm’s way.

Impact indicators

The following indicators attest to the success of PSYOP activities in Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Urban Freedom:

- Prior to hostilities, leaflet operations generated extensive Iraqi concern about the penetration of Kuwaiti airspace by U.S./coalition aircraft. In fact, that airspace was never penetrated before hostilities began.

- Iraqi soldiers fired weapons at leaflets falling from the sky.

- The morale of the Kuwaiti citizenry soared once leaflet operations began.

- Iraqi units were repositioned because of deception-leaflet operations.

- The Iraqi III Corps commander’s sandtable, found in Kuwait City, depicted virtually all coalition avenues of approach as coming from the sea.

- Despite facing a death penalty for possessing coalition leaflets, a large percentage of Iraqi defectors and EPWs were carrying leaflets when they surrendered. One prisoner was reported to have had 345 leaflets when he arrived at the EPW camp.

- Massive numbers of Iraqis deserted prior to and during the war.

- Iraqi death squads operated between



U.S. Army photo

A UH-1 helicopter carries loudspeakers used for dissemination of PSYOP messages during Operation Desert Storm.

the Iraqi and coalition fronts to stop and assassinate defecting Iraqi soldiers.

- Frontline Iraqi troops reported the continual harmful effect of coalition leaflet and radio messages.

- The Iraqis mounted their own leaflet and information campaigns to counter coalition leaflet operations.

- The Iraqi command confiscated its soldiers’ personal radios.

- Iraqi sources attempted to jam coalition broadcast operations.

- Iraqi EPWs reported listening to coalition broadcasts for “true” information.

- The Iraqi chain of command reported to its soldiers that coalition leaflets were contaminated by chemical agents.

- Iraqi “Mother of All Battles” broadcasts changed frequencies to counter coalition broadcasts.

- A 500-man battalion surrendered in the XVIII Airborne Corps’ sector prior to the start of the ground war. After the ground war began, more than 87,000 Iraqis surrendered, including the 1,405 soldiers on Faylaka Island. Ninety-eight percent of all EPWs either carried or had seen PSYOP leaflets.

- Fifty-eight percent of all EPWs reported hearing the “Voice of the Gulf” and trusted the broadcasts. Eighty percent of those followed the instructions or actions encouraged by the broadcasts.

- Thirty-four percent of all EPWs reported hearing loudspeaker broadcasts,

and more than half of those complied with the surrender messages.

Lessons learned

- Given the success of PSYOP in Panama and in the Gulf, its legitimacy as a force multiplier has improved remarkably. However, there are still those who do not understand its components, its applicability or its potential in peacetime and in war. DoD and interagency education remains a primary requirement to ensure that PSYOP will be used successfully in the future.

- The DoD-approval process for peacetime PSYOP prevented PSYOP activities during the deterrence phase. Deterrence PSYOP can be very effective in preventing or postponing combat operations. A baseline of generic, non-theater-specific PSYOP initiatives must be developed and endorsed by the senior military commander on the scene and by the U.S. ambassador as soon as possible.

- Deployment of PSYOP specialists was delayed during the Gulf War despite the small amount of airlift they require, their high return on investment and the fact that they are the only means of shaping the battlefield during the deterrence phase. Early deployment of PSYOP forces is critical to deterrence and psychological preparation of the battlefield.

- With the exception of the 64 strategic initiatives approved in August 1990 by the commander of USCENTCOM and forwarded to the Joints Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense, there is little evidence of strategic PSYOP during either the deterrence or combat phases of the Gulf War. This deficiency was noted by the British Ministry of Defense. Strategic propaganda analysis was performed throughout the conflict by the 8th PSYOP Battalion's civilian Strategic Studies Detachment. The analysis was provided to all components as well as to the U.S. country team.

- The Washington-based Public Diplomacy Coordinating Committee, although initially effective, played little tangible role in the orchestration of international public opinion. This committee should convene routinely, before and during crises, and should play an active role in seeking

support from allies and friends.

- Effective, coordinated, combined multitheater PSYOP requires planning, effort, patience, communications and command endorsement. Much can be done in peacetime to increase the probability of success in a crisis or in war.

- Host-nation approval and participation are essential to effective PSYOP in most theaters.

- Liaison with the U.S. country team was critical in achieving expanded conduits in Iraq and Kuwait. From the ambassador, the deputy chief of mission and the U.S. Information Service representatives to the members of the defense attaché office, support for PSYOP could not have been better.

- PSYOP contributed significantly to the success of operational and tactical deception operations.

- Joint PSYOP with the Air Force and the Marine Corps contributed to the success of ground operations. Although understandably reluctant in the beginning to commit aircraft to the PSYOP effort solely for the delivery of leaflet bombs, USCENTAF provided B-52s, F-16s and C-130s, targeting Republican Guards divisions, frontline divisions in Kuwait and Iraq, towns, villages and even Baghdad before the end of the war. Coordination was constant and effective. The commander of USMARCENT became an enthusiastic advocate, committing both personnel and fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft to the PSYOP effort.

- PSYOP support to EPW operations proved invaluable. Several administrative camp-support requirements, such as processing-station signs, camp rules and EPW handouts, became the responsibility of PSYOP almost by default. Although support could have become a diversion from more time-sensitive tactical requirements, it did not.

- The U.S. Army inventory of 155mm leaflet artillery rounds would have been insufficient for multicorps offensive operations had the war lasted longer. Production of the rounds has since been discontinued. This may be a mistake, even though maneuver warfare makes their

use less likely.

- Loudspeaker operations were instrumental in persuading thousands of Iraqis to surrender. The theater requirement for loudspeakers, however, exhausted the U.S. supply from both the active and reserve components. More loudspeakers are clearly needed.

- Virtually without exception, organic linguist skills proved insufficient for the requirement. Without Arab augmentation, unilateral U.S. PSYOP efforts would have failed.

- Reserve-component PSYOP forces activated for the war performed superbly. The tactical requirements, however, were for loudspeaker and liaison teams, not for headquarters. The only exception to this was the need for a headquarters element from the EPW PSYOP battalion.

- There is no substitute for in-country training. Exercises, long-term TDYs and permanent assignments that placed PSYOP soldiers in the area before the Iraqi invasion proved invaluable.

- During consolidation, PSYOP forces were instrumental in the re-establishment of print and media capabilities in Kuwait. They also contributed to post-occupation humanitarian-assistance operations.

In his recommendation for the 4th PSYOP Group's Meritorious Unit Citation, Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf stated that the group conducted the largest and most successful psychological-operations campaign in U.S. military history. During 7 1/2 months in the Gulf, PSYOP accomplished its mission as an effective combat multiplier for an entire unified theater, saving thousands of lives on both sides of the war. There can be no greater contribution.



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8th PSYOP Battalion during Operations Just Cause and Promote Liberty in Panama and Desert Shield and Desert Storm in Southwest Asia. Colonel Jones holds a master's degree in international relations from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C.