



MERGING Information Operations and Psychological Operations

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Isolated communities of personnel should begin to think of themselves as IO personnel rather than personnel participating in a core component of IO.¹

—Department of Defense
Information Operations
Roadmap, October 2003.

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PHOTO: From left to right, the author, LTC Mike Czaja (IO chief, actually a civil affairs officer), and MAJ Dan Reid working together on contracting a radio transmitter for broadcasts in the CENTCOM area of responsibility, 2004. (courtesy of author)

This article represents my personal observations and opinions and does not reflect the official views of the PSYOP community, U.S. Special Operations Command, or the U.S. Army.

I PROPOSE merging the IO functional area (FA) and the Psychological Operations (PSYOP) branch into one specialty under the umbrella term "information operations." Combining resources, training, and functions can only help the overall DOD effort in the information war.

Instead of the two specialties competing for scarce personnel resources, the Army should create a single entity containing officers who are culturally trained, well grounded in marketing and influence, and knowledgeable about all IO elements. Some argue that we need to change PSYOP's name because it is associated with propaganda, lying, and misinformation, but those critics are missing the larger issue: what we actually need is a paradigm shift in the way we conceptualize information operations.²

IO Elements

There seems to be a lot of confusion in the Army as to the exact nature of information operations. Under current doctrine, IO has five elements:

- Computer network operations (CNO).
- Electronic warfare (EW).
- Military deception (MILDEC).
- Operations security (OPSEC).
- Psychological operations (PSYOP).

In my experience, the Navy and Air Force have most of the CNO and EW expertise. From 2002 to 2005, I was in the IO section at U.S. Central Command. Almost all of the CNO and EW officers and subordinate units I worked with came from the Navy or the Air Force.

All of the services practice OPSEC and MILDEC at some level. In some ways, the two are opposites. OPSEC secures information about our capabilities, plans, and operations while MILDEC may deceive the enemy about them.

Of the five IO elements, PSYOP is the Army's biggest contribution by far to the joint effort. About 5,000 Soldiers comprise one active duty and two reserve PSYOP groups as well as the Joint PSYOP Support Element.³ Soldiers also fill staff positions in conventional and special operations forces (SOF) units. The PSYOP branch's active duty officer corps numbers around 200, about the same as the number of active duty IO officers in the Army.

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Confusing Terms

We often hear military commanders incorrectly refer to traditional PSYOP activities and products as information operations. Leaders do not seem to want to use the term “PSYOP,” possibly because they do not understand it or because of its negative association with propaganda.⁴ “Information operations” has been so widely used in and outside the military that it has become the common term to describe the process of using information to influence. Often, we hear something like this: “Let’s conduct an IO campaign by dropping IO leaflets on the enemy to influence him to surrender.” If leaders are going to call such an endeavor IO, perhaps that is what we should name it. “Information” certainly has a less threatening sound than “psychological.” Moreover, we already refer to PSYOP teams that support U.S. embassies as military information support teams (MISTs).⁵

The evolving concept of strategic communication, which no one has been able to define yet let alone practice, adds to the confusion. Most define strategic communication as “information and actions designed to influence at the strategic level.” Based on this definition, however, strategic communication is nothing more than PSYOP at the strategic level. Consider this excerpt from Joint Publication (JP) 3-53, *Doctrine for Joint Psychological Operations*: “Strategic PSYOP are international information activities conducted by U.S. Government agencies to influence foreign attitudes, perceptions, and behavior in favor of U.S. goals and objectives during peacetime and in times of conflict. These programs are conducted predominantly outside the military arena but can utilize [DOD] assets.”⁶

Many articles are now being published that discuss IO and strategic communication and how to influence foreign audiences. Unfortunately, the

writers of these articles sometimes confuse IO with PSYOP. For example, in a recent *Military Review* article, “Marketing: An Overlooked Aspect of Information Operations,” two officers with first-hand experience of tactical information operations say, “Information operations have the same goal as marketing communications: to influence a target audience to respond positively to a message.”⁷ In my opinion, they were not describing IO; clearly, they were talking about PSYOP. The writers completely disregard the PSYOP discipline, yet they say, “A significant shortfall in military operations continues to be insufficient knowledge about the local populace and how to influence it. The Army should acquire skilled marketing professionals by . . . providing marketing training for military IO practitioners.”⁸ Unfortunately, perception can become reality. If battalion, brigade, and division commanders do not see the PSYOP community’s marketing expertise, then PSYOP officers are not doing their jobs well. If the PSYOP community is failing to explain its discipline to the rest of the Army, is it any wonder that it is losing relevance?

Migration of PSYOP Roles

PSYOP units and Soldiers perform five traditional roles. They—

- Influence foreign audiences.
- Advise the commander on the psychological effects of actions and operations.
- Provide public information to foreign audiences.
- Serve as the commander’s voice to foreign populations.
- Counter enemy propaganda.⁹

The PSYOP community informs and influences foreign audiences fairly well. Still, many in DOD’s upper echelons seem to be trying to box it into tactical operations only (creating face-to-face and loudspeaker communications and print, radio, and some TV products).

It is not immediately apparent that anyone really understands counterpropaganda or how to conduct it. Leaders often react to what they hear in intelligence reports or see on TV about the enemy’s information products. They want to know immediately what we are going to say in response, and they usually favor direct refutation; this, however, is only one form of counterpropaganda, and often not the best.¹⁰ Commanders must not forego the

analysis that can determine the best way to counter propaganda. Unfortunately, commanders often fail to ask PSYOP officers and NCOs for advice about the psychological effects of actions and operations, so their expertise is wasted.

The PSYOP community has abdicated the role of advising the commander to the IO/strategic communication function, and it has given up to the public affairs (PA) community the role of serving as the commander's voice to foreign populations. In my experience, PSYOP officers rarely talk directly to commanders. Communication usually goes through the IO officer or strategic communication officer to the operations officer or chief of staff and then to the commander. Too often, the commander talks directly to foreign populations without the aid of PSYOP units.

Over the past four years, I have witnessed battalion, brigade, and division commanders using public affairs officers (PAOs) to help them speak directly to Iraqis via public and private meetings, radio broadcasts, and press conferences without asking PSYOP units' help. Brigades have even commandeered radio stations and run them.

At present, strategic communication (sometimes called "effects") staff sections are coming to the fore in all combatant commands.¹¹ Sometimes, these sections are merely converted IO sections or, worse, a cobbled-together bunch of non-PSYOP and/or non-PA officers and noncommissioned officers untrained in any form of communication. These sections and their PA counterparts perform the traditional PSYOP roles of advising commanders on the effects of actions and operations and serving as the commander's voice to foreign populations. Often, commanders defer IO issues to the IO officer even if an issue relates to PSYOP because they have given IO officers planning and supervisory responsibility for all five IO disciplines. As I noted earlier, commanders tend to think in terms of IO, not PSYOP.

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Competition Between IO and PSYOP

PSYOP is about influence, specifically via marketing. The IO career field is moving into this area. The nine-week IO Qualification Course includes instruction in marketing, culture, and negotiation.¹² An FA30 (IO officer) recruiting brochure notes that the IO officer should have—

- Specific marketing and international media skills.
- The ability to plan, prepare, and execute influence activities.
- Cross-cultural communications expertise and cultural awareness.
- Face-to-face engagement skills (using translators for the simple purpose of communication).
- The ability to apply cultural awareness and human factors throughout the full spectrum of operations.¹³

Compare this to the description of a PSYOP officer's skills, knowledge, and responsibilities as listed in U.S. Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management*:

- "Psychological Operations officers possess expertise in assessing foreign target audiences; developing PSYOP plans, programs, and products; disseminating PSYOP products; and synchronizing PSYOP activities in peacetime and combat operations.
- "PSYOP officers must maintain proficiency in critical skills associated with a specific region of the world to include foreign language competence, political-military awareness, and cross-cultural communications.
- "Conducting PSYOP requires interaction with host nation military, civilian officials, the general populace, displaced civilians, and internees; as well as inter-agency coordination within the U.S. government."¹⁴

It seems that skills in marketing are no longer the sole purview of the PSYOP community; information operations officers are now being encouraged to obtain degrees in public relations and related academic disciplines such as marketing and international relations. Meanwhile, the IO and PSYOP officer communities are competing for scarce personnel resources while the Army is assigning both IO and PSYOP officers to the same units and sections. Why do we need an IO and a PSYOP lieutenant colonel at a division or an IO and a PSYOP major at a brigade or Special Forces group?

The secretary of defense has mandated that functional IO components, including PSYOP, merge into one field. So why are the two communities still separate? Perhaps one reason is that “the complexity and technological growth in EW, PSYOP, and CNO tend to isolate the specialists who practice these disciplines from one another.” But as the *IO Roadmap* goes on to say, “To be successful, an IO career force will have to break some cultural norms. Isolated communities of personnel [i.e. PSYOP] should begin to think of themselves as IO personnel rather than personnel participating in a core component of IO.”¹⁵

The *IO Roadmap* recommends the development of IO capability specialists who are functional experts in one or more of the highly specialized core capabilities of CNO, EW, or PSYOP.¹⁶ It also recommends that these IO capability specialists alternate between assignments in their specialized core capability and assignments as IO planners. In other words, PSYOP officers and NCOs should serve in IO billets.

Recommendations

The time has come to merge the IO functional area and the PSYOP branch. General officers and other commanders already refer to PSYOP activities as simply information operations. There are many parallels between the two specialties, and both communities compete for the same scarce personnel



courtesy of author

LTC Rohm (PSYOP) and LTC Gary Martel (IO) work side by side and interchangeably with the Department of State on strategic communication and public diplomacy, 23 June 2007. Under Secretary of State for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy Karen Hughes is at center.

resources. With only negligible adverse effects, the Army stands to benefit greatly from a merger of IO and PSYOP activities. It will achieve economies of scale by not doubling up IO and PSYOP officers in the same unit, and IO officers will gain better marketing and cultural training as well as become members of a branch. Moreover, PSYOP officers will gain better access to commanders, and the IO force will gain enlisted members and an NCO corps from the PSYOP community. All of this will ultimately improve the professionalism and technical expertise of new IO Soldiers. **MR**

NOTES

1. U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), *Information Operations Roadmap* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 30 October 2003).

2. Still, the PSYOP community's apparent image problem must be addressed. One of the special operations force imperatives is to “ensure the legitimacy and credibility of Special Operations (SO)” because “without legitimacy and credibility, SO will not gain the support of foreign indigenous elements, the U.S. population, or the international community.” In the discussion under “SOF Imperative: Ensure legitimacy and credibility of Special Operations,” in U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 33.05.30, *Psychological Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 15 April 2005), 1-9 through 1-10, legitimacy is seen as “the most crucial factor in developing and maintaining internal and international support. The concept of legitimacy is broader than the strict legal definition in international law. The people of the nation and the international community determine its [special ops] legitimacy based on collective perception of the credibility of its cause and methods. Without legitimacy and credibility, special operations will not gain the support of foreign indigenous elements, the U.S. population, or the international community.”

3. The Joint PSYOP Support Element, a relatively new organization assigned to U.S. Special Operations Command, has approximately 60 assigned personnel, about half of them civilians.

4. The term “propaganda” originated with the Roman Catholic Church in the 1600s and meant “a congregation for propagating the faith.” *Webster's Dictionary* defines propaganda as “the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person,” and “ideas, facts, or allegations spread deliberately to further one's cause or to damage an opposing cause.” <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/propaganda>.

5. Technical Sergeant Jim Moser, “MIST: Small footprint big impact,” *Tip of the*

Spear (June 2006): 13, <www.socom.mil/TOTS/2006/TOTS_web-200606.pdf> (accessed 17 October 2007).

6. Joint Publication 3-53, *Doctrine for Joint Psychological Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 5 September 2003), ix.

7. CPT Stoney Trent and CPT James L. Doty III, “Marketing: An Overlooked Aspect of Information Operations,” *Military Review* (July-August 2005): 70.

8. *Ibid.*, 72, 74.

9. For more about the five traditional PSYOP roles, see FM 3.05.30, 1-3.

10. PSYOP experts know that U.S. Army doctrine lists several techniques to counter propaganda: direct refutation, indirect refutation, diversion, silence, restrictive measures, imitative deception, conditioning, forestalling, and minimization (FM 3-05.301, *Psychological Operations Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures* [Washington, DC: GPO, December 2003], 11-22).

11. In many commands, information operations and/or strategic communications sections are called “effects cells or sections.”

12. For more information about the IO Qualification Course, see “IIT Awarded Functional Area (FA30) Information Operations Training, Education and DOTMLPF Contract,” <www.ewa-iiit.com/content.asp?SectionID=15&contentID=166> (accessed 17 October 2007).

13. FA30 is the FA designation for an IO officer. The designation for the PSYOP officer branch is FA37, <www.us.army.mil/suite/personalization/gruppepage.do?groupid=482> (accessed March 2006).

14. DA Pamphlet 600-3, *Commissioned Officer Professional Development and Career Management* (Washington, DC: GPO, 28 December 2005), 3-13.

15. *DOD Information Operations Roadmap*, 30 Oct 2003, 33.

16. *Ibid.*, 34.