

PSYOP: Oldest, most effective weapon

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One of Air Intelligence Agency's newest units is dedicated to one of the world's oldest and most effective weapons: psychological operations.

Activated in Dec. 1997, the Psychological Operations Division represents an AIA initiative to close an operational gap in the Air Force's offensive and defensive information capability. Then-AIA commander, Maj. Gen. Michael Hayden, decided to integrate PSYOP into the agency's information operations/warfare arsenal and tie it more closely to functional requirements.

Hayden turned to Col. Frank Goldstein, director of Research at the Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., to head the new effort.

A fully-qualified biomedical science officer with years of experience in PSYOP development, planning and employment, Goldstein welcomed the challenge of bringing this venerable weapon to a command known for its leading-edge technologies.

"The battlefield is changing dramatically," Goldstein observed in a recent interview, "and is doing so in ways we could hardly have anticipated even 10 or 15 years ago. That's what underscores the irony, if you will, of PSYOP. Here is a weapon described by the Chinese strategist Sun Tzu over 2,500 years ago, but it's critically important that it be fielded early and wisely in this age of information warfare.

"Our goal," Goldstein continued, "is to see that PSYOP is integrated into the planning cycle for all levels of air combat and information operations. Napoleon had it right: 'There are only two powers in the world, the sword and the mind. Invariably, the sword was beaten by the mind.'"

Defined by the Air Force as operations intended to "convey selected

information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups and individuals," PSYOP is becoming increasingly important in an era of shrinking defense budgets and global responsibilities.

"I am a targeteer by training," explained Master Sgt. Chuck Doig, noncommissioned officer in charge for the division. "Leaving some adversary's communications node, say, as a smoking ruin is something we can do, if necessary. It is something we can do with pinpoint accuracy. But it doesn't have to be our only option or even our first. PSYOP can change that; it puts new arrows in the quiver."

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Maj. Rick Krakoff, DO2's chief of mission support and an aviator, agreed. "Lethality has to remain an option, and the newest weapons in information warfare give us cyber lethality, not just physical. But PSYOP is nonkinetic; it really is an elegant weapon. It works by changing minds, not by destroying targets. I like the way one of our reservists put it, 'PSYOP helps win the war before the battle even begins.'"

The new division has grown rapidly. Now comprising a staff of nine and augmented by five Air Force Reserve officers, it draws from sev-

eral diverse career fields and even from other services: two of its team members are former Army officers. And DO2 has attracted considerable attention, having been designated the Air Force PSYOP center of excellence by the Air Staff. Additionally, AIA's new PSYOP effort has won key support from the Air Staff, the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, the Joint Staff, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict, the U.S. Special Operations Command, and the Air Force Special Operations Command.

It's apparent no one has time to get bored in the new division. DO2 has been chartered to develop and advocate PSYOP policy, programs, doctrine, as well as participate in joint strategic and operational planning. It's working to implement an IO/PSYOP reachback capability for all AEFs and forward-deployed IO flights, and is designing the training new Air Force PSYOP officers will take with them into the soon-to-be fielded IO flights in support of the numbered air forces.

Additionally, DO2 will serve as the Air Force "PSYOP bridge" to service/theater counterparts and external agencies, as well as hosting the Air Force PSYOP working group. But Goldstein and his staff seem to thrive on the pressure.

Goldstein said, "Recall Sun Tzu: 'The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.' What could be better than that? The Air Force gave up much of its organic PSYOP capability after Korea. That was over 40 years ago. Now, with AIA sponsorship, cooperation with AFSOC and other PSYOP organizations, such as the Army's 4th Psychological Operations Group, we're getting it back. In today's global environment, that's an art well worth recovering." ■