

PSYOP AS A CHALLENGE FOR MILITARY OPERATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The Stress Research Center of Military University Vyškov

Airbase Kbely, Mladoboleslavská ul., Prague 9-Kbely, 197 06

phone: 420-2-2020 7444, fax: 420-2-850 15 32, e-mail: sykoraj@army.cz

Petr Jandejsek, David Novotný, Hana Èervinkova, Michal Kopecký, Jaroslav Sýkora

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The character of current conflicts and the spread of means of communication, e.g. electronic media, together with the findings of communication science have caused deep changes in the understanding of the role psychological operations (PSYOP) can play in this information age. The former understanding of PSYOP tends to be replaced by a new one in two aspects. The first aspect is an option of new effective techniques and the resulting other aspect is a raise of PSYOP to the status of a full scope method of conflicts resolving.

I set the changes in the understanding of PSYOP into the process of globalization and democratization, which involves not only economy, culture and politics but also communication and information flows (Ch. Dandeker 1994, D. Segal, M. Segal, D. Eyre 1992).

Using practical and theoretical resources I will argue for this new PSYOP paradigm based on communication. At the end of my presentation I will describe the development and orientation of the Czech PSYOP.

Introduction

Let me begin with an illustration. During the World War II the German command is planning the invasion of Britain. They are getting ready for the forthcoming crossing of the Channel by boats. At that very time the BBC broadcast a brief "language lesson". *"Attention, Jerries! (British slang for the German soldier). Since you are preparing to invade our country, it is important that you learn some English phrases. Please repeat after me: The Channel crossing, the Channel crossing. Very good, now some words you will find helpful while you are on the boat. The boat is sinking, the boat is sinking. Again very good! Now, let's practice the conjugation of verbs. Now repeat after me: I am burning, You are burning, We are burning."*

Documents which were found much later confirmed that, after that radio broadcast, the Germans had the impression that the British had a very effective plan how to resist the German invasion from the sea. They believed that they were prepared to cause them maximum losses, which would have been a

disaster for the German forces.¹ This is an example of a classic psychological operation. Activities like this, whatever named, have probably been present in all military operations throughout history.

Excellent commanders have always recognized that a battle is not just a struggle of arms but of and for minds and hearts as well. Basically, PSYOP is a tool in the hands of a commander for the objectives of an operation to be successfully achieved. It is the commander's primary tool of communication with the foreign target audiences.² The more sophisticated the weapon systems and technical equipment are, the more enhanced should be psychological, medial, and communicative capabilities.

According to the NATO policy we understand PSYOP as planned psychological activities directed to the target audience (individual or group) in order to influence attitudes and behavior.³ They mostly bear the form of informing and persuading. They mostly bear the form of informing and persuading. Although PSYOP occurs across the operational continuum in various forms, in this paper I take account especially of the most challenging forms today, the Peace Support Psychological Activities (PSPA) and Psychological Consolidation Activities (PCA).

Character of PSYOP in transformation

What are the benchmarks and resources for the next development of PSYOP? In the quest for answers I will draw mainly from practical findings in SFOR and KFOR PSYOP, and from the experiences of Czech peacekeeping missions. Then I will discuss the theoretical background of PSYOP and its implications for practice.

Lessons learned in Bosnia, based e.g. on Lt. Col. Steven Collin's observations⁴, made it clear that too much energy and resources were put in support of less-powerful traditional tactical elements and tools, such as leaflets, handbills, and loudspeakers, although much more influential electronic media, e.g. radio and TV, were neglected. That happened in spite of the huge role electronic media had played before and during the war in Bosnia. Capturing various TV and radio transmitters, Bosnian Serbs focused inwards and produced the atmosphere of jeopardy and hatred, while Bosnian Muslims successfully influenced the international audience and gained its sympathy.

SFOR case proved that the increasingly urban and interconnected world demanded new and more appropriate approach of PSYOP forces. More time, training, resources, and money should be spent on electronic media in order to make PSYOP more powerful and influential.

¹ Lísková, Radka: Psychological Operation. In: Czech Armed Forces Today, AVIS 1/2001, pp. 23-25.

² 4th Psychological Operations Group: Organization and Capabilities. Briefing of MAJ J.P. Morgan at the National PSYOP Course 2000 in Vyskov, Czech Republic

³ Definitions and division are drawn from MC 402 and AJP-3.7.

⁴ Collins, Steven, 1999, *Army PSYOP in Bosnia: Capabilities and constraints*

Commanders on all levels should be educated about the media environment in prospective areas of operation and, contrary to the traditional manner, PSYOP should not use its own media and transmitters so far, but should make use of the inland media, support them, and make products for them. It is both more effective and cheaper. PSYOP in KFOR made use of experiences dropped in SFOR. Unlike SFOR, the basic products here are the self-produced newspaper Dialogue, newspapers inserts, leaflets, and especially radio and TV broadcast using inland stations.⁵

PSYOP in KFOR is provided on the level of MNBs, receiving special support from the Joint Forces Command at the theater-level. It turned out that when operating in low-intensity conflicts, such as in Bosnia and Kosovo, tactical commanders need a relatively high degree of local autonomy to conduct their own PSYOP plan, in order to be responsive and flexible. The standing hierarchical process of approval for all PSYOP products is complicated and slow-paced.

Also the preparation of PSYOP specialists is not accurate many times and Lt. Col. Collins points that these "soldiers often become generalists lacking an intimate knowledge of the culture and history of the region where they are deployed – and even lacking adequate linguistic skills." (1999)⁶

The secondary analysis of the regular research reports on the Czech SFOR and KFOR peacekeeping units provide us with other important information.⁷ The most effective and decisive influence on local inhabitants seems to have the physical presence and face to face communication with soldiers. Moreover, the advantage of Czech soldiers in Bosnia is the possibility to speak and understand the local language up to a certain degree, since both Czech and the language spoken in Bosnia belong to the Slavic linguistic family. This is unfortunately not the case in Kosovo.

To be better prepared for this form of communication, the training of our candidates for Balkan missions is beginning to include social-cultural preparation consisting in an overview of history, cultural habits, social environment, and religion of the area. We also suggest providing soldiers with the training in communication, that would cover important phrases in local language, techniques of communication, persuasive communication, and the usage of key symbols.

PSYOP as communication

The starting point of our theoretical research into psychological operations is the following: PSYOP may be viewed as a kind of communication. In other words, for psychological operations to be effective,

⁵ Tytgat, S., 2001, *PSYOPS Support Element Operation Joint Guardian*. Briefing at the NATO PSYOP Working Group, Prague

⁶ Collins, Steven., 1999, p. 3

⁷ The Center of Advanced Social Studies of the Chief of General Staff makes a three-phase social-cultural research in each of the Czech SFOR and KFOR rotations.

they must become more and more a form of communication.⁸ This seemingly a non-conflictual point is not generally accepted when we look at the form of many psychological operations today. We encounter a unilateral conduct without any bond with the addressee, and that can hardly be called communication. Communication is not a mere transmission of information, but it is a relation between a sender and a receiver. That relation requires a kind of joining. Also the roles of senders and receivers are always interchangeable and we cannot think of a linear or a one-way instructive interaction, since it is not effective. We should rather imagine a circular or a dialogical model, where all sides are active and the feedback is essential for the re-formulation of my original mission and view.

Everyone perceives a problem, which is in fact a different view of reality, from his/her own perspective. The task of communication then is to try to agree on a common goal and to harmonize diverse perspectives. The condition is to know how the other side understands reality. It has great implications for the planning process.

Results and recommendations

In the previous parts I argued for a new approach towards psychological operations which I call a paradigm based on communication. On a strategic level I recommend a broad usage of the inland electronic media with the aim of overcoming the national isolation. As Steil and Woodward in their study “A European ‘New Deal’ for the Balkans” claim, “no positive political change can occur until the damaging psychological effects of isolation are reversed”. (1999) On a tactical level then the interpersonal creative communication should be enhanced to produce a connection or a bond with the audiences, and to harmonize perspectives on a day to day basis. The presumptions of this PSYOP will be a medial and communication training.

⁸ The question of effectiveness brings us to the broad problem of testing and evaluating in PSYOP. We will see later that a paradigm of communication sets new measures of effectiveness, e.g. a degree of agreement on the view at the reality.

Czech PSYOP and the Stress Research Center

The Czech Armed Forces are actually building its PSYOP structure. The role of the Stress Research Center of the Military University Vyškov, which is the research and expert element in PSYOP, is to imprint the new 'communication approach' into this process of development.

The Stress Center grounds its PSYOP know-how on participation in the editorial board for the NATO PSYOP Doctrine AJP-3.7, and especially on the preparation of the first national PSYOP course. This course was successfully run in the Fall of 2000 at Military University Vyskov, Czech Republic, in cooperation with the lecturers of 6th PSYOP Battalion, US. We provided the first 15 Czech officers with the basic information on PSYOP. Besides these fundamentals we focused on our special interests in this field, and engaged in discussions about marketing, communication, ethics, and socio-mapping.

In the long-run the Stress Center provides research into PSYOP as a form of conflict resolving, into ethics in PSYOP, and professional qualities of PSYOP specialists. Our last current task is to prepare the methodology and criteria for the selection of PSYOP specialists.

Conclusion

The shift towards the 'PSYOP communication paradigm' requires a mental change from the static bipolar view of reality typical for Cold War to the understanding of reality as a chessboard where each player has some restrictions but usually much more options to move.

Psychological operations may play an important role in this game by promoting intra- and international discourse, instead of combat solutions. The powerful tools in doing this will be the electronic media and the personal presence with the face to face communication.

There is no need to pretend that PSYOP is an almighty solution. In fact, there is no such solution. However, the chance is that commanders will make better use of this tool which adds to the success of military operations.

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