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Advancing the Art and Science of Psychological Operations Requires a Serious Investment

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There are but two powers in the world, the sword and the mind. In the long run the sword is always beaten by the mind.

--Napoleon Bonaparte

Developing a robust DoD Psychological Operations (PSYOP) capacity to help counter violent extremist ideology and promote U.S. national security interests on a global basis is a strategic imperative. All Services, Combatant Commanders, and other key stakeholders have a valuable role and inherent responsibility to accelerate, advance, and use the Department's Psychological Operations and related influence operations capabilities.

--Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense

A pivotal question facing the Psychological Operations (PSYOP) career field over the next few years is whether PSYOP can overcome its previous Cold War paradigm and posture to become a more effective instrument of information and influence during this era of, as President Obama has stated, "Smart Power". Smart Power is the skillful use of all of our resources, both non-military and military, to meet the challenges America faces at the start of a new century. The PSYOP career field must adapt to this paradigm shift, whereby even the application of military power must temper a hard and soft approach. The recent establishment of PSYOP as a basic Branch in the Army is a significant development, signaling clear recognition of the profession and providing a unique opportunity to implement change. However, to meet the operational expectations of the Army's general purpose (GPF) and special operations (SOF) forces, several internal changes must be made to the PSYOP career field, force allocation, structure, training and doctrine in order to achieve the desired results. This paper intends to address several issues of concern for the PSYOP profession:

- Proponency
- PSYOP Education, Training, and Career Development
- Active Component (AC) and Reserve Component (RC) Balance

History is replete with tacit examples of tactics and techniques in military strategy, commonly attributed to PSYOP, both in times of peace and war. One of the earliest examples is found in the thirteenth century. Genghis Khan, leader of the Mongols, conquered more territory than any other leader in human history. A key to his success was his ability to defeat the will of his enemy. His technique, demand submission from those not already assimilated and if any opposed him, even in the slightest, complete destruction of their people. Khan's true brilliance was to ensure he always spared a few to carry the tale to neighboring villages, reinforcing his reputation and increasing the level of fear and intimidation throughout the land. In the more recent past PSYOP has been used, with varying degrees of success, by both sides of conflict in World War II, the Cold War, Vietnam, and the Gulf War. During these large scale conflicts, the PSYOP campaigns were predominantly effective from a United States and coalition partner perspective, except in Vietnam, where PSYOP was more effectively used by the adversary.¹

While neither the definition nor the purpose of PSYOP has significantly changed since the end of the Cold War, the nature of conflict, the available technologies, the sociopolitical environment, and the character of operations involving military forces have all changed dramatically.² In today's post 9/11 world, there is widespread acknowledgement of the fact current military strategy must focus as much, if not more, on the indirect "soft" approach as it does the direct "hard" approach to counter extremist ideology. Therefore, increased capital should be invested in what is arguably the primary player in the indirect approach, PSYOP, and it should have a more prominent role in the Global War on Terror (GWOT). As defined by joint doctrine:

*Psychological operations (PSYOP) are planned operations 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. The purpose of PSYOP is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behavior favorable to the originator's objectives.*³

The effects attained through properly planned, integrated, and executed PSYOP activities can shape the human terrain, mold opinion, modify behaviors, and provide commanders unique opportunities to influence the battlespace while minimizing casualties. For the warfighter, victory on the non-contiguous asymmetric battlefield requires the persuasive potential of PSYOP to achieve military objectives through indirect means.⁴ Unfortunately, since Vietnam, this unique capability has been largely neglected, evidenced by insufficient funding, resourcing, manpower and equipment shortages.

Today's PSYOP forces are growing in only the special operations dimension, yet even this modest increase in force structure is isolated to the operational group. There is no institutional or headquarters growth in either special operations or the general purpose PSYOP forces. The absence of action officers within higher command structures like HQDA has undermined

¹ "The Creation and Dissemination of All Forms of Information in Support of Psychological Operations (PSYOP) in Time of Military Conflict" by The Defense Science Board Task Force, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, Washington, D.C. 20301, May 2000.

² Ibid

³ Doctrine for Joint Psychological Operations, Joint Publication 3-53, 5 September 2003.

⁴ COL Curtis D. Boyd, Commander, 4th Psychological Operations Group, email correspondence, 29 March 2009.

equipment fielding, stagnated cold war doctrine, and left the term PSYOP open to confusion within the IO lexicon. Inadequate staffing, resource constraints and a force imbalance coupled with a rising demand for PSYOP, either in Military Information Support Team (MIST) configurations or tactical support to the Brigade Combat Teams complicates the understanding of PSYOP capabilities and limitations.⁵

John Nagl, in his book, *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, argues convincingly that in order for organizations to progress and adapt they must have buy-in and a commitment from the larger institution and its leadership in order to break the reluctance to change institutional norms and perceptions. And he quotes the following...

Without the emergence of bureaucratic acceptance by senior military leaders, including adequate funding for new enterprises and viable career paths to attract bright officers, it is difficult, if not impossible, for new ways of fighting to take root within existing military institutions.⁶ Organizational theory suggests that organizations are created in order to accomplish certain missions. Over time certain missions become more important than other missions to the leadership of the organization.

Organizations favor policies that will increase the importance of the organization, fight for the capabilities that they view as essential to their essence, seek to protect those capabilities viewed as essential, and demonstrate comparative indifference to functions not viewed as essential.⁷ Career officials of an organization believe that they are in a better position than others to determine what capabilities they should have and how they should best fulfill their mission. Morton Halperin observes, military officers compete for roles in what is seen as the essence of the services' activity rather than other functions where promotion is less likely ...Army officers compete for roles in combat organizations rather than advisory missions.⁸

This is not to imply there has been a lack of effort to fix the problems with PSYOP. On the contrary, there have been multiple studies designed to identify and address problems associated with PSYOP support; including Defense and Army Science Studies, Rand Studies, SOCOM End-to-End Studies, Tiger Teams and workgroups, to name a few. Unfortunately, the advocacy nor the resources (manpower, fiscal, or material) have been sufficient to implement the necessary changes. Common complaints from supported units in the field, I submit, are symptoms of a more fundamental problem with the foundation of the career field. As a member of the SOF community the mantra of Special Operations, the SOF Truths, hold true. These tenets have political as well as operational significance.

- Humans are more important than hardware
- Quality is more important than quantity
- SOF cannot be mass produced
- Competent SOF cannot be created after the emergency arises

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Watts and Murray, "Innovation in Peacetime," in Murray and Millett, *Military Innovation* 409.

⁷ Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 39-40.

⁸ Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 55.

Each of these tenets applies to PSYOP, but it is the last two in particular that hold significant relevance. To become a competent PSYOP professional it takes years of training, education, and experience. Although technology plays an important role in the way we fight, Soldiers still remain the centerpiece of the force. Former Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, summed this up best when he stated, “All the high-tech weapons in the world won’t transform our Armed Forces unless we also transform the way we think, train, exercise, and fight.”⁹ The current administration, under President Obama, seems to also recognize the importance of these low density, high demand skills as outlined in his Defense Agenda, which states, “...we must build up our special operations forces, civil affairs, information operations (PSYOP), and other units and capabilities that remain in chronic short supply.”¹⁰

Issue: PSYOP Proponency

Prior to 16 October 2006 PSYOP was classified as a Functional Area (FA). A FA is a grouping of officers by a career field other than an arm, service, or branch possessing an interrelated grouping of tasks and skills that may require significant education, training and experience.¹¹ Effective 16 October 2006, pursuant to the authority of Section 3063(a) (13), Title 10, United States Code, PSYOP was established as a basic branch of the Army. As one of the newest branches in the Army, this act is acknowledgement by the Army that the Art and Science of the profession requires a field of devoted professionals who are dedicated to the study and mastery of the requisite skills. As the designated Branch Proponent the Commanding General, U. S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (USAJFKSWCS), a career Special Forces (SF) officer, is the Specified Proponent for not only SF and Civil Affairs (CA) but PSYOP as well.

According to AR Reg 5-22 a Branch Proponent is the commandant or director of the respective school or institution that develops concepts, doctrine tactics, techniques, procedures, organization designs, materiel requirements, training programs, training support requirements, personnel requirements, education requirements, and related matters for a branch in the Army. A Specified Proponent is the commander or chief of any agency responsible for a designated area that does not fall within the purview of a branch proponent. Specified Proponents will have the same responsibilities as branch proponents. Commanders who are designated branch and specified proponents develop and document concepts, doctrine, tactics, techniques, procedures, organization designs, materiel requirements, training programs, training support requirements, and personnel requirements. Again, PSYOP is under a specified proponent - USAJFKSWCS. While this arrangement might have been appropriate when PSYOP and CA were Army Functional Areas and aligned under a single component command (USASOC), it does not serve either branch sufficiently today. A fundamental problem with this paradigm is the Commanding General of USAJFKSWCS is not a PSYOP branch officer, trained and experienced in the art and science of PSYOP. Yet as the proponent, he is responsible for establishing and enforcing the

⁹ William Pfaff, “The Question of Hegemony,” *Foreign Affairs* (January-February 2001): 221-32; Donald Rumsfeld, “Transforming the Military,” *Foreign Affairs* (May-June 2002): 20-32.

¹⁰ White House web site, President Obama’s Agenda, accessed via web: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/defense/> <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/agenda/defense/>> , Feb 07, 2009.

¹¹ Global Security.org Website: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/agency/army/fa-cf.htm>, Feb 10, 2009.

standards and direction for the branch. Certainly the SF branch would not be served well having a “Commandant” of the profession who was not a career professional SF Operator directing the future of the SF Branch. Within USAJFKSWCS both PSYOP and CA receive less advocacy, representation, and dedication of resources. PSYOP would be best served by establishing a senior PSYOP career professional to serve in the role of a Commandant and designated as the Chief of PSYOP branch. This individual would be a dedicated advocate, a former PSYOP group or battalion commander, serving as a parochial agent, facilitator, and troubleshooter for the branch. Currently the highest ranking PSYOP representative in USAJFKSWCS, in a position of influence for the branch, is a LTC/O5. It is not surprising that under the current situation PSYOP and CA garner minimal advocacy in a SF centric organization. (Figure 1) A more equitable solution would be to model USAJFKSWCS after other centers of excellence such as the Maneuver Support Center (MANCEN) (Figure 3), which provides equal representation for each branch. Under this structure each of the branches, SF, CA, and PSYOP, would be represented by a Brigadier General. (Figure 2)

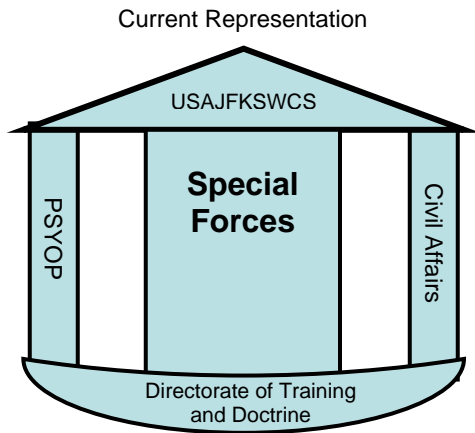


Figure 1

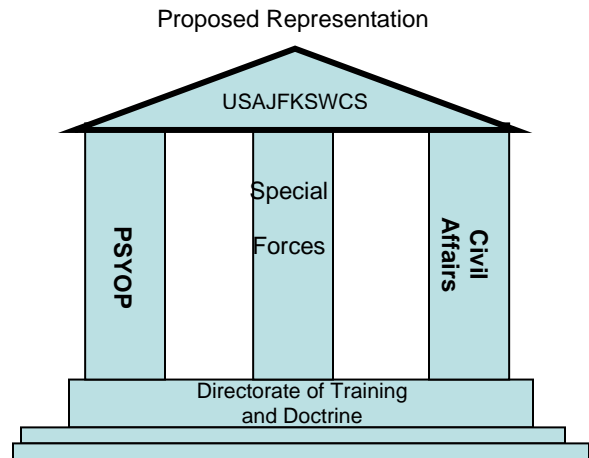
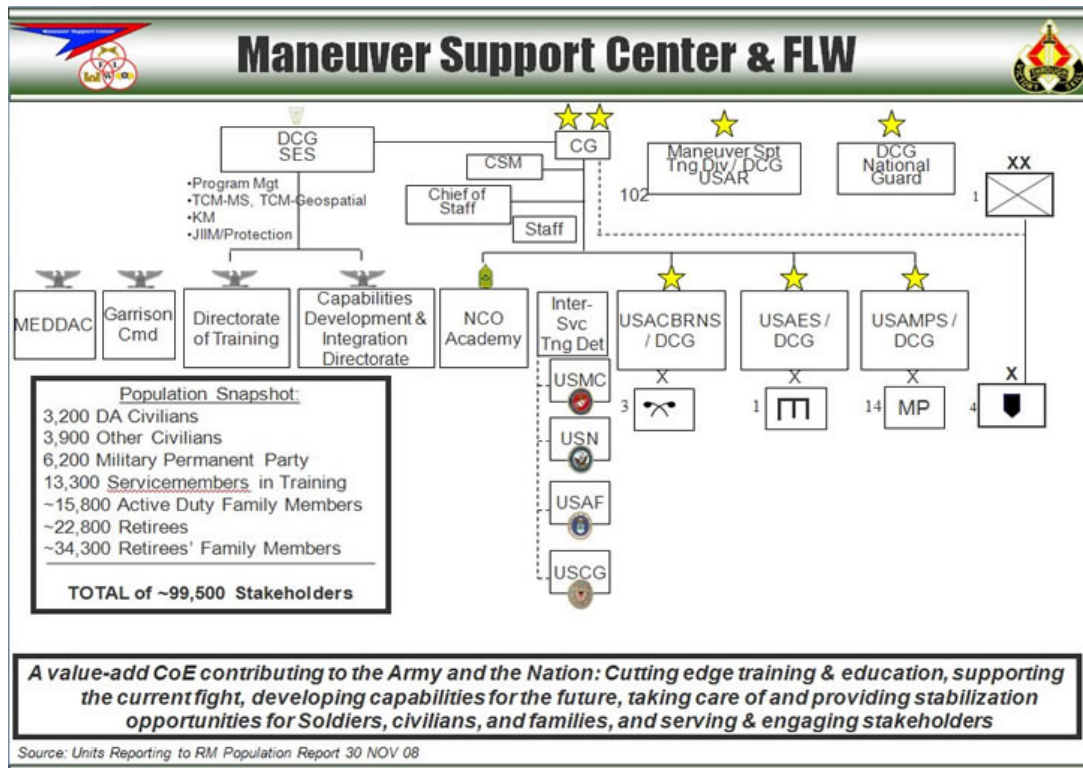


Figure 2



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Figure 3

Additionally, RC PSYOP forces, under the command of U.S. Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (USACAPOC), do not have any direct influence over the direction of the branch since RC forces have been realigned under United States Army Reserve Command (USARC) control.

Issue: PSYOP Education, Training, and Career Development

Since the 1950s, the center of gravity of military PSYOP has been the Special Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, NC. The Special Warfare Center, established in 1956, evolved from the Psychological Warfare Center which was established in 1952. As it is now known, USAJFKSWCS is responsible for special operations training, leader development, doctrine and personnel Proponency for SF, CA, and PSYOP.

Basic training for PSYOP Forces is taught at USAJFKSWCS at Fort Bragg, NC. It is the only DoD course that teaches officers and enlisted personnel the influence tactics, techniques, and procedures of target audience analysis necessary to plan, conduct, and assess PSYOP activities. The school provides PSYOP instruction to AC/RC Soldiers as well as allied nations, DoD civilians, and other Services. The core curriculum is based on the premise that all PSYOP practitioners need the same level of training. From Private to Major, the essential and terminal learning objectives are virtually the same. The PSYOP process is central to the course instruction; plans & programs, target audience analysis, product development, and test &

¹² Maneuver Support Center and Fort Leonard website: http://www.wood.army.mil/wood_cms/orgchart.htm accessed 10 Feb 2009.

evaluation. The level of detail provided is what differs most, as well as the degree of basic soldier skills emphasized. For example, the advance individual training (AIT) or reclassification course (MOS/T) contains more shoot, move, and communication tasks than the officer's program of instruction. Accordingly, there is only a minor degree of difference among the junior enlisted, reclass, and officer courses.¹³

The course prerequisites and standards for full qualification represent the most significant difference in PSYOP course instruction. Active duty Soldiers must attend resident training at Fort Bragg that consists of a 42+ week PSYOP basic qualification course, airborne school, and foreign language training. The RC Soldiers by comparison are not required to be airborne or language qualified and the 42+ week PSYOP course is reduced to less than six weeks of resident instruction. A major reason for this training qualification disparity is due to realities of the citizen-soldier. RC officer and enlisted Soldiers simultaneously advance both civilian and military careers. With less time available to devote to training, RC courses are specifically tailored to maximize correspondence and distance learning in lieu of resident instruction.¹⁴

Another way to achieve greater skills proficiency and/or professional competence is to tailor PSYOP recruiting. There are certain civilian skills that parallel PSYOP unique occupational skills like media entertainment, film and cinematography, broadcast journalism, and media industry experience. A civilian comparison to the skills required for PSYOP would be those desired by Madison Avenue marketing firms or political campaign organizations which expend millions of dollars on research, analysis, and educated individuals to convince the public to buy or vote a certain way.

PSYOP is a thinking man's game. Accordingly, as a cerebral profession, PSYOP education and training requires life-long learning and a career focus, which is not sufficiently met through a single basic course of instruction. A PSYOP Soldier's career must be punctuated by a series of professional development courses and schools that progressively build upon one another preparing the Soldier to assume positions of increasing responsibility and influence. This level of structured development does not exist today.

Today, the PSYOP force is largely composed of a rather small pool of U.S. Army personnel, who are trained at best to be media amateurs. Further professional and intellectual growth is incumbent upon the individual to pursue. The Army is the sole provider of the less than eight thousand PSYOP operators who are trained to influence foreign audiences. Of the eight thousand only one third are active duty, assigned to a single brigade size unit, and responsible for global influence. These forces must attempt to compete against often culturally advantaged foreign fighters and sympathizers, who are less encumbered by policies, timelines, approval processes, and rigid organizational structures. Ideally, PSYOP research and analysis regarding foreign audiences should be empirical, utilizing a wide range of national intelligence capabilities while leveraging the latest modern and sophisticated, commercial marketing and polling

¹³ COL Curtis D. Boyd, Commander, 4th Psychological Operations Group, email correspondence, 29 March 2009

¹⁴ Ibid

techniques. PSYOP personnel therefore require education and in-depth training in social marketing, public relations, polling, surveying and media production skills.¹⁵

As the service proponent, USAJFKSWCS has developed and instructs multiple advanced SF skill courses. By comparison, PSYOP lacks a similar professional developmental framework of intermediate, advanced, and special skill training. As stressed previously, a PSYOP professional must possess expertise in assessing target audiences; developing PSYOP campaign plans, media programs, and products; disseminating PSYOP products; and synchronizing PSYOP activities at strategic, operational, and tactical levels in peacetime and combat. They must also be knowledgeable of the specific vulnerabilities to foreign influence from information and other forms of behavioral/attitudinal change associated with a specific region of the world. This includes foreign language competency, political–military awareness, and cross–cultural communications. Conducting PSYOP requires the ability to successfully interact with military and civilian officials at the national and theater level as well as with host nation military and civilian officials intended to influence and effect behavioral change. (DA Pam 600-3 (2005))

To address these identified shortfalls for the PSYOP career field, what is truly needed is a PSYOP Center of Excellence. Such an institution would be dedicated to advancing the Art and Science of PSYOP. This center of excellence would not only validate basic initial entry PSYOP education but could also develop intermediate and advanced training and education courses to prepare PSYOP professionals for assignments at the senior levels within USSOCOM, OSD, the Joint Staff, GCC staffs, and the interagency.

For these to be sustainable adjustments the current branch force structure needs to transform to facilitate career progression and retention. Under the current force structure the predominance of the officer force can expect retirement at LTC/O5 due to a limited number of O6 positions and no General Officer billets for PSYOP officers. In a profession in which talent and experience count the branch finds its most seasoned and experienced leaving the service before they can be utilized at strategic positions of influence. This seems to contradict the logic, that as an art and science, PSYOP professionals are at their best in their senior years of service and when operating at the strategic level senior rank is important. Professionalization of military PSYOP requires specialization in the career field, and that field should offer the possibility of senior rank.¹⁶ Additionally, consideration should be made towards breaking the PSYOP MOS into areas of expertise similar to SF. The current PSYOP MOS is broken down into two primary MOSs: 37A (officer) and 37F (enlisted) compared to the Special Forces branch which is broken down into 6 primary MOSs: 180A (warrant officer), 18A (officer), B (weapons NCO), C (engineer NCO), D (medical NCO), and E (communication NCO). As information technology advances at exponential rates, the demand for specialization in polling and research, and a supporting PSYOP intelligence specialization are essential. PSYOP MOS specialization in these areas

¹⁵ “The Creation and Dissemination of All Forms of Information in Support of Psychological Operations (PSYOP) in Time of Military Conflict” by Defense Science Board Task Force, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, Washington, D.C. 20301, pg 13 May 2000.

¹⁶ “The Creation and Dissemination of All Forms of Information in Support of Psychological Operations (PSYOP) in Time of Military Conflict” by The Defense Science Board Task Force, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, Washington, D.C. 20301, May 2000.

would greatly enhance PSYOP capability. Additionally, a PSYOP warrant officer program would bring increased specialization, professionalism, and stability to the branch.

Issue: PSYOP Active and Reserve Component (AC/RC) Balance of Forces

The US Army PSYOP force structure, with one active component group and two Reserve Component groups, reflects an outdated Cold War force allocation model. Force distribution of AC versus RC PSYOP forces is 1/3 (-) AC/RC, compare inversely to SF branch distribution of 5/2 (+) AC/RC. In addition, more than half the current PSYOP forces are tactical units with limited ability to plan and produce PSYOP products.¹⁷

USSOCOM's Army component, the U. S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), has the Army's active component PSYOP Force, the 4th Psychological Operations Group (POG) (A) at Ft. Bragg, NC. As a special operations force, the 4th POG's primary mission is to predominately provide support to SOF. Its secondary mission is to provide PSYOP units to support the rapid deployment force or in support of GPF conducting contingency operations.

As of October 2006, the Army Reserve PSYOP forces were designated non-SOF and reassigned to the USARC. USACAPOC is the major subordinate command with Title X authorities for the two USAR PSYOP Groups in the Army Reserve. The 2nd POG is located in Cleveland, Ohio, and the 7th POG is located in Moffet Field, California. The primary mission of both of these groups is to provide tactical PSYOP support to the Army's Brigade Combat Teams (BCT).

Although the RC PSYOP force structure has seen substantial growth in recent years, that growth does not compensate for the requirements inherent in providing the primary PSYOP support to the GPF. These requirements include training with supported units between deployments and deploying rapidly with a supported unit, while providing it with the right level of support at each echelon.¹⁸

The increase of brigade combat teams has outpaced USAR PSYOP MTOE changes and growth. This combined with fluctuating mobilization policy from 15 to 12 to 9 months boots-on-the-ground (BOG) has been incompatible with BCT deployment schedules and GPF Army Force Generations Cycles (ARFORGEN). Meanwhile, mission rehearsal exercises (MRE) and combined-arms training center (CTC) rotations continue with must fill requirements that often include units on dwell and/or those ineligible for future rotation. This means the supported units train with a unit other than the one they will be deployed with on the battlefield.¹⁹

Force availability limitations and mobilization policy limit the ability of RC PSYOP forces to deploy in response to contingency operations, which requires the AC PSYOP force to serve as a bridging force until RC forces can be mobilized and deployed. The 2006 realignment of AC and

¹⁷ Steven Collins, Army PSYOP in Bosnia: Capabilities and Constraints, <http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/99summer/collins.htm>; *Parameters*, Summer 1999, pp. 57-73.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ COL Curtis D. Boyd, Commander, 4th Psychological Operations Group, email correspondence, 29 March 2009

RC PSYOP forces into SOF and non-SOF has further exacerbated and alienated the two segments of the force.²⁰

Additional demands on the PSYOP force come in the form of an increased demand for Regional PSYOP expertise. These missions are generally long-term and enduring efforts conducted exclusively by the AC PSYOP force. Regional PSYOP missions include MIST, Joint Psychological Operations Task Force (JPOTF) and trans-regional PSYOP coordination. AC PSYOP forces provide cultural awareness, regional or host-country expertise, in-depth human factors analysis, and linguistic expertise, while being attuned to operational and strategic operations.

A potential solution is to further increase the AC PSYOP force presence in the GPF, whereby each brigade combat team has an organic PSYOP company with the inherent capacity to support operations at that level. Additionally, given the increased demand for Regional PSYOP missions form multi-compo groups (AC/RC) designed to support the Geographic Combatant Commands (GCC), TSOC and the US Country Teams. Similar to First Army Division East and West, these Integrated Groups would conduct training and readiness oversight as well as mobilization of designated AC/RC forces in their designated area of responsibility in order to provide trained and ready forces to the GCC. Each integrated group would support pre-mobilization training for reserve component forces in accordance with ARFORGEN; assess and report pre-mobilization readiness for RC forces; conduct mobilization and demobilization operations; and provide command and control over assigned and mobilized forces. This integration of AC and RC forces will facilitate standardization of training and ensure a cross pollination of tactics, techniques, and procedures. It would also reestablish a link between the AC and RC PSYOP force which was broken with the realignment of USACAPOC under USARC.

Conclusion

In today's ubiquitous media environment where information technology has reached what might be the most primitive and underdeveloped areas of the globe, opportunities for PSYOP are infinite. Information and influence have become commander's business. Non-kinetic targeting has become the topic of choice among many leaders in operations centers around the globe. Never before could we conceive of a time when information might be the main effort, that day has come.

A media savvy consumer who is accessible and vulnerable is a suitable target of influence. PSYOP is the unit of action. Accordingly, it is essential for our practitioners of influence to be masters of the art and science of influence techniques. This ability must be matched with the capability to integrate these techniques at all levels of warfare, covering military and interagency operations and across the spectrum of conflict. In order to achieve this goal, senior leadership must commit to a serious investment. That investment includes reconciling the disparities in proponent authorities between the AC and RC, and accounting for the education and training needs of the total force. It requires adapting the current accessions and recruiting schemes to

²⁰ "Review of Psychological Operations Lessons Learned from Recent Operational Experience," by Christopher J. Lamb with a contribution from Paris Genalis, National Defense University Press, Washington, D.C., September 2005.

address the real needs of the PSYOP force by leveraging civil expertise. It includes reinvigorating the training pipeline to establish a foundation upon which advanced skills can be built on. And finally integrating a career path that aligns PSYOP's best with command and staff structures where critical decisions take place and advice and counsel can occur. This paper attempted to address these issues and propose potential solutions, but in the end the truth is no solution can be realized unless fundamental changes are made.

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