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Not Only Blood. The Need to
Integrate Psychological Operations
in the West's Military Culture

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Abstract:

Despite the historical and cultural difficulties faced by Western armed forces in employing psychological operations or PSYOPS (case studies: France and Spain), it is increasingly urgent to reconcile conventional and psychological military actions. PSYOPS must be considered together with lethal kinetic actions and can also improve the planning and direction of our operations, from the strategic to the tactical level. The development of PSYOPS capabilities is particularly important in the age of the Internet and population-centred conflicts. In addition, Russia and China, as well as non-state actors, are integrating PSYOPS into their campaigns much more effectively than the West.

Keywords:

Psychological operations, PSYOPS, influence operations, France, Spain, NATO, insurgencies, cyberdefence, population-centred conflicts, military doctrine.

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Introduction

'Without doubt, psychological warfare has proved its right to a place of dignity in our military arsenal¹'. This quote is extracted from General Dwight D. Eisenhower's comments in the Psychological Warfare Division of the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force. Eisenhower emphasised the importance and effectiveness of psychological operations (PSYOPS) in Western operations at World War Two. However, more than seventy years after this compliment, PSYOPS no longer benefit from the same image, understanding and usage in the Western world as they did². It would be wrong to say they have disappeared, as one will easily find national and international (NATO) doctrines for the use of Strategic Communication (StratCom), Information Operations (IO) and PSYOPS. Nonetheless, the core issue when it comes to the use of influence operations –especially PSYOPS as the main component of military influence actions³– is a lack of internalisation of their practice in the West.

This poses an issue when it comes to preparing Western militaries for current and future challenges, as it is not enough to have a sample of PSYOPS capabilities under a written form. We want to tackle here the internalisation of PSYOPS in the West with the support of two case studies, France and Spain. Our aim is to show how historical and cultural influences have led to a separation between conventional kinetic actions and PSYOPS, along with a marginalisation of the latter. One could argue that many other capabilities also exist as a sample in the military and are activated and deactivated depending on national and international trends and needs. However, PSYOPS need more than ever to be considered as core components of military operations, from the strategic to the tactical level.

¹ General Dwight D. EISENHOWER, quoted in PADDOCK JR., Alfred H., "US Army Special Warfare: Its Origins, Psychological and Unconventional Warfare, 1941-1952", Washington: National Defense University Press, 1982, p.21

² GOLDSTEIN, Frank L. & JACOBOWITZ, Daniel W., "Psychological Operations, An Introduction", in "Psychological Operations: Principles and Case Studies", ed. U.S. Government, Department of Defense, 5-11, Progressive Management Publications, 2000, p.11

³ PAUL, Christopher, "Information Operations: Doctrine and Practice: A Reference Handbook" Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008, p.57

Most twenty-first-century confrontations are characterised by a population-centred prism. This trend implies the 'return' of counterinsurgency, the proliferation of international terrorist organisations and the use of new technologies to interfere in foreign and domestic politics. Consequently, in the era of globalisation and information, there is a particularly acute need 'for military actions to be fully capable of fighting and controlling both the physical and informational virtual space'⁴.

At the same time, there is nothing new in this need for control to either protect its own forces, population and allies from enemy actions leading to behavioural changes, or to influence enemy forces, people and allies. In fact, 'Psychological Warfare employs age-old ideas in the [twenty-first] century'⁵. Looking back at Machiavelli's advice on warfare, one will read that 'however strong your armed forces are, in entering a new province you will need the goodwill of the people of the place'⁶. Destroying an army on the battleground is not enough; one has to gain psychological superiority over the enemy and its people while preserving oneself from enemy psychological actions. These words resonate today, at a time where Western militaries try to carry out the so-called 'hearts and minds' operations when confronted with insurgencies. Furthermore, nations such as Russia and China have (re?)-developed clear influence capabilities to advance their political goals without necessarily entering the field of open military confrontations⁷.

After defining PSYOPS and analysing their use in NATO, France and Spain, this article elaborates on the erroneous dichotomy military practitioners tend to create between PSYOPS and kinetic actions, mostly because of historical and cultural implications. A clear vision of PSYOPS, with their strengths and weaknesses, is needed as, despite their efficiency, PSYOPS cannot 'redeem inadequate training, weapons, or tactics that result in poor combat performance. However, the methodology can increase the overall functional degradation of enemy capability'⁸.

⁴ MINISTÈRE DE LA DÉFENSE, "Doctrine Interarmées des Opérations Militaires d'Influence", Publication Interarmées (PIA)-03.253, 2008, p.5

⁵ LINCOLN HARTE, D., & SULLIVAN, John, "Propaganda Handbook", Philadelphia: 20th Century Publishing Co., 1953, p.198

⁶ MACHIAVELLI, Niccolò, "The Prince", Multiple translators. Edited by Jonathan Bennett, 2017, <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/machiavelli1532.pdf>, p.3

⁷ MORALES, Samuel, "Guerra informativa: llenar la información de desinformación", Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Documento Opinión 45/2019, May 29th, 2019, p.23

⁸ GOLDSTEIN & JACOBOWITZ, "Psychological Operations, An Introduction", *op. cit.*, p.9

With a focus on strategic implications, in light of modern challenges and taking into consideration the implications of new technologies, the last section shows the potential impacts of PSYOPS from the planning to the conduct of military defensive and offensive actions, and how they could improve the way Western countries defend themselves and tackle new challenges. With a better understanding of their operational environment, an effective behavioural change perspective rather than 'vague talks of hearts and minds'⁹ and joint action on the psychological and physical dimensions, PSYOPS can help countries such as France and Spain to protect themselves.

However, this requires first of all an internalisation of PSYOPS in Western military practices, which means reconciliation with history and cultural practices as our two case-studies show. Moreover, it needs a better understanding of war and of the complementarity between psychological and kinetic actions.

Analytical Framework

In order to develop a clear argument, some key terms need to be defined: PSYOPS, IO, StratCom, war, warfare and strategy.

PSYOPS are understood using NATO's definition, this is, 'planned activities using methods of communication and other means directed at approved audiences in order to influence perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, affecting the achievement of political and military objectives'¹⁰. PSYOPS are as old as warfare¹¹, but were only theorised in 1945 by Ellis M. Zacharias¹². For NATO, IO are in charge of analysing, coordinating, planning, and integrating every information operation from deception to PSYOPS and public affairs¹³. PSYOPS are 'the core provider of information content from within the IO umbrella'¹⁴. StratCom are 'the coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications

⁹ JONES, David Martin & SMITH, M.L.R., "The Political Impossibility of Modern Counterinsurgency", New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, p.27

¹⁰ NATO, "Allied Joint Doctrine for Psychological Operations", Allied Joint Doctrine (AJP) – 3.10.1 (B), September 2014, p.1-1

¹¹ GOLDSTEIN & JACOBOWITZ, "Psychological Operations, An Introduction", *op. cit.*, p.9

¹² MERCHET, Jean-Dominique, "La Guerre des "PsyOps." Libération-Secret Défense, April 26th, 2009, <http://secretdefense.blogs.liberation.fr/2009/04/26/la-guerre-des-psyops/>

¹³ NATO, September 2014, *op. cit.*, p.1-2

¹⁴ PAUL, *op. cit.*, p.57

activities and capabilities –public diplomacy (PD), public affairs (PA), military public affairs (Military PA), information operations (Info Ops)¹⁵. Consequently, PSYOPS are a sub-branch of IO, which are a sub-branch of StratCom.

In this article, war is understood through a Clausewitzian lens, that is to say, ‘a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means’¹⁶, and ‘an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will’¹⁷. Wars ‘must vary with the nature of their motives and of the situations which gave rise to them’¹⁸: this is warfare. Finally, we use a strategic approach to study the utility of PSYOPS and the implications of a redevelopment of such capacities. Following John Stone, strategy is ‘the instrumental link between military means and political ends’¹⁹.

PSYOPS: their use, their strengths and their limits

An overview of PSYOPS’ evolution

From psychological warfare (PSYWAR) to PSYOPS, along Military Influence Operations, PSYOPS have been known under different names throughout the years. However, this has rarely impacted what such actions entailed, apart for the French distinction between psychological *actions* directed at their own troops, populations and allies; and psychological *warfare* directed at their enemies²⁰. These semantic differences are only a matter of ‘recent’ doctrinal perspective as PSYOPS were already around before the Zacharias’ 1945 theorisation and the French 1957 distinction. Indeed, it was during World War One that PSYOPS came into their own as a formal activity²¹, with leaflets dropping from planes and balloons, although their use and efficiency were not properly assessed

¹⁵ NATO, September 2014, *op. cit.*, p.1-2

¹⁶ CLAUSEWITZ, Karl von, “On War”, translated by Michael Howard & Peter Paret, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.252

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.13

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.30

¹⁹ STONE, John, “Military Strategy: The Politics and Technique of War”, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011, p.4

²⁰ MINISTÈRE DE LA DÉFENSE NATIONALE ET DES FORCES ARMÉES, “Instruction Provisoire sur l’Emploi de l’Arme Psychologique” Texte Toute Armes (TTA) No. 117, 1957, p.3

²¹ GOLDSTEIN & JACOBOWITZ, “Psychological Operations, An Introduction”, *op. cit.*, p.10

until World War Two²². Employed in World War Two²³, Vietnam²⁴, Irak²⁵ and so on, PSYOPS gained a reputation as a force multiplier.

However, what has changed is the scope given to PSYOPS. Indeed, PSYOPS have been used by some states at the strategic level²⁶, while other nations focus on tactical actions²⁷. Moreover, some nations used PSYOPS to influence their opponents, allies and own people while others limited the use of PSYOPS to enemy forces and non-allied groups. Modern NATO doctrine follows the latter principle²⁸. Finally, the 'methods of communication and other means' of PSYOPS' definition have also changed. Indeed, modern understandings of PSYOPS focus quasi-solely on non-lethal methods of communication, while 'lethal' PSYOPS exist and are possible (included amongst the 'other means' of NATO's definition). Indeed, the use of kinetic actions such as bombings to influence enemy behaviour is possible: the 'Doolittle Raid' (April 18th, 1942) is a good example of this practice²⁹.

How PSYOPS work

There are three types of PSYOPS. 'Black' PSYOPS are rumours or 'fake news' with a hidden origin, 'Grey' PSYOPS are based on truth but have an unclear origin and 'White' PSYOPS are truthful with a clear author³⁰. Military operations tend to focus on 'White' PSYOPS as 'Black' PSYOPS are very risky, creating a bad reputation for the state or the

²² *Ibid.* p.10-11

²³ POLLARD, John A., "Words are cheaper than blood", *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 9 (3), Autumn 1945, pp.291-292

²⁴ JONHSTON, William F., "Some thoughts on Psychological Operations." In "Psychological Operations: Principles and Case Studies", ed. U.S. Government, Department of Defense, 60-65. Progressive Management Publications, 2000, p.63

²⁵ GOLDSTEIN, Frank L. & JACOBOWITZ, Daniel W., "PSYOP in Desert Shield/Desert Storm", in "Psychological Operations: Principles and Case Studies", ed. U.S. Government, Department of Defense, 198-210, Progressive Management Publications, 2000, p. 206-208

²⁶ PADDOCK JR, Alfred H., "No More Tactical Information Detachments: US Military Psychological Operations in Transition", in "Psychological Operations: Principles and Case Studies", ed. U.S. Government, Department of Defense, 16-29, Progressive Management Publications, 2000, pp.16-17

²⁷ GOLDSTEIN & JACOBOWITZ, "Psychological Operations, An Introduction", *op. cit.*, p.9

²⁸ NATO, "NATO Military Policy on Psychological Operations", Military Committee procedure (MC) 402/1, March 2003, p.7

²⁹ GOLDSTEIN & JACOBOWITZ, "Psychological Operations, An Introduction", *op. cit.*, p.11

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.6

force behind the operation when discovered³¹. Consequently, PSYOPS tend to be truthfully based as the consequence of a lie's discovery often outweighs the potential results it would have provided³².

This being said, all PSYOPS tend to work according to the same method. Following a two-step process, PSYOPS may be divided between the analytical/planning part and the 'action' part, when the message is conveyed to the Target Audience (TA). A TA is 'an individual or group selected for influence or attack by means of psychological operations'³³. The first part of the process is essential, and it will play a core role in the recommendations this article develops later on. It is during this phase, based on psychological and behavioural analyses, a focus on effective intelligence-gathering³⁴ and joint actions to understand the operational environment³⁵, that TAs are defined and analysed. The way to influence TAs, the centre of the action part of PSYOPS, is based on logistics, time constraints, the search of the most effective channel of communication and higher command approval³⁶.

AC—Action	FF—Face to Face	NP—Newspaper/Insert	TC—Tactical Communication
BB—Billboard	GF—Graffiti	NV—Novelties	TE—T-shirt
BU—Button/Pin	HB—Handbill	OO—Other	TF—Tri-fold
CB—Comic Book	HV—Hat/Visor	PM—Pamphlet	TH—Theater
CL—Clothing (Other);	IN—Internet	PS—Poster	TV—Television
DE—Decal/ Sticker	LF—Leaflet	RD—Radio	TY—Toys
DG—Durable Goods	LS—Loudspeaker	RL—Rally/ Demonstration	VD—Video/ Cinema
EM—E-Mail	LT—Letter	SP—Sports Equipment	WR—Wireless Messaging
FD—Packaged Food	MS—Medical Supplies Supplies	SS—School Supplies	

Figure 1: Non-Exhaustive list of different PSYOPS products used in the 'action' part³⁷

³¹ PAUL, *op. cit.*, p.65

³² MIELCAREK, Romain. "L'Armée Française se Remet Progressivement à l'Action Psychologique." *Défense et Sécurité Internationale*, Special Edition 41, April-May 2015, p.61

³³ NATO, September 2014, *op. cit.*, p.Lex-9

³⁴ TROŠELJ, Ivana, "Victor Turner and the Art of War", Ba diss., Murdoch University, 2011, p.20

³⁵ GOLDSTEIN & JACOBOWITZ, "Psychological Operations, An Introduction", *op. cit.*, p.6

³⁶ NATO, "Allied Joint Doctrine for Psychological Operations", Allied Joint Doctrine (AJP) – 3.10.1 (A), October 2007, p.21

³⁷ PAUL, *op. cit.*, p.64

Strengths and Weaknesses of PSYOPS

Despite a thorough analysis and planning job and an effective choice of PSYOPS products to influence TAs, PSYOPS are no magical solutions to military problems. They offer a range of effective results, but they also have limits.

PSYOPS are effective at (i) weakening the will of (potentially) adversary TAs, (ii) reinforcing the commitment of friendly TAs and (iii) gaining the support of uncommitted or undecided TAs.³⁸ At the strategic level, PSYOPS give a better understanding of the operational environment, in order to help define reasonable political goals, based on a sound understanding of the threats faced³⁹. They can also transform military wins into political successes with, for example, peace treaties and commercial victories⁴⁰. At all levels, PSYOPS can deliver counter-propaganda outcomes, although they are often limited to Force Protection (FP)⁴¹. All these positive results have been experienced in history, with occasionally spectacular results such as during *DESERT STORM*⁴².

This being said, this article notes three main issues with PSYOPS. Firstly, they suffer from a heavy approval process because of a need for technical and practical expertise that is often away from the place PSYOPS are to take place⁴³. They also require a high-level approval before being launched, which is justified by the potential side effects PSYOPS may have, with consequences at the strategic level even for tactical PSYOPS⁴⁴. However, this often delays PSYOPS and can make them miss an opportunity to influence TAs.

³⁸ NATO, October 2007, *op. cit.*, p.18

³⁹ CENTRE INTERARMÉES DE CONCEPTS, DE DOCTRINES ET D'EXPÉRIMENTATION (CICDE), "L'Influence en appui aux engagements opérationnels", Concept Interarmées (CIA)-3.10, Ministère de la Défense, 2012, p.27

⁴⁰ CHARVIEUX, Grégory, "L'influence : un outil de puissance à développer au sein des forces armées", Centre de Doctrine et d'Enseignement du Commandement (CDEC), Pensée Mili-Terre, June 18th, 2018, p.3

⁴¹ NATO, September 2014, *op. cit.*, p.1-9

⁴² GOLDSTEIN & JACOBOWITZ, "PSYOP in Desert Shield/Storm", *op. cit.*, p.206-208

⁴³ Although this offers 'reach-back' capacities, NATO, September 2014, *op. cit.*, p.1-8

⁴⁴ MUNOZ, Arturo, "U.S. Military Information Operations in Afghanistan: Effectiveness of Psychological Operations 2001-2010", RAND Corporation, 2012, p.121

Secondly, there is a tendency to integrate a business-marketing perspective into PSYOPS. Although useful to some extent, as dialogue between civilian and military fields helps innovation, this tends to corrupt PSYOPS. It is not the same thing to get a certain percentage of your TA to buy your product (a win in marketing) and to influence whole masses of people, while simultaneously dealing with human lives⁴⁵. It is a proven fact that this civilian/marketing perspective is greatly responsible for the American PSYOPS failure in Afghanistan as it marginalised a theatre behavioural and social analysis⁴⁶.

Finally, the means to evaluate PSYOPS results can be problematic. Indeed, one can find many specific PSYOPS successes. However, when it comes to agreeing on the best way to quantify PSYOPS victories, the choice of the methodology (polls, data collection, detainee interrogation...) and the timeframe of analysis often pose questions. Knowing when someone has missed PSYOPS opportunities is also very hard. Andrew Mackay and Steve Tatham sum up this: 'If you've lost a helicopter, HQ will soon know. If you've lost a chance to win friends and influence people, nobody further up the military hierarchy need ever know. The soldier in question may not even realise the missed opportunity himself'⁴⁷.

Cultural and Historical Issues with PSYOPS in the West

Beyond these three main weaknesses, PSYOPS in the West suffer from cultural and historical influences that curb their use and effectiveness at all levels. It is only by understanding the weight of such influences that Western culture and practice can improve and internalise the use of PSYOPS. France and Spain, two Western countries with long military traditions but also some conflicting historical and cultural influences, perfectly illustrate this diagnosis of Western issues with PSYOPS.

⁴⁵ GÉRÉ, François, "Mutations de la guerre psychologique", *Stratégique*, 85 (1), 2005, p. 89

⁴⁶ MIELCAREK, Romain, "Échecs des opérations d'information en Afghanistan : La Guerre n'est pas une affaire de marketing", *Défense et Sécurité Internationale* 106, September 2014, pp.41-42

⁴⁷ MACKAY, Andrew & TATHAM, Steve, "Behavioural Conflict: Why Understanding People and their Motivations Will Prove Decisive in Future Conflict", Saffron Walden: Military Studies Press, 2011, pp.xv-xvi

France & PSYOPS, the Return of PSYOPS in French Operations?

During the second part of its colonisation era (post-1830s)⁴⁸, Marshals of France Joseph Gallieni and Hubert Lyautey developed their concept of 'oil spot' (*tâche d'huile*). Based on a centripetal and progressive approach, the oil spot method was intended to pacify by capillarity, with a mix of military force and convincing (PSYOPS)⁴⁹, with a 'pressing need to "convince rather than to force"⁵⁰ This mix between kinetic and psychological actions was progressively mastered by the French military up to the traumatic events of the Algerian War,⁵¹ during which the amalgamation in people's mind between psychological *action*, that is to say on France's own population⁵², and torture was made. This wrongful mix between PSYOPS – essentially based on radio and cinema actions at that time – and torture – used for intelligence-gathering – put PSYOPS in the dark for a very long time⁵³. Indeed, it was only with France's return into NATO and Afghanistan that PSYOPS came back in France⁵⁴.

The *Centre Interarmées des Actions sur l'Environnement* (CIAE, France's PSYOPS and Civil-Military Cooperation [CIMIC] centre), created in 2012, is in charge of delivering PSYOPS at the operational and tactical levels at the *Centre de Planification et de Conduite des Opérations* (CPCO, Planning and Conduct of Operations Centre of the General Staff)'s orders. The CIAE is a training and operational centre focusing on white PSYOPS, and it has been deployed in most French operations since Afghanistan: Central African Republic, Mali, Syria, and so on⁵⁵. The CIAE does not work on strategic-level PSYOPS, but follows NATO regulations and standards, although it did not follow NATO instructions on the permanent integration of PSYOPS elements in every operation during the successful Operation *SERVAL* in Mali (2013)⁵⁶.

⁴⁸ ROUQUET, Michel, "Point de Situation sur les Opérations Psychologiques", Base de Connaissance de l'Association de l'École de Guerre Économique, 2009, p.3

⁴⁹ FRANC, Claude, "Gallieni et Lyautey : Penseurs pour le XXI^e siècle", Paris: Economica, 2012, pp.3-4

⁵⁰ CHARVIEUX, *op. cit.*, p.1

⁵¹ ROUQUET, *op. cit.*, pp.3-4

⁵² MINISTÈRE DE LA DÉFENSE NATIONALE ET DES FORCES ARMÉES, *op. cit.*, p.3

⁵³ MIELCAREK, April-May 2015, *op. cit.*, p.58

⁵⁴ MIELCAREK, April-May 2015, *op. cit.*, p.59

⁵⁵ ANCELIN, Renaud, "France: Le CIAE, « une unité jeune, mais riche en expérience et en savoir-faire »", *Défense et Sécurité Internationale*, Special Edition 41, April-May 2015, p.67

⁵⁶ MIELCAREK, April-May 2015, *op. cit.*, p.59

Notwithstanding this, it would seem that the CIAE is a testimony of France's reconciliation with PSYOPS. However, PSYOPS are not yet recognised as a specialisation, Human-Resource wise, which means they could disappear again after an Algerian War-type trauma. Moreover, some reluctances still exist when it comes to the use of PSYOPS: some soldiers still have preconceived ideas, as with this extreme example of a Foreign Legion Captain calling them 'Little Goebbels'⁵⁷. Additionally, not focusing on strategic level PSYOPS when they could support national influence⁵⁸ is a result of an unawareness of PSYOPS' capabilities. France also focuses on non-kinetic PSYOPS, which plays into the cultivation of this apparent dichotomy between the use of PSYOPS and kinetic actions.

Spain & PSYOPS, the partial integration of a foreign idea

Like in France, the use of PSYOPS in Spain pre-dates contemporary fighting. To mention just an example, in the Spanish Independence War psychological actions were widely used to demoralise Napoleonic soldiers and encourage Spanish citizens⁵⁹. During the Spanish Civil War, both sides carried out vast and continuous psychological actions⁶⁰, which were generically branded at that time as 'propaganda'⁶¹. This use of PSYOPS during one of the most troubled periods of Spain's history helps explain a certain discomfort with psychological actions. However, in the contemporary sense of the term employed in this article, it seems that it was NATO's influence what made PSYOPS known in Spain.

In 1990, the army modernisation plan RETO referred for the first time to PSYOPS groups embedded within the intelligence units of several elements of the Spanish Army, such as the *Fuerza de Acción Rápida* (Rapid Action Force)⁶². Their mission was to plan and

⁵⁷ KRAFFT, Raphaël, "Captain Teacher: Une radio communautaire en Afghanistan", Paris: Buchet-Castel editions, Libella, 2013, p.91

⁵⁸ CHARVIEUX, *op. cit.*, p.2; p.4

⁵⁹ LEON NAVARRO, Vicente, "La prensa valenciana ante la Guerra del Francés en 1808", *El Argonauta Español*, vol. 5 2008, <https://journals.openedition.org/argonauta/908> [Accessed 1 September 2019]

⁶⁰ ESTEBARANZ MONTERO, Luis & MUÑOZ-MANERO FERNÁNDEZ, Antonio, "Operaciones Psicológicas: el Mundo de las Percepciones", *Revista Ejército* 795, June 2007, p. 52

⁶¹ ZAMORA, Germán Caraballo, "La experiencia de la Unidad de Operaciones Psicológicas en Operaciones no bélicas", *Revista Ejército* 795, June 2007, p.56

⁶² VÁZQUEZ MATEOS, Manuel, "Las operaciones psicológicas y operaciones de información de

execute PSYOPS in support of tactical commands. This structure was however not really implemented due to the lack of resources⁶³, and in 1994 the subsequent plan NORTE conceived a single *Unidad PSYOPS* (PSYOPS Unit) integrated into the intelligence group of the Land Army's *Fuerza de Maniobra* (Manoeuvre Force). The idea was to create a modular structure that could be expanded or split into smaller groups. In accordance with this organisation, elements of the *Unidad PSYOPS* were deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1997 as part of NATO's Stabilisation Force (SFOR). This was Spain's first practical PSYOPS experience⁶⁴, and was mainly focused on obtaining the support of the civilian population⁶⁵.

Since the Balkan experience, both the basic structure and types of missions carried out by Spain's PSYOPS elements (in Indonesia during a natural disaster relief mission, but particularly in Irak and Afghanistan) have remained similar. As the available literature shows, their main goal has consistently been generating positive perceptions of the force amongst civilians in population-centred conflicts and at a tactical level⁶⁶. This somewhat unambitious scope can be better understood by considering the small scale of Spain's military missions abroad, usually to support US initiatives⁶⁷.

From an organisational point of view, the PSYOPS structure of the Spanish Armed Forces underlines the small scale, tactical scope, at which PSYOPS are considered. Unlike France, which as seen above possesses a joint PSYOPS centre, in Spain only the Army has a PSYOPS unit. Furthermore, it has never been fully deployed: even in the interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan it was only partly mobilised. The establishment in 2019 of the *Regimiento de Operaciones de Información nº 1* (Information Operations Regiment) by merging the PSYOPS Group with the CIMIC battalion seems to confirm that Spain understands PSYOPS as specialised support providers during peace operations. This is reinforced by the terminology generally employed by the Spanish Ministry of Defence, which states that the objective of PSYOPS is 'to modify the negative

campaña", Boletín de Información, no. 255 (1998), p. 47

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ ZAMORA, *op. cit.*, p. 56

⁶⁵ VÁZQUEZ MATEOS, *op. cit.*, p. 51

⁶⁶ ZAMORA, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ See for instance PEDRO NOVELLA, Manuel Vicente, "Las Operaciones Psicológicas en el Ámbito del ISAF Joint Command." Revista Ejército 864 extraordinario, March 2013, p.107

perceptions on military units and their activities'⁶⁸. In any case, the creation of the Information Operations Regiment can be considered as a step away from the traditionally narrow use of PSYOPS. Already in 2007 some Spanish officers hoped for a change in this direction⁶⁹.

France & Spain: Epitomes of Western Issues with PSYOPS

Although France seems to have an older tradition of PSYOPS, both Spain and France share some traumatic experiences when it comes to their use, along with the impact of an *oldish* Western military culture.

Indeed, with the experiences of the 20th century military conflicts as well as the confusion of PSYOPS with abuses on populations and prisoners, France and Spain only recently re-developed their PSYOPS capacities. Other Western nations went through similar periods: Germany, for example, with its ZopInfo (*Zentrum für Operative Information*), is still influenced by a post-Nazism guilt culture which tends to put military actions, shows of power, and influence operations in the backstage.⁷⁰ The impact of history, although understandable, needs to be openly dealt with, as enemies such as terrorist organisations or foreign actors do not shy away from the use of psychological pressures on their foes. As it will be in the next part of this article, it is only with a comprehensive approach to the use of PSYOPS along with kinetic measures that Western militaries can enhance their protection and their offensive capabilities.

Apart from cultural issues and history prejudices, PSYOPS are also relegated behind kinetic actions for another reason. Our military history tends to depict a certain vision of war according to which PSYOPS are less 'glorious' than conventional kinetic actions. A good example of the undervalue of PSYOPS relates to military awards, which tend to favour courage and bravery in combat actions, although sometimes a fighter plane's 'show of force' for example could save more lives and obtain a more effective tactical-to-strategic result than an infantry assault. There is a good reason behind this valuation of 'warrior spirit' in the military both in light of socio-historical implications and also bearing

⁶⁸ Nuevos ajustes, 17 March 2019, Blog Oficial del Ejército, <https://ejercitotierra.wordpress.com/2019/03/17/nuevos-ajustes/> [accessed 14/08/19]

⁶⁹ ESTEBARANZ MONTERO & MUÑOZ-MANERO FERNÁNDEZ, *op. cit.*, p. 55

⁷⁰ ROUQUET, *op. cit.*, pp.9-10

in mind the primary job the military profession has to undertake: to kill people and destroy things.⁷¹ However, there is a need to distinguish this primary utility of the military force from other means that could serve as alternatives or substitutes.

Indeed, in an era where media have become central actors of tensions, confrontations and even wars⁷², an era where most conflicts are population-centred, there is a need for credible PSYOPS capabilities. As Rupert Smith states, there is a need for a cognitive revolution. It is not enough to be aware that modern operations require some transformations in the way the military uses its force: we need to fully understand the necessity for joint answers to threats and enemy actions in an environment where populations have become central actors⁷³.

The use of PSYOPS to improve military practice: which path to take?

In the age of the Internet and population-centred conflicts, the possibilities that influence operations offer to advance political goals are almost infinite. Translated into the Clausewitzian military terms of this article, this entails, as Samuel Morales has pointed out, a 'shift of paradigm' when it comes to attack the centre of gravity of the enemy⁷⁴. Indeed, in population-centred conflicts, the centre of gravity necessarily turns to be the civilian population. And this population is, thanks to new technologies, easily reachable. Accordingly, armies need online actions to target populations. This last section addresses the issue of how PSYOPS could help Western militaries to achieve their goals, but firstly tries to picture the threat they need to tackle.

New Threats and Challenges for Western Democracies and Military Forces

From Vietnam to Afghanistan, it has always been obvious that population-centred conflicts can only be won with the support of the population. However, the West has failed to learn and apply the necessary lessons to win in these scenarios. To this already old military problem of successful counterinsurgency and peace operations, new

⁷¹ SMITH, Rupert, "The Utility of Force", London: Allen Lane, 2005, p.6

⁷² MACKAY & TATHAM, *op. cit.*, pp.16-18

⁷³ SMITH, *op. cit.*, pp.371-372

⁷⁴ MORALES, *op. cit.*, p.4

technologies have brought a new challenge: online propaganda, disinformation and radicalisation. Today, our adversaries cannot only resist military pressure abroad, but have also gained and mastered ways to infiltrate Western populations, alienating them from their own institutions and sometimes (take for instance Jihadists) openly calling to open 'home fronts.'

Both the difficulties of the West to win abroad and the challenge posed to domestic populations in Europe and the US have a common denominator: the little importance attached to information and perceptions when compared to our adversaries. David Kilcullen presented this problem talking about Al-Qaeda: while the West tends to design physical operations first and then craft supporting information operations to explain its actions, the terrorist organisation does exactly the opposite. For the US, information is a supporting effort; for the terrorists, it is its main effort⁷⁵. The incredible rise of the Islamic State, which attracted dozens of thousands of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq, can be better understood as a major success of a strategic-level PSYOPS campaign⁷⁶. The increase of small terror attacks in Europe following the expansion of the Islamic State can also be considered as another PSYOPS victory.

However, international terrorist organisations are not the only entities that have learned to use PSYOPS on such a massive and strategic scale. States like Russia and China have developed powerful influence tools that have become a key component of their military operations. The reasoning on which they base this shift is very similar to the approach of terrorist groups. Talking about the Russian military intervention in Syria, the Russian editor Dimitri Kiselyov explained that in today's world, military action can only be launched after winning an information war⁷⁷. He added: 'in Syria [...] Americans lost the information war. In Crimea they lost it too'⁷⁸.

Russian military and national security doctrines place information in a central place, not only as an offensive weapon but also as a way to defend its country. The Russian National Security Strategy 2020, for instance, published as soon as in 2009, already alerted that

⁷⁵ KILCULLEN, David. Quoted by MACKAY & TATHAM, *op. cit.*, p.135

⁷⁶ HOKAYEM, Joseph, "Communication, guerre psychologique et terrorisme", Independently Published, 2018, p.34, p.45

⁷⁷ MORALES, *op. cit.*, p.17

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

the 'global information struggle' would 'intensify.' The document proposed the dissemination of 'truthful' information amongst its citizens and the development of native platforms (such as social media) to safeguard Russia's 'information space'⁷⁹. The Russian approach to 'information security' entails not only guaranteeing the technical integrity of information but also making sure that it generates the right cognitive effect. While Russia focuses on the perceptions that information generates on the TA (domestic or foreign), the West seems primarily interested on the objectivity of the information.

China has followed Russian information successes attentively and created in 2016 the Strategic Support Force (SSF), an entity centralising space, cyber, electronic warfare and PSYOPS capacities⁸⁰. The SSF is under the direct command of the Central Military Commission, which underlines the strategic importance attached to PSYOPS. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, China uses psychological actions including propaganda, deception, threats and coercion both towards its own citizens and foreign adversaries to affect their decision-making capacity⁸¹. One of the most recent cases of Chinese PSYOPS has taken place during the Hong Kong protests in summer 2019. According to a public statement released by Twitter, a 'coordinated state-backed operation' was 'deliberately and specifically attempting to sow political discord in Hong Kong, including undermining the legitimacy and political positions of the protest movement on the ground'⁸². Facebook published a similar text on the same day⁸³. This operation took as TAs the populations of Hong Kong and the West (Facebook and Twitter are banned in continental China), and was combined with a rather traditional military action: the gathering of Chinese troops near the Hong Kong island.

⁷⁹ JAITNER, Margarita and MATTSON, Peter A., "Russian Information Warfare of 2014", in "7th International Conference on Cyber Conflict: Architectures in Cyberspace", eds. M.Maybaum, A.-M.Osula, L.Lindström. Tallin: NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCD COE) Publications, 2015, p.40-41

⁸⁰ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, "Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019", 2019

https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-1/1/2019_CHINA_MILITARY_POWER_REPORT.pdf , p.48

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112

⁸² TWITTER, "Information Operations directed at Hong Kong", 19 August 2019.

https://blog.twitter.com/en_us/topics/company/2019/information_operations_directed_at_Hong_Kong.html [Accessed 1 September 2019]

⁸³ FACEBOOK, "Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior From China", 19 August 2019. <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2019/08/removing-cib-china/> [Accessed 1 September 2019]

Facing these threats

The examples above show to which point there is an abyss between the understanding and practice of influence operations by the West and those of its rivals. Based on this analysis, together with our assessment of the general strengths and weaknesses of PSYOPS and the cultural biases of the West, this article wishes to suggest some recommendations. These are in no way brand new, as advocates of PSYOPS have always existed in the defence and security field. However, they are enriched by a context in which new technologies and populations play a central role and in which time is running out for Western states to jump in on the PSYOPS train.

First and foremost, there is a need for nations to have PSYOPS capabilities at a strategic level, under the direct command of the Joint Chief of Staff or equivalent superior officer in charge of the whole military, and to use such capabilities from planning to action on a permanent basis. This use of PSYOPS at a strategic level should also entail the development of explicit national influence strategies going beyond the military sphere⁸⁴ to protect its own population from foreign interferences while influencing foreign actors, both during peacetime and wartime. This joint-ministerial work as it exists or has existed in countries such as the United States⁸⁵ is crucial.

Additionally, the use of PSYOPS capacities could help avoid important mistakes⁸⁶. Indeed, the analytical aspect of PSYOPS would have a great impact on strategic planning. A sound and coherent analysis of the enemy, neutral actors, and the general environment provided by PSYOPS analysis would lead to more reasonable political goals, and therefore military actions. Taking the example of Afghanistan, how could one reasonably believe, after doing a thorough analysis of the country and its people, with their history, geography and sociology, that our 'vague talks of hearts and minds'⁸⁷ and our military intervention would suddenly lead the country to become a democracy abiding by Western human rights and values? Arguably, such position is easy to support with the benefit of hindsight. Nonetheless, a better analytical process, as PSYOPS offer, could

⁸⁴ Some Western nations have a national influence strategy or at least a guideline of principles it wants to promote to other actors

⁸⁵ GOLDSTEIN & JACOBOWITZ, "Psychological Operations, An Introduction", *op. cit.*, pp.6-7

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p.9

⁸⁷ JONES & SMITH, *op. cit.*, p.27

have helped a more reasonable goal setting. 'The challenge is to adopt strategies which recognize that long-term perceptual effects in the area of operations will have a significant impact on the success or failure of military activity'⁸⁸. Simply putting boots on the grounds to kill enemies, while simultaneously building schools and hospitals for the same people is not effective. A failure in politics when setting a strategy means a flawed strategy, rarely redeemed by operational virtuosity⁸⁹.

In any case, 'It is hard to impose our will on an opponent without having to go and fight him on his ground and take control of his space'⁹⁰. Kinetic actions will continue to be central to military interventions, with the increasing importance of those initiated by low-ranked soldiers for the strategic level, as seen through the concept of 'strategic corporals' central to modern operations. However, strategic corporals support the argument developed here: PSYOPS capacities should be increased from the strategic to the tactical level. Most Western counterinsurgency doctrines declare that the principal weapon of the insurgent is propaganda⁹¹: why are our nations not using the same means, to the same extent, but with the help of our superior resources? Therefore, it is crucial to have PSYOPS capacities at the strategic level, reporting to the highest authority to ensure maximum effect. Moreover, when we talk about taking control of the enemy space, this entails both a physical and virtual space, and in both cases PSYOPS can provide answers to major difficulties.

Furthermore, as seen above, influence-based strategies are not limited to insurgents. Foreign actors are investing in influence, from terrorist groups to states, and it has proved effective so far⁹². Positive actions exist, such as the Counter-Daesh Communications Cell, established in London in 2015⁹³, but more needs to be done in order to protect ourselves. The capacities shown by Islamic State are abnormal if compared to other terrorist organisations, but they should serve as a warning of what the future could look like. This also means an important coordination between PSYOPS and cyber capacities

⁸⁸ INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES (IISS), "Complex Irregular Warfare – the psychological component," *The Military Balance* 107 (1), 2007, p.415

⁸⁹ EVANS, Michael, "The Wretched of the Empire: Politics, Ideology and Counterinsurgency in Rhodesia, 1965-1980", *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 18 (2), June 2007, p.176

⁹⁰ GOYA, Michel, "Le Groupe de Combat comme Priorité Stratégique", *Défense et Sécurité Internationale* 139, January-February 2019, p.58

⁹¹ MINISTÈRE DE LA DÉFENSE, "Contre-Insurrection", *Doctrine Interarmées-3.4.4(A)*, p.25

⁹² VEN BRUUSGAARD, Kristin, "Russian Strategic Deterrence", *Survival* 58 (4), 2016, p.10

⁹³ "UK Actions to Combat Daesh", Gov.uk, <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/daesh/about#defeating-Daesh-Iraq-Syria>

from the strategic down to the tactical level, with joint-cells of both defensive and offensive PSYOPS using lethal and non-lethal actions. PSYOPS and Cyber capacities should accordingly be better integrated in the training of our troops, especially in urban environments.

The approach outlined here entails the end of the 'hearts and minds' narrative, which seems to us an empty concept leaving soldiers in a schizophrenic position of killing and destructing while building and healing. Soldiers need to be tasked with coherent objectives, resulting from a joint use of influence and 'conventional' operations, capable of simultaneously dealing with enemy propaganda and positively influencing TAs at all levels⁹⁴.

Overall, a professionalisation of PSYOPS, the establishment of doctrines to safeguard our own populations and the development of lethal PSYOPS are needed. However, such evolutions would require a better understanding by the military, by policymakers and by populations of what are PSYOPS, their strengths and their limits. History and cultural biases will otherwise play against them.

Conclusion

A revolution in Western military thinking and practice is needed. Doctrines exist, and are essential, but it is not enough to have a written document and a sample of PSYOPS units to make them effective. We have repeated this several times throughout this article, but we think it is crucial. In order to face terrorist organisations, insurgencies and states, Western military forces, along with the highest political levels of each state, need to recognise the importance of influence and information. It is said that the weapons used and developed by someone's enemies are the ones it decides are not worthy enough. The spread of PSYOPS around the world is facilitated by its cost-effectiveness thanks to new technologies, but also by our lack of readiness. Western nations need to redevelop PSYOPS comprehensively, from the strategic to the tactical level, from the planning to the action part of its process. A cognitive revolution is needed to link PSYOPS and other 'conventional' means as a central part of every defensive and offensive operation. A professionalisation of PSYOPS soldiers within each country, coordinated with specialised

⁹⁴ IISS, *op. cit.*, p.416

personnel from other ministries and agencies is needed to implement effective countermeasures against foreign influences in the domestic and foreign spheres.

It is hard to ask for a cognitive shift in a matter affected by cultural and historical difficulties, but it is only through such adaptation that Western states will be ready to face current and future threats. Eventually, all questions of influence and PSYOPS are reduced to one simple issue: understanding the human factor in war. As humans are still the central actors in war, it is by addressing it that PSYOPS could help reframe the way Western nations defend themselves and fight, along with tactical proficiency and kinetic actions. In the future, our enemies will surely gain more means to create their narratives at low cost⁹⁵. We can beat them at the same low cost, should we decide to change our minds.

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⁹⁵ DURVILLE, Emmanuel, "PSYOPS et Internet : de l'Irak au Sud-Liban", Revue Internationale d'Intelligence Économique 1, 2009, p.75