

Influence Operations: Integrated PSYOP Planning

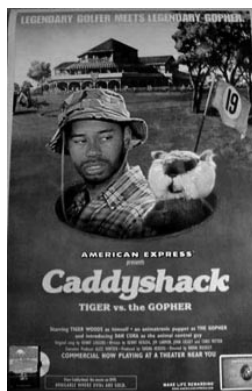
By J. "Spyke" Szeredy, Technical Sergeant, USAF
39th Information Operations Squadron, Hurlburt Field, FL

Editorial Abstract: This article, by TSgt Spyke Szeredy, was previously published in the Spring 2005 issue of *Air & Space Power Journal* and is being reprinted, with permission, in *IO Sphere* because of its direct application to joint IO. TSgt Szeredy describes, in detail, how PSYOP can be integrated into the five phases of deliberate planning. He also emphasizes the importance of recognizing the primary and secondary psychological effects of messages and actions when executing PSYOP and influence operations.

A well-known television commercial for the American Express credit card featuring golfer Tiger Woods produces both primary and secondary psychological effects.¹ By using a popular and influential spokesman familiar to many young to middle-aged people, the advertising agency responsible for the commercial seeks the primary effect of persuading the target audience to utilize its client's product. Interestingly, the fact that the agency also arranged to have the commercial appear in the movie *Caddyshack* possibly generated the secondary effect of increasing video sales and rentals of that film. The fact that American Express cross-promoted the commercial with Warner Brothers' restocking of retailers' shelves with the movie indicates that the company did take into account the primary and secondary effects.²

Like this commercial, a psychological operations (PSYOP) message might also produce both primary and secondary effects. Although no statistical evidence exists, a classroom lesson on propaganda in the Air Force's Information Operations Integration Course has repeatedly tested the creation of these effects by showing that students grasped their significance in this particular commercial. Specifically, instructors asked the students questions designed to identify the product and content of the advertisement and surveyed their desire to rent or purchase the movie in which it appeared. Responses indicated that the students linked on multiple levels with the ad and its information. Just as students identified such primary and secondary effects, so might an adversary respond to carefully crafted PSYOP messages. Of course, our enemies could very well use this technique against our own forces and citizens to achieve their own purposes.

The creation of primary and secondary effects in order to reach multiple end states during military operations raises some difficult questions. How can we measure the secondary effects of PSYOP? Do PSYOP planners look for ways to achieve not only primary effects, but also secondary effects that support the goals of the joint task force (JTF) commander? How can



An example in marketing that has multiple psychological effects on the target audience.

Air Force actions supporting PSYOP achieve these effects to ensure that a target adversary audience understands both the message and its intent? Planners in air operations centers, strategy cells, and planning cells need to consider these questions.

The Air Force's *Concept of Operations for Information Operations*, 6 February 2004, organizes all the facets of information operations (IO) into three categories: network-warfare operations, electronic-warfare operations, and influence operations (which include PSYOP). Combining PSYOP, whether offensive or defensive, with electronic warfare and network warfare operations, can greatly enhance its effectiveness. The Air Force is taking a hard look at the realm of PSYOP

and influence operations to assure that its IO planners know how to coordinate with the joint PSYOP task force during both planning and execution. One notices this desire to step back into the PSYOP realm in a possible new definition for Air Force PSYOP as *the deliberate use of airpower and space power, in both their lethal and nonlethal forms, to shape and exploit the psychological content of the battlespace in a manner advantageous to US/coalition forces and objectives*. We can start to imagine the many ways the Air Force can contribute to joint PSYOP at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels, thus complementing existing Army, Navy, and Marine Corps efforts. For example, the Air Force's air and space superiority might support task force commanders by achieving primary and secondary effects of PSYOP themes and messages tied to a greater influence-operations plan. Air Force planners could achieve these effects through synchronizing air- and spacecentric influence operations plans with respective Services and agencies to capitalize on all available capabilities, thereby maximizing effects against a target audience or region.

As the military becomes more involved in worldwide operations, especially military operations other than war (MOOTW), the ability to reach and inform or educate the target audience becomes critical to mission success. Using PSYOP during MOOTW to validate the credibility of US military and

government actions in support of indigenous people can help persuade an adversary to accept the goals of the host nation and US activities in the region. In conjunction with the 4th Psychological Operations Group (4th POG), the Air Force would create themes and messages to support the planning and execution of combatant commanders' regional plans. Additionally, by using relevant symbols and dissemination techniques, ranging from face-to-face communications to radio, television, and the Internet, Air Force assets can send messages that support missions around the world. Intelligence agencies and personnel that provide reach-back support to planners need to understand trends within the target audience so that themes and messages linked with good delivery methods provide both primary and secondary effects. Combining Air Force PSYOP and influence operations assets with intelligence reach-back makes for solid execution and assessment when supporting both kinetic endeavors (e.g., force-on-force and combat operations) and those considered nonkinetic (e.g., logistics and deployment, humanitarian relief, noncombatant evacuations, and other nation-building support).

The Air Force might realize primary and secondary effects with PSYOP and influence-operations activities through in-depth, collaborative planning within all operation plans (OPLAN), concept plans, and functional plans. Air Force Manual 10-401, vol. 2, *Planning Formats and Guidance*, 1 May 1998, divides OPLAN construction for conventional operations into five phases: (1) prehostilities or deterrence, (2) lodgment or crisis, (3) decisive combat and force stabilization, (4) follow-through, and (5) posthostilities and redeployment. Not all OPLANs have the same phase names and may lack a decisive combat portion—but they can deal with such situations as refugees created from governmental instability or collapse. Knowing an OPLAN's phases allows planners to direct primary and secondary effects against target audiences during execution of operations from peacetime, through combat, and back to peace.

Anyone planning and preparing to execute within a given area must realize that the US ambassador has responsibility for America's interests in a particular country. No matter the phase being executed in a plan, the ambassador and his or her team will coordinate activities within that country. The only exception occurs during phase three—decisive combat and force stabilization—when the regional or JTF commander guides the country (the commander returns control to the ambassador upon conclusion of that phase). The ambassador and country team coordinate all PSYOP activity with the military information support team (MIST)/PSYOP support element (PSE), provided through the 4th POG and its regional battalion. If the Air Force uses PSYOP to achieve effects, it must work with the MIST/PSE or joint psychological operations task force (JPOTF) at all times.

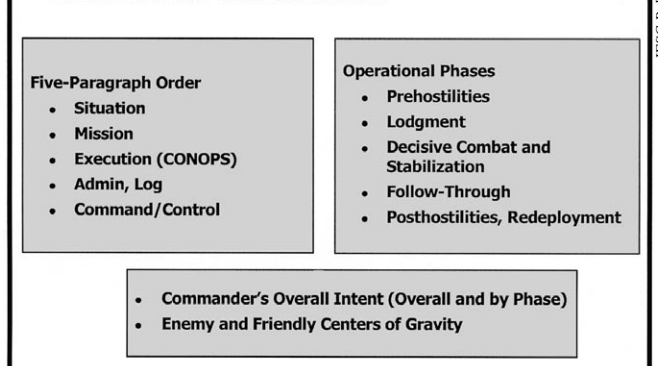
“If PSYOP and influence operations are to take hold within a region and produce long-standing effects, US personnel must plan thoroughly, execute early, and continue these operations through all phases of activity.”

Before implementing an OPLAN, the regional commander will assess actions in the region that validate a need to move the command from phase zero (day-to-day activities) to phase one (prehostilities or deterrence). These daily interactions link governmental personnel to national-level military activities. During this time, the Department of State and Department of Defense usually coordinate PSYOP and influence operations that address interests linked to the nation's diplomatic, information, military, and economic strategies. Regional commanders have coordination and input through liaison officers assigned to the various commands for actions during this phase. If PSYOP and influence operations are to take hold within a region and produce long-standing effects, US personnel must plan thoroughly, execute early, and continue these operations through all phases of activity.

Typically, conflict enters phase one when the regional commander feels that a situation may arise within the next 18 to 24 months. The commander might already have a standing and approved OPLAN for the situation or might modify one already on the shelf. Either way, plans contain prescreened, culturally aligned objectives

for PSYOP, including target sets, themes, and possible messages. Plans may also specify other themes and intentions to avoid (e.g., those that denigrate local culture, customs, and beliefs). Planners should then determine the best way to reach the target audience, seeking not only to affect actions immediately, but also to continue doing so in support of future US/coalition intentions. To further US objectives in the region, our military and government should identify influential individuals from either the United States or the target nation who have a high degree of credibility with the target audience—perhaps professional and amateur athletes with multinational appeal, such as soccer and basketball players, or actors with international followings. This approach might prove useful in an effort to improve the target

Common Plan Characteristics



Regardless of the type of military plan (OPLAN, CONPLAN, or Functional Plan), there are several characteristics common to all.

citizens' understanding of democracy by explaining, for example, that they should support US forces bringing supplies and aid to their nation.

Phase two, lodgment or crisis, usually activates six months prior to probable decisive action, which might include combat, noncombatant evacuation operations, and MOOTW. During this phase, commanders consider moving assets into a region and protecting them. Additionally, MOOTW can encompass bringing assets into a region under military deception to protect a capability or conceal its presence in-theater. PSYOP and influence operations would continue from phase one and undergo modification entering phase two to support the operation as it changes. During the movement of forces and assets, force protection and operations security expand at home stations and forward operating locations. PSYOP and influence operations aid in deterring foreign human-intelligence collection, sabotage, violence, or demonstrations; they also inform the host nation and international community of US/coalition actions that will support that nation and stabilize the region. If the adversary is a military force, PSYOP and influence operations help stem hostilities through shows of force and the willingness to use superior military capabilities. Phase-two target audiences include influential enemy and possibly friendly military, governmental, and nongovernmental personnel who might question the actions of their government in relation to US actions in the region. During this phase, exercises that show capabilities or aviation missions in support of influence operations might include conditioning drills to affect intelligence collectors or might involve air-defense operators who would collect vital information. Although the goal calls for influencing a government or military leader to capitulate or stem aggression, knowing the collector and conduit that carries the information is critically important. Throughout this phase and into the next one, we constantly try to influence the target audience. Knowing how to reach the adversary's leadership, whether government or military, as well as the general populace, will prove invaluable when and if we enter the following phase.

Phase three, decisive combat and force stabilization, does not always include force-on-force combat involving seizure of air, land, and sea space from an opposing force. Noncombatant evacuation operations, humanitarian relief operations, or other forms of MOOTW can take place as well. Strategic- and operational-level PSYOP continues during phases one and two with appropriate modifications. Phase-three planning and executing of PSYOP and influence operations start to involve operational- and tactical-level targets, usually lower-echelon fielded commanders and their forces. In the realm of achieving air and space superiority, these targets encompass adversary air-defense forces, air forces, or audiences who might use weapon systems to bring down US/coalition aircraft or otherwise



A young Afghan fighter displays a leaflet dropped by US aircraft during Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. The card illustrates Taliban oppression of women and children.

affect our air- and space-based systems. The Air Force needs to plan both for acting against hostile forces and for minimizing collateral damage against noncombatant civilians. Because news and other media outlets, including the Internet, can transmit reports of such damage to the international community in a matter of minutes, the JTF commander and planners of PSYOP and influence operations should be able to stem erroneous and damaging information.

Typically, collateral damage issues go to the public affairs representative, but under the Air Force's concept of operations, public affairs falls under influence operations—an arrangement more apparent in today's strategic communications office, which includes public affairs, PSYOP, and information operations personnel. After the JTF commander determines that hostilities and decisive combat—or MOOTW—have concluded and that a need exists for follow-through operations, planners will initiate the next phase.

Phase four, follow-through after decisive combat, entails supporting the rebuilding of a nation or region. The US ambassador reassumes the key position in the country, and various activities can take place, ranging from mop-up actions against small groups of resistance to rebuilding schools and digging wells. In the realm of civil activities, the US Army's civil affairs organizations as well as governmental and nongovernmental agencies rebuild facilities or provide comfort to displaced persons. PSYOP and influence operations can inform indigenous people about medical and dental care, food delivery, and support organizations in the area. The US Air Force can support medical, dental, and engineer civic-action plans through proper planning and use of deployed medical units; Rapid Engineers Deployable Heavy Operations Repair Squadron, Engineers (RED HORSE); and civil engineer squadrons deployed to the area. During this time, units begin to redeploy to the United States or elsewhere, and operations security as well as force-protection issues can become a concern. Additionally, the host country may request assistance from US forces in establishing foreign internal defense (e.g., building a military or police force to support reconstitution), which should be part of the overall campaign plan instead of a last-minute effort to return a country to host-nation support. Images and activities showing people, both military and civilian, from the US Air Force and host nation working side by side can promote stability in the country or region. Regardless of whether Air Force members work in Afghanistan, Iraq, or sub-Saharan Africa, they are supporting delivery convoys, civic-action plans, and stabilization operations in the immediate area of their bases. Their efforts enhance the Air Force's ability to support tactical, operational, and strategic levels of PSYOP and influence operations, thus putting the Service's manpower and equipment to use in meeting US and coalition goals. Instead of building up a military presence, as in phase two, phase four decreases that presence.

“PSYOP and influence operations, during planning and execution, always need to consider the primary and secondary effects of the message and action.”

As the exit strategy for the military, phase five—posthostilities and redeployment—leaves behind only assets requested by the US ambassador, including PSYOP activities that continue to support nation building and military assistance. The Air Force would use this phase to ensure that appropriate personnel assume control of airfields and airports and that infrastructure exists for continued operations. Various embassy teams would provide points of contact with agencies within the country that might support US interests—an important part of creating and disseminating PSYOP that has a host-nation rather than a US feel. By this phase, commercial entities would begin to work with the JPOTF to finalize products for release to the general populace as part of public support.

During all the phases of an OPLAN or action, Air Force IO planners, assigned either to the information warfare flight, regional combatant command, JTF, or JPOTF should utilize Air Force assets to deliver, reinforce, and capitalize upon the Service’s inherent capabilities. Numerous methods exist to make sure that a PSYOP message or influence operations plan reaches the intended audience. Air Force planners should know that their options for delivery of PSYOP and influence operations range from face-to-face communication, through the standard use of an aircraft platform (e.g., worldwide radio and television transmission from the EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft and the release of leaflets by Air Force Special Operations Command’s MC-130s, Air Mobility Command’s transports, and Air Combat Command’s fighters and bombers), to capabilities that reside within the nonkinetic realm of information operations and special information operations, not only for actions supporting the joint force air component commander but also the JPOTF.


PSYOP and influence operations, during planning and execution, always need to consider the primary and secondary effects of the message and action. In addition

to using themes, messages, and symbols, noncombat phases might include something as simple as a backyard barbecue or its cultural equivalent to attract and influence people. When working the tactical and operational side of persuading an audience, planners should consider any and all methods for getting the message across.

The US Air Force brings a multitude of PSYOP and influence operations capabilities to all phases of military and diplomatic actions, and its broad base of experience can help planners find the perfect niche for assets and mission requirements. The Air Force makes training in planning information operations, influence operations, and PSYOP readily available. Since no one fights alone, all of the Services must think and work jointly. Each Service has capabilities that augment those of its sister Services. Air Force planners can help bring Air Force assets to the joint fight, making sure they complement the effects-based, networkcentric outcome desired by the combatant and JTF commanders.

PSYOP and influence operations planners should always look at ways to achieve beneficial primary and secondary effects. As they study the adversary and the environment, they should consider every possibility for achieving the overall effect and reaching the end state laid out by the regional or JTF commander. No one doubts the importance of psychological factors to today’s battlefield. Looking into the adversary’s history, background, and values will allow planners to better prepare the themes, messages, symbols, sounds, and images that will produce responses that support their objectives. By working with intelligence agencies as well as the JPOTF and by taking into account all aspects of the target audience, Air Force planners can create the greatest effect at the least cost.

Endnotes

1. American Express, 18 October 2004, <http://www.americanexpress.digisle.tv/spot64/index.html>.
2. “Legendary Golfer Meets Legendary Gopher in New American Express Commercial,” American Express, 26 February 2004, <http://home3.americanexpress.com/corp/pc/2004/tigershack.asp>. 



Airborne on an EC-130E Commando Solo aircraft.

www.defenselink.mil