If your opponent is of choleric temper, try to irritate him. If he is arrogant, try to encourage his egotism. If the enemy troops are well prepared after reorganization, try to wear them down. If they are united, try to sow dissension among them.

— General Tao Hanzhang; translated by Yuan Shibing
*Sun Tzu's Art of War: The Modern Chinese Interpretation*

PSYOP is a vital element within the broad range of US political, military, economic, and ideological actions. Properly employed, PSYOP reduces the morale and combat efficiency of enemy troops and creates dissidence and disaffection within their ranks. Psychological operations can promote resistance within a civilian populace against a hostile regime or be employed to enhance the image of a legitimate government. The ultimate objective of American PSYOP is to convince enemy, friendly, and neutral nations and forces to take action favorable to the US and its allies. Because of the nature of the parent society and the comparative case of detecting falsehood in a multimedia world, US overt PSYOP campaigns are limited to presenting factually correct material. It would be disingenuous to claim that a balanced picture is presented in US propaganda, but the actual material presented in any particular overt PSYOP message will be verifiable against independent sources.

Truth and falsehood in propaganda must be separated from overt and covert operations and the issue of white, gray, and black (false) propaganda. Overt propaganda is produced by a government or organization that takes responsibility for it. Because of police state conditions or tactical considerations, it
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may have to be disseminated by covert means, such as agents who risk their lives to transport and distribute the materials. Overt propaganda may be true or false. Since the effect of propaganda depends on credibility, overt sources that utilize falsehoods quickly lose all effectiveness. Overt propaganda is also known as white propaganda because the source takes responsibility for it. Gray propaganda is material that is distributed without an identified source. It may be true or false. Black propaganda is material produced by one source that purports to have emanated from another source. Such covert productions may be used to damage the credibility of a white (truthful) source by disseminating obvious falsehoods under the label of the previously trusted source. Black propaganda—if effective at all—quickly loses effectiveness unless the populace is particularly susceptible to rumors, manipulation, and distortion of fact. Nevertheless, black propaganda can be highly effective if properly planned. For example, should intel sources determine that an invasion is imminent, broadcasting that fact under an aegis purporting to be that of the potential invader removes all surprise and falsifies all the invader’s claims of a "just" war.

Propaganda may legitimately be economical of the truth. For example, in describing the triumph of democracy there is no particular obligation to discuss the role of Boss 'tweed in urban politics.

Military psychological operations are inherently joint operations. Unified, joint task force, and other military commanders identify target audiences and develop PSYOP themes, campaigns, and products. These are submitted through channels to the joint chiefs for approval. The principles of developing a PSYOP campaign are applicable across the operational continuum. Although the complexity of the methodology varies with the level of conflict, considerations for development of PSYOP campaigns are the same for counterterrorism as they are for global war.

The psychological dimension covers the battlefield as well as the effects upon the soldiers fighting the battle, their military leaders and staffs, the political leaders, and the civilian population. On the field of battle, US forces want to face an enemy who is both unsure about his cause and capabilities
and sure about his impending doom; an enemy who, even if unwilling to surrender, has little will to engage in combat.

It is US policy that psychological operations will be conducted across the operational continuum. It must be understood that psychological operations are conducted continuously to influence foreign perceptions and attitudes in order to effect changes in foreign behavior favorable to US national security objectives. Any type or level of PSYOP can be conducted at any point along the operational continuum. The operational environment in which psychological operations are conducted does not, by itself, dictate or limit PSYOP actions or the level of PSYOP applied.

In environments short of declared war, national PSYOP policy is normally derived from official policy statements and declarations on US foreign policy as well as national security policy. Interagency coordination is required. During declared war, the policy emanates from the national command authorities (NCA) upon approval of plans submitted by the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). This national policy is executed through a strategy of coherent international information programs, which consist of US information dissemination efforts dealing with policy and information. It is essential that PSYOP themes and products reflect and support national policy, these overt messages are as official as any White House press release. Therefore, appropriate PSYOP policy and strategy must fully integrate Department of Defense (DOD) PSYOP into these international information programs to alleviate the potential for disseminating contradictory information.

Psychological actions such as show of force, cover, and deception have been used throughout history to influence enemy groups and leaders. Modern psychological operations are enhanced by the expansion of mass communication capabilities. Nations can multiply the effects of their military capabilities by communicating directly to their enemies a threat of force or retaliation, conditions of surrender, safe passage for defectors, incitations to sabotage, support to resistance groups, and other messages. The effectiveness of this communication on the target audience depends on their perceptions of the communicator's credibility—does the
communicator have the capability to carry out the threatened actions?

PSYOP actions convey information not only to intended target audiences but also to foreign intelligence systems. Therefore, PSYOP messages must be coordinated with cover and deception plans and activities, along with operational security planners, to ensure that essential secrecy is realized and that PSYOP messages reinforce cover and deception objectives. Skillful content analysts can determine overall intentions by carefully analyzing PSYOP messages and PSYOP planners can screen their own products to ensure that only the overt intention is broadcast. The methodology of overt propaganda analysis is arcane and difficult, as much derived from art as science. Some practitioners believe the method is more valid when aimed at totalitarian propaganda than PSYOP produced by democracies. Democratic propaganda normally is far less patterned, possibly because the products reflect a less organized process-ad hoc arrangements, swiftly evolving policies, lack of hidden agendas, or, frequently, no agendas at all. Totalitarian-especially communist-propaganda may be easier to analyze because it is highly formalized and patterned.

There is a psychological dimension within any element of national power projection, particularly the military element. Foreign perceptions of US military capabilities are fundamental to strategic deterrent capability. Therefore, US policymakers must articulate our national and military actions (if we don't, others will). Communicating unambiguously to allies, enemies, and neutrals is a key element of US national strategy. The effectiveness of deterrence, power projection, and other strategic concepts hinges on our ability to influence the perceptions of others.

For these communications, any player in the US government or overall body politic may become an important tactical element regardless of the strategic position that the player holds. In conveying the will of the United States, the firm set of the president's jaw in drawing "a line in the sand" may have as much influence on international, and especially adversarial, understanding of US policy as the actions taken by the government. Supporting statements by other officials, including the secretary of state, congressional leaders, and
military commanders, similarly are tactical elements carrying out the information strategy. Tactical actions of this nature, delivered at the strategic level, are analogous to the actual tactical delivery of weapons to targets of a strategic nature in a shooting war. Since much of policy is devoted to achieving national goals while ameliorating genuine conflict and avoiding a shooting war, tactical performance of these roles by strategic elements of the political/military system is critical to national policy. One of the benefits of the open political process—disseminated and monitored by a free and aggressive media—is that individuals who would be inadequate tactical communicators tend to be shunted away from positions for which the nation's fate requires skillful performance. Military PSYOP may be undertaken at the strategic level, augmenting other national communications systems, particularly in areas for which the peacetime national systems—such as the United States Information Agency—have no access.

In every case, it is crucial that military PSYOP be integrated with other national communications, since the audiences will accept military PSYOP messages as official positions. To ensure this process, military psychological operations rely on a planned, systematic process of conveying messages to, and influencing, selected foreign groups. The messages conveyed by military PSYOP are intended to promote particular themes that result in desired foreign attitudes and behaviors. Therefore, PSYOP may be used to establish and reinforce foreign perceptions of US military capability, determination, and responsiveness to US political goals and to support overall US policy.

Psychological operations are an important dimension of overall military operations. They may be used by commanders to influence the attitudes and behavior of foreign groups in a manner favorable to the achievement of US national objectives. Thus, the principal purpose of DOD PSYOP is to persuade foreign audiences to change or enhance attitudes or behaviors in a manner favorable to one or more national security objectives. Additionally, PSYOP can counter foreign propaganda that adversely affects the achievement of US objectives.

The United States typically distinguishes between PSYOP on a strategic level and PSYOP on a tactical, battlefield level.
Strategic psychological operations are usually considered an aspect of public diplomacy and are normally established and guided by intergovernment working groups created for a particular short-term situation or regional area of concern. The intergovernment groups meet periodically to clarify strategic PSYOP policy in light of political and military developments of the day. At the present time, however, the US government has no permanent mechanism to institutionalize this process.

In tactical or battlefield PSYOP, commanders use such techniques as loudspeaker broadcasts and leaflet drops with the intent of generating a force multiplier without having to increase force size. Psyopers support tactical deception, counterterrorism, counterpropaganda, and other nontraditional means as the tactical situation merits. PSYOP messages cannot replace tactical performance or redeem inadequate training, weapons, or tactics that result in poor combat performance. However, the methodology can increase the overall functional degradation of enemy capability. Missiles, bombs, bullets, and maneuvers establish the context for PSYOP multiplication and hastening the cumulative results of tactical competence. Psychological operations speed the positive effects of military prowess, and may, under certain conditions, delay the consequences of military failure. Because psychological operations multiply desired effects, positive outcomes can result in quicker victory at lower cost in material, time, and casualties. Whether strategic or tactical, PSYOP uses any available means of communication to achieve desired ends. In Western circles, truthfulness is a desirable goal in itself, and is the principal means for building credibility among targeted audiences. Success in PSYOP rests on thorough analysis and planning.

Modern PSYOP planning includes a target analysis that consists of several phases. The first phase identifies possible target audiences. Once the target audience is identified, such target characteristics as vulnerabilities, susceptibilities, conditions, and effectiveness are analyzed. Vulnerabilities are the four psychological factors that affect the target audience: perception, motivation, stress, and attitude. Susceptibilities include the degree to which the target audience can be
influenced to respond to the message it receives. Conditions of the target audience include all environmental factors-social, economic, political, military, and physical-that influence the target audience. Audience effectiveness is the capability of the target audience to carry out the psyopser's desired response. The concept of audience effectiveness is fundamental to PSYOP success at strategic and tactical levels. If the goal is functional destruction of an enemy tactical unit, the effective audience may be individual soldiers, who may be persuaded to desert, defect, or defect in place; that is, simply fail to perform without overtly resisting their commanders. Other goals may require finding different effective audiences. The responsive audience in a battlefield air interdiction campaign could be the civilian workers who repair damaged railroads and bridges. Truthfully reporting that they are at risk from restrikes of previously damaged targets may dissuade them from voluntarily working. However, if they are slave laborers, the audience may be nonresponsive regardless of their susceptibility. The responsive audience may be taskmasters, or high-level commanders. For example, the susceptibility of the high-level audiences may be threats of war crimes prosecution. Both audiences will have to be convinced, by multiple messages, if the campaign is to be effective. Once the above analysis of audiences is accomplished, the psyopser seeks to determine the specific psychological plan that supports the national objective.

Psychological operations have been a part of military strategy since armies first took the field of battle. The Persian Gulf War and the employment of PSYOP by both sides were the most recent chapter in a long history of PSYOP as an integral part of military strategy. Throughout much of military history, PSYOP’s presence has been felt in battlefield campaigns. Psychological operations were integrated into the commander’s scheme of maneuver before the label of PSYOP was invented and without the benefit of thorough or scientific planning. An early example of how PSYOP was planned and applied in ancient battle is contained in the writings of the Chinese strategist Sun Tzu, who stated that the most noble victory was to subdue his enemy without a fight. Another was the successful exploits of Genghis Khan (the Mongolian
general Temujin), who would soften his enemy’s will to resist by spreading rumors about his own army’s strength and fierceness. His planning was simple and, seemingly, relevant and effective.

As early as the Battle of Bunker Hill, colonial military PSYOP operators used leaflets designed to work on the susceptibilities of the effective audience. Leaflets distributed among British troops in Boston by trusted colonial agents were based upon analysis of the situation and the conditions the British troops anticipated, as well as their motivation. Thus, some leaflets reported that food and provisions among the colonial troops were far superior to the hardtack fed the British, and that switching sides would result in an immediate improvement in diet. More important and effective was an appeal to a basic desire to improve the British soldier's status in life, an important factor in motivating enlistment. Many troops had joined merely to obtain subsistence or with the hope of achieving enough riches to obtain farmland. The most effective message slightly pointed out that to obtain land in the colonies, a soldier needed merely to desert and walk west until he found a suitable plot. Hessian mercenaries in particular responded to this appeal later in the war, and a considerable number of the present-day Pennsylvania Dutch owe their ancestry to the effectiveness of this appeal as these soldiers settled in a language-compatible area in which they were unlikely to be turned over to British authority. Colonial strategic psychological operations were masterful from inception, with Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine effectively working their various chosen audiences while Benjamin Franklin used his post in France to bolster not only continental support—which eventually resulted in the Franco-American force that was victorious at Yorktown—but also helped bring Lafayette, Pulaski, and Kosciuszko to American shores. The campaigns within Britain that drained political support for the war were most effective. Battlefield competence was important to the success of this effort and included not only victories at Trenton and other places but also the amazing raids by John Paul Jones upon English coastal towns, whose political effect far outshone their minimal military importance. James H. Doolittle's raid on Japan—undertaken for the same purposes
and with analogous military results—was foreshadowed in methodology and in equivalent technological means almost 150 years before.

In the American Civil War, both sides of the conflict directed strategic campaigns at England in the hope of winning support for their respective causes. It remains questionable, however, that these campaigns had been formally planned and that the proper resources were marshaled to execute them. The Southern campaign was virtually undercut by the Confederate refusal to sell cotton to Great Britain. This economic suicide overwhelmed any positive effects that media campaigns may have engendered.

During World War I, PSYOP came into its own as a formal activity. Almost all countries involved in the war used forms of strategic and tactical PSYOP. Many countries formed military units specializing in propaganda. These units' primary duties included distribution of leaflets by balloon and aircraft. The linkage among planning, resource mobilization, and execution by these agencies appeared to be an uncomplicated matter. How the PSYOP details were integrated into the shooting war of the day, or how well PSYOP induced surrenders, was not recorded for history. What is known, however, is that surrenders occurred with a positive correlation to PSYOP activities. Thus, military analysts began taking a new look at PSYOP as an ingredient with surprising impact on the battle. Psychological operations were a resource because they induced stress on both civilian and military forces of the enemy.

During World War II, propaganda activities became known as psychological warfare (psywar). Public broadcast radio, about 20 years old at this point, was called into play. Tank-mounted loudspeakers with a range of approximately two miles amplified the ability of the human voice to reach opposing combatants. Besides media programs, military actions were undertaken for their PSYOP effect. The Doolittle raid against Japan was considered an important PSYOP event for at least two reasons. The carefully planned raid demonstrated credibly to the Japanese that the US could reach and bomb their homeland, prompting them to take unnecessary steps for home defense. More important perhaps, news of the
success back home caused morale to soar in an American population desperate for a victory. Planning, mobilization, and execution all worked in this one instance. However, it must be noted that during this war, aircrews frequently expressed reluctance to risk themselves on leaflet-dropping missions because they lacked confidence in that methodology as a means of bringing victory nearer.

In the years that followed, PSYOP matured as a combat force multiplier, albeit through a series of starts and stops. During the 1950s, the Soviet Union made great strides in both strategic and internal PSYOP. Soviet client-states began very elaborate psychological operations for foreign insurgents and home consurhption. At the same time, little was apparently being planned in Western PSYOP circles.

Although strategic and tactical psychological operations were effectively integrated by the North Vietnamese during the Vietnam era, US PSYOP planning was not effectively formalized or coordinated with operations and troop mobilizations. It was in Vietnam that propaganda activities assumed the current term PSYOP-and television was a new medium. The North Vietnamese mastered the art of using the international media, particularly television, for their PSYOP. The US government was ineffective in both public information and public policy in mobilizing its public for the war. As a result of this negative experience in Vietnam, the US government learned the importance of domestic and foreign support of major policy goals.

In the more recent conflicts, PSYOP has been integrated with combat operations. In the Falklands, Afghanistan, Africa, South and Central America, Grenada, Panama, and the Persian Gulf, PSYOP was included by all parties. PSYOP even became a critical part of the terrorist mode of operations during the seventies and were part of the Iraqi PSYOP plan when they threatened terrorist activities.

Any student of PSYOP will quickly learn how important PSYOP can be in political and military strategy. What every student should strive for is an internalization of the concept proposed by Sun Tzu, the Chinese military strategist, that to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists of breaking the enemy’s
resistance without resorting to fighting. Because soldiers and civilians have not fundamentally changed in nature or psychology since Sun Tzu wrote these observations, they remain appropriate today.