Psychological operations
Influencing the other by understanding the cultural topography

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Resumé

Artikeln utgör en kort genomgång av historiska händelser från olika slagfält eller första-dier till slagfält där psykologiska operationer har haft en avgörande roll och inverkan. Informationsmiljön med ett modus operandi där viljan och styrkan är att kontrollera och behärska den offentliga berättelsen är ett epicenter av vad som analyseras. Syftet med arti-keln är att förstå den historiska vikten av att bejaka information som en central ingrediens i krigsföring. Hur har militära styrkor, samhället och individen förhållit sig till de försök som gjorts att skapa miljöer som kan leda till förändringar, antingen kontextuella eller beteende-mässiga med hjälp av just information?

> *"All warfare is based on deception"*[1]
>
> Sun Tzu, General, strategist and philosopher

WHO IS MASTERING the narrative? What can be the achieved benefits of doing so? The past years increased public attention regarding disinformation campaigns, the vulnerability of the free open society with a free flow of information, and challenged as well as questioned the power shift con-cerning senders of traditional authoritative messages, causing many of us to ask a few questions. What is true and what is false information, what is relevant and not, what is exaggerated, what is the real intent of the information etc.? We are all struggling with navigating information flows from a huge spread of sources. Social media as well as the established media are all channels for dissemination of facts, so called alternative facts, professional opinions as well as ama-teur analysis. All in all, this can be seen as a natural consequence of free societies moving forward, embracing new technologies on how to share information, tell stories and gain impact. That is true. However, this

development has also given many, not only defence headquarters but whole nations, the reason to once again realize their exposure to new or maybe revived type of threats, threats that are having the shape of psychological warfare,[2] or "PSYOPS" as it will be referred to henceforth.

The article does not claim to give the de-finitive and totally comprehensive picture of the complex nature of PSYOPS. Instead this document can be seen as one effort among many to explain re-emerging tools of war in the information society.

The U.S Department of Defense states in their document "U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms" that PSYOPS is defined as planned operations to convey selected information and indica-tors to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behaviour of foreign govern-ments, organizations, groups, and individu-als. The purpose of PSYOPS is to induce or

reinforce foreign attitudes and behaviours favourable to the originator's objectives.[3] In the light of the "Cambridge Analytical story", the questioning of the last election in U.S., and several discussions about trolls advancing in the woods of social media and having an effect on national debates, western societies have on a broad front increased knowledge and understanding about PSYOPS in a modern context.

The above stated declaration of what PSYOPS is says all and nothing. This article has therefore a purpose that is two-fold in order to clarify the meaning and need of something called psychological warfare. Initially it will try to explain the meaning and history of PSYOPS, while on the second half focus will be upon how this kind of military mean is getting used in today's modern warfare, or prefaces of the new battle spaces.

By using scientific articles, news articles, military doctrines, policy documents but also personal reflections from people that have been working with PSYOPS, as myself, I hope to write a nuanced, broad and thorough analysis. Even though PSYOPS has become a fundamental tool in the interventions of Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, just to take three modern examples, the phenomena is far from new. The art of PSYOPS has a long story in the history of warfare. Let us start off by throwing ourselves into the waves of history and examine what conducting PSYOPS really entails.

A short retrospect

The use of PSYOPS has looked differently depending on where in time you chose to analyze it. Even though it has been a crucial part of the counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the phenomena of PSYOPS reaches much further back than to those two wars. Lets us start with a closer look on what PSYOPS really is and why it is used and being seen as a military capability.

Whether it is a tactical deception to support a battalion-sized operation in the desert of northern Afghanistan, or the use of mass media and the internet to influence a coming election, a precondition for successfully planning and conducting information operations and PSYOPS is the study and understanding of decisions by human-beings necessary or desired to achieve the mission.[4] Just as we must understand the terrain to conduct ground operations successfully, understanding the information environment—including the cognitive terrain—is necessary as well.[5]

Psychological operations conducted as military actions impact on both offensive and defensive forces. Flying a pair of fighter jets over an enemies hideout as a show of strength, training amphibious landing in a similar environment as known nearby conflict areas have, doing surgical air strikes, or performing an underground special operations into an opponent's heartland all influence attitudes, emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, their leaders, groups, and individuals.[6]

In the article "Psychological Operations: A New Variation on an Age Old Art: Hezbollah versus Israel" the author Ron Schleifer mentions three crucial factors to consider when talking about PSYOPS. His points of departure are the target audience, the channels of communication and the messages.[7] These elements are all fundamental parts and have to be considered while planning PSYOPS. Lets us examine the factors one by one in order to get a common picture.

So, basically every game, just for fun or on the most serious level, every athletic endeavour, business adventure and the most challenging and none challenging activities have their own psychological dimension. So

do war and the pre-stages of it. When the armistice was signed between North and South Korea US placed consciously huge American soldiers on the borderline to North Korea in order to make the closed country believe that that was how all the enemies looked like, big, tall and muscular. Psychological warfare. During Operation Just Cause in Panama loudspeakers, leaflet drops, radio and television broadcast, wanted posters as well as posters to turn in weapons for money, were all used between 1989–1990 before the arrest of the leader Manual Noriega. It has also been reported that the disturbing music that was played 24 hours a day hindered Noriega and his camp to think, plan, and sleep.[8] Psychological warfare. Several times during the Vietnam war the US Air force bombed the supplies routes of Viet Cong with nude magazines, the Viet Cong soldiers got more interested in reading the magazines instead of smoothly moving forward. However, Viet Cong soldiers also managed the idea of PSYOPS. With small means they manage to make many American young soldiers desert by reading out on the radio the names of killed Americans soldiers, three times a day. A good example of how small means can give a great impact. These are just a few examples of how the art of psychological warfare has looked throughout modern history of war. Of course, there are more examples to take from the world wars, cold war and other prominent conflicts.

Even though the above mentioned examples are from the American war history we shall not think that it all started there. The ambition to influence, reinforce, and demoralize an opponent force to secure the originator's objective is far much older that modern history. PSYOPS as planned operations to communicate selected information to foreign governments, groups, organizations, and individuals in order to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and behaviour can be traced back as far as to the Kingdom of Juddah, 871-850 BC.[9]

In II Chronicles 20 of the Old Testament, during the reign of Jehoshaphat, the city-state armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, formerly friendly to Judah, were scouring the countryside for plunder and made their approach to attack Jerusalem. Armies of that day consisted of poorly trained citizen-soldiers. Vastly outnumbered, King Jehoshaphat turned to prayer. The prophet Jahaziel delivered divine instructions, promising a miracle like no other ever seen before. Being told where the attack was to originate, Jehoshaphat was also told to line up his army on the ridges and to stand firm but not fight. Instead the army was to sing and praise God. Normally the military band is only used after a fight, but Jehoshaphat staged the band in the front line for all to hear. Seeing the army of Judah not in a fighting posture, the armies of Ammon and Moab attacked and wiped out the army of Mount Seir. Then Ammon and Moab attacked one another and fought until no one remained. The army of Judah merely walked down to the battlefields and spent the next three days collecting all the booty from the dead armies. After rejoicing and celebrating in the Valley of Beracah, the army of Judah returned home with their new wealth.[10]

Another example the clearly constitutes the long time existence of psychological warfare and its advantages is the actions of the Chinese general Sun Tzu. In 500 BC he stated that the best military ability is to defeat the enemy without a battle. "All warfare is based on deception" is a classical quote by the famous general.[11] Djingis Khan also knew this and told his soldiers to light three candles each night and tie objects at the end of their horses' tails in order to make the army look bigger that compared to what

it actually was. Alexander the great also understood the advantages of misleading and confusing the enemy. According to the legend he left gigantic suits of armour and weapons on the battlefield. This was done just because he wanted to spread the word that his army consisted of giants.[12]

A quite huge leap in time places us in modern days. Naturally a development of the techniques and the methods have been partly redefined and refined. During WW I traditional songs were played between the trenches in order to make the soldiers start longing for home. Today, influencial social networks create cross-media narratives are conducting PSYOPS and influencer-activities. The parallel might seem exaggerated concerning the time frame but the logic is the same. The strategic battlefield is the target group's perception and will. A scheme of stories that share common themes, tonality, occurrences, and participants create expectations for how those elements can be built to satisfy a desire that is rooted on conflict.[13]

In the World War II Pacific theatre, at the end of the battles on the pacific islands, Allied personnel involved in PSYOPS worked hard based on the ambition to understand and as well as communicate with Japanese soldiers on a personal level rather than view them as fanatic supporters sticking to a plan devoted to fail.[14] The Allied personnel's determination was to reduce the enemy's urge to fight and make the Japanese to surrender. Allied forces had learned and understood that the Japanese soldiers were very, not to say most concerned with the inevitabilities of combat survival such as basic supply as food, water, ammunition, weapons, air and naval support and skilled leadership. As the war progressed, these highly needed factors became very low in supply. The continuing victories of the Allied forces caused the Japanese soldiers not only to worry about

their survival, but also the safety of their family and home. This turned out to be demoralizing and decrease the will to fight of a very determined and resolute opponent.

In detail the allied PSYOPS had at least two major policies they followed when operationalizing their plans: (i) tell the truth and (ii) do not criticize the Japanese emperor."[15] The undelying analysis was that trust was essential in maintaining credibility of information that was distributed by the allied troops. It established trust between the allies and the Japanese soldiers who they hoped to influence in order to make them surrender. Rather than blaming the emperor for devastating results of the war, which would have alienated the target audience (Japanese soldiers), allied propaganda pictured the emperor as an ignorant victim of militarists who controlled Japan, whose policies were leading down the path to destruction.[16] The interrogations of prisoners provided a large body of neglected evidence that many soldiers experienced not only a crisis in confidence but also a collapse of faith in themselves, their leaders, and their nation's ability to achieve victory.[17]

The NATO Strategic Communications (NATO StratCom), which became functional in January 2014 composes the centre of excellence regarding PSYOPS and public affairs and information operations in the western society.[18] On July 1 the same year, seven member states – Estonia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and the United Kingdom – signed memorandums of understanding on co-working regarding PSYOPS. The NATO StratCom, based in Riga, Latvia, contributes to improved strategic communications capabilities within the Alliance and Allied nations. Strategic communication is an integral part of the efforts to achieve the Alliance's political and military objectives. In many aspects the rise of StratCom is one

answer to a general increased understanding of the fact that mastering the information environment is key in order to own the battle space. The fact that not only StratCom but also the increased knowledge among several actors such as nations, autonomy actors, organisations and individuals has forced the western powers to act.

Another home of modern PSYOPS is Fort Bragg, an American military base housing the Airborne and Special Operation Forces. Since the beginning of the 1950 this base has been the home of researching, developing and planning PSYOPS. The techniques are refined and tested. Soldiers are educated here and receive their pre-deployment training. Actually, On January 23, 2018, the U.S. Army reached a historic milestone: one hundred years of steadfast PSYOPS support to military and national security objectives.[19] As stated above the list of American campaigns with psychological warfare elements are many and reach far back in time.

Despite this, many officers, academics and debaters state that it was not until the 1990 USA and other countries really started to understand the benefits and power there was in controlling and mastering the flow of information and by extension the perception regarding the state of affairs. In 1991 the first Gulf War was on-going.

Operation Desert Storm included several PSYOPS measures. American troops disseminated a huge number of leaflets, which they called "Safe Conduct Passes" to Iraqi soldiers who surrendered and turned themselves in. On the leaflets they were promised food, cover and hospitality. This worked pretty well and many Iraqi soldier handed themselves over to the Americans, this even though possession of the leaflets was punished by death by the Iraqi regime.[20] After the first Gulf war, PSYOPS as a complement to traditional modern warfare became an established line of action. When USA returned to Iraq in 2003 the operations were on a new level. The situations in both Iraq and Afghanistan demanded new ideas and tactics to fight the enemy. The people had become the centre of gravity not the enemy. To master the important centre of gravity, as Carl Von Clausewitz talks about in his masterpiece On War, becomes fast a truth among officers.[21]

These brief ad hoc flashbacks in history teach us three things that are as true for PSYOPS at the time when king Jehoshaphat conducted his clever move as for todays modern battlefield regarding creating the strategic narrative with a purpose to influence. (i) Try to understand your enemy, (ii) steal the interpretative prerogative and by that (iii) create and master the information environment.

So how does it work?

The function has been known by many different names over the past century, including combat propaganda, psychological warfare, and most recently, Military Information Support Operations.[22] No matter what the etiquette has been the core principles have been the same, and they take their point of departure from the traditional established ideas about communication. What ever we do as a person, military unit or country we are sending signals, our actions and behaviour are ways of communication between a sender and a receiver.[23] This is the core principle of any communication activity. In the world of PSYOPS this is taken to its limits. In detail the mission of PSYOP is to influence the behavior of target audiences (TAs) this in order to support the military objectives in a certain operation.[24] In the long term it can as well be about to support and enhance a country or coalitions objectives.

PSYOP accomplish this by conveying selected information and/or advising on actions that influence the emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign audiences.[25] If communication is the preferred tool, behavioral change is at the root of the PSYOPs mission. It is the link between influence and behavior that distinguishes PSYOP from other capabilities and activities of information operations (IO) and sets it apart as a unique core capability.[26]

Depending on what the objective is, different target audiences are chosen, analyzed and targeted. Plans are being made regarding how to focus, what the end game is and what method to use in order to reach the desirable outcome. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq saw the allies with substantially resources and technological advantage meet a local environment that required an assiduous and well worked thru plan. Many lessons were learned. Winning hearts and minds were in both cases a main ambition in order to gain trust and credibility from the population.[27] If we break it down, relevant end games can be about focusing on the enemy in order to make them feel demoralized. It can as well be about targeting key leaders in different hostile villages to be able to quickly disseminate a message but also collect information. Or it can be about influencing the local police force in order to make them collaborate with the local natives in a more structured way. Just a few examples of how different target groups can emerge. No matter what the TA is it is crucial to identify the key nodes, which groups you are interesting in, care about, and find central. What are the formal systems as well as informal systems regarding information distribution, hierarchies and local customs? To what extent do you and your team manage to understand these factors and use them to your advantage will very soon and often in a harsh way

show if you are doing the right things. To be able to conduct good and reliable PSYOP understanding the premises of your TA will pave the way to either success or failure. All in all, PSYOPS is about understanding the cultural topography.

Furthermore, the chosen TA has to be broken down so the relevant key leaders and important stakeholders can be identified. This is a process that, done the first time, is dependent on intelligence regarding geographical areas, individuals, communication channels, standard beliefs about the key leader's perceptions regarding their situation, the socioeconomic situation, religious preferences and much more. All these information's needs constitute, as in traditional intelligence work, a piece of the bigger picture. By understanding the lenses a target uses to perceive the world, PSYOP planners can craft the message and channels of distribution to better fit the target's expectations.[28] Experts in the behavioral sciences, religion, culture, politics, linguistics, anthropology, and other subject areas help profile the TA. The more detailed the profile, the more successful the campaign will be. Factors that are considered include: politics, religion, economics, language, race, educational level, affiliations, location, social conditions, history, etc. Tests are conducted to determine the TAs reaction to a variety of environmental stimuli in order to assess their psychological vulnerabilities.

Communication with a TA usually takes place using a theme. The theme sets up a psychological frame, within which the message is communicated. After a TA has been profiled, themes and distribution channels are selected. A theme can be thought of as a series of PSYOP products that are used to promote a single message with the intent of modifying the behaviour of the TA. To accomplish this, a multitude of different products, which share a distinct characteristic, can be

used to promote a theme. Themes are used to attack the vulnerabilities of a TA as well as create new ones, which can be attacked. Themes that already have meaning to the TA are used and new themes are built on previous ones. PSYOP personnel understand what current themes are used with a particular TA and are aware of any past themes.

For example, symbols contribute to themes. A symbol is a PSYOP product spanning the visual, audio, and audio-visual realms that are used to convey a theme. A symbol is something that stands for something else by reason of association. The use of a symbol in the right way creates a powerful signal value, a value that might move apprehensions, ideas and established point of views. The first aim with a psychological action is to disturb and challenge the, at the moment, dominating trains of thought in a pre-elected matter such as, make the local population report about road side bombs, telling the enemies that they are haunted, demoralize the enemy forces, create support for a political leader, diminish the consequences of a bad behaviour and so forth. The theme and the symbol can be seen as the tactic, weapon system and ammunition chosen for achieving the specific purpose.

In the end it is about "getting under the skin" of the chosen TA. All analysis done, and measures taken, strive to in the best way address the individuals and make them act in the way the operation desires. The aim of PSYOPS is the change of behaviors and in the end the change of attitudes.

Channels of dissemination – Afghanistan as an example

As stated above, tactical or battlefield PSYOPS utilize propaganda and field actions chosen for their psychological influence on the behavior of hostile, foreign audiences within the battle space. During operation Desert storm and operation Desert Shield field commanders employed such media as ground-based and airborne radio, loudspeaker broadcasts, and leaflets, and coupled them with other psychological actions.[29] The intent was to create a synergy of information and military action to increase the effectiveness of coalition units, while degrading that of Iraqi forces. A criterion for success regarding PSYOPS is to have a good plan in order to make sure that as many as possible are getting the message after you have done the analysis of the chosen TA. In the first Iraq war, it was shown that using different channels of dissemination was crucial not just because it made it possible to communicate on a broader scope, but also because some people were illiterate. Pictures and broadcasted radio messages are as important as leaflets and posters with different messages. Often the practical ambition with PSYOPS is to establish a "word on the street". Norms and behaviors have to be broken and trains of thought have to be changed among the chosen target audience. By including different means of communication, it becomes possible to reach out to groups that otherwise would not have been informed.

Let us maintain the focus on Afghanistan for a while. After all, that country inherited a conflict that very much was impregnated with PSYOPS efforts. In Afghanistan, the literacy among males is only 43,1 percent and 12,6 among women according to the CIA World Fact book.[30] This demands creativity and unconventional thinking while discussing different methods of dissemination. In a society where the literacy is low the spoken word becomes more central. The proclamation of the mullah in a remote village becomes reality and truth. The tools of critical thinking are not present where the ability and culture to question one and

other is almost none existent. Consequently, the word on the street becomes a key for the PSYOP officer to master. Also, in Afghanistan PSYOP-resources effectively integrated radio broadcasts, loudspeaker activities, leaflet drops but also made sure the rifle platoons were equipped with talking points corresponding to the overall strategic goal. As ISAF continues to face non-state actors in ideological struggles, the fight about the information sphere is ever ongoing. PSYOP traditionally shapes and influences minds on the battlefield and is a key component of the over all strategic communication.[31]

The strategic communications message of the Afghan government and ISAF to the people and the regional audiences are only partly disseminated due to the restricted information flow. The remote unconnected newspapers and radio stations, to include those, which exist in the periphery of the border regions, continually sway their populaces, which are critical in the allied military's battle for the center of gravity of the Afghan populace.[32] The insurgents know where the media outlets are, the numbers and ways to get their message to them, and they are using them to effectively influence the population. In 2006, the Taliban was able to claim credit for the downing of an Apache helicopter on the local radio and the Internet in less than thirty minutes. It took twenty-four hours for the American forces and PSYOPS-team to communicate that the helicopter crashed due to mechanical failure. Simply watching the current campaign by the Taliban against the use of US aircraft inflicting extreme casualties on insurgent forces and their ability to redirect the perception of indiscriminate killing of the Afghan populace is causing the Afghan people to lose faith in the Afghanistan government's ability to protect them. This perception of indiscriminate killing also portrays a brutal image of coalition military forces to the international media. It does not matter if the air strikes are causing the damage or not, or if the dead are truly combatants, or if the number of Afghan dead is factual. Many of the Afghan people think the reports are credible and the President of Afghanistan must deal with that perception. Insurgent forces are not similarly constrained.

The above stated example is just one of many which show the necessity to own the initiative regarding the perception of the population. Channels of communication and how that correlates with the strategic imperative are a matter of winning or losing, not just the fight but also the war.

PSYOPS can operate between national levels down to the personal level. Although thought of as primarily a military tactic PSYOPS is used by government and non-military originators as well.[33] This has been even more obvious regarding the general security development after the terrorist attacks in 9/11. Although PSYOP has traditionally been applied at both the operational and tactical level, these operations have strategic implications. The importance of themes is something that can be discovered on different levels from the personal to the national. Themes are synchronized with all instruments of national power. In Afghanistan, intelligence has for long been telling us that a strong insurgency is embedded in the country among the population--a terrorism related concern, a part of the global commons that has to be addressed in some way. For example, every successful suicide bomb action is a win for the elements in Afghanistan that do not long for a democratic development. Afghanistan is not only about winning a war, but also about building a state. By that said all PSYOP related efforts often become a tool to support a larger narrative.

ISAF has been on the leading edge of the general strategy in Afghanistan called COIN, counterinsurgency. In December 2006 the US Army published Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24 as an effort to structure a well thought out strategy where PSYOPS had a central role to play. The idea of spreading identical messages on a broad front in order to influence the target audience and gain support among the population dominated the strategic agenda on scene in Afghanistan. However, the time has come for ISAF to lead the way in developing a PSYOP methodology that enables commanders who interact with the populace and the insurgents on a daily basis. The traditional PSYOP model is irrelevant to the COIN fight. Ensuring all messages are the same in a situation that requires flexibility inhibits the creation of desired effects.[34] Tactical HUMINT Teams in order to provide the COIN commander with a robust localized target audience analysis that he can use to develop influence approaches when conducting village Shuras, key leader engagements, and other tactical COIN operations has become of greater importance the latest time in Afghanistan. An intelligence driven PSYOPS helps the PSYOPS officers to adjust their messages depending on local not to say social and familiar networks. The network as such is a key point of handling no matter what kind of intelligence work you are doing. Networks can reveal a lot. Networks can also act as a primary channel of dissemination of different messages. At the end of the day it is all about marketing, intelligent marketing.

Talking about PSYOPS as marketing, we have to mention the product. The government of Afghanistan is basically the product much of the PSYOPS mission is trying to sell. At least there is often a question of creating trust and credibility for the specific system and institutions that the people need to rely on.

David Killcullen, a counterinsurgency expert heavily involved with in the work of writing the Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24, noted that the "information side of Al-Qaida's operation is primary; the physical is merely the tool to achieve a propaganda result". The information part of every operation is planned as well as the actual attack.[35] In other words, can 9/11 be explained as one of the biggest PSYOP actions after the Second World War. Of course, the act in itself is much more than one advanced PSYOP operation. However, the attack still shakes the most powerful military force in its cornerstones. Every roadside bomb in Afghanistan or Iraq, every suicide attack against Americans, coalition forces or other western countries is a reminder that Al-Qaida and its peer organizations are still working entities. The use of PSYOPS as a means to spread fear and insecurity is very efficient and small means can earn great consequences. The terrorists of today as well as intelligence organizations and the military system know this. The modern prerequisites such as Internet, the possibility to effective mass communication, big data, and other tools are creating new maps of the battlefield.

Future relevance of psychological operations in the modern era

The rise of Internet and mass communication have created new starting points regarding the matter of disseminating PSYOPS messages and influencing your target audience. The landscape is rewritten when perceptions, beliefs and experiences become a three-dimensional battle space. Let us take a closer look at exactly what has happened the latest years regarding the development of PSYOPS as something to take for granted in modern battles.

The success of military and Information Operations depends on a thorough and nuanced understanding of target audiences. This is as true for the rural villages of Afghanistan when it comes to PSYOPS as it is true for conducting info operations on the Internet, media or in the social sphere. Twitter is an especially suitable tool in this respect and the misuse of Twitter information was seen as early as the 2008 conflict between Russian and Georgia.[36] It can be simply done by creating an account and following organizations and known individuals without the need to tweet you. Twitter tends to 'push' information towards the user, meaning that you often end up discovering information you weren't necessarily looking for or even knew existed.[37]

Twitter might just be seen as one channel or separate battle space when it comes to PSYOPS or Info Ops conducted in a modern society. However, the logic is always the same, but the tools are new and by that also the possibilities. If we turn to a holistic perspective regarding the today's prerequisites we can see how a new battle space is emerging among us where we all are a potential audience and targets for influence. Media activities in general are focused on either of two main goals – (i) securing control over the information dissemination infrastructure by direct ownership or indirect control of the editorial process, or (ii) through content placement by many different means. Often it can be a combination of the two.[38]

Focusing on the modern media structure, it can implicate buying up media space, creating one's own independent news outlets or news editorials, or through pressure of media owners or employees. The main purpose is to establish influence over the editorial process and decisions.

The use of "experts" in the media to interpret events, influencing or discrediting other experts used by the media, or through intimidation of such experts, can also be a part of media activities.[39] Here, "agents of influence", can become a matter of relevance. Agents of influence are normally correlated with persons using their official or public position to exercise influence on policy, public opinion, course, and the activity of political organisations or state organs in a target country. They are usually citizens of the country targeted for influence activities who are controlled by a foreign intelligence service.[40] These persons are not perceived by the general public as being instruments of a foreign power. Their purpose is to influence the public discourse on specific topics by inserting specific phrases and concepts into the public discourse that serve the foreign power's interests.

The author Thomas Elkjer Nissen writes in his report, "*Social media's role in 'Hybrid Strategies'*; "Unlike 'agents of influence', so-called 'useful idiots' are advocates on their own initiative for a cause that serves the outside power, who are not fully aware of the ultimate goals of the cause and are cynically used by the foreign power." These set-ups and well worked through plans and far going actions in order to develop and effect a narrative are becoming yet another headache for national security agencies to understand, monitor and take relevant action upon. What makes this fairly new approach complex regarding foreign powers enabling their will take its course within another country is that we all are becoming potential targets. If we consume news, daily news analysis and navigate in social media we are, whether we want it or not, operating in a battle space that demands high alert and risk awareness as in any minefield.

Concerning content and our tendency to consume news historically in a quite non-critical way, influence activities and

modern PSYOPS mostly involve creating trustworthiness and a sense that the sources are objective and neutral, as it should be. In order to manage this, media undertakings in support of influence activities can involve making seemingly neutral 'think-tanks' or research establishments.[41] These can deliver content in the form of policy analysis, fake academic reports that can bring other objectively conducted research into question or reshape it. One very daunting example of this that even reached the political world elite is how the Russian government did or did not influence the American elections in 2016. In the book "Fire and Fury – Inside the Trump White house" the reader finds the following sentences;

> On January 6, 2017 – nearly six months to the day after Foer's piece was published – the CIA, FBI and NSA announced their joint conclusions that "Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the U.S. presidential election". From the Steele dossier, to the steady leaks from the U.S. intelligence agencies, a firm consensus had emerged. There was a nefarious connection, perhaps an on going one, between Trump and his campaign and Russian government.[42]

Suddenly the complete intelligence community is taken by surprise when a foreign power is by, according to them, clear evidence influencing their national elections. If we assume the Russians did this, we may also assume that they have done their target audience analysis, carefully chosen their messages and ways of distribution. With this on top of our minds it is interesting to analyze what the Swedish Defense Commission is stating in their report "The total defense concept and the development of civil defense 2021–2025", a report that presents a number of proposals regarding the Swedish total defense concept and the future development

of Sweden's civil defense for the next defense bill period 2021–2025 that psychological defense is key.

The commission states, "the Swedish total defense concept rests on the will of the population to defend the country, their commitment in peacetime, and resilience and resistance in war."[43] The commission claims that the importance of actively defending our open society, the rule of law and our sovereignty has increased. It is necessary to ensure the resilience and willingness of the population to defend the country. The commission goes as far as proposing an inquiry concerning a new agency with the general responsibility to develop and coordinate the psychological defense. An inquiry will have to clarify tasks and roles to maintain and strengthen the psychological defense, propose a suitable structure for the agency, as well as discuss the research and development requirements.

According to Alexander Nix, CEO of the now famous Cambridge Analytica, their system can with ten Facebook likes predict an individual's behavior better than their work colleague might. They only need 70 to make behavioral predictions better than a friend; 150 to understand a voter better than a parent; and with 300 Likes, his organization can predict a person's actions, thoughts, and feelings better than their spouse.[44] Since our presence in social media leaves footprints not just digitally but also about whom we our authorities need to collaborate in new ways to inform about risks, prevent damage and reveal actors with a skeptical agenda. Easier said than done. Never the less it is certain that we today are all targets and object for a target audience analysis.

Summary

This paper constitutes a brief review of historic events from different battlefields or pre-stages of battlefields. The recurrent theme while analysing these levels of conflict is their

definitive connection with the so-called information environment, a modus operandi where the will and strength is to control and master the public narrative. Purposefully, an act of influence is generally aimed at damaging the solidity of a society, often already in peacetime in order to create environments that can lead to change, either contextually or behavioural. This is brought into action by a combination of information activities both overt and covert. The rules of the game are old, however the means and context change.

PSYOP deals largely with information or the perception of information. Since different types of information flows occur, interpretation of and valuation of information are all recurrent daily actions taken place by us all in the modern society. In the long run, perception and interpretation is all that we are left with. Our own ability to sort and evaluate is the bridgehead to take for those who want to affect us. By that said and shown in this article it is logical to conclude that PSYOP will play a major role in future warfare. The ongoing revolution in information technologies is the driving force behind that statement. Although it is difficult to predict the future, current trends indicate that the strategic context in the future will be significantly different from today. Some of the key features of this new strategic context might include the continued absence of weaker alliances, less stability, intensified prospects for both regional conflict and mid-intensity conventional warfare, and persistence of low-intensity internal warfare and international lawlessness. A significant theme will continue to be the proliferation of information.

The rising availability of global television and other visual media channels with real time reporting combined with internet type technologies will have a major impact on a larger number of the world's population.

This will have a greatly enhanced impact on decision-making processes and diplomacy. World opinion will be influenced by whoever controls information flowing across the various media available to the crowds. The concern here will be the decline of popular support for military involvement. Instead accessibility, speed, anonymity, no geographical or content-related borders and high volumes of information are all features that characterize the new information environment.

This paper has tried to show how different conflicts demonstrate how different actors have adapted their strategies based on communication habits, information flow and perception. The development of the information environment is evolving day to day. Adaption in order to create good PSYOPS but also protect ourselves and our societies is key. It will be no surprise that more sophisticated and unpredictable methods will be used to influence target audiences in the future.

I suggest that future papers explore whether the combination of big data social media profiling, hyper-customized content, and Facebook 'dark ad' buys can be used to sway opinion? Or are these claims little more than big-data mumbo jumbo, spun like some seductive web designed to draw in big political budgets and security services contracts?

This matters in strategic communications, as a caution, as well as an opportunity. Any significant claims to advances in the technology of propaganda potentially shift methodologies and efficacy on all sides.

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