Information-Age Psychological Operations

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THE MASTERS OF WAR understood the importance of psychological effects in warfare. According to Carl von Clausewitz's book *On War*, "War is an act of violence whose object is to compel the enemy to do our will." Sun Tzu, who wrote 2,000 years earlier, established a benchmark for the mastery of war with his observation that "To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill." Underlying these simple, yet provident statements, is an appreciation of the psychology of war. Ultimately, victory or defeat resides in the mind.

By combining Clausewitz's and Sun Tzu's ideologies, we can discern a goal for information-age psychological operations (PSYOP)—"to compel the enemy to do our will without fighting." This goal is particularly relevant today in view of an increasing American intolerance for casualties. Information-age PSYOP, more than any other military instrument, may provide us with an increased capability to pursue our national interests without bloodshed.

Spectrum of Conflict

Modern warfare and diplomacy offer numerous ways for nations to resolve their differences. Figure 1 shows a sampling of military, diplomatic and economic alternatives that span the spectrum of conflict. The spectrum is further subdivided into peace, conflict and war options in acknowledgment that conflict is not simply a war or peace issue.

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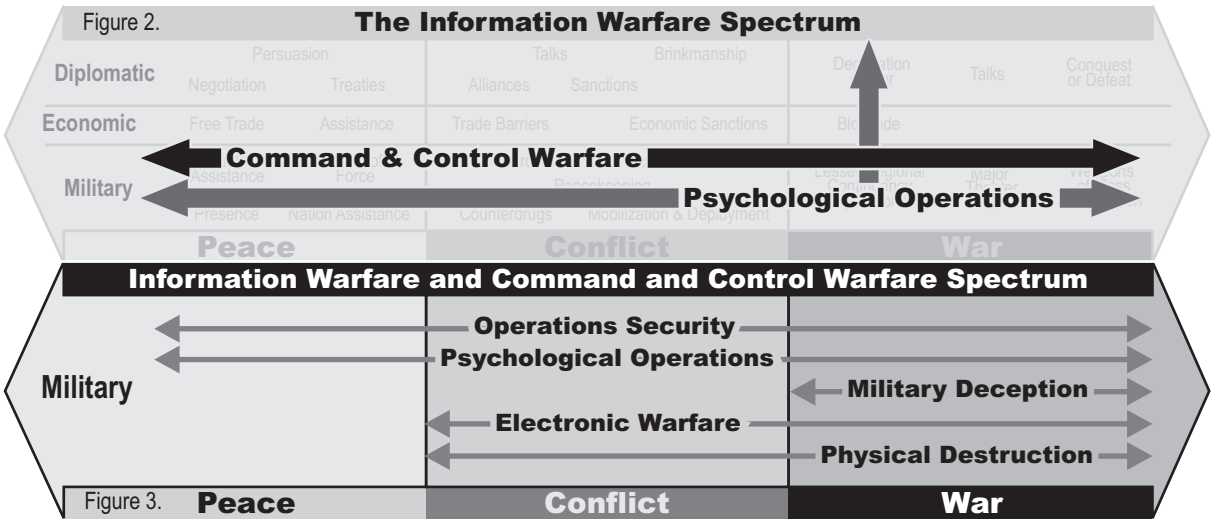
World powers continue to find peaceful solutions in the "not quite peace, not quite war" conflict region. For example, the use of economic sanctions has obtained mixed results. According to a study by the National Association of Manufacturers, unilateral sanctions were levied 70 times between 1993 and 1996. Unfortunately, the vast majority failed to change the behavior of targeted governments.[1] Peacekeeping operations in Bosnia have been successful, but at great cost to the military—both in dollars and troop commitment.

Information warfare (IW) will only exacerbate the complexity of solutions required to resolve conflict peacefully, providing combinations and permutations to the plethora of conflict options. While definitions abound and continue to be refined, IW is currently defined in Joint Publication 3-13.1, *Joint Doctrine for Command and Control Warfare (C^2W)*, as "actions taken to achieve information superiority by affecting

Figure 1. **The Spectrum of Conflict**

	Peace		Conflict		War		
Diplomatic	Persuasion, Negotiation	Treaties	Talks, Alliances	Brinkmanship, Sanctions	Declaration of War	Talks	Conquest or Defeat
Economic	Free Trade	Assistance	Trade Barriers	Economic Sanctions	Blockade		
Military	Humanitarian Assistance, Presence	Show of Force, Nation Assistance	Counterterrrorism, Peacekeeping, Counterdrugs	Peace Enforcement, Mobilization & Deployment	Lesser Regional Contingency Operations	Major Theater War	Weapons of Mass Destruction



adversary information, information-based processes, information systems, and computer-based networks while defending one's own information, information-based processes, information systems and computer-based networks."[2] IW spans across the conflict spectrum from peace to war, diplomatically, economically and militarily, as illustrated in Figure 2. Solutions will increasingly require a vertical integration of the three to resolve conflict peacefully.

Among the C²W elements, PSYOP alone may offer the opportunity* to compel the enemy to do our will without fighting, *both horizontally and vertically across the spectrum of conflict. . . . Give opponents alternatives to conflict. If the enemy no longer resists, he will do our will.

The military is concerned with C²W, an IW subset.[3] As shown in Figure 3, C²W also spans the conflict spectrum, but differently for its individual constituents. For example, military deception is a "trump card" played only when the stakes are highest—wartime—as it frequently requires misinformation from a reliable source that, once used in this fashion, becomes suspect. On the other hand, operations security (OPSEC) is routinely practiced by the military to deny potential adversaries critical information about friendly forces.

PSYOP

PSYOP are defined as "planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning and, ultimately, the behavior of foreign government, organizations, groups or individuals."[4] Returning to Figure 2, we see that PSYOP not only span the full military spectrum of conflict, but also have applicability outside of the military arena—unique in this feature as an element of C²W.[5]

PSYOP capabilities vary among the services, with the majority of the expertise residing in the Army Reserve Components (RC). Principally at the tactical level, Army equipment includes 10- and 50-kW radio and TV broadcast transmitters, print systems, loudspeakers and mobile audiovisual vans. The Air Force's radio and TV broadcast capability resides primarily in four EC-130 *Commando Solo* aircraft, assigned to the Pennsylvania Air National Guard. MC-130 *Combat Talon* aircraft are also configured to drop leaflets. The Navy can produce audiovisual products from a host of imaging commands, but its broadcast capability is limited to a van-configured 10.6 kW AM radio transmitter.[6] Marine Corps PSYOP support consists of shore-based loudspeaker broadcasting, aerial and artillery leaflet dissemination and audiovisual equipment.[7]

Among the C²W elements, PSYOP alone may offer the opportunity *to compel the enemy to do our will without fighting*, both horizontally and vertically across the spectrum of conflict. The skeptic will rightly ask, how so? PSYOP has been around since Sun Tzu, yet, we still have wars. What has changed to potentially offer a quantum increase in PSYOP effectiveness? Before answering that, it is constructive to look at PSYOP's general capabilities and limitations in Figure 4. While most of the capabilities listed complement a commander's warfighting effort, two stand out in support of our

Capabilities

- Amplify effects of military operations.
- Inform audiences in denied areas.
- Overcome censorship, illiteracy or interrupted communication systems.
- Give guidance or reassurance to isolated, disorganized audiences.
- Target opponent audiences to diminish morale or will to resist.
- Sustain morale of resistance fighters.
- Exploit ethnic, cultural, religious or economic differences.
- Give opponents alternatives to conflict.
- Influence local support for insurgents.
- Support deception operations.
- Project favorable US image.
- Use all available means to channel the target audience's behavior.

Limitations

- Extensive planning and deployment time.
- Incomplete information from intelligence agencies.
- Coordination difficult between military units and civilian information agencies—allows time for counterpropaganda.
- Lack of qualified personnel—linguists, understanding of cultural, political, economic, social and ideological conditions.
- Laws of war.
- Accessibility to potential target audiences.

Figure 4. PSYOP Capabilities and Limitations.[8]

goal of compelling the enemy to do our will without fighting:

- Target opponent audiences to diminish morale or will to resist.
- Give opponents alternatives to conflict. If the enemy no longer resists, he will do our will. Giving opponents an alternative to conflict—essentially a "carrot and stick" approach—also has the desired effect when the adversary chooses the carrot.

It seems, then, that our goal is essentially within the capabilities of PSYOP but perhaps not in the desired scope. However, given information-age opportunities and the ability to overcome most PSYOP limitations, I think PSYOP capabilities can be increased to achieve our goal.

Information-Age Opportunities

Three information-age developments stand out as having the potential to greatly increase PSYOP effectiveness:

- Information-age technology enabling the expansion and sophistication of networks.
- The growth and reach of mass media.
- Social science advances in understanding human behavior.

Individually, these developments are important and have significant implications for society. However, when viewed synergistically against a backdrop of Clausewitz's trinity, their potential to enhance the effectiveness of PSYOP is profound.

Clausewitz's trinity. It is critical to remain focused on the objective in war. Clausewitz described the objective as the center of gravity (COG), "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends, . . . the point at which all our energies should be directed." He viewed defeating the enemy's COG as the most direct path to victory. At the strategic level, the enemy's COGs consist of the military, the government and the will of the people—referred to collectively as Clausewitz's trinity, shown in Figure 5. There are many elements within each COG, however, to which one might "direct his energies." The leader of a government might be targeted directly. On the other hand, the collective will of government might be targeted, such as Congress in the case of the United States. If the will of the people is deemed to be the COG, PSYOP might be mounted against a population's morale via the media.

Elements can differ significantly between nations. Governments range from democracies to dictatorships. Populations differ in culture, religion, economies and so forth. Militaries stack up against one

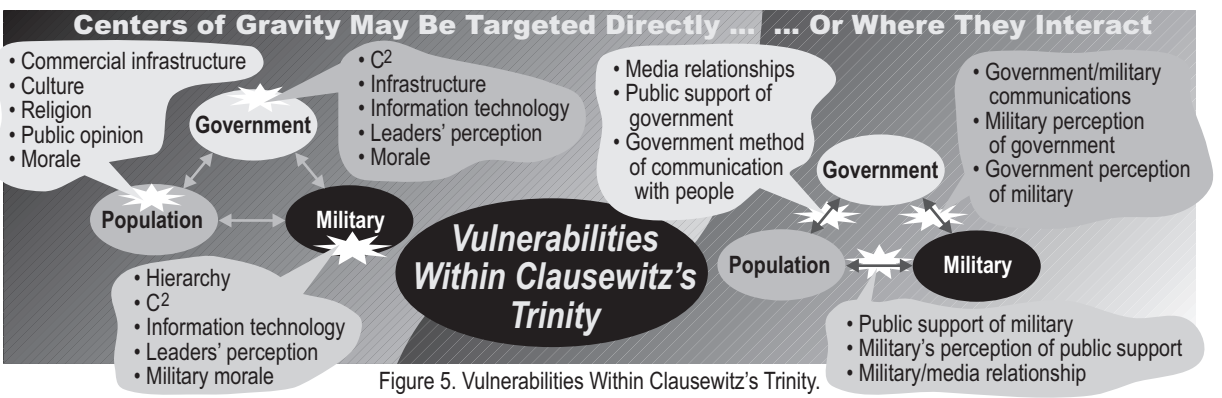
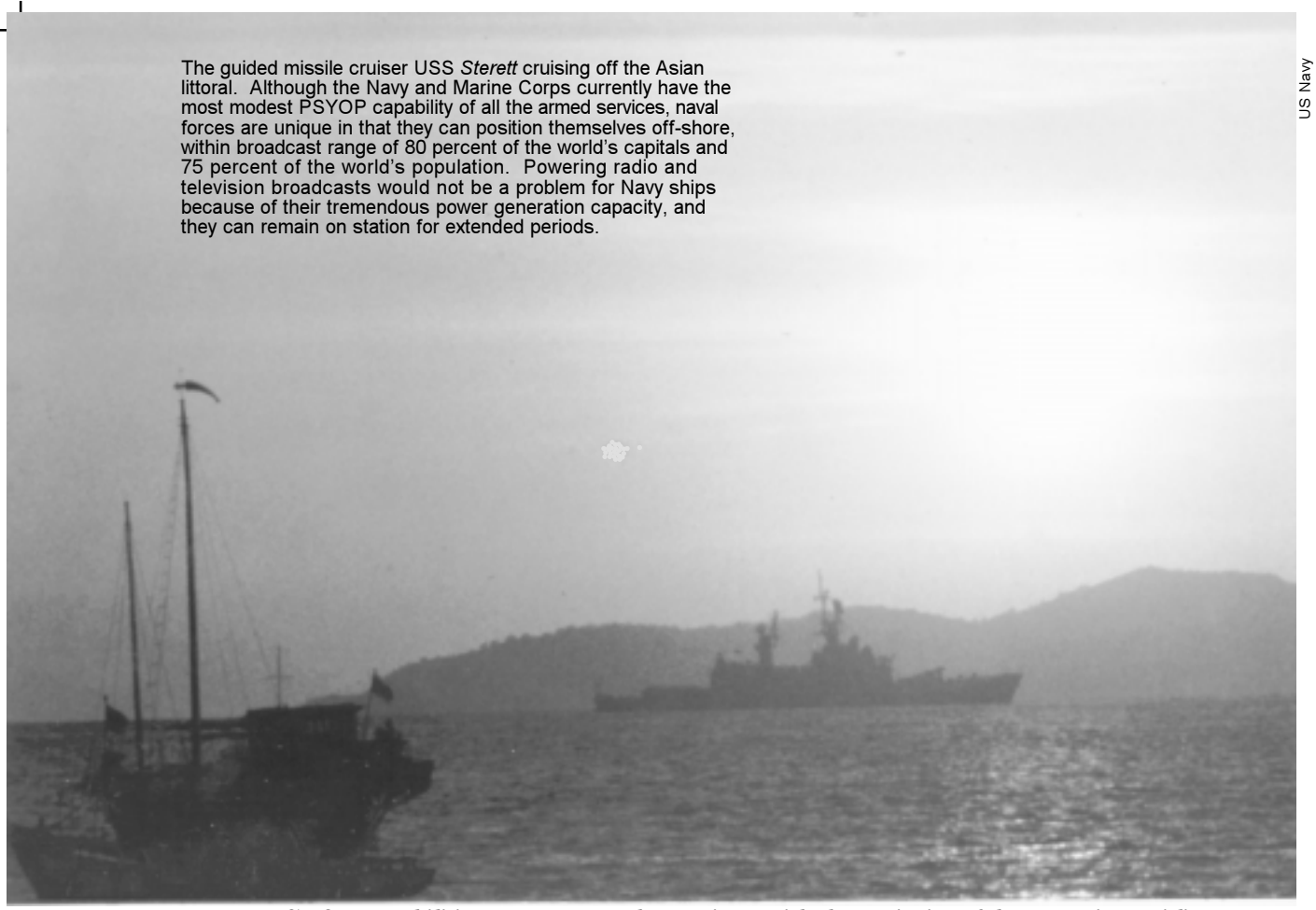


Figure 5. Vulnerabilities Within Clausewitz's Trinity.



The guided missile cruiser USS *Sterett* cruising off the Asian littoral. Although the Navy and Marine Corps currently have the most modest PSYOP capability of all the armed services, naval forces are unique in that they can position themselves off-shore, within broadcast range of 80 percent of the world's capitals and 75 percent of the world's population. Powering radio and television broadcasts would not be a problem for Navy ships because of their tremendous power generation capacity, and they can remain on station for extended periods.

US Navy

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another in more ways than capability. Understanding these elements and their interactions is critical in conducting PSYOP.

Networking. Networks have been around since the advent of language and the interaction of people between groups. Nonetheless, the introduction of the network as an organizational scheme only recently found utility when information technology (IT) reached critical mass in business, government and society. Networks differ from hierarchical and market organization schemes in the nature of transactions that occur within them. Hierarchical organizations are about power, control and accountability. Market organizations evolve to enhance the exchange of goods, services and commodities. Networks, on the other hand, expand the exchange of information and knowledge. Interestingly, incorporating networks into market and organizational schemes has the effect of facilitating the former and corroding the latter.[9]

From a Clausewitzian perspective, the effect of networking is particularly noteworthy. As shown in Figure 6, networking enables communication across hierarchical levels of elements within Clausewitz's trinity, effectively blurring the lines of distinction between them. The effect of this is a redistribution of power between society and government, previously the principal province of government. The old saying that "knowledge is power" cuts both ways—having more access to information and knowledge has empowered society at some expense to government.

From a PSYOP perspective, *these effects translate into significant vulnerabilities within the strategic COGs*. Openness suggests accessibility, and—lacking a very robust defense—with accessibility comes vulnerability.

Mass Media. In the past 10 years, the number of TV viewers has tripled—to over 1.2 billion people.

More than 120 communication satellites beam TV to every inhabited continent. CNN International reaches 209 countries.[10] TV's reach is, without doubt, ubiquitous and growing, but what about its ability to influence governments, the military and society?

A single image, imprinted via mass media on the collective consciousness of a population, can influence the course of history. Two such images from the Vietnam conflict—a summary execution of a Vietcong officer by a Saigon police chief, and a naked Vietnamese child, burned and fleeing in terror from a napalm strike—brought war home to an entire society and made it personal. These two images, and others like them, were indelibly etched in the American psyche of that time, influencing our attitudes toward the war effort.

Industry believes in the power of advertising to influence the purchasing behavior of society, spending more than $161 *billion* in 1995—with TV advertising representing almost a quarter of the sum.[11] The government also has agencies that specialize in promulgating US policy via the media. One such agency is the United States Information Agency (USIA). "The USIA engages in a wide variety of communications activities—from academic and cultural exchanges to press, radio, and television programs—to accomplish its goals of strengthening foreign understanding of American society and support of United States policies."[12] The Voice of America (VOA), USIA's broadcasting agent, radiocasts in 48 languages, focusing on countries in which the United States has an interest. Iran, China and Bosnia have all protested VOA broadcasts, a testament to their effectiveness.

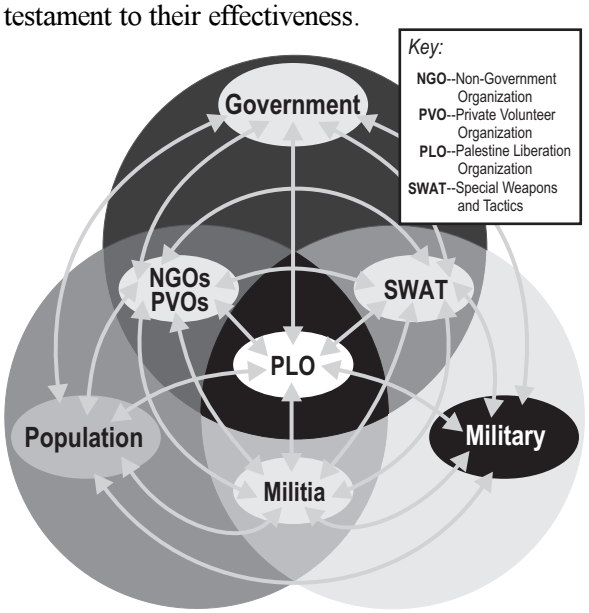

Figure 6. The Effect of Networking on Clausewitz's Trinity.

The power of TV and radio to influence behavior has not been lost on military PSYOP personnel. During Operation *Uphold Democracy*, radio and TV programming was used in a carefully crafted interagency campaign "to prepare Haitians for democracy's restoration and the imminent arrival of US forces."[13] Although it would be imprudent to claim a causal link, the mission was a resounding success—with PSYOP playing a major role.

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Social Sciences. While the general goal of the social sciences is to understand more about human behavior, there are elements within the social sciences that are concerned with determining what *influences* human behavior. Obviously, PSYOP personnel must be well versed and up to date with respect to social science advances. It is critical to have expert knowledge in this area to mount an effective offensive PSYOP and to counter enemy PSYOP.

One social science area particularly germane to PSYOP is political psychology, illustrated in a recent study on political learning: "What makes political authority so fascinating from a psychological point of view, is that it seems able to produce compliance *voluntarily*—by getting followers *to want to do* what their leaders want them to do."[14]

Social science research can provide insight into common beliefs, sometimes countering what is generally accepted as true as being somewhat off the mark. For example, much has been made of the "CNN effect"—the loss of elite decision makers' policy control to the print and broadcast media by way of their real-time coverage of breaking events. The common view is that the media set the agenda to which the government must react, rather than allowing the government to pursue national security objectives in a proactive manner. Research, however, does not totally support this contention. A recent study of US involvement in Somalia showed

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that "the decision to intervene was the result of diplomatic and bureaucratic operations, with news coverage coming in response to those decisions."[15] The assertion is that officials, not the media, set the news agenda. Both react to events, but officials set the agenda with regard to action taken.

PSYOP must be in touch with advances in the social sciences. The social sciences can provide a deeper understanding of the factors that influence human behavior and the dynamics of mass media interaction with society and the government.

Information-Age PSYOP Implications

If we are to take full advantage of information-age opportunities, there are a number of things we must do better. Figure 7 summarizes the opportunities, challenges, vulnerabilities and implications of each information-age development described. As societies, governments and militaries continue to network via IT, our knowledge of IT must do more than merely keep abreast of them. If we are to protect our own information systems and exploit those of our enemies, we must remain in the vanguard of the field.

To do this, we must redefine the way we look at IW. Information *in* warfare should be used in the same fashion that physical hardware, such as bombs, guns and missiles, is used to achieve a desired effect. Thus, IW should be categorized as either information fires or information defense. Likewise, PSYOP should consist of PSYOP fires and PSYOP defense. In *Joint Vision 2010* terms, information and PSYOP fires become elements of precision engagement. Likewise, information and PSYOP defense would be elements of full-dimensional protection. To achieve a desired effect, a psychological weapon may be a better choice than a physical one. Targeting boards must understand their physical and information weapon options, to include the requisite expertise to choose the right weapon for the right target. Simply put, targeting boards must transition to *effects* boards.

Military media capability is no match for the commercial sector. Likewise, the military's understanding of journalism, marketing and advertising in the pursuit of influencing behavior through the media is similarly dwarfed. We must tap that expert knowledge and capability to realize the full potential of information-age PSYOP. We must bring together the commercial sector's best with government agencies that understand the Clausewitzian elements required to wage PSYOP. For example, intelligence agencies such as the CIA are chartered to understand foreign society, government and military strengths and vulnerabilities. As previously discussed, the USIA broadcasts US policy on a daily basis. The military services train and maintain cadres of proficient linguists, who are instrumental to effective PSYOP. Bringing together experts from these agencies yields results greater than the sum of individual efforts. The power of networking should allow virtual collectives of government agency and the private sector expertise to collaborate securely from the Continental United States in

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Development	Opportunity	Challenge	Vulnerability	Implications
Networking	Increase span of control Increase horizontal exchange of information Cross agency boundaries Increase information accessibility	Erosion of accountability and control Cost and coordination to link agencies	Increases accessibility to own infosphere	Must develop and maintain expert IT knowledge to: - Attack - Defend
Mass Media	Global reach Great influence which cues off official sources	Expensive Most effective in language of target audiences Linguists required Effectiveness depends on understanding culture and receiving human intelligence	Backlash due to "Being Used" Identifying and countering enemy propaganda	Requires additional expertise outside DOD: - USIA - Marketers - CIA - Journalists - Advertisers
Social Sciences	Increase understanding of what influences behavior	Reliably influencing human behavior	Enemy use	May require additional expertise outside DOD: - Psychologists - Sociologists

Figure 7. Information-Age PSYOP Implications.

Info-Age PSYOP *continued*

support of a PSYOP effort halfway around the world.

However, synthesizing commercial broadcasting, marketing and advertising capability with social science experts and government and military expertise will not be enough to achieve an information-age PSYOP capability. PSYOP currently require NCA approval, with good reason. But PSYOP personnel do not participate on a regular basis with the National Security Council (NSC). If PSYOP are to keep pace in the dynamic arena of foreign relations, they must be plugged in at the top for two reasons:

- By working PSYOP on a routine basis with top-level decision makers, PSYOP personnel can craft and have plans and contingencies for emerging crises.
- Working closely with decision makers allows PSYOP personnel to understand decision-maker concerns and execute within their intent.

A permanent PSYOP interagency working group should be established under the NSC, similar in composition to the Interagency Information Working Group (IIWG) that was set up for Operation *Uphold Democracy*.[16] Composed of elements from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Defense Intelligence Agency, CIA, Department of Defense, Department of Justice, Department of State, USIA, US Atlantic Command and the Aristide government in exile, the IIWG was able to develop and execute a strategy under NSC auspices with impressive results. A permanent IIWG would do well to include representatives from these agencies, along with social science experts from academia, advertising private sector experts and the mass media. The Rwanda tragedy might have been averted had such a permanent group recognized and countered the hate propaganda of extremist Hutu radio broadcasts.[17]

Military PSYOP capability and active force structure should be improved. While successful PSYOP were recently conducted in both Haiti and Bosnia, PSYOP personnel are stretched awfully thin. If an information-age PSYOP capability is to be achieved, a full-time cadre of PSYOP personnel will be required. The Active Component must work hand-in-hand with an information-age RC, recruited from the ranks of Madison Avenue, Hollywood and academia, with working knowledge of how to influence behavior.

In the face of diminishing defense budgets and increasing conflict around the world, information-age PSYOP may prove to be a valuable foreign policy instrument "to compel the enemy to do our will without fighting." In no fashion could it supplant the need for an active fighting force. But, even if it works only sporadically or in certain circumstances, we will gain immeasurably in the conservation of human life.

An information-age PSYOP capability is well within our reach. By inculcating current PSYOP capability with information-age advances and organizing differently to overcome current limitations, an opportunity exists for a PSYOP sea change. Arguments against pursuing such a capability will include its cost, the elusiveness of proving its effectiveness and the specter of Orson Welles' "big brother"—all are valid observations. But when contrasted against the potential to avert the spilling of our nation's sons' and daughters' blood, one must ask, "how can we afford not to?" ***MR***

NOTES

1. Evelyn Iritani, "U.S. Learns How to Anger Friends While Failing to Influence Enemies," *Los Angeles Times,* 24 March 1997, A6, A8.
2. Joint Publication (Pub) 3-13.1, *Joint Doctrine for Command and Control Warfare (C²W)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office [GPO] 7 February 1996).
3. Joint Pub 3-13.1 defines C²W as "The integrated use of operations security (OPSEC), military deception, psychological operations (PSYOP), electronic warfare (EW) and physical destruction, mutually supported by intelligence, to deny information to, influence, degrade or destroy adversary command and control capabilities (C²) while protecting friendly C² capabilities against such actions."
4. Joint Pub 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: GPO, 23 March 1994).
5. This suggests that PSYOP may be incorrectly bound as a subset of C²W. PSYOP actually transcend C²W into the larger set of information warfare.
6. Curiously, the Navy and Marine Corps have the most modest capability. This is puzzling, budget constraints aside, for a number of reasons. Naval forces are unique in that they can position themselves off-shore, within broadcast range of a targeted country, without requiring any nation's consent. Navy ships already carry tremendous power generation excess for which powering radio and television broadcasts would not be a problem. Couple these factors with naval sustainability and littoral access to over 80 percent of the world's capitals and 75 percent of the world's population, and one must wonder why the Navy does not lead the way in PSYOP capability.
7. Joint Pub 3-53, *Doctrine for Joint Psychological Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 10 July 1996).
8. Summarized from US Army Field Manual 33-1, *Psychological Operations* (Washington, DC: GPO, 18 February 1993), 1-2, 1-3.
9. David Ronfeldt, "Institutions, Markets and Networks: A Framework About the Evolution of Societies," RAND, P-7967, Santa Monica, CA, 1996.
10. Richard Parker, "The Future of 'Global' Television News: An Economic Perspective," *Political Communication*, Vol. 12, 431-446.
11. *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1996*, October 1996, 574.
12. *Code of Federal Regulations*, Part 504.2, Published by the Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, 129.
13. Stephen Brown, "PSYOP in Operation *Uphold Democracy*," *Military Review*, September-November 1996, 61.
14. Donald Searing, "The Psychology of Political Authority: A Causal Mechanism of Political Learning Through Persuasion and Manipulation," *Political Psychology*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 1995, 677-695.
15. Steven Livingston and Todd Eachus, "Human Crises and U.S. Foreign Policy: Somalia and the CNN Effect Reconsidered," *Political Communication*, Vol. 12, 413-429.
16. Brown, Ibid., 60.
17. Joseph Nye Jr. and William Owens, "America's Information Edge," *Foreign Affairs*, March-April 1996, 32

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