



Historical Aspects of Formation of Psychological Operations Units

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Annotation: The article discusses the issues of the formation of units of psychological operations in different historical epochs of time, the tendencies of their development, the use of various forms and methods, along with the formation of the itself theory of psychological operations. Also, their definite role and place in the achievement of individual societies and states of their own goals and objectives.

Keywords: psychological operations, psychological warfare, information-psychological influence, propaganda, apparatus, politics, state, society, human, war, conflict.

Psychological operations units (PsO), perhaps not in the current modern interpretation, began to form simultaneously with the theory of the appearance of PsO back in ancient centuries.

Thus, at different times, taking into account the level of human development, including scientific and technological progress, the characteristics and capabilities of various types and levels of associations, states, their geopolitical location and interests, as well as many other factors and conditions, PsyOps were carried out in all possible ways and methods, and the bodies and divisions had different names, structures, compositions, goals and objectives, respectively.

In this regard, the formation of PsyOp bodies and units in a historical perspective should be considered in parallel with the formation of the theory of psychological operations itself.

Today there are many interpretations of this activity. At the same time, according to many experts, the American and Russian (Western and Eastern) are considered one of the most developed interpretations of the PsO theory.

According to the charters and instructions of the US Armed Forces, psychological operations are understood as measures to influence certain groups of people and individuals using the media, various types of printed, audio or video products, as well as through personal communication, in order to induce in them such a mood or behavior that contributed to to achieve political and military goals. The main targets of influence are considered to be the leaders of political and public organizations, religious communities, the most influential representatives of the business community, the military elite and the creative intelligentsia. Activities may also include members of the armed forces, workers, peasants, technical intelligentsia and government officials.

The concept of “psychological operations,” according to the views of American military experts, has a broad and narrow interpretation.

In a broad sense, psychological operations refers to the planned use of means, forms and methods of disseminating information to exert a certain influence on a person’s attitudes and behavior. Such operations consist of political, military and ideological activities. They are carried out in line with state policy, and their military side is coordinated with the activities of relevant government agencies.



More specifically, psychological operations are used by armed forces to demoralize and disorient the enemy. In addition, PsyOps contribute to the consolidation, information support and strengthening of the morale of the population and personnel of the armed forces of allied and friendly states [1].

According to the US Army Field Manual, psychological operations are planned propaganda and psychological activities carried out in peacetime or wartime, designed to target foreign hostile, friendly or neutral audiences in order to influence their attitudes and behavior in a favorable direction to achieve both political and political goals. and US military national targets [3].

In NATO countries, the entire range of measures of information and psychological influence on enemy troops and populations is also designated by the term “psychological operations” and is interpreted almost similarly to the American approach [4].

Experts today note the main difference between the Western and Chinese approaches to PsyOps in the main provisions of their strategy. If Chinese experts view PsyO as a way to spread truth and justice, conquer minds and reveal the enemy’s plans to penetrate the mental space of the PRC, then the West sees it as just a means of spreading its hegemonic interests aimed at subjugating other countries.

A significant part of Chinese experts in the field of PsyOp focuses on the system of human values, which underlies the motivation of human actions. In their opinion, the most important strategic goals of psychological warfare can be achieved by destroying state ideology through the erosion of the value system accepted in the culture of a particular people.

At the same time, PLA PsyOps experts define psychological warfare as a multi-level activity at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. They see the main goal of psychological influence in ensuring the high moral and psychological potential of the nation, interpreting it through the state of public consciousness, cultural traditions, the rhythm of the country’s economic life and the fighting spirit of the army.

In general, Chinese military experts also consider PsO in a broad and narrow sense. In the first case, we are talking about combat operations, where information dominates and “digital” units use the appropriate means. In the second case, PsyOps are considered in the sense of “on the battlefield,” which involve the integrated use of reconnaissance, disinformation, operational camouflage, psychological and electronic warfare, as well as striking the enemy’s entire information infrastructure, including personnel.

Many Russian sources note that psychological warfare (synonymous with psychological operations) is a psychological impact on enemy troops (forces) and the population with the aim of demoralizing them and inducing them to stop resistance. It can be carried out in preparation for military operations and during them.

According to I. Nepomnyashchiy, psychological warfare is a special type of preparation and conduct of wars, allowing the ruling circles, using propaganda, terror and other means, to influence their own people, the peoples of enemy, allied and neutral countries in political-ideological, moral and psychological attitude to achieve the goals of its military strategy [5].

Psychological operations were already carried out in armed clashes between tribes during the era of the disintegration of the primitive communal system and in the wars of slave states.

In the history of the ancient world, the most common way to influence an enemy and undermine his morale was to intimidate him with his combat power. For example, Genghis Khan and Hannibal,



even before the start of the battle, deliberately spread rumors about “secret weapons” - war elephants, “fire snakes”, poisonous smoke, etc.

In 480 BC, the Persian military leader Xerxes, before going to Greece, in order to maximize the emotional impact on the enemy, spread rumors about the large size of his army, and also, through influence on the relevant priests, conveyed the imminent defeat [6].

This activity was first described in China 500 BC. e. in one of the oldest treatises on the art of war. The author of the treatise, the famous commander Sun Tzu, outlined the main ways of influencing the psyche and behavior of the enemy [6].

At the same time, the entire doctrine of PsO in Ancient China was based on the philosophical teachings of Lao Tzu, in which great attention was paid to influencing the strategy and diplomacy of the enemy, demonstrating one’s own strength and rejecting blind faith in luck.

Another Chinese treatise on strategy, The Six Arts of War, provides an example of a staff structure. Of the 72 staff members, 19 (26%) were responsible for conducting PsyOps. At the same time, five of them promoted the power of the army, four praised the valor of their troops, eight scouted the enemy’s intentions, and two contributed to a feeling of insecurity among his soldiers, undermining their faith in gods and spirits [7].

During the slave period, the experience of warfare was summarized in India in the form of the “Laws of Manu,” which, along with military issues, set out the moral foundations of war. According to one of the recommendations of the Laws of Manu, the belligerent should actively “encourage those of the enemy troops who are inclined to mutiny.”

This period in the field of formation of the theory of PsO on the enemy gave a lot; the method of intimidation and spreading rumors for this purpose reached a certain perfection. In a primitive form, an understanding arose of the importance of exacerbating contradictions in the enemy camp and causing a split in its ranks. The use of such a technique as declaring the just nature of the war on one’s part and the unjust, enslaving nature on the part of the enemy has been developed.

During the American Revolutionary War, American leaflets promised to allocate a plot of land to every Hessian mercenary who served the British, will go over to the side of the Americans.

Napoleon during the Egyptian campaign tried to use in his propaganda, designed for the Egyptians, the fact that France's struggle for Malta was at the same time fight against the Maltese knights.

PsyOp methods were also used by opponents of France. Thus, Suvorov, during the Italian campaign of the Russian army, appealed to the former soldiers of the Piedmontese army to go over to the side of the Russian-Austrian troops, as a result they went over not only individually, but also in entire units.

Despite the fact that methods of psychological influence for military purposes have been known since ancient times, psychological warfare in its modern sense arose and took shape only in the 20th century. There were several reasons for this.

Firstly, after the First World War it was concluded that physical forms of influence on the enemy are extremely costly. A victory obtained in this way often does not compensate for the losses in manpower and equipment.

Secondly, the ability to conduct large-scale psychological warfare directly depends on the level of development of the information and propaganda machine. Only by the beginning of



the 20th century did the media become an integral, widespread and important element of everyday life in all economically developed countries of the world.

Thirdly, the educational and cultural level has increased significantly, and the psychology of the broad masses has changed. Those in power can no longer, as in ancient times, simply tell the people that the war is being waged to obtain booty and slaves, so governments try to hide the real goals of the war.

Thus, the First World War became a turning point in the development of the theory and practice of PsO.

At the very beginning of the war, the governments of the warring countries, with the exception of Germany, came to the conclusion that it was necessary to create special bodies to conduct PsyOps.

In 1914, a military propaganda bureau was created at the British Foreign Office, and later

Directorate of Military Information, which was later transformed into the Ministry of Information, carrying out propaganda among military personnel and the population of foreign countries. In 1915, a military propaganda service department was created at the General Staff of the French Defense Ministry, whose task was to influence the enemy with the help of leaflets, and in 1917, the United States also joined in the conduct of psychological warfare, creating the so-called under the intelligence department of the headquarters of the expeditionary forces. "psychological section".

Russia, Italy and other countries, to a certain extent, tried to exert information and psychological influence on the enemy troops and population, but it significantly inferior to English and French.

In Germany, until August 1918, it was prohibited to publish and distributing leaflets, since this, in the opinion of the country's leadership, was contrary to the rules of war. Only a newspaper published in French for the population of the occupied areas was allowed, which was distributed behind the front line using balloons. When the ban was lifted, Germany began mass publishing leaflets [8].

In general, during the First World War, PsyOps were mainly carried out through the dissemination of printed propaganda. As a first experience at front-line positions, attempts were also made to conduct oral broadcasting through loudspeakers.

This war became the starting point in the formation of the theory of PsyOps, the awareness by states of their effectiveness in achieving their goals and protecting their interests, the creation of appropriate units and doctrinal foundations.

The Second World War tested the viability of theoretical assumptions about the effectiveness of PsO. The main forms during the war were printed and radio propaganda.

It was the results of the First World War that contributed to a systematic understanding of the need to form structured bodies and units with the task of implementing PsyOps, and the Second World War became a "platform" for their application and testing.

Thus, for these purposes, the following were created: in the USSR - the Bureau of Military-Political Propaganda, in Great Britain - the Executive Committee of Political Warfare, in the USA - the Bureau of Military Information, in Germany - the Ministry of Public Education and Propaganda [9].

After the National Socialist Party came to power in Germany, this ministry was formed; a propaganda department was formed at the headquarters of the Supreme High Command, to which special units were subordinated - propaganda companies designed to conduct propaganda among the German population and enemy military personnel.



Army intelligence "Abwehr" sent to the USSR, along with intelligence officers and saboteurs, specially trained agents-propagandists from among emigrants and persons fluent in Russian and the languages of other peoples of the USSR, as well as emissary propagandists of various nationalist organizations. The Propaganda Department prepared a directive on the use of propaganda in Operation Barbarossa, which became the fundamental document for the organization and conduct of PsyOps against the USSR. The directive defined the goals of propaganda, its forms and methods, and it was sent to the troops on June 6, 1941.

By June 22, 1941, the Ministry of Propaganda had printed over 30 million leaflets and pocket-sized propaganda brochures in 30 languages of the peoples of the USSR and prepared several radio broadcasts. 17 propaganda companies were concentrated on the Eastern Front. During the first two months of the war, they distributed about 200 million leaflets.

In 1943, propaganda troops became an independent branch of the military, their number reaches 15 thousand people [10].

The experience of conducting propaganda during the Second World War represents a significant contribution to the theory and practice of PsyOps in combat conditions, once again confirming the enormous importance and capabilities of this activity as an effective means of undermining the morale of enemy troops. The special importance of PsO is also confirmed by the fact of the purposeful formation for these purposes of the relevant senior management bodies and divisions.

With the technological level of development of many countries after the experience of the Second World War, PsyOps received significant development, and their implementation intensified in almost all regional and local conflicts.

Wars and local conflicts at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries clearly confirm the trend of increasing the role of non-combat forms of confrontation. Moreover, if previously they were used to create favorable conditions for the use of military force, now and in the future to achieve political and strategic goals without the use of military force.

In modern conditions, almost all countries have special structures responsible for PsyOps. However, at present, like the two main theories of PsO, there are more developed models of the apparatus (organs)¹ of psychological warfare - Western and Eastern (Soviet).

This model has been fully or partially implemented in the USA, Germany, Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, Turkey, Israel, South Korea, and a number of other Western countries.

The most powerful and professionally prepared device for The armed forces of the United States, Germany and Israel have psychological influence on the enemy. In wartime, PsyOp units are expected to be deployed to full strength in the Armed Forces of Great Britain, France, Belgium, Sweden, Turkey, and South Korea.

The psychological warfare agencies of Western states are called units of "psychological operations" (USA, UK, South Korea), "operational information" (Germany), "psychological defense" (Sweden), "psychological warfare" (Turkey) [11].

The psychological warfare apparatus of Western states is focused on solving specific problems in the event of crisis situations in certain regions and during war. In peacetime, this apparatus is engaged in analytical research, informing troops, working with the public and the press, preparing information, reference and propaganda materials, and planning strategic psychological operations.



In the context of peacekeeping activities, PsyOps units can also be deployed, as is the case in Bosnia, where the United States created a special PsyOps group “Eagle”.

The psychological warfare apparatus of Western states is usually part of the armed forces and reports directly to their general staffs (headquarters of the armed forces). The main documents according to which psychological warfare activities are carried out in Western countries are special charters and instructions (for example, charter FM 35-5 “Psychological operations” in the USA, KDV-100-200 “Manual on conducting psychological defense” in Sweden, etc.).

The organizational and staffing structure of PsyOp units is not constant. The concept of a modular structure is used in its construction. Depending on the specifics of the combat situation and the tasks set by the command, appropriate units are formed.

The main unit of Western states is the PsyOp battalion. There are four types of such battalions: regional battalions; battalions for training and distribution of materials; tactical PsyOp battalions; battalions for working with enemy prisoners of war (interned civilians).

Battalions, depending on their purpose and specific tasks, include companies, centers, platoons, sections, formed from functional teams of 27 types. The teams, in turn, are divided into three large groups: headquarters and control, supply and maintenance, operational (tactical) [12].

The Eastern model of psychological warfare organs is fully or partially implemented in Russia, China, Vietnam, India, Iraq, Syria and North Korea. Its difference from the Western model is that in the armed forces of these countries, PsyOp units are mainly a special staffed and practically unchanged apparatus of headquarters (Russia, India, Iraq) or political bodies of all levels (Vietnam, China, North Korea, Syria).

Currently, the organs of psychological warfare of the eastern states are called the apparatus of “psychological support” in Russia (in Soviet times until 1992 - “special propaganda”), “psychological operations” in India, “political work among the troops and population of the enemy” in the PRC, Vietnam, North Korea, “political propaganda among enemy troops and populations” in Syria.

In peacetime, these bodies study the military-political and socio-psychological situation in various regions of countries of interest to the leadership and in border states, inform their troops, work with the public and the press, prepare information, reference and propaganda materials, and plan strategic PsyOps.

The organizational and staffing units for conducting PsyOps in the Armed Forces of eastern states are departments (departments, directorates) that are part of headquarters or political agencies, propaganda detachments and special editorial offices. Departments (departments, departments) of PsyOps, as a rule, are available in all combined arms formations, starting with the corps, and are intended for planning and managing PsyOps. Propaganda units are intended mainly for sound and radio broadcasting. Editorial offices for the preparation of information and propaganda materials are usually staffed by districts and headquarters of the armed forces in peacetime, and combined arms armies in wartime.

In general, the theory and practice of PsyOps, under the influence of a whole complex of objective and subjective factors, has gone through a complex evolutionary path in the historical plane - from the perception of this activity as an auxiliary tool used in solving combat missions at the tactical and operational levels, to giving them the global function of controlling armed forces conflicts at the strategic level.

One of the important means of achieving your goals, along with material Since ancient times, special attention has been paid to the moral component. The experience of all wars and conflicts



clearly demonstrates that their outcome ultimately depends on two factors - material and moral. purposeful production and dissemination of special information that has a direct impact on the functioning of the information and psychological environment of society, the psyche and behavior of the population, military personnel for weakening the morale and combat power of the enemy. Many countries fought the enemy not only with armed means, but also through targeted influence on the consciousness and psyche of people, tried to use IPV, i.e. targeted production and dissemination of special information that has a direct impact on the functioning of the information and psychological environment of society, the psyche and behavior of the population, military personnel to weaken the morale and combat power of the enemy.

The analysis shows that PsyOps could and can be carried out not only during the preparation and conduct of wars and conflicts, as some experts claim. They were also carried out to achieve other goals in various spheres of life of the individual, society and state. Accordingly, PsyOp units or subjects of a given area of activity could be part of various types of activities of actors, which depends on the goals and objectives they pursue.

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