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## **Psychological Operations in Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Urban Freedom**

by

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### **Operation Desert Shield**

Long before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, soldiers from the 8th Psychological Operations Battalion (Airborne) were on the ground in the Middle East. Responsible for providing psychological operations (PSYOP) support to the Commander in Chief, U.S. Central Command (USCINCCENT), the battalion had initiated an individual and collective training program to enhance their regional, cultural and linguistic skills. PSYOP specialists and combat veterans from Operation Just Cause were working with the U.S. Military Training Mission in Saudi Arabia, with U.S. Defense Attaché Offices (USDAOs) in Baghdad, Kuwait, Djibouti, Yemen, Jordan and Pakistan, and regularly participating in exercises in Jordan, Oman, Egypt and Kenya. The experience and expertise gained during these deployments, each some six months in duration, was to prove invaluable during the Gulf War.

Within days of the Iraqi invasion, Arabic-speaking tactical PSYOP loudspeaker teams from the battalion were deployed with the initial elements of the 82d Airborne Division. A team of military and civilian PSYOP specialists, led by the 4th PSYOP Group Commander, traveled to MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, to begin development of a strategic PSYOP plan for USCINCCENT. Initial product development began for both operational and tactical PSYOP as well as preparations for the deployment of the regionally-oriented 8th PSYOP Battalion, the purely tactical 9th PSYOP Battalion supporting XVIII Airborne Corps, and all the print, radio, television and communications capabilities of the 4th PSYOP Group. By late August, the team had USCINCCENT's approval on 64 strategic initiatives which were in turn forwarded to Washington for interagency review and approval.

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Upon deployment and establishment of the 8th Psychological Operations Task Force (POTF) in late August, and the arrival of the U.S. Air Force's 193d Special Operations Group's VOLANT SOLO aircraft for aerial dissemination of radio broadcasts, a number of steps were taken to ensure effective PSYOP support to theater-wide operations. An overall PSYOP campaign plan called "Burning Hawk" was developed by a composite 4th PSYOP Group staff, 8th PSYOP Task Force team, and its initial products were deployed. Tactical, logistical and personnel support relationships were established between the task force and the multiple higher and supported component headquarters. Washington's approval was requested to initiate PSYOP in-theater prior to hostilities, and a combined U.S.-Saudi coordination cell with the host nation was created for development and approval of PSYOP in-theater.

Planning for tasks of this nature, combined with the early development of products to be used at all levels upon hostilities, consumed the majority of the period between deployment and the beginning of hostilities in mid-January 1991. By that time, the task force had grown to five battalions, including the 6th PSYOP Battalion in support of VII Corps, and elements of the 13th PSYOP Battalion (EPW, or Enemy Prisoner of War), 18th, 19th, 244th, 245th, and 362d PSYOP Companies from the U.S. Reserve. In late January, the 4th PSYOP Group Headquarters was activated in Riyadh.

Although USCINCCENT's approval for the theater PSYOP plan was received in late September, execution authority was not granted until December. The interagency approval process, mandated by DoD Directive 3321.1,<sup>1</sup> was glacial. Had the Saudis not requested U.S. support to encourage Iraqi desertion and defection, culminating in the formation of a combined U.S., Saudi, Egyptian, Kuwaiti and British PSYOP effort and the King's approval to execute, it is doubtful that PSYOP would have been allowed to play an active role in the war at all. Quite literally, months of potential psychological preparation of the battlefield were wasted. However, once both United States and host nation approval had been granted, dissemination began almost immediately.

Initially, product themes were "peace not war" and "Arab brotherhood," then "time is running out," "the world is allied against aggression," and "Saddam has betrayed you." As the United Nations deadline approached, the primary theme became coalition technological superiority and the initiation of hostilities leaflet drops from MC-130 aircraft, the fax, maritime leaflet insertion into Kuwait, and the use of ground conduits into Iraq. In addition, the maritime effort contributed significantly to the Iraqi belief that the U.S. attack on Kuwait would come primarily from the sea.

## **Operation Desert Storm**

Upon initiation of hostilities on 17 January 1991, the pace of PSYOP support increased significantly, particularly when intelligence sources began reporting the effectiveness of leaflet, loudspeaker and radio campaigns against the enemy arrayed both in Kuwait and Iraq. Further, it was decided to open a second PSYOP "front," with radio and leaflet operations staged out of southern Turkey with U.S. European Command's (EUCOM's) Joint Task Force Proven Force targeted on northern Iraqi cities and military sites. This was to become the nucleus for PSYOP's support to Operation Provide Comfort after Desert Storm.

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<sup>1</sup> *Overt Psychological Operations Conducted by the Military Services in Peacetime and Contingencies Short of Declared War.*

## Component Support

Within this operational environment, PSYOP support to the unified and component commands took several forms. Initially, theater PSYOP efforts in support of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) were directed toward coalescing the disparate elements of the multinational force into a unified whole. To support this, the POTF created, developed and produced a regionally oriented video entitled "Nations of the World Take a Stand." Disseminated throughout the Middle East and Southwest Asia, as well as globally, as a United States Information Agency (USIA) product, this video was designed to present the coalition as a formidable force unified under a common cause in support of the wishes of the world. The effectiveness of this video was heralded throughout the U.S. State Department and the Department of Defense and the video was played continuously in successful effort to attain these objectives. (USIA was later to estimate that the video had been seen by over one billion people around the world.)

USCINCCENT also approved regional broadcasts out of Egypt and Turkey with the objectives of strengthening U.S./coalition ties while providing the enemy with factual, real-time information concerning the prosecution of the war. This was combined with a strategic leaflet campaign against targets such as Baghdad, deep Iraqi air bases, and the Republican Guards units in northern Kuwait and southern Iraq. These efforts stressed the magnitude of the allied effort, the error of Saddam Hussein's political position, and the futility of standing against the strength of the coalition forces. Further, several USCINCCENT-directed missions utilizing B-52 bombers combined with leaflet missions designed to degrade enemy morale and will to fight resulted in significant numbers of desertions, defections and surrenders prior to the start of the ground offensive. (See figure 1 for one example of the many leaflets used.)

PSYOP efforts in support of U.S. Army Forces, Central Command (USARCENT) consisted mainly of enhancing deception operations, tactical PSYOP support in the form of loudspeaker surrender appeals used in defense, during combat operations and during consolidation, and "Voice of the Gulf" radio broadcasts from two ground stations of Qaysumah and Abu Ali (eventually linked with Turkey) as well as from the USAF EC-130 PSYOP platform, VOLANT SOLO from the 193d Special Operations Group (SOG). Further, tactical leaflet dissemination was provided by F-16 aircraft utilizing M129A1 leaflet bombs and 155mm leaflet artillery rounds. Loudspeaker assets consisted of 46 loudspeaker teams in direct support down to the division level arrayed across the entire ARCENT front. Leaflet operations at this level were designed to support both deception and offensive operations. Leaflets overprinted with the VII and XVIII Corps logos and dropped along the central Kuwait-Saudi Arabian border were so successful in implying that the main U.S. advance would be inside Kuwait that USCINCCENT cancelled subsequent missions due to the significant Iraqi buildup in front of the Arab Corps.

The combination of massive air power, leaflets and loudspeaker operations created a PSYOP environment not previously experienced in modern warfare. This environment produced large numbers of desertions, defections and surrenders prior to the beginning of the ground campaign, to include the capitulation of an entire battalion-sized unit before G-Day. This pervasive belief of coalition supremacy further created massive numbers of surrendering EPWs throughout the ground campaign. The 8th POTF also provided extensive PSYOP support to the overall theater EPW program. Specific PSYOP elements were deployed in theater to set up and provide EPW pacification and exploitation at both the ARCENT EPW camps. The exploitation program identified and interviewed Iraqi prisoners on a voluntary basis to produce loudspeaker and broadcast appeals to fellow Iraqi soldiers. These appeals contributed significantly to the large number of EPWs taken with little or no hostile fire. Finally, the

Fig. 1 **Invitation** (shown actual size)



“From HQ Joint Forces and Theater of Operations.

You are invited to join the Joint Forces and enjoy full Arab hospitality, security, safety and medical care. You will return to your homes as soon as the situation that Saddam has placed us in has ended. My brother Iraqi soldier . . . this invitation is open to you and your comrade soldiers. We hope you will accept this invitation as soon as you have the opportunity.

Commander, Joint Forces and Theater of Operations”



8th POTF provided support to Operation Urban Freedom, U.S. Special Operations Command, Central's (USSOCCENT's) liberation of Kuwait City and to Task Force Freedom, the USARCENT-directed consolidation operation in Kuwait, with the mission of reestablishing radio and print activities to support repatriation and resettlement of the captives.

PSYOP support to U.S. Central Command Air Force (USCENTAF) was primarily restricted to the preparation phase with the development of a downed-flyer "pointy-talky,"<sup>2</sup> a multilingual blood-chit,<sup>3</sup> and broadcasts to support search and rescue operations. These products were issued to and in support of all pilots and crew in-theater and not restricted to USCENTAF efforts. The 193d SOG's VOLANT SOLO aircraft were used initially to monitor Iraqi radio transmissions, then to rebroadcast the Voice of America until dissemination approval had been given. They then became primary aerial conduits for the POTF's "Voice of the Gulf." In the later phases of the war, PSYOP also prepared, developed and executed, on a small scale, a campaign aimed at persuading Iraqi pilots to defect with their aircraft to Saudi airspace. This campaign was initiated to a very limited degree and no results were even confirmed.

PSYOP support to U.S. Marine Forces, Central Command (USMARCENT) was similar to that for USARCENT. The Marines were enthusiastic about the use of tactical PSYOP to support all phases of their operations. Through MARCENT-wide application of PSYOP, they were extremely effective in taking prisoners and influencing enemy action through the judicious use of loudspeaker teams and leaflet drops. Further, PSYOP significantly supported the MARCENT deception plan by disseminating leaflets designed to convince the Iraqis in Kuwait that an amphibious assault was imminent. Intelligence gathered after cessation of hostilities indicated that this campaign was highly successful. Additionally, the USMARCENT support package consisted of 25 loudspeaker teams, leaflet artillery rounds, M129A1 leaflet bombs dropped by MARCENT F/A-18 aircraft, and EPW exploitation teams whose operation mirrored that of USARCENT.

U.S. Naval Forces, Central Command (USNAVCENT) PSYOP efforts were limited to a one-time leaflet drop in support of deception operations and support of a MARCENT loudspeaker operation on Faylaka Island, which led to the surrender of 1,405 Iraqi soldiers to a significantly smaller U.S. Marine force.

USSOCCENT PSYOP support during Desert Storm was also limited to minimal leaflet dissemination, support by three loudspeaker teams, and tactical leaflet support in the form of deception and intimidation themes. However, during Urban Freedom, the 8th POTF was reconstituted with print, media, propaganda development and loudspeaker assets, contributing significantly to the success of the operation.

## **Milestones**

Within the parameters outlined above, the following milestones were met throughout Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm, and Urban Freedom:

- ◆ 342,000 leaflets disseminated by waterborne insertion, manpack and other operations;
- ◆ 18.7 million leaflets disseminated by high-altitude MC-130 operations;

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<sup>2</sup> A small card (usually foldable) showing simple terms, objects, actions and symbols with both English and phonetic pronunciations of foreign language equivalents. Normally prepared for use by service-members flying over enemy territory in obtaining assistance from locals.

<sup>3</sup> A document promising a reward for helping American servicemembers to escape capture by the enemy.

- ◆ 3.3 million leaflets disseminated by M129A1 leaflet bombs utilizing USAF F-16 aircraft and spanning 36 individual missions;
- ◆ 2.2 million leaflets disseminated by M129A1 leaflet bombs utilizing USAF B-52 aircraft and spanning 20 individual missions;
- ◆ million leaflets, public service posters and handbills disseminated in Kuwait City;
- ◆ “Nations of the World Take a Stand” videos distributed to each regional capital in the Middle East and Southwest Asia regions; 200 separate copies were disseminated into Baghdad;
- ◆ an audiotape, “Iraq the Betrayed,” designed to foment anti-Saddam sentiment, broadcast from VOLANT SOLO; copies were disseminated into Baghdad as well;
- ◆ 24 hours per day broadcasting operations from three separate platforms utilizing tapes and scripts developed by a combined U.S./Saudi/Egyptian/Kuwaiti/British propaganda development cell;
- ◆ 72 total days of broadcasting which included the following items:
  - ◆ 3,250 news items reported
  - ◆ 13 Iraqi EPW interviews
  - ◆ 40 press releases and interviews
  - ◆ 189 PSYOP messages disseminated;
- ◆ PSYOP support to EPW operations at two EPW camps, three corps collection points and numerous divisional collection points;
- ◆ countless individual and combined loudspeaker operations which produced, in many instances, thousands of prisoners without friendly forces having to fire a shot or maneuver into harm’s way.

## **Impact Indicators**

Indicators of success of the above activities included:

- ◆ extensive Iraqi concern about Kuwaiti airspace penetration prior to hostilities generated by leaflet operations. In fact, U.S./coalition aircraft never penetrated Kuwaiti/Iraqi airspace until after the beginning of hostilities;
- ◆ repositioning of Iraqi units based on U.S. deception leaflet operations;
- ◆ the Iraqi III Corps commander’s 20’ x 30’ sandtable found in Kuwait City depicting virtually all enemy (coalition) avenues of approach coming from the sea;
- ◆ the extraordinary large number of Iraqi defectors (in excess of 17,000) and EPWs (over 87,000);
- ◆ Iraqi prohibitions against carrying or having a coalition leaflet and Iraqi death squads operating between the Iraqi and coalition fronts to stop and assassinate defecting Iraqi soldiers;
- ◆ the massive numbers of Iraqi desertions (over 44 percent of Iraqi units in the Kuwait Theater of Operations) prior to and during the war;
- ◆ Iraqi leaflet and information campaigns to counter coalition leaflet operations and confiscation of their soldiers’ personal radios;
- ◆ Iraqi EPW reports of listening to coalition broadcasts for “true” programming;

- ◆ Iraqi chain of command reports to their soldiers that coalition leaflets were contaminated by chemical agents;
- ◆ Iraqi “Mother of All Battles” broadcasts changing frequencies to counter coalition broadcasts, and the jamming of the “Voice of the Gulf”;
- ◆ surrender of two entire units as a direct result of loudspeaker broadcasts; these included a 500-man battalion in the XVIII Airborne Corps sector prior to the initiation of the ground war and 1,405 soldiers on Faylaka Island late in the ground war;
- ◆ 98 percent of all EPWs having seen or possessed PSYOP leaflets and taken the action the leaflets encouraged — e.g., deserting, defecting, abandoning equipment, or surrendering;
- ◆ 58 percent of all EPWs having reported that they heard the “Voice of the Gulf” and trusted the broadcasts as truthful, and 80 percent of that number having followed the instructions or actions encouraged by the broadcasts;
- ◆ 34 percent of all EPWs having reported that they heard loudspeaker broadcasts, and over half having taken actions commensurate with the messages.

### **Overall Assessment**

Although this summary is not an exhaustive look at psychological operations support to Operations Desert Shield, Desert Storm and Urban Freedom, it does give an overall appreciation for the extensive PSYOP effort mounted in an attempt to save U.S., allied and enemy lives. Without questions, it was the largest U.S. PSYOP effort in support of combat operations in history and by all accounts the most effective — admittedly acknowledging the operations were significantly enhanced by the poor logistics support and leadership provided the Iraqi forces in Kuwait. In retrospect, Psychological Operations accomplished its mission of acting as an extraordinarily effective combat multiplier for an entire unified theater, saving tens of thousands of lives on both sides of the war.

### **Conclusions/Lessons Learned**

- ◆ Given PSYOP’s success in Panama, the Gulf, Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia, its legitimacy as a force multiplier has improved remarkably. However, there are still those who do not understand its components, its applicability or its potential in peacetime and in war. Department of Defense and interagency education remains a priority.
- ◆ A baseline of generic nontheater-specific PSYOP initiatives, approved by the CINC or senior military commander on the scene and the U.S. ambassador, should be developed to allow initiation of activities during deterrence.
- ◆ Early deployment of PSYOP specialists is critical to deterrence and initiation of psychological preparation of the battlefield. Despite the paucity of lift required to deploy PSYOP units, their high return on investment and their constituting the *only* means for shaping the battlefield during deterrence, deployment during the Gulf was considerably delayed.
- ◆ With the exception of the 64 strategic initiatives approved by USCINCCENT in August and forwarded to the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, there is little evidence of strategic PSYOP being conducted during either the deterrence or combat phases of the war. This deficiency was noted by the British Ministry of Defence. Strategic propaganda analysis

was, however, done by the 8th PSYOP Battalion's civilian Strategic Studies Detachment throughout the conflict and provided to the CINC, all components and to the U.S. Country Team.

- ◆ It is essential that the Washington-based interagency Public Diplomacy Coordinating Committee be convened routinely before and during crises, play an active role, and aggressively seek supportive initiatives from allies and friends.
- ◆ Effective, coordinated, combined and multitheater PSYOP can be conducted with significant planning, effort, patience, communications and command endorsement. Much can, and must, be done in peacetime to enhance the probability of success in a crisis or in war.
- ◆ Host nation interface/approval/participation is essential to the effective application of a PSYOP in most theaters. Literally months were wasted naively attempting to operate unilaterally.
- ◆ Liaison with the U.S. Country Team was critical to expanded conduits into Iraq and Kuwait. From the ambassador, deputy chief of mission and United States Information Service representatives to the members of the defense attaché's office, our support could not have been better.
- ◆ PSYOP contributed significantly to the success of operational and tactical deception operations.
- ◆ Joint PSYOP conducted with the Air Force and Marine Corps contributed significantly to the success of ground operations. Although understandably reluctant to commit aircraft exclusively to deliver leaflet bombs, USCENTAF provided B-52s, F-16s and C-130s to the PSYOP effort, targeting Republican Guard divisions, front line divisions in Kuwait and Iraq, towns, villages and even Baghdad before the end of the war. Coordination was constant and effective. Commander, U.S. Marine Forces, Central Command (COMUSMARCENT) became an enthusiastic advocate, committing both personnel and fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft to the PSYOP effort.
- ◆ PSYOP support to EPW operations proved invaluable. Several administrative camp support requirements such as processing station signs, camp rules and EPW handouts became the responsibility of PSYOP almost by default. PSYOP exploitation of volunteer EPWs for loudspeaker and radio broadcasts, as allowed by the Geneva Convention and cleared by the USCENTCOM staff judge advocate, was extremely helpful as well.
- ◆ The U.S. Army inventory of the leaflet artillery rounds was insufficient for multicorps offensive operations during the Gulf. The short duration of the war precluded use of most of the rounds in theater. Although the U.S. production capability for 155mm leaflet rounds has been shut down, there are still a few foreign manufacturers of 105mm rounds.
- ◆ Backpacked, vehicular and helicopter-mounted loudspeaker operations resulted in thousands of surrenders, proving their efficacy. The theater requirement, however, exhausted the U.S. supply of loudspeakers from both the active and reserve components.
- ◆ With virtually no exceptions, organic linguist skills proved insufficient to the requirements. Absent either coalition augmentation or the British language instructors, unilateral U.S. PSYOP efforts would probably have been far less effective.
- ◆ Reserve component PSYOP forces activated for the war performed superbly. The tactical requirements, however, were for loudspeaker and liaison teams, not for headquarters. The only exception to this was the need for a headquarters element from the EPW PSYOP battalion.

- ◆ There is no substitute for in-country training. REDTRAIN<sup>4</sup> exercises, long-term temporary-duty (TDY) and permanent assignments provide invaluable experience, interface with the U.S. Country Team and opportunity to use foreign language skills. These cannot be overemphasized. Having PSYOP soldiers in Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Yemen, Jordan, the Sinai and Pakistan before the Iraqi invasion proved invaluable.
- ◆ U.S. Army and U.S. Marine Corps Civil Affairs and Military Police units should have organic loudspeaker equipment to assist with EPWs, displaced civilians and crowd control.
- ◆ PSYOP saved thousands of U.S., coalition, and Iraqi lives and contributed significantly to success on the battlefield and to the early termination of hostilities.
- ◆ During consolidation, PSYOP forces were instrumental in the reestablishment of media capabilities in Kuwait and significantly enhanced post-occupation humanitarian assistance operations.

(Colonel Jeffrey B. Jones, currently serving as Chief, Special Operations Division, The Joint Staff, was the commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Psychological Operations Task Force [Airborne] during the Persian Gulf War. Lieutenant Colonel Jack N. Summe, now serving as Commander, 1<sup>st</sup> Psychological Operations Battalion [Airborne], was the 8<sup>th</sup> PSYOP Task Force executive officer.)

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<sup>4</sup> Readiness Training for Army Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) 96 and 97 series (Military Intelligence) established to create overseas in-country training; normally assigned to U.S. embassies, defense attaché offices and security assistance organizations (TDY only).