



SMALL WARS JOURNAL

smallwarsjournal.com

The Future of MISO: A Critique

Alfred H. Paddock, Jr.

In his article for the January-February 2011 issue of *Special Warfare*, "The Future of MISO," Colonel Curt Boyd, Chief of Staff for the US Army JFK Special Warfare Center and School, seeks to demonstrate the rationale for changing the PSYOP name to Military Information Support Operations (MISO), and argues for a consolidation of MISO, Information Operations (IO), and Public Affairs (PA). His piece suffers from historical inaccuracies, unfounded assertions, and questionable logic.

First, on historical inaccuracies, he states: "It is important to understand that as propaganda moves from shades of white to black, the source of the propaganda becomes less obvious, until, in black propaganda, the source is unknown." This is incorrect. The source is known in white propaganda, unknown in gray, and falsely attributed in black.

"The more sensitive shades of gray and black propaganda were handled separately by the Office of War Information, or OWI." Actually, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) conducted these operations under the organizational title of "Morale Operations (MO)," not the OWI. OWI's first director, Elmer Davis, would have been mortified by the suggestion that his organization engaged in covert propaganda.

"Meanwhile, the OWI, with its subordinate Psychological Warfare Division, focused its propaganda efforts on confusing, delegitimizing and demoralizing foreign enemy audiences." In fact, the OWI did not have a subordinate Psychological Warfare Division. Rather, the Psychological Warfare Division for the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces Europe (PWD/SHAEF), headed by Brigadier General Robert A McClure, reported to General Eisenhower--not the OWI.

Additionally, the PWD/SHAEF's operations focused on more than "confusing, delegitimizing, and demoralizing foreign audiences." Indeed, PWD/SHAEF defined psychological warfare as "the dissemination of propaganda designed to undermine the enemy's will to resist, demoralize his followers, AND sustain the morale of our supporters" [my emphasis]. While the OWI had a working relationship with PWD/SHAEF, McClure was adamant in insisting that he reported to the theater commander.

"Understanding the public's sensitivity to black propaganda, the Office of Strategic Services, or OSS, took control of these programs, which were eventually assimilated by one of the OSS's successors, the CIA." This is a particularly egregious mistake. President Roosevelt established the Coordinator of Information (COI) in July 1941, headed by William J. Donovan. In addition

to his other responsibilities, Donovan took on psychological warfare, to include creation of a Foreign Information Service (FIS), which focused primarily on white propaganda. In June, 1942, however, Roosevelt transferred FIS to the newly created OWI, and the COI became the OSS-- which was left with the responsibility for covert propaganda.

Next, on unfounded assertions, Colonel Boyd's opening statement is an attention-grabber, but it strikes a discordant note: "In 2005, then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld asked whether the term psychological operations, or PSYOP, still had utility in the information age. His point was that the information age posed many branding challenges for PSYOP that adherence to the code of conduct and the Army values simply could not overcome."

That Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld actually made this statement strains credulity, particularly the remark about Army values and adherence to the code of conduct. This writer's examination of Rumsfeld's "snowflakes" [memos] concerning PSYOP and CA (Civil Affairs) from 2004 to 2006 does not reveal anything remotely related to Colonel Boyd's reference. Additionally, the latter's source note refers only to Secretary of Defense Robert Gate's 3 December 2010 decision memo that changed the PSYOP name to MISO, and says nothing about Rumsfeld's supposed concerns.

And, consider phrases like "at the operational level, the preference is to conceal PSYOP's apparently untruthful tendencies and unscrupulous underpinnings;" or, "the term PSYOP has become inextricably tied to political 'doubletalk' akin to deception, disinformation and other lies or falsehoods." There are at least a dozen formulations of this theme liberally sprinkled throughout Boyd's piece. Clearly, anecdotal misgivings have been voiced about the PSYOP term throughout its history, but I know of no legitimate, comprehensive study that supports Colonel Boyd's assertions.

Having trotted out all of these indictments, however, the author engages in mystifying statements like this: "From Vietnam to the present, psychological operations have risen to respectability and credibility within our Army and the Department of Defense." Well, which is it? "Unscrupulous underpinnings," or "respectability and credibility?"

The corollary to unfounded assertions is Colonel Boyd's fixation on "truth." For example, he states that "MISO cannot be connected with the sinister or misleading aspects of its ancestry. MISO must have only one shade of truth--white." This holier-than-thou inference is that PSYWAR/PSYOP personnel who came before MISO produced untruthful messages. The reality is that they practiced "selective truth." BG McClure reminded his psychological warfare personnel during both World War II and Korea, "Stick to the truth, but don't be afraid to use those truths that are of most use to you."

But then the author switches gears and says, "Ninety-five percent of psychological operations have reflected factual and truthful information." Again, which is it? Sinister or misleading aspects of its ancestry, or ninety-five percent truthful information? These inconsistencies, to say the least, muddy the author's argument.

This emphasis on telling the truth flows into the author's recommendation for a "partnering" of MISO, IO, and PA: "MISO...assumes more truthful connotation and clear associations with methods of communication, as well as greater interface with IO and PA to create the intended inform-or-influence effect." But here's where the logic of his argument falls short.

Despite Boyd's attempt to demonstrate that because MISO, IO, and PA all tell the "truth," and that all address basically the same audiences, this justifies creation of an "overarching information corps." It won't wash. On a practical level, PA will not ever give up its historically independent status--nor should it. While there are some overlapping functions, the audiences that it and MISO address are different--and should be. And yes, sometimes supported commanders interchangeably use PSYOP and IO terminology, but that in itself doesn't justify creating a common information branch for the two. Coordination of functions and messages are critical, but should be accomplished by IO as the integrator.

The challenge for MISO--as it was for PSYOP--is to educate supported commanders on its unique capabilities and missions. MISO units, like PSYOP, provide a combat support function. Their principal customers are conventional and special operations force (SOF) units. And in that role they address enemy, friendly, and neutral audiences. This combat support function tends to get obscured in the author's presentation. MISO should strive to carve out a separate identity and élan that will attract good officer and enlisted personnel.

The "inform" and "strategic" functions for MISO that Colonel Boyd believes will take on new emphasis for MISO are not, in fact, new. All of them were conducted at some point in the history of PSYOP. Nonetheless, MISO's principal role should remain the support of conventional and SOF commanders. The principles of persuasive communication don't change significantly over time; what changes are technological advances in media. Currently, use of the internet and social media are at the forefront of these advances.

In sum, the credibility of Colonel Boyd's argument is undermined by inaccurate historical examples, numerous assertions without a factual basis, and a weak train of logic. He says that "there are no other DoD options" to merging MISO, PA, and IO. Of course there are: carve out a separate identity for MISO that will attract good personnel, and coordinate its operations effectively with other functions.

Alfred Paddock, Jr., was on active duty in the U.S. Army, 1957–1988, and served three combat tours in Laos and Vietnam with Special Forces. He also was the Director for Psychological Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense. In June 2009 he received the inaugural Gold Award of the MG Robert A. McClure Medal for Exemplary Service in Psychological Operations, recognizing his lifetime of achievements and outstanding service to the Psychological Operations Regiment.

This is a single article excerpt of material published in Small Wars Journal.

Published by and COPYRIGHT © 2010, Small Wars Foundation.

Permission is granted to print single copies for personal, non-commercial use. Select non-commercial use is licensed via a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA 3.0 license and per our Terms of Use. We are in this together.



No FACTUAL STATEMENT should be relied upon without further investigation on your part sufficient to satisfy you in your independent judgment that it is true.

Contact: comment@smallwarsjournal.com

Visit www.smallwarsjournal.com

Cover Price: Your call. [Support SWJ here.](#)