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# Army PSYOP in Bosnia: Capabilities and Constraints

STEVEN COLLINS

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"Words are the new weapons, satellites the new artillery. . . . Caesar had his officers; Napoleon had his armies. I have my divisions: TV, news, magazines." -- Archvillain Elliot Carver to James Bond in *Tomorrow Never Dies*

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While it is true that implementation of the Dayton Agreement in Bosnia-Herzegovina has proceeded much more peacefully than many predicted,[1] it is also true that the US peacekeeping forces have maintained vigil over this Balkan country for much longer than was anticipated or advertised. Since the US commitment to Bosnia is now acknowledged to be open-ended,[2] it is important to consider how to influence attitudes and emotions in a way that will allow the ethnic groups in this area to live with one another without a permanent foreign presence guaranteeing security. There are many methods to change attitudes and shape behavior in Bosnia--economic and military pressure to name just two. However, not all approaches are as invasive as these two elements of power. A more subtle, certainly more neglected, but potentially longer-lasting element of power is information.

The principal tool available for the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) and Stabilization Force (SFOR)[3] to influence attitudes in Bosnia has been military psychological operations (PSYOP) forces, and most of the PSYOP forces accessible to NATO are in the US Army. The contribution of these forces has been laudable, but there have been many missed opportunities as well as misunderstandings over the last three and a half years regarding what PSYOP can and cannot do.[4] This article examines the performance of PSYOP forces in Bosnia, offering recommendations on how to improve this vital part of the US contribution. With US military involvement in Bosnia planned to continue for some time--and, as this article is being written, with US and NATO forces striking targets in Serbia and Kosovo--such examination is critically important.

## Centralized vs. Decentralized Approaches

Leaders of military PSYOP are finding it difficult to meet the demands of a post-Cold War military increasingly involved in military operations other than war. Applicable US government policy and PSYOP doctrine reflect a "top-down," centrally controlled, deliberate approach. PSYOP product approval authority is normally delegated by the geographic Commander-in-Chief (CINC) to the Joint Forces Commander.[5] This arrangement is satisfactory in a quickly evolving mid- to high-intensity conflict like Desert Storm where the focus is the decisive application of maneuver and firepower, but in a peacekeeping operation, where tactical commanders need a high degree of local autonomy in order to be responsive, it creates great difficulties.

Because of the need to support tactical elements as completely as possible, the PSYOP Task Force often expends an inordinate amount of resources creating, staffing, and producing tactical PSYOP products with limited distribution instead of focusing upon electronic media, such as radio and television, which can affect the entire theater. As a consequence, even in this CNN age, PSYOP forces are too focused on the use of the traditional and less-powerful PSYOP tools of leaflets, loudspeakers, and handbills. As noted by one flag officer in Bosnia, "You [PSYOP] guys still want to play with your loudspeakers and leaflets all the time and don't realize the power of television. . . . [PSYOP] should concentrate 90 percent of its effort [in Bosnia] toward television and the rest toward newspapers and radio." [6] To remain relevant, PSYOP must demonstrably influence audiences in an increasingly sophisticated international information environment. Under the current doctrinal approach and policy constraints, it is difficult imagining PSYOP

forces becoming the "military CNN" that supported commanders expect. Without a fundamental change in the way PSYOP forces are permitted to conduct day-to-day functions, they can never co-opt the information cycle of a sophisticated adversary such as the indigenous media in Bosnia.[7]

PSYOP has a vital role to play in the effective use of military force. This is especially so as the world becomes increasingly urban and interconnected through the internet and satellite television, media which decrease the likelihood that US forces can use force against an adversary indiscriminately. PSYOP's role is also magnified as the US military finds itself more involved in protracted struggles at the lower end of the spectrum of conflict. As a US Army study once noted, "Low-intensity conflict is basically a struggle for people's minds . . . . And in such a battle, psychological operations are more important than fire power."[8]

### **A Total Army Force**

The US Army PSYOP force structure, with one active component group (roughly the size of a brigade) and two PSYOP groups in the Army Reserve, reflects an outdated Cold War strategy of force apportionment. Currently, more than half the PSYOP forces are tactical units with limited ability to plan and produce PSYOP products. Moreover, the tactical PSYOP soldiers' reliance upon loudspeakers with a range of 1,000 meters is nonsensical in an age where the effective range of direct fire weapons is nearly five kilometers and the electronic media have overwhelmed all other forms of communication.

The brains of the PSYOP Task Force is the PSYOP regional battalion.[9] In theory, soldiers in these battalions focus entirely on their assigned region and are able to deploy rapidly in times of crisis to support the geographic CINC. In reality, units are often tasked by their home station chain of command to support other theaters as well as perform the usual administrative taskings. The "area expertise, language, and cultural communicative"[10] skills considered essential for these PSYOP personnel to be effective are often watered down. Regional PSYOP soldiers often become generalists lacking an intimate knowledge of the culture and history of the region where they deploy--and even lacking adequate linguistic skills. Most important, when these troops are stationed at Fort Bragg rather than forward in the geographic CINC's area of responsibility, the intangible physical and mental links between the supported CINC and the regional PSYOP battalion are rarely forged before a crisis.

Another organizational impediment for PSYOP is the lack of rank. By doctrine, the PSYOP Task Force is on par with other Joint Task Force component commanders and should be under the direct operational control of the Joint Forces Commander.[11] However, the reality is that the limited rank structure in PSYOP often leads to the PSYOP Task Force being under the command of a lieutenant colonel, or, at best, a colonel. The institutional reluctance to treat a field grade officer on a par with a flag officer exercising land, air, or sea component command often leads to the submergence of PSYOP's extraordinary capability under a Joint Task Force staff section. Hence, the direct link that all agree must exist between a Joint Forces Commander and the PSYOP Task Force if PSYOP is to work effectively is more often than not interrupted by layers of staff bureaucracy.

These several impediments have hurt the effort in Bosnia.

### **The Bosnia Propaganda Milieu**

For most of its duration, the Bosnian War (1992-95) is best explained as a struggle for perception, with the ground war a supporting effort. Some have pointed to Bosnia, and the central role of the media, as providing a glimpse of conflicts in the future.[12] The manipulation of the media by political leaders in the region was central to igniting and exploiting latent ethnic hatred. In his important work, *Forging War*, Mark Thompson convincingly outlines the essential role media orchestration played in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia, as Yugoslavia self-destructed.[13] This role was accentuated in Bosnia. While the Bosnian War occurred in fits and starts, with long periods of desultory peace punctuated by sharp conflict, the battle of words and perceptions was continuous.[14]





**Figure 1. Bosnia-Herzegovina and the surrounding region.**

Early in the war, Serb forces made the capture of various radio and television transmitters a high-priority military objective, seizing control of as much of the local electronic media as possible.[15] The Bosnian-Serb leaders tended to direct their media message toward the people of former Yugoslavia, not internationally. Generally, they achieved the desired effect, creating fear and paranoia among Bosnian-Serbs and channeling those emotions into a virulent hatred of other ethnic groups, while establishing the conviction among Bosnian-Serbs that they were struggling for their very survival. However, because of the Serb mistrust of the international media and the desire to portray the conflict as singularly regional (thus to forestall outside intervention), the Serbs made little effort to cater to media representatives from abroad. When the Serbs did try to take their case to the world, they often handled their "spin" on events in Bosnia clumsily. This decision to try to insulate themselves from the international media was disastrous for the Serbs.

While the Bosnian-Muslim, or Bosniac, side initially had fewer tools with which to wage media war, they were just as cognizant, if not more so, of the importance of perception management.[16] Whereas the Serbs channeled their efforts toward the people of the country, the Bosniacs took great care to influence the international audience. Indeed, they judged their survival to depend on massive intervention on their behalf by the international community.[17] The Bosniacs' effort to portray themselves as hapless victims was assisted by the fact that nearly all the international correspondents assigned to Bosnia stayed in Sarajevo. Because of this concentration of journalists in a city ringed by besieging Serbs, many succumbed to the "Stockholm Syndrome"--sympathizing too much with the Sarajevans and losing a measure of journalistic objectivity, as both journalist and Sarajevan suffered through privations caused by the traumatic siege of the city.[18]

It was in this environment of extremely sophisticated perception management--where the target audience was well educated, media-savvy, and already the product of more than three years of elaborate propaganda bombardment--that the US PSYOP effort began.

### **Initial PSYOP Efforts**

The hesitant early PSYOP effort was hampered by three obstacles: the leaders' inability to do an adequate reconnaissance or local media assessment before December 1995; a lack of facilities and personnel in Sarajevo to conduct operations; and, most important, a muddled policy with uncertain enforcement. These factors would play

havoc with the ability of the PSYOP Task Force to contribute effectively to the early part of the mission in Bosnia and lead to the failure of IFOR to persuade the Bosnian-Serbs to remain in the suburbs surrounding Sarajevo.

When the Dayton Peace Agreement was initialed in November 1995, PSYOP was firmly embedded in the planning of NATO's Allied Forces Southern Command. However, owing to security concerns, until IFOR officially gained control of the area of operation from the UN forces, key PSYOP personnel were unable to enter Bosnia to conduct the necessary coordination with local media and to establish appropriate logistical connectivity. Vital local printing and other media contracts took much longer to put in place than would otherwise have been the case. It was many months before the PSYOP effort would be able to effectively tap into the ample indigenous print and electronic media structure.

Another problem was the unexpected movement of the IFOR headquarters from Zagreb, Croatia, to Sarajevo, creating an immense strain on logistical and administrative facilities. After transfer of authority from the UN to NATO, Sarajevo was teeming with IFOR soldiers and vehicles, all placing demands on an already marginal support structure. Originally limited to five personnel, the PSYOP Task Force infiltrated a few soldiers at a time into Sarajevo, escaping the watchful gaze of the facilities commandant, slowly expanded to 17, and ultimately reached nearly 100 personnel by June 1996. The associated logistical and administrative issues were immensely challenging, and PSYOP Task Force leadership often spent much mental and physical energy dealing with nonoperational issues, such as ensuring that PSYOP soldiers were not tossed from the British-run mess facility or that paper for printing PSYOP products made the list of priority cargo shipments into the Sarajevo airport. Beyond all of that, the most significant challenge the PSYOP effort faced was the confused military implementation of the Dayton Agreement.[19]

Notwithstanding these problems, PSYOP radio stations were soon in operation, a weekly PSYOP newspaper in both the Latinic alphabet (favored by Bosniacs and Bosnian-Croats) and the Cyrillic alphabet (favored by the Bosnian-Serbs) was in distribution, and tactical PSYOP soldiers, working in the areas of the three ground divisions, were busy distributing handbills and pamphlets.

The first portion of the PSYOP effort, like that of all of IFOR, was tightly focused on the first few days of the IFOR mission in Bosnia, almost to the exclusion of looking beyond the first week. Planners at IFOR were apprehensive about the transfer of authority between UN Protection Forces in Bosnia and IFOR, separating the various factions' armies, preempting hostile acts against IFOR, and ensuring the Bosnians understood that IFOR had the capability and will to enforce the Dayton Agreement. All these tasks turned out to be easier than expected. What was not expected was how contentious the transfer of five Bosnian-Serb suburbs surrounding Sarajevo from control by the Serb political entity (Republic of Srpska) to the Bosniac-dominated entity (the Federation) would be.[20]

The transfer, originally scheduled to occur all at once on 3 February 1996, was stretched out over 45 days (3 February to 19 March) for reasons of administrative necessity and security concerns. It was the hope of the Contact Group for the former Yugoslavia--the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Russia, and France, which sponsored the settlement at Dayton--to have the Serbs stay in the suburbs. Perhaps naively, the Contact Group representatives and IFOR wanted to use the occasion as a litmus test of the Dayton assumption that the former warring factions could live together again. What occurred was an abject failure. The unwillingness of IFOR to guarantee the protection of the Serbs, the exhortation by the Republic of Srpska government in Pale for the Serbs to move,[21] and the heavy-handed tactics of Bosniac police in some of the early transferred suburbs made the attempt to stem the tide of departing Serbs a doomed enterprise.[22] One can argue that the essence of the Dayton Agreement, an integrated, multi-ethnic Bosnian state, was dealt a damaging blow by this event.

PSYOP played a central role in attempting to get the Serbs to stay. Many thought the Serbs would stay if they simply knew the details of the transfer plan and were aware of the requirement under the Dayton Agreement for the rights of all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, to be safeguarded. The failure to convince the Serbs to remain was blamed by some on "ineffective PSYOP." However, the hollowness of the policy and its hesitant military implementation was the true culprit. Indeed, the handbills produced by the PSYOP Task Force outlining the transfer process were designed to encourage Bosnian-Serbs to stay. The Serbs used the information to establish a no-later-than date when they should depart the suburbs and travel to Republic of Srpska territory.

It was clearly too soon to create and sustain confidence in the more idealistic aspects of the Dayton Agreement. No decent interval had elapsed to heal the wounds caused by the violence of a long war and the polarization prompted by media campaigns. Neither ethnic leadership, Bosniac or Serb, viewed keeping the Serbs in the Sarajevo suburbs to be in their interest. The decision to transfer the territory so quickly after the signing of the Dayton Agreement, coupled with the unwillingness of IFOR to guarantee the protection of the Serbs, led to their flight. PSYOP's ineffectiveness in stemming the flow of the Serbs demonstrates that PSYOP is not a panacea and cannot repair inadequate policy.[23] People will not accept a policy, no matter how well advertised, unless it is credible in their minds and backed by a firm commitment. Additionally, PSYOP is often a process that may take months if not years. To have expected the PSYOP Task Force to make any dent in the mistrust between Bosniacs and Serbs by February 1996 was optimistic in the extreme.

## **Evolution of Bosnian Policy**

By April 1996, NATO's Bosnian policy and IFOR's implementation began to shift, and so did the PSYOP effort. Tasks allocated to IFOR that would have been termed "mission creep" a few months earlier were now accepted as part of "mission evolution." Many of the military-related tasks outlined in the Dayton Agreement had been accomplished, but the civilian task timelines were dangerously behind.[24] NATO Secretary General Javier Solana and NATO military commander General George Joulwan directed in their D+120 (18 April 1996) instructions that IFOR was to shift gears and assist the civilian agencies more vigorously--particularly the UN Office of the High Representative, the lead civilian organization in Bosnia, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the agency responsible for overseeing the elections in Bosnia.[25]

Accordingly, the PSYOP Task Force developed hundreds of electronic and print media products to support civilian organizations in Bosnia. For example, PSYOP provided significant assistance to the European Union in supporting the June 1996 municipal elections in Mostar, a critically important city divided between Bosniacs and Bosnian-Croats in southwest Bosnia. In the summer of 1996, PSYOP troops were in the forefront of efforts to calm violent Serb crowds in two incidents outside the Bosnian-Serb army headquarters near Han Pijesak in eastern Bosnia and in helping to destroy tons of explosives confiscated from the Serbs in an operation called Volcano. PSYOP forces were instrumental in start-up assistance for the US State Department-sponsored Open Broadcast Network, an alternative daily television network for the people of Bosnia.[26] OSCE's chief in Bosnia, Ambassador Robert Frowick, credited IFOR, including PSYOP (then known as the IFOR Information Campaign), with helping to ensure successful national elections in 1996.[27] Early polls in Bosnia sponsored by the US Information Agency indicated that the PSYOP message was getting out;[28] the Russians also were taking note of the US PSYOP effort and gave it high marks.[29]

The announcement that the NATO mission in Bosnia would continue beyond the original December 1996 deadline did not occur until after the US presidential election in November 1996. As a result, the official planning at the Heidelberg headquarters of NATO's Land Forces Central Europe (LANDCENT), the successor to Allied Forces Southern Europe for the Bosnia mission, had presupposed withdrawal of all IFOR troops. This led to difficult questions from the press in Sarajevo, who asked why the controlling headquarters would be changed merely to execute a withdrawal. Even the words "follow-on force" were *verboten* at LANDCENT headquarters and in Sarajevo. Some planning for a continuation of the Bosnia mission after December 1996 was done, but it was limited. Perhaps no part of IFOR suffered more under these policy restrictions than the PSYOP effort, which of course had to parrot the party line throughout Bosnia that IFOR would soon withdraw and the people of the region would have to fend for themselves. It was a scenario the people of Bosnia did not believe, and it ultimately proved to be false. The credibility of the PSYOP effort and IFOR/SFOR was harmed as a result.

## **PSYOP's Lack of Responsiveness to Tactical Commanders**

Another significant challenge faced by PSYOP in Bosnia was a misperception regarding PSYOP's capabilities, especially at the tactical level. PSYOP is a powerful tool. However, because of the constraints of policy and doctrine outlined earlier, PSYOP is less flexible and responsive at the tactical level. That frustrates tactical commanders, and it did those in Bosnia.

Ground tactical control of Bosnia is divided into three multinational zones. The United States, the United Kingdom,

and France each provide the command and control of a multinational division. Each division has handled PSYOP differently, yet a common refrain has been the frustration with PSYOP's lack of responsiveness and flexibility at the tactical level.

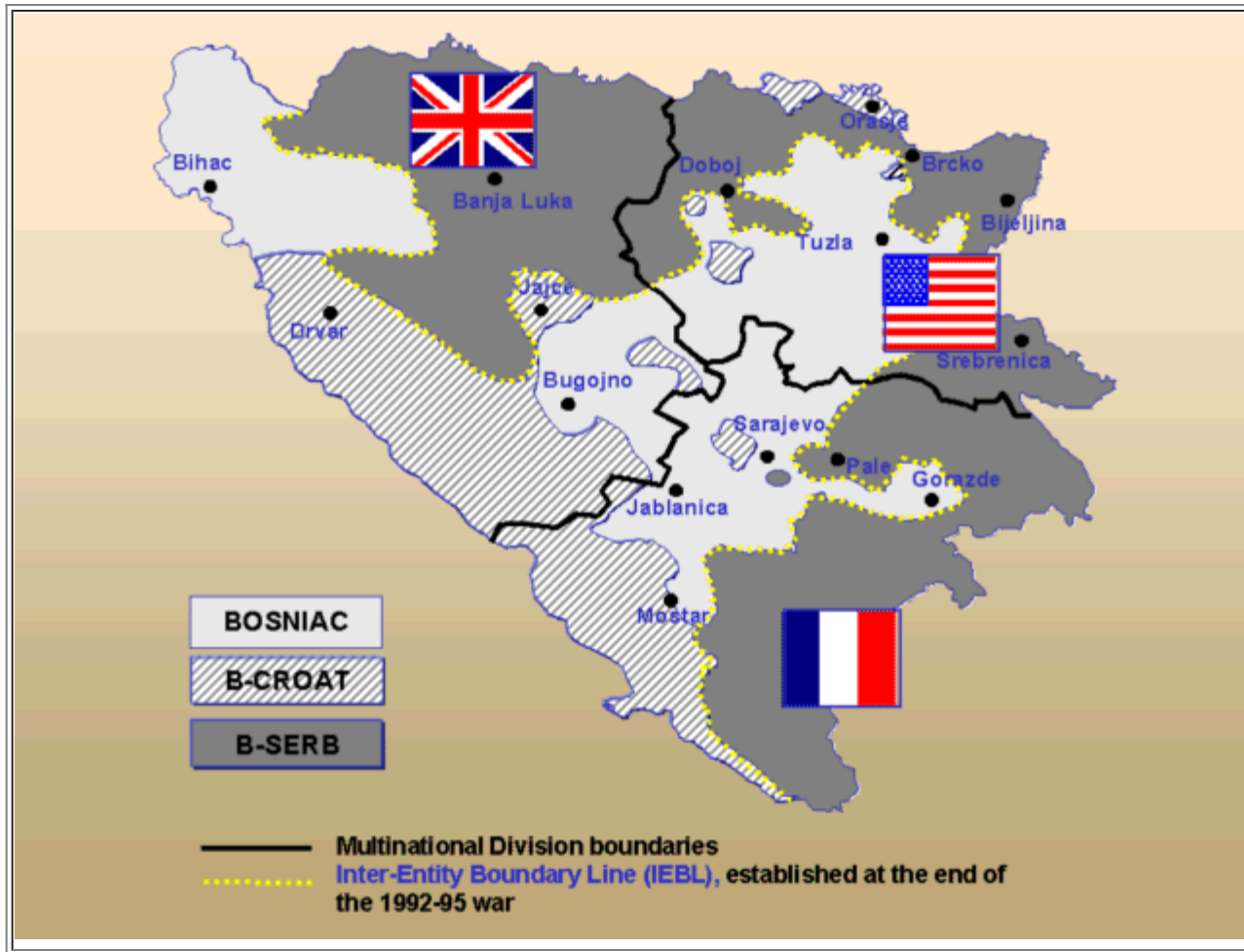


Figure 2. Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Multinational Division boundaries.

Multinational Division Southeast, under the control of the French, originally kept PSYOP at arm's length. The French reluctance to incorporate PSYOP into their plans was largely a legacy of their remembrance of French PSYOP's dubious role in the war in Algeria in the late 1950s and early 1960s and participation in the attempted coup against Charles de Gaulle in 1961.[30] The French also seemed to mistrust the motives of the US PSYOP personnel, who dominated the early effort in Bosnia. Over time, the French began to accept increased US PSYOP support, including a PSYOP radio station in Mostar and a small group of US tactical PSYOP soldiers who disseminated materials. The French frustration with the Byzantine nature of the US/NATO PSYOP product approval process contributed to their desire to develop their own capability in order to influence the PSYOP context more directly. This led to the establishment of a French-run PSYOP radio station and creation of a French/Spanish/German PSYOP print product development capability in Mostar, all with virtually no oversight from the PSYOP Task Force headquarters in Sarajevo.

By contrast, in the Multinational Division Southwest area, controlled by the United Kingdom, the importance of PSYOP was recognized early. The UK military, drawing upon its extensive experience in Northern Ireland as well as its intimate familiarity with the region as part of the UN Protection Force, knew the critical importance of the battle for Bosnian "hearts and minds." Thus they requested deployment of US tactical PSYOP soldiers and radio broadcast equipment. However, as with the French-led division, dissatisfaction with slow product support and a desire to control its own product development processes led the UK to field its own PSYOP element at its headquarters in Banja Luka. This element continued to disseminate some products made by the PSYOP Task Force headquarters in Sarajevo, but the emphasis in the region was centered on its own PSYOP magazine, handbills, and other materials produced in Banja Luka. Once again, oversight from Sarajevo was limited.

Meanwhile, in the US-led Multinational Division North, US PSYOP support, as one would expect, was robust from the beginning. The dominant mentality in this sector was not to change hearts and minds, however, but to protect the US force, almost to the exclusion of any other facet of mission accomplishment. Division Southwest, with the fewest soldiers of any division in Bosnia, vigorously patrolled its area from 20 December 1995 and immediately set a new tone to distinguish IFOR from the UN Protection Force. The US forces, by contrast, arguably operating in the least hostile area initially, but deploying the most firepower, hunkered down in their bases and moved tentatively about the countryside.[31] Some at IFOR headquarters attributed several incidents with the local populace in the US sector to the overly aggressive posture of the forces. Over time, the command group in Division North recognized the importance of PSYOP, and at its height the PSYOP effort included more than 40 tactical PSYOP soldiers, radio transmitters in both Tuzla and Brcko, a radio studio in Brcko built by Division North for live broadcasts, and a large PSYOP planning staff in Tuzla with a lieutenant colonel in charge.[32]

Yet this extraordinary level of support did not satisfy a succession of Division North commanders. The issue causing the most consternation was, and still is, the requirement in US/NATO policy and doctrine for the centralized planning and decentralized execution of PSYOP.[33] Eventually, personnel from the newly formed Land Information Warfare Activity (LIWA) were summoned to assist in planning and coordinating the overall information operations effort in the US-led area. Although LIWA's efforts were welcome, it was clear that LIWA personnel understood little about the policy implications of developing PSYOP objectives and themes *at the division level*. [34] Additionally, LIWA staff planners were nearly always senior in rank to the top PSYOP officer at the division headquarters. Therefore, even though LIWA's charter was to act as a coordinating conduit, in Division North it often became the de facto director of the PSYOP effort. Eventually the Division North PSYOP effort became as independent as the ones in the French and UK sectors. For example, in October 1997, PSYOP leaflets were unilaterally developed, produced, and distributed by helicopter in the US sector.[35]

Because of the nature of the mission and the considerable freedom exercised by division commanders in Bosnia, PSYOP was stretched to the breaking point at the tactical level. Division commanders knew the PSYOP forces were prime contributors to their success and strove to control PSYOP product development, production, and dissemination in their areas of responsibility. Even though both US and NATO PSYOP doctrine and policy place constraints on this type of decentralized action, as time passed each division formed its own PSYOP capability and began to execute its own PSYOP plan, often with little if any oversight by the PSYOP Task Force in Sarajevo.

### **PSYOP's Access to Senior Commanders**

Until October 1996, command and control of theater-level PSYOP in Bosnia was handled jointly by the IFOR and the Allied Command Europe (ACE) Rapid Reaction Corps command groups. US Navy Admiral Leighton Smith (IFOR Commander until July 1996) delegated much of the day-to-day PSYOP approval authority to his Land Component Commander, UK Lieutenant General Sir Michael Walker. Walker became the approving authority for all tactical PSYOP products (loudspeaker messages, handbills, etc.). Those operational PSYOP products disseminated simultaneously throughout the entire country (PSYOP newspaper, radio, and television) were approved first by the ACE Rapid Reaction Corps headquarters and then by the IFOR command group (with final approval by the IFOR Chief of Staff, US Lieutenant General William Carter).

Lieutenant General Walker was a godsend for the early PSYOP campaign. Articulate, accessible, and fully cognizant of the importance of PSYOP in Bosnia, he provided very skilled direction.[36] He placed the coordination of the public affairs and PSYOP efforts in the hands of his corps field artillery commander, who was able to provide the needed coordination between all the information operation assets while avoiding the temptation to exert command and control.

Nearly every morning Walker chaired an Information Coordination Group meeting with the deputy commander, his information operations coordinator, a G3 (operations) representative, a G2 (intelligence) representative, the public affairs officer, a civil affairs representative, the legal advisor, the political advisor, and a PSYOP representative. In these 15- to 20-minute meetings, the participants discussed short-term information operations actions (primarily PSYOP and public affairs), and Walker issued guidance on what "spin" to use. In addition, a weekly "perception group" meeting (led by the ACE Rapid Reaction Corps) and a Joint Information Coordination Committee meeting (led by IFOR) were held to coordinate long-term information operations planning.



The transition of the IFOR mission to the LANDCENT in late 1996 drastically changed the fashion in which PSYOP was perceived and used at the theater level. In contrast to officers at both Allied Forces Southern Europe and ACE Rapid Reaction Corps headquarters who had studied the Bosnian situation for years in preparation for contingency missions, LANDCENT personnel were not nearly as familiar with the area of operation. Additionally, the importance of PSYOP was not evident in their preparations; LANDCENT did not even have an assigned PSYOP staff member while planning its transition into the Bosnia mission.

In an attempt to streamline the chain of command, LANDCENT eliminated the role of the land component headquarters, previously filled by the ACE Rapid Reaction Corps under IFOR. The commander of the successor to IFOR, NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR), became both the Combined/Joint Forces Commander and Land Component Commander, but gave the day-to-day task of running the land operations to a Deputy Chief-of-Staff. This inhibited the PSYOP effort. First, the new arrangement gave even more autonomy to the division commanders. The ability to centrally plan and coordinate PSYOP activities in Bosnia, difficult to begin with, was now nearly impossible. The SFOR Commander was busy with theater-wide affairs, and the Deputy Chief-of-Staff for Land Operations did not have direct command and control of the divisions.

Second, few in a position of command authority at SFOR headquarters took the time to conduct conclusive information operations meetings every day as had Lieutenant General Walker.[37] The PSYOP Task Force, now working largely as a staff section under the guidance of the operations directorate of SFOR, was clearly diminished in importance. Under IFOR, a PSYOP representative met with the Land Component Commander daily; under SFOR, the PSYOP Task Force commander rarely met with the Deputy Chief-of-Staff for Land Operations, much less the SFOR Commander.

Third, perhaps because of LANDCENT's unfamiliarity with PSYOP and the area of operations, approval bottlenecks for PSYOP products were created, making timeliness of PSYOP products even more problematic. A downward spiral was now in place. Because of a seeming mistrust of PSYOP, LANDCENT placed it under more restrictions, making PSYOP even less responsive, which served to deepen the mistrust.

This spiral reached its inevitable nadir in the summer of 1997. During an internal political power struggle in Republic of Srpska, SFOR attempted to capture two secretly indicted Bosnian-Serb war criminals near Prijedor on 10 July 1997. Tragically, the PSYOP Task Force, buried in the operations section and out of earshot of the SFOR command group, was not brought into the planning process until the last minute. Consequently, the PSYOP Task Force found itself constantly responding to disinformation coming from the Republic of Srpska radio and television outlets regarding both the war criminal operation and the internal power struggle. The PSYOP Task Force was never able to reverse the negative spin created by the Bosnian-Serb media. For LANDCENT, already unfamiliar with and suspicious of PSYOP, the events of the summer of 1997 caused a serious crisis of confidence in the PSYOP Task Force.[38] As a result, attempts were made to bolster PSYOP capabilities at the theater level. Still, the most critical issue--for the PSYOP Task Force commander to have regular access to the SFOR Commander--was neglected.

To be fair, some lessons were learned from the events of the summer, and the PSYOP Task Force was an early and critical participant in another SFOR operation on 18 December 1997 to capture two indicted Bosnian-Croats. This time SFOR was prepared, making sure its version regarding the capture was told first and often, preempting the Bosnian-Croat media spinmeisters.[39] Still, the relegation of PSYOP to that of a subordinate staff component within the operations directorate ensured that the SFOR Commander's messages to the Bosnian people would usually be untimely, filtered, and diluted by various intermediaries in the SFOR headquarters.

## **Recommendations**

From its low point in the summer of 1997, the PSYOP Task Force in Bosnia managed to regain some credibility, even receiving favorable press attention.[40] To increase its competitiveness with local media and reduce military manpower requirements, the PSYOP Task Force contracted for the services of a popular and respected Bosnian political cartoonist and began to feature the footage of local videographers in its news programs.[41]

During 1998 and the first few months of 1999, the PSYOP effort in Bosnia followed a routine of business as usual,

punctuated by the occasional surge caused either by an election, capture of an indicted war criminal, or other spectacular event. The PSYOP Task Force had its first non-US commander when a *Bundeswehr* officer commanded the PSYOP Task Force from July 1998 until February 1999. While SFOR's command structure has changed, the PSYOP Task Force is still several layers removed from the SFOR Commander; it is now part of a staff section under control of the assistant chief of staff for civilian operations. Unfettered access to the SFOR Commander remains as elusive as ever.

It is clear that much work needs to be done to make PSYOP more effective. The US Army and NATO will be in Bosnia at least several more years. Many will judge PSYOP's future role in the military by its Bosnian performance. Consequently, while some in the PSYOP community may want to get rid of the Bosnian bugbear as quickly as possible, it is better to embrace the Bosnian challenge and test whether it is truly possible for PSYOP to operate effectively in the information age. Lessons learned thus far from the PSYOP experience in Bosnia include the following.[42]

- . The PSYOP Task Force commander *must* have full and continual access to the Joint Task Force command group. Much as the ACE Rapid Reaction Corps commander did in Bosnia, a key member of the SFOR command group, certainly no lower than chief of staff and preferably the commander, should chair daily meetings to coordinate the efforts of all the information operations assets and determine that day's media spin on events.

- . Commanders at all levels should be thoroughly educated regarding the media environment in prospective areas of operation. The capabilities (and constraints) of PSYOP should be a featured course segment at senior service colleges and in flag officer preparation courses. De-mystify PSYOP, making clear it is neither a black art, nor, as confirmed in the Serb suburbs of Sarajevo, a savior for an ill-conceived mission. Clearly delineate what is within the tactical unit's domain to do in terms of PSYOP products and dissemination. Loosen PSYOP policy and doctrine when operating in low-intensity conflicts, giving tactical commanders the latitude to conduct their own PSYOP plan, within given constraints. Theater-level PSYOP must remain the prerogative of the Joint Forces Commander or geographic CINC.

- . We should consider assigning regional PSYOP battalions to the standing forces of the geographic CINCs and position them accordingly--away from Fort Bragg. Beef up the PSYOP staff planning sections at all levels and contemplate the creation of a PSYOP advisor position (perhaps a civilian) on the geographic CINC's special staff.

- . The rank structure in PSYOP forces should be elevated to avoid the tendency to treat PSYOP Task Force commanders, who are by joint and Army doctrine component commanders, as staff officers. Focus the resources and energies of existing PSYOP forces on electronic media, particularly television. Allow for the early entry of PSYOP planners into the theater of operations. Consider these forces "theater enablers" and ensure their access to the local and military support structures so they can contribute to the mission as quickly and effectively as possible.

While the Bosnian operation will continue for some time, the sooner the PSYOP effort can assist in moderating ingrained hyper-nationalistic attitudes in the country, the sooner NATO and the United States will achieve the desired end state and can safely scale down their commitments without fear of a new war starting. The United States, NATO, and SFOR need to make a PSYOP investment in Bosnia in terms of both the money and the importance it is allocated--that means not just equipment upgrades but more time with and greater access to the SFOR Commander. The PSYOP effort in Bosnia must be capable of playing at a major-league level in order to be successful, but it needs help to get there. When viewed against the totality of the international effort in Bosnia, the increased contribution required to bolster the PSYOP effort would be small indeed.

If we look beyond Bosnia and the media environment in the former Yugoslavia, it is almost a certainty the US military can expect to continue to operate in environments where sophisticated indigenous media, with robust capabilities, will attempt to achieve information dominance to the detriment of US mission accomplishment. If the US military PSYOP force is unable to operate in this environment and effectively neutralize the negative effects of the local media, its methods and continued existence should be questioned. Bosnia is the testing ground to see if US PSYOP can operate capably in a 21st-century media environment. For the people of Bosnia, and for the US military, a great deal hangs in

the balance.

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## NOTES

1. For instance, see Lieutenant Colonel John E. Sray, "Selling the Bosnian Myth to America: Buyer Beware" (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: US Army Foreign Military Studies Office, October 1995).
2. Secretary of State Madeline Albright noted in a speech before the US Institute of Peace on 4 February 1999 regarding potential NATO/US intervention in Kosovo: "I think that we learned a very important lesson out of Bosnia. That is that setting deadlines . . . is often not productive. Therefore, what we want to do here is to be more concerned about benchmarks--whether certain benchmarks have been achieved."
3. Implementation Force was the term used until 20 December 1996. Since then the operative term has been Stabilization Force.
4. This article focuses on operational PSYOP conducted at the Joint Task Force (IFOR/SFOR headquarters) level. The tactical PSYOP viewpoint is examined in a chapter by Mark R. Jacobson, "Tactical PSYOP Support to Task Force Eagle," in *Lessons from Bosnia: The IFOR Experience*, ed. Larry Wentz (Washington: National Defense Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 189-224.
5. CJCSI 3110.05A, *Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction: Joint Psychological Operations Supplement to CJCSI 3110.01B, Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan FY 1996* (unclassified paragraph), 1 July 1997, p. B-2. Delegation of PSYOP product approval authority beyond the Joint Forces Commander requires approval by the Secretary of Defense.
6. Conversation with the author, SFOR headquarters, Ilidza, Bosnia, 20 December 1997.
7. "US forces must be capable of responding to media demands for instantaneous information [which] suggests the need for greater information dominance and for some thought about how modern, real-time news reporting can be used to US advantage in future military operations." As quoted by Frank J. Stech, "Winning the CNN Wars," in *Parameters*, 24 (Autumn 1994), 43.
8. As quoted by Chris Hables Gray in *Postmodern War: The New Politics of Conflict* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1997), p. 35.
9. There is currently one regional PSYOP battalion allocated for each of the following commands: US Pacific Command, US Central Command, US European Command, and US Southern Command. The US Pacific Command regional PSYOP battalion is currently task-organized for its mission area from other assets but should achieve provisional status shortly.
10. US Army, *Commissioned Officer Development and Career Management*, DA PAM 600-3 (Washington: GPO, 8 June 1995), p. 166.
11. See US Department of Defense, *Doctrine for Joint Psychological Operations*, Joint Pub. 3-53 (Washington: GPO, 10 July 1996), p. III-5.
12. This argument is well made in Larry Wentz, *Peace Operations and the Implications for Coalition Information Operations: The IFOR Experience* (Washington: National Defense Univ. Press, forthcoming).
13. Mark Thompson, *Forging War: The Media in Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Avon, Eng.: The Bath Press, 1994).
14. The purpose of this article is not to evaluate the moral correctness of any side in the war but rather to analyze the attempt to manipulate the perception of the conflict, both regionally and internationally. I limit my analysis here, in the

interest of space, to a comparison of Serb and Muslim media efforts, and do not analyze the admittedly significant Croatian or Bosnian-Croat attempts to manipulate the media.

15. Thompson, pp. 207-09.

16. The term "Bosniac" is preferred by many over Bosnian-Muslim because it is more secular, like Croat or Serb. The term Bosniac can itself be seen as a perception management gambit. The term helped portray the Bosnian-Muslim cause as nonreligious and made international support more palatable to those who feared Bosniac leader Alija Izetbegovic might create a "European Tehran." Ed Vulliamy, *Seasons in Hell: Understanding Bosnia's War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), writes that as many as 90,000 Serbs stayed behind in Sarajevo initially (p. 80), but by the summer of 1993 most Serbs and Croats departed the city because of increasing fear of attacks by Muslims (p. 314).

17. Similarly, it was also in the Bosniac interest to discredit the UN Protection Force by publicizing or contriving examples of incompetence or partiality toward the Serbs. See Lewis MacKenzie, *Peacekeeper: The Road to Sarajevo* (Vancouver, Canada: Douglas & McIntyre, 1993).

18. See Peter Brock, "Dateline Yugoslavia: The Partisan Press," *Foreign Policy*, 93 (Winter 1993-94), 152-72; and Sray. Reporter Roy Gutman admitted that he "consciously tried to move policy" and push the world toward intervention against the Serbs in Bosnia. Tom Gjelten (US National Public Radio) believed the reporters in Bosnia were "objective" but opposed the belief of some that the coverage had to be "neutral," not taking sides or assigning blame. Gutman's and Gjelten's views are in Warren P. Strobel, *Late-Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media's Influence on Peace Operations* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1997), p. 100.

19. The various interpretations of IFOR's role in Bosnia are in Richard Holbrooke's, *To End a War* (New York: Random House, 1998), pp. 337-40.

20. These two semi-autonomous "Entities" constitute the country of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

21. See "Asking the Serbs to Stay," in *Time Daily Bosnia News Archive*, 16 January 1996, on-line at <http://cgi.pathfinder.com/time/daily/bosnia/archive/960116.html>; and "Disturbing the Dead," *ibid.*, 11 January 1996, <http://cgi.pathfinder.com/time/daily/bsonia/archive/960111.html>.

22. Five suburbs were transferred: Vogosca, Ilijas, Hadzici, Ilidza, and Grbavica. See the article by Kevin F. McCarroll and Donald R. Zoufal, "Transition of the Sarajevo Suburbs," *Joint Force Quarterly* (Summer 1997), pp. 50-53, for a view of the effect of US civil affairs during the transfer process. An upcoming work by Gordon Bardos will outline the probability of collusion between the Bosniac and Serb authorities to ensure the flight of the Serbs from the Sarajevo suburbs.

23. This point is well made by Jeffrey B. Jones, "The Third Wave and the Fourth Dimension," in *Roles and Missions of SOF in the Aftermath of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Shultz, Jr., et al. (Tampa: USSOCOM, 1995), p. 230: "There must be an overarching, realistic, and fully integrated political, economic/humanitarian, military *and informational* strategy, decided and articulated *before* any peace operation. . . . Overreliance on the military, the virtual absence of a comprehensive political and economic strategy . . . set the stage for failure."

24. Annex 1-A details the military implementation of the Dayton Agreement, more properly referred as the General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP). There are 11 annexes altogether. The GFAP is available at <http://www.ohr.int/gfa/gfa-home.htm>.

25. Transcript from their conference on 22 April 1996 is at [gopher://marvin.nc3a.nato.int:70/00/yugo/sac2204.96](http://gopher://marvin.nc3a.nato.int:70/00/yugo/sac2204.96).

26. PSYOP forces sponsored the Open Broadcast Network's survey team, and built and manned in late summer 1996 the affiliate in Banja Luka, at that time the only link of this network in the Republic of Srpska.

27. Conversation with the author, 10 September 1996.

28. US Information Agency, *Public Opinion in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Vol. II (Washington: USIA, Spring 1996). USIA contracted local firms to conduct polls in March 1996 among all three major ethnic groups. The polls indicated that 43 percent of all Bosnian-Muslims, 25 percent of all Bosnian-Croats, and 41 percent of all Bosnian-Serbs had heard Radio IFOR (PSYOP) radio spots on either indigenous or IFOR Radio transmitters. Exposure to the IFOR PSYOP newspaper, *Herald of Peace*, was less encouraging, with percentages of exposure at 14, 11, and 18 respectively. However, these figures must be compared in relative terms. To reach only a small percentage of the Bosnian people, due to the local media saturation, was to be expected. Even the most popular Bosnian newspaper and radio outlets reach only a fraction of the total potential audience because of the vigorous competition.
29. Translated from Russian: "Peace [in Bosnia] is being managed `largely thanks to the efforts of the PSYOP specialists.'" Timothy L. Thomas, "Russian Lessons Learned in Bosnia," *Military Review*, 76 (September-October 1996), 42.
30. The difference in the role of military PSYOP as perceived by the United States and France is outlined in "L'armée française gagnée par l'action psychologique," *Le Monde*, 22 April 1998.
31. Mandatory four-vehicle convoys with crew-served weapons and soldiers in full battle gear at all times made it difficult for the PSYOP soldiers to do their job. The implicit message sent to the people of Bosnia was "this area is not safe," while publicly the message was supposed to be "this place is safe." This led Gideon Rose to note, "The Bosnia deployment [for the Americans] resembles nothing more than the moon landings, with the principal objective being to send men far away and bring them back safely." Gideon Rose, "The Exit Strategy Delusion," *Foreign Affairs*, 77 (January-February 1998), 66.
32. Normally a major is the highest ranking PSYOP officer in a division.
33. See Joint Pub. 3-53, pp. vi-vii; also CJCSI 3110.05A, *Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction*, p. B-2. Delegation of PSYOP product approval authority beyond the Joint Force Commander requires approval by the Secretary of Defense.
34. See article by Stephen W. Shanahan and Garry J. Beavers, "Information Operations in Bosnia," *Military Review*, 77 (November-December 1997), 53-62. PSYOP objectives and themes are approved by the National Command Authorities and can be amended only at that level.
35. See discussion at SFOR press conference, 16 October 1997, at: <http://www.nato.int/ifor/landcent/t971016a.htm>
36. In November 1995, at Exercise ARCADE Fusion, Walker was prescient when he made it clear that PSYOP and public affairs were to be main players in his land campaign in Bosnia. He invited veteran BBC reporter Kate Adie, who had covered Bosnia extensively, to discuss how the BBC covered the conflict and the dynamics of the news organization's relationship with UNPROFOR. A US Battle Command Training Program team was present, and the chief of the team, General John Lindsay, also made it clear in his comments he believed PSYOP had to be a main player in the IFOR/ARRC effort.
37. See Pascale Combelles Siegel, *Target Bosnia: Integrating Information Activities in Peace Operations. NATO-Led Operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, December 1995-1997* (Washington: National Defense Univ., 1998), pp. 131-33, 139.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 139-40.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
40. See Philip Smucker, "NATO Turns-up Psyops Heat to Melt Bosnia's War's Chill," in *Washington Times*, 13 April 1998, p. 11.
41. The cartoonist is Hasan Fazlic. A collection of his work is in *Bosnien Allein auf der Welt* (Wuppertal, Germany: Kinderbuchverlag BAMBI, 1993).

42. For similar and other recommendations, see Siegel, pp. 166-77.

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