

Modern Russian Psychological Operations (PSYOPS)

PhD Peter A Mattsson

National Defence University, Finland

peter.mattsson@fhs.se

This research paper has its main focus on the definitions and functions of the concept Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) in the Russian Armed Forces. Its different definitions and applications within a military context are discussed. The most important conclusion of this paper is the synergistic effects PSYOPS have when it is combined with other tools of national and military power. In the end of this paper is a discussion of methods and means to defend against Russian PSYOPS.

Often PSYOPS and Information Operations (INFOOPS) is in symbiosis. In some theoretical literature it is stated that PSYOPS has three distinctive characteristics in its modification of idea generating, attitudes and behavior. In the Russian Armed Forces PSYOPS have both internal as well as external functions. Information and psychological warfare in Russia includes measures aimed to undermining the morale of the population and the armed forces, as well as to protect the own population and forces. Patriotism among the Russian population and its armed forces is of highest importance. These tasks are stated in the new Russian military doctrine, especially important as a method to protect the younger population.

Internal PSYOPS is used to demoralize and disorganize the adversaries forces and as to protect own forces. External PSYOPS is used in peacetime and periods of war. In peacetime it is intentional activities of any nation or non-national organization that is the objective of PSYOPS. In period of conflict or war the aim of PSYOPS is to change the attitudes of the adversary, allies or neutral populations, as well as higher command and leadership of the military forces or the political leadership on national and regional level. The methods of PSYOPS includes: agitation, propaganda and other information actions that influence the mind, emotions, reasoning, own belief system, and of most importance the behavior of the target population. In current operations the Russian Armed forces has focused much on the individual level of decisions makers, both civilian and military, and important opinion leaders. Propaganda is an efficient instrument of mass psychology. White propaganda is based on reliable sources, grey is based on unknown reliable or just unknown sources and black is intentionally manipulated sources.

The most complex influence operation is a combination of electronic war, electronic warfare [computer network operations, CNO], and PSYOPS. As we have seen in modern Russian operations in the Five Days War in Caucasus 2008 and the Ukrainian Conflict 2014-2015 the operations were supported by PSYOPS and resulted in operational synergy and multiple effects on all command levels [Tactical, Operational, and Strategic]. The main task of PSYOPS has been political and military deceptions in order to influence important individuals and populations, and to disrupt normal processes and functions, as well as to destabilize perceptions and belief systems among the civilian population and the military forces.

The principles of the modern Russian INFOOPS/PSYOPS used in Ukraine could be described as:

- 1) Facilitate the degradation of the adversaries' defense capability, undermining the readiness and capabilities of the adversaries' forces, weakening the trust of military and civilian leadership, destabilize the armed forces personnel and its moral, and enhance malfunctions in the rear echelons of the armed forces.
- 2) Organize controlled chaos and crises by discrediting the political leadership, undermining state authorities and functions, and finally initiate disorder, panic and armed struggle among population.
- 3) Concealment of own purpose of conflict and war to weaken critical elements of own population and create a perception of threat and danger directed to Russia.

In the end of this paper the relevance to methods and means to defend against Russian PSYOPS is discussed.