Article:

Pentagon Ju-Jitsu: reshaping in the field of propaganda

Introduction

Events since 9/11 coincided with an explosion of the internet and accelerated forces of globalisation, which brought accompanying pressures and opportunities[1] alike - for citizens, governments, private corporations, groups and movements with violent or peaceful intent, whistleblowers and other important actors. Within this changing landscape cultural struggles occurred between agents within the field of propaganda - between those seeking to define how propaganda wars of the future would be fought alongside changes in coercive elements of military action, strategies for social control and stability arrangements. For counter-terrorism, US government planners at the start of the period began to argue existing propaganda doctrine and laws were out-dated; defined by their emergence in an old-media system, others sought to find a way to reassert the status quo (Briant, 2015). This analysis draws on Bourdieu to aid analysis; even though the propagandists' field is embedded in a dominant position within the field of power, limiting its autonomy, it remains a field 'marked by struggles that constantly modify …internal power balances' (Hilgers & Manghez, 2015: 11).

One important change concerned the traditional distinctions between propaganda for foreign audiences - Public Diplomacy and Psychological Operations (PSYOP) - and propaganda for the US public and international media - Public Affairs (PA). Traditional

---

[1]. Including media convergence, online leaks and cyber attacks, hyper-transparency and mass-surveillance

rules were seen as *obstructing* effective propaganda at home and abroad. Practices

were ultimately coordinated to ensure messages would not contradict, and to

maintain strategic control of messages for different audiences, particularly online. But

'Strategic communication' and the 'merging' of PSYOP and PA raised concern in

academia and beyond (eg. Gardiner, 2003; Miller, January 2004; Snow and Taylor,

2006; Briant, 2015). Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) in the Pentagon saw in this threats to

their credibility and sought to retain control of the process. This article engages in

deep exploration of this struggle within the field drawing on Bourdieu's theoretical

model of cultural production. It shows how PSYOP and Information Operations (IO)

personnel[2] struggled with Public Affairs over the adaptation of systems operating in

concert and how change occurred in the propagandists' 'field'.

The US traditionally divided propaganda capabilities according to audience,

sensitivity of operation, and extent of persuasion, with external propaganda permitting

more aggressive persuasion (particularly where directed toward enemies), and belief

in the 'fourth estate' allowing some scope for media debate domestically. One reason

given is transparency and ensuring domestically (and between allies) that propaganda

remains 'uncontaminated' by messages intended for the enemy. Traditionally then,

military PSYOP - for foreign and enemy audiences was kept distinct from PA and Public

---

[2] Information Operations (IO) is the integrated employment of different capabilities including PSYOP,

Electronic Warfare, Computer Network Operations, Military Deception and Operational Security. Some

personnel interviewed within this article are IO personnel rather than just PSYOP, however, as they are

discussing PSYOP, and where possible to avoid confusion of the reader I preference the label 'PSYOP' in

analysis, but leave 'IO' in direct quotes, titles and where the designation is important.

Diplomacy (for foreign audiences).[3] Another, *operational,* reason underpinned

targeting: messages not tailored for a specific audience are widely considered less

effective. The transformation in global media and global conflict presented *operational*

reasons compelling practitioners to change audience targeting norms, putting these in

tension with 'ethical' justifications often publicly emphasised.

This article focuses on the struggles to overcome what were seen as 'out-dated'

systems: pressing through internet policy to coordinate different online propaganda

forms and overcome discordance in messaging. It presents new evidence of how

concerns raised by PA were fought by PSYOP personnel, and ultimately marginalised.

Wider public debate was resisted and largely confined to professional or industry

forums. This pattern of social change echoes what might be predicted by Bourdieu; as

Hilgers & Manghez put it, 'dominant actors' – in this case PSYOP – 'implement

conservation strategies that involve the demand for change, while the dominated

actors' – PA – 'implement subversion strategies that involve the demand for the

maintenance of their threatened rights' (2015: 15). At onset both are dominant actors

within their field, there is not a clear hierarchy of dominant and dominated, however,

the proximity to power is such that the maintenance of the established order, through

adjustment of practices would exert such pressure as to prevail, and resistance

resulted in an adjustment of key actors' relative power. Bourdieu indicates change in

---

[3] Snow and Taylor called it a 'democratic propaganda model' (2006: 390) has been far from democratic
and other authors have pointed to the weakness of such claims (eg Miller and Sabir, 2012) or
demonstrated harsh realities underpinning power and persuasion during 20th Century conflicts (inc.
Dorril, 2002; Weiner 2008; Herman and Chomsky, 2008; Bacevich, 2006; French, 2012).

the service of preserving structures of positions is sociologically more probable than change oriented towards transforming them.

PSYOP was 're-branded' in 2010, as a hybrid communication form Military Information Support Operations (MISO). MISO's increased similarity to PD, reflects the broader role of Defense in a 'global counter-terrorism campaign', which expanded the range of Department of Defense (DOD) activities.[4] Legislation was amended in 2012 to allow Public Diplomacy media previously restricted domestically to be disseminated within the US (Smith-Mundt Act, 2012). It is crucially important to understand how changes in practise occur within government, particularly for propaganda, where a key role is played by informal planning (Briant, 2015). Challenges like those raised by new media demand a *public* reappraisal of propaganda governance, for which governments must allow greater transparency in order to enable debate, legal judgement and independent academic enquiry.

Methodology

The paper will draw on emails and interviews with 11 elite sources from the US including personnel working since 9/11 in foreign policy, defence and intelligence.[5] The

---

[4] Consolidation in 1999 of the USIA into the State Department was partly to end the appearance of a centralised 'propaganda organisation'. Yet investment in capabilities at the Pentagon became so great as to dwarf other efforts.

[5] With gratitude to Research Assistants Elizabeth Balderston and Keirstan Pawson for assistance with transcription.

paper focuses on key figures involved in US propaganda during a period of contestation when the traditional distinctions between propaganda for foreign audiences - Public Diplomacy and PSYOP - and propaganda for the US public and international media - PA - were being challenged and reshaped (See Gardiner, 2003; Miller, January 2004; Snow and Taylor, 2006; Briant 2015). The article builds on existing elite interviews with American foreign policy, defense and intelligence personnel, deepening insight into this struggle.[6]

Fluid Propaganda Audiences

      A globalised, fluid media environment means isolating audiences geographically and targeting them with different messages can be difficult. Media flowing across borders resulted in contradiction, destroying credibility. As Former Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, Department of State (2002-2005) Lawrence Wilkerson said, the propaganda message 'can't be the same for the Indian Muslims, as it is for the Indonesian Muslims', and 'you can't send the same signals to the 1.5bn Muslims, as you're sending to your own people to Ra-Ra them up for the conflict' (23rd June 2009, Interview). The DOD recognised this noting how covert PSYOP messages were increasingly entering the domestic media (30th October 2003). US Former

---

[6] The article analyses interview data some of which is previously published in Briant (2015) alongside new previously unavailable interview data including Austin Branch who held a key IO position during these events. This allows new insight into the existing data.

National Security Council Director for Global Outreach, Kevin McCarty[7] and others expressed a strong belief that the existing audience rules were out-dated. He said 'every Department, Agency or Office including that of the President, have limitations around what they can and can't do. And none of them were written for the world we live in now.' (13th March 2013, Interview).[8]

It had implications for planning and public debate. DOD became concerned with adaptation and finding a solution for what is seen primarily as a *coordination* problem not one of ethical practise. The internet era brought inconsistencies and information was harder to control. Austin Branch, who played a lead role in shaping practice throughout this period,[9] said 'we have to look at policies and procedures and communication …rhythms that would allow us to deconflict and coordinate and ensure that we weren't committing information fratricide' (8th August 2015 Interview). Traditional separation of PSYOP and PA was seen by many as a somewhat artificial division - evidence that its dominant purpose is the operational one not a normative 'strategy of truth' (Snow and Taylor, 2006). Loose distinctions between functions were renegotiated within defence to increase consistency between covert and overt PSYOP messages, PD and PA and coordination was increasingly accepted as necessary to ensuring a consistent campaign.

---

[7] Also former U.S. Naval Officer, Intelligence Officer, NSC and currently a Commercial Communications Consultant

[8] These laws and guidelines are discussed more fully in (Briant, 2015).

[9] US Army Director of IO, Space and Strategic Communications (2002-2006) and Department of Defence Senior Advisor in Information Operations (2008-2010)

It was recognisable early in Iraq, retired US Air Force Colonel Sam Gardiner, in 2003 said the US 'allowed strategic psychological operations to become part of public affairs' (8th October 2003). In 2005, Col. Jeffrey Jones, Former NSC Director for Strategic Communications and Information concluded that 'traditional dividing lines … are blurred' (2005: 109). From 2004-2006 Deputy Chief of Staff for Strategic Effects and Coalition Iraq Spokesman, Gen. Caldwell, sought to change official IO doctrine to lessen 'boundaries' preventing coordination. From 2005-2009 amid instability in Iraq spending rocketed from $9M to $580M (Vanden Brook, 2013). The article discusses the debates and planning and a short timeline below gives further context:

2001

September 11 - Attacks on United States

October 26 - Patriot Act passed

October 7 - Invasion of Afghanistan

October 30 – Office of Strategic Influence (OSI) Created

2002

February 19 – OSI Exposed in media

February 26 – Rumsfeld declared closure of OSI

November 8 – UN Resolution 1441 adopted

2003

January – April – Global Anti-war protests

February 5 – Colin Powell speech to UN Security Council on case for war

March 20 - Invasion of Iraq: 'Shock and Awe' and embedding media

April 2 – Jessica Lynch dramatic 'rescue' media spectacle shaped by Public Affairs statements (Loeb & Schmidt, 2003)

April 6 - US Marine Corps arrive in Baghdad

April 9 - US Marine Corps place a US flag on Saddam Hussein statue, remove, then stage manage Iraqis pulling statue down (NPR, 2008)

October – 'Information Operations Roadmap' (Department of Defense, 2003)

December 13 – Hussein captured

2004

March-April - First Battle of Fallujah

May – Abu Ghraib images of abuse emerge

November 7–December 23 - Second Battle of Fallujah – massive casualties;

2005

January 2 – Iraqi Elections

April – CIA: Hunt for WMDs exhausted

November-December – Media reveal US Army paid Iraqi journalists to publish propaganda

2007

January - 'The Surge' announced - 20,000 American troops deployed

'Fusion Cell' established in National Security Council targeting thought-leaders (Briant, 2015)

June-August – New DOD internet policies

July 12 - Baghdad Airstrike – Iraqi civilians and 2 Reuters journalists killed;

2008

September 11 - Joint Special Operations Command Cyberwarfare section shuts down websites identified as jihadist en masse.

2009

January 20 - Barack Obama Assumes Office

2010

MISO adopted

April 5 – Wikileaks released Collatoral Murder video showing 2007 Baghdad airstrike - Manning arrested under Espionage Act

The Impasse

As IO funding soared, in the Pentagon, a power struggle between PSYOP and PA to shape the future of propaganda was taking place, it peaked between 2005-2009. Austin Branch called it 'very, very painful' but said the debate 'was absolutely necessary to build the foundations of a policy that would shape how we operate in the information environment in the future' (8th August 2015, Interview). The internet and digital technologies challenged the way propaganda was handled. But PAOs strongly defended traditional divisions they saw as protecting their credibility. Some, like Former US Navy Chief of Information and Former US Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Rear Adm. McCreary[10], felt they didn't want to be 'tainted'. He was critical of changes taking place and felt MISO 'clearly is' encroachment of PSYOP into PA:

[10] McCreary was also Former Director of Strategic Communication for the National Counterterrorism Center.

'What you've created with [MISO] is they believe their effort is to go into

foreign audiences and convince everybody that only the United States' way

is right. ... There is no such thing as strategic PSYOP, PSYOP is an

operational function, and it was originally designed to convince people to

do or not do something on the battlefield to give you operational

advantage. And well they say that's what we're trying to do but at the

strategic level. ... They're trying to define the ... battlespace as the globe

and everything's a battle.' (15th October 2013, Interview).

Rear Adm. Frank Thorp[11] succeeded McCreary in key PA roles and both were vocal in

the impasse with PSYOP.

Early Contestations

Some pointed to history of the much-criticised 'War on Terror' Office of Strategic

Influence (OSI) – a 2001-2002 attempt to lead propaganda - as a primary reason for

this opposition to newer IO-led changes. Austin Branch said personnel at,

'OSI office … were really not professional communicators who didn't understand

… this strategic information environment, [or] the implications … of some of the

things [they were] thinking about doing from a policy, … authority, … public

perception standpoint. You can understand why the public affairs guys got

nervous and they stayed nervous.' (8th August 2015, Interview).

Branch pointed out that DOD failed to get the advice of PA in setting up OSI, as the IO

field was still developing and training and experience early on was 'kind of iffy', the OSI

---

[11] Thorp held positions as Former Special Assistant for Public Affairs, Former First Deputy Assistant

Secretary of Defense (Joint Communication) and US Navy Chief of Information (Retired)

was staffed by 'amateurs' not 'understanding of the nuances of the ramifications of their actions' (8th August 2015, Interview). By contrast, he said 'public affairs guys were … engineered to be reactors; they weren't planners, they weren't strategists' like IO who were trying 'to actively shape the information environment' (8th August 2015, Interview). But PAOs exclusion led to some animosity and suspicion.

Branch explained how 'effectiveness' or proof of 'return on investment' became an 'Achilles heel' and was concerned how it could be used as leverage by people criticising propaganda,

> '…if you're constantly changing people, and the programmes are having to be redone based on the new then you don't have that consistency or persistency necessary to get the feedback over a year, year and a half, two years about a programme. Because you know people don't change attitudes or behaviours overnight – unless you're an American [domestic] audience; people change in milliseconds.' (8th August 2015, Interview).

In assessing 'the information environment' Branch said 'there's three-dimensional checks, this is very complex and things happen at near real-time speeds … and sometimes it's gotten away from us'. He further clarified, 'Have there been times where planners didn't think completely about the second or third order effects? Yes. And as a result have learned some hard lessons.' But he stressed this is 'a challenge, but that's not unique to information operations' (Branch, 8th August 2015, Interview). To resist the impression of propaganda having little value or unpredictable effects, a large industry of contractors now flourish on 'proving' this value.

That there was a need for change and 'coordination' of some sort, was, by 2005, accepted by PAOs too - it was the *nature* of coordination that was disputed. The exposure of contractor, Lincoln Group's covertly planting articles in Iraqi and Arab media led some to feel concerned that such activities undermined trust, harming US strategic objectives *and* the credibility of independent Arab media. Articles were American-made, failing to pass as 'genuine' content. Lincoln Group had no background in public relations or the media. But they were *also* supervised and approved by the Army; the activity itself was not in fact, unusual activity for PSYOP, "We don't want somebody to look at the product and see the U.S. government and tune out," said Col. James Treadwell (Gerth, 2005). But media reaction increased PA concern over coordination with PSYOP, and risks of PSYOP outputs damaging the credibility of PA. Thorp said 'the Public Affairs folks saw what the psychological operations folks were doing on the battlefield in Iraq' and formed the 'perception that, hey – they're saying one thing, the Public Affairs people are saying another thing and the United States is looking pretty silly' (24th August 2009, Interview).

When the expansion and accountability of IO received criticism, the industry dug in its heels, journalists at USA Today were targeted with harassment by the owner of contractor Leonie, Camille Chidiac (Vanden Brook, 2013). There was distrust and concern that PAOs might be facilitating media criticism. One Anonymous IO Officer claimed of OSI 'the folks at OSD(PA) did a smear campaign on them', namely 'Victoria Clarke' and he asserted this happened again: 'we were looking who might have leaked the insider story to the USA Today reporters' (Email, 25th July 2013).[12] Public affairs

---

[12] See Bakir (2013) and Hastedt on role of strategic leaking to further a specific agenda-builder's strategic aims. Using Hastedt's, analysis, were these contested allegations confirmed, this type of

personnel reject flatly any claims of leaking, but it seems widely believed within the IO community. Clarke objected to OSI but expressed little knowledge of terf-war conflicts, saying coordination 'worked pretty well' during her time (2015: 55).

But according to Branch, 'in the earlier days … there was a great reluctance to share some information with public affairs. … a lot of it was very classified and there was a concern [among IO personnel that] classified information … would be put at risk when given to the public affairs guys because they didn't like IO. Sometimes it would be exposed to media or other folks … in ways that were unhelpful to IO.' (8th August 2015, Interview). Branch gave an example, 'in 2004 the web operations … somehow it got in the hands of the media and it … was framed in an unhelpful way. … it didn't need to happen that way. There was spin and there was concern from the public affairs community that we could have had a discussion about it and … worked it. … it was unnecessary and unhelpful to have that debate in a public space.' (8th August 2015, Interview).

High-level disagreements between PSYOP and PA could have a ripple-down effect as systems were bypassed to push ideas forward. Briant quotes McCreary (2015: 151) saying: 'The problem was when people tried to run up programs on their own side and get it to the boss and *not* do the coordination. ... and all of a sudden you're [finding you contradicted someone else] and, by the way, it's the *truth* and what [they're] trying to propose, it's not so much, or not as transparent. The problem was when it went up your own chain and it wasn't shared with the other side, it was

---

unofficial leaking during contestation would be 'warring' or 'entrepreneurial'– used to wear down opponents and block policy (2005419-421).

primarily done because you knew the other side would disagree with it. And so you probably shouldn't have taken it up to begin with!'

Coordination Attempts

In 2005, Thorp sought to facilitate coordination, recognising audiences can conflict; he sought a Public Affairs-friendly coordination. He regarded *total* separation as counterproductive but felt PA should lead the message. McCreary thought the coordination needed to be in the 'staffwork' ensuring Public Affairs are consulted and 'read in' on PSYOP campaigns (15th October 2013 Interview). Thorp said he authored the first doctrine to reshape American propaganda into the 'Strategic Communication' approach (Deputy Sec. of Defense, 2006). But many thought Thorp was *obstructive* to PSYOP.

Some interviewees said that Thorp's 'doctrine' reflected the fact he was 'a hard-core Public Affairs person'. His approach according to Matt Armstrong[13], reflected a view that 'public affairs is the centre of the universe and everything else is mischievous, and full of lies and obfuscations' (6th March 2013 Interview). Public Affairs' effort to direct the change was opposed by PSYOP personnel including Col. 'Glenn' Ayers[14].

---

[13] Member of US Broadcasting Board of Governors, Former Executive Director of the Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (28th March 2011 - December 2011)

[14] Col. Ayers was Commanding Officer, 9th Psychological Operations Battalion (Airborne) (2001-2003), Psychological Operations Division Chief, Joint Staff (2006-2008), Assistant to Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz (2003-2005), Contractor SAIC (2008 - 2012).

Some could be derisive and Ayers mocked what he saw as Public Affairs' inability to engage with in-theatre audiences and cultures:

> 'if you don't understand I'm gonna talk to you *louder* in English... just so I can and get out the *public affairs* note.' (17th May 2013 Interview).

Former Assistant Secretary of Defense (ASD) for PA Dorrance Smith indeed adopted a hostile stance on Al Jazeera calling them 'The Enemy on our Airways' (US Senate, 2006). But McCreary saw the attitude Ayers expressed as 'fairly cultural...' in the army who failed to see communication beyond PSYOP terms:

> 'operationally-focussed and really doesn't put the premium on public affairs ... I think that's because many of them grew up with PSYOP and they just don't understand the communication environment as well as they should.' (15th October 2013 Interview).

Dorrance Smith[15] also said coordination that goes beyond 'sanction' by, or check and *approval* by, Public Affairs was potentially problematic:

> 'be careful what you wish for because you then become complicit in whatever it is... and so how do you then have deniability? Or how do you then have credibility? When it then goes awry or becomes public and then you have to then go out and defend it... internally that might be brilliant... in terms of long-term relationship, I'm not sure that it's all that wise ... Public Affairs is not PSYOP and once you go down... you have to be very careful about when people were ... convincing you that it's in *your* best interests for them to deceive people for whatever reason and use the

---

[15] Also Former Senior Media adviser to Coalition Provisional Authority, Baghdad

media as part of their deception, I just have no comfort in that.' (10th September 2013, Interview).

When Ayers mocked PA as ill-equipped for communicating with foreign audiences, he had a point. Separation of foreign and domestic has been counter-productive in many ways in how it divides us from and defines our relationship with the international community. Externally imposed 'democracy-building' propaganda has merely exposed a sustained gulf of understanding of non-Western cultures in the US.

Of course, PA is also selective, presenting information in such a way that it promotes US Government perspectives. Armstrong pointed out that PAOs don't just 'throw unadulterated information over the wall'. Thorp's approach according to Armstrong is 'I inform, I do not influence. ...It is the general PA doctrine'.[16] He said, though the word is never applied, PA actually *does* 'influence' people:

'ok you're the public affairs officer for Fort Bragg. The main gate is going to close for construction ... So you're actually going to suggest alternative routes …why are you doing that? You're doing that because you wanna show the community that the army cares …and by the way did you realise you're changing their behaviour? Not only that, not just influence, but you're changing their behaviour! 'Changing behaviour' was one of the key components of *PSYOP*.' (Armstrong, 6th March 2013 Interview).

Many see it as a false or arbitrary distinction given the overlap, but there were subtle differences that fed the bureaucratic struggle. Thorp insisted that for

---

[16] Yet Thorp was key spokesman on the Jessica Lynch story, held up as an example of Iraq war misinformation (See: House of Representatives Report, 2008).

an information campaign to be strategically coordinated, there needs to be 'one set of rules' and it is necessary to decide 'whether the Public Affairs rules are right, the Psychological Operations rules are right or we need a new set of rules' for guiding propaganda (24th August 2009, Interview).

Pentagon Ju-Jitsu

Commanding General of the Combined Arms Centre (2005-7) Petraeus transformed the structures responsible for the 'information' sphere, continuing once he took over Central Command in 2008. But disagreement persisted holding DOD policy on internet activities back until 2007. Internet activities were governed by PSYOP regulations - legislated at a time before the internet was anticipated. Ayers, said that, when he was Psychological Operations Division Chief 'we got the Deputy Secretary of Defence to sign' two new policies - the Trans-Regional Web Initiative (TRWI – later, Regional Web Initiative Program) and Interactive Internet Activities (IIA) policy - and 'pushed those through' (17th May 2013, Interview). [17]

The form the policies took served to further blur the functions of PSYOP personnel and PAOs (Silverberg and Heimann 2009)and became a key period of struggle before resolution of the impasse. Ayers along with other interviewees saw Thorp and McCreary as responsible for preventing 'progress' and obstructing approval of the policies:

---

[17] The regulations were the 'Policy for DOD Interactive Internet Activities' (IIA) which enabled two-way communications using blogs, emailing, chat-rooms etc (Deputy Sec. of Defense, 8th June 2007), and 'Policy for Combatant Command Websites Tailored to Foreign Audiences' (only non-interactive websites) (Deputy Sec. of Defense, 3rd August 2007).

'There was more than reluctance [to coordinate Psychological Operations with Public Affairs], there was actual stonewalling, and physical, bureaucratic ju-jitsu to make sure that Psychological Operations authorities were *not* done.' (Ayers, 17th May 2013, Interview).

The IIA policy Ayers applies to online PA activities and 'programs, products and actions that shape emotions, motives, reasoning, and behaviours of selected foreign entities' (Deputy Sec. of Defense, 8th June 2007). Silverberg and Heimann argued it 'might be viewed as fusing PSYOP and Public Affairs into a generic communication effort', since it applies to both PSYOP personnel and PAOs and does not specify different activities (2009: 82). PA activities were included in a similar definition to PSYOP, the only difference being the words 'shape' and 'influence'. PAOs are stated to target media, but their *activities* are not distinguished from PSYOP. The term 'shape' is undefined and open to interpretation. Silverberg and Heimann state it 'establishes a hybrid PSYOP-Public Affairs model' (2009: 86) and steps into State Department territory - PD.

There is a requirement for IIA to be 'true in fact and intent' but while 'attribution' is specified, there is broad scope for the Commander to navigate this due to 'operational considerations' (Deputy Sec. of Defense, 8th June 2007; Silverberg and Heimann, 2009: 85-6). This was a point of contest for PAOs, Ayers said, viewing it as a terf-war:

'that was the first time ... in that *document*, that we had *articulated* the different types of attribution and who could use them. And specifically it

says in there that PA can only work in the realm of attributable

information. Psychological Operations could work in all three of them. PA

does not like that.'[18]

This was because it excluded PA from influencing PSYOP messaging, which they feared

would re-enter the country and be seen by a domestic audience - their area of

concern. From Ayers' perspective:

'They want to have control of information cause when it blows up in their

faces, and they're standing on a podium, they look at it from that

standpoint. 'How am I going to spin this when it comes out?'' (Interview:

17th May 2013).

Ayers described putting pressure on Thorp to pass TRWI, IIA and delegation to '0-6's' –

lower ranking personnel outside the Pentagon:

'He *specifically sat on those packets* and would not either approve them or

disapprove them, for *months*. Until ... I had to get ... my one-star Air Force boss

to go in and sit down with Frank Thorp, *in his office*, and read through the

entire message about TRWI... And he kept on saying things like, [whiney voice]

'I don't understand this' ... my IO force boss, said ... this great thing. He looked

across the table at him ...one-star to one-star and said, 'You did go to university

right? What about this message is not apparent to you, that you don't

understand? Frank.''

---

[18] 100% non-attributable military IIA can be authorised by the Defense Secretary, though this is rare as
'there are other people who do that' kind of activity (Ayers, 17th May 2003, Interview).

Ayers used influential networks to press changes through and navigate resistance from PA:

> 'Well, here's how I got it through. I always punched above my weight as a full Colonel in the Pentagon, so I got my three-star boss, I got the Director of the Joint Staff, who was another three-star... I got a couple of ...Senior Executive of Services within USDI [Under Secretary for Intelligence] within policy, to... help me push this through... Because ... my first assignment at the Pentagon was… Military Assistant for Secretary Rumsfeld and for Secretary Wolfowitz. So I went for a year to the War college and I came back in, and I still knew all the networks at the Pentagon. I was friendly with quite a few high people, so ...I used my powers do that. Those three things that I pushed through ... it was the IIA, TRWI and the O-6 thing and every single one of those I had to *use* the Pentagon Ju-jitsu and get around public affairs. Public Affairs was the *key* impediment to everything we tried to do, because once again going back to what I said Emma, they look upon all information as in the realm of Public Affairs information... but Psychological Operations uses the same information. But we only may choose to use ... 80% of it ... to *modify* the behaviour of a target audience. Public Affairs thinks everything needs to be totally open, everything needs to be spoken about, everything needs to be ... attributed. Not the case.'
> (17th May 2013, Interview).

One solution Ayers stated was to cut the ASD for PA and Under Secretary to the Defence for Policy and Special Operations in the Pentagon out of approval, which would give them greater liberty. Here Thorp describes the cultural differences in PA:

'There were folks in the psychological operations world could not understand why in a million years we would talk about ... for instance investigations... the whole Abu Ghraib thing. There were those who said 'why should we even talk about that publicly?' - Because if we talk about it the enemy will take advantage of it. Well that's true, but the issue is not *not to talk about it* the issue is *not to do it*. It will become public one way or another.' (Emphasis Added. Thorp, 24th August 2009, Interview).

Delegating out

PA's concerns clashed with the PSYOP planners' policy to increase their freedom to manoeuvre using online and digital media. One change implemented was that in the internet policies, 'contrary to two decades of practise, [a] delegation empowers commanders to conduct information operations at their discretion' where 'previously they had to have senior-level Departmental approval' (Silverberg and Heimann, 2009: 82). Significantly Ayers pushed the PSYOP approval process outside the Pentagon; he said:

'Those Commanders... in the area... knew the environment better than anybody else... so if they *had* ... an [Non-Commissioned Officer], school-trained... from a PSYOP unit ... or an Officer, and it worked through the proper procedures, they could approve at an O-6 level [that of Naval Captains or Colonels in the other services]' (17th May 2013, Interview).

Ayers' planned to change authorities for PSYOP to permit approval by lower-level officers, this meant that:

'if you had, a, PSYOP-trained NCO on your staff, or an Officer ... you could

do tactical level [PSYOP] products, without getting higher approval... prior

to that, [approval] was all the way at a 2-star or 3-star level' (17th May

2013, Interview).

Ayers said:

'what I said is if you're gonna put out a, a leaflet or a handbill, in Arabic that

says, 'dont crap in the water and drink it', you don't need a 2 star General

to sign off on that! Ok?' (17th May 2013, Interview).

This suggests PSYOP is used for seemingly-trivial 'public information' purposes -

messages support a variety of objectives and some may or may not be attributable or

truthful.

Ayers sought to remove Pentagon PA from planning, increasing PSYOP's

autonomy, because:

'At the beginning of the conflict, we ... actually had to get ... all of our

products that we were dropping over Afghanistan, approved by the

[Assistant Secretary of Defence (ASD) for] Public Affairs and by the Under

Secretary of Defence for Policy and Special Operations. We had people

looking at our leaflets in DC... this was back in 2001 and saying, 'this word is

spelled wrong, or you have a comma in the wrong place' - it's because we

had to send it to them in English!'

He got tactical PSYOP approval transferred to personnel ranking as low as 'PSYOP-

Trained NCO' in theatre, when he was Joint Staff J-39 Deputy Director Global

Operations, and:

'*out* of the Pentagon, so I could get 'em away from Frank Thorp. And I could

get him away from Policy.'

This strategy deliberately cut chain-of-command oversight to give greater autonomy in

theatre:

'We were being second guessed... and 'what if...' and all this other kind of

stuff by people who had no clue sitting in DC. So I took it upon myself when

I came in on Joint Staff, *that* approval was gonna get out of ... the

Pentagon.' (Ayers, 17th May 2013, Interview).

But this change removes a layer of checks, reducing oversight and accountability, for

the purpose of excluding PAOs from protesting PSYOP they thought was problematic.

Dorrance Smith during 2006-9 was ASD for PA, and recalled some of these

discussions from his time in office. He explained why it was important that 'front

office' approval was gained:

'I pretty much was an advocate of Public Affairs being open and

transparent in everything it did... I think that my position was consistent

with the people who went before me like Torie Clarke and Larry De Rita... I

think it's the role of [ASD Public Affairs] to *be* open and transparent and

you can't have your foot in all of the various... there's certain areas where,

as Public Affairs, you really shouldn't be involved in the planning, the

execution, the process ...I can't really remember a ... big conflict between

what I was doing in Public Affairs and what some military operation was

involved in. There were times where there would be these policy

discussions and ... the PSYOP people or the people who were in Special Ops

would try to inculcate in doctrine or in policy that they could basically

operate, you know, alone by themselves and without any transparency and

of course Public Affairs would object to the extent that, that's where you

get in trouble is where you do these 'off the shelf' operations that no-one

knows about and hasn't had anybody in the front office sanction and

approve it and then when the press find out about it the first- they don't go

to the PSYOP people for a comment, they come to *my* office for a

comment. I think a general example, there were times in policy discussions

where a General would try to argue a certain point of view to the Secretary

in order to try and make it doctrine or make it policy and I would ... as Head

of Public Affairs we would 'non-concur'' (10th September 2013 Interview).

Smith said 'I never felt that Secretary Rumsfeld ever put the Office of Public Affairs or

me personally in a position that would've compromised our ability to do our jobs' he

said 'whether or not [Rumsfeld] satisfied the itches of the PSYOP community' he wasn't

sure (10th September 2013, Interview).

But despite PA claims to have 'non-concurred' on such attempts, policies

delegating PSYOP approval out of the 'front office' were evidently passed. PA's

arguments and ability to counter were structurally sidelined as authorities were

processed, the operational imperatives had institutional priority over normative

elements PA organisational culture. Due to his closeness to Bush, some journalists also

saw Smith's role as political - preoccupied with defending the White House. One

reporter quoted in 'Harpers' contrasted this with predecessors Torie Clarke and Larry

De Rita, 'you could go to them for help and for information. We see the cleaning lady more than Dorrance.' (Silverstein, 2007).

Coordination

This all happened during a period of wider media hostility to Rumsfeld which also had an impact on PA. US Former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Doug Wilson (who did not serve at the Pentagon during the Bush Administration) observed that as a result of this hostility, Pentagon Public Affairs Office was gradually marginalised, and until 2008 or even later, 'most of the war-related communication that was done out of the Pentagon was done out of information operations' (10th May 2013 Interview). Some of Silverberg & Heimann's concern over changing practise was also felt by PA officials from this later period. Wilson for example criticised the de facto blending of PSYOP and PD. He said that in Defense, "This middle kind of plant that grew up ... some called it MISO, some called it Strategic Communications" - it was "this middle area that caused everybody such heartburn." For him, it was "a glaring example of how little on the non-military side of public diplomacy was working effectively" (Interview: 10th May 2013).

Since Frank Thorp retired as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Joint Communication) in 2009, there has also been less opposition to coordinating PA with the other tools. As Armstrong put it, 'what was starting the revolution in there [was that] you had Rosa Brooks over in policy, and Doug Wilson in PA, and Austin Branch at IO. You had three very competent, respected people who got along very well ...and you did not have Frank Thorp in there anymore.' (6th March 2013 Interview). Wilson came in to the Pentagon as ASD for Public Affairs in 2009 and had a different approach

to coordination. He described this change, 'I never thought Information Operations was a bad word. I wanted to defuse the tensions between the Public Affairs and the Information Operations shops. My approach has always been that communications is a broad spectrum, from the overt to the covert, and it's a matter of using the tools in tandem.' He observed that some in the PA branch 'thought that if you dealt with the dark side of communications, you were getting your hands sullied. I think that's the result of spending too much time carving up the field into stovepipes.' Wilson said, 'I brought with me a desire to develop a holistic communications team. And not feeling that Austin Branch was, you know, from Planet Mars.' (10th May 2013, Interview). It was suggested that it was 2009 before Public Affairs were able to 'get around the planning table' again:

'During my tenure, some under Gates, but particularly under [Leon] Panetta, Public Affairs started to regain its seat at the table as the place that developed and coordinated communication strategy for the Pentagon.' (Wilson, 10th May 2013, Interview).

This impacted his approach when he was the 'point person for communication on Wikileaks in the Pentagon.' He explained how his coordination was international, cross-governmental and of course, between PA and the IO capabilities:

'It was international in scope because [the emails] ranged from things that could be embarrassing to people, to things that could be life threatening. It involved several different agencies - the military, intelligence, diplomatic cooperation among the communicators was superb really. It was something that was done in real time. You had issues of free press vs issues of national security. And I was quite proud of how our government handled

it. We met with the *New York Times*, we were able to go through [the documents in question]. We couldn't prevent the publication but we were able to work with them in terms of identifying things that truly would put lives at risk. There was tremendous cooperation between the military and intelligence communities, great cooperation between the United States and Foreign Governments ...communicating in advance things that could be embarrassing, and things that could be a national security risk. And when it came to... between me and [Senior Advisor, then Director of Information Operations] Austin Branch, I mean he certainly was aware of and part of the discussions about how we were going to be handling it.' (Wilson, 14th May 2013, Interview).

Eventually, the systems and cultures of Public Affairs at DOD changed in response to pressure:

'for a long time in the period you're looking in, PA was viewed as the white horse and everything else was dark and simply being in the same room tainted PA and so they couldn't even be there. But you have that concept breaking down at the personal level. You have some folks in the field working very well together and properly integrating the activities.' (Armstrong, 6th March 2013, Interview).

Armstrong gave an example of where he saw IO take the lead,

'this senior officer...was IO, and smart, and the junior officer was PA, and the PA deferred to the IO guy ... and he led the initiative. He was essentially in charge of the communication synchronisation.'

But he confirmed that this could be inconsistent and depended on the initiative of the

Commander, it 'really varied' and sometimes,

> 'you had the ...commanding officer ... only wanting his PA person in the
>
> room and figured IO was something to be brought in later and sprinkled
>
> onto a project.'

This was seen as a problem because, 'Of course the PA guy's not thinking *locally* [in

theatre], the PA guy is thinking back in US primarily to the US public, congress and the

Pentagon – the *IO* guy tends to be focused locally and regionally . . .' (Original

emphasis. Matt Armstrong, 6th March 2013, Interview). Former Director of the Joint

PSYOP Support Element and Commander of 4th Psychological Operations Group in Iraq

(2003) Col Jim Treadwell stated that:

> 'From my vantage point it appears that most PA officers working in the
>
> field are more focused on supporting their operational commanders than
>
> they were 20 years ago. By that I mean they are still informing the public,
>
> but they are doing so understanding that the information they provide will
>
> have an influence. Perhaps you could say they are informing with a
>
> purpose.' (6th May 2013, Email).

The change in culture in PA was produced through what Bakir et al. (forthcoming)

might deem 'Organised Persuasive Communication' in this case utilising 1) discursive

persuasion and 2) a degree of coercion and incentivisation (their power having being

made contingent on this change) as well as 3) a generational change in personnel.

Branch stressed the importance of training - that proportionality of second and

third order effects on a population *were* weighed, sometimes concluding 'the risk is

too great' (8th August 2015, Interview).[19] But Branch stated that now if planners 'think that there is going to be a second or third level effect at someone else's space they have to figure a way to coordinate that'. And also 'the more folks that have equity in it, the more challenging it is to conduct operations… that involve activities in the information space' (8th August 2015, Interview). Yet TRWI websites, remained poorly coordinated with State Department efforts (Vanden Brook, 19th November 2013). Legally, military PSYOP must be associated with a specific *mission* but Silverberg and Heimann state that they were stepping into public diplomacy,

> 'labelling the ongoing effort a 'global war' or even a 'worldwide irregular campaign' greatly expands the range of activities that can be justified as a 'military mission.'' (2009: 79).

They warn if their mission is indistinct 'the need for funds becomes open-ended' (2009: 84 and 90).

Furthermore, with planners focus on 'deconfliction' there is assumed legitimacy of dividing the 'information space' in its entirety (domestic and foreign) into *occupied territory* for propaganda streams who have 'equity' over managing it - personnel must consider effects of treading on toes in 'someone else's space' (ie territory occupied by other government personnel). But *audiences* themselves are rarely acknowledged to have a legitimate claim. Whether domestic or foreign, friend or foe when seen as

---

[19] Other accounts show this wasn't true of everyone (Briant, 2015: 46).

'terrain' or operational 'battlespace' people are not considered actors holding 'equity' in the information environment of their own minds.[20]

These struggles illuminate the tensions in the relationships both with journalism, as their reliance on public affairs and protection of sources was viewed as offering PAO's potential strategic advantage in fighting internal battles; and the public, who rely on a media - demarcated as the 'battlespace' for propaganda - to inform their opinions regarding their governments' propaganda. US press reporting shows over-reliance on 'official' government sources (Entman, 2004), and 'excludes coverage of military alternatives' (Papacharissi and Oliveira, 2008: 71). Certain basic knowledge is necessary to consider propaganda consensual. The 'ju-jitsu' may have been 'resolved' *institutionally* by 2009 but, with a few exceptions, public discussion was limited. When criticism from PA and the State Department was vocalised, IO was gaining power and their fear of PAO's closeness to the media as potentially threatening, whether baseless or not, shaped policy and impacted the role and power of PA in shaping external communication.

Conclusion

The propaganda war involved a cultural struggle; not just with the in-theatre audience, the international community or the American public, but also within Government. Cultural differences between streams of propaganda presented a 'problem' for coordination, but may have been healthier from a democratic

---

[20] And it is necessary to remember the 'colonisation' of different parts of this 'information space' may of course also be underpinned by differentials in incentivisation, physical coercion or force in the physical 'terrain' (Bakir et al., forthcoming).

perspective. Infighting was partly power-play between personnel who forward their

own department. The contradictions were resolved institutionally, prioritising

operational imperatives with little protection of media freedom. For accountability,

governments have to communicate. But at very least, the rules *governing* propaganda

use should, in a democratic society, be transparent and subject to enquiry. Whether or

not the population supports different forms of propaganda use, how it is regulated,

and changes to the rules which govern it (when, how, if and where it is used) must be

debated. Only transparency and openness to critical social science and journalistic

enquiry can ensure planning and policy changes are genuinely in the public interest

and this example evidences how balances of institutional power powerfully shapes

these debates.

Bibliography

Bacevich Andrew (2006) *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by*

War. Oxford: OUP.

Bakir, V. (2013) *Torture, Intelligence and Sousveillance in the War on Terror: Agenda–*

building struggles. Farnham: Ashgate.

Bakir V Herring E Miller D and Robinson P (Forthcoming) Working paper: Rethinking

Propaganda as a Subset of Organised Persuasive Communication.

Briant Emma L (2015) *Propaganda and Counter-terrorism: Strategies for Global*

Change. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Department of Defense (30th October 2003) *Information Operations Roadmap*.

National Security Archive Online. Available at:

http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB177/info_ops_roadmap.pdf

(accessed 24th August 2015)

Deputy Sec. of Defense (2006) *QDR Execution Roadmap for Strategic Communication.*

Available at: http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/QDRRoadmap20060925a.pdf

(accessed 20th June 2013)

Deputy Sec. of Defense (8th June 2007) *Memorandum: Policy for DoD Interactive*

Internet Activities

Deputy Sec. of Defense (3rd August 2007) *Memorandum: Policy for Combatant*

Command Websites Tailored to Foreign Audiences

Dorril Stephen (2002) *MI6: Inside the Covert World of Her Majesty's Secret Intelligence*

Service. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Entman Robert M (2004). *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and US*

Foreign Policy. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

French David (2012) *The British Way in Counterinsurgency 1945-1967.* Oxford: OUP.

Gardiner Sam (8th October 2003) *Truth from These Podia.* Available at:

http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB177/Info%20Operations%20Roadm

ap%20Truth%20from%20These%20Podia.pdf (accessed 24th August 2015)

Gerth Jeff (2005) Military's Information War Is Vast and Often Secretive. *New York*

Times, 11th December. Available at: www.nytimes.com/2005/12/11/politics

/11propaganda.html?_r=1. (accessed 21st August 2016)

Hastedt G (2005) Public intelligence: Leaks as policy instruments–the case of the Iraq

war. *Intelligence and National Security*, 20(3): 419-439.

Herman E and Chomsky N (2008) *Manufacturing Consent.* London: Bodley Head.

House of Representatives (2008) *Misleading Information from the Battlefield: The Tillman and Lynch Episodes*. Report to Congress. Available at: www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CRPT-110hrpt858/html/CRPT-110hrpt858.htm (accessed 24th August 2015).

Jones Jeffrey B (2005) Strategic Communication: A Mandate for the United States. *Joint Force Quarterly* 39: 108-114.

Miller David (January 2004) *Information Dominance*, Coldtype Press. Available at: http://www.coldtype.net/Assets.04/Essays.04/Miller.pdf (accessed 24th August 2015)

Miller D and Sabir R (2012) Counter-terrorism as counterinsurgency in the UK 'war on terror. In Poynting, Scott and Whyte, David. (eds) *Counter-terrorism and State Political Violence: The 'war on terror' as terror*. London: Routledge, pp12-32.

NPR (2008) Reminder: Saddam Statue Was Toppled by Psy-Ops. The Bryant Park Project. Accessed at: www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89489923 (accessed 10th August 2016)

Papacharissi Z and Oliveira M (2008) Frames on Terrorism: A comparative analysis of terrorism coverage in UK and US newspapers *International Journal of Press Politics.* 13(1): 52-74.

Silverberg D and Heimann J (2009) An Ever-Expanding War: Legal Aspects of Online Strategic Communication *Parameters*. 77-93.

Silverstein Ken (2007) Dorrance Smith's Department of Propaganda: Meet the American 'Baghdad Bob' *Harpers*. Available at: harpers.org/blog/2007/07/dorrance-smiths-department-of-propaganda-meet-the-american-baghdad-bob/ (accessed 21st August 2016)

Smith-Mundt Act (2012) available at: http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-

bin/query/z?c112:H.R.5736 (accessed 25th August 2015)

Snow Nancy and Taylor Philip (2006) The Revival of the Propaganda State: US

Propaganda at Home and Abroad since 9/11 *International Communication Gazette.* 68

(5-6) 389-407.

US Senate (2006) *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 109th*

Congress, Second Session. 152(pt. 5) 5734.

Vanden Brook T (2012) US 'info ops' programs dubious, costly. *USA Today*. Available at:

http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/military/story/2012-02-29/afghanistan-iraq-

military-information-operations-usa-today-investigation/53295472/1 (accessed 24th

August 2015)

Vanden Brook T (2013) Pentagon's information operations chief moves on*. USA Today*,

Available at: www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2013/08/08/austin-branch-

information-operations-pentagon-nctc/2629939/ (accessed 21st August 2016)

Weiner Tim (2008) *Legacy of Ashes: History of the CIA* London: Penguin.