

Essay on psychological warfare

[Countries](#), [England](#)



During the end times of the World War II, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was quoted for saying that the Britons would not stop fighting for their country. They would fight on the hilltops, in the plains, in the valleys, in the skies, and every other front that could help them to achieve their goal. This phrase might have been taken to mean that the war was to go on, but looked from the modern perspective, it is clear that the prime minister implied that they could use any means possible to win the war. This is actually what happened between the allied forces as they fought against the Nazis as well as the Italian and Japanese communists. The aspect of Psychological warfare was introduced. This essay seeks to explore psychological warfare based on its historical perspective to the modern usage. It will seek to prove that psychological warfare is one of the effective strategies utilized by conflicting sides to win the war. The essay will also look at the various forms of psychological warfare and how they have been applied or can be applied in war.

It would be imperative to start off by defining the aspect of Psychological warfare. According to the Library of Congress (1989), psychological operations or what is otherwise termed as PSYOP is a strategy of war that is applied through peaceful means. It is the “planned political, economic, military, and ideological activities directed towards foreign countries, organizations, and individuals to create emotions, attitudes, understandings, beliefs, or behaviors favorable to the achievement of US political and military objectives” (Library of Congress, 1989). This definition engulfs what can be termed as psychological warfare. It can be seen as the exploitation of the opponent’s weaknesses to indicate unto them that they have no hope at all.

All they are left with is surrendering to the opposing side so as to safeguard what they already have. Otherwise, the risk loosing it all. Therefore, it can be argued that psychological warfare or psychological operations are a form of intimidation where the opponent is shown that there is no way out rather than surrendering to the attacking or opposing force.

With this understanding, it is proper to look at the historical aspect of psychological warfare. Kholod (2011) indicates that the history of PSYOP can be traced back to the Persian war where political propaganda was used against Alexander the Great. This came at a time when the Persians acted against the Macedonian King. The Persians tried to adopt the political propaganda so as to weaken the Greeks and force them not to stand behind their leader. They sought to exploit the psychological aspect by creating uncertainty in the hearts and minds of the Greek. In as much as this strategy failed at the time, it became such an invention in the field of war that it has been perfected and used effectively in the recent times. For instance, Szasz (2009) indicates that though the atomic bomb might have been used to bring an end to the World War II, yet it cannot be denied that propaganda was effectively used by the opposing forces. The British and allied forces used films and pamphlets to discourage the Japanese, Italian, and Nazi forces. On the other sides, the Luftwaffe spread pamphlets encouraging British officers to feign illness so as to escape the front line duty, while encouraging the French to oppose the British by arguing that the British men were getting favors from the Frenchmen's wives and girlfriends (Szasz, 2009).

Based on this understanding, it is of crucial essence to look at the different

ways through which psychological warfare can be propagated. According to Library of Congress (1989), the first and most used form of PSYOP is through propaganda. This is defined as “ messages of surrender offering humane treatment of the enemy upon surrender.” Propaganda is used in order to make the people believe something that might be existent or might not be existent. There are three forms of propaganda that can be used during times of war. According to Smyczek (nd), these three forms are white, black, and grey propaganda. White propaganda is that which is open. The source of the propaganda is known and the information is not hidden. As such, the opposing side knows exactly who is sending the message. This is the kind of situation described by Szasz (2009) where the British and Germans employed this form of warfare. They could not disguise who sent the message. They could use special artillery and low flying airplanes to spread the propaganda. This is white propaganda. There is also black propaganda. This creates much tension amongst the population targeted since no one knows the origin of the information. It is meant to reduce the will of the people to fight, forcing them to comply with the opposing force. There is also grey propaganda. This is quite suspicious and brings much tension since it is not very clear who exactly sent the message, though there might be speculation as to who sent it.

According to Smyczek (nd), propaganda can be very effective in PSYOP. This is despite the fact that it failed the first time it was applied by the Persians against Alexander the Great (Kholod, 2011). Smyczek (2009) observes that in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the PSYOP dropped quiet a lot of leaflets asking the Iraqi soldiers to surrender by showing them that they were bound

to lose one way or another. This was effective since the statistics indicate that about 98% of the prisoners admitted that they saw the leaflets. Of these, 88% argued that they believed the message in the leaflets while 70% argued that the leaflets informed their decision to surrender. Another successful application of PSYOP through propaganda is as indicated by SZAS (2009). He argues that in as much as the atomic bomb was to thank for the end of the war, yet propaganda had already done a great deal. For instance, the Italians were asked to die for Hitler and Mussolini, or to live for Italy. The same case went for the Japanese. These examples prove proper usage and success of propaganda.

Military action can also be used to as a PSYOP. According to the Library of Congress (1989), use of military activity can be used to prove to the enemy that the opposing force has much more power. As such, the enemy is forced to comply due to the manifestation of the opponent's might. This is well seen in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Through this incidence, the US proved to Japan and her allies that they risked more grave consequences should they refuse to surrender. This brought an abrupt end to the war since no one wanted to witness such effects again.

The last form of PSYOP that will be highlighted in this essay is terrorism. This is the form that is common in the modern world and it employs the use of excessive force. According to Ganor (2002), the terrorists are not usually interested in the numbers of people killed during their attacks. Rather, they seek to send a message to the people that despite their defense strategies, they are still prone to attacks. This is meant to weaken the will of the people to resist and force them and their governments to comply with the demands

of the terrorists. At other times, Ganor (2002) observes that terrorists can also adopt the use of the media combined with their attacks. By owning up the attacks, they seek to prove to their opponents that they have the power to cause destruction, hence intimidating them to comply with their demands. This is the same case that applied with the 9/11 attacks. The Al Qaeda, through the attacks, managed to send a shiver in the entire American community as well as the international community. They effectively utilized this mind game.

In conclusion, this essay has looked at psychological warfare. It has looked at the definition which implies that PSYOP can be termed as mind games where opposing forces seek to intimidate the other. It can be traced back in history during the Persian war where the birth of propaganda as a form of PSYOP was applied. The various channels of PSYOP highlighted in this essay include terrorism, propaganda, and military action. Based on the argument, it can be argued that PSYOP is a highly popularized weapon of war which enjoys considerable success.

References

Ganor, B. (2002). Terror as a Strategy of Psychological Warfare. Retrieved on 11th April 2013 from <http://212.150.54.123/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=443>

Kholod, M. M. (2011). Persian Political Propaganda in the War against Alexander the Great. *Ironical Antiqua*, Vol. XLVI. (Attached).

Library of Congress. (1989). An Overview of Psychological Operations (PSYOP). Retrieved on 11th April 2013 from <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA302389>

<https://assignbuster.com/essay-on-psychological-warfare/>

Smyczek, P. J. (nd). Regulating the Battle Field of the Future: The Legal Limitations on the Conduct of Psychological Operations (PSYOP) Under Public International Law. (Attached).

Szasz, F. M. (2009). " Pamphlets Away": The Allied Propaganda Campaign over Japan during the Last Months of World War II. *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 42(3). (Attached).