

# **Procedure and Principles of Information and Psychological Operations in the North-Atlantic Alliance (Based on NATO Documents)**

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## **Abstract**

The article contains systematic principles, features and procedures for conducting information and psychological operations in NATO countries. The concepts of information operation (IO), psychological (information-psychological) operations (PSYOPS), strategic communications are defined, as well as their differences and functional relationships in the context of Ukrainian national perception of these processes.

The following basic principles of IO and PSYOPS are highlighted and explained: truthfulness, consequentiality, consistency, coordination, understanding, timeliness and efficiency, evaluation, responsibility. The following features of the IO and PSYOPS are identified and explained: interaction with other units and components of the military operation, operational planning, targeting, operation evaluation, target evaluation.

The process of coordination, planning and organization of information activities is described, as well as their differences in the prism of the domestic experience of information and psychological activities.

**KEY WORDS:** *information operation, psychological operation, NATO, strategic communications, psychological influence, hybrid war, NATO Standard, military operation, subject of influence, object of influence, target audience*

## **1. Introduction**

The information component of the modern course of life, as it became apparent after the specific manifestations of the hybrid aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine in 2013, operates not only concepts and data, but also directly determines the development of mankind in all its aspects. Given the combined factor of Ukraine's current military and political course, the hybrid aggression of the Russian Federation, the processes of rapid and intensive development of the Armed Forces in accordance with NATO standards, and the dynamic orientation of non-military entities and institutions to NATO practices and procedures, there is a need for specific action psychological operations by NATO nations.

The scattered efforts and visions, the inconsistency of the approaches and procedures of the structures and institutions of Ukraine responsible for informational and ideological immunization of the population, the fight against propaganda and misinformation, as history has shown, proved to be fatal to the national and cultural integrity of the Ukrainian people.

## **2. Methodology and Previous Research on the Subject**

Considering a wide attention to the domain of informational wars in general, current field activities in this area and the domestic context, such methods as empirical observation, analysis, comparison and extensive reference to the topical sources and documents were used in this research.

In the recent years, in particular since the Russian aggression inception, the subject of information and psychological operations has received special attention – namely, in the context of the use of information and psychological operations (PSYOPS) and misinformation against both the civilian and military populations of Ukraine. The essence, practices and procedures for their implementation in terms of domestic and Soviet approaches are revealed in the works of such scientists as: A. Manojlo [1], O. Saprykin [2], Zharkov [3], I. Vorobyov [4], I. Slyusarchuk [5], V. Khoroshko [6], L. Chistokletov [7]. A. Stadnik conducts a comprehensive comparative analysis of PSYOPS models by Western structures (Britain and the USA) with the Russian model, which covers both military and civilian conceptual spheres [8].

We also drew from the works of the experts whose achievements contribute to a better understanding of

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information operations and PSYOPS practices and procedures, such as R. Marutyanyan, V. Petryk, I. Golovin, I. Panarin, N. Kostin, S. Komov, M. Popov, V. Gudim, V. Telelim, V. Fomin, A. Chernyak, V. Bogush, A. Ros, P. Chernik, A. Shumka, O. Feklistov, V. Tsigichko, D. Vedeneyev, V. Ostroukhov and others.

Yet the main sources for this research, due to their consolidated representation and regulatory nature, which specifies and pretexts the peculiarities of the information operations and PSYOPS in Ukrainian realms, are the NATO documents - Allied Joint Publication AJP-3.10.1, Allied Joint Doctrine for Psychological Operations [9] and Allied Joint Publication AJP-3.10, Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations [10].

### 3. Main Text

NATO Joint Doctrine (which is also the Alliance Standard of the for Psychological Operations - STANAG 2514) defines information operations as follows:

*systematic use of information capabilities when conducting military operations in coordination with other components of a military operation to influence, disrupt, harm, or exploit adversary and potential adversary decision-making tools and processes while protecting one's own means and decision-making processes.* [9, p. 1-1].

Information operations are conducted through three main types of information activities:

- Information activities aimed at changing, influencing or enhancing the perceptions and attitudes of adversaries and other entities approved by the North Atlantic Council (SAR). Carried out when approved by South Africa as part of the operational plan;
- Information activities aimed at safeguarding and protecting NATO's freedom in the information environment by protecting data and information that assists the activities of decision-makers and decision-making processes. Conducted constantly;
- Information activities aimed at counteracting the command functions and capabilities of the adversary and other entities approved by South Africa by influencing the data and information it provides. Also used to influence command and control functions, reconnaissance functions, and weapons systems. Carried out when approved by South Africa as part of the operational plan.

In the same standard, psychological operations (PSO) are defined as follows:

a planned activity that, through communication and other means aimed at a specific audience, influences models of perception, attitude and behavior, which contributes to the achievement of political and military goals [9, p. 1-1].

The NATO STANAG 2518 Standard on Information Operations also provides the following definition of information operations:

*staff function that is to plan, evaluate and integrate information activities to have the desired impact on the will, understanding and capabilities of the enemy, potential enemy, as well as other audiences identified by the NATO Council to ensure and support NATO's current goals, operations and missions* [10, p. 1-5].

A. Manoilo specifies that in the information war the information countermeasures are carried out by the warring parties in the form of secret information-psychological operations with the use of information weapons [1]. Thus, there is a particularly urgent need for coordination of these activities.

PSYOPS and other related capabilities are coordinated through the processes and procedures of information operations, governed by the information strategy and approaches used by NATO Strategic Communications.

NATO Strategic Communications is the coordinated and agreed deployment of NATO communications and capabilities, such as: public diplomacy, public relations, military public relations, information operations, and psychological operations to ensure realization of policy, operational objectives, and the achievement of NATO goals [9, p. 1-2].

Thus, it is important to distinguish information operations and psychological (information-psychological) operations (PSYOPS), which are different processes according to the NATO conceptual system: PSYOPS are conducted within an information operation, which in turn is subordinate to Strategic Communications.

The basic principles of PSYOPS can be delineated as follows:

- **Credibility.** Using truthful and verified information as well as clear facts enhances the trust and credibility of the target audience. Conversely, the use of lies undermines trust and discredits the source through which information is delivered, which negatively affects the long-term effectiveness and success of the PSYOPS (even if it is subsequently conducted on the basis of truth).
- **Orderliness, consistency and coordination.** All PSYOPS products and materials are subject to an overall information strategy and a single strategic story. They are performed in a consistent and coordinated manner, both in command vertical and horizontal forces and units, regardless of the possible cultural and ethnic differences and characteristics of the target audience. Coordination of PSYOPS is carried out through information operations at the operational and tactical levels, while ensuring: their integration

into the overall plan of information operations at the beginning of the planning phase; consistency with current military operations, the overall information strategy and the operational objectives of the commander. There is also ongoing coordination to prevent the disruption of PSO by the actions of other units, and vice versa. In addition, PSYOPS influence the development of an information strategy.

- **Understanding.** Target Audience Analysis is a key tool to reach target audience understanding. The effectiveness of PSYOPS depends on a comprehensive understanding of the TA, which includes historical, social and cultural aspects. Without this understanding, the success of PSYOPS is virtually impossible, and their conduct can lead to second- and third-order destructive consequences.
- **Timeliness and Efficiency.** PSYOPS materials are manufactured and disseminated in accordance with the timeframe set out in order to achieve the desired result according to the Commander's Plan (if necessary). The rapid development of success by PSYOPS based on situational capabilities is often vital, so advance planning, pre-testing and material approval procedures are required. In doing so, the Approval Institution/Person is appointed to the lowest possible extent to ensure the effectiveness of such capabilities.
- **Evaluation.** PSYOPS continuously evaluate the impact of PSYOPS on the target audience. Thus, prior to exercising any influence on TA, PSYOPS units receive standardized information on current models of TA perception, attitudes, and behavior. Such an assessment provides the necessary information on changes to the PSYOPS measures and is integrated into the overall operational evaluation process.
- **Attribution.** As to maintain credibility with NATO and PSYOPS units, responsibility for PSYOPS is usually assumed by NATO or other relevant partner country or partner organization [9, p. 1-6].

The North Atlantic Alliance documents identify the following features of PSYOPS (which is particularly relevant to overcoming the lacuna of inconsistency, fragmentation and disorderly conduct of PSYOPS by domestic forces and means):

- **Liaison** with other Units and Components of the Military Operation

Although PSYOPS are means of implementing the foreign/domestic policies of the performing State, they are planned and implemented as part of the overall operational plan and as an element of the military operation. At the same time, different phases of PSYOPS are carried out in close cooperation with other military units.

**Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) Units.** CIMIC and PSYOPS units usually work closely together and complement each other. However, PSYOPS should always keep in mind the pressing issues that may arise in certain organizations and in no way give the impression that the CIMIC is being used as a PSYOPS tool. At the same time, through the interaction of CIMIC units with civilian organizations and population categories, higher staffs receive the necessary data, as well as improve awareness of the information environment and the CA within it. PSYOPS activities are contributing to a positive change in the perception of CA, which helps CBC units to accomplish their tasks in a designated area. In turn, the physical performance of the CUF divisions also contributes to positive changes in the CA's commitment to NATO and, accordingly, increases their openness to PSYOPS materials. All CBC capabilities are integrated into the overall plan during the planning process with coordination with the Information Operations Headquarters (through the Information Coordination Headquarters).

**Intelligence Units.** PSYOPS act as both major consumers and generators of intelligence and procedures. Collaboration between PSYOPS and intelligence units is usually based on the ongoing identification of requirements and needs, the mutual development of an analysis of complex situations and situations, and by providing support in analyzing the criteria for the effectiveness of PSO activities.

**Military Public Relations Units (MPRU).** MPRU and PSYOPS are separate but complementary functions. Both the former and the latter directly ensure the achievement of military objectives, counteract the propaganda of the enemy, and also deter the enemy from hostile actions. Despite the basic differences in terms of TA categories and scope, as well as the intent of the message, MPRU and PSYOPS need coordination in planning and implementation.

**Force Protection Units.** PSYOPS can improve force protection, not only by changing the behavior of NATO-approved CAs (such as creating and enhancing motivation to cooperate with NATO or deterring enemy action), but also by using counter-propaganda to support NATO units by influencing the NATO forces. was exposed to the propaganda of the enemy [9, p. 1-10].

- **Operational planning**

NATO's general operational planning procedures are set out in the NATO Joint Doctrine for Operational-Level Planning (AJP 5) and the Comprehensive Operations Planning Directive (COPD). The early planning process is a vital factor in ensuring that the situation and subsequent development of the plan and operation plan, as well as the entire campaign, are properly understood.

- **Target Definition**

The target definition process also takes into account the determination of the appropriate means and capabilities (including PSYOPS) to influence the target and target audiences. PSYOPS analysis is an integral part of the overall target definition cycle. Such analysis facilitates the selection of the most effective means of counteracting the objectives and provides a comprehensive assessment of the potential psychological impact of any lethal or non-lethal action.

- **Evaluation of Operations**

PSYOPS are involved in the overall assessment of the military operation through information obtained via TA analysis, as well as through their own performance and evaluation criteria.

- **Consequence Management**

Consequence management is the process by which senior commands plan for emergency response and events that have a direct physical and psychological impact on the audience. This is mostly true of NATO activities (information or physical) such as, for example, culturally sensitive PSYOPS materials or indirect damage from artillery fire. PSYOPS, as well as other information activities, play an important role in minimizing any potential harm to the mission. Any information activities should not conflict with current PSYOPS programs and activities, as well as information strategy and strategic information plan. [9, p. 1-12].

Particular attention should be paid to the specificities of planning and organizing psychological operations in NATO. As noted, PSYOPS planning is a part of the overall operational planning process identified in the relevant NATO guiding documents. These documents describe how PSYOPS planners integrate PSYOPS into NATO's formalized processes and procedures. For the most part, this is done at the operational and strategic levels, but it also has an impact on PSYOPS planning at the lower levels. When developing a NATO information strategy for military operations, PSYOPS personnel must be present at all branches and bodies involved in these processes. At the operational level, at all coordination and planning meetings and working groups.

Integration of PSYOPS into military operations is mainly accomplished through the inclusion of PSYOPS topics and themes in official political messages of NATO and a lead nation. At the same time, as already mentioned, it is necessary to ensure constant coordination and synchronization with the other information activities in accordance with the information strategy and strategic plot. For example, the widespread use of the media in the area of operation involves the inevitable leakage of information into different categories of TA, which necessitates the mandatory deconfliction and coordination of the information being disseminated. Attention should also be paid to any foreseeable or unforeseen impact of PSYOPS measures.

PSYOPS planners' function as advisers in the general operation planning team. The main tasks of PSYOPS planners are:

- 1) assessment of the future PSYOPS;
- 2) assistance in amending the overall plan of the military operation;
- 3) identification of material PSYOPS needs, sources of supply and budget;
- 4) mission analysis and changes to the commander's basic information requirements and planning guidance;
- 5) participation in the development of courses of action;
- 6) participation in the development of the overall plan of the operation;
- 7) changes to the plan of operation in accordance with PSYOPS tasks;
- 8) revision of other functional requirements in accordance with PSYOPS tasks;
- 9) determination of requirements for forces (units)/capabilities;
- 10) development of a plan for providing PSYOPS.

NATO PSYOPS are organized at five levels:

- Level 1 - North Atlantic Council (NATO highest political and military decision-making body) (**NAC**);
- Level 2 - Military Committee (NATO highest military decision-making body) (**MC**);
- Level 3 - Strategic Commands (Strategic Command Transformation and Strategic Command Operations) (**SC**);
- Level 4 – Operational (Joint Forces Command) (**JFC**);
- Level 5 - Tactical (Tactical Theatre Commands) (**TTC**).

The responsibilities for organizing PSYOPS are distributed between NATO levels in two "directions" (see Figure 1, "PSYOPS at NATO"). The first direction – regulatory one, it provides guidance from higher instances to lower ones; the second is recommendation and feedback direction, where the submission of requests, proposals, recommendations (for approval) from lower instances to higher ones takes place. Organization of PSYOPS in the above discussed five levels can be divided into two main directions as is presented in the Table 1.

Organization of PSYOPS

<i>Main directions</i>	
<b>First Direction</b>	<b>Second Direction</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MC sends approved expected PSYOPS results, TAs, prohibited topics and restrictions to Level 3 (5);</li> <li>• SC sends approved expected PSYOPS results, TAs, prohibited topics, and restrictions to Level 2 (6);</li> <li>• JFC develops and approves PSYOPS topics and programs in accordance with the guidance received (7);</li> <li>• TTC conducts PSYOPS “on the ground” (8);</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JFC submits to SC for approval the expected PSYOPS results, TAs, prohibited topics and restrictions (1)</li> <li>• SC requests a MC to provide strategic guidance on PSYOPS and approve PSYOPS as a military response option (2);</li> <li>• MC informs the NAC on the received PSYOPS materials and submits them to NAC for approval (3);</li> <li>• NAC approves expected PSYOPS results, TAs, prohibited topics, and restrictions specified in the operational plan (OPLAN) (4);</li> <li>• After PSYOPS, TTC provides feedback and suggestions for changes on the Tactical Theatre Level (9).</li> </ul>

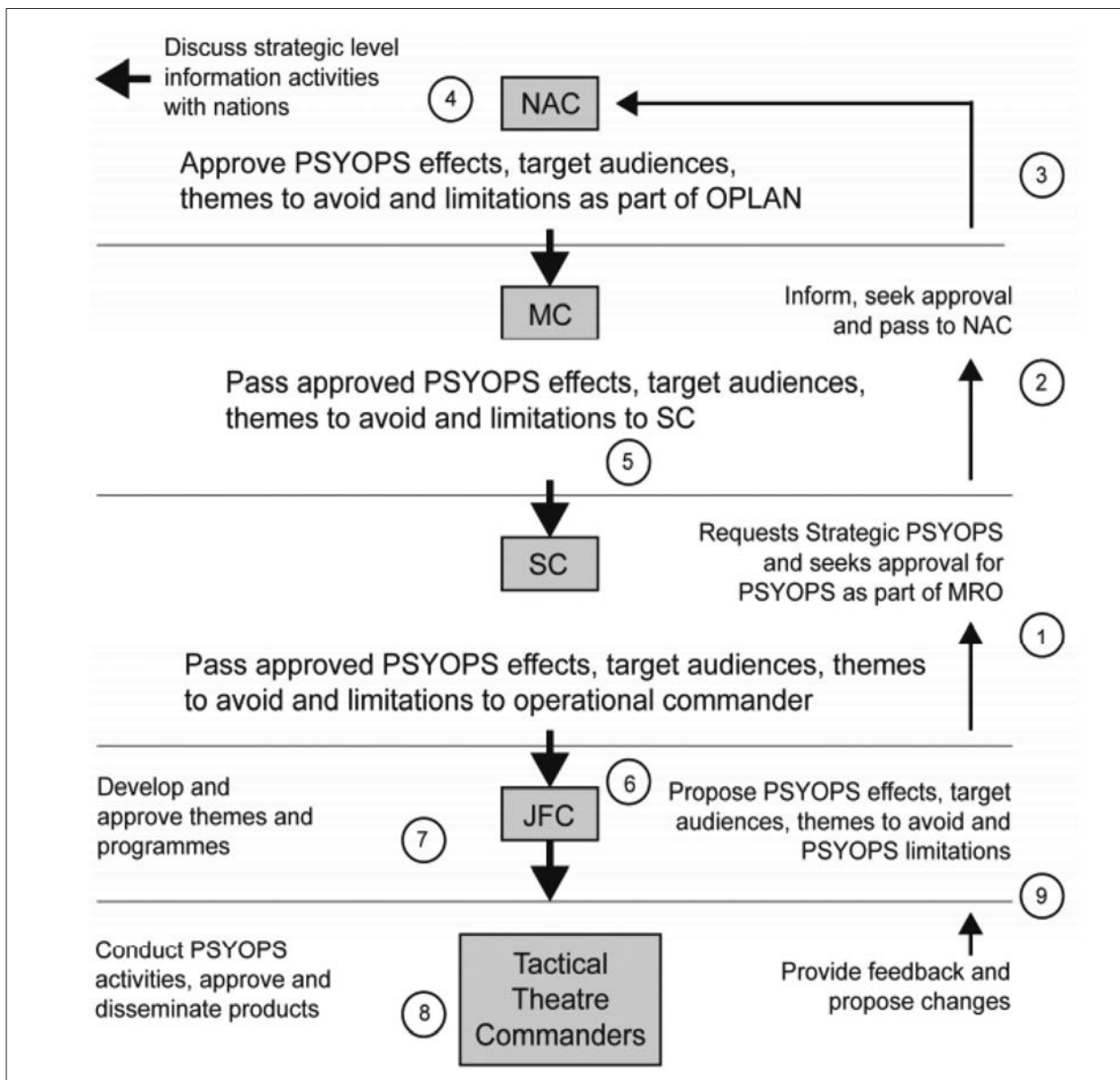


Fig. 1. NATO PSYOPS staffing process [9, p. 2-4].

#### 4. Conclusions

The article analyzes and organizes the principles and procedures for conducting NATO information and psychological operations. Fundamental differences between them were revealed, which in the realities of the Ukrainian media subjects were not sufficiently covered; a resource was provided to concertize and consolidate a common vision and approaches to conducting information and information-psychological operations in the interests of ensuring the ideological and cultural-intellectual protection of Ukrainian population.

The prospective researchers should draw particular attention to adapting or modifying the structures of the NATO information operations units in accordance with national realities and practices, the procedures for determining and measuring the effectiveness of such actions, and ways for stable and effective coordination between military and non-military actors during information and psychological operations implementation.

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