

MISO INTEGRATION WITH INTELLIGENCE AT THE BRIGADE AND BATTALION LEVEL:
COMBATTING INSURGENCIES FOR IO INITIATIVE
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Military Information Support Operations (MISO), formerly known as Psychological Operations (PSYOP), form an essential part of any information operations (IO) campaign in shaping perceptions, and thereby attitudes and behaviors of the target audience. In the current operational environment, characterized by Afghanistan, insurgents quickly produce and disseminate MISO messages to the local population, thus maintaining the IO initiative. Meanwhile, US MISO must go through a rigorous approval process up and down the chain of command, which means most time-sensitive materials and campaigns come days or even weeks after they are most relevant. However, by pushing certain MISO approval and product development to lower echelons, we can reclaim and enhance our hold over what information the target audiences receive and how they perceive it. This will require a new coordination between intelligence personnel and MISO detachments and teams to plan for their needs.

The insurgents in Afghanistan have at their disposal the means to conduct MISO dissemination within hours of a sensitive event, such as a bombing or raid, to the civilian population. Through word of mouth, they can put forth an interpretation of events that favor their own narrative. Insurgents also conduct intimidation via 渡ight letters which are dropped off after dark, as a warning to villagers against siding with the Coalition or Afghan government forces (Johnson, 2007), and publish monthly newspapers (The Taliban's Psychological War, 2008). These are targeted at the literate minority of Afghanistan, who would through their position as leader and elders, disseminate the message to the rest of the population. There does not seem to be any need for the insurgents to go through extensive planning or asking their higher levels of command for input or approval on any of these programs or products.

By contrast, current US MISO doctrine makes printed material and campaigns originate at a higher echelon and at a slower pace. A MISO company is at this time has its headquarters element and

the Development Detachment attached to division level, with three four-man Tactical Detachments located with the maneuver brigade combat teams (BCTs). Under these detachments are three three-man Tactical Teams, which are attached to each battalion. The Development Detachment conducts analysis of the target audiences, essentially a psychological IPB of various populations and demographics within the division area of operations (AO), and both designs and prints the various handbills, leaflets, pamphlets, posters, billboards and other visual IO products. It also comes up with various talking points, themes, programs and overall MISO strategies for the teams and detachments to discuss with the civilian populace. The teams in turn gather information about the perceptions, values and attitudes within their AO to be passed up to the detachments, and up to the Development Detachment for further analysis and refinement of the overall division MISO message. While the Development Detachment designs any and all printed material, most of the actual production is done through local contracted printers, while its organic printing capability consists of a machine that can churn out monochromatic handbills (FM 3-05.30).

Regardless of the work of the Development Detachment, be it products or campaign messages, each must undergo a lengthy approval process. In theory the approval for any MISO plan, program, theme or product is the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF), although that power can be delegated to the theater commander, who can in turn delegate approval authority to the joint task force commander. As of yet, however, commanders at division level or lower do not have any of this authority. The end result is that a Tactical Team or Tactical Detachment requesting approval for a product or theme to engage the local audience with must forward their plan up to the Development Detachment at division level for review. The Development Detachment must then gain approval from at least the Joint Task Force command at the joint level. Sometimes the Joint Task Force must clear it with theater or SECDEF, before such approval or revision is sent back down the line to the Tactical Detachment, who finally gives the Tactical Teams the go-ahead for dissemination. While not an impediment to long term programs or those products that are less dependent on timeliness, its effects on immediately needed MISO are severe.

Whereas insurgents can react to a situation with face to face, immediate media statements, updates to their website (Foxley, 2007), and printed material, local commanders must wait for the desired message to be approved to at least the joint level, then produced and/or disseminated. This slow pace of this process means that often the products will be overcome by events and rendered useless (Lamb, 2005), thereby ceding the IO initiative to the insurgency. Given human cognitive function, an immediate message can influence perceptions to a greater degree than one that arrives in the area after the insurgent theme has permeated the target audience, and the details of the event have been forgotten in favor of the narrative the enemy molded said details into. In a population-centric counter insurgency campaign, losing this hold on the civilians in the area of operations is unacceptable.

Faced with this dilemma, it is clear that the MISO production and approval process for certain immediate needs should be modified to accommodate the brigade-centric Army in a modern counter insurgency environment. We must give battalion, brigade and division commanders the ability to approve products and themes for immediate use in the aftermath of a major incident requiring timely IO. Approving any MISO at such a low level has been seen as problematic, since the messages put out have to be consistent with the overall theater message (Barklay, 2007). In fact, the Taliban's rapid and decentralized fielding of IO often makes their messages contradictory (Foxley, 2007). On the other hand, lower echelon commanders often have their own unique sets of problems, tribal dynamics and target audiences to deal with, and may require specific plans tailored only to their area of operations (Barklay, 2007; Joint Publication 3-53, 2003). To get around this, SECDEF, joint and theater command should equip their subordinate maneuver and MISO assets with a list of criteria for approving certain themes and plans on their own, as well as pre-approved products that can be drawn upon immediately. The criteria can be utilized by division, brigade or battalion commanders to do their own MISO approval with the Development Detachment, Tactical Detachments, or even the Tactical Teams, when there is an immediate need to preempt enemy IO. Such lists must include a set of standards as to how to judge and approve themes for discussion and products to disseminate, in keeping with the main theater MISO

strategy.

To develop this list requires close coordination between the intelligence staff and the MISO detachments and teams. The battalion S-2s should drive the process by coming up with possible enemy and population courses of action that might need immediate approval by the commander. The Tactical Teams would work closely with the S-2 section, providing their trained input based on analysis of the local target audiences to include their culture, beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. This list would then be forwarded up to the brigade G-2s and their Tactical Detachments for further refinement along the same lines, and finally to division intelligence and the Development Detachment, which would also come up with initial products (such as handbills) and themes (like talking points) to deal with these situations.

This entire package finally ends up at the traditional approval authorities, who could then come up with specific approval criteria for all the lower echelon commanders, which would be disseminated back down the chain of command to them. The products and themes would be given back as well, with any changes to be made, before they too are approved. To anticipate a variety of specific needs, these pre-approved products would be more akin to templates, which can be tailored by the MISO detachments and teams to their immediate local needs fleshing them out with any necessary specifics such as names and locations. All subordinate brigades, battalions, Tactical Detachments and Tactical Teams should receive each others approval criteria, products and themes, so as to ensure close coordination and consistency in their MISO messages, especially if enemy TTPs and potential IO crisis situations migrate between their different AOs. Taken as a whole, this bottom-up analysis ensures that on-the-ground maneuver commander and their associated MISO units can provide relevant, timely input on their specific target audiences and potential IO needs. Meanwhile, the subsequent top-down pre-approval allows the national, theater and joint command the ability to keep the lower level MISO message consistent with their broader IO campaign.

While the population of Afghanistan is mostly illiterate, those who can read find themselves as centers of gravity for spreading any IO messages. Thus, although face to face interaction provides the

main thrust of any IO in theater, printed products cannot be completely discounted. Just as the approval process and ready-made products can be pushed lower in the chain of command, so too should production itself. For this, the printing and cutting machines that are both available to the Development Detachment should be replicated and pushed down to the brigades or even battalions, so that each MISO company has four (one for the Development Detachment, one for each Tactical Detachment) to thirteen (if the Tactical Teams also receive theirs), instead of one. Such machines should be able to be accommodated within existing FOBs and electrical grids, especially if they will only be activated when needed. If they remain the sole domain of the Development Detachment, any products created will have to be distributed to the BCTs, and in turn to the battalions for the Tactical Teams who actually disseminate them, causing critical delays and potential casualties during transit. While the Development Detachment conducts overall planning of the MISO in the division area of operations and long term programs, it is in the brigade and battalion level where the requirement for this quick printing is most needed. Hence, Tactical Detachments and Teams are the most appropriate MISO component to have the organic ability to print out handbills on the fly.

Allowing battalion and brigade commanders approval authority is not without its potential pitfalls. For one, the reduced direct oversight places more responsibility on said commanders and their MISO counterparts to a far greater extent than has been before. This is compounded by the very polyglot nature of Afghanistan (and many other potential theaters), wherein numerous tribes and villages exist that are markedly different from each other in critical aspects of culture and attitudes. Poorly done target audience analysis, insufficient planning for emergency IO situations, and lack of judgment with pre-approval guidelines can all result in IO disaster. However, it is a fact that all manner of responsibilities are being pushed down to lower echelon commanders, and the vital nature of IO means that it does little good to hold back its potential when so many other disciplines are being vested to field grade officers. Hence, the alternative seems to be giving these commanders, and their intelligence and MISO staff, the training to match their added challenges. Those competing for these positions should

receive instruction, and be vetted in their ability to understand, the complexities and implications of MISO and the cultural dynamics within their AO. Being able to collect on, analyze and understand the latter is especially important for the MISO detachments and teams, as is effectively communicating them to the commander and S-2. Conversely, those receiving such analysis need to be able to comprehend and integrate it into their decision making.

Another issue that might arise is the unwillingness of joint and theater command to relinquish the process which has been the sole proprietorship of their echelon. However, it must be stressed to them that these pre-approval guidelines and per-approved products are only for urgent situations where the normal method cannot be followed and still produce timely, relevant MISO. The majority of approval for the overall plans and programs would remain ever still in their hands. Meanwhile, the national command authority must understand the need battalions and brigades might have to affect IO changes in their environment that cannot wait on joint or theater to pass on them.

MISO approval and production has remained in the model of the Cold War era Army to the detriment of exploiting the full potential of its effects. While authority for authorizing long term, broad programs can remain at the joint, theater and national level, the current brigade and battalion centric operations demand brigade and battalion centric MISO approval. We must empower BCT commanders and their MISO detachment counterparts with the flexibility and initiative, but also guidance and close coordination with intelligence elements, to anticipate their needs. This would enable US MISO to possess the timeliness of insurgent propaganda, while avoiding their pitfall of disseminating conflicting messages. This would not replace the Development Detachments as the main driver of plans and programs, themes and products. Rather, it proactively addresses potential battalion and brigade level scenarios in a manner that allows their commanders to compete more viably with insurgent IO.

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