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Defence Committee

**Lessons of Iraq**  
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## CHAPTER 14: INFORMATION OPERATIONS

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*Victory is rarely achieved purely through the destruction of an adversary's material; the key is to destroy an adversary's Will to fight. Info Ops is the primary means by which Will and the ability to impose Will and exercise command is attacked. [651]*

442. In any operation MoD provides support to the information campaign through the co-ordinated use of military capability in order to influence audiences. This has two parts: Information Operations and Media Operations, which are supposed to be mutually supporting. The Cabinet Office provides strategic direction and objectives for the information campaign and responsibility for MoD's contribution rests with the Director General, Operational Policy and the Directorate of Targeting and Information Operations (DTIO).

443. Air Vice Marshal Mike Heath, who was Director of DTIO during Operation Telic, described information operations as follows:

the concept of Information Operations for the military is to garner cross-government activity, not just military activity, to contribute towards influence and persuasion. I like to think of it as a continuum, that if you get it right it starts during pre war fighting where you are looking towards dissuasion and coercion; it continues into military operations; and, of course, it then wraps up and it is just as essential that you carry it through into post conflict restoration and reconstitution. [652]

DTIO provides strategic guidance on targeting and the cross-government information campaign, as well as advice to Ministers and the Chiefs of Staff. In DTIO itself, the staff of 98 includes a psychiatrist, an anthropologist and other specialist staff. [653] At the strategic level the British have been paying an American consultancy firm, the Redon Group, to provide advice on information campaigns for some five years. [654] DTIO also has contacts with a variety of experts in the United Kingdom in universities and other institutions.

444. The Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) carries out analysis to support military operations and the DIS Operations Support Group, following priorities set out by the Targeting Board, will conduct analyses of both infrastructure and human factors. These analyses are then brought together by the National Infrastructure Assessment Team (NIAT) into a Target Systems Analysis (TSA) identifying key vulnerabilities in 'will' and 'capability'. 'Human factors' analysis looks at the 'will' of adversaries, allies, coalition partners and key

uncommitted parties. Infrastructure analysis, as well as addressing physical infrastructure, also includes information networks, C4I (command, control, communications, computers and intelligence) capabilities and processes to identify ‘critical nodes’ and linkages in order to identify vulnerabilities. At the operational level the Joint Task Force Commander sets boundaries and provides direction.

445. MoD has put considerable effort into making this activity truly cross-departmental.

as far as Information Operations is concerned [MoD] is willing to talk to anybody and everyone who will listen...the major interlocutor is the Foreign Office, and through the process of Kosovo and Sierra Leone...we have had a meaningful and constant dialogue with the Foreign Office. We have also had dialogue with the Cabinet Office, and through Iraq we had conversations on a daily basis with the Campbell group in No 10. On an ad hoc basis we have included DfID in our discussions and the Home Office, although...those are infrequent. The advantage we have had in the Ministry of Defence is that we have a directorate that stood up for constant engagement in this area. [655]

The Information Campaign objectives are contained in an Information Operations Annex to CDS’s Directive which identifies the ‘Master Info Campaign Messages’ that must be put across. The Master Messages are so important that they ‘must not be compromised by the conduct of lower level Info Ops.’ [656] The annex may also list target audiences and additional messages.

## Information Campaign Objectives in Operation Telic

446. *First Reflections* states that the aim of the information campaign was to influence the will of the Iraqi regime and the attitudes of ordinary Iraqi people and to articulate the Government’s strategy to allies and others in the region. Air Vice Marshal Heath set out the objectives in Operation Telic as follows:

Initially, the key objective was to deter the deployment and use of weapons of mass destruction. It was to deter wilful damage to the Iraqi infrastructure either by the people or by the regime; it was to promote the coalition’s aims and objectives in terms of deterrents, potential hostile action and the reconstitution that came afterwards. All three were equally important. It was to prevent or limit civilian casualties, predominantly through creating an

understanding with the population that they were not the target group if we moved into conflict, and how they could remain relatively safe, and also to convey to military personnel how they could surrender and remain safe throughout the process once again if we went into conflict. Those, widely, are the grander, strategic concepts. [657]

447. Issues which were identified as having a potentially negative impact by the coalition information operations planners included oil, perceptions of the Bush administration's ulterior objectives in going to war with Iraq and the very obvious divisions within the UN Security Council. The Iraqi regime also had its own information operations campaign which tried (with some apparent success) to characterise the crisis as Bush family revenge for the 1991 Gulf War and part of an expansionist American policy of pre-emptive military action. It also argued that the UN inspectors should be given more time to do their job properly. The information operations picture was complicated by the failure to get Turkish support for a northern option and the fact that in the 1991 Gulf War the use of covert propaganda may have encouraged uprisings within Iraq which were not then supported by the coalition. This had left a legacy of mistrust among Iraqis, particularly in the south of the country, about the motives and commitment of the US and its allies.

448. In some respects an information campaign directed at Iraq had been conducted since the early 1990s. It had certainly had been an important part of operations such as Desert Fox (when British and American aircraft bombed Iraqi military facilities in the no-fly zones following the withdrawal of UN inspectors in December 1998). But information operations began in earnest in October 2002 when an American A10 Warthog dropped 120,000 leaflets warning Iraqi forces not to fire on US and UK aircraft in the no-fly zones. By 13 January 2003, fourteen leaflet drops had been undertaken.

449. According to one source, in advance of the first attack on 20 March over 40 million leaflets were dropped on Iraq, with another 40 million dropped during the major combat phase. [658] Most appear to have been dropped in the south.

450. American aircraft began broadcasting radio messages in Arabic in December 2002. [659] The US has admitted that it undertook a number of bombing missions in the no-fly zones in the second half of 2002 targeting elements of the Iraqi's command and control communications networks, in Operation Southern Focus. [660] The coalition's effort at the strategic and grand-strategic level appears to have been to concentrate its information campaigns on the regular

Iraqi Army, ordinary citizens, religious leaders and scientists connected with the WMD programmes, ahead of pillars of the Baath regime including the Republican Guard and the Special Republican Guard. On 11 January the US began an email campaign, targeting political and military leaders in Iraq. Some of the messages were:

If you provide information on weapons of mass destruction or if you takes steps to hamper their use, we will do whatever is necessary to protect you and protect your families. Failing to do that will lead to grave personal consequences.

Iraqi chemical, biological and nuclear weapons violate Iraq's commitment to agreements and United Nations resolutions. Iraq has been isolated because of this behaviour. The United States and its allies want the Iraqi people to be liberated from Saddam's injustice and for Iraq to become a respected member of the international community. Iraq's future depends on you. [661]

451. The test detonation of the 21,000lb MOAB (massive ordnance airburst bomb) on 11 March by the USAF in Florida is believed by some to have been an example of preparatory psychological operations for a conflict in Iraq, demonstrating the full destructive power available to the US from a conventional weapons system, should it need to retaliate to the use of WMD against its deployed forces. It has been claimed that the decision in Operation Telic to eschew an aerial bombardment phase at the start of the campaign was an example of information operations objectives influencing the conduct of military operations. Our evidence, however, suggests that other factors were as important (see paragraph 33).

## **UK psychological operations capabilities**

452. Psychological operations (psyops) can be seen as the tactical end of the strategic information operations whole. Air Vice Marshal Heath explained it as follows:

Psychological Operations is very much a part of Information Operations: its place really is at the tactical level, but without the coherence of strategic advice, operational development and then tactical practitioning, you do not have coherent psychological operations. Psychological Operations, if you like, is the more public part of military activity. It is specifically military and I cannot say that about most of the rest of Information Operations—that is cross-government. It is specifically tactical, and it is specifically targeted by military means into target audiences, so I

saw it as the end instrument of what we were crafting in London. [662]

The UK's psyops capability is provided by the 15 (UK) Psychological Operations Group (15 (UK) PsyOps) based at the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre, Chicksands. Its role is to provide psychological operations and information support capabilities for operations. [663] The Reserve element of 15 (UK) PsyOps includes personnel from civilian radio stations some of whom were used in the setting up of a local radio station in Basra—Radio Nahrain. The group uses equipment that was bought commercially and which is therefore not 'ruggedised' i.e. built to the robustness appropriate for military operations. [664] 15 (UK) PsyOps is supported by information officers at battalion and regimental level within the operational units. [665]

453. Americans psyops are supported by dedicated Hercules E-130Es (the Commando Solo [666]). As well as the basic capability to broadcast radio and TV signals these aircraft are also able to jam existing radio and TV signals and replace them with their own. They were used in advance of the 1991 Gulf War and during the Grenada and Haiti operations. All of the US Secretary of Defense's press conferences from January 2003 onwards were broadcast by Commando Solo aircraft in theatre. Other output was produced by the 4<sup>th</sup> Psychological Operations Group based at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, aided by Iraqi exiles. The US Congress has given budget approval for a replacement EC-130J version of the aircraft. There are however no plans to provide the British forces with a similar capability. As Air Vice Marshal Heath told us:

when we make the balance of investment judgements, as worthy as 15 Psyop is, it still is a small capability to be delivered. At the moment, 15 Psyop will double in size, just about, over the next year. I hope that in the lessons learned out of Telic we will deliver them an AM radio, but today there is no plan that I am aware of... and I do not believe that you will see a massive expansion in this capability. If I had an open cheque book, yes, I would buy an E-130E and, yes, I would buy a TV station. [667]

454. The US is well provided for in terms of resources but there has been criticism of their lack of cultural sensitivity compared to the British. Air Vice Marshal Heath told us:

We have a softer, smaller footprint than the Americans. I think we are better at understanding the needs of the people, rather than the needs of the war fighter. The Americans today very firmly see themselves still at war in Iraq. [668]

More importantly perhaps he argued that the cross-government approach in the UK was a strength which the Americans did not have:

The Americans have a different approach to this whole concept

and indeed all of their operations...the Americans envy our concept of joined up, cross government activity in this area...The Americans broke this out into separate parcels. Until the war was over, there was very little information operations effort into the reconstitution and the aftermath; whereas from our point of view, when we were getting towards the end state, my staff were directed to lose complete interest in the war fighting piece. We needed to start moving into the reconstruction piece. [669]

455. Planning for the British information campaign began in October, but nothing was initiated until the first day of the combat phase. According to Air Vice Marshal Heath this was 'too late' and he recommended that a lot of the activity that followed should have been undertaken in the preparatory phase. [670] Given that the Americans were undertaking extensive messaging in the months leading up to the conflict, this contrast in the British approach is surprising. **Our evidence suggests that if information operations are to be successful, it is essential that they should start in the period when diplomatic efforts are still being made, albeit backed by the coercive threat of military force through overt preparations. This would allow for the full potential of information operations to be exerted in advance of the start of hostilities and might even contribute to their avoidance.**

## Effectiveness

456. The coalition message seems to have had limited effect on world opinion. Favourable views of the US fell dramatically from the start of 2003 to March 2003. (According to the Pew Centre the figures fell from 63% to 31% in France; 70% to 36% in Italy; 61% to 28% in Russia; 30% to 12% in Turkey; and 75% to 48% in the UK.)

457. Co-ordination of the information campaign between the combat phase and post-conflict phase was weak, as is admitted in *Lessons for the Future*:

While co-ordination of the information campaign activity across Government and the agencies was extremely good at the working level during the campaign phase, this declined during the early part of the post-conflict phase. This led to a dilution of its effectiveness and coherence, despite the importance of the contribution it can make to maintaining the consent of the Iraqi people. [671]

This is an important issue since information operations must be directed to the achievement of strategic objectives (see paragraphs 445-6 above). Air Vice Marshal Heath told us:

... we were unable to counter the high level of cynicism and

hostility that we were meeting in open forum, predominantly in the media. We had no eloquent answer to most of that. We believed that unless we could have a demonstrator that confirmed our line, we felt it was better to say nothing rather than to say, 'They are wrong; we are right.' That largely undermined our position in a number of areas. [672]

458. Measuring the effectiveness of Information Operations is a significant challenge: 'the whole concept of measures of effectiveness is taxing us and we are trying to come up with a methodology.' [673] *Information Operations* refers to 'Measures of Effectiveness' which will have been included in the Information Operations plan and which must be constantly monitored. However, influencing a target audience is not an exact science. The DIS contracted a private company to carry out an analysis of the effectiveness of information operations in Kosovo. *First Reflections* noted that it was difficult to measure the effectiveness of the information campaign, but added that:

the largely quiescent reaction of the bulk of the Iraqi population and the disappearance or surrender of the most of the Iraqi armed forces may indicate its positive effects... [674]

However, *Lessons for the Future* makes no such claims.

459. Air Vice Marshal Heath explained to the Committee how difficult assessing success was:

If you cannot measure it and you cannot demonstrate that you are delivering capability, you cannot demonstrate that you are enhancing capability. You cannot demonstrate ultimately that if you get it right you will avoid conflict.

I had one individual who was a reservist. This was his full time job in terms of trying to analyse where we might see demonstrators of capability. He trawled every resource he could: newspapers, the media, the internet, reports coming out from prisoners of war, reports from people on the streets. We are pulling together as much as we can in terms of that human assessment. In terms of further assessment the PJHQ, towards the end of the campaign, came back with an embryonic matrix of trying to do a scientific analysis of where you think there are indicators and what level of effect they were demonstrating. [675]

460. Having said that, there were areas that appeared to have shown some success. Air Vice Marshal Heath claimed:

prisoners of war who were interviewed were persuaded by leaflets not to open valves in the oilfields: we saw battalions that took up

defensive surrender positions that came directly out of the psyops messages; we had people in Basra who, when they were asked to go out into the streets and riot against the Baath Party, said, ‘No, the reason we are staying indoors is because you have been telling us on the radio for the last month to keep out of the way and we will be out of harm’s way and we will be safe’. ...In some small way I see those as measures of effectiveness. [676]

461. The Secretary of State told the Committee that a range of efforts had been made to demonstrate to the Iraqi people that it was the regime that was being targeted, not them. [677] He had had reports that the clear and precise targeting of the regime and buildings was noticed by people inside Iraq. He added:

warnings were given that use of weapons of mass destruction by senior Iraqi military would be regarded as a war crime, and the fact that they were pursuing higher orders would not be an acceptable explanation, so a very clear and stern warning was given to the Iraqi military about that. [678]

Nonetheless, speaking in May 2003, he accepted that the effectiveness of the information campaign was hard to assess—‘I cannot properly answer the impact of information operations without consulting my Iraqi counterpart, and since I have no idea where he is...’ [679] He believed that the fact that Iraqis did not use chemical or other unconventional weapons was due more to the rapidity of the coalition advance and its effect on Iraqi command and control capability than to information operations—‘I place much greater weight in terms of rapidity of effect of the operations...’ [680]

462. One specific success for information operations was suggested by Rear Admiral Snelson who told us that the information operation conducted by him and the American Maritime Commander successfully deterred attacks on coalition shipping by publicly stating that they were prepared to deal with such attacks. [681] Other examples that might be identified include that the regime did not use non-conventional weapons against the coalition, the absence of any widespread destruction of the Iraqi oil industry infrastructure. Both had been targets of leaflet drops by the coalition.

463. On the other hand, Saddam Hussein himself commented on the futility of the coalition leaflet campaign in a speech on 27 January to senior army officers. Iraqi state television broadcast excerpts of the meeting. Saddam stated, ‘The enemies think that people are eager to read their leaflets...’ and ‘Your brothers among the people and the armed forces stage what resembles a ceremony after collecting and

burning these leaflets...' There is an argument that when a nation publicly attacks psychological operations it is a sign that the propaganda is effective. [682]

464. But Air Vice Marshal Heath was prepared to acknowledge areas of weakness:

I suppose that the weakest area of our performance was our ability to counter either the negative press or the negative messages that in fact were coming out of Baghdad. There was no doubt that Saddam Hussein is a seasoned practitioner of Information Operations. [683]

Indeed, in this respect, as in Kosovo, the coalition came 'second', which is a worrying conclusion for future operations:

actually we came second most of the time. Okay, we managed to make the Minister of Information a comedy or a parody character but in the very first stages he was quite coherent and issuing messages that were doing us harm, and the weakness in our performance which we are now addressing is we were not very good at responding in a timely fashion to the criticism being issued around the world.

The BBC were at pains to tell me that they were not an instrument of government and they were independent, and therefore no matter how much we would like a story to be carried, a riposte to be carried into the public domain, if they were not interested because that was not the sexy story this year, week or day, then you would find it nigh impossible to counter some of the messages being used against you. It is an area of weakness, and it is a critically important area that we have to address in the coming months. [684]

465. Nonetheless, overall he believed that the information campaign had had an effect:

I have no doubt whatsoever that we did have an effect...Had we gone on during the persuasion stage for another year, would we have avoided conflict? I do not know...It is the most difficult aspect of the whole information piece. You need to find a way of delivering messages of effectiveness... [DTIO] has the best minds trying to address this very issue because we see it as essential. There is no doubt that we delivered an element of persuasion, an element of dissuasion and an element that affected war fighting in terms of regiments or battalions giving up and making sure that we did not attack them. There is no doubt that we are having an

influence in the reconstitution of Iraq today, but I am not capable of quantifying that in terms of is it very good; is it high or is it low. [685]

**In conclusion, we believe that the British information operations campaign did not begin early enough. We are concerned that the lessons of the Kosovo campaign were not better learned in this important area. It is disappointing that the coalition is widely perceived to have ‘come second’ in perception management. However we recognise that ‘coming second’ may be inevitable if a conflict of choice is being pursued by liberal democracies with a free media. We are, however, persuaded that information operations are an activity which can be expected to become of increasing importance in future operations. There were a number of successes which provide evidence of the potential effectiveness of information operations. We recommend that the Government should consider significantly enhancing our capabilities in this area.**

## Notes

651 Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre, *Information Operations-Joint Warfare Publication 3-80* (June 2002), hereafter JWP 3-80, para 106.

652 Q 1571

653 Q 1643

654 Q 1630

655 Q 1579

656 JWP 3-80, para 112.

657 Q 1592

658 ‘Mind Games’, Lt Col Steven Collins, *NATO Review* (Summer 2003).

659 ‘Commando Solo Messages over Iraq’, [www.psywarrior.com](http://www.psywarrior.com).

660 US Bombed Iraq before war’, *Toronto Star*, 20 July 2003.

661 Herbert Friedman, ‘No-fly Zone Warning Leaflets to Iraq’, [www.psywarrior.com/IraqNoFlyZone.html](http://www.psywarrior.com/IraqNoFlyZone.html).

662 Q 1590

663 There is a small cadre of 8 regular personnel drawn from all 3 services, 2 civil servants and the Reservist group of 28 provides the Unit with its media, broadcasting and publishing specialists. The skills that the reservists bring to the Group include desktop publishing, video camera work, television editing and production, and market analysis. When deployed operationally the regular and Reservist personnel form an Information Support Team, which

would deploy in support of a national or NATO operation. Stephen Jolly, 'Wearing the Stag's Head Badge: British Combat Propaganda Since 1945', *Falling Leaf: The Journal of the Psywar Society*, 172 (March 2001).

664 Q 1640

665 Q 1628

666 The 6 Commando Solo aircraft are flown by the 193<sup>rd</sup> Special Operations Wing of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard and are generally tasked by the State Department.

667 Q 1639

668 Q 1637

669 Q 1663

670 Q 1619

671 Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq-Lessons for the Future* (December 2003), para 10.5.

672 Q 1664

673 Q 1591

674 Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq-First Reflections* (July 2003) p 18.

675 Q 1668

676 Q 1591

677 Q 17

678 Q 17

679 Q 18

680 Q 19

681 Q1491

682 Herbert Friedman, 'No-fly Zone Warning Leaflets to Iraq', [www.psywarrior.com/IraqNoFlyZone.html](http://www.psywarrior.com/IraqNoFlyZone.html).

683 Q 1601

684 Q 1602

685 Q 1669

The complete report including the full written evidence is available to view on the internet at:

[www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmdfence/57/5702.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmselect/cmdfence/57/5702.htm)