

9-7-2001

Commentary on Psychological Warfare in the 21st Century

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Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (2001) "Commentary on Psychological Warfare in the 21st Century," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 11 : Iss. 10 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol11/iss10/2>

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Title: Commentary on Psychological Warfare in the 21st Century

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Volume: 11

Issue: 10

Date: 2001-09-07

Keywords:

Abstract. This article provides commentary on 21st century challenges--threats and opportunities--to the practice of psychological warfare.

Psychological warfare can denote the intentional targeting of intrapsychic components of an adversary to engender adversarial behavior supportive of the targeter's political goals. This tool of politics has been described by applied political philosophers at least as temporally removed as Kautilya, Lord Shang, and Thucydides and as proximate as so-called international security intellectuals who write in contemporary foreign policy journals. In fact, public discourse on foreign policy operations now being implemented or contemplated by United States Government (USG) has most recently focused on (1) long-term, multi-modal efforts--including communications-- to overthrow or radically change the government led by Fidel Castro in Cuba; (2) incipient efforts to achieve similar goals through satellite television broadcasts into Iraq; and (3) yet other efforts to help achieve USG political objectives in the People's Republic of China (PRC) through financing a US-based computer network designed to impede PRC attempts to censor the World Wide Web for users in the PRC. Recognizing that the essence of psychological warfare may not have changed in thousands of years, one still might profitably explore what might be different about it in our new century.

One change may involve the infrastructure of communications. With ongoing research and development in telecommunications, there appears to be significant new opportunities to affect people through communications infrastructures that are farther and farther physically removed from their targets. This may pose a lesser threat of physical danger and destruction for psychological warfare operatives and their supporting infrastructure. Because of the seemingly ever greater disparity between the telecommunications sophistication of First World and Third World nation-states, the ability to effect psychological warfare in a more physically remote manner also presents the opportunity--if not the *raison d'etre* and *fait accompli*--for new technology-based colonialisms and hegemonies permeating not only the economics of investment and trade but also phenomenologies of mind and spirit. A third consequence of the potential for the increasing physical remoteness of psychological warfare concurrently comprises (1) the increasing threat that First World nation-states pose to each other and (2) ease with which a Third World nation-state might reign supreme among its peers through pertinent psychological warfare aid from a First World government.

Another change to psychological warfare may involve the increasing ease with which non-governmental organizations and other non-state actors can obtain access to the latest telecommunications developments and applications. This change seems to present nation-states with additional adversaries and concurrently seems to reinforce trends of the very weakening of nation-states and the international nation-state system.

A third change to psychological warfare may involve putative psychological changes in the world's human population during the current socially constructed era of globalization. Very probably, not all people are being equally affected by and through this era. In fact, some may not be affected at all. Very probably, there still remain and will remain some people who seem like all others, most others, some

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others, and no others. And very probably, variables such as ethnicities, cultures, societies, economics, politics, and so on, are complexly and differentially affecting the era's own effects on human psychologies--just as these variables are being affected by the era and by human psychologies. Be that as it may, a few generalizations may be offered concerning human psychological changes with relevance to psychological warfare.

For some people, ethnic, religious, and/or national identities appear to be ever more crucial to generating behavior of interest to psychological warriors. In fact, these identities appear to be subsuming more and more of some people's psychological make-up. Thus, the intelligence collection and analytic requirement that support psychological warfare must be affected in an increasingly focused manner on these identities.

Much more challengingly, the psychologies of some people are becoming more and more fragmented. For these people, there appear to be multiple selves, each with different situational dependencies. And for each self and self-relevant behaviors, there appears to be less cohesiveness and staying power even within a consonant situation. This saturation of self with selves presents an awesome hurdle for psychological warriors. The epistemological and metaphysical elements of these selves for both targeters and targets suggest that much might be gained from comparatively studying classical psychologies and philosophies of self to sensitize targets to important questions that need answering, while crafting a successful psychological warfare plan.

A final change to psychological warfare may involve the nature of validating relevant psychological information--specifically the putative linkages between target-perceived information source and content; the intensity and frequency of information presentation; intrapsychic aspects of the target; targeter-desired behaviors of the target; and various situational, ecological, environmental, and historical contexts. Although scientific psychology still most highly values experimental and empirical routes to validity through rigorously controlled procedures, validity constructs such as narrative resonance, the performativeness and social constructiveness of identities, and optimal communication moments may be of more pragmatic value. Perhaps, the 21st century may see scientific psychology finally give up its emulation of 19th century physical science's philosophies of science--much as 21st century physical scientists seem to be and as philosophers of science have long ago.

In conclusion, the 21st century psychological warrior will continue to practice one of the oldest human professions in a high-threat high- opportunity environment. (See Bauer, M.W., & Gaskell, G. (1999). Towards a paradigm for research on social representations. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 29, 163-186; Hartman, J.J. (2000). A psychoanalytic view of racial myths in a Nazi propaganda film: Dew Ewige Jude. *Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 2, 329-346; Hilgart, J. (August 30, 2001). Iraq, democracy and us. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Lee, J. (August 30, 2001). U.S. may help Chinese evade net censorship. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Mugny, G., Tafani, E., Falomir-Pichastor, J.M., & Layat, C. (2000). Source credibility, social comparison, and social influence. *Revue Internationale de Psychologie Sociale*, 13, 151-175; Safran, S.P. (2001). Movie images of disability and war: Framing history and political ideology. *Remedial and Special Education*, 22, 223-232; Shanker, T. (August 28, 2001). Iraqi opposition ready to broadcast satellite TV program financed by U.S. *The New York Times*, p. 7.)(Keywords: Globalization, Nation-State, Non-State Actor, Psychological Warfare.)