

Psychological Operations Field Manual No.33-1

31 August 1979 | Department of the Army

PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES

"Propaganda Techniques" is based upon "Appendix I: PSYOP Techniques" from "Psychological Operations Field Manual No.33-1" published by Headquarters; Department of the Army, in Washington DC, on 31 August 1979

Knowledge of propaganda techniques is necessary to improve one's own propaganda and to uncover enemy PSYOP stratagems. Techniques, however, are not substitutes for the procedures in PSYOP planning, development, or dissemination.

Techniques may be categorized as:

Characteristics of the content self-evident. additional information is required to recognize the characteristics of this type of propaganda. "Name calling" and the use of slogans are techniques of this nature.

Additional information required to be recognized. Additional information is required by the target or analyst for the use of this technique to be recognized. "Lying" is an example of this technique. The audience or analyst must have additional information in order to know whether a lie is being told.

Evident only after extended output. "Change of pace" is an example of this technique. Neither the audience nor the analyst can know that a change of pace has taken place until various amounts of propaganda have been brought into focus.

Nature of the arguments used. An argument is a reason, or a series of reasons, offered as to why the audience should behave, believe, or think in a certain manner. An argument is expressed or implied.

Inferred intent of the originator. This technique refers to the effect the propagandist wishes to achieve on the target audience. "Divisive" and "unifying" propaganda fall within this technique. It might also be classified on the basis of the effect it has on an audience.

SELF-EVIDENT TECHNIQUE

Appeal to Authority. Appeals to authority cite prominent figures to support a position idea, argument, or course of action.

Assertion. Assertions are positive statements presented as fact. They imply that what is stated is self-evident and needs no further proof. Assertions may or may not be true.

Bandwagon and Inevitable Victory. Bandwagon-and-inevitable-victory appeals attempt to persuade the target audience to take a course of action "everyone else is taking." "Join the crowd." This technique reinforces people's natural desire to be on the winning side. This technique is used to convince the audience that a program is an expression of an irresistible mass movement and that it is in their interest to join. "Inevitable victory" invites those not already on the bandwagon to join those already on the road to certain victory. Those already, or partially, on the bandwagon are reassured that staying aboard is the best course of action.

Obtain Disapproval. This technique is used to get the audience to disapprove an action or idea by suggesting the idea is popular with groups hated, feared, or held in contempt by the target audience. Thus, if a group which supports a policy is led to believe that undesirable, subversive, or contemptible people also support it, the members of the group might decide to change their position.

Glittering Generalities. Glittering generalities are intensely emotionally appealing words so closely associated with highly valued concepts and beliefs that they carry conviction without supporting information or reason. They appeal to such emotions as love of country, home; desire for peace, freedom, glory, honor, etc. They ask for approval without examination of the reason. Though the words and phrases are vague and suggest different things to different people, their connotation is always favorable: "The concepts and programs of the propagandist are always good, desirable, virtuous."

Generalities may gain or lose effectiveness with changes in conditions. They must, therefore, be responsive to current conditions. Phrases which called up pleasant associations at one time may evoke unpleasant or unfavorable connotations at another, particularly if their frame of reference has been altered.

Vagueness. Generalities are deliberately vague so that the audience may supply its own interpretations. The intention is to move the audience by use of undefined phrases, without analyzing their validity or attempting to determine their reasonableness or application.

Rationalization. Individuals or groups may use favorable generalities to rationalize questionable acts or beliefs. Vague and pleasant phrases are often used to justify such actions or beliefs.

Simplification. Favorable generalities are used to provide simple answers to complex social, political, economic, or military problems.

Transfer. This is a technique of projecting positive or negative qualities (praise or blame) of a person, entity, object, or value (an individual, group, organization, nation, patriotism, etc.) to another in order to make the second more acceptable or to discredit it. This technique is generally used to transfer blame from one member of a conflict to another. It evokes an emotional response which stimulates the target to identify with recognized authorities.

Least of Evils. This is a technique of acknowledging that the course of action being taken is perhaps undesirable but that any alternative would result in an outcome far worse. This technique is generally used to explain the need for sacrifices or to justify the seemingly harsh actions that displease the target audience or restrict personal liberties. Projecting blame on the enemy for the unpleasant or restrictive conditions is usually coupled with this technique.

Name Calling or Substitutions of Names or Moral Labels. This technique attempts to arouse prejudices in an audience by labeling the object of the propaganda campaign as something the target audience fears, hates, loathes, or finds undesirable.

- Types of name calling:
 - Direct name calling is used when the audience is sympathetic or neutral. It is a simple, straightforward attack on an opponent or opposing idea.
 - Indirect name calling is used when direct name calling would antagonize the audience. It is a label for the degree of attack between direct name calling and insinuation. Sarcasm and ridicule are employed with this technique.
 - Cartoons, illustrations, and photographs are used in name calling, often with deadly effect.
- Dangers inherent in name calling: In its extreme form, name calling may indicate that the propagandist has lost his sense of proportion or is unable to conduct a positive campaign. Before using this technique, the propagandist must weigh the benefits against the possible harmful results. It is best to avoid use of this device. The obstacles are formidable, based primarily on the human tendency to close ranks against a stranger. For example, a group may despise, dislike, or even hate one of its leaders, even openly criticize him, but may (and probably will) resent

any non group member who criticizes and makes disparaging remarks against that leader.

Pinpointing the Enemy: This is a form of simplification in which a complex situation is reduced to the point where the "enemy" is unequivocally identified. For example, the president of country X is forced to declare a state of emergency in order to protect the peaceful people of his country from the brutal, unprovoked aggression by the leaders of country.

Plain Folks or Common Man: The "plain folks" or "common man" approach attempts to convince the audience that the propagandist's positions reflect the common sense of the people. It is designed to win the confidence of the audience by communicating in the common manner and style of the audience. Propagandists use ordinary language and mannerisms (and clothes in face-to-face and audiovisual communications) in attempting to identify their point of view with that of the average person. With the plain folks device, the propagandist can win the confidence of persons who resent or distrust foreign sounding, intellectual speech, words, or mannerisms.

The audience can be persuaded to identify its interests with those of the propagandist:

- Presenting soldiers as plain folks. The propagandist wants to make the enemy feel he is fighting against soldiers who are "decent, everyday folks" much like himself; this helps to counter themes that paint the opponent as a "bloodthirsty" killer.
- Presenting civilians as plain folks. The "plain folks" or "common man" device also can help to convince the enemy that the opposing nation is not composed of arrogant, immoral, deceitful, aggressive, warmongering people, but of people like himself, wishing to live at peace.
- Humanizing leaders. This technique paints a more human portrait of US and friendly military and civilian leaders. It humanizes them so that the audience looks upon them as similar human beings or, preferably, as kind, wise, fatherly figures.

Categories of Plain Folk Devices:

- Vernacular. This is the contemporary language of a specific region or people as it is commonly spoken or written and includes songs, idioms, and jokes. The current vernacular of the specific target audience must be used.
- Dialect. Dialect is a variation in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary from the norm of a region or nation. When used by the propagandist, perfection is required. This technique is best left to those to whom the dialect is native, because native level speakers are generally the best users of dialects in propaganda appeals.
- Errors. Scholastic pronunciation, enunciation, and delivery give the impression of being artificial. To give the impression of spontaneity, deliberately hesitate between phrases, stammer, or mispronounce words. When not overdone, the effect is one of deep sincerity. Errors in written material may be made only when they are commonly made by members of the reading audience. Generally, errors should be restricted to colloquialisms.
- Homey words. Homey words are forms of "virtue words" used in the everyday life of the average man. These words are familiar ones, such as "home," "family," "children," "farm," "neighbors," or cultural equivalents. They evoke a favorable emotional response and help transfer the sympathies of the audience to the

propagandist. Homey words are widely used to evoke nostalgia. Care must be taken to assure that homey messages addressed to enemy troops do not also have the same effect on US/friendly forces.

If the propaganda or the propagandist lacks naturalness, there may be an adverse backlash. The audience may resent what it considers attempts to mock it, its language, and its ways.

Social Disapproval. This is a technique by which the propagandist marshals group acceptance and suggests that attitudes or actions contrary to the one outlined will result in social rejection, disapproval, or outright ostracism. The latter, ostracism, is a control practice widely used within peer groups and traditional societies.

Virtue Words. These are words in the value system of the target audience which tend to produce a positive image when attached to a person or issue. Peace, happiness, security, wise leadership, freedom, etc., are virtue words.

Slogans. A slogan is a brief striking phrase that may include labeling and stereotyping. If ideas can be sloganized, they should be, as good slogans are self-perpetuating.

Testimonials. Testimonials are quotations, in or out of context, especially cited to support or reject a given policy, action, program, or personality. The reputation or the role (expert, respected public figure, etc.) of the individual giving the statement is exploited. The testimonial places the official sanction of a respected person or authority on a propaganda message. This is done in an effort to cause the target audience to identify itself with the authority or to accept the authority's opinions and beliefs as its own. Several types of testimonials are:

Official Sanction. The testimonial authority must have given the endorsement or be clearly on record as having approved the attributed idea, concept, action, or belief.

Four factors are involved:

- Accomplishment. People have confidence in an authority who has demonstrated outstanding ability and proficiency in his field. This accomplishment should be related to the subject of the testimonial.
- Identification with the target. People have greater confidence in an authority with whom they have a common bond. For example, the soldier more readily trusts an officer with whom he has undergone similar arduous experiences than a civilian authority on military subjects.
- Position of authority. The official position of authority may instill confidence in the testimony; i.e., head of state, division commander, etc.
- Inanimate objects. Inanimate objects may be used in the testimonial device. In such cases, the propagandist seeks to transfer physical attributes of an inanimate object to the message. The Rock of Gibraltar, for example, is a type of inanimate object associated with steadfast strength.

Personal Sources of Testimonial Authority:

- Enemy leaders. The enemy target audience will generally place great value on its high level military leaders as a source of information.
- Fellow soldiers. Because of their common experiences, soldiers form a bond of comradeship. As a result, those in the armed forces are inclined to pay close attention to what other soldiers have to say.
- Opposing leaders. Testimonials of leaders of the opposing nation are of particular value in messages that outline war aims and objectives for administering the enemy nation after it capitulates.

- Famous scholars, writers, and other personalities. Frequently, statements of civilians known to the target as authoritative or famous scholars, writers, scientists, commentators, etc., can be effectively used in propaganda messages.

Nonpersonal Sources of Testimonial Authority:

Institutions, ideologies, national flags, religious, and other nonpersonal sources are often used. The creeds, beliefs, principles, or dogmas of respected authorities or other public figures may make effective propaganda testimonials.

Factors To Be Considered:

- **Plausibility.** The testimonial must be plausible to the target audience. The esteem in which an authority is held by the target audience will not always transfer an implausible testimonial into effective propaganda.
- **False testimonials.** Never use false testimonials. Highly selective testimonials? Yes. Lies (fabrications)? Never. Fabricated (false) testimonials are extremely vulnerable because their lack of authenticity makes them easy to challenge and discredit.

PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES WHICH ARE BASED ON CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CONTENT BUT WHICH REQUIRE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE PART OF AN ANALYST TO BE RECOGNIZED

Incredible truths. There are times when the unbelievable (incredible) truth not only can but should be used.

Among these occasions are:

- When the psychological operator is certain that a vitally important event will take place.
- A catastrophic event, or one of significant tactical or strategic importance, unfavorable to the enemy has occurred and the news has been hidden from the enemy public or troops.
- The enemy government has denied or glossed over an event detrimental to its cause.

A double-cutting edge. This technique has a double-cutting edge: It increases the credibility of the US/friendly psychological operator while decreasing the credibility of the enemy to the enemy's target audience. Advanced security clearance must be obtained before using this technique so that operations or projects will not be jeopardized or compromised. Actually, propagandists using this technique will normally require access to special compartmented information and facilities to avoid compromise of other sensitive operations or projects of agencies of the US Government.

Though such news will be incredible to the enemy public, it should be given full play by the psychological operator. This event and its significance will eventually become known to the enemy public in spite of government efforts to hide it. The public will recall (the psychological operator will "help" the recall process) that the incredible news was received from US/allied sources. They will also recall the deception of their government. The prime requirement in using this technique is that the disseminated incredible truth must be or be certain to become a reality.

Insinuation. Insinuation is used to create or stir up the suspicions of the target audience against ideas, groups, or individuals in order to divide an enemy. The propagandist *hints*, *suggests*, and *implies*, allowing the audience to draw its own conclusions. Latent

suspicious and cleavages within the enemy camp are exploited in an attempt to structure them into active expressions of disunity which weaken the enemy's war effort.

- Exploitable vulnerabilities. Potential cleavages which may be exploited include the following:
 - Political differences between the enemy nation and its allies or satellites.
 - Ethnic and regional differences.
 - Religious, political, economic, or social differences.
 - History of civilian animosity or unfair treatment toward enemy soldiers.
 - Comforts available to rear area soldiers and not available to combat soldiers.
 - People versus the bureaucracy or hierarchy.
 - Political differences between the ruling elite, between coalition members, or between rulers and those out of power.
 - Differences showing a few benefiting at the expense of the general populace.
 - Unequal or inequitable tax burdens, or the high level of taxes. The audience should be informed of hidden taxes.
 - The scarcity of consumer goods for the general public and their availability to the various elites and the dishonest.
 - Costs of present government policies in terms of lost opportunities to accomplish constructive socially desirable goals.
 - The powerlessness of the individual. (This may be used to split the audience from the policies of its government by disassociating its members from those policies.) This technique could be used in preparing a campaign to gain opposition to those government policies.
- Insinuation devices. A number of devices are available to exploit these and similar vulnerabilities:
 - Leading questions: The propagandist may ask questions which suggest only one possible answer. Thus, the question, "What is there to do now that your unit is surrounded and you are completely cut off?" insinuates that surrender or desertion is the only reasonable alternative to annihilation.
 - Humor: Humor can be an effective form of insinuation. Jokes and cartoons about the enemy find a ready audience among those persons in the target country or military camp who normally reject straightforward accusations or assertions. Jokes about totalitarian leaders and their subordinates often spread with ease and rapidity. However, the psychological operator must realize that appreciation of

humor differs among target groups and so keep humor within the appropriate cultural context.

- Pure motives. This technique makes it clear that the side represented by the propagandist is acting in the best interests of the target audience, insinuating that the enemy is acting to the contrary. For example, the propagandist can use the theme that a satellite force fighting on the side of the enemy is insuring the continued subjugation of its country by helping the common enemy.
- Guilt by association: Guilt by association links a person, group, or idea to other persons, groups, or ideas repugnant to the target audience. The insinuation is that the connection is not mutual, accidental, or superficial.
- Rumor: Malicious rumors are also a potentially effective form of insinuation.
- Pictorial and photographic propaganda: A photograph, picture, or cartoon can often insinuate a derogatory charge more effectively than words. The combination of words and photograph, picture, or cartoon can be far more effective. In this content, selected and composite photographs can be extremely effective.
- Vocal: Radio propagandists can artfully suggest a derogatory notion, not only with the words they use, but also by the way in which they deliver them. Significant pauses, tonal inflections, sarcastic pronunciation, ridiculing enunciation, can be more subtle than written insinuation.

Card stacking or selective omission. This is the process of choosing from a variety of facts only those which support the propagandist's purpose. In using this technique, facts are selected and presented which most effectively strengthen and authenticate the point of view of the propagandist. It includes the collection of all available material pertaining to a subject and the selection of that material which most effectively supports the propaganda line. Card stacking, case making, and censorship are all forms of selection. Success or failure depends on how successful the propagandist is in selecting facts or "cards" and presenting or "stacking" them.

- Increase prestige. In time of armed conflict, leading personalities, economic and social systems, and other institutions making up a nation are constantly subjected to propaganda attacks. Card stacking is used to counter these attacks by publicizing and reiterating the best qualities of the institutions, concepts, or persons being attacked. Like most propaganda techniques, card stacking is used to supplement other methods.
- The technique may also be used to describe a subject as virtuous or evil and to give simple answers to a complicated subject.
- An intelligent propagandist makes his case by imaginative selection of facts. The work of the card stacker in using selected facts is divided into two main phases:
 - First, the propagandist selects only favorable facts and presents them to the target in such a manner as to obtain a desired reaction.
 - Second, the propagandist uses these facts as a basis for conclusions, trying to lead the audience into accepting the conclusions by accepting the facts presented.

Presenting the other side. Some persons in a target audience believe that neither belligerent is entirely virtuous. To them propaganda solely in terms of right and wrong may not be credible. Agreement with minor aspects of the enemy's point of view may overcome this cynicism. Another use of presenting the other side is to reduce the impact of propaganda that opposing propagandists are likely to be card stacking (selective omission).

Lying and distortion. Lying is stating as truth that which is contrary to fact. For example, assertions may be lies. *This technique will not be used by US personnel.* It is presented for use of the analyst of enemy propaganda.

Simplification. This is a technique in which the many facts of a situation are reduced so the right or wrong, good or evil, of an act or decision is obvious to all. This technique (simplification) provides simple solutions for complex problems. By suggesting apparently simple solutions for complex problems, this technique offers simplified interpretations of events, ideas, concepts, or personalities. Statements are positive and firm; qualifying words are never used.

Simplification may be used to sway uneducated and educated audiences. This is true because many persons are well educated or highly skilled, trained specialists in a specific field, but the limitations of time and energy often force them to turn to and accept simplifications to understand, relate, and react to other areas of interest.

Simplification has the following characteristics:

- It thinks for others: Some people accept information which they cannot verify personally as long as the source is acceptable to them or the authority is considered expert. Others absorb whatever they read, see, or hear with little or no discrimination. Some people are too lazy or unconcerned to think problems through. Others are uneducated and willingly accept convenient simplifications.
- It is concise: Simplification gives the impression of going to the heart of the matter in a few words. The average member of the target audience will not even consider that there may be another answer to the problem.
- It builds ego: Some people are reluctant to believe that any field of endeavor, except their own, is difficult to understand. For example, a layman is pleased to hear that "law is just common sense dressed up in fancy language," or "modern art is really a hodgepodge of aimless experiment or nonsense." Such statements reinforce the ego of the lay audience. It is what they would like to believe, because they are afraid that law and modern art may actually be beyond their understanding. Simple explanations are given for complex subjects and problems.

Stereotyping is a form of simplification used to fit persons, groups, nations, or events into ready-made categories that tend to produce a desired image of good or bad. Stereotyping puts the subject (people, nations, etc.) or event into a simplistic pattern without any distinguishing individual characteristics.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONTENT WHICH MAY BECOME EVIDENT WHEN NUMEROUS PIECES OF OUTPUT ARE EXAMINED

Change of Pace. Change of pace is a technique of switching from belligerent to peaceful output, from "hot" to "cold," from persuasion to threat, from gloomy prophecy to optimism, from emotion to fact.

Stalling. Stalling is a technique of deliberately withholding information until its timeliness is past, thereby reducing the possibility of undesired impact.

Shift of Scene. With this technique, the propagandist replaces one "field of battle" with another. It is an attempt to take the spotlight off an unfavorable situation or condition by shifting it to another, preferably of the opponent, so as to force the enemy to go on the defense.

REPETITION

An idea or position is repeated in an attempt to elicit an almost automatic response from the audience or to reinforce an audience's opinion or attitude. This technique is extremely valid and useful because the human being is basically a creature of habit and develops skills and values by repetition (like walking, talking, code of ethics, etc.). An idea or position may be repeated many times in one message or in many messages. The intent is the same in both instances, namely, to elicit an immediate response or to reinforce an opinion or attitude.

- The audience is not familiar with the details of the threat posed. Ignorance of the details can be used to pose a threat and build fear.
- Members of the audience are self-centered.
- The target can take immediate action to execute simple, specific instructions.

Fear of change. People fear change, particularly sudden, imposed change over which they have no control. They fear it will take from them status, wealth, family, friends, comfort, safety, life, or limb. That's why the man in the foxhole hesitates to leave it. He knows and is accustomed to the safety it affords. He is afraid that moving out of his foxhole will expose him to new and greater danger. That is why the psychological campaign must give him a safe, honorable way out of his predicament or situation.

Terrorism. The United States is absolutely opposed to the use of terror or terror tactics. But the psychological operator can give a boomerang effect to enemy terror, making it reverberate against the practitioner, making him repugnant to his own people, and all others who see the results of his heinous savagery. This can be done by disseminating fully captioned photographs in the populated areas of the terrorist's homeland. Such leaflets will separate civilians from their armed forces; it will give them second thoughts about the decency and honorableness of their cause, make them wonder about the righteousness of their ideology, and make the terrorists repugnant to them. Follow-up

leaflets can "fire the flames" of repugnancy, indignation, and doubt, as most civilizations find terror repugnant.

In third countries. Fully captioned photographs depicting terroristic acts may be widely distributed in third countries (including the nation sponsoring the enemy) where they will instill a deep revulsion in the general populace. Distribution in neutral countries is particularly desirable in order to swing the weight of unbiased humanitarian opinion against the enemy.

The enemy may try to rationalize and excuse its conduct (terroristic), but in so doing, it will compound the adverse effect of its actions, because it can never deny the validity of true photographic representations of its acts. Thus, world opinion will sway to the side of the victimized people.

Friendly territory. Under no circumstances should such leaflets be distributed in friendly territory. To distribute them in the friendly area in which the terrorists' acts took place would only create feelings of insecurity. This would defeat the purpose of the psychological operator, which is to build confidence in the government or agency he represents.

The Logic of Inquiry: Rhetorical Devices

Both inductive and deductive arguments, even when properly formed, may result in invalid conclusions if the terms of the argument are not properly formed. The study of these sorts of errors (called “fallacies”) is called “rhetoric.” There are seven main fallacies:

Fallacy of Relevance: The argument does not relate to the issue it is supposed to be addressing.

- Ad hominem (“personal attack”)—“If you can’t argue the case, argue against the person making the case”
- Ad bellum (“appeal to force”)—“Might makes right.”
- Ad ignorantium (“appeal to ignorance”)—“You can’t prove it’s not true, so I’m right,” or, as Bart Simpson puts it, “I didn’t do it. Nobody saw me. You can’t prove it.”
- Ad misericordium (“appeal to pity”)—“If you don’t fund this project, hundreds of people will be thrown out of work.”
- Ad populum (“appeal to the gallery”)—“All the polls support this position.”
- Ad vericundium (“appeal to authority”)—“Smith & Jones (1997) say this is the way to go.”
- Post hoc, ergo propter hoc (“false cause”)—The Latin words mean “It came after this, so it must be because of this.” For example, “Students moved in, and there went the neighborhood.”

Accident & Hasty Generalization: This fallacy occurs by moving from the group to the individual (when the group characteristic is not universal), and from the particular to the universal. For example, “People in this neighborhood have incomes above \$100,000; you live in this neighborhood, so your income must be above \$100,000” may or may not be true—it depends on whether the group characteristic (“income above \$100,000”) is a universal (“in order to live in this neighborhood, you must have an income above \$100,000”) or a generalization (“the average income in this neighborhood is above \$100,000”). Similarly, “This crow is black, so all crows are black” may or may not be true—if all birds in the family “crow” must have black feathers, then it is true; but if the color of the feathers is accidental (e.g., can there be albino crows?), then it is not.

Complex Question: This fallacy occurs when two (or more) questions are combined into one, such as “Have you stopped beating your children yet?” This assumes two questions—“Have you ever beaten your children?” and “If so, have you stopped beating your children?”

Begging the Question: This fallacy occurs when the answer to a question assumes what the question was asking in the first place, rather than providing proof (circular reasoning). For example, “Your work does not meet performance standards because it is unsatisfactory.” (And why is it unsatisfactory? Because it fails to meet performance standards!).

Irrelevant Conclusion: This is similar to begging the question, except that a conclusion is offered which appears to answer the question, but it does not necessarily come from the data which were offered in evidence. For example, “Look at all the effort I am putting forth; of course I’m an effective manager!” (as if effort and effectiveness were the same thing).

Fallacy of Ambiguity: A shift in the meaning of the middle term creates the appearance of a valid argument:

- Equivocation: The same term is used, but with different meanings (“All men are mortal. Jane is not a man. Therefore Jane is not a mortal.”)
- Amphiboly: The grammatical structure itself permits different meanings (“Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like an apple”)
- Accent: Emphasis changes the meaning (“You did something right!” –implying that you usually don’t).