
A Primer For Deception Analysis: Psychological Operations' Target Audience Analysis

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Editorial Abstract: *The authors look at contemporary use of military deception, identifying shortcomings in understanding a target audience. They introduce a variation of the audience analysis process used in psychological operations as a potential enhancement for deception planners.*

Psychological operations and deception have long been synonymous, considering both have a related goal, that of changing the behavior of a specific audience. Much is written about psychological operations (PSYOP) and little is written about the conduct of deception. Deception focuses on planning and execution of deception and little is paid to understating the deception target and the target's cognitive process. By better understanding the target audience, we can make deception more effective. This article proposes a solution to this problem by modifying PSYOP's proven Target Audience Analysis into a Deception Target Analysis.

Consider that the sport-fishing industry spends hundreds of thousands of dollars researching the behavior and habits of specific game fish, and then spends more developing lures and baits of all colors, sizes, shapes, and scents, all in an elaborate deception to get a fish to believe that a dangerous lure is, in fact, a delicious meal. While people are more complex than fish, understanding the fish is the most important factor in getting the fish to do what you want—to bite the hook.

Current publications—Joint Publication 3-13, *Information Operations*; Joint Publication 3-13.4, *Military Deception*; and Field Manual 3-13, *Information Operations: Doctrine, Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*—thoroughly address planning deception with respect to friendly planning, but little to the actual analysis of the deception target. While planning deception is a very important activity, all the planning is for not, if the deception planners do not understand the behavior and habits of their target. This is similar to the sport fishing industry analyzing the fisherman in order to get the fish to bite.

PSYOP Versus Deception

Joint Publication 1-02 defines PSYOP as “planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals.” JP 1-02 further defines deception as “those measures designed to mislead the enemy by manipulation, distortion, or falsification of evidence to induce the enemy to react in a manner prejudicial to the enemy's interests.”

It is easy to see how PSYOP and deception complement each other, considering both have a mission to change behavior. Because deception is usually considered ‘lying,’ current US doctrine tries to distance PSYOP from deception by saying PSYOP influences groups of people, and deception influences individual decision makers. Current doctrine overlooks that groups of people are comprised of individuals and doctrine forgets that deception is more akin to magic and slight of hand, considering magicians get the audience to focus on A while the magician does B.

Despite the differences and arguments, there is one common thread: to be successful in PSYOP and deception, planners and executors must know their target audience.

Deception Planning Process

Like all military planning, Military Deception (MILDEC) planning is a step-by-step process that requires commanders and their staff to consider goals, objectives, targets, and means. It involves several people under the direction of the C3/J3/G3/N3 in coordination with subordinate commanders and their staffs but kept to a minimum of people who are aware of the deception plan for

operational security. For MILDEC to be successful it must, like PSYOP, result in a desired action. It is not enough to make the target believe or think that the deception is true. Deception requires the target to act or not act in a specific way that supports the MILDEC plan. Basically, the process involves the following three steps:

1. See: what does the target see from friendly operations?
2. Think: what conclusions does the target draw from those observations?
3. Do: what action may the target take as a result of the conclusions.

A historical case in which these three steps were perhaps unwittingly employed is Egypt's surprise attack in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Egyptian and Syrian planners wanted to delay Israeli response to the Egyptian build up of troops along the Suez Canal. The Arabs wanted Israeli leaders to see the troop increase, think it was a part of an annual exercise, and thus mislead the Israelis into doing nothing—thus catching them prepared for war. This was accomplished by a deception plan that supported existing Israeli (and Western) beliefs about Arabs. Specifically, the Israelis believed the Arab military was generally incompetent in that they lacked ability to coordinate military actions, especially a large-scale campaign, and that the Arabs could not keep secrets.

Understanding Arab culture and identifying specific traits enabled the Egyptian and Syrian deception planners to incorporate acts that would substantiate their ploy. However, this proved to be more difficult than it appears largely because in Arab culture, the verbal gesture and its emotional display are as important as the act making it challenging to unmask indicators of real actions from deceptive practices.

Likewise, employing PSYOP against people whose culture is centered on ambiguous signals would be challenging despite PSYOP's proven Target Audience Analysis process. However, deception planning that incorporates a formal Deception Target Analysis could, not only identify areas of ambiguity and potentially weaknesses in the plan, but also highlight these areas to achieve a specified action.

Although the basic three-step deception process identifies a general approach to deception planning, it falls short of necessary steps for a thoroughly developed plan. A more detailed planning process includes the following six steps:

1. Deception Mission Analysis
2. Deception Planning Guidance
3. Staff Deception Estimate
4. Commander's Deception Estimate
5. Deception Plan Development
6. Deception Plan Review and Approval

There is a hint of Deception Target Analysis within these six steps, stating "deception planners identify any preconceptions that the adversary leadership may have about friendly intentions and capabilities." This could mean identifying vulnerabilities and susceptibility of the target audience, although the term 'preconceptions' is much more broadly defined than the process requires, in order to fully analyze the target audience. Step 5, Deception Plan Development, is broken down into five additional steps that include analyzing the deception target. At first appearance, it seems that this may be in line with the PSYOP's Target Audience Analysis process. However, Deception Target Analysis simply includes evaluating a target for its general susceptibility, in terms of how much information is required for the target to confirm the story before reaching a decision, and how long this will take. It ignores the many other factors included in PSYOP's Target Audience Analysis.



SSG Steve Carden conducts Target Audience Analysis in Ethiopia to better understand the target audience. (US Army)

Target Audience Analysis and Deception

By examining military publications focused on target audience biases and cognition, Field Manual 3-05.301, *Psychological Operations: Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures*, we develop a sense of what Target Audience Analysis is. Using the PSYOP TTP manual's definition of Target Audience Analysis as a start, analysts morph this definition into a definition of Deception Target Analysis: a detailed, systematic examination of relevant information to select TAs that can accomplish a given objective. The purpose of Deception Target Analysis is to determine how to persuade one Deception Target Analysis to achieve the deception objective." This means analysts must determine why the Deception Target Analysis does what it does, and what friendly forces must do to change the deception target's behavior.

By taking relevant aspects of PSYOP Target Audience Analysis (as found in FM 3-05.301, Chapter 5), we will consider the following topics: Target Audience, Conditions, Vulnerabilities, Lines of Persuasion, Symbols, and Susceptibility.

- Target Audience is simply who we want to deceive. Analysts must ask themselves if the deception target can actually make the decision. Can the target actually perform the physical decisions required to be deceived? Can the target influence the decision maker? Back to the fishing analogy: What fish live in this body of water? What is the water temperature?

- FM 3.05-301 states conditions are how a target audience thinks or feels about a particular indicator (or stimulus for PSYOP). To understand the deception target, the analysts look at the target's attitudes, beliefs, and values. By examining attitudes, beliefs, and values, analysts can discern patterns in past behavior (in relation to a given bias and/or a given condition), and therefore predict the deception target's behavior if particular indicators are introduced. For example: hunter fish attack and eat injured

prey fish because less energy is wasted chasing injured fish. Hunter fish also prey on fish that invade their territory, do not blend with their background, or generally behave in ways not favoring survival. Knowing these conditions (and behaviors), anglers select lures that act like injured prey fish or bait that is focused on feeding itself versus hiding. By understanding the fish's conditions, sport fishermen identify vulnerabilities in the fish's behavior.

- Vulnerabilities are needs for information (and intelligence). Deception targets will strive to overcome their vulnerabilities. By properly identifying vulnerabilities, analysts will have a greater degree of success in deception. Fish are vulnerable to injured prey (easy food) and are vulnerable to running off trespassers.

- PSYOP uses Lines of Persuasion. Lines of Persuasion are "arguments used to obtain a desired behavior or attitude" from the target audience "that will persuade the target audience to behave or believe in the desired manner." For deception, analysts must use Lines of Persuasion in order to get the deception target to believe certain indicators. Further, analysts must identify necessary supporting deceptions. For example, in *The Man Who Never Was*, British Intelligence used false trails to further deceive German intelligence as to the actual invasion plans in the Mediterranean. British Intelligence developed a persona in Major William

Martin by giving him a fiancé (including love letters and a photo), torn theater ticket stubs, overdrawn bank account, lodging receipts and so on. These were all supporting deceptions meant to further mislead German Intelligence. In essence, British Intelligence made the bait look and taste better.

- PSYOP uses symbols while deception should use indicators. Like symbols, indicators should be recognizable and have meaning to the target audience. Symbols should convey the Line of Persuasion. They must convey a preconceived notion already developed by the deception target. If the deception target is looking for indicators, deception planners should show the deception target indicators that present the deceiver's objective. Like the Germans, they were looking to discredit Major William Martin, but instead found him very real. Sport anglers do the same by applying scents, motion, and color to indicate the lure is an easy meal.

- Susceptibility or the actual ability to influence the deception target is essential to the deception operation. Some Lines of Persuasion and indicators work better than others, depending on the deception target and the deception objective. Analysts must rate the impact of each Line of Persuasion and indicator related to the deception target. The sport fishing industry analyzes different lures, colors, motions, etc all in an effort to better deceive the particular fish species. While two lures will work with a particular species, which lure works best with which specific species?

The "Wandering Soul" PSYOP series is an example of both PSYOP and PSYOP Target Audience Analysis which could easily be adapted for deception purposes. During the Vietnam War, PSYOP units used their general understanding of the Viet Cong (VC) and North Vietnamese (NVA) soldiers, and the burial practices of Southeast Asians, to create audio tapes depicting lost souls wandering the night, causing the enemy to consider his fate since he would not be properly buried in accordance with tradition. The "Wandering Souls" tape was used effectively to cause many VC

and NVA to surrender or desert. Below is a very brief synopsis of what the Target Audience Analyst would consider:

- Condition: NVA and VC soldiers far from family and relatives; Target Audience believes in certain burial rites needing to be performed; traditional and cultural education based in part on mythology.

- Vulnerabilities: the requirement for proper burial rites performed; remembrance by family members; target audience is vulnerable to appeals by family, especially ancestors.

- Lines of Persuasion: fear of being killed; fear of not receiving burial rites; burial in an anonymous and/or mass grave; concern of family without husband.

- Symbols: ghostly sounds; children crying because their father's body was not buried; ancestors calling out for soldiers to surrender or desert; Buddhist funeral music.

- Susceptibility: target audience highly susceptible to messages dealing with family ties, but low when appeals are made to their lives as individuals.

This level of understanding can greatly assist deception. By understanding the target audience's preconceived notions, biases, and cognitive process, deception planners could enhance the target's misunderstanding and/or

misreading of reality. By understanding the lenses a target uses to perceive the world, deception planners can craft the deception indicators and information to better fit the target's expectations.

Conclusion

PSYOP's Target Audience Analysis has proven to be not only effective in the PSYOP process, but essential in developing the PSYOP plan. Changing behavior of a group or individual is challenging, even at the most basic level. PSYOP and deception share that challenge. Likewise, PSYOP and deception share principles such as understanding the target audience, in order to affect behavior that results in a specific act. With that in mind, deception planning could benefit by incorporating PSYOP's process of analyzing the target audience to better understand the adversary. This is too important to bury in a sub-step within other steps of a process. Deception Target Analysis should be better defined and take a more prominent role in the overall deception planning process. Doing so will make an already difficult process less obscure and increase its chance of success. Allied with a thorough target audience analysis, deception, properly planned and properly executed, can be an overwhelming return on investment. 