

# **Propaganda Techniques - from *US Army Field Manual***

We increasingly live in an environment shaped by information. In this environment, conflicting forces hope to sway and shape our opinions.

## ***PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES***

Knowledge of propaganda techniques is necessary to improve one's own propaganda and to uncover enemy Psychological Operations (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**

No 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 nongroup 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 X.

**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.