Chapter 2

Threats And
National Security

The international security environment has recently undergone a basic change from a bipolar balance of power to a multipolar power structure. The breakup of the Soviet Union resulted in a new world order in which superpower domination is reduced. This situation has reduced the chance of war between the former Soviet Union and the United States, notably in central Europe.

The risks of other conflicts stay high and may even have increased, as shown by recent events in the Persian Gulf. Terrorism, insurgency, and subversion can still directly affect U.S. national security goals. Over time, the cumulative effect of these events can gradually isolate the United States from its allies and global trading partners. These events can weaken the political and economic institutions of the world. These events can also reduce U.S. access to strategic resources and impair U.S. military basing, transit, and access rights. Finally, these events can shift associates and allies into positions favoring interests that threaten those of the United States.

The changes in the strategic environment resulted in what the President has called the two greatest threats to post cold war America: uncertainty and Instability. The effective use of PSYOP can contribute to countering these threats.

TYPES OF THREATS

Changes in the strategic environment have inevitably led to changes in the threat to psychological operations. To understand the application of PSYOP doctrine, the implementation of the PSYOP planning process, and the development of effective PSYOP programs of products and actions, we must understand the specific threats to PSYOP.

Threats to PSYOP are any person, institution, or environmental factor that presents an identifiable, recurring obstacle to the-

- Success of a PSYOP program.
- Execution of the commander's mission.
- Achievement of national policy objectives.

These threats must be identified and considered a part of the PSYOP planning process.

Although these threats are significant, PSYOP can convert identified threats to advantages. A thoroughly developed and well-implemented PSYOP program can exploit any factor and fulfill PSYOP goals, particularly in a multipolar world. By the same token, failure to identify and analyze the threats to PSYOP could result in uncertainty and instability. Uncertainty and instability, in turn, can bring about failure to fulfill critical PSYOP goals that could lead to direct threats to U.S. national security.

The three principal threats to PSYOP—conflict environment, technical environment, and the social and political environment—are interrelated. (See Chapter 8, Figure 8-1.) These threats have the potential to block or degrade the effectiveness of U.S. military PSYOP.

CONFLICT ENVIRONMENT

Before the former Soviet Union's break up and the resulting changes in the bipolar, superpower confrontation, the main threat to PSYOP was the Soviet PSYOP capability applied directly by that government or through client states. Soviet PSYOP included disinformation campaigns. These campaigns often appeared to American audiences to lack technical sophistication. They sometimes fell short of their clear objective. They were, however, carefully aimed at specific target audiences. The apparent lack of finesse was part of their appeal to the specific audiences.

The threat of an organized Soviet PSYOP campaign directed from Moscow has largely diminished. However, the threat of Soviet-style PSYOP campaigns directed at the United States has actually increased. Many former Soviet client states may still hold national goals that are at odds with U.S. national goals. Their principal weapon may be PSYOP programs based on the doctrine, tactics, techniques, and procedures previously used by the Soviet Union. For example, in the months leading up to the start of Operation Desert Storm, the Iraqis used Soviet-style disinformation as part of a divisive PSYOP program aimed at the coalition forces.

The conflict environment threats are not limited to PSYOP practices based on the Soviet model. With the end of the bipolar world, others will surely vie for the chance to advance their national, regional, or global goals. These goals could range from a nation using its military and economic power to ensure control of regional resources to an ethnic group seeking a secure and independent homeland. The type of PSYOP used may be either Soviet or U.S. PSYOP methods. The type of PSYOP used may also come from deeply rooted traditional culture and religious practices. It may not even be formally acknowledged as a PSYOP program. However, it has the same goals of any PSYOP program—to channel the behavior of individuals to reach a specific goal. An analyst must view such a program as a conflict environment threat to PSYOP. He must evaluate and consider this program in the PSYOP planning process and in product development.

TECHNOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

The rapid development and dissemination of communications technology has impacted on the conduct of PSYOP. Just as this new technology provides U.S. PSYOP forces with

new opportunities, it can be a threat that analysts must identify and consider in the PSYOP planning process.

Just as U.S. psychological operations exploit all appropriate technology, potential opponents will try to do the same. The most modern forms of communications technology are no longer limited to modern, industrial nations. Facsimile (FAX) machines, portable video cameras and cassette players, electronic mail, and satellite communications are almost universally available. During the 1991 Soviet coup, FAX machines owned by companies and individuals often provided the United States with real-time views of events in Soviet cities. Persons recorded the invasion of Kuwait on privately owned video cameras. Potential opponents have instant access to these resources with little or no cost.

In addition to low-cost, high-density, easily accessed communications resources, many nations have electronic and counterelectronic warfare assets that could block or degrade U.S. psychological operations. All PSYOP planning must evaluate and account for this threat.

Finally, although technology is available, methods of use and audience expectations are not universal. Americans used to over 30 years of color television and sophisticated video production techniques might give little respect to dated production techniques used in nations where television has only been available to the masses for less than 10 years. The opposite is also true. PSYOP planners must consider the masses' expectations of the technology.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The recent political upheavals may have dramatically changed the structure of certain political institutions. They have not, however, altered individual attitudes. They may temporarily alter certain life-style factors that directly affect a target audience's receptiveness to the PSYOP message.

Studies of threats to PSYOP must include an evaluation of economic, cultural, and political factors that affect individual behavior. Some may be temporary factors that result from disruptions to normal marketplace practices or changes in leadership. For example. prices for food may be unusually high, or police service may be disrupted. Other factors may be deeply held, long-standing beliefs. Regardless of the basis for these factors, they are all potential threats to the success of a PSYOP program.