

Objective: Influence perception and behaviour

By Cpl Marilou Villeneuve

MONTREAL, Quebec — The many-coloured leaflets covering the walls invite passers-by to support or oppose NATO. Some contain threats to incite people to join a cause. It's a veritable war of contradictory statements that two sides wage to win people's support.

Whom should we believe?

The CF has been using psychological operations (PSYOPS) for many years to influence people's perception and behaviour in order to achieve military and political objectives. On the ground, PSYOPS' role consists of winning people's trust, maintaining the support of those who are on the troops' side, persuading the undecided and breaking the will of opponents.

"If we can successfully influence people to support our position or surrender, it reduces the combat potential," says Master Warrant Officer Robert Unger.

"It lowers the number of injuries and deaths on our side and that of the enemy."

To do that, PSYOPS must know its target population well—its characteristics, culture, mores and what makes it tick—and put in place a team of experts: planning officers, target-audience analysts and experts in media production and dissemination.

"PSYOPS makes CF operations easier, on a number of levels," adds Captain Nicolas Gauthier.

The CF is now dealing with new types of conflicts. The enemy used to be a well-defined group of individuals in a specific context. Now the enemy is hidden among the civilian population. "In a war like the one in Afghanistan, we can't achieve our goals through strictly military or kinetic means," says Major Simon Côté. "We have to explain to people what we're doing, the mandate we've been given and the reason why we're there."

The CF therefore needs a new approach. PSYOPS must show initiative, creativity and versatility.



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"PSYOPS makes CF operations easier, on a number of levels," says Capt Nicolas Gauthier, seen here with Afghan children.

« Les opérations psychologiques permettent aux FC, à plusieurs égards, de faciliter leurs opérations », a dit le Capitaine Nicolas Gauthier, photographié avec des enfants afghans.