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‘Words are cheaper than bullets’: Britain’s psychological warfare in the Middle East, 1945-60

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Abstract

Psychological warfare, the use of propaganda to aid military operations, acquired prominence in British strategy in the early Cold War Middle East. This article argues planning made limited progress until the 1956 Suez crisis. Suez produced optimism about propaganda's ability to address threats from Egypt, the USSR and the Yemen. In Oman, Aden and Cyprus, psychological warfare was practiced to demoralise enemies, bolster allies and counter smears about British conduct. Only mixed results ensued though, and doubts about the military's involvement in propaganda lingered. Psychological warfare endured because it was a cheap option that might sometimes work, and could induce opponents to surrender rather than fight on.

Introduction

In 1947 the British Army's future leaders in training at the Staff College learned ‘The propaganda battle has come to stay.’¹ For a generation exposed to total war, concluding hostilities by persuasion was an attractive proposition, with the promise of bloodless victories.² Amidst relative international decline the potential for propaganda to compensate for waning diplomatic and military power could not easily be ignored.³ Psychological warfare (or psywar), like aerial bombing and special forces, offered cheaper strategic effects for statesmen struggling to hold their country's ambitious place in the world order.⁴ The technique was understood as ‘psychological measures, including information, propaganda and others, designed to influence the opinions, emotions, attitude and behaviour of enemy, neutral or friendly groups in support of current policy in time of war or emergency.’⁵ Yet psywar did not undergo a radical enlargement in the early Cold War. This article asks how psychological warfare's modest expansion can be accounted for in British strategy in the Middle East.

Since the end of the First World War the Middle East was a central locus for British power, and the government consistently aimed to preserve its interests in the region.⁶ Between 1946 and 1955 oil consumption in the U.K. doubled; most came from the Middle East.⁷ Cold War theatre defence was allocated to Britain at American-British-Canadian talks in October 1947. Consequently military planning was conducted on a national, rather than allied, basis.⁸ Little is known about psywar in the area; most secret intelligence papers have been closed until recently.⁹ Newly released records belonging to the unit responsible for psychological warfare are examined here for the first time. Created in 1951 to control strategic deception, from 1952 the Directorate of Forward Plans became involved in psywar planning. After the Suez crisis the Directorate assumed overall responsibility for psychological warfare.¹⁰

Existing work on early Cold War propaganda treats the military as largely irrelevant in a field dominated by the Foreign Office, and especially its Information Research Department (IRD), created in January 1948. Much debate has centred upon the IRD's position within overall Cold War strategy, whether the output it generated achieved anything, and whether the organisation should be understood primarily in Cold War or decolonisation terms.¹¹ Important questions have also been raised about the wisdom and ethics of directing propaganda at the British domestic audience.¹² The Department is regarded as a 'significant instrument of national and foreign policy.'¹³ The leading book on propaganda in the decolonisation conflicts concentrates on how government shaped public opinion at home, rather than to support military operations.¹⁴ In single-country studies, the emphasis is upon colonial information services who often, as in Kenya, ran the show.¹⁵

Psychological warfare has been interpreted according to three organising ideas, relating to effectiveness, civil-military relations, and the conviction of its practitioners. This article reinterprets these ideas to show how psychological warfare became gradually more important in regional defence in the Middle East. Cyprus is included in the analysis as defence policy considered the island to be a major base for securing British interests in the region. Cold War defence planning and colonial security are tackled together. While political concessions, social reforms and propaganda are now thought to have mattered less in British counter-insurgency than violence, studies on counter-insurgency miss the long-term reasons why propaganda occupied a marginal position.¹⁶ These were to do with defence policy rather than colonial security. This article thus makes a contribution to existing knowledge in three ways.

Turning to effectiveness first, judging whether propaganda has an impact on the intended audience is a perennial difficulty.¹⁷ Research on the IRD often echoes the organisation's own anxieties about their influence.¹⁸ James Vaughan persuasively argues propaganda aiming to generate popular enthusiasm for Britain's Middle East presence was doomed in the decolonisation era.¹⁹ Yet for the military, swaying public opinion on a mass scale was not necessarily essential, nor even their prerogative. Targeting friendly elites, small numbers of rebels, or one's own soldiers could be more appropriate. The armed forces were less bothered about proving effectiveness conclusively because, unlike their diplomatic counterparts, they employed propaganda alongside other tactics.²⁰ For the armed forces, the moment when an opponent began to counter propaganda directed at them indicated some effect was being felt.²¹ In Southeast Asia officials counted the publications distributed, the

column inches in newspapers based on their information, and how many insurgents surrendered.²² Doubts around effectiveness never decisively halted psywar's cautious expansion in the Middle East in the early Cold War. Military commanders never expected *any* tactic to be valuable in every given instance; this general rule applied to psywar too.

A second tendency in the literature portrays psychological warfare as highly divisive, rousing a deep-seated animosity between civilians and soldiers over foreign and defence policy. Discord has distracted from the prevalent compromise across the civil-military divide during the twentieth century, mundane as agreement might be when set aside sensational disputation.²³ Writing on Cold War covert action, and propaganda in Northern Ireland, Rory Cormac has a keen eye for disagreement between military and civilians.²⁴ On Britain's turbulent experience in Egypt prior to the Suez crisis, Michael Thornhill perceives civil-military friction to be the norm.²⁵ These examples partly derive from over-specialisation in intelligence studies, military history and diplomatic history. Strong demarcations are striking when the object of study is a single organisation, whether MI6, the British Army or the IRD. Disputes about psywar happened within the armed forces, within and between Whitehall departments, and between officials in the Middle East and those in London. Support for, and opposition to, psychological warfare transcended simple civil-military boundaries because these organisations permitted their staff to think for themselves.

A third notion accuses those concerned with psychological warfare of zealotry. Richard Aldrich charges the Directorate of Forward Plans with exploiting the Malaya emergency to expand from deception work into territory rightly belonging to MI6 and

the IRD.²⁶ Field Marshal Gerald Templer, High Commissioner in Malaya from 1952 to 1954 and then Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) from 1955 to 1958, is identified as the mastermind behind the Directorate's expansionism. Templer's role in Malaya is claimed by Erik Linstrum to have 'secured the status of psychological warfare in the British military for years to come.'²⁷ He is chastised by Anthony Gorst and Keith Kyle for forcing psywar into the disastrous 1956 Suez invasion plans.²⁸ Behind these views lie misgivings about psychological warfare's propensity to dangerously politicise the armed forces.²⁹ If soldiers dispense propaganda, they might develop political ideas that cannot easily be controlled. In the British military in the early Cold War Middle East the evidence points to ambivalence about psywar, not devotion, reflecting a long-running nervousness about propaganda in Britain's political culture.³⁰ Major Ashworth, a leading expert, described psywar as 'the weapon of the Cold War', though admitting an 'ugly and evil connotation', reminiscent of Joseph Goebbels.³¹ Even the supposedly zealous psy-warriors were in two minds about the business.

The article argues psychological warfare expanded gradually in British military plans and operations because the attractions of a cheap victory were counter-balanced by reservations about whether the method worked, and risked politicising the armed forces. The argument is structured in the following sections. The first section analyses how planning developed. The Chiefs of Staff abstained from inserting propaganda into their war plans until April 1952, only doing so systematically from February 1957 because changes required civil-military consensus. The Korean War and, above all the Suez crisis, hastened an extension in psychological warfare planning, capabilities and deployment. Augmentation came due to shifts in the

strategic environment (such as Egyptian and Soviet propaganda) and in defence policy. The article thus contributes to the critique of decline as the primary leitmotif in post-war defence by arguing policy-makers wanted methods to sustain British interests after the Suez crisis.³² When the 1957 Sandys Review reorganised defence, psychological warfare betokened a cheap alternative to conscription. The second section considers operations in Oman. Even as psywar failed to deliver clear results against rebels in Oman, regional commanders applauded the tactic's value in countering Egyptian propaganda in an unobtrusive way at a politically sensitive moment. With other tactics available, and psywar so cheap, effectiveness was not everything. The third section deals with Aden, where impact was judged in another sense; here, psywar reinforced allies, central to shoring-up Britain's precarious regional position. The military and colonial authorities agreed on the requirement to counter Egyptian and Soviet output: psywar was cheap and easier to arrange than other options. In the fourth section, light is thrown on the Cyprus emergency, where a dispute arose over when to undertake propaganda; was a political solution to the conflict a prerequisite? The military unit in charge of psywar attempted to breach the rule that the Foreign Office or Colonial Office held supremacy over propaganda, in a frantic bid to counter allegations about the security forces' brutality. Desperately re-defining the protection of military morale as the yardstick for judging psychological warfare temporarily broke the civil-military consensus. Though causing political headaches, these pressures from below for defensive propaganda were to return in Aden in the 1960s and Northern Ireland in the 1970s.

Planning for psychological warfare in the Middle East

Between 1945 and 1960 psychological warfare's importance in planning for conflict in the Middle East expanded, linked to debates about global strategy, and with broad civil-military agreement despite occasional friction. Preparations for a possible confrontation with the Soviet Union began during the Second World War.³³ In May 1946 the Foreign Office's Russia Committee concluded the Soviets intended to expand into the free world.³⁴ Defence policy ranked the Middle East as the third priority in war, after protecting the United Kingdom, and the sea lines of communication. The 1948 regional plan hoped a joint air offensive with the Americans would strike the Red Army and targets in the USSR. Even the planners accepted it contained flaws: a reliance on American aeroplanes, the inability to defend Suez against Soviet air assault, and assumed co-operation from Arab states.³⁵ In contending with global overstretch, the Chiefs of Staff asked the Foreign Office to accept a political warfare plan, including special operations and deception. What they really wanted was a permanent Political Warfare Executive (PWE).³⁶ Prime Minister Attlee put the military in their place in December 1949, creating the Ministerial Committee on Communism (Overseas), and a subordinate Official Committee. These committees solidified the Foreign Secretary's control over political warfare.³⁷

Psychological warfare came within the purview of a body originally intended to focus upon strategic deception. Britain's sophisticated deception operations during the Second World War, such as those surrounding the D-Day landings in 1944, are well known.³⁸ The wartime London Controlling Section, responsible for co-ordinating deception, survived into peacetime only in an etiolated form – three officers were retained to write historical accounts of the organisation's activities. The Section was revived in 1946 after both Henry Tizard's report on future war for the Cabinet

Defence Committee, and the Secret Intelligence Service, pressed for the use of deception in the Cold War. Huw Dylan points to the new terms of reference issued to the Section in December 1947 as marking its re-activation.³⁹ However, a letter from Wing Commander P.H.R. Saunders, dated 12 December 1946, notes the London Controlling Section 'has just been re-constituted.'⁴⁰ The next year an interdepartmental committee was set up under Major-General Sir Leslie Hollis to oversee the Section. The Hollis Committee met for the last time in December 1949; in May 1950 John Drew, an experienced deception planner, took over the London Controlling Section, reporting now to the Chief Staff Officer to the Minister of Defence. In February 1951 the Section was re-named the Directorate of Forward Plans.⁴¹ By June the Directorate comprised Drew as Director, retired Colonel H.N.H. Wild as his deputy, and a staff officer from each of the services. In addition there were sections in the Far East and the Middle East, the former comprising three officers, and the latter only one.⁴² Besides deception, by May 1966 the Directorate was involved in counter-subversion, psychological warfare, and schemes to improve military relations with local communities.⁴³

Erik Linstrum argues the Malaya insurgency 'served as a critical early test' for psywar; success there 'bolstered the rationale for a massive propaganda machine.'⁴⁴ Propaganda has been credited with ending the conflict, and the strategy there elevated as a model in counter-insurgency.⁴⁵ Yet Malaya made hardly any impact on wider psywar planning. Although officers at the Army Staff College in the 1950s studied Malaya, time was also spent examining the Second World War, Korea and Kenya.⁴⁶ The Korean War in fact prompted a policy change, in line with a huge rise in defence spending. Britain's deception capabilities were reinvigorated in the Directorate of

Forward Plans.⁴⁷ Leading figures in the Directorate likely felt immune to pressures to conform to mainstream military culture. Director John Drew was a civil servant with experience in Customs and Excise and the Cabinet Office.⁴⁸ Group Captain Philip Magrath, Chief Intelligence Officer in Coastal Command during the war, came out of retirement to be the officer responsible for the Middle East.⁴⁹ On returning to London to oversee all psychological warfare, he was replaced by Colonel George Davy, who was recommissioned after retiring in 1948.⁵⁰ Psychological warfare was too controversial for promising young officers to risk blotting their copybook.

Responding to increased Soviet propaganda in the Middle East, Chief of the Air Staff John Slessor called for a review in April 1951.⁵¹ The Chiefs agreed in March 1952 to establish an Interdepartmental Working Party on Psychological Warfare.⁵² Further progress only came thanks to Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden approving a key paper on 23 April 1952. In a global war, a PWE would appear on the Second World War model, reporting to the Foreign Secretary.⁵³ But this was only during a war against the USSR. A major strategic review conducted by the Chiefs later in the year established what to do in lower-level conflicts. The Global Strategy Paper expected nuclear deterrence to render all-out war with the Soviet Union improbable; more unconventional challenges outside Europe were anticipated.⁵⁴ In the Middle East, a new 'forward strategy' allocated a single division to defend the theatre, with only one brigade group permanently based there. Such optimism relied on airpower, commando raids and demolitions to slow a Soviet advance, plus assistance from regional allies.⁵⁵ Threat assessments and theatre plans now foresaw problems which irregular methods, such as psywar, could address. Thus in March 1953 the Defence

Co-ordination Committees in the Middle East, Far East and Germany were directed to plan for psywar in wartime, including under nuclear conditions:

...a future war will be of unparalleled intensity. This will include the widespread atomic attack of targets in Russia. It is considered that the Soviet Government will do all in their power to prevent the results of the allied strategic air offensive becoming known by their armies in the field, since such knowledge might decisively weaken their will to fight. Enemy troops can only be informed of the allied air effort by psychological warfare measures.⁵⁶

The Chiefs' burgeoning enthusiasm for psywar only made headway because the Foreign Office were thinking along similar lines. Two key reports written for the Foreign Office on propaganda and the overseas information services advocated investment in information services and a more assertive campaign against the Communist powers.⁵⁷ However, the shared passion for propaganda between the Foreign Office and the Chiefs was not universally appreciated. The Middle East commanders hesitated, taking over five months to respond to the call for plans. They argued the instructions made no sense. During war there were unlikely to be large concentrations of enemy troops against whom propaganda could be directed. Even if they could be reached, Soviet soldiers served in an 'indoctrinated army not readily susceptible to enemy propaganda.'⁵⁸ These reservations blocked regional planning for the time being. The Interdepartmental Working Party set up in March 1952 hardly exuded zeal either, only reporting in November 1954, but reaching the opposite conclusion to the Middle East commanders. Fear of nuclear attack made dispersing military forces essential: a spread-out enemy could be attacked with psywar and

guerrilla tactics. The Working Party advised that the Army take the lead on psychological warfare, and aim to develop training and doctrine. Planners needed to address 'local military operations', as was happening on an ad hoc basis in Malaya and Kenya.⁵⁹ The Foreign Office agreed, and yet again progress in planning happened when the Foreign Office and Chiefs of Staff agreed on the need for enhanced psywar capabilities.⁶⁰

As tensions with Egypt ramped up over Britain's right to base troops in the Suez canal zone, and in accord with the Global Strategy Paper's attention to subversion, on 3 May 1956 the IRD's charter was amended to include anti-subversion.⁶¹ Low-level propaganda within Egypt had in fact been going on since 1951.⁶² An inquiry chaired by Douglas Dodds-Parker, a junior Foreign Office minister, recommended spending an extra £568,000 annually on broadcasting in the region, plus building new facilities in Aden, Libya, Cyprus and the Persian Gulf.⁶³ With a strong consensus forming between the Chiefs and the Foreign Office, the Defence Co-ordination Committee (Middle East) finally gave in and set up a Psychological Warfare Committee, though it only met in January 1957.⁶⁴ The Service ministries also resisted expanding psywar, to an extent as a battle in their wider war against the encroaching powers of the Ministry of Defence, a war they finally lost in 1963.⁶⁵ In July 1956 all three ministries vetoed a proposal by the Directorate of Forward Plans to create a permanent psychological warfare unit, citing financial constraints.⁶⁶ In practice these would have been miniscule. At least the training authorised in late 1954 began in September 1956. Students were 'initially somewhat sceptical' about the topic.⁶⁷ One air force and twelve army officers graduated from the course as psychological warfare staff officers; a course ran every year subsequently.⁶⁸

By the time the Suez crisis struck in October 1956, only limited progress had been achieved in embedding psychological warfare into defence planning. Propaganda was an important part of the government's bid to achieve domestic support for the intervention, and resulted in a serious conflict between ministers and the BBC over the content of their news coverage.⁶⁹ John Rennie, Director of the Information Research Department, was appointed in August 1956 to head a new Information Coordination Executive (ICE), tasked with overseeing propaganda during the crisis.⁷⁰ In the planning stages, staff from the Directorate of Forward Plans plus small teams from the Royal Signals and the Royal Air Force were assigned to implement ICE directives. They hoped to sow dissension between the Egyptian army and air force, to undermine public support for Nasser's regime, and to encourage civilians to move away from the battle zone.⁷¹ The plan envisaged delivering these messages by radio broadcasts, loudspeaker vans and a million leaflets, dropped from the air.⁷² Ultimately little was accomplished, not least because the man appointed as Director of Psychological Warfare, Brigadier Bernard Fergusson, lacked any prior experience in the field.⁷³ General Sir Charles Keightley, who commanded allied forces at Suez, lamented that "we never got going with our psychological warfare at all."⁷⁴

Obstacles planted by the Service ministries and theatre commanders were eroded by the crisis, for two reasons. Firstly, far from heralding the dumping of great power ambitions, policy-makers conserved a determination to wield power in the Middle East after Suez.⁷⁵ Secondly, the Sandys Review in 1957 restructured defence policy towards an expeditionary posture. In the years after Suez several interventions were mounted to protect British interests.⁷⁶ Concerns about Egyptian expansionism in the

region lingered until the final withdrawal from Aden in 1967.⁷⁷ After Suez the IRD's 'counter-Nasserite work' expanded.⁷⁸ Rather than empire-building, the Directorate's moves to expand psywar should be seen as connected to these changes in defence and foreign policy. Suez taught 'a hastily constructed odd lot, however personally talented, is not a good idea.'⁷⁹ The IRD agreed on 'the need for a coherent policy with some appeal to the target audience,' better intelligence on the audience and language expertise, plus more equipment and training.⁸⁰

The Chiefs of Staff now ranked propaganda 'an integral part of our defence effort'. At last the Middle East commanders agreed, hoping propaganda could partially offset pending manpower reductions in the military.⁸¹ The April 1957 review by Minister of Defence Duncan Sandys marked a radical change, ending national service, reducing the armed forces by 300,000 personnel, and giving an elevated role to nuclear deterrence.⁸² As Colonel Davy, the Directorate's senior officer in the Middle East, wrote: 'the run-down of the shooting soldiers must be made up for by setting up P.W. resources.'⁸³ Psywar assets matched up with the perceived threat. The Foreign Office's Regional Information Officer saw Egyptian radio as 'our biggest worry,' a 'first-class' propaganda weapon which outclassed the British.⁸⁴ Finally jolted into action, the Joint Psychological Warfare Committee (Middle East) examined all plans to see if psywar measures might be inserted.⁸⁵ They asked for additional radio stations in Bahrain, Somaliland and Malta, plus jamming equipment, printing presses, loud hailers, and further personnel.⁸⁶ For the men in the Middle East who had to deal with Egyptian broadcasts, the necessity for striking back seemed obvious. General Bourne, in London after commanding the Middle East Land Forces (MELF), commented at a Royal United Services Institute event: 'We are engaged in a

psychological and political war, and I do not believe that the Middle East will be won or lost by firing a shot, but by psychological warfare.’⁸⁷

Opposition to psywar’s broadening remit came from civilian and military quarters. Patrick Dean, Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, was extremely suspicious of the Chiefs interfering in propaganda.⁸⁸ IRD head John Rennie wanted to maintain Foreign Office control, giving the military ‘constant political guidance’.⁸⁹ Nothing could be calculated to irritate a military commander more. At an August 1957 Working Party meeting, the Admiralty opposed setting up a permanent unit. The War Office disagreed, asserting ‘definite Service requirements for Psychological Warfare’, a call repeated by Vice-CIGS General Stratton five months later.⁹⁰ On 21 October the new Army representative on the Working Party conspired with Hugh Cortazzi from the IRD to block John Drew’s ‘empire-building ambitions.’ Major Cowan objected to the Directorate of Forward Plans’ expansion betokening a power-grab by the Ministry of Defence.⁹¹ The Colonial Office worried about psy-warriors meddling in their territories, and making matters worse. They believed ‘the whole philosophy of psychological warfare is inappropriate’, as the population should ‘not be regarded as hostile targets’, even during rebellions.⁹² They forgot the hundreds of surrendered insurgents subjected to psywar in Malaya and Kenya.

Compromises were reached. To placate the Colonial Office, the Services stopped calling the population the ‘enemy’, and later adopted the more anodyne American term ‘psychological operations’.⁹³ The Working Party accepted Foreign Office or Colonial Office supremacy over propaganda, but urged immediate action in Cyprus, Aden and the Persian Gulf.⁹⁴ The Chiefs of Staff endorsed these conclusions; while

Field Marshal Templer abandoned his drive for a permanent PWE, to satisfy the Foreign Office.⁹⁵ In July 1958 Air Vice-Marshal Heath, commanding British Forces in the Arabian Peninsula, asked London for a permanent psychological warfare unit, in addition to the unit loaned to him by MELF.⁹⁶ The War Office refused.⁹⁷ This was despite the approval of the Vice-CIGS for such a unit only six months earlier. From around January 1959 the training school at Maresfield did provide a small cadre unit for deployment overseas at short notice.⁹⁸ Progress was uneven: the Directors of Plans in London declined an appeal by the Directorate of Forward Plans to include psywar in all planning documents.⁹⁹ By April 1961 Major Shackleton, the psychological warfare officer at British Forces Arabian Peninsula headquarters, lamented ‘very few officers in the Army ever have to think about “P ops”’.¹⁰⁰ Though the ultimate goal for psywar enthusiasts – a permanent Political Warfare Executive to direct aggressive Cold War propaganda – never transpired, psywar now resided in military planning and several deployable teams. This expanded role arose because the Chiefs and the Foreign Office agreed on a strategic requirement to project psychological warfare in the Middle East after Suez.

Psychological warfare in Oman, 1957-1959

How did psywar perform in practice? Precisely because psychological warfare was supposed to be combined with other tactics, such as air strikes, small-unit patrols or political concessions, judging psywar’s contribution to the final outcome was problematic. Operations in Muscat and Oman in 1957-59 illustrate the conundrum. British policy-makers wanted to extend their interests in the country, with minimum publicity in the aftermath of Suez. After the ruling Imam’s death in May 1954, Sultan

Sa'id bin Taymur, based in Muscat, aimed to unify the country, contrary to a convention granting the interior autonomy. The Sultan was encouraged by the British, to facilitate oil exploration and secure the region against Saudi Arabia and Egypt.¹⁰¹ The new Imam, Ghalib bin Ali, and his brother Talib bin Ali, fled to Egypt in December 1955. Anti-Muscat and anti-British propaganda emanating from Egypt duly increased throughout 1956.¹⁰² On 14 June 1957 Talib led the Omani Liberation Army into the Sultanate.¹⁰³ They quickly captured Nizwa and called on all tribes to establish an Imamate, a call heeded only by the Bani Hina and Beni Riyam tribes.¹⁰⁴ In mid-July the Sultan appealed to Britain for assistance. The Chiefs of Staff authorised the bombing of rebel forts and the deployment of 1st Cameronians and the Trucial Oman Scouts, later to be joined by 15/19th Hussars. An offensive in August pushed the Imam's men out of Nizwa, and onto the Jebel al-Akhdar, a mountain range spanning 180 by 60 miles. All attempts to dislodge the rebels over the following months failed.¹⁰⁵

At this point the British government set upon psywar as an alternative to deploying troops in large numbers, which was bound to attract criticism in the tense post-Suez climate.¹⁰⁶ In November 1957 Colonel Davy created a team at Nizwa to encourage the Beni Riyam tribe to reconcile with the Sultan, using leaflets, voice aircraft, films and posters.¹⁰⁷ Within a month the team's commander, Major Isaac, had won over Bernard Burrows, the British Resident in Bahrain.¹⁰⁸ Whatever transpired in London, diplomatic support in the country concerned was essential for psywar to proceed. Yet Isaac encountered opposition from local military commanders, who confessed to 'feeling that psy-war was a poor substitute for going up the hill and into battle.'¹⁰⁹ These sentiments were dismissed as conventional attacks, such as that mounted in

mid-November by 13/18th Hussars, the Royal Air Force (RAF), the Trucial Oman Scouts and the Muscat Armed Forces, failed to quash the rebellion.¹¹⁰ Persuading the Sultan to combine psywar with political measures proved a delicate business. Eventually he agreed to refrain from executing those who surrendered. Major Isaac proposed his seven-man team aim to undermine belief in the Imam's cause and Talib's leadership, induce 'malingering, desertion, mutiny, flight or surrender among the rebels', and deny them support from other tribes.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, the Muscat Armed Forces carried out reprisals, demolishing houses, cutting down date palms, confiscating property and imposing fines.¹¹²

Views on psywar's effectiveness fluctuated. Both propaganda and the other measures failed to halt extensive landmine-laying by the rebels.¹¹³ By late February 1958 local political sentiment had hardened, with an adviser arguing the 'Arab recognises nothing but force and money.'¹¹⁴ But MELF described Isaac's work as 'the most important element and other military action is being tailored at all stages to fit in with psychological plan.'¹¹⁵ Cognisant of the scepticism about psywar back home, Colonel Davy warned that if the operation faltered, 'we should be prepared for some of our enemies to say "psychological warfare is no good; we told you so."'¹¹⁶ The Ministry of Defence was optimistic enough to send an interrogator for obtaining propaganda-worthy information from prisoners.¹¹⁷ Visiting Oman in March, Davy realised that both the authorities in Muscat and British Army officers favoured psywar.¹¹⁸ Isaac demurred: the blockade around the Jebel leaked, offensive patrols up to the mountain seldom happened, artillery bombardments achieved nothing, and the Sultan blocked any serious incentives for surrender. Matters improved by late August, when energetic patrols by the Muscat Armed Forces were finally mounted and air strikes

appeared to damage rebel morale.¹¹⁹ Psywar operations were stepped up for a short period in September. Bombing was suspended in November after the rebels put out peace feelers; talks collapsed when the Sultan refused to compromise. Air-dropped leaflets, giving the rebels until 22 November to surrender before bombing resumed, produced nothing.¹²⁰

Colonel David Smiley, Commander of the Sultan's Armed Forces since April 1958, had little patience for psywar. He mocked how: 'This "voice" aircraft was fitted with a loud-speaker through which we broadcast messages and propaganda to the rebels; after one of its flights they sent a message down to us complaining that the loud-speaker was faulty and they couldn't hear.'¹²¹ Smiley requested the Army despatch reinforcements to take the Jebel. In late October London settled on sending 22nd Special Air Service Regiment (SAS) after lobbying by the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Deane-Drummond.¹²² The SAS faced possible abolition under the Sandys Defence Review; Deane-Drummond jumped on the opportunity to prove the Regiment's relevance.¹²³ A dramatic assault on the Jebel in late January 1959, with the SAS in the lead, dislodged the rebels and sent the Imam and Talib fleeing into Saudi Arabia.¹²⁴ Major Isaac cantankerously asserted the battle was won before the SAS assault.¹²⁵ Peter de la Billière, then a junior SAS officer, recalled that during patrols before the final assault, rebels stood in the open and waved at his troopers.¹²⁶ This was hardly the behaviour of those on the verge of defeat.

Yet operations in Oman convinced regional commanders of the utility of psychological warfare. Air Vice-Marshal Heath concluded that despite the limitations imposed by the Sultan, psywar proved 'a useful complimentary influence on the local

population to that produced by the normal ground/air operations.’¹²⁷ These claims to London were rather two-faced: on returning to Aden, Major Isaac found his office, desk and clerk had all disappeared from the headquarters.¹²⁸ The Jebel Akhdar campaign of 1957-59 shows psychological warfare's status in military thinking as a potentially useful tactic when other options were limited. Psywar could be deployed easily, was cheap and avoided the need for large troop numbers. This fitted into the general preference in defence policy for cheaper alternatives to massive conventional forces after the 1957 Sandys review.¹²⁹ Even when high enemy combat motivation and limited backing from a key local ally constrained what psywar could achieve, its value was too indeterminate to be easily dismissed.

Psychological warfare in Aden, 1957-1961

Besides being aimed at an opponent, propaganda could be directed at allies. This was significant for regional strategy because Britain's weak conventional forces needed allies to deter the Soviet Union.¹³⁰ Moreover, colonial counter-insurgency relied upon local allies to supply the manpower for expanding the security forces.¹³¹ Military ties with armed forces in the Middle East were mirrored by extensive IRD contacts with broadcasters, journalists and opinion formers.¹³² IRD material was also distributed via the Baghdad Pact's Counter-Subversion Committee, formed in 1956.¹³³ Psywar aligned with civilian information policy to uphold British interests in the Middle East. Aden is an illuminating example for understanding a growing reliance on propaganda to counter anti-colonial pressures from rivals such as the USSR, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Yemen. As Spencer Mawby argues, British information policy in Aden

aimed to re-direct 'resentment against external interference away from London and towards Cairo.'¹³⁴

The British believed that subversive influences entered the Aden Protectorates from neighbouring Yemen. The trouble was really of Britain's own making, starting in the early 1950s when the colonial authorities pursued a 'forward policy', pushing their reach into the autonomous East and West Aden Protectorates.¹³⁵ Trying to incorporate tribes into a federation in the later 1950s provoked revolts, at times backed by the Yemen, concerned about a strong rival on her border.¹³⁶ Offensive covert operations into the Yemen between 1955 and 1964 aimed to destabilise the Imam's regime and deter interference in the Protectorates.¹³⁷ By July 1957 the Defence Co-ordination Committee also blamed Russian propaganda for pursuing a 'war of nerves' in Aden and the Protectorates. The Middle East commanders, eager to avoid a regional arms race, advocated 'urgent and effective psychological warfare.' A firepower demonstration for 'local notables', including 106 mm recoilless rifles (an anti-tank weapon) and aircraft firing rockets, would prove British resolve. Radio broadcasts and mobile loudspeaker units could then spread a pro-British message in remote areas. Yet the Middle East commanders hedged their bets, moving anti-tank mines and warplanes to Aden in case propaganda proved insufficient.¹³⁸

Governor Sir William Luce believed the military threat to the Protectorates to be 'slight', but local nerves to be fragile. For Luce the Arabs maintained a 'constant preoccupation ...with the apparent strength of the traditional enemy.' Rumours about the Yemen moving tanks and heavy guns to the border were accepted at face value. Local rulers, such as the Sharif of Beihan and the Audhali Sultan, wanted to see

British strength to shore up morale in their tribes. These rulers were essential in Britain's plans for making a federation in South Arabia, co-opting the local elites to suppress any rebellion and ensure continued access to the military base in Aden. Luce asked for tanks to address these concerns: they would do more than mere words. Maintaining tribal morale was essential.¹³⁹

For once the Directorate of Forward Plans and the Colonial Office agreed, backing Luce's request to the Chiefs of Staff a few days later. Templer suggested a psywar expert go to serve on the staff at British Forces Arabian Peninsula.¹⁴⁰ The other Chiefs acceded, also accepting that visual evidence was desirable. But the only available tanks, Centurions, tended to break down a lot, which was unlikely to improve Britain's image. Instead the Chiefs despatched voice truck equipment, a voice aircraft, and ten 106 mm recoilless rifles.¹⁴¹ Great store was set in the power of film, with six cinemas in Aden city, one mobile cinema in action and four more mobile units on the way. Colonel Davy believed cinema appealed because 'most of the population have nothing to do.' Local authorities asked for the Gaumont Arabic News Service and films 'showing displays', like trooping the colour, or Charlie Chaplins.¹⁴² Backed by the First Sea Lord, John Drew persuaded the Central Office of Information to make a film showing British soldiers 'in friendly contact with the local population' and helping out after a natural disaster. A disjointed narrative arc then cut to a battle where British soldiers and aeroplanes destroyed tanks. Colonial Office experts in London expected the plot to 'go over big with Arab audiences.'¹⁴³ However, the authorities in Aden dismissed the film as likely to damage local morale. Given the bureaucratic effort involved, Drew was 'much perturbed by this volte face', so pressed Colonel Davy to try and change attitudes.¹⁴⁴ He partially succeeded: by

early January 1958 the film, 'All in a Day's Work', was being shown to the Aden Protectorate Levies. But it was deemed too frightening for the public, '...who have never seen a tank. They are not thinking about the Russian tanks in the Yemen at present and the political people think it is best not to remind them.'¹⁴⁵ The episode illustrated divergent opinions between the Colonial Office in London and local administrators about likely audience reception, and the need to produce material quickly before the context changed.

As the colonial authorities incorporated the Protectorate states into a federation, a leading opponent to the scheme, Sultan Ali, was deposed after British troops invaded the Sultanate of Lahej (just west of Aden) in April 1958. His successor, Fadhl, predictably joined the federation.¹⁴⁶ By July 1958 Major Isaac had convinced the Commander of British Forces in the Arabian Peninsula to use psywar in Aden as well as Oman. In Air Vice-Marshal Heath's view, the conventional offensive in Lahej could have benefitted from psywar. Therefore he requested a psychological warfare unit be permanently attached to his command.¹⁴⁷ Heath wrote directly to the Chief of the Defence Staff a month later to reinforce his point. Britain's military position in the Middle East was being weakened by Egyptian and Russian radio propaganda, which reached a large audience. The best response was to boost British broadcasting in the region. This meant erecting a radio relay station at Berbera, across the Gulf of Aden in Somaliland, re-opening the station in Cyprus and financial and technical support to the transmissions from Aden, Bahrain and Amman. More than a year's military operations against rebels in Oman and South Arabia had produced 'no possible constructive effect.' Heath argued, '...in the long term words are cheaper than bullets, have a greater range, and are more acceptable to the recipients.'¹⁴⁸ The

Chiefs took seven months to decide how to respond, sending a psychological warfare officer, a unit for him to command, and a broadcasting aircraft.¹⁴⁹ The officer trained two Aden government teams to run Land Rovers fitted with film and public address equipment.¹⁵⁰ The threat from the Yemen receded in November 1959 when the Imam invited Governor Luce to talks in Taiz, stabilising the border question until the revolution in Yemen in 1962.¹⁵¹ Events in Aden saw the military expanding their propaganda work into areas normally reserved for the colonial authorities. Inter-departmental tussles in Whitehall were forgotten because civilians and soldiers alike perceived a growing danger from Egypt and the Yemen. Psywar units were amongst the few resources available to strengthen the resolve of local allies.

Psychological warfare in Cyprus, 1957-1959

In Cyprus the Colonial and Foreign Offices exerted tighter control for much longer before letting the Directorate of Forward Plans enter the scene. The insurgency on Cyprus attracted intense international controversy, and propaganda occupied a central place in the strategy pursued by EOKA (the National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters).¹⁵² Violence began to unfold from April 1955 because Greek Cypriots wanted *enosis* (union) with Greece. After four years of fighting the British granted independence whilst retaining basing rights on the island.¹⁵³ Up to the present time Cyprus retains a central place in British policy towards the Middle East, not least as a global hub in the Anglo-American signals intelligence enterprise.¹⁵⁴ The controversy about psychological warfare concerned the conditions under which success could be achieved: was progress only possible once a diplomatic solution to the crisis came into focus, or should tactical operations be pursued immediately to deny the initiative

to the enemy? Foreign Office expert John Reddaway visited Cyprus in summer 1955 at the behest of the Governor and the CIGS, concluding the absence of a credible political offer to the Greek Cypriots nullified the potential for propaganda.¹⁵⁵ His assessment encapsulated the London Foreign Office perspective on propaganda throughout the campaign. In July Leslie Glass, Head of the Information Division at the British Middle East Office (a Foreign Office establishment) formed the opposite view. He suggested a director for propaganda be appointed to co-ordinate operations on the island, liaising with information officers in London, Athens and Ankara on shaping international opinion.¹⁵⁶ On his appointment to the directorship in November Glass oversaw 'a very heavy stream of propaganda' targeting the local population.¹⁵⁷ He remained until early 1957, leaving without a successor.¹⁵⁸ Glass' expertise and Foreign Office background explain the military's exclusion from propaganda up until then.

Colonel Davy tried to insert the Directorate of Forward Plans into Cyprus in August 1957, sensing an opportunity with Glass absent and a lull in civilian propaganda. As Deputy Director of Forward Plans (Middle East), Davy was physically located in the Middle East Land Forces headquarters in Cyprus. The Defence Coordination Committee authorised his running a training course at Episkopi for junior officers from across the Middle East. Davy invited the Cyprus authorities to send an expert to lecture the students.¹⁵⁹ This move to build psywar capacity gave the Directorate an excuse to inveigle themselves into the campaign. Despite Davy's courting, the colonial officials held off on further collaboration. A shift in the political climate prompted a second try. In May 1958 Colonel Davy persuaded Brigadier Gleadell, Chief of Staff to the Director of Operations, to draw on the Directorate's resources.¹⁶⁰

The Commander-in-Chief at MELF, Lieutenant General Sir Roger Bower, weighed in with Governor Sir Hugh Foot.¹⁶¹ Gleadell and Bower knew psywar from Malaya, and the trailblazer there, Templer, supported psywar being implanted in Cyprus from his position as CIGS.¹⁶² Bower and Foot previously intended to postpone psywar until London devised a political initiative worth selling. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan announced such a plan on 19 June, giving shared control to the Greek and Turkish Cypriots, with British withdrawal to the base areas. Knowing this was in the pipeline, Bower urged Foot to jump on the ‘opportune moment for a vigorous psychological approach.’¹⁶³ Another incentive was a resurgence in atrocity allegations about the security forces, attracting criticism from Parliament, the European Court of Human Rights and the United Nations.¹⁶⁴ These allegations started to appear in April 1956 and the government tried to present them as fabrications to be expected in any terrorist campaign.¹⁶⁵ Foot therefore accepted Bower's ‘very welcome’ proposal for help.¹⁶⁶

This represented a serious victory for Colonel Davy and the Directorate of Forward Plans. A few months earlier, the Colonial Office had resisted any psychological warfare in their territories, psywar in Oman was failing and the tactic's future seemed in doubt. Rumours even reached Davy in April 1958 that his position faced abolition. An urgent need for vindication can be sensed in Davy's appreciations from the time. He found defeatism permeated civil and military personnel in Nicosia, yet believed in his own ability to overturn it by showing most Greek Cypriots ‘do not hate the British, but they have been intimidated by EOKA.’¹⁶⁷ Though intimidation happened, blindness to a rebellion's popularity is common in counter-insurgents, who must otherwise admit their own futility. Psy-warriors always held the audience to be

convertible. The Directorate certainly attempted to exploit an opportunity by injecting an optimistic reading of the potential for psywar. They only succeeded because officials in Cyprus wanted to buy what they were selling. Besides Bower and Gleadell, at least six District Security Committees favoured psychological operations.¹⁶⁸ The military gave increasing support: in October, the Director of Operations appointed a General Staff Officer Grade II (Psychological Support), to serve in the Secretariat.¹⁶⁹ In November the Middle East commanders created the Psychological Support Team Middle East.¹⁷⁰ The Air Ministry sent a Pembroke voice aircraft and crew - two years after the Directorate suggested them.¹⁷¹ Davy's attempt to consolidate the Directorate's position in the Middle East had succeeded at last.

Having won the argument, Colonel Davy, Squadron Leader Derry (his staff officer) and Edward Wynne, previously a deputy to Leslie Glass, co-ordinated two units from June 1958 to rejuvenate propaganda: the Information Research Unit and the Special Investigation Group. The Information Research Unit (IRU), reconstituted from the Glass era, planned and conducted operations. Its main products were leaflets appealing for peace, apologetic leaflets for distribution at road blocks and house searches, leaflets condemning terrorism, and tapes to be broadcast during curfews and searches. Their quality was diminished by the Unit's limited access to policy documents and intelligence reports.¹⁷² The Special Investigations Group (SIG) existed to counter abuse allegations about British troops. It was a first in post-war British counter-insurgency. Unlike Malaya or Kenya, mistreatment of civilians happened in full view in towns and villages, readily accessible to journalists.¹⁷³

The SIG rapidly investigated incidents, issued a statement to disprove false allegations, and gathered evidence where offences had been committed. 191 incidents were dealt with during its nine month lifetime. David French argues the Group ‘did not exist to apply whitewash to the misdemeanours of the security forces.’ However, he also describes how evidence collected by the Group was used to cover up a vengeful rampage by soldiers in October 1958, injuring 255 people and killing three.¹⁷⁴ Brian Drohan quotes the Deputy Governor's desire to make the SIG ‘an important unit in our campaign to defeat EOKA.’ For Drohan the Group existed primarily for counter-propaganda purposes. They uncovered some bogus allegations, in one case catching someone re-arranging furniture ready to blame soldiers for trashing their house. Drohan stresses the SIG purpose in stopping the counter-insurgency campaign being derailed by investigations into misconduct.¹⁷⁵ Maria Hadjiathanasiou views the SIG’s main purpose to have been protecting Britain’s reputation on the international stage.¹⁷⁶

These accounts miss the main reason for the Group's creation and the Directorate of Forward Plans' entrance into the Cyprus Emergency: a sense that soldiers were being let down by the civilian leadership. Unlike Oman and Aden, in Cyprus enemy propaganda was undermining not only the confidence of the local population in British strategy, but also that of the soldiers themselves. The Group described its ‘ultimate and overriding aim - the prevention of allegations against the Security Forces and, in any case, to buttress their morale.’¹⁷⁷ In February 1957, before the SIG came into existence, officials in Paphos and Limassol reported Greek opinion normally accepted allegations against the security forces as truthful.¹⁷⁸ Psywar techniques from Malaya and Kenya were known to have little effect, yet were still

persisted with.¹⁷⁹ This can only be understood by accepting the psywar campaign launched in June 1958 was intended to placate soldiers impatient to see action being taken against the abuse hurled at them. Whether the counter-measures worked was a secondary consideration. This was a significant departure because the conventional wisdom, in both the Foreign Office and the Army, stipulated that propaganda should not be directed at British troops. Morale was, rather, a responsibility for regimental officers, the Education Corps and padres.¹⁸⁰ IRD Director Ralph Murray stated 'Home morale is not a psychological warfare responsibility. Nor is troops' morale.'¹⁸¹ While the colonial government on Cyprus followed Murray's rule, the Middle East military commanders dissented. They aimed 'to foster the prestige and morale of British Armed Forces throughout the theatre and to devise plans to forestall and to counter anti-British and subversive propaganda directed against them.'¹⁸² The June 1958 change in course should be interpreted as the Middle East commanders acting to correct the Colonial Office's refusal to protect their soldiers from vilification.

Having approved psywar in May, Governor Foot now tried to obstruct these developments. He questioned whether the political circumstances were ripe for intensive propaganda, criticising the psywar experts who 'have not been able to give us much practical assistance in our unique circumstances.'¹⁸³ The Colonial Secretary proposed Leslie Glass return to advise on how to proceed. Foot accepted the offer, yet doubted the prospects for success.¹⁸⁴ Resistance came from military quarters too: Colonel Davy lamented his failure to get leading figures on the Director of Operations' staff to understand psywar. The real hostility came from the civil authorities, who apparently refused to wage a propaganda campaign, a huge irritation for the military after the Foreign Office's insistence in Whitehall on keeping control

over propaganda policy. Davy thought conditions in Cyprus to be ideal for exploiting tensions between groups within EOKA. He was furious about the missed opportunities and especially with the Governor:

I have never once been consulted on the Civil side. The Governor declined to be briefed by me. ...The result of this unsatisfactory operational situation is that the few leaflets and tapes which are produced are devised on an ad hoc basis, without adequate access to intelligence and unrelated to any overall plan. I am not aware of any black or grey propaganda being done at all.¹⁸⁵

The Directorate of Forward Plans and the authorities on Cyprus fundamentally disagreed about psywar's character. Davy tried to persuade the Director of Operations and the Governor that psywar could be carried on regardless of the international situation, because such a campaign would only target EOKA. In line with military doctrine, he drew a sharp line between political propaganda and psychological warfare. Thus there was no need to be wary about debates in the Commons or at the United Nations.¹⁸⁶ Here he seriously misread the conflict. EOKA was running a sophisticated, international propaganda strategy. Leslie Glass observed events on the island were constantly manipulated to impress overseas audiences, so separating military from political propaganda made no sense. Davy also misunderstood the Cypriot audience. He was wrong in arguing the insurgency bore similarities to Malaya and Kenya. Glass understood most Greek Cypriots supported enosis, whereas EOKA itself was smaller and more tightly organised than the Malayan Communists or the Mau Mau, making communication with them via propaganda very difficult. In addition to these divergences about the conflict's character, the Colonial

Office/Foreign Office and Directorate of Forward Plans clashed because their knowledge about what propaganda activities were in train differed. Little did Davy know, the Colonial and Foreign Offices directed extensive covert propaganda. This included forged leaflets, fake letters, appeals by front organisations, and rumour campaigns. Only the most senior military commanders were informed.¹⁸⁷

Soldiers felt civilians were letting them down in the propaganda war, yet the dictates of sound covert propaganda technique prevented them from knowing how much effort in fact went into defending them. Glass and Davy did agree on the need for further propaganda in early 1959, and independently suggested similar ways to organise it under a civilian director. By late April these ideas were redundant as the conflict was settled. The Directorate of Forward Plans abolished their staff officer post in the Middle East and put its Cyprus equipment into storage.¹⁸⁸ The dispute over whether propaganda could only be conducted where a diplomatic strategy for ending a conflict existed was never resolved in Cyprus. The episode starkly demonstrated the clash between high political concerns for the diplomatic implications of propaganda versus disquiet on the ground that military morale was under threat.

Conclusion

Psychological warfare gradually assumed greater prominence in British strategy in the Middle East in the early Cold War. Change came slowly because powerful voices in both the armed forces and the Foreign and Colonial Offices harboured reservations about the tactic's effectiveness and moral probity. Turf-wars between the military and the Foreign and Colonial Offices cannot fully account for the repeated

controversies over the tactic. These disputes were about the political, moral and operational characteristics of psychological warfare. Personnel within the Directorate of Forward Plans and a few key commanders with psywar experience, such as Templer, were the only consistent advocates. At times the Chiefs of Staff used a perceived vulnerability to Soviet and Egyptian propaganda as an excuse to expand their powers over regional strategy, at the expense of the civilian departments. Psywar expanded very slowly within defence planning before the Suez crisis because most senior officers accepted the Foreign Office's claim to supremacy over what they deemed a distasteful practice. American operations in Korea and British experience in Malaya began to change attitudes. Only the Suez disaster provoked a step-change. Bitter over Colonel Nasser's survival and expanding propaganda assault on Britain's position in the region, military and civilian leaders came to appreciate psywar could be a valuable tool in their arsenal.

The realisation of the need to have a capability in the region to counteract Egypt, the Soviet Union and the Yemen in propaganda terms was a matter of broad agreement between the services and the civilian departments. The changing threat environment was soon reflected in the new defence policy, which put a premium on cheaper alternatives to a large conscript army. Psywar assets were used operationally in the Middle East just as the Sandys review came into play. The Directorate of Forward Plans tried to take advantage of the opportunity to demonstrate their tactic's value. Unfortunately for them, the operations in Oman, Aden and Cyprus could not conclusively show any contribution to strategic outcomes. Another Malaya simply failed to materialise. Psywar survived these results because its practitioners were normally quite careful to avoid raising expectations too far. Failures could be blamed

on others, such as the difficult Sultan in Oman, and in any case psywar seldom made matters dramatically worse. So far as Aden was concerned, military propaganda did appear to make a difference in boosting local allies' morale.

In Oman and Aden psychological warfare came into play thanks to support from the Foreign Office and Colonial Office representatives in charge. Psywar provoked less controversy in these places because the purpose, target and extent of propaganda was agreed upon by all those involved. In Cyprus acrimony developed when the armed forces felt the civilian organisations were failing to protect them from EOKA propaganda. The Governor and his officials (including his senior military advisers) insisted the diplomatic imperative to avoid damaging Britain's international position and negotiating stance trumped tactical military considerations. If they had shared with Directorate of Forward Plans officials the extent of the covert propaganda they were undertaking at the same time, a more trusting relationship might have ensued. Where the Directorate underestimated the dangers in countering EOKA propaganda more vigorously, colonial officials took military morale for granted. Soldiers in a modern society themselves constituted an element of public opinion. The military were not a hermetically-sealed community: this was the reason why propaganda by the armed forces was, and remains, a politically contentious undertaking. Cyprus was a harbinger of things to come: in Aden in the 1960s and Northern Ireland in the 1970s the old barrier between local and international audiences also ceased to be meaningful. Yet again, soldiers demanded defensive propaganda to protect them from demoralising smears, without much interest in the political consequences. The persistence of psychological warfare into the post-colonial era was reflected in other areas in defence and foreign policy, such as covert action.¹⁸⁹

Psychological warfare's survival, despite moral qualms and obvious shortcomings when put into practice, says something significant about British defence in the early Cold War. Strategists could not afford to jettison a potentially valuable tactic, however ignoble or unproven, at a critical time for re-establishing Britain's credentials as a global power. Though used in both world wars and since, the compelling reason for psywar blossoming in both planning and on operations after 1956 was the urgent desire to overcome the humiliation of Suez. As conscription and the occupation of Egypt came to an end the political and military elite cast around for new means to remain a world power – whether building up the Cyprus base or more nuclear weapons. Psychological warfare's growth in the 1950s is evidence for the dedication amongst policy-makers to hold onto a global status. Whether military propaganda worked mattered far less than its representation of national ambition.

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¹⁸⁴ TNA CO 1027/180: Secretary of State for the Colonies to Sir H. Foot, 17 November 1958; Sir H. Foot to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 19 November 1958.

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