

**MILITARY PSYCHOLOGY
AT THE AUSTRIAN INTERNATIONAL PEACE SUPPORT COMMAND**

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INTRODUCTION

The demands on the Austrian Military Psychology in the field of Peace Support Operations (PSO) have increased in quantity as well as in quality during the past years. In addition to the psychological selection procedure, which exists since the early 80's, this field contains an adequate psychological training and preparation for PSO but also the accompanying psychological care-giving for soldiers during as well as after the end of their mission. If necessary, e.g. in case of posttraumatic stress disorder, clinical psychological treatment is provided.

The Austrian International Peace Support Command (AIPSC)

The Austrian International Peace Support Command (AIPSC) is the organisational body of the Austrian Armed Forces to provide for international and multinational tasks, especially for the preparation, implementation and follow-up activities of peace support operations (PSO). The AIPSC is the home base, command and control centre for all contingents and individuals abroad, training centre for PSO and since Sept 1999 PfP-training centre and the centre for verification and CIMIC tasks.

Organisation of Military Psychology in the AIPSC

The AIPSC consists of several divisions structured similar to the command of a brigade. One part of the planning division is the psychology section. In this section there are three psychologists and one NCO. In the responsibility of the psychology section fall three tasks: 1) Psychological Selection, 2) Psychological Training and 3) Psychological Care-giving for PSO. The chief psychologist assisted by his NCO is responsible for the psychological training and welfare, the others two psychologists are responsible for the psychological selection.

At least since the UNPROFOR mission in former Yugoslavia a large number of results of international research confirm the enormous importance of psychological measures before, during and after peace support operations.

This contribution gives a short overview of the psychological measures of the Austrian International Peace Support Command for peace support operations (PSO) of the Austrian Armed Forces.

PRE-MISSION MEASURES

The Psychological Selection

The necessity of a psychological selection procedure for PSO results from the first experiences of the Austrian Army with „problematic personalities“ in UN-peacekeeping missions in the late 70's. In 1978 a serious incident happened in the Austrian contingent on the Golan Heights, when a soldier killed two of his sleeping comrades.

As result of this incident the Austrian Military Psychology Service was instructed to draw up methods to test PSO staff. This was the beginning of the psychological selection procedure for PSO.

The aim of this selection procedure is to eliminate soldiers who might endanger either themselves or others during deployment, particularly because of a lack of stress resistance. Therefore all Austrian volunteers for PSO, rank and file, professional soldiers as well as members of the reserve, are tested three days for their medical, physical and psychological fitness. This equal treatment promotes the motivation and identification with the selection and the acceptance of the testing methods with both groups.

Soldiers on PSO missions are on duty 24 hours a day, separated from their familiar environment and families, sometimes confronted with very stressful living and working conditions. All this last at least several months and at the same time they are aware of the fact of having little or no chance to go back home soon. The soldiers do not only need to have special military skills, the living together in close companionship during deployment, e.g. at observation points (OP), requires particularly a lot of personal maturity and tolerance.

With the psychological selection procedure soldiers are tested for their ability to perform their duties under the often stress generating conditions of the mission area, to integrate successfully into a military community and not to be a potential danger to themselves or to others.

Each candidate is assessed on four psychological criteria: Intelligence including its social dimension; accuracy and concentration (neutral and under stress); stress resistance (particularly tendencies towards aggression and anxiety); the ability for social integration (especially teamwork and motivation).

With regard to these four categories we use the following methods: tests for measuring abstract and verbal intelligence; live event inventories; personality inventories; projective tests; tests measuring work performance and concentration; testing under variable stress; a procedure based on group dynamic processes under stress, called "shelter test"; behaviour monitoring and a psychological interview.

Possible reasons for rejecting candidates may be: grave deficiencies concerning the personality structure; poor results in the achievement tests; inconvenient circumstances, which would have a negative effect on the stress resistance and would make the deployment not successful (e.g. partnership problems; present pregnancy of the partner without safety net of social benefits); past or present conflicts with law and violations of rules (e.g. suspension of the driving licence because of alcohol abuse); lack of maturity (too young and inexperienced candidates).

The psychological selection procedure for PSO still guarantees to keep the number of critical incidents or serious problem cases of soldiers in PSO to a minimum. This in view of the fact,

that up to now more than 43.000 Austrian soldiers have participated in peace keeping and peace support operations over the last three decades.

Finally it represents a helpful and indispensable instrument of personal selection for PSO, not the least because there is still a shortage of psychological staff for an adequate psychological care system before, during and after missions. A positive exception is the Austrian Contingent in Kosovo (AUCON/KFOR) where since December 1999 a psychologist is integrated in the staff.

Psychological leadership-training for commanders

In the course of the international peace keeping missions (e.g. SOMALIA, CAMBODIA, BOSNIA, RWANDA) of the past years in several cases soldiers showed acute or delayed stress reactions caused by traumatising experiences e.g. the confrontation with atrocities and assassinations, hostage-taking and captivity, torturing etc.

The findings clearly confirm the urgency of an extensive psychological preparation and training especially for the commanding officers and NCOs, to give them skills and methods to handle such abnormal situations successfully.

In co-operation with officers with special leadership training the psychology section organises for each mission-rotation a three-day seminar for all commanding officers and NCO's. They are trained in leadership-skills and are also informed about the characteristics of the mission, including the special psychological aspects.

By means of group tasks, discussions, instructions, video films and video recordings the participants are confronted with the topics of deployment stress, potential stress reactions, measures of stress management before, during and after critical incidents (Critical Incident Stress Management), dealing with injury, mutilation and death, expectancies and apprehensions concerning the integration phase in the operational area, the characteristics required of a leader.

During eight rotations a year approximately 280 commanding officers and NCOs are trained at the beginning of their pre-deployment training in the psychology section of the AIPSC.

Psychological pre-mission preparation for the troops

Beside the leadership training for the commanders there is psychological preparation for all other ranks too. During their pre-deployment training approximately 800 soldiers a year are instructed by the psychologist of the AIPSC in the same fields as mentioned above within several hours of instruction.

MEASURES DURING THE MISSION

Psychological support and care-giving

Although the Austrian Armed Forces traditionally participate in peacekeeping and peace support operations for now more than three decades, Austrian military psychologists were integrated in peace support operations for the first time in 1999. The first mission, where this happened, was ATHUM/ALBA, a humanitarian mission in ALBANIA, where approximately 500 Austrian soldiers built a field hospital and a camp for 5000 refugees.

Two psychologists of the Austrian Military Psychology Service were included in the contingent for the complete four months of the mission.

This measure earned a lot of agreement from the troops as well as from the Austrian Ministry of Defence and led to the deployment of two psychologists in the organisation of the Austrian Contingent in KOSOVO (AUCON/KFOR), the present main PSO of the Austrian Armed Forces in KOSOVO, where since December 1999 male and female psychologists are on duty for six months at a time.

Unfortunately there is still not enough psychological staff for an adequate psychological care system before, during and after the end of a mission. That's the reason why at the beginning of this mission it was necessary to try and win an external psychologist for a six months term. The result was that we had only civilian female psychologists as candidates. To guarantee the permanent psychological welfare on the spot we decided to deploy these female psychologists after a two weeks instruction phase at the AIPSC and with a military psychologist as tutor for the first six weeks in the mission. The opinions and reactions of the troops were divided between agreement, indifference and disapproval. The main difficulty of the civilian female psychologists was to be the only woman among 500 male soldiers and not to be a well-trained soldier. It was difficult for the troops to accept them, although they did a good job as psychologists. Their main task is the psychological care-giving to all soldiers of the mission, especially giving support concerning partnership problems, problems resulting from the stressful deployment conditions, critical incident stress management, communication training, group dynamic problem solving.

Psychological counselling to commanders

In addition to the care-giving function the psychologist is the adviser of the commanding officer (CO) of the contingent concerning questions of psychology of leadership as well as all issues of organisation and military psychology.

For this assignment it seems to be very helpful to have at least passed a military training or to be a professional soldier or reserve with an adequate and genuine, not temporary military rank.

For the current rotation in April 2001 we were able to deploy a military psychologist who is a professional officer, which will make the acceptance easier for the CO and the troops.

Psychological family support

To take care of the family members of the deployed soldiers is a growing responsibility for the AIPSC. Until now the psychology section of the AIPSC is not able to guarantee a comprehensive social care-giving net for the loved ones at home.

The problem is that the families are spread over all the provinces of Austria and there is no net of decentralised organisations where the relatives could seek help and support.

There are small beginnings to provide social and especially psychological support for the families. The present solution is to refer family members to the psychologists employed by the induction centres or the military hospitals, which are located in most of the federal provinces of Austria. This mediation has proved to be a good measure in case of partnership problems or problems with children at school or kindergarten.

POST-MISSION MEASURES

Psychological preparation for redeployment

Another important task of the psychology section in the AIPSC is the preparation of the redeployed soldiers for the return to their families. Experience has shown that after stressful and long deployments, during which the soldiers are confronted with critical incidents or have to do their job under adverse circumstances in foreign countries with a strange culture, it might become difficult to get used to the changes in the familiar environment at home. This would be easier if the repatriates were prepared for the specific situation of the family at home as well as their own personal change during their absence.

All repatriates are psychologically prepared for redeployment by the psychologist/AIPSC approximately two weeks before their rotation in the mission area.

Feedback through after-deployment questionnaire

According to the psychological preparation for his return each soldier has to fill in a special questionnaire concerning his experiences and opinions about his deployment. The aim of this anonymous questionnaire is to gain a lot of information about all phases of the deployment, from the recruitment and selection, the pre-mission training, the life and daily duty during the deployment, up to the future prospects of the soldiers.

The main topics of the questionnaire are: motivation for PSO, attitudes of family, friends and comrades toward the assignment, pre-mission phase, attitude toward and dealing with danger, living- and working conditions in the mission area, leadership style of commanders, social relationships, leisure-time activities, apprehensions and future prospects.

The results of this survey are an important instrument for evaluating the lessons learned of each mission.

Psychological Debriefing for PSO-personnel

In addition to the three PSO-contingents (GOLAN, CYPRUS, KOSOVO) the Austrian Armed Forces have a number of military observers and headquarters personnel which is deployed in several trouble spots all over the world. Besides an individual psychological preparation before the beginning of his mission each repatriated military observer is interviewed after the end of the mission by the psychologist/AIPSC and prepared for his reintegration into the family. The same procedure is applied for soldiers who are repatriated prematurely on account of problems that can't be solved in the mission area or in case of psychological burn out or for lack of motivation, which may cause problems in service.

Evaluation of lessons learned for selection, training and care-giving

The various psychological measures applied during all phases of peace support operations help to make the deployment more effective and successful for all persons involved. These measures yield a couple of helpful findings to evaluate the lessons learned for psychological selection, training and care-giving.

Especially the experiences of military psychologists, working in the mission area, are important to improve the testing methods and decision-making process within the psychological selection procedure as well as to make the contents of the leadership training and the psychological pre-mission training more realistic.

CONCLUSION

In 1996 the psychology section of the Austrian International Peace Support Command was established as one-man section. At that time the main task of the psychologist was the psychological selection which took up most of his work.

In 1999 the psychology section expanded from one psychologist to three psychologists and one NCO. As a result it was possible to enhance the psychological pre-mission and post-mission measures.

Since the deployment of psychologists to AUCON/KFOR we gained a huge number of findings from the psychological work in the mission area that show the importance of psychological welfare measures and family support for the soldiers.

One of the main future objectives of the psychological section will be the development of psychological measures to build up an effective family support system. This would demand further personnel for the psychology section of the AIPSC. Although there is no doubt about the urgency, the realisation of this plan primarily depends on the personnel resources and financial allocations of the Austrian MOD.