Psychological Dimensions of Effective Leadership and Duty Performance Before, During and After Deployment Abroad

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ABSTRACT

The aims of the report are to assess the social psychological factors, influencing the stress level and the quality of duty performance before, during and after deployment. In addition, it aims at assessing existing problems in selection, education and training of military personnel working in multinational environment during modern military operations. Furthermore, the paper summarizes the commanders' assessment of the psychological support effectiveness and efficiency. Finally, measures for improving the system for psychological preparation and participation of the Bulgarian military in international operations are suggested.

The presented empirical data is obtained through recent surveys carried out in cooperation between Defense Advanced Research Institute at Rakovski Defense and Staff College and the Center for Military Psychology and Prevention.

The data analysis aim at assisting the optimal decision making of the commanders in improving the psychological support system as well as the overall activities associated with the Bulgarian contingents' deployment in missions abroad.

Based on the analyses the researchers' team stands for the opinion that the training aimed at building skills for stress prevention and control in its biggest part happens during the overall units' pre-deployment training and leaders' training for mission deployment. In this respect, the paper contains a broader circle of recommendations, going outside the frame of the narrow psychological training. In our opinion, the stress prevention and control training should be incorporated as an implicit part in the everyday training and education of the Peace Support Operations participants.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The participation of Bulgaria in multinational operations began in 1992 – 1993 with the UN mission in Cambodia (UNMIC) and continues during the last 14 years with the missions in Angola (1995) and Tajikistan (1995 - 1997), Bosnia and Herzegovina – SFOR (1997 - 2004) and ALTEA (since 2004), Kosovo – KFOR (since 1999), Afghanistan – ISAF (since 2002) and Iraq - SFIR (2003 – 2005).

During all these years the psychological support for the missions' participants gradually developed, reaching the current "Program for Psychological Support of Multinational Missions with Participation of Bulgarian Military Personnel" [Marinov I., Dimitrova M., 2001] [Tonev St., Marinov I, 2006]. The program provides a complex psychological support at all stages of the Peace Support Operations (PSO) training, conduct and readaptation after re-deployment in Bulgaria.

During the last 14 years the psychological support activities for missions' participants has been a subject of serious debates. Though different, the activities carried out by the Center for Military Psychology and Prevention (CMPP) and the Defense Advanced Research Institute (DARI) at Rakovski Defense and Staff College aim at providing pro-active policy for overcoming the unwanted outcomes at individual and organizational level.

The aims of the report are:

• To assess the social psychological factors, influencing the stress level and the quality of duty performance before, during and after deployment;

• To assess the existing problems in selection, education and training of military personnel working in multinational environment during PSO;

• To summarize and present the commanders' assessment of the psychological support effectiveness and efficiency;

• To suggest measures for improving the system for psychological preparation and participation of the Bulgarian military in international operations.

The results and the analysis aim at assisting the optimal decision making of the commanders in improving the psychological support system as well as the overall activities associated with the Bulgarian contingents' deployment in missions abroad.

The report uses empiric data from the following surveys:

• Expert survey completed in November - December 2004. The sample comprises 92 Bulgarian commissioned officers (COs) and Non-commissioned officers (NCOs) who have carried out duties in PSOs as well as United Nations military observers. The respondents were selected mainly from the army units designated for deployment in UN/NATO/EU PSOs. In addition, officers from the Ministry of Defense, General Staff, Staff of the Army and Rakovski Defense and Staff College took part in the survey. They have experience in various multinational operations in Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Macedonia, Kosovo, Tajikistan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Afghanistan and Iraq. Most of the respondents (81%) have been deployed in one operation and 19% - in two and more operations. The average time spent in the field is 11 months and the most frequent - 6 months. A self-administrated semi-structured questionnaire was used as the main method of data collection. A team, comprised by DARI and the CMPP researchers carried out the survey. [Yanakiev Y., Petkov G., Daskalov K., 2005]

• Military Leader Needs Assessment of Psychological Support in Modern Military Operations (Military Leaders Survey). A team from DARI carried out data collection as a part of international comparative survey in the framework of the NATO RTO HFM – RTG 081 in the period June – August 2005. The sample comprises eleven military leaders who have rank ranging from captain to colonel coming from the Army. Those are senior national representatives in SFIR Iraq, ISAF Afghanistan, KFOR Kosovo, battalion commander in SFIR; company commanders in SFOR/ALTEA – B&H; UNMO –UNMEE Ethiopia and Eritrea, CIMIC officer in SFOR, liaison officer in ALTEA. [Yanakiev Y. & Nikolova K., 2005].

• A pilot survey of the CMPP, carried out in the period 15.10 – 31.11. 2005 among 56 NCOs and soldiers from Bulgarian Armed Forces, selected among the military personnel coming back from

missions SFIR in Iraq and ALTEA – Bosna and Herzegovina. This pilot stage is a part of a thorough "Psycho social survey of the factors, influencing on the effectiveness of duty performance and stress resistance of missions participants", which will be finalized by June 2006.

2.0 SURVEY MODEL

The military is highly stressful environment, constantly exposing the soldiers' adaptive abilities to a test. The high stressfulness of the military system can be withdrawn from the specifics of its objectives, tasks, and work organization, imposing in most of the cases high (physical and/or psychological) requirement before the individual in war as well as in mission. We can accept that according to its objective and tasks the military is focused on the necessity "to reach and maintain maximum effectiveness even in the worst possible conditions" in an interaction.

This means that the organizational structure, the organizational interactions and results should be able to provide success (maximum effectiveness) even in the most unfavorable and hard combination of circumstances (i.e. mass disasters, military conflicts, armed collisions, etc.). In other words, the military system "preparing for war in peacetime" and "guarding the peace with arm force" by necessity keeps a constant inner readiness for these possible conditions. Just maintaining this over readiness and organizational "reactivity" (contrasting with the "civilian" way of life) presumes the specific unique military organizational structure and culture as well as determines the high basic stressfulness of military work.

The survey model was developed based on the collected experience and interaction between DARI and CMPP. According to this model, a number of factors determine the effective functioning during mission of the individual soldier and of the units as a whole:

• Requirements and expectations of the environment (including the social appraisal);

• Socio psychological buffers (supporting systems);

• Intrapsychological variables (personality characteristics) and actual psychological condition;

• Level of coping (adaptive and maladaptive strategies) and stress reactions and symptoms.

These factors were operationalized through indicators in the pilot survey questionnaire.

Three main groups **environmental, specific for mission deployment stressors** were determined:

• Physical stressors - heat, cold, humidity, noise, smoke, poisons, physical overload, strong light, darkness, etc.;

• Physiological stressors – insufficient sleep, dehydratation, insufficient food, bad hygiene, muscle tiredness, illness or injuries, etc.;

• Psychological stressors – cognitive stressors (too much or too little information, sensor overload or deprivation, unclearness, uncertainty, isolation, insufficient time, unpredictiveness, organizational dynamics) and emotional stressors (threat of injury, illness, pain, fear and anxiety, loss of significant one(s), causing sadness and grief, frustration, threats, guilt, causing irritation, anger and hate, loss of faith or spiritual confrontation, etc.).

Socio psychological buffers include mainly social supporting systems (formal and informal groups and structures – in the unit, during the mission as well as the families and friends) and the accessible psychological help as well as the quality of the psychological support as a whole. As a leading indicator, we can withdraw the psychological climate, presented as an overall evaluation of the characteristics of unit functioning, officers' leadership style, disciplinary practices, the type of interactions in the unit, the quality of logistics, etc.

Intraphychological characteristics and the psychological condition (cognitive, emotional, behavioral, physical and spiritual) includes parameters as motivation, self esteem, personality hardiness, stress resistance, basic anxiety, social and communication skills, team work skills, character specifics, impulse control and self control, etc.

The **level of coping** (adaptive and maladaptive strategies) and the **stress reactions and symptoms** include different manifestations (by degree of expression) of combat and non-combat stress as well as posttraumatic stress reactions and disorders, including different manifestations of risk and unwanted behavior.

This model, based on the data from the presented studies, allows research and assessment of the individual characteristics of the missions' participants as well as lessons learned from contingents' deployment at organizational level.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Preliminary expectations, environmental stressors and stress coping potential

The data received from the pilot survey show that compared to the Bulgarian Armed Forces first mission, carried out in the conditions of a different climate (UNTAC - Cambodia) [Petkov, G., Yanakiev Y., 1999] the survey respondents formed adequate expectations of the climate, situation in the country and way of life during the education and training. This is at the same time a good preventive factor in respect of the appearance and coping with stress during the mission. The data on the formed preliminary expectations show that 78,8% of the respondents assess their concept on the climate as "clear", 77,4% knew the country (people and customs), 65,5% formed a very realistic concept on how they will live there during the 6 months period of the mission and 55,4% were well informed of the living conditions there. (Table 1)

Table 1:   Preliminary expectations (Percent of positive answers)

Question	%
I had a clear concept of the climate there	78,8
I had a good concept of the country (people, customs, etc.)	60,4
I knew what the living conditions there will be	55,4
I hardly got used to the country climate	44,4
I have formed a very realistic concept for how I will live during the mission 6 months period	43,6
I hardly got used to the air pollution	41,7
It was significantly warmer from what I expected	33,9
I hardly got used to the temperature variations (day-night)	25,0
My life rhythm changed in a way that I did not expected	21,4
I had the feeling that my organism started to function in a different way	10,7
I hardly got used to the humidity	5,6
I hardly got used to the noise	5,6

Very expectedly the climate specifics of the country where the mission is carried out, especially when they are very different from the own country is a very strong stressor. Approximately 50,0% of the survey participants, returning from Iraq answered that they hardly got used to the country climate, heat, humidity, air pollution, as well as the day and night temperature variations. At the same time, only ⅓ of the respondents assess the climate at place as a warmer than they expected.

At a similar way the survey respondents assess the change of their life rhythm – for only 21,4% it changed in an unexpected way and approximately 10,0% felt that their organism started to function in a different way.

Very similar to these are the data associated with the preliminary expectations about the mission nature and the concrete duties - 73,2% share the opinion that they had enough information on the mission nature and 65,5% had a good enough concept for their duties.

On this background we cannot miss to mention the comparatively low assessment the survey respondents give to the adequacy of the training they receive in accordance with the performance of their tasks and functions during the mission – only 46,4% assess it as adequate. The possible explanations of these results would be that:

- During the mission training an accent was put on the theoretical in front of the practical training;

- The practical training was not adequately centered on the forthcoming tasks;

- The implemented tasks changed during the mission.

The analysis of the data from the expert survey carried out in 2004 (Table 2) shows a deficiency in English language training, which calls for obtaining additional knowledge and skills in connection with the mission tasks execution. This kind of training is a bigger problem for the NCOs. Part of the respondents indicates as necessary the training in the official language of the country where the mission is carried out in addition to the mission's official language.

**Table 2:   Identified additional knowledge and skills needs to
perform the mission tasks (Percent of positive answers)**

Knowledge and skills	NCOs	COs
Language education/training	72,8	68,0
Intercultural management techniques	39,1	55,3
Logistics	38,8	42,1
Communication skills	34,0	37,3
International law	31,4	37,0
International affairs	30,8	36,8
History	30,2	36,5
Religion	30,1	36,3
Mass communication techniques	25,2	34,1
Psychology	20,4	24,3
Tactics	19,7	29,2
Topography	19,2	25,8
Public Administration	18,0	29,1
Leadership skills	17,2	26,2
Sociology	16,6	17,9
Conflict resolution skills	16,3	24,1
Regulations	15,9	21,3
Economics	14,0	21,0
Decision making skills	13,4	20,7

As a whole, the studied officers are more critical to the deficiencies in their own knowledge and skills. The Cramer correlation coefficient (V) varies between 0.110 и 0.216. This is probably because the officers have more responsibility in carrying out the tasks, their activities are more complex, their contacts with the representatives of the other mission participants as well as with the local population are more frequent and the results of these contacts directly affect the fulfillment of the tasks.

The fact that more than one third of the NCOs and half of the officers reveal a necessity of additional knowledge of intercultural management techniques, logistics and communication skills development

deserves a special attention. This necessity is stronger expressed among the officers. This is probably due again to the different character of the duties performed by the officers and NCOs during PSO.

Often in the interviews, the experts shared the opinion that during the pre-deployment training for the mission a more attention is drawn to the drill training. Moreover, the necessity of a clearer mission task definition was sharply stated. An impression of existing discrepancy between the job positions for which the participants are trained and which they perform "on the field" was implied.

The pilot survey respondents share problems associated with the logistical support and especially the used equipment, which obviously strengthen the feeling of inadequate training. Approximately ⅓ (33,9%) of the respondents think that the equipment they had been in a good condition. Although 67,3% consider that the training they received in using the equipment was good and 76,4% used the equipment they were trained to, one should not miss the fact that 38,2% received new equipment they were not adequately trained to use during the pre-deployment training.

During the mission the predominant part (83,9%) of the respondents were well acquainted with their duties and 64,3% consider they had enough information about the sense and the objectives of the duties they performed. We have to point out though that approximately 1/5 (19,6%) shared that the way they perceived the "things around" them was different from the way they perceived them before deployment, which imposes the necessity of a further improvement of the pre-deployment training.

Another studied potential stressor is the preliminary expectations for getting into a risk and/or combat situation. The data shows a rather lower assessment of the existing risk during the mission. Only approximately 10,0% of the respondents expected themselves or the unit to get into a risk situation and 16,4% share the opinion that it was necessary to wear a protective vest. This, on one hand is probably due to the high assessment of their own and of their colleagues' abilities to cope with a risk situation. The fact that approximately ¾ assess their own and their colleagues' concept and training for similar situations as good is an evident proof for that. On the hand - only ⅓ of the respondents think that their life was really in danger and/or had one and more risk situations during the mission.

The next studied potential stress factor is the level of overload. Concerning the level of workload 53,8% think that all the mission participants were loaded with tasks beyond the possible, while the majority of the respondents (70,4%) share the opinion that the tasks were equally shared and they were not overloaded compared to their colleagues.

Another significant factor, associated with the stress level is the effective duty organization and the task clearness. The data show that 64,3% of the respondents share the opinion that the responsibilities they had were relevant to their job position. At the same time, approximately half of the respondents (43,6%) think that they had to perform improper to their job position duties along with their own and 73,2% consider that they had additional duties, which impeded their main work performance. These opinions correspond with the respondents' assessment of what tasks they received from their commanders. Approximately half of them (51,8%) assess these tasks as realistic and 66,1% - as feasible. One should not miss the fact that only 32,1% shared the opinion that there was clearness and exactness in tasks assignment.

The analysis of the presented data allows drawing the conclusion that there is still a room for improvement in regard of every day duties assignment and the optimization of contingents' staffing and job descriptions. The implementation of more clearness is an important factor for lowering the stress.

Another important factor leading to possible stress manifestation is the meeting with different cultures of the local population as well as the mission participants from other national contingents. Half (50,0%) of the respondents indicate they were acquainted with the local population custom during the pre-deployment training. A little more (56,4%) answered they had contacts with the local population during the mission

and 65,5% shared the opinion that the local population accepted them rather positively. Concerning the attitude of their colleagues from other nations 71,1% think that they respect their work and only 14,8% share the opinion that their colleagues from the other nations refer to the Bulgarian military members neglectfully.

The predominant part of the participants in the experts' survey in 2004, does not state existence of problems in the co-operation with colleagues from the other national contingents. The only indicator, by which approximately half of the respondents have felt a certain problem, is the difficult communication because of insufficient English language knowledge. This is more characteristic for the NCOs (V=0.165). (Table 3)

**Table 3: Perceived problems in the cooperation with colleagues
from other national contingents (Percent of positive answers)**

Problem areas	NCOs	COs
Language problems (difficult communication)	52,2	45,2
Cultural differences	33,4	25,9
Double subordination and coordination (national command, NATO, UN, etc.)	25,1	32,1
Problems connected with the operational interoperability	22,2	23,8
Problems connected with the professional military training	21,9	21,1
Diverge ROE interpretation	17,4	18,3
Diverge mission interpretation	16,3	16,4
Problems of military ethical character	13,5	33,7

Next, the cultural differences turn into a problem in the communication with the other national contingents according to ⅓ of the experts, and again this trend is more characteristic for the NCOs (V=0.130).

Another problem indicated by approximately ⅓ of the experts is the double subordination and coordination between the national command, NATO, UN and other international organizations.

**Table 4: Social psychological problems at national
contingent level (Percent of positive answers)**

Problem areas	NCOs	COs
Comparative deprivation (perception of double standards in payment, equipment, logistics, etc. compared to the colleagues from other contingents)	69,1	63,0
Anxiety/tenseness associated with life threat	39,2	34,2
Feeling of an unclear mission	32,8	29,1
Sexual deprivation	31,1	26,0
Adaptation difficulties	30,3	24,3
Problems, associated with movement and travel restrictions	30,0	34,2
Feeling of absence of social and/or media recognition and support	39,7	33,8
Boredom	27,0	32,0
Overall feeling of uncertainty	22,2	26,2
Problems associated with the mission duration	21,9	36,8
Absence of family support	15,8	16,1
Feeling of mission ineffectiveness	14,1	11,0

Additional view to the presented stressors gives the data from the experts' survey (2004) presented in Table 4. According to the military leaders, participating in the survey the comparative deprivation, perceived as double standards in payment, equipment, logistics, etc. compared to the colleagues from other contingents is among the most important social psychological problems (stressors) at national

contingent level. This result deserves a special attention, as it could turn into a serious problem in the successful integration of the Bulgarian contingents in multinational NATO and/or EU forces.

The presented shortfalls in pre-deployment training described above raise problems with predominantly psychological character. They aggravate the mission participants' situation, together with the other difficulties are serious preconditions for stress, and stress related reactions development.

Other important mission stressors mentioned by more than ⅓ of the experts, are problems associated with the feeling of anxiety and tenseness associated with the perceived life threat and the feeling of unclear mission.

The comparison between the NCOs and officers data shows the presence of significant differences in their assessment and respectively in the way in which they perceive socio psychological problems in the contingent. Cramer's correlation coefficient (V) varies between 0.100 и 0.160 based on different criteria. There is no significant difference only by the criteria "Absence of family support".

3.2   Intrapsychological characteristics

The motivation for mission deployment is one of the main intrapsychological characteristics, which is also among the strongest preventive factors regarding the stress development later, during the mission. Based on the share of the positive answers the far bigger payment during the mission is the main motive for deployment. An evidence for that is the fact that the biggest share of the respondents (69,6%) indicates this reason as a motive. The data also shows that the career development was the basic motivation for 63,6% of the respondents, the presence of challenges and risk situation – for 40,4%. Separation from the work environment was a basic motivator for 13,5%, staying at active service in the situation of forthcoming downsizing made 7,8% to go to the mission. An insignificant share (3,8%) went to a mission in order to leave the family environment (probably because of the presence of problems there). (Table 5)

Table 5:   Main motivating factors for mission deployment (Percent of positive answers)

Factors	%
I was rather motivated by the payment I would receive	69,6
Because I thought it will help me in my professional career	63,6
Because I like challenges and risk situation	40,4
To leave my work environment	13,5
Because of the forthcoming downsizing	7,8
To leave my family environment	3,8

The assessment of the respondents' own strengths, knowledge and skills, the self esteem in own capabilities and the level of coping with the difficulties during the mission, the feeling of meaningfulness and usefulness of the conducted activities as well as the feeling of control over the events were used in the survey as indicators for stress coping potential. The data shows that the main part (87,0%) of the respondents share the opinion that they knew what to expect from themselves. In addition, almost half of the respondents knew that they could cope with the difficulties during the mission and 78,6% assess their work during the mission as useful. Another exceptionally important factor that is highly assessed by the respondents is the feeling of control over the events that had happened. Almost all (94,6%) declared that they had control over their activities. Almost ⅔ (60,7%) had the real feeling that most of the things depend on them and 73,2% share the opinion that they had control over their life. The analysis of this data allows us to conclude that besides the acquired knowledge and skills the mission participants have a relatively good stress coping potential in the form of intrapsychological characteristics.

3.3   Supporting systems

The conducted pilot survey uses indicators for assessment of the three support systems – friendly circle, family, professional environment.

Probably because of the predominant share of military members in the friendly circle of the survey respondents, they receive a rather solid support in their decision to go to a mission. Two thirds (66,1%) of the respondents answered that the people they socialize with as a rule accept and approve the deployment to a mission, which is a good basis for stress minimization in the process of pre-deployment training and departure.

The participation of the family in making the decision for deployment is an important factor in prevention of the consequently arising problems, which would affect the functioning of the separate individual and the contingent as a whole. The way in which the family is involved in making the decision for deployment and the provision of support during the absence (the Bulgarian Armed Forces still lack a functioning system for family support) is also a significant indicator for the level of involvement of the participant and his/her feeling of closeness with the family as well as for his/her ability to take responsibility for the events in the family.

Table 6:   Family participation of the decision for deployment (Percent of positive answers)

Role of the family	%
My family supported me in my decision to participate in the mission	61,8
I made the decision to participate in the mission by my own, without discussion in the family	43,6
I informed my family that I will deploy for a mission without asking them to comment it	42,9
My family was not content with my departure for a mission deployment	37,5
The decision for deployment was made after discussions with the whole family	37,0
My family tried to stop me from running for mission deployment	21,8

The data in table 6 shows that 61,8% of the respondents were supported by their families in the discussion for deployment and 43,6% made the decision for deployment by their own, without discussions in the family. Approximately half (42,9%) of the respondents informed their family members that they will deploy for a mission without asking them to comment it and 37,0% made this decision after discussions with the whole family. At the same time 37,5% openly stated that their family was not content with their departure for a mission deployment and 21,8% of the respondents the family tried openly to stop them from running for mission deployment.

Almost ⅔ (61,1%) of the respondents answered that they stipulated who and how will help their families during their absence and 77,5% found a way to provide their significant ones with enough finance during their absence before deployment.

The family continues to be a significant factor for the functioning of the personnel during the whole mission. The fact that approximately half (58,2%) of the respondents answered that they felt the absence of their close ones and families during the mission and for 12,5% was not easy to cope with the absence of the families is a serious evidence for that. Obviously, the communication with the families is a rather "hot" issue. On one hand, according to ¼ of the respondents, insufficient opportunities to keep in contact with the family exist. On the other hand, we registered some "purely" psychological reasons. From the feeling that "*there is a control over the contacts*" (46,4%) or "*my family members not always say the truth*" (20,4%) to the feeling of helplessness when the family experiences problems (37,0%) and the confession "*in fact I did not want to know what was happening at home*", stated by 13,0% of the respondents.

Not of less importance from a psychological view is the question of the communication content, the feeling of what and how the soldiers and their significant ones communicate during the mission. A little

over half (57,4%) of the respondents think that their close ones did not want to bother them with the problems at home, while 81,5% confess they tried not to bother their families with problems from the mission. The share of those, who declared that they not always received understanding from the families, is minimal (5,6%).

The data analysis allows us to conclude that the mission participants truly miss their family environment. For them now obviously it is not so important whether technical means for communication exist or not. What is really stressful for them is the feeling in the predominant part of them that the communication with the families is strongly difficult mainly for psychological reasons. Obviously, it is necessary to work in this direction with the mission participants and their family members during the pre-deployment training.

In the situation of lack of close, supporting family and friends environment the role of the professional environment (colleagues, commanders) as a factor for stress reduction during the mission raises even more. Because of the practice to gather volunteers for mission deployment from different units, as it was until the middle 2005, the role of the joint education and training for acquaintance among the participants as well as among commanders and soldiers obviously is very important. The predominant share of the respondents (80,4%) stated that they succeeded to be acquainted with most of their colleagues during the pre-deployment training and 74,5% became friends with many of their colleagues that they did not know before that. Only 5,5% of the respondents preferred to contact only with colleagues they worked with before the pre-deployment training. (Table 7) This again confirms the role of the pre-deployment training as a factor in team building.

Table 7: Building horizontal cohesion (Percent of positive answers)

Item	%
My colleagues had trust and relied on me during the mission	92,9
My commanders relied on me	87,5
I received support from their colleagues	83,9
I felt like a real part of the team	83,9
During the pre-deployment training I succeeded to get acquainted with most of my colleagues	80,4
During the pre-deployment training I became friend with many colleagues I did not know before	74,5
I had the real feeling I worked in a good team during the mission	60,7
The team proved to be cohesive and supportive	56,4
During the pre-deployment training I preferred to contact only colleagues I worked with before	5,5

During the mission itself, the reached level of group and unit cohesion plays an important role in respect of stress prevention. The data shows that the missions the respondents participated had a high level of group cohesion. It is seen that 83,9% of the respondents felt like a real part of the team, almost half (56,4%) stated that the team proved to be cohesive and supportive. Concerning the feeling of support the predominant share of the respondents (83,9%) declared they received support from their colleagues and 60,7% had the real feeling they work in a good team during the mission. Almost 100,0% think that their colleagues had trust and relied on them while the share of those, who think their commanders relied on them is a little lower - 87,5%.

The survey respondents have a clear idea that reaching of this high level of cohesion is not an easy and one-time-act process. The dominant share (80,4%) of the respondents reached the conclusion that only "*after you get acquainted with your colleagues during the mission then you get to know a lot of their good sides*". Approximately half (56,4%) of the respondents stated that they made efforts to conform to their colleagues during the first months and 47,3% - during the last months of the mission. One fifth (20,4%) of the respondents openly declared that during the last months their colleagues, probably due to the collected

tiredness and the forthcoming re-deployment started to act in a more challenging manner they did not stand. The data analysis shows that there is a possibility of tensions arising besides the reached high level of cohesion because of the group and mission dynamics in different stages of its realization. Those should be carefully monitored and the commanders should implement effective measures for their minimizing and resolution.

3.4   Leadership style and practices

The evaluation, which the survey respondents give to the leadership style and practices, is exceptionally important indicator for the overall psychological climate in the contingent and the level of building the vertical cohesion and the feeling of involvement with the unit. At the same time, they are an important factor for stress prevention and control during the mission. Besides the described high level of team building there are some problems that deserve attention. The data allows the following main tendencies to be withdrawn.

First, according to the respondents the commanders changed their behavior towards their subordinates after the beginning of the real mission. One forth (26,8%) of the respondents stated that the commanders' behavior was better during the pre-deployment training than during the mission. At the same time 77,4% of the respondents are inclined to explain this change with the higher requirements that the mission imposes to the commanders. Approximately ⅓ (32,1%) share the opinion that during the mission the commanders treated them with respect while a little over half (51,9%) of the respondents say they found not very pleasant features of their commanders' characters.

Table 8:   Opportunities for communication with the commanders (Percent of positive answers)

Item	%
I could meet my platoon commander and discuss with him different problems	76,0
When I wanted I could freely speak my opinion	63,0
I could speak to some of the commanders in case of a problem	55,4
Our commander intervened adequately in a case of a conflict	44,6
The commanders gathered us to discuss general issues	42,3
We could freely express our opinion	39,3
I felt the support of my commanders during the mission	39,3
When I wanted to speak my opinion there was no one to hear it	31,5
When I wanted to speak my opinion it was not accepted by the commanders	22,2
When I wanted to speak my opinion I was afraid to do it	7,4

Second, there are certain difficulties in the communication between the commanders and their subordinates. A little over ⅓ (39,3%) of the respondents answered that they could freely express their opinion and felt the support of their commanders during the mission and 55,4% could speak to some of the commanders in case of a problem. Approximately ⅔ (76,0%) of the respondents could meet their platoon commander and to discuss with him different problems while 42,3% declare that the commanders gathered them to discuss general issues. Approximately ⅔ (63,0%) declare that they could freely speak their opinion and only 7,4% were afraid to do this. Almost ⅓ (31,5%) share the opinion that there was no one to hear them and 22,2% think that the commanders did not accept his /her opinion. Less than the half (44,6%) stated that their commander intervened adequately in a case of a conflict.

Third, the respondents hesitantly assess the personal example and the manifestation of care for the subordinates. Approximately (54,6%) of the respondents stated that the commanders participated together with them in performing combat tasks. According to 31,5% the commanders were interested in their needs. Approximately ⅓ (35,2%) share the opinion that the commanders expected their subordinates to get beyond their human abilities.

Forth, the implementation of incentives and punishments as part of the leadership style and practice was not sufficiently used and probably did not reached the wanted effect. A little over the half of the respondents share the opinion that incentives (61,5%) and/or punishments (58,8%) during the mission were not correspondent to the performed duties and tasks, which for subsequent time shows lack of leadership skills in some of the commanders.

We can conclude that as a whole the survey participants are very critical to the leadership style and practices demonstrated during the mission. This imposes the necessity a special attention to be put in the improvement of the leadership skills and practices, based on the "mission command" model during the education and the pre-deployment training.

3.5   The role of the psychologist during the mission

The presence of psychologist/mental health professional in the contingent is of an exceptional importance for the process of stress prevention and control during the mission. That is why, for the first time in the pilot survey a question assessing his/her role during the mission was included [1]. The assessment of the respondents is rather positive – ¾ of the respondents (75,0%) had the opportunity to speak with him, 43,2% declared that they discussed problems with him in a group format and 22,7% think he act adequately in different situations.

At the same time some psychological barriers, associated with the "interaction" between the mission participants and the psychologist still reveals in the respondents' answers. The opinion that it is a manifestation of weakness to search for psychological help continues to exist. A little more than 1/10 of the respondents (13,6%) stated that they were embarrassed to visit the psychologist because "*everybody knew when somebody visits him*", and approximately 10,0% did not and/or did not know why to visit him.

4.0   MAIN EXISTING PROBLEMS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SELECTION, EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACCORDING TO THE MILITARY LEADERS

4.1   Psychological training before deployment

Regarding pre-deployment psychological training, the military leaders are divided in their evaluations. They clearly distinguish between the attention paid to the units and leaders pre-deployment training to support their subordinates if they encountered stress-related problems during the mission. With the respect to the pre-deployment training of the units, they are divided between "satisfied" and "not satisfied". Regarding the attention paid to the pre-deployment training of the leaders, the experts are predominantly not satisfied. Therefore, they think that there is high necessity to improve the psychological training before the mission, as now it is not efficient enough.

According to the experts' evaluation, the pre-deployment psychological training should be focused entirely on the problems that would most probably occur during the mission and on the effective management of the teams in a conflict or a crisis. In addition, in their opinion it is important to optimize the psychological recruitment system as a methodology as well as to precise the individual characteristics required for deployment in mission abroad. Moreover, the experts think that a precise assessment of the contingent as a whole should be made before final operational readiness is declared.

The survey respondents are unanimous that the pre-deployment training should be a continuation of a broader education and training of military leaders in human relations and human resources management

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[1] *We must specify that only the BAF mission in SFIR – Iraq has a psychologist for the whole period of the mission.*

particularly in mission. The "mission command" model should become the central part of the education of the military leaders, as it will be the most probable use the armed forces in the future.

The topic of stress management should be incorporated in the curriculum of the military academies and the Defense College. In addition, practical skills in stress management should be developed during the pre-deployment training.

4.2   Psychological support during deployment

According to the military leaders the above-described trend of dissatisfaction with the unit and their personal psychological pre-deployment training to cope with stress-related problems during the mission continues.

There are some positive developments in comparison with the first missions in Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo during the last several years like the appointment of a military psychologist as a regular staff officer in the battalion for the whole deployment period in Iraq. In addition, by an Order of the Chief of the General Staff it is a common practice to provide site inspection by a group of Mental Health Professionals (MHPs) to provide psychological support for the unit members during the mission.
At the same time, there are some important problems, which deserve attention. The experts are unanimous that only one psychologist is not enough to cope with the numerous problems raised by the conditions of high risk and stress in the new kind of missions like those in Iraq and Afghanistan and for about 500 soldiers in the contingent. That is why a psychiatrist is also deployed in the battalion in Iraq. The problem is that the psychologist is assigned directly to the battalion staff, while the psychiatrist is a part of the Medical Service. The experts recommend that an institutionalized way that these MHPs work as a team in the unit during the mission be found, which is probably the optimal option. In order to be effective these MHPs must be carefully selected like all others evaluating him/her as a professional and as an individual.

In addition, particularly after tragic accidents like this of December 27, 2003 when five Bulgarian soldiers were killed and more than 60 were wounded because of car-bomb attack on the Bulgarian base "Kilo", additional psychological support has to be provided for the unit members.

According to the survey respondents, a special attention should be paid also to different phases in the development of the unit morale. Speaking about the SFIR – Iraq the experts agree that in the beginning of the mission of the second battalion there has been a high degree of fear of attack after the attack on "Kilo" base. After that (2-3 months later) the routine of the repeated activities became the prevailing mood, leading to lowering of the discipline. The fourth month was the most critical one. The routine and the repeated every day duties were a problem that influences the psychological status of the soldiers. Therefore, the duties should alter for example from patrolling to other duties in the base.

Next, there are problems because of intercultural training lack and the need to adapt to different organizational and military culture when working in multinational coalition.

Moreover, some military leader consider that a 24-hour link between the psychologist in the mission and the Center for Military Psychology and Prevention should be established in order to have access to the data base from pre-deployment screening and expert help in case of need of psychological support.

Finally yet importantly, the experts identified different interest and attention of the military leadership towards psychological support provided to the missions in Iraq and those in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. This was expressed by the words of one of the experts: "*Nobody on behalf of the institutions responsible for psychological support was interested in our unit during the 6-month mission in Afghanistan*". The real problem though is the limited resources (financial & human) to visit all Bulgarian contingents deployed in missions in two rotations per year.

Regarding the psychological climate assessment in the unit, the military leaders are unanimous that such assessment is necessary during all mission phases. Besides, the results and any specific recommendations must be reported to the commander in order to receive regular feedback from the surveys to use them in support of organization management. There is a real necessity of a development and a tool for assessment of the organizational and socio psychological unit climate. Such experience exists in US Army (Unit Climate Profile). This will allow the commanders at all levels independently to watch the unit psychological climate (even in the situation of an absence of a psychologist) and to undertake the necessary measures for its improvement. Obviously, the corresponding education and training is necessary for its correct application and interpretation of the results.

4.3   Psychological support after re-deployment

The military leaders agreed that the psychological support after deployment is the weakest point in the psychological support for the missions' participants. Therefore, general dissatisfaction with this kind of psychological support is understandable. Three fourths of the respondents declare that are "dissatisfied" and "very dissatisfied" with the support provided both to the units' members and personally to them.

Usually the unit members are screened for stress-related problems after re-deployment. It takes place immediately after rotation and according to most of the experts do not reach the goal.

The problems additionally arise from the fact that to the middle of 2005, when the survey was conducted, the contingents were manned with soldiers on voluntary basis from all services and branches of the Bulgarian armed forces and they were dismissed to their original units after re-deployment. This made the follow up of missions' participants for stress related very difficult. In the future, after the recent changes in the Law of the Armed Forces, which provide for sending complete units for missions abroad, probably those difficulties will fall.

In agreement with the sharp critics of the military leaders regarding after re-deployment psychological support, they made many important suggestions that deserve attention.

First, the military leaders consider the need to improve the overall organization of psychological support system in the Bulgarian armed Forces after re-deployment. This means that the people have to be monitored for stress-related problems for a longer period. Current practice just to meet them after rotation, to fill-up tests and to participate in the interviews is not sufficient. According to the military leaders, the specialized military psychological service has to monitor them for a long period, at least one-year. The post-deployment survey has to start at least a week after coming back and the results to be reported to the commanding officer.

In addition, there is a need of group or individual psychological consultations about a month after the deployment. If working in a group, it has to be formed based on individual preferences.

Next, there is a need to motivate commanders and to change their attitude towards the former PSO participants in order to guarantee enough time for their rest and successful reintegration in the peacetime units in their regular location.

At least 20 days period for relaxation is necessary after re-deployment. In addition, the PSO participants should have the opportunity of organized rest with their families in the military sanatoriums within a month after redeployment.

5.0 VISION FOR IMPROVEMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO GUARANTEE EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND DUTY PERFORMANCE BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER DEPLOYMENT

The presented results clearly indicate a serious necessity for improvement of pre-deployment psychological selection and training as well as psychological support during and after deployment.

Based on the analyses the researchers' team stands for the opinion that the training aimed at building skills for stress prevention and control in its biggest part happens during the overall units' pre-deployment training and leaders' training for mission deployment. In this respect, the presented vision contains a broader circle of recommendations, going outside the frame of the narrow psychological training. In our opinion, the stress prevention and control training should be incorporated as an implicit part in the everyday training and education of the PSO participants.

5.1 Military professional education and training for PSOs

The necessity of planning and implementing the practical pre-deployment training of all mission participants maximum realistically and as close as possible to the real conditions of country, where the mission is conducted is obvious. It is even more important in the Bulgarian Armed Forces units, designated for mission deployment this practical training to start with the very beginning of the professional military service and to continue throughout its whole extension. This will additionally allow in the months prior to deployment the efforts to be concentrated on the concrete tasks performed during the mission. The training for building skills for controlling risk situations should be accompanied with realistic explanation for the objectively existing risks and threats.

The different duties, responsibilities and needed skills require the implementations of specific training, oriented to the different organizational levels. The commanders training in skills, required in mission deployment should start even in the Military academies and continue through their complete military career.

Speaking about the military leaders training we should point out that the role and the responsibility of low-level leaders in the PSOs greatly increases and is of a immense importance for the success of the missions. On the first place, they would act in a volatile environment and should implement dual role of fighters and mediators. Secondly, their role as soldier's leaders in this demanding situation will be of even greater responsibility making independent decisions, including decisions for force application.

The main stress in the education of leaders for PSOs should be put on the training in independent decision-making and task performance in real-like situation during the mission. Together with the professional training, it is recommendable to increase their leadership skills.

Concerning the commanders, it is necessary to conduct a specialized and in-depth training before deployment in methods for individual and group work, effective communication, recognition of stress and stress related behavior in them and in their subordinates, negotiations and especially decision making in risk situations and situation of shortage of time and/or information. Finally, special courses whose purpose is developing of knowledge and skills to perform so called police tasks such as riot control measures and use of non-lethal weapons should be incorporated in the curriculum. This is very important because as a rule, the military are not accustomed to perform police tasks and they even resist being involved in such tasks.

It is recommendable during the pre-deployment training to accentuate on the building of horizontal and vertical cohesion in the units, especially when they are augmented with personnel from other units. The mission participants must be very well acquainted and trained to use the basic equipment and armament in

the Bulgarian armed forces and in NATO as whole, which will reduce the stress of using "new" unknown equipment during the mission and would assist the interchangeability in the teams.

5.2   Building social competence

The commanders' education and training should concentrate on building social competence. This includes knowledge and skills how to interact with civilian agencies; how to manage multinational environment in PSOs; how to work with local population and with the local authorities in the host country; how to react in hostage situations; how to work with mass media, etc.

It is essential to promote understanding among the military professionals and to help them identify many actors (diplomatic, military, NGOs, media), diverse cultures and the importance of developing working relationships among them.

Besides the good awareness of the mission participants with the socio economical and the political situation in the mission region as well as the culture of the local population there is still a necessity of a better understanding of the local traditions, customs and official languages. The results from our surveys are indicative for the necessity of additional knowledge better to understand the local people ethic norms and cultural specifics. Thus, they will better fulfill their duties and the local population will easier accept them.

The pre-deployment training of the mission participants in respect of their expectations for meeting the representatives of other nations, participating in the mission is not of a less importance. In the situation of insufficient English language skills and the limited opportunities of communication, the preliminary acquaintance with some cultural and social characteristics of the basic nations in the coalition additionally would improve the functioning of the military personnel and the contingents.

5.3   Building a system for family support work

It is obligatory to develop and make functional a system for work with the PSO participants and their families before, during and after deployment. A maximum possible access to information associated with the mission should be granted to the mission participants' families. Concerning the pre-deployment training it is necessary to incorporate some additional topics – "how to prepare our family for deployment", "how to maintain and what to expect from the communication with the family during the mission", and in the missions with a deployed psychologist – "how to reintegrate in the family".

5.4   The role of the psychologist/mental health professional

The psychologists/MHPs for the mission should be selected like all others evaluating him/her as a professional and as an individual. They should be very carefully selected not only based on their diploma but also based on their practical experience after specialized course for mission deployment. They must possess the needed theoretical and moreover – practical experience in the field of stress and crisis interventions and management. It is very important that they participate in the overall pre-deployment training of the unit as well as to ensure their position as a commander's consultant. Enough space and time for the psychological work should be ensured during the mission. Otherwise, his/her presence and activities could affect the mission negatively.

5.5   Improvement of veterans' work after re-deployment

At least three main issues should be faced in the work after re-deployment. First, it should be developed a system for psychological help, re-adaptation and specialized medical observation of the staff returning from the mission. Second, a system for the maintenance and perfection of the achieved level of professional education and training for deployment in PSOs and further development in the next

operations should be established. In this regard it is important to have in mind the process of turning from "blue helmets training" which is needed for PSOs back to "green helmets training". Third, it should be given some preferences for the veterans from the PSOs. The service in PSOs should be one of the most important criteria for the career of every officer and NCO.

Another issue that deserves a special attention and should be addressed in the near future is the development of a system for gathering, analysis and maintenance of reliable data in the MoD and Bulgarian Armed Forces psychological support structures concerning the existing of psychological problems among the ex-missioners such as divorces, alcoholism, car accidents, driving intoxicated, PTSD, etc. Now such database does not exist, which impedes the making of adequate leadership decisions as well as the psychological work with missions' veterans.

In addition it is recommendable that the procedure of medical and psychological follow up after deployment (as a 2 days period at least) becomes an irrevocable part of the mission. This will raise the PSO participants' motivation to take part in it and will increase its effectiveness.

The experts' survey proposal for equalization of the medical and psychological selection criteria for both professional military service in the country and mission abroad deserves a special attention, especially in the units designated for deployment in NATO/EU missions.

Finally yet importantly, a change in the different missions' duration may be considered as well as the possibilities of taking a leave during the mission. The missions that do not have possibilities for taking a leave (Iraq, Afghanistan) may be with a smaller duration.

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