

CIMIC CAPABILITIES AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *Starting from the idea that public events reflect social order, civil-military relations had and still have evolutions and manifestations varying according to the country in which they have exercised their capabilities. Moreover, civil-military cooperation has suffered in time, changes in approach and perception. Current concepts such as strategic communication and fake news are broadly approached in the present paper, in close relation to civil-military cooperation. The multinational character of the missions also attracts multiple relations with a high degree of international cooperation, especially at tactical and operational levels. Furthermore, the effectiveness of coordination and cooperation at strategic level in case of CIMIC missions, between states or state structures, organizations and alliances is also a determining factor in the success of a mission. Bringing this strategic level into discussion requires raising the communication standard to a required level by means of Strategic Communication.*

Keywords: *CIMIC, StratCom, fake news, public sphere*

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to the increasingly diverse background of the people that the military profession will attract as future members, military professionalism is and will be measured less by engaging in a narrower ideology and more by being able to reach a common denominator related to various belief systems and military service requirements. From American perspective, the ethics of professional is best served not by seeking an extensive ideology shared by all of them but by recognizing that military service is compatible with a wide range of political engagements, even if they are not loudly expressed in the public sphere. Moreover, they have to find that harmony between personal beliefs/commitments and military service requirements. This bridge has already been created by belonging to a greater common good that overcomes personal interest.[2]

1. STATCOM MANIFESTATIONS IN UE

Elements that belong to *StratCom* are found in Russia attitude towards the so-called Islamic state of Irak and Levant (ISIL), these representing the propaganda and promotion of *fake news*. The difference in attractiveness between Russia and the EU had to be diminished by improving Russia's position – in particular by promoting the "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*) – and, at the same time, by discrediting EU. This was to be achieved through the development of promotion mechanisms through mass media, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other key actors – from business lobbies to political parties.

Russia focused on the attack rather than on the advertising itself, thus reaching social groups disappointed with politics and the economic situation in Europe. Russia's strategic communication is based on a "meta" story or an elaborate one, a series of basic themes that consistently appear in most of the communication efforts. Although not all of these themes resemble each other, there is a number of recurring stories from which the Kremlin has inspired it and which were promoted systematically. Therefore, the EU is portrayed as close to disintegration as possible under the combined pressure of the fiscal and migration crisis. The Union is described as a monster incapable of making decisions because of the waves of expansions to the East. This type of message tries to respond to certain audiences within the EU. Moscow's end goal is to convince the European public that the EU is focusing on Russia's imagined threats and neglects the real ones in the south. Russia is also regularly involved in other controversial political issues in Europe. Any potential split or real division within the EU is amplified. The refugee crisis is one of the relevant examples: Russia has attempted to amplify the issue, claiming an anti-refugee position approaching absolute racism, while suppressing any information inside Russia that could damage relations with its own Muslim communities.

A second bottom line targets the leaders of the Member States and the EU institutions. The more European leaders seem less good, the less likely the EU will be, and the more impressive the Russian leadership will be. Thus, campaigns in Russia are trying to create a bridge between the Eastern Partnership states and their close neighbors in the EU. They often use local media stories about territorial claims (for example, by Romania or Hungary against Ukraine) or other security threats (for example, "Roma gangs" in Romania). In Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, Russia supports the deep fear of local elites to change the orchestrated external regime. In contrast, in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, Russia uses uniform messages about the destructive consequences of *Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements* (DCFTA) and visa-free regimes.

Russia also has a rather complex communication strategy – and significant infrastructure – in large parts of the Western Balkans. There are also a number of Moscow-funded media groups (though not openly) that promote Kremlin's vision of the world, in combination with conspiracy theories and Serbian ultra-nationalism. Considering all these anti-EU actions, the latter set up the East StratCom Task Force, focusing on Russian disinformation, based on the *European External Action Service* (EEAS) in 2015. It is composed of nine communication experts, good Russian language speakers. Team members mostly come from EU institutions. The Task Force seeks to create a positive image of the EU through strategic communication campaigns focusing on EU action in the region, revealing and deconstructing conspiracy theories and combating misinformation. Structure actions target the EU's eastern neighbors, not the Member States themselves. It publishes articles in "Disinformation Review" and "Disinformation Digest" weekly. These are promoted via a Twitter @EUvsDisinfo account, with thousands of followers and monthly impressions.

If the EU has so far only acted on a national level, it has recently been observed that coordinated action at EU level has been successful, especially when the challenges are addressed to the Union as a whole, and these can not be tackled separately. EU Delegations (as well as Member States' embassies) have used partial strategic communication with minimal involvement. However, external communication and public diplomacy have become a key priority with the establishment of the EEAS.

This effort is also supported by outsourced help from consultancy firms when it comes to strengthening communications across the web and social networks.

So if we were to ask whether *StratCom* exists at EU level, we can say that there are hesitant intentions and already effective actions put into practice, but the already existing concept and its implementation need to be developed to counter *fake news*, misinformation, and so on, all in a joint effort to raise awareness and involve EU Member States. From an EU perspective, strategic communication finds its definition in the *Strategic Communication Action Plan* adopted in June 2015. According to the document, this type of communication represents “*an important tool in promoting the EU's overall policy objectives*”[3]. Strategic communication has become a priority in developing response capabilities, aiming at promoting the fundamental values of the European Union.

In case of Great Britain, the Ministry of Defense proposes two definitions of *StratCom*. The first defines it as “*Developing national interests using all means of communication in defense to influence people's attitudes and behaviors*”, and the second one, as “*Systematic and coordinated use of all means of communication to achieve UK national security objectives by influencing the attitudes and behaviors of individuals, groups and states.*”[3] Therefore, the purpose of the British *StratCom* aims primarily at a national goal, mainly focused on three internal instruments of power, namely diplomatic, military and economic. This helps to achieve the strategic objectives of the state, with the significant involvement of the Ministry of Defense, which has two functions: the State Department and the Strategic Military Command. There are 5 types of strategic communication used by the British: 1. public messages designed to encourage and build trust in the defense institution; 2. activities to engage individuals, communities and businesses in the United Kingdom to inform, alert and conduct behaviors that increase resistance; 3. activities designed to change attitudes and influence the behaviors of individuals and groups; 4. activities that reduce the probability of actions against British interests by building an international influence; 5. communication in support of diplomatic efforts to influence friendly or hostile states.

Therefore, strategic communication derives from politics and strategy, but operates in an information environment being seen by the UK with two great facets: the domains (cognitive, physical, virtual) and the interdependencies between them:

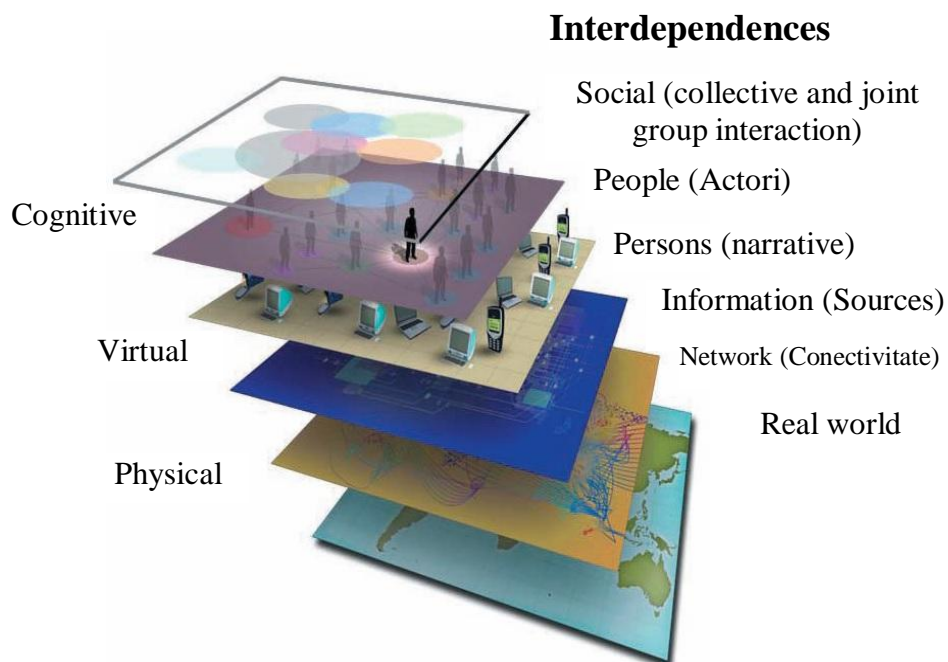


FIG. 3 Information sphere (JDN 1/12, pp.2-4)

The first facet consists of entries in 3 domains: the cognitive domain – as we think; the virtual domain – the way we communicate; and the real world of how we interact as national states, cultures and societies – the physical realm. The second facet is the relationship between 6 elements/layers of the environment. They are represented by: the real world and its events, the network connectivity that provides information; the information itself and the person who lives in the environment and who develops the accounts within it, as well as the actors and social groups (both collective and common) who interpret and exploit the environment.[4]

These elements of the information sphere are not enough for *StratCom* to be efficient. In British vision, it also requires an understanding of the public through the cultural aspects of the physical domain, the functioning of the virtual one, and the way in which employment is perceived in the cognitive field. Thus, communication is accompanied by an assessment of the availability, reliability and vulnerability of the communication infrastructure; an assessment of the communication channels best suited for broadcasting the message; and target audience analysis, so that a message is delivered to the audience. The information sphere becomes a challenge and therefore requires constant reassessment. Analyzing the perspective of Great Britain, it is clear that ideas must be communicated in competition with others to ensure security objectives and supremacy in conflicts. This involves mastering the way in which audiences think, communicate and come together, as well as the cognitive, virtual and physical aspects of the informational environment. The culmination of strategic communication from a British perspective includes a set of elements: a combination of clear and credible strategy, engagement and understanding of the public, the use of communication channels, the selection of information, the mastery of message creation and the ability to synchronize in its communication. In the case of missions outside the national territory, *StratCom* does not imply engagement only at the strategic level, but also tactical, ground level, efficiency measurement and feedback assessment. In this process of building and understanding strategic communication both the Ministry of Defense and the government and other government departments are involved. In this case, if it is desired, at the UK level, to achieve strategic communication in order to reach strategic objectives, there will have to be an influence and impact of information in both the military strategy and the operational plan.

The United Kingdom operates at the national level with three instruments of power (diplomacy, armed force and economic capacity) for achieving the strategic objectives, informing them not between themselves and being treated differently. The importance of strategic communication is not omitted, as is emphasized in the doctrine mentioned above (*Joint Doctrine JDN 1/12 - Strategic Communication: Defense Contribution*), promulgated in 2012 where this communication becomes effective when all ministries are working together, when messages are transmitted in public sphere and when actions are synchronized. In this respect, the Ministry of Defense has the task to coordinate specific communication objectives by means already known and mentioned above: information and public relations, psychological operations and information operations, civil-military cooperation, public diplomacy, presence actions, posture and profile such as *show of flag* or *show of force*, exercises and missions in theaters of operations. Thus, the definition given by the British defense ministry is clear enough: “*promoting national interests by using all means of communication of the Ministry of Defense to influence people's attitudes and behaviors*”. [5] So, the UK model is one of inter-institutional communication integrated at governmental level in order to ensure national security.

2. STATCOM AND USA

The US *DoD* (*Department of Defense*) approach aims at a larger framework than the national one. Thus, the concept of joint integration of strategic communication proposes how a joint forces commander, during a foreseeable period 2016-2028, could plan and execute joint operations to achieve strategic communication objectives in the context of a wider national effort. In this spirit, strategic communication focuses on the efforts of the US government to understand and engage the key public in order to create, strengthen or maintain favorable conditions for enhancing US government interests, policies and objectives by using coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages and products, all synchronized with the actions of national power tools. [6] A real challenge for this approach is the integration of all joint force actions and other operational capabilities to maximize their combined effect and to coordinate these actions with those of any other partner. Depending on the situation, the partners of the joint force may include various US government departments and agencies, multinational governments to include a host country, non-state organizations, academia and industrial trade. The joint force communicates strategically with partners and opponents, with populations, governments and other organizations in different contexts: conflict, cooperation or competition. Strategic communication is largely driven by influence that, in the US, covers a wide range of activities, including simple information, education, conviction, inducement, and coercion through words and actions. As a mechanism for exerting influence, communication is a complex phenomenon. In the case of strategic communication, the US Joint Force has four main objectives: 1. to improve US credibility and legitimacy; 2. to weaken the credibility and legitimacy of an opponent; 3. to convince the selected audience to undertake specific actions that support US objectives. or international; 4. for the performance (or not) of specific actions by a competitor or opponent. [7]

These goals are part of a *DoD* perspective that does not provide conclusive answers, but attempts to stimulate informed discussions and experiments to discover a set of common shared capabilities with regard to *StratCom*. This conception provides only a possible approach to how joint forces should address strategic communication, thus being defined as an exchange of meaning in support of national interest, in which influencing is the fundamental challenge, with the different forms that it takes and for which effective integration of all available means is needed. It is strengthened by nine principles of communication based on: leadership, understanding, universality, dialogue, effort, results, continuity, credibility and receptivity. Therefore, in the case of *DoD*, strategic communication is seen as an adaptive and decentralized process in an attempt to understand the selected audience by hypotheses of physical or informational signals that will have the desired cognitive effect on the audience concerned, testing those hypotheses by action, monitoring effective outcomes through feedback and rapid dissemination of the best solutions through force. [6] In the case of the United States of America, the *fake news* phrase is already a phenomenon, the public does not know what is real and what is misinformation, the images and videos are processed for the desired purpose (it is a phenomenon out of control, manipulated by institutions/ States for the continued denigration of the US president). The Naval War College in Newport, USA, studied closely and deepened the *StratCom* problem and supported the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations. It has thus come to the conclusion that there is a need for the ability to convey messages and information that create a favorable environment for the US and its allies. In this regard, the US Army needs a doctrine that establishes the foundation of the analysis and communication function with which it can be fully successful in the communication environment.

Moreover, this doctrine would lead to an understanding of strategic communication and how it should be used at the joint operational level. [7]

In NATO terminology, StratCom is an integrative concept, whose purpose is to coordinate and synchronize all communication activities or relevant from a communication point of view (special events, exercises, operations, etc.) carried out by the Alliance and allies with the purpose of shaping the informational environment in support of the fulfillment of its own political and military objectives. According to *NATO ACO Strategic Communications Directive* [8], *StratCom* actually includes all the activities and capabilities of information-handling structures: public diplomacy, military and civil information and communication, information operations and psychological operations. Therefore, *StratCom* is an integrating function to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of NATO operations and activities. This strategic communication emerged as a necessity of the current security environment, the rapidly growing information environment, the evolution of mass communication technologies and the expansion of the use of social networking. Therefore, real-time coverage of the effects of fighting can have a major (positive / negative) impact on the conduct and conduct of military operations. Moreover, if we consider the fake news phenomenon and the deliberate alteration of the informational content of the messages for public information, they can contribute to the achievement of certain political objectives.

For NATO, public opinion information is important and has been reiterated since the Bucharest Summit in 2008 and including that in 2016 in Warsaw. Allies' declarations at these meetings included prioritizing adaptation to security threats and strategic communication that is seen as "*an integral part of our efforts to achieve the Alliance's political and military goals.*" [9] The framework of strategic communication is seen as an integrating element: public diplomacy, information and public relations, psychological and informational operations. In the latest *NATO Military Policy on Strategic Communications / MC 0628*, adopted by the North Atlantic Council on 19 July 2017, the theoretical and principled framework for the organization of structures, assignment and unitary deployment of complex activities under the umbrella of strategic communication at NATO level as well as in military operations led by the Alliance. In this document it is stated that "*in the context of the military activities carried out by the Alliance, strategic communication is the integration of communication capabilities and command information function with other military activities to understand and shape the information environment in support of NATO goals and objectives.*" [10] In this context, the role of these Allied Committees is to manage communication and information capabilities in a uniform way, and to synchronize relevant military activities from the communication and communication point of view, as well as to carry out information activities in order to produce certain effects on different types of audiences. Therefore, in order to enhance the coherence of planning and the implementation of activities with an impact on the informational environment, the strategic communication framework is defined as "*a management responsibility, which extends to all levels.*" [10]

Communication in military operational planning is very important, with the support of public relations, psychological operations, information operations as well as civil-military cooperation, presence, posture and profile activities, hiring key leaders, masking and inducing opponent error. All this is done through a specific communication, in order to produce a certain impact on an informational environment and the audience, by some means to achieve the desired effects (information, influence, misleading). Acts of communication have certain meanings, with military implications. A clear and very current example is the messages for public information related to national and / or multinational exercises and missions.

These deployments of military forces that are demonstrably deployed also have a communicative value in order to discourage or transmit a message, that of physical presence in the area. Therefore, “*The environment is the message!*” [1], reflects the importance given to actions and their valorisation through strategic communication – *Action is the message!*

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the experience gained over time, strategic communication aims to communicate as effectively as possible to audiences, public institutions and the media, to achieve strategic, political and military goals. The framework of strategic communication also emerged as a need to adapt the messages to the specifics of the recipients as well as to integrate all communication activities as well as to synchronize them with the actions of the military operations in order to fulfill the political and military objectives. Communication becomes strategic when it serves political-military purposes when it is applied uniformly to achieve the strategic goals pursued. At the national level, communication becomes strategic when it goes beyond institutional public communication, with the aim of supporting national politics by fulfilling its objectives at all levels: political, diplomatic, economic, educational, informational and cultural.

Strategic communication harbors more valences and a complex and complete view of the operations underway in the US, Britain, NATO and the EU. Thus, after the March 2017 edition of the *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, edited by the US Department of Defense, strategic communication is defined as follows: “*The United States Government's concentrated efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or maintain favorable conditions to promote US Government interests, policies and objectives by coordinated use of programs, plans, themes, messages and products in a synchronized way actions of all instruments of national power*”. [11] Thus, *NATO StratCom Framework* [12] is seen as a mix of individual contributions that are synchronized and coordinated. This process involves military and civilian institutions, governmental and non-governmental organizations that contribute to areas such as public affairs, public diplomacy, military intelligence operations, civil-military cooperation, and beyond.

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