



The 18th International Scientific Conference
**“DEFENSE RESOURCES MANAGEMENT
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STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN THE MILITARY

DUMITRACHE Sorin

Ministry of Defence, Romania

Abstract:

The aim of the paper is to present the role of military leadership in Strategic Communication (StratCom). The contents of the paper include the major shift in understanding military operations and their environment, the main idea of StratCom and its evolution, and the essential StratCom functional areas. Having the background established, the paper discusses the principle of the key leaders' involvement (engagement). The principle is a fundamental prerequisite for effective StratCom, which proves the importance of military leadership in this field. The paper also includes the practical and theoretical implications referring to the assumptions of the positive management concept.

Key words: strategic communication, military leadership, information environment, principles, key leaders' engagement, positive management

1. Introduction

The emergence and development of social networks have revolutionized the field of communication in all environments, following that the changes in the expectations of the public and its need for information will have a profound impact including within any organization.

A new way of communicating appeared, a new form of information was outlined and a new type of relationship was identified. This new paradigm in communication took shape, in the first phase, in countries such as the United States of America or the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Today it has become the norm across the globe, and this whole process has unfolded extremely quickly in just a few years.



Fig. 1



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Nowadays, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google+, Instagram, blogs, podcasts, forums and many other digital channels are key communication tools in all sectors. These have become necessary not only to inform the general public correctly and in a timely manner about the services, activities and initiatives of the institutions, but also for these entities to benefit from public feedback through opportunities for direct, direct interaction between the institution and the citizen, following which state entities can improve their own internal processes.

The study of communication and cohesion within the military organization has come about as a natural result of the need to achieve successful performance in fulfilling the mission.

Good communication is an important skill in any environment, organization with human interactions, moreover, when it comes to communication in the military, effective communication is an integral element to accomplish the military objectives.

Achieving communication performance is the condition that a military organization must meet in order to achieve organizational goals with the highest standards of performance.

Team communication, a personal communication and the most common form of communication in all organizations, including the military, is essential in expert groups working on a joint project.

It contributes significantly to increasing the level of group cohesion. The military organization has also proven its effectiveness through the effectiveness of organizational communication, which will continue to rely on new and increasingly demanding military, technological, informational, social and political requirements. The importance of organizational communication stems from the fact that the military organization must have the ability to adapt.

The continuous, rapid communications flow in the information environment, facilitated by modern technological advances and media distribution methods, requires responsive, agile processes and capabilities to preserve and enhance the credibility and influence of the organization. To address these challenges through unified action, a whole-of-government approach known as strategic communication (SC) has emerged.

1. Strategic Communication in the military

1.1. A new concept is born

Contemporary military operations are conducted in the environment that is characterized by a high degree of complexity and unprecedented multidimensionality. They take many forms and often require an entirely new definition of the scope of activities that are carried out within them. They are, in fact, a manifestation of dimensional shift from the physical impact on the selected objectives to the influence of a non-kinetic character. Twenty-first century conflicts combine elements of different dimensions, including military, political, economic, social, cultural ones and others.

The best example of such a conflict is difficult, tense and volatile situation that appeared in Eastern Europe. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is the clash of different concepts of functioning of the state in the international environment. The conflict referred to as a “special military operation” seems to be a phenomenon difficult to master, which entails the involvement of a number of formal and informal factors, and includes the wide use of disinformation and propaganda. These actions are not a new phenomenon in the public space defined in terms of military operations as the information environment. The information environment itself provides a new way of perceiving the space defined once as a “battlefield”. The latter term turns out to be too narrow and limited in meaning to properly describe the reality of modern conflicts. The information environment is an ideal space to carry out activities of an asymmetric nature that seem to dominate



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the characteristics of many conflicts emerging recently. Such a changing environment, including the information dimensional dynamics of the public space, forced contemporary decision-makers to take measures to develop a specific system to shape the information environment. An adequate response to the new challenges of the contemporary environment seems to be the concept of Strategic Communication (StratCom). The new concept was based on the assumption of a redefinition of the social communication foundation and taking into account the development of communication techniques.

Along with the development and spreading access of a growing number of the process participants, the concept of Strategic Communication developed as well, especially in terms of its essence, the scope of the implemented projects (functional areas involved) and its meaning (role) in the broad sense of non-military and military operations.



Fig. 2

A number of countries initiated StratCom-related actions by creating their own national solutions which were reflected later on in the relevant documents published between 2009 and 2010. From that moment on, Strategic Communication has found its permanent place in all actions taken by the security sector, both internationally and in relation to the internal national system solutions. The Republic of Poland was among the countries that recognized the need to regulate and exploit existing information capabilities in the context of StratCom. It resulted in the development and adoption of The Concept of Strategic Communication in the Polish Armed Forces dated 19th December 2013. The changes made in the Polish Armed Forces' command and control system resulted in modification of the concept and the Minister of National Defence implemented them in the form of his decisions in 2014. The changes had no impact on the main idea of the StratCom because its essence was based on the invariable operating principles. One of the basic principles of the concept is the involvement of military leaders in the process of effective Strategic



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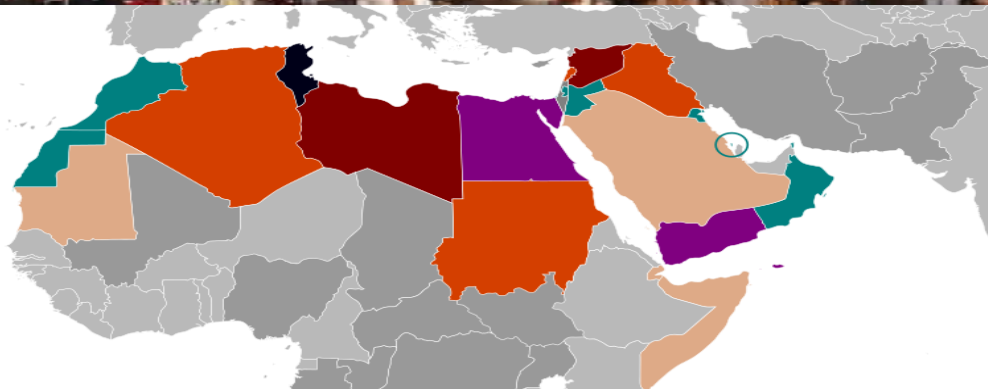
Communication. Properly exercised leadership is the ultimate condition of achieving the desired effect including the required influence results concerning specific audiences and conveying accurate information to the public. It may also be utilized for the purpose of further development of the generally perceived positive management concept, both in its practical and theoretical dimensions.

1.2. The main idea of Strategic Communication

The basic premise underpinning the establishment of measures aimed at achieving the desired level of communication with specific audiences is to redefine and rearrange the processes, resources and capabilities that have long been available in the public space referred to as the information environment. Moreover, it includes capabilities and instruments currently emerging. These elements are coordinated within the framework of Strategic Communication in order to achieve synergy leading then to the proper shaping of the information environment.

The main goal of these activities is to achieve the previously accepted political and military objectives. A very important element of StratCom is creation of close relations between the activities of the armed forces and measures implemented by the civil authorities. It includes a number of platforms to include the sphere of organization, coalition or member state activities. Taking into account the information environment’s multidimensionality, such factors as the information itself (a specific message), information systems allowing its dissemination (telecommunications infrastructure), and the influence exerted by the message should be considered.

An important element of effective StratCom is exertion of certain influence on selected target audiences or conveying messages to specified recipients of communication act. The StratCom results are closely related to the objectives specified during the planning process. The complexity of the information environment is expressed, amongst others, in the presence of a very large group of potential recipients. It is particularly important when using the instruments of wide availability such as the Internet. In recent years we have seen the growing role of social media in the wider social communication. Their extensive use by a number of social movements and non-governmental organisations, and even spontaneously formed interest groups resulted in significant political changes initiated in a number of countries (eg. North Africa in 2010).





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Fig. 3

Given the above, maintaining effective StratCom requires strict avoidance of adverse effects and unintended recipients because it can lead to disrupting or even breaking communication with the desired recipient. StratCom, as a concept developed in democratic countries, is in its nature a denial and counterweight of disinformation and propaganda. Hence, it's very important element and fundamental feature is transparency. The conveyed message is, in case of StratCom, based on the truth and real intentions of the sender, regardless of the level applied and the issues concerned.

Strategic communication, despite the use of the term “strategic”, combines horizontal and vertical influence. The StratCom message goes through communication channels from the highest authorities (decision-makers) to the lowest level of executors and is disseminated by any available and audience-oriented agents. StratCom is a comprehensive communication as it concerns both distributed media functioning outside a given organization (an alliance, a coalition or state), as well as inside it. It is crucial, in this case, to maintain coherence of conveyed message because is a condition for its credibility.

In conclusion, it should be noted that StratCom is a comprehensive approach to communication as such. It is a process requiring an in-depth analysis of the information environment, taking into account all relevant factors influencing this environment and potential changes that may occur in it.

StratCom is based on the use of the whole range of instruments and capabilities, both those that have a long tradition, as well as the brand new and innovative in nature. StratCom is carried out in a number of dimensions and on various levels. It is often compared to an “orchestra” where appropriate coordination and synchronisation of instruments is the primary factor. The key role in the proper coordination and synchronisation of capabilities and resources remains with the “conductor”. He is the guarantor of their transparent, clear and synergistic utilisation, the purpose of which is to achieve synergy. The synergy is not an end in itself and leads to achievement of a certain effect on the audience.

1.3. The evolution of StratCom concept in the military

The first attempts to specify the concept of Strategic Communication were taken at the beginning of the previous decade. The highest level of involvement in this area was presented by the United States of America. In 2006 the U.S. Department of State defined StratCom as “*focused United States Government processes and efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favourable to advance national interests and objectives through the use of coordinated information, themes, plans, programs, and actions synchronised with other elements of national power*” (QDR, 2006).

At the same time other definitions of StratCom appeared. Some of them indicated the duality of the idea in the context of both the transmission of information, as well as actions taken to shape the image of a country and some potential opportunities relating to the implementation of political guidance, decision-making process, dissemination of reliable information on the decisions taken and following actions, as well as extremely important, culturally adjusted communication with audiences.

A kind of synthesis concerning the spectrum of emerging trends in the field of StratCom defined it as a “*function to integrate coalition information activities in order to advance coalition*”



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interests and objectives, and to promote the coherence of the coalition” (StratCom in MCOVCA, 2009).

Another milestone in the development of StratCom concept was NATO Strategic Communications Policy promulgated in September 2009. Publishing the Policy, the Alliance thus confirmed that it recognises the importance of adequate, timely, accurate and active way of communicating the evolving role of the organisation, its main goals and supporting tasks to be conducted. StratCom was recognised as an integral part of the Alliance’s efforts to achieve their political and military objectives. The document clearly defined the requirement to use the full spectrum of NATO information channels available, both traditionally defined media as well as those based on the Internet technology. Moreover, it emphasised the direct involvement of the public opinion in order to make the recipients aware, understand and consequently support the decisions taken by the Alliance and the operations that are the consequence of those decisions. As any actions deliberately undertaken by the Alliance in the sphere of information, StratCom requires internally consistent approach, continuous coordination of efforts taken by Member States and all institutional stakeholders in accordance with the policy adopted by NATO, the relevant rules and procedures. NATO StratCom features specified in the document included technological innovation, active engagement and responsiveness to changes in the information environment in all its dimensions and on every level, consistency and the maximum possible transparency of actions taken.

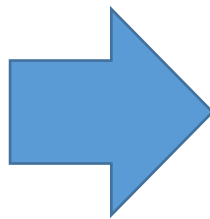


Fig. 4

The essence of the new NATO StratCom policy implementation was to raise the level of cohesion of the Alliance social communication mechanisms, both military and civilian, to improve the way NATO communicates with its audiences and other international bodies, and organisations, as well as the optimal use of its resources. Innovation of the Policy was expressed in the specific role attributed to electronic communication. It recognized the importance of the latest technology achievements in the process of gaining advantage in the information environment.

The use of such means of communication involves not only the opportunities but also certain challenges. NATO Strategic Communications Policy is a document presenting a general idea, which results from the nature of this kind of allied documents. It sets out the framework, shows the general assumptions and direction for further development of the described concept. It does not solve any potential problems and doubts but recognises the main idea of the StratCom process, provides key definitions and components, as well as defines the purpose, principles and relations among the key structures of command and control/ management system including scopes of their responsibilities in the subject matter.

The result of initiating the process of modifying the StratCom concept, particularly in terms of the tasks arising from the scope of responsibilities of the various structural bodies, was the



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publication of another important document titled ACO Directive – ACO Strategic Communications. The purpose of this document was to present guidelines for planning and carrying out actions in the field of StratCom within the framework of Allied Command Operations (ACO). A significant element of the Directive’s added value, which was the next stage of StratCom concept development, consisted in describing the key challenges the Alliance is facing in the contemporary information environment. It clearly indicated the use of information as a weapon of a potential enemy and its impact on the parties involved in a conflict.

The situation in which the challenges of this kind take on a specific role is occurrence of the environment of asymmetric threats. Another important challenge is to maintain the support of own public opinion and the elements (individuals) forming this opinion in relation to the activities carried out by NATO. StratCom is supposed to enable a proper understanding of the steps taken by NATO forces on behalf of that public opinion in the framework of its operations.

StratCom plays the key role during all phases of an operation and in managing the perception of the actions taken and also brings its direct contribution to the success of the activities carried out by ACO through the integration of all aspects of operational planning and even NATO policy planning in the subject matter area as well as to properly coordinated implementation of planned undertakings.

NATO Military Concept for Strategic Communications developed by Allied Command Transformation is the most comprehensive StratCom-related document developed by the Alliance. The Concept is a summary of previously developed StratCom solutions. It clearly defines StratCom links with the communication strategy approved the North Atlantic Council and thus adopted for the implementation. It indicates the coordinating nature of Information Operations and at the same time stresses the need for independency of those operations and activities conducted by Public Affairs structures. In addition, the document mentions the need for integration of both planning and implementing StratCom activities in the context of military operations. It also emphasises the importance of military leadership and responsibility of leaders for communicating properly with audiences at all levels. Moreover, the document draws attention to the need to modify existing organisational structures as it is recommended in the case of organisational changes resulting from the adoption of the Alliance Network-Centric Operations’ concept.

The significant modification of the previous initiatives consisted in placing the emphasis on the need for the delegation of authority in the field of StratCom (dissemination of information based on words, sounds and images) to the lowest possible level in the chain of command. The concept devotes a lot of attention to the capabilities conditioning StratCom and an adequate level of personnel training in terms of competence as well as development and the capability building.

NATO Military Concept for Strategic Communications is another step towards the construction of the real Alliance potential in the area of StratCom. It points to the key role played by the armed forces in the field of tasks implementation, especially at the lower levels of command. StratCom is the key element in a wide range of undertakings implemented in order to reach selected audiences with a specific, consistent message supporting the goals and interests of the Alliance. The structures that play the essential role in the NATO StratCom capability building include Allied Command Operations and Allied Command Transformation.

2. PCOM - Case study

The Pragmatic Complexity Communication Model (PCOM), developed by Steven Corman, Angela Trethewey and Bud Goodall in 2007, (Figure 5) is regarded as a useful communication model to analyze successful and unsuccessful uses of Strategic Communication.



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The PCOM indicates that communication is not as simple as the transfer of a message between two groups; on the contrary, it is an arrangement of a quite complex communication system between the resource and the receiver and is a characteristic of a complex system wherein participants interpret each others' attitude and behaviours; they evaluate the intention, thought and motivations behind these attitude and behaviours. The system is complex because of a double contingency that involves the participants.

The PCOM assumes that the messages are interpreted within a huge communication system; therefore, A and B have a reciprocal and simultaneous relationship of dependence. According to the model, in the simplest case of a communication system with two participants A and B, the success of the resource A and its message is dependent not only upon the message conveyed and external conditions, but also on what the receiver B thinks and does. The thoughts and actions of B are influenced by the attitude and behaviours of A as well as the expectations, thoughts and interpretations of B about A. The success of the messages of A is dependent upon the external environment and upon how B perceives A's role in this environment.

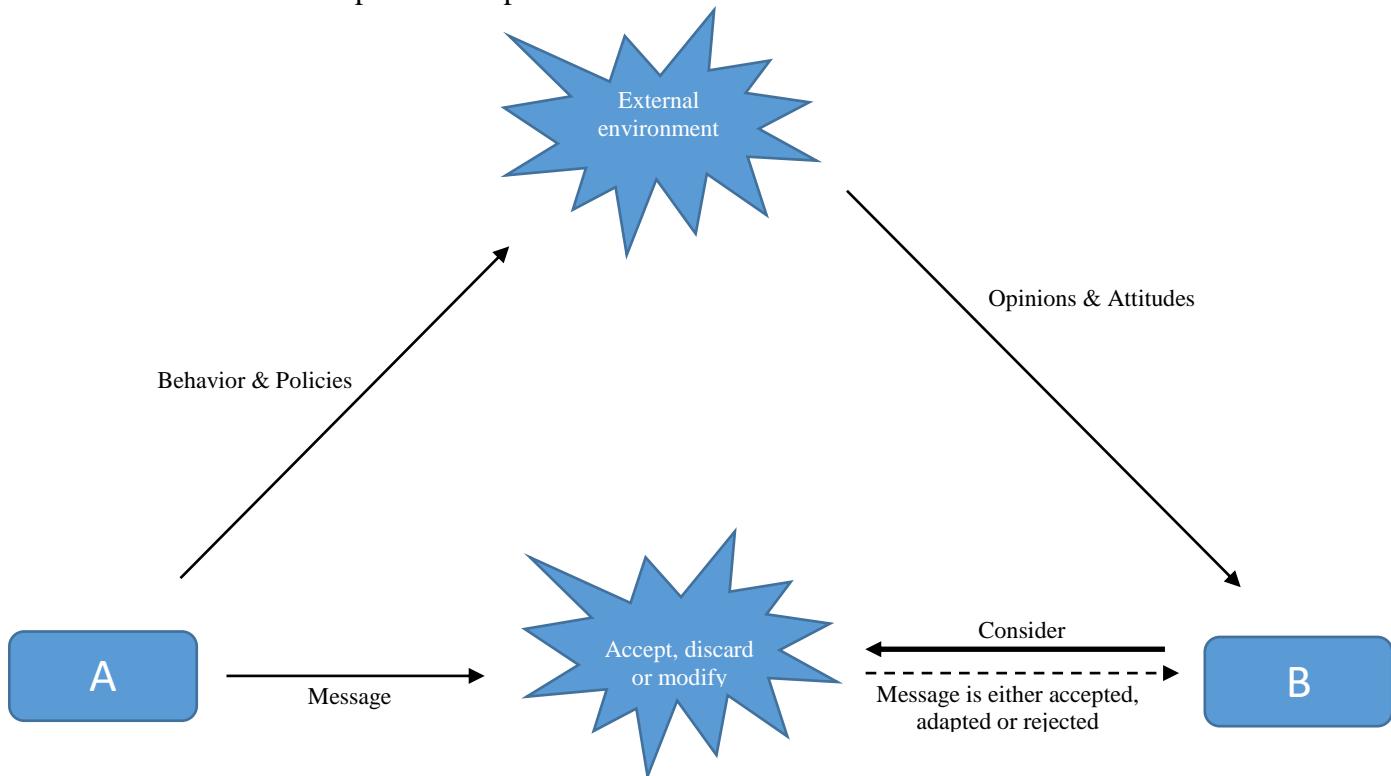


Fig. 5

A conclusive example for this theory happened in 2021 in the Romanian Army. One of the brigade-level units carried out, in a training facility, a particularly important exercise undertaken at the NATO level. In order to carry out the activity in optimal conditions, it was necessary to deploy, in the same facility, a number of over 2000 soldiers from various military units in Romania as well as foreign soldiers.

Against the background of the obligation to limit the spread of the virus, as well as the need to take all measures to prevent and combat the effects of the "COVID" pandemic, the meticulous preparation of all the activities carried out in the range was required a long time in advance. In this context, the General Staff of Defense issues a document in which it is very clearly



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specified: in order to be able to participate in the exercise, personnel must be vaccinated or quarantined before entering the training facility.

Besides the particularly great effort of the brigade headquarter (BDE HQ) generated by the preparation of the specific documents necessary for the exercise, simultaneously with the preparation of the technique and materials, the commander of the military structure had to face the reluctance of some soldiers to get vaccinated, many of them being necessary during the exercise.

Moreover, the exercise was planned to start immediately after Easter, one of the biggest Christian holidays, and the quarantine period mentioned above overlapped the religious holiday.

Despite all the efforts made on all levels to convey the message that it is good for the military personnel to get vaccinated, with all the restrictions imposed by the military system, there were hundreds of soldiers who preferred to spend the great religious holiday in barracks far from their own families, a fact that he points out that, like PCOM indicates, communication is not as simple as the transfer of a message between two groups.

A group represented by the command team, which sends a clear message to the military subordinate personnel: "I want you vaccinated!" because: military higher echelons wanted all the points assumed by Romania at the NATO level to be executed; since there was active a governmental legislative package of restrictions that must be fulfilled; two European Union state presidents confirmed the participated in the activity and this fact requires taking a very large number of security measures, including medical ones, so that the national image does not suffer.

The second group, formed by simple people with healthy origins were reluctant to get the vaccine because: the fireman neighbor who transported sick people with the isolator was not vaccinated, the policeman neighbor who constantly interacted with people in the street was not vaccinated, the nurse neighbor was not vaccinated because she wanted to remain pregnant and on certain media channels there were priests who were against the vaccination campaign.

Note: this case study does not represent the official point of view of the Romanian Government or the Ministry of National Defense, being only a personal approach to exemplify a complex pragmatic model of communication.

3. Conclusion

“... I say to you: that we are in a battle and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds... ..”, Ayman al-Zawahiri, Letter to Al-Zarqawi, 9 July 2005



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The continuous, rapid communications flow in the information environment, facilitated by modern technological advances and media distribution methods, requires responsive, agile processes and capabilities to preserve and enhance the credibility and influence of the military organization.

Contemporary challenges occurring in the information dimension of the operational environment have forced a number of organisations, including the armed forces and their surrounding – defence system of a country, to redefine their approach to social communication understood as reaching out to a selected audience with a specific message.

The communication capabilities of today greatly amplify the impact and speed of change in foreign and domestic public opinion and the subsequent influence on activities. Adversaries are often unconstrained in this environment, unencumbered by traditional processes, and unconcerned about necessary ethical, moral, or legal constraints under which the military personnel operate. In Irregular warfare, where the struggle is for legitimacy and influence over relevant populations, military may be at an extreme disadvantage operating in an unfamiliar environment where the adversary has a cultural and communication advantage and may already have the support of certain segments of the population.

Ensuring transparency, effectiveness and efficiency of Strategic Communication plays the major role in achieving the objectives of military operations but also in shaping the information environment in the desired manner.

Military leaders, being aware and active participants of the StratCom process, enable creation of the conditions required for the subordinate organisation’s mission accomplishment, which provides the essence of effective command and control, management and leadership.

The positive management concept and utilisation of its assumptions, both in theory and practice, may be the key to the successful Strategic Communication in this regard.

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