

Received: June 2023

Accepted: December 2023

DOI: 10.7862/rz.2023.hss.72

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FROM INFORMATION POLICY TO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

In the era of modern threats, Strategic Communication (StratCom) has become a key capability in responding to hybrid threats, the vast majority of which are created in the Information Environment (IE), with particular emphasis on cyberspace. The transition from the information policies of individual armed forces to the comprehensive thought of strategic communication is the focus of the article below. For this purpose, an analysis of source documents was used, showing the development of the concept of strategic communication since 2001 in StratCom collections of documents, policies, doctrines, guidelines, manuals and framework concepts.

Keywords: information policy, strategic communication.

1. INTRODUCTION – INFORMATION POLICY

Information security and information sharing with the media are the basis of today's strategic communications. In NATO, the first edition of MC 0457 was created in 2001 in response to media needs and concerns the military role of NATO in the mission of forces and air campaign operations in Kosovo. The information policy developed was the result of experience and conclusions from all NATO operations and missions. In this document, which regulates the issue of communicating with the public on military matters, the overriding category is *public information* (in Polish contexts called “press and information activities”). It consists of activities involving the use of various forms and methods of *public relations* in the process of communicating about military and defense matters. The document favors fairly free access of the media to information and independent and independent transmission of information by press service employees. In the matter of contacts with the media, NATO emphasizes that every employee of a military institution must be prepared and trained to provide information. At the same time, it is noted that the

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main role in this task is played by commanders and staff officers. However, press personnel must comply with NATO guidelines and principles regarding relations with journalists.

General Massimo Panizzi (Public Affairs & StratCom Advisor International Military Staff) notes the importance of the military communications process, saying:

The Public Affairs officer is a key advisor to the NATO commander, and this policy is intended to assist him in his tasks. The challenge for Public Affairs officers is to explain to a wide and diverse audience, including the media, the complexity of military issues that respond to 21st century security challenges and that are supported by NATO's political decision-makers. This is especially important in times of crisis, when NATO actions are undertaken. Society often pays little attention to the significance of a crisis; they only see crisis, unless they come across more shocking news. There is a lack of context, and the media very often follows the principle "the harsher, the better". The gap between the reality of public perception, expectations and actions only ends in disbelief. It is therefore very important to provide the missing context. Educating and clarifying is intended to balance criticism and maintain credibility. Transparency tolerates criticism, but a lack of transparency, intentional or otherwise, certainly deserves condemnation (NATO Military Public Affairs Policy, 2011).

This means that press department employees should meet the needs of journalists. Therefore, the approach of limiting freedom in order to ensure personal safety is abandoned. Activities aimed at involving journalists in the work of military units are widely supported. This is done in close cooperation with the appropriate press office. Media materials shall not be subject to any censorship or review by NATO personnel. This also applies to information transmitted by NATO resources. This does not apply to reports, reports or other information sent via combat means of communication. The restrictions are intended to maintain the security of Alliance operations. In this case, the types of information or materials whose disclosure would threaten the security of current or future activities are always determined. Therefore, information cannot be provided regarding, for example, the weaknesses of the armed forces or others that may be used against the Alliance's forces. It is strongly emphasized that information held by the media that is embarrassing for commanders or other personnel cannot be censored. Information protection must be ensured at the source, therefore persons possessing classified information are responsible for protecting it. If journalists disclose information not intended for publication, such as a military operation plan, NATO press and command staff are obliged not to confirm the information. It is also recommended to immediately notify the press office in accordance with applicable procedures (Kryszka, 2006).

NATO standardization documents also specify the rules for informing the public about cooperation with the media in allied joint operations (NATO AJP 01/B) (NATO AJP 01/B, 2002). The Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, Admiral Giampaolo di Paola, said:

Our societies have a democratic right to know what the Alliance is doing on their behalf and why. NATO therefore has an obligation to report on its individual policies and activities, and in particular on its activities. Only reliable information should be provided to the public. It is the role of the NATO military public affairs official to provide this information. This requires high

professionalism, an analytical mind and strong commitment. The Public Affairs Officer is a key advisor to the NATO Commander and this policy is designed to assist him in his responsibilities (NATO Military Public Affairs Policy, 2011).

The Polish equivalent of the above document is the study *Joint Operations* (Szt. Gen. Wewn. 3/20/2001), in which reliable, accurate and quick information to the public via the media is defined as one of the most important tasks of the command during joint operations.

2. NATO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

The development of the concept of NATO's information policy and geopolitical needs led to its transformation into strategic communication. The very concept of strategic communication (StratCom) officially entered NATO terminology in 2008. Although already in 2006, StratCom was used by the US Department of State in the concept of: "focused processes and efforts undertaken to understand and engage key audiences (recipients) to create, strengthen or perpetuate conditions favorable to the implementation of national interests and goals through the use of coordinated information, topics, plans, programs and activities synchronized with projects implemented by other elements of state authorities" (QDR Execution Roadmap for Strategic Communication, 2006). Since then, many articles, analyzes and polemics have been published, the aim of which was to bring to a common denominator the activities carried out by the Alliance and the Alliance member states that have a significant impact on the information environment.

Starting from the Bucharest summit (2008), as well as subsequent summits in Kehl Strasbourg (2009), Wales (2014) and Warsaw (2016), NATO declarations listed among the priority issues adaptation to emerging threats from security environment and strategic communications, seen "as an integral part of our efforts to achieve the Alliance's political and military objectives" (Declaration from the NATO Summit in Strasbourg-Kehl, 2009). Thus, the creation of the NATO Center of Excellence for Strategic Communications in Latvia as one of the key tools for countering hybrid threats was appreciated in the Welsh Summit Declaration. The first definition of StratCom agreed by Allies identified it as "the coordinated and appropriate use of NATO's communications activities and capabilities – public diplomacy, public affairs, military public affairs, information operations and psychological operations, as appropriate – in support of Alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to achieve NATO goals" (Strategic communication policy NATO, 2009). This definition emphasizes the importance of coordinating communication activities with allied activities or operations that could impact the information environment and audiences (Vasile, 2022). At the same time, it maintains the level of generality high enough to avoid possible doctrinal disputes caused by the difficulty (impossibility) of clearly separating activities consisting in informing recipients from activities of influencing them, as well as delimiting activities that are at the same time specific to PD, KLE, CIMIC or PPP. NATO Allied Command Operations Directive – ACO (AD) 95-2 Strategic Communications, adopted on May 21, 2012, confirmed this definition and described the specific roles, responsibilities and processes of StratCom. The document emphasizes that StratCom has a "political-military character (Directive NATO ACO, 2012), playing a "central role in all phases of the operation, from planning to execution" (Directive NATO ACO, 2012), which requires close "coordination among all elements of the information community" (Directive NATO ACO, 2012). During the NATO summit in Wales, Allies expressed their determination to significantly increase NATO's defense capabilities, ensuring that the Alliance "has the necessary tools and procedures required to deter and

effectively respond to threats related to hybrid warfare, as well as the ability to strengthen national forces" (Declaration from the NATO Summit in Wales, 2009; Vasile, 2022).

There are several definitions of StratCom. Most of them share a concept that describes communication processes (PD, PA, InfoOps, PsyOps) through the use of activities undertaken by ministries and state agencies in various fields: political, diplomatic, economic, cultural and military. Psychological Operations, Public Diplomacy, Military Public Affairs and Public Affairs are reflected in allied documents, the most important of which is NATO Military Policy on Information Operations MC 0628. StratCom is defined as a military function providing advice and coordination of troops' actions aimed at achieving the desired effect in the sphere of will to act (fight), perception and ability to conduct actions in support of the objectives of the operation implemented by the Alliance. Psychological Operations are psychological operations that are the planned use of information to influence the opinions, feelings, attitudes and behavior of groups of people. In turn, Public Diplomacy refers to the influence on social attitudes and, in this context, shaping the foreign policy of a given entity in the dimension of international relations. An important element here is shaping public opinion in other countries using economic and political marketing mechanisms (Kacała, 2011). The next element is military press and information activities (Military Public Affairs), focusing on promoting military goals and tasks among recipients, which is intended to result in increased awareness and understanding of the military aspects of the activities carried out among the public. Public Affairs is understood as social information, transfer of information from individual commands and building relations with society, both in the national and international dimension (NATO Military Public Affairs Policy, 2011; Public Affairs Handbook, 2020). Today, NATO must use a variety of channels, including traditional media, online media and public engagement, to build awareness, understanding and support for its decisions and operations. This requires a coherent institutional approach, coordination of efforts with NATO countries and among all their entities, as well as consistency in arrangements with other international entities and actions consistent with the procedures and principles applicable in the Alliance (Dmochowski, Wiśnicki, 2022).

The development of strategic communication thought is particularly developed in the USA. A pragmatic approach is presented by Richard Halloran, who already in 2007 proposed the following definition: "Strategic communication is a way of persuading other people to accept someone's ideas, policies or courses of action" (Halloran, 2007). This means that the most important thing is to build the institutional capacity necessary to support the implementation of strategic communication goals. They result from broadly understood strategic communication, which

means convincing allies and friends to side with you. This means convincing neutrals to come to your side or at least remain neutral. In the best of all worlds, this means convincing your opponents that you have the power and will to control them. Strategic communication is extremely important and involves persuading citizens to support the policies of their leaders in order to forge national will to achieve national goals. In this context, strategic communication is an essential element of national leadership (Halloran, 2007).

The proposed concept of strategic communication was introduced into official policy documents for the first time in the United States National Strategy for Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication in June 2007. The strategy articulates the U.S. government's

communication objectives, key audiences, public diplomacy priorities, interagency coordination requirements, ways to monitor and evaluate implementation, communication channels and necessary resources, plan examples, themes, and messages.

As we have already written, the first allied document – NATO Strategic Communications Policy (NATO Strategic Communications Policy, 2009) was created in 2009 and was the basis for the activities of diplomatic and press services in the information environment, but did not provide a clear interpretation of such activities in relation to military capabilities in the area of strategic communication. Over the next few years, NATO consistently developed and improved its own and its member states' capabilities to function effectively in the information dimension of the international security environment. Such a specific action is, for example, the establishment of the Strategic Communication Center of Excellence (StratCom CoE) in Riga in 2014, of which Poland is also one of the founding countries (Niedzielski, 2022).

During its work on the development of a holistic strategic communication system, NATO constantly monitors activities in the information environment and takes into account the activities of the NATO Military Committee and the Allied doctrine of standardization of military strategic communications (Allied Joint Doctrine for Strategic Communications – AJP-10)⁴. This document is a supplement to the previously mentioned civil doctrine from 2009 and the guidelines for the implementation of strategic communication from 2017. All three documents together constitute the alliance's systemic approach to StratCom. The long time interval between the creation of individual documents resulted from the fact that for many years strategic communication was perceived mainly as the exclusive domain of public diplomacy with little military input. Only the hybrid attack of the Russian Federation on Ukraine in 2014 became a stimulus to raise awareness of the role of military aspects of strategic communication in effective influence and counteraction in the information environment. This initiated active work by NATO and individual allied countries to build, maintain and develop the military operational capabilities of StratCom (Niedzielski, 2022).

3. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN THE EU

The situation is similar with communication and information policy in the European Union. The European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) demonstrate both the will and concern of Member States to harmonize their efforts to develop common capabilities in strategic communications, which is “an important tool in implementing the overall EU policy objectives” (Strategic Communication Action Plan, 2015). Strategic communication is seen as a valuable tool for increasing the EU's resilience and ability to respond to hybrid threats and disinformation campaigns. That is why strategic communication is mentioned in the most important documents establishing a common CFSP and CSDP framework for countering hybrid threats, such as: Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy” of 28 June 2016, EU Operational Protocol on Countering Threats Hybrid` of 7 July 2016 and the 'EU Security and Defense Implementation Plan' of 14 November 2016. As regards the strategic partnership with NATO, based on the 2002 EU NATO

⁴ The NATO Military Committee is the highest military authority of the Alliance. In relation to the North Atlantic Council, which is the highest political authority of the Alliance, the Council has an advisory function on military matters. This advice is based on a consensus developed jointly by all military chiefs of defense of NATO member states.

Declaration on European Security and Defense Policy, its importance was confirmed at the NATO Summit in Warsaw by the new EU NATO Joint Declaration, adopted on July 8, 2016. The document emphasized the need to urgently adopt procedures agreed by both organizations in order to

increase our ability to counter hybrid threats, including by strengthening resilience, cooperation in terms of analysis, prevention and early detection, through timely exchange of information and, where possible, exchange of intelligence between staffs; and cooperation in the field of strategic communication and strategic response (Joint declaration of the President of the European Council, 2016).

Strategic communication has become an integral part of the EU's activities and is now used to promote its core values, principles and goals among international and European audiences, as well as to increase public awareness of how to counteract false information and disinformation activities.

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, strategic communication, which since 2001 has been shaping the image of the army in society, like many other public institutions, and translates into its efficient operation. It is currently a dynamically developing area of activity of both NATO and individual member states. Its growing importance is particularly visible in the era of development of mass media, especially the Internet and the so-called social media, which have made both information and disinformation widely available on a global scale, competing in the race to convince increasingly larger groups of recipients. A message that is properly tailored to a specific recipient has become a weapon in the global information war waged by all players in the global security environment. The above applies to states, groups, coalitions, non-state players, and international organizations such as the UN, European Union or NATO.

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