NATO'S STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION (STRATCOM) ACTIVITIES DURING 2014 UKRAINE CRISIS*

NATO'nun 2014 Ukrayna Krizi'nde Stratejik İletişim Konsepti Uygulamaları

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Abstract

During the Cold War, NATO focused on deterrence against the former Soviet Union. In the post-Cold War era, the Alliance has embarked on new missions where non-military tasks have become priorities for which NATO's military structure is unprepared. The 2014 Ukrainian crisis exposed these deficiencies and the need for the Alliance to take a more solid and coherent approach to modern warfare. This paper assesses the Alliance's StratCom activities during the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. These activities were designed to counter Russia's hybrid warfare tactics, which were based on denial, deception and ambiguity. We argue that StratCom is vital to the success of future NATO missions.

Keywords: NATO, Strategic Communication, Ukrainian Crisis, Russia, Hybrid Warfare.

Özet

NATO Soğuk Savaş döneminde Sovyetler Birliği'ne karşı caydırıcılık konusuna odaklanmıştır. Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde ittifak askeri olmayan konuların ön plana çıktığı yeni misyonlara başlamış ve askeri yapının bu yeni misyonlar için hazırlıksız olduğu fark edilmiştir. 2014 Ukrayna Krizi ise NATO'nun yekpare ve tutarlı bir yaklaşım için eksikliklerini ve ihtiyacını tekrar ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu çalışma ittifakın 2014 Ukrayna Krizi esnasında inkâr, aldatma ve belirsizliğe dayalı Rus karma savaş faaliyetlerine karşı yürüttüğü Stratejik İletişim faaliyetlerini değerlendirmeke ve NATO'nun önümüdeki dönemde icra edeceği misyonları için Stratejik İletişimin hayati önemde olduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: NATO, Stratejik İletişim, Ukrayna Krizi, Rusya, Karma Savaş.

INTRODUCTION

During the Cold War, NATO's defense and deterrence policy focused mainly on hard power. At this time, information policy played a complementary and largely invisible role because deterrence was based mainly on the development and deployment of weapons systems and military units within NATO territory, especially in Europe. Information Warfare (IW) was shaped mainly by traditional media run by states and both sides, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, strove to inform their own population rather than influence the other side.

However, rapid development in information technology and the increased role of the media in the post-Cold War era has changed the importance of IW. The changing character of post-Cold War operations, which place increased sensitivity on human rights, has also increased the importance of the public information. The public has also become more sensitive to misinformation and propaganda, and IW has become as important as traditional warfare.

Thus new missions and operations by the Alliance, such as in Bosnia, Kosovo, or Afghanistan, focused on peacekeeping and peace building rather than conflicts, and this has increased the importance of public affairs and media operations in the Alliance. NATO's lack of expertise in this area, however, resulted in the failure of its forces to generate public support in these new missions, and also highlighted the limitations of traditional military operations. This failure has forced the Alliance to shift gears and focus on public affairs, public diplomacy, and StratCom activities.

The Alliance started to develop its StratCom concepts in September 2009. The 2014 Ukrainian crisis, however, became a turning point for the Alliance, which was forced to develop and implement a coordinated and coherent StratCom concept. At this time, NATO described Russian hybrid

Erhan UZUN

warfare, which is based on ambiguity, disguise, deception, denial, and misinformation, as one of the most immediate and largest threats facing the Alliance, which embarked on structural and functional changes called the Readiness Action Plan (RAP).

NATO has in response developed StratCom concept and increased StratCom activities. This paper describes the development of these StratCom activities and analyzes NATO's use of them during the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. It argues that StratCom will be crucially important in future Alliance missions because both deterrence and success in these conflicts will depend first of all on having coherent and effective reactions that successfully counter new IW and PO threats.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION THEORY

Strategy, which is generally thought of as a military concept, comes from the word "strategos," which was used to denote the highest military and civilian rulers in ancient Egypt and ancient Greece.[1] Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz, in his work *On War* (1832), describes strategy as the tool one uses to achieve the goals of war.[2] According to Hart, strategy is the art of distributing and using military facilities to achieve political goals.[3] However, today it is not possible to limit the definition of strategy to the military field. It is, rather, a process that constantly adapts to changing conditions and situations in a world dominated by chance, uncertainty, and confusion. Strategy is also a utilitarian and practical activity and a guide to effectively achieving goals that should be achieved by working on what and how.[4]

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1 Nezahat Güçlü, "Stratejik Yönetim", *Gazi Üniversitesi Gazi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 23(2), 2003, p. 66.

2 Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, North Charleston 1984, p. 87.

3 Liddell Hart, B. H., *Strategy*, Faber, London 1967, p. 321.

4 İhsan Tuncer Dabanlı, *11 Eylül Sonrası Ortamda (2001-2003) ABD Milli Güvenlik Stratejilerinin Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Milli Güvenlik Stratejilerine Etkileri,* Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, (Yayınlanmamış Doktora Tezi), Ankara 2007, p. 5.

The words strategy and communication have been combined to define the point where management strategy and communications intersect. When the word strategy is used in communications, it refers to a management function that covers and combines different communication practices that are performed by institutions. The emergence of communication as a strategic management function dates back to the 1960s.[5] In the years since, the concept of communication within institutions has gained importance in the context of strategic management. Today, it is possible to say that a large number of institutions from all sectors accept StratCom as a special corporate function.

StratCom is a general term used to describe the activities of many disciplines, including public relations, management communications, advertising, research, organizational communications, management, military history, and mass communications. StratCom uses disciplines such as public relations, information management, public diplomacy, media relations, and perception and reputation management synergistically, so that an institution's vision is revealed in its strategic goals, intent, and purpose, and actions and discourses as understood by the relevant public.[6] However, wider use and technological developments in communications have increased the availability and need for the StratCom in almost all sectors.

StratCom has been closely affiliated with public affairs, media or public diplomacy, and the blurring of differences among these fields makes an exact and unique definition of the term increasingly hard to achieve. While resources in the field of defense and security generally prefer to use the term StratCom, resources that are related to economy, trade and

Erhan UZUN

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5 Hallahan et al., "Defining Strategic Communication", *International of Journal Strategic Communication*, 1(1), p. 1.

6 Murphy et al., *Information As Power: An Anthology of Selected United States Army War College Student Papers*, US Army War College, Carlise PA 2006, p. 55.

politics prefer using the concept of public diplomacy.[7] Although the term StratCom has been used in academic literature for many years, scholars are only now exploring it consistently in terms of unified knowledge. [8]

Scholars and even military officials have been struggling for decades to adequately define, distinguish, or correlate public diplomacy with propaganda, public affairs, public relations, and soft power.[9] New terms that have been incorporated into the lexicons of many governments and organizations since 9/11, such as smart power, soft power, and even StratCom, are euphemisms or attempts to avoid terms that are difficult to define or that carry negative connotations.[10] Tatham and Le Page argue that "consensus about what a strategy is and how it should be used within a political-military organization is absolutely necessary for the strategy to be effective, but defining StratCom overlooks bigger conceptual issues which will continue to undermine the concept unless these problems are addressed." [11]

According to Leonard, the transition from public diplomacy to StratCom has three historical dimensions. The first and closest dimension is the daily communications that contain the explanation of the general situation of local and foreign policies.[12] In modern democracies, after making decisions government officials often pay close attention to what to say to the press and how to do so. However, they focus largely on the local press, even though the foreign press is the most important target

7   Phillip M. Taylor, "Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications", Snow Nancy-Phillip M. Taylor, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, Routledge, International Handbooks, New York 2009, p. 7.

8   Hallahan et al., *op. cit.*, p. 3.

9   Eytan Gilboa, "Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy", *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 2008, p. 55.

10   David Guth W., "Black, White, and Shades of Gray: The Sixty-Year Debate over Propaganda Versus Public Diplomacy", *The Journal of Promotional Management*, 14(2), 2009, p. 309; Richard Holbrooke, "Get the Message Out", *The Washington Post*, 28 October 2001.

11   Tatham-Rita Le Page, "NATO Strategic Communication: More to Be Done", *National Defence of Academy of Latvia*, Center for Security and Strategic Research, Riga 2014, p. 3.

12   Mark Leonard, *Public Diplomacy*, The Foreign Policy Center, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/20958/Public_Diplomacy.pdf (Date of Accession: 11.03.2021), p. 8.

Erhan UZUN

for the first dimension of public diplomacy. Leonard argues "that many states make the mistake of explaining their country's decisions only to audiences in their own countries, and are unaware of the impact of their actions on the international image of their country."[13]

The second dimension is "where a set of simple themes are developed, such as in a political campaign or an advertising campaign. Symbolic events and communications within a year are planned in the campaign to brand the main themes or to develop private government policy. Sometimes planning is easier than doing."[14] Governments have traditionally succeeded in expressing their perspectives on certain issues, but they have been less effective in dealing with managing the perception of the country as a whole. One of the reasons for this is that different organizations are concerned with politics, trade, tourism, investment, and cultural relations.[15]

The third dimension of public diplomacy is also the longest running. Through the key features of scholarships, exchange programs, training, seminars and conferences, permanent relationships are developed by building real and virtual networks and enabling people to reach media channels. It is important not just to develop relationships but to ensure that the experiences which people take away are positive and that there is follow-up afterwards.[16] Building relationships is different from selling messages because a unique exchange program allows people to see the country they are going to as it is. Building relationships can be expensive in the long run, but it is essential for more permanent and consistent public diplomatic activity. It includes cultural and diplomatic exchange activities as well as activities such as education, tourism, culture and arts. Studies and practices aimed at creating a country and brand in building

Erhan UZUN

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13 Leonard, *op. cit*, p. 8.

14 Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

15 Leonard, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

16 Leonard, *op. cit.,* p. 15.

relationships constitute the strategic communication phase of public diplomacy, which is the most important field.

StratCom is not just a resource-oriented passive communication process that aims to inform the public about the most appropriate message. It is also an active process designed to ensure that selected messages are shared with the relevant public in accordance with the vision and goals of the institution and that the public perception is shaped positively and has a positive outcome. It takes into account preconditioning and current perceptions and attitudes of relevant public opinion, and accepts that public opinion is not a passive variable in the communication process, but an active variable that affects the process.[17]

StratCom, which aims to change negative thoughts and attitudes by having an impact on certain target audiences, is a strategic and coherent set of systematic activities that regulate certain behaviors through these channels, and which determine effective and useful channels for the agreement of key audiences, supported opinions, and thoughts. We can use the orchestra as a model to provide a better understanding of StratCom. The orchestra provides harmony, and the conductor is "state." The strings in the musical score indicate the StratCom plan, and the members of the orchestra provide details about the work with various implementing institutions and organizations. Music, on the other hand, is the narrative or main theme used in strategic communication. Narrative, which is an important part of StratCom, is a thematic and sequential explanation that gives meaning to specific events as related by the narrator to the target audience.

"StratCom requires the correct use of the information with synchronization among relevant institutions by ensuring unity of efforts

Erhan UZUN

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17 Steve Tatham, *Strategic Communication: A Primer*, Defence Academy of United Kingdom, London 2008, p. 18.

towards the result. It acts on the basis of taking into account the socio-cultural structure, history and traditions of the key audience as well as technological factors in the terms of use and transmission of information."[18] StratCom does not mean disclosing and legitimizing decisions that are taken or activities that are carried out after policies are produced and decided on. In StratCom, the intention is to integrate information into every element of policy, planning, and execution because information is not an insignificant concept to be communicated to the public after decisions are made.

StratCom is important to the military because of the continuously changing nature of war. According to Harold D. Lasswell, states that participated in the First World War understood that economic and military power, which Nye Joseph defines it as a hard power[19], should be accompanied by psychological struggle.[20] This determination is still valid today but by itself is not enough to win armed struggles.[21] It is necessary to wage a winning battle against the enemy in the field of public opinion (in psychological and social fields). The discipline that is expected to fulfill this function in modern warfare is StratCom. Therefore, the concept of StratCom, which is generally discussed by states in the context of national security, is equally important to the military.

Because of the changing character of warfare, StratCom has become a crucial issue for the military, although the debate over the meaning of StratCom in a military context continues. As Tatham has pointed out, while some academics describe the concept of StratCom as soft power, military officials define it as IW or psychological operations (PO). "In fact, those who have a cynical approach to StratCom or have superficial

Erhan UZUN

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18   Mark Laity, "Strategic Communication Models", *Küresel Terörizm ve Uluslararası İşbirliği Sempozyumu, Terörizmle Mücadele Mükemmeliyet Merkezi*, Ankara 2010, p. 91.

19   Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York 2004, p. 5.

20   Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Technique in the World War*, Peter Smith, New York 1938, p. 14.

21   Patrick Eyre-James Littleton, "Shaping the Zeitgeist: Influencing Social Processes As the Center of Gravity For Strategic Communications in the Twenty-First Century", *Public Relations Review*, 38(2), 2012, p. 179.

knowledge describe it as a kind of 'distortion' or 'propaganda.'[22] Public Affairs, IO and PO are however described as core elements of StratCom for military operations.

Although articulated in various ways, StratCom has been an important part of military life for some time. As a term, the US military has used the term StratCom for decades. However, it became popular in the U.S. during the Bush administration after the 9/11 attacks as a way to garner national and international support for the war against terrorism. Since then, the US has focused on the development of StratCom and its wider use in the military. As articulated by the Defense Science Task Force in 2004, the US military regards StratCom as "a vital component of U.S. national security."[23]

In the recent years, StratCom has gained important momentum in the military of many states and international organizations such as NATO. The changing characters of warfare and new types of missions have forced national militaries and the military structure of international organizations such as NATO to focus on StratCom.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE NATO'S STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION CONCEPT

Article 5 of the Washington Treaty defines "collective defense" as the core task of the Alliance. The Military Committee stressed that "this provision is particularly critical during periods of crisis or uncertainty in the security situation in some member states of the Alliance. In such circumstances it is necessary to point out the true meaning of the NATO Alliance." [24]

Erhan UZUN

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22 Tatham, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

23 "Report of the Defence Science Board Task Force on Strategic Communication", *US Department of Defense*, Washington 2004. http://www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/reports/ADA428770.pdf, (Date of Accession: 20.03.2021).

24 "NATO Military Policy on Information Operations", *Military Committee 422, Strasbourg/Kehl Summit Declaration*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52837.htm?mode=press, (Date of Accession: 16.03.2021).

As Castells argues "it is very important for NATO to have clearly-defined strategic defense missions and guidelines for meeting these, in order to provide a real and viable mission."[25] The Alliance has succeeded in defining a clear mission, collective defense, and a concrete adversary, the Warsaw pact, during the Cold War. The Cold War experienced a massive IW between NATO and the Warsaw Pact which was based on the propaganda, IO, PO, and public affairs. However, the limited capabilities of communication technologies used at the time, compared to the present technologies, allowed each side to shape only the perceptions of their own populations.

On May 18, 1950, the North Atlantic Council, NATO's highest decision-making body, issued a resolution in which it committed itself to: "promote and coordinate public information in furtherance of the objectives of the Treaty while leaving responsibility for national programs to each country."[26] It succeeded in doing this to some extent. The Three Wise Men report, issued in 1956 at the height of the Suez Crisis, for example, enhanced non-military aspects of cooperation and coordination among Alliance members, which led to greater political consultation. It was also a call for greater cooperation in economic, scientific, and cultural areas as well as information fields.[27]

The early post-Cold War period experienced, on one hand, rapid developments in communication technologies and, on the other hand, an important change in the tasks of the Alliance. NATO embarked on new missions, such as nation-building operations in Bosnia or Kosovo, which involved human rights or non-military issues. Thus, NATO felt the urgency

Erhan UZUN

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25 Manuel Castells, *Communication Power*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, p. 417.

26 "Resolution", *NATO*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17208.htm, (Date of Accession: 15.03.2021).

27 Jamie Shea, "Üç Akıl Adam'dan Bugün Ne Öğrenebilirz?", *NATO Review*, https://www.nato.int/docu/review/tr/articles/2016/12/05/uec-akil-adamdan-buguen-ne-oegrenebiliriz/index.html, (Date of Accession: 19.03.2021).

to focus on communication, especially using modern technologies, to timely and correct inform the public and ensure the success of missions. Departments of Public Affairs and Public Policy in NATO were shaped by these new requirements. The role of public diplomacy towards both "old member states" and new, aspiring member states, as well as towards dozens of new NATO partners across the globe, resulted in stronger outreach efforts toward these audiences.

In 2003, NATO's Public Diplomacy Division was established by merging NATO's Information office with its Press office. Within the new structure, the North Atlantic Council and NATO Secretary General provided overall direction to NATO's communication and public diplomacy as derived from political decisions. NATO works in committees composed of member states since all decisions are taken by consensus. NATO's Committee on Public Diplomacy acts as an advisory body to the Council in areas of communication, public engagement, and media.[28] Strong public diplomacy campaigns, led by individual countries and supported by the NATO's Public Diplomacy Division, have brought new experiences and expanded its role in managing its public diplomacy programs.[29]

The attacks of September 11, 2001 were an important turning point in the already changing state of international security problems and international politics in general. This incident not only brought Al-Qaeda to the forefront of the international agenda but also made Afghanistan a central theater in the fight against terrorism. This process also coincided with attempts by NATO to adjust and adapt itself to the new circumstances and challenges of the post-Cold War era.[30] The Alliance increased its

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28   "NATO's Support to Ukraine", *NATO*, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/ pdf_2016_07/20160627_1607-factsheet-nato-ukraine-support-eng.pdf, (Date of Accession: 18.03.2021), p. 3.
29 Martin Butora-Zora Butorova, "Slovakia and the World: Democracy and Discontent in Slovakia", *Institute for Public Affairs*, Bratislava 1998, p. 179.
30   Haldun Yalçınkaya-Dilaver Arıkan Açar, "NATO Peacekeeping in Afghanistan: Expanding the Role to Counterinsurgency or Limiting It to Security Assistance", *Defence Against Terrorism Review*, 2(2), 2009**,** p. 59.

Erhan UZUN

media activities with the lessons learned by the ISAF mission, such as establishing NATO TV Channel, creating an internal team of experienced video-journalists who could embed with ISAF troops and providing first-hand reporting from Afghanistan and bolstering Public Affairs/Public Diplomacy teams.

As StratCom has taken on a more prominent role within the Alliance, social media also has become part of NATO's information activities. The emergence of new technologies and a plurality of voices together with an ever-changing security environment led to the build-up of NATO's StratCom so that today it is firmly embedded within political consultations, military activities, and communication efforts. Every era brings new challenges to which NATO responds by taking corresponding political decisions that require proactive and transparent communications.[31]

Because of the complexity of information activities, NATO started to develop its StratCom concept in 2009 when it defined StratCom as "a coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communication activities and capabilities in support of Alliance policies, operations, and activities in order to advance NATO's aims." The concept is designed to ensure that audiences receive clear, accurate, and relevant information regarding actions and that interpretation of the Alliance's messages is not left solely to NATO's adversaries or other audiences.[32] According to the 2010 Military Concept (2010), NATO StratCom aims to ensure that audiences receive "truthful, accurate and timely communication that will allow them to understand and assess the Alliance's actions and intentions."[33]

Erhan UZUN

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31 "Supreme Allied Commander Transformation and Supreme Allied Commander Europe", *NATO*, Frame Work for Future Alliance Operations, 2015, p. 57.

32 "NATO Strategic Communication Policy", *NATO*, https://publicintelligence.net/nato-stratcom-policy/, (Date of Accession: 15.03.2021).

33 "Military Concept for NATO Strategic Communications", *Startcomcoe*, https://www.stratcomcoe.org/article-centres-expert-antti-sillanpaa-strategic-communications-and-need-societal-narratives, (Date of Accession: 16.03.2021).

As Cornish underlined, "NATO's formal adoption of a StratCom policy is a bold and progressive move, especially in light of the fact that some nations still struggle to define and codify how communications, statecraft, and other elements of state power should coalesce."[34] It is worth noting that StratCom is aligned with NATO's Comprehensive Approach, which was developed in April 2009 at the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit.[35]

StratCom activities and capabilities include five disciplines: public diplomacy, public affairs, military public affairs, PO, and IO.[36] Departments in the Alliance structure that will handle its StratCom concept were clearly defined although it should cover more than that. However, the process defining how it will work became unclear because of the principles and complexity of these structures and activities. The component parts that comprise NATO StratCom, public affairs (political and military), public diplomacy, IO, and PO are each laden with debate and confusion as to what they are and how they should be used.[37] As Tatham and Page emphasize, the NATO StratCom concept is not without flaws. These imperfections permeate all elements of StratCom within the organization and also affect individual member nations, which have yet to adopt or define the concept.[38]

The purpose of NATO StratCom is to facilitate the coordination among communication functions throughout all levels, both horizontally and vertically among related disciplines and synchronize them with maneuver operations in order to ensure clear, credible, and timely messaging and actions aligned with NATO's goals. To ensure consistency and credibility

Erhan UZUN

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34 Paul Cornish et al., "Strategic Communications and National Strategy: A Chatham House Report", *Chatham House*, London 2011, p. 8.

35 "Strasbourg/Kehl Summit Declaration", *NATO*, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_52837. htm?mode=pressrelease, (Date of Accession: 14.03.2021).

36 Philip Seib, "The Power of Soft Power NATO's Public Diplomacy Division in Digital World", *Communication Leadership Blog*, https://communicationleadership.usc.edu/news/we-nato-philip-seib-and-the-power-of-soft-power/, (Date of Accession: 19.03.2021).

37 Cornish et al., *op. cit.,* p. 9.

38 Tatham-Le Page, *op. cit,* p. 5.

among themes and messages, NATO StratCom will provide oversight and facilitate interaction and mutual awareness among the various communication functions. Proper integration of all communication functions should be implemented at all levels of policy, planning, and execution to ensure accurate communications throughout any and all operations.[39]

Communication, especially in the context of StratCom, refers to all the words and actions that are perceived and interpreted by audiences. Therefore StratCom is not limited to media activities for the military and for the Alliance. It includes a wide of activities such as speeches by commanders, the deployment of military units, military exercises, and even weapons or uniforms used by armed forces personnel. All of these activities should be harmonized from a single center to convey the right and consistent message to the target audience. However, it is worth noting that "the concept of StratCom, which is based on continuously and transparently and accurately informing the relevant public, and Operation Deception and Counter-Intelligence (HRK) efforts, which are a military operation technique, conflict with each other."[40]

NATO defines the aim of StratCom as sharing the action-discourse packages that are developed by effectively and continuously combining traditional communications with its kinetic capabilities and in line with its strategic goals.[41] For example, NATO's most basic institutional discourse is used as a multinational and democratic alliance that aims to effectively counter any threat to international peace and security on all occasions

Erhan UZUN

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39 "NATO Strategic Communications Handbook", *NATO*, https://www.lymec.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/TT-140221-NATO-STRATEGIC-COMMUNICATIONS-HANDBOOK-DRAFT-FOR-USE-2015-BI.pdf, (Date of Accession: 14.03.2021), p. 1.

40 Anais Reding, "NATO's Strategic Communication Concept and Its Relevance for France", *RAND Corporation*, Santa Monica 2010, p. 20.

41 NATO, *loc. cit.*

and platforms.[42] With this discourse, NATO accepts democracy as a value and recognizes that it has a global responsibility to share its messages with the relevant public. Its basic message is that, as a multinational defense organization, it is ready for any threat that may arise, whether from nation-state and non-state actors.

The Alliance also inaugurated a NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga based on the Strasbourg/Kehl Summit Declaration in 2009 to coordinate StratCom activities among members. The Center aims to bring together military, academic, business and governmental knowledge. It is a norm of our information age for security sector agencies to maintain their websites, their own media and profiles on social networks.

NATO'S STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES DURING UKRAINE CRISIS IN 2014

The 2014 Ukrainian crisis has been described as one of the biggest threats against the territorial integrity of Europe since the end of the Cold War. The overthrow of the Ukrainian government by Western-backed street protests produced a harsh reaction from Russia, which invaded and then illegally annexed Crimea and created unrest in eastern Ukraine. Russia's unusual military tactics, called hybrid warfare by Western states, were based on disguise, deception, denial and ambiguity, and forced the Alliance to develop and deploy measures to counter this novel Russian threat.

Valery Gerasimov, chief of the Russian General Staff, laid out basis of Russia's hybrid warfare activities.[43] He held that successful

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42 "NATO Concept for Strategic Communication", *NATO*, https://www.stratcomcoe.org/about-strategic-communications, (Date of Accesion: 14.03.2021).

43 Riana Teifukova-Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "Russian Hybrid War: From Theory to Practic", *Uluslararası Kriz ve Siyaset Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 1(2), 2017, p. 34

implementation of non-military operations was key to the success of next-generation warfare.[44] According to Chekinov and Bogdanov, the first (or opening) phase of next-generation warfare starts with an extremely extensive, months-long coordinated non-military campaign against the target state, including diplomatic, ideological, psychological, and IW aspects. The second (or closing) phase would see the attacker's conventional ground forces entering the target state in order to isolate and destroy the remaining points of resistance.[45] The main difference between this new warfare and the traditional kind is that the first part is more important than the use of force and is based on IO and PO, which are the main components of StratCom. Finally, in information warfare there are no rear areas. According to the Chief of the Russian General Staff, Valeriy Gerasimov, a key feature of modern warfare is simultaneous effects to the entire depth of enemy territory in all physical media and throughout the information domain.[46]

Russia's hybrid warfare activities also included a lot of IW activities. Rasmussen, for example, described the Russian StratCom campaign in Ukraine as "is the sum of military operations, secret operations and intensive disinformation activities that are calculated and implemented in order to wear down the new government of Ukraine and to sustain the Russian influence in Eastern Ukraine." [47]

The Russian IW was not limited to official statements and its own people, but expanded beyond that in a multidimensional and

Erhan UZUN

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44 Janis Berzins, "Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Defense Policy", *The Journal of Military Operations,* 3(4), 2014, p. 4.

45 Sergey G. Chekinov-Sergey A. Bogdanov, "The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War", *Military Thought,* 4, 2013, p. 12.

46 Valery Vasilyevich Gerasimov, "The Role of the General Staff in the Organization of the Country's Defense in Accordance with the New Statue on the General Staff", *Journal of the Academy of Military Science*, 1, 2014, p. 14.

47 Mark Landler-Michael Gordon, "NATO Chief Warns of Duplicity by Putin on Ukraine", *The New York Times,* http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/09/world/europe/nato-chief-warns-of-duplicity-by-putin-on-ukraine.html?_r=1, (Date of Accession: 14.03.2021).

multifaceted way. During this period, Russian radio, television, and internet media made broadcasts in both Russian and English, and targeted international audiences as well as Russian-speaking ones. Russia's annual communication expenditures during the crisis reached up to 300 million euros.[48] According to Stephen Komarnyckyj, components of the Russian IW were not limited to state media. It also covered a wide network of independent-looking websites, political organizations, politicians, businessmen, and companies that have been influenced by journalists, writers, and researchers who are defending Russian views, public relations companies and paid internet commentators.[49] Russia has become successful at doing this, especially among Russians and Russian-speaking people in the region. Russians, who strongly approved of President Putin during the crisis, gave him a popularity rating of more than 80 percent.[50]

Russian tactics included the implementation of continuous IW and PO. Secret activities were carried out to destabilize the country by provoking the popular masses. Another tactic was the placement of a large military force on the border to deter effective measures against the rebels and provide assistance to these groups by violating the border in the name of humanitarian aid.[51]

In the Western world, the emergence of different voices and views are aimed at least to create question marks. This method is called "plausible

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48 Mikelis Berzins, "JBANC Report on Russian Propaganda Efforts", *Estonian World Review*, https://www.eesti.ca/jbanc-report-on-russian-propaganda-efforts/article42927, (Date of Accession: 13.03.2021).

49 Stephen Komarnyckyj, "Putin's Propaganda Machine and How to Smash It", *Euromaidan Press*, http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/07/26/putins-propaganda-machine-and-how-to-smash-it/, (Date of Accession: 13.03.2021).

50 Maciej Bartkowski, *Nonviolent Civilian Defense to Counter Russian Hybrid Warfare,* The Johns Hopkins University Center for Advanced Governmental Studies, Washington D.C. 2015, p. 8; Freedman Lawrence, "Ukraine and the Art of Limited War", *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy,* 56(6), 2015, p. 23.

51 Douglas Mastriano, "Defeating Putin's Strategy of Ambiguity", *War on the Rocks,* http://warontherocks.com/2014/11/defeating-putins-strategy-of-ambiguity/, (Date of Accession: 13.03.2021).

deniability."[52] Russian sources have argued that the crisis in Ukraine is a completely internal conflict, with arms shipments made by private individuals or groups and armed local militias staffed by former army personnel. Thus, Russia aimed to prevent NATO from acting as a whole by creating cracks in Western public opinion.

Russian military activities in Ukraine have become a wake-up call for the Alliance, as stated by Rassmussen.[53] The 2014 Ukraine crisis became a turning point for the development of Alliance StratCom activities. Russian hybrid warfare tactics that were based on ambiguity, denial, and disguise revealed the deficiencies of the Alliance in the arena of effective IW. NATO failed to effectively "explain to a wider public that Russia's aim is to break the transatlantic bonds between Europe and the US and undermine Europe's democratic institutions by supporting populist, anti-European Union and anti-NATO movements."[54]

It also became a warning call for the development of StratCom activities in the Alliance as NATO officials figured out that it needed a coherent, solid, and effective reaction against the Russian threat. Therefore, StratCom activities in the Alliance have been accelerated in several directions since the beginning of the crisis.

First, the Alliance articulated the requirement and importance of StratCom on every occasion. During the Wales Summit in 2014, NATO leaders said that "they will ensure that NATO is able to effectively address the specific challenges posed by hybrid warfare threats, where a wide

Erhan UZUN

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52 Michael Kofman, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Other Dark Arts", *War on The Rocks,* https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/russian-hybrid-warfare-and-other-dark-arts/, (Date of Accession: 12.03.2021); Maciej Bartkowski**,** *Nonviolent Civilian Defense to Counter Russian Hybrid Warfare*, Johns Hopkins University Center for Advanced Governmental Studies, 2015, p. 23.

53 Karen de Young, "Russia's Moves in Ukraine Are Wake-up Call, NATO's Rasmussen Says in Speech", *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/russias-moves-in-ukraine-are-wake-up-call-natos-rasmussen-says-in-speech/2014/03/19/80560d7c-af88-11e3-9627-c65021d6d572_story.html, (Date of Accession: 11.03.2021).

54 Judy Dempsey, "Eastern Europe's Yawning Gap", *Carnegie Europe*, http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/73566?lang-en., (Date of Accession: 18.03.2021).

Erhan UZUN

range of overt and covert military, paramilitary, and civilian measures are employed in a highly integrated design.[55] It is essential that the Alliance possess the necessary tools and procedures required to deter and respond effectively to hybrid warfare threats, and the capabilities to reinforce national forces. This includes enhancing StratCom, developing exercise scenarios in light of hybrid threats, and strengthening coordination between NATO and other organizations, in line with relevant decisions taken, with a view to improving information sharing, political consultations, and staff-to-staff coordination."[56] Thus StratCom has emerged one of the most important tools to deter future Russian hybrid warfare activity. During the Wales Summit in 2014, leaders said that "they will ensure that NATO is able to effectively address the specific challenges posed by hybrid warfare threats" and, enhancing StratCom's role as one of the most important ways to do that.[57]

During the Warsaw Summit in 2016, leaders stated that the Alliance has improved its StratCom capabilities. (Warsaw Declaration, 2016) The declaration of the Brussels Summit in 2018 stated that "Allies concerned will continue to take steps to ensure sustained leadership focus and institutional excellence for the nuclear deterrence mission, coherence between conventional and nuclear components of NATO's deterrence and defense posture, and effective strategic communications"[58]

NATO officials underlined the need to "continue to rebut Russian propaganda: not by engaging in tit-for-tat, but by deconstructing propaganda, debunking Moscow's false historical narrative, by exposing the reality of Russia's actions, and by restating the international rules it is

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55   Mehmet Seyfettin Erol-Şafak Oğuz, "Karma Savaş Teorisi ve Rusya-Ukrayna Savaşı", *Türk Dünyası İncelemeleri Dergisi*, 18(2), 2018, p. 402.

56   "Wales Summit Declaration", *NATO*, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm, (Date of Accession: 14.03.2021).

57   *Ibid.*

58   "Brussels Summit Declaration", *NATO*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm?selectedLocale=uk, (Date of Accession: 18.03.2021).

breaking, to tell a compelling story about who we are, what we do, and why we do it. And we must stand united in our actions, because actions will always speak louder than words."[59] Thus Russian hybrid warfare tactics led the Alliance to accelerate the development of an effective StratCom concept that will compete against Russia.

StratCom has been regarded as one of the important tools to assure Ukraine against Russian threat. The Alliance enhanced Ukraine's capabilities by advising and funding Ukrainian activities in public diplomacy, media relations, and StratCom, thereby helping improve Ukraine's capacity to counter propaganda. Since 2014, NATO has supported the Ukraine Crisis Media Centre and the *Kyiv Post* newspaper on factual reporting from Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. NATO has also trained government officials and civil society activists in communications. An advisor on StratCom has been provided by Lithuania for the NATO Information and Documentation Centre in Kyiv. In September 2015 a major milestone was reached when the NATO-Ukraine StratCom Partnership Roadmap was signed by the Secretary of the Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council and the NATO Secretary General. A NATO-Ukraine Action Plan on StratCom is being implemented.[60]

Secondly, the Alliance consistently criticized Russia's denial that it was performing military activities and took steps to ensure the future territorial integrity of Ukraine. NATO has adopted a firm position in full support of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders. Stoltenberg consistently stated that "NATO does not accept Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea" and called on Russia to return control of the peninsula to Ukraine.[61]

Erhan UZUN

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59   "Meeting the Strategic Communications Challenge", NATO, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_117556.htm?selectedLocale=en, (Date of Accession: 18.03.2021).
60   "NATO's Support to Ukraine", *NATO*, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_07/20160627_1607-factsheet-nato-ukraine-support-eng.pdf, (Date of Accession: 18.03.2021), p. 3.
61   "Speech", *NATO*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_170450.htm?selectedLocale=en, (Date of Accession: 21.03.2021).

The Russia-Ukraine crisis also resulted in the structural- military changes and capability-building process that NATO had neglected for a long time because it was focused on non-military issues such as partnerships or cooperative security. Thus with the crisis, the "alliance has refocused on military measures."[62] The transformation from partnership to competition has forced NATO to reassure the people of the member states that the Alliance is able to mount an effective defense, and deter Russia from further moves that could threaten the territorial integrity of the alliance.

The Wales Summit became a turning point for the new NATO. Leaders endorsed the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), which included establishment of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, establishment of logistic facilities in eastern Europe, and re-shaping the structure of the military forces. The summit defined the main objective of RAP as the Alliance's readiness to respond quickly and decisively to new threats. RAP is expected to ensure that NATO remains a strong, ready, and vigorous alliance capable of dealing with all current and future threats.[63] The new structure of the Alliance, especially the establishment of VJTF and Logistic centers in Eastern Europe, aimed to underline the Alliance's policy of deterrence against Russian activities.

NATO's Public Diplomacy Division used its entire toolbox of people-to-people engagement, press engagement, and digital presence to reach out to its citizens. A new approach to communications through a British government communications model of OASIS campaigns was adopted in early 2017. The campaign is defined as a planned sequence of communications and interactions that leads to a defined, measurable outcome by identifying clear measurable objectives, target audiences,

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62 De Young, *loc. cit.*

63 "Readiness Action Plan (RAP)", *NATO,* https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm, (Date of Accession: 08.03.2021).

Erhan UZUN

strategy, and implementation followed by evaluation.[64] The first campaign—#WEARENATO—launched on May 23, 2017 aims to improve understanding of the organization and its values among citizens of member countries. The Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, Ambassador Tacan Ildem, commented on this enhanced communication effort for PR Weekly: "Our continued success depends on our citizens" understanding the essential role that NATO plays in our security, on which our prosperity is based. We will remain fully transparent and proactive in explaining our essential work to the outside world." [65]

NATO acknowledges that it cannot fight disinformation alone. It needs partners in this endeavor, including individual member states, active grass-root activists, non-governmental organizations, and other international organizations such as, for example, the European Union. Cooperation in the area of hybrid warfare and strategic communications between NATO and the EU was reinforced by the adoption of a series of measures in December 2016 for joint cooperation following the NATO Summit in Warsaw. The independent NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence in Riga, Latvia acts as a training and analytical hub for the Alliance on wide-ranging topics on strategic communication, disinformation, and propaganda.

NATO also joined the European Center of Excellence on Countering Hybrid Warfare that opened in 2017 in Helsinki, Finland. NATO provides assistance to partner countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova that are particularly affected by Russian hybrid warfare and disinformation. It provides platforms that facilitate practical exchanges of

Erhan UZUN

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64   "Guide to Campaign Planning: OASIS", *UK Government Communication Service*, https://3x7ip91ron4ju9ehf2unqrm1-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Guide-to-Campaign-Planning-OASIS-Framework.pdf, (Date of Accession: 20.03.2021).
65 Tacan Ildem, "NATO Launches We Are NATO Campaign with MHP and Agenda", *PR Week,* https://www.prweek.com/article/1435828/watch-nato-launches-wearenato-campaign-mhp-agenda, (Date of Accession: 07.03.2021).

information and best practices in countering Russian propaganda such as the Hybrid Warfare Platform project between NATO and Ukraine, the yearly NATO Georgia Public Diplomacy Forum, and press tours by journalists at NATO events. NATO, through its offices in Ukraine and Georgia, is actively assisting local authorities in establishing their own StratCom governmental systems.[66]

CONCLUSION

Strategic management of the communications system in NATO aims to achieve the full support of its mission and objectives by member states and aspiring members, and support the goals of the Alliance. Effective communication will make it easier to deal with the security challenges of the 21st century and help set up an efficient and well-functioning model for the organization of political and security structures in the country. Also, effective communication among members and clients will enable the consistent development, achievement, and establishment of national strategic and operational facilities in accordance with the Alliance's needs.

NATO's StratCom is a starting point for creating a positive image of the organization compatible with its internal structure, mission, and vision. In terms of daily developments and changes of political-security concepts around the world, it is important for NATO to be presented and experienced by the public as an organization of high integrity, and as one with unified and coordinated policy and working assignments. Setting up an efficient StratCom framework is crucial for NATO. It is especially important for the Alliance to create a unified approach in its communication process among member states and partner countries within the organization and to the public.

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66 "Warsaw Summit Communique", *NATO*, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169. htm?selectedLocale=en, (Date of Accession: 18.03.2021).

The basic principle of StratCom is the expression of the narrative in a coherent, consistent, and solid way. Implementation of this basic principle is not always easy for international organizations such as NATO because members do not always agree on politics. The Alliance, however, has partly succeeded in standing against Russian political and military activities in Ukraine.

The need for an effective StratCom has been one of the most important lessons learned by the Alliance during and after the 2014 Ukrainian crisis. The development of the StratCom concept, which was neglected for some time, is important proof that the Alliance has been working to enhance its StratCom capabilities. Thus, StratCom is expected to be a crucial part of future NATO missions and activities.

Erhan UZUN

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