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**THE CASE OF AFGHANISTAN IN NATO'S STRATEGIC
COMMUNICATION CONCEPT IN COMBATING TERRORISM**

**Terörizmle Mücadelede NATO'nun Stratejik İletişim
Konsepti ve Afganistan Örneği**

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Abstract

StratCom is a comparatively new term that has become almost a buzzword in many areas, including the military. It has no agreed definition, but is usually associated with winning people's hearts and minds. The human factor is very important in strategic communication, as it is vital to understand, and to interact, engage, and communicate with, the public. StratCom is the synchronization of all communication and information-related attempts directed at the target audience in order to form, strengthen or maintain an idea or attitude that is in the interest of the operation or implemented policy.

This paper analyses StratCom efforts of the NATO-led ISAF forces, which have been in combat in Afghanistan since 2003. It argues that StratCom has played a crucial role in achieving success for the Alliance and coalition forces in Afghanistan because to effectively combat terrorism, modern warfare requires a comprehensive approach rather than solely military power.

Key Words: NATO, Strategic Communication, ISAF, Afghanistan, Terrorism.

Öz

Stratejik iletişim nispeten yeni bir terim olup askeri çevreler dahil bir çok alanda neredeyse bir moda sözcük haline gelmiştir. Üzerinde anlaşılan bir tanımı yoktur ancak genellikle insanların kalplerini ve zihinlerini kazanmakla ilişkilendirilir. Halk arasında mevcut savaşların ve operasyonları yapıldığı bilincine dayanır ve bu nedenle insan faktörü oldukça önemlidir. Dolayısıyla halkı anlamak,

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etkileşim kurmak, kaynaşmak ve onlarla iletişim kurmak gerekir. Stratejik iletişim, yürütülen operasyonun veya uygulanan politikanın çıkarına yönelik bir görüş ve tutum oluşturmak, güçlendirmek veya onu korumak için hedef kitleye yönelik tüm iletişim ve bilgi ile ilgili çabaların senkronizasyonudur.

Bu çerçevede, bu makale 2003 yılından bu yana Afganistan'da savaşan NATO liderliğindeki ISAF güçlerinin stratejik iletişim çabalarını analiz etmektedir. Ayrıca bu makale stratejik iletişimin, İttifak'ın ve koalisyon güçlerinin Afganistan'daki başarısı için hayati bir rol oynadığını savunmaktadır çünkü modern savaş, terörizmle etkin bir şekilde mücadele etmek için tek askeri güç yerine kapsamlı bir yaklaşım gerektirir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: NATO, Stratejik İletişim, ISAF, Afganistan, Terörizm.

Introduction

Terrorism aims to weaken its targeted elements in a psychological sense by breaking their will and determination to fight rather than physically neutralizing them as an asymmetrical method of warfare. (Hammes, 2015: p.189) Therefore, terrorist organizations generally aim at a perceptual political gain rather than a military success with their terrorist acts. Full understanding of this strategic logic underlying terrorist acts is highly important in planning anti-terrorism strategies and determining their priorities.

States with a pure security approach to combating terrorism mainly prefer to resort to hard power and use of massive military forces to neutralize their targets. Politicians and officials, in addition to some scholars in these states, tend to deny the need to tackle the historical, social, cultural, economic and ideological problems that lead to terrorism. Thus, an environment can be created in which combating terrorism turns into a mere fight against terrorists, by transferring responsibility solely to law enforcement or armed forces in these states. (Güler, 2015: p.11)

Although terrorist organizations try to act as politically rational actors, they can sometimes resort to actions that go against their political goals. This situation brings into question whether terrorists are rational actors or not. Therefore, researchers often have to question the motivations underlying terrorism. (Abrahms, 2008: p.78) In much research, observations and theories have emerged that the motivation underlying terrorism stems from the strong emotional and psychosocial ties, group dynamics, and sense of belonging that members have established with each other. Therefore, understanding the group dynamics of organizations and the nature of psychosocial ties between group members also possess great importance in determining anti-terrorism measures.

History clearly highlighted that terrorism cannot be defeated solely by military power. They also stress that military and judicial methods sometimes carry the risk of completely neglecting other dimensions that might lead terrorist organizations

to strengthen their armed wing and increase their violent actions. Thus the balanced use of military, political, legal, social, psychological, cultural, economic, historical and ideological assets play a crucial role in effectively combating terrorism.

In recent years, StratCom has become an important component of effective combat against terrorism. Military organizations, either national or international, have increased efforts to establish official StratCom organizations and policies for successful combat against terrorism.

The Strategic Communication Concept

The word "strategic" primarily defines the level of principles, decisions, plans or policies and has been regarded mainly as an official term. However, as Durand pointed out, along with institutions implementing national policies, they also develop strategies to achieve their goals. (Durand, 2006: p.35) Thus today, the term strategy is no longer limited to the military / national context and has become a policy tool for all kinds of institutions.

The words *strategy* and *communication* have been combined to express the point at which management strategy and communication intersect. When the word *strategic* is used in the context of communication, it refers to a management function that covers and combines different communication practices performed by institutions. (Hallahan et al, 2007: p.3.) The beginning of communication as a strategic management function dates back to the 1960s. (Grunig, 2006: p.151) In the following years, the concept of communication within institutions has gained importance in the context of strategic management. Today, most institutions from all sectors accept StratCom as a special corporate function.

Argenti, Howell and Beck defined StratCom as communication tailored to its overall strategy to improve the company's strategic position. (Argenti, Howell and Back, 2005: p.83) In the first issue of the *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, StratCom was defined in its most general form as an organization's use of communication to fulfill its mission. This definition stands out as the most accepted definition in the literature. The definitions of StratCom relate communication to the general strategy, goals, or mission of the institution, rather than to goals such as reputation, which institutions can achieve by using different communication functions and by good relations with the public. This approach does not exclude the different goals adopted by other communication disciplines. Instead, it argues that these goals are aligned with the overall mission and objectives of the institution.

StratCom sometimes has been regarded as part of the deception that, since Sun Tzu, has been inherent in warfare strategy. (Dulek and Campbell, 2015: p.122) However, this situation is not limited to the military mentality. Hallahan states that this origin of the word *strategy* has brought the concept to be viewed as negative in

the management literature, with a negative connotation in the context of manipulating the environment. The relationship of communication with negative perceptions such as propaganda and manipulation is well known. Therefore, employing a military concept that has a negative connotation together with communication related to activities that are perceived negatively can strengthen the negative meaning of both concepts. When practices keep pace with this negativity, the resulting scenario is considered as the dark side of StratCom. But no communication discipline, including propaganda, is inherently good or bad. As highlighted by Lasswell (1928: p.264), propaganda is neither more nor less immoral than a pump lever. It is the people who use it who make communication activities negative.

StratCom is not a brand-new research area independent from other communication disciplines. To achieve their goals, institutions employ various communication disciplines whose goals and methods are similar. The word *strategic*, which defines communication, aims to reveal these similarities between different communication disciplines that institutions use to achieve their goals. (Fredriksson and Pallas, 2016: p.153) Today's communication environment requires these communication disciplines to be organized around the goals and mission of the institution. (Hallahan et al, 2007: p.6) Thus, StratCom is considered an umbrella concept under which are combined communication disciplines with different purposes, such as public relations, organizational communication, marketing communication, and corporate communication. (Holtzhausen and Zerfass, 2015: p.3)

It should be noted that while StratCom unites other communication disciplines, it also takes on some of their problems. The biggest of these problems is the definition of StratCom (Nothaft, 2016: p.70) because there has not been any unique definition that is accepted by scholars. (Paul, 2011: p.18) Sandhu describes the problem as "StratCom management still struggling with its own identity." (Sandhu, 2009: p.72) The fact that StratCom is a new and immature discipline, combined with the definition problem, brings with it the use of the concept synonymously with different communication disciplines.

Both academic and communication professionals can use StratCom and public relations as alternatives to each other. (Sison, 2013: p.227) In referring to purposeful communication, researchers such as Tench, Verhoeven and Zerfass may deliberately choose to use concepts such as communication management and public relations synonymously with StratCom. (Tench, Verhoeven and Zerfass. 2009: p.147)

The confusion concerning concepts largely disappears when one considers StratCom to be an umbrella concept that unites the communication functions of the institution under one heading and harmonizes them with the institution's objectives. It has become a crucial part of military operations in the post-Cold War era, in which military operations have also heavily included non-military operations.

Implementation of the Strat Com Concept in Combating Terrorism

Terrorism and acts of terror have proliferated in the past decade to become one of the most crucial threats against states in the post-Cold War era, making combat against terrorism top priority for many states, including Turkey. Terrorists are embracing new opportunities to spread the psychological impact of terrorism around the world, provoke anger, and recruit supporters and recruits through various sorts of media. Today, terrorism includes not only violence, but also theater, with emphasis on script preparation, sets, props, role-playing, minute-by-minute stage management, and flashy YouTube videos. (Weimann and von Knop, 2008: p.883)

Counterterrorism communication includes various forms of interaction that focus on reducing the attractiveness of the violent extremist ideology and disrupting the pathways to radicalization, with the ultimate goal of reducing support for terrorist violence. (Schmid, 2018: p.13) It has emerged as an important tool in effective combat against terrorism, adding nuance to the traditional or kinetic approach for arresting and killing terrorists. Alongside arrest, these tactics include physically constraining their ability to kill, and to hit and attack targets. The mixed approaches also aim to limit terrorists' access to traditional mass media, reduce and censor news of terrorist acts and perpetrators, and minimize terrorists' media manipulation capacity and impact. (Weimann and von Knop, 2008: p.884)

StratCom ensures the synchronization of information, ideas, actions, discourses and images of all elements and abilities in order to harmonize the perceptions of the target audience with political goals. StratCom is not just a form of communication but it is a mindset that directs communication. It is a philosophy that ensures the harmony of all civil and military elements that can produce a message with its action, discourse and images. (Güler, 2015: p.273) In the struggle against terrorism, the concept of StratCom, puts using force and planning in secondary place in the struggle involving military measures.

Today, achieving decisive victory against asymmetric threats such as terrorism through military methods is seen as a very difficult goal to achieve. The fact that terrorist organizations do not have a clear physical center of gravity or conflict lines, certainly not like conventional armies do, makes it very hard to neutralize them by military methods. For this reason, a multi-faceted strategy has emerged that aims to break the motivation, political determination, and will of terrorist organizations to continue their armed propaganda.

StratCom activities in combating terrorism should be configured according to the terrorist organizations' determination and will to fight. In other words, StratCom activities should draw upon all military and non-military power elements in order to break the motivation to fight. The prominent approach here is to see all StratCom implementations that can be used in combating terrorism as an integral

whole along with security operations. StratCom focuses all military and civilian activities in order to create cognitive and behavioral change in key audiences, especially terrorist organizations.

The biggest challenge in managing the StratCom concept in combating terrorism lies in clarifying the StratCom activities of terrorists or their supporters. Today, “the CNN effect” has ceded place to “the Twitter effect.” If the information distributed by terrorists via social media is not monitored by security forces, this information will be monitored by others and wrong answers may be given, which may cause undesirable behavioral changes in the target audience. (Başeren, 2009: p.8) As stated by Mark Laity, Chief of StratCom at SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe), terrorism is neither more nor less a complete form of StratCom that works to create fear in people's brains; he argues that the 9/11 attacks were a method of StratCom. He also states that videoing a suicide attack on an Afghan chieftain from three different angles and sharing it on YouTube on the same day is absolutely a StratCom tactic, and that StratCom should be at the center of every operation. (Başeren, 2009: p.3)

When terrorists carry out their actions, their goal is to terrorize people, through mass media as a theater stage on which they perform their activities. At the center of their activities are disciplines such as propaganda, perception management, and psychological operations that contain information operation. The main difference is that military organizations explain their purpose after they start their operations, while terrorists plan their StratCom first and then support it through actions.

Past experience has clearly shown that fighting terrorism only with hard power does not succeed. StratCom should not be a mean of expressing legal issues. Both the terrorist and the terrorist's supporters should be neutralized, and the views and beliefs that direct them to support and tolerate the acts of terrorism should be fought, with StratCom forming the focus of this struggle. Accordingly, when StratCom is implemented, all military and civilian elements should work harmoniously and effectively, to create positive effects on the target audience in the desired direction. (Güler, 2015: 264)

First of all, the StratCom to be used in the combat against terrorism should be determined, and a suitable road map should be drawn that does not make any compromise with the terrorist. The scope of the message to be conveyed to states, to target audiences in the national or international public, and to terrorist organizations, should be determined separately, and the most appropriate channel should be recommended to accomplish the desired effects. (Güler, 2015: 265) For effective combat against terrorism, the operation should start after StratCom activities have begun; and supporters of terrorists or terror organizations must definitely be included as targets of StratCom activities, with the most appropriate communication channels determined for each target audience.

NATO, beginning mainly after the September 11 attacks, was one of the first international military organizations to develop an effective StratCom policy against terrorism. At the NATO Prague Summit in 2002, the Alliance agreed on a Military Concept for Defense Against Terrorism. The Bucharest NATO Summit (2008) and the Strasbourg/Kehl NATO Summit (2009) further developed and refined NATO's approach to combating terrorism. At the Bucharest Summit, StratCom was identified as a critical element of NATO's combat against terrorism activities. The policy guidelines envision StratCom as a contribution to developing a common understanding of NATO's role in combating terrorism, as part of a wider international effort.

Additionally, the US government established the Strategic Counter-Terrorism Communication Center as one of several tools that the State Department can use to better fight terrorist groups in the war of ideas. In particular, its mission was to identify al-Qaeda members, confront them, and weaken their communications. The Strategic Counter Terrorism Communication Center was divided into three departments: intelligence and analysis, plans and operations, and Digital Outreach teams in order to achieve its goals. The Center played an important role in the fight against DAESH, especially in disrupting the terrorist group's ability to recruit foreign fighters, or in countering DAESH propaganda (Katz, 2015) via several campaigns. (U.S. Congress House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2012)

Strategic Communication in Afghanistan

In response to the attacks on September 11, 2001, the US led a coalition of states in Afghanistan to remove the Taliban from power. After forming a new Afghan government, the international military presence in Afghanistan was divided. America's Operation Enduring Freedom actively hunted terrorists across the country, while ISAF protected the capital, Kabul, to create a safe space for the Afghan government and international actors to operate. ISAF was a British-led coalition and operated under the mandate of the UN Security Council.

After becoming fully operational on 12 January 2002, ISAF passed under NATO command in 2003. Being the first out-of-area deployment on this scale, ISAF received a new mandate in October 2003, based on UNSCR 1510, which gradually expanded its area of responsibility to all of Afghanistan. NATO's primary objective in Afghanistan has been "to enable the Afghan authorities to provide effective security across the country and ensure that the country can never again be a safe haven for terrorists". (NATO, June 2021)

At the Summit Meeting of the NATO Heads of State and Government in Istanbul on 28 June 2004, NATO announced that it decided to expand the ISAF, including adding several more Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT). It was clearly emphasized that "contributing to peace and stability in Afghanistan had been NATO's key priority and the methodology to expand the mission throughout Af-

ghanistan through establishment of additional PRTs”. (NATO, June 2004) This became one of the most important developments to closely reach out to the Afghan people. NATO took over the command of all PRTs in 2006. Within these operations are included the IO (information operations) and liaison with local and Afghan authorities. Its main objective is “winning over the population” by demonstrable resources such as organizing assemblies and solving problems that affect the daily lives of the locals through surveys, while regularly monitoring public support of the actions performed by the contingents.

It was only then – three years after taking over ISAF in 2003 – that NATO realized it had to increase its communication efforts. Public attention began shifting from Iraq to Afghanistan where NATO was increasingly involved in heavy fighting with the Taliban in the south and the east of the country. Suddenly, governments were announcing a growing number of casualties, and parts of the public began wondering whether NATO would be able to succeed in Afghanistan. This made governments realize that public diplomacy is a critical instrument to sustain public and parliamentary support for operations there. (Babst, 2008: p.4) It is worth to note that Turkey has become part of ISAF mission with massive contribution.

StratCom activities had been mainly carried out by the US Military at the beginning of the mission, however, from mid-2006 on, the importance of univocality in communication and policy with other states was realized, especially concerning disagreement on the extension of ISAF in Afghanistan. With the completion of ISAF stage III in August and stage IV in October of that year, NATO took over the leading role in Afghanistan. There was an important division between Europeans and the US in public support for the mission. Europeans stated they were ready to support reconstruction and stabilization, but in states such as Italy, Spain, and Germany there was little public support for any involvement in combat actions. A skeptical public opinion in several states was reflected in the large number of national caveats and political division over the nature of the mission. (Dimitriu, 2012: p.202)

While a number of countries talked about a counterinsurgency, other countries did not employ this term to describe the mission, or it was deliberately avoided in favor of talk about a “post-conflict reconstruction mission.” Moreover, between the different countries there were very different ideas about how the operation should be executed. NATO had the unenviable task of molding a single strategy out of all these diverse views and communicating this to an international public. It was not obvious what the contribution of the various NATO countries should be, and when it became clear in the spring of 2006 that the Taliban’s strength had actually increased over the course of the years and that the troops were now regularly being engaged in combat, critical voices from the European public grew ever louder. These developments led the then Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General

James Jones, to decide that StratCom tasks should be embedded in Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), NATO's highest military organ. (ACO Directive Number 95-2, April 2012)

The initiative was taken over at NATO's political headquarters in Brussels, where the Public Diplomacy Division quickly added StratCom to its list of main tasks. Shortly thereafter, the first StratCom directives were published. The document "Enhancing NATO's StratCom" appeared on October 31, 2007, followed a year later by a StratCom directive from SHAPE that emphasized support by the home front. In an unpublished NATO report from May 2007, it was acknowledged that strategic success in Afghanistan depended on the political will of the participating countries. Above all, according to this document, the understanding by the international public of the importance of the mission was vital for its success. The most important conclusion was that NATO must develop a consistent narrative and that all operations and actions had to conform to that narrative. (ACO Directive Number 95-2, April 2012)

In 2007 the then Secretary-General Scheffer still had critical words for NATO's communication activities: "When it comes to video, we are frankly in the Stone Age. NATO has no ability to gather video from the field to show people what is happening. We are also barely on the field when it comes to the web." (Scheffer, 2007) Since then NATO has become active on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and YouTube, has its own website and television station, and is working on applications for iPhone. Videos and images of NATO operations are declassified and made openly available to the public in order to counter the Taliban's propaganda.

By the end of 2007 the US Ministry of Defense had written a plan for the implementation of StratCom in Afghanistan, in which as many as twelve different target audiences were identified. This was followed by the ISAF Theatre StratCom Strategy in 2008. It was argued that a coherent strategy and the coordination of Public Affairs, PsyOps, Information Operations and Key Leader Engagement were needed in order to gain the local population's support and confidence in the Afghan government, the retention of international support and the undermining of support for the insurgency. The NATO Allied Joint Force Command in Brunssum, responsible for the coordination of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, implemented StratCom within the organization by setting up the Information and Influence Branch on September 1st, 2008. Despite all the initiatives and guidelines, actual implementation of those initiatives followed only fitfully. Thus, despite the new guidelines, there was hardly any coordination in Afghanistan between the personnel of Public Affairs and units charged with implementing the influence activities, such as PsyOps.

In particular, there were concerns in the Public Affairs organization that discontinuing the strict separation between influencing foreign target groups and

providing information in their own country would lead to loss of integrity and credibility. Secondly, although master narratives of the ISAF mission were disseminated within the Public Affairs organization, these had only limited impact at the lower levels. Not only were personnel at Task Force level in Public Affairs getting these narratives from NATO, they also had to contend with the national interests of various political parties at home, each with their own agenda. Moreover, the narratives were only disseminated among the personnel of Public Affairs, where they served as lines of communication and guidelines for dealing with the media; the ISAF narrative never reached the troops on the ground and was never used in planning and execution of operations at the lower levels.

The arrival of General Stanley McChrystal as Commander of ISAF in the summer of 2009 provided the needed impetus to implement StratCom in Afghanistan. General McChrystal's principles concerning counterinsurgency and a population-centric approach were not new; in fact he was elaborating on the existing ideas of his predecessors. His initial assessment on 30 August 2009 was a foretaste of the policy he would pursue: "ISAF is not adequately executing the basics of counterinsurgency warfare," he wrote, "the concepts are not new. However implemented aggressively, they will be revolutionary to our effectiveness." (McChrystal, 2009) General McChrystal regarded StratCom as "a vital contribution to the overall effort." Besides the primary target group, the Afghan people, wrote McChrystal, public opinion in the participant countries, as well as international opinion, was crucial for the success of the mission.

The 2009 Strasbourg–Kehl NATO Summit also showed hints of pessimism about the Afghanistan campaign. The summit declaration addressed insecurity, persistent corruption, and the uneven provision of good governance. NATO clearly identified Afghanistan as its "key priority" (NATO, 2008) and established a direct link between the stability and security of Afghanistan and the surrounding region and its members' security. The ever-more-complex insurgency necessitates a comprehensive, well-organized and well-implemented NATO strategy towards Afghanistan. In this context, NATO defines its guiding principles in its approach towards Afghanistan as: long-term commitment, support for the Afghan leadership, a comprehensive approach that brings together civil and military approaches, and regional engagement. (NATO, 2009)

The ISAF mission, and NATO's reasoning for being involved in Afghanistan, is explained in the Strategic Concept as: "Instability or conflict beyond NATO borders can directly threaten Alliance security, including by fostering extremism, terrorism, and trans-national illegal activities such as trafficking in arms, narcotics and people." With regards to conventional capabilities, the strategic concept notes that NATO will maintain the ability to sustain concurrent major joint operations and several smaller operations, "including at a strategic distance, mobile and deployable

conventional forces to carry out both our Article V responsibilities and the Alliance's expeditionary operations." (NATO, November 2010: p.4-5) With regard to specific outgrowths from the Afghanistan mission, the strategic concept notes that NATO must further its doctrine and capabilities for counterinsurgency, stabilization, and reconstruction operations, all of which lie at the heart of ISAF.

ISAF aims at assisting the Afghan people in building a secure and democratic nation. It provides help to the Afghan government in security sector reform by training, mentoring, and supporting the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police by means of the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan. NATO also conducts reconstruction and development activities in the country. In 2011, ISAF began handing responsibility for primary security over to the Afghan government.

The Chicago Summit in 2012 described NATO's plans for troop withdrawal as irreversible. NATO entered a predominant support function phase as of mid-2013, when all parts of Afghanistan started to transition to ANSF responsibility. The withdrawal from Afghanistan has been paralleled by the establishment of an "Enduring Partnership" between NATO and the Afghan government, ensuring a proper transition phase based on both practical and political cooperation. (NATO, December 2009) At the same time, after 2014 ISAF began transforming into a predominantly classroom mission for the training and advising of Afghan security forces. (NATO, 2012) Since then, the Alliance focused on building up the security sectors and empowerment of the central government in preparation. NATO's exit strategy from Afghanistan is essentially a form of apprenticeship for the Afghan government, with a renewed focus on stabilization that extends the authority of the central government to strengthen the ANA and the ANP. NATO/ISAF's role includes not only training and advising but also patrolling along with Afghan forces in the field. This is supposed to reinforce the self-confidence and the fighting capability of Afghan forces, enabling them to operate independently over time. (O'Hanlon and Riedel, 2011: p.123) Finally, the Alliance has declared that NATO plans to exit Afghanistan by September 1, 2021, starting in May of that year.

NATO has paid the high price of domestic discontent for its long negligence of StratCom in Afghanistan. However, the Alliance has learned important lessons on how to manage a complex mission such as ISAF or the Resolute Support Mission. NATO's effort to reconcile different positions, namely between member states that emphasize reconstruction efforts and those that stress the military aspect, has shown some results – not least because national leaders have pushed for an equilibrium of civilian and military action. Especially on the domestic front, the Media Operations Centre, NATO TV, and the soon-to-be revamped website are clear signs that NATO has taken responsibility for selling the mission to domestic publics.

Communication with the Afghan public has, so far, lacked similar improvement. NATO has hardly been able to counter Taliban disinformation, and it has not

invested enough in people with adequate language skills who can reach out to the local civil society. Recent initiatives in which actors of different communication disciplines – media relations, public affairs, information operations, psychological operations, and others – work together in newly created StratCom cells point in the right direction and have triggered high-level discussion on StratCom. NATO efforts in this respect are still evolving, and although these activities came too late, it seems that NATO has learned its lesson.

Conclusion

Combat against terrorism has been an important task for many states, especially Turkey, for a long time. Military operations against terrorists have played a crucial role in achieving success, but not enough to completely destroy the threat, as lessons learned from past experiences have highlighted. Breaking the motivation, will, and determination for armed struggle, and the support of local, regional, and global public opinion have also proven important tasks, equal to military operations. Public Affairs or StratCom, in a wider perspective, has become the main tool for this purpose, and now considered crucial for the success of missions of international organizations, especially for NATO.

The Alliance had focused on StratCom activities in missions in Bosnia or Kosovo after it realized that these missions, which also included national building phases, required more than military operations. Combat against terrorism in Afghanistan also stimulated NATO to focus on StratCom activities in order to reach the members or supporters of terror organizations as well as garner public support in the country. In the subsequent phase in particular, the Alliance adopted population-centric counterinsurgency in a latest attempt to support a transition to a legitimate government.

The Alliance, as well as member states, have learned important lessons in Afghanistan on how to apply StratCom in the struggle against terrorism. The Alliance has now focused on the withdrawal process from Afghanistan while embarking on a massive StratCom competition with Russia concerning the crisis in Ukraine. Fighting on two different fronts may not sound easy for an organization of members holding different views, but such a two-front challenge would definitely enhance StratCom capabilities of the Alliance for future missions, which most likely will simultaneously include both conventional warfare and combat against terrorism.

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