

ON THE COVER

NATO and Strategic Communications

“The role of information in our security has never been more important than now and the challenges to NATO and its values are crystal clear. We have a big job, but in the end, we will succeed because our story—the NATO story—is better. We just need to tell it right. We are all communicators now.”

by MARK LAITY

Director, Communications Division
Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (HQ SHAPE)



The Story So Far

Allies at the 2009 NATO Summit recognised for the first time that Strategic Communications was an integral part of their efforts to achieve the Alliance's political and military objectives. General Curtis Scaparrotti, SACEUR (left), and General Petr Pavel, Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, during a joint press conference, 17 January 2018. Photo by NATO



“It will never happen—never.” The statement was made with a tone of certainty. I remember the conversation last year with clarity. The “it” was MC 0628, the draft NATO Military Policy on Strategic Communications (StratCom), centrepiece of an intense struggle on how NATO communicates in the Information Age. StratCom mattered, and the comment reflected the strong feelings as well as arguments over StratCom and what it meant to those in the communication community, but the officer was wrong. A few months later, 0628 went through, approved by the Nations, and at last NATO’s military finally have a policy fit for the challenges of a security environment in which information is a fundamental component.

The struggle for MC 0628

It was the culmination of a ten-year debate, where special interests, turf fights, principles, traditional thinking, old habits, and new challenges had clashed over what StratCom was, should be, how to do it—and, even, whether it should exist. Some even wanted the term

PREVIOUS PAGE: (from left) Mark Laity, the author; a press conference by the Commander of the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, General John Nicholson; NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg meeting the media outside the UN premises. Photos by NATO

dispensed with altogether. And, while the internal battle raged, externally, the information world kept changing and our adversaries kept moving forward.

NATO’S LEADERS FIRST recognised the importance of StratCom in their Summit Communiqué of 2009, when they stated, “Strategic Communications are an integral part of our efforts to achieve the Alliance’s po-

litical and military objectives.” But, what that meant in practice was another matter.

Therein lies the vital importance of MC 0628, as the Alliance has struggled to deal with *a tool* and *a concept*—information and influence—that may be as old as Sun Tzu, but one that has been supercharged and transformed by cultural change and revolutionary technology. Before 0628, our efforts have been too often improvised, or the product of unresolved conflicts between the communication disciplines. There has been no lack of effort, and at times success, but the basis for sustained progress within the military structure has not been there.

So often in NATO headquarters, the annual staff rotation has seen massive spikes or dips in effectiveness due to variations in training, knowledge or willingness to cooperate within the communication disciplines. Too often individuals decided to go their own way and felt free to do so, or were helpless in the face of senior staff “who knew better”.

If all this sounds somewhat over-dramatic, it is not. In the ten years I was Chief StratCom, I saw this time after time. Meanwhile, so much of our effort was distracted by internal debate and, yes, sometimes they got personal. Most of the time though those in StratCom positions wanted consistent, clear guidance and we could not easily give it to them. I must emphasise again, much good work was done by many good people, and also progress made in pushing StratCom forward. Nevertheless, the lack of a baseline document held us back. We were too often arguing over yesterday’s issues



Mark Laity, the author, speaking at the 2017 NATO Bi-SC Information and Communicators' Conference. Photo by Henry Plimack



instead of coping with today’s problems and preparing for tomorrow’s challenges.

In the end it was the Russian aggression in Ukraine that made the difference. In the 2014 Summit Communiqué, NATO’s leaders stated, “We will ensure that NATO is able to effectively address the specific challenges posed by hybrid warfare threats. This will also include enhancing Strategic Communications.” In the face of the Russia’s brutally effective use of Information Confrontation, the need was clear, resulting in the Military Committee tasking of 2015 that ultimately led to 2017’s approved document.

We now have the baseline document that we needed in 2014. When I wrote for *The Three Swords Magazine* in 2015, I noted we were still arguing too much about StratCom and my frustration at the distance we still had to go to get it right. This is not to forget or downplay the StratCom response of so many individuals within Allied Command Operations (ACO) and the wider NATO, which was magnificent, as people rose to the occasion and improvised. However, in the end what we got in 2017 we could have had in 2013, because neither the arguments (nor the protagonists) had essentially changed in ten years of debate.

But late or not, we now have the essential start point for the next stage of the StratCom evolution. We also have to acknowledge that a policy is only as good as the plans that it catalyses, and of course plans are only as good as the implementation they enable and that are successfully put into effect. However, I feel confident about the fundamental soundness of the MC 0628, not just because the thinking and principles behind it are sound, but it is also a product of experience—empiricism is the partner of theory.

That experience, and the parent of much of MC 0628’s contents, came from Afghanistan, where again an adversary exposed the inadequacies of our current information effort. Here again the dedication of our communication teams could not be faulted, but the results rarely matched the effort.

I was a part of all this with three Afghan tours between 2006 and 2010. It means I can criticise without accusations of hindsight or backseat driving precisely because I was a part of it—the successes, the failures, and the learning. It has been fairly common for critics and sometimes our commanders to complain the

Taliban were out-communicating us and although that wasn’t always so, sometimes it was.

It was my first Afghan tour, in 2006-7, that in many respects pointed the way, both in highlighting the problems and the solutions. The ARRC-led ISAF IX of 2006 understood the communication challenge, and sought to face up to it, but never fully achieved the outcomes their insight deserved. By the time I returned I knew we were not fit for the communication fight. Our structures divided not united, our policies, doctrines and processes tended to marginalise communications both within the disciplines and from the wider headquarters. Our training was woeful with, too often, good people thrown in to learn on the job, trying to pick up skills unrelated to the common experience of most military officers.

Concepts such as Strategic Narrative were little appreciated, our ability to understand cultures, and how to speak to them even less so. The requirement for Information Effects (the StratCom term was little used then) could vary wildly from being a belated afterthought to unrealistic expectations of quickly

influencing unpalatable effects on the ground—what some wearily called “sprinkling more information fairy dust”.

When I went to Kabul, I had been SHAPE’s Chief of Public Affairs, the first civilian to hold the post, but within a few months of my return, I was SHAPE’s Chief Strategic Communications, the first StratCom position anywhere in NATO. The circumstances of the post’s creation had been a little messy, and the job requirement was somewhat vague, but the timing was right, and the need for change was clear. And not just to me. I am proud to have played a part in advancing StratCom within NATO, but it was as part of a team. The ARRC left Afghanistan even more convinced of the value of StratCom, as did a succession of headquarters and individuals. They arrived in Afghanistan with the traditional approaches, and left with different attitudes and advocating reform. Existing policy gave little guidance, and often added quite a lot of confusion and contradiction to the movement for change, but

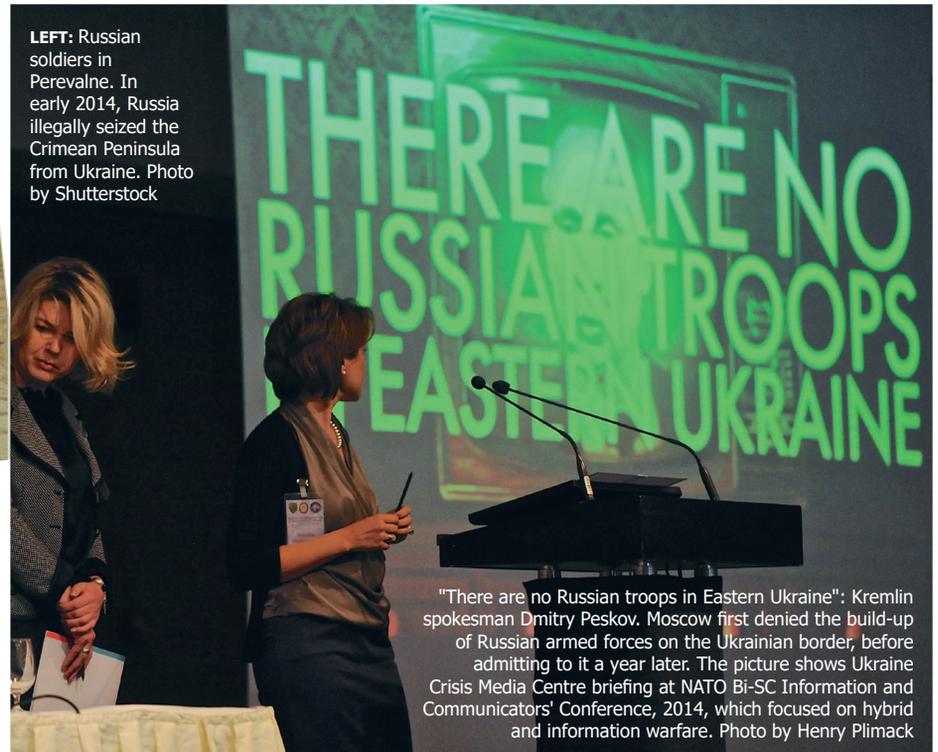


ISAF was one of the largest coalitions in history and is NATO’s most challenging mission to date. At its height, the force was more than 130,000 strong, with troops from 51 NATO and Partner Nations.





LEFT: Russian soldiers in Perevalne. In early 2014, Russia illegally seized the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine. Photo by Shutterstock



"There are no Russian troops in Eastern Ukraine": Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov. Moscow first denied the build-up of Russian armed forces on the Ukrainian border, before admitting to it a year later. The picture shows Ukraine Crisis Media Centre briefing at NATO Bi-SC Information and Communicators' Conference, 2014, which focused on hybrid and information warfare. Photo by Henry Plimack

in my new post at SHAPE, I was in a position to help encourage and shape reform.

In doing so, this movement for change produced its “heroes”, who helped lead the way, for instance, the Netherlands Lieutenant General Ton van Loon. Formerly Commander of Region Command South in Kandahar in 2007, he left persuaded of the centrality of StratCom, and when he became commander of 1 (German/Netherlands) Corps, he launched a systematic review of his Corps’ structure and the outcome was the creation in 2010 of a Communication and Engagement Division that in most respects prefigured the structures now required by MC 0628.

At more or less the same time, ISAF was also undergoing radical change. The crisis in ISAF’s fortunes in 2008-9 ultimately brought in General Stan McChrystal and amongst his changes was the creation of a Communication Directorate under a 2-star officer charged to “plan, coordinate, execute, and assess all Strategic Communication efforts, including Public Affairs, Information Operations and Psychological Operations throughout the Combined Joint Area of Operations”.

In effect then most of the key principles and features of MC 0628, including the most controversial elements such as structures, were already a strong trend at the operational level in 2010. But there was no such agreement at the strategic and political/military level. Most knew there was a problem, but there was no agreement about the solution. Indeed, notwithstanding the 2009 Summit Communiqué quoted above, within the communication community there were still those who still

challenged the very notion of StratCom, with one country’s department of defence even banning the term.

UNTIL 2014 WHEN, as outlined earlier, the Russian’s effective use of information warfare gave NATO the same shock at the political-military level as a decade earlier the Taliban had shocked ISAF at the operational level. Reality bites, and the debate after Russia’s aggression in Crimea and then Eastern Ukraine took on a very different tone.

It quickly became evident the Russians were using the information line of effort to disrupt, deceive, delay and dismay. It could be trolling; disinformation; information smoke-screens and lies about Spetsnaz, false narratives to scare, mislead or control, taking down or controlling cell net towers. What was also clear was that the Russian use of information was not some add-on or improvised effort, but a fully integrated part of their overall strategy. If we had needed evidence we were in a new world, we had it. Now we are learning to live with the consequences. MC 0628 is one piece—but only one piece, however essential—of the puzzle we now have to solve to ensure StratCom reaches its potential to help the Alliance.

The 21st century Information Age and security

To adapt the old saying, there is nothing new under the “Sun Tzu”, and it is both true and a cliché to say that the principles of war are enduring in their application. However, if the principles still apply, then the circumstances of their application do change, oftentimes to transformative effect. Thus, the bow and arrow, howitzers, and fighter-bombers are all forms of indirect fires, but of course, they were also all revolutionary technologies that changed the nature of warfare.

The same applies to information technology. I make no apologies for repeating a quote from Napoleon whose use of propaganda was masterful and is reputed to have said, “Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets.” How much more to “be feared” is the omnipresent smartphone?

The doyen of communication theorists, the Canadian Marshall McLuhan, is best known for predicting the nature of the media age when he said, “the medium is the message”, but more relevantly for this article, he said in 1970, “World War III is a guerrilla information war with no division between military and civilian participation.” He was thinking more





The Economist magazine featuring Vladimir Putin on cover and headline "A Tsar is Born", 28 October 2017. Photo by Hadrian, Shutterstock

too often that theoretical acknowledgement has been more lip service than real implementation. What we saw in Crimea in 2014 was such thinking being implemented, especially in the information environment. Thus, when the Russians inserted their Special Forces into Crimea, they disguised their entry with what Churchill might have called a "bodyguard of lies".

Putin himself played a full role stating in March 2014 those Spetsnaz were "local militia" before casually admitting to the lie a year later. They isolated Crimeans from outside information sources, while at the same scaring them with lies about the imminent arrival of Ukrainian fascists, cleverly playing upon old narratives of the Patriotic War.

The Russians saturated the internet with disinformation and the ultimate effect and intent was, in military terminology, to get inside our decision-making cycle so that by the time we really knew and agreed on what was happening, it was too late, and the Kremlin was in full control of Crimea. Of interest was that quite consciously the Russians wanted minimal violence in the takeover knowing that the more the violence, the more the West would react.

The same tactics were tried to initial effect in Eastern Ukraine, but the shock effect had worn off and the response of both other countries and Ukraine also showed that the information line of effort is not enough on its own if the other objective circumstances are not also sufficiently aligned. Critically they underestimated Ukraine, the same narratives and desires that had driven the EuroMaiden—itsself an in-

The aftermath of Russia's aggression in Ukraine not only accelerated the development of StratCom within NATO, it also belatedly focused attention on Russia's defence policies and thinking.

about Vietnam, but I would suggest the technology of the internet has brought such statements to maturity.

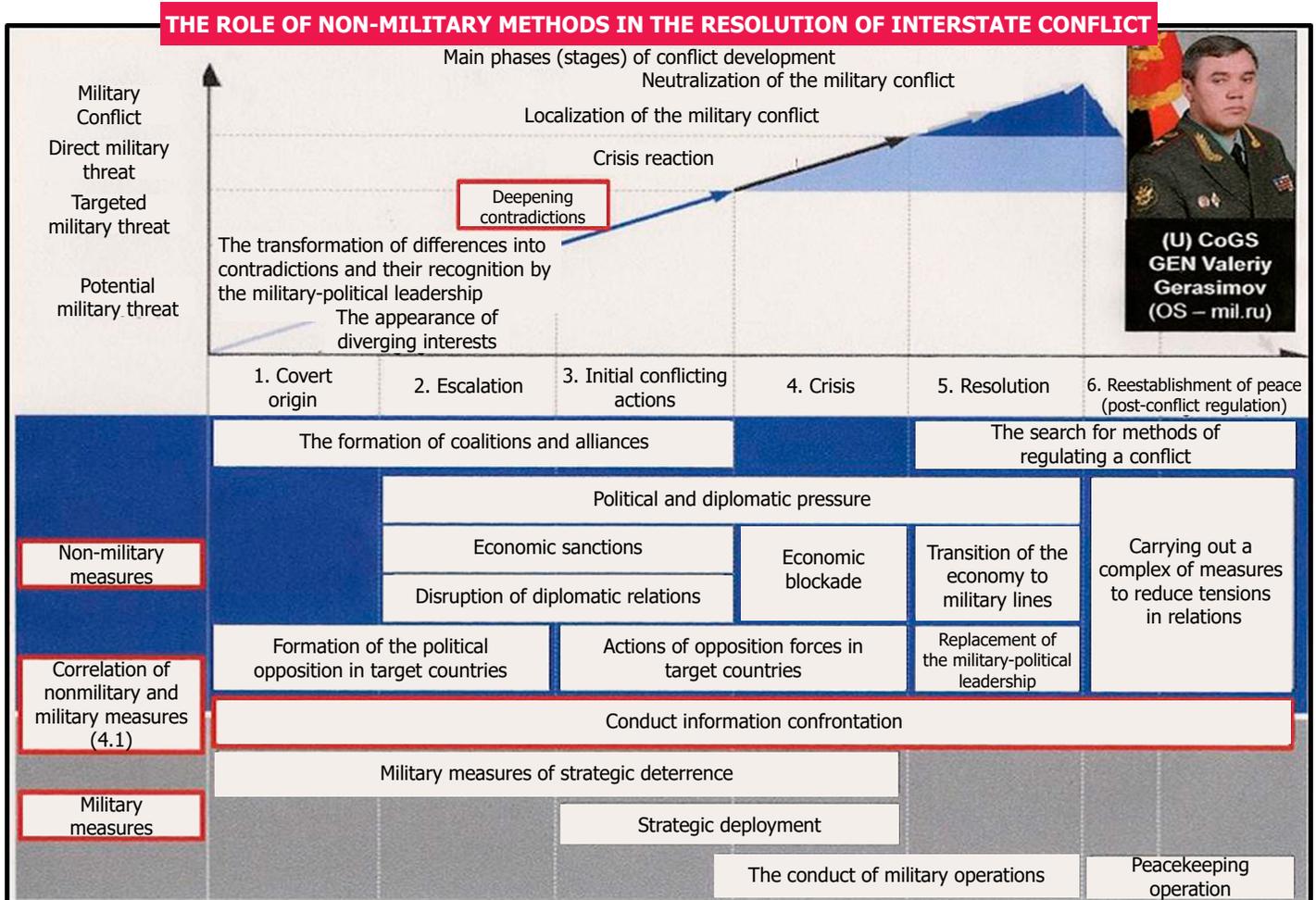
The traditional view of the Russian military is as stolid, unimaginative and just following orders, but this stereotype has always been something of a caricature that disguises some deep thinking about the art of war, especially at the operational and strategic level. I think this applies to their thinking about the nature of modern conflict, and for the purposes of this

article, their awareness of the information line of effort as integral to the overall strategy.

Of course, the Russians are not alone in recognising this, at least theoretically, and in the West most of us are familiar with DIME: Diplomatic; Information; Military; Economic, and PMESII: Political; Military; Economic; Social; Information; Infrastructure. However,

BELOW: Journalists of the state-owned "Russia Today" TV Channel. Photo by Goga Shutter, Shutterstock. General Gerasimov, Russia's Chief of the General Staff, wrote on modern warfare in 2013, "the new means of conducting military operations have appeared that cannot be considered purely military."





ABOVE: The Gerasimov slide, showing the six phases of conflict.

formation warfare battleground—produced an upsurge of determination and courage that allowed Ukrainians to improvise a response to the Russian-supported rebels in the East. Ultimately Russia, which had sought to minimise both the violence and its footprint in Crimea, had to use considerable violence using conventional Russian forces to freeze the conflict.

The aftermath of Russia’s aggression in Ukraine not only accelerated the development of StratCom within NATO, it also belatedly focused attention on Russia’s defence policies and thinking. What it showed was that we should have been less surprised than we were because what the Russians did they had been talking about for years.

Much of the public Western discussion has had as its starting point the so-called Gerasimov slide. General Gerasimov, the current Russian Chief of the General Staff, wrote an article in the *Military-Industrial Kurier* of February 2013 in which he stated among other things, “new means of conducting mili-

tary operations have appeared that cannot be considered purely military”. The article was illustrated with the now famous slide showing the six phases of conflict from covert beginnings to a victorious peace. For our purposes, of most interest is the box labelled Information Confrontation. It is the only box which covers all six phases of conflict and also straddles both non-military and military measures. In other words, it is omnipresent.

It would be a mistake to regard the much-debated article as laying out how the Russians planned to conduct what we call hybrid conflict. Rather it was looking ahead and providing an analysis of the trends for future warfare; in other words how warfare would be conducted by everyone, including us. But, if this is how future conflict will unfold then those implementing it will of course include Russia. The article is in many, but not all, respects something of a tick-box for what actually happened in Ukraine and is going on elsewhere.

The article’s content is also far from an

outlier, and is mirrored in multiple articles in other Russian journals, and also reflected in Russia’s 2014 military doctrine, which stated, “Characteristic features and specifics of current military conflicts are: a) integrated employment of military force and political, economic, informational or other non-military measures implemented with a wide use of the protest potential of the population and of special operations.” Again, the doctrine’s analysis of modern conflict is not specific to Russia, but does reflect to a large degree its actions in practice.

The pre-eminence of Information Confrontation in Russian thinking for future conflict was further highlighted by General Gerasimov in March 2017, when he stated, “The army operating concepts of the leading states postulate that achieving **information dominance is an indispensable pre-requisite of combat actions** (my highlighting). The means of mass media and social networks are used to perform the set tasks.”

Of course, Sun Tzu, highlighting that





STRATCOM PRINCIPLES

- All activity is founded on NATO's values.
- Activity is driven by Narrative, Policy and Strategy.
- Credibility is a vital asset and must be protected.
- Words and actions must be aligned.
- The Information Environment must be understood.
- Communication is a collective and integrated effort.
- Focused on achieving (a) desired effect(s) and outcome(s).
- Empowered communication at all levels.



PERCEPTION BECOMES REALITY: The "Mouth of Truth" (Bocca della Verità), is a marble mask in Rome, Italy, which is said to bite off the hand of anyone not telling the truth.



ABOVE: 2017 was the third anniversary of the illegal annexation of Crimea. Picture shows inauguration of the new premises of the NATO Representation to Ukraine by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, Ivanna Klympush Tsintsadze, 10 July 2017. **INSET:** Jens Stoltenberg presents certificates to the Ukrainian Team participating in the Invictus Games. The word "Invictus" is Latin for "unconquered" and embodies the fighting spirit of the servicemen and women who became wounded, injured or ill fulfilling their duties on the battlefield. (invictusgames.in.ua/en). Photos by NATO

means may change, but *principles* endure, has something relevant to say, noting, "Thus, it is that in war the victorious strategist only seeks battle after the victory has been won, whereas he who is destined to defeat first fights, and afterwards looks for victory."

Indeed, one of the current discussions in Russian defence debates is whether the effective use of non-military measures may not just make victory in conflict inevitable, but render actual fighting unnecessary to achieve your aims. Or, as good old Sun Tzu might put it, "... supreme excellence consists in breaking the enemy's resistance without fighting."

Looking at the history of the Soviet Union perhaps helps explain the way they are thinking about future conflict. Much of what we see now is using today's technology of the internet to update the Information Confrontation tactics of the Cold War. This included routine use of disinformation and deception, for instance, the notorious KGB Operation *Infektion* in the late nineteen eighties, which claimed the U.S. was responsible for the creation of HIV/AIDS as part of a biological

weapons programme gone wrong.

Such information activities were an intrinsic part of Soviet "Active Measures", which covered a range of activities from disinformation through subversion to political assassinations, political warfare, media manipulation, foreign election-rigging and "special actions" involving various degrees of violence. The aim of Active Measures included creating disruption and discord among NATO and its Allies. It was taught at the KGB's Andropov Institute near Moscow, one of whose graduates was, as a young KGB officer, President Putin.

Compared to television, radio and newspapers, social media and internet naturally enhance the features of Soviet-style Information Confrontation. For instance, it is easier to stay covert; the cost of information technology has plummeted enabling saturation tactics; it is possible to bypass intermediaries to go direct to your target audience; smartphones are omnipresent making information activities far more powerful, and in an era of distrust then disruptive narratives are far more potent.

Just as the Kremlin has updated its Cold

War playbook and drawn upon its lessons then, even accepting we are not in a new Cold War, NATO too can look back and potentially learn. Our first SACEUR, General Ike Eisenhower was a strong proponent of the power of information and the necessity to compete in this arena.

What has changed is that the Cold War was a clash of ideologies, between communism and liberal democracy, with their concurrent narratives. The modern Russia has no such positive-sounding narrative to offer, but is more the disruptor, seeking as the Soviet Union also did in the Cold War, to exploit the differences and discords within the West. It would be a mistake though not to understand that the conduct of Russia's Information Confrontation is in support of an overall grand strategy. It is also worth noting that Russia is not the only body that is exploiting the new information environment. China, typically taking the long view, approved in 2003 its "Three Warfares" (*san zhong zhanfa*), comprising Strategic Psychological Warfare, Media Warfare and Legal Warfare.



In a different league, and a direct enemy of NATO, are terrorists such as ISIS, who in practicing asymmetric warfare regard information as a critical tool. Their strength has been exploitation of social media and in particular their understanding of culture and narrative for their target audiences. They have also proved creative at times, for instance, when advancing upon Mosul, they used social media posts to create panic among Iraqi forces in the city.

Managing the new information environment

As outlined above, we face a formidable challenge to compete in this arena. There is no doubt, we in NATO, are now taking StratCom with a level of seriousness significantly greater than before. For instance, one major step forward was the creation of the StratCom Centre of Excellence in Latvia, variously as a centre of thinking, expertise, mentoring and promotion, while also further linking us to the wider communication community outside the military.

As noted in the first section, MC 0628 also gives us a clear roadmap, and importantly ends some of the internal disputes that distracted us from our external challenge. Along with that has come some growth in terms of people, training and budget.

But is it enough? If, as General Gerasimov posits, “information dominance is an indispensable pre-requisite of combat actions,” then the level of resources required, whether in training, organization and thinking, is significant. Having just declared Cyber as a domain of operations then arguably information should



Russia's over \$4 billion-focus on computer technology, the Skolkovo Innovation Centre, which is a high technology business area near Moscow, Russia. Some refer to it as Russia's Silicon Valley. Photo by Shutterstock

also be one. Interestingly Russia sees cyber more as a tool of the wider information effort.

In looking at rising to this challenge then certain principles stand out. One is to recognise that NATO and its military can only do so much. Success in the information battle is part of an overall effort of which the military provide some but not all of the tools. As the Gerasimov slide shows, there are many elements contributing to success in the current security environment, most of them outside the Alliance's control. They also requiring action well before the immediate run-up to actual fighting that is NATO's forte. The line between conflict and peace is very blurred. In this context then NATO must be an integral part of a wider team, partnering not just with NATO's Nations but institutions like the European Union (EU).

That net also needs to go wider still. One lesson of the last few years has been the effectiveness and impact of civil society. It is no exaggeration to say that at the height of their crisis it was groups like the *Ukraine Crisis Media Centre* and *StopFake* that brilliantly carried the main burden of Ukraine's communication effort. But we, with all our resources, have hugely benefitted from the independent efforts of groups like *Bellingcat* and the *Atlantic Council* as well as individual experts. Not only did they bring expertise they also brought credibility. Whether deserved or not, we live in an age of distrust of institutions and they are more trusted than we. We should also be aware that it is the very diversity of our societies that is one of our major strengths in terms of both values and quality. In a very real sense they are ambassadors for what we stand for and we need to work together.

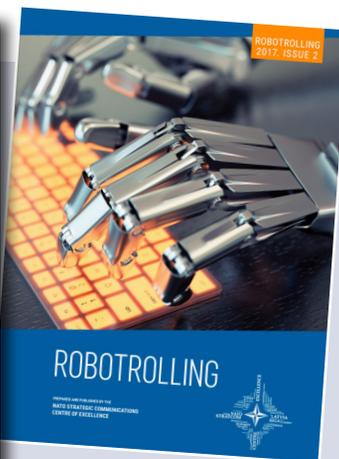
Those values are at the heart of successful StratCom, and indeed the key section of MC 0628 is the list of StratCom principles, and the first is, “All activity is founded on NATO's values.” This is no mere political statement because relying on our values as a start point produces a cascade of critical StratCom activity.

Those values for instance enable the generation of our narratives, and narratives are what drive both individuals and groups. As Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel prize winner for behavioural psychology and author of *Thinking Fast and Slow* stated, “No-one ever made a decision because of a number. They need a story.” Further, a narrative is an organizational scheme expressed in story form and stories are

DID YOU KNOW?

84%

Every two out of three Twitter accounts posting in Russian about NATO's operations are not real people but automated 'BOTS', responsible for 84% of all messages.



LEFT/ABOVE: NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, "Robotrolling 2017/2" can be downloaded at the following link: <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/robotrolling-20172>



StratCom success is based on gaining support for our story, not knocking down theirs or getting immersed in essentially tactical action.

often the basis for community identity as well as strategies and actions. Having values that resonate—speaking to the heart as well as the head—with audiences are also essential to the credibility that is needed to make others listen, engage and ultimately support. That support must then be sustained. That mutually supporting triangle of values, narrative and credibility is the basis for successful StratCom.

In the face of the trolling, disinformation and lies of our adversaries and rivals it is all too easy to get distracted from the basics, and to spend our time reacting. However, over-focusing on this by definition gives them the initiative. Further, while in the Cold War Russian disinformation operations were often elaborately planned, now they mostly rely on quantity not quality. As shown by the multiplicity of false stories put out by the Russians to hide their responsibility for the shooting down of the MH17 airliner, if you knock down one story another will quickly follow.

This is not to say we can ignore what our adversaries say, but to pick and choose what we respond to and always emphasise the need to take the initiative. In the end, StratCom success is based on gaining support for our story, not knocking down theirs or getting immersed in essentially tactical action.

DEVELOPING A NARRATIVE is no easy task and one that requires time and resources and too often the need is realised too late as we are deep into the crisis before such work is underway. This is a good area for contingency planning. Notably to develop a story requires an understanding of the audience and the information environment, and this has been one of our weaknesses. In many of our conflicts our grasp of culture, understanding of the audience and general awareness of the environment has been lacking, and we have paid the price in our inadequacies in gaining and maintaining support.



To learn more about NATO, please visit <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news.htm>

The use of big data (think Google©Analytics) promises much but effective Information Environment Analysis (IEA) is still somewhat elusive. This is a key area of current work. But, if the story is so central, then that narrative must be integrally linked to our strategy, which in turn must align words and actions to sustain the credibility that makes our audiences take notice. In helping create that Strategic Narrative, NATO has developed one very effective tool, the StratCom Framework. The Framework integrates communication and mission objectives and gives Direction and Guidance on the situation, objectives, themes, focus topics and coordination—a kind of StratCom mission command linking all levels.

This alignment of strategy, action and communication is central to achieving success. It is noticeable that for all the apparent randomness and outpouring of disinformation the Russian information effort is focused. For instance, they have different narratives for different countries, maintain their strategy of wedge-driving to create and exploit discord within Europe, and all this is done to support clear aims, including to especially influence their neighbours and critical areas such as the Middle East, while securing an information bastion within Russia. Sometimes where it appears the West is losing the StratCom struggle it is not tactics, techniques and procedures that are the problem, but

a lack of certainty about what we want or a lack of unity about our aims. Without a clear story or strategy, we are vulnerable and will find it hard to set, let alone achieve, desired communication effects and outcomes.

We have also found it hard to truly empower our people. If one thing is clear about our Information Age is that everyone is now a communicator and want to engage with their peer groups not listen to us. It means our best communicators are not formal spokespeople, but our soldiers, sailors and airmen and women who have a credibility more senior people do not. We need to use them—in the cacophony of modern communication we need lots of voices and to live with the fact sometimes they will say the wrong thing. Indeed, this reflects the central aim of StratCom, which is to create the mindset where we recognise we are all communicators in some form, whether planning or conducting operations, and knowing everything we do is sending messages, so we need to be conscious what they are and what we are trying to say.

The role of information in our security has never been more important than now and the challenges to NATO and its values are crystal clear. We have a big job, but in the end we will succeed because our story—the NATO story—is better. We just need to tell it right. We are all communicators now. ✦