

NATO's Strategic Communication in Combating Terrorism

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ABSTRACT

Responding to a crisis generated by large-scale emergencies caused by terrorism we should ask ourselves what are the population's perceptions of the terrorism, of the terrorism acts and of the defense against terrorism as it is defined, conceptualized and promoted by NATO. From NATO's perspective, this perception is trying to be organized and, shaped by employing a variety of instruments, mainly now under the Strategic Communication umbrella. What we have now is a NATO information strategy, which is communicating strategies (for different operations) rather than strategic communications on the defense against terrorism initiative as a whole. New organizational bodies were elevated in order to better coordinate the communication activities. So, we have now a full Media Operations Centre (MOC) at the PDD level and a "Master Narrative" for ISAF mission. We have also a video blog of the NATO Spokesman, a NATO TV channel (internet based), RSS and podcast...

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The War on Terrorism is not a war in the traditional sense, but a mixture of kinetic warfare and a war of and sometimes about ideas and ideals. Contemporary terrorism is a complex phenomenon involving a range of non-state actors linked in networked organizations. Those organizations (one of the best-known example is al-Qaeda) are operating as transnational networks within a galaxy of like-minded networks. All these entities pose security threats to nation states as well as to the collective regional/global security. Within the frame of our democratic way of life, we have had to pass from securing territory to securing values [1] of course with all the implications further developed. Frankly speaking, or coming down from this theoretical level to a more real life one, we have to deal with the fact that those mentioned values could mean institutions, educational processes and related practices, as well as a certain way of thinking and doing business (stressing the first idea either way). And this is to mention only a very small part of the implied issues of the securing values philosophy.

Almost all the analysis made by now on the defense and security field singled out the fact that in the future ethnic, religious, economic, social, and environmental strains will continue to cause instability and raise the potential for violence. Using the technologies available on the global market, different players masters already regional, national and probably worldwide (levels of) influence.

From 2001 to at least 2008, the war on terror has become a meta-narrative for a big number of national security related issues, whatever the country may be. Governments, media and independent players started to link sometimes very different themes in this generic and handy frame, because it is more logical and, finally, less expensive in term of resources spent to convey a new message. On the other hand, public opinion has started to understand and to operate with new terminologies and categories in order to deal with day-to-day challenges. However, this is a two way game to be played. In addition, the terrorist organizations took advantage of this meta-narrative construction.

The information revolution is changing the extent to which communication can reach audiences and eventually modify their information, attitudes and behaviors. This changing environment has implications for the media, for citizens and governments. Perhaps most importantly it reduces the ability of national governments to define events for their citizens. The consequence of a more transparent and public environment is to force governments to engage with the media and publics to tell their story. What the effects of this will be would vary from case to case (and from country to country) but it can only increase the interpenetration of war, politics/governance and the media.

Responding to a crises situation generated by large-scale emergencies caused by terrorism we should ask ourselves what are the population's perceptions of the terrorism, of the terrorism acts and of the defence against terrorism defined, conceptualized and promoted by NATO. From NATO's perspective, this perception shall be organized and shaped by employing a variety of instruments, some of them now under the Strategic Communication umbrella. Nevertheless, we have to ask ourselves if we do recognize the same narrative in the defence against terrorism. Therefore, we have a NATO information strategy, which, as I will underline later on, is merely communicating strategies (for different operations) than strategic communications on the defence against terrorism initiative as a hole. We've been also exposed to different national strategies designed to inform us about the danger of terrorist activities and the measures taken by our governments, and we have the mainstream media (international and national) with their perspective. Above all, we have our experiences in relating with terrorism – if we experienced in our countries terrorist attacks than we will have a certain understanding, which is slightly different from ones inexperienced in this kind of aggression on its intimate sense of security.

The expansion of the number of news outlets over the past ten or so years ensures that military action is accompanied by massive and continuous media coverage and commentaries, sometimes even driving the storytelling in a very bizarre way. Such an approach suggests that the impact of media developments on the conduct of military operations could be more serious than is normally suggested (at the political and academic field for sure) at least at the policy and strategic communication level. Moreover, if we are to discuss about communicating operations, all the military efforts shall be seen in a different perspective.

The public relies on the media to track events, thus creating a context for future actions and judgments, trusting them to provide a complete picture when that is not possible for different individuals or even communities. Media goals of speed and scooping other outlets are in direct conflict, at first sight, with public use, need for accuracy and balanced reporting. What we see is story shortening, simplification, and the use of attention grabbing techniques to draw and retain as much time as possible audience interest. In a day-to-day life, newspapers, radio, televisions and Internet based news providers do not necessarily tell the public what to think, but determine the relative importance of different issues, setting the agenda of issues and themes, and finally suggesting the public how to think about them, about their relative importance. So, the media does not tell the people what to think, just what to think about, and what details could be more important in defining a situation [2].

We are facing today highly developed technology and integrated communication strategies. But how to apply all these connective concepts to a military driven strategic communication campaign? For instance, in a social media environment, we have to act and react in a world without interruption, where the information needed to make an informed choice/decision is readily available. You cannot stop your public and ask for special attention to deliver your message. It simply does not work. We (as a military or as NATO) are not the only communicators, and for sure, not for granted the most trusted ones. So far, our way of doing businesses in this field was mainly trying to continuously exerting and consolidating control over the message (PSYOPS, IO, PR/ PA, Strat Comm). We are facing a huge fragmentation in traditional media channels, sometimes very difficult to be mapped – therefore, when they agree and amplify our messages it's wonderful, because we have a coherent chorus, or an "echo chamber". But when they didn't do this and remix, restate or republish their version we are facing the reality that things can get ugly very fast. I think we have to manage what it's known as the paradox between giving up (to some degree)

control (because, in this case, you cannot control conversation that aren't yours) and simultaneously gaining influence by becoming member in the communities that matters to us (or building communities). Mistrust and avoidance are predictable endpoints for messages and campaign methods that fail to respect the common understanding of the so call common place of the mass-communication practices in today's environments. What it's strange to me is the fact that we, as a huge and very bureaucratic organization (but with good records on transforming itself really fast) only started to adapt our means and messages to Web 2.0 "stuffs" (a lot of papers were published last year for instance). It's a first step, but we have been better start to discuss and ask (already) how to integrate the new coming Web 3.0 "stuffs" into our strategies and practices.

2.0 NATO'S DEFENSE AGAINST TERRORISM INITIATIVE AND ACTIONS

After the end of the cold war, as no nation-state was really threatening NATO countries, NATO's new objective dealt mainly with the spread of such key values as liberty, freedom and democracy. At the NATO Prague Summit in 2002, the Alliance agreed on the Military Concept for Defence Against Terrorism. The main elements of NATO's fight against terrorism are antiterrorist operations, military reform and strengthening capabilities, strengthening cooperation with NATO member, Partner and Dialogue countries, and working together with other international organizations such as the EU, the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The defence against terrorism became the corner stone of many of NATO activities, ranging from intelligence cooperation to civil emergency planning.

On 2nd of April 2004, the North Atlantic Council issued a Declaration on Terrorism which called for an enhanced set of counterterrorism measures: improved intelligence sharing between Allies (a better use of the NATO Terrorist Threat Intelligence Unit); enhanced response to national requests for NATO support (including through the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre); enhancing capabilities to defend against terrorist attacks; maintain the contribution of Operation Active Endeavour; enhance NATO's cooperation with Partners and the Mediterranean Dialogue countries, through the implementation of the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism. The Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism is the first issue-specific initiative for practical co-operation involving Allies and interested Partners.[3,4]

In 2004, at Istanbul Summit, NATO leaders reaffirmed their support for the defense against terrorism initiative, and in 2006 at the Riga Summit was endorsed the Comprehensive Political Guidance.[5,6] The document addressed NATO's Defence Against Terrorism initiatives and set out the priorities for Alliance capability issues, planning and intelligence. One of the requirements was to better adjust the NATO military and political planning procedures with a view to enhancing civil-military interface. NATO's policy of partnerships, dialogue, and cooperation will be constantly developed to foster strong relationships with countries of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), as well as with Contact Countries. Aside from the imperative, to improve the NATO-EU strategic partnership in order to avoid unnecessary duplication and achieve greater efficiency, a very important idea was stressed. The message is that the Alliance will continue to support the promotion of common values, reform, and dialogue among different peoples and cultures. These make perfect sense been derived strait from NATO's ethos. In this regard, was mentioned the "Alliance of Civilizations" initiative, launched by the UN Secretary General.[7] This sign of looking for "togetherness" and fully supporting UN initiatives in this field it's very important and, in my opinion, in the long run could be also very effective.

Bucharest NATO Summit (2008) and Strasbourg/Kehl NATO Summit (2009) further developed and refined the NATO approach on defence against terrorism.[8,9] At the Bucharest Summit, strategic communications was mentioned as one very important element of the NATO's defence against terrorism

activities. Although strategic communications was not (yet) defined as a key capability, its growing importance has been reiterated at the NATO Summit in 2009, because “Strategic communications are an integral part of our efforts to achieve the Alliance’s political and military objectives”. The efforts made to better integrate the NATO’s defence against terrorism approach into the international general efforts made under UN or other organizations initiatives were very clear. In this regard, the [10] and the NATO-EU Capability Group, were integrated as important pieces in the effort made for the full implementation of relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions (UNSCR), in particular UNSCR 1373, UNSCR 1540, as well as of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.[11]

2.1 NATO operations within the frame of defence against terrorism initiative

Under defence against terrorism “umbrella”, NATO conducted different operations. From October 2001 to May 2002, NATO deployed Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) to protect US homeland during the Operation Eagle Assist. In October 2001, the maritime Operation Active Endeavour started in the Mediterranean Sea to detect, deter, defend and protect against terrorist activity. Over the years, Operation Active Endeavour has evolved, both in mission requirements and in participants number, attracting Partner countries and becoming an information and intelligence-based operation. In August 2003, NATO took command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, considering that here is one of the key fronts in fight against terrorism. ISAF’s mandate has evolved progressively, as well as the missions and manning. Now ISAF’s total strength is approx 58,390 personnel, with 42 Troop Contributing Nations. NATO-lead peacekeeping forces in the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina- SFOR and Kosovo – KFOR) have conducted missions against terrorist groups linked to al-Qaida network. On request NATO provided security for major events: the Euro 2004 football Championships, the football World Cup in Germany in 2005, 2004 Athens Olympic and Paralympics Games, NATO and EU summits.

3.0 INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES IN THE DEFENSE AGAINST TERRORISM

Many of our strategies or national strategies for fighting/combating terrorism points out the fact that, in the long run, winning the War on Terror means winning the battle of ideas. On the other hand, in his oft-cited letter to Zarqawi in July 2005, Zawahiri explained that “we are in a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place in the battlefield of the media” and that the jihadi movement is “in a race for the hearts and minds of our Umma.” So, they have put a major emphasis on propaganda, or what the leadership generally refers to as the “media war”, and we as a domain of influence activities (name it Information Operations - INFO OPS, Psychological Operations/PSYOPS, Public Affairs/Public Relations (PA/PR), Public Diplomacy/PD, Cultural Diplomacy/CD and so on). [12]

In our way of doing businesses, in the military I mean, strategic communication it’s used as a tool for reaching some effects in order to support a certain policy. However, the military decision cycle it’s everything but media logic driven. Facing with new threats and challenges, nations developed national strategies for combating terrorism, and, subsequently, information associated strategies. Coalition developed also this kind of strategies. In fact, what we see now is a chorus composed of many voices trying to send one unified message. Is it possible to have a unified message?

In a coalition, in an operation (one might name NATO operation in Afghanistan) things would get a little bit more different. We will have a lead nation Strategic Communication Plan, an Information Strategy of nation B for instance, a communication Strategy of nation C, a NATO Information Strategy (because NATO is involved), a UN Information Strategy (if UN is involved) and, of course, an IO Information strategy (let’s say ICRC one). As we can see there are many, all of them trying to fit in the so call Coalition Information Strategy. Usually the Coalition member states succeed to agree on a common

strategy. Things get complicated at the national level. Here, public information is a national, not collective responsibility, which means that agreed upon master messages and themes may not reach all the domestic target audiences with regard to the main topics. For GWOT for example, or different operations under this umbrella, this may be quite challenging in trying to get a common understanding of the operation or common endeavor.

Nowadays it's common to say that information is power, and using the information in order to influence attitudes and behaviors of a desired target audience it's a must in contemporary military operations. To meet all these requirements, military has developed different structures, endorsed by policies, doctrines, tactics and procedures. We are talking about information operations (INFO OPS), psychological operations (PSYOPS) and public affairs (PA). In addition, now we are talking about strategic communication.

In almost all the definitions, PSYOPS is defined as planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups and individuals. Summarizing, it's about changing attitudes and behaviors by disseminating information.

Information operations in turn are defined as a military function to provide advice and coordination of military information activities in order to create desired effects on the will, understanding and capability of adversaries, potential adversaries and other approved parties in support of Alliance mission objectives (NATO definition). It's an "Integrating Strategy" to influence 'Will', 'Capability' and "Understanding" of key decision-makers&audiences. It is principally directed at adversary but not solely. The main focus is on the decision makers and decision making process, in order to influence the attitudes and change behaviours. The development of the NATO INFO OPS doctrine and after that, the evolution of this concept, was not at all very smooth. For instance, one study group found out, that between 1998 to 2005 as much as 20 current and evolving INFO OPS concepts, policies and doctrine documents, were used on this topic. I would argue that from 2005 on the dynamics were at least the same, if not more. We've had, for sure, a certain degree of commonalities and differences between the approaches to INFO OPS in NATO and nations. However, there is agreement among all of the reviewed documents that INFO OPS serve a coordinating or integrating function. Having said that, would make sense to find information operations as an important capability employed in the effects-based approach to operations.[13] In today's operational environment, the Combined Joint Psychological Operations Task Force (CJPOTF) and INFO OPS structures, together with the Joint Public Affairs Support Elements (JPASE) usually supports Joint Task Force commanders in dealing with the requirements of strategic communication.

Media Operations are activities developed to ensure timely, accurate and effective provision of Public Information (PI) and implementation of Public Relations (PR) policy within the operational environment, of course whilst maintaining Operational Security (OPSEC). Public Information is defined as information, which is released or published for the primary purpose of keeping the public fully informed, thereby gaining their understanding and support.[14] The main objective is to provide accurate and timely information in order to the public opinion to facilitate informed decisions.

Talking about influence operations, another term was used, in an attempt to better integrate all the major players in the information domain. The term was perception management, used mainly by the US military community. Perception management is defined as actions to convey and/or deny selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives and objective reasoning; and to intelligence systems and leaders at all levels to influence official estimates, ultimately resulting in foreign behaviors and official actions favorable to the originator's objectives. In various ways, perception management combines truth projection, operations security, cover, deception, and psychological operations.[15]

The public diplomacy was reevaluated and rejuvenated. Public Diplomacy (PD) is understood as the promotion of national interests through efforts to inform, engage, listen to and influence foreign publics.... PD seeks to communicate (directly) with foreign citizens worldwide with the aim of supporting the achievement of national objectives and building up a sustained support and understanding of the originators efforts within the audience. PD deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. More detailed, it encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy, the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries, the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another and the processes of inter-cultural communications. "Traditional public diplomacy has been about governments talking to global publics (G2P), and includes those efforts to inform, influence, and engage those publics in support of national objectives and foreign policies. More recently, public diplomacy involves the way in which both government and private individuals and groups influence directly and indirectly those public attitudes and opinions that bear directly on another government's foreign policy decisions (P2P)." [16]

The NATO understanding of Public diplomacy is the totality of measures and means to inform, communicate and cooperate with a broad range of target audiences world-wide, with the aim to raise the level of awareness and understanding about NATO, promoting its policies and activities, thereby fostering support for the Alliance and developing trust and confidence in it. [17]

We have so far the military perspective and the civilian one. Both of them shall be linked up under a more comprehensive approach, namely strategic communication concept. On the US perspective for instance, strategic communication is defined as „a variety of instruments used to understand global attitudes and cultures, engage in a dialog of ideas between people and institutions, advise policy makers, diplomats and military leaders on the public opinion implications of policy choices, and influence attitudes and behaviors through communications strategies".[18] There are some developments in this field in the US, in 2006, 2007 and 2008. So, in the proposed "Strategic Communications Act of 2008" (never approved or debated) strategic communications means engaging foreign audiences through coordinated and truthful communications programs that create, preserve, or strengthen conditions favourable to the advancement of the national interests of the United States.[19] As mentioned in those documents, a strategic communication strategy should clearly link national interests and objectives with themes and messages that will guide all strategies of influence developed by various governmental bodies.

The effects of strategic communication might include inform, persuade, influence, disseminate, legitimize and build attitudes, behaviors and so on. The effectiveness depend on the ability to communicate effectively and engaging with many different audiences, including adversaries, friends, coalition partners, and domestic audiences. The effect shall be measured in terms of shifts in behaviour and attitude. It will be indeed very difficult to accept to plan and after that, to conduct a campaign to change a certain attitude or behaviour of friend, coalition partners or domestic audiences. From a planner perspective it's almost a nightmare. It's very difficult to find a policy regulating this field. However, we don't have to forget that how one perceives and measures progress is central to formulating and implementing a strategy. The perception of progress has a major impact on establishing priorities and allocating resources. The parameters used to measure progress can also set the framework for measurement of failures.

One of the best examples of creating and experimenting in collaborative way new approaches is the Multinational Experiment (MNE) series. [20] The Multinational Experiment campaign began in 2001 to develop better ways to plan and conduct coalition operations. While the United States is the overall lead for the experiment, coalition partners lead in exploring focus areas and special areas of interest. Principal focus areas include: Strategic Interagency Multinational Planning (led by France); Cooperative Implementation Planning (led by the United Kingdom); Cooperative Implementation Management and Evaluation (led by the United States); Knowledge Development (led by Germany); Information Exchange Architecture and Technology (led by Sweden); Shared Information Framework and Technology (led by Finland); Coalition Information Strategy/Information Operations (led by Germany); Effects-Based

Approach to Multinational Operations Concept of Operations (led by NATO); Logistics (led by the United States). Apart of the advantages of working together in a collaborative manner, these projects succeed to initiate the paradigm shift from control to support in terms of the military's role in stability operations. MNE 6 (in-progress now) involves 16 nations and NATO's Allied Transformation Command (ACT). The goal is to improve coalition capabilities to counter actions of irregular adversaries and other non-state actors, focusing on synchronizing efforts and better assisting host nations, developing and implementing a shared information strategy, assessing campaign progress and success, and gaining shared situational understanding. I think that, in the line of ACO's understanding of strategic communications, this concept will find its place within the collaborative experimental design.

When INFO OPS and Public Affairs were very close to be integrated under the same umbrella, the results were at least debatable. The most discussed examples came from the US. In the US, since 2001, there have been two major incidents involving the blurring of the distinction between INFO OPS and Public Affairs. The first incident was the closure of the "Office of Strategic Influence" (OSI). OSI was a Department of Defense (DoD) initiative begun shortly after the 11 September 2001. The intent was to shape the perceptions of foreign audiences. Some reports pointed out the fact that OSI would even use disinformation to shape the target audiences' perceptions. Shortly after, the Pentagon closed the OSI in the midst of concern that disinformation from the OSI would eventually be picked up by US media outlets and then the disinformation would reach a US audience.[21] The second incident involving the blurring of lines between IO and PA started in 2005, when the *LA Times* published an article claiming that DoD contractors from the Lincoln Group were actually paying Iraqi newspapers to publish pre-written pro-US articles in their papers. In both incidents, the media was very critical because it claimed that those actions were damaging the perception that media was an impartial presenter of the news. Not to mention the potential violations of US laws by using the media to influence US audiences. [22] Following those incidents, in January 2005, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), issued a Professional Standards Advisory (PSA) that provided the following guidance: "...to reduce the confusion inherent in wartime communication, there must be a firewall separation between IO and PA and a mechanism based on disclosure, exposure and public discussion to reestablish a basis of truth and trust when situations of honesty, clarity and truthfulness have been breached. Coordination between PA and IO is essential to maintain the firewall". [23]

Sometimes commanders would use PA strictly to communicate to the national and international press and PSYOPS to communicate with local press within the respective theatre of operations. Thus, we will have a slightly different messaging, although we may recognize the same themes. Due to the development in the media landscape and the broad access to the information disseminated, soon the indigenous press will demand commanders treated them the same those commanders treated the international press

4.0 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN THE DEFENSE AGAINST TERRORISM

During our operations and deployments, we will always be watched by the world through mainstream media lens. Our efforts will be observed, commented upon and, most probably, selectively portrayed to and by the world audience through the media (old and new altogether). The perceptions created by our operations will result in changes to local or regional realities that may, in turn, affect our in progress missions. We know that information is a powerful component of battlespace shaping, because the perceptions that our actions create matters a lot.

One of the overused today's paradigm in strategic communication is to go for centralizing and more tightly controlling the message. This way, what was largely a decentralized field directed communication effort merged in a more centrally coordinated one, with message activities controlled by the "home" or "strategic office." What we see now is a huge effort put in disseminating (carefully) coordinated issue's

positions and talking points into a group of sympathetic media outlets with the aim of creating a so call “echo chamber” that could repeat the message through a large number of channels, for a long period. On the other hand, we have established a coherent framework for imposing message discipline on the upper government’s level, with different departments and agencies implementing the communication strategies. Usually we employ “interagency communication team” with members from the relevant bodies whose job is to “coordinate message points”. By doing this, would make sense in the planning phase and after that in the evaluation one to consider communicators, mediums and messages as independent components. If they are independent, than much easier could be optimized individually. Current control-oriented strategies attempt to eliminate potential interaction between messages. But suppose we accept the idea that messages will interact no matter what we do. Then we have to begin thinking about how this interaction might be managed to our advantage.

At the national level, a general national information strategy was framed to employ a military component (MEDIA OPS, CIMIC, PSYOPS, INFO OPS, DEFENSE DIPLOMACY) and a civilian one (Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs, Diplomatic Activity) in the fight against terrorism. All will work together in order to foster a synergetic effect on respective target audiences.

In an effort to cope with today challenges, NATO developed a new policy on Public Information, changing its name and concept to Public Affairs and trying to better integrate this functional area into the operations and operational planning process. NATO military PA is seen now as a function responsible to promote NATO’s military aims and objectives to audiences, in order to enhance awareness and understanding of military aspects of the Alliance. But unfortunately, the institutional memory on conducting public affairs (public information) in our countries but also in NATO, tells us that so far we’ve had more emphasis on media facilitation and a tendency to avoid the so call “advocacy”, which means interaction and influence (different from the inform effects requirements in the first paradigm). In the same time, new organizational bodies were elevated in order to better coordinate the communication activities. So, we have now a full Media Operations Centre (MOC) at the PDD level and a “Master Narrative” for ISAF mission. We have also a videoblog of the NATO Spokesman, a NATO TV channel (internet based), RSS and podcast.

It’s very difficult for the military training facilities to adequately portray the information environment, which would allow the commander to analyze and understand the information environment. How many commanders would have today a realistic approach in integrating the strategic communications to achieve success in such complex environment? For the commander, the capability to go from achieving information superiority (and dominate the information environment) to dominate the operational environment is paramount. Ones inability to visualize the information environment meant the impossibility to articulate priorities for shaping the overall operational environment through the information one.

So far, the military were trained to address the external communications activities in a very straight approach – the communication was mediated through some in place arrangement under different SOPs, based on well defined rules (see for instance the UK Green Book to mention only one type).[24] Therefore, there is a “safe distance” enough to buy some time to process the information and to react to the media queries applying the procedure. Strategic communications will probably change this. Media real-time realities will change our SOPs, policies and doctrines. We have seen already important developments in implementing the requirement to build up a real cultural competency of our military people, at least for the theatre of operations in which they will act. Within the strategic communications framework, however, we must address, in addition, the cultural competence of our militaries in relation to domestic audiences. Moreover, I expect this will fuse a spirited debate within our societies.

At the strategic level, strategic communications should be included in the myriad activities directed by the upper level of political-military command. From this level down, an effective execution of the plan will

require a high degree of coordination between all involved military, government (national ones??), IOs and NGOs. Nevertheless, we need to pay attention to a myriad of details. For instance, like it or not, the argument that democracy is un-Islamic because it places human-made law above divine law resonates across much of the Muslim world. In time, some of ours counter-arguments may gain more visibility, but they have yet to do so. Our governments would be better work to avoid creating the perception that they are trying to convert peoples into something they do not necessarily want to become... Discussing now about framing and narratives I sincerely believe we can do a better job in avoiding overemphasize religiously charged phrase (in this context) like “democracy” or “secularism.”

Let us take few moments to comment on NATO strategic communications initiatives in general, and to have a closer look on the defense against terrorism one. As a first comment, one could say that we have some initiatives aimed to obtain a better degree of integration and synchronization of the communications activities. At least at the INFO OPS, PSYOPS and PA level, we do have a lot of agreed upon in place arrangements, backed up by policies, doctrines and SOPs. From the military perspective, what was already defined, planned and used as an activity to support the commander in accomplishing its mission it's more or less synchronized. At different levels, all those functional areas would use different procedures and different tools to address their audiences. Of course, this field it's very dynamic, and the approaches, definitions, policies and doctrines changed every two or three years at least. We have to take into account national perspectives and susceptibilities on this, as well as the different levels of support given to the influence dimension in each NATO country due to financial, history or pure political reasons. Therefore, our first tool to synchronize those actions would be the operational planning process (OPP) itself, meaning a better integration into the OPP.

We see that important steps on implementing strategic communications requirements are in development now. I would have expected to find a coherent and robust NATO narrative on the defense against terrorism initiative. That means a clear identity, topics and issues, a community having or living on the same understanding of the actions taken so far by NATO. What we do have is a basket of slightly different messages being sent either in conjunction of NATO missions under this initiative or, in support of capabilities and policies requirements in development. Indeed, we have a pretty strong identity of ISAF and Active Endeavour as NATO missions, not necessarily as NATO mission under the defense against terrorism approach. At least for ISAF, from this perspective, Media Operations Centre and the NATO TV channel are doing an excellent job. However, I think it needs more than that. Because, all those many very important actions done so far by NATO in defense against terrorism would be better understood within a coherent narrative, delivered by NATO as it is. Now, we as a target audience, are trying to do the puzzle, putting all the pieces together. We may not have all the same result, and is likely to have different contexts to integrate the resulted narrative to be used in future message decoding actions. Not to mention about the dream to have a slightly common narrative used by NATO nationals when referring to those NATO missions as being an important part of NATO's engagement in the fight against terror.

Engaging, from the strategic communications perspective should not means only preaching on something. This meant for a couple of years within the military community when talking about influence activities. May be worthwhile to consider engaging also as interaction, as communication through building relations, by listening and speaking, delivering messages.

It seems that NATO's approach to strategic communications it's within the logic of the influence model only. It's almost mirroring some of the INFO OPS core concepts. I would say that in NATO, strategic communications is wearing combat butts, doing combat related missions and being planned as a combat mission. If we are going to enlarge this concept and to adapt it to nowadays realities, having in mind only the comprehensive approach (CA) and effects based approach (EBAO), as it is understood by many today, would be suitable to deal with all the challenges. For instance, within the effects based approach to operations the redefined definitions on effects (having in mind the fact that one category of effects is on the cognitive domain), end states, objectives and actions might require a very high degree of sophistication

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of the planning tools used to integrate strategic communications into the OPP. We will talk about measures of effectiveness for effects and measures of progress for actions. Not to mention that EBAO tries to synchronize all force capabilities.

How effective is NATO's strategic communication strategy in our defence against terrorism? At the national level (for every NATO member state), a general national information strategy was framed to employ a military component (MEDIA OPS/PA, CIMIC, PSYOPS, INFO OPS, DEFENSE DIPLOMACY) and a civilian one (Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs, Diplomatic Activity and so on). All should work together in order to foster a synergetic effect on respective target audiences. At least this is the plan. Let us see what was done at the NATO level. We do have some in place structures (a Strategic Communications Branch/Allied Command Operations, Information and Influence Branches at the Joint Force Command HQs, Media Operations Centre/Public Diplomacy Division at NATO HQ...). We have also new policies developed mentioning/defining strategic communications (MC 0422/3 on Information Operations, MC 0402/1 on Psychological Operations, MC 0475/1 on Public Affairs), but so far no official NATO definition of "strategic communications" has been agreed upon. Strategic communications was not identified as one of the essential capabilities needed to successfully implement this NATO Defence Against Terrorism initiative, although some initiatives were made: e.g. Action Plan on NATO's Strategic Communications (but focused mainly on ISAF mission) and some work on enhancing NATO's Strategic Communications. [25] In this document, NATO Strategic Communication definition is: in concert with other political and military actions, to advance NATO's aims and operations through the coordinated, appropriate use of Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs (PA), and Information Operations (LNFO OPS). We are keen to see the new NATO Strategic Concept, which will probably change something in this regard. We see a significant number of papers on strategic communications (mainly depicted as a three-pillar construction: Public Diplomacy, Information Operations and Public Affairs). Moreover, work was done on employing this concept on the strategic - usually understood as global, operational - regional and tactical - TAO level, and a "battle of narratives" (so we have Master Narratives for the topic NATO in Afghanistan).

At the NATO Strategic Command level, strategic communications is understood as having a central role in supporting ongoing operations and managing public perceptions. The idea behind is to gain and maintain the support for NATO missions, and this will be done by using all elements of the information community. The accent will be on prioritizing communication actions and maintaining consistency as a must, to have credibility. A special focus will be on target audience analysis. One very important issue identified is the need to harmonize, as much as possible, themes and messages across NATO nations and Partners on the same operations. Other than that, the planning process will be the same one, and a kind of message discipline with regard to general themes and messages will be the goal for main communicators.

At ACO level, a Strategic Communications Working Group will coordinate his work with ACO Engagement Plan (managed by the Public Affairs Office). At the ACO level the structure will come all the way down, from the SACEUR's office (SACEUR's Strategic Communications Group) to the Strategic Communications Policy Group. A long discussion about integrating and synchronizing strategic effects into the Strategic Effects Team is probably in progress now. Not to mention about capabilities required to implement this concept.

In branding and marketing, scholars are talking about two main types of consumer decisions: rational and emotional. In NATO we are talking about a coherent narrative (the NATO story) on the basis that the support for any institution (or campaign) is founded on both logic and instinct... Of course, we might use, in defining new policies, some fundamental tenets such as effect-based approach, credibility, truthfulness, unity of effort, leadership-driven while engaging many communicators, sound knowledge of the audience, dialog and continuity and so on.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Coming back to the developments in the branding theory, I think it's worthwhile mentioning Peter van Ham's suggestion for the nation branding: "...the change of slogans is not merely rhetorical window-dressing. On the contrary, it implies a shift in political paradigms, a move from the modern world of geopolitics and power to the postmodern world of images and influence." [26] Moving one step forward, I would argue that it is not enough to create and define a new concept in order to achieve the desired result. You have to make changes in policies and doctrines, in allocating resources, in training and so on. Creating a new concept for Strategic Communications would definitely mean more than better coordinating disparate assets and organizations in NATO. As we saw, many resources were directed towards the achievement of influence effects. If we want Strategic Communications to be fully effective and respond to the requirements of tactical, operational and strategic commanders then we need to understand how effects are being achieved. On the military sequence of the conflict resolution, we are close to the moment when new information technologies will allow us to build command, control, and communication systems that can maintain an overwhelming operational tempo through rapid planning and execution. Unfortunately, this is not (yet) the case for the NATO strategic communications field.

NATO nations developed national strategies for combating terrorism, and, subsequently, information associated strategies. Coalitions developed also this kind of strategies. NATO missions or NATO lead missions communicate having a communication strategy. All of those strategies shall be, at least, on the same line if not coordinated and synchronized. In fact, what we see now is a chorus composed of many voices trying to send one unified message, but we hear a different tempo, same themes being played but delayed, and often slightly different narratives and wording.

We have some developments for the concept of strategic communications in NATO. I would say it's about time to have this kind of approach in communicating with our audiences. What I did not see so far was the real integration of those activities into the operational planning process. Moreover, this is a long and sometimes difficult process. On the other hand, I think it's worthwhile to explore the strategic communications initiative from its way back, meaning from the effects and operational environment. Using a social media like driven logic, sharing values within existing or new built communities, employing techniques and capabilities used already in community and nation building initiatives could make the difference. We are not doing very well in using the opportunities created by the myriad interconnected entities, and it appears that we are still stuck in our old way of doing business. It's difficult to keep the balance between the operational requirements – created for circumstances in which the normal democratic rules are under siege in some well defined spaces - and the requirements of the domestic free media. In the fight against terrorism at the strategic level it's difficult, due to the new communication medium, to have a clear line between domestic and adversary audience, and therefore the themes used should be harmonized for in theatre target audience, national/domestic target audience and the global one.

As it is now, NATO strategic communications is not a core capability in the frame of the Defence Against Terrorism initiative. It may be in the future, but to succeed, strategic communications should start to engage the audience by interacting, by building relationships instead of preaching or doing mainly media facilitation. If we are repeating the same messages in the same channels and expect new or different results this won't happen. We've tried to control the message meaning in cultures we do not fully (yet) understand, and I'm referring now to the middle level communicators. You have to know a lot about audiences that matter, to create a message that they will actually receive as intended. Why was chosen this name and not another one? What does it mean for the public opinion? Was the name designed for domestic audiences, for global ones, or both of them? What does it mean, in terms of shaping perceptions, this term?

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