

"We must promote collaborative work as a standard, and I think that we have made significant progress in that direction. This collaborative approach should be extended more and more to all sources of knowledge, of progress, of creativity to take the full benefit of our interconnected world. First to come to my mind are the Centres of Excellence (CoEs). In order to take the full benefit of this precious resource for Transformation, we must involve them more and more in our work, as it is the case for training. We must promote the CoE networking, which will multiply their effectiveness.

I am sure as well that CoEs represent a great asset for innovation. In fact, Transformation should be nurtured by innovation; by effective, pragmatic, and efficient innovation."

— General Jean-Paul Paloméros
Supreme Allied Commander
Transformation (SACT)

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THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (CoE)



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS, or StratCom, a nascent concept in 2008-2009 when the first NATO StratCom office was established at SHAPE, has evolved to occupy a position of primacy within the Alliance. There are now StratCom offices at every level of the NATO Command Structure and in missions. NATO exercises include StratCom as a major exercise objective, and a NATO Centre of Excellence (CoE), devoted exclusively to the development of StratCom and its application in NATO, is accredited and well on its way to establishing itself as the "go-to" institution for StratCom support to NATO. The NATO Strat-

Com CoE was inaugurated in January 2014 under the Latvian Ministry of Defence. By July, it had seven sponsor nations — Estonia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the United Kingdom — in September, the CoE received formal NATO accreditation, and by October, the Centre had become an international organization. This is an important designation and distinction as Centres of Excellence are not part of the NATO Command Structure.

StratCom and NATO

Today's complex communications environment plays a vital role in contemporary crisis and conflict. The importance of Strategic

Communications for NATO and nations is ever increasing. The revolution in information technology has diversified the resources available — especially with the accessibility of internet and internet-enabled applications, such as social media by computers, tablets and smart phones — and has complicated the task of communicating with audiences, especially as audiences are no longer only recipients of the information, but active content creators. Moreover, the increasing number of partners in NATO coalition operations and different activities has also made it more difficult to agree quickly on a coherent information campaign. From Afghanistan to Libya, it is increasingly





Opposite: Architectural view of the new StratCom CoE building, which will be operational in August this year. **Left:** To mark the Canadian contribution to the StratCom CoE, the Canadian Ambassador to Latvia, Alain Hausser, and the Director of the Centre of Excellence, Ambassador Janis Karklins, came together for a ceremonial raising of the Canadian flag on 18 February. On the picture, from left: Dr Steve Tatham, IOTA Global; Ambassador Alain Hausser; Ambassador Janis Karklins; Nigel Oakes, CEO, SCL Group; and Canadian Chargé d'affaires to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, Ms Jeanette Stovel. **Inset:** A picture of the report cover. Photographs by StratCom CoE.

more challenging for NATO to compete effectively in today's media environment, or to implement proactive information techniques. These challenges relate to the Alliance's mindset as much as the structures, established procedures and finances, but NATO cannot afford to cede the information theatre if it is to continue to be a successful Alliance.⁽¹⁾

StratCom CoE organization

The StratCom CoE began with a handful of dedicated Latvian staff working hard to handle the administrative, legal, financial, and logistical requirements of standing up a new organization while beginning research projects directed by the Latvian Ministries of Defence and Foreign Affairs as well as Allied Command Transformation (ACT) and Allied Command Operations (ACO). The CoE's capabilities have increased with the arrival of officers from sponsor nations, including Estonia, Poland and the United Kingdom. However, the establishment is not anticipated to be fully staffed until the au-

turn of 2015 with the arrival of officers from Germany, and voluntary national contributions from three additional nations.

Programme of Work 2014

The first major research paper facilitated by the StratCom CoE, "*Analysis of Russia's Information Campaign Against Ukraine*", was published in late summer 2014 and focused on an area of great interest to NATO — the role of the information environment in relation to Russian aggression towards Ukraine. The paper, widely briefed and distributed throughout NATO's political and military communities, invoked both a tremendous interest and desire to expand the original timeframe examined in an effort to keep extant the knowledge gleaned from the study. This again has led to a greater understanding of the methods and psychology employed to motivate various audiences. The report covered the period from the third Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius (28-29 November 2013) until the annexation of Crimea (16 March 2014). It referred also to some more relevant examples of the information campaign relating to events, such as the MH17 air tragedy. Although Russia's informa-

tion campaign against Ukraine entered its active phase as the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius approached, the campaign should not be viewed as a separate, spontaneous phenomenon, but rather as a result of a long-term strategy rooted in vertical power and state controlled mass media. This long term strategy is supported by national policies and legal frameworks as well as the protracted application of "active measures" in countries of strategic interest to create a favourable environment for such targeted campaigns.

General conclusions of the research paper

— **Russia was prepared to conduct a new form of warfare in Ukraine where an information campaign would play a central role:** The characteristics of the new form of warfare, which were implemented in Crimea were outlined by General Valery Gerasimov, Chief of the Russian General Staff, nearly a year before the crisis in Ukraine. Analysis of the Ukraine conflict suggests that NATO and the EU must adapt to the new reality where information superiority, as opposed to military power, is becoming increasingly important.





Hybrid (information) Warfare:

In February 2013, General Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Federation, wrote in *Military-Industrial Kurier* about the "military means of a concealed character" and how: "(...) a perfectly thriving state can, in a matter of months and even days, be transformed into an arena of fierce armed conflict, become a victim of foreign intervention, and sink into a web of chaos, humanitarian catastrophe, and civil war." He added: "The very 'rules of war' have changed. The role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness." (Huffington Post, Robert Coalson)

Left: Lieutenant Colonel Geir Karlsten, Director Strategic Communications and Psychological Operations, Norwegian Defence Command and Staff College, at the 2014 NATO Bi-SC Information and Communicators Conference. Photograph by Henry Plimack.

— **Russia's narrative is largely based on historical memory:** Russia, through understanding of its own audiences — including compatriots abroad — was able to leverage historical memory; e.g. the Great Russian Empire (1721-1917), the atrocities of the World War II, and the might and collapse of the USSR.

— **Crisis in Ukraine is a result of Russia's long term strategy:** Learning from the Russian information campaign in Ukraine, it is clear that early detection and analysis of those elements within the Russian narrative signaling potential aggressive behaviour is critical. *(The report also demonstrated that Russia's state policy documents contained such indications.)*

— **The role of the "Compatriots Abroad" policy is critical and should be considered carefully in the future:** The security implications for countries neighbouring Russia are particularly serious. The kind of strategy that Russia has employed in Ukraine may also be used in other areas where large communities of Russian compatriots live.

— **There is "another side of the coin" to Russia's information campaign:** Although Russia's information campaign has been successful in

influencing its audiences (the ethnic Russian population abroad), it also bears a degree of counter-productivity as it has radicalized and alienated other audiences such as Ukrainians, the populations of NATO and EU countries.

— **Deception is used by Russia as a tactic to distract and delay:** Investigating and disproving the false information, different versions of events and even conspiracy theories rapidly disseminated by Russia requires a lot of time, effort and resources on the part of international organisations like NATO, the Ukrainian Government, independent media, defence experts and even ordinary citizens.

— **Disinformation campaigns erode over time:** The evolution of the crisis in Ukraine beyond Crimea demonstrates that disinformation campaigns erode over time as more and more factual evidence is revealed to negate lies and falsification.⁽²⁾

"Russian strategic communications is driving media coverage"

The second major report commissioned by the StratCom CoE and completed by the Arizona State University Centre for Strategic Commu-

nications is *"Strategic Frames Analysis of NATO Ballistic Missile Defense and Changes in Public Opinion."* The report noted that the project used "a media analysis methodology based on strategic framing; a well-known function of media and strategic communications that attempts to influence the perception of facts and situations by encouraging certain interpretations and discouraging others using words, phrases, metaphors and images highlighting desired aspects of a perceived reality," adding that the goals were to "demonstrate that framing is relevant to understanding and improving strategic communications capabilities of NATO member and partner countries, to do this in the context of a topic important to NATO, and to show the potential relevance of these methods to operational capabilities."

The report stated that the project "studied NATO Ballistic Missile Defense, as discussed in texts from NATO, the governments of nine member/partner countries, and major print media outlets from these same countries." The text below is an extract from this report:

"The analysis shows, first, that with respect to NATO/government sources, NATO framing is very disciplined, consistently invoking general threat, specific threat, collective security, deterrence systems, progress/effective-



ness, and Russia partnership in the affirmative, and negation of threat to Russia. Government framing is remarkably similar to NATO framing. Second, media framing is significantly different from that by NATO and government sources. In almost all cases, media are significantly less likely to invoke the frames favored by NATO and government, and significantly more likely to use frames less emphasized by them. This indicates that Russian strategic communications is driving media coverage, likely because of the media's interest in reporting and promoting controversy. Third, framing appears to differ based on both individual countries' political and economic concerns, as well as the general political climate. Finally, there are strong correlations between some of the frames studied and public opinion in the United States and Poland. This suggests that framing analysis could serve as a useful measure of effectiveness for NATO strategic communication."

The report noted that the project also established the practicality of adding a strategic framing capability to the StratCom CoE. "First, it showed that data from the project could be effectively incorporated into a decision-making environment based on Arizona State University decision theater visualization technology. Secondly, it demonstrated that automation of strategic frames coding using machine classifiers is feasible. The combination of these can provide real time, on-demand analysis and monitoring of strategic framing on topics of interest to NATO."



Programme of Work 2015

The StratCom CoE received some 60 projects for inclusion in the 2015 Programme of Work, submitted by sponsor nations, ACT, ACO and other Allied nations. These were refined and resulted in the Steering Committee accepting 41 projects with 81 associated sub-projects, the scope of which includes: research papers, policy manuals, studies, surveys, reviews, publications, courses and NATO exercises. This now defines the CoE's mandated work for 2015.

Major projects in 2015

- A research paper on how to identify the early signals of a "hybrid warfare scenario" in order to develop "early-warning measures".
- A policy manual on how NATO and its members could protect themselves from subversive leverage.
- A study on Russia's information campaign against Ukraine, Volume 2.
- A research paper on the Russian information campaign and propaganda methodology against NATO.
- A research paper on analysis of social media networks as well as activities within them being used as a weapon or larger part of hybrid warfare.
- Research and deep analysis of ISAF StratCom lessons.
- A survey paper on NATO StratCom policy implementation within the NATO Command Structure.
- NATO countries' StratCom review.
- A research paper on the ISIL information campaign and its influence on NATO countries' societies.
- Recommendations on how to connect NATO and its members' training capabilities.
- A study paper on NATO's image and reputation among Allies.
- Establishing an academic magazine on StratCom and printing an annual CoE book.
- StratCom courses for senior officials (for instance, for the Cabinet of Ministers) about StratCom and its influence on national security in order to increase understanding about StratCom as well as its impact on national and international security and decision-making processes.
- Establishing an e-learning course to be used before attending in-classroom StratCom courses or taking StratCom electives.
- International staff officers basic StratCom

course and international staff officers advanced StratCom course.

- Support to NATO exercises, such as the high-visibility exercise TRIDENT JUNCTURE 15.

Target Audience Analysis: "Train the Trainer" Programme

In addition to these projects, the CoE is undertaking a major, Canadian-funded Target Audience Analysis "Train the Trainer" Programme in Riga, Latvia. On 4 September 2014, at the NATO Summit in Wales, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Honourable Stephen Harper, announced support to various initiatives to help Ukraine and NATO Allies counter the Russian threat to the region, including a CAD \$1-million contribution to the StratCom CoE, saying, "The Canadian support being provided for NATO initiatives today will help Ukrainians better defend themselves against the Russian threat and strengthen the ability of NATO Centres of Excellence in the region to better address regional security challenges related to energy, communications and cyber defence."

The StratCom CoE's project is to acquire the Behavioural Dynamics Institute Target Audience Analysis "Train the Trainer" methodology in the form of a purpose-built NATO course delivered in Riga by Strategic Communications Laboratories, Ltd., based in the UK. The course, which will be attended by CoE staff as well as CoE sponsor-nation personnel, was approved in early 2015. The course itself is a two-month intensive training programme recognized as world-class and is expected to be completed by end July 2015.

THOUGH ONLY into the second quarter of the 2015 Programme of Work, the StratCom CoE is already building the 2016 Programme of Work. So, while the first year has been very busy with incredibly diverse projects, the second year promises to expand the work further covering all aspects of StratCom support to operations, StratCom education and training, and StratCom doctrine, concept development and experimentation ✦

(1) Section taken from stratcomcoe.org

(2) Taken from the report.