



NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION
DEPUTY SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER TRANSFORMATION

DSACT's remarks to
NATO Bi-SC Information and
Communicators' Conference (NICC)
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Final

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Ambassador,

Deputy State Minister,

Deputy Assistant Secretary,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear NATO Communicators family,

I am very happy to be here with you this morning to address a few words at the beginning of the final day of this conference.

Allow me to thank first of all **this year's host nation Spain**, the beautiful town of Valencia, and all the local support that made the organization of this event a success.

My special Thanks to Francisco. Without the outstanding support of your men and women from the Spanish NATO RDC this conference would not have been possible.

Did you know that the original Latin name of the city was Valentia, meaning "strength", or "valor"?

The city was named according to the Roman practice of recognizing the valor of former Roman soldiers after a war.

This should be an excellent sign for this conference, the outcomes and actions that follow will build strength through better coherence in the NATO Communicators Community!

We are indeed at the verge of ending the 4th edition of the NATO Bi-SC Information and Communicators' Conference.



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We discussed the overall theme of “**Competing in the Information Environment**”.

And I would like to thank the whole organization team. Ladies and Gentlemen, you did a great job!

It was a great initiative this year to combine all four different communication functions

- Strategic Communications,
- Public Affairs,
- Information Operations, and
- Psychological Operations,

to exchange, to share and where possible to merge our adaptation efforts.

This link in my humble opinion is crucial. I know, for some of our countries this is already common practice.

But for others, including my home country, **to think, to plan and to act together** is not always easy.

Some of our nations are still in the mindset of confrontation between the ‘good’ **STRATCOM** and the ‘evil’ **PSYOPS** folks.

I’m consciously using this provocative wording, but I think I’m no far from some realities that continue to haunt us.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Two weeks ago Apple presented the new iPhone 10 to the world.



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During the presentation, the CEO of the group, Tim Cook, said: “the iPhone 10 will open the path to the technologies for the next decade to come”.

And he added: “the iPhone 10 represents the biggest technological advance since the inception of the first smartphones”.

What Tim Cook actually said is that this iPhone 10 **is not** just another upgrade from the previous series.

iPhones 8 and 8plus will cover that.

The “10” presents a breakthrough, a real game changer for the world of commercial global communications.

These are the kind of breakthroughs or game changers that mark innovation.

And that is exactly what we need to do as well in the very broad spectrum of communication functions in NATO’s structures in the global Information Environment.

Think a few seconds about the following: *“What the iPad did to the music industry, autonomy will do to the automobile industry...”*

We call it “disruptive technology” – but it is the world and the environment we all share.

And this brings me to my first point.

What is this reality? We live in a global interconnected world, and, **to communicate, to share and to exchange information, is the “Number One” human activity.**



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Nobody can no longer imagine a world without the Internet, without smartphones, without tablets. We are all permanently globally connected.

This networked world offers new challenges - but at the same time - great opportunities for us.

So, I'm asking you:

How can we, NATO as an international organization, compete in today's Information Environment?

Let us first briefly have a look at this environment. What has changed? Why do we need to adapt to make sure we can keep the pace?

First, the global strategic security environment has become very complex and evolves at an unprecedented speed.

Second, we can no longer define separate solutions to the challenges and threats because they are all interrelated.

This means we need structures that are robust enough to cope with the worst case scenarios, and at the same time flexible enough to simultaneously respond to a wide range of threats:

Conventional, unconventional and hybrid warfare methods.

Third, we can no longer oversee all the players in the game that shapes this environment.

Besides ourselves, who are the other actors?

They range from state to non-state, individuals and organizations, both private and government.



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We have no clear picture, because we are in fact all part of this new information environment!

And finally, why should somebody intentionally take the risk of provoking Art. 5 in NATO, when the game can be played in the information realm.

A realm where Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance means and decision making in NATO will - for several reasons - always be in the reactive mode?

Consequently, in these increasingly connected human networks it is of utmost importance to grasp the new opportunities they presents to influence through enhanced effective and precise Strategic Communications.

I've used the word "influence", and it is a key word.

To influence better and more, we must not only be part of the Information Environment.

We must also be "champions" in the use of the most innovative tools and technologies that are available to shape the Information Environment.

And this is my second point.

We must ask ourselves the question how we can better use the tools, technologies, and possibilities of the existing global networks - including the social media - to implement more effective Strategic Communications.

I do not offer the solutions, but I am asking you the question. You are the experts in the different functions I described earlier.



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Be ambitious, take the risk of being innovative, including the risk of failure.

However, it will be vital for us to use existing tools and develop innovative new ones to monitor and assess the Information Environment.

This will allow us to detect the early stages of emerging crises before they occur.

In other words, to avoid escalation through proper information management and to better support the decision making process.

We are all part of this decision making process. Strategic Communications is not limited only to the experts or the senior leadership.

This is a kind of new “battlefield” that is affecting NATO at all levels.

It is therefore essential to include information management and communicator skills in the education and training of our military.

Not only for the operational commanders, but also - and maybe foremost - all the way down to the tactical levels, to our people in the field. Why?

Because information networks are in many cases open and unfiltered.

This represents **the risk of misinformation**, or better known in the social media as fake news.

And this is my third point.



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How can we verify the value of information? The exchange of information is built on willingness and trust.

The exchange of false information, even unknowingly, can cause huge damage!

Not only by the effect this false information may have on the decision making, but also on the willingness of Allies or partners to share information once the scam has been identified.

It is a wide spread phenomenon and, unsurprisingly, also well-known method in hybrid warfare to use misinformation to enforce the acceptance of controversial decisions.

And, much more important, to influence public opinion.

This stresses the impact of Strategic Communications and in doing so, we must be prepared to counter misinformation.

Let me illustrate this by an example.

“A December 2016 survey by the Pew Research Center suggests that 23 percent of U.S. adults have shared fake news, knowingly or unknowingly, with friends and others.

Much of the fake news that flooded the internet during the 2016 election season consisted of written pieces and recorded segments promoting false information or perpetuating conspiracy theories.

Some news organizations published reports spotlighting examples of hoaxes, fake news and misinformation on Election Day 2016.”



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It is clear – and many other examples can illustrate this further – that some messages, and especially fake messages, can have a huge impact.

So, we must ask ourselves the question: how can we anticipate to prevent this from happening, and – if it occurs – how do we counter it?

I don't have all the answers, but for sure we must learn lessons from these past mistakes to prevent them from happening again.

Many potential adversaries will continue to use this against us, and for some it has even become a strategy.

An additional underlying danger is the spreading of perceptions.

To “find” a causal – even when it is false - explanation for an unexplained event is significantly more effective than a denial.

Even when the denial is backed by strong evidence.

This can lead to a general perception that nothing can be done to change the course of events and that no further actions are needed.

On Sunday national elections will take place in Germany. Some statistics show that 40% of the voters are still undecided today.

It creates the perception that everything is still possible, while in reality many voters may intrinsically stick to their usual political choices on the day of the elections.



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Political parties however, have used these statistics to spread “political rumors” on future decisions or reforms and will try to influence the voters’ behavior.

We must therefore also integrate these aspects within all domains of warfare. The Cyber domain in particular, because it could be used against us to deny the messaging we want to deliver.

To conclude.

In parallel with all other adaptation efforts within our Alliance, the key to success will be **to develop cohesion and exchange information.**

We must be **innovative in finding the solutions** – this is where I count on you, the experts in your specific functions.

Allied Command Transformation will deliver the best support we can in the respective work strands.

First tangible ideas are for example

- Pushing for the transition of Public Affairs from Function to Capability in the NDPP,
- Meet this year as a Bi-SC Public Affairs Working Group,
- Draft a revised Military Public Affairs Policy to update the former Policy,
- Identify ACT support to JFC Naples for Exercise Trident Juncture 2018,
- Support ACO in the re-writing of the Public Affairs Handbook,



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- Enhance Individual Training Activities by revising existing programs and building on a federation of national training capabilities.

The first step will be to develop a definition of **innovative competition in the Information Environment** that is shared, actionable, and sets expectations.

We must do this in a persistent way, and we must include it in our training.

That is why, STRATCOM will effectively be built in, in next year's major exercise, Trident Juncture 2018.

The newly released NATO Military Policy on Strategic Communications takes all of the above into account.

Now is the time to implement and to act accordingly, the time to "jump ahead of the game" – or to push further. We speed up our efforts is crucial for our success.

Let us not sit and wait for our potential adversaries to exploit the information space and (continue) to use it against us.

We need to challenge this, so let us start by challenging each other.

Finally, I would like to appreciate and thank all of you for your hard work. ACT is looking forward to further discuss the outcomes of the conference.

We will start thinking on how we can implement actions to overcome the challenges and to develop solutions in the near future.

Thank you for your attention.