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THE CURRENT INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE OF NATO'S STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

The topic of the article stems from the relevance and importance of the study of the communicative component in foreign policy, the need to outline the framework and forms of foreign policy communication and its key tools, among which strategic communications occupy a prominent place.

Strategic communications are one of the tools of mass purposeful and controlled communication. This article discusses general approaches to understanding strategic communications, the concept, institutional dimension and structure of NATO's strategic communications. After all, at the current stage of international relations, this tool comes to the fore, and NATO and its partners and allies are increasingly turning to the use of planned and coordinated messages, ideas, communication channels for purposeful impact on target audiences to achieve common goals. The impetus for the channeling of strategic communications efforts and their scaling was the intensification of destructive information influences by the Russian Federation in 2014, which resulted in an unconventional, hybrid war against Ukraine in particular and the European continent and NATO in general. At the leadership level, NATO recognized these threats and began to form a common vision of StratCom, particularly in institutional and functional areas.

Today, it can be stated that there are no significant contradictions in the implementation of strategic communication policy in the North Atlantic Alliance. In accordance with doctrinal documents and existing NATO institutions, a three-tier management structure of StratCom has been formed, which provides for both general management of this area at the strategic level and its implementation at the tactical and operational level.

The issue of promoting the interests of NATO member states through global communication, namely through strategic communications, was also explored. The impact of modern hybrid threats on StratCom of the Alliance states is examined, and a direct relationship is found between the strengthening of Russian information activity and the strengthening of the role and development of NATO's strategic communications.

Keywords: Strategic communications, NATO, information security, hybrid threat, international relations, institutional structure.

Formulation of the problem. The modern communication tools of international relations, which function in various forms, determine the national, corporate and public interests of actors such as states, transnational associations, public organizations, religious denominations and other representative groups.

Strategic communications are relatively new phenomenon in the theory and practice of international politics related to the sphere of foreign policy of states. The conceptual basis of strategic communications is a coordinated impact on specific target audiences through a set of actions, supported by information activities of relevant actors. Given the specifics of the phenomenon, strategic communications are closely linked to the national security of the state, its strategic and national interests, national ideology and general line in foreign policy.

That is why the study of the strategic communication system of NATO and partner countries, the analysis of their institutional structure is important in terms of understanding international communication processes, strategic decisions and tools to ensure the interests of the North Atlantic Alliance. Modern challenges and hybrid threats only increase the focus on the importance of a detailed study of strategic communications as the basis of a mechanism to counter destructive information influences.

Analysis of recent research and publications. A review of scientific papers shows that in the field of strategic communications, most researches focus on the issues of information support of individual states,

the use of communication technologies and tools of strategic communications in the international activities of leading actors in the world and more. The scientific works of G. Pocheptsov[1], E. Makarenko[2], M. Ozhevan[3], A. Lipkan[4], and D. Dubov[5] are devoted to the study of the concept and mechanisms of using NATO's strategic communications and mass communication in general. Foreign researchers analyze the problems of using information and communication technologies to counter modern challenges and threats in the information space.

Works of A. Barovska[6], O. Kushnir[7], E. Tikhomirova, RAND corporation experts[8], Chatham House[9] center P. Kornish, J. Lindley-French and C. Yorke, as well as other scientists who have studied the development of strategic communications in the field of security are dedicated to NATO's strategical communications in the security policy sphere, because, in the opinion of experts, they are the main response to information aggression.

However, despite the long tradition of research in this area, the academic and expert community has not yet fully formulated a single comprehensive system of concepts related to strategic communications. The issues of the institutional structure of the implementation of NATO's strategic communications also remain important.

The aim of the study is to analyze the institutional concept and structure of NATO's strategic communications as a tool for implementing security policies of the Alliance.

Presenting main material. Strategic communications are just one example of the use of communication technologies in the foreign policy of states, but given their prospects and conceptual uncertainty, they continue to be the focus of discussions of many researchers and experts.

NATO's strategic communications activities were intensified by the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the military campaign in Afghanistan, which demonstrated the importance of efforts to explain its actions and operations in the regions, including the local population. In 2007, the Office of Strategic Communications was established within the Supreme Headquarters of the NATO Allied Powers in Europe to convince the European public of the correctness of actions of European countries of the Alliance in Afghanistan. In the following years, reports and statements on strategic communications (in particular, "NATO's Strategic Communications Policy", "Improving NATO's Strategic Communications") appeared.

The Declaration of the NATO Summit in Strasbourg and Kehl[10] (2009) explicitly states that "it is increasingly important for the Alliance to communicate on changing its role, goals and missions in an appropriate, timely, accurate and proactive manner. Strategic communications are an integral part of our efforts to achieve the Alliance's political and military goals". Since then, the process of developing strategic communications in the activities of the North Atlantic Alliance in the regulatory and institutional dimensions has begun.

In 2014, the NATO's Strategic Communications Center of Excellence (or "The NATO StratCom COE") begins its work in Riga, Latvia. Its tasks include: developing programs to promote development and

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harmonization of the doctrine of strategic communications; conducting research and experiments to find practical solutions to existing problems; "learning lessons" from the use of strategic communications during military operations; increasing training and educational efforts and opportunities for interaction[1]. As of 2017, Estonia, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom are the countries sponsoring the Center's activities; Finland and Sweden have the status of partner countries; France and Canada have additionally provided their specialists for the operation of the Center[2].

The functioning of strategic communications within NATO involves defining a clear institutional structure and responsibilities for each component of that structure. Accordingly, we can talk about the Alliance's strategic communications system.

First of all, it should be noted that the activities in the field of strategic communications have significant structural consequences, as they are aimed at facilitating the interaction between the various institutions engaged in information and communication activities. At the same time, as noted by RAND analysts, such changes are not easy, especially in the long-term operation of a vertical, hierarchical management structure[3].

One of its leaders is the *North Atlantic Council*, which provides overall guidance for NATO's strategic communications efforts and provides specific strategic and policy guidance on the Alliance's information and communications capabilities. The leadership includes *the Secretary General*, who is in fact NATO's chief spokesman and sets out specific strategic messages for all NATO civilian and military bodies on the Alliance's policy. More specific functions are assigned to *the Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy*, who is fully responsible for strategic communications on behalf of the Secretary General. It oversees, inter alia, the coordination of all strategic communications activities in all civilian and military bodies and NATO Command, and directs all public diplomacy activities to ensure coordination and synchronization. In turn, *the Spokesman for the Alliance* on behalf of the Secretary General provides day-to-day management of all information activities at NATO Headquarters and ensures that all messages and communications policies of NATO comply with policy guidelines and decisions[4].

There are also three levels of responsibility for formulating the Alliance's strategic communication policy, which are worded as follows:

(1) Messages conveying NATO's objectives are defined at the level of NATO Headquarters, in particular the aforementioned North Atlantic Council, the Secretary General and the Military Committee (the latter monitors the compliance of political actions and decisions with NATO's military policy and provides purely military advises to the North Atlantic Council).

(2) Strategic communications are then determined at the level of the Supreme Headquarters of the NATO Allied Powers in Europe (SHAPE), but under the direction of the Alliance Headquarters. At this level, accordingly, the concept of strategic communications is specified, including their goals and the necessary resources for their implementation. Also at this level there is responsibility for the implementation of training programs for strategic communications.

(3) Finally, the third level is the level of unit commanders ensuring that all communications (oral, written, even behavioral) convey the messages that have been developed at NATO Headquarters (first level). Unlike the previous two levels, which are actually strategic in nature, this one is operational and tactical[5].

While the tasks of the lower level of the structure of strategic communications are more or less clear, the specifics of strategic activities in the communication context need to be clarified. NATO documents define the tasks of the Strategic Communications Guide as follows:

1. Analysis of the information environment. Its prerequisite is situational awareness, which identifies opportunities and risks and provides a basis for assessing the effectiveness of strategic communications. Analysis of the information environment is an interdisciplinary continuous task to be performed by trained employees. At the same time, the results of this analytical work should be formulated in an accessible way in order to be useful.

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2. Formation of the desired consequences. It is about modeling the circumstances and modalities under which NATO's strategic communication efforts will deliver the results it needs for the Alliance. It is noted that these activities require in-depth knowledge of the information environment, the goals and objectives of a specific NATO mission, as well as the available resources to assess the relevant consequences of certain actions. Thus, this task is directly related to the previous one – analysis of the information environment.

3. Promoting goal setting. The point is that all actions in one way or another affect the information space: positively (if the gap between words and actions is reduced) or negatively (if, for example, the message for the internal and external audience differs in content). Therefore, it is necessary to minimize the negative consequences and maximize the positive ones.

4. Activity planning. This task concerns the involvement of information operations planning units, if required.

5. Integration of communication activities. Effective communication requires harmonization and synchronization of communication efforts at different levels; in addition, activities aimed at creating certain consequences in the information space must also take into account the context of all other actions within a specific mission or operation.

6. Communication involvement. Direct communication helps to establish transparency, trust and authenticity. Therefore, such actions of the third, tactical and operational level of the structure of strategic communications should be carefully planned. And since NATO's communications leaders are both communicators (for example, the Secretary General and the Alliance's Spokesman), it is necessary to plan their actions in detail in order to convey the right messages to allies in a synchronized manner.

7. Communication in the mass media. NATO has its own media resources and can use third-party media in a variety of ways, from ad placement in them to implementation of embedded journalism program. The difficulty is that information that has entered the media space from the Alliance is no longer under its control, and therefore such a format of communication needs to be properly organized to maintain the requirements of transparency, accountability and authenticity.

8. Impact assessment. It is about determining the effectiveness of the communication, its compliance with the goals and objectives of NATO operation or mission, as well as the formulation of conclusions for its further improvement.

9. Education and training. This function shifts from strategic to operational and tactical levels within NATO's strategic communications framework. It is necessary not only to build the necessary human resources for the direct implementation of specific NATO operations or missions, but also to maintain continuity within the group of specialists dealing with strategic communications of the Alliance[1].

As already mentioned, the impetus for the formation of NATO's communication policy in the strategic dimension was the events of 2001, which showed the weakness of the Alliance's activities in this dimension[2]. That is why the first pilot models of strategic communications began to take shape within the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a joint force to promote security in Afghanistan, whose main task was to create a peaceful and stable environment for assisting the country in post-war reconstruction, as well as preventing the resumption of terrorist activities there.

Within ISAF, the first problem in the functioning of NATO's strategic communications was organizational. It has already been mentioned that they include public diplomacy, public policy, military public policy, information operations and psychological operations. The question was how to ensure the coordination of such diverse areas of activity, including at the operational and tactical levels[3].

Thus, at the beginning of NATO doctrine, it was defined that military public policy was to be handled directly by the head of the unit involved in a particular mission or operation, while information and psychological operations were entrusted to a separate structure, the Operations Bureau (J3), which coordinates its activity with the command through the strategic communications coordinator.

On the one hand, this structure distinguished between psychological operations and military public policy, which corresponded to the basic documents of NATO, on the other hand, it made difficult

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[2] Site Public Intelligence (2009). *NATO Strategic Communications Policy* <http://info.publicintelligence.net/NATO-STRATCOM-Policy.pdf> (2021, January, 14).
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to coordinate the activities of strategic communications, as provided for in their definition. Therefore, it was later reorganized: all three components of strategic communications (information operations, psychological operations and military public policy) were under the actual care of the Operative Bureau (instead of J3 became known as Joint Effects), but the direct coordination of military public policy was already engaged in unit commander. It managed both to comply with the requirements of NATO doctrine and to increase the effectiveness of coordination[1].

Further, more compromising mechanisms for the organization of strategic communications within ISAF began to take shape. The point was that most of the Alliance states were reluctant to coordinate information and psychological operations with military public policy. The fact is that while the first two components of the StratCom directly accompany hostilities, the third is used for peaceful purposes. Therefore, a structure was proposed in which the coordination of military public policy is conducted through a separate spokesman, who receives instructions from both the commander and the deputy chief of staff for communications (instead of Joint Effects). The latter is also in charge of information and psychological operations.

Another problem in the organization of strategic communications is formulated by RAND analysts as the problem of "firewall challenge". The fact is that some components of NATO's strategic communications allow the use of military deception, while others do not. Yes, the aforementioned military public policy, which is responsible for transmitting factual information about the Alliance's activities through media channels, therefore inspires the trust of the audience, which does not mislead it. Instead, psychological operations by definition involve the use of information to influence the target audience. This partly explains the already mentioned contradictions in the organization of the operational and tactical level of NATO's strategic communications. In the United States, for example, an attempt was made to solve the problem of "firewall challenge" by setting up Office of Strategic Influence in 2002, which would deal with purely strategic communications and balance this problem. But due to media reports, this idea was abandoned[2].

The establishment of the NATO Strategic Communications of Excellence in 2014 shows that attention to this area of the Alliance's activity has intensified relatively recently. This is confirmed by expert assessments. Thus, NATO representative M. Laity in 2018, analyzing the strategic communications of the Alliance, said about the massive use of disinformation and propaganda by Russia: "If we needed evidence that we live in a new world, we got it; now we are learning to live with the consequences of this process".

According to M. Laity, it was the Russian aggression in Ukraine that accelerated the development of strategic communications within the North Atlantic Alliance, which had previously been limited primarily by ISAF activities in a particular region. Now there is a more comprehensive vision of using these tools not only to support conventional means of conducting NATO operations and missions, but also to respond to hybrid information threats posed primarily by Russia's destructive activities in Ukraine in particular and in Europe and NATO members in general.

At the same time, M. Laity notes that the success of strategic communications within NATO in the context of information confrontation lies in creating an effective and convincing narrative that would find a response among target audiences, and not in "refuting the hostile narrative or engaging in essentially tactical information confrontation". At the same time, there is an understanding within the Alliance that creating such a narrative is not an easy task and requires time and resources, as well as the involvement of all NATO members: "We are all communicators now"[3].

Conclusions. Strategic communication is one of the tools of foreign policy communication, which consists in use of planned and coordinated messages, ideas, communication channels to purposefully influence the target audience in order to achieve national goals and promote national interests. Despite the long tradition of research in this area, the academic and expert community has not yet formulated a single definition.

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At the same time, the StratCom concept arose in NATO even before Russia's active aggression against Ukraine, as a reaction to the terrorist acts of 2001 in the United States, but was then limited to specific military actions and operations within the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). That first period revealed problems in the formation of the StratCom structure at the operational and tactical level, in particular the distinction between actions that involve the use of military deception and actions that, on the contrary, are based on full trust from target audiences.

The impetus for the channeling of strategic communications efforts and their scaling was the intensification of destructive information influences by the Russian Federation in 2014, which resulted in an unconventional, hybrid war against Ukraine in particular and the European continent and NATO in general. At the leadership level, NATO recognized these threats and began to form the common StratCom vision, in particular in institutional and functional areas.

Today, it can be stated that there are no significant contradictions in the implementation of strategic communication policy in the North Atlantic Alliance. In accordance with doctrinal documents and existing NATO institutions, a three-level structure of the StratCom management has been formed, which provides for both general management of this area at the strategic level and its implementation at the tactical and operational level. At the same time, the process of forming a single narrative, which the Alliance sees as the key to the success of strategic communications, is still ongoing due to its cost and need for more time. In the long run, it can help to shape NATO's new image as a global security institution relevant to today's world and the security threats that are most important for it.

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