



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION - OPPORTUNITY AND NECESSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF EXPANSION AND DIVERSIFICATION OF HYBRIDITY

*Bogdan ȚUȚUIANU**

In an era of internet, highly developed technology, and hugely exploited and omnipresent information environment, communication in the field of defence and security has acquired remarkable significance. In an age of expansion and diversification of the hybrid phenomenon, of an assertive geopolitical competition based in large measure on any methods and means employed so as to ensure the fulfilment of own state interests, it is easy to notice the use of media and social networks more than any time before, in order to influence and even manipulate public opinion meant to change perceptions, mislead, polarize and divide. This gave rise to the necessity of emergence of strategic communication concept, developed in the western world, including at the level of North Atlantic Alliance in order to support the achievement of security goals of the Alliance and the Member States. The present article is a plea for raising awareness upon the increased importance of strategic communication, at military and political levels, in the context of expansion and diversification of hybrid phenomenon as a reality that needs revealing and countering, when coming from our opponents, and used for reaching own goals.

Keywords: *Strategic Communication; information; hybridity; disinformation; information environment.*

*** Captain (Navy) Bogdan ȚUȚUIANU is a PhD Student in the field of Intelligence and National Security in “Carol I” National Defence University, Bucharest, Romania.
E-mail: bogdan_tutuianu@yahoo.com**



Introduction

In the wake of a series of largely mediated 2021 big events, with considerable strategic importance and impact such as G7 Summit, NATO Summit and the bilateral Summit of the presidents of the United States and Russian Federation, it can be easily agreed that Strategic Communication, hereinafter named StratCom, all the messaging, the narrative adopted and the subsequent, supporting facts are of extreme relevance. In the field of security and defence, communication is extremely important not only to ensure the appropriate functioning and coordination of all the factors, but also to transmit in an adequate manner the justification for the actions undertaken and their effects on a general level. According to Admiral James Stavridis, “Effective communication requires leaders of an organization to take an early and persistent role in deciding how ideas and decisions are shaped and delivered” (Stavridis 2007, 4).

The definition of strategic communication and the implications for the political-military world are still under debate. What is clear, however, as shown in the consistent work of Christopher Paul, is that „perceptions and understandings of images, policies, and actions matter, that the success of many policies is contingent on the support they receive from various populations (both foreign and domestic), and that perceptions are influenced both by what you do and what you say” (Paul 2011, 1). At purely political level, Admiral Stavridis was also saying that “in the national security context, a leader can improve the effects of operational and policies planning by ensuring communication implications of that planning are considered as early as possible in the process. If planning is done in that fashion, then it is likely that the communication associated with it will indeed be strategic in its effects” (Stavridis 2007, 7).

On the other hand, in the era of expansion and diversification of the hybrid phenomenon, of approaches that are far from being traditional or conventional and of an assertive competition among states based on influence, the relevance and role of StratCom acquire even more significant dimensions in order to build the trust and support of own audience, to diminish the effects of enemy StratCom and to deter this enemy from taking any kind of action against own interests.

The aim of the present paper is to clarify to some extent the complexity of the strategic communication process and establish if its intensive employment and exploitation are justified. Thus, we are also going to check the research hypothesis according to which, in the current geopolitical and military context, StratCom is related to the ongoing hybridization process and therefore it has a major role in countering the effects of the hybrid phenomenon. The analysis will comprise a brief description of hybridity, underlining the connection between the hybrid phenomenon and the information domain, followed by a presentation of the importance and role



of StratCom in this context. The research methods used for this endeavor are those associated with qualitative exploratory research, more precisely the descriptive method, that of pointing out certain aspects of current concepts and phenomena, as well as the content analysis method, meant to make the connections among these in order to generate reliable conclusions. The research is built on a mix of capstone documents, different reports, studies, focused on both issues of StratCom and hybridity.

Also, from the beginning, we have to make it clear that all the ideas, opinions and conclusions expressed in this paper belong to the author, representing a personal approach and analysis, and do not reflect in any way the official points of view or positions adopted by any national authorities or organizational entities.

1. The Intrinsic Link between Hybridity and the Information Environment

We consider it essential to briefly address the matter of the hybrid context that is invoked in the title of the paper, as hybridity has lately got more and more attention, as it has become more and more visible in so many domains. Also, this part of the article can be seen as a preliminary step, preparing the ground for pointing out the link between the information environment and *hybridity*, understood as a combination of unconventional and conventional threats which create a mutant threat, hard to counter. Afterwards, that will be also useful for trying to elucidate the specific role played by StratCom in this hybrid context.

According to a dedicated research paper of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (NATO StratCom COE), hybrid threats are considered genuine “levers of influence” (Aday, *et al.* 2019, 23), respectively “information or influencing activities” (Aday, *et al.* 2019, 23), which can be deciphered as the influencing efforts of the hybrid aggressor fully responsible for targeting its victim also in the information domain, transforming it in real battleground of the hybrid aggression.

For clearly understanding the hybridity mechanism used by the above-mentioned aggressors against their targets and its inherent interconnection with the information domain, we have to switch to another valuable resource related to a framework of collaboration between NATO and a group of different nations and other organizations, which among other areas of interest has been focused inclusively on understanding and countering hybridity. One of the products developed within Multinational Capability Development Campaign/Countering Hybrid Warfare project (MCDC/CHW) describes the hybrid warfare as “the synchronized use of multiple instruments of power tailored to specific vulnerabilities across the full spectrum of societal functions to achieve synergistic effects” (Cullen and Reichborn-Kjennerud 2017, 8). The comprehensive description of the hybrid phenomenon



includes, among other instruments of power, the informational one (Cullen and Reichborn-Kjennerud 2017, 9). Furthermore, the same reference work highlights the fact that the hybrid aggressor is doing that by exploiting those vulnerabilities of the targeted state “across the political, military, economic, social, informational and infrastructure (PMESII) spectrum” (Cullen and Reichborn-Kjennerud 2017, 4). Along with those PMESII range targeted vulnerabilities, once again the one connected to the informational dimension is included in the list.

In accordance with the document called *NATO 2030 Initiative*, the current security environment is characterized by “the re-emergence of geopolitical competition” (NATO 2020a, 16) that came along with “a proliferation of hybrid attacks” (NATO 2020a, 17). In the content of the communique (NATO 2021) of the latest 2021 Brussels NATO Summit, the hybrid phenomenon is repeatedly mentioned – actually, 15 times – in various contexts, in the form of different expressive syntagms gravitating around the word *hybrid*. By that, the overall hybridity can be specifically portrayed as a mixture and combination of those hybrid-centric syntagms, as follows: *hybrid actions*, *hybrid activities*, *hybrid threats*, *hybrid campaign(s)*, *hybrid warfare*, and *hybrid challenges* (NATO 2021). Linking the latest NATO Summit with the previous one, also organized in Brussels, would assure more than just a leap back in time, namely an opportunity to explain what is beyond that mixture of words. In the *2018 Brussels NATO Summit Declaration*, hybrid activities were depicted as challenging tools used indiscriminately by both state and non-state actors in order to “create ambiguity and blur the lines between peace, crisis, and conflict” (NATO 2018). This can be taken as an overture of the current security dynamics which fully resonates with the overall picture illustrated in latest yearly report of NATO Secretary General, released in 2020. This describes the current security environment and situation as “a world of growing global uncertainty, more sophisticated and disruptive cyber and hybrid threats, and exponential technological change rapidly transforming the way wars are fought” (NATO 2020b, 10).

On the other hand, returning to the connection between hybridity and information environment, it must be underlined that the same hybrid attacks have had eroding, undermining, dividing and weakening effects, affecting the cohesion within societies through “disinformation and subversion” (NATO 2020a, 64), among other hybrid tools. Apparently, this is possible since “information is now a domain of contest” (NATO 2020a, 48), and “the information environment is contorted by misinformation, disinformation, and deception” (NATO 2020a, 48). By paraphrasing the incumbent NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, who labelled hybridity as a destabilizing, “dark reflection” (NATO 2015) of Alliance’s stabilizing efforts, disinformation can be labelled as the dark mirroring reflection of reality, an evil side of communication meant to distort reality for influencing purposes. A concrete



example in this regard is the statement made by the same Jens Stoltenberg who said that in the context of coronavirus pandemic there were attempts made by Moscow and Beijing to undermine the cohesion of the Alliance, by describing in an untruthful, malicious way the state of facts and the relationships among Member States, as well as the capacity to provide mutual support to counter the effects of the pandemic and save lives. On the contrary, NATO General Secretary emphasized the existence of extended cooperation at the level of the Alliance regarding medical support and transportation of patients, including by air (Joswiak 2020).

The issue may become even more stringent serious when these influencing activities are performed in an intrusive way. In this hybrid context, the hybrid perpetrator, totally responsible for planning, initiating, applying, amplifying, and perpetuating the hybrid pressure, is directly or indirectly involved in actions pertaining to this kind of “dark” communication. Consequently, its target is involuntarily the recipient of that aggressive, deceptive type of communication, that is neither truthful and justified, nor objective or showing integrity.

The exponentially advancing transformations in the technological field have also played a dominant role. “Technological trends suggest that the portfolio of hybrid hazards will rapidly expand” (Ondrejcsák and Lippert 2019, 212), and this looks like an accurate prediction at least in information environment. Beyond the traditional or specialized means such as the media, that has been done through new ways and means. Practically, everything became possible due to the rapid progress and innovations made in the technological field. The use of personal data of those who use one way or another the online environment and the use of artificial intelligence easily lead to a personalization of the digital content people are exposed to, according to their interests, sensitivities, or vulnerabilities (Kreps 2020). Definitely, in an era of hyper-technologization, communication is carried out in a newer, quicker, more innovative way, irrespective of the languages used, the explicit styles and formats, the concrete contexts and circumstances, or the specific means used for that. By exploiting these spectacular metamorphoses and rapid transformations, communication itself, no matter its originator and its receiver(s), or the targeted audience(s), has self-propelled into a new era and a new information environment. Due to technological advances and innovations, communication has become a high-speed, almost instantly provided, all-over-spread reality, without borders and other physical limitations. There is even the idea of so-called guerrilla communication strategies, equated with the principles of guerrilla warfare, accomplished and serving particular purposes due to these technological developments, social media and online networking and communication platforms (Nothhaft and Schölzel 2015, 18). Thus, „the aim of guerrilla communication is not to win but to introduce irregular ways to communicate to change the rules and norms of communication” (Holtzhausen, Fullerton, *et al.* 2021, 55).



That had both positive and negative intertwined consequences. In this new information domain, human virtual inter-linking and communication based on smart-device interconnectivity have been skyrocketing, as social trends facilitated and encouraged by internet and social media platforms. In the beginning, the level of expectation was very high, and everything sounded extremely encouraging since “the early days of the internet promised a mind-expanding utopia, where we could freely exchange new ideas and contemplate other points of view” (Grimes 2017). Yet, there seems to be a considerable difference between the pioneering day prospects and current reality since, beyond the anticipated socializing and exchanging ideas, online social media became a significant source of information. The final product is a mixture of apparently certified news, made of qualified ways and views, thoughts, beliefs, judgements, ideas (Grimes 2017). As a bonus, „rumors and gossip” (Grimes 2017) have been infiltrated, routinized and became part of this new reality, dramatically decreasing and dulling the ability to clearly distinguish between solid fact-checked information and misleading/deceiving views, thoughts, believes nurturing and fertilizing the so-called “echo chambers” and “online bubbles” (Grimes 2017). By that, the social networking services and messaging services spread in online space have created favorable environments for disinformation flow and expansion. That is not a simple guess since they have been already classified and labeled as “important means of spreading disinformation” (European Commission 2018, 4). Also, as it is clearly shown in the content of *NATO 2030 Initiative*, it has become a booster and multiplier of the earlier coined term *dark mirroring reflection* of the reality and information, since “disinformation, propaganda, and misinformation are especially dangerous in times of rapid technological advancements” (NATO 2020a, 64).

Therefore, in a hybrid context, from both perspectives of the hybrid actor and its victim, the information domain has a strong significance. The bigger picture could be clearer if the way of seeing the information environment were aligned with that provided by StratCom COE, respectively as a sort of trinomial space, namely comprising three dimensions. The first one, a *cognitive dimension* is the one “where people think, understand and decide” (Aday *et al.* 2019, 9). The second one, a *physical dimension* is created by “facts, knowledge and data” (Aday *et al.* 2019, 9). The third one, extremely relevant in this context, is the *informational dimension* consisting of “individuals, organizations and infrastructure” (Aday *et al.* 2019, 9). These dimensions are able to assure the desired level of understanding the interaction between various players in this field, the way of seeing and perceiving what is going on around them and the way of making decisions according to the respective deductions. This, in other words, is the equivalent of the key obligation and responsibility related to StratCom, of knowing, understanding and assessing this multi-dimensional space. It is not just the hybrid aggression that is based on an



integrated exploitation and synchronization of all instruments of power, including the informational one. According to StratCom COE, that is also the case for StratCom which is based on a “collective and integrated” (Aday *et al.* 2019, 22) effort, an effort involving all relevant governmental authorities, an inclusive effort that has the same foundation of understanding the information environment.

All these aspects can be virtually encapsulated in a *hybrid toolbox* meant to counter the consistent set of synchronized hostile actions, corresponding to every hybrid aggressor’s instrument of power. Altogether, these directly or indirectly influencing tools produce a diversity of effects in all informational environment dimensions. Asymmetric actors [...] employ actions to create information effects rather than to win tactical engagements on the battlefield. Their field of battle is political, and information strategy is their key weapon (Farwell 2012, 225). Thus, the common perception regarding the current hybrid context is that the competition has gradually moved into the information environment which has become a contested one, permanently under dispute. That is why there is a need for strategic communication to „promote awareness of, attention to, and consideration of the information and communication implications of government and military actions and utterances (Paul 2011, 54).

2. The Relevance of StratCom

Regarding the complexity and the real dimension of the type of communication under analysis, we need to start from the assumption that the human factor is involved, one way or another, in communication. From a basic and utterly simplified perspective, communication could be seen as a naturally verbalized continuation of the way of feeling, thinking, seeing and perceiving people, things, actions or reactions, of judging, classifying, categorizing and labelling them in direct connection with the surrounding reality. Through communication, a huge part of those thoughts and feelings are translated into images accompanied or not by spoken or written words, in a variety of combinations, used both privately and publicly. Words as meaning carriers spread information around either privately, or publicly to a larger targeted audience that in turn will do the same thing. There are lots of elements pertaining to effective communication ways and means currently under consideration (Popp, Astorino-Courtois 2021).

Similarly, by going from this basic level to a much higher one, at state and above-state level, this dissemination scheme would be replicated and could be interpreted as promoting and conveying the specific national security values, interests and objectives, the vision of the political establishment. It would definitely carry a higher degree of sophistication and formalization, exploiting the existing diplomatic channels, the specialized media agencies and outlets. There would be the



same information interchanging and sharing effort but between two or more states, groups of states, organizations and so on. In this case, the human involvement is a little selective, StratCom requiring and involving an entire mixture of politicians, decision makers, managers, specialists, subject matter experts, and practitioners, irrespective of their specific political orientation, status, position, rank, affiliation, nationality, gender, or age. Thus, according to Cristopher Paul, the notion of strategic communication comprises all the „coordinated actions, messages, images, and other forms of signaling or engagement intended to inform, influence, or persuade selected audiences in support of national objectives” (Paul 2011, 3).

In the same way, in accordance with a paper included in the NATO StratCom COE official journal, this kind of communication is multifaceted, a mixed process accurately defined by the complexity of producing and maintaining this reality, and also by repairing and transforming this reality (StratCom COE 2020, 23). By refining and adjusting reality to serve a certain purpose, the result would be moderately altering or even radically changing the general public’s perception of this surrounding reality. Thus, information may turn into disinformation. In order to reveal the real meaning and dimension of disinformation, one can use the terms in which it was introduced in an EU dedicated action plan, respectively that is “verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm” (European Commission 2018, 1). The same area of disinformation could include or associate any complementary, voluntary actions such as misinformation, deception and manipulation.

The very existence of the *information – disinformation* binomial is sufficient for the emergence and use in this context of StratCom. Obviously, what is needed is the appropriate reaction of exposing and revealing disinformation, of countering and combating disinformation, the same disinformation that is “often part of hybrid warfare” (European Commission 2018, 3). As the new ways and means of the communicating era have been developing in the same geopolitical trend, in the earlier mentioned competition and its subsequently associated hybrid manifestations, this overlapping and synchronization have created the premises for a more rapid proliferation of a contemporary form of disinformation. However, according to the above-mentioned paper, included in the official journal of NATO StratCom COE, it is “hardly something new” (StratCom COE 2020, 22), but on the contrary, a phenomenon with a very long history. The same reference work emphasizes, in total accordance with its title, that the last ten years represented “The Long Decade of Disinformation” in which this tendency of “mass manipulation of information” (StratCom COE 2020, 21) has been continuously growing. Also, the same disinformation is associated to a consistent campaign of “information war” (StratCom COE 2020, 23) or “information warfare” (StratCom COE 2020, 24) which



in turn is fully aligned with the hybrid aggressor's approach and conceptualization of StratCom, the abstracted counterpart and equivalent of this commonly used concept in the Western world.

On its turn, according to NATO StratCom COE vision, StratCom is intriguingly approached as a "philosophy or mindset" (Aday *et al.* 2019, 10), a "process" (Aday *et al.* 2019, 10) and a "capability" (Aday *et al.* 2019, 10). That sort of philosophy or mindset is explained by the fact that in StratCom everything is an active part of communication and communicates by itself, no matter if we are talking about specific words or combinations of words, about different deeds, performances, actions, imagery, visual depictions and illustrations, about strategies, policies, plans or projects. This entire argumentation highlighting the connection between hybridity and the information environment, respectively the parallelism between communication, StratCom, disinformation and information warfare was meant to create the foundation for analyzing the role of StratCom under the present circumstances.

The deductive preliminary conclusion made at the end of previous section is validated by reality. Lately, the information environment has been massively used as a playground by the hybrid aggressors, either state or non-state actors, a fact accurately reflected in the regular reports, specialized literature, dedicated articles and security studies. Thus, examples could be brought from the generous range of publications that have been developed and published under NATO StratCom COE umbrella, since 2014, its first year of existence. This is an easy provable fact because all those research products are not classified in any way, but on the contrary, there is no room for secrecy since they are accessible to any audiences and are openly available on its specific site, www.stratcomcoe.org/publications. Among that diversity of titles there are some self-explanatory terms and defining concepts of the hybrid arsenal as follows: *disinformation, propaganda, manipulation, information laundering, information operations, fake news, hostile narratives, information war, information campaign*, etc.

All of these are self-defining for the ongoing influencing process that can be easily associated with unconventionality. They could all lead to affecting the way of people's thinking and perceiving things and realities, degrading the level of awareness and consciousness and also influencing the way of acting and reacting. In this context of perpetual hybridity, directly jeopardizing the overall stability and security of the targeted states, we will try to clarify an essential aspect, based on this level of understanding: "What is the role of StratCom in the context of hybrid threats?"

3. The Role Played by StratCom in a Hybrid Context

Due to all aforementioned arguments, at least theoretically, it should not be difficult to answer to the question regarding the role played by StratCom in the



current hybrid context. Thus, we could mention the way in which StratCom is described in a subchapter of *NATO 2030 Initiative*, a subsection suggestively named *Strategic Communications, Public Diplomacy, and Tackling Disinformation*. Thus, StratCom is depicted as “a critical tool of deterrence and defence” (NATO 2020a, 48). The terms used are clear and explicit, at least for the purpose of this paper, but, in terms of clarity, the definition might be considered too generic. For that reason, it can be supplemented with a relevant aspect regarding disinformation, that is “effective communication is essential to counter and deter disinformation” (European Commission 2018, 7). Also, as shown, „one of the long-term goals offered for strategic communication and public diplomacy is the generation and creation of credibility” (Paul 2011, 50), while another one is „the promotion of shared values” (Paul 2011, 51).

There is something more beyond that clear combination between StratCom and the effort of tackling disinformation. The idea is backed by another credible source, the second product of the MCDC/CHW project, focused specifically on countering hybrid warfare. As it was mentioned in its content, *along capability and credibility, communication is emphasized as one of the dedicated pillars for deterring hybridity* (Monaghan *et al.* 2019, 35). This approach resonates with the definition mentioned earlier, portraying StratCom as a deterrence tool. Beyond this, any interested reader and/or audience can find the role of communication in this context explained as “the two-way understanding and perception that informs cost-benefit calculations on both sides” (Monaghan *et al.* 2019, 35). According to the hybridity mechanism described before, the two sides invoked that must be fully aware of the implications of their actions are the hybrid aggressor and the target of the hybrid aggression.

Therefore, in these circumstances, in terms of deterring hybridity, this trio comprising *capability, communication and credibility* should not be seen as a mere iteration of desiderates. In real life, *this trio must be materialized in a set of preemptive, proactive, and reactive measures* which are inter-dependable, because one without the other would be able neither to provide efficiency nor to have the desired effect in deterring hybridity.

The specific capabilities are supposed to cover all essential functions necessary to mitigate hybridity in an early and timely manner, such as *monitoring, detecting, identifying, revealing, attributing, and rejecting any hybrid actions and activities*. These capabilities give actional weight and embolden the determination to react and to respond when the re-emerged competition and influence sought by hybridity are beyond any bearable limits. Without those capabilities designed for early detection and opportune intervention to counter the hybrid threats, no matter what the volume of communication would be involved, most probably there could not be enough and palpable room for credibility.

Still, beyond presenting and promoting all those specific capabilities and



their overall efficiency, there is another side of the credibility, namely the political determination to point the finger to the perpetrator, to reveal its hybrid actions publicly. StratCom is involved in this equation, too, by conveying the appropriate messages, following own narrative. All lexical and imagological constructions are expected to be directed towards motivating, initiating or improving cooperation and coordination, increasing consciousness, improving situational alertness and better understanding. This needs to be done in a synchronized and coherent way, in order for the targeted audience to anticipate, to be ready, to be involved, to be proactive against hybrid actions. All the energies, all the efforts, all the solutions materialized in actions must coalesce, coagulate and converge towards the desired deterring effect.

Besides generating credibility, even though it is seen itself as a mindset, StratCom represents a real helping tool and option for changing people's mentality. Thus, beyond voluntary involvement and unconditioned taking of responsibility, first of all, it is about continuous adaptability and flexibility so as to keep the pace with the expansion and diversification hybridity. Ideally, it would occur at the highest or leadership levels of an organization and be carried out at the lowest or tactical levels. It educates and informs publics; but the most effective strategic communication changes behavior (Holtzhausen and Zerfass 2015, 354).

Secondly, StratCom is about changing the traditional threat perception. By revealing the reality created by this type of hybrid threats, there would be some real impulse for coordination and integration of all relevant actors. In the inter-agency, inter-institutional format, cooperation and communication can pave the way for a better mutual understanding, sufficient for sensing and framing the larger picture, so as to acquire the ability to think strategically and in an integrated way. Thus, the institutions involved in the defence system would come to the operational maturity of adjusting their own existing tactics and methods in this regard. Spreading out knowledge about hybrid threats should not be a one-way road.

Beside the warning component meant to make everybody aware of the presence (if not even omnipresence) of this hybrid phenomenon, there is an acute need for another aspect that can be reached via StratCom. Thus, we consider that there is a need for an elaborate explanation focused on the demystification of hybridity. That is an essential element since everyone should understand that the hybrid phenomenon is not an unusual characteristic of a statal or non-statal actor targeting and detrimentally acting against your line of work, acting domain, state, or organization. By that demystification, this kind of hybrid threats can be seen as tangible threats that can be counteracted by some tangible actions, translated in adjusted tactics and methods. This reflects the second of the "Five key principles for deterring hybrid aggressors" (Holtzhausen and Zerfass 2015, 40), as they are highlighted by the second MCDC/CHW product in a specific infobox, expressing the same idea in the maritime domain: "hybrid aggressors are deterrable" (Holtzhausen



and Zerfass 2015, 41). With a new, refreshed, somehow adjusted mentality to this new reality, that would in turn help to reduce the chances for transforming this new hybrid reality into a new normality and somehow discourage and stop any other hybrid interference. Thus, “strategic communication and its confluent effects with kinetic action should stand on an equal footing with military strategy” (Farwell 2012, 225).

We can, therefore, synthesize the relevance of StratCom by enumerating the objectives detailed above: promoting own interests, revealing the hybrid phenomenon at information level and countering its effects, and even deterring all hybrid acts as such.

Conclusions

We consider that all the arguments presented in this paper are sufficient reasons to prove our hypothesis that, under the current circumstances of extended and diversified “hybridization”, manifested inclusively via disinformation, majorly favored by hyper-digitalization, this new reality has all the premises to become a darker picture, perpetuated in the future, if the relevance, importance, and role of StratCom are diminished or ignored. In a hybrid context, StratCom can be considered highly relevant since it is simultaneously a mindset, a process, and a capability with a significant fingerprint in the informational realm. In terms of benefits and desired effects, StratCom can be seen as a two-edged sword. Irrespective of its name and form of manifestation, due to the diversity of the targeted audiences it should cover both external and internal target audiences.

On the same note, StratCom can be seen as one of those soft solutions for increasing the deterrent effect, by making everybody aware of that hybrid aggression, by portraying the legitimacy of own actions and responses, proportionality of reaction and intervention. In any hybrid context, StratCom is an appropriate tool for fighting disinformation and its influencing effects in the information environment. Also, it is an efficient tool for disseminating reassuring messages about own capabilities, for portraying and proving the level of awareness, of determination to act and react for legitimizing credibility. At the same time, StratCom has a significant role in demystifying hybridity and making people understand that the hybrid phenomenon is not a game with a predetermined result, with an outcome which cannot be prevented or changed in any way.

StratCom has to be one of the basic ingredients for a successful formula of deterring hybridity, representing both an opportunity and an acute necessity especially in the current security context and dynamics. Its role is highly relevant and can create favorable conditions for better preventive options and timely responses, essential for efficiently deterring and countering hybridity, anywhere



and at any time. Any possible intention of denying, ignoring or diminishing the importance and role of StratCom in the current context of hybridity expansion and diversification should be seen as a serious issue by any state.

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