PUBLIC COMMUNICATION IN PURSUING AND PROMOTING THE INTERESTS OF SECURITY ACTORS – A TAXONOMIC APPROACH

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This paper aims to identify the best ways to support security actors in the process of promoting and pursuing their interests, through public communication. In this respect, we have considered it relevant to identify and present the forms of public communication most often used in the information environment for the purpose of influencing power games, and we have classified them into two categories: constructive and destructive, taking into account ethical aspects in terms of transmitter's intentionality, as well as the whole set of effects that they produce on the security environment (direct effects – short term, and indirect effects – long term), on its dynamics, and ultimately on the world order. Following our analysis, we will have identified strategic communication (and the techniques derived from it) as the form of public communication whose whole set of effects generated suits the interests of the actor – transmitter, the citizen – as an exponent of international society –, as well as the ideal of peace.

Keywords: public communication; influence; strategic communication; persuasion; manipulation.

Introduction

Throughout history, actors in the security environment have resorted to different strategies in order to pursue and promote their own interests, which, in general terms, consist of maximizing their level of power. One of the most important forms of power (in a state) is the cultural power, which "is propagated at the social level through communication" (Stănciugelu, Tudor, et al. 2014, 243), and therefore, the potential of the communication process has been understood and exploited since ancient times, with Aristotle being one of the first thinkers who laid the foundations of communication theory as a process of influence (Roșcan and Deac 2018, 29).

Mucchielli proposes a view that "all communication is an attempt to influence" (apud Leseniuc 2017, 86), since every act of communication produces effects. The transmitter aims to make the other believe, think or act in a certain way, according to his own beliefs or interests. In this sense, *influence* can be considered a "resource", as it represents the ability to cause the one to whom the message is addressed to change his perceptions and behaviour in a certain

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direction, pursued by the one who transmits the message (Roșcan and Deac 2018, 29). In these terms, one of our objectives is to bring to light the ways of exploiting influence, in order to conclude which of them can be put into practice in an ethical manner, in order to obtain benefits for societies (as states) or society as a whole, i.e., the entire security environment.

We start from the premise that the spectrum of influence through communication ranges from *information* as the most indirect form of influence to *coercion* as the most direct form of influence.
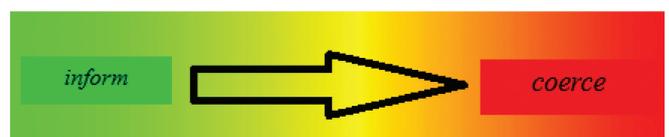

Figure 1: *Spectrum of influence*

The aim of this analysis is to place the most commonly used forms of public communication on the influence spectrum (see Figure no. 1) in order to conclude which of them are beneficial to the development of societies in terms of the full set of effects their implementation entails. We will therefore address both first-order effects – i.e., those that materialize in the short term and relate to the achievement of national objectives designed to support a state's instruments of

power in the pursuit and promotion of its interests – and effects of the effects – i.e., those that materialize in the long term and relate to the impact they have on the entire security environment and on the state of world order/peace.

Communication hypostases – a taxonomic approach

The analysis we are carrying out is intended to reveal which of the forms of public communication most often practiced by actors in the international environment (persuasion, manipulation and strategic communication, and all their specific techniques (such as propaganda, disinformation, fake news, etc.) have effects that contribute to the state of world order/peace, or which, on the contrary, generate effects that in the long term disrupt or prevent this state.

Thus, the present approach presents a vision that proposes two hypotheses: a *destructive* and a *constructive* one, which will be explained below. The classification is based on a common point for both, namely the intention of the actors to promote and pursue their own interests, but in order to distinguish between the two, we will look at the ethical and moral aspects of the sender's (actor's) intentions, the effects generated by the act of communication, and the repercussions of these effects (the effects of the effects) on the security environment dynamics. We stress that this approach is relevant both *internally* and *externally*, since, as we will explain below, the intentions of the sender differ when the purpose of the communication is to achieve effects at the national level as opposed to those that are sought at the level of the entire security environment, but in either case, the effects produced can have an impact on the power games.

By *destructive character* we refer to the potential of the communication to influence the masses or the adversary/adversaries, with the aim of inducing them to take decisions that would normally *disadvantage* them. We consider that within this hypostasis there are included forms of communication that have elements of *coercion*[1] in their composition, and thus do not conform to ethical and moral conduct.

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[1] Coercion is the act of forcing someone to do something, and in this case, the coercion we are referring to will be through communication, which thus becomes a means of coercion.

We believe that the effects produced in these circumstances can support actors in their process of pursuing and promoting national interests and can help them achieve short-term objectives. In the long term, however, we argue that these effects disrupt the world order, as they ultimately produce a range of other effects (such as distortion of reality, of mass perceptions of relationships in the security environment or of the intentions of actors involved in power games), which implicitly affect the security status of the transmitter, with the potential to create a general state of uncertainty, chaos, mistrust, and which may consequently give rise to a range of risks and vulnerabilities for the whole social system.

Internally, this is reflected in the intentions of the state (or its institutions and instruments of power) to impose certain rules/laws that do not benefit the ordinary citizen, but only a privileged niche (e.g., oligarchy).

Externally/globally, this is expressed by distorting the perception of one or more other target actors, usually targeting their level of power in the international environment, in order to intimidate or mislead opponents by exploiting their vulnerabilities (e.g., Russia, in the context of the current conflict, threatening to be ready with nuclear weapons in order to intimidate opponents by exploiting a human vulnerability, namely fear). This implies crafting messages and narratives specifically designed to achieve objectives that converge with the interests that the actor-transmitter pursues (attracting allies, promoting its own doctrines, generating a general state of fear among the masses e.g., use of weapons and technologies of mass destruction).

Constructive character, in our view, refers to the potential of communication process to support actors in the security environment in pursuing their own interests, but this time with the aim of *informing and making clear* their position, attitude, intentions and actions. Thus, we consider that the forms of communication arising from this situation fall within the sphere of information, on the scale of influence, illustrated in Figure no. 1.

The communicative intentions that arise from the forms of communication that we will classify under this (constructive) hypostasis are mainly informative or educational, and influencing can refer here, for example, to the way in which the

receiver can be induced/educated to develop critical thinking – a concept defined as a way of thinking that involves relating correctly to reality, by developing a cognitive system that is well prepared for the correct analysis of the information provided (E. Mc Peck 1981, 5-13), or as "the intellectual process of conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from or generated by observation, experimentation, reflection, reasoning, or communication, which can be a guide to persuasion and action" (University of Louisville, n.d.). In the field of security, the short-term effect of practising forms of communication that arise from constructive hypostasis is to stabilize and standardize the perception of reality among the citizens of a state, or the citizens of the world, thus reducing the level of uncertainty. In the long term, by practising constructive forms of communication and increasing critical thinking, it will be possible to develop cognitive mechanisms to counter the malicious communication intentions of opponents. These effects have multiplier potential, as once ingrained in one's consciousness, this way of thinking will naturally be perpetuated to subsequent generations through transgenerational education.

Internally, constructive communication is carried out as a circular process in which feedback regulates relations between the citizen and the state, the overall aim being to match the needs of citizens with those of the state and setting a unified direction (common to instruments of power and civilian capabilities) of action which suits both national and individual (citizens') interests. At the same time, by practicing constructive forms of communication, the promotion of security culture is achieved, for example by presenting the values that a state has at the basis of its ideology and according to which it operates (Lungu, Buluc, and Deac 2018, 6) and strengthening critical thinking. Not least, constructive communication internally can also have the role of making known the norms of the respective community, as well as the changes that may occur in the legislative framework, being the main tool that the state can use in this regard.

Externally, constructive communication is used by security actors with the main purpose of making widely known the values underlying their political doctrine, their intentions in the international environment, their actual level of

power – by declaring the number and types of capabilities they possess, thus avoiding new arms races, which are typical of security dilemmas.

The presentation above outlines the conceptual framework for the present analysis of the communication forms that we will place in one of the two hypostases, according to the mentioned criteria. However, we draw attention to the fact that some forms of communication can fall both within the spectrum of influence at the level of information - attributed to the constructive hypostasis - and within the spectrum of influence at the level of coercion, attributed to the destructive hypostasis of communication.

Influencing through forms of public communication. From information to coercion

As we will approach influencing as a spectrum encompassing all forms and techniques of communication, we want to clarify some conceptual issues. In a general definition, influencing is "an action that an entity exerts on another (either *deliberately* – to change its character, its evolution – or *involuntarily* – through the prestige, authority, power it enjoys)" (DEX online, n.d.), "social influence occurs when, as a result of interaction between two social entities (individuals or groups), one of which is the "target" and the other is the "source" of the influence, the target reacts to an "object" differently than in its usual way" (Roșcan and Deac 2018, 15). Translating these definitions into international relations terms, we understand that actors can exert influence within the security environment both intentionally, when the purpose of messages and narratives is specifically designed to create certain effects on a pre-determined target group, but that their message, once in the public space, can also create effects on groups to which it is not specifically addressed. The second situation occurs most often when the speeches, debates and diplomatic information provided in the public arena by one of the powerful states (which has prestige and authority in the power game) are widely followed by the majority of states which do not enjoy the same level of power – whether we are referring to states whose doctrine is inspired by that of the hegemonic state in question, or to those states which, on the contrary, reject and contradict the doctrine of the same state.

At the same time, it is important to note that communication processes are also influenced by external factors, such as social factors (culture, organization, group to which one belongs), physical factors (spatial, infrastructure), or temporal factors (Deac 2003, 1-2).

In the following, we propose to present the specific features of the forms of communication that have had and/or can have a significant impact on the dynamics of the security environment and that have been most often put into practice by the actors of the international security environment over time, seeking to place them in one of two categories, according to the criteria listed in the previous chapter.

Forms of public communication

Persuasion is the technique of communication studied and practiced since ancient times, as the foundations of this concept are laid by Aristotle (Roscan and Deac 2018, 29), it being defined as "the intentional effort to influence the mental state of another, through communication, under conditions where the one to whom this intention is addressed has, to a certain extent, freedom of choice and both parties seek mutual benefits that do not undermine public interests" (Bayou and Panitz 1993, 44-45).

Although most scholars consider intentionality a sine-qua-non of persuasion, there are however theorists who propose an extended approach to the process. Thus, Robert H. Gass and John S. Seiter construct a model of analysis that includes different criteria used in conceptualizing persuasion and that distinguishes between "pure persuasion" and "borderline persuasion", depending on the presence or absence of intentionality, effects, coercion, symbols and also the involvement of one or more persons, as illustrated in figure no. 2 (Roscan and Deac 2018, 32) (Gass and Seiter 2018), and for the purpose of the present material we can state that pure persuasion is a form that imposes more of an intention to influence than borderline.

According to this scheme, any form of persuasion, whether pure or borderline, falls under the umbrella of influence. Further, in terms of *effects*, two meanings of persuasion are highlighted: one aimed at achieving the desired result and the procedural one. In other words, the very process of persuading is considered to be
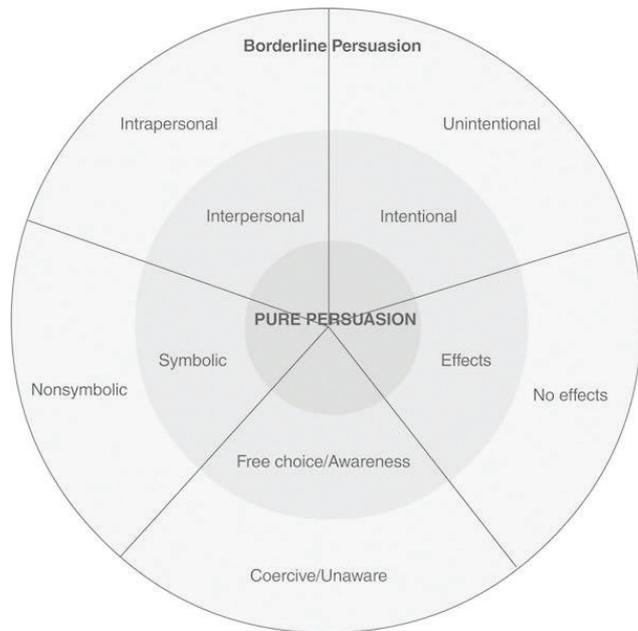

Figure 2: *Extended persuasion model*[2]

persuasion, regardless of whether it is followed by the desired outcome. As regards freedom of choice and coercion, it is difficult to make a concrete demarcation, as there is a possibility that what is initially achieved through coercion may end up being desired and vice versa, and the boundary between unsolicited acceptance and forced submission generally depends on how the situation is interpreted and passed through one's own filter of values and perceptions (e.g., the Romanians' fight against bribery changes the attitudes and behaviour of corrupt people). The presented model proposes to consider the means of achieving persuasion, i.e., either through language or nonverbal communication (Roșcan and Deac 2018, 32-34).

It is necessary for persuasion agents to assume an ethics of persuasion, and the agents' accountability can result from the status or social position acquired or granted, from the duties assumed, from promises, from commitments, from agreements, from the consequences of communication. In persuasive communication, it is necessary for both the sender and the receiver to exercise conscious and deliberate judgement – responsible communication requires a careful analysis of claims, a thorough assessment of possible consequences and a lucid weighing of relevant values (Roscan and Deac 2018, 39).

Given that people are constantly subject to

persuasive influences, the answer is not refusal/ denying (its existence) but educating the masses so that selective reception of persuasion occurs. Therefore, responsible persuasion implies the awareness of the recipients of the strategies and forms of persuasion used by the agents of persuasion, but also the critical reception of the persuasive contents, and, from these considerations the *positive function* of persuasion can be argued, (Larson 2003, 42). The strategy (of persuasion) represents "the whole of the persuasive approaches, the plan of action, the science and the art of using the most appropriate means to achieve the goal of the actions" (Chelcea 2006, 193-194).

Hugh Rank identifies different persuasion strategies, based on the principle of intensification or minimization, as follows: intensification of one's own strengths or weaknesses of the other party/other's weaknesses and minimization of one's own vulnerabilities or strengths/strengths of the opponent, where each type of strategy will be assigned specific tactics, namely: for intensification, repetition, association or composition will be used, and for minimization, omission, diversion or confusion will be used (Chelcea 2006, 193-197)[3].

Taking into account the criterion that in order to consider a form of communication as destructive, the receiver is influenced with the aim of being induced to take decisions that are usually **disadvantageous** to him and analyzing persuasion still from the definition – "the intentional effort to influence the mental state of another, through communication, under the conditions that the one to whom this intention is addressed has, to a certain extent, freedom of choice and both parties seek mutual benefits that do not undermine public interests" (Bayou and Panitz 1993, 44-45) – we will place persuasion in the middle of the influence spectrum, but we consider it necessary to differentiate between pure persuasion (which we will place towards the coercion side) and borderline persuasion which we will place towards the information side, according to the conceptual delimitation and characteristics we established in the first chapter, in order to make the classification.

In terms of short-term effects, it is sure that certain objectives related to the pursuit and

promotion of national interests will be more easily achieved by an actor once this form of communication is practiced, whether we are referring to its exercise internally or externally, but in the long term, we believe that its excessive use can lead to distortion of the receivers' perception (states or citizens) of reality, and for this reason the way in which we view persuasion will be one of skepticism regarding the degree of morality of the one who puts it into practice. On the other hand, as Larson points out, there is also the possibility that persuasion is a starting point in the desire to educate the thinking of the masses to produce a critical reception of this form of influence.

In conclusion, in terms of the implications for the dynamics of the security environment, the use of persuasion can on the one hand create vulnerabilities, or on the other hand create levers that lead to increased resilience by drawing attention to the ways in which the reception of persuasive messages can be done selectively and consciously.

Manipulation is defined as "the action of inducing a social actor (person, group, collectivity) to think and act in a way that is compatible with the interests of the initiator, and not with his interests, by using techniques that intentionally distort the truth, while leaving the impression of freedom of thought and decision. In contrast to influence of the rational persuasion type, manipulation is not aimed at a more accurate and deeper understanding of the situation, but at inducing an understanding that is convenient to the sender, using both misleading falsified arguments and non-rational emotional layers. The real intentions of the one who transmits the message remain invisible to the receiver" (Stănciugelu 2009, 122).

Analyzing the definitions of the two forms of influence mentioned above, we can see that manipulation differs from persuasion primarily in terms of the (hidden) intentions of the initiator, since manipulation does not take into account whether or not the initiator's goals coincide with those of the receiver. We will therefore distinguish between persuasion and manipulation by looking in particular at the sender's intention (while in persuasion the intention is not a negative one, in manipulation the opposite is true) and the way in which the messages and narratives have been designed (the truthfulness of the data – where in

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[3] For details on persuasion strategies and tactics see Septimiu Chelcea, "Public opinion. Strategies of persuasion and manipulation", Economica Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006.

persuasion only certain aspects that suit the sender's interests are highlighted and no falsification of data is used, as in manipulation).

In order to better understand the areas where manipulation can have an effect, we consider it important to explain the three forms of manipulation:

- *Psychological manipulation* – aimed at affecting people's knowledge of alternatives and their consequences, their reasons and ability to think rationally, to decide, to choose and to integrate their choices into the context of social life;

- *Information manipulation* – occurring when acting with the aim of affecting a person's knowledge of alternatives by altering their understanding of context. It is achieved by withholding information or conveying it in an erroneous form;

- *Contextual/situational manipulation* – when new meaning is given to the existing situation by intervening in it (Roscan and Deac 2018, 49).

Among the best known manipulative practices we mention rumor[4], intoxication[5] disinformation[6], propaganda[7] (Stănciugelu, Tudor, and others 2014), which, increased by the fast pace at which information is propagated in the online environment and in contemporary media, have led to the emergence of new themes in this field, such as fake-news[8] – a phenomenon widely debated today, around which we can say that a new concept has formed, especially because of the cognitive effects it causes on the societies concerned.

In the present material we will not insist on explaining or addressing each of the forms of

manipulation listed above, as a correct approach is necessarily a complex and far-reaching one, and that is not the purpose of this article. We will conclude, however, that any manipulative practice generates effects such as lack of trust in the actions and directives of state institutions, multiple perceptions of the same reality – which in turn generates chaos, anxiety, tension among citizens – or even favors espionage actions (Romanian Intelligence Service, n.d.). In the long term, the effects take the form of vulnerabilities in the entire power system of a state, affecting the societal sector, the economy and the state of its security. A world with states that are vulnerable in terms of their security is a world further away from what we call world order, and therefore further away from the common goal of the world's citizens: living in a peaceful world.

Thus, manipulation (and, by implication, all manipulative practices) will be placed in the sphere of influence illustrated in Figure no. 1 to the side of coercion, to the right of persuasion, classifying this form of public communication as destructive, according to the arguments listed above.

The aim of this material is not only to distinguish between communication practices that benefit societies in terms of the effects they have, but also to highlight how they can be put into practice to prevent and combat the threats posed by destructive communication practices.

Communication scholars distinguish four functions of this process, namely: norm creation, socialization of the individual, social control and innovation (Stănciugelu, Tudor, et al. 2014). The realization of these functions is necessary for the proper functioning of a state/organization, as well as its/their evolution, which can only be done in a sustainable and "healthy" way through constructive practices, as we call them in this article. We have thus identified a form of communication that suits the characteristics of the constructive side, namely strategic communication.

Strategic communication (StratCom) is "the concept of understanding the information environment and, based on this understanding, using all means of communication – including activities, images and words – to achieve desired results. In other words, it is the design, planning and execution of communications and outreach activities in a contested information environment

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[4] A statement presented as true without the possibility of verifying its accuracy.

[5] Insidious action on people's minds, tending to confirm certain opinions, demoralize, confuse.

[6] Any intervention in the basic elements of a communication process which deliberately alters the messages conveyed in order to induce certain attitudes, reactions or actions desired by a particular social agent in the recipients (called targets in disinformation theory).

[7] A systematic activity of transmitting, promoting or disseminating doctrines, theories or ideas from the positions of a particular social group and ideology, with the aim of influencing, changing, shaping conceptions, attitudes, opinions, beliefs or behaviors.

[8] A completely false news item or with incomplete or partially true passages, launched with the aim of forming erroneous opinions by those who access it (Romanian Information Service, n.d.).

to maintain or change the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of a target audience in order to achieve desired strategic outcomes" (NATO 2008).

In our understanding, strategic communication is that form of communication designed with the intention of supporting an actor (the state, supra-state organizations and its/their institutions) and, at the same time, the individual (as a citizen) in understanding reality as close as possible to the truth – in order to create lasting and trusting relationships between them –– to combat threats arising from hostile communication actions, and whose implementation generates effects which in the short term support the actors in the pursuit and promotion of their own interests, without generating other sets of effects which in the long term disturb the state of order, of peace; on the contrary, which aims to develop a cognitive system among international society, capable of filtering information and integrating it in a way appropriate to reality and the ideal of the state of peace.

We see strategic communication either as a process, as a form of constructive communication, or as a way of thinking (NATO 2008), aimed at framing the whole set of actions associated with instruments of power in a single conceptual framework, necessary to support the political directive, to provide guidance to all instruments of power, from the planning stage to the execution and even evaluation stage, so that all actions taken are in line with the interests pursued, at all levels of action. Actors in the security environment will use this form of communication by promoting their own values, policies and principles, or the benefits that following such a regime brings to their society. Communication should take place in as transparent a manner as possible, with a high degree of objectivity, providing truthful and verifiable arguments for any premise put forward or information conveyed.

We believe that such practices have always been used, through techniques such as education in educational institutions or informal settings (presentation of scientific data, generally valid truths, axioms, laws of nature), religious preaching (the example of Jesus Christ, who taught his apostles, and other prophets of different religions, and continuing to the present day, with the example of priests preaching to their parishioners) and that strategic communication techniques

such as intercultural communication are still being developed today, in line with the current international context and the dynamics of the contemporary security environment. However, the theoretical foundations for how to put this process into practice in the sphere of security and defence studies have recently been laid by NATO, which has called this process Strategic Communication (StratCom).

In NATO's view, strategic communication aims to promote the values, principles and policies of a given actor, supporting the whole process of promoting and pursuing its interests. The process involves public engagement, and communication channels are complex and range from traditional mass media to modern, internet-based media. They define strategic communication to be the coordinated and effective use of the alliance's communication activities and capabilities in support of policies, operations and the whole set of activities. These are:

- *Public diplomacy* – civil communications and outreach efforts to increase awareness, understanding and gain audience support for alliance policies, operations and activities, complementing individual actor efforts

- *Public Affairs* – the alliance's civilian commitment to inform the public about its policies, operations and activities through the media in a timely, accurate, responsive and proactive manner

- *Military Public Affairs* – the promotion of NATO's military goals and objectives to the public in order to increase awareness and understanding of Alliance military issues

- *Information Operations* – military advice and coordination of military information activities to create the desired effects on the will, understanding and capabilities of others in support of Alliance operations, missions and objectives

- *Psychological Operations* – planned psychological activities using communication methods and other means directed at approved audiences to influence their perceptions, attitudes and behaviour, affecting the achievement of politico-military objectives (Stratcomcoe, n.d.).

NATO's communication strategies set the benchmarks by which member states will be guided, taking into account the characteristics of the security and communications environment of the period to which they relate, as well as trends in

global developments.

The organization operates according to three basic concepts: keeping the alliance strong militarily, strengthening it politically and ensuring that it adopts a comprehensive approach.

In order to implement the strategies, there is a need for the proactive participation of allies, as the primary actors responsible for engaging home audiences to promote NATO's messages and brand. In this regard, it is necessary for member states to initiate actions in support of alliance objectives, such as military exercises, or participation in joint operations, in the planning of which strategic communication specialists participate. Furthermore, in order to adapt and improve NATO's actions, Member States need to develop audience analysis, conduct effective communication campaigns, monitor and evaluate impact, and ensure the provision of trained and experienced staff.

NATO's engagement with audiences requires an understanding of attitudes, beliefs and information consumption. A better understanding of motivations, interests and preferences, as well as the environments in which target audiences are active, allows the Alliance to engage directly with audience segments, using the most appropriate channels and themes for each.

The communication pillar approach allows the identification of the themes that best resonate with each audience and facilitates the planning of communication activities for different groups, segmented according to specific demographic and geographic benchmarks and built on the data gathered from polls and surveys conducted for this purpose.

The current strategy stresses that, for domestic audiences, it should be considered that once the objectives of awareness, support and confidence in NATO have been achieved, communication activities should be targeted at audience groups in the low-information category about the Alliance's mission and their nation's membership, so that they perceive the benefits they can enjoy in this context. Equally, partner audiences also play an important role in the strategic communication process. Where possible, NATO will communicate with partner audiences, making use of liaison and outreach offices in partner countries and the network of embassies and contact points to raise awareness of

NATO's presence. Last but not least, efforts will be made to make the Alliance's mission known among those who oppose the doctrine and values that underpin the ideology of the organization.

Although the approach outlined above belongs to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, we emphasize that any actor can make strategic communication, using the same principles but adapting its mechanisms according to its own interests and context. Thus, presenting the process from the NATO perspective is relevant as it is the only documented reference approach developed to serve security and defence studies.

From an ethical point of view, we consider strategic communication to be the "cleanest" form of communication, as it suits the moral principles of the sender's intentions as well as its predominantly informational character. For these reasons, we place it at the right end of the influence scale and consider it a constructive form of communication.

The effects that can be generated in the short term, as in the case of the other forms of public communication presented, relate in particular to the achievement of one's own objectives, in accordance with the interests pursued, or, more than that, to countering threats from hostile communication actions. In the strategic communication approach, seen as a process, the short-term effects can take the form, for example, of rapid information for the masses about changes or new developments in the regulatory environment, which they must comply with or which they can benefit from. On the other hand, it should be taken into consideration that it will not be possible to achieve short-term effects from the strategic communication approach as a way of thinking, as the process of assimilating and learning behavioral skills is a long-term one.

In the long term, however, the effects are of a different nature from those hitherto identified in the case of the forms of communication that we have called destructive, and this time they take the form of strengthening the culture of security and hence the level of resilience, by minimizing vulnerabilities, developing cognitive mechanisms that support critical thinking, stabilizing mass perception of reality and standardizing it among all international players, which together contribute to the state of peace and lead towards the idea of world order.

Final considerations

Finally, it can be said that the communication process in a general sense can significantly support the efforts of actors to promote and pursue their own interests. Starting from the premise that any act of communication implies, to some extent, the intention to influence, we have established that the extremes of the influence spectrum are, on the one hand, information, as the most indirect form of influence, and on the other hand, at the opposite pole, coercion, as the most direct form of influence.

By following the ethical aspects of the sender's intentions, the way in which the effects of the act of communication are produced, and the repercussions of these effects on the dynamics of the security environment, we have identified two hypostases of communication, i.e. two classes that serve our taxonomic approach: constructive and destructive.

We considered the analysis of the most commonly used forms of public communication by international actors, such as persuasion, manipulation and strategic communication, in order to make a comparison between the effects that each can generate in the security environment. Thus, we have placed these forms on the spectrum of influence (see Figure no. 3) and placed them in one of the two hypostases mentioned above.

We can conclude that the safest and most sustainable form of communication is constructive communication, the specific form of which is strategic communication, as it is carried out in an

INFLUENCE

Figure 3 *Placing persuasion, manipulation and strategic communication in the influence spectrum*
Source: Author conception

ethical manner and has the lowest risk of generating negative effects and the highest potential for achieving the desired effects, both in the short and long term.

Although seemingly utopian, the goal of replacing destructive forms of communication with constructive ones, we believe it can be achieved through sustained efforts and intra-institutional and international collaboration, and every step towards achieving this goal is a step towards a peaceful world, a state to which every citizen of international society aspires, regardless of his or her particularities.

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