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CAN WESTERN STATES COMPETE WITH STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS?

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JCSP 44

Exercise *Solo Flight*

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By Major Chris Canavan

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> *Social media and smart technology have transformed every aspect of daily life, conferring great benefits on the people it connects, worldwide. But much greater access to communications technology has simultaneously fostered new vulnerabilities, which we are called to address.*

> - Department of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged – Canada's Defence Policy*

Introduction

Since the 1990s, Western States involved in Middle Eastern conflicts, as well as Ukraine and other Easter European States, have struggled to create a narrative that fosters lasting support to their operations.[1] Western States have had to battle within a complex operating environment of these culturally unique failed States, but also within the realms of international and domestic support competition. The methodology to achieve international and domestic support for operational sustainment and success is through the term Strategic Communications. With the rapid growth of social media and cyber outlets, instant communication has a wide global reach and is disseminated over a multitude of means. As there exists little checks and balances to regulate how different State and Non-State Actors employ their Strategic Communications approach.[2] As a result of this advanced in technology, Western States through their defensive nature to protect government credibility, is often reactive. Now and more than ever they need to embrace a Multi-Domain Operations approach if they are to compete in the global landscape.[3]

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[1] O' Steen, T.W. "Adapting to the evolving strategic environment: Applying the lessons of the global war on terror to future threats." *Harvard International Review, 37*(4) (2016): 34. https://search-proquest-com.cafvl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1914193572?accountid=10524.

[2] Armistead, E., & Starsman, S. "Perception shaping and cyber macht: Russia and Ukraine." *International Conference on Cyber Warfare and Security, Reading*. (2015): 14-16. https://search-proquest-com.cafvl.idm.oclc.org/docview/1781335747?accountid=10524

[3] Guerrero-Castro, C.E. "Strategic Communication for Security & National Defense: Proposal for an Interdisciplinary Approach" *Connections: The Quarterly Journal Garmisch-Partenkirchen* Vol. 12, Iss. 2, (Spring 2013): 27-28.

The purpose of this paper is to prove that Western States, are at a disadvantage when in competition with other Non-Western State and Non-State actors' Strategic Communication policies within the Multi-Domain Operations environment. In order to demonstrate this disadvantage, this paper will identify what Strategic Communications is, and place it in the context of Multi-Domain Operations. Next it will outline the current approaches taken by Western States, as well as Non-Western States and Non-State Actors. The comparison of these results will determine if Western States can compete.

Strategic Communications and Multi-Domain Operations

In order to compete in the complex nature of global influence within the Multi-Domain Operations environment, Strategic Communications policy and application has a central pillar required for success.[4] In order to understand how Western States are at a disadvantage when compared to other Non-Western State and Non-State Actors, definition of key terminology must first be established. As the United States (US), is the leading force in Western lead initiatives across the globe, this paper will primarily draw from its doctrine and joint policies. For contrast it will compare the US against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Russia. The explanation of Strategic Communications and Multi-Domain Operations are fundamental terms when examining Western approaches versus the others.

To begin, the United States' Joint Integrating Concept on Strategic Communications was created in 2009 and it defines Strategic Communications as:

> Focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives

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[4] United States. US Army Training and Doctrine Command. The U.S Army in Multi-Domain Operations, 2028. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1. Fort Eustis, VA, 2018. viii.

through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.[5]

This term asserts and implies that Strategic Communications is not solely a military function but a national effort to gain support for strategic objectives, both globally and domestically. Based on this assertion, Western States seek to employ their governmental efforts to create favourable conditions for success in their conflicts, competitions, and coalitions. It is a challenge for military leadership alone to influence and support across each domain due to the aggressive posture and capabilities the military innately has. This realization by government and senior military leaders highlights the importance of having an over-riding national and coalition policies and objectives, set from by the head(s) of government(s).[6]

Since Strategic Communications is an integrated part of Multi-Domain Operations, this term is the framework to understand how the Western States alone or as a coalition approach operational construct. Multi-Domain Operations is best defined by the US Army's TRADOC Pamphlet on Multi-Domain Operations 2028. This document defines Multi-Domain Operations as:

> Operations conducted across multiple domains [land, maritime, air, space, and cyber forces] and contested spaces to overcome an adversary's (or enemy's) strengths by presenting them with several operational and/or tactical dilemmas through the combined application of calibrated force posture; employment of multi-domain formations; and convergence of capabilities across domains, environments, and functions in time and spaces to achieve operational and tactical objectives.[7]

Western States, however, are not the only powers that understand why Strategic Communication, and cross domain integration is important. ISIS employed a robust Strategic Communications

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[5] United States. Department of Defense. "Strategic Communication Joint Operating Concept." Version 1.0 October 2009. 2.

[6] *Ibid*,. 3-6.

[7] United States. US Army Training and Doctrine Command. The U.S Army in Multi-Domain Operations, 2028. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1. Fort Eustis, VA, 2018. GL-7.

campaign to achieve their objectives of credibility and establish legitimacy. Their methods reached outside of the operating environment and created a global network in which they could access support. This approach from a Non-State Actor (ISIS), establishes that Strategic Communications are not only a means to attain power to influence locally, and regionally, but also a way to create and interconnected global community outside of State loyalty.[8]

Another example of successful Strategic Communication application comes from Russia in their rebirth of *Realpolitik*.[9] In this Strategic Communication approach, Russia, lead by President Putin, is attempting to ensure Russia has an influence buffer, from NATO and the EU. Since 2008, when Russia first began these operations in Georgia, where they employed a strong government-military hub to sustain their Strategic Communications across all means available. The debate on their approach is if ethical or legal is up for debate, but this approach is often referred to as deceptive, mass narratives.[10]

To conclude this terminology establishment, Strategic Communications are as Caroline Holmqvist states in her article, *War, 'strategic communication' and the violence of non-recognition*, "What distinguishes Strategic Communication from ordinary communication is the ability to apply a holistic approach to achieve sustained behavioural change in the target audience(s).'"[11] The common theme is that Strategic Communication, no matter the source applying it, is a useful tool and implemented by all influencers who are competing within another, be it locally, regionally, or globally. This competition is focused on if a States'

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[8] Farwell, J.P. "The Media Strategy of ISIS." *Survival*, 56:6, (2014): 49-50.

[9] Matlary, J.H. Heier T. Ukraine and Beyond: Russia's Strategic Security Challenge to Europe. University of Oslo, Norway, 2016. 35-36. Realpolitik a system of politics or principles based on practical rather than moral or ideological considerations.

[10] *Ibid*,. 109.

[11] Holmqvist, C. "War, 'strategic communication' and the violence of non-recognition.*" Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:4, (2013): 644.

objectives can be sustained within the Multi-Domain context, is as it's creator General Townsend explains:

> The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028 concept proposes a series of solutions to solve the problem of layered standoff. The central idea in solving this problem is the rapid and continuous integration of all domains of warfare to deter and prevail as we compete short of armed conflict. If deterrence fails, Army formations, operating as part of the Joint Force, penetrate and dis-integrate enemy anti-access and area denial systems; exploit the resulting freedom of maneuver to defeat enemy systems, formations and objectives and to achieve our own strategic objectives; and consolidate gains to force a return to competition on terms more favorable to the U.S., our allies and partners. [12]

The approach taken by Non-Western State and Non-State Actors will reflect their cultures, values, and ethics. By comparing the US to Russia and ISIS, advantages and disadvantages to their Strategic Communication plans will be discovered and will help prove if the West can compete.

Strategic Communications application by Western States

As has been established by General Townsend, Strategic Communications are a core component of maintaining influence in the competitive global environment. Strategic Communication has a potential positive, as well as negative outcomes, within the Multi-Domain Operations environment.[13] The following will examine Western States' Strategic Communication goals, fundamentals, and doctrine. The aim is to provide a background to draw out advantages and more so the disadvantages that can be compared to Non-Western State and Non-State approaches. This examination will focus on US directives but are reflective of other

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[12] United States. US Army Training and Doctrine Command. The U.S Army in Multi-Domain Operations, 2028. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1. Fort Eustis, VA, 2018. iii.

[13] Townsend, Stephan. "Accelerating multi-domain operations: Evolution of an idea." Military Review, 98(5) (2018): 4, 6-7. https://search-proquest-com.cafvl.idm.oclc.org/docview/2110240246?accountid=10524

Western States Strategic Communications policies, such as Canada, UK, and coalitions organizations such as NATO.[14]

As mentioned previously, the US Multi-Domain Operations joint force construct seeks to employ Strategic Communications to enhance their ability to achieve strategic and operational objectives. When examining their Strategic Communication doctrine, fundamental goals are outlined. These goals will enable an understanding of a State's approach to influence using Strategic Communications.

The United States has four basic goals for their Strategic Communications, and they are:

Improve US credibility and legitimacy; Weaken an adversary's credibility and legitimacy; Convince selected audiences to take specific actions that support US or international objectives; and cause a competitor or adversary to take (or refrain from taking) specific actions.[15]

The first goal of improving credibility and legitimacy, is centred on creating an operational setting that enables a favourable attitude, allowing for lasting support to operations campaigns. This is fostered through effectively communicating, shared values, and interests. There is a requirement that actions, as much as statements, demonstrate resolve, and mutually support other regional and global actors. This first goal can be summarized as fostering global goodwill.[16]

The second goal of weakening an adversary's credibility and legitimacy is the opposite of the first goal. This goal is to decrease the support of a competitor's actions or policies, to remove their influence from select target audiences. Western States often need to challenge the rapid execution of mass narratives, their lies, and misdeeds pushed by adversaries. This is ideally done

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[14] Pamment J. "Strategic Narratives in US Public Diplomacy: A Critical Geopolitics." *Popular Communication*, 12:1, (2014): 48-50.

[15] United States. Department of Defense. "Strategic Communication Joint Operating Concept." Version 1.0 October 2009. 7-9.

[16] *Ibid,*. 8.

by finding credible sources to expose the deceptive narrative at play. Doing this is not always an easy process, based on the current media landscape within the operational area. Usually the target audiences impacted differently at the local, and regional levels. This stems for the fact Western States are often deployed in an area consisting of a differing culture, language, whom attain and access news and information differently than Western outlets, which result in comprehension challenges. With that stated, as global means and methods used to weaken Non-Western State and Non-State Actors' international reputation Western States and Coalitions often successful, as the globalization nature of *Human Rights*, is generally supported.[17] However, as regional and local results have proven less effective, due to the lack of understanding and influence within those areas, the West remains at a disadvantage.[18]

The third goal is to convince selected audiences to take specific actions that support the Western State's objectives. In the operating environment, a joint force uses this to strengthen friendly relations, as well as seek support of those neutral to one side or the other. This goal is achieved in the Multi-Domain Operations context by applying the full weight of military and political powers. As such, the targeted audiences will ideally support the Western objectives, instead of demonstrating disinterest with the environment, or worse, supporting the competition.[19]

The fourth goal is to cause a competitor or adversary to take (or refrain from taking) specific actions. This is the most aggressive form of Strategic Communications and is often a critical component of the military operational plans, and where they provide support in the

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[17] Pamment J. "Strategic Narratives in US Public Diplomacy: A Critical Geopolitics." *Popular Communication*, 12:1, (2014): 51-53.

[18] United States. Department of Defense. "Strategic Communication Joint Operating Concept." Version 1.0 October 2009. 8.

[19] *Ibid*,. 8.

Multi-Domain Operation environment. This fourth goal has an aim is to influence the adversary through deterrence, deception, and diplomacy. It most often has military involvement since military power is best able to project power through the threat of violence, which is often required to influence (deter) a determined adversary.[20]

These four goals are not without risks, constraints, and restraints, based on ethics and legal considerations of Western design. These considerations will have different effects locally, regionally, and globally, based on the Multi-Domain Operations approach that is utilized. The following will outline the risks to current Strategic Communication doctrine, which in turn can be labelled as a disadvantage, when compared to other competitors.

The first risk facing Western States or a Coalition, is their ability to successfully assess the impact of their actions to understand if they are creating the desired result. This assessment is required for each of the target audiences to allow for the intended objectives to succeed. The scope, time and space, and cultural context, by Western States is often not at the appropriate level of understanding. Without effective assessment, as was proven in Iraq and Afghanistan, it was difficult to achieve the four goals. Understanding of target audiences and applying the correct influence generally take more time than is available and its impact is not easily measured.[21]

Next, is the employment of a decentralized structure by the Western States and Coalitions that will allow for quick reaction time as well as provide authorities the empowerment to achieve the four goals. Currently, at the strategic level, Western States understand and seek for ways to best enable a joint force to mutually support each other to achieve their objectives. These

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[20] United States. Department of Defense. "Strategic Communication Joint Operating Concept." Version 1.0 October 2009. 9.

[21] United States. Department of Defense. "Irregular Warfare: Countering Irregular Threats Joint Operating Concept." Version 2.0 May 2010. 23-24.

strategic level assets, such as the different military components, when pushed into the joint theatre need to have a well-educated operational level command team. This includes knowledge about the State's and Coalition's objectives and what risks are acceptable. This knowledge if provided can result in a force structures that is aligned with State and Coalition objectives with an approach to compete and communicate. Currently, however, joint force structures often lack the flow of information between governmental departments on the home front. Thus, the operational joint force is often reacting to differing strategic level leadership instead of being enabled by them.[22]

Western States and Coalitions face unique challenges, due to their democratic nature and multicultural core values and ethics. Global competition can unexpectantly place the next hotspot(s) in a location(s) where there is little time to properly plan, or train forces to achieve the holistic approach as outlined by Multi-Domain Operations. The risks become apparent when a Strategic Communication plan is not fully developed or supported. As such, a future result could easily see another Iraq or Afghanistan situation arise, where military success was not sustained to achieve a desired States lasting objectives. In these previous situations, the joint operating environment was not effectively enabled to achieve national objectives, and the military was forced to work through items blindly or without assessment support.[23] To critically analyze if the goals and risks of Western States enable them to compete against non-Western State and Non-State Actors, their approaches require examination.

[22] United States. US Army Training and Doctrine Command. The U.S Army in Multi-Domain Operations, 2028. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1. Fort Eustis, VA, 2018. 23-25.

[23] Iulian, Chifu. "Hybrid Warfare, Lawfare, Informational War. The Wars of the Future." *International Scientific Conference* "Strategies XXI", Bucharest "Carol I" National Defence University, 2015. 206-210.

Strategic Communications application by Non-Western State and Non-State Actors

Russia and ISIS are recent examples of Non-Western State and Non-State Actor' successfully applying Strategic Communication policies to achieve local, regional, and global objectives. Russia since 2008, has been very active along their Western border to enhance their objective of creating and maintaining a buffer area away from the EU and NATO's influence.[24] Looking to how Russia successful continues to influence global and Western audiences is also important to allow for a comparison of the effectiveness of Western States' Strategic Communication approach. Secondly, although ISIS was militarily, and operationally defeated, an examination of their Strategic Communications policy will help to demonstrate the power Non-State Actors have in today's Multi-Domain Operations environment, against Western States.[25]

Russia took the world by surprise with their "small green men" campaign in which they seized control of the Crimean Peninsula from the Ukraine.[26] The conduct of this operation focused on a hybrid style of warfare. The principals implemented in this hybrid campaign are very similar to the Western Multi-Domain Operations, showing that a similar understanding of the importance of joint effects across the domains.[27] Russia, as will be explained, employed their Strategic Communications approach through a robust, layered, deceptive, and mass narrative campaign to skillful defend against Western States attempts to counter their objectives.

Since the application of truth is not always a consideration for Russia leadership in their Strategic Communications approach, their methods are often labelled as *propaganda.*[28] The four

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[24] Matlary, J.H. Heier T. Ukraine and Beyond: Russia's Strategic Security Challenge to Europe. University of Oslo, Norway, 2016. 88-93.

[25] Farwell, J.P. "The Media Strategy of ISIS." *Survival*, 56:6, (2014): 52.

[26] Matlary, J.H. Heier T. Ukraine and Beyond: Russia's Strategic Security Challenge to Europe. University of Oslo, Norway, 2016. 88-93. 181.

[27] United States. Department of Defense. "Irregular Warfare: Countering Irregular Threats Joint Operating Concept." Version 2.0 May 2010. 24.

[28] Matlary, J.H. Heier T. Ukraine and Beyond: Russia's Strategic Security Challenge to Europe. University of Oslo, Norway, 2016. 88-93. 181-182.

means, as described by Karlsen in his Chapter on Russian Influence, is that Russia's propaganda apparatus can be categorized as: "media, social media, political communication and diplomacy, and covert active measures."[29] What stands apart from Western States, is that the apparatus is fully integrated within all levels of Russian government, achieving cross domain support to national objectives.

To compete against the West, Russia has "weaponized information, culture, and money".[30] This approach means that they employ deceptive messaging, as well as mass narratives, in order to achieve their objectives. They take the risk of a negative reaction by the global community but are content if Russia's objectives are achieved. This unity of effort allows the full weight of Russian Strategic Communications to create a buffer from their competitors' influence locally, and regionally, by clouding the operating environment in uncertainty and misinformation.[31] This application of weaponized information of as a Strategic Communications tactic has been seen in Non-State Actors as well. ISIS skillfully developed an alternate approach that merits review in order to prove whether Western nations can effectively counter the weaponized Strategic Communications.

ISIS employed a global reaching Strategic Communications approach as they seized and then attempted to hold a large portion of Iraq and Syria. James Farwell in his article on *The Media Strategy of ISIS*, examined the successful application of hard power through "brute force, while building credibility and establish legitimacy through social media and cyber

[29] Matlary, J.H. Heier T. Ukraine and Beyond: Russia's Strategic Security Challenge to Europe. University of Oslo, Norway, 2016. 88-93. 182.
[30] *Ibid,*. 183.
[31] *Ibid,*. 183-184.

technology…".[32] As a Non-State Actor, ISIS was able to utilize social media to persuade a large portion of Muslims, locally, regionally, and globally, that their cause was just.

ISIS used an approach that most, if not all, Western States avidly look to avoid. That being, religiously belief and unity. They used a mass media platform campaign to influence potential supporters from across the globe, by directed messaging through themes that supported their religious zeal.[33] Through active promotion of their ideals, and by actively participating with their audience, ISIS was able to quickly inform them of their exploits and successes. However, this approach did have moments of negative feedback when lower level ISIS leaders' conduct was an act outside of the scope they wished to portray.[34] Interestingly, ISIS understood their open approach to social media could impact their image, or even worse provide intelligence such as their location and activities. The challenge Western States faced with ISIS, is that ISIS championed their vision by substantiating it in Muslim religious beliefs.[35] This approach meant the Western States were at a disadvantage due their lack of firm religious stance. As well, ISIS took advantage of this, by labelling Western States as Christian and citing past historical acts against Muslims. Being placed in a such difficult position, Western States have come to understand that they need regional powers of the Muslim faith to step forward and oppose ISIS and future ISIS-like groups, if local and regional lasting success, is to be achieved.[36]

Russia and ISIS employed a deceptive mass narrative Strategic Communication approach which allowed them to gain operation initiative. The Western States due to their democratic and

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[32] Farwell, J.P. "The Media Strategy of ISIS." Survival, 56:6, (2014): 49.
[33] *Ibid*,. 51.
[34] *Ibid*,. 52.
[35] *Ibid*,. 52.
[36] De Graff, B., Dimitriu, G., Ringsmose, J. Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion and War: Winning Domestic Support for the Afghan War. Routledge, 2015. 194-195.

truthful nature were not able to effectively counter in a timely manner.[37] Since Russia's and ISIS' deceptive mass narrative methods and domineering ideals were amplified cross a variety of domains, their successful impact was felt locally, regionally, and globally by their understanding and ability to influence the target audiences. While these means and methods were not without risk to the credibility and legitimacy both groups, they provided unique advantages. By comparing Western against non-Western approaches to Strategic Communications the results will prove if the West can compete within this operational level of war.

Can Western States compete with their biggest competition?

Now that this paper has outlined both Western and Non-Western State and Non-State Actors approaches to Strategic Communications, we can determine if Western States can compete with their adversaries. *NATO Science for Peace and Security Series E: Human and Societal Dynamics[38]*, provides context to how NATO is working to develop their counter capabilities within the realm of Strategic Communication and fighting propaganda. As such it is the ideal primary source for understanding how Western States are currently attempting to develop counter actions. It also will prove how they are not able to counter their biggest competitors.

As was discovered previously, the advantage that Russia and ISIS have over the West is the use of deceptive information through mass narratives. This was conducted through the application of social media, and a fully interlinked Strategic Communication platform. In order to counter this advantage, NATO has highlighted two recommended action plans. These two

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[37] De Graff, B., Dimitriu, G., Ringsmose, J. Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion and War: Winning Domestic Support for the Afghan War. Routledge, 2015. 196.

[38] NATO Science for Peace and Security Series E "Challenges in Strategic Communication and Fighting propaganda in Eastern Europe: Solutions for a Future Common Project" Ed by Sultanescu, Dan. IOS Press, 2018. 1-128.

actions plans are first, is to invest in *media literacy*, and secondly, is to call out *Fake News* and its perpetrators quickly and accurately.[39] Reviewing these developing Strategic Communications methods to combat current NATO disadvantages will determine if the West can compete.

From government institutions down to the local levels, Western supported narratives need to "tell as stories effectively and compellingly, especially in the age of social media."[40] The best means to do so, is to invest in media literacy. This shows support and allows for growth of influence by the local media. Globally, the local media is understood to be the best cultural interpreters of their immediate surroundings. By ensuring the messaging is revealed through important details of a story, they aim to allow readers to formulate their own opinions. This Western approach allowes for facts and data to be confirmed. Thus, inhibiting regional or global influence, or allowing them to gaining credibility and legitimacy over their local understanding. Alternately, the mass narratives that Russia and ISIS employed allowed them to control and support their multi-domain efforts and direct the narrative. All the while employing these same measures to destabilize their competitors within all levels of the competition space.[41]

The second advantage that Russia and ISIS employed is deceptive information. This news can overwhelm and dominate the media and cyber domains. This is more so the case where no credible or legitimacy source can counteract it. NATO researchers, therefore, have assessed that to counter this threat, Western Nations and Coalitions need to locate positive stories. These stories need to "compellingly make the case for Western values and institutions, for democratic principles and rule of law, for government that operates by the people, for the people and of the

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[39] NATO Science for Peace and Security Series E "Challenges in Strategic Communication and Fighting propaganda in Eastern Europe: Solutions for a Future Common Project" Ed by Sultanescu, Dan. IOS Press, 2018. 1-3.
[40] *Ibid*,. 6.
[41] *Ibid*,. 6.

people."[42] To achieve this competitive advantage, regional involvement with local governance across the multi-domain setting are required.

Without a Multi-Domain Operational approach and an interlinked Strategic Communication node, Non-Western States and Non-State Actors, such as Russia and ISIS, can influence the local and regional levels much more effectively that Western States.[43] While Western based research and conferences continue to study how best to counter, neither media literacy, nor the ability to counter deceptive mass narratives is currently in place or proven effective.[44] As a result, Non-Western States and State Actors have a competitive local, regional, and potentially global advantage over Western Nations and coalitions through their Strategic Communications policies.

Conclusion

This paper set out to prove that Western States are at a disadvantage when in competition with other Non-Western State and Non-State actors' Strategic Communication policies within the Multi-Domain Operations context. This was proved by first identifying what Strategic Communications is and place it in the context of Multi-Domain Operations of primarily US based doctrine and policies.

The paper, then went through the current Western States approach to Strategic Communications and identified four goals as: improve US credibility and legitimacy; weaken an adversary's credibility and legitimacy; convince selected audiences to take specific actions that

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[42] NATO Science for Peace and Security Series E "Challenges in Strategic Communication and Fighting propaganda in Eastern Europe: Solutions for a Future Common Project" Ed by Sultanescu, Dan. IOS Press, 2018. 6.

[43] De Graff, B., Dimitriu, G., Ringsmose, J. Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion and War: Winning Domestic Support for the Afghan War. Routledge, 2015. 196.

[44] NATO Science for Peace and Security Series E "Challenges in Strategic Communication and Fighting propaganda in Eastern Europe: Solutions for a Future Common Project" Ed by Sultanescu, Dan. IOS Press, 2018. 25-28.

support US or international objectives; and cause a competitor or adversary to take (or refrain from taking) specific actions. This Western State focus review concluded by identifying the disadvantages Western States and coalitions face when involving themselves in local and regional conflicts.

With the Western States' Strategic Communications policies identified, the paper shifted to Non-Western States and Non-State Actors approaches. The results of this examination demonstrated the deceptive nature of their methods, as well as how effective their multi-domain and interlinked application of Strategic Communications was through mass narratives, and social media. This examination set the stage for the determination on if Western States or Coalitions could compete with Non-Western State or Non-State Actors, such as Russia and ISIS.

In the comparison of West versus other, it was determined that Western States understand the advantages Russia and ISIS have as they employ their deceptive and mass narrative campaigns. However, the actual Western application to counter the deceptive narratives is not fully realized through joint force operational integration. This implication is that regional and local joint forces the currently lack the support needed to compete, putting sustained operation and strategic objectives at risk. Future research in how Western States can invest in media literacy, as well as call out fake news and its perpetrators quickly and accurately, will see if the narrative can change and allow future Western States and Coalitions the ability to compete within the Multi-Domain Operations environment.

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