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**A STRATEGIC CHORUS: INTEGRATING PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND
OTHER INFORMATION ENABLERS**

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AIM

1.   Over the last several years, the Public Affairs (PA) branch has restructured its training to deliver enhanced capabilities more closely aligned with other military information enablers to facilitate more effective operations within the information domain. A recent media leak of the proposed Military Public Affairs Enhancement and Employment Concept (MPAEEC) raised questions about the appropriateness of this direction. Subsequently, the branch has been ordered back to its traditional role focused solely on corporate PA.[1] This paper will detail the criticality of maintaining the PA branch's integration with other information enablers to support operational effectiveness within the information domain. It also recommends a starting point for this endeavour that meets the needs for public transparency through a clear delineation of roles, and identification of authorities and possible missions.

INTRODUCTION

2.   In 2015, the CDS tasked the PA trade with "operationalizing" the branch to produce Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) capable of acting with purpose in a dynamic and fast-moving information environment.[2] This transformation of PA was outlined in a 2017 proposal called "Conceptual Vision: From Operationalizing Military Public Affairs to enabling the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in the Information Domain." It identified the PA branch as the foundation of a future information domain capability for the CAF. This capability would leverage the existing professional qualifications of military PAOs and train them in other information specialties, such as Information Operations (IO) and Psychological Operations (PSYOPS). The transformation concept suggested linking PAOs with other information enablers to support targeting, influence activities during deployed operations, and collective training.[3]

3.   This concept grew into the MPAEEC, which identified two separate information environments: the military information environment and the global information environment. The military information environment, which centers itself on CAF operational activity, involves activities conducted by information-related capabilities (IRCs) like IO, PSYOPS, Electronic Warfare, and Deception. The global information

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[1] Laurie-Anne Kempton, "Changes in ADM (PA) / Changements au sein du groups SMA (AP)," email, sent 5 November 2020.

[2] David Pugliese, "Chief of the Defence Staff Gen. Jon Vance and the 'Weaponization of Public Affairs'," Ottawa Citizen, 22 September 2015, last accessed 28 January 2021, https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/chief-of-the-defence-staff-gen-jon-vance-and-the-weaponization-of-public-affairs

[3] Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, A Conceptual Vision of the Operationalization of the Canadian Armed Forces Military Public Affairs Capability (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2017), 2.

environment encompasses everything else, including CAF strategic and institutional activity, engagements, diplomacy, and culture, among others, and it requires a more corporate approach to communications.[4] The MPAEEC argued that IRCs must continuously function in both information environments, and proposed the Defence Strategic Communication concept. This concept unites key DND and CAF authorities to "formulate strategic objectives and select and prioritize the defence activities by which to achieve them."[5] The MPAEEC, which was still in draft form, was leaked to a blog writer before it had been formally briefed outside of the PA transformation group. The subsequent article accused the CAF of establishing a unit that would conduct domestic influence activities.[6] Conveniently, this article came on the heels of a blog post by the same author about an unrelated training incident in which a reserve Army unit accidentally conducted a fictitious PSYOPS campaign on the public.[7] The political fallout was swift. The Minister of National Defence Office stated that the plan would not be authorized.[8] The Assistant Deputy Minister (Public Affairs) followed up by standing down the PA transformation group, and ending the relationship between PA and the other IRCs.[9]

DISCUSSION

A Lexical Debate

4.   A key concern raised in the referenced media report was the appropriateness of PA to influence vice inform, which remains an ongoing internal and public debate. Doctrinally, CAF PA is responsible for the latter and conducts "activities related to informing internal and external audiences" through the "delivery of information programs."[10] However, this doctrine is more than 20 years old and fails to reflect today's information environment. As such, communication experts and public affairs

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[4] Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, Military Public Affairs Enhancement and Employment Concept (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2020), 2.

[5] *Ibid*., 7.

[6] David Pugliese, "Canadian military wants to establish new organization to use propaganda, other techniques to influence Canadians," Ottawa Citizen, 2 November 2020, last accessed 28 January 2021, https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/canadian-military-to-establish-new-organization-to-use-propaganda-other-techniques-to-influence-canadians

[7] David Pugliese, "Forged letter warning about wolves on the loose part of Canadian Forces propaganda campaign that went awry," Defence Watch Blog, 14 October 2020, last accessed 28 January 2021, https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/forged-letter-warning-about-wolves-on-the-loose-part-of-canadian-forces-propaganda-campaign-that-went-awry

[8] David Pugliese, "Canadian military wants to establish new organization to use propaganda, other techniques to influence Canadians," Ottawa Citizen, 2 November 2020, last accessed 28 January 2021, https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/canadian-military-to-establish-new-organization-to-use-propaganda-other-techniques-to-influence-canadians

[9] Laurie-Anne Kempton, "Changes in ADM (PA) / Changements au sein du groups SMA (AP)," email, sent 5 November 2020.

[10] Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, DAOD 2008-0, Public Affairs Policy, last accessed 27 January 2021, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/2000-series/2008/2008-0-public-affairs-policy.html#def

practitioners have started arguing that while communication can always inform, it's very difficult to communicate without also influencing. PAOs do not conduct and coordinate media engagements, or push content out on social media, without first developing a public affairs plan. The PA plan is the result of a deliberate and collaborative planning process that identifies the desired effects that a particular activity is meant to achieve. These objectives shape the activity's approach, means and timing, as well as the narrative or messaging used to maximize the likelihood that the audience sees an issue from a specific perspective. This ability to achieve an effect is the very definition of influence.[11]

5.   Influence, however, has typically been associated with other IRCs, specifically IO, PSYOPS and Deception. In CAF doctrine, IO coordinates information activities to affect the will, understanding and capabilities of a current or potential adversary or other approved audience to achieve mission objectives.[12] PSYOPS aims to influence the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour of an approved target audience through planned actions or communications efforts.[13] The association of the word 'influence' to activities that may or may not colour slightly outside of the lines has given the word a negative connotation. However, the use of IO and PSYOPS on international operations are only authorized by the Minister of National Defence / Chief of Defence Staff, and are subject to Rules of Engagement, international law, policy, doctrine, orders, and directives.[14] Futhermore, neither IO nor PSYOPS activities are authorized to be conducted in Canada, unless specifically requested and authorized by Cabinet under extraordinary circumstances.[15] The argument that PA is leading the development of an information domain capability that will be used against Canadians falls flat when held against these facts.

6.   The inform / influence debate is a lexical argument from which the CAF, and specifically the PA branch, need to disengage. It detracts from the institution's ability to establish a capability for effective manoeuvering in the information domain. Not doing so would reinforce the idea that PA should remain disconnected from other IRCs because the business of IO and PSYOPS puts PA's credibility at risk. In this light, PA is either guilty by association or worse, corrupted.[16] This is troubling for two reasons. First, it implies that PAOs, when integrated with other IRCs, will not act ethically in carrying out their duties in line with the core values of the trade: truthfulness, transparency, timeliness,

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[11] Merriam Webster, "Definition of influence," last accessed 29 January 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/influence

[12] Department of National Defence, B-GG-005-004/AF-010, *CF Information Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1998), 1-4.

[13] Department of National Defence, B-GJ-005-313/FP-001, *Psychological Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2004), 1-1.

[14] Department of National Defence, B-GG-005-004/AF-010, *CF Information Operations* (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1998), 1-13.

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Sara B. King, "Military Social Influence in the Global Information Environment: A Civilian Primer," *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 11, no. 1, 2011, 7.

and accountability.[17] These professional obligations are not turned off simply because PA is coordinating their activities within a larger effort. Second, it isolates only one IRC and creates the probability of ineffective activities at best and at worst, information fratricide.[18] This puts the credibility, and the effects, of all IRCs at risk. The PA branch must acknowledge there is a difference between the influence activities conducted by the likes of IO and PSYOPS, and PA activities that influence. This distinction will help move the CAF toward an effective and ethical presence in today's complex information domain.

The Information Domain

7.   Technology has redefined the battlefield. The advent of the internet and the smartphone has removed state borders and opened relatively unfettered access to audiences around the world. Adversaries have recognized that while they perhaps can't match the conventional forces of Western nations, they can still achieve many of the same effects through coercive and often subversive activities.[19] These activities, which aim to destabilize the core power structures of a nation, allow adversaries to project power without triggering a full-scale conventional response.[20] The Pan-domain Force Employment Concept (PFEC) calls this style of modern-day intimidation "grey zone conflict" which requires the CAF to reconsider the domains in which it operations.[21] It puts particular emphasis on the information domain, where much of the grey zone conflict is currently taking place. The PFEC recognizes that every action in one domain has an effect in the information domain, making it the "decisive domain in contemporary operations."[22]

8.   If it is to be the domain where battles are won or lost, the CAF has a lot of ground to make up on its adversaries. For years, they have been weaponizing narrative: using information and information systems to attack the core identity and beliefs of a nation in order to degrade will and cohesion.[23] One merely has to look to the United States to see how effective these actions can be. Aceves notes that during the 2016 presidential election, Russia created thousands of fake social media accounts to spread false or

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[17] Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces, DAOD 2008-0, Public Affairs Policy, last accessed 28 January 2021, https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/defence-administrative-orders-directives/2000-series/2008/2008-0-public-affairs-policy.html#def

[18] Curtis Boyd, "Army IO is PSYOP: Influencing more with less," *Military Review*, 87(3), May-June 2007, 72.

[19] Braden Allenby and Joel Garreau, "Weaponized Narrative Is the New Battlespace: And the U.S. is Behind its Adversaries," in Weaponized Narrative: The New Battlespace, The Weaponized Narrative Initiative White Paper, 2017, 5-6.

[20] Braden Allenby, "The Age of Weaponized Narrative Or, Where have You Gone, Walter Cronkite?" *Issues in Science and Technology* 33, no. 4, 2017, 67.

[21] Department of National Defence, Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept: Prevailing in an Uncertain World (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2020), 36, 41.

[22] *Ibid.*, 16.

[23] Braden Allenby, "The Age of Weaponized Narrative Or, Where have You Gone, Walter Cronkite?" *Issues in Science and Technology* 33, no. 4, 2017, 67.

misleading information about race and social justice issues. These social media posts, which were seen by millions of Americans, stoked the flames of national division. Some posts called for racial equality and solidarity, while other posts denounced the Black Lives Matter movement and supported calls for violence from white nationalists. These posts pitted Americans against each other, tearing the social fabric of the nation at a time when America was choosing its next president. It was an inexpensive and effective way for Russia to influence American politics.[24]

9.   Canada is not immune. As its closest neighbour, events in the United States invariably have an impact in Canada. Additionally, Canada is just as vulnerable to Russia's subversive activities. The NATO battle group in Latvia has been the target of several disinformation campaigns, ranging from accusations of Canadian soldiers living in luxurious apartments at Latvian expense[25] to suggestions that the contingent has a high number of COVID-positive soldiers.[26] These efforts are meant to weaken the credibility and reputation of NATO forces in the eyes of the local population. Yet thanks to global connectivity, they are also reported in Canadian media. This requires double the effort on the part of PAOs, in-theatre and at home, to dispute these types of stories at the same speed as the adversary is creating them.

10.   The current Assistant Deputy Minister (Public Affairs) has unequivocally stated that it is not the role of PA to "mitigate the threat of future adversaries on the international stage in the Information Operations/Influence Activities domain" and that it is "an operational role."[27] This ignores the fact that global connectivity has erased the lines between domestic and international operations, and that the CAF can no longer afford to treat them as separate entities.[28] Removing PA from the sphere of influence activities doesn't protect the branch's credibility. It erodes it by reducing situational awareness and the ability to act effectively. It creates a situation in which the left hand isn't talking to the right, which wears at the CAF's reputation of professionalism and trustworthiness. These situations can be mitigated if PA is an integrated member of the team.

11.   This line of thinking also discounts the value PA brings to the other enablers in the information domain. Of all the other IRCs, including new growing capabilities like

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[24] William J. Aceves, "Virtual Hatred: How Russia Tried to Start a Race War in the United States." *Michigan Journal of Race & Law* 24, no. 2, 2019, 178-180.

[25] Tom Blackwell, "Russian fake-news campaign against Canadian troops in Latvia includes propaganda about litter, luxury apartments," National Post, 18 November 2017, last accessed 28 January 2021, https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/russian-fake-news-campaign-against-canadian-troops-in-latvia-includes-propaganda-about-litter-luxury-apartments

[26] Murray Brewster, "Canadian-led NATO battlegroup in Latvia targeted by pandemic disinformation campaign," CBC, 24 May 2020, last accessed 28 January 2021, https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/nato-latvia-battle-group-pandemic-covid-coronavirus-disinformation-russia-1.5581248

[27] Laurie-Anne Kempton, "Changes in ADM (PA) / Changements au sein du groups SMA (AP)," email, sent 5 November 2020.

[28] Department of National Defence, Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept: Prevailing in an Uncertain World (Ottawa: DND Canada, 2020), 21.

space and cyber, PA is the only enabler that is its own trade. PA brings with it associated occupational qualifications[29] and, more importantly, decades of experience in the information domain. There are many overlaps between the types of activities, products, and engagements produced by PA and other IRCs. While PA certainly must not be involved in the production of these materials or the execution of these activities, it can share years of learned best practices to ensure the other IRCs are as effective as possible in achieving mission objectives. PA can, and should, have a leadership role throughout the development of a more fulsome CAF information domain capability.

Strategic Communications

12.   While PA can be an IRC leader, it should not be in charge of this broader capability. Rather, all IRCs should be coordinated under a defence strategic communications framework. The CAF currently does not have its own official definition of strategic communications. As such, the Defence Public Affairs Learning Centre teaches several definitions in its Strategic Communications course.[30] This paper will focus on the NATO definition: "the coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities in support of Alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to advance NATO's aims."[31] Simply put, NATO coordinates and concentrates its information enablers to create strategic effects.[32] NATO further defines and enables this process through its NATO Strategic Communications Policy (2009), NATO Military Policy on Strategic Communications (2017), and the NATO Strategic Communications Handbook (2017).

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[29] PAOs are trained in core PA functions: PA policy, media engagements, community and stakeholder relations, PA planning, internal communications, advising leadership, and managing the imagery capability. This core training also includes development of PA products such as news releases, public service announcements, and media advisories. Additionally, over the past four years, PAOs have also been cross-trained in other IRC roles, including IO, PSYOPS, Strategic Joint Targeting, and Target Audience Analysis.

[30] Diane Larose, "Describe strategic communications," (lecture, Defence Public Affairs Learning Centre, Hull, QC, 23 February 2020), with permission. The Defence Public Affairs Learning Centre (DPALC) teaches three different definitions in their strategic communications coursework: the NATO definition used in this paper, a definition from notable communications expert Christopher Paul, and a definition from a RAND study on NATO's strategic communications concept. The fact that the CAF does not have its own formal definition of strategic communications, yet has released strategic communications guidance, such as the CDS Directive for Strategic Communication Framework – Enhance Forward Presence Battlegroup Latvia, is problematic.

[31] NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, "About Strategic Communications," last accessed 29 January 2021, https://www.stratcomcoe.org/about-strategic-communications This paper will use the NATO definition as the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence is considered a leader in military strategic communications, and will serve as an example for future CAF strategic communications development.

[32] *Ibid.*

13.   Strategic communications is important because it provides a process and means for coordination of effort.[33] NATO strategic communications, established roughly 10 years ago, provides a good example of how the coordination of key IRCs functions and why integration of these capabilities is critical to mission success. The Military Committee (MC) advises the North Atlantic Council, NATO's political decision-making body, on military affairs. The MC is also responsible for strategic communications, and provides guidance, advice, and working capacity through a Strategic Communications Working Group.[34] NATO identifies essential IRCs as public diplomacy, PA (civilian), military PA, PSYOPs, and IO. It separates civilian and military PA, assigning civilian PA to communication activities associated with NATO's corporate business while military PA manages communication activities associated with NATO's operational business.[35] NATO also recognizes the need for military PA to maintain its functional responsibilities as an advisor to senior leadership, and as the lead on external media engagements.[36] In order to protect PA's credibility in these roles, NATO ensures that PA is simply not involved in the planning or execution of IO, PSYOPS, or deception operations. It stresses that this does not prevent PA from coordinating with these enablers to ensure synchronization of messaging and efforts.[37] In fact, as underscored throughout the NATO Strategic Communications Policy and the NATO Military Policy on Strategic Communications, the integration of PA with the other IRCs is fundamental to ensuring consistency, credibility, and efficacy of NATO strategic communication efforts.

CONCLUSION

14.   The PA branch must embrace some key concepts to integrate appropriately with other IRCs in pursuit of achieving CAF objectives in the information domain. First, it must recognized itself as an enabler that wields influence. It must trust the professionalism of its PAOs to act in an ethical manner that aligns with CAF policy, directives, and orders. This is what will protect the credibility of the branch. Second, it must be a leader within the information domain, as the only professional trade among IRCs. This means being fully integrated with all information enablers and sharing best practices and professional expertise founded on decades of experience in the information domain. Third, the branch must support the development of a defence strategic communication framework to guide the coordination of all IRCs, including PA, toward achieving CAF strategic objectives. The PA branch has an opportunity to be a force multiplier in the information domain, provided it gets out of its own way.

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[33] Nicholas Michelsen, and Thomas Colley, "The Field of Strategic Communications Professionals: A New Research Agenda for International Security," *European Journal of International Security* 4, no. 1, 2019, 62, 78.

[34] NATO, SH/SAG STC/AM/17-318278, *NATO Military Policy on Strategic Communications*, (Belgium: Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, 2017), 12.

[35] NATO, SG(2009)0794, *NATO Strategic Communications Policy*, (Belgium: NATO Headquarters, 2009), 2.

[36] NATO, SH/SAG STC/AM/17-318278, *NATO Military Policy on Strategic Communications*, (Belgium: Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, 2017), 7.

[37] *Ibid*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

15.   In order to move into the future, the CAF must first go back to basics. The Canadian Joint Warfare Centre should be tasked to develop doctrine for Canadian Armed Forces Strategic Communications that establishes the foundation for the institution's information domain capability. This doctrine should identify required enablers, the command and control structure of the capability, the authorities and relationships between IRCs, the missions it will accept and train to, and the guiding principles of the conduct of information domain operations.

16.   This publication will help maintain the public's trust by clearly defining and delineating the roles of each IRC, while protecting the credibility of PA. It will also satisfy the requirement of public transparency, and serve as a touchstone for public debate and media queries that question how the CAF conducts operations within the information domain. The establishment of this doctrine will provide an easy transition for PA back into a role that is an integral part of the CAF information domain capability.

17.   As the broader CAF is implicated by both the PA function and the future of operations in the information domain, it is also recommended that a Defence Administrative Orders and Directives (DAOD) is established for a CAF Strategic Communications Policy. Doing so will provide awareness, guidance, and intent to all members within DND and the CAF that are in line with the core purpose of strategic communications. That is, we all speak with one voice. Together.

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