



THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION WITHIN CONTEMPORARY INFORMATION WARFARE

Date: November 16, 2023

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KEY EVENTS

On November 16, 2023, Brigadier General (Rtd.) Jay Janzen presented *The Role of Strategic Communication within Contemporary Information Warfare* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The key points discussed were the increasing importance of cognitive warfare in contemporary conflict, NATO's reimagining of its doctrine to address evolving threats from adversarial states, and the role of physical, virtual, and cognitive effects in defence and deterrence.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

NATO is reimagining its doctrine to further incorporate Strategic Communication as a means of addressing the increased prospect of conflict with a near peer exhibiting disregard for the rules-based international order (RBO) and the use of military power to achieve foreign policy. As such, the Alliance is adapting its concept for deterrence and defence and crafting a war-fighting strategy that seeks to ensure no adversary gains an advantage in geography, domain, or readiness in times of peace, crisis, or war. Central to this is a behaviour-centred approach to operations that influences the attitudes and behaviours of populations through multi-domain demonstrations that carry effects in the physical, virtual, and cognitive dimensions.

BACKGROUND

Brigadier General Janzen introduced the concept of cognitive warfare—defined as the role of information, narrative, and communication in warfare—highlighting the current conflict in the Middle East as evidence of its importance to strategy. He noted that both sides in the conflict attach a premium to its meaning, and that this meaning shapes, and is shaped by, legal, moral, and

tactical elements, influencing the support of the international community and views of billions of people.

Brigadier General Janzen stated that NATO is returning to a focus on collective defence, marking a departure from its focus prior to 2014, which was centred on out-of-area operations such as counter-insurgency operations. However, the possibility of conflict has now returned to Alliance borders via systemic confrontation between NATO-aligned democratic actors and authoritarian adversaries. While the former view post-war laws, norms, and treaties as safeguards to peace, the latter perceive these systems as check and balances on ambition.

Brigadier General Janzen asserted that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is not simply about territorial acquisition, but rather about breaking alliances and challenging systems with the intention of creating new systems that act as more beneficial to adversarial states and actors, be they economic, political, or militaristic. He suggested that underpinning this hegemonic competition are the core values of democracy versus authoritarianism and that, although the subject of warfare has become unpopular in Canada, our way of life is dependent on the integrity and security of our systems, and that these require consistent investment to sustain.

Brigadier General Janzen explained that NATO is actively re-establishing its systems, evolving its concepts for deterrence and defence in the Euro-Atlantic area, and crafting a war-fighting strategy that seeks to ensure no adversary gains an advantage in geography, domain, or readiness in times of peace, crisis, or war. In terms of readiness, this manifests as alert systems, intelligence, and early detection that is supplemented by demonstrations of force and capability. For geographical defence, this entails ensuring that no territorial advantage is ceded to an adversarial state. Multi-domain defence and deterrence—land, sea, air, space, and cyber—is essential as near-peer adversaries such as Russia seek to challenge via a variety of tactics, including fomenting destabilisation in neighbouring states which can be exploited to foster disorder within NATO-aligned nations through targeted cyber and information operations.

Brigadier General Janzen highlighted that the Deter and Defend concept centres on NATO's defensive nature, its war prevention aims, and its commitment to the RBO; offering integrated defence plans to the 31 member states for times of peace, crisis and war. These include top-level plans that cover the entire Euro-Atlantic area and others that are specific to geographic regions or domains, and central to each is their integration among the Alliance and capability to predict and prevent challenges by adversarial states. Key to this war prevention strategy

is the demonstration to adversarial states that NATO holds a multi-domain advantage and, should this be challenged, the Alliance will detect, track, and respond to the threat, countering and imposing a dilemma on the adversary in another domain.

Brigadier General Janzen stated that NATO has reimagined its doctrine to utilise warfighting functions not to primarily seize territory or destroy adversarial systems, but rather influence the attitudes and behaviours of people on the ground who, ultimately, determine the outcome of conflict. This behaviour-centred approach to operations is revolutionary for NATO in that it encompasses the physical, virtual, and cognitive dimensions of conflict. Brigadier General Janzen acknowledged that information and communication are central tenets to this approach; however, it is only in conjunction with physical and virtual demonstrations of NATO's advantage that this can produce the desired cognitive effects. He explained that the strategy of Allied command for Strategic Communication is focused on four objectives—Allied cohesion maintained; Allied publics assured; Allied legitimacy maintained; and Adversaries deterred—and that each of these is achieved by demonstrative effects in the physical and virtual dimensions, which are then communicated to achieve effects in the cognitive dimension. Brigadier General Janzen pointed to the NATO exercise Neptune Strike as an example of such a demonstration, as large-scale and Europe-wide carrier missions were then leveraged in the cognitive dimension to demonstrate Alliance advantage to both adversarial states and to those living in Allied states who feel close to conflict.

Brigadier General Janzen stated that NATO's shift in warfighting functions extends beyond peacetime into times of crisis, in which the Alliance adds objectives to enhance deterrence and target effects to key decision-makers in order to persuade adversaries against conflict. Should adversarial states insist on conflict, however, NATO activates a further set of objectives and effects that disrupt activity through a variety of means that effectively demonstrate NATO's multi-domain advantage. Brigadier General Janzen emphasised that a strategic victory for NATO must now include the cognitive dimension and focus on changing attitudes and behaviour and imparting meaning to people, as this is the decisive element to future conflict.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Cognitive Warfare is of increasing importance to modern conflict, as it imparts meaning to people that then shapes the legal, moral, and tactical elements of conflict and influences the support of the international community.

- States such as Russia are seeking to break alliances and challenge systems with the intention of creating new systems more beneficial to adversarial states and actors, be they economic, political, or military. Underpinning this systemic competition are the core values of democracy and authoritarianism.
- NATO is focused on Collective Defence given the increased prospect of conflict with a near peer exhibiting disregard for the rules-based international order (RBO) and the use of military power to achieve foreign policy. This is a departure from NATO's focus prior to 2014, which was centred on out of area operations.
- NATO is revolutionising its systems, evolving its concept for deterrence and defence and crafting a war-fighting strategy that seeks to ensure no adversary gains an advantage in geography, domain, or readiness in times of peace, crisis, or war. Key to this is the demonstration to adversarial states that NATO holds a multi-domain advantage and, should this be challenged in any domain, the Alliance will detect, track, and respond to the threat, followed by the imposition of a dilemma in another domain.
- NATO has reimagined its doctrine to employ its warfighting functions to influence the attitudes and behaviours of people on the ground. This behaviour-centred approach to operations is revolutionary for NATO in that it encompasses an integrated strategy that utilises the interplay between the physical, virtual, and cognitive dimensions of conflict.

FURTHER READING

Janzen, J. (2019). What if the Pen is a Sword? Communicating in a Chaotic, Sensational, and Weaponized Information Environment. *Canadian Military Journal*, 19(4), 4-16. <http://www.journal.forces.gc.ca/Vol19/No4/PDF/CMJ194Ep4.pdf>



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Published by the Journal of Intelligence, Conflict, and Warfare and Simon Fraser University

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