



NATO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

Kalnaciema Street 11B, Riga, LV-1048, Phone: +371 67335467
e-mail: info@stratcomcoe.org

INVITATION TO TENDER FOR THE PROVISION OF AN INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT SIMULATION FOR EXERCISES IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

To be supplied to the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (NATO StratCom COE)

Revision	Version 1
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Invitation to Tender for the Provision of an Information Environment Simulation for Exercises in Strategic Communications

You are kindly invited to submit a tender to provide an Information Environment (IE) Simulation for the NATO StratCom COE's project.

By participating in this tender you are indicating your acceptance to be bound by the guidelines set out in this letter. We provide below the key details of the NATO StratCom COE requirements, which you should take into account in your response. Please acknowledge via e-mail safe receipt of this letter within two working days together with your confirmation of your intention to tender.

To simplify exchange of information regarding this Invitation to Tender (ITT) please nominate a Bid Manager and relevant contact details: phone and e-mail address.

Please direct any questions regarding the ITT content or process to LTC Soenke Niedringhaus. You should not contact other NATO StratCom COE personnel unless directed to do so by the appointed NATO StratCom COE representative. The NATO StratCom COE reserves the right to disqualify and reject proposals from suppliers who do not comply with these guidelines. All questions should be submitted in writing to the e-mail: soenke.niedringhaus@stratcomcoe.org.

As part of this tender process the NATO StratCom COE makes no obligations in any way to:

- (i) pay any supplier for an ITT response; or
- (ii) award the contract with the lowest price proposal or any Bidder; or
- (iii) accept any ITT information received from suppliers; or
- (iv) include suppliers responding to this ITT, in any future invitations; or
- (v) any other commitment to suppliers whatsoever.

Looking forward receiving your response.

Yours Sincerely,

LTC Soenke Niedringhaus
NATO StratCom COE Staff Officer Education and Training
E-mail address: soenke.niedringhaus@stratcomcoe.org.

Whilst care and attention has been exercised in the preparation of this document, it remains subject to contract and all warranties whether express or implied by statute, law or otherwise are hereby disclaimed and excluded.

These limitations are not intended to restrict continued business discussions between the NATO StratCom COE and suppliers.

Any proposal received by the NATO StratCom COE is subject to contract with the NATO StratCom COE.

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1) Introduction

- a) NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (NATO StratCom COE), based in Riga, Latvia, contributes to the improved strategic communications (StratCom) capabilities within the Alliance and Allied nations. The NATO StratCom COE designs programmes to advance StratCom doctrine development and harmonisation, conducts research and experimentation to find practical solutions to existing challenges, identifies lessons from applied StratCom during operations, and enhances training and education efforts and interoperability.
- b) NATO StratCom COE is running a tender for the product and service of an Information Environment (IE) simulation, in order to train military and civilian personnel in strategic communications. The product should provide the virtual simulation platform in order to train the full range of StratCom capabilities, including assessment, planning, execution and measurement.
- c) The winner will be announced 1 month after the final response date. The contract shall be executed by the end of the 2021.

2) Background

- a) Since 2020 NATO StratCom COE started to develop a concept for virtual IE simulation. The IE has become a primary domain for threats and challenges towards NATO, in peacetime as well as in crisis. StratCom COE wants to address these recent developments by offering NATO and national institutions a realistic training solution with the necessary IE simulation.

3) Requirements

- a) Comprehensive virtual IE simulation platform to train different kinds of personnel (in number / in type).
- b) Detailed requirements:
 - i) **Develop / provide the necessary software tools and interfaces for simulation.** The provided solution should in principle be open to future implementations of additional tools, if needed and requested.
 - ii) **The simulation should entail the following features that guarantee a realistic and dynamic environment:**
 - (1) News media from different countries:
 - (a) Simulation of different news media types, such as online, print, TV and radio.
 - (b) Covering both mainstream media and fringe media based on respective exercise context.
 - (2) A variety of predominant social media channels (foreign/domestic):
 - (a) Including the main popular providers and applications currently on the market.
 - (b) Less popular and niche platforms.
 - (3) The capacity to simulate a large number of accounts and personas:
 - (a) Including opinion leaders, audiences, stakeholders, influencers etc.
 - (b) Offering a level of automatization in order to minimize manual scripting and the need for role-players during exercise.
 - (4) The capacity to simulate information and communication channels beyond media as additional input for IE assessment by the Training Audience:
 - (a) Diplomatic channels, where communication between national representatives is simulated.
 - (b) Intelligence channels, where simulated sensitive information can be accessed.
 - (5) The capacity to simulate engagements of and between accounts and personas:
 - (a) Including engagement features such as reactions, shares and comments.
 - (b) Including metrics such as views, likes and shares etc. to increase authenticity, simulate viral posts and differences in relevance for each post.

- (c) Including malicious use of information technology, for example:
 - (i) simulated bot-networks supporting the spread of disinformation and/or promoting specific narratives;
 - (ii) Information Laundering¹ networks using frivolous media outlets, trolls and proxies to distort factual information and obscure sources.
- (6) The capacity to simulate non-manually scripted content, in form of automated injects and pre-scraped content:
 - (a) Including background noise² of IE activity for the exercise scenario.
 - (b) Including tools to automatically control exercise injections.
 - (c) Including explored options of possible AI support.
- (7) The capacity to run on local servers without internet access.
- (8) The capacity to evaluate performance by Training Audience in a quantitative manner:
 - (a) Statistical overview of the actions, reactions and timings.
 - (b) Offering methods of team scoring.
- (9) The capacity for the Training Audience to analyse and assess the IE in a quantitative manner:
 - (a) Simulation implemented IE analytics tools for measuring activities of actors, trends of topics and sentiments of audiences.
 - (b) Statistical and graphical display of the assessments.
- iii) **Cooperation with COE.** The Bidder should be ready to:
 - (1) Coordinate and discuss all relevant technical aspects of the simulation with the representatives of NATO StratCom COE.
 - (2) Discuss and provide API access possibilities to additional tools developed by COE or third parties for data injection and data access for analysis purposes.
 - (3) Train all necessary staff and operators of COE to provide full functioning of the platform.
 - (4) Provide an offer for the technical maintenance of the simulation platform.
 - (5) Conduct a test exercise:
 - (a) There is the requirement to conduct an exercise with a predefined Training Audience selected by StratCom COE to test the simulation platform.
 - (b) The exercise will be planned and conducted by a joint exercise team consisting of StratCom COE, the contractor and potential third-party contractors.
 - (c) The composition of the exercise team will be specified in the final contract.

4) **Timeline and Reporting**

- a) We would like to hold an initial meeting to clarify the process of development/implementation as soon as the tender has been awarded (via videoconference or other means).
- b) We would like to receive and conduct:
 - i) A conceptual presentation of the virtual simulation platform by May 31, 2021.
 - ii) Bi-monthly reporting by the joint exercise team on their progress beginning May 2021
 - iii) A test demonstration of the whole platform and its capabilities by July 31, 2021.

¹ Information Laundering refers to several techniques of distortion and obscurement of news. The process of IL starts with the placement of a distorted news fact by a source, which is then layered and laundered through a network of actors in the IE in order to amplify legitimacy and reach until the distorted news fact enters a state of broad public integration (e.g. QAnon conspiracy theory).

² Background noise refers to a simulation capacity of virtual content that is non-manually scripted and does not directly influence the main injects and exercise storyline. It is automatically pre-scraped and injected. While it can be loosely connected to exercise storyline topics, background noise does not entail content considered as main training objective. The idea behind background noise is to make the simulation environment more complex, realistic and overall challenging to interact with.

- iv) Pre-testing of the platform by the exercise team by September 30, 2021.
- v) Test exercise with pre-defined Training Audience by 30 November 2021.

5) Deliverables

- a) The tender submission should consist of:
 - i) A written proposal for the delivery of the work as listed above (See Section 3.Requirements).
 - ii) Detailed budget for the delivery of the work (amount of VAT or any other kind of tax must be clearly specified for each budget position and marked as zero where not applicable). It should indicate the budget estimates for:
 - (1) Software acquisition
 - (2) Service Subscription
 - (3) Tool Development
 - (4) Exercise support
 - iii) Copy of Bidder's Certificate issued by the national Commercial Register. If that is not applicable, please provide an explanatory statement and a different form of a document confirming your legal status and, if possible, permit to engage in a commercial activity.
 - iv) Evidence of the work experience with similar projects and Statement of previous work experience. The following experience is required for the Bidder to be eligible for selection:
 - (1) The evidence of the software engineering and development capabilities of at least two similar projects (national or international level) in last five years;
 - (2) The evidence of experience with 3 other projects of similar scale
 - v) Profile of the key personnel to be working on the Contract delivery providing evidence of skills, knowledge and experience (for example, a CV). The Bidder should also indicate the roles of the personnel working on the Contract delivery and the approximate time each of them are planning to spend for this work.
 - vi) At least two references from former customers (can be in email form with visible contact details, date and time when issued and recipient's address to whom the reference was emailed).
 - vii) Information about any persons or entities that the Bidder may choose to sub-contract for work on the Contract delivery (company or person's name, other relevant credentials (like company registration number, website address, contacts, etc), and a short company profile or person's biography).

6) Timetable

General	
Confirmation of bid	Please confirm you have submitted your bid by notifying soenke.niedringhaus@startcomcoe.org
Deadline for submission	23:59 hrs (Eastern European Time zone: UTC +02:00) on Mar 5, 2021
Contract implementation date	Upon agreement
Questions	Questions arising from this document should be given to LTC Soenke Niedringhaus until February 26, 2021
Full contact details	Soenke Niedringhaus, Kalnciema Iela 11B, LV-1048 Riga, mobile: +371 67335460, email: soenke.niedringhaus@startcomcoe.org

7) Respondent Instructions

- a) This section provides detailed instructions to be followed in responding to this ITT.
- b) Response Guidelines.
 - i) You will be required to submit a written proposal that complies with the indicated requirements (see Section 5. Deliverables). The proposal should be submitted electronically in PDF format.
 - ii) **Please deliver the electronic copy to:**
 - (a) tender@stratcomcoe.org
 - (b) **by 23:59 hrs (Eastern European Time zone: UTC +02:00) on March 5, 2021.**
 - iii) The NATO StratCom COE will disregard any response submitted after the timetable deadline.
 - iv) Bidders are expected to supply all required information, or clearly state the reasons for being unable to do so.
 - v) Any assumptions used in preparing responses should be clearly stated. Any appropriate supporting documents e.g.: brochures, demo videos, presentations, should be included.
 - vi) If any of the requested documents in the Section 5. Deliverables is not submitted, the Contract Award Committee shall have the right to exclude the applicant from further participation in the procurement.
- c) Questions relating to clarification of the ITT will only be accepted in writing to NATO StratCom COE representative. Likewise, all responses from the Centre will be written and may also be made available to other suppliers (subject to confidentiality). In the event that any answer materially affects the ITT specification, an amendment of the original requirements will be escalated to all suppliers. The NATO StratCom COE will attempt to answer any questions within two working day of receipt of that request; otherwise, it will respond within that timescale notifying you of the estimated time to obtain the information.
- d) The NATO StratCom COE reserves the right to modify the provisions of this ITT at any time prior to the scheduled date for written responses. Additional scope and requirements can be added. Notification of such changes will be provided to all suppliers.
- e) Should you wish to propose a deviation from the specification please ensure that you clearly identify and highlight where appropriate in your response.
- f) All information supplied in this tender to date, any further information supplied during the tender process will remain confidential and available only to the Contract Award Committee members.

8) Tender Assessments

- a) Evaluation Criteria and Process. A set of evaluation criteria has been prepared by the NATO StratCom COE for the evaluation of every Submission. Within each stage an initial evaluation will consider whether or not every instruction and requirement contained within the ITT has been fulfilled.
- b) The evaluation criteria will be based all of the following aspects of the Bidders' proposals (not in order of significance):
 - i) Commercial
 - (1) Clarity of price (in EUR with VAT and w/o VAT);
 - (2) Competitiveness of price.
 - ii) Service capability:
 - (1) Capacity to provide and develop the necessary platform and interfaces to conduct full range StratCom training;
 - (2) Previous experience with conducting similar projects and exercises;
 - (3) Previous experience with developing simulation software and tools;
 - (4) Quality of previously delivered service (based on the evidence provided);
 - iii) Previous experience in cooperation with national government institutions and international organisations;

- iv) Level of compliance with the Requirements, Reporting and Deliverables of the ITT.
- c) You are reminded that through the process the NATO StratCom COE will continually assess all contact with the Bidders' organizations including compliance to the process, presentation. The NATO StratCom COE reserves the rights at its sole discretion to disqualify without further consideration any submission that does not satisfy this basic requirement.

9) Briefing for Unsuccessful Participants

- i) The NATO StratCom COE reserves the right to control the format and content of any such briefing, and to limit it in any way believed by the NATO StratCom COE to be appropriate (which includes, in exceptional circumstances, the right to refuse a briefing without giving any reasons for doing so).

10) Contract Details

- i) 10.1. Contractual and payment details will be subject to negotiation with the selected supplier.
- ii) 10.2. The NATO StratCom COE reserves the right to modify the scope of this tender, after receiving the bids (including price estimates).