Foreword

The map of the world is changing before our eyes. But most of us are not looking. The film director Stanley Kubrick once talked of 'walking with eyes wide shut', choosing not to see what we don't wish to see.

2022 was a revealing year, albeit in ways not obvious at first glance. Dramatic events encouraged us to look at maps through fresh eyes. And 2023 will no doubt go further, reminding us that maps sit at the forefront of how strategic communicators shape people's understanding of their world. Into this cartographic imaginary, they attempt to introduce 'positive change'.

For a long time maps remained fixed on paper and imprinted on our imaginations. Once set, there seemed little reason to change the way we read borders delineating one sovereign country from the next. We saw fixture and stasis, not mobility and change. Where were the humans whose busy lives straddled these divides; where were the changes in landscape that nature's winds and rains were remoulding? A multitude of small moments and events merged into process across time and place ignored by cartographers. After all, Greenwich Mean Time as a measure of longitudinal timekeeping did not emanate from the movement of the planets but from the projection of state power.

Maps were, and always have been, markers of intent—the colourful display of peacock power. Empire and conquest would be absorbed into bureaucratic ways of officialising a divided world, sometimes bilaterally and unequally neighbour to neighbour, sometimes multilaterally through powerbroker consensus. Witness the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, the bedrock of how we seek to pin down stability amid global anarchy. Or Yalta in 1945, a cynical triage of post-war populations to benefit great powers. A new order, such as that born in Bretton Woods, was meant to create a new stability among states. But it would always be to someone's

detriment. Despite the protestations of just war theorists that war has no winners, nevertheless some states emerge from tragedy materially better endowed than others. Each, nevertheless, carries its own memory of suffering to which maps remain amnesiac.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Covid pandemic since 2019, and China's sabre-rattling towards Taiwan and regional neighbours throughout 2022 offer us good cause to reflect on borders.

Russia's irredentist ambitions in Ukraine, writ large with Grad missile barrages, suicide drones, and indiscriminate targeting of civilians, have returned Europe to a command-and-control geopolitics evocative of former days. Moscow has set out to achieve a redrawing of a map that had been, until the short century of the Soviet Union, unstable. Hence the systematic flooding of Russian, Ukrainian, and international discourse spaces with delegitimising tropes—Ukrainians were Russians, there was no Ukrainian nation or history, and Ukrainians were homosexuals, Nazis, and criminals, Moscow claimed. After annexing Crimea in 2014, and infiltrating eastern Ukraine through proxy actions soon after, 2022 marked the attempt to absorb the entire territory into the map of an imagined greater Russia.

Strategic communicators, however, must deal with nested maps which represent space and place where the material features of statehood are present, and at the same time, indicate discourses which appear in an altogether different way. Discourses are fluid, organic, and impermanent. Ideas which they capture may rise and fall, and rise again with the ages. A discourse map is more like a meteorologist's—local weather patterns, concentrations of pressure, high and low, and arrows of airstreams variously cross the bordered outlines of countries that lie a long way beneath them. Meteorologists identify weather systems which depend on the movement of their constituent parts. So too do discursive maps feature interconnected conversations that can be monitored in space or geographically, and in time or historically.

Conversations traverse state borders and penetrate populations to different degrees, particularly with today's widespread dissemination of consumer technologies. They are best visualised as parallel, contiguous, sometimes overlapping, and sometimes distinct. Often they resonate with the residue of conversations from the past, since these are rarely lost but become revitalised by current events, acquiring a new significance in people's lives. Most important, conversations rarely endure through call-and-response, thrust-and-parry exchanges; they do not resemble the offensives and counter-offensives of kinetic conflicts. Publics and counterpublics offer a more productive insight into the map of discourses—not audience demographics—since these groups define themselves according to how and when they engage with a particular mediated conversation.[1]

Throughout the Ukraine war, these Western discourses have included:

> On the one side, the existential struggle between advancing autocracy against democracy seen to be in retreat across the globe; a post-Westphalian discussion around the breach of international law and the borders of one sovereign state by another; consequently, too, the right to protect (R2P) and transgressing sovereign borders to achieve human security; a neo-colonial independence struggle; and even more existentially, the assertion of a people's organic subjectivity in the face of brutal war; the view that the Ukraine war represents a Russian colonial attempt to hold back the inevitable demise of its own empire; a sacrifice on the part of Western economies amid a global energy and food crisis giving rise to a new recession; and calls for war crimes and retribution against the highest in the Kremlin; the threat of nuclear strikes and the return of

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1   Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

> MAD (mutually assured destruction) for so long
> considered a relic of Cold War discourse.

These, as captured in a recent report, lead the author to observe: 'Put simply, these are discourses promoted by Western communicators but are aimed variously at Russian audiences as well as those in the West and the Global South.' The Russian repertoire includes:

> On the other side discourses range across the
> promotion of a neo-imperial *Russkii mir*; the
> questioning of Ukraine's national identity and
> fundamental right to exist; associated accusations
> of criminality and Nazism gripping the country;
> an accusation of historic NATO *expansion* rather
> than *enlargement*; a perception in the global South
> that this is Europe's war, and not theirs.[2]

Nor should we forget the repeated evocation of the Great Patriotic War by Moscow's leadership and the sacrifice of millions of Soviet lives during World War II.

That a virus such as Covid-19 shows no respect for human constructs for keeping some people in and others out of sovereign containers we call states has become a truism all too familiar to people across the world over the last three years. Instead the virus recognises only vectors of dissemination and vulnerabilities for infection. The map it creates is different. Through conduits of transmission, it resembles networks of nodes and links—a picture of dots and lines energised by motion and interrupted by occasional friction—roads and rivers scrawled across the page of living and breathing humanity. China's zero-Covid policy to contain viral spread by constraining free movement of its own citizens is only now proving to have collapsed under popular pressure. A sovereign map goes head to head with a viral map: there can be only one winner.

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2   For a more detailed discussion of the discursive ecosystem, see Neville Bolt, NATO, Strategic
     Communications Centre of Excellence, 2023, in press.

Where a virus once revealed the fragility of human security, governments have attempted to reassert control over state security through human agency.

Brutal war in Ukraine targeting civilian populations reminded Europeans that the Balkan atrocities of the 1990s, so close to home, were no simple aberration. Meanwhile in the Indo-Pacific region, strategic ambiguity in Chinese Communist Party foreign and security policy continues to keep the world guessing—the Belt and Road Initiative, on the one hand (persuasion), and kinetic confrontations in the East and South China Seas, on the other (coercion), beg the question: China, good guy or bad?

All three threats—Russia, China, Covid—share a common outcome. Consumer economies around the world are hastily reappraising their erstwhile embrace of global supply chains that span continents, crossing borders. Confidence in post-1980s globalisation has been shaken. Supply chains draw arcs of movement of goods and people across the globe—arcs that criss-cross a backdrop of entire oceans and continents. Deep-water harbours and shipping lanes, airport terminals and flight paths, commodity storage and logistics centres paint a different kind of map. For them, state sovereignty with its alternative lines on the map matter in so far as transnational corporations and protective taxation regimes can benefit from economic models of manufacture in low-cost labour markets and production assembly closer to consumer centres.[3]

Yet Apple's triangulated production of its iPhone speaks volumes—designed in the US, with a case manufactured in China, but brain installed in Taiwan—demonstrates how microchips can so easily turn into bargaining chips when a geopolitical context becomes a contest. Apple's map of the world, originally drawn to a corporate logic, suddenly highlights three key protagonists in a geopolitical drama. Apple's own dilemma becomes not simply a question of failure to supply hungry markets but a confusion between how to conduct public relations, product

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3   For further discussion of maps and networks see, Nicholas Michelsen and Neville Bolt, *Unmapping the 21st Century: Between Networks and the State* (Bristol University Press, 2022).

and corporate marketing, and strategic communications—each distinct but so often confused with the next in the business of projecting influence.

At the same time, vulnerabilities exposed by both natural and human interventions have undermined the very notion of liberal freedoms extended through trade and cultural exchanges. But in our times, great power contest has become the new order of the day. Consequently, short supplies of consumer goods through factories closed by pandemic, or global shipping lanes constricted by hegemonic ambitions, threaten the world's interconnected economy as never before.

As George Kennan's containment became the enduring metaphor of the Cold War, inviting our imaginations to draw mental maps around confronting ideologies, reduced to good and evil, so too a new map is already being drawn around engagement in what Europe and North America once labelled the Far East, more recently Asia-Pacific. Since that celebrated train ride in 2016 when Shinzo Abe, then prime minister of Japan, and Narendra Modi, prime minister of India, announced the mapping of the Indo-Pacific as a new mental construct, a diplomatic map has ushered in a new phase of geopolitics with a fresh organising framework. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific captures myriad uncertainties in perhaps the world's most sensitive region, economically and militarily. This is not simply an initiative that derives impetus from Washington's pivot to Asia, but more organically and authentically a strategic communications concept that emerges dynamically from the complexities of the region itself. It comprises forty countries, including Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea (ROK), Taiwan, Vietnam—and the United States, together with North Korea (DPRK) and China (PRC). Each reads the Indo-Pacific map differently through its own national interest. Whether China and North Korea should be included in this framework depends on what effect each participant presumes engaging with these troublesome countries can achieve. Which in turn depends on how each predicts those countries' ambitions and future actions.

The Indo-Pacific invites cartographers to reimagine the world but once again at the expense of the tensions that permeate it. Namely, despite certain ambiguous interpretations by its diverse actors separated by ideology, economic might, and historical antipathies, these actors remain united in a shared concern for the rise of an economically dominant China with a penchant for advertising its military prowess. The nineteenth century witnessed Britain face Russia in the Great Game. Does this evoke a similar confrontation for strategic communicators in the twenty-first century, but this time between the US and China? Except now a plethora of medium-sized states militarily has to be counted into multi-dimensional calculations.

Where the Middle East is a clumsy construct disowned by many academic area specialists, the Indo-Pacific, first mentioned in the 1850s, attempts to connect more coherently Asia and Africa across two oceans, the Pacific, via the East and South China Seas, and the Indian Ocean. Home to two of the world's most populous countries (India, democratic; China, authoritarian), and two of the world's leading economies (China and Japan), the region generates 60 per cent of the world's GDP, and much of that trade passes through the Strait of Malacca and waters off China's coastline, where it presumes to exert its claim to sovereignty.[4] All the while, the US and other free states fear a potential stranglehold on free movement, ultimately destabilising the global economy. This map is one of threats and vulnerabilities.

Why do maps matter? Mental maps, like printed maps, create normality—a given, a common-sense view of the world through which all else should be processed and understood. As the philosopher Timothy Garton Ash notes: 'The deepest power is that of determining what people consider normal. If you can persuade others that your way of doing things is normal, you have won.'[5] Strategic communications can transform the abnormal into the normal. Around us our maps are changing. They conceptualise and filter the way we read the world. But they vary in

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4   *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States,* The White House, Washington, DC, February 2022.

5   Timothy Garton Ash, 'Beware of the Creeping Normalisation of the Hard Right', *Financial Times*, 14 November 2022, p. 25.

their character and appearance—why should a financial balance sheet, normally thought of as a snapshot in accounting time, not also be a way of finding a route between one place and the next, or reveal the relative power of one location to the next? More on this topic and a discussion of maps in strategic communications in future volumes.

The Autumn issue of *Defence Strategic Communications* journal remains as eclectic as ever—better to explore the multidisciplinary nature of this fast-emerging academic field, informed by policy and practice.

Donara Barojan brings a more serious lens to the study of celebrity influencers on politics, weighing celebrity advocacy against celebrity endorsement. This perspective, she claims, is long overdue; nor should influencers be viewed as the frivolous preserve of the popular press or noisy social media. Governments have long realised that to connect their campaigns to target audiences involves finding the most persuasive bridge to address particular grievances. How significant are race, gender, and the politics of today's leading influencers in their ability to draw large audiences? This research suggests we are still at an early stage in this important line of inquiry. In their article, marketing experts Aybars Tuncdogan and Aidan Hughes survey the literature on organic social media marketing as the overarching driver in word-of-mouth communications, arguing that while strategic communications scholars and think tanks devote extensive research time to social media, they fail to include the large body of literature in the world of marketing. The authors seek to correct this by examining the output of commercial organisations and products. However, they point out, 'there is little or no marketing research that distinguishes between strategic political communications versus tactical political communications, although this is an important difference worth future research effort'.

When Ursula von der Leyen led the ban on Russian media outlets RT (Russia Today) and Sputnik inside the EU following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine—'spread[ing] their lies to justify Putin's war and to sow division in our Union'—it divided opinion sharply inside the Union.

What was at stake was freedom of information, a view advocated strongly by the International Press Institute. Not only did the ban interfere with free speech, but it was considered ineffectual in the face of systematic disinformation and misinformation. And anyway, such decisions should be the preserve of individual states not supra-states, it argued. Aiden Hoyle and Peter B.M.J. Pijpers combine psychological and legal methods of inquiry to guide us through this thorny issue. Researcher Will White continues the disinformation theme, but questions why so few attempts have been made in the academic world to break down disinformation conceptually and from the point of view of the author's intent. He offers three ways of moving our understanding forward which can be gleaned by reviewing the scholarly literature on disinformation: 'parodic, which critiques the scholarly process through mimicry and humour; opportunist, which seeks to promote the author's scholarly image; and malicious, which distorts the reader's perception of a controversial issue like vaccination or climate change'. A backdrop of literature around Covid-19 and right-wing extremism make this article even more poignant.

Two further articles focus on NATO strategic communications but from different perspectives. Aurelio Insisa charts the change in public mood in Italian politics following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It was initially seen as Moscow's act of aggression. But, despite the atrocities of a brutal war, public discourse among a sizeable minority across mass media and social media is seen to have shifted towards being critical of NATO's role in having caused the conflict. This has consequences for NATO, suggests the author. Pacifist and 'geopolitical' critiques, and left- and right-wing political attacks, are now hindering the Alliance's ability to pursue effective strategic communications in a member state, Italy. How should NATO speak to its own members? Meanwhile, Elizabeth Fry tackles the complex field of propaganda, much argued over and diverse in its interpretations, proposing that NATO's simplistic dichotomy between influence and information is misleading, if not counterproductive. 'There is no such thing as value-free information,' she argues. 'There is, or should be, an intent behind all military communications: we are always trying to persuade audiences to see the world as we do.' For

Fry, a historic sensitivity around propaganda is to blame for a wider misunderstanding, for which US and NATO terminologies and poor theorising should bear their share of responsibility.

Defence Strategic Communications has for many years encouraged the review essay as a literary form. And its contributors are among the most downloaded by readers of the journal. Here, Paul Bell reflects in a deeply moving essay on a long career spent in this field, but only after considering some ideas by two leading academics, Francis Fukuyama and Helen Thompson. The future and indeed the present of liberal democracy offer him much food for thought amid the disorder of the new century, which he surveys from the vantage point of his work in Tbilisi, Georgia. Anda Boluža looks back to a moment of awakening in the Latvian independence movement during the last days of Soviet Latvia in the 1980s. Her profile of the magazine *Avots*—a brief cultural, artistic, and political outpouring—offers a glimpse into a seemingly paradoxical event when the lid was finally released from the pressure cooker of decades-long censorship and repression. Such moments need to be recalled lest we forget forever.

James Farwell, a familiar essayist in these pages, ponders on recently published commentaries on Russia and its historic relations with Germany. The latter features strongly here because of a relationship spanning centuries and the guilt and atrocity of millions of war dead, and because of an ambiguous and perhaps defining moment in recent history involving Mikhail Gorbachev, James Baker, and the political agility of Helmut Kohl. How should we read the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and its aftermath through these lenses? Farwell offers some robust observations. And finally, China specialist Una Aleksandra Bērziņa-Čerenkova draws on the Apple TV+ *Home before Dark* series to create her metaphor through which to gauge China's hesitant responses to Russia and the Ukraine war. She explores the contradictions of Chinese foreign policy, more a guessing game than political science inquiry on the part of scholars and policy experts. One particular lens she singles out is Responsibility to Protect (R2P), through which she explores multiple coexisting contradictions

in Beijing, which add up 'to support that falls just short of casting itself squarely in the Russian worldview'.

We wish all our readers, authors, and peer reviewers a successful 2023 and look forward to welcoming you back to further issues of the journal in the coming months.

Dr Neville Bolt,
Editor-in-Chief