ISBN 978-9934-619-68-7

Strategic Communications in Government

Putting principles into practice

PREPARED AND PUBLISHED BY THE
NATO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

ISBN 978-9934-619-68-7

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Riga, April 2026

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About this report

This research, requested by several of the Centre's contributing nations, examines the challenges governments face applying strategic communications principles to daily decisions, policies, and public engagement. It also suggests ways to overcome these challenges. The report defines strategic communications as a holistic approach to communication, based on values and interests, that encompasses everything that is done or said to achieve objectives in a contested environment. Based on interviews with experts and practitioners from NATO governments, and existing research, it proposes a simple organisational model – the LOGIC-C framework – to help governments communicate more effectively.

Where once a commander maintained control by field telephone, today STRATCOM extends command and control world-wide.

STRATCOM:

The Army's Global Communications Manager

Major General Richard J. Meyer

THE Strategic Communications Command (STRATCOM), one of the Army's newest major commands, is maintained at wartime readiness around the clock. From its headquarters nerve center, the Command Telecommunications Status Office, global operational direction extends to STRATCOM units in Viet Nam and the Dominican Republic and to all other theaters where STRATCOM subcommands operate designated strategic communications.

Quick-reaction elements are poised in the United States to respond to contingencies anywhere in the world. Other elements are already deployed to shooting areas or serve in humanitarian missions.

Following every war, more military communications continue to flow than during the war itself, especially strategic or long distance communications. In the modern era of cold war, military communications traffic has steadily increased along with all the exacting requirements of securing and safeguarding large amounts of classified information. In so-called peace, then, STRATCOM is continually involved in an "at-war" task.

The mission and principal functions of STRATCOM are spelled out in Army Regulation 10-13. This new Command is the principal manager for all strategic Army communications and communications projects.

Strategic communications embraces the long-haul, point-to-point, fixed station and transportable communications facilities owned and operated by the Army or leased from commercial carriers. Generally, these strategic communications are the Army-operated portions of the Defense Communications System which are available to all military users.

STRATCOM became operational on 1 March 1964 when it was formed as a major command alongside others that had been previously established in the 1962 reorganization of the Army, such as the Army Materiel Command, the Combat Developments Command, and the existing Continental Army Command. (See "Army Reorganization Up-to-Date," May 1965 Digest.)

In the 1960s, "STRATCOM" had a very practical, nuts-and-bolts meaning in the U.S. Army: it was short for Strategic Communications Command, the global network that kept telephones, radios, and early satellites talking to each other. It linked commanders to far-flung units, from Europe to Southeast Asia, and managed long-distance voice, data, and teletype traffic around the world. Ever since, people have been arguing over what the term means.[1]

Contents

Executive summary

This report explores national governments' attempts to apply principles from the field of strategic communications to day-to-day decision-making and policy implementation. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, various governments have embraced strategic communications to help improve their ability to influence audiences in pursuit of strategic objectives. A concept imported from the commercial sector in the 1990s, the original idea was that strategic communications could make government messaging more coherent, coordinated and credible. Democratic governments hoped this would help them adapt to how the Internet was transforming communication, and counter attempts by insurgents and hostile states to undermine their societies.

Since then, there have been two decades of disagreement about what strategic communications is, how it should be done and who should be responsible for it. But as more governments and militaries have embraced the concept, understandings of it have evolved. Many now see it not just as a way to coordinate an organisation's messaging, but a more holistic approach to communication which considers the effects of everything an organisation says and does on audiences. The concept may be better understood, but 'How can our government be better at strategic communications?' remains one of the most common questions asked of the NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence.

Strategic communications is defined here as 'a holistic approach to communication, based on values and interests, that encompasses everything a government organisation does to achieve objectives in a contested environment'. Communication, from this perspective, is not just about deliberate messaging, but is integral to all aspects of domestic governance and foreign and security policy. This is because *everything* a government says, and *every* action it takes, communicates.

Strategic communications in this report is based on several key principles:

- that **'everything communicates'**;
- that because 'everything communicates', governments need a strong, ongoing **understanding of audiences**;
- that communication activities must be **integrated** within all government departments and agencies and **coordinated** vertically and horizontally
- that whatever governments communicate reflects their **national strategic objectives**;
- that it is important to adopt a **long-term**, **proactive approach** rather than a short-term, reactive one;
- that government communication should adhere to the **liberal democratic values** of openness, transparency and accountability.[2]

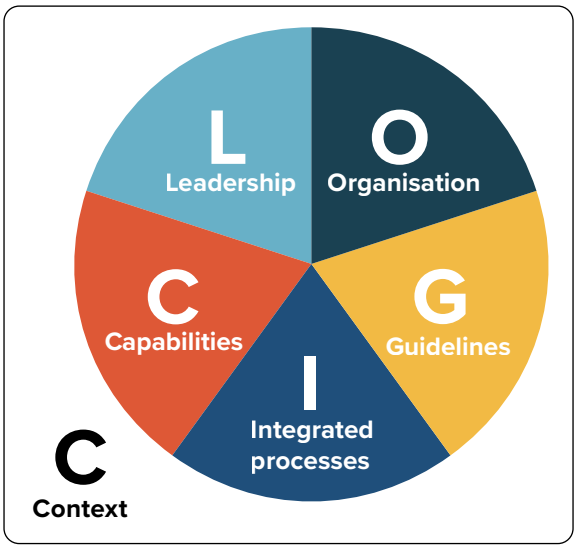
First the study outlines the challenges governments face trying to implement these principles, using three lenses through which strategic communications can be viewed: **mindset** (how an organisation should think about communication) **process** (how to organise and direct communication) and **capability** (the techniques, skills and resources employed to communicate). Strategic communications practitioners still report that they struggle to get politicians, senior government officials and managers to buy into strategic communications as an idea; to create structures and processes to coordinate communication within and across government; and that even if government officials buy into the concept, they often lack the capabilities and resources to obtain the outcomes they want.

Having explained these challenges, the report introduces the **LOGIC-C** framework, an organisational change model to help government practitioners analyse the specific barriers they face applying strategic communications principles and identify solutions to address them. The model contains five main elements: **Leadership**, **Organisation**, **Guidelines**, **Integrated Processes** and **Capabilities**. These elements are shaped by an additional, cross-cutting factor, context.

Element	Purpose
L Leadership	Directs the implementation of the strategic communications mindset, establishes strategic communications processes, and ensures communication supports national strategic objectives.
O Organisation	Ensures that government departments and agencies are set up to integrate communication vertically and horizontally.
G Guidelines	Establishes a strategic communications mindset and principles, and enables them to be standardised and spread across government.
I Integrated processes	Creates a co-ordinated, cross-government communication system, including a cyclical process of understanding the information environment, integrated planning, execution and evaluation.
C Capabilities	Ensures governments have the specific techniques, skills, expertise and resources to conduct strategic communications.
C Context	Considers the political, cultural, social and technological factors affecting the implementation of strategic communications principles.

Rather than prescribe a course of action, the framework is a general tool of organisational change, which practitioners can apply within their own political systems.

The LOGIC-C model of strategic communications



Using the LOGIC-C framework, the report concludes with a series of recommendations. These include a bank of questions to aid assessment of a government's ability to operate according to strategic communications principles, and suggestions of how to implement these principles more effectively. The general areas these cover include:

Element	Recommendations
L Leadership	Conducting an audit of leadership perspectives on communication across government, establishing strategic communication training programmes, fostering a communication-minded culture, establishing a national strategic narrative, and enabling distributed leadership.
O Organisation	Assessing existing organisational structures' contribution to strategic communications, creating a central organisation to direct strategic communications and forming cross-departmental units to better co-ordinate decision-making and communication.
G Guidelines	Reviewing existing doctrine and guidance, and developing new national strategic communications guidelines to standardise practices across government, including a focus on what *actions* communicate.
I Integrated processes	Auditing existing communication processes and refining systems for audience analysis, integrating communications expertise within the policy process, cross-governmental coordination and measurement of effect.
C Capabilities	Conducting thorough capability assessments of what techniques and skills are necessary to develop strategic communications across government and ensure that these are adequately resourced with long-term funding, staffing and training.
C Context	Conducting research into the organisational culture across government regarding communication, convening a working group on how to adapt to technological, political and social change, and learning what has worked from other countries' efforts to conduct strategic communications.

1. Introduction

1.1 Over the past thirty years, private companies, international organisations, governments and militaries have embraced the concept of *strategic communications* to address different challenges. In the 1990s, private companies adopted it to better coordinate public relations, advertising, and marketing, aiming to engage audiences more effectively and boost profits. The United Nations followed in 1997, hoping to rebuild trust after humanitarian failures in Somalia, Rwanda, and Yugoslavia.

1.2 In the 2000s, the US and UK governments adopted strategic communications to justify foreign policies more credibly – particularly interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq – to domestic and international audiences. Since then, liberal democracies have turned to strategic communications to address multiple concerns: ensuring consistent and credible messaging, winning wars, countering terrorism and disinformation, deterring electoral interference, and strengthening societal resilience. Their underlying idea has been that applying strategic communications can help an organisation influence target audiences through aligning its words, images, and actions with its goals.[3]

1.3 A persistent challenge has been agreeing on what *strategic communications* means, especially for democratic governments, which often struggle to distinguish it from the communication they already do. Two decades ago, U.S. officials debated whether strategic communications was simply another term for *public diplomacy*—messaging aimed at foreign audiences—or a broader framework for coordinating related functions such as public diplomacy, public affairs, and information operations.

1.4 Another debate was about whether strategic communications mainly concerned media management and messaging – 'public affairs on steroids' – or a more holistic approach involving all aspects of government communication and influence.[4] Ask ten experts what strategic communications is, RAND's Christopher Paul says, and you will get ten different answers.[5] Talk to 100 governments, and you will get even more. The issue, Paul argues, is that 'strategic communications is vague'. The solution: when you talk about it, 'say what you mean'.[6]

1.5 This report examines the challenges national governments have faced trying to adopt strategic communications principles and practices. Drawing on conceptual work by the NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence, it defines strategic communications as 'a holistic approach to communication, based on values and interests, that encompasses everything a government says and does to achieve objectives in a contested environment'.[7] Communication, from this perspective, is not just deliberate messaging. Rather, all government actions, policies, words and images communicate something to audiences, intentionally or not. Trading with another government sends a message; refusing to sends another. Visiting a disaster zone sends a message; ignoring it sends another. Opening schools sends a message, closing hospitals sends another.[8] 'Every action, from the mundane to the worldly, is an observable activity that communicates a message'.[9]

1.6 Applying strategic communications to government work involves several core principles:

- that **'everything communicates'**;
- that because 'everything communicates', governments need a strong, ongoing **understanding of audiences**;
- that communication activities must be **integrated** within all government departments and agencies and **coordinated** vertically and horizontally

- that whatever governments communicate reflects their **national strategic objectives**;

- that it is important to adopt a **long-term**, **proactive approach** rather than a short-term, reactive one;

- that government communication should adhere to the **liberal democratic values** of openness, transparency and accountability.[10]

1.7 The better an administration can do these things, the more effectively it will communicate. Political decision-making will be improved because leadership will better understand how words and actions affect audiences. Government communication will be more consistent, credible, and better able to achieve longer-term influence rather than shifting from crisis to crisis. And by adhering to liberal democratic values, governments will be better able to sustain legitimacy and public trust, about which there is a pervasive sense of crisis worldwide.[11]

Strategic communications in government origin story

1.8 It is not that easy, however. Implementing strategic communications principles has often been like taking two steps forward and one backward.[12] Back in 1997, the UN imported strategic communications from the corporate world, several years before Western militaries embraced it.[13] The UN was concerned that it was failing to convince international publics of its relevance and effectiveness and that its communications functions were uncoordinated, undirected, and insufficiently tailored to local audiences. But a broader concern was that its claim to be central to maintaining international peace and security was not aligned with its actions, after it struggled to respond strongly enough to the humanitarian emergencies of the 1990s.[14]

1.9 The UN hoped that adopting strategic communications principles would better coordinate its communications functions, just as the corporate sector used strategic communications to co-ordinate advertising, branding, marketing and public relations (PR). But the UN's plans reflected two ideas that were more radical in the 1990s. First, that communication was central to an organisation's overall function, not just a way to convey messages to audiences, and second, that the Internet was transforming communication, making information a more important source of power. Accordingly, in 1997 the UN recommended placing its communications function 'at the heart of the strategic management of the organisation', and that it should see itself as a 'global communications agency' not just a diplomatic organisation.[15] The report also recommended several fundamentals of contemporary strategic communications – improving central management of communications, coordinating communications teams more effectively, tailoring messaging to local contexts, and ensuring a two-way flow of information with audiences.[16]

1.10 The US government and military were the next major international organisations to consider using strategic communications principles to communicate more coherently. Following 9/11, when Al Qaeda insurgents attacked the World Trade Center in New York, the US launched its global 'War on Terror', invading Afghanistan in October 2001 (where Al Qaeda were based) and Iraq in 2003. Adopting strategic communications principles, they hoped, would help explain these wars to international audiences, and minimise the 'say-do gap' between the US's words and actions. A decade later, however, the US dropped the concept amid disagreements over what it was, how it should be done, and by whom.[17] An early disagreement was whether strategic communications, like public affairs, should only be about *informing* audiences, or whether it should *influence* them in pursuit of an objective (a false dichotomy, since communication inevitably influences audiences whether we want it to or not).[18]

1.11 A further disagreement concerned whether strategic communications was a *mind-*

set, a *process*, or a *capability*. Some argued it was a *process* to coordinate and synchronise government words and deeds; others that it was a *capability* – where specific teams would design programmes, campaigns and tools to communicate with audiences.[19] Later, strategic communications practitioners made a third argument: that it should be a *mindset* adopted by everyone in an organisation. As Rosa Brooks put it, everyone in government should understand that '*everything* is a form of communication — that our actions (and omissions) can speak as loudly as our words', and that the military and civilians 'must consider the "information effects" of all that they say and do'.[20] Theorists now recognise that mindset, process and capability are *all* integral to strategic communications, and that if any is lacking, implementing strategic communications principles across large organisations may fail.[21]

1.12 NATO has been the bigger success story. Having started incorporating strategic communications into its policy and military-strategic documents in 2007, it eventually established strategic communications policy in 2017 and doctrine in 2023.[22] These directed NATO members to integrate communication into all military activities and align them with NATO's strategic objectives – something it struggled with when leading the ISAF coalition in Afghanistan.[23] The doctrine's implementation remains inconsistent across NATO, but strategic communications seems increasingly influential, even if not all nations use the term itself.

1.13 Beyond defence, governments have explored how to make strategic communications a 'whole-of-government' effort.[24] Over twenty years ago the UK government recommended 'strong integrated departmental communication structures' and that communications should factor into 'policy development and delivery, not tacked on as an afterthought'.[25] Fifteen years ago, Chatham House recommended establishing a proactive strategic communications 'mindset' across government, high-level political leadership, integrating communication expertise across different departments and making communication more 'joined up'.[26]

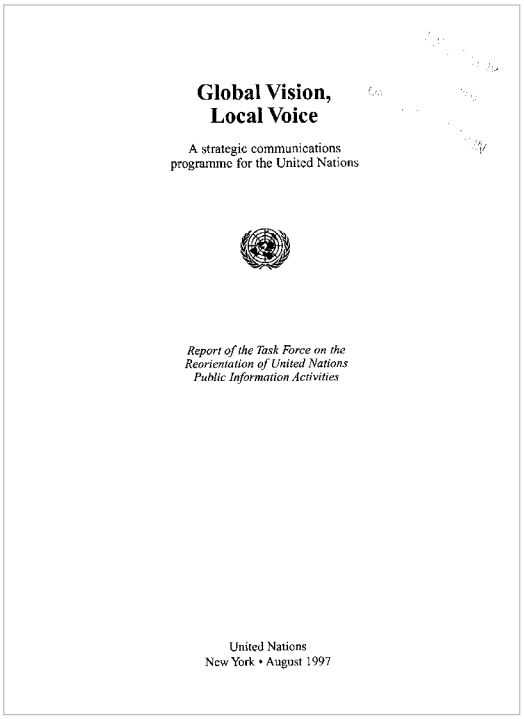
1.14 But however well understood these recommendations are, putting strategic communications principles into practice is often harder for national governments than militaries. Both face bureaucratic obstacles, inter-departmental turf wars and siloing.[27] But the larger scale of national government makes coordination even harder. Militaries can usually centralise command and control, but democratic checks and balances can impede coherent cross-government communication. Constitutional barriers, coalition disagreements, decentralised decision-making structures and distributed capabilities can all inhibit government practitioners' ability to understand audiences then speak and act in unison. Ironically, the stronger democratic checks and balances are across government, the harder communicating in a coordinated, strategic manner may be.

1.15 Due to these challenges, '*How can our government be better at strategic communications?*' remains one of the most common questions asked of the NATO Stratcom Centre of Excellence. It is also one of the hardest to answer, for as Rosa Brooks emphasises, putting strategic communications into practice across government is not like a company trying to improve at 'selling a soda'.[28] It is a complex, 'wicked' problem requiring long-term commitment, resourcing, and organisational change.[29]

1.16 Chapter Two explains these challenges by documenting the problems government officials report in putting strategic communications principles into practice. Using the lenses of *mindset*, *process* and *capability*, it shows how practitioners struggle to get politicians and leaders to buy into strategic communications as an idea; to establish structures and processes to integrate and coordinate communication across government, to embed strategic communications expertise throughout the policy process, and to ensure adequate resourcing.

1.17 Chapter 3 then introduces an organisational change framework – the LOGIC-C model – that senior officials and practitioners within the government communication func-

tion can use to analyse the barriers their governments face operationalising strategic communications principles and identify solutions to address them. The model has five components – Leadership, Organisation, Guidelines, Integrated Processes and Capability, each of which can enhance a government's ability to conduct strategic communications. However, each is shaped by a cross-cutting sixth element – Context – as it is crucial that strategic communications practices are tailored to the political, cultural, social and technological context in which a government operates. The report concludes with recommendations national governments could use to put strategic communications principles into practice.



Global Vision, Local Voice is a landmark 1997 report setting out a strategic communications programme for the United Nations. It argues that communication must sit at the heart of UN decision-making, be aligned with UN priorities and reforms, planned and resourced at leadership level, and actively build support and shape perceptions rather than simply disseminate institutional news.[30]

2. Challenges governments face implementing strategic communications principles

This chapter outlines the difficulties governments have faced when trying to implement strategic communications principles and practices within their administrations across the dimensions of **mindset**, **process** and **capability**.

2.1 Mindset

2.1.1 A major challenge practitioners have faced when trying to get governments to adopt a strategic communications approach is to achieve buy-in for the strategic communications 'mindset'. The mindset's central idea is that '**everything communicates**' – that everything we say, do, don't say or don't do, conveys something to audiences, whether we like it or not. Superficially this is obvious. Children learn at school that whether they wear a uniform, and how tidily they wear it, conveys something about them and the institution they represent. Workers understand that the tone and timing of how they respond to emails, how they dress and how many hours they work, convey something about their professionalism. But the idea that 'everything communicates' suggests something more radical: that all members of an organisation need to recognise that everything – words, images, actions, objects, symbols – conveys meaning, and that they must always consider this.[31]

2.1.2 However, this core element of the strategic communications mindset implies a second premise. Everything may communicate, but *what* it communicates depends on how audiences interpret it. Strategic communications therefore requires an unwavering focus on **understanding audiences** throughout the process of planning, executing and evaluating one's actions.

2.1.3 Two other components of the strategic communications mindset are to focus on the **long term** rather than the short term and to be **proactive** rather than reactive.[32] These elements differentiate strategic communications from crisis communications – the latter involving short-term responses to immediate challenges. Government communicators often report constantly having to react to short-term, negative publicity, leaving them little time to promote their governments' long-term vision (assuming it exists).[33]

2.1.4 A final element of the strategic communications mindset is that everything a government communicates should reflect its **strategic objectives**. A popular idea is that senior figures should craft a 'strategic narrative' – a story explaining the organisation's overall strategy – and its words, images and actions should support this strategic narrative. [34]As former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair puts it, the strategic narrative is like a 'washing line running the length of the government'. All government policies and actions should be 'attached to the line like an item of clothing'.[35]

2.1.5 Some evidence suggests progress in embedding these five elements of mindset across government (everything communicates, understanding audiences, thinking long term, being proactive, and alignment with strategic objectives). But that progress is uneven.

Taking 'Everything Communicates' seriously

2.1.6 A major barrier strategic communications practitioners report is that many politicians do not see strategic communications principles as sufficiently novel. One reason is that politicians already consider themselves as effective communicators, and therefore believe that they embody the strategic communications mindset already. The argument should not be dismissed too readily. Unless they came to power because of blatant nepotism or political patronage, politicians *are* likely to be effective communicators, even if they lack the holistic and broad understanding of audiences strategic communications advocates call for.

2.1.7 The idea that 'everything communicates' may also already be common-sense among politicians and their political advisors. Any politician photographed eating something awkwardly, not smiling at the right time, meeting or not meeting certain people, understands that everything communicates – as should the advisors who suggested they do these things.

2.1.8 It is less clear that the 'everything communicates' mindset is prevalent among policy-makers, particularly in governments where formulating policy and communicating it have been separate disciplines. Communication practitioners report that policy teams still often see policy formation as their sole responsibility, then leave it to communications teams to sell policy to the electorate. Others report a hesitation among policymakers to recognise that their role is to influence audiences rather than simply inform them. From a strategic communications perspective this distinction is invalid, because everything communicated is assumed to influence audiences, intentionally or not.

2.1.9 Even if policymakers are reluctant to incorporate communications thinking into policy formulation, it is unlikely that they ignore how their policies affect audiences entirely. Anyone thinking 'we shouldn't do this because it would look bad', 'let's recommend this but the minister won't like it', or even 'we should do this for the greater good even if it will be unpopular', is thinking about effects on audiences – just unsystematically. A strategic communications mindset calls for a far more comprehensive and systematic understanding of audiences throughout the policy process.

Stuck in crisis mode

2.1.10 Even if government practitioners buy into the strategic communications mindset, the reality of day-to-day business can impede their ability to enact it. Practitioners commonly report being stuck doing crisis communications rather than strategic communications, with the need to manage immediate scandals leaving little scope to proselytise the government's future vision. Electoral cycles create further pressure towards short-termism. One practitioner explained that their government had to explain to its population that they needed to cut public spending and welfare, and that a good way to promote this would be to explain how this would benefit society in a decade's time. But with elections coming far sooner, politicians rejected the idea.

2.1.11 Getting stuck managing immediate crises rather than looking to the long term is not just a *mindset* issue, but one of *process* and *capability*. If structures and processes do not enable proactive, longer-term thinking, strategic communicators struggle to gain influence within government, and everyday governance remains a never-ending firefighting exercise. The longer this goes on, the more idealistic (rather than realistic) the strategic communications mindset appears to be, and the less likely government practitioners are to buy into it.

2.2 Process

2.2.1 A second area in which attempts to put strategic communications principles into practice can fall short is **process**. Processes matter to strategic communications in at least three ways. First, to ensure that, in planning policies and actions, governments are informed by a deep understanding of the information environment – that is, the dynamic physical and/or virtual setting in which communication takes place.[36] Understanding this reduces the likelihood of government actions, policies and messages being misinterpreted or interpreted negatively, and reduces risk throughout the communication process. Second, processes can enable one to adapt one's communication to changes in the information environment through feedback loops. Finally, processes are needed to improve 'cross-government' communication – whereby communication is more 'integrated' (as different parts of government are collaborating effectively) and more 'coordinated' (because roles and activities are structured coherently). Colloquially understood as everyone 'being on the same page', or 'speaking with one voice', the assumption is that this makes an organisation appear more unified, more credible, and its communications more powerful, as each act of communication reinforces others.[37]

2.2.2 Having a process to align words, images, actions and policies matters because everything communicates, and every participant in government is a communicator. However, it is unrealistic to expect total congruence across all parts of government, partly because of a government's size, but also because of the very premises on which strategic communications is based. If different audiences interpret a given message differently, then that holds for government officials too. Perfect alignment may not be entirely desirable in a political context where many successful communicators are achieving success by prioritising performatively authentic, off-the-cuff communication over spinning everything so that it adheres strictly to a single message.[38] The key, as NATO thinking on strategic narratives suggests, is to improve alignment while recognising that different actors within an organisation need to tailor their communicationsto different audiences.[39]

The curse of bureaucratic politics

2.2.3 Bureaucratic politics continues to undermine attempts to refine communication processes in some governments. A core assumption of bureaucratic politics is that different parts of government pursue their own interests. Competition, bargaining and negotiation between them produces political outcomes.[40] But when departments are 'siloed', or if rivalries impede cross-department communication, poor outcomes can result. An infamous example was the failure of the US FBI and CIA to share intelligence that together could have prevented 9/11.[41]

2.2.4 In the day-to-day practice of strategic communications, bureaucratic politics is a major impediment. One practitioner explained to us that their government had established a team to embed strategic communications thinking across government, but other department heads were not receptive to the team's recommendations because they 'already had their own people… and preferences'.

Centralised vs decentralised governance

2.2.5 Another issue shaping the effectiveness of strategic communications processes is how far governments are centralised or decentralised. It appears easier to establish strategic communications processes in more centralised democracies. The UK's gover-

nance system – which has gone further than most in operationalising strategic communications principles – is relatively centralised. Its governments are most often from a single party. The Cabinet – the senior ministers of the ruling party – are bound by the principle of 'collective responsibility': they must accept the government's official position or resign.[42] A permanent, politically neutral civil service provides continuity of knowledge between different administrations. The Government Communications Service, over 7000 strong, embeds expertise across the administration, including a central team in the Cabinet Office to direct cross-government communication.[43] Since 2010 the UK has convened a National Security Council to provide central direction on national security priorities. These elements make it easier to establish a process that enables coherent communication at the strategic level.

2.2.6 However, in more decentralised systems, and those run by coalitions, establishing consistent cross-government communication processes is harder. In Finland, the Prime Minister's Office is tasked with establishing coherent messaging across government, but cannot dictate how each department communicates. Apart from crisis situations, when central government can be more directive, the Prime Minister's Office can only offer guidance, which departments can ignore. Each party in the coalition runs a portfolio of different departments and the parties often disagree. These checks and balances are intended to safeguard liberal democracy by preventing power becoming too centralised but they make it harder to implement processes to enable effective strategic communications. Nevertheless, Finland has consistently managed to communicate consistent and unified narratives regarding foreign policy.[44]

2.2.7 Other governments are not so centralised or decentralised. According to Katarina Klingová and Dominika Hajdu's review of best practices in strategic communications, Latvia and Estonia have centralised units devoted to strategic communications, even if they are not named as such. Sweden does not, instead relying on state and local level government institutions to communicate themselves, but institutions can get training from the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency.[45] Slovakia established a strategic communications department in 2022, though it 'lacks the authority to convey core narratives and coordinate other public institutions', and its meetings only 'occur on a voluntary basis'.[46] Klingová and Hajdu describe Ukraine's system as being like a 'beehive', with the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy providing some direction, each department having its own strategic communications teams, and civil society groups playing a prominent role in strategic communications efforts. There is, the authors conclude, 'no one-size-fits-all' approach to strategic communications, as each approach reflects the culture of the relevant administration.

Integrating policy and communications expertise

2.2.8 Another key task for the government communication function is to embed communication expertise throughout the policy process, so that policymaking is shaped by a stronger understanding of target audiences. According to the OECD in 2021, less than half of government communication practitioners surveyed across 46 administrations interacted regularly with policy teams.[47] This often results in governments announcing a policy and then having to reverse the decision later because of public or media pressure. This makes governments look incompetent – an impression that can be avoided if ministers understand audiences' likely responses from the outset.[48]

2.2.9 There has been some progress, though, with some countries integrating communications expertise with other departments. The UK Government Communication Service's 2021 'Engagement Framework' explains that while policy teams can define objectives, communications specialists can use their understanding of audiences to advise on what communication interventions might help achieve the objectives.[49] This still implies that

strategic communications are not involved in setting policy objectives, only in advising how to explain them to audiences. But the UK's management standards for communication in 2023 go further, stating that 'Strategic communication specialists should work alongside policy, operations, human resources and project delivery colleagues from the outset, so they can inform and advise the government and organisational decision-makers on appropriate communication options and strategies'.[50]

2.3 Capability

2.3.1 As well as mindset and process, capabilities (the skills, ability and expertise necessary to perform tasks) are crucial to effective strategic communications.[51] Embedding strategic communications across government is a long-term process, requiring adequate funding, staffing and political will.[52]

2.3.2 Government practitioners still report that strategic communications capabilities are insufficient. However, in many democracies these have improved markedly this century. Initially this was driven by counter-terrorism, as governments set up communications teams focused on 'counter-narratives' and 'counter-radicalisation' to undermine the Salafi-jihadist movement. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, its war in eastern Ukraine since then, and 2016's controversies about Russian interference in the Brexit referendum and the US presidential election, many Western governments developed counter-disinformation capabilities. These grew further during the COVID-19 pandemic. More recently, actors such as the EU embraced a new concept, FIMI (Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference), partly because they realised that countries like China can undermine other societies not just through disinformation but by taking control of news outlets and communications infrastructure.[53] In parallel, countries like Sweden and Finland focused more on building 'societal resilience', with Sweden re-establishing the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency in 2022. All of these capabilities can contribute to strategic communications, insofar as they help governments achieve their national security objectives.

What capabilities are needed to conduct strategic communications?

2.3.3 Conducting strategic communications effectively requires both capabilities and *capacity*. Running an opinion poll is a *capability* that could help understand audiences. A government's *capacity* to conduct polling concerns whether it can poll citizens every week, rather than only once or twice per year, as communications specialists in government commonly report.

2.3.4 There is no definitive list of capabilities necessary to conduct strategic communications, as this will depend on a government's objectives and the context in which it operates. Strategic communications principles and policy can provide a useful guide, though. The UK government's 2021 guidance, for example, states that strategic communications teams should be able to provide Insight (through understanding audiences), Ideas (engaging in strategic planning), Implementation (overseeing communication campaigns and product creation) and Impact (measuring communication effects).[54]

2.3.5 Many governments now recognise the importance of understanding audiences and measuring impact – but these tasks require extensive capabilities to be done well. As a senior US official put it, you have to look at 'where [content] runs, how it runs, what language it runs in, who has what contract to even be able to read that conversation – we don't read Ukrainian, we don't read Russian, and if it's not available online, we don't see it.[55] Some insights are better than none –

'anything that reduces the uncertainty under which future decisions are made adds value'.[56] But weak 'understand' capabilities inhibit the government's ability to understand audiences.

2.3.6 Another commonly reported challenge is that different government departments have their own monitoring tools but these are not joined up. This causes duplication of effort, which wastes resources. Here, capability, process and mindset intersect. Sometimes one department may have useful insight into audiences but lacks a *process* to share it with others – or indeed a proactive *mindset* that assumes that the insight needs to be shared.

2.3.7 Responding at speed is another issue. 'One may have a monitoring capability comprising trained staff and appropriate software', for instance, 'but lack the capability to use the data in a timely manner'.[57] This is a problem fact-checkers routinely face – the time it takes to painstakingly debunk disinformation means that the political conversation has often moved on before the fact-check is published.

2.3.8 There is also a gap between understanding and action. In 2021 the OECD found that, across 46 governments, most officials recognised the importance of evaluating the effects of communication, but far fewer actually did so. Only 42% of respondents actually evaluated the uptake of their services, and only 16% evaluated their communications – a troublingly low figure.[58]

2.3.9 James Pamment argues that many governments need to understand and assess more thoroughly what communication capabilities they have, where they are, whether they are joined up, whether they are resourced adequately and how effective they are. Without tools to measure the effectiveness of communication capabilities, governments are less able to demonstrate transparency, accountability, value for money, and assess the impact of their actions, policies and legislation.[59]

2.4 Conclusion

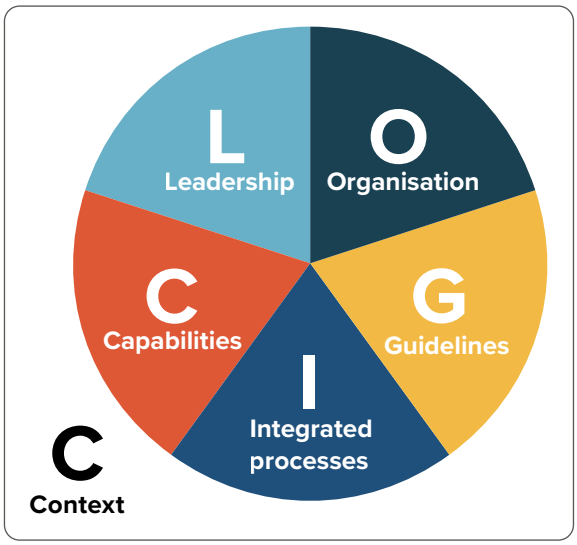
Mindset, process and capability are core elements of Strategic Communications and they are useful lenses to identify where governments are falling short. Many countries face common challenges putting strategic communications principles into practice. But context matters. There is no single plug-and-play model for all countries. 'Geography, history, political systems, areas of expertise, and relative power' shape how governments think about communication, the terminology they use, the structures and processes they enact, and the capabilities they possess. Nevertheless, as the next chapter will explain, it is possible to suggest general frameworks that governments can use to analyse the challenges they face operationalising strategic communications.

3. The LOGIC-C model of strategic communications

3.1 Introduction

Applying strategic communications principles in national government may require wholesale organisational change, shifting mindsets, updating processes, and enhancing capabilities. Where to begin? This chapter introduces the LOGIC-C model, an organisational change framework to help government practitioners identify problems putting strategic communications principles into practice and develop solutions to address them. The framework has five central components: **Leadership**, **Organisation**, **Guidelines**, **Integrated Processes** and **Capabilities**. These are shaped by a sixth, cross-cutting factor, **Context** (see **Figure 3.2** and **Table 3.3**). This is because context – *political*, *cultural*, *social* and *technological* – influences what governments will need to do to implement strategic communications principles effectively. What works in one country at one point in time may not in another.

3.2 The LOGIC-C model of strategic communications



3.3. Elements of the LOGIC-C model

Element	Purpose
L Leadership	Directs the implementation of the strategic communications mindset, establishes strategic communications processes, and ensures communication supports national strategic objectives.
O Organisation	Ensures that government departments and agencies are set up to integrate communication vertically and horizontally.
G Guidelines	Establishes a strategic communications mindset and principles and enables them to be standardised and spread across government.
I Integrated processes	Creates a co-ordinated, cross-government communication system, including a cyclical process of understanding the information environment, integrated planning, execution and evaluation.
C Capabilities	Ensures governments have the specific techniques, skills, expertise and resources to conduct strategic communications.
C Context	Considers the political, cultural, social and technological factors affecting the implementation of strategic communications principles.

3.3.1 These elements are interrelated. Without effective **leadership** and **guidelines**, a government will be unlikely to inculcate a strategic communications mindset, develop **processes** to enable strategic communications or invest in **capabilities** to staff them. Developing **capabilities** such as staff training and skills will be ineffective if **organisations** and **processes** do not exist to enable people to use them.

3.4 Leadership

3.4.1 Implementing strategic communications across national governments requires leadership. A key aim of strategic communications is to align what a government communicates with its national strategic objectives, so it is vital that strategic communications principles are embraced at the highest level.

3.4.2 Leadership is also needed to convince different parts of government to embrace organisational change. This direction could come from a newly created strategic communications team or an existing unit – such as the UK's Cabinet Office, Latvia's State Chancellery or Finland's Prime Minister's Office. Key individuals matter, too. One lesson NATO might have taken from operating in Afghanistan was that a director of strategic communications can help coordinate communication activities and reduce the risk of communicators contradicting each other.[60]

3.4.3 Communication specialists can lead too, by conducting training and by modelling and promoting strategic communications principles every day.[61] An easy win is to ensure that communication specialists are available to decision-makers, so that they can adopt a

'devil's advocate' approach, questioning how government decisions and actions will be interpreted by audiences.[62]

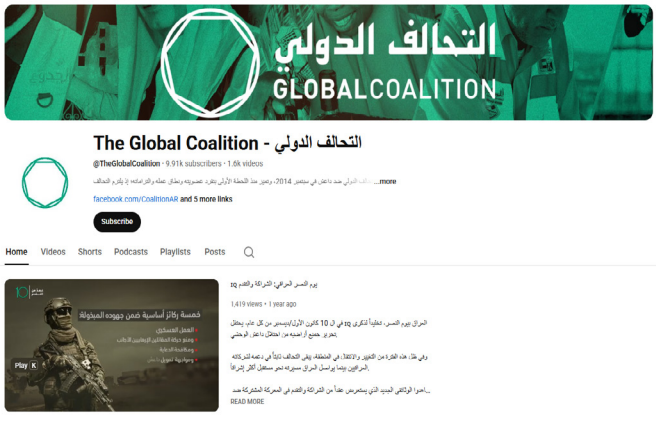
3.4.4 Embedding strategic communications principles across government requires distributed leadership. Empowering lower level staff to operate more independently can enable governments to respond more quickly and flexibly to the speed of the contemporary information environment, in which 'the 60 per cent solution today now often trumps the 90 per cent solution tomorrow'.[63] If leaders can provide a clear, centralised understanding of intent – typically through articulating a strategic narrative – they can enable decentralised execution – as subordinates who understand the leader's intent can act without overbearing oversight or permission-seeking.[64] The method has reportedly been used effectively in NASA's Mars mission programme, which claims that empowering decentralised decision-making has enabled project teams to respond quicker to unforeseen challenges.[65]

3.5 Organisation

3.5.1 Organisation concerns how governments structure themselves to communicate. It is closely related to process. If strategic communications is the outcome of a process through which communicators seek to understand audiences and integrate and coordinate their communicative activity across government, it requires organisational structures – teams, directorates, task forces – for that process to work.

3.5.2 The first task is to understand existing structures, their strengths and limitations, and what structures are needed to enable governments to operate according to strategic communications principles. What works best will depend on context because, in different countries, structures related to the government communications function will have different levels of authority, responsibilities, levels of oversight and constitutional status. Creating a new strategic communications unit may be preferable in some cases, but in others might be unconstitutional or too politically controversial (and too easily framed as a propaganda unit). The task, then, would be to adapt existing structures. However structures are organised, they must encompass all elements of the administration to make strategic communications a genuinely strategic, whole-of-government effort.

3.5.3 How governments organise themselves to conduct strategic communications should also consider external actors. Governments face complex security issues, including wars, terrorism, organised crime, pandemics, climate change, maritime piracy and cyber threats. These issues require governments to work with allies, coalitions, the private sector and civil society. The Global Coalition Against Daesh, for instance, was praised for unifying counter- Daesh communication and for disseminating best practices internationally.



The Global Coalition against Daesh unified counter-Daesh communication, bringing together multiple nations, platforms and audiences. Shared branding and locally tailored content demonstrated a common narrative and coordinated effort to challenge Daesh's claims and highlight partners' ongoing commitment.[104]

3.5.4 CASE STUDY: The UK concept of National Security Communications

The UK has made considerable progress developing structures to integrate communication into national security policy and decision-making. Following the 2018 National Security Capability Review, it established Fusion Doctrine, which emphasised the need to integrate instruments of national power more effectively. The government also established the National Security Communications Team (NSCT), largely staffed by senior Government Communication Service members, to embed strategic communications expertise at the national strategic level. The administration also established National Security Strategy and Implementation Groups (NSSIGs) (later relabelled Integrated Review Implementation Groups) to gather expertise from different areas of government to enable effective cross-government communication and decision-making. These are led by a 'Senior Responsible Officer' (SRO) – essentially a director of communications. These Senior Responsible Officers ensure that communication is incorporated into national security policy from the start, rather than being an afterthought. There is organisational flexibility, too, with ad hoc working groups created to address specific issues.

Whether Fusion Doctrine or the Integrated Review has led to improved, and thus more strategic, cross-government communication in the UK requires more research. Anecdotal evidence from practitioners suggests these structures – and the processes they enable – have helped foster a communication-centric culture across government. 'It is now acknowledged that comms needs to be in the room', one senior official explains. 'It's been a long challenging journey of trying to win people's trust and make sure that we have the right skills and senior people to actually champion what communications can do.' 'National Security Advisors now say, "get a comms person here now", if they're in a meeting without a comms person there – that's not necessarily codified but it's just part of the organisational approach'.

3.6 Guidelines

3.6.1 If spreading the strategic communications mindset across government is a challenge, formal guidelines are part of the solution. Guidelines can codify core principles, establish best practices, and help governments develop consistent procedures. Ukraine, in response to Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, issued guidance explaining how government communicators, international partners and civil society organisations can speak with 'One Voice', in order to explain the country's actions more coherently to domestic and international audiences.[66]

3.6.2 Formal guidelines are especially useful for strategic communications, where uncertainty persists about what it is, who does it and how. Guidelines can help socialise the 'everything communicates' mindset across government and explain how different parts of the administration contribute to strategic effects.[67] Guidelines can help reinforce corporate memory by maintaining consistency of thought and action despite staffing changes, such as the regular movement between departments that happen in many governments. Guidelines, once internalised, can reduce the risk inherent in decentralised decision-making by standardising principles and procedures. This may be especially useful in decentralised political systems where governments are constitutionally unable to provide central direction.

3.6.3 Providing the guidelines are read. Strategic communications guidelines will only be effective if they are promoted and understood across government, which requires senior-level buy-in and resources for training and education. Their value must be visible, otherwise the most thorough and thoughtful guide-

lines risk being just another pdf that is barely read and rarely implemented.

3.6.4 Finally, guidelines will be most effective if they are not interpreted too rigidly. The complexity of the contemporary information environment calls for pragmatism, flexibility and a willingness to improvise, rather than sticking dogmatically to a prescriptive way of thinking. To be accessible, guidelines will likely oversimplify the world they describe, and the fast-evolving information environment means they risk becoming out of date fast. Governments must be able to adapt. Guidelines should be a 'pragmatic basis for action' – a guide to *how* to think, not *what* to think. [68]

3.7 Processes

3.7.1 Processes are integral to a government's ability to conduct strategic communications. They are needed to give governments a strong understanding of target audiences, to enable coordinated, cross-government communication, to assess the capabilities they have and to measure the effect of their communication on audiences.

3.7.2 There is no single process whose outcome is 'effective strategic communications', and what works in one context may not be appropriate in another. Nevertheless, across two decades of writing on strategic communications, an idealised strategic communications process often involves a cycle, in which communicators seek to:

- **Understand** the information environment and audiences;
- **Plan** how to communicate, using this information;
- **Execute** their plans by communicating words, images and actions;
- **Evaluate** the effectiveness of what one communicates and update their understanding of the information environment accordingly.

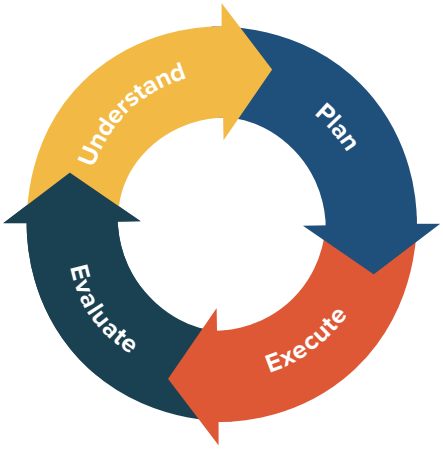


Figure 3.7.3. A standard cyclical communication process.

3.7.4 A cycle like this is standard across most communication fields. The UK government's 'Modern Communications' (MCOM) doctrine uses the 4 I's: **Insight**; **Ideas**; **Implementation**; **Impact**.[69] It also uses the **OASIS** framework, which adds that one should establish objectives first.[70] Using standardised processes helps create unity of effort and can make communication across government more effective.[71]

Figure 3.7.5 The OASIS communication model

3.7.6 These models may be well-established, but failure to put strategic communications principles into practice probably stems from limitations in one or more of these areas. Anecdotally, a common limitation is that that processes to understand audiences are inadequately resourced or not linked up, so insights are limited or not reaching the right parts of government. Another issue is that efforts to measure the impact of government policies and communication are unsystematic, speculative or under-resourced, so communicators do not know whether they are changing or reinforcing audience beliefs and behaviours.

3.7.7 The main recommendation from this is obvious – to ensure target audience analysis and monitoring and evaluation are better resourced (see **3.8** on Capabilities), constantly conducted, and that there is a process to use findings to inform decision-making. Useful first steps include auditing existing processes by determining who conducts information environment analysis, who they report to and how they communicate their findings; analysing how efficient, fast and proactive processes are, and assessing how far they are influencing policy-making.

3.7.8 The cyclical models above are insufficient to implement strategic communications in government, however. Refining the policy development process is another key task, so that communication experts are fully involved at all stages, rather than just being drafted in once policy has been decided and tasked with explaining it to the electorate. One solution is to embed communications expertise in policy teams. Another is to establish formal processes for policy and communications teams to collaborate. Monitoring these processes is vital, since communications experts are still being called on to apply 'communications magic' to finalised policies rather than participating in their development. [72]

3.7.9 However, it is important to consider the flip side of involving communications specialists in policy teams: they are likely to offer limited or generic advice if they do not understand the policy issue well enough. Training to ensure that communication specialists understand the relevant policy area is therefore also important, so that their advice is as tailored as possible.[73]

3.7.10 Processes are also needed to ensure that communication is integrated and co-ordinated *across government* (vertically and horizontally) and aligned with *national strategic objectives*. Section **3.5.4** showed how the UK created new organisational structures and processes in a centralised political system. The following example from Finland shows how strategic communications processes can also be refined by adapting the work of an existing government department in a decentralised system.

3.7.11 CASE STUDY: The Finnish Prime Minister's Office

The Finnish Prime Minister's Office (PMO) demonstrates how organisation and process interact to influence the government's ability to conduct strategic communications in a decentralised political system. The office functions as a strategic communications hub at the centre of a network intended to enable the Finnish government to make informed political decisions and communicate them compellingly.

The office is central to several processes that can help facilitate strategic communications in government. One core task is to ensure that political decision-making and communication, up to and including the President, is better informed by an understanding of target audiences. Two processes are involved – an in-house audience analysis process, and a process to communicate its insights vertically to senior officials to inform their decisions. The PMO combines research and advocacy – the more robust the office's audience analysis is, the stronger the evidence underpinning its recommendations, and therefore the more persuasive its arguments are likely to be.

However, the PMO also has a horizontal coordination function – as it is tasked with guiding other departments to communicate in line with government objectives. This is harder because Finland's political system is highly decentralised. The PMO can convene meetings and advise government departments and agencies but it cannot dictate what and how they communicate. Also, because the Finnish government is a multi-party coalition, with each party running different departments, disagreement and incoordination are more likely.

Refining the processes which involve the Prime Minister's Office can help make the government's communication more strategic. Ensuring the Office's audience analysis and evaluation capabilities are well-resourced will help it produce more persuasive recommendations. Establishing a process so that feedback can flow in both directions is useful – as other government departments may have in-house analysis and evaluation capabilities and deeper understanding of their sectors, on which the PMO often relies. Ring-fencing staffing and funding for longer-term thinking and horizon scanning can avoid staff constantly being tasked with crisis communications. Combinations of formal and informal meetings can help disseminate best practices and socialise the strategic communications mindset across departments. If the Office cannot direct other departments to communicate, it can at least ensure that it conveys the government's strategic narratives to other departments as compellingly as possible. It can also serve as a devil's advocate, critically analysing the communication plans of other departments and offering advice. By modelling a culture of openness and accountability, it can promote information sharing, and discourage decentralised departments from retreating into their own silos. In these ways it may be possible to make government better-coordinated horizontally, even if political imperatives limit how integrated.

3.8 Capabilities

3.8.1 An obvious way to improve a government's ability to conduct strategic communications is to enhance its capabilities – the specific techniques, skills and resources it needs to communicate effectively. Many capabilities can contribute to strategic communications but government resources are inevitably limited. A sensible first step, therefore, is a cross-government audit of existing capabilities. If one assumes that effective communication comes from understanding audiences, integrated planning, execution, and evaluation, capabilities are needed to perform each adequately.

3.8.2 These elements must be broken down further, though. Understanding audiences could involve media monitoring, early warning systems or predictive analysis of what effect future communication might have – and each can be done differently.[74] Data gathering could be quantitative, qualitative, derived from surveys, polls, focus groups, social media analytics, sentiment analysis, visual analysis, textual analysis and subject matter expertise. Generative AI is likely to help refine these processes over time – though only if governments, teams and staff members have a mindset that embraces it and training to use it effectively.

3.8.3 Capabilities to actually communicate are similarly extensive. Even if one focuses on a narrower area of communication than strategic communications, such as countering disinformation and foreign interference, capabilities include content moderation, flagging, labelling and demotion, fact-checking, OSINT investigations, content correction, debunking and pre-bunking, counter-messaging, attribution campaigns, informal anti-trolling networks ('elves'), public awareness and public diplomacy campaigns, media literacy and counter-intelligence.[75]

3.8.4 These are just some of the formal communication capabilities a government might have. But if one takes seriously the strategic communications principle that 'everything communicates', then relevant capabilities potentially extend to any sphere of government action. Deploying weapons systems, altering prison sentences, undertaking an infrastructure project are all actions that communicate – as well as being activities about which to create communication products. While not 'capabilities' in the sense of being formal communication techniques and skills, thinking about what they communicate will help governments communicate more strategically. Convincing citizens to participate in a national vaccination programme, for example, does not just require capabilities to inform them of the benefits and debunk disinformation. It requires actions to procure sufficient vaccines, deploy medical staff, re-purpose facilities, create a functional booking portal, and to ensure the experience is as positive as possible. The more granular a government's capability assessment is, the more able it will be to identify and mitigate weaknesses.

3.8.5 Evaluation, like understanding audiences, will be more robust and reliable if more capabilities are committed to it. Triangulating results using multiple data sources is preferable. In some short term situations, evaluating impact is more straightforward – such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, when disinformation and misinformation about certain treatments immediately caused spikes in people buying and using them, sometimes with disastrous consequences.[76] But, more often than not, evaluating impact is challenging, especially with the long term focus of strategic communications. The temptation will always be to choose simple, cheap metrics such as clicks, views and likes that convey little about behaviour or attitude change (or reinforcement) over time. It may be that several pieces of circumstantial trace evidence, analysed by subject matter experts, is the best one can do, and therefore communication specialists may need to convince senior officials to adopt a more pragmatic approach to assessing impact.

3.8.6 The scope of capabilities should ideally be international, not just domestic. Decisions in one country have always affected others – what happens in Washington does not stay in Washington. But in today's globalised online communication environment, which is dominated by a small number of platforms and companies (Google, Meta etc.), the influence of the platforms must be better understood too. The flow of information on the dominant online platforms is rarely constrained by national borders, so a threat in one country can swiftly affect others. Moreover, as platform power grows, their owners have growing power over politics worldwide – and they are exercising it. Having capabilities that are mainly limited to the domestic information environment is inadequate in this context. An election may be bounded domestically; the information flows shaping it are not.

3.8.7 To conduct a capability assessment, recent strategic communications research suggests four foci: Objectives, Indica-

tors, Risk Assessment and Process Maturity.[77] Objectives concern whether capabilities are achieving their intended aims (is a given media monitoring tool representing public opinion accurately?). Indicators – qualitative and quantitative – can measure whether a given capability is effective or not. Risk assessments can help identify pressure points that might be preventing certain capabilities from operating effectively. Process maturity (which overlaps with the process element of this report – see **3.7**) can identify whether capabilities are combining to produce effective outcomes, based on data such as response times or success rates.[78]

3.8.8 Capabilities will only be effective if they are adequately resourced – that is, funded and staffed. The government's *approach* to funding also matters. A government might be able to set up a cross-departmental funding source and sustain this long-term. The UK's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) has enabled its National Security Communications Team to fund analysis platforms to better understand audiences and 'delivery capabilities' to communicate effectively, as without these, 'it's just a bunch of people having clever ideas in a room that no one delivers on'.[79] The funding has also enabled the National Security Communications Team to do experimental 'proof of concept campaigns that departments otherwise wouldn't want to take a risk on, and also fund research and analytics that informs new activity'.[80] In other cases, funding may be distributed across departments, which may undermine how consistently strategic communications principles are implemented across government.

3.8.9 Staffing shapes who conducts key elements of strategic communications and how thoroughly. Lack of staffing and expertise may mean a government has to contract private sector agencies to do some of its audience analysis – probably at higher cost. Some governments can afford bespoke software, or have the internal expertise to develop their own. Others may rely on free software and tools. Some will have information-sharing agreements with allies – others may have these cut off if diplomatic relationships change.

3.8.10 Education and training also require adequate resourcing. Two lines of effort are especially important, as recommended by Latvia's National Concept of Strategic Communications. The first is to establish training programmes to educate all government officials in strategic communications.[81] This can help socialise the strategic communications mindset and improve officials' awareness of, and baseline skills in, strategic communications. The second is to improve the status of communication specialists within government.[82] If communication as a specialism is perceived to have a secondary status, and its experts are underpaid and unable to be promoted to senior positions, governments will struggle to recruit and retain leading talent.[83]

3.9 Context

3.9.1 Finally, governments' efforts to operate according to strategic communications principles will only succeed if their actions are tailored to **context** – the specific conditions and circumstances facing the country at a particular point in time.[84] Four elements of context are especially crucial – **political**, **cultural**, **social** and **technological**. They are strongly interrelated.

Political context

3.9.2 Political context is important because what works in one political system may not in another. As explained earlier, more decentralised democratic systems, such as Finland, may find it harder to direct strategic communications than more centralised democracies like the UK. Countries have different legislation and can interpret directives from or-

ganisations like the EU differently. They are at different points on their paths to implementing strategic communications. Some have attempted this for decades, with mixed success; others do many things strategic communications doctrine would advocate, but do not call it that; others are just starting out. The political system in which strategic communications is being developed shapes how established the strategic communications mindset already is and how hard it will be to develop coherent, cross-government communication processes.

Cultural context

3.9.3 Cultural context – the shared beliefs, values, practices and behavioural norms within society[85] – is vital for governments to understand how to operate according to strategic communications principles. First, cultural context shapes what actions are deemed acceptable in a given country. Generalising about national cultures should always be done cautiously, to avoid relying on stereotypes rather than robust analysis. Nevertheless, it is widely argued that nations' histories, identities, values, institutions, myths and social practices can affect the character of government, political decision-making, public opinion and behaviour. A classic example with strategic communications is when it encountered resistance in the US in the early 2000s because of sensitivities about it being used to influence *domestic* populations – which had been outlawed because of historical concerns about propaganda being used against American citizens during the world wars. A concept like 'psychological defence', as used in Sweden, may seem normal to a population familiar with it, but to other populations it might seem alien or threatening.

3.9.4 Cultural context also matters *within* government, because **organisational culture** shapes how hard it will be to develop the elements of the LOGIC-C framework. Government efforts to apply strategic principles may fail if communication is undervalued as a specialism, if its importance in policy development is unrecognised, or if the centrality of information and communication to national power is underappreciated. Politicians may know that how effectively they communicate determines whether they stay in power, but whether communication is valued and prioritised across other departments may vary significantly. Research establishing the extent of this variation would be valuable before implementing strategic communications training programmes, which could then prioritise areas of government where the strategic communications mindset is less well-established.

Social context

3.9.5 Social context should also be considered when putting strategic communications principles into practice. Whereas cultural context refers more to shared beliefs, values, identities, customs and behaviours, social context is more about structures within society that shape human relationships, such as the power dynamics between groups based on education, class, age, race, gender or partisanship. Together social and cultural context shape political context by influencing how governments behave and communicate.

3.9.6 Understanding social context is especially important given the growing crisis of legitimacy many democracies are currently facing. While citizens across the democratic world continue to support the idea of representative democracy, growing majorities in many countries are dissatisfied with how their governments are functioning.[86] Meanwhile their governments face concerted efforts by some domestic and international actors to polarise their societies, on the assumption that this is the best strategy to enhance those actors' political power. In more and more countries, this polarisation is reaching the point where

different groups of citizens appear to be living in parallel realities, in which a fair election for one group is fraudulent for another, in which the same politician is a national saviour for some and an existential threat for others.[87] In this context, the traditional strategic communications aim of finding a single, clear narrative, and disseminating that consistently, risks only speaking to one section of the electorate, and governments are likely to struggle to get widespread buy-in even for broad-based policies and communication. The more polarised societies are, the more strategic communications is necessary, but the harder it will be to conduct successfully.[88]

Technological context

3.9.7 Perhaps the most pressing issue requiring additional thought regarding strategic communications is **technological** context. It is rare to read any government national security document that does not start by expressing alarm at how security issues have become more complicated, and that the information environment is increasingly 'challenging', 'complex', 'fast-paced', 'unpredictable', 'disordered', 'chaotic' or 'non-linear' (meaning that small inputs can have disproportionate effects). This makes narrative sense, partly because in many ways it is accurate, and secondly, because the document is usually intended to position the current administration as the hero who will solve these issues. But beyond making these points, it is less clear that government approaches to strategic communications reflect these trends.[89] Plenty of documents include 'tokenistic' references to the information environment being more 'challenging' without specifying initiatives to do better.[90] Part of the issue is that many approaches to how governments communicate remain dated. Communication in many countries is 'still too often linked to media relations and press offices, with undue emphasis on securing visibility and on channels that are losing centrality with many audiences across the world'.[91]

3.9.8 While this paper will only scratch the surface of how to think about technological change, it will emphasise a key point: it is crucial to consider how the information environment works *today*, not just how it has evolved *generally* because of the Internet and social media. The information environment has already evolved significantly in the digital age, as anyone who recalls having a 56kb modem, dumb phone and a MySpace account will know. The Internet of the 1990s and 2000s is very different from the Internet in the smartphone era. The digital ecosystem in which Daesh rose and fell, is significantly different to the era of generative AI. Efforts to understand how technological change shapes strategic communications need to think about how the information environment works today – and ideally anticipate how it will evolve in five or ten years' time.

3.9.9 Making recommendations is difficult, since the complexity, non-linearity and chaos inherent in the contemporary information environment are abstract and hard to understand, let alone apply. An obvious action is to teach government officials and communication experts about these ideas. Another is to incorporate them into formal guidance, as the US and UK militaries have done in their doctrine. Admittedly, though, neither of these ideas solves the practical challenge of what government officials should do differently when they arrive in the office on Monday morning, beyond simply knowing that the effects of what they communicate are more unpredictable.

3.9.10 There are some suggestions in the literature, though. One recommendation of how to operate in a complex, fast-paced and unpredictable communication environment is to 'fail fast'. Putting an experimental product in the field, which can then be quickly assessed, can generate lessons one can use to refine one's efforts.[92] Two recommendations from Ukraine's war with Russia are to prioritise speed over structures, and to prioritise testing what works through action.[93] Ukraine does this on the battlefield in its drone war with Russia. The same principle is useful when testing communication activities.

3.9.11 These are logical suggestions. But socialising them across government may be challenging, as they each advocate giving up close control of communication to increase speed – something large centralised hierarchies remain reluctant to do. The risk of not doing so, however, is that government messaging is drowned out by competitors who prioritise publishing controversial, emotive, often improvised content at high volume and speed. These opponents are less concerned about whether what they say is consistent, or if it reflects reality – what matters is that it gets attention. How governments can better tailor their strategic communications efforts to this context requires serious thought.

3.9.12 One obvious priority is to adapt to the evolution of generative AI. Generative AI is maturing fast, so governments need capabilities to detect it, analyse it, understand how audiences perceive it, and assess its impact. They also need to train their staff to look beyond the techno-panic that comes with any new technology, and develop a measured understanding of how it works, how adversaries might use it, and what effects it might have, and how they themselves might use it to make processes and capabilities more efficient. There is no logical reason, for instance, why generative AI cannot be used to make citizens more informed and democratically aware, yet discourse on its political implications is almost entirely negative currently. Governments and communication practitioners will fail to understand its potential if they only view it through the narrow lens of how adversaries might use it to spread disinformation more effectively.

3.9.13 To that end, the UK's Government Communication Service has already distributed policy on how government officials should use generative AI.[94] The guidance insists that officials ensure factuality at all times, that they must not create misleading content, and that citizens must be told if they are interacting with AI products, but it also encourages using generative AI to make communication more efficient. This includes using it to brainstorm new ideas, produce first draft content, summarise complex topics, create automatic subtitles and translations, enhance the quality of images or audio, create lists of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and identify previously unconsidered risks regarding a topic. Generative AI can also analyse large bodies of data to identify core themes, so could speed up audience analysis and evaluation, provided this is combined with expert judgment. Staff will require training to learn how best to employ these tools ethically and efficiently.

3.10 How shifts in context are making strategic communications harder

3.10.1 A final recommendation is to think about technological and political change *together*, rather than adhering to an oversimplistic 'technological determinism' in which technological advances directly cause changes independent of politics and culture. Considering technological and political context together makes it clear that they have evolved in ways that may impede efforts to develop strategic communications across government. For instance, any country that has tried to resist disinformation, domestically or internationally, will have benefited from third-party fact-checkers debunking that disinformation. But the decision of Meta, parent company of Facebook, to follow Elon Musk's X platform and stop using third-party fact-checkers in the US and beyond, is potentially crippling for much of the fact-checking industry worldwide. Many fact-checking companies are financially precarious and relied on Meta for funding. But every fact-checker that goes out of business weakens a capability governments benefited from indirectly to counter disinformation. It undermines government efforts to create a shared understanding of reality on which democracy, in theory, depends.

3.10.2 A less regulated media environment with more limited content moderation has implications for understanding audiences and measuring effects. A large shift in the content that algorithms prioritise will affect measures of sentiment on a given platform, without necessarily indicating a shift in public opinion or offline behaviour (although it may shape this in the longer term). Social media is already dominated by those who shout the loudest, with the majority of users lurking rather than posting – and therefore is often not an accurate guide to public opinion.[95] A more hostile environment on social media platforms may make it even less likely that content reliability reflects public sentiment. Instead it will reflect the views of whoever is willing to speak up or who is willing to pay to have their content prioritised. Just collecting social media data, and assuming this adequately reflects public opinion or likely behaviour, is not nuanced enough.

3.10.3 Ultimately, those tasked with operationalising strategic communications principles need to appreciate that, within democracies, the conditions conducive to developing strategic communications may have become more challenging and could continue to do so. As authoritarian communication practices continue to spread in democracies,[96] and more governments get comfortable with spreading disinformation when it suits them, government officials tasked with putting strategic communications principles into practice may find that they face more opposition from within their own governments, and potentially their own alliance networks, than previously. Governments will likely remain keen on cross-government communication and unity of messaging, but could be less keen on the liberal democratic values – respect for different points of view, transparency and accountability – that can differentiate strategic communication from propaganda.[97] Retaining a focus on those values is integral to ensuring that strategic communications plays a positive democratic function.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the LOGIC-C model - an organisational change framework which governments can use to analyse their existing communication practices, and consider how to change them to reflect strategic communications principles. The model's elements – Leadership, Organisation, Guidelines, Integrated Processes and Capabilities – do not provide a one-size-fits-all tool to solve all strategic communications challenges. Interventions need to be tailored to the prevailing political, cultural, social and technological context to be effective.

4. Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to enhance governments' ability to conduct strategic communications. The relevance of each one will vary in different countries. They are not exhaustive, and some restate recommendations from a decade ago that have not been widely enacted.[98] Still, every one that is adopted will, in some way, enhance the strategic communications capacity of a given administration.

4.1 Leadership

- **Conduct an audit of leadership perspectives on communication** across government departments. This will help identify how widespread the strategic communications mindset is and identify areas for training and development.

- **Establish leadership training programmes** in strategic communications in government. Training should emphasise the vital role leaders have in inculcating the strategic communications mindset, and especially the importance of considering the communication effects of *actions* and *policies*, not just messaging. Training programmes should have clear and measurable objectives.

- **Senior leaders should act as role models to spread the strategic communications mindset across government**. They should consistently articulate the importance of understanding the information environment and considering the effects of government actions on audiences. A culture of 'communications mindedness' amongst senior leaders will echo amongst subordinates.[99]

- **Create a national strategic narrative and determine how it can be tailored to different domestic and international audiences**. This strategic narrative should be grounded at the highest political level and guide national strategy and strategic communications, and should be updated as strategic circumstances change.

- **Enable distributed leadership.** Leaders should use strategic narratives to convey their intent clearly, create processes and foster mindsets which encourage lower level initiative. They should be willing to sacrifice a degree of central control to enhance operational tempo.

4.2 Organisation

- **Assess existing organisational structures and their contribution to strategic communications.** Determining the function and performance of existing structures will help practitioners work out whether to create new structures or adapt existing ones.

- **Create a central organisation to direct and coordinate national security decision-making and strategic communications.** The form this department takes will vary in different governments, but useful elements would include a forum/council for high-level decision-making, an office/secretariat to implement these decisions, and working groups to address specific strategic priorities and to bring together different departments.

- **Create or enhance a strategic communications office or team at the cabinet level**. This office/team should coordinate strategic communications across government, including devising overall communication

strategy, implementing processes, identifying capabilities, and convening meetings and working groups to enable cross-government communication. The office should report to senior leaders such as the Prime Minister or President and the National Security Advisor, or equivalent.

- **Create inter-departmental / inter-agency structures (e.g. centres, working groups) to enable cross-government communication**. In addition to – or instead of – a centralised structure, governments should establish working groups or research centres to bring together relevant departments, agencies, and potentially private sector and civil society experts to address specific issues. These structures should be able to feed back to central government to enable more informed decision-making.

- **Establish a mechanism for creating *ad hoc* structures for specific situations.** Different national strategic challenges require different specialisms and departments to play leading roles. Being able to create working groups flexibly can enable faster and more informed decision-making and communication.

4.3 Guidelines

- **Create or enhance strategic communications guidelines**. Establish an inter-agency working group to develop strategic communications guidelines, tailored to the government's objectives and values. These cabinet-level guidelines should provide the necessary legal foundation for strategic communications capability development, operational guidance, definitions of key roles and responsibilities and how they relate to other government functions.

- **Review and adapt national security doctrine** to integrate strategic communications principles. Examine guidelines used in other countries to identify elements that might be similarly applicable.

- **Ensure guidelines address the importance of actions** as an element of strategic communications, and how practitioners can consider how to coordinate government actions, policies, words and images to achieve intended effects.

4.4 Processes

- **Audit existing processes through which governments communicate**. This will help identify processes that are missing, inefficient or ineffective, which can subsequently be replaced or refined. This includes processes for understanding audiences, using these insights to inform the policy process, systems for cross-government communication, and for monitoring and evaluation.

- **Enhance systems for analysing the information environment**, ideally involving multiple quantitative and qualitative assessment tools, on legacy media, social media and offline, focusing on both beliefs and behaviours relevant to government strategic objectives. There would ideally be a process to receive products from other government agencies, including the intelligence services, allied states, and potentially the private sector and civil society groups. The system would ideally be international in scope, not just domestic.

- **Include communication experts at every stage of the policy process,** rather than involving them only after policy has been decided. This may involve embedding them in policy teams or regular, formal collaboration. Monitor adherence to this across government.

- **Establish or refine monitoring and evaluation systems** to assess the effects of what

governments communicate, ensuring this incorporates assessments of government actions and policies, not just messaging. Ensure this is adequately resourced, and monitor to ensure that ongoing evaluation takes place. Establish baseline measures so that change can be assessed. Triangulate findings using as many different methods as possible. Focus on both beliefs and behaviours, and ideally reinforcement of these, not just changes to them.

- **Foster a more pragmatic mindset to measuring the effects of communication**, given that it is very hard to determine the effects of communication on beliefs and behaviours. A series of circumstantial traces from a wide range of sources, interpreted by experts, may be preferable to superficial quantitative indicators of reach and engagement.

- **Ensure insights from evaluation are used to update understanding of the information environment**. Monitor communication processes to make sure that they are genuinely cyclical, and that evaluation feeds into subsequent planning.

4.5 Capabilities

- **Conduct a thorough capability assessment** of existing communication techniques, tools and skills. This can identify strengths and areas where capabilities need further investment.

- **Focus on four areas**:

  Objectives: Examine whether capabilities are achieving their intended aims.

  Indicators: Assess qualitatively and quantitatively how effective a given capability is.

  Risk assessments: Use these to prioritise capabilities and identify weaknesses or bottlenecks that may prevent capabilities from operating effectively.

  Process maturity: Assess whether processes are enabling capabilities to be used effectively, for example by assessing response times and success rates.[100]

- **Develop more advanced capabilities for audience analysis and evaluation**. These may be more efficient if centralised, but if so, ensure that their insights are available across government. If these capabilities are decentralised, ensure all relevant departments have access and appropriate training to use them.

- **Develop capabilities to understand and respond to the use of generative AI as a communication tool**. This should not just include how to respond to hostile actors who use generative AI to spread disinformation, but how the government can use it to streamline communication processes. Developing policy guidelines for how government officials should use generative AI is a key element of this process, and communication specialists should be involved at every stage.

- **Provide funding and staffing for teams to provide capabilities to address specific national security concerns**, such as countering disinformation, domestic and foreign information interference, or building societal resilience.

- **Create a central fund to support cross-government processes and programmes.** This can enable more in-depth research into audiences, and more experimental tools that can enhance government capabilities in future. Explore sources of funding beyond central government if necessary, including international organisations like NATO or the EU and grants from international foundations.

- **Provide additional funding to generate deeper understanding of audiences**. This should include ongoing monitoring tools,

multiple methods, across all relevant platforms, and ideally incorporate forecasting or predictive tools (while being aware of their limitations).

- **Ring-fence funding and staffing for forecasting and planning longer-term communications**. Without doing this, strategic communications specialists may keep being subordinated to crisis communications.

- **Create a strategic communications introductory course** as part of civil service induction programmes.

- **Collaborate with academic institutions** to develop more advanced programmes in strategic communications. Promote these to international allies and partners.

- **Second people to industry** to speed up their learning. This will help staff improve their understanding of different contexts and cutting-edge changes in the commercial sector.

- **Increase the exchange of personnel between departments and between partner nations.** This will help countries collaborate more effectively and generate new ideas about how governments can enhance their own strategic communications capabilities.

4.6 Context

- **Conduct research into the organisational culture across government** to identify areas where more work is needed to establish the strategic communications mindset and strategic communications processes. Ensure this assessment considers impediments to the establishment of a communications culture, including limited resources, inadequate skills and dismissive attitudes towards communications as a specialism.

- **Convene a working group** to develop practical recommendations for how to adapt to technological, political, cultural and social change. Staff it with a diverse team, incorporating communications, policy, academic and industry experts.

- **Learn what has worked and has not worked in other countries**. While every context is unique, many governments and militaries will have faced similar challenges trying to operationalise strategic communications principles. Understanding the conditions that have enabled success, and how other organisations have overcome barriers to implementation, can generate ideas to apply in one's own government.

4.7 Analysing government strategic communications using LOGIC-C

Element	Questions to guide assessment
L Leadership	• How far does the leadership value – and are they adopting – a whole-of-government approach that considers the communicative effects of actions and policies, not only messaging? • What relevant training and education have leaders received in strategic communications principles and practice? • Are leaders willing to trade some message control for speed, credibility, and adaptability?
O Organisation	• Where does responsibility sit for the strategic communications function in government? • What are the government's political and constitutional constraints regarding communication? • Do existing structures enable effective horizontal and vertical integration of communication? How could they be improved? • What mechanisms currently exist to engage external actors for communications purposes (allies, commercial sector, civil society, journalists)?
G Guidelines	• Are there guidelines articulating strategic communications principles across government, including on audience analysis, alignment with strategic objectives, coordination and coherence, and high-level roles and responsibilities? • Are the guidelines disseminated, reinforced, and updated? • How far does current national security guidance and doctrine incorporate strategic communications principles?
I Integrated processes	• What processes exist to understand audiences and to plan, execute, and evaluate communications? • Are these processes genuinely cyclical with evaluation informing future planning and decision-making? • How far are communications specialists involved in policy formulation? • How far do existing processes enable coordination across departments?
C Capabilities	• Have capabilities been systematically assessed, including key gaps in audience insight, content production, and evaluation? • Are funding, staffing, and training sufficient to maintain proactive, long-term strategic communications capabilities rather than just crisis response? • Are resources and structures in place to enable experimentation and flexible use of capabilities across government?
C Context	• How do current political, cultural, social and technological conditions shape our ability to apply strategic communications principles, and what barriers and opportunities follow from this? • Which features of our political system and society most constrain or enable strategic communications, and how far can these be addressed or adapted? • How does organisational culture influence adoption of the strategic communications mindset, and what changes may be needed to support it?

5. Conclusion

5.1 Strategic communications is idealistic, in that it is grounded in liberal democratic values and aims to promote a positive, long-term vision. But implementing it requires pragmatism. Even if many of these suggestions are implemented, operationalising strategic communications principles in government is an extremely complex challenge. Shifting mindsets that have developed for decades is difficult. Changing long-established processes, and securing far more funding and staffing, is always tough – especially when the effects of communication are hard to prove definitively. The best approach may be to try to crawl before one can walk, and walk before one can run – by determining relatively straightforward initial changes, and then making tougher changes once the foundations necessary to enable strategic communications have been established.[101]

5.2 Getting governments to operate according to strategic communications principles must be seen as a long-term process. 'We should hold moderate expectations of what is reasonably possible in the short term', one strategic communications expert cautions. 'Obvious progress will be slow and take many years'.[102] As shown in the last two decades, efforts to implement strategic communications may seem like taking two steps forward and one back. However, the imperative to change is clear. If we believe that strategic communications is integral to democracies' national security and social cohesion, then 'we should organise the effort accordingly. We risk liberal democracy if we don't try harder, faster'.[103] This report's LOGIC-C model provides one start point for how to think about this pressing challenge, in the hoping of helping democratic governments make better decisions, implement more effective policies, and communicate more coherently.

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Prepared and published by the
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