MAPPING OF STRATCOM
PRACTICES IN THE NATO COUNTRIES

SCOPE

The findings consist of analysis of the questionnaire results filled in by 11 NATO nations and structured interviews with 6 NATO nations during the first half of 2015.

DEFINITIONS

Of the 11 nations who responded to the questionnaire, 6 cited the use of the NAC approved definition for StratCom, or a close derivative of it, as their national definition. The following table is an interpretation of the key concepts used by nations in their understanding of StratCom (combined data from questionnaires and interviews):

Concept/Attribute	Cited by
Mindset	
- Audience driven (Understanding)	9/11
- Placing communications at the heart of strategy (Words, images and Actions)	4/11
- Narrative focused (Informing and engaging)	3/11
Process (Insight, Analysis, Delivery)	
- Cross government coordination (dialogue & liaison)	10/11
- Integral to the planning and conduct of all military operations and activities (mostly in a supporting role)	9/11
- Cross capability (PA, MPA, PD Info Ops, PSYOPS)	8/11
- Attitudinal research	8/11
- Use of strategic communication frameworks	7/11
- Behavioural research	1/11

It would appear that most nations tend towards a description of process rather than mindset in their definition of StratCom. Many described the structure and key personnel used to impart the capability when asked for a definition. There was a popular tendency for audience focus across the definitions of respondent nations, both in mindset and process. Surveyed nations demonstrated a strong tendency towards attitudinal polling as a means to gauge audience perception rather than aspiration towards behavioural change.

Almost all respondent nations agreed upon the importance of cross capability coordination. At the military level this is described as the essential coordination of information activities in support of strategic goal. At the political level the importance of cross departmental consensus was emphasised but most nations described the delivery of this function to be via dialogue and liaison rather than formalised policy or doctrinally led procedure.

The majority of nations described StratCom as a supporting rather than supported role at both the political and military level. However a notable proportion noted the need for this to change and cited developmental projects to increase the relevance of the capability in policy and strategy making.

BEHAVIOUR VS ATTITUDE

When questioned about the degree to which StratCom practices were designed to change attitudes or behaviours among target audiences, very few nations made a distinction between the two concepts. Most respondents did not sufficiently understand or accept the concept of behavioural change leading attitudinal change and therefore relied upon attitudinal surveys and polling to measure changes in behaviour. 3 potential reasons are offered to explain this:

The relative newness of the behavioural approach. The academic credibility of the behavioural approach is not yet sufficiently proven to replace attitudinal approaches completely. It is still gaining traction in military thinking. Attitudinal change remains a more attractive and practical target for senior decision makers.

Relevance of application at Strategic vs Operational level. The need to change behaviour among key audiences is more relevant at the operational level where short term changes in behaviour can be specified, observed and measured in support of operational objectives. Higher political strategic issues are often concerned with influence upon attitudes.

Reactive vs Proactive StratCom approach. Behavioural analysis tends to be long term and resource intensive. It is more akin to organisations who take a more proactive StratCom approach. The majority of nations interviewed emphasised the short-term reactive emphasis of communications departments predominantly fixed by crises. Here, the time and resource necessary to conduct behavioural research was generally not available and they generally relied upon attitudinal information to gauge audience perception and sentiment.

CROSS GOVERNMENT COORDINATION

Analysis of organisational structure gives an insight into the relevance placed upon StratCom at military and political levels. Most nations place a high degree of importance on cross government coordination but few have developed this beyond liaison and dialogue when incorporating communications as a supporting function to policy or operational plans.

Increased cooperation between the StratCom sections of various government departments reported by certain nations is encouraging and there is a clear aspiration

among most nations to develop StratCom into a fully-fledged command function.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The seniority of key appointments in different disciplines within military and political organisations gives an insight into the degree of importance those organisations place upon StratCom. This provided a further indication of the degree to which communications sits at the heart of strategy. The greatest emphasis in both establishment and in rank across the sample of respondent nations is in Public Diplomacy (PD). The PD therefore forms the core of participating nations' StratCom capability and is likely to dominate developmental thinking. In lead rank terms the data suggests that status falls off progressively through the capabilities of PA, MPA, Info Ops and PSYOPS. This is mirrored in the reported data for levels of establishment. The highest degrees of creativity in StratCom capability development seems to lie in those nations with the smallest institutional systems.

THE IMPACT OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Firstly, the organisational culture associated with the "management of information" in any military organisation is heavily influenced by security classification. This has a significant bearing upon its communications culture encouraging, for good reason, the creation and maintenance of information silos and restricting the ability of organisations to adopt adhocracy or market behaviour. Secondly, bureaucratic behaviour is not necessarily a bad thing in the defence communications domain. It is synonymous with a corporately derived and consistently delivered narrative that is managed to maintain resonance among key audiences. Matching words with deeds, it seems, is a great deal more challenging in an environment that encourages initiative and risk taking at subordinate levels of command. A larger comparative sample and more longitudinal research is required to investigate the relationship between bureaucratic behaviour and organisational maturity and the incidence of adhocracy in nations experiencing more tangible and present communications threats.

SWOT ANALYSIS
Political level

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Political support for StratCom. • Good "communications" (PA focused) coordination and delivery. • Capable talent base across independent StratCom disciplines.	• Lack of formalised "top down" StratCom mindset. • Incoherent information and resource silos within government departments.
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Reinforce development/understanding through key interoperability opportunities (domestic and international). • Streamlining understanding and delivery by harnessing improved technology.	• Predominance of departmental agenda and lack of consistency. • Asymmetrical use of all channels by adversaries.

Military level

Strengths	Weaknesses
• Effective operational coordination. • Capable talent base across independent StratCom disciplines.	• Lack of "top down" strategic direction. • Lack of resources (turnover, training).
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Corporate "StratCom Awakening." • Ongoing Defence Reform / Modernisation programs	• Defence budget cuts. • National perception mismatch, loss of public trust.

NATO context

Strengths	Weaknesses
• NATO's strong emphasis and recent development on StratCom. • NATO as an alliance of collective voices and means. • Consensus and cohesion.	• Pathologies of Bureaucracy (Vagueness of documents and directives). • Lack of clear direction (including a more representative definition).
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Clarification of NATO Lead organisations (COE, SHAPE StratCom, PDD, ACT, MNIOE). • Reinforcement of cohesion and sharing best practice via other NATO multinational opportunities and activities.	• NATO's cohesion and reputation can be compromised by competing national agendas. • Asymmetric disadvantage.