

**EDITORIAL****STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS  
AND THE ARMED FORCES**

This second edition in the 21<sup>st</sup> year of the publication of ‘Contemporary Military Challenges’ is dedicated to strategic communications and their influence, connections and interactions connected to the armed forces. Maybe you have already noticed that we use the term communications, and not communication? At first glance, many would think that the difference between these words and phrases is minor and irrelevant, because strategic communication and strategic communications cannot be that different in meaning; while others may be of the opinion that one form or the other is incorrect. Terminological consensus has not yet been reached in Slovene or in English. Based on the opinion of the Fran Ramovš Institute of the Slovenian Language<sup>1</sup>, the term ‘strategic communications’ is used in Slovene in this edition in the context of the NATO concept. We would like to emphasize that we are not trying to codify the use with our choice of the term, but rather seeking to achieve consistency and encourage debate. The articles in this edition show that a lot of effort needs to be put into terminology. Some believe that it is not important to focus on small terminological differences, claiming that it is the content and its associated development that really matters. But is that really the case?

While preparing this themed edition, we encountered numerous challenges, beginning with the planning phase itself. The basic idea was to devote some attention to the communications and communication of armed forces with different target audiences (internal or external), in different forms, such as classic media, social media, various public events and the use of force, among others. For the armed forces, the relationships within the forces, that is, between their personnel, and the relationships with other audiences, who may decide on the functioning and future of the armed forces, are of the utmost importance. In order to achieve the best possible result, we collaborated with Professor Marjan Malešič, PhD, from the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, a long-standing coordinator of the Public

Opinion, Mass Media and the Military Working Group at the European research group on military and society, ERGOMAS.

We have addressed not only the issue of terminology, but also the concept. This topic often appears in writing and has a rich history in terms of its content. The terms used most frequently in its history are: propaganda (the oldest), public relations, information influencing, communication, strategic communication, corporate communication, and strategic communications, among others. As concepts, they are listed in the NATO Military Concept for Strategic Communications, and described as the coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities - Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs, Military Public Affairs, Information Operations and Psychological Operations, as appropriate - in support of Alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to advance NATO's aims. The Republic of Slovenia has been a member of the Alliance for 15 years. The Slovenian Armed Forces have been fully engaged in various NATO activities and committed to NATO's Strategic Communications Concept. So, the title of this themed edition is 'Strategic Communications and Armed Forces'.

The conceptual and terminological aspects are only two of the many aspects of exploring this interdisciplinary and highly relevant topic. With its fast development, it offers many opportunities, but also questions. In the future, there will be even more opportunities for research, debate and various solutions.

In the article *Strategic Communication(s) – what is the difference?* **Iris Žnidarič** presents the conceptual difficulties arising from different use of the singular and the plural forms: “communication” and “communications”. The emphasis is on the English language. Having NATO's Strategic Communications concept as the starting point, the author presents the use of the concepts by individual theories, authors and institutions working in this field. An agreement on unified terminology has not yet been reached, but there are many reasons in favour of agreement.

The legitimacy of the armed forces' functioning is of extreme importance. The influence of social media on legitimacy and on the Swiss Armed Forces is described in the writing of **Eva Moehlecke de Baseggio, Olivia Schneider** and **Tibor Szvircevs Tresch** in the article *#Inclusion - the impact of social media communication on armed forces' legitimacy*. Activities on Instagram commenced in 2017; a study on their effectiveness has already been carried out, and the findings are described in the article.

In the article *Strategic Communications as a NATO and NATO nations' leadership opportunity*, **Nina Raduha** explores the concept of NATO's Strategic Communications with an emphasis on the key role and responsibility of the leader or the commander in enforcing, directing, co-shaping, implementing and monitoring the quality of the implementation of the concept of strategic communications, one of the most important tools of every modern organization when dealing with modern

security challenges. There is no doubt whether or not StratCom should be used, and the leader has the key role in how.

Information operations are one form of strategic communications, claims **Glen Segell** in *Information warfare by means of soft and sharp power: the case of Israel and Hamas*. The author explains that Hamas, a non-governmental organization in Israel, uses sharp power, whereas Israel uses soft power in information warfare within its strategic communications in Gaza.

In the aftermath of international operations and missions, some members of the armed forces write books about their experience. In her article *Military autobiographies: encourage, discourage or ignore?* **Esmeralda Kleinreesink** writes about the nature of these experiences and the authors' message. For the purposes of her research, she analyzed authors who dealt with their experiences in Afghanistan.

**Paul Ellis** and **Ric Cole** focus on social media and their key elements. What should be the focus of all organizations which want to communicate strategically and of all armed forces that want to achieve not only strategic but also purely operational goals through strategic communications? Find out in the article *The need to improve engagement and communications in a world that is in a state of persistent competition*.

It is our hope and wish that our themed edition will contribute to the development, understanding and implementation of strategic communications, and will help to highlight the importance of the selected topic as a crucial element of functioning in the modern security environment.

