

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN THE ARMED FORCES: CHALLENGES AND DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract. *This article examines the theoretical and practical dimensions of strategic communications as an essential component of contemporary military operations. It explores the concept of strategic communications within the context of the armed forces, tracing its evolution and examining its role in strengthening national security. The study analyzes the core components of military strategic communications, including information and psychological influence, public affairs, civil-military cooperation, and operations in the information environment. It identifies the principal challenges to the effective implementation of strategic communications in the armed forces, including the absence of a unified doctrinal framework, insufficient personnel training, and the lack of a systematic approach to communication planning. Drawing upon the experience of NATO member states and the current practices of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the article proposes key directions for improving the strategic communications system. Particular attention is devoted to the role of strategic communications in the context of hybrid warfare and information confrontation. The findings may serve as a basis for further reform of military communication structures, the development of doctrinal and policy documents, and the professional training of military communication specialists.*

Keywords: strategic communications; armed forces; hybrid warfare; information environment; national security.

1. INTRODUCTION

The transformation in the character of contemporary armed conflicts driven by the rapid development of digital technologies, the globalization of the information space, and the spread of network communications has led to a substantial revision of traditional approaches to ensuring a state's military security. In the twenty-first century, the achievement of military-political objectives increasingly depends not only on the application of military force but also on the ability to manage information flows effectively, shape favorable narratives, and counter destructive information influence (Gorbulin, 2017). Under these conditions, the information space is becoming a distinct theater of military operations, in which the struggle over the perception of events is often no less significant than direct armed confrontation. Against this background, strategic communication is acquiring particular importance as a comprehensive system for planning, coordinating, and implementing communicative activity aimed at achieving the strategic objectives of the state and its armed forces. Unlike traditional information measures, strategic communication entails the coordinated use of all available communication capabilities from public relations and civil-military cooperation to information and psychological operations in order to shape the necessary information environment and support military-political decision-making (Hallahan & Zerfass, 2015).

The relevance of research into strategic communication has grown substantially as a result of the spread of hybrid forms of warfare, in which information-psychological influence serves as one of the key instruments for achieving strategic advantage. The events connected with Russian aggression against Ukraine (beginning in 2014 and especially after the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022) have

demonstrated that the effectiveness of military action depends to a significant degree on a state's ability to defend its own information space, maintain public trust in state institutions, sustain the moral and psychological resilience of the population and military personnel, and shape favorable international perceptions of events.

The concept of strategic communication underwent systematic development in the doctrinal documents of NATO member states and the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It rests on the understanding that any action taken by a state and its military structures has a communicative effect and influences the perceptions of target audiences. Accordingly, the effectiveness of contemporary military operations is determined to a considerable extent by the degree to which the communicative component is integrated into strategic and operational planning processes. The problematics of strategic communication remain at the center of attention among foreign and domestic researchers. The theoretical foundations of strategic communication have been examined in the work of Hallahan et al (2007), Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015), Paul (2011), and other scholars, who treat it as an instrument for achieving organizational and political goals through the coordinated management of communication processes. A significant contribution to the development of domestic scholarly discourse has been made by Pocheptsov (2015), Lipkan (2015), Barovska (2015), and other researchers, who analyze strategic communication through the lens of national security and the state's information policy.

At the same time, a review of the scholarly literature reveals a number of unresolved issues. Above all, there is no unified understanding of the essence and structure of strategic communication in the military sphere, and questions concerning its institutional support and its integration into the system of military command remain insufficiently developed. Moreover, the body of research devoted to the practical problems of strategic communication functioning within the Armed Forces of Ukraine under conditions of prolonged armed conflict and adaptation to NATO standards remains limited. Particular attention is warranted by the problem of evaluating the effectiveness of strategic communication and defining criteria for assessing its results under conditions of contemporary information confrontation.

Thus, there is an objective need for a comprehensive study of the theoretical foundations, structural components, and current problems in the organization of strategic communication in military service. Resolving these issues is of considerable importance both for the development of military science and for the practical improvement of the communication support system for the activities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The purpose of the article is a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical foundations and problems of strategic communication functioning in military service, together with the substantiation of directions for improving its organization under conditions of current security challenges and Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration.

Achieving this purpose requires resolving the following tasks:

- to clarify the essence and content of the concept of "strategic communication" in the context of the armed forces and to distinguish it from adjacent concepts;
- to characterize the structural components and mechanisms for implementing strategic communication in contemporary military operations;
- to systematize the key problems of implementing effective strategic communication in the Armed Forces of Ukraine on the basis of an analysis of domestic and foreign experience;
- to develop proposals for improving the system of strategic communication in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, taking into account the doctrinal approaches of NATO countries.

The article is grounded in the following hypothesis: the effectiveness of strategic communication in the armed forces is determined not so much by the presence of individual communicative tools or units, as by the degree of systemic integration of strategic communication into operational planning processes and the level of institutional maturity of the corresponding organizational structures. If this hypothesis is confirmed, it will make it possible to substantiate the claim that reforming the system of strategic

communication in the Armed Forces of Ukraine requires not isolated measures but systemic institutional changes — from the revision of doctrinal documents to the restructuring of officer training curricula.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodological basis of the research comprises a set of general scientific and specialized scientific methods, the application of which is conditioned by the interdisciplinary character of the problematics of strategic communication in the military sphere. The theoretical foundation of the work is formed by the tenets of communication theory, security studies, military science, and public administration, as well as contemporary concepts of information confrontation and hybrid warfare.

The dialectical method was used to investigate the regularities in the development of strategic communication under the influence of the transformation of the security environment, the digitalization of society, and the growing role of the information factor in contemporary armed conflicts. This made it possible to examine strategic communication as a dynamic system that evolves in accordance with changes in the nature of threats and military operations.

The historical method was applied to analyze the genesis of the concept of strategic communication in NATO member states and to trace the process of its establishment in Ukraine. Within the framework of this method, the preconditions for the formation of strategic communication policy following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the development of the corresponding NATO doctrines between 2009 and 2025, and the impact of Russian aggression against Ukraine on the institutionalization of strategic communication within the state's security and defense sector were examined.

The formal-legal method was used to analyze the regulatory and legal foundations of the functioning of strategic communication in Ukraine. In particular, the provisions of the Law of Ukraine "On National Security of Ukraine," Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 392/2020 "On the Decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine of September 14, 2020, 'On the National Security Strategy of Ukraine,'" Decree of the President of Ukraine No. 121/2021 "On the Decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine of March 25, 2021, 'On the Military Security Strategy of Ukraine,'" as well as the Strategic Communications Doctrine of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, were examined. Analysis of these documents made it possible to identify the regulatory foundations for the organization of strategic communication, its place within the national security system, and the principal directions of its further development.

The comparative-legal method was applied to compare the Ukrainian regulatory framework with NATO doctrinal documents, in particular the NATO Strategic Communications Policy (PO (2009)0141), the NATO Military Concept for Strategic Communications (MCM-0085-2010), the NATO Strategic Communications Handbook, and the recommendations of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. This made it possible to assess the level of implementation of Alliance standards in the activities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and to identify directions for the further adaptation of the national strategic communication system to Euro-Atlantic requirements.

The method of analysis and synthesis was used to process scholarly sources devoted to the problematics of strategic communication. The works of K. Hallahan, D. Holtzhausen, C. Paul, H. Pocheptsov, V. Lipkan, A. Barovska, and other researchers were analyzed. This made it possible to distinguish the principal theoretical approaches to defining the concept of "strategic communication," to clarify its relationship to the categories of "information operations," "psychological operations," and "public diplomacy," and to form the conceptual basis of the study.

The systems method served as the key instrument for investigating strategic communication as an integral, multi-level system. Within this approach, the interaction among public relations structures, civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), information operations (Info Ops), psychological operations (PSYOPS), and military command bodies was analyzed. This made it possible to determine the place of strategic communication within the overall system of defense force management.

The structural-functional method was used to investigate the functional purpose of individual components of strategic communication. On this basis, the role of public communications in building trust in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the significance of civil-military cooperation for interaction with the population in areas of combat operations, and the contribution of information and psychological operations to achieving strategic effects in the cognitive space were determined.

Content analysis was applied to Ukrainian regulatory acts, NATO doctrinal documents, analytical materials of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, and official communications of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security. In the course of this analysis, the key categories, principles, and mechanisms for the implementation of strategic communication were identified, and the principal problems of their implementation in the military sphere were systematized.

The method of generalization was used to systematize the research findings, to formulate conclusions regarding the current state of strategic communication in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and to develop proposals for its improvement with due regard to the practices of NATO member states.

The empirical basis of the research consists of Ukraine's regulatory and legal acts in the field of security and defense, in particular the Law of Ukraine "On National Security of Ukraine," the National Security Strategy of Ukraine (2020), the Military Security Strategy of Ukraine (2021), and the Strategic Communications Doctrine of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, as well as NATO documents — the NATO Strategic Communications Policy, the NATO Military Concept for Strategic Communications, the NATO Strategic Communications Handbook — and analytical materials of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Theoretical foundations of strategic communication in the military sphere: Essence, evolution, and place in the national security system

Strategic communication in the military sphere is one of the key elements in the transformation of the contemporary approach to conducting armed conflicts, in which the information space has become an autonomous sphere of confrontation. Whereas the traditional model of military command was predominantly concentrated on the physical destruction of adversary forces, contemporary conflicts are characterized by a struggle over perception, the shaping of public sentiment, the legitimization of one's own actions, and the erosion of the opponent's informational advantages. It is precisely for this reason that strategic communication is today regarded not as an auxiliary function of military structures but as an integrated mechanism for achieving political and military objectives.

In both scholarly and practical terms, the concept of "strategic communication" lacks a fully unified definition. This is due to the fact that the concept was formed at the intersection of several fields: military command, public diplomacy, information operations, crisis communication, and strategic management (Hallahan et al., 2007).

One of the most widespread approaches is that proposed in NATO documents, according to which strategic communication is regarded as the integrated and coordinated use of communication capabilities to support the political and military objectives of the Alliance. In its contemporary understanding, NATO Strategic Communications encompasses not merely the transmission of messages but also the alignment between the organization's actions, its words, and the perception of those actions by target audiences. This approach is reflected in the Alliance's strategic documents, in particular the NATO Strategic Concept (2022), which emphasizes the need to strengthen societal resilience, counter disinformation, and develop capabilities in the field of strategic communication (NATO 2022 Strategic Concept, 2022).

In Paul's view, strategic communication in the military context should be understood as the process of synchronizing various communication instruments and activities in order to achieve strategic effects.

This approach focuses attention not merely on the informational product but, above all, on coordination among political leadership, military command, and communication structures (Paul, 2011). At the same time, contemporary research emphasizes that the effectiveness of strategic communication is determined not by the number of informational messages but by an organization's capacity to construct durable frameworks of meaning and to influence the behavior of defined audiences. Ukrainian researchers predominantly examine strategic communication through the lens of national security and information sovereignty. Thus, Syvak (2018) defines it as the management of meaning under conditions of a competitive information environment, in which the key resource is not merely information as such but the capacity to shape the necessary interpretation of events. In the context of the Russo-Ukrainian war, strategic communication has acquired particular importance as an instrument for ensuring state resilience, sustaining the international coalition, and countering hostile information-psychological operations.

Important to distinguish strategic communication from other types of communicative activity in the military sphere. Strategic Communications is the broadest concept, uniting all the communication capabilities of a state or military organization in pursuit of strategic objectives. Its principal characteristic is integrativeness: strategic communication encompasses both informational measures and direct actions, since any action taken by the state has a communicative effect. Public Affairs constitutes a separate component of strategic communication and is directed toward ensuring open interaction between the military organization and the mass media, the public, and other external audiences (Storozhenko & Petkun, 2021). The principal function of Public Affairs is to inform, to ensure transparency of activity, and to build trust in military structures. Unlike strategic communication, Public Affairs does not encompass the full spectrum of informational influence but is concentrated predominantly on the public dimension of communication. Information Operations represent the coordinated use of informational capabilities to influence the decision-making processes of an adversary, neutral parties, or other defined audiences. In military practice, Info Ops encompass such areas as cyber operations, electronic warfare, psychological influence, and the management of the information environment. Psychological Operations constitute a narrower instrument, directed toward influencing the perception, persuasion, and behavior of specific audiences through the use of psychological mechanisms (Karpchuk et al., 2023). Unlike StratCom, psychological operations are predominantly operational in character and are applied to achieve specific military effects.

Thus, the relationship among these concepts can be represented as a hierarchical model: strategic communication forms the overarching framework, within which Public Affairs, Information Operations, and Psychological Operations perform discrete functions in accordance with defined strategic tasks.

The evolution of the concept of strategic communication is linked to the transformation in the character of contemporary conflicts. In the United States, the active development of this approach began after the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, when it became evident that military superiority does not guarantee political success without the support of the information environment. In response, the U.S. Department of Defense began to form a systematic approach to strategic communication that entailed the integration of informational capabilities into military planning processes. Within NATO, the concept of strategic communication received institutional formalization in 2009–2010 and continued to develop under the influence of the Alliance's operational experience, in particular in Afghanistan. The contemporary NATO approach holds that strategic communication must be integrated at all levels of command — from the political to the tactical. An important role in the development of this field is played by the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (2023), which conducts research into the information environment, develops methodologies for narrative analysis, and supports the development of communication capabilities among member states and partners (Ministry of Defence, 2020).

In Ukraine, the development of strategic communication accelerated after 2014 in response to Russian aggression and the adversary's large-scale application of information-psychological operations. A regulatory and organizational foundation for strategic communication in the security and defense sector was gradually established. Important milestones included the adoption of the Law of Ukraine "On National

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Security of Ukraine," the National Security Strategy of Ukraine (2020), the Military Security Strategy of Ukraine (2021), as well as the establishment of dedicated strategic communication units within the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine and other security-sector bodies. Today, the Strategic Communications Department of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine coordinates the development of the strategic communication system in the defense sphere, the formation of communication strategies, and the strengthening of the defense sector's resilience. Within the national security system, strategic communication performs several key functions. First, it ensures the legitimization of state defense policy by building the trust of citizens and international partners. Second, it contributes to strengthening society's resilience to informational threats and disinformation. Third, it ensures coordination among the various actors of the security and defense sector in responding to hybrid threats.

Strategic communication in the military sphere should therefore be regarded as a systemic component of national security provision, one that unites informational, organizational, and managerial mechanisms of influence. Its significance extends far beyond traditional public communication, since in contemporary conflicts victory is determined not only by control over territory but also by the capacity to shape the perception of events, sustain trust, and secure strategic advantage within the information environment.

3.2. Structure and functional components of strategic communication in contemporary military operations

Under present-day conditions, strategic communication is regarded as an integrated system for managing the information environment, one that ensures the alignment of political, military, and communicative measures in order to achieve defined strategic effects. Unlike the traditional model of communication, oriented predominantly toward the transmission of information, the contemporary concept of strategic communication entails the comprehensive management of the processes by which perception, the interpretation of events, and the behavioral responses of target audiences are shaped.

In the military sphere, strategic communication is not a discrete type of activity or the function of a single unit. It constitutes a cross-functional system that integrates various communicative capabilities and ensures their synchronization with operational planning processes. Bjola and Pamment (2019), for instance, in analyzing the transformation of public diplomacy amid the spread of digital propaganda, emphasize that the effectiveness of strategic communication in the digital age is determined not by isolated informational products but by an organization's capacity to align actions, messages, and channels into a single system for responding to threats within the information environment. In accordance with the NATO approach, strategic communication must be incorporated into every stage of the planning and conduct of military operations, since every action taken by a military organization produces an informational effect and influences how the operation is perceived by different audiences (NATO StratCom COE, 2023).

The integrated character of strategic communication lies in the fact that it brings together several interrelated lines of activity: public affairs, cooperation between military and civilian actors, information operations, operations aimed at shaping psychological effects, and digital communication and social media engagement. Rid (2020), in examining the evolution of disinformation campaigns over the past century, demonstrates that it is precisely the integration of technical, psychological, and organizational instruments of influence — rather than isolated propagandistic messages — that determines the effectiveness of information confrontation in the digital era; this conclusion applies directly to the logic underlying the construction of a contemporary strategic communication system. Each of these components has its own functional purpose, yet their effectiveness is determined not by autonomous application but by their capacity to operate within a single, unified strategic logic.

Public affairs is one of the central components of the strategic communication system, ensuring open interaction between military structures and society, the mass media, state institutions, and other external audiences. Its principal task is to ensure the transparency of a military organization's activity, to build trust in the security and defense sector, and to explain the objectives and consequences of military decisions. In

contemporary NATO doctrine, public affairs is treated not merely as an informing function but as an instrument for shaping the information environment that supports the strategic objectives of an operation (NATO Strategic Communications Handbook, 2023). At the same time, public affairs is fundamentally distinct from information operations: its activity is grounded in the principles of accuracy, openness, and engagement with the public, whereas information operations may include measures deliberately intended to influence the adversary's information environment. Public affairs thus functions as the "outward-facing communicative dimension" of strategic communication, securing the legitimacy of military action and sustaining the connection between the armed forces and society.

Cooperation between military and civilian actors — commonly referred to by its NATO abbreviation, CIMIC — is a component of strategic communication that ensures interaction among military structures, government authorities, international organizations, humanitarian bodies, and the civilian population in areas where operations are conducted. Its principal function is to create the conditions for the effective execution of military tasks by managing the interface between the military and civilian environments. In contemporary conflicts, this form of cooperation acquires particular significance, since the support of the local population, the maintenance of humanitarian stability, and the building of trust in military structures directly affect the success of operations. Within the framework of strategic communication, this cooperation serves to ensure consistency between the practical actions of military units and their strategic messaging: humanitarian measures, assistance to the civilian population, or the restoration of critical infrastructure all generate a communicative effect irrespective of whether they are accompanied by explicit informational messaging. It is for this reason that the contemporary concept of strategic communication rests on the principle that actions communicate in themselves: if the actual conduct of a military organization contradicts its stated values, even an effective information campaign will fail to produce the necessary strategic effect.

Information operations constitute one of the most important components of strategic communication in the military sphere. They are directed toward coordinating the use of informational capabilities in order to influence the adversary's decision-making processes, to protect one's own information resources, and to shape a favorable information environment. Under contemporary NATO approaches, information operations are not equated with the dissemination of information or with propaganda as such; their essence lies in the planning and coordination of measures that make it possible to achieve defined military effects through influence on informational processes. Such operations may encompass the analysis of the information environment, countering hostile disinformation, cyber operations, electronic warfare, the management of information flows, and support for operations aimed at shaping psychological effects. In the Russo-Ukrainian war, information operations have become one of the key axes of confrontation: Russia actively employs them to construct alternative narratives, discredit Ukraine, and influence international audiences, while Ukraine, for its part, is building its own information-defense capabilities and integrating them into its strategic communication system.

Operations aimed at shaping psychological effects — known in doctrine as psychological operations — represent a specialized component of military communication directed toward influencing the perception, motivation, and behavior of defined audiences through the use of psychological mechanisms (Karpchuk et al., 2023). Unlike strategic communication, which is comprehensive in character and oriented toward the broader information environment, such operations have a narrower, more operational purpose: their objective is to achieve a specific psychological effect — for example, lowering the adversary's morale, sustaining the morale of one's own forces, or influencing the behavior of particular groups. In contemporary conflicts, these operations increasingly rely on digital platforms, social networks, and large-scale data analytics, which allow for more precise audience segmentation and the formulation of tailored communicative messages.

Digital communication and social media have fundamentally reshaped the structure of strategic communication. Social media have become not merely a channel for transmitting information but an environment in which public sentiment is formed, narratives compete, and support is mobilized. In contemporary military conflicts, digital platforms perform several functions: providing timely information

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to the population, countering disinformation, shaping strategic narratives, supporting international communication, and analyzing informational trends. Ukraine's experience since 2022 demonstrates the significance of digital communication in securing international support and shaping global perceptions of the war: the use of social networks has made it possible to establish direct contact with international audiences without the mediation of traditional media (Storozhenko & Petkun, 2021).

On the basis of a synthesis of NATO's doctrinal approaches, an analysis of how the strategic communication system functions within the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and the current characteristics of information confrontation, the author proposes an Integrated Military Strategic Communications Model (IMSCM) — an integrated model of strategic communication for a military organization. Unlike the conventional approach, which treats public affairs, information operations, psychologically oriented operations, and cooperation with civilian actors as separate functional strands, the proposed model rests on the principle of their continuous integration into a single cycle of military command and control. The model's key distinguishing feature is that strategic communication does not merely accompany a military operation but forms an integral part of every stage of its planning, execution, and evaluation. This ensures the synchronization of command decisions, informational influence, and the practical actions of forces, thereby making it possible to produce durable cognitive effects among defined target audiences (Figure 1).

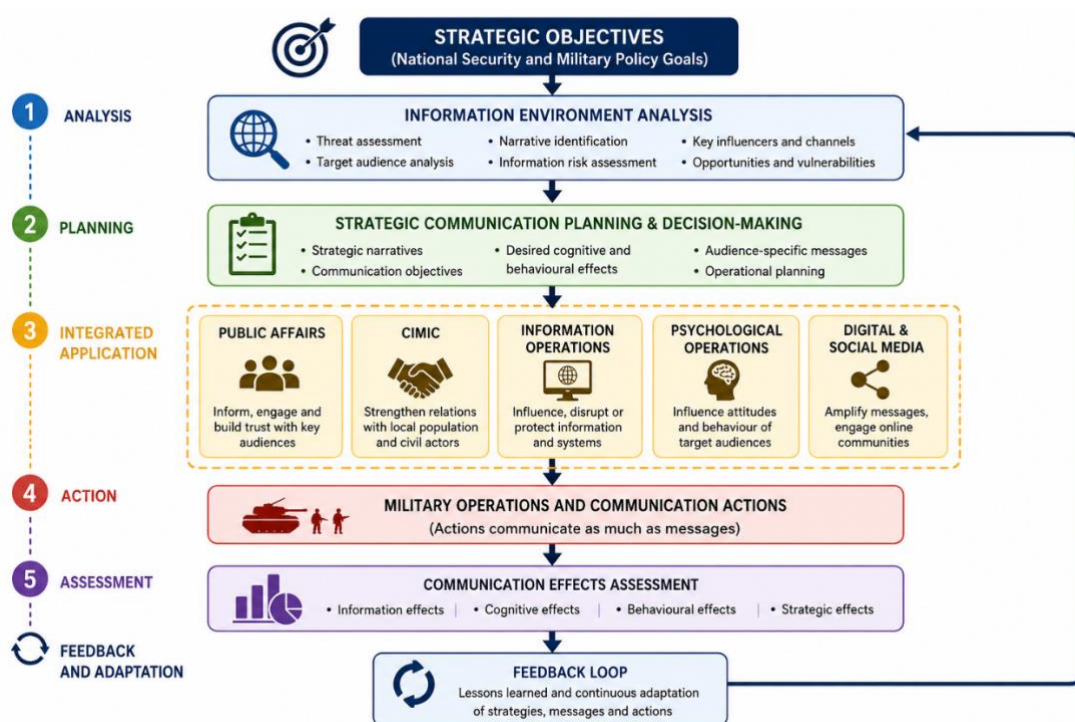


Figure 1. Integrated military strategic communications model

Source: developed by the author

The proposed model demonstrates the cyclical character of strategic communication. In the first stage, the information environment is analyzed, encompassing the identification of informational threats, key audiences, dominant narratives, and the forecasting of potential communicative risks. The results obtained form the basis for constructing strategic messages and defining the communicative effects to be achieved during the military operation. This is followed by the integrated application of all functional components. The final stage consists of evaluating the informational, cognitive, and behavioral effects achieved, the results of which are used to adjust the next cycle of strategic planning. The model thus embodies the principle of continuous feedback, in line with contemporary NATO doctrinal approaches, and ensures the adaptability of the strategic communication system to changes in the information environment.

The model comprises five sequential stages, joined by a feedback loop, and unfolds beneath the strategic objectives of the operation (national security and the state's military-political goals):

Analysis of the information environment — assessment of informational threats, identification of dominant narratives, analysis of target audiences, key influential actors and communication channels, and identification of informational risks, opportunities, and vulnerabilities.

Strategic planning and decision-making — formulation of strategic narratives, definition of communicative objectives, desired cognitive and behavioral effects, audience-specific messages, and operational planning of the communicative dimension of the operation.

Integrated application of components — the simultaneous and coordinated implementation of public affairs, cooperation with civilian actors, information operations, operations aimed at shaping psychological effects, and digital and social media activity, all within a single managerial logic rather than as isolated functions.

Action — direct military operations and communicative actions that give effect to the principle that "actions communicate no less than words."

Assessment — the measurement of the informational, cognitive, behavioral, and strategic effects achieved.

The results of this assessment form a feedback and adaptation loop that ensures the adjustment of narratives, messages, and actions in the subsequent planning cycle. The model thus embodies the principle of continuous feedback, consistent with contemporary NATO doctrinal approaches (NATO Strategic Communications Handbook, 2023), and ensures the adaptability of the strategic communication system to changes in the information environment.

Unlike the classical decision-cycle model (the OODA loop) or the standard strategic communication planning process set out in the NATO Strategic Communications Handbook, the key distinguishing feature of the IMSCM is that its third stage — integrated application — brings all five functional components together into a single parallel phase of the cycle, rather than treating them as separate, accompanying processes that unfold outside the main operational planning cycle. This makes it possible to avoid the fragmentation that arises, for example, when operations aimed at shaping psychological effects or information operations are planned separately from public affairs — a practice that in practice often results in contradictory messaging and the erosion of target audiences' trust.

In sum, public affairs ensures engagement with external audiences, cooperation with civilian actors builds the connection between military and civilian environments, information operations ensure the management of informational processes, operations aimed at shaping psychological effects are directed toward achieving specific psychological outcomes, and digital communication ensures the speed and scale of strategic message dissemination. The integration of these components within the single managerial cycle of the IMSCM makes it possible to move from fragmented communicative activity to the systemic management of the information environment a necessary condition for achieving strategic objectives in contemporary military operations.

3.3. The role of strategic communication in hybrid warfare and information confrontation

The transformation in the character of contemporary armed conflicts has led to a substantial expansion of the space of confrontation, in which — alongside traditional military operations — the informational, cognitive, and psychological dimensions are acquiring ever greater significance. Hybrid warfare entails the combined application of military, political, economic, diplomatic, informational, and cyber instruments in pursuit of strategic objectives, without necessarily escalating to the classical model of full-scale armed confrontation. Under such conditions, the information space becomes a distinct theater of confrontation, in which states compete for control over the perception of events, the shaping of public sentiment, and the determination of the dominant interpretation of reality (Paul and Matthews, 2018).

A distinguishing feature of the informational dimension of contemporary conflicts is that the object of influence is not merely information infrastructure or data-transmission channels but, above all, the consciousness of individuals, social groups, and the international community. Unlike the traditional propaganda of the past, contemporary information-psychological operations employ digital platforms, social networks, content-personalization algorithms, and automated tools for disseminating information, which makes it possible to exert large-scale, rapid influence on diverse audiences (Ecker et al., 2026). Under these conditions, strategic communication acquires significance as a mechanism for managing the information environment, since it ensures not merely the dissemination of messages but also the construction of a system of meanings, values, and strategic narratives necessary for achieving political and military objectives.

The experience of the Russo-Ukrainian war is one of the most illustrative examples of the role of strategic communication in a contemporary conflict. Beginning in 2014, the Russian Federation actively employed a complex of hybrid instruments in which informational influence became one of the central elements of its aggression. Its information operations were directed toward legitimizing the unlawful annexation of Crimea, constructing a distorted image of Ukraine on the international stage, demoralizing Ukrainian society, and diminishing the level of support for Ukraine among its foreign partners (Mammadov, 2026). A distinguishing feature of the Russian approach was the systematic use of disinformation, manipulative narratives, and pseudo-news, together with the use of social networks and controlled media resources to construct an alternative picture of reality.

Following the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the significance of strategic communication for Ukraine grew substantially. The war demonstrated that informational superiority can directly affect military and political outcomes. Ukraine's system of strategic communication became one of the key instruments for securing international support, mobilizing domestic resources, and building societal resilience (Pynnöniemi and Tolvin, 2025). An important factor in this success was the combination of official communication by state bodies, the activity of military structures, digital diplomacy, and the engagement of civil society.

The experience of the Russo-Ukrainian war merits examination not merely in descriptive terms but also through the lens of the Integrated Military Strategic Communications Model, which makes it possible to explain why informational advantage or defeat on either side is determined not by the presence of individual communicative instruments but by the degree of their systemic integration into a single management cycle. The Russian side, for instance, has since 2014 demonstrated a high level of coordination among individual components (information operations, psychologically oriented operations, and controlled digital media) corresponding to the third stage of the model. Yet this coordination has not been accompanied by a stage analogous to "action" within the IMSCM: Russia's practical conduct (the occupation of territory, war crimes) systematically contradicts its own stated strategic narratives even a highly effective information campaign loses its strategic effect if it is not reinforced by consistent action. Ukraine's system of strategic communication after 2022, by contrast, more closely approximates the full IMSCM cycle: the analysis of the information environment (monitoring hostile narratives), strategic planning (the formation of a unified communicative position among state bodies), integrated application (the combination of public affairs, digital diplomacy, and civil-society engagement), and the assessment of effects (adjusting communicative strategy in response to shifts in international perceptions of the war) can be traced with reasonable consistency across the activity of Ukrainian institutions, although the institutional maturity of individual components of the cycle remains uneven — a matter examined in greater detail in the section devoted to the problems of implementing strategic communication within the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The comparison of the two approaches thus substantiates the central hypothesis of the study: advantage in information confrontation is determined not by the instruments themselves but by the degree of their integration into a unified management cycle.

One of the key areas of application of strategic communication in the context of hybrid warfare is countering the adversary's disinformation and information-psychological operations (Ehrl, 2023). Such counteraction cannot be confined to the refutation of individual false claims, since contemporary

information campaigns are directed not so much at disseminating isolated falsehoods as at constructing durable patterns of perception. For this reason, an effective system of strategic communication must include the monitoring of the information environment, the analysis of hostile narratives, the forecasting of informational threats, timely response, and the formulation of persuasive messages of its own.

In this context, it is important to shift from a reactive to a proactive model of communication, under which the state not merely responds to the adversary's informational attacks but independently sets the agenda and shapes strategic meanings. Such an approach entails the construction of coherent strategic narratives that explain the objectives of state policy, strengthen citizens' trust in institutions, and secure the support of international partners. A illustrative example of this proactive approach is the work of Ukraine's Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security (SPRAVDI), established in March 2021 under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy. In particular, the Center's information campaign explaining the ideological doctrine of the "Russian World" was directed not at refuting individual Russian claims but at constructing a durable counter-narrative addressing the origins and dangers of this ideology; according to the Center's own leadership, the campaign's findings were partly reflected in the subsequent resolution of the European Parliament condemning the "Russian World" ideology (Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security of Ukraine, 2025). This example illustrates the key distinguishing feature of the proactive model: a state institution does not respond to disinformation already in circulation but instead sets the agenda itself, preempting the adversary's potential manipulative narratives. In the military context, a strategic narrative functions not merely as an informational message but as a comprehensive system explaining the causes of the conflict, the objectives of the struggle, and the desired future outcome. This is consistent with N. Bolt's definition, which treats strategic narrative as a projection of a state's foreign and security policy, directed toward changing the attitudes and behavior of target audiences in order to achieve strategic effects through words, images, actions, and even inaction employed in the state's interest (Bolt, 2011). In this sense, strategic narrative performs not only an informational but also an explanatory and legitimizing function, uniting the past (the causes of the conflict), the present (the objectives of the struggle), and the future (the desired outcome) into a single construct of meaning.

Strategic narratives are of particular importance for sustaining societal resilience. The conditions of a prolonged armed conflict impose a considerable psychological burden on the population and contribute to the spread of war fatigue, distrust, and social tension. At the same time, empirical evidence indicates that effective communicative work can sustain a high level of trust in security-sector institutions even amid a protracted conflict: according to a survey by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, trust in Ukraine's Defense Forces stood at 94 percent as of December 2025, remaining consistently high (92–94 percent) throughout 2024–2025, whereas trust in other state institutions — the courts, the prosecutor's office — did not exceed 15 percent (KIIS, 2025). This gap in trust indirectly confirms the role of strategic communication in the defense sector as a factor sustaining societal resilience even against a backdrop of broader institutional distrust. Under these conditions, strategic communication performs the function of sustaining moral and psychological resilience by explaining the rationale behind decisions taken, demonstrating the results of the security and defense sector's activity, and fostering a sense of shared purpose.

Beyond its domestic dimension, strategic communication plays an important role in the international environment. In contemporary wars, victory depends to a considerable degree on a state's ability to shape favorable international perceptions of the conflict, to secure the political support of its allies, and to counter the adversary's attempts to impose its own interpretation of events. Ukraine's experience demonstrates that effective strategic communication can become an important factor in building an international coalition and sustaining a state's defense efforts.

The empirical material examined here provides grounds for testing the study's central hypothesis directly against the case of the Russo-Ukrainian war: whether the effectiveness of strategic communication is determined by the presence of individual instruments or by the degree of their institutional integration. The analysis supports the latter proposition. Ukraine's system of strategic communication possesses a

broad and functionally complete set of instruments — the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security, dedicated units within the Ministry of Defence, the Strategic Communications Department of the General Staff, the Center for Countering Disinformation, as well as a developed sector of digital diplomacy and civic initiative. Yet the effectiveness of this system over the period 2022–2025 was constrained to a considerable degree not by a shortage of instruments but by the insufficient institutional stability of its coordinating center. Tellingly, the ministry responsible for strategic communication changed its name and mandate three times within three years: the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy (until September 2024) was renamed the Ministry of Culture and Strategic Communications, only to be reverted in October 2025 to its previous name and scope of authority — the Ministry of Culture (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2024; 2025). At the same time, the Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security itself was compelled during 2025 to change its organizational and legal form from a state institution to a non-governmental organization, retaining its practical cooperation with state bodies while losing part of its institutional standing (Detector Media, 2026). Such organizational fluctuations illustrate a situation in which individual functional components of strategic communication — public affairs, information operations, digital communication — continue to operate and develop, while the degree of their systemic integration into a unified command vertical remains unstable — a pattern that directly bears out the study's hypothesis: it is not the array of instruments but the institutional maturity of the coordinating structure that constitutes the decisive factor in effectiveness. By contrast, the high and stable level of public trust in the Defense Forces (92–94 percent throughout 2024–2025, according to KIIS data), set against considerably lower trust in other state institutions, indirectly confirms that where the integration of the communicative function within the military command system is more consistent above all at the level of the Armed Forces themselves rather than civilian coordinating bodies strategic communication produces a more durable result.

Strategic communication under conditions of hybrid warfare thus performs a comprehensive function in securing a state's informational, political, and societal resilience. It brings together the instruments of communication, the analysis of the information environment, the countering of disinformation, and the construction of strategic narratives. The experience of the Russo-Ukrainian war confirms that informational superiority is an integral component of contemporary military advantage, and that an effective system of strategic communication must be regarded as one of the key elements in securing national security and defense. The empirical material drawn from the hybrid war waged by Russia against Ukraine confirms the practical applicability of the proposed IMSCM: it is the cyclical integration of analysis, planning, action, and assessment that determines the strategic effectiveness of countering information aggression.

3.4. Challenges in implementing strategic communication in the armed forces of Ukraine

Despite significant progress in developing the system of strategic communication within Ukraine's security and defense sector, its practical implementation in the Armed Forces of Ukraine remains a process accompanied by a range of doctrinal, organizational, personnel-related, technological, and methodological problems. The formation of a fully-fledged system of strategic communication is taking place under conditions of ongoing armed aggression by the Russian Federation, requiring the simultaneous conduct of combat operations and institutional adaptation to NATO standards. This produces a certain asymmetry in development: on the one hand, Ukraine has established the basic elements of the regulatory and organizational framework for strategic communication; on the other, individual mechanisms of its functioning have not yet attained a sufficient level of systemic coherence and integration.

One of the key problems remains doctrinal ambiguity and insufficient conceptual coherence with respect to strategic communication in the military sphere. Despite the codification of the concept of strategic communication in the regulatory documents of the security and defense sector, practical activity still exhibits a certain conflation of the concepts of strategic communication, public affairs, information operations, and psychological operations. Such terminological ambiguity can lead to the duplication of functions among structural units, divergent understandings of tasks among relevant officials, and

insufficient coordination of communicative activity. In particular, strategic communication is not infrequently equated exclusively with the work of press services or with the informational support of military command bodies' activities, although under NATO standards it is considerably broader in character and entails the integration of communicative capabilities into planning and decision-making processes.

The doctrinal problem is also linked to the need for the further development of a national model of strategic communication that takes into account the specific character of the Russo-Ukrainian war. The mechanical transfer of NATO approaches does not always account for the particularities of Ukraine's security environment, in particular the scale of the adversary's information-psychological operations, the substantial role of digital platforms, and the need to secure both domestic and international support simultaneously. The task of adapting allied doctrinal approaches to the conditions of a prolonged armed conflict, and of formulating an indigenous practice of strategic communication, therefore remains an urgent one.

A further set of problems concerns organizational and institutional challenges. The effectiveness of strategic communication depends on the extent to which it is integrated into the structure of military command. In practice, strategic communication often remains the function of individual units rather than a cross-cutting process that must be taken into account throughout strategic, operational, and tactical planning. In many instances, the communicative component is incorporated into the command process only after the relevant decisions have already been taken, which limits its capacity to shape strategic effects.

A further problem is the insufficiently clear delineation of authority among the various actors involved in strategic communication within the security and defense sector. The Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, military command bodies, public affairs units, and structures responsible for information operations, psychological operations, and cooperation with civilian actors are all simultaneously engaged in shaping the information environment. The absence of a fully integrated coordination mechanism among these actors can create risks of unsynchronized messaging, duplication of functions, or delayed response to informational threats.

A separate problem is the inadequacy of the regulatory framework for strategic communication. Ukraine has established a basic regulatory foundation through the provisions of the Law of Ukraine "On National Security of Ukraine," the National Security Strategy of Ukraine (2020), the Military Security Strategy of Ukraine (2021), and the Strategic Communications Doctrine of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine and the Armed Forces of Ukraine. At the same time, these regulatory documents predominantly define general principles and directions for the development of strategic communication, whereas questions concerning the system's practical functioning — planning procedures, the allocation of responsibility, mechanisms for evaluating effectiveness, and interaction among its components — require further elaboration.

An important challenge remains the staffing of strategic communication functions. The contemporary strategic communication model requires specialists who combine knowledge of military command, communication, informational analysis, psychology, digital technologies, and international relations. However, the traditional system of military personnel training was for a long time oriented predominantly toward classical military specializations, whereas competencies in the field of strategic communication have only begun to be actively developed in recent years.

An insufficient number of specialized training programs, the absence of unified standards for the preparation of specialists, and limited practical experience in dealing with contemporary informational threats are factors affecting the effectiveness of the strategic communication system's functioning. Particular attention is required not only for the training of narrowly specialized communicators but also for command personnel, who must understand the role of the informational component in the process of military decision-making.

Technological problems are linked to the need for constant adaptation to rapid changes in the information environment. The Russo-Ukrainian war has demonstrated the significance of social networks, digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and automated information analysis in contemporary confrontation. At the same time, the development of Ukraine's own technological capabilities for monitoring the information space, analyzing narratives, and forecasting informational threats requires substantial resources and a systematic approach.

One of the most complex issues remains the assessment of the effectiveness of strategic communication. Unlike traditional military indicators, communicative effects are often long-term and indirect in character, which complicates their quantitative measurement. For example, an increase in public trust in the Armed Forces, a shift in international perceptions of the state, or a reduction in the influence of hostile narratives cannot be assessed solely through standard statistical indicators.

In NATO's strategic communication practice, increasing attention is being paid not only to the results of informational activity but also to the achievement of desired behavioral and cognitive effects. For Ukraine, an urgent task is the development of its own evaluation system that would make it possible to determine the extent to which communicative measures contribute to the achievement of military-political objectives.

The problems of implementing strategic communication in the Armed Forces of Ukraine are thus comprehensive in character, spanning doctrinal, organizational, personnel-related, technological, and methodological dimensions. The principal challenge remains the transition from an understanding of strategic communication as a discrete informational domain to its recognition as an integrated command function. The further development of the strategic communication system requires not only the improvement of the regulatory framework and organizational structures but also the cultivation of a corresponding culture of communication within the military environment, in which every decision and action is regarded as an element of strategic informational influence.

To synthesize the results of the analysis conducted, it is appropriate to systematize the principal problems affecting the functioning of the strategic communication system in the Armed Forces of Ukraine according to their underlying causes, potential consequences, and possible directions for resolution (Table 1). This approach makes it possible to assess comprehensively the interrelationship among organizational, regulatory, personnel-related, and technological factors, and to outline priority directions for the further reform of the strategic communication system.

Table 1. Matrix of key challenges in implementing strategic communications in the Armed Forces of Ukraine (developed by the author)

Problem	Underlying cause	Potential consequences	Recommended solution
Fragmented coordination between StratCom actors	Absence of an integrated coordination mechanism and unified management procedures	Inconsistent messaging, duplication of functions, reduced operational effectiveness	Establish a unified strategic communications coordination system integrated into operational planning
Insufficient integration with military decision-making	StratCom is often regarded as a supporting rather than operational capability	Communication activities are disconnected from operational objectives	Integrate strategic communications into all stages of military planning and command processes
Limited institutional capacity	Shortage of qualified personnel, insufficient training programmes and lack of specialised education	Reduced ability to counter information threats and conduct influence activities	Develop professional education programmes, specialised training and NATO-oriented capacity building
Incomplete regulatory framework	Fragmented legal regulation and absence of unified doctrinal documents	Different approaches among military units and institutions	Harmonise national doctrine with NATO standards and adopt comprehensive regulatory documents

Technological limitations	Limited use of AI, OSINT, big data analytics and digital monitoring systems	Slow identification of threats and ineffective assessment of information operations	Introduce advanced analytical technologies and decision-support systems
Weak interagency cooperation	Insufficient information exchange between defence, intelligence and civilian institutions	Delayed response to hybrid threats	Strengthen institutional cooperation through permanent coordination mechanisms
Insufficient assessment of communication effectiveness	Lack of unified indicators for evaluating information influence	Difficulties in measuring operational success and adapting communication campaigns	Introduce a comprehensive system of strategic communication performance indicators

The synthesis of these problems indicates that most of them are systemic in character and cannot be resolved through localized organizational changes alone. Effective reform of the strategic communication system requires a comprehensive approach that combines institutional, regulatory, personnel-related, and technological measures. It is for this reason that the subsequent analysis is appropriately focused on identifying promising directions for improving the strategic communication system, taking into account the practical experience of NATO member states and the current requirements of information confrontation.

3.5. Directions for Improving the System of Strategic Communication in the Armed Forces of Ukraine: NATO Experience and Prospects for Adaptation

The further development of the system of strategic communication in the Armed Forces of Ukraine should proceed with due regard to the experience of NATO member states, which over recent decades have developed comprehensive models for managing the information environment. Analysis of the Alliance's practices indicates that the effectiveness of strategic communication is determined not merely by the presence of specialized units but, above all, by the degree to which the communicative function is integrated into the system of strategic and operational command. It is precisely this approach that makes it possible to move from a reactive model of responding to informational challenges toward the proactive shaping of the information environment in accordance with defined political and military objectives.

The problems systematized in Table 1 give rise to the need for a set of interrelated solutions. These solutions are best regarded not as a discrete list of measures but as a coherent model of reform grounded in the experience of NATO member states, which over recent decades have developed comprehensive approaches to managing the information environment. One of the most developed of these is the NATO approach, codified in the Alliance's key doctrinal document — the Allied Joint Doctrine for Strategic Communications (AJP-10) — which rests on the principle of synchronizing all communicative capabilities: public affairs, information operations, psychological operations, and cooperation with civilian actors (NATO Standardization Office, 2023a). A more detailed treatment of the approach to information operations is provided in AJP-10.1, the Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations (January 2023), which introduces the so-called behaviour-centric approach — an orientation not toward the dissemination of messages but toward the achievement of defined behavioral effects among target audiences (NATO Standardization Office, 2023b). Matters concerning the public communication of military structures are addressed separately in AJP-10.3, the Allied Joint Doctrine for Military Public Affairs, which defines the role of public affairs at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels (NATO Standardization Office, 2022).

Within NATO member states, strategic communication is treated as a function of command rather than merely a task assigned to discrete informational units: communication advisers are embedded within military command structures at every level — from the strategic to the tactical — and their task consists not only in preparing informational materials but also in ensuring that the informational dimension is taken into account throughout the planning of military operations. A distinguishing feature of this approach is the consistent application of a principle already articulated in Section 2 of this article: every military action produces a communicative effect, and strategic communication must therefore begin not

after a decision has been taken but already at the stage of situational analysis, the definition of operational objectives, and the assessment of an operation's possible consequences for different audiences.

It is important to distinguish the functional purpose of the two models presented in this article. The Integrated Military Strategic Communications Model (IMSCM) proposed in Section 2 is an operational model: it describes the cycle of planning, execution, and assessment for specific communicative measures within an individual operation. The five-level model set out below, by contrast, is institutional in character — it outlines the directions for the systemic reform of strategic communication at the national level of command, thereby addressing not the question of "how to plan a specific campaign" but rather "how to restructure the institutional architecture so that the IMSCM cycle can be consistently implemented in practice."

An important direction for improvement is the further development of the regulatory and doctrinal framework for strategic communication. Ukraine currently possesses a set of basic regulatory documents that define the significance of information security and strategic communication, in particular the Law of Ukraine "On National Security of Ukraine," the National Security Strategy of Ukraine (2020), the Military Security Strategy of Ukraine (2021), and the Strategic Communications Doctrine of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine and the Armed Forces of Ukraine (2020) (see Table 1, row "Incomplete regulatory framework"). It would be advisable to develop an updated strategic communications doctrine for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, one that clearly defines the conceptual apparatus of strategic communication; the relationship among strategic communication, public affairs, information operations, and psychological operations; the procedures for interaction among the relevant units; and the processes for planning, executing, and evaluating communicative measures. Such a document should be aligned with the provisions of AJP-10, AJP-10.1, and AJP-10.3.

The effectiveness of strategic communication depends on the degree to which it is integrated into the structure of military command. An improved model should provide for the participation of strategic communication representatives in the work of staffs and command groups from the moment an operation's concept is first formulated, rather than at the stage of providing informational support for decisions already taken.

A further direction concerns the integration of strategic communication into the operational planning processes of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. At present, the communicative component is often treated as an element of informational support for decisions that have already been made, whereas NATO standards call for the inclusion of strategic communication at every stage of operational planning. An improved model should provide for the participation of strategic communication representatives in the work of staffs and command groups from the moment an operation's concept is first formulated. Within this approach, the process of operational planning should include the mandatory analysis of the information environment, the identification of key audiences, the assessment of potential informational risks, the formulation of desired communicative effects, and the development of corresponding messages. Strategic communication must be linked not merely to the dissemination of information but to the decision-making process itself, since any military action must take into account its possible impact on public perception, international support, and the state's informational resilience.

A separate priority direction concerns the development of a system for the professional training of strategic communication specialists. NATO's experience demonstrates that the effectiveness of strategic communication depends to a considerable degree on the availability of trained personnel possessing interdisciplinary competencies in military command, communication, informational analysis, psychology, digital technologies, and international relations. For the Armed Forces of Ukraine, it is necessary to establish a multi-tiered system of personnel training. At the basic level, all officers and commanders should acquire knowledge of the role of the information environment in contemporary warfare and of the principles of strategic communication. At the specialized level, it is necessary to ensure the training of strategic communication officers, public affairs specialists, analysts of the information environment, and specialists in countering information-psychological operations. Also important is the development of joint

training programs with NATO member states and the use of the experience accumulated by the Alliance's relevant training centers.

One of the most complex issues remains the assessment of the effectiveness of strategic communication, since communicative effects are often long-term and indirect in character. One of the principal problems of strategic communication is the difficulty of determining its effects, since the results of communicative activity frequently emerge only over the long term and are predominantly qualitative in nature. Assessment should not, therefore, be confined to the number of publications, views, or informational messages. In NATO practice, increasing attention is being devoted to a three-tiered system of assessment: (1) informational activity (the quantity and quality of measures undertaken, audience reach, speed of response); (2) perception (the level of trust, shifts in public opinion, the dynamics of narratives); and (3) behavioral effects (changes in the behavior of target audiences, support for state policy, and a reduction in the effectiveness of hostile information operations) — an approach consistent with the logic of the behaviour-centric approach embedded in AJP-10.1. For Ukraine, an urgent task is the development of its own evaluation system based on this logic, supplemented by technological tools for monitoring the media space, analyzing social networks, and forecasting informational threats, including through the use of big-data analytics and artificial intelligence.

The implementation of this five-level institutional model creates the conditions under which the operational model can be consistently applied in practice: doctrinal clarity removes terminological confusion; organizational integration ensures unity of coordination; the operational inclusion of strategic communication in planning makes it possible to realize the principle that "actions communicate no less than words"; personnel training supplies the human resources needed to execute the cycle; and the assessment system closes the feedback loop. The transition from the fragmented use of individual communicative instruments to a fully-fledged, institutionally integrated system of strategic communication thus corresponds to the contemporary requirements of hybrid warfare and creates the preconditions for strengthening Ukraine's informational resilience under conditions of prolonged security confrontation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Under present-day conditions of transformation in the character of armed conflicts, in which the information space has become one of the key domains of confrontation, strategic communication has acquired the status of a critically important element in ensuring a state's national security and defense capability. The present study was directed toward a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical foundations, structural components, functional problems, and prospects for the development of strategic communication in the military sphere. The results obtained confirm that contemporary war is waged not only over territory and resources but also over perception, trust, public support, and a state's capacity to construct and defend its own strategic narratives.

The study established that strategic communication in the military context must be understood as a systemic managerial function that ensures alignment among a state's actions, its military decisions, and its communicative processes. Unlike the traditional model of informational activity, oriented predominantly toward the dissemination of messages, strategic communication entails the comprehensive management of the information environment, the construction of targeted meanings, and the achievement of defined cognitive and behavioral effects among relevant audiences. The theoretical analysis made it possible to clarify the relationship between strategic communication and adjacent concepts — public affairs, information operations, and psychological operations. It was established that public affairs ensures open communication between military structures and society and the media; information operations are directed toward coordinating influence on the information environment; and psychological operations are employed to achieve specific psychological effects among defined audiences. At the same time, it is strategic communication that functions as the integrating mechanism, ensuring the coordination of these lines of activity in accordance with the strategic objectives of the state and its armed forces. To operationalize this integrative logic at the level of a specific operation, the study proposed an original

analytical instrument which represents strategic communication as a continuous five-stage cycle (analysis, planning, integrated application, action, and assessment) rather than as a set of parallel, loosely connected functions.

Analysis of the experience of the United States, NATO member states, and Ukraine demonstrated that the development of strategic communication constitutes a direct response to the changing nature of contemporary conflict. NATO practice shows that the effectiveness of strategic communication is determined not by the presence of discrete communicative units but by the degree of their integration into the system of military command. At the same time, the experience of the Russo-Ukrainian war confirmed that informational superiority, the capacity to counter disinformation, and the ability to construct persuasive strategic narratives can directly affect the course and outcomes of armed confrontation. The examination of the functional components of strategic communication showed that their effectiveness is secured through the interaction of public affairs, cooperation with civilian actors, information and psychological operations, and digital communication. In contemporary military operations, these components cannot be treated in isolation, since only their synchronized application makes it possible to ensure consistency among military actions, official messaging, and the intended strategic effects.

The analysis of the problems involved in implementing strategic communication in the Armed Forces of Ukraine identified the principal groups of challenges — doctrinal, organizational, personnel-related, technological, and methodological — and systematized them according to their underlying causes, potential consequences, and recommended solutions (Table 1). Among the most significant of these problems are the insufficient integration of strategic communication into operational planning processes, the need for further improvement of the regulatory framework, the absence of a fully developed system for training specialized personnel, and the difficulty of assessing the effectiveness of communicative activity, given that its results cannot be reduced solely to quantitative indicators.

The results of the study confirm the hypothesis advanced at the outset: that the effectiveness of strategic communication in the armed forces is determined above all by the degree of its institutional integration into command processes, rather than merely by the presence of individual informational instruments or specialized units. This conclusion is substantiated not only theoretically but also empirically: the comparative analysis of the Russian and Ukrainian approaches to strategic communication during the ongoing war (Section 3.3) showed that Russia's high level of coordination among individual instruments has not translated into strategic effectiveness, since its practical conduct systematically contradicts its own narratives, whereas Ukraine's comparatively more consistent — albeit institutionally uneven — implementation of the full communicative cycle has been accompanied by a sustained high level of public trust in the Defense Forces (92–94 percent in 2024–2025, according to KIIS data), even as recurrent institutional restructuring at the level of the coordinating ministry indicates that this institutional integration remains incomplete. This implies that the further development of the strategic communication system of the Armed Forces of Ukraine must entail a comprehensive institutional transformation — from the improvement of doctrinal documents and organizational procedures to the cultivation of a new culture of military command in which the informational dimension is taken into account in every strategic decision.

Taking into account the experience of NATO member states and the particularities of Ukraine's security environment, the study proposed the principal directions for improving the strategic communication system of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. These include: adapting the regulatory and doctrinal framework to Alliance standards; incorporating strategic communication into the operational planning cycle; establishing a multi-tiered system for the training and professional development of specialists; developing technological capabilities for analyzing the information environment; and constructing a system for assessing communicative effects based on cognitive, behavioral, and strategic indicators.

The proposed model for improving strategic communication in the Armed Forces of Ukraine entails a transition from the fragmented use of individual communicative measures to a comprehensive system for managing the information environment, integrated into the processes of military planning and

decision-making. The implementation of such a model would contribute to strengthening the state's informational resilience, deepening public trust in the security and defense sector, reinforcing international support for Ukraine, and building the capacity to counter contemporary hybrid threats effectively.

The study is subject to certain limitations that warrant acknowledgment. The empirical analysis relies substantially on open-source materials, doctrinal documents, and publicly available sociological data, rather than on internal institutional data regarding the actual planning and coordination procedures of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, access to which is restricted for reasons of operational security. The proposed IMSCM and the five-level institutional model should accordingly be regarded as analytical frameworks derived from the synthesis of doctrinal sources and open empirical material, the practical validation of which would require further field-based or institutional research.

Promising directions for further research include the development of practical methodologies for assessing the effectiveness of strategic communication in the military sphere, the study of the influence of digital technologies and artificial intelligence on the transformation of information confrontation, and the formulation of models for adapting NATO experience to the specific characteristics of Ukraine's defense system.

AI Use Declaration. *This article was originally written by the author in Ukrainian. AI-based tools were used to assist in translating the manuscript into English. The author reviewed and edited the resulting translation for accuracy, terminology, and academic style, verified all sources and citations against the original materials, and confirms that the research, analysis, and conclusions presented are entirely the author's own. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the final text.*

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