ASSESSMENT OF THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION STRUCTURE IN POLAND AND ITS POTENTIAL

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Introduction

The following report is part of a project concerning strategic communication in Central Europe, prepared methodologically and with expert support from the International Republican Institute's Beacon Project. The report primarily analyses official government documents and literature concerning strategic communication in Poland (in Polish) and strategic communication in NATO (in English).

Additionally, the report utilizes data regarding interactions on Facebook among key actors engaging in strategic communication regarding NATO in Poland. The data was collected and prepared by IRI through the CrowdTangle application, based on the methodology employed by IRI within the Beacon Project (more about this analysis in section IV).

More information about the entire project can be found on the website.

This report has been prepared with support from IRI's Beacon Project. The opinions expressed are solely those of the author and do not reflect those of IRI.

Strategic communication in Poland - scene setting and background

The debate and process of shaping the approach to strategic communication in Poland have a long history and a substantial body of literature. In a simplified view, one can assume that this process gained momentum with the spread of new digital threats primarily arising from the development of new technologies and digital tools, including social media facilitating the proliferation of data and information that could harm the state. The course of the debate and the process of creating strategic communication in Poland are also influenced by changes in Poland's external environment (and the broader Central and Eastern European region) regarding the growing threat from Russia (and indirectly Belarus), with particular attention to Russia's war against Ukraine since 2014 and hybrid threats inspired by the authorities of Belarus on the Polish-Belarusian-Lithuanian border since 2021[1]. The situation beyond Poland's eastern border (and thus NATO's eastern border) has led to the most serious incidents affecting Poland's security and has served as a kind of test for the country's strategic communication.

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[1] In 2021, Belarus started the process of pushing immigrants to cross the EU border (Poland, Lithuania, Latvia) causing a security crisis for all countries involved. Before that the immigrants were brought to Belarus in a state-orchestrated process of sending people from Asia and Africa into the EU. The aim was to destabilize the security situation within the EU. As a response, Poland has strengthened the border with Belarus by building a fence alongside the border. Belarus continues causing a crisis on the border till today. Some immigrants died in the woods and quagmires during the attempts to cross the EU border sparking a society-dividing debate in Poland regarding the state's response to the crisis.

In the process of creating Polish strategic communication, two overlapping and complementary trends can be distinguished. The first trend refers to the concepts of strategic communication developed within the framework of the North Atlantic Alliance and highlights the need for synergy among Alliance members in this regard. The second trend speaks to the necessity of developing Polish solutions (legislation, strategies, coordination), drawing on the sovereignty of the state and the need to ensure effective defense of the country. This report is based on knowledge gathered from expert studies and documents (desk research) that seek to analyze the development of strategic communication from the perspective of these two complementary approaches.

Strategic Communication: legal and institutional framework

This section of the report provides a general outline of the most important institutions and documents shaping and regulating the issue of strategic communication in Poland. Readers interested in specific issues can refer to the bibliography attached to the report.

A significant portion of expert studies on Poland's strategic communication refers to documents and definitions developed by NATO, particularly the NATO Policy on Strategic Communication from 2009, the NATO Strategic Communication Handbook from 2015, and, in purely military terms, guidelines for implementing strategic communication adopted by the NATO Military Committee at NATO Headquarters in 2017 and document MC 0628 - NATO Military Policy on Strategic Communications[2]. In this context, the definition of strategic communication applicable in NATO is cited: "*The coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities – Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs (PA), Military Public Affairs, Information Operations (Info Ops), and Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), as appropriate – in support of Alliance policies, operations, and activities, and in order to advance NATO's aims*."

At the same time, it is noted that NATO allows Alliance members autonomy in developing their approach and terminology regarding strategic communication, taking into account local conditions. Nevertheless, attention is drawn to the fact that the responsibilities of NATO's strategic communication include the use of modern technologies (including new media); a proactive approach involving the ability to take swift actions concerning events occurring in the information environment both within and outside the kinetic layer; and the pursuit of maximum coherence in messaging and transparency in actions taken.

Military

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[2] The current list of NATO documents regarding strategic communication can be found, among others, in the report of the Ministry of Defense of the United Kingdom, AJP-10 Allied Joint Doctrine for Strategic Communications, March 2023.

At the military level, strategic communication is defined concerning the solutions adopted at the NATO level. An example is the Concept of Strategic Communication in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland, which contains a definition of strategic communication: *targeted actions of cells and organizational units of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland (Ministry of National Defense) involving the creation and dissemination of a specific communication message directed at the internal environment, external environment (including opponents), which are systematically coordinated with kinetic actions. Integrated capabilities developed within strategic communication include military public relations activities, promotional activities, information operations, psychological operations, CIMIC, KLE, and others utilizing a variety of tools, such as social media[3]*. This document states that strategic communication affects the information environment, its primary function being to support the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland through the coordination of communication activities. Strategic communication should therefore contribute to gaining informational advantage and thus influence specific individuals or collective entities through communication messages.

The Concept also distinguishes (1) recipients: external (not part of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland) and internal (individuals and institutions directly or indirectly associated with the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland); (2) planes: national, alliance-related (NATO), and coalition (in the case where actions of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland are conducted with at least one country that is not a member of NATO); (3) directions of action: directed at the audience within Poland and directed at the audience beyond the borders of Poland.

The Concept also describes the relationship between the political and military spheres in the area of strategic communication, indicating that the political-military level is created by the Ministry of National Defense and the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces. However, the Concept does not describe the tasks assigned to the Ministry of National Defense, focusing instead on the description of tasks within the military domain.

It should be noted that although the concept of strategic communication in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland approaches this issue comprehensively, it is not a document of doctrinal and/or strategic rank, although it could serve as the basis for such documents. In fact, in expert studies on strategic communication in Poland, it is emphasized that there is a lack of a document such as a doctrine of strategic communication, which - despite a prepared draft - has not been implemented. Also, the National Security Strategy approved by the Polish government on May 12, 2020, does not refer in detail to strategic communication. Although it includes a separate section on "Cybersecurity" and "Information Space," the term "strategic communication" itself appears in the document only twice, indicating the need to create a

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[3] The Concept of Strategic Communication in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland in Kacała, T. (2015). Basic Assumptions of the Concept of Strategic Communication in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland. "Bellona Quarterly, (2), 681."

unified system of strategic communication for the state, "whose task should be to forecast, plan, and implement coherent communication activities, using a wide range of communication channels and media, as well as utilizing reconnaissance and influence tools in various areas of national security[4]. The strategic communication is also not mentioned in the Act *on the Defense of the Homeland* adopted on March 23, 2022.

The lack of an approved doctrine of strategic communication at the political-military level, and consequently the lack of proper coordination of actions among various entities with competencies in the field of strategic communication, is often indicated as the biggest shortcoming of the process of developing and implementing Polish strategic communication. Even representatives of political structures in the security area point this out, as evidenced by the statement of the Head of the National Security Bureau from 2021[5], in which he states that in the sphere of strategic communication in Poland, too many activities take place without established procedures and developed schemes.

Within the military structure, it is also important to mention the Territorial Defense Forces (WOT), established in 2015, which were formed on January 1, 2017, under the act of November 16. WOT constitutes one of the five branches of the Polish Armed Forces, and their most distinguishing feature among the other branches of the armed forces is the voluntary nature of service.

From the perspective of strategic communication, it is important to point out the "Cyber" component within the WOT, which carries out tasks related to countering disinformation and utilizing social media among other means. Moreover, it is assessed that WOT engages in strategic communication for the Polish Armed Forces similar to the other branches of the armed forces. R. Żuchowski emphasizes that one of the primary tasks of WOT in the area of strategic communication is to build a positive image of this branch of the armed forces in society and to attract volunteers to service[6].

An important component in the field of strategic communication at the military level is also the analytical and educational activities carried out by the Academic Center of Strategic Communication (ACKS). ACKS was established in 2021 at the War Studies University (Akademia Sztuki Wojennej – AszWoj), a Polish public military university. ACKS defines its tasks as *improving the communication system in the Polish Armed Forces, increasing public*

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[4] Strategia Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego, S. B. N. R. (2020). Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego, Warsaw. Accessed from: https://www. bbn. gov. pl/ftp/doku menty/Strategia_Bezpieczenstwa_Narodowego_RP_2020. pdf.

[5] https://defence24.pl/geopolityka/soloch-nato-i-ue-podzielaja-polska-perspektywe-dotyczaca-agresji-aleksandra-lukaszenki; see also: https://cyberdefence24.pl/polityka-i-prawo/komunikacja-strategiczna-w-polsce-do-poprawy-putin-wykorzystal-slabosc-warszawy

[6] Żuchowski, R. (2017). Wojska Obrony Terytorialnej w działaniach antydezinformacyjnych. Bezpieczeństwo. Teoria i Praktyka, 28(3), 79-97.

awareness of threats arising from the information environment, and initiating public debate on strategic communication and countering disinformation[7].

ACKS divides its activities into two main areas: (1) training activities through seminars, and conferences for Polish and international personnel, taking into account NATO guidelines on strategic communication, and (2) analytical activities and knowledge dissemination through the publication of reports, expertise, and other analytical studies.

Government

The above-mentioned lack of a strategic document delineating tasks, responsibilities, and action plans in the field of strategic communication is particularly evident at the political level, where there is also a dispersion of activities and responsibilities across various ministries and government agencies, including primarily the Ministry of National Defense (MON), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MSZ), the National Security Bureau (BBN), as well as the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Under the auspices of the BBN, a draft document called the Information Security Doctrine of the Republic of Poland was prepared in 2015. However, this document has not been approved by the Polish authorities to date. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that the draft Doctrine included a definition of strategic communication: *it is the synthesis of informational activities of a given strategic entity (e.g., a state, alliance, coalition) aimed at shaping views, assessments, opinions, etc., and decisions of other entities in the strategic environment (subordinate, cooperating, neutral, competing, hostile) in a manner favorable to one's own strategic interests. It is carried out through activities in such areas as public diplomacy, social communication, information operations, and psychological operations[8].*

An older document is the decision of the Minister of National Defense dated July 8, 2014. This document establishes a team for the development and implementation of a strategic communication system in the MOD and indicates that it should take into account the principles of strategic communication applicable within NATO[9].

Despite the lack of a single document that would specify the division of competencies in the field of strategic communication, it should be noted that at the political level, the primary role in this area falls to the Ministry of National Defense. This is because the MOD is responsible for creating and conducting informational policies related to defense[10]. Within the structure

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[7] https://www.wojsko-polskie.pl/aszwoj/stratcom/

[8] Doktryna Bezpieczeństwa Informacyjnego RP [draft], https://www.infor.pl/akt-prawny/U23.2014.052.0000236,decyzja-nr-284mon-ministra-obrony-narodowej-w-sprawie-powolania-zespolu-do-spraw-opracowania-i-wdrozenia-systemu-komunikacji-strategicznej-w-resorcie-obrony-narodowej.html

[9] https://www.infor.pl/akt-prawny/U23.2014.052.0000236,decyzja-nr-284mon-ministra-obrony-narodowej-w-sprawie-powolania-zespolu-do-spraw-opracowania-i-wdrozenia-systemu-komunikacji-strategicznej-w-resorcie-obrony-narodowej.html

[10] The Regulation of the Council of Ministers of July 9, 1996, on the detailed scope of the Minister of National Defense's activities.

of the MOD, activities related to strategic communication are carried out by the Operational Center of the Minister of National Defense, which is tasked with defining challenges and coordinating strategic communication efforts[11].

In the case of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there is a lack of official public information allowing for the assessment of actions taken in the field of strategic communication. However, the source of information indicating that the MFA carries out tasks in this area is announcements for recruitment to the position of specialist in strategic communication. According to the information provided in the announcements, the unit responsible for strategic communication is located within the Press Spokesperson's Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs[12]. Among the responsibilities of this position is, among others, countering foreign disinformation regarding the priorities of Poland's foreign policy and strategic communication of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From the content of the announcements, it can also be learned that the Press Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs serves as a contact point for the Rapid Alert System, which is a platform for European Union cooperation, and a part of the Action Plan against Disinformation introduced in 2018, ensuring the exchange of information among EU institutions and Member States regarding disinformation and the development of related threats[13].

Public diplomacy is another area of strategic communication within the MFA's structure (Department of Public and Cultural Diplomacy). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs defines its actions in this area as having "strategic, coordination, and executive character, aimed at shaping social attitudes and public opinion abroad to achieve understanding and support for Poland's raison d'etat and foreign policy." The use of Soft Power mechanisms in public diplomacy, such as promoting Polish culture, history, science, and innovation, the Polish language, education, sports, tourism, and the economy, allows for building a positive image of Poland abroad and fostering good international relations[14].

In the literature on the subject, it is pointed out that the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration can and should also engage in tasks related to strategic communication[15]. Although there is no direct reference to strategic communication in the Ministry's documents, in theory, the competencies of the Department of Social Communication are significant for the implementation of strategic communication. Publicly available action plans in the event of a terrorist threat, for example, include communication with society among other aspects[16].

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[11] Order No. 5/MON of the Minister of National Defense of April 9, 2018.

[12] An examples of job recruitments at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2021: https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/nabor-na-stanowisko-specjalisty-ds-komunikacji-strategicznej-przeciwdzialanie-dezinformacji-zagranicznej-dot-priorytetow-polityki-zagranicznej-rp-i-komunikacji-strategicznej-msz-w-biurze-rzecznika-prasowego-brp-492021

[13] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/59644_en

[14] https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/dyplomacja-publiczna

[15] Gawęcka, J. A. (2021). Komunikacja strategiczna.

[16] https://www.gov.pl/web/mswia/poziomy-systemu-antyterrorystycznego-i-fazy-dzialan-antyterrorystycznych

An integral part of the state institutional architecture is the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for the Security of the Information Space of the Republic of Poland, established by a Council of Ministers regulation in August 2022[17]. Its responsibilities include: *the coordination of activities of government administration bodies, whose responsibilities include detecting, monitoring, and neutralizing informational threats aimed at the interests of the Republic of Poland, encompasses recognizing and neutralizing threats to the security of the informational space of the Republic of Poland and responding to these threats.* Among the specific tasks listed is the enhancement of Poland's information space resilience through **coordinating communication activities of institutions responsible for shaping Poland's information policy[18]**.

Civil service and national agency

The National Security Bureau (BBN) mentioned above is a state office under the authority of the President of the Republic of Poland, through which the head of state carries out tasks in the field of national security and defense. The BBN also serves as the organizational and substantive support for the National Security Council, the advisory body to the President of the Republic of Poland on matters of state security. Within the structure of the BBN, tasks related to social communication, including strategic communication and general information policy, have been placed in the Office of the Chief of the Bureau. Another example of BBN's activities in the process of shaping concepts and procedures in the field of state security and defense is a mini-dictionary of concepts, which includes the definition of strategic communication (the same one that was introduced into the not-approved version of the Information Security Doctrine of the Republic of Poland mentioned above).

Another unit with competencies in the field of cybersecurity, particularly in countering disinformation, is the Governmental Security Center (RCB), which reports to the Prime Minister. Within the Critical Incidents Team, RCB carries out tasks related to countering cyber threats. In addition to this, RCB conducts continuous monitoring under the name "Disinfo Radar," focused on detecting and disseminating information about Russian disinformation within NATO's area[19].

Besides institutions within the broad structure of Poland's security, the Scientific and Academic Computer Network – the National Research Institute (NASK) can be mentioned. NASK defines its primary task as ensuring internet security and is one of the entities specialized in cybersecurity and indicated in the RP Cybersecurity Strategy. Within the NASK structure,

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[17] Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dania 11 sierpnia 2022 r. w sprawie ustanowienia Pełnomocnika Rządu do spraw Bezpieczeństwa Przestrzeni Informacyjnej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej.
[18] Ibid.
[19] https://www.gov.pl/web/rcb/disinfo-radar

responding to network security breaches in Poland and coordinating tasks in this area belong to the Cybersecurity Center Unit, which includes the CERT Team, responsible for responding to network incidents. Since 2000, CERT has been part of the European Incident Response Teams - TERENA TF-CSIRT working group, and under the Act of July 5, 2018, on the national cybersecurity system, CERT carries out some tasks of the NASK CSIRT. Among the key tasks of this team are monitoring cybersecurity threats and incidents at the national level, sharing incident information with other entities in the national cybersecurity system, and conducting awareness-building activities in the field of cybersecurity. In a broader context, NASK conducts research, analytical, and knowledge dissemination activities regarding digital threats and countering disinformation. Among the activities aimed at the entire society are social campaigns focused on promoting good practices online (e.g., content verification on the internet)[20].

Non-governmental sector

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engaged in security and defense issues, including combating disinformation, can be divided into two general categories:

a) Foundations and associations with activities focused on security and defense issues, often acting as think tanks and belonging to the broader security sector environment. Experts from these types of organizations may eventually join the ranks of political-military structures or, after completing their public service, move to the non-governmental sector. Examples of such NGOs include the Kościuszko Institute Foundation (projects such as Cybersec Forum, Cyber-Resilient), Security Forum Foundation (conducts initiatives like the Disinformation Prevention Forum), Kazimierz Pułaski Foundation (organizes the Warsaw Security Forum conference), Nowa Konfederacja, Stratpoints Foundation, INFO OPS Poland Foundation (conducts projects like DisinfoDigest, aimed at identifying and countering disinformation and propaganda campaigns in the Polish information space).

b) Organizations that do not specialize in defense issues but carry out projects related to broad education (formal and informal), focusing on topics such as countering disinformation, media literacy, critical thinking, or other activities aimed at strengthening civic resilience. Examples of such organizations include the Demagog Association (ongoing content monitoring for verification and debunking of disinformation and manipulation), Orange Foundation, Counteracting Disinformation Foundation (fakenews.pl internet portal), Geremek Foundation (Keyboard Warriors), Panoptykon Foundation (Stop Disinformation portal: A Guide for Journalists and

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[20] https://www.nask.pl/

Editorial Offices), Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe (organizes events like the Polish Eastern Policy conference and training projects for journalists).

Strategic communication is rarely the subject of independent projects or actions for non-governmental organizations in Poland. Most of the entities mentioned above address strategic communication within various programs and projects or as part of analytical and research activities. An exception here is the Center for Disinformation and Propaganda Analysis, which has published several reports over the years touching on the entire issue of strategic communication in Poland.

One drawback in the activities of non-governmental organizations in the broadly defined security sector is the relatively low level of networking and cooperation among organizations. Most foundations and associations tend to focus on implementing their activities using their resources or grants from public and private sources. Only some of them establish partnerships with other entities aiming to increase the scale and impact of their projects. Some of them do not continue their activities when funding for a specific project is lost, resulting in the intellectual output and competencies gained within that activity not being further utilized. Instead, other organizations duplicate actions carried out by other entities instead of leveraging existing tools and practices.

Assessment of the current state of strategic communications and its effectiveness

Social media monitoring on NATO in Poland

The evidence for assessing the effectiveness of strategic communication used by key actors in Poland is provided by the aforementioned analysis of data concerning published posts on Facebook (their interactions levels) about NATO in Poland on the Facebook platform, which brings additional information regarding the engagement of individual actors and the scale of their impact in the digital information space.

The data available for analysis were collected through the CrowdTangle application based on keywords related to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (examples include #NATO; #North_Atlantic_Treaty_Organization, #North_Atlantic_Alliance). In total, 40+ keywords were created, including variants and variations present in the Polish language. The analysis of interactions focused on (1) the general audience (all users); (2) state and political actors; and (3) questionable actors, which are entities or individuals whose identity is not always clear, and who sometimes operate officially as media outlets with unclear funding sources, or who may have ties to third countries. Such entities are often sources of disinformation.

During the analyzed period (January-February 2024[21]), the highest number of interactions related to NATO among Polish politicians was recorded on the account of Prime Minister Donald Tusk (7% of all interactions) and the account of President of Poland Andrzej Duda (6%). Among governmental and military actors, most interactions were generated by posts from the NASK agency (Włącz Weryfikację program account), the Territorial Defense Forces, the Ministry of National Defense, and the Polish Armed Forces website. However, the total number of interactions obtained by governmental and military actors in posts related to NATO was lower (totaling 1391 interactions) than in the case of questionable actors (3312 interactions). The disparity between governmental/military actors and questionable actors also lies in the sheer quantity of published posts. While the most active accounts on the governmental side record 3-4 posts, individual accounts from the questionable actors' category (e.g., kresy.pl; goniec.pl) record a dozen or more, even above 20 posts. This difference becomes even more pronounced when considering the number of views of video materials - in this case, questionable actors dominate significantly, recording even tens of millions of views, while government/military actors use video materials to a very limited extent. The category of questionable actors dominates (with just under 1.5 million interactions) over government/political (just under 100,000 interactions) and also in the overall number of interactions unrelated to the NATO topic.

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[21] This report analyzes data for the period between January 12 and February 12, 2024.

On one hand, a positive aspect is that governmental and military actors, mentioned in the first part of the report, engage in communication through social media, and their interactions appear in the monitoring. However, only a small portion of them are active, and their activity is quite limited, especially in comparison with the so-called questionable actors. In the analysis of posts and their interactions, it can also be observed that communication mainly targets audiences within their social bubble, with fewer attempts to reach a wider audience and engage with individuals not typically interested in security and defense issues.

Case study: communication regarding unprecedented purchases in the Polish Armed Forces

Since the United Right (Zjednoczona Prawica) government came to power in 2015[22], ambitious plans to modernize the Polish Armed Forces have been announced. This issue gained particular significance, especially after the outbreak of a full-scale Russian invasion against Ukraine in February 2022. Poland increased its military spending to around 4% of GDP in 2023, with 1% coming from the Special Fund for Armed Forces Support (Fundusz Wsparcia Sił Zbrojnych), which is an off-budget instrument not subject to the same financial controls as state budget expenditures.

Increased military spending occurs not only in a hostile international environment and the threat from Russia and Belarus but also amid economic difficulties compounded by expenditures related to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic turbulence (mainly in the hydrocarbon market) associated with cutting off energy resources from Russia. One of the most palpable consequences for society was the rising inflation, which peaked at almost 15% in 2023. In such economic conditions, questions about the rational spending of public money become pertinent, and although defense spending has never been widely contested in Polish society, the scale of current investments has brought this topic more prominently into the public debate.

The Academic Center for Strategic Communication (operating at the War Studies Academy as an analytical and training facility in the field of strategic communication) previously mentioned, prepared a bulletin[23] dedicated to modeling communication regarding increased expenditures from public funds on the Polish Armed Forces. Insight into this study provides a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of strategic communication in Poland.

The communication strategy proposed in the bulletin primarily seems to concern actors from the military sector and only occasionally refers to political actors, primarily including the Ministry of National Defense (MON). It does not specifically address the entire structure of the state's strategic communication, which may also involve entities from spheres other than

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[22] The government of the United Right ended after two terms in October 2023.
[23] Akademickie Centrum Komunikacji Strategicznej, Biuletyn 3/2022.

governmental and military. It should be noted, however, that the study prepared by the Academic Center for Strategic Communication states in the title that it is only an outline of the communication strategy in this area, so perhaps this observation is unfounded.

The document highlights the key communication elements that should be included in every public message regarding new military purchases:

A. Emphasize that the ordered military equipment comes from the USA, making it the best in the world as it has been extensively tested in combat conditions (Iraq and Afghanistan). The ordered military equipment is modern and most advanced. It has logistics enabling adaptation to Polish conditions and modernization potential for use over many decades.

B. Highlight the advantages of equipment purchased from South Korea (e.g., K2 tank) as equally reliable and having the potential for the modernization of the Polish Armed Forces, as well as the possibility of modernizing and expanding the ordered equipment in Polish defense industry facilities (acquiring know-how, not just equipment).

C. Emphasize that the Ministry of National Defense and the military command constantly monitor the course of military operations in Ukraine and, based on the conclusions drawn from that battlefield, make decisions about purchasing specific types of armaments.

D. The Polish Armed Forces are the guarantor of the state's security and its development, so they must be strengthened.

E. Unverified or false information must not be allowed in the media content.

F. The social group that should be particularly remembered and to which appropriately prepared messages should be directed (using photo and video materials) is the youth, who should indirectly be encouraged to connect their careers with the Polish military.

G. Indicate the reasons behind the purchase of armaments (including supplying a large amount of equipment to Ukraine, as an investment in Poland's security). Emphasize that Poland must have its own deterrent capability against Russia, rather than relying solely on support from NATO members.

H. In media appearances, focus on highlighting the successes of the current government in modernizing the Armed Forces, while criticism of the achievements of previous governments should only serve as background for a broader statement.

Among the strengths of the proposed communication strategy is the focus on providing recipients with arguments for the formulated theses and the focus on presenting only reliable and verified information. Most of the proposed points are accompanied by additional explanations presenting a broader context to instill trust and conviction in the recipient regarding the justification for increased military purchases. At the same time, the proposed model recommends building the message "from top to bottom". It is largely one-way communication, in which political-military structures play a leading role. This plan does not

mention the potential role of other entities (e.g., from the non-governmental sector), which could somehow mediate contact with citizens due to their established social position (also at the local level) based on trust. The above-presented concept assumes that political-military structures are the main initiators of communication, and the form itself (media materials) can/should be developed with the participation of specialized marketing agencies.

Case study: lack of coordination in a crisis turns into chaos

As indicated in the initial part of the report, the current debate on strategic communication and the formal solutions adopted in this regard is taking place in the conditions of war near Poland. From the very beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, it was clear that the risk of security incidents occurring in Poland's sphere of security was a matter of time. One of the first examples of this kind was the penetration of Ukrainian anti-aircraft defense missile into Polish territory in November 2022, which, falling to the ground in the village of Przewodów near the Polish-Ukrainian border, killed two people[24]. This event caused tension in Polish-Ukrainian relations and served as evidence of a real threat to the citizens of Poland. In early 2024, news reached the public about the scrambling of three Polish F-16 fighter jets due to the approach of Russian missiles to Polish territory[25].

However, from the perspective of analyzing Poland's strategic communication, the incident deserving the greatest attention is probably the issue of the Russian missile found near the town of Bydgoszcz in northern Poland, which fell there at the end of 2022, not far from the NATO Joint Force Training Centre.

In this matter, the most important aspect is not just the fact that a long-range missile (Ch-55 launched from a Russian aircraft flying over Belarusian territory) penetrated Polish territory, but that it was found only after four months, moreover by a random person who was riding a horse in the forest where the missile fell. The issue sparked a sharp dispute between the Polish Armed Forces Command and the Minister of National Defense. The main concern was the lack of information exchange regarding the fact that a Russian missile had crossed the border of Polish airspace, fallen on Polish territory, and its location was unknown.

The situation gained momentum in early May 2023 during a press conference by the Minister of National Defense, Mariusz Błaszczak, in which he blamed the operational commander, General Tomasz Piotrowski, for the crisis. According to the minister, it was General Piotrowski who neglected his duties by failing to inform the Minister of Defense about the missile that had penetrated Polish territory, and he accused him of not taking sufficient action to search for the object. General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces publicly stated that the political

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[24] https://www.rp.pl/kraj/art39165861-coraz-blizej-prawdy-o-rakiecie-w-przewodowie-wiadomo-czyj-byl-pocisk
[25] https://businessinsider.com.pl/wiadomosci/polska-poderwala-trzy-f-16-to-odpowiedz-na-dzialania-rosji/3tj5h29

leadership of the country had been informed about the incident when it occurred[26], and after the missile disappeared from radars, the Chief of the Polish General Staff, General Rajmund Andrzejczak, and the operational commander recommended initiating extensive search operations, which the Ministry of National Defense allegedly did not approve[27]. General Rajmund Andrzejczak publicly supported General Piotrowski, and President Andrzej Duda, as the Supreme Commander of the Polish Armed Forces, also acted as a mediator in the argument between the army and MOD.

The situation led to a dispute between the military command and the Ministry of National Defense, and to a significant loss of trust between the two entities. According to media reports, the Ministry of National Defense deliberately ignored the highest military commanders in the process of making important decisions and did not involve them in decision-making processes, which, given the ongoing war near Poland, must be unequivocally assessed negatively. The situation reached its climax only in the autumn of 2023 with the resignation of Generals Rajmund Andrzejczak and Tomasz Piotrowski.

The incident involving the Russian missile near Bydgoszcz highlights key shortcomings and challenges in the area of strategic communication in Poland. Primarily, it exposes the problem of the lack of clear formal decisions at the state level regarding competencies in strategic communication. The situation, unfortunately, evident in crisis conditions, confirms the lack of synergy among various centers in the country responsible for strategic communication. This is compounded by the dispute between the political and military spheres, which, in certain circumstances (such as the 2023 parliamentary election campaign in Poland), may have divergent interests and perceive events differently, thereby promoting disparate actions. The absence of a unified strategy concerning strategic communication facilitates the dispersion of responsibility, which in this case has led to a sense of disorientation among the public regarding who should be held accountable in such a situation. This has not contributed to building a positive image of the defense sector in Poland and may have undermined society's trust in key actors in this field.

Conclusions

Challenges and potential of strategic communication in Poland

This report confirms one of the most common conclusions found in the literature on strategic communication in Poland: the lack of proper coordination among different entities with competencies in this area. Various state institutions in the political-military structure operate

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[26] https://bydgoszcz.wyborcza.pl/bydgoszcz/7,48722,29994199,raport-nik-w-sprawie-rosyjskiej-rakiety-ktora-spadla-pod-bydgoszcza.html
[27] https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/sprawa-rakiety-pod-bydgoszcza-zrodla-onetu-mon-chce-dymisji-na-szczytach-armii/sqmxe6p

based on separate documents and carry out their assigned tasks without necessarily recognizing the potential for synergy with other entities. An additional complication is the lack of an officially adopted definition of strategic communication, which would clearly indicate how key actors in the security sector perceive this issue. In this situation, the most commonly referenced definition, especially in the military sector, is the one developed by NATO.

However, the Polish political-military sector possesses sufficient knowledge and competence regarding strategic communication. This is evidenced by the quite rich literature on the subject, regularly produced analyses, and other expert works, especially in the military sector. Individual political actors incorporate strategic communication into their strategic documents and make this information available to the public (with some exceptions, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The fundamental challenge remains better utilization of this knowledge and the adoption of a more horizontal model of cooperation.

Poland did not fare well in the "resilience test" regarding strategic communication, as demonstrated by the incident involving the Russian missile in Polish airspace in December 2022. Instead of demonstrating effectiveness and coordination in communication with the public, Polish society witnessed a dispute and mutual accusations between the leadership of the Ministry of National Defense and the armed forces command, culminating in the latter's dismissal. Similar situations tarnish the good image of the Polish security sector more quickly than building a positive image based on trust.

The discourse in the field of strategic communication is dominated by the political-military sector. It seems that the potential inherent in a well-developed civil society in Poland could be more effectively utilized. Numerous non-governmental organizations engage in activities to enhance societal resilience to digital threats and could also contribute to improving defense quality in Poland by better reaching various segments of Polish society not typically interested in security issues. However, these organizations rarely collaborate with think tanks or other specialized entities in the field of security and defense.

The potential for this type of collaboration between the public and non-governmental sectors has already been recognized and partially described in the expert community on security issues[28]. However, it is not yet a universal demand, and further debate on this matter is still needed, as well as the search for solutions that, on the one hand, would be feasible for state actors burdened with various formal limitations (in the positive sense of the term) and for non-governmental organizations for which it is important to maintain their independent position and subjectivity in relations with state entities. It will be crucial to build trust between

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[28] https://cyberdefence24.pl/cyberbezpieczenstwo/walka-z-dezinformacja-co-wplywa-na-wspolprace-panstwa-z-ngosami and https://cyberdefence24.pl/cyberbezpieczenstwo/wyzwania-w-przeciwdzialaniu-rosyjskiej-dezinformacji-wspolpraca-administracji-panstwowej-z-organizacjami-pozarzadowymi. See also the reports published by the Defence24 Group listed in the sources.

both sectors, which will enable the effective use of tools for official communication and cooperation (social consultations, citizen panels, etc.).

At the same time, the main actors within the strategic communication realm engage in direct dialogue with society through social media, but only a portion of them are active in this field. The challenge in this area remains the relatively low effectiveness in reaching a wider audience (number of posts and interactions).

Recommendations

- At the political-military level, Poland should "finalize the process" by adopting a strategic document that would define strategic communication in Poland and set the framework for relations among actors responsible or involved in conducting strategic communication. This document should be compatible with regulations regarding strategic communication at the NATO level.

- Poland should implement procedures to avoid disruptions in strategic communication resulting from tensions between the political and military spheres and establish a clear mechanism for enforcing accountability in this regard.

- The political-military sector should be more open to cooperation with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Poland, including those that currently do not engage in projects related to the broader security sector. The goal should be to continually improve the quality of public debate on defense and national security and involve the widest possible audience, including at the local level. An intermediate goal is to extend discussions on security matters beyond the social bubble operating in the security sector and its environment.

- Potential donors interested in supporting projects in strategic communication should prioritize, in defining priorities, aspects of increasing coordination and cooperation among entities operating in different sectors of the state and society.

- NGOs working with resilience building and analyzing/countering information threats issues should seek to combine the potential of their projects and strive to build broader coalitions for their actions to become more attractive partners for cooperation for governmental entities or those operating in the national security domain. A key change should be a focus on maintaining the sustainability of projects in place of implementing short-term and one-off projects.

- Among all actors engaged in strategic communication, greater effort should be placed on presence in social media with reliable messages regarding security issues. Emphasis

should be placed on a more diverse use of social media (video materials, podcasts, shorter and longer forms of expression), replacing text and image-based messaging. Furthermore, the state actors' language of communication should be tailored to specific audience groups, as the one used by state actors is often opaque and demands certain knowledge. There should be a search for opportunities to collaborate in this regard with non-state actors (which may be difficult due to formal constraints), who may effectively convey messages to particular audiences (e.g., youth).

- At the state level, matters concerning national security and countering disinformation (through positive methods such as teaching critical thinking or media literacy education) should be implemented to a greater extent within the formal education process, from the earliest stages of education to higher education levels.

- Actors involved in StratCom as well as institutions funding projects in this area should pay greater attention to understanding the patterns and characteristics of information consumption in Polish society[29]. There is a need for funding and supporting research into where and how Polish society obtains information on socially relevant topics and what consequences it has for communication between the state and its citizens.

- State actors should more extensively utilize diverse and inclusive forms of engagement (e.g., public consultations, panels, and citizen hearings) with citizens to better convey messages regarding threats and challenges in the realm of security, including countering disinformation. The long-term goal on the part of the state should be to strive to build a platform for cooperation among entities implementing strategic communication at different levels, which could take the form of online meetings. Such actions should ensure the continuity of efforts and solutions undertaken by the state in this regard, adjust legislation and other formal solutions to changing needs and threats, and neutralize tensions in relations between individual sectors of the state and society operating in the broadly defined area of security and defense.

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[29] A group of Polish non-governmental organizations conducted a quantitative and qualitative study on this topic in 2021. The findings and report are available online: https://wyzwaniacyfrowe.pl/raport-z-badania-grupy-przeplyw-informacji-w-sprawach-lokalnych/.

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