

SUPREME HEADQUARTERS  
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GRAND QUARTIER GÉNÉRAL  
DES PUISSANCES ALLIÉES  
EN EUROPE  
B-7010 SHAPE - BELGIQUE

ACO DIRECTIVE  
NUMBER 95-2

TT 204863  
15 September 2008

**ACO STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS**

This is a new Allied Command Operations (ACO) Directive.

- REFERENCES:
- A. SACEUR Strategic Plan 2008-2012.
  - B. SACEUR's Vision for ACO, dated 17 Jul 07.
  - C. MC 422/3 NATO Military Policy on Information Operations (Final), dated 8 Jul 08.
  - D. MC 457/1 NATO Military Policy on Public Affairs (MIL DEC), dated 19 Sep 07.
  - E. MC 402/1 NATO Military Policy on Psychological Operations (Final), dated 17 Apr 03.
  - F. MCM-0135-2007 Enhancing NATO's Strategic Communications, dated 31 Oct 07.
  - G. AJP 3.10 (Pre-Ratification Draft) Allied Joint Doctrine for Information Operations, dated 29 Aug 08.

1. **Applicability.** This directive is applicable to all ACO headquarters/units and should be used as a guide for the preparation of local directives.
2. **Supplementation.** Supplementation is not authorised.
3. **Interim Changes.** Interim changes are not authorised.
4. **Purpose.** To provide guidance on the planning and conduct of Strategic Communications within ACO.
5. **Review.** Chief Strategic Communications to review 6 months after promulgation.

6. **Table of Contents**

	Page	Paragraph
<b>CHAPTER 1 – BACKGROUND</b>		
Operating Environment	1-1	1-1
Key Challenges	1-1	1-2
StratCom's Role	1-1	1-3
Guidance to J(F)Cs	1-1	1-4

	<b>Page</b>	<b>Paragraph</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2 – OVERVIEW OF STRATCOM IN ACO</b>		
Mission and Purpose	2-1	2-1
Audiences	2-1	2-2
Themes and Messages	2-1	2-3
Narrative	2-2	2-4
Technology and Capability	2-2	2-5
Measures of Effect/Assessment	2-3	2-6
<b>CHAPTER 3 – EXECUTION AND ORGANISATION</b>		
Definitions	3-1	3-1
Organisation	3-1	3-2
Working Methods	3-1	3-3
Linkages	3-2	3-4
Strategic Effects	3-2	3-5
Tools and Enablers	3-2	3-6

AD 95-2

## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND

#### 1-1. **Operating Environment**

a. ACO is operating in an era where the global role of information and media is critical to success. The alliance must justify itself to its members and partners while under more operational pressure than at any time in its history.

b. The global information environment has ushered in unprecedented changes including offering opportunities to our opponents, and traditional institutions will struggle to manage these new challenges unless they are bold in reforming their structures, mindsets and working methods. Such is the importance of information in mission success that, on occasion, policies and actions will even need to be adapted in response to the imperatives of Strategic Communications.

1-2. **Key Challenges.** All of the key challenges facing NATO have a critical information component, whether it is countering our opponents' use of information in their asymmetric campaigns, or working to sustain the support of our publics and opinion leaders by ensuring they fully understand what is being done in their name.

1-3. **StratCom's Role.** Strategic Communications (StratCom) has a central role to both assist in operations and manage public perceptions, and is at the heart of leading and managing our response to the challenges of the information era. SACEUR therefore directed that a StratCom Office be created and expects all parts of ACO to assist StratCom in achieving his goals.

1-4. **Guidance to J(F)Cs.** SACEUR requires that the peacetime establishment (PE) review produce a coherent structure for ACO that reflects the challenges of the information era.

AD 95-2

## CHAPTER 2

### OVERVIEW OF STRATCOM IN ACO

#### 2-1. **Mission and Purpose**

- a. To make a major contribution to Alliance success through gaining and maintaining understanding and support for NATO/ACO and its operations, particularly among NATO nations, partners, and within our areas of responsibility. This enhanced understanding and support covers a broad range of audiences, and also encompasses the concept of making potential or actual opponents aware of, and therefore influenced by, NATO/ACO power and will to succeed.
- b. StratCom will support ACO's mission as described in SACEUR's Strategic Plan 2008-12 by harnessing all elements of the information community to work in co-ordination with the rest of ACO in conducting operations.
- c. StratCom outputs will be designed to reflect the expected tone outlined in SACEUR's vision for ACO. The values embodied in the vision reflect the enduring qualities of our militaries, the Alliance, and our societies.

#### 2-2. **Audiences**

- a. NATO/ACO must communicate to a wide variety of external audiences, with differing interests and priorities, some of which overlap. These range from conventional media, through NGOs and other international bodies to, adversaries in theatres of operation. Working with NATO HQ, and under the oversight of StratCom, the various components of the information community will prioritise different sections, while ensuring the consistency of messages that is vital to maintain credibility. External audience analysis and assessment capabilities will be essential to this process.
- b. There is a need to maximise theme and message coherence across the Alliance and its Partners, and ACO will co-operate closely with nations, especially when communicating to their domestic audiences, and avoid public differences between NATO as a body and NATO nations. Close co-ordination is also required with NATO HQ, which has primacy in dealing with NATO nations.

#### 2-3. **Themes and Messages**

- a. Broad messages, including for operations, are determined by NATO HQ. ACO's main role is to take these broad themes and interpret them appropriately at the strategic, operational and theatre level. SACEUR's primary requirement is the imaginative and active implementation of our messages in ways that appeal to and influence our audiences. This will include explanations for and justifications of our high-level policies and

AD 95-2

actions, kinetic and otherwise, to appropriate audiences. ACO, led by StratCom will:

- (1) Actively participate in the process of generating messages and themes that go to the NAC, and ensuring they take account of operational realities.
- (2) Disseminate messages quickly and widely in accessible and easily understood format.
- (3) Ensure messages and themes are regularly monitored, adapted and updated.
- (4) Seek to seize opportunities to spread our messages in a 24/7 information environment.
- (5) Ensure a clear linkage between actions and messages. Actions accompanied by themes and messaging provide the most powerful StratCom effects. ACO must listen to key audiences and respond either through explanation or justification, or, if necessary, be prepared to modify policies or actions, followed by effective messaging.

b. SHAPE StratCom will produce regular themes and messages for dissemination throughout ACO. This product will be produced every four weeks by the Strategic Communications Working Group and be co-ordinated with an ACO engagement plan managed by the Public Affairs Office (PAO).

#### 2-4. **Narrative**

a. Sustainable support for any institution or campaign is founded on both logic and instinct. NATO/ACO therefore needs to ensure that, firstly, it has a narrative that resonates with its audiences, and, secondly, its operations and actions are consistent with that narrative. The NATO narrative, of a **democratic, multinational alliance uniting across borders to guard, with courage and competence, against threats to our homes**, has not changed, but it has not been properly adapted to today's world.

b. At the strategic level our primary task is updating the NATO story, which will be generated by NATO HQ, and having created such a narrative to ensure it is disseminated, adapted and interpreted at all appropriate levels.

#### 2-5. **Technology and Capability**

a. Traditional media continues to be vitally important, but new media (largely internet-driven) is increasingly important. Moreover by its nature it is developing in rapid and often unpredictable ways that presents conceptual, organisational and resource challenges, especially to traditional bodies such as NATO.

AD 95-2

- b. In order to meet this new challenge ACO will respond on two levels:
  - (1) Intellectual and organisational. ACO must create adaptable structures, staffed by individuals who are responsive to this changing environment.
  - (2) Resourcing. ACO must fund, equip and train to stay abreast of and exploit both traditional and new media.
- c. SACEUR expects continuing emphasis to be placed on resolving the existing resource, equipment and training challenges currently experienced across the StratCom capability area - from tactical to strategic level. It is noteworthy that some of NATO's adversaries have significantly more advanced and effective StratCom capabilities than those possessed by the Alliance - ACO must close this key gap. 4\* oversight will be provided to drive progress.

2-6. **Measures of Effect/Assessment**

- a. Non-kinetic effects are hard to assess, and there needs to be realism about the limitations of measures of effectiveness (MOEs), and indeed what we should be measuring. ACO must not fall into the trap of valuing what can be measured over what actually matters.
- b. However, today's information and measurement technologies offers potential to better assess our performance and indicators of effectiveness. SACEUR requires a sustained effort to find new and more effective ways to measure our performance.

AD 95-2

## CHAPTER 3

### EXECUTION AND ORGANISATION

3-1. **Definitions.** StartCom is new to NATO and will require new approaches to achieve effectiveness. Currently, no NATO official definition has been agreed, but in the interim the following will be used as guidance in implementing StratCom policy within ACO:

a. **Recommended NATO StratCom draft definition:** In concert with other political and military actions, to advance NATO's aims and operations through the co-ordinated, appropriate use of Public Diplomacy, Public Affairs (PA), and Information Operations (Info Ops).<sup>1</sup>

b. **ACO StratCom draft sub-definition:** StratCom as generally understood takes in all components of the information campaign, but Public Diplomacy and political guidance is the responsibility of NATO HQ. The following takes account of this in guiding ACO actions: **In concert with other military actions and following NATO political guidance, to advance ACO's aims and operations through the co-ordinated, appropriate use of Public Affairs and Information Operations<sup>2</sup>, in co-operation with the Public Diplomacy Division.**

c. StratCom at the ACO level will follow the relevant NATO policies, MC422/3 on Information Operations, MC402/1 on Psychological Operations, and MC457/1 on Public Affairs, which highlights both the need for co-ordination between all elements of the information community, but also the continuing separation between differing disciplines.

3-2. **Organisation.** StratCom at SHAPE will, therefore, operate as a co-ordinator and catalyst for action, with the following structure (detail in Annex B):

a. SACEUR's StratCom Group (SSCG). Will meet monthly at 4\* level to approve proposed plans and give direction.

b. StratCom Policy Group (SCPG). Will meet monthly at OF-5/1\* level to discuss policy and themes.

c. StratCom Working Group (SCWG). A decision-making body that meets fortnightly at working level, chaired by Chief Strategic Communications (CSC) to oversee, agree and implement policy.<sup>3</sup>

d. The StratCom Working Group will meet on an ad hoc basis whenever necessary.

<sup>1</sup> In line with AJP 3.10 (Pre-Ratification Draft), for our purposes, "NATO policy indicates that PSYOPS falls within the larger construct of Info Ops"

<sup>2</sup> See footnote #1.

<sup>3</sup> This group will also meet during the fortnightly ISAF IO/PA VTC

AD 95-2

**3-3. Working Methods**

a. The creation of the Strategic Communications Office, coinciding with the PE review, offers an opportunity to develop operating practices more in tune with the flat, network structures found both in information era businesses and among our opponents.

b. Lower level ACO HQs are to create or adapt information coordination structures, processes, and procedures that are appropriate to their particular circumstances. However these must support SHAPE's StratCom principles and SACEUR's strategic intent. Subordinate HQ StratCom activities are to be coordinated with, and in support of, SACEUR's direction and guidance.

**3-4. Linkages.** The broad remit of StratCom requires a more formal linkage with the Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) and International Military Staff (IMS) at NATO HQ. The Command Group and Chief Strategic Communications will develop a way ahead.

**3-5. Strategic Effects.** StratCom is not a standalone capability. At SHAPE, the Strategic Effects Team<sup>4</sup> will be required to provide integration and synchronisation with policy advice, key initiatives and 4\*CG strategic objectives, in support of current and future operations<sup>5</sup>. Strategic Assessment and Measures of Effectiveness will be important in this regard. However, lower level ACO HQs should ensure that StratCom is closely linked to organisations and groups connected to delivering effects.

**3-6. Tools and Enablers**

a. Pending the outcome of the PE review an interim StratCom Office, headed by CSC has been created to oversee the new StratCom working structure (Annex B).

b. The NATO HQ Strategic Communications Plan for Afghanistan has defined the need and created the opportunity for significant enhancement to PAO in terms of staffing, organisation and equipment. Further to this, a higher headquarters StratCom plan will be issued providing further detailed guidance for the implementation of this directive. This work will be prioritised under 4\* direction.

c. In the current ACO PE review, the critical and growing importance of the information campaign should be taken fully into account before proceeding with any reduction in numbers. Structural change should be targeted at adapting to the particular demands of information handling, requiring fast and flexible decision-making and actions.

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<sup>4</sup> The Strat Effects Team will formally stand-up as part of Dir C P&P's area under the PE Review.


<sup>5</sup> Where effects and conditions need to be generated above the Operational level.



AD 95-2

- d. The role of training and NATO national capability, at Info Ops, PSYOPS and Public Affairs (PA) levels, is the single most important measure for a timely, sustainable and substantial improvement in delivery. This issue will be addressed as a matter of priority under 4\* direction.
- e. Exploitation of new media will require concerted effort from multiple members within NATO HQ, ACO and ACT.
- f. Theatre-specific StratCom direction and guidance will be provided on a case by case basis. StratCom plans for specific operations will be drafted at SHAPE, fully-staffed with NATO HQ and appropriate subordinate HQs, and issued under joint SECGEN and SACEUR signatures.
- g. Following promulgation of this directive, a standing BiSC development working group will be established to maintain progress on all aspects of StratCom.

FOR THE SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER, EUROPE:



James Selbie  
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Director of Staff

**ANNEXES:**

- A. Strategic Communications Goals for 2008/9.
- B. SHAPE Strategic Communications Structure.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

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**AMENDMENTS/COMMENTS**

Users of this directive are invited to send amendments/comments and suggested improvements to SHAPE, Office of the Chief of Strategic Communications

**STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS GOALS FOR 2008/9**

1. SACEUR's strategic goals for StratCom fall into External and Internal goals. In conformity with the intent of NATO doctrine, Strategic Communications is a coordinating and oversight role, and detailed implementation will remain the responsibility of PAO, Info Ops and PSYOPS.
2. **External**
  - a. To generate a coherent narrative on NATO's continued relevance to 21<sup>st</sup> century security challenges.
  - b. To enhance public and opinion leaders' understanding of, and support for, a sustained NATO presence in Afghanistan.
  - c. To increase understanding of the role of security and NATO in particular within a comprehensive approach to peace support operations.
3. **Internal**
  - a. In concert with ACT, producing and getting underway the implementation of a training plan to produce enough Public Affairs Officers to fill PEs at NATO HQs and crisis establishments (CEs) on operations.
  - b. Secure full and timely funding of equipment and personnel sufficient to generate a 21<sup>st</sup> century information capability for NATO military HQs and operations.
  - c. To ensure Strategic Communications, PAO, Info Ops and PSYOPS are properly structured to efficiently respond to 21<sup>st</sup> century information challenges. In particular, to develop the ability to appropriately fast rebuttal or exploitation of events.
  - d. In concert with NATO to generate an effective information analysis process.
  - e. To put in place effective Strategic Communications linkages with NATO HQ and the Public Diplomacy Division.

### SHAPE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS STRUCTURE

1. SACEUR's Strategic Communications Group (SSCG). Monthly meeting.
  - a. CSC, DirSDC, SACEUR, DSACEUR, COS.
  - b. To assess SCWG proposals and give direction.
2. Strategic Communications Policy Group (SCPG). Monthly meeting.
  - a. CSC (chairman), CPAO, ACOS J5, DirSDC, POLAD, XO SACEUR, Principle Staff Officer (PSO) COS.
  - b. An advisory group to give higher level guidance and advice.
3. Strategic Communications Working Group (SCWG). Fortnightly meeting.
  - a. CSC, Chief Public Affairs Office (CPAO), Info Ops, PSYOPS, Dir Strategic Direction Centre (SDC), StratEffects, J5, J2, Polad, Chief of Staff (COS) representative.
  - b. A co-ordinating and decision-making body.
  - c. This group will meet alternatively the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> week of each month in conjunction with the ISAF IO/PA VTC, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> week of each month as a SHAPE internal SCWG.

### SHAPE Working Rhythm

1. Week 1. SCWG (in conjunction with IO/PA VTC)
2. Week 2. SCWG (SHAPE internal)
3. Week 3. SCPG and SCWG (in conjunction with IO/PA VTC).  
\* SCPG provides assessment and guidance for Week 3 SCWG as prep for SSCG.
4. Week 4. SSCG and SCWG (SHAPE internal).  
\* SSCG assesses proposals and gives direction, to be applied at next SCWG.
5. The SCWG will develop and propose SACEUR's themes and messages.

6. There is a key role for ad hoc meetings of the SCWG to either exploit or mitigate particular events. This will be complemented by CSC engaging as necessary with the Command Group informally to make proposals or seek guidance.

**Terms of Reference – SCWG**

1. The SCWG will be the co-ordinating body for all information activities within SHAPE
2. The SCWG will be chaired by the CSC.
3. The SCWG will normally meet weekly, either as a SHAPE internal SCWG or in conjunction with the ISAF IO/PA VTC.
4. Membership will normally include, CSC, Director SDC, Strategic Effects team leader, CPAO, Info Ops, PSYOPS, J2, J5, POLAD, and other individuals as required by CSC.
5. The SCWG will develop proposals for a broad range of information activities in support of ACO. These proposals will be presented to the Command Group on a monthly basis at SACEUR's StratCom Group, or more frequently as directed.
6. The SCWG will oversee the implementation of StratCom policies as directed by SACEUR.
7. To operate in conformity with MC422/3, MC402/1 and MC457/1, decisions in the SCWG will require the agreement of the CSC, Director SDC and CPAO, or most senior representative of the StratCom Office, SDC and PAO present.

**Draft Terms of Reference – Chief Strategic Communications**

1. CSC and the Strategic Communications Office is part of the Command Group special staff.
2. CSC will:
  - a. Chair meetings of the SCWG and SWPG;
  - b. Manage a strategic communications policy and a campaign plan on ACO's role, objectives and principal tasks within NATO, including relevant aspects of cooperation and coordination with other institutions and/or organisations inside and outside of NATO, and target audiences;
  - c. Develop strategic communications policies and campaign plans on ACO's role, objectives and tasks for all ongoing operations, missions and special activities (e.g. development of the NATO Response Force (NRF)), and target audiences;

- d. Coordinate these policies and plans within SHAPE/ACO, NATO HQ/PDD and ACT as required;
- e. Coordinate these policies and plans with Info Ops and PSYOPS activities as required; and
- f. Develop and propose necessary guidance/directives for implementation and assume responsibility for those implementing tasks assigned to him.