

Riga StratCom Dialogue 2022

25 – 26 May 2022 | Riga, Latvia

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has threatened values that underpin the rules-based international order: human rights, peace, security, self-determination, and national sovereignty. With the world's eyes on Ukraine, we must recognise that what is happening in the information space and in the hearts and minds of people across the world will have an outsized impact on the outcome of this war. In this fluid and contested environment, it is more important than ever that strategic communications maintains its place at the highest level of decision-making.

To that end, strategic communications must continue to be at the leading edge of the latest developments in communications, technology, and politics and where they intersect: be that foreign election interference, the (mis)use of big data, or the ongoing war in Ukraine. Era-defining crises, from the COVID-19 pandemic to climate change, have also underlined the need to not only analyse the present but to offer visions for a fairer, more peaceful, and united world.

From 25-26 May 2022, the Riga StratCom Dialogue will bring together the strategic communications community for two days of intensive and inspiring discussion between experts across disciplines from around the globe.

As in years before, our conference does not shy away from asking difficult questions: whether that means interrogating assumptions on how to counter disinformation, exploring uncharted territory in AI regulation, or assessing what Russia's invasion of Ukraine means for NATO and the future of the global rules-based order.

AGENDA

DAY 1 – 25 MAY

8:30 – 9:30 Registration

9:30 – 10:00 Opening Remarks

10:00 – 11:30 Under fire: Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the global information space

In February, Russia launched an unprovoked and unjustified military attack against Ukraine, posing the gravest threat to Euro-Atlantic security in decades. As part of this attack, it has further invaded the global information space with everything from misleading narratives to deceiving images and flat-out lies. What communication tactics has the Kremlin used to justify war and to what impact? How effective has the communication response been by Ukraine and the West? Which of our long-standing assumptions and beliefs about Russian communication warfare have been confirmed or proven wrong?

11:30 – 12:00 COFFEE BREAK

12:00 – 13:30 Battlefields in the mind: societal resilience and cognitive defence

Undermining an opponent's will without firing a shot is an ancient strategy with continued appeal. Societal resilience is key to effective defence. In the past, imminent threats and clear enemies have helped unite societies in times of crisis. But today, social media's information silos and echo chambers have fragmented people into their own micro worlds. Against this backdrop, how do we make sure that people in democracies can find common ground and unite to meet the myriad crises we face?

13:30 – 14:30 LUNCH

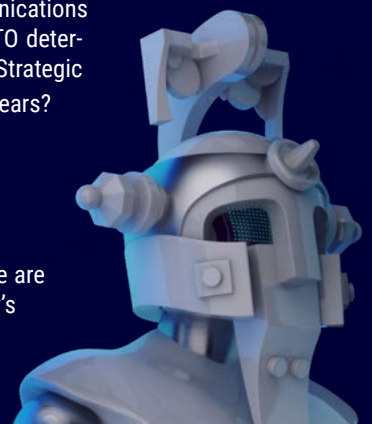
14:30 – 16:00 What strategic communications has to say about NATO's new Strategic Concept

When NATO leaders meet at the Madrid summit later this year, they will finalise the new Strategic Concept and determine the Alliance's approach to defence and deterrence for the next decade. This is a pivotal time for the future role of strategic communications in NATO. In the lead-up to the summit, people thinking about and practicing strategic communications must clarify the following questions: How can a strategic communications mindset further strengthen NATO deterrence? What are the main tensions in the field of strategic communications which must be heeded in the new Strategic Concept? And more generally, what are the prerequisites and priorities for its implementation over the next years?

16:00 – 16:30 COFFEE BREAK

16:30 – 18:00 Foreign election interference: where we are today

Years after extensive Russian election meddling in the United States and elsewhere was brought to light, we are still grappling with its political, legal, and social ramifications. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, today's



information environment has become even more tense. As tensions continue to escalate between Russia and the West, are governments, media, and NGOs ready to fight disinformation and foreign interference and secure electoral integrity? The value liberal democracies place on freedom of expression, freedom of opinion, and a competitive media environment means our societies are inherently vulnerable to ruthless and cynical methods of manipulation. Can we finally address the challenge of identifying and holding to account those who peddle disinformation? And, if not, what are avenues available to nation states in fighting and retaliating against foreign interference?

18:00 – 18:15 CLOSING REMARKS

18:15 - 20:30 DINNER

DAY 2 – 26 MAY

9:00 – 9:45 Registration

9:45 – 10:00 Opening Remarks

10:00 – 11:30 Formulating a rules-based order for the digital age: big tech in the spotlight

Billions of people begin and end their days immersed in online environments and virtual reality. While the offline world has largely been marked by peace, in the online world, an information battleground is only ever a few clicks away. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, we are witnessing the coalescing of offline and online battlegrounds. Social media giants know that decisions they make at this time concerning their platforms can be matters of life or death and provoke tectonic geopolitical shifts. Russia's invasion has highlighted still unanswered questions concerning how much responsibility big tech and social media companies have in preventing online propaganda. For example, what have these companies done to limit the spread of Russian disinformation about the war in Ukraine? What role can NATO play in envisioning and realising what a rules-based virtual life should look like?

11:30 – 12:00 COFFEE BREAK

12:00 – 13:30 How to be smart about Artificial Intelligence

Over the past ten years, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning has experienced unprecedented growth. These developments have made it easier for malicious actors to manipulate audiences, but have also offered up new methods to counter the spread of disinformation. As the application of AI reaches into more areas of human life, what risks and opportunities must we balance against each other? What can and should be done to ensure oversight and control? More fundamentally, the immersive experiences of enhanced reality and virtual reality are poised to profoundly alter our perception of reality. Will this change what we believe and who we think we are?

13:30 – 14:30 LUNCH

14:30 – 16:00 War of the words: military strategy and strategic communications

A motivated soldier, demoralised enemy, and supportive population are the dream of any commander. Those who view conflict through the lens of strategic communications know that these key ingredients of victory rely on the power of narratives to inspire minds and channel emotion. In a time of informational incoherence and societal division, military commanders have a role to play in both physical and virtual battlefields. Hard questions need to be asked, not in pursuit of final answers, but to remain self-aware and keep pushing strategic communications forward. How do we measure outcomes in the cognitive domain? And how can commanders of Western militaries make sure that the practice of strategic communications are in line with democratic, liberal, and ethical values?

16:00 – 16:30 CLOSING REMARKS

16:30 – 17:30 Verre de l'amitie

