



# RIGA STRATCOM DIALOGUE 2023

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### STRONGER THAN EVER. STRONG ENOUGH?

The unstable geopolitical landscape demands that we refine our approach to strategic communications. The cascade of global, generation – defining crises from the beginning of this decade has felt unrelenting: the pandemic, global democracy in retreat, invasion of Ukraine, re-emerging tyranny on Europe’s doorstep, climate emergency. “Permacrisis” unsurprisingly became the Word of the Year 2022.

With war returning to Europe, the debate about military preparedness, capabilities and global solidarity has deepened. Amidst bloodshed not seen on the continent since the Second World War, we assess the initial response of the West to the invasion. Lessons from the Information Environment are ripe for analysis.

In the meantime, rest of the world has not stood still. Technologies related to Extended Reality, including the recently praised ChatGPT stoke fears about potential for information manipulation at an unprecedented scale and continue to revolutionize the information space, including individual information consumption habits. We are witnessing strategic geopolitical shifts with an embedded component of technological rivalry. These developments demand bold thinking, broad mindset and adaptation of our long-term strategy.

There is hardly a forum better suited to hold these essential conversations than the Riga StratCom Dialogue. This annual flagship event of the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence draws hundreds of experts, practitioners, and top-level policymakers from across disciplines and around the world. This year, from 7-8 June 2023, this community will meet again in Riga, Latvia to immerse in lively debates and search for sustainable solutions.



## DAY 1 June 7

### **1. TACKLING STOCK OF OUR READINESS**

Since Vladimir Putin ascended to power, the democratic West and other parts and likeminded partners have been constantly attacked with information operations. Putin's Chief Prigozhin recently admitted: *"We interfered, we interfere and we will interfere. Carefully, precisely, surgically and in our own way, as we know how. During our pinpoint operations, we will remove both kidneys and the liver at once."* Amidst the ongoing bloodshed in Ukraine, it is time to assess our own success and failure in foreseeing and resisting the "unpalatable buffet" targeted at our audiences.

### **2. THE POWERFUL MASTERCLASS BY UKRAINE**

When Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine, the initial tension in the information space was palpable. However, President Zelensky's decision not to flee the country along with his daily addresses inspired the nation for total defence. It also served as a decisive driver for an ironclad stance in the information space well beyond Ukraine. How have Ukrainian authorities, citizens and armed forces achieved it?

### **3. AN ETERNAL 1984 ON OUR BORDER**

With every year the rights and freedoms of Russian citizens have been suffocated. In an increasingly totalitarian Russia, people have become nothing but an instrument in the hands of the master – "the Tsar", echoing Orwell's novels. Following the announcement of the so-called "partial mobilization", the trend of squashing people's privacy has moved towards a new low by depriving human rights and most importantly - the freedom of speech. The information space, civil society and freedom of expression are all degraded and outlawed. While borders remain open from Russian side, it is unclear – for how long. However, while tyrants can influence what people say, they cannot police their thoughts. The stakes are high. What can be done to support Russian cognitive independence?

## DAY 2 June 8

### **4. DETERRENCE OF THE NEXT DECADES**

Russian invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, conflict Syria, migration, other Global challenges- there have been several alarm clocks that the Collective West left on snooze. The year 2022 proved that a massive conventional war is not only a hypothetical possibility, but also a brutal reality at the heart of Europe. Failing militarily by conventional means, Russia is resorting to nuclear sabre-rattling. Unfortunately, there is no ground for optimism regarding the next decade. Are we



able to deter Russia not only from further bloodshed, but also from executing hybrid and foreign interference operations in Europe, including in the information space?

## 5. THE THEATRES OF TOMORROW

China keeps demonstrating and investing in an assertive influence clearly visible across Global South. How much data, infrastructure and power has been accumulated by the CCP? Are we prepared for the theatres of tomorrow? While Ukraine succeeded in shaping the information environment in the West, the situation is more dire across the Global South. Russian narratives and proxies are present in the information space of many countries in Africa, Latin America and other regions. The “grain crisis” is a depictive case study of Russia weaponizing hostile narratives in order to blame Ukraine for “causing war and making the developing world starve to the death”. While the reasons in each of the countries for ambiguous positioning towards Russia are different, the question remains – what can we do to counter this trend?

## 6. EXTENDED REALITIES. GETTING PREPARED?

Technological development is not something we can or should stop from happening. There is a popular side of Extended Realities allowing vast audiences around the globe to immerse in the metaverses and use tools like ChatGPT already today. However, there are many angles and dimensions still difficult to grasp. This includes the influence of human-driven hype on shaping demand, unrealistic expectations, technological restraints, governance issues, as well as discussion on values dominating these new spaces. It is essential to know - what kind rights and freedoms the initial design of this technology will endorse and encourage.