

The Army's Strategic Communication and the Informational Dimension

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Strategic communication¹ can be defined as integrated communication, synchronized and aligned with the actions taken by an organization to achieve its goals. It presupposes the combination of practices adopted in the context of traditional **social communication**² with systematic **institutional relations** and the use of **digital media**, including social media and social networks. This concept of communication, typical of the corporate environment, is perfectly applicable to communication within the Brazilian Army.

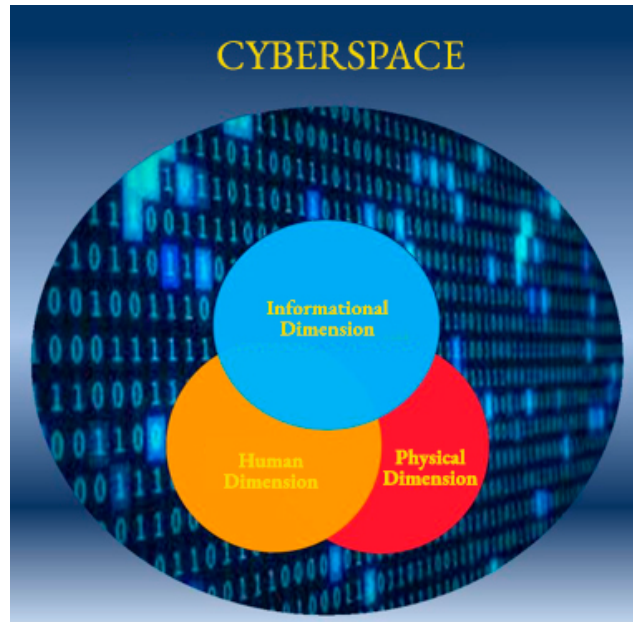
It is important to analyze the development of the Brazilian Army's strategic communication as a function of the complexity characteristic of the informational dimension, applying both concepts to the institutional and operational aspects of this communication, considering the growing relevance of actions.

The military ground doctrine states that the operational environment where military actions take place comprises three **dimensions**: the physical, which is geographical and material in nature, emphasizing the terrain, weather conditions and equipment; the human, of a psychosocial and cultural character, based on the interactions between troops and the involved populations; and the **informational**, highly dependent on technological means, focused on the elaboration of narratives that portray perceived reality (BRASIL, 2017b). The **cyberspace** stands above this configuration (Fig. 1). Although one should not lose sight of human intentionality in the phenomenon of communication, the cyberspace is where the acceleration, potentialization and automation of the most diverse systems and processes is taking place.

1 There is no consolidated definition in the literature about this concept. However, there is a consensus that these are integrated communication actions aimed at achieving organizational objectives.

2 It comprises Public Relations, Press Office and Institutional Publicity activities (BRASIL, 2017b).

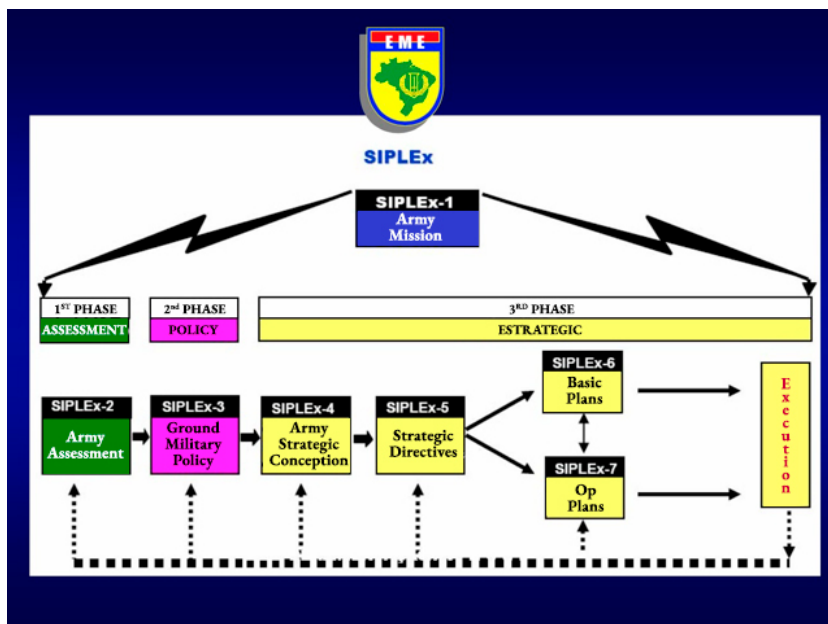
Figure 1 – Dimensions of the operating environment



Source: Brasil (2017b).

By means of its Strategic Planning System (*Sistema de Planejamento Estratégico – SI-PLEx*) (Fig. 2), the Brazilian Army clarifies its institutional objectives and specifies the conditions necessary for carrying out its planned actions. In line with SIPLEx, Army communication acquires strategic features and is ratified according to its integration and synchronization capacity – either in relation to its own specific objectives or in supporting the pursuit of others.

Figure 2 – SIPLEx Schematic



Source: Strategic ... (2005)

The corporate system in charge of the Army's social communication is the SISCOMSEx³, whose central organ is the Army Social Communication Center (*Centro de Comunicação Social do Exército* – CCOMSEx). The CCOMSEx is responsible for proposing communication plans and guidelines and coordinating the corresponding actions, using a network dedicated to this: RESISCOMSEx⁴. Additionally, CCOMSEx's institutional role is expanded by its function as the direct and immediate assistance organ (*órgão de assistência direta e imediata* – OADI) to the Army Commander.

The strategic, eminently institutional, permanent and systematic character of Army social communication does not restrict its participation in the operational environment. On the contrary, it enhances this participation, particularly in the field of information operations (BRASIL, 2014), which is one of its information-related capabilities (*capacidades relacionadas à informação* – CRI). In this field, **strategic communication assumes operative features**, and becomes an indispensable tool for multiplying combat power. In the human dimension, it strengthens troops' corpus spirit and morale; in the **informational dimension**, it seeks to dominate the narrative in order to obtain the support of public opinion, the informational dimension's center of gravity.

In any situation, considerations about cyberspace activities are imperative, given their relatively low cost and the difficulty of assigning narrative responsibilities in such an ambiguous environment, and in which the enemy of the enemy is not always a friend.

Considering this range of attributions, CCOMSEx has the primary **mission of preserving and strengthening the Army's image**. The Army relies on an immaculate reputation and on the highest indexes of credibility among Brazilian society. These are essential conditions if the institution is to achieve its goals.

The mission of preserving the Army's image implies a preventive and reactive approach in the face of potential or concrete threats. The most important assets are the institution's credibility and reputation cores. Thus, its ethical principles and underlying moral values, the organizational culture that characterizes it, and the consolidated narrative of its historical trajectory need to be permanently protected against adverse stances that, explicitly or covertly, may affect the image of the Force and hamper the achievement of its strategic objectives.

In this context, the following should be given special attention: the Army's educational establishments and the military education provided by them, which is recognized for its high quality and worship of the Institution's core values; the memory of the patrons and other figures and historical facts by way of which the Ground Force became notable; the honorability of commanders, chiefs and directors at all levels; the respect for the precepts of hierarchy and discipline; the current employment of the Force in a broad spectrum of operations; the narratives compiled by the Force and disseminated by SISCOMSEx, particularly in the Army's various digital media assets.

Eventual deficiencies observed in the treatment of these themes can become vulnerabilities that could be exploited negatively. Such deficiencies can have even more significant

3 System composed of the 'A,' 'B,' 'C,' or 'Special' class of agencies. These are social communication structures distributed throughout all Army military organizations (BRASIL, 2017b).

4 Collaborative network used by system members to establish the technical channel connections necessary for the operation of SISCOMSEx (BRASIL, 2017b).

reflexes when they present themselves in the cyberspace. The methodology for the analysis of risks affecting organic safety is also relevant here. Inadequate exposure or overexposure of subjects of interest, for example, is a significant risk deserving proper consideration. The lack of alignment, synchronization and integration of communication – that is, the loss of its strategic character – is the worst possible scenario. It may be construed as a shortcoming in the institution’s “social cybersecurity” (a field dealing with understanding and predicting changes in human behavior caused by cybernetics and their social, cultural and political outcomes) (BESKOW, CARLEY, 2019).

Threats to the Army’s image – like any other threat against the achievement of its strategic or operational objectives – may be of internal or external origin, from regular or irregular opposing forces, non-governmental organizations or other agencies, media producers, or unstructured actors. Attacks delivered in the informational dimension are ultimately aimed at disinformation, counterposition of alternative narratives with the deliberate purpose of harming the image, with or without factual foundation (e.g., *fake news*). Common resources for these attacks are *hackers*, *bots* and *trolls*⁵, manipulation, distortion, decontextualization, and falsification of profiles and content.

The appropriate response to these threats depends on an effective monitoring of the cyberspace, employing technological tools developed for the analysis of everything potentially related to the interests of the Army that circulates in digital media. In this task, strategic communication, intelligence and cyber defense need to act in an absolutely integrated way, so as to provide accurate decision-making advice to serve as a basis for the necessary direct and indirect actions. For the success of the Force’s image preservation mission, initiative and leadership are key attributes that have to be observed at all levels. With the speed and breadth that characterizes cyberspace actions, there is no time to lose when it comes to adopting preventive or reactive measures.

The mission to strengthen the Army’s image requires a proactive stance, with a view to taking advantage of all opportunities for the transmission of favorable messages by SISCOM-SEx members. Public opinion support provides the legitimacy necessary to obtain freedom of action and thus achieve the strategic and operational objectives of the Force.

Legitimacy is also related to understanding the structural importance of the Army in society. In this context, the scholar milieu provides the validation and credibility necessary for the construction of discourse to be disseminated via different media, including scientific journals.

Peer-validated scientific communication, constantly evaluated and reassessed, confers credibility and legitimacy to the work done by the Army alongside the rest of society, which directly participates in this construction.

The most positive attitude is the dissemination and reinforcement of narratives about the essential elements of the institution’s reputation and credibility in an integrated and synchronized manner – after all, “everything communicates!” In this regard, all available

5 Typical cyberspace actors, *hackers* are individuals who can make unauthorized modifications to computer systems; *bots* are software designed to act as robots simulating human actions; and *trolls* are agents responsible for disrupting content editing and social network discussions.

vehicles must be mobilized, with particular attention to digital platforms. The pursuit of partnerships with agencies outside the Force – in order to multiply the effect of these narratives – is highly recommended. To this end, the systematization of institutional relations, including with the media, is a relevant component of the Army's strategic communication.

The aligned, integrated and synchronized use of digital media within SISCOMSEx is critical to mission success. To this end, the Standards for the Creation and Management of Social Media within the Brazilian Army were published on July 1, 2019 (BRASIL, 2019). These norms constitute an essential disciplinary instrument for the Army's strategic communication, clearly explaining what is permissible and desirable and safeguarding the Institution from any interactions harmful to the Force's narratives.

Strengthening the Army's image also involves the use of artificial intelligence. On March 1, 2019, Soldier MAX (*Módulo Auxiliar de relações públicas*) was incorporated into the ranks of the Army. The name is homage to the World War II Brazilian hero.⁶ A groundbreaking initiative, this Army-developed chatbot has demonstrated exceptional interactive capability, particularly with younger audience segments interested in joining the Ground Force.

Even though the dimensions of the operating environment are all permeated by cyberspace, one cannot lose track of the fact that the performance of an armed force is intrinsically linked to real facts, generated in the physical and human dimensions. The informational dimension refers to virtual representations of this reality. As such, these representations are subject to a series of multidisciplinary filters. History, Law, Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, among other disciplines, together with diverse ideological positions, shape society's perception of reality. Thus, the construction of narratives aimed at strengthening the Army's institutional image needs to take into account this complex spectrum of knowledge areas.

One of the most appropriate spaces for the discussion and construction of these narratives in the different areas of knowledge is the academic space. In it, a freethinking and legitimate scientific community develops its own discourses. For this to happen, especially in Social and Human Sciences, a diversity of thoughts, research, and institutions – including the Army – have to be present.

In the literature on so-called Hybrid Warfare, one can see the combination of these dimensional variables, integrated and synchronized with traditional forms of combat. This integration has a deep impact on public behavior. Narratives manipulated in the cyberspace are often used to obtain legitimacy and the consequent freedom of action. The Army has to be prepared for this kind of conflict. Nothing better, then, than being proactive in strengthening the institution's image and domain of narrative, whether in peace or wartime.

As we have shown, the preservation and strengthening of the Army's image in contemporaneity requires one to advance beyond the scope of traditional media. Our communication logic must shift towards the adoption of the precepts of strategic communication.

⁶ Sergeant Max Wolf Filho, killed in action in the Montese region of Italy on April 12, 1945.

An institution with the Army's reputation and credibility owes much of this condition to the respect for truth and transparency, the latter limited only by the secrecy surrounding national security issues.

Although nowadays fashionable, so-called post-truth (POST-TRUTH, 2019) – which opposes facts in order to appeal to emotions, feelings, beliefs and ideological passions, creating alternative narratives – is not in line with the Army's strategic communication. This kind of opportunistic narrative does not endure in democratic societies that are grounded on solid institutions. They cannot, however, be disregarded, due to their potential for causing severe damage that disinformation can cause. Victory, in this context, demands constant vigilance and permanent disposition for proactive action in the informational dimension.

With the increasing technological possibilities provided by cyberspace, which are enhancing and automating informational actions, today it is even more important to observe solid ethical principles, ensuring that the Army's regularity and permanence are preserved. This is consistent with the greatness of the mission to defend the Brazilian homeland.

In this sense, a scientific journal, as a means of communication legitimized by the scientific community, is undoubtedly a permanent channel of dialogue. The Meira Mattos Collection is part of this institutional construction. Good reading!

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