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Implementation of Public Affairs in the interests of military operations: NATO standards and Ukrainian Armed Forces experience

Abstract. The research relevance is determined by the need for a deep understanding of Public Affairs strategies in modern military conflicts, where the information space becomes an arena of struggle no less important than the battlefield itself. In the context of the growing role of media and information technology, the effective implementation of Public Affairs can determine the success of military operations and the formation of public opinion. The study aims to analyse current approaches to Public Affairs in the military sphere, with a focus on the experience of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the implementation of NATO standards, to identify effective strategies and methodologies in this area. The methodological basis of the study is based on the following methods: analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalisation, classification, and systematisation. The results of the study include a review of regulations, organisational structure, means and methods of Public Affairs used in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and NATO countries. Analysis of the challenges and problems faced by Public Affairs professionals in the current conditions of hybrid warfare, as well as the prospects for the development of this area of activity in the context of strengthening the information security of the state, is given special attention. The author emphasises the importance of integrating Public Affairs into the overall system of Strategic Communications in the structure of military command and the need to ensure the active participation of Public Affairs Officers in the planning and implementation of military operations. The importance of developing the professional skills of Public Affairs professionals and using the latest information and communication technologies to improve the effectiveness of Strategic Communications is emphasised. The practical significance of the study is due to its contribution to the development of approaches and standards for the implementation of effective Public Affairs in the context of military operations, identification of problems and challenges in this area, recommendations for developing the skills of specialists and improving the level of information security of the state

Keywords: strategic communications; information warfare; hybrid warfare; mass media; information operations; propaganda

Introduction

Given the rapid development and widespread use of information and communication processes in the modern world, Public Affairs (PA) in the military sphere plays a key role in supporting military operations. In this context, it is important to implement this function of military command according to the standards of the armies of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) member states, as well as the experience of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) gained during the repulsion of Russian military aggression countering the destructive actions of the aggressor country in the information dimension. Public Affairs is an important component of Strategic Communications in the military sphere, as it contributes to the formation of a positive image of the Armed Forces, maintaining trust and

understanding between military and civilian actors, and countering the enemy's information aggression.

In the twenty-first century, Public Affairs have become a subject of widespread interest for both academics and practitioners. Previous research in this area carried out both within the academic community and within military organisations, has made a significant contribution to the understanding of the processes of implementing PA. However, some gaps and shortcomings need to be addressed for the further development of this field. The topic of PA is relevant and well-studied in the academic literature, especially in the context of NATO standards and policies. Many researchers point out the importance and complexity of this area of activity, which requires a high level of

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professionalism, coordination, synchronisation and adaptation to changing conditions and challenges.

Many studies addressed the organisational structure, methods and tools of Public Affairs in the armies of NATO member states, as well as the specifics of their application in peace and crisis operations. For instance, O.F. Salnikova *et al.* (2019) examined the main components of the Strategic Communications system in NATO member states, such as directives, doctrinal documents, plans, reports, organisational and staffing structure, training, monitoring, etc. The authors also focused on NATO Strategic Communications standards and policy, which define the goals, principles, objectives, functions, roles and responsibilities of the communication process. As for the experience of the General Staff in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, it is also the subject of scientific research, especially in the context of reforming the military sphere and ensuring the effectiveness of Ukraine's NATO membership course. For instance, H. Myronovych & I. Kolosovska (2022) addressed Public Affairs in the Strategic Communications system of the Armed Forces of Ukraine as a typical model of communication in public administration.

In addition, domestic scholars and communication practitioners have made a significant contribution to the study of this topic. For example, D.V. Dubov & A.V. Barovska (2017) studied the impact of legal and organisational aspects on the creation of an effective Strategic Communications system and considered the role of Public Affairs as a key element of this system, which provides effective communication with citizens, shaping public opinion and ensuring support for government initiatives. In his study of legal relations in the field of Strategic Communications and approaches to the formation of their components, O. Melenko (2023) emphasises the importance of the PA in the formation and implementation of Strategic Communications aimed at achieving the strategic goals of the state through targeted, coordinated synchronisation of the activities of all Strategic Communication actors.

As R. Poronyuk & O. Hapeieva (2022) note, the press services of the Armed Forces of Ukraine made a significant contribution to ensuring the information security of the state and maintaining the high morale of the military in the context of military operations and information warfare. This was made possible by the development of information and media structures in the field of defence and security, the establishment and development of press centres, the optimisation of the number of military publications and the evolution of Public Affairs in the context of a changing information space.

A significant contribution to the study of the development and implementation of Public Affairs was made by the RAND Corporation. D. Porch (2002) analysed how military leaders and governments have used Public Affairs and the media throughout history to shape public opinion, legitimise military campaigns, and gain support from the population. He examined numerous historical periods, including both World Wars, the Vietnam War, and more recent conflicts. He has argued that effective information management and presentation can be crucial to gaining strategic advantage and securing long-term public support for a conflict. At the same time, his work highlights the potential negative consequences of misusing Public

Affairs for military purposes, including the risks of disinformation and manipulation of public opinion that can undermine trust in governments and military leadership. According to C. Paul & J. Kim (2004), there is some tension in the relationship due to the divergence of missions and goals of the media and military in performing tasks within military operations, especially in terms of maintaining operational security. Nevertheless, the common professional goals and objectives of serving the public demonstrate the possibility and necessity of effective cooperation.

However, despite numerous studies on this topic, certain shortcomings or gaps require further study and improvement. There is insufficient attention to the historical development of PA, its evolution and transformation in the context of the changing geopolitical situation, and the impact of new information technologies and mass communications, as well as the requirements of modern society for openness and transparency of the military sphere. There is also a need for a proper comparative analysis of the Public Affairs of different NATO member states, their specifics, similarities and differences, and attention to the study of best practices and successful cases of Public Affairs in the military sphere of foreign armies. In addition, there is a need to analyse the effectiveness and efficiency of Public Affairs, their impact on building a positive image of the armed forces, maintaining trust and understanding between military and civilian actors, and countering enemy information aggression.

The study aims to investigate and analyse the implementation of Public Affairs in the context of the military sphere, during military operations, taking into account NATO standards and the experience of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Our research focuses on the key aspects and principles of Public Affairs in military operations, identifying the most effective practices and developing recommendations to improve the effectiveness of this process in the context of modern military conflicts.

Materials and Methods

The choice of research methods was based on the need for a deep understanding of the topic, the ability to analyse and synthesise a large amount of diverse information, and the need to compare and generalise the experience of different countries. These methods effectively addressed scientific data, regulatory documents, statistics, standards, analytical reports and other primary sources, which ensured a comprehensive approach to the study. The methods used in the study included analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalisation, classification, and systematisation. They were used to study scientific literature, regulations, statistics, documents and reports of NATO and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, media and online resources. Analysis and synthesis helped to identify the main components of an effective Public Affairs system in the armies of NATO member states and Ukraine. The comparison was used to assess the differences and similarities in the approaches of NATO and the Ukrainian Armed Forces to implementing Public Affairs in the interests of military operations. The generalisation allowed us to formulate the main challenges and problems faced by Public Affairs professionals. Classification and systematisation were used to build the main features, key

aspects of planning and main tasks of Public Affairs in the military sphere.

The research consisted of three stages. The heuristic search for research materials included a review of available literature, regulations, statistics, and analytical reports to determine the scope of the topic and set the research goal. In the next stage, the sources were analysed, which allowed us to consider the experience of organising Public Affairs of the Alliance and the Armed Forces of Ukraine in chronological order. The study of NATO's experience, standards, strategies and key documents of this organisation and the Armed Forces of Ukraine provided recommendations for more effective Strategic Communications.

The study analysed the current provisions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine on the organisation of Public Affairs (Order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine No. 127..., 2017; Order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine No. 44..., 2020) and NATO standards in the relevant field (NATO Strategic Communications Policy No. SG(2009)0794..., 2009). Key aspects of the NATO Public Affairs planning process were identified through the analysis of the NATO Standard: AJP-5 (2019), which formulates the Alliance's doctrine for planning operations. To study the Public Affairs activities during NATO's Operation Allied Force, an interview with Jamie Shea (NATO, 2008) was used. The analysis of these materials helped to reveal the topic by providing an overview of existing approaches and methods of implementing Public Affairs, identifying challenges and problems, as well as prospects for the development of this area.

Results

In today's world, where the information space has long been a full-fledged place of conflict and influence, the importance of Public Affairs is gaining a new dimension. In the Armed Forces of Ukraine, they are one of the components of Strategic Communications (Doctrine of the Armed Forces of Ukraine No. VKP-10-00(49)..., 2020), as well as a management function that consists of measures aimed at forming a favourable public opinion about the activities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and maintaining a positive image by constantly informing the public about their activities (Order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine No. 127..., 2017).

As an important component of Strategic Communications, this area plays a critical role in shaping public opinion and aims to create, maintain and develop a positive image of the military organisation, strengthen public trust and support, as well as effectively inform about the activities, tasks and achievements of the Armed Forces. This sphere includes a wide range of communication activities and techniques aimed at interacting with the public, media, civil society international organisations, etc. (Güleç, 2021; Stivachtis, 2023).

According to NATO standards, Public Affairs is one of the components of Strategic Communications in the military sphere, along with Psychological Operations (PSY-OPS), Information Operations and Military Diplomacy (MD) (NATO Strategic Communications Policy..., 2009). However, it should be emphasised that Public Affairs differ from other types of military communication in the following ways: have a wider and more diverse audience, including the media, civil society organisations, academia, government agencies, international partners, local populations, etc.; are based on the principle of truthfulness and transparency, i.e. provide reliable and verified information without misleading the audience, concealing facts, distorting data, using fake evidence, etc; are aimed at maintaining trust and understanding between NATO and its target audiences, rather than at changing their minds, behaviour and attitudes in the interests of military operations, as Psychological Operations do; use mostly open and legal channels and formats of communication, such as press conferences, press releases, interviews, social media, websites, brochures, posters, etc., rather than covert and illegal ones, as information, and almost always Psychological Operations often do; take place at all stages of military operations, not just at the preparatory and final stages, as other components of Strategic Communications are mostly implemented.

Understanding these features, functions, and principles of Public Affairs makes it possible to analyse and understand the role and place of this component of Strategic Communications not only within the entire spectrum of military organisations but primarily in the interests of military operations. In the armies of NATO member states, Public Affairs are defined as a vital function that ensures two-way communication between the military and civilians, the media, and the international community. This function is aimed at supporting the mission by ensuring transparency and understanding of the actions of the troops (United States of America Field Manual No. FM 3-61..., 2015).

The use of modern means of communication, including social media, official websites, and media events, allows reaching a wide audience and ensuring timely dissemination of information. The NATO Public Affairs Handbook (NATO, 2020) concludes that the integration of Public Affairs Officers (PAOs) into headquarters structures and their involvement in media operations, internal communications, and community relations is a key aspect of effective communications in NATO. Public Affairs professionals play an important role in mission planning and execution, ensuring that communication processes are implemented and directly integrated into overall operations plans. Based on the analysis of this document, it is possible to conclude that NATO's Public Affairs planning process is a well-structured and integrated element of military planning and execution. Important aspects of this process are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Key aspects of NATO's Public Affairs planning process

Integration with the command planning process	The PA is an important part of planning operations, missions, exercises and other training activities, ensuring that all communication efforts of the command are coordinated.
Early involvement in the planning process	Ensures that the objectives of the command's Public Affairs function are adequately integrated into overall planning and that the necessary resources are properly considered.

Table 1. Continued

Interaction with other areas of communication	Public Affairs are coordinated with Information and Psychological Operations but are implemented separately from these tasks, ensuring the unity of the information line.
Proper Public Affairs planning	Each NATO operation or mission should be accompanied by a detailed Public Affairs plan that is consistent with the overall mission objectives and Strategic Communications concept. This plan includes communication objectives, approaches, tools and resources.
Planning cycle	The planning process follows defined stages, which include the development of strategic and operational plans by the Comprehensive Operational Planning Directive (COPD). For example, the Allied Joint Operations Planning Doctrine describes how planning activities and processes are integrated and coordinated to support decision-making and the preparation of plans, orders and directives for all types of operations. The cycle focuses on the operational level, although it is also useful at the strategic and tactical levels.
Planning hierarchy	PA planning is guided by higher-level guidance, including strategies and plans that provide clear objectives and coordination instructions.
Coordination with higher and subordinate headquarters	This is ensured by a constant exchange of information for cooperation and parallel planning.

Source: systematised by the author based on NATO Standard: AJP-5 (2019)

The information section of the Joint Operations Planning Doctrine (NATO Standard: AJP-5..., 2019) emphasises the importance of coordinating Strategic Communications in general and Public Affairs, Information Operations and Psychological Operations as its components through the common functionality of personnel performing these tasks. The main goal of involving Strategic Communications in the operations planning process is to achieve a common understanding of information and communications activities within planning groups and other elements to coordinate and coordinate activities related to the information environment. This contributes to the implementation of the overall communications strategy.

The role of Public Affairs units in NATO-standard military operations is to disseminate information, respond to media inquiries, provide briefings, and facilitate media access to the units involved (Wright & Bergman, 2021). By interacting with the media, Public Affairs officers help shape public opinion and maintain transparency about NATO's activities. This role is essential for gaining public support and understanding of military efforts. Public Affairs functions in NATO operations include digital engagement through websites and social media to reach diverse audiences and stakeholders. By using digital platforms, Public Affairs professionals can amplify the impact of communication strategies and ensure that information is delivered to a wide range of audiences in line with NATO's Strategic Communications objectives. Importantly, the overall direction and management of NATO's communications and information activities are provided by the North Atlantic Council (NAC), with specific direction and management by the Secretary-General. Military commands and the International Military Staff also communicate on matters within their competence, following agreed NATO policy. At the same time, the Public Diplomacy Division (PDD) at NATO Headquarters coordinates all public diplomacy activities, as well as communications activities across the Alliance.

The mechanism of interaction between these structures is as follows. The North Atlantic Council and the Secretary-General set the overall direction for communications to civilian and military audiences of the Alliance. The Committee of Deputies manages Strategic

Communications on behalf of the NAC, and NATO-specific committees provide more detailed guidance on various communication issues. The Public Diplomacy Committee is an advisory body to the Alliance on communications, media and Public Affairs, and provides recommendations on how to increase public understanding and support for Alliance objectives.

The Public Diplomacy Division at NATO Headquarters, which is responsible for communications and public diplomacy programmes within the International Staff, works closely with the International Military Staff, particularly with the Public Affairs and Strategic Communications Adviser to the Chairman of the Military Committee (MC). It also cooperates with the staff of two strategic commands, Allied Command Operations (ACO) and Allied Command Transformation (ACT) (NATO, 2020), which communicate these issues in the context of military operations, exercises and other activities within their competence. Importantly, the interaction between civilian and military target audience groups is key to ensuring a coherent and consistent approach to communications within NATO (Communications and Public Diplomacy, 2022).

One example from military history where Public Affairs played a significant role in NATO operations is the 1999 Operation Allied Force in Kosovo (Sayers, 2019). At the time, Public Affairs Officers played an important role in providing timely and accurate information to the media and the public, shaping the narrative of NATO's involvement in the operation (Latawski & Smith, 2018). By effectively communicating NATO's objectives and actions, the Public Affairs Department helped to ensure public support for the mission and transparency in the operational planning process. The campaign was organised in the context of significant international attention and required the effective use of Public Affairs to achieve strategic objectives. The main Public Affairs activities during the operation are presented in Table 2. These and other Public Affairs activities were aimed at supporting the legitimacy of Operation Allied Force, building trust in NATO, and ensuring transparency of military operations. Providing accurate and timely information was recognised as a key element in reducing misunderstandings and criticism from the international community (Meilinger *et al.*, 2002).

Table 2. Public Affairs activities during NATO Operation Allied Force

Daily press conferences	Held to inform the international media and the public about the progress of operations, and the goals achieved and to process journalists' requests. These daily briefings helped to create a transparent and open channel of communication between the military command and the public.
Special media tours and visits	NATO organised special tours and visits for journalists to key locations related to the operation to provide a first-hand look at the conditions and challenges faced by the military.
Press releases and newsletters	The routine dissemination of written materials, including press releases and newsletters, provided an additional channel for communicating NATO's official position and information to a wide audience.
Use of the Internet and social media	NATO attempted to use available online platforms to disseminate information and engage with the public.

Source: systematized by the author based on Jamie Shea's (NATO, 2008) interview

Public Affairs have also played a key role in other NATO missions and operations. During Operation Enduring Freedom, 2001-2014 in Afghanistan, which was initiated as a response to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. NATO's Public Affairs capabilities were tasked with informing the public about the objectives, progress and results of the operation, as well as countering propaganda and disinformation from the Taliban and al-Qaeda (Lambeth, 2005). The main tasks of the Public Affairs units during this operation were to support the legitimacy and justification of the operation, ensure its transparency and openness, restore and maintain peaceful life in Afghanistan, etc. These and other similar tasks can be considered integral components of NATO's Public Affairs mission, particularly during military operations.

The mission was defined by NATO governing documents, which regulate and govern Public Affairs in both day-to-day activities and military operations. It aims to promote NATO's military goals and objectives through timely communication and delivering accurate information to different target audiences. This raises awareness and understanding of the military aspects of the Alliance's role, operations, other activities and issues, and enhances the credibility of the organisation (NATO, 2020). The mission also includes the planning and implementation of core Public Affairs functions, focusing on both external and internal communication within the framework of NATO's policies (NATO Military Public Affairs Policy..., 2011).

Public Affairs play an important role in NATO military operations in the context of Information Operations. Strategic Communications impose on the command the task of developing effective strategies, processes and organisational structures for the effective exchange of information. In the context of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, military leaders initiated the creation of new structures to optimise communication processes to achieve specific operational results. This led to a debate among Public Affairs, Information and Psychological Operations theorists and practitioners to develop a unified strategy that would integrate all three aspects to create a coordinated and comprehensive approach to communication. Commanders faced three key questions: what role Public Affairs should play, how it should be integrated into the organisational structure, and how to make Public Affairs more effective (Keeton & McCann, 2008).

In theory, the concept of combining Public Affairs, Information and Psychological Operations looks reasonable, but in practice, the tasks of these three areas differ significantly. Public Affairs aim to provide objective,

reliable information to the public, while Information and Psychological Operations aim to influence the audience with the subsequent change in their perception or behaviour. According to the doctrinal provisions, the functions of Information Operations and Psychological Operations are integrated into the operational activities of headquarters, while Public Affairs acts as an independent special segment directly subordinate to commanders and officers. Public Affairs are tasked with being the voice of the military leadership and an information intermediary between the command, internal and external audiences, including the media.

As an intermediate conclusion, based on the experience of NATO member states' armies, it is possible to summarise that the main function of the Public Affairs function is to provide truthful and timely information, not to influence public opinion through public initiatives or lobbying, but to enable the audience to form their own informed opinions and positions. One of the main requirements of Public Affairs is that the media should not be used to change public opinion, as this contradicts their main mission. It is necessary to realise that to win the information war, one must not lose the strategic perspective and trust of the people whose support one wants to use.

The experience of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in implementing Public Affairs before 2014, when the Russian invasion started, was focused on information and communication activities of Ukrainian army contingents in international peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the UN, NATO and other international organisations, in particular in the Balkans, Africa, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Several guiding documents very briefly defined the tasks for the structural units of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine in terms of implementing the PA. For example, the current Order of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 23 (2017) outlines the tasks for the Department of Communications and Press of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine to conduct instructional and methodological classes with officers appointed to the positions of assistant commanders of national contingents for work with the media (press secretaries) on practical aspects of information support for the activities of the national contingents. However, it was not possible to find any guiding documents or other legal acts that regulate or currently regulate the implementation of the PA within such operations and at the tactical level.

The former head of the press service of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine O.O. Kluban (2013) notes that in fact, for the first decade after Ukraine's independence and the creation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, military

specialists who were responsible for information support did not have outstanding skills in Public Affairs in organising the work of the media in combat zones and other extreme conditions. These specialists had been trained in a school of military journalism based on the training of Soviet-style propaganda officers. At that time, the standards and approaches of NATO armies were not yet considered as promising working mechanisms for implementing effective information and communication activities.

This situation in this area existed until the very beginning of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine in the spring of 2014. At that time, military units in the format of brigades (regiments) and below did not have staff units that directly implemented Public Affairs – press services. This task was partly entrusted to the personnel management units (Klochko, 2023). Accordingly, the qualifications of such specialists were low, as was the commanders' awareness of the role of this area of information activity.

With the annexation of Crimea, the occupation of certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and the intensification of hostilities in eastern Ukraine, the public, both Ukrainian and foreign, demand for information about the course of those events increased significantly, and the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other components of the Security and Defence Forces needed effective information and communication support. This was one of the reasons for the prompt introduction of full-time press services in military units. However, their main tasks at that time were to inform the public through their communication channels and in cooperation with the media (Table 3). Press Officers were usually not involved in the planning and support of operations, nor the implementation of specific tasks within other activities, such as information operations. The situation has not changed significantly since then. The brigade Press Offices continued to perform their tasks, mostly focusing on working with media representatives and creating their own media content and news.

Table 3. Priority tasks of Public Affairs units in the military administration

Informing	Informing the public and the media about the activities of military units, important events, participation in operations, training activities (exercises) and other events.
Information support	Organising information support for the activities of military units, including the preparation and distribution of press releases, articles, videos, etc.
Crisis communications	Implementation of crisis communications in case of a crisis or for crisis prevention.
Media Relations	The organisation of press conferences, briefings, interviews with commanders and servicemen, escorting media representatives in operations, etc.
Monitoring	Continuous and in-depth analysis of publications in the media and social networks to identify various types of information about the activities of military units, detect false or negative information, and respond to it.
Archiving	Maintaining an archive of photo and video content, as well as other materials related to the activities of the military unit.
Resource management	Support of official electronic resources (social networks), updating information, and interaction with users.
Media content	Production of media content (photo, video, audio materials) for further distribution on its information resources and media outlets.

Source: systematised by the author

Separate provisions on the implementation of this area of information and communication activities in the legal regime of martial law and a special period providing for military operations on the territory of the state are defined in the Doctrine of the Armed Forces of Ukraine No. VKP-18(00).01 (2020) and in the Regulation on Public Affairs Department of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (2020). The latter regulation, in particular, states that under martial law, the Public Affairs Department ensures the publication of orders of senior military commanders concerning the civilian population and military administrations, except for information with restricted access. It is also involved in information support of combat operations, organising the work of the media and other media production entities broadcasting media content for military purposes, and conducting public outreach. In addition, it organises interaction with other components of the security and defence sector, military and civilian administrations to ensure the information and communication needs of the martial law regime, develops proposals for the involvement of Public Affairs structures of other Defence Forces in these activities (Order of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine No. 44..., 2020).

Summing up the above, the features, tasks and limitations of implementing Public Affairs during military operations can be identified. Thus, the most inherent features of the implementation of Public Affairs during military operations, under the legal regime of martial law (special period), are that there is a need to adapt information and communication measures to the conditions of hostilities, focusing on ensuring the accuracy and efficiency of information disseminated to the public and military personnel. Particular attention is devoted to preserving the morale of military personnel and civilians and maintaining trust in the Armed Forces and the military leadership of the country. In this context, it is important to recognise that the Public Affairs planning process is a highly structured and integrated element of military planning and operations. A good example is the experience and standards of NATO member states' armies.

The tasks of the Public Affairs units should include maintaining constant information communication between the military leadership and the civilian population, informing about the course of hostilities in compliance with security requirements, countering disinformation and enemy propaganda, and coordinating with other state organisations and international partners to ensure unity in

Strategic Communications. In contrast to the current approaches of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, special attention in the implementation of the GP should be paid to the interests of all target audiences, including the domestic one.

At the same time, some restrictions require compliance with information security, restrictions on access to confidential information, and the need to avoid disseminating data that could harm their units or assist the enemy. These provisions reflect a strategic approach to managing information and communications in particularly difficult martial law conditions, requiring the Public Affairs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to be flexible, responsible and focused on ensuring national security and supporting the military and civilians in the context of military operations.

Based on the analysis, the following conclusions and recommendations can be made to further improve the implementation of Public Affairs in the interests of military operations, in the context of NATO standards and the experience of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It is necessary to ensure close integration of Public Affairs with other aspects of Strategic Communications, including Information and Psychological Operations, to form a unified information policy within military and peacekeeping operations.

Military Public Affairs specialists (Press Officers) at the level of military units (brigades, regiments, separate battalions, detachments, etc.) should be involved in the early stages of planning military operations to ensure consistency of information messages and proper implementation of Strategic Communications. Their involvement allows them to consider the potential reactions of the public and media to military operations, as well as to plan measures to counteract disinformation and enemy propaganda. At the level of military command and control bodies, Press Officers should ensure coordination of communication strategies between different units and subdivisions, using coordinated information and communication approaches to achieve strategic goals. This includes the development and implementation of military-wide and interservice information campaigns aimed at supporting military operations, strengthening the image of the Armed Forces and maintaining the morale of the military and the population.

Public Affairs Officers should report directly to the command of military units, ensuring close interaction with commanders and staff to accurately understand the course of operations, and operational and strategic tasks. At the same time, they need to interact with various units, including intelligence, operations, logistics and other departments, to gather relevant information that will be used in the communication process. Public Affairs specialists should be involved in the development and implementation of communication plans, media operations planning, crisis communications, and monitoring and analysis of the information field. It is important to establish clear procedures for interacting with the public and the media, as well as a procedure for promptly responding to media inquiries and crises. A particular need is to strengthen internal communication channels within the military structures to ensure timely and accurate information of personnel about important decisions, changes and events.

Guidance documents and manuals in the Armed Forces of Ukraine that contain provisions on Public Affairs

during military operations may not consider all modern requirements and needs in the context of a rapidly changing information space and hybrid warfare (Caliskan & Liégeois, 2021). It is important to constantly update these documents to include more detailed guidelines on media relations, crisis communications, social media and counterpropaganda. For example, it would be worth considering the feasibility of developing a Field Manual for Public Affairs of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, similar to the US Communication Strategy and Public Affairs Operations (2022). This could be a significant step in standardising approaches and methods of work in the field of Public Affairs in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Such a document could systematise the experience gained during the fighting to repel Russian military aggression against Ukraine and address the specifics of hybrid warfare in general.

Further effort to improve the professional training of Public Affairs specialists is needed, using both domestic and international resources, training and internship programmes. Special attention should be paid to the introduction and use of modern information and communication technologies, including social media, to ensure effective interaction with the public and the media. International cooperation and exchange of experience in the field of Public Affairs with NATO member states and other partners should be developed to improve the effectiveness of their communication strategies to avoid misunderstandings that may arise between allies (Vyklický & Divišová, 2021). Given the above conclusions and recommendations, it is possible to significantly increase the effectiveness of Public Affairs in the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the interests of military operations and to ensure greater transparency and openness in the military sphere.

The findings of this study fully reflect the conclusions drawn by O.F. Salnikova *et al.* (2019), reinforcing the idea of the critical role of Public Affairs in modern military operations. The researchers analysed the main components of Strategic Communications in NATO member states. The authors point out the importance of integrating Public Affairs into the overall command and control system. At the same time, the study by R. Poronyuk & O. Hapeieva (2022) focuses on the problems of using social media for Public Affairs in military conflicts. While the convergence with these findings on the importance of social media is obvious, this study further points to the need for a comprehensive approach that includes not only social media but also traditional communication channels. Differences in conclusions may be due to the specifics of the conflicts studied or differences in methodological approaches. At the same time, it is worth noting that the reported success of the information and communication structures of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine in 1991-2014 is not entirely true, as evidenced by the results of a scientific study of the development of the Public Affairs system in Ukraine. The importance of Strategic Communications in wartime is also emphasised by D.V. Dubov & A.V. Barovska (2017). The authors focus on the general legal and organisational aspects of communication, which, as indicated in this study, are already partially applied in the practice of the AFU.

O. Melenko (2023) highlights the role of Strategic Communications in achieving the strategic goals of the

state through the coordinated activities of various actors, which is fully supported by the findings of this study. This is indicated by the fact that the success of Public Affairs depends not only on technologies and communication channels but also on their integration into the broader context of Strategic Communications. At the same time, this study expands on this idea by demonstrating how specific NATO practices and standards can facilitate this integration.

Finally, the analysis of D. Porch (2002), who examines the historical evolution of military communications, points to the enduring importance of Public Affairs for military leadership. The findings of this study echo these conclusions, reinforcing the idea of the ongoing relevance and need to adapt Public Affairs to modern conditions. However, this study adds a new perspective by focusing on modern technologies and NATO standards, which could lead to a slight divergence in our assessments of the historical and contemporary role of Public Affairs.

In general, the comparative analysis with other studies emphasises that the results of this research fit into the broader scientific context while adding new emphasis to it on the use of NATO standards and the experience of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Disagreements with other authors are often due to differences in methodological approaches or research focus, which only enriches the discussion and allows for a deeper understanding of the complexity of the topic. These differences not only point to the polymorphism in approaches to Public Affairs in military operations but also stimulate further research to clarify the most effective strategies and tactics.

Conclusions

The results of this study provide an opportunity to define the role of Public Affairs in modern military conflicts, with a focus on NATO standards and the experience of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. By analysing various primary sources, including standards, interviews, and legislation, it was found that the effective implementation of Public Affairs is a key factor in shaping public opinion for information support for military operations. An important conclusion of the study was that the integration of NATO standards and the implementation of best practices in Public Affairs contribute to the effectiveness of communication strategies of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. This, in

turn, provides better coordination, increased transparency and reliability of information, which is achieved through professional development of specialists and the use of the latest technologies.

The results of the study highlight the need for further study and development of Public Affairs as an important tool in modern military conflicts, to ensure effective support for military operations and strengthen the information security of the state.

The study also demonstrated that there is a need for a deeper analysis of the psychological aspects of Public Affairs, especially in the context of hybrid wars, where information warfare and propaganda are becoming key tools of influence on society. It is important to understand how Public Affairs can be effectively used to protect national interests, strengthen state security, and at the same time ensure respect for democratic values and human rights. The academic community should also pay attention to studying the effectiveness of different communication channels, including traditional media, social media, and even non-traditional platforms that can be used to reach a wider audience. Finally, studying international experience and cases of successful use of Public Affairs in military conflicts in other countries can provide valuable lessons and recommendations for developing domestic strategies. This will help not only to improve existing approaches but also to ensure progressive development in the field of Public Affairs adapted to modern challenges and threats.

Further research in this area should analyse the impact of new communication technologies and social media on Public Affairs in wartime. It is also necessary to focus on studying international experience in the field of information security to identify the most effective methods of countering disinformation and manipulation of public opinion. Another important area is the development of mechanisms to engage civil society in the process of Strategic Communications, which will help build trust between the military and civilians.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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