

## Coalition Wargaming in the Cognitive Domain

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### Abstract

Adversarial disinformation campaigns threaten national security and NATO cohesion by eroding public trust and destabilizing democratic institutions. While wargaming has been applied to disinformation challenges in the past, most efforts focus on operational or national level responses. A gap exists in frameworks to explore multinational approaches at the strategic level, where threat perceptions, policy priorities, and response measures differ across and within states. Wargaming adds to other frameworks by acting as a key form of alternative analysis (AltA), where multiple possible outcomes, actions and consequences can be explored in a safe-to-fail environment that can be iterated and customized according to the situation. Data collected from these wargames can be analyzed to strengthen situational awareness and the consequences of proposed courses of action (CoAs) for decision makers.

This paper introduces a conceptual analytical wargame framework for exploring multinational responses to disinformation at the strategic level. The design enables participants to identify and evaluate consensus-based CoAs used by NATO. In addition, it enables them to explore the consequences of action or inaction and identify mitigation measures across whole-of-government and whole-of-society contexts. It does this while maintaining a balance between complexity and playability. In so doing, it aligns with the need for enhanced multinational strategic communication in NATO, and the emerging NATO Cognitive Warfare Concept which emphasizes resilience in the human domain. Integrated into a broader cycle of research, the framework for this type of wargame acknowledges the limitation of the generated outputs as only one data point amongst many, and that the triangulation of these insights with complementary methods enhances validity and generalizability.

By providing a structured framework, this research supports efforts to test assumptions, reveal friction points, and inform collective strategies to combat and thwart disinformation campaigns. The results of this research can be applied impactfully by military and civilian leaders to disrupt and defeat disinformation now and in future.

**Keywords:** alternative analysis (AltA), disinformation, hybrid threats, information environment, strategic communication