



THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF MILITARY COMMUNICATION

Head of the Psychological Service of the Military Aviation Institute of the University of Military Security and Defense of the Republic of Uzbekistan —
Ruziyev Nodirbek Ikromovich.

Abstract. *Military communication is inherently a socio-psychological process that extends beyond the mere transmission of information. It both reflects and shapes the attitudes and behaviors of personnel, binding individuals into cohesive units. Research emphasizes that communication in hierarchical organizations like the armed forces creates mutual bonds and also serves control, motivation, and persuasion functions [1, p. 110]. In the military context, communication flows can be "vertical" (top-down or bottom-up along the chain of command) or "horizontal" (peer-to-peer), each with distinct roles in coordinating action. This thesis examines these dynamics by first defining communication in military settings, then comparing practices in Uzbekistan, Russia, and NATO forces, and finally assessing the psychological impacts – especially stress buffering, trust in leaders, and group cohesion – that stem from communication patterns. Informed by recent case studies and doctrinal sources, the analysis shows how clear, ethical, and two-way communication enhances unit cohesion and resilience, whereas rigid, one-way patterns can erode trust and increase stress.*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the most fundamental processes in any organization, and this is especially true in the armed forces [1, p. 110]. In military units, where uncertainty and high stakes are routine, commanders must subordinate orders clearly and ensure that information flows effectively. Lipinski notes that in an army setting, communication is not merely data transfer but a dynamic social process that constantly forms and modifies soldiers' attitudes and knowledge [1, p. 111].

It creates mutual relationships and bonds among people, performing control, motivation, and persuasion functions in the cultural context of the organization

[1, p. 112]. In practice, this means that every order, briefing, or informal conversation in the military carries social weight: it shapes expectations, builds trust, and coordinates group behavior.

Proper communication has a direct impact on task execution. As Lipinski explains, in a rigid military hierarchy the directions of information flow are



clearly defined: subordinates generally cannot bypass their supervisors, and must relay information along the chain of command [1, p. 113]. This "chain-type" flow ensures order and discipline, but it also makes each link in the hierarchy responsible for understanding and transmitting the intent of messages [1, p. 113]. Accordingly, the effectiveness of a mission often hinges on how well leaders and soldiers interpret and share critical information. Thus, understanding military communication requires seeing it as both a formal system of orders and an informal network of social influence. The latter includes the way words, symbols, and nonverbal cues create a common culture and reinforce authority. In sum, military communication must be examined as a socio-psychological phenomenon: one that defines leadership relations, group identity, and the collective capacity to cope with stress

Theoretical Framework

Definitions and Functions. In the military, communication serves multiple functions simultaneously. It provides information (orders and feedback), exercises control (ensuring compliance with the chain of command), and offers motivation and emotive support (building morale and cohesion) [1, p. 110]. In practice, commanders issue clear instructions with intent, while subordinates report status and needs; through these exchanges the organization maintains situational awareness. Importantly, communication is recognized as a social influence process: it is not neutral but actively shapes how individuals think and act. As one study notes, formal communication in an army unit creates a bond and mutual trust between superiors and their teams, while also performing motivational and persuasive roles [1, p. 112]. In this sense, orders and feedback become tools to align each soldier's attitudes with the mission and with each other.

A classic definition appears in Lipinski's review of military communication: if information flow in an army is highly structured, it is a chain-type system, meaning subordinates "cannot communicate directly with a similar position, but only with a supervisor" [1, p. 113]. In other words, the military relies heavily on formal, vertical channels. Such hierarchical flow has the advantage of clarity, but it can bottleneck feedback and peer support. Parallel to vertical lines, however, are the horizontal links that run between soldiers on the same level or in adjacent units. Lipinski explicitly defines these: "Vertical communication refers to the flow of information up and down in line with the order line, while horizontal communication is the flow of information between people working in the same workplace" [1, p. 114].

These distinctions matter because they fulfill different functions. Vertical channels enforce authority and synchronize commands, whereas horizontal channels build shared understanding and camaraderie. King argues that even



formal communication drills in military training serve this social purpose. Drawing on ethnography of British troops, he observes that collective drills – above all, the communication drills – are key social rituals that bind soldiers together [5, p. 495]. In other words, repeatedly practicing orders and responses instills a sense of teamwork and trust: each soldier knows how the other will act, which creates a powerful bond.

Chain-of-Command and Social Structure. The formal hierarchy deeply shapes these processes. In a military context, the role positions of sender and receiver are clearly defined by rank: officers typically issue orders, and enlisted personnel execute them [1, p. 115]. This means subordinates may not question or bypass commands, reinforcing discipline but also limiting open dialogue. Such rigid verticality can improve clarity in crisis but also suppress ground-level innovation and trust if overused. As Lipinski notes, informal communication channels often operate in parallel to this formal structure, hinting that troops find ways to connect outside official paths (for example, casual peer conversations) [1, p. 116].

Comparative Analysis: Uzbekistan, Russia, and NATO

Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan's armed forces illustrate the post-Soviet blend of hierarchy and gradual reform. Traditionally influenced by Soviet doctrine, the Uzbek military long emphasized a strict chain-of-command and loyalty to centralized authority. Recent reforms under President Mirziyoyev have aimed to modernize and professionalize the force. For example, Uzbekistan's 2017 Defense Doctrine explicitly called for military modernization and professional training to improve capabilities [4, p. 118]. President Mirziyoyev noted that many officials had "failed to live up to the trust placed in them" and lacked real connection with their troops [4, p. 121]. This suggests that historically, communication was too one-way. Today, Uzbekistan is leveraging partnerships (e.g. NATO's Partnership for Peace) to adopt Western communication and leadership models.

Russia. The Russian military is well-known for its strongly hierarchical, autocratic style. Recent analysis highlights chronic top-down communication problems in Russia's chain of command. One expert study notes that Russian forces have been "unable to decentralize decision-making" and struggle to communicate accurate information up and down the ranks [3, p. 3]. Wasielewski observes that a culture of "reliance on brutality to control" troops and corruption in logistics has been "detrimental to good order, discipline, morale, and unit cohesion" [3, p. 4].

NATO. In contrast, NATO emphasizes interoperability and shared communication doctrine across many national militaries. For example, NATO's Allied Command Transformation recently published a Strategic



Communications Fundamentals doctrine to align messaging and public affairs across all member states [7, p. 2]. The Allies also invest in joint exercises and conferences focused on information trust and cohesion [7, p. 3]. Overall, NATO's model integrates different national systems through doctrine and training, rather than imposing a single command hierarchy.

Socio-Psychological Implications

Stress Buffering and Resilience. Robust communication networks act as social support systems that mitigate stress. Empirical studies show that soldiers embedded in highly cohesive units experience less anxiety and PTSD after combat than those in low-cohesion units [6, p. 4]. This suggests that knowing your comrades have your back serves a stress-buffering role.

Leadership Trust and Command Climate. Trust in leaders is a critical outcome of effective communication. Campo Verde emphasizes, "a positive command climate" is fundamentally built on trust, respect, motivation, and open communication [2, p. 2]. Campo Verde recounts that subordinates "listen to and [are] influenced by those they trust" [2, p. 3].

Unit Cohesion and Mission Success. Ultimately, the socio-psychology of communication manifests in unit cohesion – the glue that keeps a military group together under stress. Soldiers form bonds when they share information and experiences. As the Human Performance Resource Center highlights, "cohesion takes shape when you actively engage in meaningful communication and make the most of opportunities to build trust" [6, p. 6].

Conclusion. In military settings, communication is not merely a technical act but a complex socio-psychological phenomenon. Vertical (hierarchical) channels ensure control and order, while horizontal (peer) channels foster cooperation and shared understanding. Across different forces, we see that systems blending both – combined with a culture of trust – produce the strongest units. Evidence shows that units with open, trustful communication enjoy higher cohesion and resilience, and their members suffer less trauma after combat [6, p. 4]; [2, p. 3]. Future military leaders and policymakers should therefore continue to develop communication training and doctrines and to build cultures that encourage honest dialogue.

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