WEAPONIZING COMMUNICATION. WORDS VS. BULLETS IN THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

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In the light of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the article is built around the aim of contributing to a better understanding of the current information environment, as it is necessary both for the public opinion and for the authorities to adapt and respond effectively to the security environment dynamics. The present paper seeks response to the following research question: "How did the Ukrainian Strategic Communication (StratCom) campaigns function in supporting the Ukrainian state to resist the first year of war?". For the development of the answer, we relied on a qualitative approach, analysing several discourses of the Ukrainian President in mass-media, in the first year of the war.

We started from identifying some key-aspects regarding the background of the Russian-Ukrainian relations that Kremlin has exploited in developing their hostile information campaigns, such as common historical landmarks or the religious, cultural and linguistic values shared by these two states. Next, we observed how these issues were included in the Russian officials' discourse through various messages. Further, we presented Ukraine's information strategy, implemented beginning with 2014 (after Crimea's annexation), that was mainly carried through their StratCom campaigns, so that in the final part of the article to analyse some elements of Ukraine's President discourses, starting with the first days of the war.

Our conclusions lead to the fact that Ukraine's StratCom campaigns have decisively contributed to supporting its resistance in the first year of constant attacks from an undeniably stronger enemy.

Keywords: Information Environment (IE); Public Communication; Hostile information campaign; Strategic Communication (StratCom); Russian-Ukrainian War; Hybrid Warfare.

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Introduction[1]

Today's information environment (IE) is characterized by constant dynamics and rapid changes, as the way people are interacting with the world around them has also changed fundamentally (NATO Standardization Office (NSO) 2020). IE may be the most comprehensive security environment, and the actual most large-scaled battlefield, being "comprised of the physical, virtual and the cognitive dimensions, in which humans disseminate and receive, interpret and process information to create knowledge, and the inter-relationship between them, as activities that take place in the physical and virtual dimensions create perceptions in the cognitive dimension" (NATO Standardization Office (NSO) 2020, 7). Moreover, in the age of hybrid conflicts, which involve a combination of different hostile actions, public communication has a great potential in supporting an actor's interests and objectives, as a wide range of effects can be produced in the cognitive dimension of the IE.

Evidence to date reveal that actors have exploited communication's potential in influencing perceptions and representations in two main different manners. On the one hand, aggressors have carried out hostile communication campaigns against their targets, promoting and pursuing their interests through propaganda and disinformation by using different means. We call this stance of communication *destructive*, as its main purpose is to mislead or deceive a targeted audience's perceptions of reality, in order to influence their behaviours and decisions, in the aggressor's advantage. In the military literature, this concept is called reflexive control[2].

On the other hand, actors have also employed communication means and techniques in peaceful purposes, such as maintaining public order – by informing their own residents with regard to law-matters, for instance, or to promote their core-values and principles in the world; in other cases, communication is used to counter hostile information campaigns. In this respect, we will name this stance of communication *constructive*, as its main purpose is to contribute to a public perception on reality as it is, supporting people to take decisions that best suits their purposes. We consider StratCom to be one of the forms of constructive communication (Cojocaru 2022).

In the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, our objective is to observe to what extent the belligerent parties have employed these two stances of communication during the last year and before, and what were the effects for each of them.

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[1] A.N.: Parts of this paper were presented via online participation in the International Conference *NATO in the Face of Emerging Security Challenges on its Eastern Flank*, held on March 31st, 2023, in the third section, "Russia and information warfare", and organised by War Studies University, Poland.

[2] Reflexive control – "a means of conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action" (Timothy 2004).

Thus, we have examined some aspects of Ukraine's information environment evolution, in three specific timeframes: the period immediately preceding 2014 – with emphasis on Kremlin's hostile information campaign upon the Ukrainian people; the period between 2014 and 2022 – with a focus on Ukraine's course of actions on combating the Russian information threats; and the first year of war (February 2022-February 2023) – with emphasis on the StratCom campaigns Ukraine carried out during this timeframe.

1. Russian Hostile Information Campaigns Targeting Ukraine, until 2014

Our analysis starts from the fact that before Russia initiated the conventional military actions against the Ukrainian state, they had been conducting a psychological warfare, where the hostile information campaigns were used as weapons upon both the Ukrainian *people and authorities*. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the causal mechanisms and relations that have introduced (or led to) the present hybrid[3] conflict by first identifying some background issues that Kremlin exploited in developing its strategy upon the Ukrainian state and its people.

As Russia and Ukraine have a complex and intertwined history which spans centuries, there is a series of *factual aspects* that Moscow relied on in their hostile information campaign. Our intent is to observe in which way these historical facts were used in the messages Russia used upon Ukraine *until 2014*.

1.1. Background of the Russian-Ukrainian Relations
Historical Landmarks
• There is a historical timeframe in the Middle Ages (9th to mid-13th century), when today's Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus were united under the Ancient Rus (or Kivean Rus), the first East-Slavic state. Over time, the Kievan Rus became increasingly fragmented and eventually dissolved, with its territories coming under the control of various regional powers. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the territories that today form Ukraine were part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, while Russia gradually expanded its territory to the East and South (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2023);

• In the late 18th century, Russia annexed much of what is now Ukraine, and the region became part of the Russian Empire. During this period, the Ukrainian language and culture were suppressed, and many Ukrainians were forced to assimilate into Russian culture (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2023);

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[3] The hybrid aspect implies the use of conventional military actions, along with other non-military ones; it involves "the synchronized use of multiple instruments of power tailored to specific vulnerabilities across the full spectrum of societal functions to achieve synergistic effects" – (Cullen and Reichborn-Kjennerud 2017).

• In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution of 1917, Ukraine briefly declared independence, but it was soon occupied by Soviet forces, and in 1922, it became one of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union, alongside Russia; during the Soviet era, Ukraine and Russia were subject to centralized control by the Communist Party, and their economies and societies were tightly integrated. However, tensions between the two republics simmered beneath the surface, and in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine declared independence (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2023).

Cultural and Linguistic Aspects

• Russia and Ukraine have common roots regarding the Orthodox *religion*, since 988, when "Prince Volodymyr I of Kyiv accepted Christianity and established a devout kingdom that became the predecessor to the modern states of Ukraine and Russia" (Houston and Mandaville 2022);

• Both Russian and Ukrainian *languages* have East Slavic roots, and also nowadays Russian is "the most important minority language" in Ukraine (Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. n.d.).

Thus, relations between Russia and Ukraine have been characterized by both *cooperation and conflict*, with ongoing disputes over issues such as territory, political influence, and energy supplies. Despite these tensions, the histories of Russia and Ukraine remain closely intertwined, with shared cultural and linguistic traditions, as well as economic and political ties. Kremlin has strategically exploited these facts in such a manner that supports Putin's plan of Russian *lost pride recovery*.

In order to understand how the preparation and execution of the Russian information campaigns were set, one must know that there were two important means that contributed to making it possible: "Russian national policy documents[4] and the mechanisms with which the Russian state controls the media and the narrative[5]" (NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence 2015, 9). Also, it is important to understand the Russian policy regarding their so-called "humanitarian direction" approach on *compatriots[6]*.

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[4] Some of Russia's strategic narrative aspects used in their information campaign against Ukraine are included within the *Russian Foreign Policy Review of 2007*, *the Russian State Security Strategy of 2009*, and also in the *Foreign Policy Concept of 2013* (NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence 2015, 9).

[5] The Russian power elite's dominance over the media has effectively established systematic authority over narratives. This authority over narratives entails mastery over the way information is understood. When an authoritarian government practices narrative control over an extended period, a significant segment of its population, lacking critical thinking, tends to perceive information in an exaggerated manner and adheres to a particular interpretation, even when it does not align with actual events (NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence 2015, 39).

[6] In the 2007 Russian Foreign Policy Review, there is a chapter titled "The Humanitarian Dimension of Foreign Policy", which delves into the concept of *Compatriots Abroad* and elucidates the imperative of safeguarding their interests. Furthermore, the section addressing Human Rights Challenges

1.2. Themes, Messages and Narratives
The Russian Narrative

A narrative is "a spoken or written account of events and information arranged in a logical sequence to influence the behaviour of a target audience" (NATO Strandardization Office n.d.).

NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence n.d.) has developed a report that analyses Russia's information campaign against Ukraine, leading up to the annexation of Crimea in 2014, which concludes that "Russia's narrative is largely based on historical memory and on a thorough understanding of its own audiences, that enables the leverage of historical memory: the Great Russian Empire, World War II and Nazi atrocities, and the collapse of the USSR" (NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence 2015, 5). Their analysis also emphasizes the existence of a specific trait for a narrative used in an information operation, namely that it centers around an unresolved issue or incomplete story. In this case, the incomplete story revolved around the belief that "fascism has not been extinguished" and urged the audience to eliminate fascists and those who follow Bandera[7] (banderovtsi)" (NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence 2015, 16-17).

Main Themes of the Russian Campaign

The Russian narrative stated above was reflected in several themes (NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence 2015), as follows:

• *"Ukrainians and Russians – one nation, united under the Russian World"* – Russian World which unites Eastern Slavs, implies that Russians and Ukrainians are one nation, and recognizes the natural supremacy of Russia, using historic justifications to legitimize Russia's actions in Ukraine (including the Crimean Referendum);

• *"Clash of Civilisations"* – Russian Slavic Orthodox Civilization is seen in opposition to the "decadent" Europe;

• *"Ukraine is central to Eurasia"* – positioning Ukraine as integral to Eurasianism and the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union, and at the same time portraying it as a divided and unstable country, plagued by corruption and political infighting;

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underscores Russia's obligation to adopt an assertive stance on crucial matters, notably the protection of the human rights of compatriots. These compatriots are defined as the "tens of millions of (our) Russian people" who were artificially displaced from their historical homeland (Russia) following the dissolution of the USSR (NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence 2015).

[7] Stepan Bandera, a Ukrainian political activist, led the Ukrainian nationalist movement in Western Ukraine during the 1930s and early 1940s, aiming for Ukrainian independence from the USSR. They considered the Nazis as potential allies in their fight against the Soviets. In 1959, it's believed the KGB was ordered to assassinate Bandera. He is now a symbol for Ukrainian nationalists but viewed as a Nazi collaborator by Moscow, which refers to Ukrainian nationalists as *banderovtsi*. Russia used the Bandera narrative during the Euromaidan to discredit it as nationalist and neo-Nazi, stoking fears of potential rights violations against "non-Ukrainians" (NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence 2015, 16-17).

• *"Ukrainians are not an independent nation"* – promoting the idea that Ukraine is an artificial state, and portraying its people as a pseudo-nation unable to administer their own country and sustain their statehood;

• *"The Great Patriotic War continues, the fascists in Ukraine have not been eliminated yet"* – referring to the Great Patriotic War thus bringing out the hatred of Nazism and relating it to the Euromaidan protesters who are labelled as nationalists, Nazis and fascists posing a threat to the ethnically Russian part of Ukraine's population;

• *"The West is divided"* – attempting to divide the West by utilizing the differing interests of EU Member States and positioning the USA in opposition to the EU (NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence 2015, 4), (Pomerantsev and Weiss 2014).

1.3. Crimea Referendum and Annexation

Following the Euromaidan, a referendum was held in Ukraine in March 2014, offering Ukrainian people two options to choose from: to join Russia, or to restore the 1992 Constitution that granted Crimea greater autonomy within Ukraine. The results were overwhelmingly in favour of joining Russia, with 96.77% of the votes, and 2.51% in favour of restoring the 1992 Constitution. However, the referendum was widely criticized by the international community as being illegal and illegitimate. Ukraine, the United States, the European Union, and many other countries refused to recognize the results of the referendum and condemned Russia's actions in annexing Crimea (BBC News 2014).

Thus, we believe that the referendum's results proved that the Russian information campaign carried out until 2014 has achieved their objectives (at least regarding the targeted audience: Crimean residents), and that it was a part of Putin's expansion-strategy.

2. Towards a More Cohesive Ukrainian Information Strategy

The conflict that started in 2014 in Eastern Ukraine has involved a complex array of military, political, economic, and information strategies and measures. Following Crimea's annexation, Ukraine's Government has pursued a range of Strategic Communication efforts, including several measures to properly inform and also shape domestic and international public opinion, counter Russian propaganda, and promote the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government.

One of the greatest efforts regarding Strategic Communication was the establishment of the Center for Strategic Communications – *StratCom Ukraine*, in 2014, through which the Ukrainian Government outlines and promotes a series of measures, as follows:

• *Developing a centralized information strategy*: in the early days of the conflict, Ukraine lacked a cohesive messaging strategy. However, over time, the Government has developed a more centralized approach, including by establishing a *Ministry of Information Policy*, in December 2014 and a *Strategic Communications Center – StratCom Ukraine* in 2015 (StratCom Ukraine n.d.). These are responsible for coordinating public information campaigns and countering disinformation;

• *Engaging in information warfare*: Ukraine has sought to counter Russian propaganda with its own information operations, including the use of social media, digital advertising, and strategic messaging. For example, the Ukrainian Government has worked to counter Russian narratives about the conflict and promote its own version of events, namely reality in data and facts;

• *Promoting Ukraine's international image*: Ukraine has also worked to improve its international image through Strategic Communications efforts. For example, the Government has worked to promote Ukraine's cultural and historical heritage, as well as its democratic values;

• *Cooperating with international media*: Ukraine has also sought to use international media to promote its message and counter Russian propaganda. This has included working with Western media outlets to provide accurate reporting on the conflict, as well as engaging in public diplomacy efforts to promote Ukraine's perspective (StratCom Ukraine n.d.), (Ukraine Government n.d.).

• In the following, allow us to make a review of some of the most important information projects and campaigns that Ukraine carried out between 2014 and 2022:

• "*Development of a model of state Strategic Communications*" – the main task for this campaign was to implement a systemic approach regarding a coordinated interaction between state's authorities, in order to create "reliable and effective state communications" (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.). The final result was Ukraine's president approval of the Doctrine of Information Security, which is based on the specified model, on February 25, 2017 (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.);

• "*The concept of a Strategic Communications Training Center at a military university*" – supporting the main purpose of building Strategic Communications capabilities, this project's task was "the introduction of a system of professional training in communicative disciplines of the defence forces" (StratCom Ukraine n.d.);

• "*Army. Second birth*" – before 2014, Ukraine's Armed Forces image was poor in most Ukrainian citizens' perception, and, therefore, one of the most prominent campaign had to combat Russian propaganda on this topic and show the world their evolution and achievements. The results were very satisfactory for the Ukrainian security culture, as the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence has assesesed (Ministry of Defense of Ukraine n.d.);

• "*Countering Gender-Based Violence in Conflict-Affected Regions of Eastern Ukraine*" – this project started as violence upon women and girls in the East of Ukraine

has increased, since Russian hostilities have started. Authorities organized trainings and five round tables in order to combat this fact, and also conducted "a large-scale campaign called "*Break the Circle*" in the Eastern oblasts to raise awareness about preventing violence and what to do in case of violence" (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.);

• "*#MyUkraineIs*" – a project that promotes the image of Ukraine and its potential in adhering to European values and principles, as modern Ukraine (after 2014) promotes dignity, freedom and creativity as their new core-values. In subsidiarity, this project has developed a communication campaign, called "Ukraine. People's Cut" referring to what modern Ukraine wish to eliminate from their old, Russian-driven perspectives. They have also developed a website (myukraineis.org), other social-media campaign with the hashtag #MyUkraineIs on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and broadcasted a short video in this regard (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.);

• "*Let My People Go*" – since Russian aggressions started in Eastern Ukraine, many Ukrainians have been taken hostages. Under the umbrella of this campaign, a brochure has been developed in eight languages, presenting the stories of 11 Ukrainians and, as well, a Facebook campaign has been developed in order to support Ukraine's mission to promote its message to the world (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.);

• *Exhibition* "*Warrior. Freedom Through the Ages*" – aiming to revive the prestige of the Ukrainian military services, this exhibition broadcasts the image of a Ukrainian warrior, throughout one thousand years of history (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.);

• *Demobilization 2016* – a project to support the demobilized Ukrainian soldiers returning home from the battlefield, in order to provide helpful information in a simple and clear way, regarding "instructions on how to receive government social assistance, guidance on issues such as housing, medical care, discounts on utility bills, professional adaptation, prosthetics, and psychological help" (StratCom Ukraine n.d.). Also, the project developed a website, demobilization.info that "became the first government resource to provide quality information for service members" (StratCom Ukraine n.d.).

3. Ukraine's Information Campaigns since the Beginning of the War: Public Requests and International Responses

Statistics reveal that before 2022, Russia boasted more than four times as many active military personnel as Ukraine. Additionally, Russia's arsenal included 13 times as many aircraft, four times the number of armoured vehicles, and a naval fleet that was 16 times larger than Ukraine's. In 2021, Russia ranked fifth globally in terms of military expenditure, spending nearly 66 billion U.S. dollars, while Ukraine allocated almost six billion U.S. dollars for its military (Statista 2023). Therefore,

on February 2022, when Russia started the war, a simple logical deduction would have hardly predicted that Ukraine could resist for too long in facing an undeniably stronger enemy.

Even so, being aware of the military disproportions, in the first days of war, Ukraine's President, Volodymyr Zelensky, understood his fundamental duty, which was not that of a military strategist placing battalions on a map. Instead, he assumed the role of a communicator, a living embodiment of the state, whose capacity to capture and retain the global spotlight could play a crucial role in determining the survival or demise of his nation (Shuster 2022). Thus, he put on the military-style coat, and joined his soldiers in their efforts to counter the Russian attackers.

Also, he has made multiple public calls on the citizens of Ukraine to participate in defending their country, and soon the result of these public appeals had a very positive outcome: not only that Ukrainian residents responded to his request, but also Ukrainians abroad, and a large number of volunteers from all over the world have joined the Ukrainian army in this battle. However, the volunteers' help was not enough for Kyiv to stand the war, and, therefore, Ukraine's authorities, mainly through the voice of their president, have made repetitive other calls to the international community, using various means of communication: television, social networks, the press, official international visits, videoconferences, invoking Russia's illegitimate actions such as war crimes that violate the rules of international law.

To show their disagreement with these war crimes, the majority of Western countries, such as European Union (EU) members, Switzerland, the United Kingdom (UK), and the U.S. imposed sanctions on Russia. The restrictions targeted the financial sector, individuals affiliated with the Government, and exports of high-tech products to Russia, among others. The EU also banned Russian airlines from its airspace, while Germany halted the certification of the gas pipeline Nord Stream 2. Albania, Australia, Canada, Japan, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan also announced sanctions (Statista 2023). Major international companies, such as Apple, H&M, Ikea, Inditex, and McDonald's suspended operations in Russia (Statista 2023).

On the other hand, China and India took a neutral stance in the conflict, while some countries showed their support for Russia: Belarus, Cuba, Iran, Myanmar, Syria, and Venezuela officially supported Russia (Statista 2023). In addition, several actors have also supported Ukraine with bilateral aid. The United States donated the largest share of GDP, Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries donated the most significant percentage of their gross domestic product (GDP) to help Ukraine, until January 15, 2023.

Not only state-actors were concerned with the Ukrainian support, but also citizens from all over the world that offered humanitarian aid and volunteered

themselves to help Ukraine by different means. One major support from foreign citizens was in terms of helping the Ukrainian residents that have fled the war zone. People in other countries have received Ukrainians in their homes, offered them food, clothes and other necessary supplies, they have created numerous non-profit groups, offered psychological and medical aid, and welcomed the refugees with generosity and empathy. Statista developed a report on public opinion regarding different issues on the Russian-Ukrainian war, on a group of 19,000 respondents, from 27 countries. Among the conclusions drawn resulted that nearly three quarters of the respondents in 27 countries worldwide believed that their nations should take in refugees from Ukraine (Statista 2023). These being said, we believe that Ukraine's President public discourses were an important factor in modelling the worlds' citizens perception regarding the war and, subsidiary, their behaviour in order to receive their support.

Following the analysis of a causal relation ("X caused Y"), our research is based on a qualitative approach, with an emphasis on the *causal mechanisms* that made the effect possible. In other words, we started from the presumption that *Ukraine's Stratcom course of action* (X) caused/led to *Ukraine's resistance during over one year of war* (Y) in the war with Russia, an undeniably stronger enemy. Even though this may be a debatable statement, as others can argue that there are a series of other reasons to consider for Ukraine's resistance, our focus stays on answering the research question introduced in the beginning of the article: "*How* did the Ukrainian StratCom campaign *function* in supporting the Ukrainian state to resist this first year of war, against most expectations?".

In order to answer, we considered necessary to understand what prompted those who offered their support to do so, taking into consideration (1) Ukraine's public requests during this past year, (2) how they reasoned these claims, (3) what they have received following these requests and (4) from what countries (see Table no. 1).

Russia's military power is uncontestably higher than Ukraine's, comparing their military personnel, military capabilities, and military investments (Statista 2023). In terms of these three main factors of military power, one can observe how these were also Zelensky's main public claims to the world, as well as his requests on sanctioning Russia, in order to diminish its economic power that would have fed the war. In formulating his claims, the Ukrainian President invoked democracy and its values, the violation of international law and the civilian victims and war damages, explaining this way the *illegitimacy* of the Russian military actions, and presenting the Russian threat as a menace to the world, to the state of peace and order, and to democracy as well.

Table no. 1: How did the Ukrainian StratCom campaigns function?

1. Ukraine's public requests	2. Reasoning requests through Zelensky's public statements	3. Support received	4. State and non-state actors supporting Ukraine[8]
A call to national and international volunteers to join the fight against the Russian invasion	• "Anyone who wants to join the defence of Ukraine, Europe and the world can come and fight side by side with the Ukrainians against the Russian *war criminals*" (McKernan 2022) • "friends of *peace and democracy*" (McKernan 2022) • "This is the beginning of a war against Europe, against European structures, against *democracy*, against *basic human rights*, against a *global order of law, rules* and *peaceful coexistence*" (McKernan 2022) • According to a 2016 decree, "foreigners had the *right* to join the Ukrainian army for military service on a voluntary basis" (McKernan 2022). • key message on the platform for enrolment as a volunteer to join the international legion of defence of Ukraine – "*Freedom* is a choice. Join the *brave!*" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine n.d.). • "We have nothing to lose but our own freedom" (Bella and Timsit 2022)	• National and international volunteers: more than 20.000 fighters from 52 countries, as per November 2022 (Guarino 2022) • In 2022 Spain created a Training Coordination Centre in Toledo, a programme meant to train up to 400 Ukrainian conscripts once in two months, as part of the European Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine. 24 EU countries have offered training modules and personnel; by the end of 2023, the mission will have trained 30,000 Ukrainian soldiers (Reuters 2023)	• Ukrainian diaspora and foreign citizens • fighter volunteers from 52 worldwide countries – US and 24 Western States, (Abend 2022), (Statista 2023)
Ukraine asks the world leaders to impose sanctions on Russia	• "Zelensky urged U.S. companies still doing business in Russia to leave." "American companies must leave Russia's market because it is flooded with our blood" (Public Broadcasting Service 2022) • «In a speech to the Italian Parliament […] Zelensky urged the country's MPs to freeze all assets belonging to the Russian elite and to declare a full trade embargo, starting with oil. He said: "You know very well who orders troops to go to war and who propagates this. Almost all of them use Italy as a place to rest. Do not be a resort for murderers"» (Solomons and Wynn-Davies 2022)	Sanctions on Russia[9] • Since February 2022, and as of February 2023, the United States has imposed over two thousand list-based sanctions on Russia. Switzerland placed the second largest number of list-based sanctions on Russia after that date, followed by New Zealand, United Kingdom, Belgium, Australia, Japan and Poland (Statista 2023). • Organizations worldwide imposed 10,608 restrictions on individuals from Russia. Furthermore, 3,431 list-based sanctions were placed on entities over that period (Statista 2023).	United States, Switzerland, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Belgium, EU, Australia, Japan, Poland (Statista 2023)

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[8] A full list of sanctions can be found at URL: //www.statista.com/topics/9087/russia-ukraine-war-2022/#topicOverview
[9] In hierarchical order.

1. Ukraine's public requests	2. Reasoning requests through Zelensky's public statements	3. Support received	4. State and non-state actors supporting Ukraine[10]
Financial aid and military capabilities	• "Zelensky asks Europe for more aid, calls Russia the 'biggest anti-European force' in modern world" (Amaro 2023) • "The sooner we get heavy long-range weapons and our pilots get modern planes, Emmanuel, the earlier our pilots can get modern planes, Olaf, the more powerful will be our tank coalition" (Amaro 2023) • "Your money is not charity. It's an investment in the global security and democracy that we handle in the most responsible way." (Le Monde with AP 2022) • "Iranian deadly drones sent to Russia in hundreds became a threat to our critical infrastructure. That is how one terrorist has found the other. It is just a matter of time when they will strike against your other allies if we do not stop them now." (European Pravda 2022) • "The world is too interconnected and too interdependent to allow someone to stay aside and at the same time to feel safe when such a battle continues. Our two nations are allies in this battle and next year will be a turning point, I know it – the point where Ukrainian courage and American resolve must guarantee the future of our common freedom, the freedom of people who stand for their values." (Liptak and Vazquez 2022)	Foreign aid • *Bilateral Aid donations* Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries donated the most significant percentage of their gross domestic product (GDP) to help Ukraine until January 2023. (Statista 2023) Estonia contributed nearly 1.1 percent of GDP in bilateral aid, followed by Latvia with almost one percent of GDP. Among countries outside CEE, the United States donated the largest share of GDP. (Le Monde with AP 2022)	Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, United States, Bulgaria, Norway, United Kingdom, Canada, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Denmark, Portugal, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Finland, Slovenia, Luxemburg, Greece, France, Italy, Croatia, Belgium, Spain, Switzerland, Hungary, Australia, Ireland, Japan, Cyprus, Taiwan, Malta, Turkey, New Zeeland, South Korea. (Statista 2023)
		• *Military capabilities* "The United States committed to provide nearly 23 billion Euros worth of military aid to Ukraine until November 2022, followed by Germany, the United Kingdom, and several other Western countries." (Statista 2023) • US representatives: "Helping equip our friends in Eastern Europe to win tcapabilities to menace Americhis war is also a direct investment in reducing Putin's future a, threaten our allies and contest our core interests" (Thomas and Andrew 2022)	United States, Germany, United Kingdom, Poland, Canada, Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, Latvia, Turkey, Estonia, France, Australia, Norway, Denmark, Czechia, Finland, Lithuania, Croatia, Belgium, Slovakia (Statista 2023)

We argue that the world's response in sending their aid or even volunteering to join arms with the Ukrainians is strongly related to the fact that *Ukraine raised empathy*[10] among international state and non-state actors and citizens, as those who have offered their support share the same core-values as modern Ukraine promotes.

Moreover, we believe that the whole democratic world responded in a positive manner to the Ukrainian StratCom campaigns, and that promoting cooperation upon

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[10] In order to enable empathy, it is implied that both the transmitter and the receiver must share some common values, as this notion refers to "the ability to understand and share the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of others" (Eisenberg and Miller 1987).

shared values is a key-aspect of Strategic Communications. From our point of view, the effect was not only an unexpected year of resistance, but also a demonstration of cohesion from many democratic states that cooperate and act in accordance with the democratic values for which they stand.

Conclusions

We conclude that Ukrainian resistance has been decisively enhanced through its StratCom, that raised empathy and finally won the hearts and minds of many international decision makers and citizens around the world, taking into account all the international support Ukraine received in response to their public requests during the first year of war.

The ongoing war does not only affect Russia and Ukraine, bringing upon security implications at least at regional level and also bearing other kind of implications – such as economic – at global level as well. Thus, world actors should understand that promoting, acting and responding in accordance with democratic values such as freedom or justice – through ethical and moral means – can bring together all those who believe in them, in what may be seen as a powerful coalition of democracies. Moreover, promoting and raising security culture, as well as critical thinking, through different Strategic Communication campaigns, may not only support a state to combat hybrid threats from the information area, but can also be a measure to prevent them.

Furthermore, one may see how hostile information campaigns erode over time, as many of the themes and narratives promoted by Kremlin were disproven and, as a consequence, Russia has lost much of their public discourses reliability, as well as much of its influence.

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