

---

*Peer-reviewed*

---

## **(Re)Framing the Frontlines: The Role of Strategic Communication in the Russian-Ukrainian War**

### **(Re)Formulování frontových linií: Role strategické komunikace v rusko-ukrajinské válce**

**Iulia-Alexandra Cojocar<sup>1</sup>, Marinel-Adi Mustăț<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> “Carol I” National Defence University, Bucharest, Romania

**Abstract:** This paper examines the role of strategic communication in military operations, with a focus on its impact during the first year of the Russian-Ukrainian war. Using a process-tracing methodology, the study explores whether Ukrainian strategic communication was decisive in resisting Russian attacks. Our findings indicate that strategic communication functioned as a central component of Ukraine’s defence. Effective messaging mobilized broad support from diverse actors, including state entities with no regional stakes and non-state contributors such as civilians, volunteer fighters, and organizations, driven by motivations beyond self-interest. Ukraine’s resilience stemmed not from a deceptive Russian strategy (i.e., a lack of genuine intent to engage in a full-scale war), but from its bold counter-offensive, bolstered by international aid - support amplified and sustained by the strategic communication efforts that shaped global perceptions and secured critical assistance.

**Abstrakt:** Tento článek se věnuje roli strategické komunikace ve vojenských operacích se zaměřením na její dopad v průběhu prvního roku rusko-ukrajinské války. S využitím metodologie sledování procesů studie zkoumá, zda byla ukrajinská strategická komunikace rozhodující při odolávání ruským útokům. Naše zjištění ukazují, že strategická komunikace byla ústřední složkou obrany Ukrajiny. Účinná komunikace mobilizovala širokou podporu různých aktérů, včetně státních subjektů bez regionálních zájmů a nestátních přispěvatelů jako civilistů, dobrovolných bojovníků a organizací, kteří se řídili motivacemi nad rámec vlastních zájmů. Odolnost Ukrajiny nebyla důsledkem klamné ruské strategie (tj. absence skutečného záměru vést válku v plném rozsahu), ale její odvážné protiofenzívy podpořené mezinárodní pomocí – podporou, která byla posílena a udržována strategickým komunikačním úsilím, jež formovalo globální vnímání a zajistilo zásadní pomoc.

**Keywords:** Case-study; Empirical Research; Hybrid Warfare; Process-tracing; Russian-Ukrainian War; Strategic Communication/(StratCom).

**Klíčová slova:** Případová studie; hybridní válka; sledování procesů; rusko-ukrajinská válka; strategická komunikace / StratCom.

## INTRODUCTION

The role of strategic communication in hybrid warfare has frequently been discussed in the literature in a largely speculative manner (Wallenius and Nilsson 2019). This paper aims to address this gap by empirically analysing the role of strategic communication in supporting military operations within a hybrid security context, focusing on the first year of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

Scientific advancements have given rise to disruptive technologies while shifts in strategic thinking reveal a growing emphasis on soft (and sharp) power. These evolutions have contributed to the emergence of new forms of hybrid warfare, including informational, psychological, and cognitive operations. In response, military analysts advocate for a comprehensive re-evaluation, reframing, and modernization of existing conceptual frameworks in security and defence studies. These efforts should prioritize generating actionable knowledge to effectively inform and support decision-makers in crafting responses that meet the demands and challenges of contested and rapidly changing operational environments.

A recurring theme in both theoretical and practical discussions emphasizes the significant potential of strategic communication in tackling the complexities arising from the evolving phenomenon of hybrid conflicts. In response to critiques regarding the lack of empirical studies addressing strategic communication theory in security and defence studies, this article aims to identify existing data that either support or weaken the relevance of this conjecture. To achieve this aim, we conducted a process-tracing case study, analysing the extent to which Ukraine's strategic communication contributed to the achievement of its security and defence objectives during the first year following Russia's invasion.

We argue that the empirical study of strategic communication theory is essential, especially in the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. By examining Ukraine's efforts to shape its narrative and engage diverse stakeholders, researchers can uncover testable insights into effective communication strategies during crises. This understanding not only contributes to the refinement of theoretical frameworks but also offers evidence-based practical lessons for governments and organizations managing complex security and geopolitical challenges.

## 1 BACKGROUND – A CONCISE LITERATURE REVIEW

From a multidisciplinary perspective<sup>1</sup>, strategic communication is defined as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its mission” (Hallahan, et al. 2007, 3). Over time, the study of strategic communication has provided clarity on various aspects of its theory, such as the deliberate and intentional nature of specific practices, the goal-oriented approach to achieving predefined outcomes, and the involvement of practitioners who communicate in the public sphere on behalf of communicative entities. Accordingly, specialists offer a comprehensive definition of strategic communication as “the practice of deliberate and purposive communication that a communication agent enacts in the public sphere on behalf of a communicative entity to reach set goals” (Holtzhausen and Zerfass 2013, 74). This definition highlights the primary objective of strategic communication, which is to maintain “a healthy reputation for the communicative entity in the public sphere” (Holtzhausen and Zerfass 2015, 4).

While it is widely accepted that strategic communication has its roots in the military domain (Paul, 2011; Farwell, 2012; Holtzhausen and Zerfass, 2015; Nothhaft and Schölzel, 2015), this niche has been rather excluded from the multidisciplinary approach due to its possible associations with notions such as manipulation and control, propaganda or information warfare (Holtzhausen and Zerfass 2015, 12; Zerfass, et al. 2018, 489-490; Wallenius and Nilsson 2019, 404). Nevertheless, the military perspective has gained much interest in current expert debates (Zerfass, et al. 2018, 489-490), as it offers a morally acceptable alternative to the use of force within a conflict, while providing cost-effective means of pursuing and achieving security objectives (Zerfass, et al. 2018, 489).

In the field of security and defence studies, strategic communications<sup>2</sup> is often defined in ways that align with military approaches. Bolt and Haiden’s (2019) definition is particularly influential: “a holistic approach to communication based on values and interests that encompasses everything an actor does to achieve objectives in a contested environment.” Also, In NATO terminology, strategic communications represents “the coordinated and appropriate use of NATO communications activities and capabilities in support of Alliance policies, operations and activities, and in order to advance NATO’s aims” (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence n.d.). Furthermore, another understanding of the concept is that of strategic communications *mindset*,

<sup>1</sup> The first issue of *The International Journal of Strategic Communication* debuts with an article in which the authors analyse key aspects of strategic communication from the perspective of six disciplines: management, marketing, public relations, technical communication, political communication, and information/social marketing campaigns (Hallahan, et al. 2007, 3). In addition, debates on this topic also gained interest in other domains, such as health communication, environmental communication, or business communication (Holtzhausen and Zerfass 2013, 74).

<sup>2</sup> It is to be noted that within the literature there is an alternation between “strategic communication” and “strategic communications”. The plural form is most often used in the military literature. While there is no certain conceptual difference generally admitted, Farwell (2012, xviii) points out that in the emerging phase of the field, “public affairs had used the term ‘strategic communications’- plural - but limited the meaning of that term to informing, not influencing”. Today, within NATO documents, there is a consistency of using the plural form of the term.

which holds that *everything communicates*. This perspective views military capabilities and activities not merely as tools for physical effect, but as communicative acts in their own right – aimed primarily at producing cognitive effects rather than serving as ends in themselves (NATO Standardization Office 2023, 12).

In line with existing definitions and approaches, this study conceptualizes strategic communication as a comprehensive and deliberate process that integrates both words and actions to achieve desired effects - such as influencing target audiences, shaping the information environment, reinforcing institutional credibility, and supporting operational objectives. This understanding aligns with NATO's doctrine, which emphasizes coherence between communication and behaviour, and is particularly pertinent in addressing contemporary military and security challenges.

Amid the rapid evolution of hybrid warfare, one of the most critical roles of strategic communication in contemporary security studies lies in its potential to effectively address hybrid threats. While a substantial body of literature examines the theoretical foundations of strategic communication in the context of hybrid warfare (e.g., Heap, Hansen, and Gill 2021; NATO Standardization Office 2023; The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies n.d.; Boswinkel et al. 2022; Kertysova, Rademaker, and Sweijs 2019), empirical research on how specific strategic communication activities determine desired effects in actual conflict settings remains scarce. Scholars encounter major limitations in studying strategic communication effects in the military domain due to imprecise and inconsistent measures of effectiveness, challenges in establishing causality, methodological constraints, operational complexity, and restricted access to classified information (Wallenius and Nilsson 2019, 407-408).

Empirical research on the effects of strategic communication in conflict settings underscores its pivotal role in shaping operational outcomes, public perception, and institutional legitimacy. Studies on military engagements such as the Iraq War reveal how strategic messaging was employed by the U.S. Department of Defense to influence public opinion and sustain policy support through impression management techniques (Audia, Rousseau and Stimmler 2023). Within hybrid warfare, strategic communication has been shown to function as a critical tool for integrating psychological operations and countering disinformation, particularly in the context of the Russian–Ukrainian conflict (Salnikova, Sivokha and Ivashchenko 2019). NATO's strategic response during the 2014 Ukraine crisis further illustrates the use of coordinated messaging and public diplomacy to mitigate adversarial narratives and reinforce alliance unity (Uzun 2021). At the organizational level, effective communication strategies have been linked to enhanced resilience and leadership credibility in defence institutions (Kacała 2016), while broader sectoral analyses in Ukraine point to strategic communication as a linchpin in the adaptive capacity of national security frameworks (Kushnir and Izhutova 2021). Despite these insights, specialists argue there *remains a notable deficiency in empirical research demonstrating the practical effectiveness of strategic communication in real-world military operations* (Wallenius and Nilsson 2019), suggesting a gap between theoretical expectations and operational evidence.

In this context, the primary aim of our paper is to contribute to bridging the gap in the literature by empirically examining the role of strategic communication in support of

military operations within the framework of hybrid warfare. To achieve this, we conducted a process-tracing case study focusing on the first year of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The rationale for the case study was to assess whether empirical evidence supports the theoretical proposition that, in the context of hybrid conflict, the effective use of strategic communication alongside military actions significantly contributes to achieving security objectives.

At the outset, it was essential to establish the criteria for selecting a case suitable for this study. Accordingly, we identified four preliminary conditions: (a) the conflict under analysis must be of a hybrid nature; (b) at least one of the actors involved must have employed strategic communication during the conflict; (c) it must be possible to clearly identify and articulate the primary objective of the actor utilizing strategic communication; and (d) the outcome of the conflict must already be known.

Given that the Russian-Ukrainian war, started with Russia's invasion on February 24, 2022, has already been demonstrated to involve both conventional and unconventional/hybrid actions (Ioniță 2023; Marahrens and Schröfl 2024), and considering Ukraine's explicit emphasis on strategic communication efforts – primarily aimed at countering and preventing the Russian threat – we considered this conflict as the most appropriate and relevant case for analysis.

We identified Ukraine's primary security objective as defending the independence and sovereignty of the Ukrainian state against Russian attacks. Given that the war was ongoing at the time of the research, our analysis focused exclusively on its first year. Ukraine's resistance during this period can be considered anomalous, given the significant power disparity between the two states. Based on the outcome of the war's first year, it can be assessed that this objective was achieved. For clarity and fluency throughout the paper, we encapsulated this outcome using the phrase *Ukraine resisted*.

We set out to determine whether Ukraine's strategic communication played a decisive role in achieving this outcome, or whether other factors (variables) were more critical, rendering strategic communication relatively irrelevant in meeting this security objective<sup>3</sup>. To address this aim, we employed a **process-tracing case study methodology**, which is specifically suited for analyzing a hypothesis in relation to competing explanations.

---

<sup>3</sup> An essential aspect to highlight for a proper understanding of this study is that, in essence, Ukraine employs strategic communication as a tool to globally articulate and promote its commitment to democratic values. Consequently, during the war, strategic communication can be viewed as a means of national defence, effectively emphasizing the protection of democratic principles and targeting audiences that uphold democracy at its core.

### 3 RESULTS

The process-tracing research design consisted of seven predefined steps (Ricks and Liu 2018), as follows:

#### 3.1 The first step: formulating the main and the rival hypotheses, based on theories existing in the literature

The main hypothesis was: *(H1) Ukraine's effective engagement in strategic communication has played a decisive role in securing the support of Ukrainian citizens and various international actors, thereby contributing significantly to the achievement of its primary security objective: resisting (defending) against Russian attacks.*

This hypothesis is framed through the lens of both hybrid conflict theory and strategic communication theory. Hybrid conflict theory posits that modern warfare strategies encompass a range of measures beyond traditional military actions, which are synchronized and combined to achieve specific strategic outcomes (Hoffman 2007; Hoffman 2009; McCuen 2008; Cullen and Reichborn-Kjennerud 2017). This approach is evident in the Russian-Ukrainian war, where both actors have employed a mix of offensive and defensive measures - informational, economic, and political - alongside military actions (Ioniță 2023; Marahrens and Schröfl 2024). Meanwhile, strategic communication theory asserts that the effective implementation of strategic communication activities plays a critical role in achieving the security objectives of the communicator (Paul 2011; Farwell 2012; NATO Standardization Office 2023).

Rival hypotheses (RH)<sup>4</sup>:

*RH1 - The entities providing support to Ukraine acted out of their own self-interests - rather than being influenced by Ukrainian strategic communication - ultimately contributed to the achievement of Ukraine's primary security objective: resisting and defending against Russian attacks.*

This hypothesis is grounded in realist theory, which highlights the centrality of power, security, and self-interest in shaping the behaviour of actors within the international system. According to this theory, in a competitive and anarchic global environment, states prioritize their own security and survival, which are the primary factors driving the actions of international actors (Wohlforth 2010).

*RH2 - Russia's deceptive approach, characterized by a lack of genuine intent to engage in a full-scale war - employing only a small fraction of its arsenal and primarily aiming to deter Ukraine from aligning with democratic values - contributed to Ukraine's ability to resist after the first year of the conflict.*

<sup>4</sup> In the early stages of this study, we formulated a larger number of rival hypotheses, but, according to the guidelines from the literature, we only tested those that rely on existing theories and concepts, and which would have had a strong enough relevance to counter the main hypothesis.

The theoretical foundation of this hypothesis is rooted in the theory of (Russian) military deception, known as *maskirovka*, which outlines how Russia has historically developed and employed various tactics of deception and disinformation in warfare to mislead opponents and achieve its strategic objectives. In this case, the hypothesis assumes that Russia's military operation in Ukraine is primarily driven by imperialistic ambitions, rather than the officially stated objectives for the invasion - such as protecting ethnic Russians or countering a "neo-Nazi" government in Kyiv – as argued by specialists (Marples 2022).

### 3.2 The second step: defining the timeline for analysis and sequencing events within this period

To provide essential context for the analysed process, we began with February 2014, marking the start of Russia's illegal annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. Although the focus of the study is on the actions undertaken during the first year of the war, data collected from February 2014 to February 2022 serves to strengthen the argument for the relevance of the case study. This timeline demonstrates that the first two preliminary conditions are met: (1) an ongoing conflict between the two states, which began in 2014 with Russia employing hybrid warfare tactics against Ukraine, and (2) one of the states, Ukraine, actively engaging in strategic communication as part of its efforts in this war<sup>5</sup>. The conflict between the two states escalates in February 2022 into a full-scale hybrid warfare, with Russia's military invasion of Ukraine (implying both conventional and unconventional means).

We opted to analyse only the first year of the war, as eligible data can be collected for this timeframe, and as Ukraine's resistance might be assessed as a security peculiarity<sup>6</sup> even only for this period.

### 3.3 The third step: construction of the causal graph

A causal graph is a tool which establishes the independent variables, thus focusing on the link between the explanation and the outcome in question. Thus, we revisited

<sup>5</sup> Relevant evidence for the case can be assessed within this timeframe, such as Ukraine's declared intention to align with democratic values in opposition to Russian autocratic principles, under whose influence it had been for a long time. During this period, Ukraine began making significant efforts in this direction, including initiating projects to modernize and equip its military, implementing reforms in the legislative framework related to security and defence, establishing various projects and partnerships for international cooperation with Western states, and enhancing its strategic communication efforts.

<sup>6</sup> Some specialists argue that "Ukraine's ability to survive the brutal onslaught of a full-scale Russian military invasion in February 2022 might appear to have been little short of a miracle" (Sanders 2023).

the hypotheses stated in the first step and constructed a causal graph for each of them (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Possible Causal Pathways Leading to Ukraine's Resistance During the First Year of War

### 3.4 The fourth step: identifying alternative choices or events

This step refers to the possible changes in the situation if, at one of the given moments, other decisions had been made or other events had happened than the ones that actually occurred. We identified the following alternatives:

- Ukraine could have been constrained by capacity or have decided not to employ strategic communication.
- International actors could have had no interests of their own in the region
- Russia could have acted more forcefully (excluding nuclear weapons).

### 3.5 The fifth step: counterfactual outcomes

This step is closely connected to the fourth step, and involved identifying counterfactual outcomes that would have occurred if the previously identified alternatives had been realized within the scenario. This step is crucial, as the analysis of hypothetical predictions requires the consideration of at least one plausible alternative outcome; without it, no real choice has occurred, making process-tracing unnecessary (Ricks and Liu 2018, 844).

To accomplish steps 4 and 5, (i.e. identifying alternative choices and counterfactual outcomes), we revisited each hypothesis presented in the causal graph, and formulated the following alternative decisions:

**(AH1)** *Had Ukraine not employed strategic communication, it would not have secured the support of Ukrainian citizens and international actors necessary to achieve its strategic defence objective.*

**(ARH1)** *If international actors did not have their own interests in the region, they would not have provided Ukraine with the support necessary to achieve its strategic defence objective.*

**(ARH2)** *If Russia had acted more forcefully (excluding the use of nuclear weapons), Ukraine would not have been able to resist its attacks for an entire year.*

The counterfactual statements above show that other decisions were possible with different corresponding outcomes. Thus, the hypotheses stated are adequate.

### 3.6 The sixth step: collecting data for testing the main hypothesis

This step entailed systematically collecting data on the key moments and events relevant to the main hypothesis (Ricks and Liu 2018). According to the methodological framework, the collected data must then be categorized into distinct groups based on whether they are (1) necessary and/or (2) sufficient for validating the causal inference under analysis (Collier 2011). It is important to note that assigning data to these categories is largely subjective, relying on the perspective and interpretation of the researchers conducting the study (Collier 2011). Furthermore, the nature of the data supporting a particular hypothesis determines the type of test it should undergo. Collier (2011), drawing from a model adapted by Bennett (2010) and originally proposed by Van Evera (1997), identifies four empirical test categories for evaluating hypotheses: straw-in-the-wind, hoop, smoking gun, and doubly decisive.

To perform the tests, we have formulated the hypotheses, detailed the clues that can support them (the data collected), and formulated the inferences – what can be deduced from the data analysis – and finally, the conclusion has been drawn regarding the level of acceptance of the tested hypothesis (Collier 2011).

Ricks and Liu (2018, 845) described the testing process based on the criteria of necessity or sufficiency, as follows:

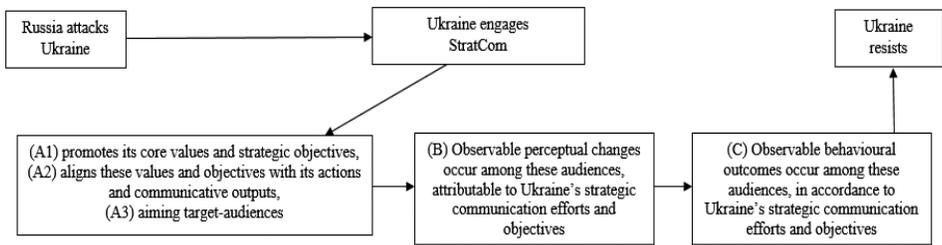
- *Straw-in-the-Wind Test* – this test is applied when the data identified for testing a hypothesis are vague, providing only a preliminary indication of the relevance or irrelevance of x in producing y (probable or plausible inferences);
- *Hoop Test* – this test is used when the evidence suggests the necessity of x in causing y but does not establish that x alone was sufficient to determine y;
- *Smoking-Gun Test* – this test is applied when the data indicate the exclusive sufficiency of x in causing y but do not demonstrate that x was necessary for y to occur;
- *Doubly Decisive Test* – this test is employed when independent pieces of evidence collectively establish both the necessity and the exclusive sufficiency of x in determining y.

To lay the groundwork for a more in-depth analysis, we first delineate the conditions under which Ukraine's strategic communication efforts can be considered efficient. Drawing on established theoretical frameworks (NATO Standardization Office 2023), strategic communication is deemed effective when a state actor deliberately aligns its actions and communicative outputs (including messages, themes, and narratives) with its *core values* in pursuit of its *strategic interests*. These efforts are directed at specific *target audiences*, with the aim of *shaping their perceptions* in ways that lead to subsequent

*changes in attitudes and behaviours.* When successful, this process contributes to the achievement of the actor’s *strategic objectives*.

Our analysis proceeds from the working assumption that Ukraine’s strategic communications were designed to generate distinct information effects across multiple audiences. In addressing international governments and decision-makers, the likely objective was to influence policy by framing support as a necessary investment in security and democracy; in relation to foreign publics, to foster empathy and sustain solidarity; for potential volunteers, to inspire direct participation in Ukraine’s defence; for Russian elites, to raise the perceived costs of complicity in the war; and for states seeking neutrality, to underline the risks the conflict poses to global stability and interdependence. Framing the analysis around these presumed information effects allows us to better grasp how Ukraine’s strategic communications operated as an extension of statecraft, closely aligned with its broader diplomatic and military practices.

Thus, we expanded the causal mechanism for the main hypotheses as in Figure 2:



**Figure 2:** The causal mechanism for the main hypothesis

To evaluate the effectiveness of Ukraine’s strategic communication during the first year of the war, this study employs a process-oriented analytical framework grounded in empirical evidence. The analysis is structured around three interrelated phases that reflect the core mechanism by which strategic communication operates. First, we assess **(A)** the extent to which Ukraine has (A1) articulated its core values and strategic objectives, (A2) ensured coherence between its actions and communicative content within this framework, and (A3) targeted specific audiences through their efforts. Second, we examine **(B)** evidence of perceptual shifts within those audiences attributable to Ukraine’s messaging strategies. Third, we assess **(C)** the extent to which these perceptual changes translated into tangible behavioural outcomes that advanced Ukraine’s principal strategic objective – namely, to resist the Russian attacks by mobilizing international support and the reinforcement of societal resilience.

Thus, we began collecting data to assess the three propositions of the first variable, A, which posits that Ukraine has: (A1) articulated its core values and strategic objectives; (A2) ensured coherence between its actions and communicative content within this framework; and (A3) targeted specific audiences through these efforts.

**A1:** Ukraine’s core values and intentions to accede to a democratic path, towards EU and NATO integration, can be documented since 2014, when pro-Russian President,

Viktor Yanukovich, is forced by circumstances to leave Kiev following the Euromaidan protests, being thus relieved of his duties (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.). The same year, on June, 27<sup>th</sup>, the “Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part” (EUR-Lex 2023), is signed, an agreement meant to confirm EU’s support for Ukraine in its efforts towards democratization and good governance. The document clearly states Ukraine’s commitment to common values with the EU member states, “namely respect for democratic principles, the rule of law, good governance, human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, non-discrimination of persons belonging to minorities and respect for diversity, human dignity and commitment to the principles of a free market economy, which would facilitate the participation of Ukraine in European policies” (EUR-Lex 2023, Preamble).

**A2:** Starting with March, 2015, the StratCom Ukraine project is being launched in support of the Ukrainian government’s efforts to combat Russian threats and to publicly showcase Ukraine’s efforts to transform and modernize towards democratic values (StratCom Ukraine n.d.). A whole series of StratCom campaigns and sub-projects carried out by the Ukrainian authorities have been publicly presented, showing what concrete actions have been undertaken and what results have been achieved, through specific communicative outputs, such as: “Army. Rebirth” (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.); “Countering Gender-Based Violence in Conflict-Affected Regions of Eastern Ukraine” (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.); “Like. U” (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.); “#MyUkrainels” (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.); “Let my people go!” (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.); “Exhibition Warrior. Freedom Through the Ages” (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.); “Demobilization 2016” (StratCom Ukraine n.d.); “Corruption in the army kills” (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.); “Invictus Games Team Ukraine” (Stratcom Ukraine n.d.).

During 2016, through the joint efforts of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, the Ministry of Information Policy of Ukraine, the NATO Information and Documentation Center and the StratCom team, a model for the integration of strategic communication within the state system was developed, and proposed a series of reforms in government communication, the development of public diplomacy, crisis communication systems, and a professional system of educating communication specialists (StratCom Ukraine n.d.).

On July 9, 2016, NATO and Ukraine sign the Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine (NATO 2016), and on June 8, 2017 Ukrainian Parliament votes to restore NATO membership as a strategic foreign policy objective of the country (NATO 2022). This commitment is being reinforced on February 21, 2019, when an amendment to the Constitution of Ukraine enters into force, establishing NATO membership as a strategic foreign and security policy objective (Brooke-Holland 2024). On June 12, 2020, North Atlantic Council recognised Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner (NATO 2020). On September 14, 2020, President Zelenskyy approves the new National Security Strategy, acknowledging Russia as an aggressor state, prioritizing the strengthening and development of the defence sector, aiming NATO membership and deepening the EU cooperation (Service of the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine 2020).

Thus, it can be clearly stated that since 2014 Ukraine has remained committed to democratic values and to the democratization process, which is proven not only by their communicative outputs but also by all their diplomatic, military, economic efforts and other actions, in this period until the beginning of the war.

As our analysis regards the first year of the war (February 2022 – February 2023), we want to assess whether these StratCom efforts continue during this period, and to what extent are they effective for Ukraine’s security objective.

Thus, we collected a large series of data within this timeframe, and briefly presented them in the table below, showing the connection between the Ukrainian public requests (mainly addressed by President Zelenskyy), their reasoning, and the targeted audiences.

We also track whether and to what extent these requests have led to (B) changes in perceptions among the target audiences (raising awareness) and whether they eventually responded to the requests – which would indicate (C) a change in behaviour (from not acting to supporting).

**Table 1:** Ukraine’s Public Requests During the First Year of the War, their Reasoning, and the Targeted Audiences<sup>7</sup>

Ukraine’s public requests	<b>A1, A2.</b> Reasoning requests on democratic values and principles <sup>8</sup>	<b>A3.</b> Target audiences
A call to national and international volunteers to join the fight against the Russian invasion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “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)</li> <li>• “friends of <i>peace and democracy</i>” (McKernan 2022)</li> <li>• “This is the beginning of a war against Europe, against European structures, against <i>democracy</i>, against <i>basic human rights</i>, against a <i>global order of law, rules and peaceful coexistence</i>” (McKernan 2022)</li> <li>• According to a 2016 decree, “foreigners had the <i>right</i> to join the Ukrainian army for military service on a voluntary basis” (McKernan 2022).</li> <li>• key message on the platform for enrolment as a volunteer to join the international legion of defence of Ukraine – “<i>Freedom is a choice. Join the brave!</i>” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine n.d.).</li> <li>• “We have nothing to lose but our own freedom” (Bella and Timsit 2022).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ukrainian citizens and diaspora</li> <li>• Foreign volunteers</li> <li>• Fighter volunteers</li> </ul>

<sup>7</sup> Some parts of this table have been presented in another work of the first author (Cojocar 2023, 19-20).

<sup>8</sup> The quotations analysed were systematically collected from a larger sample of speeches and statements by President Zelensky and other Ukrainian officials. From this broader corpus, only the most reliable and widely disseminated sources were selected and verified through established international media and official channels, and, when possible, cross-checked across multiple outlets.

Ukraine’s public requests	A1, A2. Reasoning requests on democratic values and principles*	A3. Target audiences
Imposing of sanctions on Russia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Zelensky urged U.S. companies still doing business in Russia to leave.” “American companies must leave Russia’s market because it is <i>flooded with our blood</i>” (Public Broadcasting Service 2022)</li> <li>• «In a speech to the Italian Parliament [...] Zelenskyy 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 <i>resort for murderers</i>”» (Solomons and Wynn-Davies 2022)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• World leaders</li> <li>• Decision makers, Stakeholders</li> <li>• NGOs, Companies</li> </ul>
Financial aid and military capabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Zelensky asks Europe for more aid, calls Russia the ‘biggest <i>anti-European force</i>’ in modern world” (Amaro 2023)</li> <li>• “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 <i>coalition</i>” (Amaro 2023)</li> <li>• “Your money is not charity. It’s an investment in the <i>global security and democracy</i> that we handle in the most responsible way.” (Le Monde with AP 2022)</li> <li>• “Iranian deadly drones sent to Russia in hundreds became a threat to our critical infrastructure. That is how one <i>terrorist</i> has found the other. It is just a matter of time when they will strike against your other <i>allies</i> if we do not stop them now.” (European Pravda 2022)</li> <li>• “The world is too <i>interconnected</i> and too <i>interdependent</i> to allow someone to stay aside and at the same time to feel safe when such a battle continues. Our two nations are <i>allies</i> 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)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allies</li> </ul>

This analysis reveals that Ukraine’s public requests – primarily articulated through President Zelenskyy – were mainly reasoned upon democratic values and principles. These appeals were directed toward a broad target-audience, encompassing both Ukrainian citizens and the international community.

A closer examination of President Zelensky’s speeches reveals several recurring strategic narratives that frame Ukraine’s strategic communication during the war.

First, *Ukraine positions itself as the frontline defender of democracy and the rules-based international order*. The war is portrayed not as a local conflict, but as “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) In this narrative, Ukraine’s resistance becomes a universal struggle for civilization itself.

Second, the theme of *shared responsibility and collective security* is foregrounded. Phrases such as “Freedom is a choice. Join the brave!” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine n.d.) or “Your money is not charity. It’s an investment in the global security and democracy” (Le Monde with AP 2022) frame Ukraine’s cause as a common burden: allies are reminded that their own safety is at stake. Neutrality or inaction is rejected as illusory “the world is too interconnected and too interdependent to allow someone to stay aside and at the same time to feel safe.” (Liptak and Vazquez 2022).

Third, a narrative of *moral legitimacy versus criminal aggression* is sustained. Russia is consistently described as a terrorist state, a “criminal” and “anti-European force,” while Ukraine is portrayed as the embodiment of courage and moral clarity. This framing supports diplomatic efforts to isolate Russia politically and economically, for example through calls to freeze oligarchs’ assets or impose embargoes.

From these narratives emerge several core messages:

- Ukraine is defending not only itself but also global freedom, democracy, and security.
- Russia represents criminality, terrorism, and existential threat to civilization.
- Support for Ukraine is not charity but an investment in collective safety.
- Inaction is impossible: every state and individual must choose a side.
- Ukraine is courageous and determined, but requires solidarity, weapons, and sanctions to prevail.

Another crucial aspect of Ukraine’s strategic communication is the use of imagery – both rhetorical and visual – to reinforce these narratives. Rhetorically, Zelensky employs powerful metaphors: the Russian market “flooded with our blood,” or Russia and Iran as “two terrorists” reinforcing each other. He also relies on binary contrasts – freedom versus tyranny, bravery versus murder – that distil complex geopolitical realities into stark moral choices. Visually, Zelensky has consistently adopted wartime symbolism. His olive-green military T-shirt, worn in addresses to national parliaments and international organizations, conveys authenticity, solidarity with ordinary soldiers, and a refusal to perform politics as usual. Similarly, his choice of backdrops often austere settings in Kyiv under bombardment project resilience and credibility. Ukrainian communication has also strategically tailored video appeals to foreign audiences, invoking their historical traumas – Pearl Harbor for the U.S. Congress, the Berlin Wall for the German Bundestag (Dyczok and Chung 2022, 153-155), thereby creating shared symbolic frames. Finally, the promotion of the “International Legion” with slogans such as “Join the brave!” and the circulation of images of foreign volunteers reinforce the idea that Ukraine’s cause is universal and open to all.

Through this interplay of strategic narratives, core messages, and rhetorical as well as visual imagery, Ukraine has constructed a communicative framework that transforms its war of survival into a global struggle for freedom and order.

These communicative efforts are coherent with Ukraine’s broader actions/deeds, most of which have been diplomatic in nature and carried since 2014, aimed at securing international support and integration (see pp. 7-8, A1 and A2).

Thus, we consider that the data collected are sufficient to demonstrate that the first variable (A – A1, A2, A3) is valid in this case study.

Further, we examined existing evidence of **(B)** perceptual shifts within these audiences (Ukrainian citizens and international actors – stakeholders, authorities, citizens, mass-media decision makers), attributable to Ukraine’s messaging strategies (StratCom). Thus, we analysed a series of polls and surveys, reflecting changes in public opinion (domestic and international) on the war in Ukraine.

**Domestic shifts of perception** – A Ukrainian sociological institute has conducted a survey on the dynamics of Ukrainians’ trust in state institutions, comparing data from 2021, 2022 and 2023 (KIIS 2023). The results of the 2022 survey show how the level of trust has increased for most indicators (except the church and the Russian media), compared to the previous year, as follows: for the army: from 72% in 2021 – to 96% in 2022; for the president: from 27% in 2021 – to 84% in 2022; for the national police: from 30% – to 58%; for the Ukrainian media: from 32% – to 57%; for the government of Ukraine from 14% – to 52%; and for the parliament of Ukraine/Verkhovna Rada: from 11% – to 35% (KIIS 2023). Next year, the results of the survey show how, compared to the previous year, the trust of Ukrainian citizens in the institution of the army is maintained at the same percentage (96%), and also a high percentage of trust in the commander of the armed forces – 88% have trust (KIIS 2023). Moreover, a poll conducted in Ukraine ten months after the start of the war shows how public opinion is interested in the economy, politics and the war, and that 69% of citizens are willing to endure the problems associated with the war until Ukraine achieves victory, highlighting the optimism of Ukrainians, 67.9% of whom believed at the time that their lives would improve during 2023 (KIIS 2023). It can be noted that, from a majority negative perception of 55.8% and only 6.6% positive in 2021 in terms of public opinion regarding the efficiency of the state, the situation has improved significantly, reaching a majority positive proportion of 46.6% and 26.1% negative in 2022 (KIIS 2023). At the same time, more than 95% of the respondents of this poll were confident in Ukraine’s victory in the war with Russia, and 63.8% of them assess international support as being of great importance for Ukraine’s defence, and 32.1% as being of medium importance (KIIS 2023). In other words, Ukrainians’ motivation to fight against the Russians in the first year of the war is high. This is also confirmed by the results of another survey, conducted to gauge public opinion on the cost-effectiveness of committing to the liberation of Crimea, where the majority of respondents (68%) said yes, even if it would mean prolonging the war and reducing international support (KIIS 2023).

**International shifts of perception** – Statista has conducted a report on public opinion on various aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian war, based on a sample of 19,000 respondents from 27 countries, which found that nearly three-quarters of respondents worldwide believe that their nations should receive refugees from Ukraine (Statista 2023). According to IPSOS (2023), there is also a majority agreement in international public opinion on supporting Ukraine in this war. Thus, a report on international public opinion, conducted almost one year after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, shows that a large majority of the world’s citizens agree that their states should continue to provide support to Ukraine (70%), take in Ukrainian refugees (66%), exclude Russia from major sporting competitions (66%), believing that a lack of state involvement will encourage Russia to carry out such aggressive activities in other parts of Europe or Asia (63%), maintain

sanctions against Russia – despite the efforts they as citizens have to bear in limiting the heating of their own homes (67%), and finding it worthwhile to spend more on fuel, in exchange for support in defending the sovereignty of a wrongfully attacked state (53%) – even though they are aware that their states do not have the necessary funds to lend to Ukraine (64%) (IPSOS 2023).

**Media shifts of perception** – Zelenskyy played an important role in countering Russian misinformation and positioning mass media as a platform for strengthening support for the Ukrainian cause. His interventions helped redirect international media attention from predominantly amplifying Russia’s perspective and President Putin’s statements toward highlighting Ukraine’s narrative and his own appeals. As a result, Zelenskyy emerged as a central and increasingly credible source of information on the Russian–Ukrainian conflict. This visibility contributed to a gradual reframing of international discourse, shifting emphasis from a “Crisis in Ukraine” to “Russia’s war against Ukraine”. Moreover, his media engagement can be seen as one of the factors that supported a broader change in global responses, which evolved from hesitation about confronting Russia to the adoption of coordinated international sanctions and restrictions against the aggressor state (Dyczok and Chung 2022).

Thus, we consider that the data collected are sufficient to validate variable **B**, and demonstrate the link between it and the first variable (**A**).

Third, we assess (**C**) the extent to which these perceptual changes presented above have turned into tangible behavioural outcomes – i.e. had mobilized national and international support. To do this, we revisited the public requests initially presented (Table 1) and collected data for each of them, which we have briefly presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Ukrainian Public Requests During the First Year of the War, the Support Received, and the Supportive State and Non-State Actors<sup>9</sup>

Ukraine’s public requests	Support received	State and non-state actors supporting Ukraine <sup>10</sup>
A call to national and international volunteers to join the fight against the Russian invasion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National and international volunteers: more than 20.000 fighters from 52 countries, as per November 2022 (Guarino 2022)</li> <li>• 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)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ukrainian diaspora and foreign citizens</li> <li>• fighter volunteers from 52 worldwide countries – US and 24 Western States, (Abend 2022), (Statista 2023)</li> </ul>

<sup>9</sup> Some parts of this table have been presented in another work of the first author (Cojocaru 2023, 19-20).

<sup>10</sup> In hierarchical order.

Ukraine’s public requests	Support received	State and non-state actors supporting Ukraine <sup>10</sup>
Imposing of sanctions on Russia	<p>Sanctions on Russia<sup>11</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since February 2022, the United States has imposed over two thousand list-based sanctions on Russia, with the total continuing to rise after February 2023. 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).</li> <li>• Organizations worldwide imposed 10,608 restrictions on individuals from Russia. Furthermore, 3431 list-based sanctions were placed on entities over that period (Statista 2023).</li> </ul>	United States, Switzerland, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Belgium, EU, Australia, Japan, Poland (Statista 2023).
Financial aid and military capabilities	<p>Foreign aid</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Bilateral Aid donations</i> 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)</li> <li>• <i>Military capabilities</i> “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)</li> <li>• US representatives: “Helping equip our friends in Eastern Europe to win this war is also a direct investment in reducing Putin’s future capabilities to menace America, threaten our allies and contest our core interests” (Thomas and Andrew 2022)</li> </ul>	<p>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 Zealand, South Korea.(Statista 2023)</p> <p>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)</p>

We consider the collected data sufficient to demonstrate that the targeted audiences changed their behaviour – from inaction to action, specifically by providing support to Ukraine – in alignment with Ukraine’s strategic objectives. Thus, the third variable (C) is empirically supported, and the connection among all three variables is likewise substantiated.

Thus, we have shown that for each proposition of the theory (A, B, C) there is empirical data confirming the presence of the independent variables, and we have advanced a possible explanation of the causal relationship between them and the outcome. However, this does not fully confirm the validity of the theory in this case study, since there are rival hypotheses that may combat the tested theory, according to which the same result (*Ukraine’s resistance after the first year of war*) could have been obtained under different circumstances.

<sup>11</sup> The full list can be found at URL: <https://www.statista.com/topics/9087/russia-ukraine-war-2022/#topicOverview>

In line with the methodology, we next proceeded to testing the main hypothesis against the rival hypotheses.

#### Testing the Main Hypothesis

Based on the data collected for the main hypothesis (H1), we determined that the hoop test would be the most appropriate method for testing it. For the hypothesis to pass the test, there must be data indicating that  $x$  was necessary for causing  $y$  (i.e., without  $X$ ,  $Y$  could not have occurred). While passing the test affirms the relevance of the hypothesis, it does not confirm it. Conversely, for the hypothesis to fail the test, there must be data indicating that  $x$  was not necessary for causing  $y$  (i.e.,  $x$  certainly did not contribute to causing  $y$ , and  $y$  could have been determined with certainty in the absence of  $x$ ). Failure of the test eliminates the hypothesis. Additionally, inferences for rival hypotheses suggest that if the hypothesis passes the test, it weakens the rival hypotheses, whereas if it fails, it strengthens them (Ricks and Liu 2018, 845).

To perform this test, we have also analysed data on the balance of forces between Russia and Ukraine at the onset of the invasion to determine whether the engagement of strategic communication was necessary. The alternative hypothesis posits that *if Ukraine had possessed military power comparable to Russia's, strategic communication would not have been necessary for resistance during the first year of the conflict.*

Prior to the February 2022 invasion, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the RAND Corporation, and the Swedish Defense Research Agency simulated war games and conducted campaign analyses of how a short, sharp conflict between NATO and Russia would unfold. The results indicated that at least in the first phase of fighting, Russian forces would likely defeat NATO and national troops in Northern Europe (Dalsjö, Jonsson and Norberg 2022).

According to conventional military theory, one way to predict the outcome of a war is by applying the force ratios law. This law is commonly associated with the 3:1 rule, which states that achieving success when attacking a prepared defensive position typically requires an offensive force to have three times the number of troops as the defenders (Christian 2019; Davis 1995).

To support this analysis, we consulted *The Military Balance of 2022* (The International Institute for Strategic Studies 2022, 6) and a set of statistics produced by Statista (Statista 2023). These sources reveal that Russia's military power was significantly superior to Ukraine's at the time of the invasion, across most key indicators. Specifically, prior to 2022, Russia had more than four times as many active military personnel as Ukraine. Its arsenal included 13 times as many aircraft, four times as many armored vehicles, and a naval fleet 16 times larger than Ukraine's (Statista 2023). Furthermore, in 2021, Russia ranked fifth globally in military spending, allocating nearly 66 billion USD, compared to Ukraine's nearly six billion USD (Statista 2023). On average, Russia's military strength at the time of the invasion was four times that of Ukraine's.

By late 2021, in November, Russia initiated a large-scale action near Ukraine's border, significantly increasing its military presence in the region and showcasing its capacity to mobilize both troops and civilian and military infrastructure (The International Institute for Strategic Studies 2022, 6). Experts have estimated the force ratio between Russia

and Ukraine at the start of the war to be approximately 4:1, with scenarios predicting outcomes favorable to Russia at the end of the first year of the conflict (DiMarco 2022).

Additionally, the urgent and repeated appeals of the Ukrainian president to the international community for support in defense efforts underscored the inadequacy of Ukraine's defense capabilities to withstand Russian attacks on their own.

The presented data confirm that the force ratio between Russia and Ukraine at the beginning of the invasion was heavily in Russia's favour. Consequently, it was essential for Ukraine to secure support from its targeted strategic audiences. This included Ukrainian citizens, who contributed human resources for defence, as well as various international entities. These entities encompassed global citizens, who facilitated the mobilization of international fighters, managed the influx of Ukrainian refugees, and donated funds or goods. Additionally, non-governmental and governmental organizations, profit and non-profit entities, state actors, and supranational organizations played a critical role. Their contributions included financial resources, military capabilities, humanitarian aid, and the imposition of sanctions on Russia, which effectively restricted its funding and capabilities.

At this stage, the hypothesis supported by the interpretation of the data can be articulated as follows: the support received by Ukraine was necessary to achieve the objective of resisting Russian attacks. However, the hypothesis cannot be fully validated at this point, as it remains possible that the support Ukraine received was not the result of its strategic communication campaigns. Instead, it could have been driven by the self-interests of the actors providing the support, interests unrelated to the defence of democratic values or the aspirations of states seeking to align with those values.

In other words, the hypothesis passes the *straw-in-the-wind test*, indicating some relevance, but the data is not sufficiently compelling to pass the *hoop test*. Therefore, in line with the methodological guidelines, it is necessary to proceed with testing the rival hypotheses.

### 3.7 The seventh step: identifying data for testing rival hypotheses

This step will be carried out in the same way as the previous step, but will emphasize alternative explanations. The objective of this step is to eliminate as many alternative hypotheses as possible, leaving only one (at most two) of the hypotheses initially mentioned as the most likely (Collier 2011).

#### Testing the Rival Hypotheses

- *RH1 – The Straw-in-the-Wind Test* examines data suggesting a possible connection between Ukraine's resistance and the fact that entities providing aid to Ukraine did so based on their own interests in the region, rather than as a result of strategic communication efforts.

According to realism theory, the behavior of actors in the international system is primarily shaped by their security and survival needs, with states focusing on power and self-interest (Wohlforth 2010). Ukraine's geographical position holds strategic

importance, as it lies on the border between Russian territories and NATO/EU alliances, making its alignment with either side a significant geopolitical advantage. Additionally, Ukraine controls a substantial portion of the Black Sea coastline, offering states that establish military, economic, or trade partnerships with the country enhanced access to the Wider Black Sea region. Notably, NATO member states – key supporters of Ukraine during the war – had expressed interest in cooperation with Ukraine even prior to Russia's invasion (Atlantic Council 2019).

Under these circumstances, the data suggest that the support Ukraine received during the war may be attributable to the strategic interests of certain actors in the region, independent of Ukraine's strategic communication campaigns. Thus, the hypothesis passes the straw-in-the-wind test.

Following this result, we go further with testing the same hypothesis with the *hoop test*, thus gathering data according to which self-interest was a *necessary* condition for the entities that provided aid to Ukraine. To test this hypothesis, we have resorted to the collection of counterfactual data.

Beyond the national interests that a state-actor may follow, we bring into account the fact that non-state actors (which cannot manifest national interests) have also provided substantial support to Ukraine, i.e.: civil society – which has mobilized in various forms of volunteering and provided support for refugee management, set up campaigns and centres for donations, or psychological counselling; at the same time, non-governmental financial organizations, which have donated substantial amounts, or non-profit non-governmental organizations, which have provided humanitarian support, as well as the world's large corporations, which have ceased their activities and partnerships with Russia (Dalsjö, Jonsson and Norberg 2022) have substantially contributed to Ukraine's support.

Nevertheless, data shows how by February 2023, 40 governments supported Ukraine, including: all G7 and EU member states (31), as well as Australia, New Zealand, Norway, South Korea, Switzerland, Turkey, India, China and Taiwan (9), and EU institutions, in the form of military support, financial support, humanitarian assistance, sanctions imposed on Russia, training for soldiers to fight in the war, etc. (Trebesch, et al. 2023).

The fact that non-state actors supported Ukraine, and also that state-actors that are not members of any military coalition/organizations, and that have not shown or expressed interests in the region – thus risking an attack by Russia, as threatened by President Putin (Faulconbridge 2022) – indicates that they acted on the basis of motives other than self-interest (alternative possibilities would be: belief in international order, empathy, civic spirit, altruism – effects that can be augmented by strategic communication).

Thus, from the interpretation of these cues we deduce that national interest (state or supra-state) *was not necessary* for the supporting entities to do so (since there were also actors who cannot manifest such interests and who provided substantial support).

In this case, hypothesis RH1 fails the *hoop test*, being eliminated, and thus reinforcing the other hypotheses H1 and RH2.

- RH2 – *The straw-in-the-wind test* examines data suggesting that Russia may have acted in a deceitful manner (i.e., lacked the genuine intent to engage in a full-scale war), which could correlate with Ukraine's resistance.

A first clue supporting this test is Russia's longstanding history of employing coercive strategies such as *maskirovka*, *realpolitik*, and reflexive control (Adamsky 2024). Another clue comes from the theory of coercive diplomacy, which explains how an actor may use limited force either to deter an adversary from specific actions or to compel submission to conditions favorable to its own interests (Jentleson 2010). The interpretation of these clues supports the notion that Russia may have acted in a limited and strategic manner, potentially contributing to Ukraine's resistance.

However, a counterfactual interpretation of additional clues provides an alternative perspective. Despite Russia's initial superiority in military capabilities (Statista 2023), the Russian military sustained significant losses during its attacks (Coleman, Gal, and Shyanne 2022). Meanwhile, Ukraine bolstered its military strength significantly through international support (Forum on the Arms Trade 2022). Furthermore, the extensive sanctions imposed on Russia by governments, corporations, and other entities (Funakoshi, Lawson, and Deka 2022) have severely impacted its economy (Sweet and Hussein 2022). These factors destabilized the initial balance of power, allowing Ukraine to supplement its strength while Russia's capabilities were diminished beyond initial estimates.

Additionally, Russia's repeated threats to use nuclear weapons (Faulconbridge 2022) – a move considered an extreme measure by experts (Myre 2022) – highlight a sense of desperation on the part of the Russian leadership to leverage all available means of deterrence (CBS News 2022). This further suggests that Russian resources, excluding its nuclear arsenal, were limited.

Moreover, Russia's attempts throughout the first year of the war to proclaim or annex Ukrainian territories, including the initial attack on Kyiv, indicate that its invasion was not merely a limited operation to assert regional presence. Instead, it reflects an effort to expand its influence and borders.

Given that the existing data does not support the idea that Ukraine's resistance was due to Russia's coercive strategy, but rather highlights that Russia underestimated the strength of Ukraine's counteroffensive (significantly bolstered by international support), this hypothesis fails the *straw-in-the-wind test*.

Next, we return to the main hypothesis to assess whether it can be validated as a necessary condition<sup>12</sup>, using the new data and inferences derived from the previous analysis.

*The Hoop test:* Given that Ukraine's resistance during the first year of the war relied on the support it received, and considering that we have ruled out the explanation that this support was driven solely by self-interest on the part of the supporting actors (citizens, states, and non-state entities), we focus on whether strategic communication was essential to mobilizing that support. Moreover, since no counterfactual evidence suggests that such widespread support could have been achieved in the absence of Ukraine's strategic

---

<sup>12</sup> Given that our analysis is limited to understanding the decisive role of strategic communication in *contributing* to the fulfilment of a security objective (Ukraine's resistance), it is not needed to demonstrate also the sufficiency of the strategic communication variable for determining the outcome. Thus, undertaking the smoking gun test is irrelevant for our research.

communication efforts, we argue that these campaigns were a necessary condition for Ukraine's resistance. In this sense, the main hypothesis passes the hoop test.

## CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings of the case study, we present the following conclusions:

- Ukraine could not have achieved its objective of defending the state without the support it received during the first year of the war; therefore, this support was a necessary condition for its resistance.
- The motivation for providing support to Ukraine was not solely based on the self-interest of the entities involved, as some state actors had no explicit interests in the region or its political dynamics. Furthermore, several actors and entities – such as civilian populations, volunteer fighters, non-profit organizations, non-governmental financial organizations, and corporations – that cannot inherently pursue self-interest also provided substantial support.
- Ukraine's resistance cannot be attributed to a deceitful strategy by Russia. Instead, Ukraine's bold counter-offensive, bolstered by international support, caught Russian decision-makers by surprise.
- The effective use of strategic communication was a necessary condition for Ukraine to achieve its strategic objective of defending itself during the first year of the war with Russia.

In summary, the strategic communication efforts undertaken by Ukraine since early 2015 significantly contributed to the state's ability to resist during the first year of the war with Russia. These efforts proved effective in positively influencing the perceptions of strategic target audiences, as the values embedded in Ukraine's messaging promoted justice, human rights, freedoms, and the broader set of democratic principles.

We argue that Ukraine's military actions were strongly supported by its strategic communication campaigns, which played a pivotal role in achieving the primary security objective of defending the state. Furthermore, the strategic communication initiatives helped strengthen Ukraine's security culture, as evidenced by the attitudes of Ukrainian citizens, who displayed a profound moral commitment to defending their country's integrity and sovereignty, even at the cost of their lives.

Beyond achieving its strategic objective of state defense, Ukraine's strategic communication campaigns also yielded additional benefits. These campaigns effectively built a strong international brand for Ukraine, positioning the country as a symbol of the global fight for freedom and democracy and as an exemplar of courage admired worldwide. Another critical outcome of these efforts was the significant sympathy Ukraine garnered from international authorities and populations. This sympathy translated into actionable support, both direct and indirect. Direct support included the donation of arms, funds, troops, medical services, psychological counseling, food, and clothing. Indirect support involved sanctions imposed on Russia, international protests against Russian actions, dissemination of Ukraine's strategic messages through global information campaigns, the rapid mobilization to develop infrastructure for Ukrainian refugees, and efforts by

various entities, including religious organizations, to appeal to Vladimir Putin to cease the offensive operation.

Under these circumstances, Ukraine has gained a level of influence in the international security environment far exceeding its pre-war standing. The lessons drawn from this conflict will likely serve as a lasting example of the potential of strategic communication in supporting military actions within a hybrid operating environment.

Reflecting briefly on a counterfactual scenario may also help underline the role of strategic communication in Ukraine's resistance. Had Ukraine not engaged in effective communication, several consequences would likely have followed. Internationally, the absence of a coherent Ukrainian narrative would have left more space for Russian frames to dominate media coverage, potentially reinforcing perceptions of the conflict as a regional crisis rather than an attack on the international order. Without Zelensky's visible appeals and symbolic presence, the momentum behind Western assistance –including weapons deliveries, sanctions, and humanitarian support – might have developed more slowly, or less extensively. For foreign publics, the lack of emotive storytelling and imagery could have reduced empathy and pressure on governments to sustain costly measures against Russia. Domestically, the absence of a unifying voice might have weakened morale, undermining Ukraine's ability to mobilize resilience in the face of overwhelming force.

While these outcomes cannot be proven with certainty, the counterfactual scenario suggests that strategic communication served as an enabling condition for Ukraine's resistance: not sufficient in itself, but essential in amplifying diplomacy, sustaining alliances, and framing the war as a struggle of global significance.

In concluding this case study, it is important to consider additional factors that may have contributed to Ukraine's resilience. As Sanders (2023) highlights, one key factor was Ukraine's military reform, initiated in 2016, which transformed the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF). This transformation included the adoption of NATO-compliant concepts, programs, and normative documents, substantial equipment acquisitions, advanced military training capabilities, the creation and transition to a modern logistics system, and other significant improvements (Ministry of Defence of Ukraine 2017).

One of the primary limitations of our study lies in the challenge of generalization, imposed by the unique historical, political, and cultural factors inherent in the case study. These factors are deeply embedded in the context and cannot be extricated, thereby significantly reducing the generalizability of the results. Consequently, it is necessary to acknowledge from the outset that the findings and conclusions drawn from the analysis of the Russian-Ukrainian war cannot be applied to most if not all hybrid conflicts.

Additionally, the nature of military sciences imposes constraints on research methodologies. For instance, experimental methods are limited by the inability to recreate the conditions of armed conflicts, meaning most theories in this field can only be tested post-factum. Another significant limitation is data availability. Researching an ongoing conflict, as in the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war, presents challenges in accessing comprehensive and reliable data. Military data is often classified, and one of the key actors involved (Russia) cannot be regarded as a fully reliable source of information. These factors have inevitably impacted the depth of the study.

In light of these constraints, a potential future research direction could involve conducting a broader comparative study. Such a study could examine the efficiency of strategic communication in achieving security and defence objectives by comparing the results of this research with findings from similar case studies on hybrid conflicts with differing contextual variables. Analyzing the differences and similarities in the effects observed across these cases could significantly enhance the understanding of this topic.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracking the long-term effects of strategic communication engagement in hybrid warfare could provide valuable insights into the dynamics of informational, psychological, and cognitive warfare. By examining how communication strategies evolve and adapt over time in response to changing conflict conditions, researchers could identify patterns and models to inform future strategic communication efforts.

Finally, we argue that the integration of military sciences and communication sciences is essential for understanding the contemporary information environment, managing emerging global conflicts, and fostering peace. This fusion of disciplines is critical for building a more comprehensive body of knowledge on the interplay between strategic communication and hybrid warfare in today's complex geopolitical landscape.

***This article is derived from the researchers' independent study without any external financial support.***

***The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in connection with the publication of this article and that all ethical standards required by the publisher were accepted during its preparation.***

***English language editing was supported by DeepL and ChatGPT (versions 4o and 5).***

---

## REFERENCES

Abend, Lisa. 2022. "Meet the Foreign Volunteers Risking Their Lives to Defend Ukraine—and Europe." *Time*. March 7. Accessed March 21, 2023. <https://time.com/6155670/foreign-fighters-ukraine-europe/>.

Adamsky, Dmitry (Dima). 2024. *The Russian way of deterrence: Strategic Culture, Coercion, and War*. Stanford : Stanford University Press.

Aday, S., M. Andžāns, U. Bērziņa-Čerenkova, F. Granelli, J. Gravelines, M. Hills, M. Holmstrom, et al. 2019. *Hybrid Threats. A Strategic Communications Perspective*. Research Project Product, Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. [https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfjs/?file=/publications/download/2nd\\_book\\_short\\_digi\\_pdf.pdf?zoom=page-fit](https://stratcomcoe.org/pdfjs/?file=/publications/download/2nd_book_short_digi_pdf.pdf?zoom=page-fit).

Amaro, Silvia. 2023. "Zelenskyy asks Europe for more aid, calls Russia the 'biggest anti-European force' in modern world." *CNBC*. 9 February. Accessed March 21, 2023. <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/02/09/zelenskyy-expected-to-ask-for-more-aid-from-eu-leaders-in-brussels.html>.

Atlantic Council. 2019. „US strategic interests in Ukraine.” *Atlantic Council*. 4 December. Accesat 05 23, 2022. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/event/us-strategic-interests-in-ukraine/>.

Audia, Pino G, Horacio Rousseau, and Mary Kate Stimmler. 2023. “Public Opinion and Impression Management in the Communication of Performance During the Second Iraq War.” *ORGANIZATION SCIENCE* 34 (2): 777-800. doi:10.1287/orsc.2022.1598.

Bella, Timothy, and Annabelle Timsit. 2022. “Zelensky says 16,000 foreigners have volunteered to fight for Ukraine against Russian invasion.” *The Washington Post*. March 3. Accessed April 02, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/03/zelensky-ukraine-16000-foreign-volunteers-russia/>.

Bennett, Andrew. 2010. „Process Tracing and Causal Inference.” *Rethinking Social Inquiry*.

Bolt, Neville, and Leonie Haiden. 2019. *Improving NATO Strategic Communications Terminology*. Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.

Boswinkel, Lotje, Neill Bo Finlayson, John Michaelis, and Michel Rademaker. 2022. *Weapons of mass influence Shaping attitudes, perceptions and behaviours in today's information warfare*. The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

Brooke-Holland, Louisa. 2024. *NATO enlargement: Ukraine*. Research Briefing, House of Commons Library. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9819/CBP-9819.pdf>.

CBS News. 2022. “Russia says Ukraine war could go nuclear if West keeps sending weapons.” *CBS News*. 04 26. Accessed 05 26, 2022. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/ukraine-news-russia-warns-nuclear-world-war-if-west-keeps-sending-weapons/>.

Centre for Strategic Communications StratCom Ukraine. n.d. “StratCom Ukraine.” *StratCom Ukraine*. Accessed aprilie 4, 2024. [https://stratcomua.org/Content/CmsFile/en/startpage\\_\\_StratComUA.pdf](https://stratcomua.org/Content/CmsFile/en/startpage__StratComUA.pdf).

Christian, Joshua T. 2019. *An Examination of Force Ratios*. Monography, Fort Leavenworth: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

Cojocar, Iulia-Alexandra. 2023. “WEAPONIZING COMMUNICATION. WORDS VS. BULLETS IN THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR.” Edited by Carol I National Defence University Publishing House. *Strategic Impact* 88 (3): 9-25. doi:<https://doi.org/10.53477/1842-9904-23-13%20>.

Coleman, Julie, Gal, și Shayanne. 2022. „The Russian military's heavy losses from Ukraine in charts.” *Business Insider*. 21 March. Accesat May 25, 2022. <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-russian-militarys-heavy-losses-from-ukraine-in-charts-2022-3>.

Collier, David. 2011. „Understanding Process Tracing.” *The Teacher* 825-828. doi:doi:10.1017/S1049096511001429.

Cullen, Patrick J., and Erik Reichborn-Kjennerud. 2017. *Understanding Hybrid Warfare*. A Multinational Capability Development Campaign project, Multinational Capability

Development Campaign (MCDC). [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/717539/MCDC\\_CHW\\_Information\\_Note-Understanding\\_Hybrid\\_Warfare-Jan\\_2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/717539/MCDC_CHW_Information_Note-Understanding_Hybrid_Warfare-Jan_2018.pdf).

Dalsjö, Robert, Michael Jonsson, and Johan Norberg. 2022. "A Brutal Examination: Russian Military Capability in Light of the Ukraine War." *Survival* 64 (3): 7-28. doi:10.1080/00396338.2022.2078044.

Davis, Paul. 1995. *Aggregation, Disaggregation, and the 3:1 Rule in Ground Combat*. Santa Monica: RAND.

DiMarco, Louis. 2022. „URBAN OPERATIONS IN UKRAINE: SIZE, RATIOS, AND THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR." *Modern War Institute*. 06 Junie. Accesat Mai 21, 2023. <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/urban-operations-in-ukraine-size-ratios-and-the-principles-of-war/>.

Dyczok, Marta, and Yerin Chung. 2022. "Zelens'kyi uses his communication skills as a weapon of war." *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 146-161.

Ekman, Ivar, and Per-Erik Nilsson. 2023. *Ukraine's Information Front - Strategic Communication during Russia's Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine*. Swedish Armed Forces.

Encyclopaedia Britannica. n.d. "The Maidan protest movement." *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Accessed 05 30, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-Maidan-protest-movement>.

EUR-Lex. 2023. "Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part." *EUR-Lex*. 01 12. Accessed January 14, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A22014A0529%2801%29>.

European Parliamentary Research Service - EPRS. 2021. *Strategic communications as a key factor in countering hybrid threats*. Study, Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_STU\(2021\)656323](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_STU(2021)656323).

European Pravda. 2022. "Iran Threatens Zelenskyy Over His Speech to Congress." *Euro Integration*. December 22. Accessed May 11, 2023. <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/news/2022/12/22/7152958/>.

Farwell, James. 2012. *Persuasion and power : the art of strategic communication*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

Faulconbridge, Guy. 2022. *Russia warns United States against sending more arms to Ukraine*. London: Reuters, 25 04. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-warned-united-states-against-sending-more-arms-ukraine-2022-04-25/>.

Forum on the Arms Trade. 2022. *Arms Transfers to Ukraine*. 08 06.

Funakoshi, Minami, Hugh Lawson, and Kannaki Deka. 2022. "Tracking sanctions against Russia." *Reuters Graphics*. June 06. Accessed June 10, 2022. <https://graphics.reuters.com/UKRAINE-CRISIS/SANCTIONS/byvrijenzmve/>.

Guarino, Mark. 2022. "Foreign fighters in Ukraine speak out on their willingness to serve: 'I had to go.'" *ABC News*. November 06. Accessed MARCH 22, 2023. <https://abcnews.go.com/International/foreign-fighters-ukraine-speak-willingness-serve/story?id=91671528>.

Hallahan, Kirk, Derina Holtzhausen, Betteke Van Ruler, Dejan Vercic, and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh. 2007. "Defining Strategic Communication." *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 1 (1): 3-35. doi:10.1080/15531180701285244.

Heap, Ben, Pia Hansen, and Monika Gill. 2021. *Strategic Communications Hybrid Threats Toolkit Applying the principles of NATO Strategic Communications to understand and counter grey zone threats*. Scientific Report, Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.

Hoffman, Frank G. 2007. *Conflict in the 21st Century: the rise of Hybrid Wars*. Arlington, Virginia: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies. [https://www.potomacinstitute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac\\_hybridwar\\_0108.pdf](https://www.potomacinstitute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf).

Hoffman, Frank G. 2009. "Hybrid Warfare and Challenges." Edited by Joint Force Quarterly. *Joint Force Quarterly* (National Defense University Press) 1 (52): 34-39. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA496280.pdf>.

Holtzhausen, Derina, and Ansgar Zerfass. 2013. "Strategic Communication – Pillars and Perspectives of an Alternative Paradigm." In *Organisationskommunikation und Public Relations [Public Relations and Communication Management - Current Trends and Emerging Topics]*, by A. Zerfass et al. (Editors), 73-94. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. doi:10.1007/978-3-531-18961-1\_4.

Holtzhausen, Derina, and Ansgar Zerfass. 2015. "Strategic Communication Opportunities and Challenges of the Research Area." In *The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication*, by Derina Holtzhausen and Ansgar Zerfass, 3-17. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis.

Holtzhausen, Derina, și Ansgar Zerfass. 2015. *The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication*. New York: Routledge .

Information Defense Hub. 2023. *War in Ukraine: Lessons Identified and Learned*. Praga: The European Values Center for Security Policy - Information Defense Hub.

Ioniță, Crăișor-Constantin. 2023. „Conventional and hybrid actions in the Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.” *Security and Defence Quarterly* 5-20.

IPSOS. 2023. *One year in, global public opinion about the war in Ukraine has remained remarkably stable*. 20 January. Accessed February 21, 2024. <https://www.ipsos.com/en/war-in-ukraine-january-2023>.

Jentleson, Bruce. 2010. "Coercive diplomacy: scope and limits, theory and policy." In *The Routledge Handbook of Security Studies*, by Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Victor Mauer, 404-414. Abingdon: Routledge.

Kacała, Tomasz. 2016. "THE ROLE OF MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION (STRATCOM)." *Journal of Positive Management* 7 (1): 32-44. doi:10.12775/JPM.2016.002.

Kertysova, Katarina, Michel Rademaker, and Tim Sweijs. 2019. *The Role of Strategic Communications in Enhancing Resilience and Stability in the Eu's South-Eastern Neighbourhood*. Studiu, The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies.

KIIS. 2023. *DYNAMICS OF TRUST IN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN 2021-2022*. 13 January. Accessed february 21, 2024. <https://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1174&page=3>.

—. 2023. *DYNAMICS OF TRUST IN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN 2021-2023*. 18 December. Accessed May 21, 2024. <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1335&page=8>.

—. 2023. *FEASIBILITY OF LIBERATING CRIMEA BY MILITARY MEANS: RESULTS OF A TELEPHONE SURVEY CONDUCTED ON FEBRUARY 22-MARCH 6, 2023*. 12 March. Accessed May 12, 2024. <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1204&page=19>.

—. 2023. *PUBLIC OPINION IN UKRAINE AFTER 10 MONTHS OF WAR*. 15 January. Accessed April 21, 2024. <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1175&page=21>.

Kushnir, Viktoria, and Iryna Izhutova. 2021. "Strategic communications: current state within security and defence sector." *Rocznik Ochrona Przedsiębiorcy* (National Defence University of Ukraine named after Ivan Cherniakhovskiy) 68-77.

Le Monde with AP. 2022. "Ukraine President Zelensky to US Congress: 'Your money is not charity, it's an investment in global security'." *Le Monde*. December 22. Accessed April 12, 2023. [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/12/22/ukraine-president-volodymyr-zelensky-addresses-us-congress\\_6008649\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/12/22/ukraine-president-volodymyr-zelensky-addresses-us-congress_6008649_4.html).

Liptak, Kevin, and Maegan Vazquez. 2022. "Zelensky delivers impassioned plea for more help fighting Russia on the 'frontline of tyranny'." *CNN*. December 21. Accessed March 21, 2023. <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/21/politics/zelensky-biden-washington-visit-ukraine-russia-war/index.html>.

Marahrens, Sönke, and Josef Schröfl. 2024. "The Russia-Ukraine Conflict From a Hybrid Warfare Cognitive Perspective." *The Defence Horizon Journal*. Accessed October 29, 2024. <https://tdhj.org/blog/post/russia-ukraine-hybrid-cognitive-warfare/>.

Marples, David R. 2022. "Russia's war goals in Ukraine." *CANADIAN SLAVONIC PAPERS* (Routledge) 64 (2-3): 207-219. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00085006.2022.2107837>.

McCuen, John J. 2008. "Hybrid Wars." *Military Review* 107-113.

McKernan, Bethan. 2022. "Ukraine appeals for foreign volunteers to join fight against Russia." <https://www.theguardian.com/>. February 27. Accessed March 21, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/27/ukraine-appeals-for-foreign-volunteers-to-join-fight-against-russia#:~:text=Interested%20volunteers%20have%20been%20told,voluntary%20basis%2C%20Zelenskiy's%20statement%20said>.

Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine. 2021. "The Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security is presented." *The Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security*. aprilie 1. Accessed aprilie 9, 2023. <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/news/prezentovano-centr-strategichnih-komunikacij-ta-informacijnoi-bezpeki>.

Ministry of Defence of Ukraine. 2017. *The White Book 2016: The Armed Forces of Ukraine*. White Book, Kyiv: Ministry of Defence of Ukraine.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. n.d. *Russia invaded Ukraine. Enlist to the International Legion of Defence of Ukraine*. Accessed March 23, 2023. <https://fightforua.org/>.

Myre, Greg, interviu de Ailsa Chang. 2022. „National Public Radio, NPR Putin publicly put Russian nuclear forces on high alert. What should we make of that?" *Putin publicly put Russian nuclear forces on high alert. What should we make of that?* (29 March).

NATO. 2016. "Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine." NATO. July. Accessed February 15, 2023. [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_09/20160920\\_160920-compreh-ass-package-ukraine-en.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_09/20160920_160920-compreh-ass-package-ukraine-en.pdf).

—. 2020. *NATO recognises Ukraine as Enhanced Opportunities Partner*. 12 June. [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_176327.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_176327.htm).

—. 2022. "NATO-Ukraine relations." NATO. February. Accessed June 22, 2023. [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/2/pdf/220214-factsheet\\_NATO-Ukraine\\_Relations\\_.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/2/pdf/220214-factsheet_NATO-Ukraine_Relations_.pdf).

NATO Standardization Office. 2023. *AJP-10 ALLIED JOINT DOCTRINE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS*. Strategy, NATO STANDARDIZATION OFFICE. Accesat april 23, 2023.

NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence. n.d. "About Strategic Communications." *Stratcomcoe*. Accessed 02 16, 2021. [https://stratcomcoe.org/about\\_us/about-strategic-communications/1#:~:text=What%20is%20StratCom%3F,military%20strategy%2C%20and%20many%20others](https://stratcomcoe.org/about_us/about-strategic-communications/1#:~:text=What%20is%20StratCom%3F,military%20strategy%2C%20and%20many%20others).

Nothhaft, Howard, and Hagen Schölzel. 2015. "(Re-)Reading Clausewitz The Strategy Discourse and its Implications for Strategic Communication." In *The Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication*, by Derina Holtzhausen and Ansgar Zerfass, 18-33. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis.

Parlamentul European. 2024. *Trei țări vecine membre ale Parteneriatului estic: Ucraina, Republica Moldova și Belarus*. Accesat Martie 12, 2024. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/ro/sheet/171/trei-tari-vecine-membre-ale-parteneriatului-estic-ucraina-republica-moldova-si-b>.

Paul, Christopher. 2011. *Strategic Communication: origins, concepts, and current debates*. California: Praeger.

Public Broadcasting Service . 2022. "What did Ukraine President Zelensky ask for during his call with Congress?" *PBS News Hour*. 16 March. Accessed March 21, 2023. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/what-did-ukraine-president-zelensky-ask-for-during-his-call-with-u-s-congress>.

Reuters. 2023. "Spain trains Ukrainian volunteers ahead of expected Russian offensive." *Reuters.com*. 09 February. Accessed March 22, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/spain-trains-ukrainian-volunteers-ahead-expected-russian-offensive-2023-02-09/>.

Ricks, Jacob I., and Amy H. Liu. 2018. "Process-Tracing Research Designs: A Practical Guide." *The Teacher - American Political Science Association* 51 (4): 824-846. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096518000975>.

Salnikova, Olha, Igor Sivokha, and Andrii Ivashchenko. 2019. "Strategic communication in the modern hybrid warfare." *Social Development and Security* 9 (5). doi:<https://doi.org/10.33445/sds.2019.9.5.9>.

Sanders, Deborah. 2023. "Ukraine's third wave of military reform 2016–2022 - building a military able to defend Ukraine against the Russian invasion." *Defense & Security Analysis* (Routledge Taylor & Francis) 39 (3): 312-328. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2023.2201017>.

Service of the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine. 2020. *Olha Stefanishyna: The new National Security Strategy determines an algorithm of actions on the way towards NATO membership*. 15 September. Accessed June 21, 2024. <https://www.kmu.gov.ua/en/news/olga-stefanishina-nova-strategiya-nacbezpeki-viznachaye-algoritm-dij-na-shlyahu-do-chlenstva-nato>.

Shuster, Simon. 2022. "Inside Zelensky's World." *Time*. April 28. Accessed May 14, 2023. <https://time.com/6171277/volodymyr-zelensky-interview-ukraine-war/>.

Solomons, Adam, and Stephen Wynn-Davies. 2022. *Daily Mail*. 22 March. Accessed March 21, 2023. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10639491/Zelensky-told-Italian-MPs-Ukraine-brink-surviving-Russia-war-Rome-backed-EU-bid.html>.

Statista. 2023. *Russia-Ukraine war 2022-2023 - statistics & facts*. statistics & facts, Statista Research Department. <https://www.statista.com/topics/9087/russia-ukraine-war-2022/#topicOverview>.

—. 2023. *Russia-Ukraine war 2022-2023 - statistics & facts*. Accessed March 23, 2023. <https://www.statista.com/topics/9087/russia-ukraine-war-2022/#topicOverview>.

Stratcom Ukraine. n.d. *#MyUkrainels*. Accessed March 21, 2023. <https://stratcomua.org/en/communication/10#open>.

—. n.d. "ARMY. REBIRTH." *Stratcom Ukraine*. Accessed June 12, 2022. <https://stratcomua.org/en/communication/13#open>.

—. n.d. "Corruption in the army kills." *Stratcom Ukraine*. Accessed June 12, 2022. <https://stratcomua.org/en/changesProject/2#open>.

—. n.d. *Countering Gender-Based Violence in Conflict-Affected Regions of Eastern Ukraine*. Accessed March 22, 2023. <https://stratcomua.org/en/communication/16#open>.

StratCom Ukraine. n.d. *Demobilization 2016*. Accessed March 21, 2023. <https://stratcomua.org/en/communication/1#open>.

Stratcom Ukraine. n.d. *Exhibition "Warrior. Freedom Through the Ages"*. Accessed March 24, 2023. <https://stratcomua.org/en/communication/7#open>.

—. n.d. "Invictus Games Team Ukraine." *Stratcom Ukraine*. Accessed June 12, 2022. <https://stratcomua.org/en/changesProject/3#open>.

—. n.d. *Let My People Go*. Accessed March 12, 2023. <https://stratcomua.org/en/communication/11#open>.

—. n.d. "Like.U." *Stratcom Ukraine*. Accessed June 12, 2022. <https://stratcomua.org/en/communication/3#open>.

StratCom Ukraine. n.d. *Strategic Communications Center StratCom Ukraine*. Accessed March 23, 2023. <https://stratcomua.org/ua/about>.

Sweet, Ken, and Fatima Hussein. 2022. "How sanctions are affecting the Russian economy." *PBS*. 04 23. Accessed 06 06, 2022. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/how-sanctions-are-affecting-the-russian-economy>.

The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies. n.d. *The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies*. Accessed December 19, 2023. <https://hcss.nl/research/>.

The International Institute for Strategic Studies . 2022. *The Military Balance 2022*. London: Routledge.

Thomas, Ken, and Restuccia Andrew. 2022. "Zelensky Says Ukraine Will Never Surrender, Asks Biden and Congress for More Aid." *The Wall Street Journal*. 22 December. Accessed March 21, 2023. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/zelensky-heads-to-washington-to-shore-up-more-u-s-support-for-ukraine-11671644438>.

Trebesch, Christoph, Arianna Antezza, Katelyn Bushnell, André Frank, Pascal Frank, Lukas Franz, Ivan Kharitonov, Bharath Kumar, Ekaterina Rebinskaya, and Stefan Schramm. 2023. *The Ukraine Support Tracker: Which countries help Ukraine and how?* Kiel Institute for the World Economy. [https://www.ifw-kiel.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/fis-import/87bb7b0f-ed26-4240-8979-5e6601aea9e8-KWP\\_2218\\_Trebesch\\_et\\_al\\_Ukraine\\_Support\\_Tracker.pdf](https://www.ifw-kiel.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/fis-import/87bb7b0f-ed26-4240-8979-5e6601aea9e8-KWP_2218_Trebesch_et_al_Ukraine_Support_Tracker.pdf).

Uzun, Erhan. 2021. "NATO's Strategic Communication (Stratcom) Activities During 2014 Ukraine Crisis." *Journal of Crisis and Political Research* 5 (1): 154-1784.

Van Evera, Stephen. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Walker, Nigel. 2023. *Conflict in Ukraine: A timeline (2014 - eve of 2022 invasion)*. Research Briefing, House of Commons Library.

Wallenius, Claes, and Sofia Nilsson. 2019. "A Lack of Effect Studies and of Effects: The Use of Strategic Communication in the Military Domain." *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 404-417. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2019.1630413>.

Wallenius, Claes, and Sofia Nilsson. 2019. "A Lack of Effect Studies and of Effects: The Use of Strategic Communication in the Military Domain." *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF*

*STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION* (Routledge) 13 (5): 404-417. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2019.1630413>.

Wohlforth, William C. 2010. "Realism and security studies." In *The Routledge Handbook of Security Studies*, by Myriam Dunn Cavelty and Victor Mauer, 9-20. Abingdon: Routledge.

Zerfass, Ansgar, Dejan Verčič, Howard Nothhaft, and Kelly Page Werder. 2018. "Strategic Communication: Defining the Field and its Contribution to Research and Practice." *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 12 (4): 487-505. doi:[10.1080/1553118X.2018.1493485](https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2018.1493485).