



The legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine during the full-scale Russian aggression in the context of Ukrainian-American relations

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Abstract. The full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine has increased the importance of legal argumentation in international political communication and transformed public diplomacy into an important instrument of international legitimisation and strategic mobilisation. Under these conditions, the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine acquired particular significance in strengthening international democratic solidarity and support for the rules-based international order, including within Ukrainian-American relations. The aim of the article was to determine the principal instruments, functions and political significance of the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine during the full-scale Russian aggression and to clarify its role in strengthening international democratic and legal solidarity, with particular emphasis on the Ukrainian-American dimension. The methodological framework combined qualitative content analysis, discourse analysis, framing analysis and the comparative method. It has been established that legal discourse became one of the central components of the wartime public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine. References to international law, sovereignty, territorial integrity, war crimes and international accountability were systematically employed to legitimise Ukraine's position and delegitimise Russian aggression. The study demonstrated that legal public diplomacy contributed to strengthening democratic solidarity between Ukraine and the United States by framing the war as a global challenge to international legality and collective security. It has also been determined that legal public diplomacy functioned as a distinct form of strategic communication combining legal legitimisation, political mobilisation and strategic narrative construction. The practical significance of the study consisted in the possibility of applying its findings within international relations, strategic communication, public diplomacy and international law for analysing legal narratives and mechanisms of international legitimisation during contemporary armed conflicts

Keywords: international law; strategic communication; presidential diplomacy; democratic solidarity; legal narratives; rules-based order; accountability for aggression

Introduction

The full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine has become one of the most serious challenges to the international legal order and the post-Cold War security architecture. The war has intensified debates concerning the effectiveness of international law, collective security mechanisms and the rules-based international order. Under these conditions, public diplomacy has acquired exceptional strategic importance as states increasingly compete for international legitimacy,

political solidarity and normative authority within the global communicative space. Legal argumentation has become a central component of such communication, serving to legitimise political positions, delegitimise aggression and mobilise international support. In this context, the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine has emerged as an important instrument for strengthening international democratic solidarity, particularly within Ukrainian-American relations.

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The issue of wartime public diplomacy and strategic communication has attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent years. Japanese researchers M. Matsuoka & R. Matsuoka (2022) analysed Volodymyr Zelenskyy's address to the Japanese parliament and concluded that emotional solidarity, symbolic identification and the personalisation of political communication became central mechanisms of Ukrainian wartime diplomacy. According to the authors, the President of Ukraine successfully adapted rhetorical strategies to the historical memory and cultural context of the target audience, thereby increasing the effectiveness of communicative influence. M. Karmazina (2024) examined the diplomatic activity of Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the first months of the full-scale invasion and emphasised the role of political subjectivity, symbolic resistance and anti-colonial narratives in shaping Ukraine's international image. The researcher concluded that wartime presidential diplomacy transformed into a mechanism for consolidating both domestic and international political support.

O. Koptiev (2023) investigated public diplomacy as an instrument of Ukraine's foreign policy and demonstrated that strategic communication became an important factor in strengthening Ukraine's international position during the war. Particular attention was devoted to digital diplomacy and the transformation of communication technologies under conditions of military conflict. M. Trofymenko (2025) analysed public diplomacy in the context of Ukraine's national security and argued that international communication during wartime performs not only informational but also strategic-security functions. The researcher emphasised that public diplomacy contributes to the formation of international coalitions and strengthens political resilience under conditions of external aggression.

Several studies have focused specifically on the public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine during the period of full-scale war. O. Vysotskyi (2024) analysed the metamodern features of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's public diplomacy and argued that the President of Ukraine combined irony, emotional sincerity and strategic seriousness within a new communicative model adapted to the conditions of wartime political communication. The existing body of scholarship has made an important contribution to understanding various dimensions of Ukrainian wartime public diplomacy and legal communication. Nevertheless, the available studies tend to focus on particular legal initiatives, communicative campaigns or thematic aspects of presidential diplomacy. The concept of democratic solidarity in Ukrainian presidential diplomacy has also attracted scholarly attention. O.Y. Vysotskyi (2025) examined the representation of American leadership in Volodymyr Zelenskyy's public diplomacy during the presidency of Joseph Biden and demonstrated that the Ukrainian president consistently portrayed the United States as

the principal defender of democracy and international law. According to the researcher, this communicative strategy contributed to strengthening bipartisan support for Ukraine within the American political system. Author analysed Ukrainian anti-Americanism during the full-scale war and concluded that the public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine played an important role in preventing the spread of anti-American narratives within Ukrainian society despite periods of political disagreement between Kyiv and Washington. A comprehensive analysis of legal public diplomacy as an integrated strategic instrument operating through legal narratives, international legitimacy and democratic solidarity, with particular emphasis on the Ukrainian-American dimension, remains limited. This gap determines the relevance of the present study. The aim of the article was to determine the content, principal instruments and functions of the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine during the full-scale Russian aggression and to clarify its role in strengthening international democratic and legal solidarity, with particular emphasis on Ukrainian-American relations, through appeals to the norms and principles of international law and the rules-based international order.

Materials and Methods

The methodological framework of the study was based on an interdisciplinary approach combining the theoretical instruments of international relations, public diplomacy studies, strategic communication research and international legal analysis. Such an approach makes it possible to examine the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine not only as a communicative phenomenon but also as a mechanism for constructing international legitimacy, mobilising political support and shaping normative interpretations of the Russian-Ukrainian war within the framework of the international legal order. The conceptual foundation of the research relied upon contemporary approaches to public diplomacy, strategic narratives and legal communication in international politics developed in the works of J. Melissen (2005), J. Nye (2005), A. Miskimmon *et al.* (2017), N. Cull (2019), A. Miskimmon & B. O'Loughlin (2026) as well as studies devoted to lawfare and legal diplomacy (Dunlap, 2008; Kittrie, 2016).

Within the framework of the present study, legal public diplomacy was interpreted as a form of strategic international communication in which legal norms, principles, institutions and categories are systematically employed to legitimise political positions, delegitimise violations of international law, mobilise international support and construct mechanisms of international accountability. Such an understanding makes it possible to distinguish legal public diplomacy from broader moral, emotional or value-based rhetoric. Whereas moral rhetoric primarily appeals to ethical values and humanitarian solidarity, legal public diplomacy is

based upon references to international legal norms, the Charter of the United Nations, international criminal responsibility, sovereignty, territorial integrity and mechanisms of legal accountability. Consequently, the analytical focus of the study was concentrated specifically on legal argumentation and legal framing in the wartime communication of the President of Ukraine.

The empirical basis of the research consisted of official speeches, public addresses and statements delivered by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy between February 2022 and March 2025 and retrieved from the official website of the President of Ukraine (Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy to American students..., 2022). The selection of empirical materials was based on several criteria. First, the analysed speeches had to contain explicit references to international law, legal responsibility, international tribunals, sovereignty, territorial integrity or the rules-based international order. Second, the speeches had to be directed toward international audiences capable of influencing political decision-making concerning support for Ukraine. Third, the selected materials had to possess significant political and communicative resonance within the international public sphere. The corpus of analysed materials included the address delivered at the joint session of the United States Congress on 22 December 2022 (Speech by the President of Ukraine at the Riksdag..., 2022), speeches before the United Nations Security Council (I propose to convene the global peace formula..., 2022), addresses to the Group of Seven (It is necessary that Russia stops killing people..., 2022), speeches before the parliaments of Sweden and Denmark (We stand, we fight and we will win..., 2022), communications with American academic audiences (Freedom must always prevail when challenged..., 2023) and official statements concerning the establishment of a special tribunal regarding the crime of aggression against Ukraine. In addition, official documents related to the activities of the Coalition of States ("Core Group") concerning the establishment of the special tribunal were examined. The empirical materials were collected primarily from the official website of the President of Ukraine, official international institutional sources and publicly accessible governmental documents.

The methodological design of the study combines several complementary qualitative research methods. The principal method employed in the research is qualitative content analysis. This method made it possible to identify recurring legal concepts, normative categories and communicative patterns within the speeches of the President of Ukraine. Particular attention was devoted to the frequency and contextual use of references to sovereignty, territorial integrity, aggression, international criminal responsibility, the Charter of the United Nations, democracy, freedom and the rules-based international order. Content analysis

also facilitated the identification of dominant legal narratives and strategic communicative priorities within Ukrainian wartime diplomacy. The application of content analysis corresponds to contemporary approaches in political communication research emphasising the importance of systematic textual examination for identifying latent political meanings and ideological structures (Krippendorff, 2019).

Discourse analysis constituted another important methodological instrument of the study. The use of discourse analysis made it possible to examine the mechanisms through which legal meanings, political legitimacy and collective identities are constructed in presidential communication. Particular attention was devoted to the discursive construction of Ukraine as an active subject of international law defending not only its own sovereignty but also the broader international legal order. Simultaneously, the discourse analysis enabled the examination of mechanisms for delegitimising Russian aggression through references to war crimes, terrorism, genocide and violations of international law. The methodological use of discourse analysis is based upon approaches developed within critical discourse studies and international political communication research, according to which political language functions not merely as a descriptive instrument but also as a mechanism for constructing social and political reality (Fairclough, 2010).

An important component of the methodological framework is framing analysis. The framing approach made it possible to determine how the President of Ukraine structured interpretative schemes concerning the Russian-Ukrainian war for international audiences, particularly for the United States political establishment and American society. Framing analysis focused on identifying dominant interpretative frames employed within legal public diplomacy, including the "defense of democracy", "protection of international law", "collective security", "accountability for aggression" and "shared democratic solidarity". The methodological application of framing analysis relies upon the theoretical assumptions developed by R. Entman (1993), according to which political communication influences international perception through the selection and emphasis of particular interpretative elements.

Elements of the comparative method were employed to examine legal narratives and communicative patterns across presidential speeches delivered to different international audiences. Particular attention was devoted to identifying variations in the use of legal argumentation in communications addressed to American political institutions, international organisations and foreign parliaments. Comparative observations facilitated a more nuanced understanding of the contexts in which references to international law, democratic solidarity, accountability and collective security were employed. This approach contributed to the interpretation

of the role of legal public diplomacy within broader international communication and, in particular, within the Ukrainian-American dimension. To strengthen the analytical validity of the study, elements of source triangulation were employed through the combined examination of presidential speeches, official statements and international legal documents related to accountability for the crime of aggression against Ukraine. Particular attention was devoted to materials concerning the establishment of a special tribunal and related international initiatives. Such an approach helped to reduce the limitations associated with the analysis of a single category of sources and provided a broader contextual understanding of the legal narratives employed in presidential public diplomacy.

The study additionally relies upon a broad range of scholarly literature devoted to wartime public diplomacy, strategic narratives, political legitimacy, lawfare and international communication. Particular importance was attached to recent studies analysing the wartime communication of Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the transformation of public diplomacy under conditions of full-scale war. The incorporation of contemporary theoretical and empirical studies contributed to the conceptualisation of legal public diplomacy as a distinct communicative phenomenon situated at the intersection of international law, strategic communication and international political legitimacy. The methodological limitations of the study should also be acknowledged. The research primarily focuses on qualitative analysis of political communication and therefore does not provide a quantitative assessment of the direct influence of legal narratives on American public opinion or foreign policy decision-making. Furthermore, the complexity of international political processes makes it difficult to isolate the impact of legal argumentation from broader geopolitical, strategic and domestic political factors influencing United States support for Ukraine. Nevertheless, the selected methodological framework makes it possible to comprehensively analyse the structure, functions and political significance of legal public diplomacy under conditions of contemporary interstate war.

Results

The analysis demonstrated that the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine functioned as a systematic international communicative activity aimed at forming broad international support for Ukraine among democratic states and international institutions, including within the framework of Ukrainian-American relations. In legal public diplomacy oriented towards the American target audience, Volodymyr Zelenskyy positioned Ukraine not as a victim but as an active subject of international law that defends its own sovereignty: "Our country will never be a victim again. It will not just be an observer of life – including its own life. We can, want to and will be subjects in life" (Address by President

of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy to American students..., 2022). Here the President of Ukraine rejects the narrative portraying Ukraine as a victim of aggression and instead presents the state as an active subject of international law defending its sovereignty. This distinction reflects the fundamental principles of international law, in particular the sovereign equality of states and the right of self-defence in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. By emphasising subjectivity, Volodymyr Zelenskyy constructs a narrative in which Ukraine's resistance represents not only national survival but also the defence of the legal principle that states have the right to determine their political existence.

Addressing the American public, Volodymyr Zelenskyy employed legal reasoning in international politics and resorts to the argument of precedent: "There is case law in your country. If once – even a long time ago – a decision was made at the appropriate level by a proper court, similar cases are decided according to this precedent. This is always taken into account. The same is true, in fact, in international politics" (Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy to American students..., 2022). The president deliberately refers to the American doctrine of judicial precedent, which constitutes the foundation of the United States legal system, interpreting international politics through a legal analogy. The essence of this form of message lies in the idea that geopolitical events function in a manner similar to legal precedents: if a violation remains unpunished, it becomes a model for future behaviour. This rhetorical strategy represents a paradigmatic manifestation of legal public diplomacy, as it frames geopolitical events through a legal lens.

Using legal discourse, Volodymyr Zelenskyy interpreted Russia's aggression as a dangerous international precedent: "What is Russia doing now? It is trying to set a precedent. If it manages to break the statehood of the neighboring nation, other states will do the same" (Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy to American students..., 2022). Here the Ukrainian president directly applies the analogy of precedent to the international system. The destruction of Ukrainian statehood would create a normative precedent for aggressive war, effectively undermining the prohibition on the use of force established by the Charter of the United Nations. Such an argument shifts attention from a regional conflict to a systemic threat to the international legal order. The message to the American audience is clear: if aggression proves successful, the norm prohibiting territorial conquest may be violated across the world. Volodymyr Zelenskyy interprets Ukraine's resistance to the aggressor, supported by its partners, as a counter-precedent: "What is Ukraine doing now with its partners? Trying to set another precedent. So that all the aggressors in the world once and for all see that the war will create the biggest problems for them – for the aggressors" (Address by President of Ukraine

Volodymyr Zelenskyy to American students..., 2022). This statement expresses one of the core concepts of legal public diplomacy under conditions of war: the creation of a precedent with a deterrent effect. Ukraine and its partners are portrayed as the creators of a new norm in international relations, according to which aggression leads to serious political, economic and legal consequences. The statement indirectly refers to mechanisms such as sanctions, international criminal prosecution and diplomatic isolation. As a result, American support is presented as necessary for the creation of a new precedent concerning the enforcement of law within the international legal system.

The President of Ukraine emphasised the role of the United States in protecting international law: "There are states that contribute as much as possible to protect freedom. To stop the aggression. To guarantee the force of international law. It is this role that the United States has chosen" (Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy to American students..., 2022). This statement clearly positions the United States as a guarantor of the international legal order. Volodymyr Zelenskyy acknowledges the United States for supporting the observance of international law, thereby reinforcing the idea that American leadership is necessary for the preservation of global stability. In the context of Ukrainian-American relations, this constitutes a classic example of strategic public diplomacy: by praising the United States as a defender of international law, Volodymyr Zelenskyy encourages further cooperation and leadership. The President of Ukraine calls into question the legitimacy of neutrality under conditions of aggression: "There are states that are trying to stay away. Be supposedly neutral. And not help fight for our common values" (Address by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy to American students..., 2022). The President equates geopolitical neutrality with moral passivity, comparing it to observers who witness injustice without intervening. From the perspective of international law, this argument indirectly refers to the collective responsibility of states to defend the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, in particular the prohibition of aggressive war. Thus, the speech establishes a normative expectation that democratic states should actively support the observance of international law.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy clearly defined international assistance as a legal and normative investment in the rules-based international system: "Every decision to protect Ukraine and freedom guarantees the preservation of the international rules-based order" (We need global leadership of democracy..., 2023). The president emphasises that each concrete decision – military, economic or political – strengthens the global legal framework regulating interstate behaviour: "As a house grows from bricks, so does freedom grow from our decisions – we guarantee it" (We need global leadership of democracy..., 2023). The metaphor of building

freedom "brick by brick" emphasises the cumulative nature of law enforcement in international relations. For the United States during the presidency of Joe Biden, this argument aligned the defence of Ukraine with longstanding objectives of American foreign policy: the maintenance of a stable rules-based international order. Volodymyr Zelenskyy explicitly recognises the United States as the central leader of the democratic coalition supporting Ukraine: "I am grateful to the United States and all Americans for the large-scale military and economic support as well as the support with sanctions. The US has united the free world and established a solid foundation of our security solidarity" (I propose to convene the global peace formula summit..., 2022). This diplomatic acknowledgement served two purposes. It reinforced the perception of the United States as a guarantor of international law and democratic security, while also strengthening the political legitimacy of continued American support. In the context of Ukrainian-American relations, such recognition constitutes a strategic component of legal public diplomacy aimed at sustaining bipartisan support in the United States.

An important step within the framework of the legal public diplomacy conducted by the Ukrainian president was the initiation of the creation of a tribunal concerning Russian aggression. The issue was first raised by Volodymyr Zelenskyy exactly one month after the beginning of the full-scale Russian aggression, on 24 March 2022, during a speech to the Riksdag of Sweden. At that time, the Ukrainian president emphasised: "Those who gave the order to kill and those who killed must face the Tribunal. So that no other country in the world thinks that it can kill people with impunity just like that, that it can destroy neighboring countries" (Speech by the President of Ukraine at the Riksdag..., 2022). At the same time, the head of the Ukrainian state already realised that the work of such an institution might take years: "An international tribunal? They know that it takes years to bring specific perpetrators to justice" (Speech by President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Folketing, 2022). During the conduct of his legal public diplomacy, the President of Ukraine raises the issue of Russian responsibility for genocidal political communication, the essence of which lies in the structured, deliberate and systematic use of language aimed at legitimising and normalising killings, state aggression and their consequences, the use of weapons to resolve political issues, the seizure of the territories of other sovereign states and objects of civilian infrastructure, the deportation of populations, violations of fundamental human rights, the deterioration of living conditions on the planet, and the destruction of ethnic groups and peoples. Speaking before the Parliament of Romania in April 2022, Volodymyr Zelenskyy referred to a publication disseminated by the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti as evidence of narratives aimed at denying Ukrainian statehood and identity, arguing that

such materials could serve as evidence in future proceedings against Russian war criminals. Russian official and semi-official narratives frequently contained openly revisionist and dehumanising representations of Ukrainian statehood and identity, which further reinforced the legal and moral arguments employed in the President of Ukraine's public diplomacy.

On 5 April 2022, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, at a meeting of the UN Security Council, stated that a tribunal concerning Russian war crimes in Ukraine should be analogous to the Nuremberg Tribunal. "Immediately bring the Russian military and those who gave them orders to justice for war crimes in Ukraine. Everyone who gave criminal orders and fulfilled them by killing people will face a tribunal similar to the Nuremberg trials. I want to remind Russian diplomats that a man like von Ribbentrop has not avoided punishment after World War II. And I also want to remind the architects of Russia's criminal policy that punishment has reached Adolf Eichmann as well. None of the culprits will escape. No one" (Speech by the President of Ukraine at a meeting..., 2022), emphasised the President of Ukraine.

Already on 29 June 2022, in the address to the UN Security Council, Volodymyr Zelenskyy called for the establishment of a special international tribunal to investigate the actions of the Russian occupiers on Ukrainian soil, as the UN Security Council had done in the case of the genocide in Rwanda. This Organisation "already has enough power to bring a terrorist state to justice. Chapter VII of the UN Charter allows for the establishment of a special international tribunal to investigate the actions of the Russian occupiers on Ukrainian soil. The word "genocide" has repeatedly been used. And you all saw what the Russian occupiers did in our city of Bucha. Each of you can obtain information on how many mass graves appeared around the city of Mariupol alone after the Russian army razed it to the ground. It was a city of half a million residents! Now there are ruins. In the case of the genocide in Rwanda, the UN Security Council established an International Tribunal within six months since the beginning of the genocide" (It is necessary that Russia stops killing people..., 2022), emphasised the president.

While conducting public legal diplomacy, Volodymyr Zelenskyy explained to the international community the expediency of establishing a special tribunal concerning Russian aggression. Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated: "...the existing judicial institutions for jurisdictional reasons cannot bring to justice all those guilty of the primary crime of aggression. That is why we need a Special Tribunal regarding this crime – Russian aggression against Ukraine. A Tribunal that will ensure the fair and lawful punishment of those who started this history of disasters and tragedies, which has become the biggest war in Europe since World War II. Our efforts will be enough to record the crimes of the Russian occupiers; to gather all the evidence so that it is absolutely

admissible in the courts; to establish each of the guilty. However, those people whose decisions led to this array of crimes must not hide behind the so-called immunity of officials. The principle of inevitability of punishment must also apply to these people. And this can only be ensured by the Special Tribunal on Aggression against Ukraine" (All Russian criminals..., 2022).

Already on 9 May 2023, the Coalition of States ("Core group") for the establishment of the tribunal was officially formed, whose representatives stated that "those responsible for committing the crime of aggression against Ukraine must not go unpunished, and call on the international community to consider appropriate actions, including through the establishment of an appropriate justice mechanism to ensure effective accountability for the crime of aggression, which is of concern to the international community as a whole. We therefore support exploring the creation of a tribunal to ensure effective accountability for the crime of aggression against Ukraine" (Joint statement on efforts..., 2023). As of April 2024, the Coalition of States ("Core group") for the establishment of the tribunal included 44 countries, namely: Albania, Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Netherlands, New Zealand, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, Britain and the United States (Yemets, 2024).

In Strasbourg on 19-21 March 2025, the participants of the Coalition of States (Core Group) held their final, fourteenth meeting. The coalition's legal experts completed the technical work on three draft documents necessary for the establishment of the special tribunal concerning the crime of aggression against Ukraine: the draft bilateral agreement between Ukraine and the Council of Europe on the establishment of the special tribunal, the draft statute of the special tribunal, and the draft enlarged partial agreement on the administration of the special tribunal. The special tribunal is planned to be established within the framework of the Council of Europe with a mandate to prosecute high-ranking political and military leaders for the crime of aggression against Ukraine. This crime concerns the decision to use armed force against another state, which constitutes a violation of the Charter of the United Nations. One of the most vivid episodes of the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine during the full-scale Russian aggression in the context of Ukrainian-American relations was the speech on 22 December 2022 at a joint session of both chambers of the United States Congress. It performed several functions, including the legitimisation of Ukraine's cause within the framework of the international legal order, the consolidation of

the transatlantic democratic coalition led by the United States, the presentation of American assistance as a strategic investment in the international legal order, and the mobilisation of political support in the United States Congress by embedding the Ukrainian struggle within American historical memory and identity.

The central task of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's legal public diplomacy was the construction of a shared political identity between Ukraine and the United States. From the very beginning, Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed Americans not merely as an external audience but as members of a common normative community: "Dear Americans! In all states, cities and communities. All those who value freedom and justice. Who cherish it as strongly, as we, Ukrainians, in all our cities, in each and every family. I hope my words of respect and gratitude resonate in each American heart!". Such wording transforms Ukraine's struggle from a regional conflict into a collective democratic cause. The Ukrainian president clearly formulates a triadic coalition: "... We are united. Ukraine, America and the entire free world". This is undoubtedly an effective narrativisation of identity formation, representing Ukraine not as a peripheral partner but as an integral part of the global liberal-democratic order led by the United States. From the perspective of international law, the speech indirectly refers to the principle of collective defence, linking the defence of Ukraine with the protection of the global normative system. The speech notes that Ukraine's war is aimed at the defence of international law: "The restoration of international legal order is our joint task" (We stand, we fight and we will win..., 2022). Rather than presenting Ukraine's war solely as national self-defence, Volodymyr Zelenskyy defines it as a struggle for the restoration of the international legal system violated by Russian aggression.

The Ukrainian president repeatedly emphasises the unique role of the United States in defending the normative order: "Americans gained this victory – and that's why you have succeeded in uniting the global community to protect freedom and international law" (We stand, we fight and we will win..., 2022). Here Volodymyr Zelenskyy attributes leadership in the defence of the international legal order to the United States, which corresponds to America's traditional self-perception as a guarantor of global legality since the end of the Second World War. The significance of this speech by the President of Ukraine in the context of legal public diplomacy is determined by the fact that it corresponded to the fundamental norms of international law, in particular the prohibition of aggression under the Charter of the United Nations, the territorial integrity of states, and responsibility for international crimes. "...To ensure that America's leadership remains solid, bicameral and bipartisan... You can strengthen sanctions to make Russia feel how ruinous its aggression truly is. It is in your power to help us bring to justice everyone, who

started this unprovoked and criminal war" (We stand, we fight and we will win..., 2022).

The principal pragmatic objective of this speech by the President of Ukraine was to secure continued military support from the United States. Volodymyr Zelenskyy carefully interprets assistance not as charity but as a collective defence of the international system. The concise phrase clearly expresses this principle: "Your money is not charity. It's an investment in the global security and democracy..." (We stand, we fight and we will win..., 2022). Such wording reconceptualises United States support as strategic, mutually beneficial and consistent with American national interests. Volodymyr Zelenskyy also addresses concerns regarding escalation by emphasising Ukraine's self-reliance: "Ukraine never asked the American soldiers to fight on our land instead of us" (We stand, we fight and we will win..., 2022). This was undoubtedly intended to reassure American policymakers that support for Ukraine does not imply direct United States military intervention, which in turn was an important factor for maintaining bipartisan consensus. The speech of the President of Ukraine was also directed towards the normative delegitimisation of Russia: "It would be naive to wait for steps towards peace from Russia – which enjoys being a terrorist state" (We stand, we fight and we will win..., 2022).

By describing Russia as a terrorist actor, the Ukrainian president sought to legitimise the establishment of legal responsibility and the strengthening of sanctions against it, as well as continued military assistance to the Ukrainian state. It is important that Volodymyr Zelenskyy positions Ukraine as a responsible actor committed to the lawful resolution of the conflict, thereby strengthening its diplomatic legitimacy. Presenting a structured peace plan – the Ukrainian Peace Formula – Volodymyr Zelenskyy advanced a concrete legal diplomatic initiative consisting of ten points in accordance with the norms of international law and the fundamental provisions of the Charter of the United Nations: "Ukraine has already offered proposals, which I just discussed with President Biden – our Peace Formula. Ten points, which should and must be implemented for our joint security – guaranteed for decades ahead... Each of you, ladies and gentlemen, can assist in its implementation – to ensure that America's leadership remains solid..." (We stand, we fight and we will win..., 2022).

During the conduct of legal public diplomacy before an American audience, the President of Ukraine repeatedly positions Russian aggression as a challenge to the post-war international legal order, of which the United States was one of the principal architects and guarantors: "2022 turned out to be the year when one of the biggest enemies of freedom, with its all out, unjust, and unprovoked war, tried to smash everything built up since the Berlin Wall fell" (Freedom must always prevail when challenged, 2023). Here Volodymyr Zelenskyy employs legal discourse. "Unjust, and unprovoked

war” constitutes a direct reference to the concept of the crime of aggression in international criminal law. The semantic formulation “everything built up since the Berlin Wall fell” refers to the liberal international order based on state sovereignty, the inviolability of borders and human rights. Thus, Ukraine is presented as a bastion of international law, and United States support as the defence of the global legal order.

An important aspect of the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine has been the delegitimisation of the aggressor through the construction of the image of Russia as a systemic threat to international law: “Russia’s war on Ukraine isn’t just about some old-fashioned dictatorship trying to settle scores, real or imagined... It’s Putin attacking that big shift that happened back in 1989”. Two dimensions of legal interpretation are employed here. First, Russia is portrayed as a revisionist of the international order, a state seeking to dismantle the security system that emerged after the Cold War. Second, responsibility for aggression, war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law is personalised: “Putin’s crafting his own ideology, and at its core is complete disregard for human life, for freedom, and for respecting any kind of borders – between countries, between people, even between truth and lies” (Freedom must always prevail when challenged, 2023).

Discussion

The results of the present study demonstrated that the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine during the full-scale Russian aggression constitutes a distinct and increasingly important form of strategic international communication situated at the intersection of public diplomacy, strategic narratives and international legal legitimisation. The analysis indicated that legal discourse in Ukrainian presidential communication performs not merely a declarative or symbolic function but also operates as an instrument for constructing political legitimacy, mobilising international support and reinforcing the normative foundations of the rules-based international order. In this respect, the Ukrainian case significantly expands existing theoretical understandings of wartime public diplomacy and demonstrates the growing role of international legal argumentation within contemporary global political communication.

The findings of the study generally corresponded to contemporary approaches to public diplomacy emphasising the transformation of diplomacy under conditions of globalisation, digital communication and international political interdependence. The present findings support the arguments of previous researchers concerning the growing importance of public communication in contemporary diplomacy. However, the Ukrainian case demonstrates that under conditions of full-scale interstate war public diplomacy extends beyond informational and image-building functions and

increasingly incorporates legal argumentation as an independent mechanism of international legitimisation. N.J. Cull (2019) argued that public diplomacy increasingly functions through communicative interaction with foreign audiences rather than through traditional interstate diplomatic channels alone. Similarly, J. Melissen (2005) emphasised that modern diplomacy has become deeply interconnected with symbolic politics, public narratives and media communication. The legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine illustrates this transformation particularly clearly, as presidential communication became an essential mechanism for influencing international political discourse and shaping foreign perceptions of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

At the same time, the Ukrainian case demonstrates several important features distinguishing wartime legal public diplomacy from traditional models of public diplomacy. Classical approaches to public diplomacy often focus primarily on cultural attraction, national image promotion and soft power resources. In contrast to J.S. Nye (2005) emphasis on attraction and soft power resources, the present study demonstrates that legal legitimacy may itself function as a strategic resource of influence during wartime. Therefore, the Ukrainian experience expands traditional interpretations of soft power by highlighting the political significance of legal narratives and accountability mechanisms. The present study demonstrates that under conditions of large-scale interstate war, public diplomacy increasingly acquires legal-security dimensions. In the speeches of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, legal argumentation was systematically employed to frame the Russian invasion not merely as a bilateral regional conflict but as a fundamental violation of international law threatening the stability of the international order as a whole. Such communicative framing transformed Ukraine from a passive victim of aggression into a defender of universal legal principles, including sovereignty, territorial integrity and collective security.

The findings of the study also contribute to the theoretical literature concerning strategic narratives in international relations. While the findings generally confirm the strategic narrative approach proposed by A. Miskimmon *et al.* (2017), the present research demonstrates that legal narratives constitute a distinct subtype of strategic narratives centred on international legal norms, responsibility and accountability. This aspect remains insufficiently elaborated in existing scholarship. According to the authors, strategic narratives function as instruments through which political actors seek to shape the international environment by constructing coherent interpretations of political reality, legitimacy and collective identity. The legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine clearly demonstrates the operation of strategic legal narratives aimed at legitimising Ukraine’s position within the international system while simultaneously delegitimising

Russian aggression. Several dominant legal narratives were identified in the course of the analysis, including the narrative of self-defense under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, the narrative of accountability for war crimes and aggression, the narrative of democratic solidarity and the narrative of protecting the rules-based international order.

Particularly important was the integration of legal and democratic narratives within Ukrainian presidential communication. The study demonstrates that legal discourse addressed to American political audiences was frequently combined with references to shared democratic values, collective historical memory and the moral responsibility of democratic states. In this regard, the findings partially confirm the conclusions of studies devoted to emotional diplomacy and symbolic mobilisation during wartime communication (Matsuoka & Matsuoka, 2022). However, unlike purely emotional or symbolic approaches, the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine relied heavily upon institutional and normative categories derived from international law. Consequently, the communicative strategy combined emotional mobilisation with legal legitimisation, thereby strengthening the persuasive capacity of presidential rhetoric in the international arena.

The results of the study additionally support previous research emphasising the central role of strategic communication within Ukrainian wartime diplomacy. At the same time, the findings demonstrated that the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine extended beyond the bilateral Ukrainian-American dimension and contributed to the consolidation of broader Euro-Atlantic and international democratic solidarity. Through appeals to international law, accountability and the rules-based international order, Ukrainian presidential communication mobilised support among international organisations, European states and democratic partners across the wider international community. M. Karmazina (2024) argued that the diplomacy of Volodymyr Zelenskyy became an instrument for strengthening Ukraine's political subjectivity within international politics. Similarly, O.S. Koptiev (2023) demonstrated that public diplomacy during the war transformed into an important technology of Ukrainian foreign policy. The present research further develops these conclusions by demonstrating that legal argumentation constituted one of the principal mechanisms through which Ukrainian political subjectivity was internationally constructed and defended. Through references to sovereignty, aggression, genocide, war crimes and international criminal responsibility, the President of Ukraine consistently framed Ukraine as a fully legitimate subject of international law confronting unlawful imperial aggression.

An important theoretical implication of the study concerns the relationship between legal public diplomacy and lawfare. Contemporary researchers

increasingly argue that international law has become an instrument of strategic political competition and geopolitical confrontation (Dunlap, 2008; Kittrie, 2016). The findings of the present research confirm that legal norms and institutions are no longer confined exclusively to judicial or diplomatic procedures but actively function within global public communication. Ukrainian presidential diplomacy illustrates how legal discourse may be strategically employed to mobilise international coalitions, influence foreign public opinion and construct international accountability mechanisms. In this context, legal public diplomacy may be interpreted as a communicative dimension of lawfare operating within the informational and normative domains of international politics. Thus, the present study supports the theoretical assumptions of aforementioned researchers regarding the strategic use of law in international competition. At the same time, it extends these approaches by demonstrating how legal argumentation operates not only within institutional and judicial arenas but also within presidential public diplomacy directed at foreign audiences.

The Ukrainian case also demonstrates the growing importance of legal legitimacy within the contemporary liberal international order. According to G.J. Ikenberry (2020), the stability of the post-Cold War international system largely depends upon the preservation of institutional rules, legal norms and multilateral cooperation mechanisms. The Russian invasion of Ukraine represented not only a military conflict but also a challenge to the normative foundations of the liberal international order itself. Consequently, the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine consistently emphasised the universal significance of defending international law and collective security. The study demonstrates that references to international law served not only pragmatic foreign policy purposes but also broader normative functions aimed at preserving the legitimacy of the international system.

At the same time, the findings of the study indicate that the effectiveness of legal public diplomacy should not be overstated. Although legal argumentation played an important role in strengthening international support for Ukraine, the political decisions of the United States were influenced by a broader combination of strategic, geopolitical and domestic political considerations. Realist approaches to international relations traditionally emphasise that state behavior is primarily determined by security interests and power calculations rather than normative commitments (Mearsheimer, 2014). From such a perspective, American support for Ukraine may be interpreted not only as a defense of international law but also as a strategy aimed at containing Russian geopolitical influence and preserving the balance of power in Europe. Certain elements of political skepticism toward support for Ukraine within the United States also demonstrate

the limitations of legal public diplomacy. Isolationist and populist political groups, particularly among representatives associated with nationalist or “America First” approaches, frequently questioned the strategic necessity of extensive American involvement in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Within such discourses, references to international law or democratic solidarity often proved less influential than arguments concerning domestic economic priorities, migration issues or political polarisation. Consequently, the study confirms that legal public diplomacy operates within broader political contexts where normative arguments interact with geopolitical interests, domestic ideological competition and media polarisation.

Nevertheless, the research demonstrates that legal public diplomacy contributed significantly to the formation of bipartisan political support for Ukraine during the initial phases of the full-scale invasion. References to international law, war crimes and aggression enabled Ukrainian presidential communication to frame support for Ukraine not merely as assistance to a foreign state but as participation in the defense of international legality and democratic civilisation. In this respect, the findings correspond to studies emphasising the importance of legitimacy and normative framing in international political mobilisation (Adler-Nissen, 2014). Legal argumentation strengthened the moral and institutional legitimacy of Ukraine’s position while simultaneously increasing the reputational costs of political neutrality toward Russian aggression. An important feature of the Ukrainian case concerns the personalisation of legal public diplomacy through the figure of the President. Unlike traditional diplomatic communication conducted primarily through institutional channels, Ukrainian wartime diplomacy became highly personalised and media-oriented. Volodymyr Zelenskyy functioned simultaneously as head of state, wartime leader, global communicator and symbolic representative of democratic resistance. Such personalisation increased the visibility and emotional effectiveness of legal communication while also facilitating the rapid dissemination of strategic narratives through digital media platforms. The findings therefore support broader scholarly arguments concerning the mediation and personalisation of modern diplomacy under conditions of digital globalisation (Pamment, 2016).

The study additionally demonstrates that legal public diplomacy should be conceptualised as a distinct analytical category within contemporary international relations research. Existing scholarship frequently analyses wartime communication through the frameworks of soft power, strategic narratives or digital diplomacy. However, the Ukrainian case illustrates that legal discourse itself may become an autonomous strategic instrument within international communication. Legal public diplomacy differs from broader moral or value-based rhetoric because it systematically employs

legal norms, institutions and accountability mechanisms as central communicative resources. Consequently, the concept of legal public diplomacy makes it possible to better understand the interaction between international law, legitimacy and strategic communication in contemporary international conflicts. The broader significance of the study extends beyond the Russian-Ukrainian war. The findings indicate that legal communication is likely to acquire growing importance in future international conflicts characterised by intensive information warfare, geopolitical polarisation and competition over international legitimacy. Under such conditions, states increasingly seek not only military or economic superiority but also normative and legal dominance within the international communicative sphere. Therefore, the Ukrainian experience of legal public diplomacy may represent an important model for understanding the future transformation of diplomacy, international law and strategic communication within the evolving global political order.

Conclusions

The conducted research demonstrated that the legal public diplomacy of the President of Ukraine during the full-scale Russian aggression has become an important instrument of strategic international communication aimed at legitimising Ukraine’s position within the framework of international law, mobilising international support and strengthening Ukrainian-American relations. The study established that legal discourse occupied a central place in wartime presidential communication and functioned not merely as an auxiliary rhetorical element but as a systematic mechanism for constructing international political legitimacy under conditions of interstate armed conflict. The analysis of presidential speeches and public addresses revealed several dominant legal narratives that structured Ukrainian wartime communication. These included the legitimisation of Ukraine’s right to self-defense in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, the delegitimisation of Russian aggression as a violation of international law, the promotion of accountability for war crimes and the crime of aggression, the defense of the rules-based international order and the construction of democratic solidarity between Ukraine and the United States. Through these legal narratives, the President of Ukraine consistently framed the Russian-Ukrainian war not as a regional or bilateral conflict but as a global challenge to international legality, collective security and democratic political order.

The study additionally demonstrated that legal public diplomacy constituted an important mechanism for strengthening Ukrainian-American relations during the period of full-scale war. References to international law, democratic values and institutional responsibility enabled Ukrainian presidential communication to appeal simultaneously to the normative

foundations of American foreign policy and to broader traditions of democratic internationalism within the United States political culture. The study substantiated the conceptual distinction between legal public diplomacy and other forms of wartime political communication. The proposed interpretation of legal public diplomacy as a distinct form of strategic international communication constitutes one of the principal theoretical contributions of the article. Further research may focus on comparative analysis of legal public diplomacy in other contemporary armed conflicts, as well as on the quantitative assessment of the influence of legal narratives on international public opinion, media discourse and foreign policy decision-making

processes. Particularly promising is the further theoretical development of the concept of legal public diplomacy as an independent analytical category within contemporary international political science and international legal studies.

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Правова публічна дипломатія Президента України під час повномасштабної російської агресії в контексті українсько-американських відносин

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Анотація. Повномасштабна російська агресія проти України посилила значення правової аргументації у міжнародній політичній комунікації та перетворила публічну дипломатію на важливий інструмент міжнародної легітимації й стратегічної мобілізації. За цих умов правова публічна дипломатія Президента України набула особливого значення для зміцнення відносин зі Сполученими Штатами Америки та підтримки міжнародного порядку, заснованого на правилах. Метою статті було визначити основні інструменти, функції та політичне значення правової публічної дипломатії Президента України в умовах повномасштабної російської агресії, а також з'ясувати її роль у зміцненні міжнародної демократичної та правової солідарності з особливим акцентом на українсько-американському вимірі. Методологічну основу дослідження становили якісний контент-аналіз, дискурс-аналіз, фреймінг-аналіз і порівняльний метод. Встановлено, що правовий дискурс став одним із центральних компонентів воєнної публічної дипломатії Президента України. Посилання на міжнародне право, суверенітет, територіальну цілісність, воєнні злочини та міжнародну відповідальність систематично використовувалися для легітимації позиції України та делегітимації російської агресії. Доведено, що правова публічна дипломатія сприяла зміцненню демократичної солідарності між Україною та США шляхом представлення війни як глобального виклику міжнародному правопорядку та колективній безпеці. Також визначено, що правова публічна дипломатія функціонувала як окрема форма стратегічної комунікації, яка поєднувала правову легітимацію, політичну мобілізацію та конструювання стратегічних наративів. Практичне значення дослідження полягало у можливості використання його результатів у сфері міжнародних відносин, стратегічних комунікацій, публічної дипломатії та міжнародного права для аналізу правових наративів і механізмів міжнародної легітимації в умовах сучасних збройних конфліктів

Ключові слова: міжнародне право; стратегічна комунікація; президентська дипломатія; демократична солідарність; правові наративи; міжнародний порядок, заснований на правилах; відповідальність за агресію