

## **THE U.S. IMAGE IN THE INFORMATION WAR: THE CASE OF SLOVAKIA**

The war in Ukraine has reintroduced large-scale military conflict to Europe, but it has also intensified a parallel information war in which the image of the United States plays one of the central roles. On the one hand, the United States is presented by its allies as a defender of democratic values, a reliable security partner, and a leading force in supporting Ukraine's sovereignty. On the other hand, adversarial actors – most notably Russia and affiliated media – portray the United States as an aggressor, a manipulator, and the true instigator of the conflict. These competing representations are not merely rhetorical constructs, they carry concrete political implications. They influence public opinion, shape international alliances, and impact the perceived legitimacy of U.S. foreign policy.

Information warfare can be conceptualized as a strategic domain in which both state and non-state actors compete to shape perceptions, manipulate trust, and disseminate targeted narratives to achieve political objectives. Unlike conventional warfare, it doesn't rely on physical force but on discursive dominance. Techniques such as disinformation, propaganda, selective historical framing, and strategic storytelling are disseminated through mass media, social networks, and digital platforms [2, p. 8-12]. Within this environment, the construction of a state's image becomes a deliberate act of strategic communication. States attempt not only to promote a favorable image of themselves but also to challenge or degrade the image of adversaries [7, p. 11].

This study examines how the image of the United States has been constructed and contested during the war in Ukraine, with particular emphasis on information warfare as a tool of persuasion, influence, and confrontation. The analysis focuses on Central Europe, highlighting the case of Slovakia as a country where disinformation campaigns targeting the United States have been particularly active and where pro-Russian narratives have gained traction in the public discourse.

The image of the United States in this context is formed across multiple,

interrelated levels: historical-narrative, media-communicative, geopolitical-strategic, domestic-political, and local-regional. Each level reflects distinct mechanisms of perception, narrative construction, and political messaging. In the Slovak case, these levels interact to produce a complex, often contradictory image of the United States – one that reflects both global dynamics and domestic particularities.

At the historical-narrative level, the image of the United States is shaped by collective memory and the strategic use of historical references. Competing actors draw on specific historical episodes to legitimize their present-day narratives. In the Slovak context, the legacy of U.S.-Slovak (and previously U.S.-Czechoslovak) relations plays an important role. Positive associations include American support for the creation of Czechoslovakia after World War I, the U.S. contribution to the defeat of fascism in World War II, and its backing of post-1989 democratic transitions [6, p. 156-160]. However, anti-American sentiments inherited from the communist era still persist among segments of the population. These often emphasize alleged U.S. imperialism, interventions abroad (such as NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia), or portray the United States as a dominant power interfering in the sovereignty of smaller nations. Such competing historical interpretations form the symbolic backdrop against which current U.S. actions in Ukraine are assessed.

At the media-communicative level, traditional and digital media serve as key arenas for disseminating opposing narratives about the United States. In Slovakia, this level has particular significance due to the strong presence of both pro-Western and pro-Russian voices in the media. Russian state-backed narratives – originating from sources such as RT and Sputnik – are frequently recycled by Slovak alternative media and social media influencers [1, p. 15].

Common themes include portraying the United States as the hidden orchestrator of the war, as responsible for provoking Russia through NATO expansion, or as dragging Europe into conflict for its own strategic gain. Simultaneously, mainstream Slovak media often reproduce Western perspectives, depicting the U.S. as a vital supporter of Ukraine and a defender of liberal democratic norms. This coexistence of contradictory narratives contributes to growing polarization in Slovak society, particularly given the rapid spread and emotional intensity of digital content.

At the geopolitical-strategic level, the image of the United States is shaped by its role and behavior in the international system. As the principal military supporter of Ukraine, the U.S. is framed by allies as the guarantor of European security and as a counterbalance to authoritarian regimes. Slovakia, as a member

of both NATO and the European Union, officially aligns with this position and has cooperated with U.S. security initiatives, including the provision of military aid to Ukraine. Nevertheless, criticism exists, especially among nationalist or Eurosceptic actors, who frame the U.S. as pursuing self-interested geopolitical objectives and treating Central Europe as a buffer zone. Public debates over the 2022 U.S.-Slovakia Defence Cooperation Agreement, for example, included accusations that the agreement would lead to U.S. military dominance over Slovak territory [8]. In this way, geopolitical developments are reinterpreted through national lenses and domestic political struggles.

At the domestic-political level, internal developments within the United States are frequently employed in the information war to weaken its credibility abroad. Narratives emphasizing domestic polarization, racial injustice, institutional dysfunction, or democratic backsliding are circulated by adversarial actors to challenge the United States' legitimacy as a promoter of democratic values. Following the 2024 presidential election, Russian and pro-Russian media outlets amplified narratives portraying the U.S. as a deeply divided society in political and moral crisis. Slovak media outlets, both mainstream and alternative, reflected a range of reactions, with some expressing concern about the global implications of U.S. instability [3. p. 246-250]. In Slovakia, such narratives resonate particularly with segments of the population already skeptical of Western liberal models, reinforcing doubts about American moral authority and strategic reliability.

At the local-regional level, Slovak-specific factors mediate the perception of the United States. Historical sensitivity to foreign influence, the legacy of Soviet domination, and the importance of national identity contribute to the public's reception of international narratives. Surveys by the GLOBSEC Policy Institute have shown that a substantial proportion of Slovaks either distrust the United States or are ambivalent toward its role, with such attitudes becoming more pronounced during times of crisis [5, p. 38-41, 9, p. 8, 13]. In addition, local actors, including politicians and civil society leaders, play an essential role in either reinforcing or challenging dominant narratives.

The war in Ukraine and the intensifying global competition over narratives have made the construction of a national image a central element of information warfare. As this paper has demonstrated, the image of the United States in Slovakia isn't fixed – it is shaped through a complex interplay of historical memories, media narratives, geopolitical framing, domestic political perceptions, and local-regional factors. These multiple layers reveal how global narratives are filtered and reframed through national contexts, often with competing

interpretations coexisting in public discourse.

The Slovak case underscores the vulnerability of smaller democracies in Central Europe to disinformation campaigns and the importance of strengthening media literacy and critical historical awareness. While the United States remains officially viewed as a key security partner, significant portions of the population remain ambivalent or skeptical. Future research could benefit from comparative analysis across Central European countries to explore whether similar dynamics exist, offering deeper insight into how national images are constructed, contested, and instrumentalized in times of geopolitical tension.

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## **ОСОБЛИВОСТІ ВЗАЄМОЗВ'ЯЗКУ МЕДІА ДИСКУРСУ ТА СУСПІЛЬНОГО ДИСКУРСУ ЩОДО ВІЙНИ В СУЧАСНІЙ УКРАЇНІ**

Мета повідомлення\* – проаналізувати процес зміни дискурсу в українському суспільстві та медіа щодо бажаного завершення російсько-української війни в період між лютим 2022 та березнем 2025.

Російсько-українська війна, яка набула відкритої форми з початком повномасштабного вторгнення Росії 24 лютого 2022 року, стала ключовим каталізатором трансформації дискурсу в українському суспільстві. Вона не лише змінила політичний, соціальний та культурний ландшафт країни, але й вплинула на сприйняття українцями бажаного завершення війни. На початку війни домінуючим фреймом у медіа та суспільному дискурсі було формулювання «перемога України». Однак із часом спостерігається поступовий перехід до іншого фрейму — «справедливий мир». Це повідомлення має на меті проаналізувати процес цієї трансформації, визначити часові рамки змін, описати проміжні стадії та з'ясувати роль медіа та суспільного дискурсу (відображеного в соціальних мережах) у формуванні нових наративів.

### *1. Зміна дискурсу: від «перемоги» до «справедливого миру»*

На момент початку відкритого вторгнення українське суспільство демонструвало єдність у прагненні до перемоги над агресором. Цей наратив активно підтримувався медіа, політичними лідерами та волонтерськими організаціями. Фрейм «перемога України» базувався на ідеях захисту суверенітету, територіальної цілісності та відновлення справедливості. У медіа простежувалися чітко виражені елементи героїзації української армії та цивільного населення, а також акцент на моральну перевагу України над агресором.