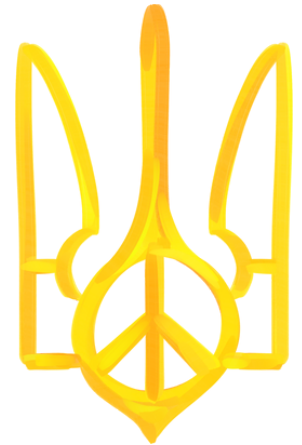


# Symbols in Ukraine's Stratcom



The Seal-Trident of Volodymyr the Great, founder of Ukraine

## SYMBOLS AND NARRATIVE

- Symbols are instantly recognisable and can convey powerful emotions, often formed through historical and contemporary experiences. These emotions are not just passive morale boosters, they can directly influence action:
  - In ancient Rome, the Eagle standard was a symbol of pax Romana and directly tied to legionary pride, in some cases, their loss directly motivated Emperors to conduct campaigns and negotiations with the sole objective of recovering them.
  - In the USA, the flag is respected to a sacred degree; containing more rules about its raising, lowering and folding than any other in the world. Its raising at Iwo Jima was directly cited by veterans as pushing them to keep fighting.
  - In military units, the 'Cap Badge' plays an important part of fostering camaraderie and regimental pride, influencing individuals to go above and beyond "for the badge."
- These examples (and many others) across history demonstrate how symbols play a critical part in narrative formation and stratcom telling a story that is already ingrained in the subconscious. Ukraine is successfully doing the same in its ongoing narrative conflict with Russia.

## THE OLD AND THE NEW



"St Javelina" raised over \$1 million for Ukraine.

- Some of Ukraine's symbols are historical; such as the Seal-Trident of Volodymyr the Great (above).
  - It is a symbol of the founder of Ukraine and Russia, with evidence of its popular use stretching back to the 10th century.
  - It was also briefly the national symbol in 1918, before the Russian Bolsheviks absorbed Ukraine and suppressed national symbols.
  - It is also a symbol that encapsulates defense and the hardship of prior Russian suppression, a powerful narrative for a state fighting a defensive war. The Trident has regularly appeared on uniforms, civilian clothes and military equipment.
- The sunflower has had a long history in Ukraine as a symbol of warmth, energy and life that was worshiped by pre-Christian Slavs and as an agricultural food source. More recently, it has become a symbol of resistance; being placed on barricades, featuring in protests against Russian embassies and being given to Russian soldiers 'so that when they die, at least sunflowers will grow.' Leading comedian John Oliver to remark: "that woman brought flowers to a gunfight and somehow still comfortably won."

- More modern symbols include 'St Javelina' (above). Originating from a Ukrainian-Canadian marketeer seeking to raise money for Ukraine, it has become widely adopted in Ukraine as a piece of dark humor (itself an important part of stratcom) and a symbol of the West's support for Ukraine. The symbol can also be viewed as a subtle mockery of the Kremlin's distortion of religion to justify its own narratives.

## WHAT ELSE CAN BE CULTIVATED?

- The symbols in Ukraine's stratcom are not only ways of raising awareness and connecting with domestic and international audiences; they are testimony to Ukraine's unique and separate cultural identity that the Kremlin has routinely denied.
- They can also be emphasised as "underdog" symbols; emphasising defensive tools and living things tied to the land. A contrast to Russia's "Z", "V" and double headed eagle, which are directly tied to conquest.
- There are many more symbols at Ukraine's disposal, such as the nightingale. Traditionally viewed as symbols of beauty and melody they would tie in to Ukraine's use of music in stratcom and the tragedy of the beauty destroyed by the Kremlin's invasion.
- Learn more about Ukraine's national symbols here.