

RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA WARS: RUSSIA-UKRAINE 2022

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Abstract. Modern wars rely heavily on working with the mass consciousness of both compatriots as well as foreigners. A combatting party aims to prove the justness of their actions. Going into war against Ukraine, Russia allegedly tried to achieve demilitarisation and denazification, but in addition to failing to contrive the attack, they also never achieved the desired level of popular support. Propaganda wars resolve what cannot be achieved in the physical world. They can accentuate victory while losing in reality. Propaganda is a virtual space into which its creators are pushed from the physical and informational space. The Soviet experience of propaganda warfare is difficult to repeat today because total propaganda cannot work when the population has access to other sources of information. Contemporary world is not without propaganda; instead, we have a world of multiple propaganda where everyone can find something to prove their individual perception.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, war, propaganda

Propaganda takes its strongest forms in times of crisis, and war is crisis¹. The propaganda toolkit of contemporary Russia has been shaped, on one hand, by both the power and volume of past Soviet propaganda which at that time accompanied a person from birth to death, and on the other hand by two events in post-Soviet Russian history: the election of Boris Yeltsin and the election of Vladimir Putin. They demonstrated the power that has strength in nonviolent methods of ruling. These were also critical events. Yeltsin was elected when he was seriously ill and not even able to appear on TV. The phrase uttered by Boris Yeltsin's press secretary S. Yastrzhembsky who

¹ This article was translated from Russian to English by Sirje Kupp-Sazonov. See more on propaganda: **Potšeptsov, G.** 2009. Propaganda trumppörin. Uus külm sõda ja infokonfliktid postsovetlikus ruumis [Drums of Propaganda: Information Conflicts on Post-Soviet Territory]. Tallinn: Olion; **Fedchenko, Y.** 2016. 'Kremlin Propaganda: Soviet Active Measures by Other Means.' – StopFake, 21 March 2016. <https://www.stopfake.org/en/kremlin-propaganda-soviet-active-measures-by-other-means/> (accessed 30 November 2022); **Pikulicka-Wilczewska, A.; Sakwa, R.** 2015. (eds). Ukraine and Russia: People, Politics, Propaganda and Perspectives. Bristol: E-International Relations Publishing.

explained Yeltsin's absence with the sentence "The president works with documents and his handshake is firm"² became a well-known meme.

Putin was elected because of the characteristics that people wanted to see in their future president, but which in reality he did not possess. According to film director V. Mansky, who is the author of documentaries about Putin, voters had to be convinced that Putin had such qualities. In these two cases Russian propaganda demonstrated its victory over the collective consciousness by carefully managing all the information. It was a propaganda war against its own people.

One interesting feature of propaganda wars is the use of words with no reality behind them. When a Soviet propagandist said "all of progressive humanity supports us" he used one of such fictitious objects 'progressive humanity' because it is impossible to determine what it is or how strongly it actually supports anybody.

Propaganda wars can be distinguished from the usual information wars and they form a separate type because of the following characteristics:

- *Difference in the size of the audience*: the information war seeks to narrow down its target audience, thus trying to increase its effectiveness. The propaganda war targets the entire population of the country;
- *Information war is short-term, propaganda war is a long-term phenomenon*: it covers an increasing number of tools, topics and people as it develops;
- *Substantial changeability*: the propaganda war changes its set of narratives as its objectives are transformed. The information war, having achieved its goal, may end.

Propaganda war is always evolving and continuing. Information war, having more specific goals, often ends, switches to other goals, or stops for a while. In that sense, propaganda war is endless. Only a change of political regime can stop it or give it a completely different content.

Today we live in a world of information availability; in the past, information was a scarce resource. This is the reason why people used to watch television news more intensely than they do today. Then, a person was looking for the information; today it is the other way around—information is looking for a person.

² Ivanov, M. 2007. Survival Russian. Enlarged second edition. Montpelier: Russian Information Services, Inc., p. 89.

The civilization is developing towards the predominance of open systems over closed ones. This applies to everything in general. The work of the media, the work of the government, and business structures are also more successful outside of rigid rules. Countries with strict governance such as North Korea are at the bottom of the list of successful ones.

Tough governance also requires tough propaganda. Both rely on a system of punishing dissenters, which also slows down development of the country. China combines soft and hard methods. The former help the country to develop and the latter keep order, which is important for a country with a huge population. This is not so good for urban dwellers, but perhaps it is the only way to effect transition to democratic development.

One can admit that the USSR had strong propaganda because it had the ability to make it total. Everything relied on its narratives: media, cinema, literature, education and science. This meant that there was no other model of the world than the one propaganda gave. In fact, the collapse of the USSR coincided with the period when the jamming of Western radio programs was abolished.

Political information (*политинформация* in Russian) was also present in schools and children had the newspaper *Pionerskaya Pravda*, analogous to the main newspaper of the country *Pravda*. Children had ‘pure faith’; they absorbed everything all at once and completely. What is more, they had their own pantheon of children—the pioneers (also called the heroes). That being said, all Soviet heroes of that time, both children and adults, immediately lost their heroic characteristics when they disagreed with Soviet ideology, e.g., from Pavlik Morozov to Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya. In their real biographies we can trace how propaganda selects and strengthens the necessary characteristics in the image of a person, cutting off the unnecessary ones that could possibly destroy a desirable image. The first Soviet heroes appeared during the catastrophe of the Chelyuskin steamship and the rescue of its crew and passengers³. Thus, a fundamentally negative event was transformed into a positive one, a feat which can be considered the highest aerobatics of propaganda—the negative of the physical world is replaced by the positive of the virtual world.

War is always a time for heroes and propaganda, since without it the transition from human to hero is almost impossible. Propaganda is strong in the sense that no one dares to argue, since no one can directly oppose the state.

³ See this disaster for an example: **Shipping Wonders of the World. The “Chelyuskin” Rescue.** <https://www.shippingwondersoftheworld.com/chelyuskin.html>.

Only when time passes can heroes obtain different characteristics, sometimes of an opposite nature. The crisis ends and censorship eases.

For example, fifty years after the war the heroic deed of Soviet partisan Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya began to crumble. She turned out not even to be a partisan, as she had been presented before, but a military spy sent to burn down villagers' houses in the Moscow region so that the Germans would have no place to live. But as the peasants' houses were disappearing at the same time they detained her and, as a result, she ended up in the hands of the Germans.

A. Bilzho wrote that she was mentally ill:

the historical truth is this: Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya was repeatedly taken to the psychiatric hospital named after P. Kashchenko. She had another seizure, caused by the powerful shock associated with the war. But it was a clinic, not a heroic deed of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, who had been suffering from schizophrenia for a long time.⁴

As a result, a wave of criticism unfolded simultaneously, which is also understandable⁵. No hero who entered your memory in childhood can stop being a hero when you become an adult. Your child's 'alphabet' of heroes stays with you for a lifetime.

A. Bilzho said in his defense:

Myths are possible during war, but not later. War – it is tragedy, blood and mud. And corpses, corpses, corpses. We must remember, but only the truth. Only the truth! Behind many heroic deeds, there was treachery, cowardice and stupidity. Heights were often conquered in order to report. People were not spared. Generals were evacuated, and they abandoned their soldiers.⁶

In this conflict there is a clear rule: about sacred things one can speak only positive words or nothing at all. The opposite process is also painful for official propaganda when they want to turn not a hero but an enemy into

⁴ Сидорчик А. 2016. Диагноз доктора Бильжо. Чем болела Зоя Космодемьянская? 13.12.2016. https://aif.ru/society/history/diagnoz_doktora_bilzho_chem_bolela_zoya_kosmودemyanskaya.

⁵ Кононенко, М. 2016. Диагноз по переписке: правда и мифы о Зое Космодемьянской. <https://ria.ru/20161213/1483497480.html>; Беляев, И. 2016. Врач-мозговед и диагноз недели. 15.12.2016. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/28177469.html>; Богомолов, А. 2017. Два лица Зои Космодемьянской. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/26132.3/3023039/>.

⁶ Директор Музея Космодемьянской опровергла утверждение Андрея Бильжо о психической болезни разведчицы. 13.12.2016. <https://www.newsru.com/russia/13dec2016/declineschizo.html>.

ordinary person. Thus, today the authorities resist the rehabilitation of the soldiers of Vlasov's army who fought on Hitler's side⁷. Similarly, the authorities are reluctant to move forward in condemning Stalin's repressions. As a result, Stalin's view of the war of 1941–1945, created not only by history but also by propaganda, remains dominant.

Well-known journalist E. Kiselyov joins this discussion with the conclusion:

Democracy, freedoms and human rights and other values of Western civilization, that they tried to establish in the country during President Yeltsin (about that one can find information in the Yekaterinburg Center named after the first president of Russia, the center was fiercely criticised by Mikhalkov) somebody can consider almost the same evil as Nazi ideas. If not evil, then at least garbage. However, the ideological paradise means fighting against the West with its spiritual principles, Orthodox, nationalism, sacred canonical history and autocracy in the person of the president for life of all Russia – that is the saddest part of all.⁸

It was because of such discussions that Kiselyov left to work in Ukraine. The website *newsru.com* where this statement was published, with 3 million readers in a month, was closed down in 2021 ‘for political reasons’⁹. This means that the cleansing of the Russian information field began long before the war, whereas propaganda decided to, instead of war, call it SMO—a special military operation.

Recently, the concept of a ‘foreign agent’ was introduced in Russia. Such a reference must accompany the author’s name in the media if they have ever received royalties from abroad. For anyone, this resembles the status of ‘enemy of the people’ from the Stalin era. However, since not everyone who needs to be punished has received royalties from abroad, the expression ‘under foreign influence’ has been added, which is both difficult to prove and disprove.

Russia thus cleanses its information field in order not only to prevent the triumph of propaganda from being disturbed, but also to make other journalists or political analysts understand what they can expect. It is such a pinpoint method, but in the end it reaches anyone who writes. This method of

⁷ Историк “Ельцин Центра” подаст к Михалкову иск о клевете. 12.12.2016. <https://www.newsru.com/russia/12dec2016/nikitasokolov.html>.

⁸ Евгений Киселев: Ельцин, Михалков и Кончаловский. 12.12.2016. <https://www.newsru.com/blog/12dec2016/mihalkov.html>.

⁹ Спасибо всем, кто был с нами в течение 21 года. 31.05.2021. <https://www.newsru.com/russia/31may2021/newsrucomoutoforder2.html>.

'internal censorship' was very strong in Soviet times when everyone perfectly understood that it was better not to write or say anything at all.

One can see how *internal propaganda crushes any discussion, because one understands that it will be followed by a rejection of the ideological framework, which Putin inherited from the Soviet era.*

Propaganda wars take place inside and outside of the country. Russia successfully uses the propaganda of the past Soviet era against Ukraine as well. Since Russia and Ukraine share a Soviet past, these kinds of information strike often achieve their targets.

There is the same situation with history. Putin found himself at the end of his reign in charge of history, which was due to the need to set the stage for the war in Ukraine. And his perceptions have nothing to do with mainstream history.¹⁰

The U.S. State Department has identified five basic themes of Russian propaganda, including historical¹¹: Russia is an Innocent Victim; Historical Revisionism; The Collapse of Western Civilization is Imminent; Popular Movements are U.S.-sponsored 'Color Revolutions'; Reality is Whatever the Kremlin Wants It to Be.

One can use these strategic narratives¹² in order to explain many current events to the collective consciousness. Almost all of them (including all five of the above-mentioned topics) have been used to justify the war in Ukraine.

¹⁰ Yermolenko, V. (ed.) 2019. Re-Vision of history. Russian historical propaganda and Ukraine. Kyiv: K.I.S. https://ukraineworld.org/storage/app/media/Re_vision_2019_block%20eng.pdf.

¹¹ **Russia's Top Five Persistent Disinformation Narratives.** U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/russias-top-five-persistent-disinformation-narratives/>.

¹² Editor's note: One of the important tools of this information influence are strategic narratives. Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon and Ben O'Loughlin (**Roselle, L.; Miskimmon, A.; O'Loughlin, B.** 2021. Strateegiline narratiiv: pehme jõu uus käsitlus. Sõjateadlane, No. 17, pp. 13–32) have argued that the soft power of the 21st century is strategic narratives. Strategic narratives are stories disseminated to the public that are used by political actors (e.g., various organizations, states, etc.) as a means of shaping the common past, present and future of international politics to shape the perceptions and behavior of domestic and also international actors (see more **Miskimmon, A.; O'Loughlin, B.; Roselle, L.** 2013. Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order. Routledge. **Miskimmon, A.; O'Loughlin, B.; Roselle, L.** (eds). 2018. Forging the World. Strategic Narratives and International Relations. University of Michigan Press.). The author accentuates (G. Pocheptsov): "We often live in the real world and the virtual world at the same time. In the real world there may be some winners and losers, while in the virtual world there are others. Narratives describe both situations. And on the narrative level future defeats can hide because narratives are part of our thinking, an essential part, and we follow them, treating them as certain cognitive constructs. A narrative is

It is not so important that the themes of ‘denazification’ and ‘demilitarization’ are inadequate in relation to Ukraine. They can also be applied in the same way to Russia itself. In principle, they are inadequate for the modern world and the situation in Europe.

The war in Ukraine, like any other war, requires not only weapons but also words that act as weapons. One of such heralds of propaganda was T. Sergeyev, who wrote:

Denazification can be carried out only by the victor, which implies (1) his unconditional control over the process of denazification and (2) the power to ensure such control. In this respect, the denazified country cannot be sovereign. The denazifying state – Russia – cannot proceed from a liberal approach to denazification. The guilty party undergoing denazification cannot dispute the denazifier’s ideology. Russia’s recognition of the need for denazification of Ukraine means the recognition of the impossibility of the Crimean scenario for Ukraine as a whole.¹³

There is even the following remark: “The timeframe of denazification can in no way be less than one generation, that must be born, grow up and reach maturity in the conditions of denazification.”

It became an example of a new, or well-forgotten, propaganda genre that has been adequately evaluated.

Sergeyev’s radicality did not go unnoticed – the text has more than a million and a half views. In Wikipedia articles appeared in eight languages devoted to the text. Bundestag deputy Thomas Heilmann filed a complaint with the

a mental structure by which we can understand exactly how our thinking proceeds, how it is structured. Narratives come from literary studies where they were used to describe the structure of a narrative. It is a network of cause and effect relationships, revealing what follows and from what. Narratives set the causes of warfare to justify it in the eyes of their population and the world. Russia set its goals in the war in Ukraine as “demilitarization” and “denazification”. But they were too weak and vague to make its population go to war. They were completely undeveloped as narratives and weakly applicable to Ukraine. This led not only to failures in the war itself, but also to the mass flight of citizens abroad during the announced “partial mobilization”. Only 200 thousand people fled to Kazakhstan, while the declared number of mobilized people was 300 thousand. And the total number of those who escaped reaches up to 700,000.” (**Форбс: с начала мобилизации из России уехали 600-700 тысяч человек.** 04.10.2022. [https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5594283](https://meduza.io/news/2022/10/04/forbes-s-nachala-mobilizatsii-iz-rossii-uehalii-600-700-tysach-chelovek; МВД Казахстана сообщило о 200 тыс. прибывших россиян с начала мобилизации. 04.10.2022. <a href=).)

¹³ Серге́йцев, Т. 2022. Что Россия должна сделать с Украиной? 03.04.2022. <https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html>.

Berlin prosecutor's office and accused Sergeytsev of instigating genocide, and Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelensky called the text "evidence for a future tribunal against Russian war criminals". On 3 June 2022 the European Union put Sergeytsev on its sanctions list.¹⁴

At the same time, it is known that the Ukrainian party of this type enjoys the approval of one percent of voters.

In the past Sergeytsev was also 'noticed' as a screenwriter, although also in the propaganda field:

Timofey Sergeytsev is listed among the screenwriters of the 2012 feature film Match, about the soccer 'death match' between the Kiev players and the Luftwaffe team in the occupied Ukrainian capital in the summer of 1942. In this film, starring Sergey Bezrukov and Yelizaveta Boyarskaya, many local residents are shown as negative characters. Because of this, in 2014 the film was even banned from being shown in Ukraine as "the most odious example of modern Russian propaganda directed against the Ukrainian people."¹⁵

Sergeytsev's text is called 'the manifesto of Russian fascism'¹⁶.

We overestimate the opponents' thoughts; in fact, their reading does not go beyond popular books. The conventional bureaucrat does not have time to read books, especially serious ones; those are written for different reader. Politicians do not read scientific treatises, but popular books.

A. Morozov, for example, emphasizes:

Putinism relies on books by Nikolay Starikov and Sergey Kara-Murza, i.e., the stream products of political mythology. The Kremlin is firmly based on the foreign and domestic policy textbooks for the Higher School of the KGB (now the FSB), and then inscribes whatever fits into its scheme. All forms of 'complicated and excessive patriotism' Putin keeps at hand, scoffs, and considers entirely from

¹⁴ Лебедева, О. 2022. Немецкий депутат подал иск к автору статьи в РИА "Новости". 08.04.2022. <https://www.dw.com/ru/nemeckij-deputat-podal-isk-na-avtora-stati-o-denacifikacii-ukrainy-v-ria-novosti/a-61404136>; see also Венявкин, И. 2022. Человек, который придумал деукраинизировать Украину. История Тимофея Сергеяцева – методолога, политтехнолога и идеолога войны. 10.06.2022. <https://holod.media/2022/06/10/sergeitsev>.

¹⁵ **Окончательное решение украинского вопроса? Российское госагентство опубликовало пугающую статью – рассказываем подробнее.** 06.04.2022. <https://news.zerkalo.io/cellar/12257.html>; see also В Украине запрещен скандальный фильм "Матч". <https://glavnoe.in.ua/news/n193772>.

¹⁶ Зарипов, И. 2022. "Явка с повинной". Рунет читает "манифест российского фашизма". 05.04.2022. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/yavka-s-povinnoj-runet-chitaet-manifest-rossiyskogo-fashizma/31786412.html>.

the perspective of ‘recruitment’. [...] Very crude myths drive large contingents. These are the very ones that constitute the intellectual source of Putinism. This must be remembered when we read about the influence of Alexander Zinoviev or Nikolay Berdyaev, Georgy Shchedrovitsky or Lev Gumilev. Otherwise, both Russian intellectual history and the description of the Kremlin ‘myth machine’ will be distorted.¹⁷

It is clear that, to justify its invasion, Russian propaganda used a set of old motifs introduced and rooted in Soviet propaganda, since everything comes from ‘childhood’—in this case from a Soviet one.

Man needs a meaningful worldview which makes his life easier, helping him to make decisions. The state, with the help of its propagandists and by giving the label of ‘foreign agents’ to its opponents, is trying to hold onto its narratives, not allowing anything ‘hostile’ to catch the attention of the collective consciousness.

Propaganda is a mechanism for the collective consciousness for understanding situations. With propaganda narratives, anyone—not just a political scientist or journalist—can construct an algorithm for justifying any decision of the state. In addition, it is a conversation directly with the collective consciousness bypassing individual consciousness.

Today the system seems to have changed, and it likes officials who look completely modern but who are, inside, still in the same humble position in front of the authorities.

S. Medvedev describes this new reality of governance:

In the morning these state officials in Gucci suits return to their homes on Old Square, turn on their computers and open not Bloomberg news or oil quotes, they open Facebook. Because that is the Russian government, for them it is important what the intelligentsia writes. That is, I do not understand at all why people who rule billions of dollars, decide the matter of life and death, need all this /.../. It is not only about dependence on the system, it seems to me that everything is deeper – in the structures of identity. Putin and the war have given people an identity they have not had for decades. One can like Pelevin or not, but he says brilliant things. He said 15 years ago: Russia has found its national idea – Putin. I am afraid he is right about many things. Putin’s strength – and we should

¹⁷ Морозов, А. 2022. Жмых путинизма. 11.06.2022. <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/06/11/zhmykh-putinizma> [Морозов 2022]; on Sergeytsev see also: Захаров, Д. 2022. Манифест роснацизма: кто в Кремле написал программный материал об уничтожении Украины. 05.04.2022. <https://apostrophe.ua/article/politics/2022-04-05/manifest-rosnatsizma-kto-v-kremle-napisal-programmnyiy-material-ob-unichtojenii-ukrainyi/45202>.

call things by their proper names, recognizing the strength of the opponent – is that this man is really manipulating the world with little resources. As Dmitry Muratov told Open City [Открытый город], Putin spins the nuclear button on his finger like the keys to a car, he now spins the whole world with oil prices, with food prices, with American inflation unseen in the last 40 years, etc.¹⁸

In propaganda wars, it is fundamental to distinguish between primary and secondary goals. The secondary goals can be seen on the surface and the primary ones are hidden. Therefore, denazification or demilitarization are secondary goals, while the primary goal is to take Ukraine into its sphere of influence, because without it Russia becomes not a European but an Asian power, and in principle loses its power.

They are looking for powerful roots in Russian ideology today. But, in fact, there can be none since Putin does not read books—he listens to them in the car while travelling. Listening to books is not equivalent to reading.

A. Morozov emphasizes that:

In reality there are no direct sources. Putinism relies not on them, but on ‘secondary mythology’, i.e., various classical concepts that have already been vulgarized, i.e., assimilated, digested and expelled by someone and then eaten a second time.¹⁹

Propaganda builds fast routes for its messages; they run everywhere with terrifying speed, hitting literature, film, education and even science. All to the glory of propaganda. It is popular because it gives clear answers to every question.

Propaganda relies on sociology, so it must be sensitive to the movements and thoughts of the collective consciousness. Otherwise, its efforts will go to waste.

At the same time, it is interesting that Russian authorities have lately begun to react to ‘mini-conflict’ situations without allowing them to become the subject of debate. For example, Conversations about Important Things was a new subject introduced in schools on September 1st. This was meant for discussing the war in Ukraine with schoolchildren. However, after some parents refused

¹⁸ Фаст, Т.; Вигман, В. 2022. Русская обида придумана политтехнологами. Интервью С. Медведева. 16.08.2022. <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/08/16/russkaia-obida-pridumana-polittekhnologami>.

¹⁹ Морозов 2022.

to let their children attend those ‘classes’, the topic of the war was removed from discussion with children.

It is too quick a reaction for one to assume that the teachers themselves dared to do this. We are facing a clear recommendation from above, and it is an order for the bureaucracy below.

The Ministry of Education has updated the methodological materials for the class ‘Conversations about important things’, which is planned for September 12th. All references to Ukraine, ‘special operations’, and NATO as well as the slogan ‘it’s not scary to die for the homeland’ were removed from the ready-made materials for the class.²⁰

On the other hand, monumental propaganda has picked up—a monument to Prince Nevsky²¹ is being erected in occupied Mariupol. According to Stalinist propaganda, he once fought the German knights somewhere. However, modern historians have discovered that there was actually no battle, but there was a small scuffle. In addition, Alexander Nevsky collected tribute to the Golden Horde, meaning that he was not such an inveterate patriot that they want to portray him. Putin simply began to associate his struggle with NATO through this image, and the monument was erected. In addition, this is on the initiative of the authorities of St. Petersburg. Small bureaucrats are always happy to please big bureaucrats. Therefore, each region gives not only its battalions, but also its monuments.

Propaganda wars accentuate new types of concepts to be studied and used. Thus, nowadays there has been increased attention on narratives, which have become a subject of propaganda from literary studies. It is kind of a ‘strange’ term but, working with flows of texts, modern propaganda is in search of its own tools.

What does propaganda do? It amplifies the characteristics necessary for the ‘right’ worldview and silences those that contradict it. Therefore, power

²⁰ Рабочая программа курса внеурочной деятельности “Разговоры о важном” для 1–4-х классов. 2022. <https://koncpekt.ru/nachalnye-klassy/raznoe/7190-rabochaya-programma-razgovory-o-vazhnom-1-4-klass.html>; Минпросвещения внесет изменения в программу “Разговоров о важном”. 07.09.2022. <https://newizv.ru/news/society/07-09-2022/minprosvesheniya-vneset-izmeneniya-v-programmu-razgovorov-o-vazhnom>.

²¹ Матяш, Т. 2022. Росіяни встановлюють в окупованому Маріуполі пам’ятник Олександру Невському. 12.09.2022. https://lb.ua/society/2022/09/12/529133_rosiyani_vstanovlyuyut_okupovanomu.html; Власти Петербурга установят в Мариуполе памятник Александру Невскому. 25.08.2022. <https://www.svoboda.org/a/vlasti-peterburga-ustanovyat-v-mariupole-pamyatnik-nevskomu/32004755.html>.

and the necessary worldview begin to live in symbiosis. According to this worldview, all decisions of the authorities seem ideal and the only possible ones. Hence came the war with a neighboring country, which in Europe seems to be forgotten.

It is also necessary to explain a misconception about why so many people in Russia support the war. The common answer is that this is the result of propaganda. However, propaganda is only a tool of understatement or exaggeration. That is to say, it is a certain, or rather distorted, map of what is already in the collective consciousness. If the collective consciousness was against the war with Ukraine it would be difficult for propaganda to achieve such ‘brilliant’ results. Propaganda is not only a map of what is, but also a map of what could be, and only from the point of view of the authorities. There are no ‘ghosts’ there, but the frequency of occurrence of events in real life and in propaganda are not the same. There could have been happiness on the face of a man at the opening of the monument to Alexander Nevsky in the TV report, but propaganda presents this happiness of one as the happiness of the masses.

Propaganda wars target the collective consciousness of their country. The authorities are their source, the collective consciousness is the recipient, and they belong to the same country. Information operations are more often directed at foreign countries. However, this is the ideal situation; in reality there may be other combinations.

The authorities are always stronger, since they have all the resources, but the opposition is often more inventive in creating its propaganda product. However, the authorities defeat with sheer volume; the opposition product is not universal. The authorities’ product is massively replicated, while the opposition product is not.

Propaganda not only accompanies politics, but also often precedes it. A. Åslund has noted Putin’s constant ‘irritation’ with Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin is obsessed with Ukraine – or, rather, with pretending that Ukraine doesn’t exist. In his annual call-in show on June 30, he claimed, “Ukrainians and Russians are one.” He then published an article aimed at justifying that ‘conviction’ by tracing the two countries’ shared history. It is a masterclass in disinformation – and one step short of a declaration of war.²²

²² Аслунд, А. 2021. Опасный Путинский нарратив об Украине. 14.07.2021. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/putin-denial-of-ukrainian-independence-could-lead-to-war-by-anders-aslund-2021-07/russian?barrier=accesspaylog>.

Nevertheless, even this did not lead to a coherent narrative from Russia to Ukraine and the world about the purpose of this war. The shock of the invasion was simply replaced by the shock of the war.

This ambiguity persists to this day:

The political purpose of the Russian invasion of Ukraine was not clearly articulated. In preparation for and immediately after the invasion, various representatives of the Russian leadership voiced many different political goals, many of which were quite vague and even contradictory. Among them were ‘demilitarization and denazification’, terms that no one has deciphered clearly. ‘Protection of the population of Donbass’ was a completely different task that required completely different preparation. The annexation of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions is one thing, but an external guarantee of their independence is completely different thing.²³

The same vague situation turned out to be for military purposes. For example, the Washington Post in its investigation quoted an American official with access to classified information about Russia: “They set up an entire war effort to seize strategic objectives that were beyond their means. Russia’s mistake was really fundamental and strategic”²⁴.

Despite the fact that preparation for the war had already taken place in 2015, T. Sergeyev argued in his article from that period that “the fight against Russia is declared and begun. With the help of and through Ukraine. Ukraine is only one of the bridgeheads of this struggle, but the one where we already have firing contact with the enemy, where military propaganda works, where there is the actual military regime of social management, but where legal establishment of the military regime in the absence of law is not required. All political efforts of the Ukrainian leadership are aimed exclusively at increasing the military and technical capabilities of aggression and its propaganda and ideological support. The economic efforts are just as exclusively aimed at personal enrichment, which is the payment for service. This activity of the Ukrainian authorities is fully and unconditionally supported and directed by the United States, their Eastern European agents, and Old Europe. The so-called ‘sanctions’ against Russia are the economic part of

²³ Аксенов, П. 2022. Невыученные уроки “Стратегии” Свечина. Разбираем войну в Украине при помощи классического военного труда. 12.09.2022. <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-62757109>.

²⁴ Miller, G.; Belton, C. 2022. Russia’s spies misread Ukraine and misled Kremlin as war loomed. August 19, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2022/russia-fsb-intelligence-ukraine-war/>.

the aggression, are military in their nature, designed not only to weaken the economy of Russia and the fall of the ‘Putin regime’, which is declared openly, but above all to prepare a deployed comprehensive aggression against Russia, including the military”²⁵.

*The illusion of kinship. We are supposedly brothers and sisters, one family. Even if we are, family conflicts sometimes reach the level of murder. However, it is not about the metaphor of the family, although there are many and deep relationships. Nevertheless, they did not stop the revolution in Russia, and neither did faith in God. For several centuries, Slavic internecine warfare has fed on our princes’ proximity of blood. The fact is that we cannot believe in the betrayal of the whole nation. Yet there is nothing unexpected and impossible. And everyone has the same fate here: the one who betrays betrays first of all himself.*²⁶

Today, so much attention has been drawn to Sergeytsev, that the unofficial head of methodologists P. Shchedrovitsky even had to ‘justify himself’ when he left Sergeytsev out of the Moscow Methodological Circle:

*Sergeytsev is not a native of the Moscow Methodological Circle, he represents the population that came in during the movement of games. I do not know any of his methodological works. However this baggage [left over from the games] he used in his consulting and political technology practice. By the way, he worked in Ukraine for a long time.*²⁷

Then Shchedrovitsky even compared Sergeytsev’s text to *Mein Kampf*:

If one compares [Sergeytsev’s text and Adolf Hitler’s book], there is no notable difference, there are no discoveries. Simply, [in Hitler’s book] there are Jews, and [in Sergeytsev’s] Ukrainians. What else one can say about it? I can say that the man has lost his mind. Maybe his mother dropped him as a child, I don’t know. In this sense, this is already the internal structure [of his consciousness], but it has nothing to do with methodology at all.

²⁵ Сергейцев, Т. (*sine anno*). Что будет с Украиной? Что будет с нами? <http://www.odnako.org/almanac/material/chto-budet-s-ukrainoy-chto-budet-s-nami/>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ “Быть лоялистом уже недостаточно. Надо ходить в пионерском галстуке и салютовать” Интервью “методолога” Петра Шедровицкого Михаилу Зыгарю (*sine anno*). <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/06/22/byt-loyalistom-uzhe-nedostatochno-nado-hodit-v-pionerskom-galstuke-i-salyutovat>.

As one can see, methodologists experimented a lot while working with consciousness, and ‘created’ a dangerous supporter. He can be denied, but he will not change...

Propaganda also experiments, changing themes, accents, sometimes leaving the danger of its communications. In the case of the propaganda war, withdrawal is just as important since the work is with millions. The latest example of such a propaganda “retreat” is the introduction of ‘Conversations About Important Things’ into the school curriculum, where children were supposed to be told about a ‘special military operation’.

They began to treat children in the spirit of ‘if you love your homeland, you should give your life for it’. Third-graders were already supposed to remember or teachers were supposed to remind them of proverbs like ‘It is not terrible to die for the homeland’.²⁸

However, when some parents announced that they would not let their children to take part in this, a ‘miracle’ happened:

On September 5th the materials of ‘Conversations about important things’ for September 12th were removed from all websites where they had been posted. At 6 p.m. on September 6th they were restored, but without the military part. Without proverbs about death for the homeland, without ‘special military operation’, without patriotic feats.²⁹

It naturally frightened parents when such propaganda came to their homes.

That same day parents decided to talk to their youngest son, who is in a different class, to find out what his first lesson was about. According to Natalia, her son answered “about patriotism”. We asked, “What is patriotism?” He answered, “Well, I guess it is love of war”. “That was the last straw,” Natalia said. The woman declared that her children would not spend one more minute in that school and transferred them to home schooling.³⁰

²⁸ Виноградская, М. 2022. Дела идут неважно. Почему “специальная военная операция” пропала из “Разговоров о важном” в российских школах. 12.09.2022. <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2022/09/12/dela-idut-nevazhno>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ “Не надо его расстреливать – коленки прострелить, и пусть его катают в коляске”: чему учат на “Разговорах о важном”. 08.09.2002. <https://newtimes.ru/articles/detail/221509>.

Propaganda shows clearly that the world is words—many, many right words. Physical reality becomes secondary and begins to adjust to words when they resonate with the elite and collective consciousness. We more often live in the informational and virtual world, not in the physical world.

Russia also fights propaganda wars in the West with the hands and lips of Western citizens, though with Russian funding. Not only specific politicians are paid for but, of course, information campaigns as well. The money transfers were massive:

As US intelligence has learned, front companies, foundations, think tanks, the Russian embassy and state enterprise accounts, and other ways were used for the transfers. Funding came in the form of cash, wire transfers, cryptocurrency, and expensive gifts, and transactions were controlled by Russian agencies, including the FSB, private individuals, and businessmen. According to officials, entrepreneur Yevgeny Prigozhin and Deputy Chairman of the Russian State Duma Alexander Babakov were involved in the financial schemes.³¹

Information is also massively spread on social media where the Russian troll factory operates. Finnish journalist Jessikka Aro has researched the Russian ‘troll factory’ and published the book *Putin’s trolls* translated into more than 10 languages. She discovered troll attacks on Finns:

As soon as a Finnish expert wrote about Russian aggression, especially in Ukraine, he was attacked by furious troll commentators. This was the case with cyber security expert Jarno Limnell and former Finnish Defense Minister Carl Haglund, among others. Their accounts were flooded with offensive and false comments. I also interviewed ordinary Finnish Internet users who had encountered the aggression of Russian trolls. The results were depressing – many stopped writing about Russia as early as 2014, fearing cyberbullying, and some left social networks altogether.³²

³¹ США рассекретили данные разведки о том, как Россия тайно финансировала политиков по всему миру С 2014 года она потратила на эти цели 300 миллионов долларов. ? <https://meduza.io/feature/2022/09/14/ssha-rassekretili-dannye-razvedki-o-tom-kak-rossiya-tayno-finansirovala-politikov-po-vsemu-miru>; see also Merchant, N. 2022. US: Russia spent \$300M to covertly influence world politics. September 14, 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-putin-biden-politics-presidential-elections-03d0ae84fb34833b78b1753d0a9602db>.

³² Аро, Дж. 2022. “Сядясь в машину, я должна была проверять, не заминирована ли она”. 13.09.2022. <https://holod.media/2022/09/13/jessikka-aro/>.

Propaganda is propaganda when it is successful, and in it at least the majority of the population should find answers to their questions. According to Russian data, 20% of the population does not support the war. There is also a sociological portrait of these people:

They are mostly young people, residents of Moscow or other major cities, who get their information from the Internet. Sociologists have recorded a majority of those who oppose the war only among those who historically supported the opposition, participated in protest rallies, and travelled in Europe more often.³³

In 2014, only 10% of Russians opposed the annexation of Crimea.

There is one more parameter of the success/failure of propaganda, not according to sociologists, but linguists. M. Yevstigneyeva said:

The efficiency of the language technologies of propaganda can be understood by analyzing public opinion with the help of opinion polls or field studies (to see how people react in spontaneous situations of communication). The success of language technologies can also be judged by the prevalence of propaganda clichés in people's speech. For example, the expression 'where have you been for eight years?' is widely disseminated. But if one analyzes public opinion by the reactions of people on the Internet, then one should take into account that these can be the comments of bots, but not of real people.³⁴

Propaganda often has to praise what does not exist and hide what does, because telling the whole truth is not one of its tasks. It must whisper about defeats, finding new and more subtle formulations.

Propaganda wars allow what one cannot achieve in the physical world. They can accentuate victory while in reality there is defeat. Propaganda is a virtual space into which its creators are driven from physical and informational space. Its slogan is 'don't believe your eyes' but believe our words. Nevertheless, any world built by propaganda has an expiration date, it is never eternal. Even if it is built by the best specialists and spread by the most modern of technologies. The truth is always stronger.

³³ Центр Карнеги опроверг заявления Кремля о консолидации общества вокруг Путина после начала войны в Украине. 07.09.2022. <https://www.agents.media/consolidation/>.

³⁴ "Мы", обесценивание и высмеивание – как пропаганда влияет на язык и эмоции? Отвечает социолингвист. 22.07.2022. <https://paperpaper.ru/my-obescenivanie-i-vysmeivanie-k/>.

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