

D. O. Babich<sup>1</sup>

## WESTERN MILITARY PROPAGANDA. TECHNIQUES AND PRINCIPLES FROM 1991 TO THE SPECIAL OPERATION IN UKRAINE

Late 1980s were a period of false hope and unhealthy euphoria. Against the backdrop of agreements between the “Soviet leader” Mikhail Gorbachev (as the Western press referred to the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and American presidents Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, the end of the Cold War was announced. It seemed a closure of the period of perilous confrontation which began in the second half of the 1940s through the fault of both sides – Stalin’s Soviet Union and the United States, which was in a state of McCarthyism. At that time, the Americans were supported by Britain, France, the resurging West Germany and other allies who feared Soviet expansion, including former enemies Japan and Italy.

The Cold War was a complicated process, one of its negative consequences being the restriction of contacts between the “genetically” quite European successor to the Russian Empire – the Soviet Union – and Western Europe with its overseas “expansion” – the United States. While not so painful today, in the 1960s and 1970s this isolation indeed looked very harmful to the USSR, because the states of America, Western Europe and Japan (“Big Seven”) constituted the group of industrially developed countries.

Nevertheless, the Cold War was a form of maintaining equilibrium in international relations, helping avoid major international armed conflicts in Europe from 1945 to 1990 (beginning of civil wars in the former Yugoslavia). Russian historian Professor Anatoly Utkin suggests this understanding of the period, recognizing its positive consequences. (In the relatively peaceful period from 1945 to 1979 when the Afghan War started, the USSR accumulated knowledge and became softer in the morals, which enabled democratization and creation of a pluralistic press independent of the state in the 1988–1990s).<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, Professor Utkin points out that the United States and its allies in Western Europe never saw the process of mutual disarmament as a “win-win” game, even during the “honeymoon period” between Russia and the West at the time of late Gorbachev and early Yeltsin. Even from the early warming of U.S.-Soviet relations in 1986, Reagan, Bush senior, and then Bill Clinton saw what was happening as a process that is beneficial primarily for the global West, necessarily entailing gradual weakening of Moscow.<sup>3</sup> The West simply decided not to inform Moscow about this yet – according to the rules of the advertising market, unfamiliar to Soviet people, where the author of an advertisement is not responsible for the naivety of the consumer.

Nevertheless, for the residents of the USSR (and, since 1991, for the inhabitants of the former Soviet republics), as

well as for the well-meaning left-liberal public in the West, the advertising created a version of some “end of history” – a “perpetual peace” beneficial to all the inhabitants of the Earth, wherein military conflicts were eliminated due to the gradual transition of the entire world to the universal Western values, which “have conquered the entire world and will not be replaced by anything in the foreseeable future.”<sup>4</sup>

American political scientist Francis Fukuyama’s first article dedicated to the end of history was published in 1989, the “miraculous year” (*Annus mirabilis*, to quote the enthusiastic European commentary) when pro-Soviet regimes in Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria have fallen one after another. All of these coups were bloodless, the only bloody one being the fall of the relatively Soviet-independent regime of Nicolae Ceausescu in Romania at the end of that same year. Fukuyama’s theory seemed to work by and large.

But in August 1990, it cracked. The Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein, which had just emerged from a difficult war with Khomeinist Iran (1980–1988), decided to compensate for the losses incurred due to the fruitless attempt to occupy the oil-producing provinces of Iran. In August 1990, Iraq occupied the oil-rich emirate of Kuwait, one of the main sources of Persian Gulf oil for the world markets. The U.S. unleashed a war with Iraq in January 1991. Its goal was to push Iraqi troops out of Kuwait and – now that was a new thing! – a change of regime in Iraq. As a result, the 1991 war was almost bloodless for the United States (the number of American troops killed by Iraqi weapons was less than the number of anti-Iraqi soldiers who died in car accidents and other mishaps while delivering massive amounts of weapons to battlefields in the Persian Gulf region).

This was a completely new situation for the Western military propaganda. Now there was no need to calm down the people of the United States and other Western countries about the losses of their armies. As for the Iraqi army and civilian casualties, a soothing version was created: first, the extent of those casualties was understated (only after the war they have shown the houses and underground shelters destroyed by American bombs, in which thousands of Iraqis died); second, it was claimed that the war was weakening the “repressive regime” of Iraq, which would otherwise kill many more innocents.

Fukuyama himself tried to portray the wars not only in Iraq (in 1991 and 2003), but also in Syria, Libya and Yemen as “transitional conflicts” to perpetual peace, but now his utopia is finally failing. The irony of his own story is that after the coup of 2014 in Ukraine, Francis Fukuyama began moonlighting in Kiev as a lecturer for several “leadership programs” of the American “Atlantic Council.”<sup>5</sup> In his speeches back in 2019–2021, Fukuyama promised Ukraine peaceful development and prosperity, especially in the days when he has given a paid lecture course to Zelensky’s team, who had absolutely no public administration experience after winning the 2019 Ukrainian elections.

<sup>1</sup> Journalist and columnist for the RIA Novosti news agency. Author of a number of publications, including: “The Theatricalization of Evil in Nabokov’s Novels,” “The Writer’s Universe Must Be All-Inclusive: On the Novels of Albert Camus,” “Nabokov and New Criticism in the U.S.,” “The Theory of Receptive Aesthetics,” “Success in Journalism – What It Constitutes and What Traps There Are Along the Way,” etc. Member of the Russian Union of Journalists.

<sup>2</sup> *Уткин А.* Мировая холодная война. М.: Алгоритм, 2005. С. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* С. 18.

<sup>4</sup> *Фукуяма Ф.* Конец истории и последний человек. М., 1991. С. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Atlantic Council, Analytical Survey, 2021.

The main principles of the new Western military propaganda became apparent during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Before giving them a detailed scrutiny, let me name the necessary “framework elements” that make it effective:

1) the war zone is closed to uncontrolled penetration by any independent journalists, both Western and non-Western. All visits should be accompanied by the US military or international missions loyal to the US – *the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)*, *the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)*, the European Union, etc.;

2) the actively working press center produces information (primarily videos) in a “constant news flow” mode to satisfy the persistent “information hunger” of the world’s media with materials beneficial to Western troops;

3) with regard to possible unpleasant surprises inherent to war (unexpected losses in personnel and equipment, abandonment of territory, image losses due to cruelty to the enemy population), the rules of “damage control” are applied by PR services of large companies.

The methods of damage control are already well known to all employees of PR services of large companies: all “unauthorized persons” are denied access to the “disaster zone,” the most negative versions of what happened are discredited in advance, competitors are blamed (in war – the enemy “violating the laws and customs of the war”). The mantra that “the situation is under control” is constantly repeated, and the civilians “need not worry.”

Very soon after 1991, it became clear that Fukuyama’s conclusions had meant exactly the opposite: fragmentation instead of a united planet, war instead of peace. The Gulf War was followed by wars in the former Yugoslavia (Serbo-Croatian in 1991–1992, Bosnian in 1992–1995, Kosovo in 1999), as well as in the former Soviet Union (Moldovan in 1992, the civil war in Tajikistan in 1992, the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in 1991–1994, a series of wars in Georgia). After a brief period of detached observation of these conflicts in the early 1990s, the West (primarily the US and the EU) began to actively intervene in almost every war, with the goal of destroying large states and replacing them with a multitude of the new quasi-states that were only formally sovereign, but in fact dependent on the West (steps were taken to destroy Yugoslavia as the largest Eastern European federation, weaken Russia as the largest “fragment” of the USSR, and Iraq and Iran as the largest independent countries in the Middle East). Since U.S. President Donald Trump took office in 2016, an open economic war has been launched against China – with mutual losses of tens of billions of dollars.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of Russia’s current confrontation with the NATO bloc and its allies over the Ukrainian issue, it would be useful to highlight the basic principles of the Western military propaganda, as these are the principles that have guided the Zelensky regime and its Western allies in their actions since the beginning of hostilities in Donbass in the spring and summer of 2014 and especially after the start of the Russian special military operation in Ukraine in February 2022. Here’s how they are delivered by the non-conformist edition Anti-Spiegel.<sup>2</sup>

1. “We do not want (did not want) war.”

Anti-Spiegel’s comment on this principle: “If you believe the Western media and politicians, all they want is peace. But in the case of the Ukrainian conflict, there is an obvious inconsistency: if the West is so eager for peace, why isn’t it taking the initiative to negotiate and compromise? Instead, Western countries began to destroy channels of communication with Russia, deport Russian diplomats en masse, etc.”<sup>3</sup>

2. “The other side is fully responsible for the war.”

In the case of the Ukrainian conflict, it is undoubtedly Russia. So, German mass media refer to the events in Ukraine as “Putins Angrießkrieg” or “Rußlands Angrießkrieg” (“Putin’s attack war,” “Russia’s attack war”). The phrase “Angrießkrieg” is deliberately lumped together in one word to clearly identify the culprit.

Here’s how Anti-Spiegel refutes this version: “The Western mass media know very well that it was France and Germany who officially buried the Minsk Peace Accords in October 2021. They just decided not to discuss it too much in the Western press. The Western mass media also know that Russia has marked Ukraine’s accession to NATO as a red line, but this has not changed the behavior of Western countries; the Western media remember that since December 2021 Russia has invited the West to talks on mutual security guarantees, including the Ukrainian issue – and the West has rejected such talks. All of this is not news to the Western media. They just don’t tell their readers about it.”

3. “The leader of a hostile country is demonized.”

The Anti-Spiegel author ironically notes that “there is nothing to add, everyone knows what commentary the ‘quality Western media’ are publishing on Putin. They are below the standards of the worst tabloid press.”

4. “The West protects the common good, not the private interests.”

Rapid entry of American oil companies in Iraq after its occupation by the United States in 2003, major economic interests of France in Libya (the first NATO country to attack it in 2011), purchase of black earth in Ukraine by Western buyers – all these examples by Anti-Spiegel speak for themselves.

5. “The enemy deliberately commits atrocities. When our side commits them, it is unintentional.”

Remember that the war in Iraq began with reports (later proven to be false) of the killing of babies in Kuwait by Iraqi troops, and the events in Bucha, Ukraine, were used to dramatically increase shipment of arms to the Ukrainian regime.<sup>4</sup>

**Conclusions.** The principles of the Western military propaganda briefly listed here should be carefully studied. With the rigid ultra-liberal ideology that has won in the West, these principles are unlikely to be called into question in the near future – it will take both time and courage to do so.

Russia should clearly point to these techniques rather than speak in general of the “deceitful nature of the Western mass media.”

<sup>1</sup> Owen J. Liberal Peace, Liberal War. American Politics and International Security. Ithaca : Cornell Univ. Press, 1997. P. 113–116.

<sup>2</sup> Nach Lehrbuch: Deutsche Medien betreiben Kriegspropaganda // Seniora.org : [website]. URL: <https://seniora.org/politik-wirtschaft/nach-lehrbuch-deutsche-medien-betreiben-kriegspropaganda>.

<sup>3</sup> Nach Lehrbuch: Deutsche Medien betreiben Kriegspropaganda.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.