

# PROPAGANDA AND INFORMATION WARFARE AS SOCIO-PHILOSOPHICAL PHENOMENA AND POLITICAL TOOLS

## PROPAGANDA E GUERRA DE INFORMAÇÃO COMO FENÔMENOS SÓCIO-FILOSÓFICOS E FERRAMENTAS POLÍTICAS

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da possibilidade mas da necessidade de propaganda no funcionamento da sociedade, permitindo encontrar e justificar os melhores exemplos de vida social em todas as suas manifestações, e, por outro lado, tornam-se um argumento adicional para provar a perniciosidade e a inferioridade da guerra de informação.

**Abstract:** The confusion of concepts in the analysis of social processes leads to incorrect theoretical conclusions, resulting in erroneous and sometimes harmful decisions and practical actions. This argument also applies to the evaluation of such phenomena as propaganda and information war. Information war, which is generated by contemporary political realities and scientific and technological conditions, many authors consider an analog of propaganda, which has a very long history and a different purpose. With all the seeming similarities, propaganda and information war have major differences and divergences of both substantive and functional nature. The authors believe that the present paper can initiate a scientific discourse not only of the possibility but of the necessity of propaganda in the functioning of society, allowing to find and justify the best examples of social life in all its manifestations, and, on the other hand, become an additional argument in proving the perniciousness and inferiority of information war.

**Keywords:** Propaganda; Information War; Equivalence; Distinction.

**Resumo:** A confusão de conceitos na análise dos processos sociais leva a conclusões teóricas incorretas, resultando em decisões e ações práticas errôneas e por vezes prejudiciais. Esse argumento também se aplica à avaliação de fenômenos como propaganda e guerra de informação. A guerra da informação, gerada pelas realidades políticas contemporâneas e pelas condições científicas e tecnológicas, muitos autores consideram um análogo da propaganda, que tem uma história muito longa e um propósito diferente. Com todas as aparentes semelhanças, propaganda e guerra de informação têm grandes diferenças e divergências tanto de natureza substantiva quanto funcional. Os autores acreditam que o presente artigo pode iniciar um discurso científico não só

**Palavras-chave:** Propaganda; Guerra de Informação; Equivalência; Distinção.

## 1. Introduction

The relevance of the study is shaped by the fact that in recent decades, the predominant position on the concepts of propaganda and information war has become their association with the needs of functioning of primarily totalitarian regimes. That being said, the events of the recent years in the world arena make researchers think about the popularity of propaganda tools in the world. The use of propaganda techniques in a variety of settings, including political campaigns, advertising and public relations, and its use as a communication tool in a democratic society is often controversial. While propaganda can be a powerful tool for shaping public opinion, its use in a democratic society should be limited and carefully regulated. It is important that citizens have access to a variety of perspectives and viewpoints, and that the media is held to high standards of accuracy, impartiality, and transparency. This can help to ensure that citizens are well-informed and able to make decisions based on a broad range of information and ideas, rather than being swayed by one-sided or misleading propaganda.

As for the concept of "information war", this phenomenon has become widespread in space and time. In hindsight, all options for using information to intimidate and deceive the enemy began to be attributed to information wars almost since ancient times. In modern conditions, any use of the media as a tool in interstate confrontation is also defined as an information war. Undoubtedly, there is every reason to consider such types of confrontation between states as the cold war, ideological war, psychological war, based on information exchange, to be considered varieties of information war. All of them have become not just a continuation of politics by other means, but the content of noopolitics carried out by means of mass information exchange (Nikonov, 2012).

As in the case of the "propaganda" category, scientific sources contain a wide range of suggested terms "information warfare", starting from the fact that this is a type of hostilities in which the key object of influence is information stored or circulating in control, intelligence, combat and other systems of the enemy, before analyzing this phenomenon in line with the cognitive linguistics of L. V. Kotsyubinskaya, who considers information warfare to be "information impacts on the public (mass) consciousness in order to make changes to the

cognitive structure in order to subsequently obtain changes in the behavioral structure” (Kotsiubinskaia, 2015).

In this regard, research questions arise, how do propaganda and information warfare relate to each other in the socio-philosophical approach, and what are the important differences between them? In a democratic society, the use of information warfare for political purposes as a means of information can be seen as a threat to freedom of speech and to the free exchange of ideas?

### **1.1 Propaganda as an informational and socio-philosophical phenomenon**

The negative perception of the term “propaganda” was reduced to the study of what was proposed as its classic example – the work of the ideologists of Fascist Germany. However, it is known that the phenomenon itself and the term “propaganda” have undergone major changes along the long historical period of their existence. The term was originally used to refer to a missionary institution founded in Rome in the 17th century, which aimed to propagate Catholicism among pagans and combat heresies. However, during the years of the French Revolution, the term acquired a political connotation and became associated with the activities of secret societies that sought to disseminate ideas in other countries through their emissaries. Undoubtedly, since the inception of propaganda techniques and methods in mass information exchange, much has evolved and improved, with propaganda itself emerging as a potent mobilization instrument.

Modern sciences offer quite a wide range of definitions of propaganda. Professor I.B. Orlov identifies three of the main ones: “The first definition is based on the fact that conclusions or generalizations are made based on questionable or one-sided arguments and some arguments are either silenced or blatantly discredited. Under the second definition, “propaganda” is viewed as a way of spreading erroneous ideas. Finally, the third, cultural definition includes within the scope of propaganda a vast area of social relations, including philosophy, education and entertainment, politics, journalism, and the arts” (Orlov, 2009).

We will not challenge the equivalence of the groups presented from the point of their essential content, but will only note the validity of the view that propaganda is “motley” and that this phenomenon covers a variety of spheres of activity.

Alternative definitions for this phenomenon suggest that the views, ideas, and emotional states shaped by propaganda influence people's behavior. However, over time, propaganda began

to be defined more narrowly as an activity aimed at disseminating the ideology and policies of specific classes, parties, and states among the masses. This perspective emphasized the class character of propaganda and noted that, in bourgeois social thought, the concept of propaganda is often used as a synonym for lies and a means of manipulating consciousness. This interpretation was driven by a deliberate desire to portray propaganda as a "universal evil of modern civilization." We can observe that Soviet propaganda received similar, mirrored assessments in the West. Throughout the 20th century, "propaganda" was employed in various ways as a means of politically discrediting opponents.

During the Soviet era of our country's development, contemporary ideological scholars have attempted to demonstrate the inconsistency and inefficiency of communist (Bolshevik, state) propaganda. However, the results of the Russian Civil War, World War II, and the periods of massive construction and development of "new lands" revealed that messages of truth and hope for victory and a prosperous future had a powerful mobilizing effect on the Soviet people. The issue arose when political orientations became unclear, party and Soviet bureaucracy expanded, and a discrepancy between words and actions (double standards) emerged, causing propaganda to lose its strength and effective content. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union's theorists failed to provide answers to pressing life questions. Propaganda devolved into hollow praises, such as "To catch up and overtake" (America), "The Party and the people are united," "The economy must be economical," and "Forward, to new victories of communism." There was no substance behind these words. Ideological messages did not align with the realities of the time.

Propaganda promoting the benefits of the Soviet way of life, with its modest lifestyle and prosperity, could not withstand the allure of the glossy Western mass consumer society. Furthermore, early propaganda methods lost their effectiveness as they failed to address the needs of a new, more educated and literate audience. As the Iron Curtain fell, a different image of Western life emerged, which, although not as ideal as initially believed, was far from the unfortunate, impoverished, and capitalism-crushed image painted by Soviet propaganda. Consequently, Soviet propaganda suffered a crushing defeat following the Cold War.

The ideological confrontation demonstrated that the quality and effectiveness of propaganda depend on numerous factors. Among the most important are the alignment of propagated ideas, values, and perspectives with the needs of social development and audience demands, as well as the compatibility of propaganda discourse's value judgments with the realities of life. Soviet propaganda failed to prove the superiority of its system and way of life,

rather than deceive, distort, and disseminate ideas, views, and values, without forcing them upon others. However, it is worth noting that, during the final stages of the confrontation between the two systems, counter-propaganda emerged alongside propaganda theory and practice in our country. This development suggests that the appeal to counter-propaganda may have actualized the need for so-called "gray" and "black" propaganda.

The varying degrees of media utilization as a weapon, the methods of its deployment, and the objects of orientation are manifested in different types of confrontation, as captured in concepts such as "ideological war," "cold war," "psychological war," and "moral-psychological war." All these concepts reflect various aspects and nuances of the same phenomenon, encompassing historical, socio-political features of the confrontation and the unique socio-psychological perception of the impact on a real or potential enemy. The crux of the matter is that information serves as the foundation of influence in all these types of confrontation. Taking historical experiences into account, seeking potential analogies, and avoiding mistakes constitute the primary practical focus of theoretical research in this area.

## **1.2 Information warfare as a means of manipulating information by conflict participants**

The concept of "information war" is analogous to the concept of "war" as a specific and overarching category. The term itself answers the question: what is it? It is a war conducted through the media. In a conventional war, the main focus is armed conflict, executed using weapons and military equipment to achieve war objectives, such as defeating the enemy. Undoubtedly, other supporting components—economic, diplomatic, ideological, informational, and other means of struggle—also play a role and may become more prominent depending on various circumstances. It is important to remember that information, as a property of matter, is an integral component of all processes and phenomena.

However, in information warfare, information itself emerges as the primary weapon for defeating the enemy. This refers not only, and not necessarily, to information that controls units and subunits on the battlefield or the overall command and control of troops or information circulating in combat information systems. These aspects relate more to the so-called cyberwar. Instead, we are discussing mass information disseminated through the media, aimed at the consciousness, will, thought processes, and mentality of enemy troops and populations. In this context, mass media becomes the primary destructive factor in information warfare.

"The physical violence of the sword, guns, and shackles, and then the economic violence of unemployment and monetary credit, was replaced by informational violence: the manipulation of people's minds, an invasion of their psyche and inner world. 'Network computing' serves simultaneously as a tool for information, political, and cultural expansion by developed countries. With its assistance, changes in the political map of the world and the existing relationships between geopolitical centers of power are possible" (Markov, 2019).

Forceful and violent aspects of information impact are increasingly being employed to achieve political objectives. Notably, this impact differs significantly from the information influence exerted during the process of propaganda.

Several circumstances enable us to view the relationship between the categories "war" and "information war" as specific and generic concepts. We have already noted the first circumstance: like any war, an information war is the continuation of politics through the use of information violence. Secondly, just as in conventional warfare, information warfare aims to achieve similar goals—both types of warfare seek to defeat the enemy. The third factor is the tangible consequences of the impact.

Regrettably, the practice of using the term "war" has migrated from journalism to academia when describing any contradictions and scandals in international or interstate relations. Consequently, we have seen the emergence of terms like "resource wars," "diplomatic wars," and "sanctions wars." This development can be attributed to the fact that the category of "war" and related concepts are convenient as a categorical toolkit for describing phenomena of the new era, which, in terms of their consequences, degree of tension, and damage inflicted, are comparable to an actual war (Labush and Puyu, 2019). For instance, the implementation of maximum restrictions on economic interactions between states is referred to as a "nuclear bomb in the economy." All these terms reflect conflicts in which opposing parties attempt to impose their will on their adversaries, utilizing one or another reason for the conflict or its subject matter. In some cases, these involve resources or currency, while in others, they revolve around legal or contractual restrictions.

As for information warfare, it is not appropriate to assign such a meaning to every contradiction in the information space. What real parameters of states' information confrontation should be considered as information warfare? In our opinion, there are several, but the main ones include the following:

1 The formal beginning of information warfare can be marked by the adoption of official documents, such as concepts, doctrines, laws, directives, statements, and speeches by government officials.

2 The specific goals of information warfare are outlined in the official instructions of special services, and the unique preparation for it is embodied in the creation of specialized units within the military to conduct information warfare.

3 Evidence of a gradual transition to information warfare includes limiting access to information by the opposing side of the conflict.

4 A distinctive feature of modern information wars is the rigid division of journalists into "us" and "them," resulting in the loss of a corporate spirit within the journalistic community.

5 Preparation for information warfare involves creating an atmosphere of hostility and tension among the population regarding the opposing side, publishing manuals and brochures teaching safe behavior in the event of aggression, demolishing monuments, and rewriting history.

6 A particular sign of information warfare is an increased aggressiveness index when analyzing the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of content (Labush, 2018).

## 2. Methodology

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study was constituted by the general scientific methods of structural-functional analysis – the methods of study of systemic objects in conjunction with the concrete-historical method of research, which allowed tracing the genesis, emergence, and development of the studied object in its relationship with other phenomena of the socio-political sphere. One of the phenomena of the socio-political sphere is cognition, and its implementation goes through the improvement of concepts and the logic of reasoning, which reveals the problem of definitions – the emergence of competing concepts and the displacement of some by others. This implies that there is a process of making sense of reality.

In our study, we employed a comparative approach, which serves as a potent tool enabling researchers to make insightful observations and draw conclusions. Through this approach, we examined propaganda and information wars, on the one hand, as socio-philosophical phenomena influencing the development of societies over an extended period, and on the other hand, as instruments of political struggle. The comparative approach facilitated the



identification of similarities and differences, ultimately providing answers to the research questions posed.

### 3. Results

Russian scholars, such as S.P. Rastorguev, G.G. Pocheptsov, and A.V. Manoilo, consider information confrontation in a variety of aspects.

In an attempt to dive deeper into the essence of this form of information confrontation, researchers appeal to its definition in the broad and narrow sense. In a broad sense, information war is one of the ways of confrontation or alliance of states in peacetime, in which the objects of influence, along with the armed forces and the civilian population, are society as a whole, its state administrative systems, structures of production management, science, culture, etc. In a narrow sense, in turn, it refers to a type of combat operations or immediate preparation for them aimed at achieving an overwhelming advantage over the enemy in the process of obtaining, processing, and using information to formulate effective administrative decisions, as well as to successfully carry out activities to reach superiority over the opposing side on this basis (Serov, 2011).

Proceeding to examine the relationship between propaganda and information war, we can note that in most works, researchers focus on their common characteristics, disregarding the peculiarities. For instance, V.V. Kapralov and M.N. Cherniaikov, exploring the relationship between the concepts of “anti-state propaganda” and “information war”, begin their analysis with a very simple correlation: “The conduct of information war is expressed in the ideological propaganda of one’s own political and ideological attitudes using a wide range of means” (Kapralov and Cherniaikov, 2018). Thus, the authors consider it reasonable to conclude on the equivalence of the concepts of “information influence on the mass consciousness as part of information war” and “anti-state propaganda” suggest using them as synonymous.

It is important to not only agree that consideration of the process of propaganda influence must be included in a broad ideological, socio-psychological, and power contexts but also proceed from the fact that propaganda is “an interrelated system of methods and technologies the purpose of which is to integrate an individual into society and isolate them from alternative information flows (which reduces protest moods) and offer them simple orientation schemes to answer vital questions” (Luchkin, 2005). At the same time, factual reality shows, on the one hand, an utterly negative view of propaganda and, on the other, the appeal of specialists-researchers to a new phenomenon – information war and, as a result, complete oblivion of



propaganda or its “damnation”. Indeed, propaganda has been forced out of the scientific field of academic research. In the meantime, American scholars refer to a new conception of noopoly (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1999), in which propaganda, in their view, is to take its rightful place. In the Russian Federation, the introduction of noopoly into political life is, as of yet, insignificant (Kalugina and Nikonov, 2020).

Identification of the essential characteristics of information war requires determining its similarities with and differences from propaganda and counterpropaganda, although in practice, they are closely intertwined and difficult to distinguish. Russian scientist N.N. Iakovlev refers to CIA employee W. Donovan in citing the tasks that, in his opinion, the US special services adopt: “Propaganda to foreign countries should be used as a tool of war – an artful mixture of rumor and deception, the truth being only a bait to undermine unity and sow confusion <...> In essence, propaganda is the tip of the initial penetration, preparation of the population of the territory chosen for invasion. This is the first step, then the fifth column comes into action, followed by the subversive paratrooper units, or ‘commandos’, and the invasion divisions” (Iakovlev, 1983).

Propaganda is interpreted both as the dissemination of some views and knowledge in society by means of their constant detailed explanation and as a system of activities aimed at the dissemination of knowledge, artistic values, and other information to form certain views, ideas, and emotional states, exerting influence on people’s social behavior, and as the popularization of political, philosophical, religious, scientific, artistic, and other ideas in society through spoken word, mass media, visual, and other means of influence on public consciousness. Furthermore, propaganda is understood as a consistent, sufficiently prolonged activity aimed at creating or informing various events to affect the attitudes of the masses toward an issue or phenomenon; a mechanism for large-scale indoctrination; negative or misleading information used to maintain interest in an issue to be addressed; a deliberately provoked and directed campaign to get people to accept a given viewpoint, position, or value. “Propaganda is often associated with ‘brainwashing’ – disinformation or actions deserving of censure from the point of public welfare” (Evdokimov, 2012).

According to Harold Lasswell, it is precisely the work of the state on shaping the public opinion regarding the military objectives on the foreign and domestic front that are the true propaganda, as to achieve the strategic goals, it is necessary to unite society and mobilize its citizens to fight the enemy. Propaganda, along with military and discriminatory economic measures, is one of the main tools of the struggle against rivals. Besides, as noted by the

American political scientist, propaganda itself is of military origin: “When society is brought to the realization that the war was started by the enemy ... then we can say that the propagandist has achieved his goal ... Every nation that started the war must necessarily be incorrigible, corrupt, and depraved. By stressing directly on these properties of it, we are only taking precautions, the main purpose of which is to convince that the enemy is even capable of such a monstrous thing as offensive warfare. <...> The enemy almost always carries himself with demonstrative arrogance and condescension. The enemy is not only arrogant, he is greedy. The enemy conducts propaganda based on lies. The enemy is conceited, rude, and cruel” (Lasswell, 1949).

#### 4. Discussion

We believe it possible to compare the phenomena in consideration substantively, by their orientation, goals, and objectives, and functionally, characterizing the intensity, methods, and techniques.

Indeed, propaganda can and should be attributed to the arsenal of information war. Accordingly, their relationship can be as between the private and the general, since it is in the information war that the entire arsenal of means based on the use of mass information is applied. Yet at the same time, these phenomena are not identical:

- unlike information war, which involves at least two parties, propaganda is a one-sided process. Only the emergence of counterpropaganda as opposition to propaganda allows for an equal comparison between the two;

- the two phenomena are also distinguished by the degree of intensity of information influence. It is the increased intensity of information exchange that characterizes information war;

- propaganda and information war differ in the deployed techniques. Specifically, the information war is dominated by techniques, strategies, and methods based on deception, lies, disinformation, slander, etc. Unlike in the case of propaganda, the opponent’s point of view is not weighed and evaluated, but distorted and used to achieve its own goals. Information is used not as an argument, but as violence;

- the imposition of goals and ideas alien to the opponent, the destruction of their mentality to achieve political benefits is the main aspect that distinguishes information war from propaganda, which is carried out in the interests of the influencing party. Propaganda seeks to

prove, convince, and change the mind of the opponent, even with false arguments and unreliable data, while information war aims to deceive, to break, to defeat;

- the divergence of these phenomena in terms of the volume and scope of their manifestation. Propaganda can be part of information war as a technique, as its integral part, yet information warfare cannot become an integral part of propaganda.

The literature presents some attempts at showing the similarity of these phenomena by means of distinguishing between positive (constructive, white) and negative (destructive, black) propaganda. The former is understood as a striving to convey some views or interests to the consumer in a convincing, understandable form. It is assumed that positive (constructive) propaganda helps individuals and social groups find the most promising, true meanings, ideas, and values and is not aimed at the demolition and destruction of the opponent's position. The destructive, or black propaganda has the opposite characteristics. Guided by the principles "the ends justify the means", negative propaganda is aimed at inciting social enmity, escalating social conflicts, and exacerbating contradictions. In this respect, information warfare and negative propaganda are much alike, but still, we should not reduce the essential characteristics of propaganda only to the negative impact and manipulation of individual consciousness.

Historical experience shows its similarity with information war, while the conditions for the implementation of propaganda, its limited means, and unilateral impact (as information aggression) do not allow it to be elevated to the rank of war.

## 5. Conclusion

Propaganda and information war are related concepts, but they have important differences. Propaganda refers to the dissemination of information, ideas, or opinions with the goal of influencing public opinion or behavior. Propaganda often employs biased or misleading information and relies on emotional appeals to elicit a desired response from the audience. Propaganda can be used to promote a particular ideology, political agenda, or social cause.

On the other hand, information war refers to the use of information and communication technologies to manipulate and control information in order to gain a strategic advantage over an opponent. Information warfare can involve the dissemination of false or misleading information, hacking, and other cyber attacks to disrupt or destroy an opponent's information systems.

While propaganda and information war both involve the use of information to achieve a desired outcome, the key difference is that propaganda is primarily focused on shaping public

opinion, while information war is focused on gaining a strategic advantage over an opponent by controlling or manipulating information.

The information war can pose a serious threat to freedom of speech in a democratic society. In an information war, various actors engage in the dissemination of information, often with the aim of promoting a particular agenda or narrative. This can include the spread of false or misleading information, propaganda, or manipulation of public opinion.

When information is weaponized in this way, it can have a chilling effect on freedom of speech. People may feel pressured to self-censor or refrain from expressing their opinions out of fear of being targeted or attacked by those promoting a different agenda. Additionally, the spread of false or misleading information can undermine trust in the media and other sources of information, making it difficult for people to make informed decisions and participate in public discourse.

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