

# Alastair Crooke : Western Propaganda Wars

By Alastair Crooke •

**War propaganda and feint are as old as the hills. Nothing new. But what is new is that infowar is no longer *the adjunct* to wider war objectives – but has become *an end* in and of itself.**

The West has come to view ‘owning’ the winning narrative – and presenting the Other’s as clunky, dissonant, and extremist – as being more important than facing facts-on-the ground. **Owning the winning narrative is to win, in this view. Virtual ‘victory’ thus trumps ‘real’ reality.**

**So, war becomes rather the setting for imposing ideological alignment across a wide global alliance and enforcing it via compliant media.**

This objective enjoys a higher priority than, say, ensuring a manufacturing capacity sufficient to sustain military objectives. Crafting an imagined ‘reality’ has taken precedence over shaping the ground reality.

The point here is that this approach – being a function of whole of society alignment (both at home and abroad) – creates entrapments into false realities, false expectations, from which an exit (when such becomes necessary), turns near impossible, precisely because imposed alignment has ossified public sentiment. The possibility for a State to change course as *events* unfold becomes curtailed or lost, and the accurate reading of facts on the ground veers toward the politically correct and away from reality.

The cumulative effect of ‘a winning virtual narrative’ holds the risk nonetheless, of sliding incrementally toward inadvertent ‘*real war*’.

**Take, for example, the NATO-orchestrated and equipped incursion into the symbolically significant Kursk Oblast. In terms of a ‘winning narrative’, its appeal to the West is obvious: Ukraine ‘takes the war to into Russia’.**

Had the Ukrainian forces succeeded in capturing the Kursk Nuclear Power Station, they then would have had a significant bargaining chip, and might well have syphoned away Russian forces from the steadily collapsing Ukrainian ‘Line’ in Donbas.

And to top it off, (in infowar terms), the western media was prepped and aligned to show President Putin as “frozen” by the surprise incursion, and “wobbling” with anxiety that the Russian public would turn against him in their anger at the humiliation.

Bill Burns, head of CIA, opined that “*Russia would offer no concessions on Ukraine, until Putin’s over-confidence was challenged, and Ukraine could show strength*”. Other U.S. officials added that the Kursk incursion – in itself – would

not bring Russia to the negotiating table; It would be necessary to build on the Kursk operation with other daring operations (to shake Moscow's *sang froid*).

**Of course, the overall aim was to show Russia as fragile and vulnerable, in line with the narrative that, at any moment Russia, could crack apart and scatter to the wind, in fragments. Leaving the West as winner, of course.**

**In fact, the Kursk incursion was a huge NATO gamble: It involved mortgaging Ukraine's military reserves and armour, as chips on the roulette table, as a bet that an ephemeral success in Kursk would upend the strategic balance. The bet was lost, and the chips forfeit.**

**Plainly put, this Kursk affair exemplifies the West's problem with 'winning narratives': Their inherent flaw is that they are grounded in emotivism and eschew argumentation. Inevitably, they are simplistic. They are simply intended to fuel a 'whole of society' common alignment. Which is to say that across MSM; business, federal agencies, NGOs and the security sector, all should adhere to opposing all 'extremisms' threatening 'our democracy'.**

This aim, of itself, dictates that the narrative be undemanding and relatively uncontentious: 'Our Democracy, Our Values and Our Consensus'. The Democratic National Convention, for example, embraces 'Joy' (repeated endlessly), 'moving Forward' and 'opposing weirdness' as key statements. They are banal, however, these memes are given their energy and momentum, not by content so much, as by the deliberate Hollywood setting lending them razzamatazz and glamour.

**It is not hard to see how this one-dimensional zeitgeist may have contributed to the U.S. and its allies' misreading the impact of today's Kursk 'daring adventure' on ordinary Russians.**

'Kursk' has history. In 1943, Germany invaded Russia in Kursk to divert from its own losses, with Germany ultimately defeated at the Battle of Kursk. The return of German military equipment to the environs of Kursk must have left many gaping; the current battlefield around the town of Sudzha is precisely the spot where, in 1943, the Soviet 38th and 40th armies coiled for a counteroffensive against the German 4th Army.

Over the centuries, Russia has been variously attacked on its vulnerable flank from the West. And more recently by Napoleon and Hitler. Unsurprisingly, Russians are acutely sensitive to this bloody history. Did Bill Burns et al think this through? Did they imagine that NATO invading Russia itself would make Putin feel 'challenged', and that with one further shove, he would fold, and agree to a 'frozen' outcome in Ukraine – with the latter entering NATO? Maybe they did.

**Ultimately the message that western services sent was that the West (NATO) is coming for Russia. This is the meaning of deliberately choosing**

## **Kursk. Reading the runes of Bill Burns message says prepare for war with NATO.**

Just to be clear, this genre of 'winning narrative' surrounding Kursk is neither deceit nor feint. The Minsk Accords *were examples of deceit*, but they were deceptions grounded in rational strategy (i.e. they were historically normal). The Minsk deceptions were intended to buy the West time to further Ukraine's militarisation – before attacking the Donbas. The deception worked, but only at the price of a rupture of trust between Russia and the West. The Minsk deceptions however, also accelerated an end to the 200-year era of the westification of Russia.

**Kursk rather, is a different 'fish'. It is grounded in the notions of western exceptionalism. The West perceives itself as tacking to 'the right side of History'. 'Winning narratives' essentially assert – in secular format – the inevitability of the western eschatological Mission for global redemption and convergence. In this new narrative context, facts-on-the-ground become mere irritants, and not realities that must be taken into account.**

### **This their Achilles' Heel.**

The DNC convention in Chicago however, underscored a further concern:

Just as the hegemonic West arose out of the Cold War era shaped and invigorated through dialectic opposition to communism (in the western mythology), so we see today, a (claimed) totalising 'extremism' (whether of MAGA mode; or of the external variety: Iran, Russia, etc.) – posed in Chicago in a similar Hegelian dialectic opposition to the former capitalism versus communism; but in today's case, it is "extremism" in conflict with "Our Democracy".

The DNC Chicago narrative-thesis is itself a tautology of identity differentiation posing as 'togetherness' under a diversity banner and in conflict with 'whiteness' and 'extremism'. 'Extremism' effectively plainly is being set up as the successor to the former Cold War *antithesis* – communism.

The Chicago 'back-room' may be imagining that a confrontation with extremism – writ widely – will again, as it did in the post-Cold War era, yield an American rejuvenation. Which is to say that a conflict with Iran, Russia, and China (in a different way) may come onto the agenda. The telltale signs are there (plus the West's need for a re-set of its economy, which war regularly provides).

**The Kursk ploy no doubt seemed clever and audacious to London and Washington. Yet with what result? It achieved neither objective of taking Kursk NPP, nor of syphoning Russian troops from the Contact Line. The Ukrainian presence in the Kursk Oblast will be eliminated.**

**What *it did do*, however, is put an end to all prospects of an eventual negotiated settlement in Ukraine. Distrust of the U.S. in Russia is now absolute. It has made Moscow more determined to prosecute the special**

**operation to conclusion. German equipment visible in Kursk has raised old ghosts, and consolidated awareness of the hostile western intentions toward Russia. 'Never again' is the unspoken riposte.**