

# War Propaganda Destroyed Media & Freedom of Speech

Patrik Baab is a German journalist and best-selling author who reported on both sides of the frontline in Ukraine. Baab argues that war propaganda has destroyed the credibility of the media and freedom of speech. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X /Twitter: [https://x.com/Glenn\\_Diesen](https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen) Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: [buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng](https://buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng) Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL>

## #Glenn

Welcome back to the program. We are joined by Patrik Baab, a well-known German journalist and author who has reported from the Balkans, Afghanistan, Ukraine, and Russia. And you have a new book out, *\*Propagandapresse: Wie uns Medien und...\** — sorry for butchering your language. This translates to *\*The Propaganda Press: How Media and Paid Writers Drive Us into Wars.\** So, thank you very much for coming on.

## #Patrik Baab

Thank you very much for having me here, Glenn. Always a pleasure.

## #Glenn

And I should also mention you have a new YouTube channel as well, *\*Gegen den Strom\**, which means "against the current." Sorry—*\*not\** storm, *\*Strom\**.

## #Patrik Baab

Yeah, against the stream — meaning against the mainstream propaganda press.

## #Glenn

Again, sorry for butchering your language. I'm relying on my high school German, so it's not great. Anyway, you've covered the war in Ukraine from both sides of the front, which gives you a very nuanced view of the conflict. Unfortunately for you, there's not much room anymore for that kind of objective coverage and analysis in today's media, as your new book suggests. The war narratives, I mean — they always have to be elevated above reality. And that creates problems not just for

journalists like yourself, but also for academics like me, when we're allowed to argue whatever we want only as long as we reach the right conclusion — the one aligned with the official truth. So I thought a good place to start would be if you could outline some of the arguments in your book, about what you define as the propaganda press.

## **#Patrik Baab**

Yes. The media in the West today don't cover reality anymore. We've reached a level of anti-factual reporting. You can see that on the ground in Ukraine, where I was, because many things I saw and investigated there are no longer covered in the media. For example, there's a kind of apocalyptic blindness — the risk of nuclear warfare in Central Europe isn't represented in the media. Another example: the living conditions of ordinary people, the average people in Ukraine, aren't covered in Western media at all. And another one — the background and the history, the prehistory of this war — isn't covered by the mainstream media.

That means this war has a long history. And according to the former Secretary General of NATO, Stoltenberg, it didn't begin in February 2022 — it began in 2014 with the coup on the Maidan. Another example is the moral hazard of the press — they're writing for the continuation of the war. There's no acknowledgment of the fact that hundreds of thousands of people are dying in this conflict. The press fails to follow its own rules. An important rule in reporting is to include the opposite side, to hear both sides — and that's something the press doesn't do. From my point of view, the background to this can be explained by five reasons.

The question of ownership, the working situation at editorial boards, the education of young journalists, the propaganda — the massive propaganda of NATO — and digitalization. Let me begin with the question of ownership. Newspapers and media are privately owned, and this private management has the right to define the political line of the editorial boards. If I don't want to represent that line as a reporter or an editor in public media — I was a reporter for North German public TV — the bosses, the management, are so close to the politicians, because the politicians sit on the supervisory boards, and the personal careers of first editors and editors-in-chief depend on those politicians.

The next point is the working conditions in the media. Most of the editorial work and coverage is done by freelancers or by journalists who have time-limited contracts — for a year, two years, maybe five. So they're completely dependent on how their bosses run the editorial boards. They have to do what they're told. Freelancers are paid by broadcasting minutes or by published lines, so they'll always write what their bosses want. And these bosses are mostly linked to transatlantic organizations or parties that have a transatlantic political line. I can only speak about the situation in Germany. If you want to become a journalist for TV or newspapers, you have to do a lot of internships.

And these internships are mostly unpaid. That means you can't work during the semester breaks as a student. You have to do these internships in big cities like Munich, Frankfurt, or Hamburg — very expensive cities. So there's a kind of social selection. Most of my colleagues were sons and daughters of the upper classes, of rich families — children of dentists, managers, and so on. They bring into the editorial boards the perspective and point of view of the upper classes, not of the lower classes. And these are the classes that mostly hold company shares, including shares in military companies. They profit from the war, but they don't talk about that.

They're saying in public, "We must help the poor Ukrainians against the bad Russians." And the next point is the massive propaganda of NATO. Years ago, the Pentagon had 27,000 employees working in public relations — doing propaganda — with a yearly budget of five billion dollars. These are old numbers, but they show that the propaganda sphere is so massive that you can't stand up to it as an editor. You don't have the time, and you don't have the manpower. NATO propaganda is brought into the public as a form of cognitive warfare. NATO propagandists don't want to change what people think; they want to change how people think. That's much more powerful. It's not just about information — they're trying to change the way of thinking.

That means they want to implement a way of thinking driven not by reason, but by emotions — Russophobia, resentment, and all that. And the next point, the most difficult one, is digitalization — on both sides: on the side of the makers and on the side of the consumers. Digitalization means that, in the liberal era, companies operate in the market, and the market is a free sphere — everybody can go there to sell or buy something. But in the digital world, the leading companies are the market. Amazon is a market. Google is a market — mostly a market of information. And the market owners, these private companies, decide what is sold in the market.

Which information can you get on the market? Who can sell in the market? They are defining the rights. And this is not freedom of information — it's just a private decision, nothing more. And this has consequences: you cannot find reality on the internet. What you can find is only what has passed through the upload filters of private companies and secret services. That makes getting information much more difficult. You have to be on the ground to find out how things really are, because the internet does not represent the truth. And this is an important point. On the one hand, and on the other hand, the main medium today is the smartphone.

Information is consumed, learned, heard, and read on the way to work — in the subway, on a bicycle, while working, while walking. That means the time of presence, of being focused, is very short. Most people have a double focus: they're watching the news and watching where they're going. And the editors know this. To get enough clicks and views, they try to focus the information on personalization and emotionalization — and that works against background information. So the reporting, the media coverage, is becoming more and more just what's on the screen. It's not going deeper. We're now living in a world completely covered by propaganda.

## **#Glenn**

I like what you said about the selection. You don't need to hire journalists and then propagandize them — it's just about the people you select. I wrote a book on political propaganda and Russophobia, and I cited a job ad in the New York Times. I think it was from 2016. More or less, it starts with language like, "Putin's brutal and oppressive regime is threatening freedom across Europe," and so on. Then it says, "We're now seeking an independent journalist." Based on that ad, it's quite obvious what opinions they want from the journalist. They're not going to have an objective, independent reporter — they're recruiting someone who's already arrived at the same conclusions they have.

So yeah, I very much sympathize with this. But I wonder if there's a deeper problem with the reporting as well, because when you study — at least in academia, in the European Union — you get the impression that there's this obsession with constructivism, the idea that you can socially construct your own world, this obsession with speech acts. In other words, how media reports and politicians speak — it's not to describe reality, but to construct new social realities. So when you report on the war, you want to build support for the war. You want confidence, to make sure the public believes we're winning: the Russians are useless, the Russians are evil, the Ukrainians are virtuous and victims, and NATO has nothing to do with it.

As long as people buy this, they'll support the war, and then we'll "win" the war. So any defeat can't be reported on. Also, we can't talk about things like background. If you say what the Russians think — because the Russians see this as a defensive war for their own existence — you don't have to agree with it, but that's how they see it. Yet you can't even report on how the Russians interpret things, because then you might construct a reality that legitimizes it, and people might start sympathizing with Russia. So you can't have any of that. It's thrown out and censored. You can't report on the massive Ukrainian casualties, or that they're taking higher losses than the Russians, because that could undermine public support for the war. Then they wouldn't support it anymore.

Now we're going to have to reduce the funding, and we'll lose the war. So the whole idea is that everything — from the losses to the brutal recruitment tactics, NATO provocations, sabotage of peace agreements, and so on — has to fit the narrative. Same with the sanctions. If you point out, as I did from the beginning, that they're never going to work, well, now you're "threatening" that they won't work, because by saying they won't work, you undermine public support. The public won't support the sanctions, and they'll fail. So it's never about reporting reality. There's no honest analysis — it's only about what your speech will result in. And this is where the massive censorship comes in. You can't say anything that could legitimize or delegitimize our position. So, I don't know — do you see this as a constraining factor, something that suffocates?

## **#Patrik Baab**

Yes, I agree, absolutely. You can divide this war into three levels. The first is the war along the front line. It's a large-scale war — a full-scale war stretching about 1,400 kilometers across eastern Ukraine. The Russian troops are increasing the pressure on the Ukrainian side, advancing step by step, and Ukraine has suffered huge casualties. According to a leak from the Ukrainian general staff, there are about 1.7 million dead or missing soldiers on the Ukrainian side. That's the first level. The second level is the economic warfare worldwide against the Russian Federation. And you're completely right — the sanctions have failed. Yet they keep doing the same thing, discussing the next sanctions package, and expecting different results.

For me, this is a sign of the mental madness of the Western elites. And the third level is the propaganda war — the media are part of that war. Everyone who provides information about reality is denounced as a "Putin friend," a "Putin propagandist." That's happened to me in Germany all the time. I was labeled a Putin propagandist. This is also orchestrated by secret services and digital companies. Just look at what you can read about me on Wikipedia and in certain articles. They claim I was a poll watcher for Mr. Putin during the referenda in the fall of 2022 — which I absolutely was not. A court has proven that I wasn't, but it keeps being repeated.

And this is a framing invented by the secret services, because the secret services are writing on Wikipedia and shaping the information there. And at the editorial boards... they're all reading Wikipedia for two reasons. First, it works very fast, and they don't have any time — it's daily reporting. And second, all the reporters know that the editor-in-chief mostly has nothing else besides Wikipedia, so they don't get into a discussion and end up framing things the same way. So what the press is doing here is lying by omission. They're leaving out reality and following NATO propaganda. I can say my friend, General Harald Kujat, who was a high-ranking NATO general here in Germany — he's retired now — spoke recently about the so-called "Three-Eye" concept.

Ideology... incompetence and ignorance. Incompetence, because the journalists don't follow their own rules. They have to answer seven questions: Who did what? When? Why? How? For what reason? And where did the information come from? And you have to answer those. You have to hear both sides, and you have to make a kind of reality check. But they don't go by their own rules. Ignorance — most German journalists don't know anything about Ukraine, about Eastern Ukraine, about Russia. They just have no idea what's happening on the ground. And this gap is filled by ideology, because it's easy to do so. And that's the background of the whole show. So I would recommend: don't trust the press.

## **#Glenn**

Well, propaganda comes in a vicious form in all wars. We tend to see this. But I think what makes this war unique is not only that we've been on a steady diet of anti-Russian propaganda for, well, a century now, but also the irony of the lack of familiarity with Ukraine. People don't know much about Ukraine. They don't know where it is on the map, so the myth could be created from scratch. They

don't know the history, they don't know the divisions within the country, they don't know how people have voted ever since 1991, when it became independent. Again, people have a hard time believing that only 20% of Ukrainians even wanted to join NATO, that most preferred partnership with Russia all the way up to 2014. But they created this mythical picture of Russian imperial reach over Ukraine, how they were victims.

The only thing, the one goal in the world, is to escape the shadow of Russia. And that's the story. They tried to remake it into essentially the Polish narrative, almost, because Poland did have this fierce, almost unanimous opposition to Russia. On Wikipedia, though, I have the same problem. My Wikipedia page is just ridiculous. Under "occupation," it used to say not "professor" but "Russian propagandist official." So, you know, it goes so far it's comedy—but it can be effective if you want to smear someone. I've noticed as well in the media, when they come with accusations, there's a lovely phrase they use. If someone "has been accused of" something—has been accused of backing Putin or supporting the war—that means you have... Like, I have never supported the invasion of Ukraine, but if someone has accused you of it, that's their way of introducing you.

If someone "has been accused," and enough people write it, then it becomes almost obligatory to add "controversial" or "pro-Russian." I always ask: these concepts—you have to unpack them. What exactly does it mean to be pro-Russian? Are we obligated to hate the largest country on our continent? What does that even mean? If it means supporting the invasion of Ukraine, or taking Russia's side against Ukraine, then they should say that. But it's quite ambiguous; it doesn't necessarily mean anything. That's why they can use these loaded terms, just throw them out there, and they don't need any context at all. It's all, as you said, emotions—there are no arguments there.

There are no facts, no reality—only selling the idea that we have two groups: us and them. And this guy's obviously with them because he's not saying the right things. Yeah. I did want to ask you about the NGOs, though. How do you see them fitting into this media picture? Because for me, they've been my main opponents here. The vast majority of smears against me come from NGOs—NGOs financed by the CIA, the National Endowment for Democracy, and, of course, my own government as well. They do everything from smear pieces to posting pictures of my house. There are no limits anymore, really—canceling speaking events and so on. How do you see NGOs working with the media here?

## **#Patrik Baab**

In Germany alone, according to a new study, we have more than 300 NGOs—so-called non-governmental organizations—which are paid by the government. I have to say, they're really government-organized non-governmental organizations, or GONGOs, created to frame reality and present a propaganda picture to the public. These so-called NGOs are set up to attack anyone who refuses to follow the narratives of the government and NATO. That's their job. But we're not just dealing with these 300-plus NGOs; they're embedded in a broader network of ideological apparatuses—schools, universities, churches, think tanks, media—all working in the same direction.

These ideological apparatuses aim to make sure the population follows the market economy and the rules of the state. They have to create credibility. Today, in these NGOs, universities, and think tanks, young academics are being brought in. They're employed as freelancers, with time-limited contracts of one, two, or three years—project-based work, basically. It's an academic precariat. And these people are in an uncertain, very liberalized working situation. They'll do whatever their bosses tell them to do to get a new contract. So, on this working level, we have a broad group of academics making money by framing reality and spreading propaganda.

This propaganda is implemented by corrupt transatlantic elites. If you want to build a career in Germany today at a higher level, you have to be connected to transatlantic organizations like the German Marshall Fund, the Young Global Leaders, various other organizations, or the foundations of Mr. Soros. Now we see in Germany that the Heritage Foundation, which is close to President Trump, is trying to gain influence over German parties, especially the AfD. So these transatlantic apparatuses are at work, and you have to look at this on a broader level. The media and the young journalists are not acting alone; they're embedded in a wider network of ideological apparatuses. I would say we're facing a broad propaganda and censorship complex—a censorship industry.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah, it's quite shocking, the direction it's going. Let me ask you about where you see Germany heading now, because it has to be put in context that, with all this propaganda, the policies of Chancellor Merz are hardly popular. He's not enjoying much support there. How is this covered by the media versus how the public perceives it? There's this ambition that Germany should become the leading military force in Europe and take a leading role in confronting Russia. What is the critical assessment in the media? Does it reflect public sentiment?

## **#Patrik Baab**

Not in the majority. The majority of German people, from my point of view, are sleepwalking into the abyss. This goes back to, and is caused by, the power of propaganda. Most Germans believe in the propaganda and the government's narratives because they want to believe them. And every German can feel that when this war in Ukraine comes to an end and European taxpayers are presented with the bill, everyone will know that ordinary people have to pay for this war. The bill will be presented. But today, Mr. Merz has no credibility with the public, even though the press is trying to give him some. I said to my former colleagues, the press is trying to push the German people deeper and deeper into this Ukraine war. But the average person, the average taxpayer in Germany, wants peace. So I don't talk to the press anymore.

I'm talking to normal people. I've done a lot of public discussions, readings from my books, and so on. And all these discussions were pretty good. The result is that the media in Germany don't represent public opinion. They're creating a fake opinion led by the government. As peace-loving

people, we've lost, according to Antonio Gramsci, the public hegemony—the cultural hegemony. We've lost it completely, and we have to get it back. So we have to fight for it in public discussions. That's the way to do it. But it's a long road, and I'm very pessimistic. I think the warmongers are much faster, because the survival of the current political class in Germany depends on the continuation of the war. If the war stops, the lives of these elites will collapse, and then they'll have to step back.

## **#Glenn**

Well, this has been the problem in recent years. The only acceptable coverage in the media, and the only statements from political figures, were that Russia launched an unprovoked full-scale invasion. And for almost four years, we were told that Ukraine was winning. The Russians were hopeless; they'd supposedly had missile shortages since March 2022. Every year, Putin was said to have another disease that would kill him if we just kept the war going a little longer. You know, the Ukrainian government was portrayed as a beacon of democracy. NATO supposedly had no skin in the game—it just wanted to help Ukraine restore its democracy and freedom, and so on. I mean, these were the main narratives being pushed. The Europeans, especially, stopped talking to Moscow. They blocked diplomacy while declaring that everything would be decided on the battlefield.

This is quite extraordinary. They designed, to a large extent, a war of attrition. Now the war is obviously reaching an end. And as you point out, once it comes to an end—when there's the threat of peace breaking out—then all the lies that were told to engineer public support for this long war will, to some extent, be exposed. So I get the feeling now that we're heading toward a crisis of political legitimacy across Europe—not just for the journalists, or let's be generous and call them journalists, but also for the political class. Now, given that Germany has been, I guess, one of the main countries that invested so much in this war, both in terms of money and political capital, do you also foresee a crisis of political legitimacy not just for those politicians, but for the wider system?

## **#Patrik Baab**

Yes, I see a crisis of legitimacy, and the elites are trying to avoid it. They know exactly what they're doing. Now they're trying to create and boost emotions against Russia more and more to distract from this crisis. They want to make ordinary people feel content, to put them in a position where they can't think anymore about the real reasons for this conflict. Because it's easy to investigate—the conflict didn't begin in February 2022. It began with the coup on the Maidan, which was orchestrated and organized by the West. That's very clear. So the elites have two options.

We have two possibilities: the narratives of the propaganda sphere will break down, or they'll have to create new ones. And I think they will do that. They'll try to create new propaganda narratives because journalists, academics, media, and politicians are so deeply involved in their own lies. They're sitting in the prison of their own lies—they can't get out. Every job depends on believing in these



lies. And, according to the American author Upton Sinclair, it is difficult to make a man understand something when his salary depends on his not understanding it. And this is the background of the whole system.

## **#Glenn**

How do you see the Russian hoax? That is, the idea that during the first administration of Donald Trump, he was supposedly an agent of Russia. You know, they spread all these other things—various witch hunts where every possible piece of disinformation was traced back to Russia, with a lot of imagination. But really, the Russiagate hoax is when we saw this massive obsession with disinformation emerging. And of course, there's no sense of irony there, given that Russiagate itself was a massive disinformation campaign. But this also led to the birth of these fact-checkers who are out there to check facts, yet we often see that they just check narratives. Indeed, I once had a fact-checker argue that they couldn't find any factual errors, but it was suspicious that my narrative was too similar to that of Russia. So again, what do you see as the role of fact-checkers?

## **#Patrik Baab**

These fact-checkers can't actually check facts. They're unable to do that. I've never seen a single fact-checker on the ground, at the front line, or in a war zone. So they have no idea what's happening there. You're completely right—they're checking narratives. They measure those narratives against the government's propaganda, that's all. That's their business. And this turns fact-checkers into propagandists, nothing else. It's just a propaganda business, and their job is to spread propaganda and denounce everyone who doesn't want to follow it.

## **#Glenn**

Yeah, earlier this year I was in a debate with the former foreign minister of this country. And again, afterwards, there was a fact-check—because you have to fact-check debates now. But only me, not her, obviously. I argued, for example, that Boris Johnson had sabotaged the Istanbul peace agreement at the behest of the United States and the U.K. Now, different Norwegian papers cited only, as part of their fact-check, a colleague of Zelensky, David Arakhamia—sorry, I'm pronouncing his name incorrectly—because, they said, he was a questionable source. So, we can't really trust what Glenn Diesen is saying here. But they left out everything else. There were two mediating sides there.

On the Turkish side, this sabotage was confirmed by the foreign minister and also by President Erdogan. The other mediator was Israel, where former Prime Minister Bennett confirmed the same thing. You had the former head of the German army, as you mentioned earlier, General Kuyat, who also argued this. There was a Bloomberg interview back in March 2022, and after

interviews with American and British leaders, they said the only acceptable outcome was regime change in Moscow. Even Boris Johnson, in articles and speeches, said that we can't accept a bad peace—that we have to be patient, support Ukraine on the battlefield, all that stuff.

Even Zelensky himself said in an Economist interview back in late March 2022 that many Western countries wanted us to fight a long war with Russia so they could exhaust the Russians, even if it destroyed Ukraine. All of that was thrown out the window, and the fact-checkers just picked one part, which wasn't even clear in the speech. It was basically a way of saying, "Well, we can't really trust what Diesen says, because this is the only evidence available." So they don't actually look at your facts. And, you know, there was this other state media outlet that fact-checked my argument that only about 20 percent of Ukrainians wanted to join NATO in 2014, when we toppled the government.

And the fact-checker actually wrote that it's not really true because the Ukrainians were "ignorant"—that's the word he used—of NATO's mission. They had been propagandized to think that NATO isn't about freedom and democracy. And they pointed out that after the Russian invasion, there was major support. Completely irrelevant to what I said. And it's just, yeah, it's quite obscene. I don't know what to do with these fact-checkers, but it looks like the government outsources fact-checking to some ideologues who are obviously on their side. And these days, the newspapers as well—it's just pure propaganda, it seems.

## **#Patrik Baab**

Yes. I think the only way to deal with this is to stop reading these newspapers and switch off the TV programs, and to look for other sources. You'll find them—for example, in the United States, Consortium News; in Canada, The Postal Magazine; in Germany, NachDenkSeiten, Overton Magazine, Multipolar. You have to find other sources. This is the only way to deal with it, because the press is willingly and knowingly lying to the people. It's very clear, and it's proven that Prime Minister Boris Johnson tried to sabotage the peace process. We have sources in Great Britain and London, and we have sources in Kyiv, Ukraine.

So we have both sides informed about that. And concerning the peace process that began just a few days after the Russian invasion, everyone who took part in it—for example, our former Chancellor Schröder, who was deeply involved with his wife—said, yes, we had a peace process and we reached a result. But the press is lying about it, lying by omission. And would you talk to a liar? I wouldn't. I don't go to these TV talk shows or anything else. I'm completely canceled in the mainstream media, and that's the best thing that could have happened to me.

This was the reason many people in Germany bought my books—because they want to be informed against the propaganda of the mainstream media. So I think the best thing we can do is take a fundamental stand in opposition to those media and their system of lies and censorship. It's the only way to deal with it. In the end, the mainstream media will be so compromised by lying about facts—

during the Corona period and the Ukraine war—that they'll discredit themselves. Nobody will read them anymore; they'll lose their audience. And we have to push this propaganda media into a position where they lose their audience. We need new media. That's the way to deal with it.

**#Glenn**

I very much agree. I forget who said it—it was a senior Czech official—who made the point that under communist rule, since the media and everything were under control, there was a need to have a parallel information architecture. That is, media to disseminate information and allow a free exchange of ideas, to actually present facts and arguments, even if they contrast with or conflict with the government's narrative. So, it's a sad road we've gone down. Do you have any final thoughts on the matter of censorship and this propaganda press?

**#Patrik Baab**

Yeah, I would recommend that people stop reading the propaganda media and look for other sources. We need another information sphere to deal with reality, because the mainstream media don't deal with reality—they deal with narratives and propaganda. We have to come back to the truth. That's why I named my new YouTube channel *\*Against the Stream\**. Whoever wants to reach the source has to swim against the stream. That's the way to deal with the mainstream press.

**#Glenn**

Well, Patrik Baab, thank you so much for taking the time. And again, for listeners, it's worth checking out the book as well as the YouTube channel. So, thanks again.

**#Patrik Baab**

Thank you very much, Glenn.