Benoit Paré: OSCE Whistleblower: The Ukraine War — Narratives vs. Reality

Benoît Paré, a French army reserve officer and former defense ministry analyst, brings his expertise and experience as an OSCE observer in Donbas. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: https://glenndiesen.substack.com/ X/Twitter: 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 Go Fund Me: https://gofund.me/09ea012f Buy Diesen merchandise: https://diesen-shop.fourthwall.com/en-nok Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MDL 00:00 Introduction to Benoit Paré and His Background 00:50 Observations from the Ground in Ukraine 05:14 Statistics and Reporting on Civilian Casualties 10:34 The Role of Media and Public Perception 13:23 Challenges in Reporting and Communication 20:11 Political Pressures and the Minsk Agreement 21:52 NATO's Dual Role in the Conflict 24:48 The Role of Nationalists in the Ukrainian Government 25:44 Impact of Volunteer Battalions on the Donbass Conflict 27:12 Human Rights Violations and Media Coverage 30:00 Crimes Committed by Ukrainian Armed Forces 34:18 The Influence of Extremism in Ukrainian Politics 38:41 Media Manipulation and the Narrative of the Conflict 45:50 The Unifying Narrative in Western Media

#Glenn

Welcome back, everyone. We are joined today by Benoit Paré, a former analyst at the French Ministry of Defense, an OSCE observer, and a whistleblower following his observations during an OSCE mission in Ukraine. Thank you for coming on the program. Thank you very much for having me again.

#Benoit Paré

It's always a pleasure.

#Glenn

And yes, you have written books before about what you saw as an observer. You have another book out, which is worth mentioning. Behind you is What I Saw in Ukraine, but there's also the new one, The Great Manipulation.

#Benoit Paré

The new one is The Great Manipulation, but that's the French cover. In English, it's almost the same: Ukraine: The Great Manipulation, which is available on Amazon.

#Glenn

So, long story short, you were an OSCE observer in Ukraine between 2015 and 2022, which was when the Minsk Agreement was supposed to have been implemented. And indeed, the failure to do so, obviously, is what led to the Russian invasion in 2022. So what happened during these years is quite relevant. How would you contrast what happened on the ground—the reality—with the media narratives presented to Western audiences?

#Benoit Paré

Well, there was a gap from the very early stages of this conflict. It was called a conflict initially, not a war—the Donbass conflict. And actually, I realized as soon as I arrived in August 2015, when I was deployed in Donbass, that there was such a gap. I immediately had the impression that, you know, there was substantial shelling despite the Minsk II agreement—in Donetsk, for instance, where I spent my first couple of weeks. From the day of my arrival, you know, I heard shelling over there. And this trend continued. I was even able to analyze it in figures later on. I don't remember if we discussed this the first time we talked together.

But anyway, if I forgot, maybe other people forgot too. The thing is, I had access to data about civilian casualties in Donbass as part of my duties. I belonged to this small unit within the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission called Human Dimension. And within Human Dimension, starting in 2016, we began systematically verifying reports of casualties. And most of the casualties were wounded people, right? You don't measure such things just by how many people died, because for every person killed, about four or five people get injured, some of them severely. So we started systematically verifying these reports. At first, I only had access to data for Donetsk Oblast.

But at the end of 2018, I had a chance to be deployed to Lugansk city. And then I had access to data from Lugansk Oblast, so I could compare the two and get a general idea. I compiled statistics that nobody asked me to compile, not only on how many victims there were on each side, but also on a special classification of those victims, because there were two main causes of injury or death. One was what we call remnants of war, such as mines or unexploded ordnance. And the other was what we call the continuation of the conflict, meaning shelling and shooting, right? And this is a different category, a distinction that we somehow tried to blur within the OSCE mission.

We mixed everything together. Except for 2016, we actually refused to publish data showing which side had the most victims, both overall and, even worse, if you considered only victims of the continuation of the conflict, meaning victims of shelling and shooting. Because then the difference between the number of victims we could verify on the non-government-controlled side—that is to

say, the side where the separatists were in control—and the government-controlled side, controlled by the Ukrainian military, was even worse than the overall trend with all causes combined.

And the figure I ended up getting was that between 2016 and 2018—that's a three-year period, right?—72% of the victims of shelling and shooting verified by the OSCE were on territory controlled by the separatists, meaning the shelling came from the other side, unless you would consider, as some would actually dare to do, that it was the separatists shelling themselves. So that gives you an overall figure that was never published. I actually pointed out this statistic to my superiors when I was working in the OSCE. I mean, at the local level, everybody congratulated me for this work, including my direct managers, but at the headquarters level, that was a different story.

Somebody told me, "Well, it's not up to you to do the statistics." I said, "Okay, but why not do it then?" And there was no answer. But I knew the answer, because the head of mission had decided not to publish those figures. We were initially told this in 2017, and it was confirmed by the head of mission himself, who was a Turkish ambassador, when he left the mission in May 2019. I had a one-on-one conversation with him, and he confirmed to me, "Yes, I decided not to publish those figures because I was under heavy pressure from the Ukrainian government, who accused us of being biased, of being influenced or manipulated by Russian monitors," which I knew was just nonsense.

Because among the people involved in verifying these figures at the time I was doing it, there was not a single Russian. It was just people of other nationalities doing this job. So to claim that we were manipulated by Russian observers was ridiculous. But that's how it was dismissed by the Ukrainian government. And before he departed, our head of mission also said, "You know, I was under so much pressure from the Ukrainian government. They told me that if I ever met with separatist leaders, they would ask for my expulsion from the country." You know, but our mandate stipulated that we were supposed to establish dialogue on the ground.

It was written in black and white in the mandate adopted on the 21st of March 2014. And so one side of the conflict, the Ukrainian government, forbade our head of mission to talk to the other side. "No, you don't have the right to establish dialogue. You don't have the right to fulfill your mandate." I mean, it's surreal, but this was the situation. Now, the only place where some form of dialogue was accepted was in Minsk, because you had high-level negotiations there between a Ukrainian delegation, separatist delegations—because there were two of them, the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic—and the OSCE in the middle. But what is important to say is that the Ukrainian delegation never agreed to meet directly with the separatists.

So first you had meetings between the Ukrainian delegation and the OSCE representatives, and then OSCE representatives would meet the representatives of the DPR and LPR, you know, if you use the acronyms for the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic. And this is how negotiations that led nowhere, by the way, were conducted during all those years in Minsk. On the ground, there were no negotiations. There was hardly any contact with the separatists. Once in a while, the number two in our mission—not the number one, because it was forbidden—would

discreetly come to Donbas and meet with the separatist leaders. And I witnessed that when I was in Lugansk. But, you know, there was never any official communication about it. It was like, you know, we didn't even dare to publicize these contacts.

It was insane. We were hiding from the Ukrainian government somehow. But at the same time, I doubt they were unaware of what was happening, because they were probably watching every move. But it was a game of hypocrisy that went on for years. And in the end, anything in our reports that could make Ukraine look bad was, how can I say, not necessarily deleted from every single report, but overall, you could actually reach that conclusion. Now, the way our mission functioned, we were supposed to report on facts on a daily basis. Our public daily reports were a compilation of the main security events of the previous day, because of the time it took for the reporting machinery to collect the data, verify it when necessary, and condense it into a format that was eventually published.

But the amount of data collected by our mission was 100 times more than what was published. It was huge. But there was a very systematic process of eliminating what was considered irrelevant from all these reports. And in the end, you would only get the tip of the iceberg of what was going on. And every time we could not verify information, it was not published. It didn't mean it didn't happen. It just meant we could not verify it, which is a different thing. And talking about civilian casualties, going back to this theme, if we didn't have three different sources that could actually confirm that we had a civilian casualty, we would not publish it.

If you had only two, well, that's not enough, sorry. So it's like it doesn't exist. And we had many such cases. I wouldn't want to say thousands, but dozens of cases like that when I was in Lugansk, for instance, where we could not get confirmation from three sources for various reasons. And sometimes it was the victims themselves who refused to talk to us because they were afraid of retaliation from the Ukrainian government, believe it or not. Now, usually this came from pensioners living on the LPR side, in this specific case, because we had several cases like that. These people were wounded on LPR territory by shelling. But at the same time, these people were collecting pensions on government-controlled territory.

So they were crossing the line of control regularly to get their pensions. But in order to be allowed to get their pensions, they had to declare a false address on government-controlled territory as IDPs, internally displaced persons. And from 2016, the Ukrainian government refused to pay pensions to these people unless they lived in government-controlled territory. So it was a huge movement. I think I addressed that when we talked the first time. The figure I remember, just for Donetsk Oblast, is 700,000 pensioners who had to re-register to get their pensions—just for Donetsk Oblast. I'm not talking about Lugansk Oblast in this case.

So altogether, probably around a million and a half people were impacted by this. So somebody who, on paper, lives as an IDP on the other side doesn't want to take the risk of having their name published as a victim of shelling while living where they're not supposed to live. So they refused to

talk to us, and they did not exist in our statistics. So even the official statistics were below the reality in this sense. So in many ways, to be fair, I would say that the vast majority of what was eventually published was accurate. I would say at least 95% was accurate. But the big problem was what was not published. Because, again, what we published was the tip of the iceberg.

And then it's not only that, but okay, let's say we publish daily reports about victims here or there. But at some point, I thought it wasn't enough because the general public in Ukraine, if they followed the media or their own politicians, thought that there were victims only on the government-controlled side and that shelling was only coming from the separatists. They didn't know what was happening on the other side because it wasn't reported anywhere in the media. The only people who could do that were us. But okay, we would publish such things in our daily reports, but the Ukrainian media would only pick and choose whatever served their narrative.

They would ignore the rest. Whenever we reported on victims on the separatist-controlled side, that was ignored. They would only report on victims on the government-controlled side. And that was systematic. So people were left unaware of what was going on. And I discussed this with the head of a village on the separatist-controlled side. It was the village of Kominternove—that was its original name—then renamed Pikuzi by the Ukrainians following the decommunization law of 2015. And the village leader knew this village was a martyr village because, out of the 450 people who used to live there at the beginning, most had fled. Only 150 people remained.

And out of these 150 people, more than 30 were wounded or killed—in just one village. And so this village leader told me one day, "You know, I read your report every day, but what you do is not enough. I watch Ukrainian media. They never talk about us." So he said, "What you should do as the OSCE is organize live press conferences so that the media cannot cut them. And then you should just list the victims you have verified on any given day or during the week. Like, make a summary: 'Okay, this week we verified X number of victims in this village.' And then people will understand." That was all he suggested: compiling our own reports. Actually, I thought it was a good idea.

I said, "Okay, why not?" So I wrote this proposal in my report exactly as it had been suggested to me. And, of course, as I expected, nobody answered me, and they never changed anything in the system. Once, somebody at headquarters told me, "Well, it's not up to us to do such things. Our job is just to do the minimum. We report on a daily basis, and then it's up to other people to compile statistics. It's not our job." But we refused to do this simple thing: make the information we had collectively collected more understandable to the general public. It didn't require much—just compiling statistics and communicating them. But we refused to compile the statistics—well, actually, some of them, at least. And we refused to communicate them in any case, in spite of my attempts, because at some point I even asked to talk to the head of mission about it.

He listened to me politely. He said, "Okay, write a memo to me about it. I'll discuss it with my deputy and the head of reporting." And I did write the memo. And of course, nobody responded to me. The memo is published in my book, by the way, for those interested. And then, since nothing

changed, I even decided to write to the chairman of the OSCE. And if you are familiar with the OSCE, it's an organization that has two heads. There's a secretary general who is kind of permanent, who sits in—I forgot where—Vienna, of course. And then you have a political representative who is the minister of foreign affairs of a member state. Every year it changes. And that year, the country in charge was Italy. And one of my colleagues was from Italy.

And he had a very long career within the Italian administration. So I discussed this matter with him. And I said, "If I write to your foreign minister, do you think there's a chance that the letter would reach him?" He said, "Oh yeah. I'll make sure of that. I have connections." I said, "Okay." So I wrote the letter. I gave it to him. And since I trusted this guy, I assumed the letter reached the office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was the acting head of the OSCE at that moment. But of course, I never got any answer. Again, the letter I wrote, or a summary of it, is in my book. So everything's there. Then I thought, "Okay, it doesn't work. Maybe I can try with my own embassy."

So, you know, we had regular meetings with our embassies. Every six months, we would meet and discuss things. It was accepted by the OSCE. And so I made a presentation with PowerPoint slides and so forth, with all the figures I had. At that time, it was just about Donetsk Oblast, which already was significant because Donetsk Oblast accounted for 80% of the victims overall. So it gives you a pretty good idea. They listened to me politely. They thought it was interesting. And then nothing changed. A month later, I spoke with one of the embassy staff, and I said, "So why is it that nothing changes, given the data I gave you and more after that?" He said, "Yes." I said, "I don't know." He said, "We are not in Paris."

"We don't know what they do with it. But what I can tell you is that whatever you gave us was transferred to Paris. But then it's not up to us." And then one day, during one of my trips to Paris, I asked to meet one of the diplomats there. And again, I put this subject on the table. I said, "Well, you know, I compiled these statistics, and I think we should actually talk about them. I think it would contribute to reducing the amount of hatred there is in Ukraine on the government-controlled side, because people are fed propaganda. And this propaganda fuels hatred and the will to continue the war and to continue to shell the separatists because they're considered to be the bad guys."

And I said, "If you want to reduce tensions, you know, France is one of the godfathers of the Minsk agreement. So I thought it should be in the interest of the French government to encourage everything that moves us toward peace and the reduction of tensions, which was also one of the objectives of the OSCE mandate. So I thought communicating the real casualty figures would also contribute to reducing tensions." But these diplomats told me, "Oh, no, no, no, we shouldn't do that, because then the separatists would use this as grounds to make more demands." I said, "What does that mean?"

What kind of reasoning is that? But okay, you know, he didn't hesitate a second before giving that answer. And then I realized, okay, for these people, the truth doesn't matter. What matters is the narrative, what they want to do. And then I started to doubt whether my own government wanted

peace in Ukraine, whether my own government wanted to apply the Minsk Agreement. So it was disturbing to me. But everything that followed only confirmed that it seemed both the French and German governments were not interested in the truth and were not interested in implementing the Minsk Agreement.

And this led, as you mentioned, down the line to Russia eventually deciding that, okay, this Minsk Agreement was a dead end. It's a failure, so we have to think of something else. And so I think we collectively decided not to push the Ukrainians to fulfill their part of the Minsk Agreement and to ignore facts that showed that they were violating it. Because if there were so many civilian casualties, it meant that Ukrainian authorities were regularly shelling the people of Donbass, which in itself was a violation, multiplied by every single victim. So we decided to ignore all of that. And this led to, you know, Russia deciding that, okay, now we have to do something else. And then the SMO started.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, you say that you got the impression that the French government didn't necessarily want an end to this conflict. And that observation is interesting because it appears that the NATO countries attempt to wear two hats. On the one hand, it was NATO that had a key role in toppling the government in Kiev, then installing a proxy and backing that proxy ever since 2014. And at the same time, they're wearing the other hat. That is, "Oh, we want to put an end to this whole conflict and mediate." But still, there's a conflict of interest. I mean, you see the same thing even now. Trump is talking about how we have to have peace, putting pressure on Zelensky and Putin.

But at the same time, you see American drones flying over the Black Sea, picking targets to strike. American weapons are being sent there. So it's very strange to see one of the sides in the conflict also trying to play the role of a mediator. And I guess the problem here, though, is once you have that government in Kiev, which was anti-Russian to the core and would align itself with NATO and Western intelligence services, and you had the rise of the resistance in Donbass, with those people rejecting the legitimacy of the new government, then you have a conflict. To what extent would the NATO countries actually want a settlement that gives autonomy to Donbass, according to the Minsk Agreement, if that's able to essentially function as an instrument for cementing the neutrality of Ukraine?

That kind of defeats the whole purpose. It kind of reminds me of when they negotiated this Istanbul agreement in 2022. I mean, after NATO spent eight years building a massive proxy army of hundreds of thousands of men, training it, arming it to the teeth, suddenly they're going to have an agreement with Russia to restore Ukraine's neutrality. It doesn't really make any sense. Why would you do that when you have hundreds of thousands of troops you can use to weaken a strategic rival, who aren't even yours? You don't have to count the dead. I mean, the idea that you can be a mediator and a key participant in a conflict does seem to be a conflict of interest.

I did want to ask, before I forget, though, about the nationalists. In 2014, when Donbass refused to recognize the post-coup government, Kiev started sending soldiers down to break them in Donbass. However, we saw that a lot of Ukrainians didn't want to, you know, kill their own people. So that's when the government became very dependent on these nationalists out of western Ukraine. Many of them, of course, were still carrying the flag of Bandera and the Hitler collaborators, still having the same insignia, all this kind of stuff. But how did that impact the conflict? How was that for the people of Donbass, the fact that these nationalists became kind of the spearhead of the war?

#Benoit Paré

Very quickly, before answering this question, I just wanted to remind our audience that both Angela Merkel and François Hollande stated in December 2022 that the Minsk Agreement was meant to help Ukraine gain time. Gain time for what? Military retaliation, you could guess. Going back to your question, I understand you're asking about the impact of these volunteer battalions in Donbass from 2014 onward. Well, when I was deployed in Kramatorsk and especially in Mariupol, I got a lot of feedback about what happened in those years, because I was only deployed from July 2015. So that was after the most dramatic events of that Donbass war. But especially in Mariupol, I was able to follow what had happened through trials. We were following conflict-related trials.

I was also able to have regular conversations with the Human Rights Monitoring Mission of the United Nations, which was probably more effective than we were in terms of monitoring human rights, because they had to report on many more things than we did. We had lots of exchanges about what was going on. And I also had the chance to directly interview victims of kidnapping, torture, and arrest in various instances. Some of them were journalists. At some point, I did a series of interviews with journalists and asked them what had happened to them during those years. And in Mariupol—just Mariupol city, I'm talking about only one city—I found five different journalists who all had different stories of either physical violence or intimidation.

Threats led to three of them quitting. In two of these cases, the SBU told them, "You stop working as a journalist now, or we put you in jail for eight years." Both of them told me exactly the same thing in separate meetings. So this is how they proceeded, apparently. For others, it was arrest or torture. Two of them actually continued to work, but they told me, "We have to be very careful with what we publish." And one of them told me, "For me, it's very simple. I try not to report anything about the war." So you're trying to become irrelevant if you don't want to be threatened by the system, by the SBU or the volunteer battalions. In another case, Azov was at home in Mariupol from June 2014.

#Benoit Paré

And they were hunting down so-called collaborators and separatists. And they were the most involved in these kidnappings, violence, and torture. And it was well known that at the Mariupol airport, they had created a torture chamber called the Library. And I even watched an interview with

Vasily Prozorov, who is a former SBU officer. He mentioned that. He said, "I was there in 2014. I visited this place." So I can't confirm, but people were killed there. And when I was there, I heard a rumor that not far from this place, there was a trench where they would bury bodies and pour acid on them to erase every trace. And then I discussed this with the ICRC. I won't name the person, of course. And I said, "Well, are you aware of that?" And they told me, "Oh, of course we're aware of that." So I said, "So what do you do about it?"

And the answer was that, well, right now the situation is not politically adequate. I don't remember the exact term that was used. "The situation is not politically mature." I think it was "mature." "The situation is not politically mature for us to investigate that." Even the ICRC. So I don't know if this was ever done afterwards, but anyway, that was the rumor going around about such things going on. And I talked to people who were put there. Some of them testified about it in court during the trials I followed. And then I read more things later on. To be fair, the Ukrainian government itself even arrested members of the Tornado Battalion that was acting in the Lugansk Oblast, doing horrible things, acting as a criminal gang, pure and simple, kidnapping the locals to demand money and torturing them to get money or whatever. And some people disappeared in those pits.

And they received relatively long sentences, let's say, but they were not sentenced for murder because the bodies of the people who disappeared were not found. So they could not establish in court that they were guilty of murder because they said, "Well, we don't know where these people are." But according to some witnesses, they were killed in those basements, including a 10-year-old girl who, according to testimony I watched in a video about the trial, was raped to death over eight days. And apparently, they got rid of her body.

But okay, in this case, it was so gross that the Ukrainian government acted. But then, in 2017, I had access to a list of people from the Ukrainian Armed Forces detained in the SIZO, which is the detention center for people who have not yet been sentenced under the Ukrainian system. And on this list—I'm talking from memory, but the details are in my book—was it 17 or 23? I'm not sure. It was something like 17 or 23 members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces detained for crimes ranging from murder to kidnapping and torture. Serious stuff, you know? And I recall that 13 of them, 13, were put in jail for murder.

But actually, that list is not even exhaustive because I knew of two more cases: one involving an Azov soldier and another involving an Aidar soldier. Both killed a local inhabitant with a knife, and this is confirmed—one in Mariupol and one in Ugledar. They got into arguments with locals, and in both cases, they used a knife and killed an unarmed local inhabitant, right? And neither perpetrator was ever put in jail. In one case, I actually just found out information about it recently because I now have a Swedish publisher who is reading my book and checking everything I wrote.

So he asked me questions. Then I double-checked one story about the Ugledar guy, and actually, I found the name of the guy who was accused of the crime. I found a document that basically said the guy was never put in jail, and his trial had still not been completed in 2022, when the Russian

SMO—the special military operation—started. So this guy was never sentenced. And the other guy from Azov, the way it was resolved, they had an agreement with the family to pay something like $5,000 to the victim's wife in order to escape any harsher punishment. So he never did a day in jail. And so he was not even on this list from the SIZO that I saw. So, in other words, even that was just, you could say, the tip of the iceberg.

And on this list from the SIZO, there were some names we knew because we had followed these people's trials. But most of the names we didn't know. We had never heard of them. And I'm only talking about one SIZO in Mariupol. You have SIZOs in every major city. There was another one in Bakhmut, for instance, and there were probably also members of the Ukrainian forces there. Statistically, you would guess that. And then there was Luhansk Oblast. So what I'm saying is that we only had the tip of the iceberg. The good news was that the Ukrainian authorities started to do something about it at some point. But when you look at the types of sanctions that were applied, as I just mentioned, they didn't amount to much at all. And two of these people were Gorbatenko and Motika from Azov.

They were accused of kidnapping, torture, and murder. Again, not small stuff. And we followed their trial in Mariupol. When I left Mariupol in December 2018, the trial was not over, so I don't know what happened with it. But then I was very surprised because I later saw reports in Ukrainian media, but not only Ukrainian—even French media—about these two guys. They were back in the fight in 2022. And one was even a battalion commander in the new Azov in Kiev, the new Azov Brigade, which later became the Azov 3rd Brigade. So not only was he not in jail, but he had been promoted to battalion commander. And the other one was back on the front, even though, according to earlier documents, he had been fired from Azov. But okay, then in 2022, the game changes, and he's back.

And so I don't even know if these people were ever sentenced, even though they were accused of what they did by one of their own Azov members. They killed one of these guys they had kidnapped, who was allegedly a small drug dealer. So they wanted to go after drug dealing in the city, like it was a police mission. You know, it's not up to them to do these things, but they decided to do it by themselves, with their own methods. And their own method was torturing people. So it went so far that they killed one of them, and then one member of this gang basically started to blame the others, saying they were going too far. They got into a fight, and the end result was that the other guys injured the guy who opposed the killing of the prisoner so badly that he had to be hospitalized. Again, all these facts were in the local press.

They were discussed in court. And then these guys are back as heroes and whitewashed. So this is what happened with these guys. And even the leader of the Tornado Battalion and his deputy were back in the game from 2022. One of them was Daniel Yashuk—that was his name. His nickname was "the Mujahideen" because he converted to Islam and grew a beard at some point, even though he has a swastika tattooed on his arm. But then he fought the Islamic State. He was fascinated by the Islamic State, for instance, fascinated by violence. And so he decided to convert to Islam to embrace extreme violence, ISIS-style. And so these are the kind of lunatics, you know, we were talking about.

And this guy joined the ranks again in 2021 or 2022. And he was eventually killed in Bakhmut in 2023. Now, all of this is documented, once again. It's in my book. The details are there. And I found even more confirmation afterwards. And the leader of that gang, the Tornado Battalion, also said that when he was released in the summer of 2022, he wanted to join the ranks again to fight the Russians. But I couldn't find information about him afterwards, so I don't know what happened to him. But okay, then Ukraine decided to use these war criminals to fight the Russians, knowing their background as torturers. I mean, you send them back into a war zone. What do you expect? If they find locals whom they suspect of being pro-Russian, they would do the same thing, or even worse.

So this is what I can tell you about the impact, the influence of these guys from volunteer battalions. And you could even say that their mentality has reached the higher levels of the government because of this form of extremism that they demonstrated in the field. I remember one of the first times I was stopped for a little while at a Ukrainian armed forces checkpoint. It was manned by Dnipro-1 Battalion members. And the guard wanted to give us his political views about what was going on back then, in 2015. And he said, you know, "Poroshenko should not negotiate with the Russians. We should just kill the enemy, period." Okay, so that was very blunt.

But this is how nationalist people think. No negotiations. No, there's nothing to negotiate. You have to fight to the last one, to the last Ukrainian. And up until now, you find lots of people online who say exactly the same thing. They don't want to negotiate anything. There's nothing to concede. There's no room for compromise. Even Dmitry Yarosh. Dmitry Yarosh was the founder of Right Sector. Then he quit his own movement and created a new one called the Yarosh Initiative. And in 2019, just days after Zelensky was elected, he said in an interview—I also published the link in my second book, I think, or the first one, I don't remember—but he basically said that if Zelensky implements the Minsk agreement, he will be killed in the center of Kyiv.

And you can read that as a direct threat because everybody knows that the people who are likely to do that are people around him, around Dmitry Yarosh, Right Sector people—the same people who had threatened to kill Yanukovych in 2014. So, you know, when they say something like this, they mean it. And so I think from the start, Zelensky knew he was basically a hostage of these guys. And, you know, this is how it works in Ukraine. Some people would tell you, "Oh, you know, but these people represent only a tiny minority in Ukraine," which is also true when you look at the latest election figures we have from 2019. However, even though they are a minority, you know, in terms of electoral weight, they have managed to infiltrate the security apparatus of the Ukrainian state.

When you see Zaluzhny, you know, the chief of staff of the Ukrainian military, posing in front of a portrait of Bandera, you know what that means for those who know about the history of Bandera and the UPA. These people were allies—well, some people will say, "No, it's not true. They fought against the Nazis." But initially, they were allied with the Nazis. And the only reason why they

started to fight the Nazis was that Hitler opposed the idea of Ukrainian independence. Otherwise, they would have stayed on, fighting on Hitler's side until the very end. Anyway, from September 1944, they eventually all joined ranks again with the Nazis to fight the Soviets.

So they resumed collaboration. And Bandera himself and his movement, OUN-B, had pledged allegiance to the Third Reich as early as April 1940. So this is the history of this movement. Everything is verifiable, even on Wikipedia, even though most people don't have a clue about it because, of course, this part of history is being hidden. And so when you see the chief of staff of the Ukrainian military posing in front of this portrait, I mean, you say, "This guy is not ignorant of what it means." So those who know understand what this means. So that's the sad reality of the influence of these nationalists within the Ukrainian state up until now.

#Glenn

What I find frustrating, though, is that this is not really based on misunderstanding, but it's deliberate manipulation. I mean, you've seen it over the past 12 years now. I remember, for example, back in 2014 with the Odessa massacre. Our journalists had to report on it, but they framed it in such a manipulative way. It was all framed as, you know, fighting: some people died, who did what, we don't really know. And it was all framed as being, you know, pro-Ukrainians versus pro-Russians. They were all Ukrainians. And, you know, a different framing would be to look at the people they simply referred to as pro-Russian, which is what our journalists do when they want to dismiss someone and essentially deprive them of any legitimacy.

They were anti-Maidan protesters. Again, what our journalists don't say is that the majority of Ukrainians didn't support Maidan. They didn't support the toppling of Yanukovych. And so why did people go against this? Well, because we helped to topple their democratically elected government. We helped to install radical nationalists in power. We stripped Ukrainians of their basic rights, their political opposition, and their media. And so they went out, they protested, and then they were massacred. I think it was 48 of them. And the only way our media can refer to them is, "Oh, there was a clash between pro-Ukrainians and pro-Russians." In other words, patriots versus traitors, and some traitors died.

I mean, it's such a despicable, horrific way of referring to it, especially when the whole premise for fighting to the last Ukrainian is that we're standing with them, we want to help them. But it's something wider, though. Every time one sees a swastika, the first impulse, the first instinct, is to look the other way. Every time a Ukrainian is abused, it's treated by the media as a threat to Zelensky's authority and the war narrative, which is required for a long war. You probably saw this 14-year-old kid who was protesting in front of this army detention center. He was knocked down, brought in, and beaten up. His clothes were cut up, and he was filmed during the whole process. And the first instinct of the media is always the same: dismiss it, reject it.

“He was a protester. It was probably staged.” And they never, ever report on what he actually said himself. I mean, it's becoming so horrific. But as you suggested, when you empower the extremists, you know, the Nazis, it makes sense to have them as a partner of NATO, though, because they will never make peace, and they will fight to the last man. And, you know, in all fairness, they are great fighters as well. They're motivated. They're highly trained. So I can understand why it works on many levels. I just hope that one day some of our media will be held accountable for how they have portrayed this. And the fact that they've done it under the banner of standing with Ukrainians and helping Ukraine is such an absurd proposition. Anyways, do you have any final thoughts before we finish?

#Benoit Paré

I mean, I totally agree with what you just said. I do remember, with Odessa, when I first heard about it on the French news, I didn't really understand who was fighting whom or what they were fighting for. It's exactly as you described it. I only understood what exactly happened when I watched this documentary called The Mask of the Revolution by a French journalist called Paul Moreira. He did a very good documentary about this Odessa massacre. He spent 25 minutes talking about it. And when I was assigned to Odessa myself at the end of 2021, I showed this documentary to my assistant, who was from the city and was living in Odessa back then.

And she told me, “That's the best account of what happened that I have ever seen in the media.” So for those who want to know, I recommend this documentary. But of course, Paul Moreira was heavily criticized and attacked in France by the mainstream press because, you know, he was not allowed to tell the truth about Ukrainian nationalists, to describe the extent of their crimes. It's not allowed in the Western press. And what I would say is that there is so much unanimity in every single European country, in every single mainstream media outlet that is more or less connected to either those in power, the government, or, you know, oligarchs, because we have our own oligarchs, right?

There’s such unanimity in the way information is being treated that you can only conclude that this is all coordinated by a central power that basically has dictated to all these people, “Okay, when you talk about Ukraine, you have to follow the narrative.” And the narrative is that Ukraine defends democracy, that there are no neo-Nazis in Ukraine—that’s Russian propaganda—and so forth. And we want Ukraine to win, and we will support them to win because that’s our goal, right? And because they defend democracy against barbarism, which is represented by Russia. And the same narrative is followed by everyone, every single one of them. So, of course, everything we just said will be dismissed as pro-Russian propaganda because Russian media say the same or similar things.

So, of course, it means it cannot be true, right? And this is how our Western world works. It has basically fallen, in my opinion, under the complete control of some form of oligarchy. And who exactly that is remains a little bit of a mystery. But some people say that this coordination of

information is done directly at the level of NATO or the CIA, which basically has the means to infiltrate various media outlets in one way or another, or even political circles. So, I mean, one former French senator actually says publicly that, according to his information, the talking points come directly from NATO headquarters for everyone to follow. So this is what's happening. It's too bad, but that's the situation as it is.

And you and I, we are trying to fight because our idea of truth is that we cannot accept being part of a lie, even if it would make our lives easier. It doesn't make our lives easier to oppose what we see as lies. But, you know, we are built in a different way, I guess. I wish there were more people built like us, for whom integrity matters before anything else. Because if you start to think integrity doesn't matter, then how can you have a civilization, you know? Then it's no wonder that our Western civilization is collapsing once, you know, people consider that narrative matters more than integrity. So I think that's the bottom line of this discussion.

#Glenn

No, no, I think that's the best conclusion as well. A civilization that rejects reality doesn't really have any future, which is why this is not just sacrificing the Ukrainians; it's also an exercise in self-harm. So, yeah, Benoit, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

#Benoit Paré

Thank you.