

Gaslit Nation Transcript

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“If You Listen to Fools, The Mob Rules”

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Rep. Tim Ryan:

I want to thank the gentleman from New York and the other Republicans who are supporting this and thank them for their bipartisanship. To the other 90% of our friends on the other side of the aisle, holy cow, incoherence. No idea what you're talking about. Benghazi, you guys chased the former Secretary of State all over the country, spent millions of dollars. We have people scaling the Capitol, hitting the Capitol Police with lead pipes across the head, and we can't get bipartisanship. What else has to happen in this country?

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the best selling books; *The View From Flyover Country* and *Hiding in Plain Sight*.

Andrea Chalupa:

I'm Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*.

Sarah Kendzior:

This is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the United States and rising autocracy around the world. The opening clip you heard earlier was from Representative Tim Ryan of Ohio, one of the few Democrats showing the proper level of concern about the erosion of our democracy. It has now been over four months since the violent attempted coup on the Capitol, and we not only do not have an investigation, we not only still have Federalist Society member, Christopher Wray—the head of the FBI—refusing to prosecute elite organizers, but we have a Democratic Party that has done nothing but surrender in advance.

Sarah Kendzior:

The Democrats are not merely surrendering to the GOP. I think their leadership would prefer you to see it that way—to cloak this as a bipartisan feud—but they are surrendering our country itself. They are surrendering democracy and the possibility of justice. They are surrendering the future of the United States, and this surrender, at least from the Democratic leadership, is intentional.

Sarah Kendzior:

They are running out the clock, just like Mueller did, just like Cy Vance is doing, just like the rest of Trump and his mafia syndicate's lackeys have done for decades. They are accomplices and it is the American people who will pay the greatest price.

Sarah Kendzior:

Let me be clear: a failed coup is a dress rehearsal. A political party that stages a coup and blocks investigation—that is the Republican Party—ultimately wants that coup to succeed. A political party that did not stage a coup but does not assertively, quickly investigate and prosecute it—that would be the

Democrats—also wants that coup to succeed. No officials who value democracy or the survival of this country would approach an attack on the Capitol with anything but the utmost urgency, unless their long term goals match that of those who back the attempted coup.

Sarah Kendzior:

The stakes were made abundantly clear throughout Trump's presidency, we are not dealing in hypotheticals anymore, and yet the Democrats had to be dragged, kicking and screaming to impeach, despite the worst onslaught of rampant criminality from the executive branch in our nation's history. The Democrats were then targeted for slaughter themselves by the mobs that Trump and his cohort instigated, with bombs placed outside the Capitol and insurrectionists calling for their death allowed inside.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yet, once again, Pelosi had to be dragged to a second impeachment and it basically only happened because of Jamie Raskin and others who had simply had enough. The Impeachment Committee then tried to bring witnesses at the second impeachment of Individual One, Donald Trump, and Pelosi destroyed that initiative, which was desperately needed, too.

Sarah Kendzior:

As a result of there being no witnesses, Representative Raskin is now releasing letters from Capitol Police who are desperate to see an investigation of why these events were allowed to happen and baffled by the lack of support for them by the Congresspeople they are tasked to protect.

Sarah Kendzior:

Let me be even more clear: the only time to act is now, not in 2022. There is no 2022. Since January, we've seen the Republicans dismantle voting rights, and in some GOP state legislatures pass laws that allow them to throw out votes on their whim. We've seen the Democrats, despite holding the House, the Senate and the presidency, be unable to pass most policies including voting rights acts, because they will not abolish the filibuster. And we've seen no meaningful effort by Chuck Schumer, Joe Biden or other Democratic leaders to get Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema in line.

Sarah Kendzior:

Biden fully acknowledges that the attack on January 6 was the most severe internal attack on the United States since the Civil War, but he and others are not behaving as if it is, and it's actions that count now, not words. After the Civil War, traitors, including 11 senators and three house representatives, were expelled from the legislature. The current Congress not only did not expel the seditionists in their midst, they asked them to supervise the crimes that they helped commit.

Sarah Kendzior:

In all of my studies of authoritarian regimes, I have never seen a case where a country attempted to memory-hole a coup, but that's what's been happening for the past four months. I know there's a lot going on what with the global plague and all, but there's simply no excuse for the endless demands of Democratic leadership that the commission be, "bipartisan". Predictively, Republicans both rejected it and used that requirement as a wedge to water down the commission's investigatory capacity, and now are using it for delay or denial.

Sarah Kendzior:

The refusal to rigorously investigate the coup mirrors the refusal to stop it in the first place. The January 6 seditious attack was not a spontaneous uprising of pro-Trump acolytes. This was an armed insurrection organized by some of the most powerful elites in the country—among them, Roger Stone, Steve Bannon and Michael Flynn. Their effort involved a massive year's long propaganda operation in QAnon, and they recruited openly and heavily from pre-existing violent groups, like the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers. They announced the place and the date, they tweeted out hotel recommendations, and they made t-shirts commemorating the occasion.

Sarah Kendzior:

This was the easiest plot in the world to deter because it all happened in the open. And it was the easiest plot to document because it was aired on live TV and social media. An investigation did not need to be bipartisan. It could have begun with the Democrats on day one, and could have initially consisted of daily consistent briefings about what happened and what they've uncovered since. Instead, they've sought to run out the clock and let the GOP rewrite the narrative, and there's only one reason you do that. And that's if, for some reason, you want the second coup to succeed.

Sarah Kendzior:

I have some theories as to why certain people—not all the Democrats, for sure, but certain people—want that. But first, Andrea, what are your thoughts?

Andrea Chalupa:

Well, it's certainly a slippery slope we find ourselves in. I want everyone to understand that the future has not yet been written. The themes we're talking about today; basically losing our sovereignty as a nation to a transnational crime syndicate, the world devolving into oligarch fiefdoms, because of all this unchecked corruption spreading globally, the Republican Party and the Kremlin being united in values, because they're both just so brazen in how low they go to undermine ruthlessly their enemies and enrich themselves and come to power, stay in power, and avoid accountability. There's a reason why Republicans and the Kremlin are so linked now today, because they see the world the same way and they see human life the same way, which is the shit they grow their money in, as one person put it to me in Ukraine many years ago.

Andrea Chalupa:

So, as demoralizing as these themes today may be, and the threats we're up against, I want to assure people that we can and must still fight for the future. None of this is inevitable that we're up against. It is a threat that we can chip away at, and the way we're going to win is by being relentless and seeing ourselves as marathon runners for democracy. We just chip away, we chip away, and we outlast them, and we grow a number so great that they simply cannot get rid of us and we're everywhere they turn.

Andrea Chalupa:

Through the phone calls and the texts and the protests and the communities that we organize and fortify, we're going to be living inside their minds rent free, and they cannot get rid of us and whatever dystopian tech they try to invent to try it again inside our minds, we're going to be comfortably entrenched in theirs. That is the whole name of the game.

Andrea Chalupa:

I want to tell everybody right now listening, please own your power, accept your power—because we need everybody to recognize how powerful they are and how needed they are right now in this moment of history—and do what you can to support the groups that are going to make a difference in 2022 and 2024. Do that now. You can go to the Gaslit Nation Action Guide and set up automated donations to any of those groups listed there. Those groups need your money now, now, in the spring of 2021, in order for it to make a really big difference in 2022.

Andrea Chalupa:

People who are going back to brunch as though we've survived the worst and are choosing to go back into the Matrix and live under the illusion that everything is suddenly now fine because the pandemic might be coming to an end and people are getting vaccines and Biden is president, those are our worst enemies right now. Do not become one of those people because there is no comfort when you have the threat of rising authoritarianism backed by mafia states and growing global corruption that literally takes away your sovereignty. It literally takes away your vote and your voice, and is now at the point of kidnapping dissidents on flights between EU nations. That's where we are now. Recognize your power, own it, go to the Gaslit Nation Action Guide.

Sarah Kendzior:

We've had to remind people that that exists so many times. I'm just thinking of the constant barrage of like, "what do we do?" Which, if you genuinely don't know is fine, but we've had a few dishonest brokers on that one.

Andrea Chalupa:

Oh, yeah. Gaslit Nation is snorting caffeine. [laughs] It's like that plunge in ice cold water that's really good for your health, they say. It's like that. It's good for you and Sarah and I do it anyway, because we're just wired that way.

Sarah Kendzior:

Well, there's an entire contingent of the Democratic Party that I actually think is fairly small, but is over-represented on social media, that is literally against the idea of people doing anything, or officials doing anything, or just the idea that things can be done and must be done. Look, they'll call you, for example, like a Do Something Democrat. A Do Something Democrat is a Democrat who believes that public servants should serve the public, that we live in a society in which we're mutually interlinked. When there's corruption at the top, it filters down to the bottom. When vulnerable people are getting hurt at the bottom, people on the top who are elected officials who we pay their tax money, have an obligation to stop that pain.

Sarah Kendzior:

They are completely against this. They are only interested in personality cults and bowing down in weird ways to various elected officials, smearing and tarring others. It's gross, and I don't think it's representative of the general American public. I actually think most people are rightfully freaked out right now, four months into the Biden administration, because they see a pattern. It's not like it's just Biden or something. You see Merrick Garland refusing to release the full memo on Trump and obstruction of justice and Bill Barr's role. You see him protecting Bill Barr, and of course, Bill Barr protected Mueller, and Mueller protected Trump. You have this long train of that.

Sarah Kendzior:

You see Janet Yellen refusing to release Trump's tax returns to Congress, even though she's *legally obligated* to do so. You see, of course, what I just described with Christopher Wray refusing to investigate elites like Stone and Flynn and going after low hanging fruit. You see the continued destruction of the Postal Service—people still unable to get their mail and certainly unable to vote by mail, if that comes to pass in 2022—because Biden will not restructure the board so that the board members can fire Louis DeJoy. That still hasn't happened, and it's absolutely necessary now.

Sarah Kendzior:

Then, of course, the biggest problem of all, is voting rights; the lack of voting rights protections, the lack of the end of the filibuster. These are things that we have every right to be gravely concerned about. We've described in many other shows how they influence problems we haven't even gone into here, like what are we going to do about climate change, and so forth? But anyway, I'm just breaking... because I'm so sick of the idea of doing something, the idea of caring about something, being portrayed as a negative quality that you need to suppress.

Sarah Kendzior:

They want automatons. I think that's what the leadership of the Democratic Party wants and that's what certain fundraisers want, and we're refusing to be automatons. If you don't like it, that's just too fucking bad.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah, on that front, it's elite, criminal impunity that got us the violent coup attempt on January 6. This long history of Barr getting away with his Iran Contra coverup, Barr getting away with his Mueller investigation cover up, George W. Bush getting away with his war crimes in both Iraq and Afghanistan, all of this elite criminal impunity over time builds up to an atrocity, like the terrorist attack on January 6, and all of the trauma and ongoing gaslighting—the abuse that goes with that.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's all connected. I want to ask the Biden administration, you know, you got Joe Manchin's wife, Connelly Manchin, a job. She's now in charge of the Federal State Economic Development Partnership, according to Forbes. Joe Manchin's wife was confirmed by the Senate as the co-chair of the Appalachian Regional Commission. That's a six figure job.

Andrea Chalupa:

Basically, Joe Biden's White House gave Joe Manchin's wife a job, thinking, “Come on, Joe, let's play ball. Let's pass some voting rights,” at a time when you have an authoritarian Republican party trying to make it extremely hard for people to vote and putting themselves in positions of power where they can steal elections. Joe Manchin just took this taxpayer money through his wife's job. He's like, “Nope, no voting rights.”

Andrea Chalupa:

It's really infuriating. The authoritarians basically have us by the balls right now and it's in the form of complicit actors like Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema and others, and also, the cyber war. What

happened with the colonial pipeline with Russian hackers coming in with the ransomware attack on a major gas pipeline, that was a warning shot. What they could do is far worse than that.

Andrea Chalupa:

The way the Democrats in positions of power are behaving, it's as though they are in some hostage situation. It's as though our sovereignty is already lost. They're making decisions that are against national security, against our own national interest, that simply do not make sense and put us in a position of basically losing what's left of our democracy, making it easier for our enemies to come to power and stay in power.

Andrea Chalupa:

Their moves simply do not make sense. And one case in point is you could see, following the colonial pipeline ransomware attack by Russian hackers—and again, Putin's Kremlin is a mafia state. Whatever the criminal elements are doing, you better believe that any Russian criminal hacker sophisticated enough to do what they did to the colonial pipeline, they're operating under the authority of the Kremlin. Putin's regime is a mafia state. It's all in tangent.

Andrea Chalupa:

Following that, the ransom was paid, and then what happens? The Biden administration is reportedly going to waive sanctions on Nord Stream 2, so that project can move forward. You might recall during Antony Blinken's confirmation hearing before the Senate, he pledged to do everything in his power to stop Nord Stream 2.

Andrea Chalupa:

Why would that be in the US interest to stop Nord Stream 2? Because it is a horrific chess move by the Putin mafia state, where it builds a pipeline between Russia and Germany that further entrenches German dependence on gas—Russian gas. Controlling access to Russian gas, dependency on Russian gas, has been used by Putin's mafia state as a leverage, as a weapon to pressure and force its interests.

Andrea Chalupa:

For instance, the Kremlin has turned off its Russian gas pipelines into Ukraine in the dead of winter to hurt Ukraine. Now, Germany is saying, “Oh, yeah, come on in. Let's ensure our dependence on Russia and gas moving forward. Never mind that it's terrible for the environment.”

Andrea Chalupa:

It is Nord Stream 2, Russian gas pipeline between Russia and Germany, just furthers Germany's dependence on Russia, and that's going to put Germany in a tricky position when it needs to hold Putin's mafia state accountable for all of its many crimes, and all of its many human rights atrocities, from murdering people on British soil, from using some advanced death ray brain damage machine on US targets, from deliberately mass murdering civilians in Syria to flood the EU with refugees and then financially propping up far-right anti immigration parties to further divide the EU, to propping up the Venezuelan dictator who is starving his people and creating a famine and a refugee crisis that could be larger than Syria's.

Andrea Chalupa:

So, who the hell is going to hold Putin's mafia state accountable if so-called Western Democratic leaders like Germany are making these big Blood Money deals with them like Nord Stream two? The reason why the US government really needs and wants to stop Nord Stream 2—and this is a bipartisan position, both Republicans and Democrats support this—is because they know that Germany is out, Germany's hands are going to be tied.

Andrea Chalupa:

Even under Obama, where Obama pretty much, in my view, did the bare minimum in trying to hold Putin accountable. You know for a fact it was the bare minimum because what happened? Putin got his asset elected President in 2016. That happened in part because of Obama's foreign policy. We've talked about that in previous episodes.

Andrea Chalupa:

Even under Obama, Obama had to drag Merkel into sanctioning Russia. Imagine how much harder that's going to be now that Nord Stream 2 is about to be complete. It's 95% complete. And guess who's running Nord Stream 2? The CEO is a Putin crony who served in the KGB in East Germany, with Putin. So you know what the whole spirit of this project is: it is to establish an economic weapon that it could yield to pressure the EU to continue to not hold Russia accountable.

Andrea Chalupa:

On the heels of the Biden administration, as it was reported in Axios, the Biden administration reportedly plans to waive sanctions for Nord Stream 2. In that reporting, the Biden position, whatever it was, is talking out of both sides of their mouth. They've decided to waive the sanctions. That hasn't been officially announced yet, but the idea is they can't stop the project moving forward anyways, so they might as well waive the sanctions. But guess what? They're going to make sure that the gas pipeline is not used. How the hell do you plan to do that when you pledged to stop the thing from being complete in the first place?

Andrea Chalupa:

Stop kicking the can down the road on that. The second position they had was we can still levy sanctions, we can still levy sanctions... bullshit. Alexei Navalny is in prison right now, and he gave you a list of people to sanction and you completely ignored it. It's shocking. It's shocking the weakness that Biden is showing to Putin, and the only possible reason behind it is that our US government is somehow in a hostage situation due to Kremlin aggression.

Andrea Chalupa:

Whatever success the Kremlin had in 2016 with installing their asset, they currently are holding a lot of really good cards right now, having had their way with the full US government for four years during Trump's term. They clearly seem to have us in a corner if Blinken and Biden cannot hold their promise on holding ground on Nord Stream 2.

Andrea Chalupa:

Because what happened after that weakness? There was a young dissident from Belarus, who was instrumental in helping build the uprising that's been ongoing against the dictator of Belarus, Lukashenko, who's nicknamed the Last Dictator of Europe. He is very much in Putin's pocket. He's

completely dependent on Putin. As much as the dictator likes to think of himself as autonomous, it's an isolated regime that's very much in the pocket of the Kremlin.

Andrea Chalupa:

Just as this happened this last week, there was a flight that left from Athens on its way to Lithuania. On that flight was this young dissident by the name of Roman Protasevich, he and his girlfriend, Russian citizen, Sofia Sapega, a 23 years old, boarded from Athens on their way to Vilnius, Lithuania. During the flight, there was reportedly four KGB agents that were taking photos of them at the airport in Athens. Remember, in Belarus, they still call their security services—their terror police—the KGB. The branding just works for the purpose.

Andrea Chalupa:

Those four men got on the flight. As the plane is flying between EU nations and is flying through Belarus airspace, the KGB agents threaten the crew with a bomb saying there's "a security risk, they must land immediately." A jet fighter from Belarus flies up and escorts the plane down, it's a Ryanair commercial jet. As it's going down, this young dissident is begging for his life, saying, "Please don't release me to Belarus, I will be killed." Because of his pro-democracy activism and organizing and journalism, he's seen as a terrorist in Belarus.

Andrea Chalupa:

The plane lands in Belarus, and Roman and his girlfriend are escorted off, and four other passengers, presumably the four KGB agents, get off with them. Then the equivalent of a hostage video was just released featuring Roman talking to the camera, looking quite in shock saying that he's being treated well. That's a hostage video. We're all familiar with that.

Andrea Chalupa:

This event was, of course, shocking. It's another example of what happened with the murdering Crown Prince, MBS, in Saudi Arabia, where he hacked a Washington Post writer, Jamal Khashoggi, who was in Turkey—was in Istanbul—and just popped into a Saudi embassy with his fiance waiting in the car. He just needed to take care of some paperwork. They had a wedding coming up. And he never came out. He was completely dismembered and MBS got away with murder.

Andrea Chalupa:

Again, the Biden administration let him get away with it. So, elite criminal impunity leads to more innocent lives being lost. Do you understand? You're endangering all of us. You're endangering me, you're endangering Sarah, you're endangering our families, you're endangering people that do this work, that need to do this work in order to ensure that we have a democracy and that our democracy even functions.

Andrea Chalupa:

You're not making any of us safe or safer. So, please, Biden administration, all that great work you've done to get vaccines in the arms of Americans, now please apply that same mind, that same empathy, that same power of organization and American might to your foreign policy, and protect Americans from the virus of transnational corruption and authoritarianism. Because none of us are safe. Nowhere on the planet are you safe from this threat.

Sarah Kendzior:

Absolutely, and so well said. I just want to add a couple of points just building off of what you said about the Kremlin's actions, about their desire to break up the EU, which they succeeded in doing with the Brexit referendum and the turn of Hungary and Poland and other states towards authoritarianism. Obviously, there are domestic issues, but the Kremlin has exacerbated them. Many people have gone into Cambridge Analytica and all of these transnational criminal technological movements and propaganda operations that helped this succeed.

Sarah Kendzior:

They wanted to break up the EU, they also want to break up the United States. It's been interesting because, throughout the time we've done this show, it has been a struggle to convince people that Trump was an aspiring autocrat and that the GOP was an authoritarian cult. These are now things that people say commonly. You see mainstream people saying what we said back in 2018/2019 because they understand the severity of the threat.

Sarah Kendzior:

Now, they're saying, you know, "I'm very worried the United States is going to become an authoritarian country." To which I'm like, AN authoritarian country, if you're lucky. Because I think the ultimate goal of the Kremlin, but also all of these partner states, these transnational actors who really do not have an allegiance to a particular country.

Sarah Kendzior:

It's like the guys who are suing Catherine Belton for her book, Putin's People. We went into that a few episodes ago. These oligarchs, these plutocrats, these elite mafiosos, they would rather have us stripped down and broken up into parts. They would rather have the United States consist of oligarch fiefdoms, and that is why they keep pushing secessionist movements. You have Marjorie Taylor Greene, who I usually don't think is worth the discussion—

Andrea Chalupa:

Marjorie Taylor Greene is like the American Maria Butina.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yes. I was thinking of that! I was thinking of that, because she has the same god damn lines-

Andrea Chalupa:

Same energy. Same energy.

Sarah Kendzior:

with the guns, and with the pushing for a secessionist movement. She's pushing for the United States to break apart. Now, think about that. You know, yeah, there are people run their mouths or whatnot, we just had a violent insurrectionist, seditious attack on the Capital of the United States, and now we have a representative who has threatened other representatives. She has stalked Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. People like to frame that as a cat fight, it is not. It is serious, it is violent, it is obsessive, and she is now calling for secessionist movements. You're seeing the same things happening in Texas. There are people

they're calling for secessionist movements. There are people calling for the creation of what they deem "Greater Oregon", which is basically overlapping with a lot of the territory where White supremacist groups have been plotting for several decades. A lot of this was long coming,

Sarah Kendzior:

it absolutely needs to be stopped. My fear, and I've said this before, is that the Democrats—or liberals or leftists, or whatever you want to call yourself, people who are definitely not Republicans—they also fall for all this bullshit. They think they're going to build some sort of paradise out of a northern state, or—this is what worries me most—out of California, where again, you see Kremlin efforts and Kremlin money backing the Cal Exit Movement, in which California could become an independent country and would become, in turn, one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think if that would happen, you would not have a paradise. You would likely have a technocracy of some kind. It would be built on Silicon Valley dirty money. What worries me a lot is that I think some of the absolute worst representatives in the Democratic Party are coming from California and are flooded with Silicon Valley money.

Sarah Kendzior:

When people say, "Well, what would be in it for them? What's in it for the Democrats to block voting rights? What's in it for the Democrats to kiss ass to the Republicans who literally were encouraging a mob to murder them? What could they possibly gain?" Sometimes the answer in my head is, California. That's a theory. I normally would feel like a little iffy sharing that theory, but honestly, the shit that you all know about, the shit that's actually happened to our country since 2016 that has gone completely unpunished and that's going on in plain sight is so horrific, is so over the top, that I think that speculation is warranted.

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm not saying this is definitely something I know, I'm just thinking, when I try to think of incentives for behavior that is so blatantly anti-American, anti-constitutional, anti-the sovereignty of our nation, I think of perks. I think of, well, what do they get in exchange? I think about the fact that we truly do have a class of people—mega millionaires and billionaires—who do not need this country to exist. They truly don't. They could carry on with their lives exactly as they lived them before with their corporations, with their accumulated wealth that they can pass down from generation to generation, and none of this will affect them.

Sarah Kendzior:

They don't need to worry about public schools, hospitals, human rights, civil rights, voting rights. It doesn't matter. Their power will remain. That is another reason why we obviously need dirty money, and I think big money in general, out of politics. And we need to have people in office who are not from this class of wealthy politicians.

Sarah Kendzior:

It is so... ugh, God, I know I sound so furious, but it's because I am and it's because I'm very frightened for the future, for what our children will inherit. Because I see a really malevolent plan, worse in many ways than the traditional fascist state. But anyway, as you were saying, you were making a lot of good

points about the Belarusian case and the attack on the West, the attack on free journalism, the attack on free media. So, go on from there.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's very clear that Lukashenko, the dictator Belarus, snatched a dissident. He hijacked a plane between EU nations because he felt emboldened by the fact that his-

Sarah Kendzior:

Sugar daddy.

Andrea Chalupa:

... his sugar daddy, thank you, throughout this uprising that Lukashenko has been threatened by with the Belarusian people rising up against him, risking their lives, their freedom—hundreds have been arrested, many tortured, dissidents have had to flee abroad, as we've seen, they're not safe—Lukashenko has been turning a lot to Putin for help. The Russians have been ramping up their support because they need to keep Belarus a hostage state, because they leverage their hostage states to show their geopolitical might, and unity is power, and having a Eurasian Union to counter the European Union. That's this terrorism that they could leverage as a threat against democratic states so they could avoid accountability and stay in power and be staggeringly wealthy.

Andrea Chalupa:

Putin is estimated to be—by Bill Browder, somebody that we're going to have on the show—as the wealthiest man on Earth. That's certainly true when you factor in all the extraordinarily wealthy oligarchs he controls. Lukashenko has been on Putin's lap crying for help, begging for help, hiding behind Putin, and Putin has been sending in his agents to Belarus, including propagandists, to try to spin the narrative and all of it.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's hard to believe that Putin wasn't in Lukashenko's ear, just saying, "Go ahead and do this. Why don't you do something really badass, like, grab your dissident off that EU flight?" And that's what he did. Putin, of course, felt emboldened by that because he got a slap on the wrist. Biden's sanctions package was quite sweeping, it was comprehensive, but it stopped short.

Andrea Chalupa:

Again, Alexei Navalny said, "Here's a convenient little list for you on oligarchs that you need to please sanction, Biden." Biden did not follow that list. That sends a message of weakness to Putin and that emboldens Putin. The other thing that is a national crisis is the Republican Party itself. Putin, who has literally studied our way of life, the way we think, they had those Russians in the troll farm watching House of Cards and consuming other American culture to try to get into our heads when they would pump out all these bots.

Andrea Chalupa:

Of course, Putin has relied for many years on the Republican operative, Paul Manafort, to further his interests in Ukraine and in the US and media and business. The Republican Party itself is a national security threat. Marjorie Taylor Greene and others talking about secessionist movements, Putin wants

those people back in power. Putin appreciates how the Republican Party has become so aggressive, so Nazi Stormtrooper, so intimidating and ruthlessly undermining, that he's happy that these Republicans are making Biden's job harder and blocking Biden now, and blocking any progress and protection of voting rights.

Andrea Chalupa:

Putin wants all that because it weakens the United States from within, and it basically ties our hands in terms of standing up to Putin, because we're dealing with all these problems, and why would the Biden administration want to risk escalating any tensions with Putin by holding his aggression accountable abroad?

Andrea Chalupa:

So congratulations, Republicans. I know a bunch of you took a trip, spent Fourth of July in Moscow, when Kremlin's asset, Trump, came to power-

Sarah Kendzior:

And 9/11.

Andrea Chalupa:

And 9/11. You are just continuing doing Putin's dirty work by weakening the U.S. from within, and showing that there is a sizable power in the United States that would be completely fine, as it was under Trump, in allowing Putin to just do what he wanted on the global stage, and giving him his wish list and letting him get away with actual murder.

Andrea Chalupa:

It is dangerous, because the threat is coming from inside the house and it's growing from abroad, and you really need to have a smart and strong foreign policy to outsmart all these actors that we're up against, because you have a lot of fires that are encroaching on you. Sticking your head in the sand or trying to play the waiting game or thinking they're going to go away is only going to make things worse, and it is only going to empower them, as we're seeing. How many more dissidents need to lose their lives before the people in positions of power, from Merkel and Biden and others, finally do something about this growing autocracy that is literally choking our planet?

Andrea Chalupa:

And it's all connected. You want to talk about the anniversary of George Floyd's murder by a white police officer, Derek Chauvin, who was, of course, found guilty of that murder in broad daylight. It's all connected. Putin's regime of autocracy represents a strangling of the planet, through pollution. It's an oil-based economy. It's a gas station dictatorship, like so many that are polluting this planet with actual oil and human rights abuses.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's an anti-immigration regime. There's viral videos of people attacking immigrants on the streets in Russia, and that's a fun game that they play. There's White supremacy in Putin's regime. He had a nationalist march that turned into a Neo-Nazi march. The parties that he's propping up across Europe are posh Nazi parties.

Andrea Chalupa:

All the threats that we're up against, from environmental degradation, from White supremacy to the violence of patriarchy, it's all connected. The one big weapon of our time to use against it is calling out corruption and fighting corruption and taking on corruption. Because when you do that, you make the world safer for greater racial and gender equity and the environment as a whole. Understand, if Biden wants to get serious about his climate goals, you need to take on the gas station dictatorships.

Andrea Chalupa:

If Biden wants to honor George Floyd and his family and all those who remain vulnerable under White supremacy violence, then you need to take on xenophobic regimes and hold them accountable and challenge your allies across the pond, and you to do the same, because none of us are safe with these authoritarians emboldened by inaction by the West.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yep. To just stress this point, yet again, we have been fighting transnational organized crime. As we've described in many episodes, the Kremlin is an essential apparatus of this operation—it's the biggest state apparatus—but it's intertwined with other countries like Israel, like Saudi Arabia and, to be precise, with the worst actors from those countries, with people who have wantonly abused power, people who hold multiple passports, because the name of their game is money laundering, it's rigging political systems, it's suppressing the power of individual human beings.

Sarah Kendzior:

I want to pick up where we left off last week—we did an entire episode about the attacks on Palestinians in Israel—because it relates directly to what you're saying, that the Biden administration needs to have a consistent stance on states that are committing grotesque human rights violations, that are, in this case, an apartheid state.

Sarah Kendzior:

We were obviously glad, like everybody else, to see that there was a ceasefire last week. We don't want anybody on any side of this to die and we don't want the continual bombardment of Gaza. But it's important to note that the occupation continues, and Palestinians are still being denied clean water, electricity and medical care.

Sarah Kendzior:

Israeli police and military forces have gone on a rampage inside Israel since the ceasefire, and have beaten and arrested Palestinians, including, once again, children. Among the people they arrested was a 10 year old boy who they released after his younger sister was wailing hysterically. As we noted last week, this iteration of the ongoing conflict began with the forced eviction of Palestinians from their homes by Jewish settlers, and with violence against Palestinians praying in Al-Aqsa Mosque. Both of those things are continuing.

Sarah Kendzior:

This conflict did not start with Hamas launching rockets at Israel. The only thing that has changed is that the Israeli military has stopped bombarding Gaza. But furthermore, the American media is now cracking

down on journalists who believe in Palestinian rights. The openness that I discussed last week, the ability to discuss this conflict fairly, seems to be dissipating.

Sarah Kendzior:

The most egregious case of this is Emily Wilder, a journalist who was fired from the Associated Press after conservatives harassed her employer and said she should be fired because she supported Palestinian rights in college and mocked GOP mega donor Sheldon Adelson, who died in December. The mockery was beforehand. Wilder, notably, was not even covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Just the fact that she had sympathy for Palestinians and that she supported Palestinian human rights was enough to get her fired.

Sarah Kendzior:

Wilder, who is on Twitter, released a long statement defending her position. She's standing up for herself, other journalists have stood up for her. I think that's good to see. People are appalled, not only because she didn't do anything wrong, but because her firing happened right after the Israeli military destroyed the building that was holding the Associated Press offices in Gaza.

Sarah Kendzior:

That attack, as we noted on last week's Gaslit Nation, was aimed at intimidating journalists and it worked. That the Associated Press would supplicate itself and fire one of its own after its own building was destroyed under the false pretext that it was harboring Hamas—this is a myth that Secretary of State, Blinken, has debunked—is deeply disturbing.

Sarah Kendzior:

That worries me a great deal. I'm seeing ominous signs of press freedom about this conflict, and also the fact that the conflict hasn't stopped. I'll bring up one more thing going on there that I think is of note. For years, we've discussed Mike Pompeo, the rapture fiend. He is somebody who believes that foreign policy should be based on the Rapture. He felt that way as head of the CIA. He felt that way as Secretary of State. And the evangelical or extremist Christians—there's honestly a variety of people holding this belief—think that the road to salvation involves destroying the Al-Aqsa Mosque, building the Third Temple in Israel.

Sarah Kendzior:

There are some Jewish extremists who believe this as well. These two beliefs tend to cancel each other out, because in the evangelical view, it's the Jews returning to Israel where then they will either have to forcibly be converted or die, that will pave the road to paradise. This is an anti-semitic theory or goal, but nonetheless, we've seen a lot of collaboration between these two groups, at least in the present realm in which we live.

Sarah Kendzior:

Anyway, Pompeo, as you know, is no longer the Secretary of State, thank God. He spent the time period between the election and the coup going to Israel repeatedly and meeting with Mossad. We never really found out why he was meeting with Mossad, just like we never found out why he was meeting with Kremlin spies who had been sanctioned—which is what he did get his Secretary of State job, that's another story.

Sarah Kendzior:

A disturbing thing is Mike Pompeo, private citizen, is now going back to Israel to meet with Mossad. The official reason is to celebrate the retirement of Yossi Cohen, the Head of Mossad, and he is going to be there at the exact same time as Antony Blinken, who is scheduled to be there this week, as well. This is disturbing to me, because you have to remember the Republicans, I think they know that Joe Biden legitimately won this election, but they are behaving as if he has not. That's key not only to their future goals of saying that the 2022 results must be rejected, the 2024 results must be rejected if a Democrat wins, but I think to an ongoing plan that they had for the Middle East.

Sarah Kendzior:

The other thing Mike Pompeo desperately wanted, along with Kushner, Pence and John Bolton and so many others, was a war with Iran. And Netanyahu recently said that he's, again, interested in a war with Iran. All of this is of grave concern to me. The Biden administration needs to take this very, very seriously, and just look to who is suffering here. Look to the preservation of human life.

Sarah Kendzior:

If we have institutionalists and your goal is to protect the institution at all costs, but the institution has been corrupted deeply from within—corrupted to the point that it's shattered—you need to build a new structure of laws and norms, or at least you need to state what your intent is plainly. It cannot just be this kind of de facto embrace of an alleged ally when that ally has hurt us badly, or hurt other people badly, and that goes for Saudi Arabia, as well, what Biden and the State Department did in regard to Khashoggi. There needs to be a consistent set of values.

Sarah Kendzior:

Obviously, diplomacy is fluid and it's never going to be perfect, but sometimes these situations, they're so cut and dry, and they're so incredibly dangerous, and they harm so many innocent people that you need a government that will stand up for the most vulnerable, that will be a real leader on the global stage. I see a lot of pain in the present and in the future. I see bad things down the road. I'm being vague now because the stuff I'm envisioning is so awful that it's not really worth sharing, and you could probably guess what I'm thinking based on my description now. But anyway... ugh, anyway, I hope that they find a solution.

Andrea Chalupa:

Absolutely. The news was just announced while we were taping this show that Putin and Biden will meet in June, on June 16th.

Sarah Kendzior:

Oh good God.

Andrea Chalupa:

Dear President Biden, we refer you to every single episode of Gaslit Nation for your notes in preparation of that meeting with mass murderer, xenophobic, mafia state henchmen, Putin. I want to close out this show as a warning to Biden and anybody that works in any position of power, and to every single person listening, to please be motivated, to get involved in where you live.

Andrea Chalupa:

If you are represented by idiots in power who are just making things worse, take their jobs. The solution to what we're up against is to flood the system with good, empathetic, science-driven people. The men and women on the front lines of fighting for democracy in Belarus and Russia, that's their arena. They're running for positions of power. And they're losing their lives, they're being thrown in prison, they're being harassed for it.

Andrea Chalupa:

We're not there yet in the US. You're not there yet in the UK, and Canada and elsewhere, and EU nations. So, fight like hell wherever you live. Be involved locally where you live. Build a community, fortify a community. Even running for office is an act of power and defiance, and it shines a light out in the world and it draws other lights to you and your light together become stronger.

Andrea Chalupa:

Understand that we all have a lot of power in our hands, and that's why Sarah and I keep doing this show because we're standing in our truth, we're standing in our power, and they hate it. [laughs] We're going to end this episode with a reading of an excerpt from a great article from Edward Lucas in the Times. It's a must read piece.

Andrea Chalupa:

I'm reading from it because some people complained when I shared on Twitter that it had a paywall. Ed Lucas is a longtime Russia watcher. He faced his own pressures by being very early on the issue of Russian oligarch blood money, turning London into London grad and the dire outcomes he predicted for that. Now, in this new piece, he's warning what we're up against.

Andrea Chalupa:

Every single nation on this Earth faces losing its sovereignty due to the growing threat of transnational crime, corruption, authoritarianism, it's all the same thing. It's all connected. I'm going to read from this piece now, and we'll link to it in our show notes if you're able to access it.

Andrea Chalupa:

"It may be too late, but democracies are at last beginning to get to grips with the threat posed by kleptocracies, criminal regimes that loot their own countries and subvert ours. The US has a new law on the seemingly obvious requirement that company registration should list real 'beneficial owners.' Many countries have introduced Magnitsky sanctions, which target foreigners involved in theft and thuggery. Our efforts so far merely scratch the surface."

Andrea Chalupa:

"Kleptocrats have all the resources of a state on their side. They can run disinformation campaigns to demoralize Western societies, they hire the best lobbyists and bribe decision makers. They use cyber espionage tools to snoop on whistleblowers, anti-corruption campaigners and investigative journalists. They hire assassins, armed with bone saws and nerve agents, and then deny brazenly what they have done. The super rich can use foreign courts to bully detractors into silence."

Andrea Chalupa:

“Even if you have truth on your side, defending a libel action, as I know from personal experience, can cost hundreds of 1000s of pounds, nothing for an oligarch but ruinous for an individual. They can file bogus criminal charges against critics, resulting in Interpol red notices that cripple the ability to travel. I increasingly hear from academics who have been told to tone down criticism of China because it is bad for business.”

Andrea Chalupa:

“The first stage in countering this is to get different bits of government working together. The regimes in Moscow and Beijing are a national security threat, that winning them goes way beyond the capabilities of armed forces, or intelligence services. Other kleptocracies are supposedly allies.”—Hello, Saudi Arabia.—“Reputation laundering camouflages their activities. We need close-knit teams of detectives, prosecutors, financial supervisors, cyber sleuths and other officials with the skills and clout to deal with the slippery super rich.”

Andrea Chalupa:

“The stakes could not be higher. Who runs the world? Governments elected by voters and controlled by law, or people whose ill-gotten wealth automatically turns into ill-used power? So far, our enemies are winning.”

Andrea Chalupa:

Our discussion continues and you can get access to that by signing up on our Patreon at the Truth Teller level or higher.

Sarah Kendzior:

We want to encourage you to donate to your local food bank, which is experiencing a spike in demand. We also encourage you to donate to giveindia.org to help Indians battling COVID-19.

Andrea Chalupa:

We also encourage you to donate to the International rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Syria. Donate at rescue.org, and if you want to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to The Orangutan Project at theorangutanproject.org.

Andrea Chalupa:

Gaslit Nation is produced by Sarah Kendzior, and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review on iTunes. It helps us reach more listeners. And check out our Patreon, it keeps us going. And you can also subscribe to us on YouTube.

Sarah Kendzior:

Our production managers are Nicholas Torres and Karlyn Daigle. Our episodes are edited by Nicholas Torres and our Patreon exclusive content is edited by Karlyn Daigle.

Andrea Chalupa:

Original music in Gaslit Nation is produced by David Whitehead, Martin Vissenberg, Nick Farr, Demien Arriaga and Karlyn Daigle.

Sarah Kendzior:

Our logo design was donated to us by Hamish Smyth of the New York based firm, Order. Thank you so much, Hamish.

Andrea Chalupa:

Gaslit Nation would like to thank our supporters at the Producer level on Patreon...