

Gaslit Nation Transcript

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Joe Manchin Gaslights America

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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*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine.

Sarah Kendzior:

And this is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the United States and rising autocracy around the world. And so, once again, Americans are still under attack. Yes, we no longer have a Kremlin asset mobbed up sociopath plague fiend and nuke fetishist as the president, but we still have his criminal backers running around free.

Sarah Kendzior:

As we've long stated on Gaslit Nation, it's the operators behind the scenes—the oligarchs, the mafias, the blood and money drenched right-wing fanatics—who are the true source of control over the American body politic. Getting rid of Trump did not get rid of the core problems, much as his win did not create them. Elite criminal impunity remains the scourge of this country. Among the crimes that the Biden administration, the FBI and other investigatory bodies seem content to ignore are, first, the January 6 seditious attack on the Capitol. Second, the purposeful spread of and profiteering over COVID-19 by the Trump administration and its backers. Third, the fact that a Kremlin asset and a bunch of crime lords hijacked our government with the stated intent of dismantling it, and fourth, the mass abuse of migrant children on the border by a cabal of White supremacist sadists, and so on. I could go on and on with the crimes that have seen no redress.

Sarah Kendzior:

It's the tip of the iceberg, and there is no excuse for not pursuing these criminals with urgency, both because inaction sets a dangerous precedent, but also because we simply do not have much time to act, which brings us to the GOP's continued attack on voting rights. You may think that Biden has four years to fix this, but you are extremely wrong, since at this rate, it is likely that the Democrats are going to lose the House in 2022, meaning that the ability of the Democrats to pass meaningful structural reform and pursue justice expires next year.

Sarah Kendzior:

Why are the Democrats set to lose the House? Because states with GOP legislatures are rewriting the laws to determine who can vote, where they can vote, how they can vote, and even whether votes and elected officials can be overturned on their whim. There is a way to stop this Jim Crow revival, which we've mentioned many times: kill the filibuster and pass voting rights protection, particularly the John Lewis Voting Rights Act.

Sarah Kendzior:

But the Senate refuses to do it, and their refusal has put us back in the same self-destructive feedback loop that has defined Democratic politics for the past decade. Frustrated Americans are told to shut up and obey and give money in order to "vote them out next time". The trouble is there will not be a next time under the current GOP operation.

Sarah Kendzior:

Unfortunately, Democratic leaders are not fighting back assertively, but making excuses. This is an old pattern that's been particularly pernicious over the past four years. The first excuse was the GOP trifecta of 2017 (which was actually a legitimate excuse), but their second excuse was the bullshit, "we can't show any initiative because Mitch McConnell will stop us" excuse, which demoralized Democratic voters in 2019 and 2020. Now, with all three branches of the federal government in their hands, the new excuse is Democratic Senator Joe Manchin of West Virginia, who has embraced his role as the new mascot of obstructionism. So, Andrea, what are your thoughts on Joe Manchin?

Andrea Chalupa:

Joe Manchin gaslights America. [sound effect] [laughs] Listen to what he says here in an interview. I'm quoting a tweet we'll share in the show notes as we do for every episode we post on Patreon. Amanda Terkel, reporter for HuffPost writes, citing Manchin, saying, "The only thing I would caution anybody and everybody about is that we had an insurrection on January 6, because of voting, right? We should not at all attempt to do anything that would create more distrust and division." Joe Manchin, we got Donald Trump as president in large part because John Roberts—his Supreme Court—gutted the Voting Rights Act.

Andrea Chalupa:

There is a sweeping epidemic against Black voters, who are, of course, predominantly Democratic voters. None of this is normal, and to try to normalize it with your gaslighting is simply what it is, you are gaslighting the American public. None of your arguments make any sense, and they do not stand up to scrutiny of the moment at hand—the crisis that we're facing, which Sarah listed—and it doesn't stand up to the record of history. No appeasement could settle down the Nazis.

Andrea Chalupa:

The Nazis are a violent cult, energized by more violence, and that violent Nazi train has left the station. That is literally what we're up against. So, you trying to appease Nazis like a modern day Chamberlain is going to come back to haunt us all and hurt us all.

Andrea Chalupa:

I want to just go into some of the weeds of what we're up against from this great piece. Again, we'll link to in our show notes. From Adam Jentleson in the Atlantic. You all know Adam. We had him on the show recently, he is the author of The Kill Switch, going into the long racist history of the filibuster. The US Senate was never envisioned by the founding fathers to be an obstructionist body. It was never meant to be obstructionist. The obstructionism was launched by senators representing slave states, trying to protect the violent, evil institution of slavery.

Andrea Chalupa:

The filibuster became this mutant, obstructionist force, always, always when it came to taking away the rights and stopping any progress for Black people, for People of Color, even if, at the time, throughout the last 200 years or so, even if at the time there was popular support for anti-lynching legislation, even though there was popular support of getting rid of a poll tax, which, of course, was meant to stop Black people from voting. It didn't matter because you had the proudly, openly, White racist senators using the filibuster to create a veto by the minority against the majority, and it's been used increasingly in recent years.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's obstructionism by the minority party to block any progress, and it's extremely dangerous that this is still in play when we are being hit with so many crises that demand that government works, and works fairly and works for everyone.

Andrea Chalupa:

Now, from Adam Jentleson's piece in the Atlantic: "According to the Brennan Center for Justice, which tracks voter suppression efforts across the country, 47 states have seen 361 bills aimed at restricting voting rights since the beginning of the year. A 2018 analysis by Civics Analytics found that non-White voters are more underrepresented in the Senate than at any time since 1870. In today's Senate, evenly split at 50 seats a party, that bias toward predominantly White, small states means that Democrats represent 41 million more people than Republicans."

Andrea Chalupa:

That will of the majority is being suppressed by the filibuster, which Joe Manchin wants to protect. "Control of the White House and Senate allows Republicans who came to power on the backs of a White conservative minority to appoint judges who make it even easier for Republicans to win elections. Although conservative and liberal justices sided against former President Donald Trump's outlandish claims of election fraud, conservative judges are waging a steady, if quieter campaign against voting rights."

Andrea Chalupa:

"A recent study shows that 79% of decisions by Republican-appointed judges restrict access to the ballot, versus 37% for Democratic appointed judges. This has proved true at the Supreme Court, where Chief Justice John Roberts authored the majority opinion on the Shelby case, which gutted the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and capping off the career-long crusade against voting rights that John Roberts began as a political appointee in the Reagan Justice Department. Overall, judges appointed by Bush and Trump make up 48% of the judiciary. Judges appointed by Trump alone make up 28%. When these judges hear anti-democratic claims that are less absurd than Trump's, they're likely to be sympathetic."

Andrea Chalupa:

As we've always said on Gaslit Nation, the judiciaries are the cage bars of any struggling democracy. "Gerrymandering at the state level also plays a crucial role in this doom loop that allows Republicans to maintain control of state legislatures, which then pass restrictive voting laws in key swing states and inflate Republicans numbers in Congress, despite representing a minority of the populations in those states."

Andrea Chalupa:

"A bipartisan panel of judges found that in North Carolina's 2018 midterm elections, Democratic candidates for the state legislature won a majority of the statewide vote, but Republicans won 54%"—the majority, 54%—"of state House seats and 58%"—again a majority—"of state Senate seats. A University of Southern California study found that Michigan, Wisconsin, Virginia, Ohio and Pennsylvania, all states needed to win electoral college, all suffer from minority rule in one or both chambers of their state legislatures."

Andrea Chalupa:

"These state legislators draw the Congressional district maps every 10 years and will do so in the coming months following the results of the 2020 census."—which I will add was cut short by the Trump administration and was carried out during a pandemic and carried out under Trump, who was laying out a far-right onslaught on immigrants and undocumented people who likely would, of course, not want to be counted in a census, when a government census worker comes knocking around.

Andrea Chalupa:

So, the 2020 census, which is about to determine the political future of the country, was deeply flawed. Now back to this article. "As Dave Wasserman of the Cook Political Report has shown, Republicans can use this upcoming round of redistricting to gerrymander away Democrats' majority in the House of Representatives before a single vote is cast in the 2022 midterm elections."

Andrea Chalupa:

Did you hear that? Democrats have already lost control of the House. This is a crisis. We are losing our democracy. Biden and Democratic leadership in Congress can protect democracy by protecting the most vulnerable. Right now, the most vulnerable in America are People of Color, especially children. People of Color are responsible, through their hard work and organizing for winning the White House and Congress for the Democrats. Biden and Democratic leadership must repay them, by protecting them, by treating White supremacy, state violence against Black votes, against Black bodies, as an urgent crisis. There must be swift action and accountability.

Andrea Chalupa:

We're living in a time of mass trauma that's only going to get worse, especially for People of Color, especially for children of color who are being taught that they're growing up in a country where their life doesn't matter, where they can expect to be hunted down and assassinated in a "routine traffic stop." This human rights crisis is only going to get worse. The horrors escalating under Republican authoritarian control with posh Nazis like Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley and Marjorie Taylor Green, soon in charge of the Congress in 2022, everything is going to escalate. The violence is going to escalate.

Andrea Chalupa:

Look at how bad things are now, then imagine how much worse they will be if we don't reform the filibuster *immediately* and pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act *immediately*, pass a big climate change legislation *immediately*. Climate change, which impacts communities of color the most, to pass meaningful legislation to confront White supremacy in all its many insidious forms, from the healthcare system, to predatory financial corruption, immediately. Action. Urgent crisis, immediately. There's no time to waste.

Andrea Chalupa:

Just look at the daily trauma of headlines we're constantly assaulted with in America to show how sick and fragile democracy has become. We have yet another story of state-sanctioned murder. In the middle of a high profile case of Derek Chauvin, who killed George Floyd by suffocating him to death—a fact confirmed by a long list of medical experts testifying in court as Derek Chauvin's defense tries to put the victim on trial—you have yet another assassination of a young Black man in Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, 10 miles from where Floyd was killed by a veteran police officer named Kimberly Potter, who has served on the force for 26 years, was a longtime police union president and was in the middle of training another officer when she claims she mistook her loaded gun for a taser when she pulled it out to shoot and kill 20-year-old Daunte Wright.

Andrea Chalupa:

Wright was pulled over for expired tags and killed. It's a pandemic. Do you know how hard it is to renew anything these days? He's 20 years old and has a toddler who's nearly two years old. All those factors combined, I sure as hell would be driving with expired tags if I were him. But the major difference is that I would be protected simply for my white skin color.

Andrea Chalupa:

All these casual state killings of People of Color, that's not normal, it's dystopian. If this was happening in any other country, tourism would plummet, Western leaders would pass sanctions. Every latest murder adds to the state-sanctioned trauma impacting all communities of color who have to raise their children under the constant threat of White supremacy violence.

Andrea Chalupa:

Daunte Wright's little boy is going to celebrate his second birthday without his father and grow up in a society that can one day hunt him down and kill him, too. Police forces in America were created to hunt down enslaved people who risked their lives to escape to freedom. America's long history of genocide of Black people and Native Americans—hunting and killing pPeople of Color—has been so normalized, it keeps happening. And this long, hateful legacy tried to violently overturn our democracy on January 6, and is acting like it's entitled to get away with it.

Andrea Chalupa:

What's worse is that the climate crisis is going to impact these communities of color the hardest, compacting this trauma, letting rising sea levels threaten and eventually flood the homes, and what's going to happen is we're going to neglect the countless climate refugees because they're People of Color, and that's going to be a story we're going to be forced to live with every day, just like this dystopian state murders of Black men and women.

Andrea Chalupa:

None of this is normal. People of Color brought Democrats to power with the clear understanding their lives would be protected, that their children's lives would one day be spared this trauma. Joe Biden must act with urgency to get his party in line and pass filibuster reform, pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, pass sweeping human rights legislation to end state violence against communities of color in all its many insidious forms.

Andrea Chalupa:

Biden and Democrats must act with every day urgency with the little time they have left, because by the time the 2022 election is over, it will be too late. White supremacy has already laid the groundwork to steal the 2022 election from you, and once they do, we may never get our democracy back—not without a generation or two of martyrs sacrificing their lives and freedom, like the people are doing right now in Belarus and Ukraine and in Russia—and those generations in America will look back on Biden, Pelosi and Schumer as those who could have done more when they had the chance, but failed to treat the decline of our democracy as an urgent crisis.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yes, absolutely. This is a time where we need resolute moral leadership, and this is a time when time is running out, as we keep emphasizing again and again. That's not to panic you, that's to motivate you to contact your representatives, to drill everything that Andrea just pointed out into their heads, because this is the future we're looking at, and we are at a turning point. Within this turning point, you cannot have one individual like Joe Manchin be the node upon which democracy or autocracy triumphs. It's absolutely absurd. It's absurd that it's not called out more. It's absurd that he's not investigated more as to what exactly is motivating his behavior.

Sarah Kendzior:

I think it's because people don't want to see this as a crisis because we've just endured so many crises, some of which seem to be fading but as I pointed out in a previous episode, they really just went underground. That's true of the Trump crime cult and all its backers. With COVID, you actually are seeing improvement. We do have vaccines. We're seeing the numbers of deaths and sick people go down. I think a lot of people just want to look the other way and assume things are going to be alright, but that's exactly how we got in this position and that certainly applies also to racist police brutality and to systemic racism, that Andrea was just describing.

Sarah Kendzior:

This idea that somehow progress just moves along on its own without people pushing it, without people bending the arc forcibly toward justice, because it doesn't move on its own. So it's absolutely essential that we examine these people who are obstacles to that, and who are denying people their rights and denying people their freedom. Manchin is a weird one, because he seems just so vacuous. He's like an enigma wrapped in a riddle, wrapped in a lot of money.

Andrea Chalupa:

[laughs]

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm just going to go into, who is Joe Manchin, and what is his guiding philosophy?

Andrea Chalupa:

And journalists need to be digging into Joe Manchin.

Sarah Kendzior:

They do, they do. I dug, man, and it's a road to hell. But anyway- [laughs]

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah, exactly right.

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm going to bring you down this road to hell, because I started nosing around and I found a bunch of weird shit. I'll start with this one. What is Manchin doing there? Why is he in the Senate? Why does he want this job?

Sarah Kendzior:

So, in 2017, he was asked to leave Schumer's leadership team, just due to lackluster behavior, and when he was asked to leave, he responded—and I am quoting him directly, this is from the West Virginia record—"I don't give a shit, you understand? I just don't give a shit. I don't care if I get elected. I don't care if I get defeated. How about that?" Well, yeah, how about that?

Sarah Kendzior:

So Joe Manchin is a person who, by his own admission, does not care about his job. Getting elected is not the point, governing is not the point. This is probably why he continues to oppose the filibuster, which would allow voting rights laws to be enacted, even though the lack of voting rights laws would almost certainly cost him his Senate seat. This is a self-defeating thing that he's doing in opposing the filibuster.

Andrea Chalupa:

It sure as hell is going to end any chance of Democratic control of either chamber, for sure, if they don't-

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, and his little party of being the big important guy is going to end because he'll just be out completely. But he doesn't seem to care, not about his country, not about his role in leading it. So, what is Joe Manchin interested in, besides money? He likes to define himself as a true centrist, but it is impossible to be a "centrist" when the other party is an authoritarian cult. You are merely a cult enabler, one far more to the right than you present yourself as being.

Sarah Kendzior:

Manchin was one of few Democrats to vote in some of Trump's most destructive nominees, including Jeff Sessions, Bill Barr, Steve Mnuchin, Mike Pompeo, Rex Tillerson, David Freeman—that's Trump's personal bankruptcy lawyer who was made the Ambassador to Israel, Manchin was only one of two Democrats who voted for that guy—Rick Perry, and I can go on and on, but it's probably easier to just list who Joe Manchin vetoed, which was Betsy DeVos, Mick Mulvaney and Wilbur Ross.

Sarah Kendzior:

Honestly, I'm not sure why he vetoed Wilbur Ross, he was kind of an exception there. Most Democrats foolishly let that corporate raider turned plague profiteer be the Commerce Secretary. So, I don't know if Manchin just checked the wrong box or something but I guess credit where credit is due. Good job on vetoing Wilbur Ross, Joe Manchin. That shows you can do it. It's too bad you went ahead and backed Brett Kavanaugh right after.

Sarah Kendzior:

Anyway, that's just his official role. What he was doing behind the scenes gets worse. Joe Manchin liked doing shady shit with the Trump crime cult. He was a welcomed guest at dinners with Ivanka and Jared, but most concerningly, he was a backer of one of Jared Kushner's earliest plots, a plot that took place even before Trump was inaugurated. This is the plot that got Michael Flynn in so much trouble and played a prominent role in the Mueller probe.

Sarah Kendzior:

We've gone over this a million times, but to recap: In late December 2016, Michael Flynn contacted Russian Ambassador to the United States Sergey Kislyak and asked Russia to veto a UN Security resolution condemning Israel's settlements in the West Bank. He then lied to the FBI about this illegal act. Kushner was doing the same thing as well, applying the same kind of pressure. Russian Ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin was one of the few direct witnesses to their actions. But by February 2017, Flynn was out of office as Trump's National Security Adviser and put under federal investigation, while Churkin died under mysterious circumstances one week later, with the cause of death still sealed. You can go listen to the archives for more on that.

Sarah Kendzior:

Anyway, you might be like, "Well, what does Joe Manchin have to do with any of that?" While most Democrats were supporting Obama, who was still The President then, and who did not want this resolution vetoed, Manchin went rogue and supported Kushner, Flynn and Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu, a long time Trump and Kushner confidant. Manchin released a statement saying, "I urge the Obama administration to veto the UN resolution demanding an end to Israeli settlement building. I support two-party negotiations to reach agreement on any settlement issues, and this UN resolution is not the way to pursue..."—He wrote "peach", but it's actually peace. So, way to go, Joe Manchin. "To pursue peace-"

Andrea Chalupa:

That's a Freudian slip about Trump, that's who was on his mind. That's who he's serving.

Sarah Kendzior:

Exactly, Big Orange, Joe Manchin works for Big Orange, or Big Peach, I should say. "—not the way to pursue peach between the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel." Notably, Manchin was joined in this effort by Chuck Schumer. Those were the two Democrats who were backing this. If you're wondering why Schumer has been so soft on Manchin's obstructionism, that may be a place to look. Then we have more strange things going on with Manchin in the Middle East.

Sarah Kendzior:

Manchin was one of only four Democratic senators, I believe, to vote against the 2015 Iran Deal, and he was one of the co-authors of the anti-BDS bill, which punishes US companies that participate in the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement against Israeli human rights violations. This is an action that is reminiscent of the GOP's current outrage over corporations speaking up about civil rights in the US right now.

Sarah Kendzior:

Manchin has repeatedly claimed that Israel is the US' best ally, but he also seems fond of other states with autocratic regimes. One of those autocrats is Bashar al-Assad of Syria. In 2013, Manchin doubted that Assad used chemical weapons, saying "There is no doubt that an attack occurred, and there is no doubt that it was produced under the Assad regime. It's not clear cut if Assad gave the order himself. This has not been proven."

Sarah Kendzior:

In 2014, he voted against funding Syrians who were fighting Assad and called Republicans insane for doing so. But before you go labeling him some sort of peacenik, this all changed when Trump was elected, and Trump decided he wanted to bomb Syria, which was an action that Manchin ardently supported.

Sarah Kendzior:

While it may seem he's just all over the place, he's actually very consistent when it comes to supporting Trump/Kushner destructive Middle East foreign policy. On that note, he also voted against a Senate resolution disapproving of arms sales to Saudi Arabia, thereby ensuring its failure and benefiting the brutal regime of MBS, who is yet another Trump/Kushner confidant.

Sarah Kendzior:

This leads to the question, is he compromised? Is he in league with these crime cult folks? I don't know, and I'm not claiming that, because I don't think that there's enough evidence to claim that. It could be donor money, it could be a personality thing. It's very hard to tell. I wasn't kidding when I said he was enigmatic. But I do think there needs to be more investigation because this stuff is all out there and very few people seem to be trying to get into the why. It's more the whether that they focus on, like, will he do this? Will he do that? Well, look into his record and try to figure out why he made these other baffling decisions.

Sarah Kendzior:

As he said, it's not for his own election. He doesn't care if he wins or loses. It's not for West Virginia. They don't care about these issues versus things like jobs or broadband or roads and infrastructure. It's weird, I don't know. Andrea, do you have any thoughts on that?

Andrea Chalupa:

It's not surprising at all that Joe Manchin is in lockstep with Trump, Ivanka, and Kushner. He's one of them. The fact that he's, through his votes, supporting these mass murdering dictators that are part of the axes of power, which Putin is very much a part of. Putin is a far-right leader. Under Putinism, there have been open attacks on immigrants. It's a Xenophobic mass murdering terrorist regime that Putinism has created and launched against the world.

Andrea Chalupa:

As part of that axis of power, there is Netanyahu, a close Putin ally. There's Trump, a close Putin ally. There's Assad, a close Putin ally, and if Manchin with his votes is essentially supporting these people, and even being schizophrenic as time as you mentioned, he has it in him to vote down some of these crooks, right? But just a lot of the outlier votes are extraordinarily troubling, and they're red flags.

Andrea Chalupa:

I don't think Manchin is ever going to budge. I think his whole purpose is to wait out the clock until 2022 under this gaslighting campaign of being bipartisan, and that way, nothing gets done and his cronies—his fellow warriors of whiteness—this corruption culture that he lives and breathes, of all these weird connections, they're going to be back in power and they're going to thrive.

Andrea Chalupa:

Republicans are on a roll. They're building off of all their successes. Once they get back in power in Congress in 2022, they're going to be laying the groundwork to steal the White House in 2024. It's just going to keep building on itself. A lot of the horrors that we're living with today are going to be normalized and we're going to be up against other horrors.

Andrea Chalupa:

There's a video right now of NYPD officers with a robotic dog that has been the focus of Black Mirror episodes. Black Mirror is a futuristic dystopian nightmare TV series, and they full-on had these same robotic dogs. They showed one hunting down a woman in this barren landscape. NYPD has robotic dogs. What we're telling you is that these are the good old days and that we need to fight like hell now to protect our future before things get really, really dark. And they will get very, very dark if Democratic leadership doesn't yank Joe Manchin in line, for the literal sake of humanity.

Andrea Chalupa:

I want to point out that, on top of all this, Joe Manchin is a living embodiment of what we say—that White supremacy endangers all of us. He is a living, breathing monument to Neo-confederacy by blocking filibuster reform. The filibuster, as I mentioned earlier, as that long tradition of specifically being abused, and being turned into this weapon to stop progress for civil rights, and that is what he is doing right now, and he's part of that long tradition.

Andrea Chalupa:

I want to just go back to Adam Jentleson's great piece in The Atlantic where he shows the stakes that... He goes into this. I'm going to read it now: "President Joe Biden came into office facing four converging crises; COVID-19, climate change, racial justice and the economy. But after a few weeks of fast action on a pandemic relief plan, a fifth crisis will determine the fate of the rest of his administration, and perhaps that of American democracy itself: the minority rule doom loop, by which predominantly White conservatives gain more and more power, even as they represent fewer Americans."

Andrea Chalupa:

"The doom loop consists of four interlocking components; candidates who represent White conservatives; Republicans in our ideologically sorted era begin every election cycle buoyed by voter suppression and gerrymandering—what I call electoral warfare—which makes it easier for them to win; then, anti-democratic features of the American system that have always existed, but never benefited one party over the other in any systematic way, help those same candidates take control of institutions, such as the White House and the Senate, despite winning fewer votes and representing fewer people than their opponents."

Andrea Chalupa:

"Once in control of these institutions, these newly elected officials use them to entrench their power beyond the reach of voters. If they are eventually voted out of power, they retain a veto over the agenda

of the majority, which they use to block change and feed the conservative case that the government is broken. This hastens their return to power along the very path they greased with voter suppression.”

Andrea Chalupa:

“The net effect of this doom loop is a growing divergence between the agenda of the government and the will of the governed, an untenable dynamic in any democracy. With Democratic control of Congress hanging by a handful of seats, the next two years might be the country's last chance to stop this cycle.”

Sarah Kendzior:

There's one more thing I want to add to that, which is that one thing some Democrats have been proposing, given the obstinacy of both Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema to get rid of the filibuster completely, is to make an exception where they would get rid of it to pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act and protect voting rights. Obviously, this is not the greatest solution since you're still left with all of the other things that the filibuster prevents from getting done, but it handles the most critical problem, because if we do not have voting rights, if the type of policies that are being passed—these Jim Crow policies in states like Georgia—become more widespread (as they're going to do over the next couple of years), then yeah, we are in a doom loop. We are going straight down, and this is the time to fix it.

Sarah Kendzior:

You don't get to choose your time. I know people want to kick back and relax and that probably includes members of Congress, but you can't. If you do that now, you will never be able to do it again. This is when you buckle down and you secure the future and you start digging us out of this hellhole that we've been in particularly in the last four years, but to some extent the last 40 years since Reaganomics kicked off, and to a large extent since the founding of our country on genocide and slavery. This is your time to try to turn things around, in terms of these structural, malevolent systems that have existed.

Sarah Kendzior:

If they don't, it's like, what I see happening, honestly, it parallels—and we've discussed this on other shows—it parallels the fall of the former Soviet Union, where institutions are so profoundly weak, where you have a gerontocracy at the top that is unable to respond to urgent, deteriorating conditions, when you have a populace that is broken up and disheartened... I don't want to make too much of an analogy because the Soviet Union was an empire. It's an empire that forced other countries, independent nations like Estonia, Lithuania, all of the Central Asian states, it drew those state boundaries, encouraged nationalism within them, but then folded them into Sovyétsky naród—into the "Soviet people." It's a different story, in many ways, than that of the United States.

Sarah Kendzior:

But, you see these secessionist movements rising up in California for liberals, in Texas for conservatives. You see foreign backers, especially in Russia, pushing them. You see a number of people falling into this trap that somehow this will create a more equitable solution, and it's insane. I've been into this. I've discussed this so many goddamn times on the show, how there are not red and blue states, how there are not neat demarcations, how if there is a partitioning of the United States, once again, the most weak and vulnerable people will suffer. The poor will suffer, communities of color will suffer, the people who are suffering already will suffer more, and oligarchs and plutocrats will go in, take advantage of the chaos and reap a whirlwind of profits while continuing to chip away at rights and freedoms.

Sarah Kendzior:

There will be no paradise partition republic within a broken up United States. Also, just on a personal level, the idea of this breaks my heart. I'm an American, this is my home. For many of our listeners, this is your home. The idea of envisioning this, it taps into something very emotional for me, very painful for me, and I see it coming around the bend, and I see our opportunities to stop it dead in its tracks, and I hope that people understand the urgency of this moment and do everything that they can, because while this may not happen immediately, it's the direction we're going over the next decade.

Sarah Kendzior:

I can already see the people who are in line to profit off of this. They're the exact same elites who are not being prosecuted for the multitude of crimes that they've been committing around the world—people like Paul Manafort, people like Roger Stone, many of them have already been indicted and pardoned. This is a crime cult. This is transnational organized crime posing as governments, posing as corporations, enmeshed within them. Just go look at the archives. We've been down this road many times.

Sarah Kendzior:

But every month that goes by without even an acknowledgement that this is happening, or that this could potentially happen, is deeply unnerving to me, because if January 6 didn't bring it home, if Trump allowing and wanting over half a million Americans to die of COVID didn't bring it home, I don't know what can bring it home to these people, and I'm left to think well, maybe some of them want it, too. Maybe it's not just the Republicans. Maybe there's the Vichy Democrats in the fold. Because I don't know how you cannot see it. It's just clear as day to me, but anyway.

Andrea Chalupa:

It comes down to... How do I say it? Just to summarize, Joe Manchin is gaslighting America. Anybody who would sacrifice our democracy at this critical time by being obstructionist to his own party, to the tens of millions of people that worked so incredibly hard to bring his party into power, anybody who has that in him has something to hide. So investigate the hell out of him. Expose him for who he is.

Andrea Chalupa:

I'm not even confident a guy like that can be bought off because he will always be demanding more. There's greed in this obstructionism. There's greed. He's doing it for his own self-interest. And the good moments in America's history—the moments when we've moved forward as a nation and finally achieved some human rights and progress—were when people were willing to sacrifice their own self-interest. Joe Manchin refuses to do that now. And don't buy any argument he's trying to justify his excuse. It's all classic gaslighting.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yep. All right. To switch gears, we've had a number of notable developments with Russia, and I created a list of them last night. But I want to start this out by saying, as you probably know by now, Biden today had a phone call with Vladimir Putin and they put out a little summary of that call, and I was absolutely astounded to see this, because I'm just not used to it. I'm used to little covert, behind the scenes meetings in Helsinki. I'm used to a Kremlin asset's obsequious bowing down to Putin, to a veil of secrecy.

Sarah Kendzior:

So, yeah. Biden spoke with Putin. It says, "They talked about cyber intrusions and election interference, about Ukraine, about the military buildup. It says he called on Russia to de escalate tensions. He reaffirmed his goal of building a stable and predictable relationship with Russia, consistent with US interest and proposed a summit meeting in a third country in the coming months to discuss the full range of issues facing the United States and Russia."

Sarah Kendzior:

Kind of like a milquetoast statement, which is to be expected. What I would like to see is Biden addressing the American people about Russia and what Russia did in the election, and about the massive unprecedented cyber attack that is going on still from Russia on the United States that was launched in 2020. Then there's some other stuff that I would definitely like the Biden administration to weigh in on, because it's been quite a lively few months.

Sarah Kendzior:

These are some dangerous things that Russia has been up to recently. I will start with the nuclear torpedo. So, Russia is planning to deploy a nuclear powered missile to the Arctic next summer that is designed to detonate off the coastlines of enemy countries. That is according to CNN. One of those countries is the United States and the nuclear tsunami is expected to hit the East Coast. Russia, in addition to creating a nuclear tsunami, is fine melting the Arctic in order to carry out this initiative.

Sarah Kendzior:

So, you've got two existential threats to the world from Russia—of nuclear war and accelerated climate change—going on at once. Second, we have a potential acceleration of the war in Ukraine. Tens of thousands of Russian troops have amassed on the Ukraine border. These are the largest numbers of troops since Russia invaded Crimea in 2014.

Sarah Kendzior:

The Kremlin is not hiding this in any way. On Monday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov called the United States, "Our adversary." They are warning of war. They've spread footage of their military buildup all over social media. They sent warships to intimidate Ukraine from its coasts. Biden today vowed to protect Ukraine, but the situation is extremely volatile. Then you have Alexey Navalny. He is a Russian dissident slowly starving to death in a hunger strike in a Russian prison and being denied medical care.

Sarah Kendzior:

Kremlin critic, Bill Browder, known for spurring the Magnitsky Act—the sanctions on Russian oligarchs—has called for new sanctions on Russia saying, and I quote, "The Kremlin is killing Navalny. He may not die next week or next month, but they will grind him down until his health deteriorates and make up an excuse about how he died." Browder then said he wants the sanctions to be on the corrupt officials who Navalny singled out before his arrest.

Sarah Kendzior:

He says, "Navalny made a list of who needs to be sanctioned, and it was full of people who are not working for the Russian government, but are the cashiers, the business people who look after the funds of Putin and his cronies. The US should go down that list and sanction more people and keep doing it until they release the Navalny. That is the way to stop Putin from killing him." Makes sense to me.

Sarah Kendzior:

The fourth thing is the cyber attack, which I guess Biden briefly mentioned today. I don't know quite how that conversation goes with Putin, but it's probably better than what Trump did, which was asking Putin to join a cyber alliance team with Rudy Giuliani. So, I guess, yeah, we've gone up in quality here.

Sarah Kendzior:

I want to go into the horrible thing that the Biden administration is rumored to be doing in terms of their hire for the Russian Director of the National Security Council. But did you have thoughts on the nuclear torpedo or other things? [laughs]

Andrea Chalupa:

I always have thoughts on the nuclear torpedo. That keeps me up at night. If you look at the end game of what Republicans want and the real heart of Russiagate, it's our idiots aligned with their idiots. All the authoritarian experts that we elevate on this show and the research we share on authoritarianism, it's just idiots in power running amok, making things worse and being destructive.

Andrea Chalupa:

The Nazis get this reputation of being so organized because they kept really good records of all the people they mass murdered, but that was a chaotic regime where they were just pillaging the state and creating their own little... Hitler's lieutenants were creating their own little fiefdoms. That's the story of autocracy is just destruction and chaos.

Andrea Chalupa:

If you look at Russia, that's what's going to happen to the US, the idiots in power, making things worse. Trump on steroids, if we don't stop this.

Sarah Kendzior:

With a nuclear torpedo.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah, with a nuclear torpedo, and we'll get our own nuclear torpedo and President Matt Gaetz will have fun leveraging it with his friend Joel Greenberg. It's going to be nuts. But the way to stabilize foreign policy today, and combat Putin's political warfare, which he is a genius of, because the Russian military is trash. It's a broken military. The US, in a military fight, would decimate the Russian military, but the Russians defeat the US when it comes to asymmetrical warfare. You know that because they won a big one by getting their asset elected president, who then furthered all this corruption and failed to stop a pandemic that killed several hundreds of thousands of people, more than the number of Americans killed in total in World War II.

Andrea Chalupa:

That's a big win for Putin. That's something we're going to be living with for a very long time to come, and it's a deep shame that our leaders in both parties don't join together to talk more openly about that and be more forthcoming with the American people about that. If you want to secure our democracy, it comes down to stabilizing the economy, ending the pandemic, bringing people out of poverty, showing their lives being transformed, and that's why the infrastructure bill is so essential, that's why protecting

voting rights to ensure... Passing the John Lewis Voting Rights Act, ending gerrymandering, all these things will end political instability, will end the economic depression, which are two major factors that allow authoritarianism to thrive.

Andrea Chalupa:

That's why Biden needs to have his party in line to pass his agenda, and that's why Joe Manchin is not just a threat to us here at home, he's a threat to our national security by being obstructionist. The policies that Biden would be able to pass would benefit his own constituents in West Virginia, which rank last in all sorts of categories for quality of life.

Andrea Chalupa:

I just want to emphasize that, in the 21st century, domestic policy is foreign policy. If we're headed towards autocracy, that's great for Putin. If we're headed towards a stronger, thriving democracy, that's horrible for Putin, because Putin needs to show that democracies, they fail, and he needs to add to his dictator club which he could wield against the democratic world. That's my point on the nuclear tornado, what I think of it, the torpedo.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, and that's why it's also, in addition to Congress getting in line, the Democratic Party in the House and Senate getting in line, we need the absolute best, most trustworthy people-

Andrea Chalupa:

Best and brightest, most empathetic and wise, and we're not going to get that.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. Well, especially to be handling Russia, handling the relationship between the US and Russia in an honest, transparent way, and one that calls for full accountability for Russia's various attacks on the United States, often in conjunction with Americans, who are traitorous, who are corrupt, and so forth. This is something many Americans, especially in the GOP participated in willingly and there needs to be accountability for that as well.

Sarah Kendzior:

But we need a straight shooter. Unfortunately, instead of that, rumor has it that Matthew Rojansky, who is currently the Head of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute, is Biden's pick to be the Russia Director of his National Security Council.

Sarah Kendzior:

The reason this is of great concern is that Rojansky is a guy who basically took orders from Paul Manafort back in 2013. This was revealed by the Mueller investigation. In his report, Mueller cites a 2013 email that Manafort wrote, and I'm going to quote Manafort here, he says, "This week, we directed the efforts of a number of positive news articles that appeared in several prominent publications." This is when Manafort was in Ukraine, doing dirty deeds for the Kremlin affiliated Ukrainian government.

Sarah Kendzior:

One of those articles was a CNN op-ed by Matthew Rojansky, who painted Yanukovich as a noble reformer. This is part of a broader pattern, a reputation he has for being soft on the Kremlin, including dismissing the idea in 2017 that Trump had any illicit relationship with Russia. In 2020, Rojansky opposed sanctioning Russia for helping the Taliban kill US soldiers. In 2012, he suggested ending pro democracy programs in Russia that were not approved by Putin himself.

Sarah Kendzior:

This goes on and on, and that this is the guy being considered when there are so many alternatives, different people who are qualified to take on this role, has outraged experts on Russia, some of whom believe that Rojansky may be on the Kremlin payroll. For example, Garry Kasparov, the known chess player and dissident and writer tweeted, "If Rojansky goes to work for the White House on Russia, will he keep his Kremlin salary too?" Anders Åslund, an economist who focuses on Russia tweeted, "Rojansky is the most purchasable person in D.C., which says a lot. Nobody needs him for any purpose."

Sarah Kendzior:

Obviously, it is necessary to have more details about these allegations. I'm not making any claim that he is on the Kremlin payroll, but I am making a claim that he seems uniquely unqualified for this moment, given that he worked with Paul Manafort at the height of Paul Manafort's criminal power and never divulged that information, even when he was writing about Manafort in a 2016 op-ed about the Trump and Clinton campaigns. That says a lot. His continual stance towards Russia, which is appeasement under the guise of wanting there to be peace. We all want peace. We do not want military action with Russia. We do not want nuclear torpedoes flying back and forth. We want sanctions on oligarchs. We want sanctions on the people who fund these brutal policies. That is where you hit them. You hit them in the wallet, you don't hit them with troops and bombs.

Sarah Kendzior:

And we want the truth. We want real investigations, not the bullshit that we've been handed by Mueller or Comey, or the FBI, which, of course, has had its previous heads go on and work for the Russian mafia. We want the straightforward truth about how much danger we're in, what is going on with our elections, what is going on with cyber security, what exactly is going to happen with Ukraine and Russia. We need the most qualified, empathetic and sensible, straight shooting people in charge of this division. That is not Matthew Rojansky.

Sarah Kendzior:

And I'm wondering, well, why would he even be nominated? This brings us back to—we did a special on this—when Biden had his transition team, and he had a Christian Ferry on it, who is another Kremlin lackey, worked with dirty Republicans, worked for Russian interests, and we were baffled about that. What are your thoughts on that?

Andrea Chalupa:

I think if you want to reward Putin for all the mass murder he's committed in Ukraine and Syria, in propping up the dictator of Venezuela who's starving his people, and against the US by bringing Trump to power, then Matthew Rojansky is a great way to do it. Putin would be thrilled and it would just further Putin's aims. To elevate a guy like Matthew Rojansky would be an invitation to Putin to come on in, let your spies, your cutouts, your assets come on in and flourish and do their thing.

Andrea Chalupa:

This guy just comes across as with no moral compass. He's just the worst of the think tank circle jerk of Washington, D.C. I looked up his name in my email to see if we ever crossed paths, and what came up were emails over the years, over several years, of Ukraine watchers and Russia watchers who I deeply trust complaining about him and his latest bad take in the media, trying to essentially “both sides” the Ukraine crisis with Putin and then trying to say, no accountability for Putin and his violence and his mass murder.

Andrea Chalupa:

The thing that people have to understand is when you try to stand up to Putin and you say, “There needs to be some accountability. He needs to be contained,” people immediately think that you're a warmonger. And Putin himself plays on that narrative and pushes that narrative. Matthew Rojansky types try to say, “Oh, we're realists. Putin is not going to go away. We have to do business with them.” What they're basically saying is, “Let's all get rich, let's profit off of Putin's blood money.”

Andrea Chalupa:

If you start taking that drug, it's a dangerous gateway drug that leads to a greater entrenchment of Putin-driven corruption in your country. Look at Londongrad for instance, and look at all the influence that Russian oligarchs wield in the UK, for example, and Russia's connections to helping tip the Brexit vote. Deripaska, for instance, an all-out oligarch thug that won the aluminum wars, he was a welcomed character in the UK where he couldn't step foot in the US. He was a persona non grata in the US. Then, under Trump, he gets an entryway through McConnell by investing in this aluminum plant in Kentucky.

Andrea Chalupa:

So, Matthew Rojansky is a big welcome mat for Russian oligarchy and their weaponized corruption, and their golden handcuffs, and buying politicians. America is just too fragile right now to afford to have Matthew Rojansky in such a position of power. He should stay in his self-indulgence think tank sauna rooms hearing himself talk. He should be a think tank lifer and not allowed out of that box.

Andrea Chalupa:

Instead, they should decolonize foreign policy and put somebody in that position who empathetically and deeply understands the crisis and knows how to stand up to it, like any Ukrainian American, like an Alexander Vindman, who risked his career to call out Trump. His testimony became the base of the Trump impeachment trial, and he's suffered greatly for that with all the far-right attacks against him.

Andrea Chalupa:

My sister, Alexandra Chalupa, who risked her life and her career in 2016 to alert both Democrats and Republicans about Trump and Manafort being a Kremlin Trojan horse. People thought she was crazy. No one was listening to her. She was vindicated, and they punished her relentlessly for it with ongoing threats to her and her family, and making her a focus of Trump's impeachment trial.

Andrea Chalupa:

Make either of those people... Elevate those voices. Elevate the voices that represent the communities that are most understanding at a deeply personal level how effective Kremlin aggression is. Decolonize foreign policy. Don't have another wanker who looks at the globe like a chessboard and a country like

Ukraine just as another pawn, so entrenched in that Kissinger mindset of Ukraine just being a buffer state, and it's all about the great powers.

Andrea Chalupa:

No, look at it from a human rights point of view. I just think the fact that he's even being considered is extremely troubling, and I would like to see somebody in that post who has more of a personal connection to Ukraine, because we should listen to the Ukrainian American community. They've been closely following Kremlin aggression, and Ukraine is one of the few countries that has effectively stood up to Kremlin aggression, both the political warfare and the very real hot warfare that's killing thousands of lives in the east, and right now holding Crimea as a prison.

Andrea Chalupa:

We do not need any more of this self-serving careerism of the think tank world polluting our foreign policy. Those guys need to be sidelined now. They could write their books, they could blurb each other's books, they could remain cloistered in their little ivory tower—where they're happiest, I think—but for the real world solutions, the pragmatic solutions, outthinking your enemy three steps ahead, you need somebody who respects Ukraine, who's deeply connect to that country in some way, and that could bring in the lessons of Ukraine and harness that energy in a productive, empathetic human rights first way.

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.

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, and research ways on how you can cut out palm oil in your life.

Andrea Chalupa:

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