

Gaslit Nation
Roger Stone Democracy's Undertaker

Andrea Chalupa
Sarah Kendzior

Theme Music

Sarah Kendzior: I'm Sarah Kendzior. I'm a journalist and scholar of authoritarian states with a focus on the former Soviet Union. I'm also the author of the book *The View From Flyover Country*.

I'm Andrea Chalupa, a writer, activist, and filmmaker and screenwriter of the upcoming journalistic thriller *Mr. Jones*.

Sarah Kendzior: And this is Gaslit Nation, a podcast about corruption in the Trump Administration and rising authoritarianism around the world. This is the first time in a month that we've done an episode with an operational federal government. But while the shutdown may be over, the existential threat to the United States is not. We are merely in the eye of the hurricane. Since reopening the government last week, Trump has both threatened another shutdown and threatened a National Emergency — a scheduled National Emergency — that could happen on or by February 15th. Let's make one thing clear: contrary to cable news clamoring the shutdown is not about winners and losers, we all know who lost, and it was the American people. The media coverage that treats the shut down as Trump versus Pelosi is like watching a monster movie in which the human casualties are totally disregarded. They're just disposable background players in the battle between the beasts. This is not a movie and it's not a goddamn game. This is about our lives, about the lives of our fellow Americans. In my view, Nancy Pelosi did a great job holding the line and not giving into Trump's demands, but Trump did not cave or surrender he just slowed down. And it's good that Pelosi and the federal workers forced Trump and the GOP to slow down. But Trump does not quit, and I'm not saying that in the sense that it's an admirable quality like he's resolute or tenacious, I'm saying it because he's an entitled sadistic sociopath backed by GOP enablers like Mitch McConnell who have their own destructive agenda. We've discussed this agenda in the last four episodes of the show and it's the same agenda that Trump has had since taking office — they want to strip the US down and sell it for parts. The only difference between Trump and others in the GOP is whether the buyers are foreign or domestic. That's why you're starting to see things like the Koch brothers withdrawing their support for Trump. They want that money for themselves, they don't want to give it to some far an oligarch or mobster. We may be looking at the beginning of a battle between US and global kleptocrats. But in the end, they all want the same thing — the destruction of the US for their own profit and under their own unchallenged power, immune from oversight or accountability. They're not going to stop. So what are your thoughts on this Andrea?

Andrea Chalupa: No I mean we got a break, this is, we're all taking a breather. I think both sides definitely needed a breather including, of course, the Trump Klan — clan with a K, that's what we say on this show — but I think what's really interesting with how this all finally moved forward thank God — we've been in crisis as the country about the strain on our system of checks and balances. Obviously being under one-party rule, seeing the Republican Party fall in

lockstep to this president with authoritarian instincts, it's all been very terrifying and traumatic for us to live through as a country, and what was really amazing here with how the shutdown finally got temporarily resolved, it was the workers, it was all these heartbreaking stories that were coming out and, of course, air traffic control — that was the crisis point. As we all know, those people have incredibly stressful jobs and you compound that stress when you stop paying them, and enforce them into taking second jobs driving Ubers, waiting tables, and so therefore you have sleep deprived people who are in financial strain, who might get evicted, who don't know how they're going to pay for medical bills or whatever their children need, so you're just creating a crisis for our public safety of airlines. And that, of course, is an important part of the United States economy and therefore the global economy, so this tremendous ripple effect that those workers had by just saying we cannot do our jobs anymore, it's no longer safe so we have to ground the flights at one of the major airports in our nation. It's amazing that these workers were able to be an important check on the Republicans abuse of power and what's been really interesting about this is it's taken a direct crisis that the Republicans themselves were potential victims of, were inconvenienced by, which was, you know, losing the ability themselves to reliably fly home from DC, home to their districts where they could do fundraising etcetera so that their lives are suddenly inconvenienced and when they're — when the lives of Republicans in Congress were inconvenienced, that's when they finally got angry and found their backbone. It wasn't when the Muslim Ban, the unconstitutional hateful Muslim Band (sic.) was pushed through by Trump and Steven Miller, it wasn't when a Trump fanatic shot up a synagogue during a Bris, a sacred right for a family, it wasn't that. It didn't take that for Republicans to finally stand up and find their courage. No it was when they themselves had their lives disrupted by this destructive president and that's when they finally revolted against McConnell and then something had to give. So that's pretty heinous that we saw what it took for Republicans to finally protect our country and protect our economy and our national security from this President and — and all credit, of course, to Nancy Pelosi who held firm and all the Democrats that held firm and, of course, to Ocasio-Cortez for leading what was essentially a People's March through the halls of Congress looking for Mitch McConnell that was incredibly effective as for leading what was essentially a people's March through the halls of Congress looking for Mitch McConnell that was incredibly effective and the optics of that were, of course, humiliating for Mitch McConnell. I don't see how he's going to get elected again, but you never know. Kentucky, of course, is the state that gave us those racist Catholic School boys that got in the face of a Native American so all of this has been really interesting as well as an indicator of how to manage Trump. What I loved about Pelosi's approach as we saw in her sit down with Schumer and Trump in the Oval Office where Trump like a big idiot got baited and walked right into that trap where he said that he was going to own the shutdown. He branded it, he branded it as Trump's shut down, just like he branded Trump Steaks and Trump University and all the other Trump disasters. So Nancy Pelosi handled him like you handle a toddler and as any parenting book will tell you, infants crave boundaries. And so what Nancy Pelosi did was she provided him some boundaries and really stuck firm to those boundaries and he had nowhere to go and like some toddler throwing a tantrum he finally was like forced to give in. And so you saw this really interesting psychology at play and I really connected to that because back in early 2017, I knew that Trump was going to fire James Comey, I saw that coming and I kept telling people yeah no, Comey's going to go. ProPublica published a piece saying that Comey mismanaged emails and what a big mistake Comey had made. I tweeted. I said this is a setup to fire Comey and later that afternoon he was gone, Trump fired him, and why did I accurately predict that? Because I've been around toddlers having a meltdown. I know what they're like, and if you can't get your way you just start

screaming at the top of your lungs and refuse to take a nap and just start throwing your toys and that's what Trump did when he fired Comey, that's what Trump did when he orchestrated this whole shut down 'cause he didn't like that the Dems were coming after him with impeachment, he didn't like that Mueller was coming after him, subpoenas were coming after him. And so Nancy Pelosi to his face handled him like a toddler like he needed to be handled. But behind his back, that's when she got Trumpian and snarked on him and said a lot of hilarious things like the Wall's about his manhood, so that's really interesting insight confirming again what a big, spoiled, privileged brat that this meltdown-in-chief that we have in power is. And it's an important conversation to have because we're going into a presidential election so whoever emerges from the Democratic primary has to know how to bait Trump successfully and how to really back him into a corner.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah how to contain him and, you know, thank god she is the speaker, and after the shutdown quasi-ended we get this this alleged three-week reprieve that could honestly be shorter because we don't know what's going to happen, I had all these people kind of rejoicing and celebrating and being like "it's over he caved, he surrendered, Trump is done" and I'm just like oh my God like this is not remotely done like you know. First of all, this caused an enormous amount of damage like federal workers are not going to get back pay, contractors possibly are not going to get back pay, the low wage workers and industries that surround the federal government like hospitality are not, it cost the government 11 billion dollars, three billion of that is probably permanently lost according to the Congressional budget office, so it's like you look at this, you're dealing with this and, of course, Trump's ambitions haven't changed, the GOP's ambition to destroy the government, privatize everything, deem all of these workers non-essential, eliminate their jobs, all of that is unchanged. Nancy Pelosi understands this. She has dealt with these people for decades and she knows how to manage Trump so, you know, in one sense I'm very relieved that this woman, you know, who is so adept at this is in charge, but it doesn't go away and, you know, one thing that concerns me like you brought up 2020, you know, Mitch McConnell's re-election all of these things, the GOP once again is acting as if there's not going to be free and fair elections in 2020, you know, they have absolutely horrible popularity rankings right now Trump's popularity has just plummeted, basically no one likes them, no one trusts them, no one wants them, and they don't care. The GOP put out a statement during the shutdown or right around the end of it giving their unequivocal support for Trump for 2020 and so once again I'm worried about all the same things I worried about with the midterms, some of which we saw play out like domestic voter suppression that's been possible because of the partial repeal of the VRA in 2013, you know, situations like what happened to Stacey Abrams in Georgia happening on a national scale. And then, of course, foreign interference, like, we still have a Russian asset in the White House. We still have a transnational crime syndicate masquerading as a government. And we still have a potential second shutdown or "National Emergency" and I'm sorry when you're scheduling a National Emergency it's not actually a national emergency and it's an excuse for a massive abuse of power. And so I feel like we're — we are in the eye of the hurricane. It is just as dangerous as before, but what we do know is that there is some capacity to have leverage. You certainly can credit the federal workers and the unions for that. I think especially Sarah Nelson, you know, the flight attendant who gave that really great really powerful speech and you know and also Pelosi but, you know, we are not out of the woods by any measure.

Andrea Chalupa: No not at all and I think the same tactics that we saw used in 2016 are going to

be employed again in 2020. It's going to be — it's going to be a war, you know, the Kremlin's going to be back again and there was just an attempted come on a hack on the DNC so they're fishing around the DNC for more, see what they could exploit there. That's just for one thing. I am very heartened though by this wonderful group of democratic challengers who are emerging and more that might come out. I think we're to be — I know people are very nervous 'cause part of why Trump was successful in 2016 was because of how divided we were in 2016 and, of course, it was the Kremlin really pushing those divisions with the Wikileaks bombshell right before the DNC and that massive far-reaching social media Blitzkrieg that was across all of our social media platforms that were really fanning the flames of division of Trump's opponents, so I think we'll see a lot of that again in 2020 and I hope that we're smarter now and we can rise above that and just see the primary as an important conversation among brilliant people, brilliant progressive leaders for the most part Progressive candidate so far seem to be emerging about the direction our country should go and I think that's what's really essential, just treat the primary, treat the Democratic primary as an opportunity for us to talk about what kind of country we want to live in and how we're going to get there.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah I mean it should be, I don't want to say, go as far as say it's like a blessing 'cause it's honestly a nightmare and we know that, but, you know, it's a chance for all of us to hash out these structural issues that have been in place since before Trump, you know, the erosion of opportunity, a broken economy, broken social trust as well as see how people are going to respond to whatever hellhole we're living in by the time November 2020 rolls around. I mean that's what I'm kind of looking at, are leaders that understand not only that this is abnormal, I think everyone grasps set, but that are willing to say it, that are willing to call him out as an aspiring autocrat, that are willing to call out exactly how lawless the GOP is and speak frankly about how much trouble we're in. I feel like there's kind of a hesitancy because everyone wants to be upbeat, everybody wants to be positive. That did not work out. Like when Obama told all of us in January 2017 that we're all going to be okay, you know, my heart absolutely sank because I knew that millions of Americans are going to be left with a false impression that exactly how dangerous the situation is and maybe he really did think checks and balances would hold or that the Republicans wouldn't be as awful as they were I mean honestly the Republicans were worse than I expected and I really wasn't expecting much, but they still managed to, you know, exceed my worst expectations. Media news, they skirt over so many of these issues, they skirt over the pain that it causes everyday citizens, they skirt over the organized crime aspect of this, they present it as a game, as a sort of horse race phenomenon, but I don't think the candidates themselves are inclined to do that and when they're in direct conversation with each other, we might finally get the kind of substantive coverage that we deserve and, you know,, of course, another great format for that are impeachment hearings so either way I look forward to seeing our Representatives take these issues on.

Andrea Chalupa: What I would love is a woman-packed field for the Democratic primary. Amy Klobuchar's got to jump in there. The whole superhero cast of women that we have in the Senate they all have to run. I think that would be just the most awesome primary to watch. There was this article on the women on President Obama's foreign policy team, how in meetings they would get their ideas through by backing each other up because foreign policy is traditionally a boys club and so when women like Susan Rice and others would speak up in these meetings, you know, some other man would just sort of jump in and steer the conversation in different directions. So the women just sort of organically evolved into this strategy where when one

woman would introduce an idea the other woman would turn the conversation around back to her idea after a man had interrupted her and that's how they would sort of collaboratively make each other seen. And I thought that was so interesting and I would love to see something like that carried out in the Democratic primary, just all these women on stage backing each other up like you see them doing in the halls of Congress and really pushing for their ideas for, you know, Medicare For All, for taking on the banks, for a working class tax cut, all of it, 'cause the platforms are pretty much the same and — which is great — because we have an involving Democratic mainstream party that is becoming increasingly more Progressive, and no longer ashamed of it and owning it and realizing what the urgency of why we need this now 'cause we're, with the crisis of income inequality, with the crisis of global warming, so all of it has just been fantastic of seeing a more Progressive Democratic party. And, of course, Bernie is in there as well with his announcement. So I think it's going to be really interesting to see so many different people on stage together who essentially agree with the direction the country needs to go in and I just hope that they can carry on a collaborative conversation that inspires us and shows an alternative vision collectively for our country, and not succumb to any of the trash out there and tear each other down. And you had the historian, Doris Kearns Goodwin, who's covered leaders in America for generations. She had wonderful advice that she shared this weekend on MSNBC to the media. She told the media, like, do not cover the 2020 election like a horse race. Cover it like a search for a leader, what makes a leader? Be on the hunt for integrity among the candidates and spotlight and focus on the Integrity, because even she who has been around, who has covered recent history in America, she said that this is not a normal election. You cannot cover it like a normal election. The rules do not apply anymore. The rules have all been burned to the ground. So what we need right now to emerge from the ashes is a very strong leader with integrity and courage and moral courage and that's what the media needs to be on the lookout for. And highlighting those features and pushing and asking questions that can help identify those features.

Sarah Kendzior: And I think you're right that we kind of see this collaborative approach I guess for lack of a better term, you know, this ability to see the stakes, to see the big picture, I see it more among women. And you really notice because the political media is very male-dominated and what they're looking for is a catfight and they continue to be disappointed, you know, they are disappointed by Pelosi and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. They saw them as enemies and then they became allies in a much bigger battle because they get that. Ocasio-Cortez was living that life, you know, she was affected by the actual conditions of this economy, you know, by the loss of opportunity. And Pelosi I think is just very politically adept and she just realizes, you know, we are facing encroaching authoritarianism. And we need absolutely everybody to get on the same page to oppose that because it's a very, very difficult fight and the longer that they stay in office, the more difficult that fight gets and, you know, I see it among other women in Congress too, you know, I haven't seen this kind of bitchy back-biting that characterized the 2016 race and I hope they stay that way 'cause I think on the whole, with a few exceptions, they do get that. It's not about ego for them. Country before ego. So, it's good to see.

Andrea Chalupa: But I want to go back to Nancy because I had the privilege of interning on Capitol Hill. I was the environment energy intern for Senator Barbara Boxer, an incredibly Progressive senator from California. I got to see her verbally box Vice President Cheney in the face repeatedly in a congressional hearing and it was a thing of beauty. I myself went up there to ask Dick Cheney a question and because his people could smell the hippie on me, they cut off the

mic right when I got to it, I wasn't allowed to ask a question, I was like what? [laughing] Is it 'cause of my hair? Is it 'cause I didn't really brush it this morning? Damn you! I happened to be there for the anniversary of 9/11 and so the members of Congress came out onto the steps and the Congressional leaders came out and gave speeches and we had Tom DeLay who was the Republican Party House Majority Leader at the time talking on the steps of the Capitol building and he was introducing the next speaker which was Nancy Pelosi. It was him or some other, like, rabid right-wing weirdo. Whoever it was that introduced Nancy Pelosi, I remembered perfectly that they did something really snarky, they did something very vulgar given how honorable this moment was supposed to be in honoring the victims of 9/11 and uniting our country, but they just did something so House Republican. Just something dumb and Nancy Pelosi clocked it like she acknowledged it, but barely, it was like she's like wiping a piece of lint off her shoulder, and just went up to the mic completely unphased and made her comments and gave a very moving speech and what it reminded me of, like the way she's handled Trump, is that Nancy Pelosi has lived her entire career getting all these stupid little racist Kentucky Catholic School boys in her face, her entire career, and she just picks them off like lint on her blazer and she's just doesn't even — it's like noise to her. She doesn't even see them anymore. She just stays above it and just set boundaries for these toddlers and that's how she's able to navigate the system. And I hope I hope I hope I hope, you know, I know that a lot of it is hard won battle-hardened lessons, but I hope that she trains this next-generation, like all her tricks, all of her coping mechanisms all of it, how to work these people because one thing that great leaders forget to do is create a legacy and to train those who are going to then replace you when you're gone. And I think it's so essential that Nancy Pelosi not only help lead us through this crisis, but also while doing so, make sure that she has an army of people that could just step in and fill in the void once she retires from being the house leader for the Democrats.

Sarah Kendzior: I have more hope for that like if we do not go in the direction of crime syndicate autocracy in which there is no hope for free political expression and political leverage, and we actually continue to have a democracy I do have more hope for the future 'cause first, you know, you have strength in numbers and that there are so many more women in Congress that have influence. But I also feel like the younger generation just doesn't give a fuck and it's great, you know, because if you're going to go through life as a woman in politics in any sense as somebody runs for office, as somebody who writes about it, you cannot care what people think about you. I mean care what people you respect think about you, care whether you're doing your job well you know, have standards, you know, don't make it a total free-for-all, but if there's like a bunch of assholes who are just like talking shit, like fuck them! Like who cares? You know I would have quit a long time ago if I gave a shit and, you know, I look at like, you know, Ocasio-Cortez and her Twitter. It's like she doesn't care you know, like she cares about the people that she's trying to serve and I see that attitude among younger women and I think some of it may be the fact that we've grown up in a world where there are so few opportunities and you get so little for trying to appease power that it's like why bother? Just do the right thing, you know, concentrate on what your values are, on what effect you want to have in the world, and just go from there. So hopefully, you know, as we grow older there'll be more people our age involved and people younger than us involved, you know, bringing the world into a better place. But speaking of people who brought the world into a worse place, we should be looking for the antithesis of Roger Stone who has finally been indicted at long last after 40 years. So on January 25th —

Andrea Chalupa: There was no other way this could end. [laughs]

Sarah Kendzior: None. He knew and it's ridiculous. It kind of gives me pause that like Roger Stone knew he'd be indicted, we knew he'd be indicted, and like indict him quicker then, but we'll get to that. On January 25th, Roger Stone was arrested in Florida and charged in a 7 count indictment: one count of obstruction of an official proceeding, 5 counts of false statements and one count of witness tampering which Trump is now engaging in with Michael Cohen, we may get to that later. The indictment that was brought by the Mueller probe heavily emphasized Stone's connection to WikiLeaks and noted that in October 2016, Stone received an email from a high-ranking Trump official asking about future Wikileaks releases. That email is widely believed to be referencing Steve Bannon due to the matching terminology of the Mueller report and an earlier report in the New York Times. And on that note, I have to say, indict Bannon now because he's on a fascist World Tour and he's not going to come back to the US possibly if he knows that he is being sought, but he's also causing incredible damage in real time and has been causing incredible damage for the last two years and you know I have the same feeling about Roger Stone which is like you got 40 years of political damage right there like indict them sooner. It is not some sort of like "let's get even, let's get vengeance", it is a public safety issue. These guys are running around, they're threatening people, they're threatening bloodbaths, they're working with hostile foreign agents, they're rigging elections. It's like, they need to be locked up because otherwise, they're going to hurt people. But instead of locking up Roger Stone, Roger Stone was freed on a \$250,000 bond and went right back to lying on cable news that evening showing that the mainstream media has learned absolutely nothing.

Andrea Chalupa: Roger Stone who, like, is famous for his eccentric fashion — he dresses like the Undertaker of American democracy — Roger Stone is somebody that, like Donald Trump himself, I have a hard time looking at, because they're just such disgusting human beings and they just remind me of dark web porn, like, bestiality porn. My soul cringes when I see these guys. They're like a truck-stop pornhub and Trump being accused of underage rape and being surrounded by so many pedophiles in his life and the sex parties he would go to, how he compared surviving the AIDS crisis in New York City in the 1980s to his own personal Vietnam, and Roger Stone himself being a notorious swinger and putting out an ad looking for people to have sex with him and his wife, and using his actual email address for that, so everything about Roger Stone, like yes I'm so happy that he's finally in prison, and I know people have been making —

Sarah Kendzior: But he's not! Well, he will be, but yeah.

Andrea Chalupa: Will be hopefully, that's my own personal idea of porn is imagining Roger Stone in prison. [laughing] But so I am jumping ahead, but it's funny because people are making completely inappropriate prison rape jokes — rape is violence, whether it happens inside or outside prison — but you have to also wonder, wherever they put Roger Stone if he does go to prison, Roger Stone himself will be the sexual predator inside the prison.

Sarah Kendzior: Yes!

Andrea Chalupa: Don't you think so?

Sarah Kendzior: Oh my god I was thinking the same thing, I was like the jokes are so

inappropriate, but you need to worry about everyone else in the prison!

Andrea Chalupa: Yes! Yes!

Sarah Kendzior: I'm not really for solitary confinement, but you're going to have to protect people from Roger Stone. Like it's going to be awful like I feel so bad for the other prisoners. I don't know. This is going down a bad road, go on.

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah and there's a saying that the internet, that technology, is driven by sex and you see that with AI robots like we thought we would all have Rosie from *The Jetsons* being our Butler by now, but instead we have sex robots. Like that's how Robotics are being pushed through and innovated. That's been like the first of frontier of robotics has been the sex robots, and I thought about that in terms of like this Republican party. It's driven by sex. When they hand picked Sarah Palin to be McCain's running mate it wasn't because of any substance whatsoever. The woman couldn't even name a newspaper that she reads. It was just her look. And in Michael Moore's latest documentary looking at Trump's surprise victory as almost like a terrorist attack, breaking it down that way, he has a whole segment on how men sexualized Palin. Whether they were a Democrat or Republican they would talk about masturbating to her, making jokes about that because she was attractive. What's really interesting about this Republican party, this white male dominated Republican party — when Michael Pence, for instance, says you know, when you find out that he can't be in a room alone with a woman 'cause there's something sexual about that you have to wonder if that applies to all of them 'cause there's just no women among them in Congress anymore. They have an inability to see women as human beings, and they just see them as sex dolls. And a lot of these sex scandals that you've seen that have that have emerged have come out mostly on the right in recent history. But when you see like statistics like that conservative states have the highest number of porn viewership, you have to wonder what is going on with this Republican party. Is it a culture that they're supporting where they're just so repressed and they're living by such unrealistic standards and refusing to face reality and where the world is headed and adapt and acclimate to the 21st century that all of that gets repressed and then expressed in these weird sexual urges where they just can't help but objectify women 'cause they're just, I don't know, so repressed? Does the party today what it stands for attract that kind? I don't know. But, you know, Roger Stone has been so flamboyant and open about who he is and I remember this one disgusting photo of him around the time of the inauguration where he posted a photo with some blond woman, attractive woman, and said “now this is what a real woman looks like”, and it was like right after defeating Hillary. To kind of be like “Hillary's not a real woman 'cause I don't want to fuck her.” All of this is to say that Roger Stone is gross. In summary, future prison rapist Roger Stone is disgusting.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah I mean well there's something really wrong here in the Republican party that I've seen very few people even get into. You know we've previously talked about Jeffrey Epstein, who is linked to Trump, who had procured underage girls for powerful men to rape. Trump was accused of raping a 13-year-old in his tenure, but there's this sort of cohort that you can trace back to Roy Cohn, which seems to have engaged in a lot of, you know, incredibly disturbing activity related to sex trafficking, related to pedophilia. There are scandals, some in which Roger Stone is directly implicated and some of which he's just sort of skirting around the edges. I mean one thing no one really seems to have brought up and I thought at the time, you know, this is what Pizzgate was really about if it's not just about Epstein, is the Craig Spence

Scandal of 1989, when we were children, in the White House of George HW Bush which is when he died, heralded as like oh, you know, the good old days when Republicans had values, you know, this guy, he was a republican lobbyist accused of running like a underage pedophile male sex trafficking ring in part out of the White House, and this is something perhaps we should look at more in future episodes because when I discovered this like about a year ago like I kind of freaked out 'cause, you know, you can go on Wikipedia like just look up this guy, you can read stories in the Washington Post and it's about how he was basically involving himself with callboys, procuring them for other Republicans, and using the White House and tours of the White House to facilitate this activity. And then in 1989, he's found dead under suspicious circumstances in the Ritz-Carlton in Boston. And so, you know, he leaves this weird note — this reminds me very much of Peter Smith — that says, "Chief, consider this my resignation effective immediately. As you always said, you can't ask others to make a sacrifice if you're not ready to do the same. Life is duty, God Bless America." I'm sorry, that's weird, like that's like a giant weird story. And you can go back and look at newspapers from this time where they talk about how they wanted to cover the story, but they just felt like they couldn't or they felt like no one wanted to speak out about it. It was so disturbing, they just didn't want to go there. It reminds me very much of the Jeffrey Epstein scandal. And then, of course, you see the same cast of characters. You see Trump's lawyer Victoria Toensing and, you know, de Genova, like, they were involved in this sex trafficking scandal of 1989 in the Republican Party. So, I'm just waiting, you know, I don't like everything falling on my shoulders, especially this kind of shit, so I'm hoping more people explore that. And then you also have Roger Stone with his involvement with Eliot Spitzer, when Spitzer was caught with a prostitute. That appears to have been something that Stone helped arranged. He bragged about it. You can watch the documentary *Client 9*, you know, where he's in there just kind of like cackling about it, and the FBI last week invaded the home that he shares with the Madam that got Spitzer his prostitutes, Kristin Davis, so he was still involved with her and, you know, the important thing with this case is that Spitzer, of course, was investigating white-collar crime. He was cracking down on the kind of people that we've seen, you know, in this presidential election and rising through the Republican party and was an actual obstacle for them and Stone is the guy who gets rid of them. And he can't help bragging about it, you know, he like allowed a whole documentary to be made, *Get Me Roger Stone*, where he brags about all the shitty stuff that he's done, all these terrible, illegal activities because no one ever arrested him. He's never had any consequences. So now he finally has consequences, but I'm like way to go, way to do this decade later than you could have, and the same is true of corruption all throughout the Republican Party and the Trump campaign. Like we now have six people from the Trump campaign, high-level people, arrested. We have Stone, Manafort, Flynn, Gates, Cohen, George Papadopoulos just kind of hanging on the lower levels and yet we still have, you know, Kushner, Ivanka, Sessions, who had to recuse himself because of his involvement in illicit activity in the Trump campaign, everyone seems to have just forgotten, you know, that he had committed a crime that was what he needed to be recused, they're all just hanging around, you know, Bannon's just hanging around. They're doing irreparable damage to this country and we know the tip of what they've done in terms of treason, in terms of sex crimes, in terms of, you know, every kind of illicit activity you could imagine. So it's like, isn't there some kind of urgency here especially with the shutdown and the lengths that they've shown they can go to just get these guys out. I'm so frustrated, I don't understand why they're so slow and why this has lingered for so long and why people still continue to view this information with shock like "wow I had no idea they were this bad a crook", but it's like holy shit they told you, they made documentaries about themselves.

Andrea Chalupa: And when you've had dozens of people indicted, including like well over a dozen Russians or people linked to the Kremlin, and six of your direct campaign officers arrested, you're an illegitimate president. To your point, it's like I love how we're just pretending, like let's just carry on business as usual and then you see people like the Chuck Todd Industrial Complex pushing Democratic leaders saying “do you think your language is a little bit strong? Those strong words you used to describe“ — and it's like, dozens of people who helped win this election for this president have been indicted by the FBI. It's like stop acting like any of this is normal Chuck Todd Industrial Complex, just stop. But of course, they're going to continue because there's money to be made in corporate media for a few people at the top.

Sarah Kendzior: What's weird, and this goes back even to that thing that I brought up before the 1989 Craig Spence Scandal, and the refusal to cover that, is that there's money to be made in covering crime, in covering treason, in covering all these terrible things that have been done, I mean the country is pissed off. The majority of the country does not want Trump in office, they're fed up with chaos, they're fed up with not being able to envision a future for themselves 'cause we don't know if airlines are going to be flying like they're sick of all this shit, and they're also kind of caught up in the whole criminal espionage dirtiness of it all. This is a classic tabloid scandals, and yet the media's impulse is to just whitewash everything and to try to present everybody as more benevolent than they are, as less criminal you know, they sometimes do the sort of bumbling idiot thing like they didn't have a set 40-year history of basically anti-American criminal activity and so they do this like, "oh Roger Stone, you know, he's like a little dirty trickster, he's so funny and debonair," it's like, you know, shut the fuck up. I'm just so tired of it. It's the same as 2016, you know, if you look at this indictment, so much of it is about Wikileaks. And so if you look at Wikileaks, Roger Stone, and the mainstream media, it's like a triad of doom, like they can't exist without each other, like if the media in 2016 had thought holy shit this is a bunch of stolen information procured by an outlet that by that time, you know, many had identified as a Russian front, many knew was just, you know, immoral and disgusting, like they'd been posting anti-semitic comments, you know it was a dirty actor — instead of examining Wikileaks in that capacity they were like, you know, “oooooh emails, like risotto recipes, like let's do it”. And it's like what the fuck?! Why not parse out what is obviously like a Watergate-style scandal of theft instead of just printing the materials and analyzing them like the person who gave them to you didn't have some sort of nasty motive? And you especially see this with people like Maggie Haberman from the New York Times who's still cranking out the apologetic little puff pieces about Roger Stone and Jared Kushner and it's like, you know, you could go find tweets from Roger Stone where he's like, you know, “happy birthday dear kid Maggie, you know, such a great kid”, it's like holy shit man! If Roger Stone knew when my kid's birthday was, I'd fucking run. I'd be like oh my God, either like what have I done with my life —

Andrea Chalupa: I would start a neighborhood watch. [laughs]

Sarah Kendzior: Yes exactly! Like, you know, I'd get like a restraining order. It's like what the fuck is going on here? Like, it's so insane, like that is her social circle. That's the social circle of so many people in the mainstream media. They just see all these guys not as criminals, not as accomplices, but as totally normal people because they're rich. They're rich and they're white and they live in New York and they've — or DC — and they've just been like hanging out with each other forever and so like their sense of ethics and morality has completely dissipated and they

have this completely warped view of how to behave. You know, it was like what I said on a previous episode about nepotism: if you yourself are the product of nepotism, if you're like working at the same newspaper with your father for a publisher that's working for the newspaper founded by his father and then you see Trump who, of course, got in the business of his father, hiring his daughter, hiring his son-in-law into the White House, a normal person is going to be like "what the fuck is this? This is a violation of the nepotism rule. This guy's totally unqualified and this is also very dangerous that, you know, given their, you know, the criminal proclivities to both the Trump and Kushner families, we need to get rid of this", they instead are like "yeah, of course, of course, you go and work with your daddy, of course, you keep it in the family, of course, your accrue money and power and have that is your central goal, not serving the public." It's gross! And Roger Stone adeptly capitalized on that. And what you would hope is that here we are three years later that they would have learned something and changed their ways, by "they" I mean, you know, the Chuck Todd Industrial Complex, the Maggie Haberman Industrial Complex. But no, they're still up to their own dirty tricks.

Andrea Chalupa: I'm glad you pointed out Wikileaks', Julian Assange's history of being anti-semitic, 'cause that was completely ignored in 2016. And Roger Stone being linked up with Wikileaks is no surprise. What Mueller's office released on his arrest was it was shocking just to see that Wikileaks, which is an instrument of Putin's government, was an extension of the Trump campaign itself. And these guys were so relieved and excited to have Wikileaks as part of their coalition that Roger Stone himself couldn't help but brag about it when he said "it'll soon be John Podesta's time in the barrel." He wasn't just some passive bystander that heard something somewhere, he was actively involved, the campaign was, and he himself was, in making sure that Wikileaks was coming through for them and that this was all coordinated. And you have to wonder, who was it that was sorting through all of the hacked material? They took volumes of material, the Russians stole volumes of material from the DNC, so who was in charge that had the sophistication, had the mind for understanding our political landscape, our media landscape, and spinning it into a narrative that would inflict the most damage on on Trump's political opponents in 2016? It's hard to believe that Roger Stone did not have a hand in crafting that narrative, that Paul Manafort wasn't all over crafting that narrative. You have Luke Harding's bombshell at The Guardian saying that Paul Manafort had visited Assange in the Ecuadorian Embassy. So Roger Stone and Paul Manafort made an entire career with these destructive dark arts and have been bragging about it over the course of their entire career because they get so much play over anally raping democracies. Not just ours, but around the world. I'm so sorry this is a crude episode of — like, an R-rated episode of Gaslit Nation, it's just Roger Stone's gross. I did not realize how gross I thought he was until we had him on the agenda to talk about. I was like oh God really? So I'll have to take a shower after a recording, my mouth will get washed out in bleach, my mind, all of it. But —

Sarah Kendzior: Shall we leave him behind and talk about something relaxing like Venezuela?

Andrea Chalupa: Let's lock up our daughters and move on to the next topic. [laughs] So Sarah and I are not experts on Venezuela, but we do want to talk about it like so many others who are not experts on Venezuela, unfortunately. We obviously do want to cover this and we and we have some people to point you to in order to get more on the ground information from experts who have studied the country specifically for many years or are there on the ground so we will be directing you to that. We wanted to start this conversation on Venezuela with sort of an overview

of US foreign policy there and what the latest is there, and what experts are saying just to cut through all of this noise. I want to say on a personal note, when I was watching very closely on live streams Ukraine's Revolution as it was happening, as pro-democracy protesters were being brutalized by Yanukovich's riot police in Kyiv, when there were all these reports of kidnappings and torture, and horrible photos were emerging of the victims, while that was going on in 2014 when I was heavily involved with urgent efforts to raise awareness of what was really happening in Ukraine, one thing that I was very sensitive to that I built a life around was fact-checking people in Western media, including pundits, who were just simply getting the facts wrong on what was happening in Ukraine and painting it like a far-right uprising, a CIA coup, and just getting so much blatantly wrong and falling into the hands of the Kremlin when it came to the narrative. It was quite amazing. So just to give you an example, there was a big debate going in Western media during Ukraine's Revolution that it was a far-right uprising, and the far-right characters on the Square in Kyiv were given a disproportionate amount of attention from the media and basically held up as faces of this revolution. But if you followed the reports closely in Ukraine itself and listened to Ukrainian journalist themselves, and Ukrainian experts themselves, including those who happen to be Jewish, what you saw instead to contradict all that were Jewish leaders themselves inside Ukraine issuing statements and saying "no no no we are here on the ground as part of this popular Uprising. This is not a far-right movement. Please stop falling for the Kremlin's propaganda. We have organizers here on the Square in Kyiv who themselves are Jewish." You had a self-defense instructor who was Israeli who got some press for himself for the assistance he was providing the protesters in Kyiv. This was just a leaderless movement. And what ended up happening was those pieces in the Western media that were calling Ukraine a far-right uprising, they all disappeared when — for the most part — when Ukraine had an election and the far right candidates, the two of them barely got together 2% of the vote, and the overwhelming number of votes went to the current president. And so when the numbers themselves of Ukraine's election showed that that far-right narrative that the Kremlin was pushing was overblown, then a lot of those far right — a lot of those far right stories just went away 'cause they had nothing to stand on anymore 'cause the numbers themselves in the election spoke loud and clear. And in fact, if you were following Kremlin propaganda closely coming out of Russia itself in Russian language, what you saw was Russia was very two-faced in this. Russian propaganda focused on the Russian audience, was telling Russians that this was a Jewish uprising in Ukraine, and then telling the West that this was a fascist uprising in Ukraine. So, Tim Snyder, the historian, mentions this in a piece during the revolution. So understand that the only fascist far-right threat involved in Ukraine's Revolution was Putin himself, Putin's government himself. So what you're seeing now with Venezuela, which is bringing a lot of this back, is the same labeling, that this is a far-right CIA-backed coup happening in Venezuela. If you examine the facts on the ground and experts there are saying "no, that's just simply not it." Obviously, it's impossible to examine Venezuela without taking a broader look at sort of US foreign policy overall. So for instance, US foreign policy can largely be summed up as self-inflicted karma. A really classic example of this is, of course, the 1953 US- UK-led coup on Iran where we overthrew a democratically-elected government in Iran that wanted to nationalize their oil, and we did this just to serve the interests of British and American oil corporations. And what ended up happening was the powers that we installed were then overthrown in a revolution and that revolution then lead way to a repressive regime that we now have to contend with today because it's one of the biggest financiers of terrorism in the region and it's itself a terrorist regime that's trying to nuclearize. So, that is a great example of how US foreign policy creates its own self-inflicted karma, and, of course, that can as well be said of US foreign policy in South America

where we've had many decades of CIA-backed coups of far-right powers that have led to repressive governments, and this is all been done in the name of you know, stopping the spread of Communism, stopping leftists, and it's all come back to bite us. It's contributed to, of course, the immigration crisis as well. Like, there's a reason why people don't want to stay in these countries. So, the US has made its own bed and has been forced to sleep in it when it comes to our foreign policy all over the world, and so that's why people have their guard up and are very concerned about what's happening now in oil-rich Venezuela. But if you look at the facts on the ground, it's a story that is more similar to Ukraine, but far more, far, far more extreme. Here's a quick overview of Venezuela: "Venezuela has been undergoing an economic crisis caused in large part by government mismanagement, widespread corruption, and the 2014 oil crash. Venezuela's economy largely depends on oil. It has the biggest proven oil reserves in the world. To cling on to power during this worsening crisis, Venezuelan president, Nicolas Maduro, has turned into an autocrat. Political repression has spiked, including the arrest, torture, and murder of protesters and opposition leaders. There has been a clamping down on freedom of the press as well as political checks and balances like the Judiciary. Venezuela suffers from a widespread famine overwhelming emergency rooms and humanitarian aid workers with children starving to death. In one year, 75% of the country lost an average of 19 pounds. The Economist reports that nearly 4 million Venezuelans have fled the country in a refugee crisis that may surpass that of the Syrian Civil War that displaced 6 million. That means in a country of 30 million people, 10% of Venezuela has fled. Bipartisan sanctions began under Obama in March 2015, targeting 7 Venezuelan officials for human rights abuses for cracking down on protests. The sanctions continue targeting Venezuelan officials. The Trump Administration passed sweeping sanctions against the oil industry. The Trump sanctions have faced credible accusations of having gone too far, threatening harm to average Venezuelans, not just the military-backed dictatorship of Maduro. As for the current escalation of the political crisis, David Luhnnow, a Latin America editor for the Wall Street Journal/DOW Jones, provided this analogy in a [Twitter thread](#) which has been endorsed by other experts like Ricardo Hausmann, a professor of economic development of Harvard's Kennedy School and the director of the Center for International Development at Harvard." I'm going to read from that now:

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"Some politicians and folks on the left in US, Europe, and Latin America wonder if what is happening in Venezuela is a coup against de facto President Maduro. Let's use an analogy that might help. Imagine a world where US President Donald Trump stacked the Supreme Court and other institutions with political hacks. The midterms come, and Democrats win a resounding 2/3 majority in Congress. Stunned, Trump gets courts to declare Congress null and void, ignores its decisions. Trump then creates another Congress, filled with his own supporters, to pass laws. When there are street protests against this, he sends out National Guard to crack down. More than 100 people are killed by security forces. Thousands arbitrarily arrested. Top Democratic leaders are arrested or forced into exile. Some are tortured. Trump then heads for re-election. But his administration bars any top Democrat from running. The Democrats boycott the election. Trump holds it anyway and wins! No credible observers are allowed. Even the guy who set up the electronic voting system says there was fraud. Trump is sworn in by his Fake Congress. The real Congress, meanwhile, says he's an illegitimate president. And, according to law, they swear in the head of Congress as the legitimate president until new elections can be held. That interim president is recognized by many nations. Now, is that a coup by the real Congress? Or has the coup already taken place by the President? In a nutshell, that's what's happened in Venezuela."

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And again that is a thread on Twitter by David Luhnnow, the Latin America editor for the Wall Street Journal and Dow Jones. Now the countries that have recognized Juan Guaidó as the interim president include the US, Canada, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, Mexico, Uruguay, and the EU call for dialogue. The EU will recognize Guaidó if Maduro's government does not hold an election within days. So this opposition leader Juan Guaidó is looking at the Constitution and seeing that legally, according to the Constitution, as the leader of the parliament in Venezuela given that there's been a fraudulent election, he can, therefore, become president. And in response, Maduro refuses to step down. He's calling this a US- backed coup and he's cut off ties with the imperialist United States government, but he has no problem taking aid in billions of dollars from the imperialist Russian government. There has been massive movement of Russian representatives heading to Venezuela right now, including a chief war propagandist who's there on the ground now just arrived in Venezuela. According to Reuters, you have an estimated 400 private Russian mercenaries — the firm Wagner, which belongs to one of Putin's top oligarchs. You may remember that Wagner's active in Africa and three Russian investigative journalists were killed investigating Wagner in the Congo. Wagner mercenaries have fought in Syria and Ukraine and now there's an estimated four hundred of them in Venezuela. There's claims that they're there to protect Maduro's security from a so-called US-backed coup. I think the presence of so many Russian mercenaries on the ground in Venezuela, especially during this tense time, makes it a significantly different case study, yet again, from what happened in Ukraine, surely, even though in Ukraine you had Russian trained snipers who were firing on the protesters. But what's happening now in Venezuela seems like a much different story, a much hotter cauldron, a much scarier situation. It's estimated that there are up to 400 Russian mercenaries arriving in Venezuela to protect the Kremlin's guy, Maduro. I don't know where this will go 'cause it's — I don't think anyone does. But it's not looking good for the Venezuelan people who are caught up in the middle of this. There's so much disinformation that's going around on Twitter and unfortunately you have people on the left who rely on a lot of leftist sources that sometimes, you know, I'll listen to and pay attention to get news, but I think if you have any doubts on who to listen to, I think in a time of crisis like this, my advice from watching what was going on with Ukraine and how so many in the media were getting it wrong on Ukraine, I think it's very helpful to listen to the voice of the protesters themselves because they're the ones who, I'm sorry, but they get the credibility, because they're on the ground risking their lives and their freedom. That's not an easy decision to make. Have we done that in the United States? Hardly, not by the standards that they've done it in Venezuela and Syria and Ukraine, not by those standards where you can actually be killed by a sniper or dragged out to the woods and stripped naked and beaten to death. That's the fate those guys are choosing to fight for a different country. It's not a chessboard, it's not a game of Risk, it's not one empire versus another, so stop spreading narratives by either empire, and listen to those whose lives will directly be affected and start there. And study what they have to say and then from that framework, then check out other sources. So I think a really good place to start for that, go to Facebook — yes we all hate Facebook and Mark Zuckerberg will never become president — but go to Facebook and type in SOS Venezuela and it's a Facebook page liked by over 200,000 people. It's been active for years tracking the protests going on on the ground for years before mainstream media really picked up on the crisis in Venezuela. I met one of the coordinators. She and I spoke together on a panel in Civic Hall and the theme of the panel was "Is Authoritarianism Making a Comeback?". And this

panel was organized by really, really good people. And then Civic Hall, which hosted us, is ran by really, really good people. They organize every year the Personal Democracy Forum at NYU bringing together top tech activists and organizers fighting on the front lines of Human Rights issues and personal privacy issues and what have you. So SOS Venezuela. They share mainstream articles on there, so they're vetting mainstream sources and the reason why I like this model to start there with sort of understanding the situation on the ground in Venezuela and the history is because we had the same model in Ukraine. There was a Facebook page that was called Euromaidan PR, and it became Euromaidan Press. It's still operational and it was by activists on the ground and activists around the world who were fact-checking the Kremlin's propaganda war on Ukraine in real time, and they became the media voice for journalists parachuting into Ukraine. One of the founders of this Facebook page for the Ukrainian Revolution was featured on 60 Minutes, their segment on the revolution. So this is grassroots news by people who do not have time to lie to you because they're basically crying out for help and saying no this is what's really happening down here. SOS Venezuela – it's been vetted and it's trusted and they share mainstream sources on there as they're directing you to which mainstream sources are getting it right.

Sarah Kendzior: That's really good advice. I think when you're dealing with any kind of international conflict you need to center the country and the people that are suffering it and not look at it abstractly, not look at it as a game, you know, we already saw that mistake in our country, you know, with the shutdown in this is something of course, you know, American pundits are notorious at doing whether it's Ukraine or Uzbekistan and now we have it in Venezuela. And so I encourage people to actually do their research. It's okay to not know everything about everything and I think true expertise is knowing what you don't know and making a good-faith effort to find out, especially when there are lives on the line and you don't want to fall prey to what are multiple propaganda operations that are happening at the same time and so, you know, I'm not going to speak for Venezuelan people. The only thing I can kind of offer to this is like an analysis of what various actors are trying to get out of this because as Venezuelans are fighting for their lives, for their freedom, for their country, it's like a weird replay of Cold War relations from the '70s and '80s with the twist that the President the United States is a Russian asset. And so everything that we look at it in terms of what the Trump Administration is trying to do by exploiting this conflict, in terms of what the Kremlin is trying to do by exploiting this conflict, needs to be looked at through that lens. And so, you know, at this point it's difficult to say exactly what's going on. There are certain things that you can rely on, which is that neither the Trump Administration nor the Kremlin has any interest in the welfare of Venezuelan people. They do have great interest in oil, and in taking oil, you know, Trump has previously said that the point of any international conflict in a state with oil should be to steal the oil. We're seeing a literal revival of 1980s Latin American conflicts with the dispatch of Elliott Abrams from the Iran-Contra Affair who then later went on to try to stage a coup in Venezuela in 2002 under George W. Bush. He is now there, so that's a terrible sign. That is not who we want involved, and as with, you know, Roger Stone, Paul Manafort, John Bolton and so many others, you're seeing, you know, the recurrence of assholes. It's like this Merry-Go-Round time continuum that just sucks us in and where they should be in jail, instead they're just jet-setting around the world causing a lot of problems and so yeah it is frustrating, it's frightening. Some have said okay, you know, Trump wants a quote “distraction”, he wants a distraction from the Mueller probe, from the crash of the US economy that is very likely to happen as a result of the shutdown and basically already is happening. I don't think anything is ever that simple. I

think that there are broader goals. Pence has been obsessed with Venezuela for a long time. We don't know precisely why. Ivanka was tweeting about it before the uprising happened. Pompeo talks about it at the UN with a certain amount of glee. You know all I can say is that yes, the uprising — I'm not going to say it's legitimate, that's not my role to decide that, but this is not like a far-right coup installed by the CIA top-down. These are genuinely frustrated people that want to take their government back. But is the Trump Administration going to help them? No. The Trump Administration has not done anything good in terms of foreign policy anywhere. They've tried to withdraw from NATO, they have exacerbated tension in Brexit and EU, they've allied with dictators all over world and so just because they chose, you know, the right guy in this conflict doesn't mean that that is their motive, that's just a way in, I think, to exploiting the broader situation in Venezuela and probably just trying to capitalize on natural resources, kleptocratic initiatives, backhanded deals, and I think it's going to get nasty, you know, I think it's going to be frightening and I don't like where it's going, especially in conjunction with what's happening domestically. And as you said I do not like the parroting of a lot of these propaganda narratives that are going out there by certain members of Congress. That's irresponsible — it's one thing for a pundit to get this wrong on TV, that is damaging, you know, we've come to expect it though — it's another thing when you may actually have a hand in shaping the policy to just be parroting lies and propaganda, especially that influenced by the Kremlin, which clearly has its own agenda in Venezuela.

Andrea Chalupa: Again, it's not a far-right uprising. So here we have a really comprehensive, wonky piece in CNN called ["What's really going on in Venezuela"](#), it's by Fabiana Sofia Pereira who has lived and studied in Venezuela. She holds an MA in Latin American Studies from Georgetown University and a Ph.D. in Political Science from George Washington University. She's an assistant research fellow at the William J. Perry Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies and subject-matter expert on oil-producing countries in Latin America. In her piece, she writes:

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"In a plaza in Caracas, surrounded by supporters carrying flags and chanting for democracy, Juan Guaidó, a 35-year-old legislator from a coastal town in Venezuela swore, "to assume all the powers of the presidency to secure an end to the usurpation." The event was widely reported as "Guaidó declares himself President of Venezuela." This language, the idea that he "declared himself," suggests images of banana republics and of misguided attempts to claim foreign pieces of land for oneself or one's children. This language misrepresents what happened in Venezuela on Wednesday. Guaidó did not "declare himself" president of the South American country. He assumed the presidency of Venezuela as constitutionally mandated. Guaidó was elected to represent his home state of Vargas in the Venezuelan National Assembly, the unicameral legislature, in December 2015. He was part of a group of opposition legislators that handed then-President Nicolás Maduro his first significant electoral defeat. Maduro responded by attempting to strip the legislature of its powers."

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Sarah Kendzior: That sounds familiar. We deal with that in the US with the GOP.

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"Maduro had the Venezuelan Supreme Court, a judicial body that is not independent, rule all of the powers of the National Assembly be passed on to the court. The court later reversed its decision. A few months later, Maduro called for elections for a new Constitutional Assembly, which would assume the legislative power. The opposition boycotted the election. Through all of this maneuvering, the opposition-controlled National Assembly continued to meet regularly to seek ways to restore democratic order in Venezuela."

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Andrea Chalupa: So what you have in Venezuela is a constitutional crisis, and the opposition is trying to work within the legal framework to push Maduro out of power. But they're following the constitution of Venezuela in order to do this and Maduro himself is using heavy-handed tactics here to try to shut down his opposition and furthermore he has incredibly powerful allies with abysmal human rights records and that includes, of course, Russia and China, and Russia extensively is bringing in literally troops on the ground in to Venezuela to back up their guy, they've pumped in billions of dollars into his government so they don't want to lose him. My instinct here is that Venezuela could potentially be another Syria, rather than Ukraine, Ukraine being a rare example of a successful revolution. Syria was a revolution, and it's turned into one of the worst civil wars in modern history. So it's not looking good for Venezuela by any means and obviously, the Trump regime is going to find ways to profit from it 'cause that's what they do. They have Elliott Abrams in there with a terrible track record of course. He was involved in the Iran-Contra Affair and the US's violent involvement in Nicaragua. It's not looking good at all for Venezuela. And when in doubt, go to SOS Venezuela, read what they're posting there, and then look through the news from the perspective of those who are going to suffer the most.

Sarah Kendzior: There's one thing that's interesting here and you kind of see this with Ukraine too, you know, you see the people that try to argue that the Trump Administration is actually hard on Russia, you know, that they back Ukraine and they give these like little examples of the Trump Administration arming Ukraine or pseudo-sanctioning Russia, you know, as we've seen with all Oleg Deripaska, you know, those sanctions are not fully enacted, and we, of course, know from Trump regularly prostrating himself to Putin that that's where his loyalties lie, and then so here you have a conflict where, ostensibly, Trump and the Kremlin are on opposite sides. They are each backing opposite leaders, you know, we see this with Ukraine, we kind of see this with Iran. Because Trump is a Russian asset, you know, his loyalty is not to the United States, to its safety and security or anything like that. It is however very beneficial in some respects for there to be a proxy war, in which case, you know, it is not actually the US versus Russia, it's Trump in collaboration with the Kremlin using the resources, the military of the United States, to achieve kleptocratic goals in conjunction with the circle of elites that surrounds Putin, manipulating and exploiting terrible situations and vulnerabilities in other countries. That's what I think may be happening here and it's going to be played up WWE-style as if they're on opposite sides. But we really need to watch it through that lens and just think who exactly is benefiting here? Because we're kind of beyond nation-states. We have actors who we can't exactly define because Trump's allegiance is not to the United States, yet he is its president, you know, that is a brand new situation and so we have to see — follow the money, see where it goes, see who's calling for certain policies there. It's not quite as cut-and-dry. We've already seen the entrance of other actors into this conflict like Turkey, and I think all of this needs to be viewed through this

realignment globally that we've been seeing since Trump took power, this axis of autocrats, you know, where you see Trump, Saudi Arabia, Putin, Netanyahu, Erdogan, although there's conflict, you know, all these dictators basically, these corrupt people, working together while he tries to alienate our traditional allies. And on the face of it, this looks like we actually are doing for once what our allies in North America and South America are doing, backing the right guy, but, you know, because it's Trump, to be cynical is to use common sense. Like, they're not out for humanitarian reasons. They're not interested in resolving anything, they've got another agenda, and so I think it's right for people to be wary and, like you, I am very wary of where this is going because I can see all the different ways they can manipulate it. I can definitely see the potential for a refugee crisis. I don't know exactly what will happen from there, but of course, we have Trump clamoring for his Wall, I mean which is basically as we've both said more of a symbolic entity, but he'll use any pretext possible to keep pushing for that.

Andrea Chalupa: It's already a horrific refugee crisis in Venezuela and obviously, if you have an estimated 400 Russian private mercenaries there for the firm Wagner, soldiers that have experience in Syria and Ukraine, that's going to a horrific refugee crisis potentially so —

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah like a Syria-level refugee crisis is what I'm worried about.

Andrea Chalupa: One thing you have to never lose sight of is you do not want to, especially if you're a member of Congress like you said earlier, Sarah, amplify the Kremlin propagandists, like the Kremlin's flying monkeys, if you will. And unfortunately we saw that this past week with congresswoman Ilhan Omar of Minnesota who is one of these fresh faces who came into Congress on the Blue Wave and instilled us with so much hope, that rare feeling of hope that we've been deprived for so long in America. And she's very much a celebrity of this wonderful Left Progressive Movement that is finally going to show Democrats how to find their spine and fight for their values and establish a fair, freer nation and take on the crisis of income inequality, and fight for environmental justice and all the things that we desperately need. Unfortunately, Congresswoman Omar discredited herself by not only amplifying, on Twitter, actual Kremlin propagandists, we're talking like an employee for the Kremlin currently, and then doubling down on that when several people — journalists, you know, incredibly credible experienced activists who have witnessed some of the worst atrocities by this Kremlin in Syria and Ukraine and elsewhere — when she was called out for that, for a variety of reasons of wrong, she doubled down and put up a fist emoji of solidarity with an actual Kremlin employee, a flying monkey of the Kremlin. Flying monkey, of course, being The Wizard of Oz reference of — cause it's not the flying monkeys of the propagandists that we're at war with. It's — our mission is to expose this unprecedented disinformation war being waged by the Kremlin. So in February 2017, you had the head of Russia's military announcing to the Duma that Russia plans to make its propaganda far more sophisticated, and they're going to ramp up their propaganda. What do you think RT is? It's Russian propaganda. And RT that we're getting here in America is very different from the Russia Today they get inside Russia. They're two different things. The RT we get here in America, it's very much geared towards the left and trying to be anti-establishment. Back in Russia, it's like Fox News on acid. It's even worse than Fox News, there's no criticizing Putin on Russia Today inside Russia. And it's racist, and xenophobic, and the left falls for the RT that gets blasted out to the West. You fall for it. RT, which is international facing and left-leaning, is a totally separate, very different network from Russia Today, the Russian domestic TV network inside Russia, which is proudly nationalistic, proudly xenophobic, blames Obama and the gays

for everything. I'm just trying to underline the point that Russian propaganda is very good at manipulating entirely different audiences. RT's editor-in-chief Margarita Simonyan has described the work she does — compared it to the Ministry of Defence, waging a war on the West. That is her job description. And it's funny because the US and Russia have always been engaged in this culture war. You've had Russia deliberately using art as a front in the war in trying to influence hearts and minds. The US, of course, did that the same way with covertly funding major literary reviews all over the world, including the Paris Review, promoting expressionist artists like Pollock and Rothko and others, funding the cartoon adaptation of Animal Farm and what have you, and really funding the arts covertly to try to like contrast what Russia was offering and what the Soviets were offering and really win hearts and minds that way. So there's always been this culture war between us, and Russia right now is winning the culture war 'cause they package their sites. It's hard to distinguish it from a credible news site. And not only that, they've convinced people that sites like RT are anti-establishment when Russia is the establishment. When you have the second most powerful military in the world, when you're led by arguably the richest man in the world, you are the establishment. So there's nothing anti-establishment about RT and all these others. And what's really amazing is they keep adapting because we keep catching them so all these other news sites like Ripley and In the Now — In the Now looks like Now This News. They look identical, like bright graphics, really digestible videos that pop up on Twitter, geared towards the short attention span of millennials. So as the head of Russia's military told us in February 2017, according to a piece in Reuters, they are adapting and making their propaganda more sophisticated, and unfortunately, people are falling for it. So you have, again, a congresswoman that we desperately need to protect us and fight for us, she is amplifying the voices of actual paid careerist Kremlin propagandists including — what is her name? I don't even — I hardly pay attention to these people 'cause I see them as just complete tools. So I hardly pay attention to them —

Sarah Kendzior: Rania Khalek? That flying monkey? [laughs]

Andrea Chalupa: Exactly! Rania Khalek. So, Rania Khalek, an employee of the Kremlin, gets money from the Kremlin, she has a history of whitewashing Assad's brutality against his own people, including the chemical attacks. She's made the rounds of pushing all of this Kremlin propaganda and she's collecting a nice paycheck from the Kremlin. Do you understand that — investigations into RT and Kremlin Outlets — they pay really well. They pay really well for your soul. And here you have congresswoman Omar putting up a fist emoji of solidarity with Rania Khalek who's been a big white washer of Assad's brutality and has very much promoted the Kremlin's narrative on many things including Venezuela. So you have congressmen Omar amplifying these Kremlin propagandists, saying that Venezuela's a far-right US-backed coup which is simply isn't true. We just went over the facts on the ground in that situation. She's dehumanizing those on the ground who are suffering most and are most vulnerable, especially to all the violence potentially coming down the line, especially with all these Russian mercenaries on the ground there now. And plus, as a refugee herself, she's ignoring the fact that this current government has created a massive refugee crisis which could even get worse. And the reason why I'm feeling so gut-punched by it, it's because I looked up to her number one and number two is we need her to have the sophistication, the intelligence, the self-awareness to push through sensible policies on income inequality, on fighting global warming, and can we trust someone to do that given her judgment here? Why are you amplifying the Kremlin? Especially when the Kremlin attacked our democracy in 2016, continues to attack our democracy, and helped install

this Trump regime that is not only one of the worst administrations in the history of our country, but has created a constitutional crisis that has put us on the cusp of possible fascism, actual fascism in America. And it's created a human rights crisis on our border where babies are dying, where children are dying, where babies are forced to represent themselves in court, where children are disappearing and possibly being trafficked, okay? And you have a trans woman that was beaten to death, all types of Human Rights abuses. These people that are doing this to us in our name were put in power with the help of the Kremlin which you're now amplifying! How dare you? And on top of that, you are advertising to the Kremlin that you can be influenced. And you serve on the Foreign Affairs committee, and you're showing the Kremlin that you can be influenced, that you're willing to play ball, that when you're challenged with the facts from people who are experts on the Kremlin's mass murderer, on the Kremlin's meddling in democracies across Europe and in our own country, when you're challenged with the facts you double down? Do you understand the message that you as a representative of Congress are sending to the Kremlin, a hostile regime? They're attracted to you now. They see opportunity here. Kremlin infiltration was built over time through the GOP. They did it through conduits. No, you're not going to have Kislyak or Putin himself showing up to your office in Congress, you're going to have some interested people coming in, maybe grad students, maybe whatever, what have you, you're going to have conduits of some kind, that they're going to know are going to appeal to you 'cause they know how to appeal to you. And they're going to have people sent to your staffers, to your researchers, and they're going to try to infiltrate and influence you that way on the decisions you're going to be making on our behalf in the Congress. And that is incredibly dangerous. And what's more, what you're doing to us, the American people that have suffered, that have been direct victims of Kremlin aggression, by the attack on our democracy, by this information warfare that they're waging on us to this day, in addition to the attack on our democracy in 2016, helping install Donald Trump as president — you're rewarding this regime by amplifying its propagandists, you're rewarding them — how do you think that makes us feel? The victims of their aggression that have had no accountability, no justice, save for these arrests by Mueller that are trickling in at a snail's pace. This feels like such a layered level of abuse of your power and such a lack of awareness, a negligence of your duty to our country. I don't understand it. I looked up to you, I had high hopes in you. I need you to be a strong leader. Americans have felt so traumatized and so abused that we're desperate now to have trust our leaders and for our leaders to make us feel safe. I don't know what you're doing, but you need to get it together and not double down when people present the facts to you. You as a refugee should know better.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah unfortunately I just — I agree, I share your disappointment. It's extremely frustrating, especially because it's clear that people not only are not bothering to study Venezuela, not talking to Venezuelans, they're not looking hard at how exactly the propaganda apparatus of Russia works now, or worked in 2016. These same people that are coming out now and putting this far-right CIA narrative, they were the ones who said that Trump was going to be the candidate of peace. That Trump was going to prevent wars, that Trump lacked imperialistic ambitions — they will say absolutely anything to get the left to back Trump. And their primary tactic, and this is just an age-old Soviet trick repurposed, is whataboutism, you know, where they present this false choice, you know, this either-or choice, but what you actually have is like a neither-nor choice. You do not want to support the Kremlin, you do not want to support the Trump administration, because they are doing the same things. They have imperialistic, materialistic ambitions with no regard for human rights. They will lie, they will steal, they are

out for money, they're out for natural resources. Anything that you stand for as a progressive, as an American, as a moral human being, it is not reflected in either of these administrations which have shared goals. And I'm completely sympathetic and I agree with, you know, wholeheartedly, the view that the Trump Administration is out to do exploitative, nasty shit in Venezuela. You know, they are not the good guys, we have not been the good guys for a long time and as Andrea pointed out, in South America and Central America, we are pretty much never good guys. You know, the US has a terrible track record and we can all agree on that. But that does not mean that you turn around and support the Kremlin and Putin and RT and oligarchs. We should all be able to see this as the same common enemy of kleptocracy, of oppression. Like it's not that hard to grasp, and it's really sad. I think we still need better education about propaganda because the media's narrative is often just about quantitative metrics, like, this number of bots appeared, or these kinds of Facebook pages appeared, and they don't talk about the human effect on it, they don't talk that much about mainstream media amplification of Russian propaganda like we just were with Wikileaks, and it becomes really easy to just like dismiss it. You're like "okay, you know, it's just a bunch of bots whatever." it's not that. It's a network of non-state actors like Wikileaks, of propagandists posing as journalists like Rania Khalek and several others who are paid by the Kremlin, who are limited in what they want to say. And while occasionally they may be right about something like, you know, Trump is going to go do a bad thing, we can all agree on that, their broader motive is destructive and harmful to the US, harmful to Venezuela and just harmful to human life. So for God's sakes, like, we have the potential to all be on the same page about this and all fighting, you know, a common enemy for the greater good and it would be nice if we could concentrate on that instead.

Andrea Chalupa: The entire show Gaslit Nation is dedicated to how our government and our media is not ready for the challenges of the 21st century. We had, for instance, the Russians and the Chinese hacking our government, hacking our major corporations, and the Russians, of course, hacking us to the point where they helped install their puppet as president, and then a media that just aided them by not calling out this crime soon enough as it was happening. And so, if you have a member of Congress that is amplifying somebody who is paid by the Kremlin, how ready are you to help us face the challenges of the 21st Century? I don't think you are. And think of it this way — the kleptocracy that you're trying to fight here at home, the oligarchs you're trying to fight here at home — do you think they live in separate fiefdoms, totally separated by their counterparts in some of these other countries like Russia? Big Russian money being thrown into Brexit as well, you had all that dark Russian money going to the GOP in 2016, dark Mercer money going to the GOP in 2016. In the 21st century kleptocracy, the modern-day Mafia, wears the face of fancy accounting firms, fancy law firms, and all this oligarch blood money swishing around, buying up real estate in the major capitals, putting their names on institutions to try to buy credibility, funding and co-funding social media platforms and media companies — it's a new challenge that you're up against, and it's going to try to undermine you in various ways, ways you don't even see coming. We need clear vision and clear leadership and leadership that has acclimated to the challenges of the 21st century 'cause the reason why we are where we are is because everyone was asleep. The people that were supposed to be protecting us were asleep. And right now if you want to create sensible solutions to the crises we're being hit with at the same time, from a quality global warming, you need to have clear eyes of who you're up against. Do you think a gas station dictatorship like the Kremlin is on your side when it comes to combating global warming? No, absolutely not. So know who your enemies are, know who your friends are, and know that when you amplify the Kremlin propagandists, you're hurting

those children in Russia who are getting arrested protesting the Kremlin's kleptocracy and the vast income inequality inside Russia, where the average monthly salary is \$500, where their social safety nets is getting chipped away, where it's ruled by an oligarch class of people — that's who you're betraying, the Russian people themselves. And don't tell me or Sarah that were Russian-phobic for pointing this out, when where are you defending us, anybody that would dare accuse us of that, where are you when we ourselves get accused of being Russian agents, Kremlin agents, because we're amplifying the voices of brave Russians fighting on the front lines, whose lives are being threatened, whose family's lives are being threatened, and organizing with them and meeting with them to tell their stories of what's really happening on the ground in Russia. So, because of the work I've done personally when organizing with Russian opposition people who've come in New York, who work in New York, and try to build something here to fight for human rights 'cause they no longer feel safe in St Petersburg or Moscow. Okay, when I do that and I get called out by bots on the internet trying to claim the I'm some Kremlin agent and trying to discredit me because of the work I'm doing, where are you to defend me from that McCarthyism? You're nowhere 'cause it would not serve your agenda to defend me ever, because the agenda that the people that attack us serve, typically these faceless bots, and these Kremlin flying monkeys, they want to confuse, they want to hit our credibility. All we want to do is stick up for the facts. And facts in the situation is kleptocracy anywhere in the 21st century is kleptocracy everywhere, and if you're going to fight it here at home, you have to be smart. The kleptocracy here at home has very powerful allies abroad. Mercer could not have gotten his candidate elected if he didn't have the Kremlin coming in and the Kremlin's oligarchs coming in, and backing that effort. So keep in mind of the challenges were dealing with today.

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.