

Gaslit Nation  
Fraud Guarantee

Andrea Chalupa  
Sarah Kendzior

### *Theme Music*

Sarah Kendzior: I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the bestselling book *The View from Flyover Country* and the upcoming book *Hiding in Plain Sight*.

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

Sarah Kendzior: And this is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the Trump administration and rising autocracy around the world. We're starting off today's show where we've always started off—with Ukraine, the country at the heart of the Trump crime family geopolitical heist, the country where Manafort and Giuliani and other Mafioso operatives laid the groundwork for the current crisis, the country that has long served as a laboratory for horrific Kremlin experiments. If you're new to Gaslit Nation, we have over a year's worth of episodes explaining Ukraine's relevance to U.S. politics, and we encourage you to listen to them, especially our spring 2019 episodes where we detailed the whistleblower's complaint before it happened. Gaslit Nation is the O.G. whistleblower, so go check out our episode, "Will Giuliani be the Manafort of 2020?," which I believe aired in April. Sometimes our listeners have wondered why we put so much focus on Ukraine, but in light of recent events, like the arrest of Giuliani goons Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman and the testimony of the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine about Trump administration corruption, no one is wondering that anymore. They are, however, wondering what the hell is going on. So I'm going to start by asking Andrea, our Gaslit Nation Ukraine expert, what the hell is going on?

Andrea Chalupa: Well, Sarah, thanks for having me on your show. [laughter] You know, as we're always saying on this show from the very, very start is you have to think of the election of Donald Trump as a marriage between the Russian mafia in the East and the Russian mafia in the West. And there's no better example of that than this latest case of Putin's goon squad, these two knuckleheads Parnas and Fruman. They were on their way to Vienna when they were arrested, and Giuliani himself was on his way to Vienna. Well, what's in Vienna? One of the Kremlin's favorite Ukrainian oligarchs and an agent of the Kremlin—and a guy with very, very deep ties whose entire fortune is thanks the Russian mafia—and that's a guy named Firtash who is wanted by the U.S. government. He's stuck in Austria at the moment. And so it turns out that these knuckleheads that Giuliani was running around with, Parnas and Fruman, were funded by Firtash. One was even on the payroll of these two conspiracy theorist American lawyers who work for Trump, who try to invent dirt on Trump's opponents. They had partners specifically on their payroll as being a translator in their work with Firtash. So we're gonna go into a little bit like, who is Firtash? Why does he matter? If you've been following the show for a while, you know that when the Soviet Union collapsed, you had a big power grab, a resource grab where you had this oligarchy emerge, which was basically like the strongest dog in the fight won. You had guys like Deripaska in Russia who won the aluminum wars, which is an actual war with a body count, and so forth. Now he's like this big aluminum magnet and trying to dress himself up as a dapper gentleman in the West in capitals like London and throwing his blood money around. Well, in Ukraine, emerging out of the ashes of the Soviet Union, you

had this oligarch, Firtash, who made a deal with the devil with the help of fancy Westerners, Western consultants making money off of this, to establish a big gas deal between Putin and Ukraine. So all of this at the end of the day, just like Bush's invasion of Iraq, came down to oil. What we're dealing with now in Ukraine and with Russia's leverage on the West is gas. At the heart of all this is gas. One of the first things Putin did when he became president was he took over Gazprom. A huge, huge proportion—like nearly 50%—of Russia's budget is dependent on gas and oil, and they use that as leverage over Europe. Sarah and I are pretty furious, because—I want to pause for a second and say this. This last week, you have to understand that the apocalyptic news headlines coming out of this past week, we are going to be living with the fallout of what has happened this past week for many years to come. What we're talking about is essentially Trump hastily pulling the U.S. out of Syria and giving it over to Putin, and what that means for U.S. interests for many years to come, including in the energy wars, including in Europe's security, America's security, especially where fighting terrorism is concerned. I can't even tell you what a deep wound that this is going to leave on our world for many years to come. A lot of our fury is at Obama and Merkel, the Western Alliance, not standing up to this threat of Putin's chess-playing sooner. And that all comes down, like I was saying before, to gas. So just to illustrate that, Putin for years has leveraged Russia's gas dominance in Europe to wage economic warfare on Ukraine specifically. They've done things like shutting off the gas, the pipeline that leads from Russia to Ukraine in the Winter when there have been negotiations over prices or any type of tension that's come up between Russia and Ukraine. They've done the same for Europe. So Gazprom is not just a major gas company of Russia. It's also a foreign policy tool of leverage. If you want to understand where the world is headed, just look at how anything coming up can be used as leverage by the Kremlin. That's what this is about, so we'll go into that specifically in regards to Syria and the apocalyptic mouth of hell opening up there, thanks to Trump. Right now, you have Angela Merkel, who for years has talked about Western values and trying to keep the EU together and just standing up for a strong Western Alliance, but at the same time, she was giving into mass murderer Putin by promoting and allowing Nord Stream 2, which is a big pipeline that is being built connecting Russia and Germany so Russia can transmit more gas to Europe, to Germany specifically. And why that is such a danger is because, for one thing, that gas pipeline is built intentionally to circumvent Ukraine so Ukraine doesn't get money from having big gas pipeline pass through its country. That hurts a country like Ukraine that's suffering economically from Russia's continuing invasion and so forth, and that's done intentionally. So it's essentially economic warfare that Merkel is allowing and promoting, essentially by allowing this Nord Stream 2 to be built. The other thing is, Europe's dependence on Russian gas, which has been used as a pawn, as leverage to try to, you know, the tap being turned off in winter months especially, is basically giving a green light to Russian active measures, like Russia's way of intimidating the West. That's just a strange thing to do, and the reasoning behind it is that as much as Germany and Europe overall is turning towards green energy, solar and wind, they do need natural gas, they claim, to try to compensate for times of the year when it's not as windy, when it's not as sunny, so that's where natural gas comes in. Whereas, you know, what if you used the power of science and technology to just create more advanced batteries that can hold all that excess energy and kick in on those cloudy and windless days—there's a thought! No, instead, you're going to have your energy dependent on a mass-murdering dictatorship that literally uses providing you that access as leverage to put pressure on you to give it what it wants despite its abysmal human rights record at home and abroad. At the heart of this, what we want to really stress for everyone to give you the bigger picture is that at the heart of this is, of course, corruption. Corruption has to be seen as its own industry. You have an entertainment industry. You have a media industry. You have a farming industry. Well, think of this blood money

corruption of doing business with a mass-murdering Kremlin and so forth, and taking its gas, and greenlighting projects like Nord Stream 2 to create further European dependence on Russian gas, and so forth, as just another corruption industry where a lot of big businesses, namely German businesses and the really tight German Russian lobby are benefiting from this. So with one hand, Merkel is sanctioning Russia, but with the other hand, it's furthering dependence on Russia. So it's the schizophrenic message that the West has been sending Russia and the Western world saying, you know, we'll put up posters, or put up statements, and we'll take photo-ops showing a united front against Putin, but behind the backs of Ukrainians and Georgians and Syrians that have been slaughtered by Putin's government, we're going to be collecting that blood money to benefit ourselves and our industries because we see it as good business.

Sarah Kendzior: We've made this point many, many times, going back to our first show, but for people who don't grasp the nexus of interests here, there is no separation right now of dictatorships, of organized crime, mafia groups and plutocrats—like corrupt businessmen. And so that's why you're seeing things, like these alliances of two guys like Parnas and Fruman, who just look like these two shmoes, like they look like extras from *The Sopranos*. And you kind of think, well, why in the world are these two lowlifes doing things like going with Giuliani to the funeral of George H.W. Bush, a very high profile, elite, limited kind of event? It's because all of those lines have been blurred. So when you are participating in an alliance with the Kremlin, which the West has been willing to do at different points, or they certainly have been willing to not put up much of a fight against it. You know, as Andrea was just saying, this is certainly true of the second half of the Obama administration. It's true of action that the EU hasn't taken. When you're doing that, you're enabling organized crime. It's not just this matter of good states and bad states and failed states and successful states. It's about criminal non-state actors, transnational and transactional actors that drift from country to country to enhance their own wealth and to enhance the wealth of their backers. And they don't follow the law; they live above it. That's currently what we have installed in the White House. So, yeah. Anyway, go on with what you were saying.

Andrea Chalupa: Well, I mean, that's it. It's Firtash. It's the Ukrainian oligarch stranded in Vienna at the moment because he's wanted for bribery charges by the U.S. The U.S. has been trying to extradite him from Austria for about five years now, and he's a major fish. He's a major fish. He was a backer of Yanukovych's government in Ukraine. He's got major shares in a number of big industries across Ukraine. He is an agent of the Kremlin in Ukraine. He benefits directly from deals with the Kremlin. He works directly with the head of the Russian mafia, Semion Mogilevich. He's Putin's guy in Ukraine, and so I hate to say this, but the imagery just serves this purpose so well. Think of a Russian nesting doll, right? You got Trump, and inside Trump, you've got Giuliani, and inside Giuliani, you have Parnas and Fruman, and inside Parnas and Fruman, you have Firtash. Inside Firtash, you have that little itty-bitty Putin doll in the very center of it all. That's what we're dealing with. And so when you talk about the 2020 election, the Democratic candidate running for president 2020 is going to be running against the Russian mob. That is, yet again, like in 2016, who is on the ballot again in 2020. It's us—American democracy—versus the Russian mob.

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Sarah Kendzior: I feel like there are these two parallel realities, like one where you're seeing pundits looking at polls and talking about, you know, the basis of Trump and the Democrats. And then there's another reality in which we've been taken over by a

transnational crime syndicate masquerading as a government, as I've said many times, that is actively realigning the world order. And we're going to talk about that more in detail when it comes to Turkey and Syria, and shifting alliances that are moving closer toward Putin in particular, but towards dictatorship in general, and these layers of organized crime that are not new. They did not start with Trump entering the White House. They've been put in play for 30 years. They've been accompanied by various actors, mostly in the Republican Party, who are linked to corrupt evangelical groups, linked to the NRA, linked to white supremacists. This is a very long running plot that is not new. 2016 was not the beginning of a coup. It was the end of one, and now we're in a new stage of it that—I think we remarked on the show—basically began in April when the Mueller Report was revealed to be what we had suspected it was, which is a kind of placeholder, a way to give false assurances to people that Rule of Law is still operational. I'm seeing those same false assurances now. I'm seeing those assurances about Parnas and Fruman, like that's going to be some sort of unusually big deal, about the whistleblower, as if there haven't been many whistleblowers already in the past, most of whom have been imprisoned or indicted. I'm thinking of people like Natalie Mayflower Edwards from the Treasury and Reality Winner.

I hope this is new. I hope this is a turning point. I obviously hope we succeed, because it's an apocalyptic outcome if we don't. But it is very frustrating that people won't confront this reality head on, especially because all of this evidence has been in the public domain the entire time. All Andrea and I do is our research. We do our homework, and I don't know if other people aren't doing it at this point. I suspect. Like, how do you escape it? How do you escape this realization when Trump and his cronies are so blatantly acting like mafia bosses and are showing off their actual affiliations with the Russian mafia, with people like Firtash. You know, none of this is swept under the rug anymore. It's displayed right in front of you. They want you to see it. And yeah, the majority of people don't talk about it, and one very obvious reason you don't talk about the Russian mafia is that they'll kill you. I mean, there have been deaths. We've seen threats and intimidation in that direction as well, but I honestly don't know how we solve this problem if we don't name it and define it and call it what it is.

Andrea Chalupa: And please give money to our Patreon so we can hire a white male translator to say exactly what we're saying so people finally listen to us and have these conversations and do something about it. Yeah. In other news, we have a job opening for a white male translator. [laughter]

Sarah Kendzior: Do you remember Josh Marshall when he was like, "Nobody's ever made the connection between Manafort, Giuliani, and Ukraine?" And we literally have an episode called from months ago. It's bizarre. I think there's misogyny at play, but it's also just, people don't want to go down this road. They don't want to admit that institutions have failed them, and they don't want to admit, I think, things that seem wild, that seem conspiratorial, that seem garish, that seem below them. That's the greatest trick that the Trump crew plays, is to be so brazen and so flamboyant and so obnoxious that all these little elite pundits are just like, "Oh, yeah, I can't take this seriously. These are just a bunch of idiotic goons with no geopolitical acumen." It's like, yeah, that's what they want you to think. And their greatest talent, it's been their greatest talent, is tricking the media and especially tricking egotistical blowhards like you. So I don't know. People gotta swallow their pride. They've got to catch up. They've got to get their shit together, because there's a lot on the line. Anyway, back to Ukraine. Do you want to talk about the testimony of the U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, Mari Jovanovic, or do you have more to say on...?

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah, I mean, the ambassador, the fired Ambassador to Ukraine, she gives basically a eulogy for America's standing in the world. That's what her testimony to Congress was. This is just such a deep topic. We do have to pause, and I want to just say, a lot of this blood money, this corruption that allowed this far-right Russian mafia coup to take place in our country was aided by a lot of so-called respectable people. If you look in Germany, you have Gerhard Schröder, the former chancellor, who is one of Putin's top lobbyists in the West, and trying to legitimize mass murderer Putin to the Western world and put a friendly face on his business dealings, like Nord Stream 2. You have the former Hungarian culture minister, Andreas Knopp, who was involved with Firtash, Putin's oligarch in Ukraine, and building up his gas empire with the Russian mafia. There is another fancy Western suit for you there, who's putting a respectable face on this blood money empire. And then, of course, you have America's Mayor, Giuliani, doing the exact same thing for Kremlin interests, attacking Putin's opponents in Ukraine, who are the reformers and investigative journalists who literally are risking their lives and have been for years in fighting corruption in Ukraine, especially Russian-backed corruption in Ukraine. A lot of these so-called respectable people, primarily white men in business suits who go on Meet the Press, who get softball questions from Chuck Todd like Paul Manafort did—another blood money operative of the Kremlin. We have to start calling it what it is. It's a conspiracy that's being driven by the Western establishment itself. I mean, if Gaslit Nation wanted to be a talking heads type band of a podcast, all you would do episode after episode is read Mueller's 2013 speech, the Iron Triangle speech, talking about how the 21st century mafia is no longer a bunch of guys sitting in some backroom in Brooklyn shooting each other's kneecaps out. It's fancy law firms, it's fancy accounting firms, it's political operatives from the West spreading this corruption around the world and making money hand over fist and laundering money, and so forth.

All of this really points to the big failure of Robert Mueller himself, because he knew the enemy. He named the enemy. He knew what he was up against, and yet he still prioritized just a few decades-old DOJ memos over the U.S. Constitution with refusing to hold a criminal, an accused criminal, accountable, and allowing that criminal to stay in the White House, where he's now complicit in a genocide of our allies, the Kurds, and unleashing a second wave of ISIS on the world. Okay, Robert Mueller is complicit in that. James Comey is complicit in that, with his abject failure in not stopping the Russian mob and taking the head of the Russian mafia off the FBI 10 Most Wanted list in December 2015, and in a year later, a Russian mafia asset is president. This is all connected. It's clear as day, and I want to point out that a lot of this crisis we've seen unfold just in this last last week alone, that we're going to be feeling the effects for years to come—because this is a big, big turning point—it also begs the opposition, the liberals, to soul search and understand how they give their power away. Because if you look at, you know, why wasn't Comey wheeled in? So if you look at Loretta Lynch, why didn't Loretta Lynch rein in Comey when she was Comey's boss? She was the A.G., and she was quoted, it was reported her position was that he wouldn't have listened to her anyway.

Sarah Kendzior: What kind of excuse is that?

Andrea Chalupa: But that's sort of like an internalized misogyny, right? Because we know that Comey's a misogynist, because you had all these FBI cadet women reporting to him from the FBI Academy saying that they were being discriminated against, and Comey took the side of the people doing the discriminating. Even though they had male colleagues stand up to defend them, Comey still sided against the women, so Comey is a well-known misogynist, and that's how he'll be remembered in history. And here you had his boss,

Loretta Lynch, giving her power away and refusing to rein him in because she didn't believe that she'd be listened to anyway.

So the West has to accept—from Merkel to Obama's Syria foreign policy—the West has to accept its responsibility in all this, and how it repeatedly gave its power away to stand up to this. That even goes to Silicon Valley and the social media bots, the bot farms from the Kremlin that were allowed to circulate, driving out the authoritarian vote, for instance. You know, what about all the Democratic representatives that take Silicon Valley money that just sort of turned a blind eye? It's the same thing.

Sarah Kendzior: And that's one of those things that I think is difficult for people to discuss, because obviously we're dealing with severe enemies. You're dealing with a mafia syndicate, we're dealing with brutal dictators. We're dealing with, you know, apocalyptic rapture fiends. And so the last thing people want to do, I think, is criticize what remains of the liberal Western world order. But I think the only way forward is to examine where people went wrong so that we fully understand the scope of the crimes and so that also we don't make those mistakes again. And, you know, the people who I've been impressed with currently are the ones who are willing to do that kind of soul searching, like that's not an anti-American act. That's not an anti-Western act. To just have blind fealty, to kind of absorb this authoritarian mentality of, "I obey authority. In this case, I'm obeying the authority of liberal Westerners," that's not better. A truly liberal, a truly free way of viewing the world is to challenge authority in every forum, to have the right to do that without fearing for your life, without fearing for your future. It's through critique that people grow, that countries improve, and you have to hold yourself accountable, and you have to hold other people on your side accountable. When you do that, you're usually much more successful at holding actual criminals accountable, because you have standards and principles and morals.

Andrea Chalupa: I would love it if the Pod Save America guys wrote a book saying what we could have done differently. What the Obama administration could have done differently. I think that would be an important and necessary service to our country, because, again, if Donald Trump, a Russian mafia asset, is President of the United States, something was wrong with your foreign policy.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, exactly. And then that's the thing is like, I don't think either of us are saying that in a rude way or to insult them like we genuinely want to know. We want to know, when all of this was obvious—and it really was by 2014—why didn't you take greater protections? Or were other people holding you back or holding other people back from protecting our country? Why didn't more people speak out about this during the election? Why was Paul Manafort, for example, treated like a regular Sunday show guest instead of a well-known mafia operative who ran a group literally called the Torturer's Lobby?

Andrea Chalupa: Who was already being investigated by the FBI at that point!

Sarah Kendzior: It's maddening, and I think that that would be a valuable contribution, and I think that we would not, if such a thing were to occur, we would not be trashing people for admitting their wrongdoings. We would be glad, because people on the whole would be more informed. That should be the goal of everyone, is to inform the public to avoid making these mistakes over and over and over again.

Andrea Chalupa: Let's say if a Democrat wins in 2020, which I'm not certain that's going to happen, because there's been no accountability for the crimes, the corruption that got Trump elected in the first place, but let's say it happens. Whoever is the next President of the United States, hopefully Biden, Warren, Sanders, any of those contenders would be necessary to stop the bleeding going on in the world right now. What they would have to do is have the FBI, have the CIA, have the State Department, and pull together their own national security team to answer that question. What went wrong? How did the 2016 election happen where a Russian mafia asset became President of the United States? How did the Kremlin help elect a President of the United States? That's what all of those major agencies that our national security and our allies' security depend on, need to ask themselves. They need to have an, "Okay, here's everything that went wrong, and here's what we're doing to fix it." It's just a basic matter of security. That shouldn't even be a controversial discussion.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, I absolutely agree, and one of the biggest mistakes of the Obama administration and their foreign policy with Syria and how they handled the Syrian crisis is—this is not unique at all to the Obama administration. The entire west bears the guilt for that sin, for that abdication and for that humanitarian catastrophe, which got much worse this week. On October 7th, which is Putin's birthday, notably, the Trump administration ordered American troops to withdraw from northeast Syria, where the U.S. had been supporting its Kurdish allies. Turkey, under the command of Erdogan, has now moved into Syria and is slaughtering the Kurds. We are watching a genocide of our allies play out in real time, and the U.S. Government is responsible. Turkey's assault on the Kurds and their abandonment by the U.S. has now pushed the Kurds to Assad's army for support, so they are now beholden to both Assad and Putin. Meanwhile, you have tens of thousands of ISIS members released who will likely resume their terrorist activity, and we'll likely see an even greater humanitarian crisis in Syria and countless refugees, which will further destabilize the Middle East and Europe. So all of this fulfills the wishes of the Kremlin, proving once again what we've said for 3 years that Trump is a Kremlin asset. It has weakened the Western alliance, particularly NATO, increases both terrorism and refugees headed to Europe, and has caused other countries to distrust the U.S. even more. And at this point, they should distrust us, because the U.S. is behaving like a Russian proxy state. Meanwhile, I want to make this point. There is a narrative going around that all of this is just about Trump Tower Istanbul, that this is another little quid pro quo. This is a grossly simplistic and misleading narrative. Trump's agenda with Turkey is not about Trump Tower Istanbul any more than his Russian agenda was about planning Trump Tower Moscow. Trump profits far more off a transnational crime syndicate who give him money and power in exchange for policy arrangements than he does from any hotel. People need to look at the full cast of autocrats, oligarchs and mobsters to grasp what is really happening with Syria. To this group, everything is transactional and all human life is disposable. They are realigning world powers, and Trump is a useful vehicle and their willing participant. Much as Trump's hotels have historically been a front for money laundering, they are now a front for war crimes. Pundits seem to be settling on this hotel explanation because it's simplistic, much like they tried to reduce Trump's decades of dealings with the Russian mafia to a proposed Trump Tower Moscow hotel scheme. It is never as simple as that, and it does a disservice to the American people to look at it this way. When you limit the scope of a crime, you limit scrutiny of the criminals, which makes it much less likely that they will ever be held accountable.

So, any thoughts after my rant?

Andrea Chalupa: I mean, what's going on in Syria is essentially Putin holding a loaded gun to Europe's head. Think about it. This deal that was struck, so you had Iran, Russia and Turkey meeting a month ago, and that was announced by the Kremlin that those three had a big joint meeting. Then, next thing you know, Putin—sorry, sorry, Freudian slip there—Trump is pulling the U.S. suddenly, suddenly and sloppily, out of Syria, and letting Turkey go forward in slaughtering the Kurds. Turkey likely deliberately targeting U.S. stations in Syria. You have, like you said, ISIS fighters being released. An ISIS flag just went up in Syria. So how is this Putin holding a loaded gun to Europe's head? It's very simple. For one thing, the Kremlin said, "All foreign armies out of Syria," except for Russia, of course, because they were invited there by Assad. Right? So what does that mean? With the U.S. gone, without any presence in Syria, we are not able to have our own intelligence, our own tracking, of ISIS, a determined and globally destructive terrorist movement. Right? So there you go. We don't get that intelligence ourselves and we can't share the intelligence with our other Western allies who are targets of ISIS's terrorism. Another way this is extra leverage for Putin is how does the Kremlin wage warfare today? It's asymmetrical. They power up their bot farms. It's no accident that Putin's chef, Prigozhin, who not only has his own private mercenary army in Africa, in Ukraine, and Syria, but he's also the guy that's in charge of Putin's Kremlin bot farms. So what does Russia like to do? Whether it's to help install Trump as president, they get their bots going in spreading disinformation and driving people out into the streets. That whole sweeping bot campaign that was on every single available social media platform invented by the U.S., that had a real world impact. People actually did go out and do real world on-the-street events based on that sweeping bot campaign.

You also had France investigating whether Kremlin bots were driving the extremist violence of the yellow vest movement in France. So what does Russia have to do? All that Russia has to do is fire up its Kremlin bot campaigns to drive those newly-released ISIS fighters to further their extremism, to incite them to attack the West. And if the West wants Putin is stopped doing that, then give Putin what he wants. Give Putin what he wants, and that is dropping sanctions, that is being welcomed back into all these fancy Western clubs like the G8, that is Ukraine, a country right now that has a president who just in a press conference the other day shut down a far-right extremist troll in the audience who was going on and on about George Soros and the big gay agenda taking over the world. Ukraine's president shut him down and said, "For the love of God, let gay people live in peace!" Okay, that is monumental. If you've been following post-Soviet states, that is monumental that one of these countries has an openly pro-LGBT rights president. That's in sharp contrast to Russia, where anti-gay laws are passed and gay men and women, they're pogroms against them in Chechnya and in Russia, and they're used as scapegoats to consolidate Putin's far-right base. Alright? So human rights are at stake. Our principles and values of democracy are at stake. Actual people's lives are at stake—investigative journalist reformers there. The world has ever been more vulnerable, and this week just made it exponentially worse.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, it did, and it's only the beginning. Something I would really encourage people to do is watch the surrounding countries in these regions and watch what's happening there, because, you know, as we say, this is a transnational crime syndicate. It is not just about the U.S. and Russia, and in this case, it's not just the U.S., Russia, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine. You should be looking at Saudi Arabia, where apparently, we're going to be sending more U.S. troops, which, of course, was the rationale for bin Laden attacking us on 9/11. We should be looking very closely at the relationship between the Saudi royal family, especially MBS and members of the Trump administration like Kushner, attacks that they've made on innocent civilians like Jamal Khashoggi, and



broader geopolitical initiatives. We should be looking at what's happening in Israel and the relationship that they have with other countries in the region, and who is going to be leading Israel, whether it's going to be Netanyahu, what kind of territorial expansion goals they've had and they still have. You know, all of that, and then, of course, the relationship between Israel and many of these guys involved in the current Ukraine crisis, like Fruman and Parnas were hanging out with the ambassador, the former U.S. Ambassador to Israel, who used to be Trump's bankruptcy attorney, I believe, Friedman. They were with Giuliani in Israel, then Giuliani was meeting with the rabbi of Ukraine. There are all these discrete actors who seem to be invested in a broader plan of territorial expansion, of Islamophobic genocidal ambition, of procuring money. I mean, sometimes many people are like, "Wow, it's mysterious what's going on? Like, what could they possibly want?" It's like, money and power! It is always money and power. It is so, so simple, and the reason that it confuses people is they think, "Well, they wouldn't just violate all these laws right in front of us, like U.S. laws, international laws, basic morality. They wouldn't. Surely they wouldn't just do that right in front of our faces." Yes, they will. They don't care unless you enforce boundaries, unless you enforce actual accountability. They will go and go and go and take and take and take, and this is bad in any time, and there are definitely historical precursors to this sort of brazen, horrific behavior. What makes this unique is, of course, climate change, and the combination of the ticking clock of climate change bearing down upon us and all of these gas station dictatorships, all of these dictators out for resources, out for oil, out for gas, not wanting a green economy because it threatens those interests. This is very complicated, and there are a lot of interlocking parts, but it's important to as much as possible look at this as a whole. Like it's so easy and satisfying to say, "Oh, I get it. It was about his hotel," or, "Oh, I get it. He just didn't want people to know that Russia illicitly influence this one election for him." There is never one explanation, and there's not one person. Like there are so many participants in this crime scheme, and so many of them don't meet what was the traditional definition of a criminal because they're world leaders, because they're business people, because they're riding that fine line between licit and illicit behavior. So you sort of need to rethink how you categorize people, and especially how you categorize respectability, and you let that illusion of prestige, cloak criminal ventures because they are absolutely banking on you to do that. They're also banking on you to underestimate them when they do things like, I don't know, have a dance club called Mafia Rave or have a business called—what was it, Fraud...?

Andrea Chalupa: Fraud Guarantee.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, Fraud Guarantee! You're thinking, "Oh, well somebody who has a business—"

Andrea Chalupa: Which is consequently what we're going to call this episode.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, like someone with a business called Fraud Guarantee clearly wouldn't be committing fraud, right? That would be too obvious. Like, no. They love that. They love flaunting it right in your face. They don't care if they get caught because they don't believe they're going to be punished. So the thing that needs to be done is punish them, and it's not as simple as that, but that's the first step in the right direction.

Andrea Chalupa: I do want to read from the Ambassador's testimony, Mari Jovanovic, because she sets up not only what's happening with the State Department, but the Department of Justice as well, where Attorney General Bill Barr is essentially Roy Cohn. He's a mafia lawyer. He's the wartime consigliere for the Trump Crime Family, and the Ambassador's testimony before Congress this past week, Mari Jovanovic, who was

pushed out of her role by Giuliani and his Putin crony buddies for essentially standing in the way of corruption of Giuliani and the Trump Crime Family from inventing, inventing, not digging up, but inventing dirt on their political opponent, Biden, in the 2020 election and also trying to grab Ukraine's lucrative gas resources. That's also at the center of this, okay? Remember, Putin uses gas, Russian gas, as a leverage against Europe, against Ukraine, to wage economic warfare, to blackmail Europe into giving him his way. And these little goons, Parnas and Fruman, were after Ukraine's gas. That's an important part of this that you can't overlook. So the Ambassador in her remarks was basically pointing out to everyone that, yeah, our institutions are failing us. So I want to read from them now:

"Today we see the State Department attacked and hollowed out from within. State Department leadership with Congress needs to take action now to defend this great institution and its thousands of loyal and effective employees. We need to rebuild diplomacy as the first resort to advance America's interests and the frontline of America's defense. I fear that not doing so will harm our nation's interest, perhaps irreparably. That harm will come not just through an inevitable and continuing resignation and loss of many of this nation's most loyal and talented public servants. It also will come when those diplomats who soldier on and do their best to represent our nation face partners abroad who question whether the Ambassador truly speaks for the President and can be counted upon as a reliable partner. The harm will come when private interests circumvent professional diplomats for their own gain, not the public good. The harm will come when bad actors and countries beyond Ukraine see how easy it is to use fiction and innuendo to manipulate our system. In such circumstances, the only interests that will be served are those of our strategic adversaries like Russia that spread chaos and attack institutions and norms that the U.S. helped create in which we have benefited from the last 75 years."

Since World War II. Since the last time we defeated fascism. For years, since 2014, myself and others were screaming that Putin is not just a mafia state, but he's a fascist state. We made comparisons to Hitler's aggression, and we were called hysterical, and now Putin is reshaping the world order that we've had since World War II, since the last time we defeated fascism.

Sarah Kendzior: It's very frightening, and it's also in line with what a number of people associated with the Trump administration are working with, Trump's crime crew, have been saying is their explicit goal for a long time. You know, you've seen Steve Bannon saying he has this theory that every 80 years the world essentially falls apart. He ignores the fact that every eighty years when this happens—I mean, he's not completely wrong about that—the good guys win like in the end of World War 2, for example, the good guys win. This time, he's assuming the bad guys are going to win, and I'm not sure he's completely wrong about that either, but that's his explicit goal. He'll call it the deconstruction of the administrative state, as if it's somehow this liberating phenomenon. That is not at all what this is about. It's about the consolidation of corruption. It's about people like him, millionaires, fascists, white supremacist, taking resources, hoarding opportunities, limiting people's personal freedom for their own personal and political gain. That is what they want. And then you have, you know, a religious side to this. You have an administration of rapture fiends right now in the White House, which includes Mike Pence, Mike Pompeo, and of course, Opus Day member Bill Barr. These are fanatical and cruel cult members who seek to dominate the U.S. no matter what the cost is in rights or lives, and they are using the rhetoric of religion to push their agenda. I think this is an important distinction, is it's not quite about religion, certainly not about piety. It's about a framework that they can operate in. If you've read Jeff Sharlet's *The Family*, or saw the series on Netflix, he describes how absent the question of God or morality is from these allegedly devout

Christians, and Barr is no exception in this way. He's seeking to attack and purge Trump's political enemies, and then he frames it as a holy quest. I guess we can play the clip from a talk he gave this week.

Audio Clip of William Barr: "Among the militant secularists are many so-called progressives, but where is the progress? We are told we are living in a post-Christian era, but what has replaced the Judeo-Christian moral system? What is it that can fill the spiritual void in the hearts of the individual person? And what is the system of values that can sustain human social life? The fact is that no secular creed has emerged capable of performing the role of religion. This is not decay. This is organized destruction. Secularists and their allies have marshaled all the forces of mass communication, popular culture, the entertainment industry, and academia in an unremitting assault on religion and traditional values."

Andrea Chalupa: The Trump Crime Family is leveraging its cult of Evangelical followers and its white supremacist militias as its own brownshirts. They're leveraging these far-right extremists, whether it's religious or just about good old-fashioned racism. That's how they're threatening us, saying if you dare to hold us accountable, we're going to unleash vigilantes and militia mobs after you, as we saw in Charlottesville, that killed Heather Heyer.

Sarah Kendzior: So you've got on one hand, this kind of polished, quasi-holy presentation from Bill Barr. And then on the other hand, we have another viral video that's been going around that emerged last night, which is this video meme allegedly created by someone outside the Trump camp. I have some doubts about that, given some of the targets. What it does is it imposes Trump's head on the lead character of the movie Kingsman, and shows Trump executing political figures. Among them are Hillary Clinton, Obama, Bernie Sanders, John McCain, as well as a variety of media outlets and activists' groups. And the media outlets, one thing I noticed, tend to be the ones who are sometimes his cheerleaders, but more recently have moved in into more critical territory, which is why I wonder if it originated from the Trump camp itself and it's intended as a kind of a warning then. So it is meant to intimidate those individuals and outlets in question. Notably, this video is not some rando thing, but it was shown at a conference for Trump supporters held in Miami last week. Both Donald Trump Junior and Sarah Huckabee Sanders were in attendance. So this is something that, you know, I'm sure they're going to deny that they approve of this while also kind of saying that they did, much like in Charlottesville, when Trump had his like, "Oh, there were, you know, good people on both sides." I'm sure you're going to hear some sort of like—officially, I condemn the violence, yet all these people are deserving of some punishment. You're gonna get an equivocation, and you should never accept that kind of equivocating.

Andrea Chalupa: That video is horrendous. You have, some of the worst violence was reserved for black leaders. You know, Maxine Waters was, I think, stabbed in the face or something, and she's experienced neverending death threats in standing up to Trump. Obama, too, as president, the Secret Service was overrun with all the death threats that he was getting. The entire birther movement that was led by Donald Trump and Melania Trump in this country for years put the First Family's life in danger. Michelle Obama wrote about that in her book. And then this video just captures all of that, just how serious this is. People could really be killed as has already taken place already, as we mentioned, you know, in Charlottesville, but all of our members of Congress, like the Squad that are standing up to Trump, they go to work every day facing, not knowing whether somebody's rushing up to them is a journalist or some Trump supporter that feels like it's their duty to

protect the President by killing his opposition. This is very serious. When Boris Nemtsov was assassinated in the shadow of the Kremlin, the initial sort of conversation was if it wasn't Putin directly that ordered the hit, then Putin, at the very least created the conditions for someone to kill Boris Nemtsov. Because what you're doing is you're frothing up this violence, this fever pitch of hate. It's like in Orwell's *1984*, they had the two minutes of hate. And that's what this video essentially is, against the institutions that are supposed to be a check on the president's powers, from journalism to members of Congress. So I can't stress enough that this is not normal and we can never get used to this. We have to remain shocked.

Look at the employees that were killed at the Capital Gazette, that shooting in that newspaper office. Two days before that, Steve Bannon's little dancing puppet Milo told a journalist in an interview that he can't wait for vigilante squads to start gunning journalists down on site. He said that, and then two days later, a newsroom was shot up. There's direct consequences to this rhetoric. Ben Shapiro, he inspired the mass shooter who shot up the mosque in Quebec City. That kid that did that was a MAGA-hat wearer. He was a Ben Shapiro fan, and he studied Shapiro's Twitter feed before going into a mosque and opening fire. So we have to remind ourselves that we're up against a death cult, essentially, and that's white supremacy, which is one of the greatest threats of terrorism in the world today, especially here in America, and also the Evangelicals that are not about Christ or the teachings of Christ, but they're just after power. They're just after power, and these forces are being leveraged by the attorney general, by the Trump Crime Family to intimidate and incite actual violence against the mob boss in chief of being held accountable for his crimes.

Sarah Kendzior: I think your point that numerous people in that video have already been targeted for violence, like the number of people in that video who've had to wear, like, bullet proof vests when they're presenting is large, or people who we know were threatened like Joe and Mika from Morning Joe, who were blackmailed by the National Enquirer at Trump and Kushner's behest. Or Kathy Griffin is another one, who we interviewed on our show, who went through absolute hell, who went through constant death threats, and still is going through death threats for over a year because of a tasteless meme that she created.

I don't think people sometimes grasp the number of journalists who are undergoing constant threats to their lives. It's at the point, I mean, because you and I fall in that category, we just kind of get used to it and we hope that we don't wait for that phone call about the other one, or perhaps your sister, who is also a target of these threats. It is very hard to live this way. I mean, that's the understatement of the year. But especially if you're a mother, especially if all you're really trying to do here is tell the truth, you know, inform your country for the sake of your country because you love your country, and you love the things in life that you love. You don't want them stolen from you. It's hard for me to watch, for example, the videos from northern Syria, where I'm watching these parents whose children have been senselessly murdered. It's hard for me to watch that in any of the countries that our government and the Russian government and this crime syndicate have engaged in. So it's not like we're just signaling out the threat to journalists and to politicians because of their no ability or fame or whatever. This is a threat to everyone, and the job of both journalists and of politicians should be to inform the public and try to protect the public. There's that old adage that journalism is to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted, and we've certainly tried to do that on our show, but it's really, it's shocking to me the way people normalize this, the way they try to excuse it, the way the outrage just comes and goes as if people are subject to a kind of collective amnesia that rises up and

down. Maybe that's just a reaction to trauma, because I do think that the country is traumatized, and there are so many horrific things happening at once that it is truly difficult to process, but the result of that is feeling like you've got no protection. And that's just the cold, hard truth of it.

When you have no protection, then rely on your principles, rely on your values and just push through, because I don't think anyone is necessarily going to be there, at least in some sort of official capacity, to help you. We have to help each other, and I guess the consolation in that is that at least we do still have each other, and we do still at least have the ability to speak and to fight back and to expose the people behind this. I just sometimes wonder how much longer that will last.

Andrea Chalupa: And I'm curious to see, 2020, if they're going to get away with it again, and whether the misogyny runs so deep in America, and whether the greed runs so deep in America, that even when we have this growing crisis-level income inequality gap, where we have Ivanka Trump's tax cuts, which basically tax the poor and middle class to pay for gratuitous, ridiculous tax breaks for the super rich. We've reached such extreme levels that Elizabeth Warren, for instance, her platform is just common sense. It's practical, but yet she's being painted by the cable news bubble as extreme, and some like Che Guevara T-shirt wearing socialist, where in reality it was Wall Street that was bailed out through its socialism. Okay, look at the Wall Street socialism that the taxpayer has had to shell out. That's not normal. So in 2020, will common sense prevail? Will a practical path forward prevail? Or are we just going to self-destruct as a country under the weight of our greed and misogyny?

## MUSIC

Andrea Chalupa: Our discussion continues, and you can get access to that by sending up on our Patreon at the truth teller level or higher.

Sarah Kendzior: We want to encourage our listeners to join us in donating to help climate refugees in the Bahamas impacted by the hurricane. One way you can help is by donating to the Grand Bahama Disaster Relief Foundation, a local organization coordinating relief efforts on the ground.

Andrea Chalupa: We also encourage you to donate to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry, and now, horrendous fires in Indonesia. Donate to the Orangutan Project at [theorangutanproject.org](http://theorangutanproject.org).