

Donald Trump: Our President will start a war with Iran because he has absolutely no ability to negotiate. He's weak and he's ineffective so the only way he figures that he's going to get reelected and assure he's just sitting there is to start a war with Iran.

Sarah Kendzior: I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the best-selling essay collection, *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.

Andrea Chalupa: Our opening clip was from November 16, 2011 of Donald Trump projecting his intentions to start war with Iran onto his obsession, then President Barack Obama. So happy new year everyone. We want to start off by congratulating Jared Kushner for bringing peace to the Middle East. The world of course laughed at you and Ivanka. Way to prove them wrong. Getting Middle Eastern leaders together for a karaoke night was ingenious.

Andrea Chalupa: So first off, John Bolton is having a great 2020. This is going to be John Bolton's year. Before we get into that, we want to first say that our hearts are breaking for our Australian listeners. Nearly 30 people killed so far, over a billion animals killed. We're so, so sorry that you have this government who've been driven by greed and inaction, and your coal industry helped create the most devastating fires in your country's history. We plan to cover Australia and its rehabilitation so please send us any recommendations for guests and articles. Our DMs on Twitter are open.

Andrea Chalupa: You can also email us through our website, [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com). It was difficult to imagine anything worse than the Amazon fires, then Australia happened. Monster fires, storms, and flooding are increasing due to the climate crisis, so make sure your elected leaders where you live have bold plans of action to urgently confront the Climate Crisis if they don't do everything you can to replace them. Check out the Gaslit Nation Action Guide on [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com) on where to start with that.

Andrea Chalupa: So to help Australia, please donate whatever you can to WIRES, a group that rescues native Australian wildlife in distress. Donate at [wires.org.au](http://wires.org.au). So now we're going to get into World War 3, or what looks like the Franz Ferdinand sort of event of a world war starting. We saw this coming. We had two holiday episodes, one with Andy Greenberg of WIRED magazine on his new book *Sandworm: A New Era of Cyberwar and the Hunt for the Kremlin's Most Dangerous Hackers*. Andy goes in a stunning detail of how cyber warfare works, giving us an idea of what we can expect from Iran's retaliation for Trump's assassination of Qasem Soleimani, the top military commander and second

most powerful person in Iran. Experts point to cyber warfare as the most likely way Iran will strike the US. So check out that interview.

Andrea Chalupa: The second interview we ran over the holidays was with Congresswoman Barbara Lee, the lone voice in the entire US Congress against authorizing force in response to 9/11, which dragged us into the Forever Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, where we fought with and then against Iran. As Orwell wrote in *1984* about the inevitability of the Forever Wars, "Oceania was at war with Eastasia. Oceania had always been at war with Eastasia."

Andrea Chalupa: Now, some background on Soleimani and the Iran Deal. On December 1st, 2016, I tweeted: "When the story of 2016 is written and historians exhaust our research, all roads will lead to the utter stupidity and overreach of the Iran Deal." Simply put, what I mean by this is the Iran Deal was an overreach by the Obama foreign policy team, which desperately wanted it to be their crowning achievement. While they were preoccupied with the Iran Deal negotiations, Obama's foreign policy failed to prioritize Putin as an immediate danger.

Andrea Chalupa: Now, Donald Trump, the Russian mafia asset that stole the White House with Putin's help, has ripped up the Iran Deal. That's what you get for not prioritizing the very serious and direct threat who imposed on America's security and the security of our allies. Iran is a regional power and the architect of making Iran a regional power was Soleimani. From one of Dexter Filkins' must-read articles in *The New Yorker*, "Soleimani's biography as a pivotal figure in Iran and the region is well-known. Since the late 1990s, he was engaged in trying to remake the Middle East to Iran's advantage. Directing his proxies to kill or dispatch anyone who impeded his vision of an Iranian dominates fear of influence stretching from Tehran to the Mediterranean Sea."

Andrea Chalupa: He was remarkably successful, legendary even, certainly the most influential operative in the region in modern times. He was involved in sponsoring terrorist attacks, propping up despots like Bashar al-Assad in Syria, helping to assassinate at least one foreign leader, the Prime Minister of Lebanon, Rafic Hariri, and killing hundreds of American soldiers along the way. In the latter years of the American War in Iraq, Soleimani's militias deployed a particularly bloody weapon against US soldiers, the Explosively Formed Penetrator or EFP, which tore through the armor of US military vehicles and wreaked havoc on soldiers and marines. It was no small irony that he died on the road to the Baghdad International Airport where so many American soldiers and Iraqis died by ambush.

Andrea Chalupa: So Iran is indeed a regional power, but it does its best by staying in its own lane, in staying in the Middle East. Iran's operations tend to be less successful far beyond the Middle East, like when it tried to lure a Mexican drug cartel into an assassination plot and ended up tipping off an informant in the Drug Enforcement Agency. So by contrast, Russia is a regional power that does a much better job at exporting its influence and aggression beyond its own region to cases in point, Brexit and Donald Trump.

- Andrea Chalupa: Both elections were won with help from the Kremlin from sweeping bot campaigns spreading disinformation to dark money and traitorous proxies like Nigel Farage and Aaron Banks in the UK and Paul Manafort, Mike Flynn, Rick Gates and a whole host of other traders in the US including the Trump Crime Family.
- Andrea Chalupa: When compared to Iran, Russia tends to be better at asymmetrical warfare with greater impact on Western States within their own borders, while the Kremlin weaponized our own corruption against us, propping up far-right groups and leaders, infiltrating useful idiots and complicit actors like the NRA. The Obama Administration, with the noble goal of trying to stop Iran from becoming a nuclear power, spread itself too thin with the Iran Deal, and in the process gave Syria up to Russia and Iran and gave Iraq up to Iran. The world needs to eradicate nuclear weapons but the reality is when you're juggling several crises, prioritize the one that faces an immediate danger to your country. In this case, asymmetrical warfare by the Kremlin was the immediate danger because it was so effective, as we've seen in the rise of Brexit and Trump.
- Andrea Chalupa: Russia by the way is a nuclear power and did it need its nukes to successfully undermine us? Iran becoming a nuclear power, while terrible of course, but being a rational actor, Iran likely would continue to rely on its successful strategy of waging asymmetrical warfare rather than nuking its enemies. Mutually assured destruction is why Russia hasn't nuked us, especially given that the Russian elite hide their money in Western capitals and send their kids to schools in Western capitals. If they nuked us, they would be nuking their own properties, their own bank accounts. So yes, the bomb getting into the hands of doomsday terrorists in Iran is always a threat, but that's already a threat we live with given how many rogue states have the weapons or are actively working on getting weapons of that scale.
- Andrea Chalupa: The Obama Administration had extraordinarily difficult tasks of containing ISIS and did so successfully. But that's work that's now being undone by Putin's proxy in the White House through Trump's chaos in the Middle East. Overall, Obama's foreign policy missed a threat just as dangerous as ISIS, one that killed more civilians in Syria than ISIS, and that is Russia. Obama's foreign policy tended to prioritize symbols over substance. The Russian reset button, symbolic. The assassination of Osama bin Laden, symbolic. The Iran Deal, symbolic. Trying to negotiate peace with Russia in both Syria and Ukraine, symbolic.
- Andrea Chalupa: Kremlin aggression had to be confronted at the core, which of course was very difficult, but it was right there out in the open. The aggressive disinformation campaigns, propping up far-right leaders in Europe, in the US, spreading its influence to Western capitals through oligarch proxies close to Putin, buying off politicians and other political influence. Through Western corruption, the UK and US let Putin in through the front door. Now, the gas-station dictatorships like Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela—where Maduro just staged a parliamentary coup against the opposition—are winning.

Andrea Chalupa: We have the rise of authoritarian populism and the Climate Crisis hitting us at once, because master strategists in asymmetrical warfare, Putin and Soleimani, have outsmarted the most powerful military on Earth.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, I absolutely agree and I don't think we can underestimate the danger of this time. This is the culmination of so many different facets of danger, enough abuse of power that we've been warning people about since we began this show. And to go back to the original War in Iraq, as you mentioned, our most recent interview was with Barbara Lee who cautioned against that war as well as against the use of force in Afghanistan, giving us this forevermore mentality. During that time, the phrase "axis of evil" was coined to refer to Iraq and Iran and North Korea in this almost arbitrary fashion, in a very destructive fashion, to try to create this idea of a unified multi-state enemy against the United States.

Sarah Kendzior: And paradoxically what we have now is an actual axis of autocrats. We have now, under Trump, a new form of alliance including Saudi Arabia, Israel, Russia, the US with the Trump Administration and the UK post-Brexit. We've discussed this alliance many times. We've discussed its ties to the Russian Mafia, to transnational crime, to money laundering. But to a certain extent, one of the things that it has focused on, I guess with the possible exception of Russia, although Russia does benefit from our Korean aggression, is Iran.

Sarah Kendzior: The goal of destroying Iran has been a long-term obsession for many of the people currently involved in this crisis. It predates Trump by a long time. And so today, as our first recorded show since December 18th, the day that Trump became the first President to be impeached in his first term, and almost immediately following that impeachment, as you've mentioned, Trump escalated the aggression against Iran and against Iranian factions in Iraq, but that has been a mainstay of his presidency.

Sarah Kendzior: It's important to remember that from the moment Trump took office, he surrounded himself with a toxic mixture of war-mongering neo-cons, rapture fiends, pro-Israel hardliners seeking to aid indicted President Netanyahu who also needs this Iran war, and other assorted Islamophobes and kleptocrats who have been seeking to destroy Iran for decades. A desire for war in Iran is one of the commonalities of nearly everyone who has served in the Trump Administration over time, including departed cabinet officials like Mattis and Bolton, who we'll discuss later.

Sarah Kendzior: War in Iran was in fact one of the main goals of the alleged, quote-unquote, "adults in the room" who clueless pundits kept saying would save us, but there are never adults in the room, only accomplices, and Iran was always a profound danger, but it has become even more so with the assassination of Soleimani and the realignment of powers in the Middle East. It's also particularly dangerous given that the State Department has been decimated since Trump took power and over the past year, the DoD has also been gutted with many positions in the

Pentagon left unfilled, making it easier for Trump's lackeys to carry out their perverse ambitions unheeded.

Sarah Kendzior: We should not just forget that the United States did not have a Secretary of Defense for nearly a year, and on Monday, the Pentagon Chief of Staff resigned, creating yet another vacancy. There has been no real oversight and what we don't know is probably even worse than what we do. And so from there, I don't know, do you want to give a little more context into the situation before we go into the impeachment strategy?

Andrea Chalupa: What does Trump want to distract you from by making this audacious move that's going to have a massive ripple effect for many years to come by killing this cult figure, Soleimani, who is a force of the Middle East, a major architect of shaping today's Middle East? So, here's what Trump and the Trump Crime Family are trying to distract you from. So, Trump of course carries a unique distinction of being the first US President to be impeached during his first term. Congratulations, guys. That's some great branding there. Put that on your towers in Baku.

Andrea Chalupa: So the National Security Forum, Just Security, published a bombshell just days ago that new documents with a smoking gun showing Trump himself ordered aid to Ukraine to be withheld and that the illegality of that made the Pentagon nervous. This was blatant extortion of Ukraine trying to pressure the country to get its much-needed military aid promised by Congress in exchange for inventing dirt on Trump's political opponent. Trump was forcing a foreign power to tip the scales in our election because that is how he won his first election.

Andrea Chalupa: Trump did not get impeached for what he did in 2016. Trump got impeached for trying to do it again. The Mueller Report reads like the Star Wars prequel to Trump's impeachment. A British investigative journalist, Carole Cadwalladr, is back with a big story. She of course has been on our show explaining how Brexit and Trump are the same crime. The latest from Carole in The Observer, an explosive leak of tens of thousands of documents from a defunct data firm, Cambridge Analytica, is set to expose the inner workings of the company that collapsed after The Observer revealed it had misappropriated 87 million Facebook profiles.

Andrea Chalupa: More than a hundred thousand documents related to the work of Cambridge Analytica in 68 countries will lay bare, the global infrastructure of an operation used to manipulate voters on an industrial scale. Those documents are set to be released next month. This comes as Christopher Steele, the ex-head of MI6's Russia Desk and the intelligence expert behind the so-called Steele Dossier and Trump's relationship with Russia said that while the company had closed down, the failure to properly punish bad actors meant that the prospects for manipulation of the US election this year were even worse.

Andrea Chalupa: Steele said authorities in the West had failed to punish those practicing social and other media manipulation and the result will be, quote, "That while

Cambridge Analytica may have been exposed and eventually shut down, other even more sophisticated actors will have been emboldened to interfere in our elections and sow social divisions." Former Cambridge Analytica employee, Brittany Kaiser, said the Facebook data scandal was part of a much bigger global operation that worked with governments, intelligence agencies, commercial companies and political campaigns to manipulate and influence people and that raised huge national security implications.

Andrea Chalupa: The unpublished documents contain material that suggests the firm was working for a political party in Ukraine in 2017, even while under investigation as part of Mueller's inquiry and emails that Kaiser says described how the firm helped develop a sophisticated infrastructure of shell companies that were designed to funnel dark money into politics. All right. So more of the same in 2020 unfortunately because nobody's been held to account.

Andrea Chalupa: BuzzFeed just published its third investigation of the FBI's summaries of interviews with key witnesses in Mueller's Russia investigation. We'll link to that in the show notes along with the other investigations we're citing. This latest treasure trove shows that Manafort communicated with Fox News host, Sean Hannity, thinking Hannity was a proxy for Trump. This was when Trump, in his typical Trumpian fashion, essentially pretended not to know Manafort, his longtime neighbor, and friend, and campaign chairman. Manafort was just the coffee boy decked out in ostrich leather paid for with blood money.

Andrea Chalupa: Days leading up to the killing of Soleimani, Trump bragged about something big coming in Iran to random guests at Mar-a-Lago. So guests paying the President of the United States several thousands of dollars to have access to him at his private club knew more about the impending act of war than Congress itself. Another thing the Trump Crime Family wants you not to pay attention to in the years leading up to the 2016 election done in part under the leadership of Ivanka Trump, the Trump Organization built a Trump Tower in Azerbaijan which never opened and appeared to be, according to experts, a very clear money-laundering operation likely benefiting the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

Andrea Chalupa: This was originally reported by Adam Davidson in The New Yorker who tweeted in April 2019 in response to the Trump Administration taking the unusual step of labeling Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps a terrorist organization, which according to Vanity Fair is the first time in history the US have classified another country's government as such. Davidson tweeted mostly in caps, "There are days I just want to scream, 'President Trump was a knowing partner in a likely Iranian Revolutionary Guard money laundering and weapons of mass destruction acquiring scheme.'" So there you have it.

Andrea Chalupa: Now we're going to go over some of the stupidity of Trump's move. Here to explain that is Barbara Slavin, an American journalist and foreign policy expert, and this is a clip from her interview with CBS this morning.

Speaker 4: Barbara Slavin, the director of the Atlantic Council's Future of Iran Initiative. She's in our Washington bureau this morning. Barbara, good morning.

Barbara Slavin: Good morning.

Speaker 4: The President says he did this to prevent war. Rand Paul says he believes we are now going to go to war. Who's right?

Barbara Slavin: Well, I'm afraid Rand Paul may have the better argument here, but what I see are winners and losers. Winners from this are ISIS, Al Qaeda, Sunni fundamentalists that hate Iran as well as the United States. Russia, China, which will become more powerful in the Middle East. In a strange way I think Donald Trump is engineering the US withdrawal from the Middle East because, as has been pointed out, it will be untenable for American forces to stay in Iraq, probably Syria. We will see a drastic drawdown in American diplomats.

Barbara Slavin: American tourists, business people are going to be forced to think more about their security because of this. It was a stunningly, can I say stupid and counterproductive move on the part of the United States, and we're going to pay the price for this. And the people of the Middle East will pay the price for this for years to come.

Speaker 6: It sounds like you're saying that this is simply not a one-and-done in our part. I think back to shock-and-awe mission accomplished. Not happening here?

Barbara Slavin: Very much not. And the idea that one man somehow will determine Iran's policies, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps is a very large organization. The Quds Force, the elite force, is a very large organization. He has been replaced. There are people with deep ties to a variety of groups in the Middle East. This policy will continue. Killing Soleimani does nothing but feed Donald Trump's ego and distract attention from other issues involving him very temporarily.

Speaker 6: Barbara, there's been so much talk over the last day or so about the idea that there has been the ability for the US to do something like this previously, but they have not. There has been restraint. This happens now but you say this started a few years back now with the President and the Iran Nuclear Deal, his pulling out?

Barbara Slavin: Yes, absolutely. I mean, none of this was necessary. Donald Trump decided to leave a deal that was working. He decided to declare an economic war on Iran to try to prevent the country from exporting any oil. Iran stayed patient for a year and then they began to retaliate with a variety of attacks that we've seen. This is no justification for what they've done but we have to understand how it started. Donald Trump started this cycle of escalation. If there is a war, it is Donald Trump's war.

- Speaker 4: But, Barbara wasn't Soleimani killing Americans long before they pulled out of that deal?
- Barbara Slavin: Yes. But the United States actually worked with the Quds Force indirectly to get rid of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The problem started when the US invaded Iraq in 2003 and when people like John Bolton said, "Iran should take a number," implying that Iran's regime would be next to fall. Then the Quds Force became the enemy of the United States and then they began to support groups in Iraq that killed Americans. You have to know the history. This is not one-sided.
- Speaker 6: Barbara, 10 seconds here. Who are the biggest losers?
- Barbara Slavin: Biggest losers are people of the Middle East, people of Iran, people of Iraq, people of Lebanon. They were beginning to push back against some of these policies and now the subject will be changed to the United States and what the United States has done.
- Sarah Kendzior: Now, I want to comment on what you're saying before about Trump using the Iran conflict as a distraction from impeachment and from his ongoing crime spree. I think that that's true but I think what we need to look at both, with Trump taking out Soleimani and also with some of the other things that they were recommending to do like destroy 52 Iranian cultural sites, I don't think that this is necessarily Trump's idea. I think Trump is fine with it. I think Trump has been looking for war and going into war during a time of personal political peril is a time-tested strategy, but the specificity of some of these recommendations, I don't think really emanates from Trump himself.
- Sarah Kendzior: I think what we see, it's like, yes, the Trump Administration does not want attention to all the matters that you just raised, but what they really care about is consequences. As I said here many times, they don't mind being caught as long as they're not punished. An impeachment has brought them at least closer to punishment than before, although it's still likely. And so while yes, the war is a distraction, there are also other things going on because no war or attempted war can completely be just a distraction.
- Sarah Kendzior: It's a crisis that's happening at the same time. A war always has terrible consequences that cannot be controlled and a few examples of that, that we're seeing right now are the massive protests in Iran and Iraq that have brought people in that region together in justified anti-American sentiment. And most Americans, I want to stress, we do not want or condone violence either here or abroad, but regular Iranian and Iraqi citizens did not want violence either, and the Trump Administration has stoked it and endangered their lives.
- Sarah Kendzior: The Trump Administration has put all of our lives at risk. Everyday Americans, Iraqis, Iranians. Everyday citizens of any country affected by this massive regional conflict and especially Iranian-Americans who now have become targets of border control police and of profiling in the United States. As we've



said on the show many times before, foreign policy is domestic policy, and while Trump and his neo-con cohorts have infamously claimed that they can control reality, that control does not extend to a conflict this vast and unprecedented.

Sarah Kendzior: And so as we're recording this, today is January 8th, the world is still waiting for Iran to respond to Trump's provocation and as Andrea mentioned before, cyber attacks are the most likely response given Iran's proclivities and its track record. But it's very important to note that in 2018, the Trump Administration changed the Nuclear Posture Review so that a nuclear strike is an acceptable response to a significant cyber attack on the US.

Sarah Kendzior: This was an extraordinarily dangerous move then due to the fact that Trump has been obsessed with nuclear weapons for over 30 years and has publicly proclaimed his desire to use them and it's obviously even more dangerous now. Major GOP donors like Sheldon Adelson have proclaimed their desire to nuke Iran explicitly, and John Bolton has vouched both for bombing Iran and for the use of nuclear strikes in general. There is nothing to stop Trump from nuking Iran. As commander-in-chief, he is the only one who can make that decision and the only way to ensure that Trump will not use nuclear weapons is to remove Trump from office.

Andrea Chalupa: I mean, this whole thing reminds me of Trump's longtime feud with Rosie O'Donnell.

Sarah Kendzior: Go on.

Andrea Chalupa: How that kept escalating, he kept taking that harder and harder and started, like, grabbing her by the throat with the vicious things he would just say about her in public and Twitter was awful. We all laughed at it and made fun of it because it was just so over-the-top ridiculous, but the point is it just had this inevitable escalation to it. And given that Trump is the Reality Show President, given that he is the WWF Fake Wrestling President and he loves American carnage, he's going to want to put on a show. And I think all those factors combined, what we already know about him has been out in the open for years.

Andrea Chalupa: This is Trump. There is no other Trump. Anyone who thought they could babysit him, they're just arrogant. So I think Trump is going to need to have some big season finale for his reality show of doom and that, I think, is inevitably a nuclear weapon. This is the first time I've really thought that. Before I thought it was just posturing like he just enjoyed, "I'm rubbing it in everyone's faces" that he had that ability, but I really think that in terms of the Trump show, in terms of the vacuum of power right now in the White House, because a lot of the adults have been jumping ship or pushed out or under greater suspicion of being possibly the next whistleblower, and so forth, I think things have never been so dangerous for our country.

Andrea Chalupa: And if you're feeling despair by that, go to the Gaslit Nation Action Guide and do something about it. This isn't a time for you to binge watch this like a Netflix

series. No one's allowed to be a bystander. When we're being hit with so many crises at once, that's in part how we got here, with people assuming that someone else would fix it. So the days of us living as citizens on autopilot, that's over. It's like we now have to be actively engaged in our democracy. There is no other way out of this right now.

Sarah Kendzior: I think people, they'll listen to this show, they'll hear me talking about the Nuclear Posture Review and Trump wanting to nuke Iran, and then you go right to Rosie O'Donnell, and it has this sort of like "we didn't start the fire" element of presentation, but that is the key to understanding Trump, is that, in his mind, this is a show. In his mind, people are disposable. In his mind, a geopolitical conflict is just an act of presentation, of performance. He does not understand the value of human life. He does not understand, I think, what other human beings are. And so something that can seem incredibly antiquated in his mind to really... One of the most serious junctures in human history, a literal existential crisis, is happening now with this possible new war combined with Climate Change at the same time, and he is at the level of someone who is still obsessing about celebrity feuds, obsessing about his personal brand.

Sarah Kendzior: The danger of that, it's been obvious forever. It's been obvious from the moment that he proclaimed he was running for office for the fifth time. This was something that should have been prevented and I still feel like you said that people are on autopilot, that they don't quite believe it's really happening in part because it is absurd on a certain level, but also because it's fallen so completely out of control because everyone just sat around saying "the adults are going to save us", saying "Mueller is coming and Pelosi is coming, and Comey is coming" and what have you. No one is coming. If they were coming, they were coming to make matters worse.

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah. Hitler was a morbid curiosity during the rise of Hitler. People laughed at Hitler. They had a difficult time taking him seriously. They thought Hitler could be babysat and everything would be fine. This is how it works. The idiots are indeed idiots. Our enemy is indeed that stupid and that is how they win is because they shock decent people who cannot fathom somebody stooping so low, and that is how they've lived without consequences. Ivanka Trump, the Trump children generally included with all the investigations that have hit them in the organizations. They've just gotten away with it because they've done all of this out in the open and it's been just so over-the-top and ridiculous.

Andrea Chalupa: And so I want to get going as well on the brilliant strategic minds of Trump and Bolton and Pompeo dragging us into war in Iran, as you mentioned, about the street protests. Iran has seen some of the largest street protests in nearly 15 years. The Iranian people are tired of the sanctions, tired of the ruling hardline religious leaders, tired of the corruption. Like in many places in the world, the people of Iran are a powder keg. And so with these street protests firing up, they've been turning to the current President Rouhani who speaks like a reformer and makes dazzling promises of greater freedom and empowerment

of the people of Iran including women and religious and ethnic minorities, but these have largely been empty promises.

Andrea Chalupa: And so the growing protests are against business as usual in the authoritarian state. But now, thanks to Trump, Iran is united by the audacious killing of Soleimani, a cult-like figure known for his quiet charm and the strategic mind of a chess master. The opposition has been forced into silence. Iran was a fractured country, Trump has just united it. Our allies won't support us in war with Iran, of course. Look at the mess we dragged them into in Afghanistan and Iraq. Maybe poor nations, maybe extorted into joining a US-led coalition against Iran, but largely we're on our own. Trump's chaos increasingly isolates the US on the world stage and our traditional allies were recently caught on video at the NATO summit in London laughing at the President of the United States and the world laughed with them.

Andrea Chalupa: We've already abandoned Syria with Russian soldiers posting videos of taking over hastily abandoned US military bases and now we're going to be forced to leave Iraq. Trump has empowered ISIS. Remember when the US partnered with the Kurds to defeat ISIS? After a reign of terror, ISIS was contained in Syria. Then what does Trump do? He allows his friend, Erdogan, another dimwit autocrat wannabe, to invade Syria to commit genocide against the Kurds, our allies. Trump rewards the Kurds for defeating ISIS by enabling a genocide against them, and in that chaos with the Kurdish forces detaining tens of thousands of ISIS fighters and their families, ISIS fighters escaped in the chaos.

Andrea Chalupa: When Trump was asked about it, he shrugged and said the ISIS fighters are going to Europe. Does he think the Europeans will come to our aid in a war with Iran after he unleashed ISIS fighters on them and just shrugged it off? Absolutely not. Trump enabled what allowed for the rise of Isis in the first place from foreign policy. Thanks to the Trump Administration, the Kurdish forces guarding Syrian prisons that contain tens of thousands of ISIS militants and their families are now fighting for their lives. The flurry of prison breaks reported in recent days isn't just an accident of the Turkish invasion.

Andrea Chalupa: For years, ISIS has relied on breaking its fighters out of jails and detention camps to bolster its manpower. That strategy has worked time and again, and it will likely enable ISIS to replenish its ranks eventually allowing the organization to strike at Europe or the United States. According to US intelligence, there are still some 14,000 to 18,000 Jihadi militants in Syria. ISIS can still regroup. Their major weapon is social media, spreading their terror. When I was in Kyiv several years ago, it was in 2015, a British security expert in Kyiv had just flown in from Iraq. I asked him, "what's the strongest weapon of ISIS?" And he told me "social media". All they had to do was post a video of themselves storming a prison and beheading the guards, and those videos would go viral.

Andrea Chalupa: So the next time they showed up at a prison, the guards would just surrender, so social media. So ISIS has been very successful asymmetrical warfare. What's more, Soleimani was a gravity center in the Middle East. His vast network of

proxy groups may become far more destructive and unwieldy and unpredictable, and therefore far more dangerous without their strong central leader. Soleimani was the power center, and now the vast network of Iranian proxy groups have become decentralized. Yes, they all answered to Iran which funds them, but Soleimani had a force, a personality that cannot be replaced for Iranians that support the regime.

Andrea Chalupa: He was a larger-than-life figure who stood for strength and defiance even as enemies were known to revere him. Let me be clear that Soleimani was a mass-murdering Nationalist and the architect of a wide-reaching terrorist state that caused humanitarian crises in several parts of the world including Syria, Yemen, Iraq, not to mention acts of terrorism against Israel and the US and their allies. Those on either side of the political spectrum who are glad he's dead should be careful what they wish for. Who knows who or what might take Soleimani's place. So I hope you're happy, John Bolton, flying on your Ron Burgundy rainbow on your glorious unicorn screaming into the night, because I know that's how you're feeling right now.

Sarah Kendzior: Should we discuss Bolton, who has suddenly reemerged willing to testify after blowing off his House subpoenas and cooperation for a book deal?

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah. The big heads mounted on the wall of the neo-cons of America, and Soleimani being killed, and then Bolton suddenly popping up and saying, "I'm ready to testify.", that reminds me of how Trump lackeys are forced to go on cable news shows or Twitter to kiss the ring, to prove their obedience to Trump. It's like when Maria Jovanovic said that she was told to tweet support for Trump to prove her loyalty, suddenly Bolton emerging, ready to testify, it's like he's just going to get in line and lie before Congress like so many other Trump lackeys so far have lied to Congress and get away with it. It's like he's going to go up there before the Senate and try to clear Trump's name. And that's what it seems like in exchange for getting the war he's always wanted, the regime change he's hoping for in Iran.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah, absolutely. I think Bolton, like a lot of people in the Trump orbit, never actually left. When Bannon departed, when Manafort was gone, none of these people were actually gone, they were off on the sidelines. They held secrets. They had currency. They could trade it. They could get their own objectives met and the lifelong objective of John Bolton has been war in Iran. And the way he's doing it now, he was always a neo-con. Now, he's the neo-con artist. He posts his little entreaty to go and testify to the Senate on a website where he's raising money for himself after he did his little book deal.

Sarah Kendzior: So he's trying to profit off of this crisis in so many ways like he's honestly rivaling Trump in this respect. And one thing that, of course, is notable, is that Bolton could have testified to the House. I doubt that the veracity of that testimony would have held weight. I don't think these guys care about perjury. We've seen multiple people commit perjury. We've seen multiple people break plea deals.

The old rules are gone. People seem to not really grasp that when they're discussing the justice system, but that's what's actually happening.

Sarah Kendzior: But he, of course, refused to testify to the House, which is dominated by the Democrats, in favor of talking to the Republican Senate, which has been building a show trial. As we've said many times on this show, when you don't have impeachment hearings, you end up with show trials. The Democrats delayed the impeachment hearings, which certainly could have been held over things beyond Ukraine in favor of doing it on this one very narrow but important issue of Trump shaking down Ukraine in order for his own personal and political gain.

Sarah Kendzior: But we're seeing the fallout of that lack of strategy and of that hesitation and of that unwillingness to tackle the severity of Trump in his deadly administration head-on. So much time has passed, so much purging of agencies and packing of courts has taken place that they hold leverage. And what I wish the house would do now is take the remaining leverage they have and subpoena Bolton again, subpoena him now to testify in front of the House. One of the few things that Pelosi has done that I really strongly approve of was her willingness to hold the articles of impeachment and not bring them to the Senate.

Sarah Kendzior: I think that was absolutely the right move and it's good that she did this. And so now there's an opportunity for them to bring Bolton in and try to get him to actually answer these questions, and at the least, for the Democrats or any patriotic individual in Congress who wants to speak out now, this is your time to do it, to really question him, question him about what he witnessed when he was working in the White House, what he saw Trump do on that phone call and in general with his Ukraine and Russia policy, and also question him about Iran, question him about all this shit.

Sarah Kendzior: Put Bolton under the spotlight where he should have been a long time ago. We've said this so many times, that we have this, like, Celebrity Apprentice of criminals in this White House. All these D-listers getting dredged up from previous Republican administrations. These disgraced people who get put back whether it's Jeff Sessions or Roger Stone or Manafort, and John Bolton. It's unfortunate that Pelosi is the Speaker of the House in the sense that she has never thought that George W. Bush committed war crimes. She was unwilling to pursue impeachment for that. That set a standard for the United States to come, and when it comes to evaluating illegal wars or wars done under false or illegal pretext.

Sarah Kendzior: And now, unfortunately, I just think that if they had handled this a long time ago, if they had held figures like Manafort or Bolton and others in the Trump Administration accountable, if it had held Trump accountable, we would not be in this position. So the time for accountability is now. The time for accountability was always, and nobody fulfilled their obligation, but they have to start. At the very least they need to bring the truth to light.

Sarah Kendzior: I always am undecided on this issue. People ask, is it too late? And I'm like, too late for what? For justice? I mean, possibly. For survival? I mean, I don't think we make a decision. We don't just hold up our hands and say, "Yeah. It's too late, too bad. We lost." You have to keep fighting. And one thing that we really can continue to keep fighting for, even as "we" just meaning good people of humanity with a conscience, even as we lose power is the truth because the truth matters in its own right and the truth is a way to get power back, to have an informed public because an informed public is a powerful public and the house and anyone else trying to prevent World War 3 should be using every avenue possible, and one of those is forcing Bolton to testify publicly not in front of the Senate, which is already proclaimed that this is going to be a rigged procedure, but in front of the House where they actually would have to face open inquiry.

Andrea Chalupa: Bolton as the architect of Bush's invasion of Iraq, which was based on lies, he's going to have no problem lying in the Senate to defend Trump, who gave him his war finally with Iran. It's going to be 2020.

Sarah Kendzior: 2020 sucks.

Andrea Chalupa: I'm ready. I'm ready. I am so pumped up and ready you have no idea because the way I look at all of this is what's going to get us out of this is thinking in terms of decades, not these little election cycles. So all of us right now have to fight our hearts out and elect bold Progressives who are going to close all the loopholes that the Kremlin took advantage of when it weaponized our own corruption against us. And it's time to elect Progressives because guess what, having the most powerful military in the world, it's not protecting us.

Andrea Chalupa: And so what we need now is to strengthen the social safety net. We need to hold polluting social media giants like Facebook accountable for the disinformation slosh they spread, the super fun site of Facebook. Clean that up and so forth. And we need to confront this at its root, and it's the progressive candidates, it's the progressive leaders that work tirelessly, and the community leaders that work tirelessly to do that. So find your community, join your community and build a more progressive union.

Andrea Chalupa: Grassroots power is the most reliable power we have left. We keep saying that because it's true, and if anybody feels hopeless when they listen to this show, you're missing the point. We're staring disaster in the face because we should have been staring disaster in the face a long time ago, and now we are playing catch-up. And so all of us together are united in our Gaslit Nation community and helping each other through this. And I actually do, Sarah, I do feel quite good coming off of the holidays. I had a fantastic time with my family and catching up with everyone. It was a time filled with laughter, making fun of each other and it was really great.

Andrea Chalupa: And any time I had any sort of uncertainty and watching Australia for instance on fire and thinking, "Okay. Well, this has to be the Apocalypse. There's no other explanation." I took action. I'd go and I'd start researching, "Well, who are the people in New York City who are doing really effective work to confront the Climate Crisis? Who can I join with? What community can I become a part of to help be part of a solution?" And I would go out and I'd find that information and it totally turned my mood around. And then I started thinking, "God, I wish Gaslit Nation had its own newsroom and we could just tackle all these incredible issues and really drive people towards these real-world solutions of how to take power back into their own hands, into their own communities.

Andrea Chalupa: So don't think in terms of 2020, think in terms of decades. Think in terms of all the work you can do with the time you have here on Earth to really make a difference in people's lives. And even if you don't see the result of that work, you'll be passing on the baton to those who come after you. Sarah and I, we're not the first female journalists in existence. We were not the first women to raise our voices with strong opinions. We stand on generations of women that did the dangerous work allowing us to do this. And that's where I start crying because I think it's so comforting to be part of such a larger community that grows and strengthens across generations, and I think that's so important for people not to lose sight of, that none of us are alone right now. None of us are alone. I just think that's really exciting and I'm very moved by it as you can hear.

Sarah Kendzior: Your attitude is right. I think your recommendations are right. It's not mutually exclusive from looking at the severity of the crisis right in the face. I think that that is necessary. I think also knowing your own principles, knowing your own moral code. When institutions collapse around you, knowing what you value and finding people who sincerely hold those values and will work with you to try to prevent this suffering and prevent this atrocity, that is something that you can do. That's something that no one can take away from you and of course Andrea and I are getting emotional now. This was never a game to us. We took this seriously.

Sarah Kendzior: This was never a horse race thing. This was never a career thing. This was a preventing the Apocalypse kind of thing. Now, we are literally up against people who want to bring about the Apocalypse. The Apocalypse, much like climate change, is a man-made phenomenon for this crowd of individuals. That's one of the things that I think people are not really confronting now. I've mentioned this before when they do all this history will judge you or oh my god, your reputation.

Sarah Kendzior: That is not the logic with which people in the Trump Administration, particularly Pompeo, Pence, Kushner, Barr, Miller, they're not thinking in conventional ways. They are people who are pure kleptocrats who are only in it for material gain, for personal gain. Trump, I think embodies that, and then there are people who think that they are on a Holy War and they are dragging the rest of the world into their fanaticism, into their extremely violent provocations, and they're

linked, you know, with leaders around the world who share that and who also use this, who used these religious extremist movements for their own financial gain, for their own pursuit of personal power, and they share with Trump this view of human life as disposable, and I think that this gets even more hardened when they look at climate change.

Sarah Kendzior: They're not looking at it like "Oh my god. What a tragedy. All of these people are dying. Our planet is dying. Our living conditions are becoming more unstable. What do we do to stop it?" They're thinking, "good." In some cases, maybe if they are true believers, which I often doubt with this crowd, they're thinking "this is God's plan", but they're definitely thinking, "This is my plan. This is to my benefit because the depopulated Earth is easier to monopolize and control."

Sarah Kendzior: Unfortunately, this is how they see the world. Religious fanaticism can be a gloss on that and it also can be a motivation. I'm not here criticizing people who are deeply pious. I have no problem with that. The issue is when that piety crosses into political force. I mean, when it crosses into something like a neo-Crusades in which citizens of sovereign nations are forced to live under people with fanatical belief systems, and I think the exemplar of this right now is Pompeo, who is definitely one of the architects of the current aggression in Iran. And I think it's important to look at who Pompeo has been meeting with recently, in particular Netanyahu, with whom he spoke multiple times before the Pentagon took out Soleimani.

Sarah Kendzior: He's also meeting with Lavrov. Pompeo met illegally with sanctioned Russian spies right before becoming the Secretary of State. Before that, he was in the CIA. He's very dangerous and one of the reasons he's dangerous is he structures foreign policy around the Rapture. It's a very bad idea to structure policy around the Rapture. And I'm going to read a little excerpt from an article from the BBC, from March 2019, and this is what it says. It says, "US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has said it's possible that President Donald Trump was sent by God to save Israel from Iran. In an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network during a high-profile trip to Israel he said it was his faith that made him believe that."

Sarah Kendzior: He also praised US efforts to, quote, "Make sure that this democracy in the Middle East, that this Jewish State, remains," end quote. The comments came on a Jewish holiday celebrating rescue from genocide. The holiday forum commemorates the biblical rescue of the Jewish people by Queen Esther from the Persians as the interviewer noted to Mr. Pompeo. Thanks interviewer. He was asked if, quote, "President Trump right now has been sort of raised for such a time as this. Just like Queen Esther to help save the Jewish people from an Iranian menace. As a Christian I certainly believe that's possible," said Mr. Pompeo, a former member of Congress for Kansas and CIA director. "I am confident that the Lord is at work here," Pompeo added.

Sarah Kendzior: So that is the mentality behind a lot of these decisions is that Trump was put here by God and unfortunately Trump believes this. Trump also thinks he was



put here by God and Trump encourages a radical cult of personality around himself. And then you have his lackeys, you have his son-in-law Jared Kushner, a lifelong associate of Netanyahu. With the Kushner family and Netanyahu family were so close that Benjamin Netanyahu literally slept in Kushner's bedroom when he would come and visit them in New Jersey during his trips to the United States.

Sarah Kendzior: They, too, are united in many ways. They are united against Iran. They are united in that this is the crime syndicate. The Kushner's, the Trump's, the Netanyahu's have all been implicated and often indicted for various offenses and have spent their life trying to get out of them and often in the case of Kushner and Netanyahu trying to use religion or trying to use Zionism as a pretext to justify horrific actions.

Sarah Kendzior: And this extends to things like their financial arrangements, the Kushner's investment in the West Bank of Israel and in building new settlements. I mean, there's so much. There's so much that we could potentially get into here, but God, I'll let you comment on this, on this sort of nexus of Evangelicals, and Zionists, and general Rapture fiends, and fatalists like Trump, people who just are cool with the apocalypse like no particular religious affiliation needed.

Andrea Chalupa: I mean, in this case we're talking about religion being used as it always has historically been, and on this level as a means to hold onto or gain more power. Its power at the center of this. This isn't about spirituality by any means, it's about power. And Soleimani and all those who are going to be the destroyed in the fallout of Soleimani's assassination, they are human sacrifices for Trump, and Trump has basically abused his power in part by creating human sacrifices. Look at all the lives he's destroyed, including the lives of innocent children and separating families on the border. Those are human sacrifices by Trump for his own power to please his base.

Andrea Chalupa: And so again, as dire as things are, and they are what they look like, and they're probably worse than we even realized, of course, but that's fine to confront that because we got here by not confronting this. And now it's time for us to do our part. So we're going to end this episode with a plea for us to all come together and do our part in our communities where we live. Elect bold Progressives with bold plans to confront the Climate Crisis. Go to the Gaslit Nation website. Go to our action guide on [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com) and start there to build and strengthen your community.

Andrea Chalupa: And sending us off from this episode with a call to arms is Christiane Amanpour interviewing on CNN the Australian climate scientist, Tim Flannery, reminding us we need to start now and think not in this election cycle, but we have to think in decades and begin the work now so we stand a fighting chance 10 to 15 years from now.

Tim Flannery: We need to understand the science of climate change. We need to protect ourselves with good advanced warning, but the government so far hasn't been

interested in this. And it is truly tragic. I can't tell you how it feels to me to wake up every morning smelling the smoke of my country burning for month after month, and knowing that we could have done something about this had we started 10, 15 years ago.

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

Sarah Kendzior: We want to encourage our listeners to help the victims of the Australian fires by donating to the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, working on the ground to help people in need. Donate at [donate.vinnies.org.au](https://donate.vinnies.org.au). For help directed toward Australia's First Nations communities, check out the Fire Relief Fund for First Nations communities by Neal Morris. We've posted links to these groups and others on our Patreon page.

Andrea Chalupa: We also encourage you to donate to WIRES, a group that rescues native Australian wildlife and distress. Donate at [wires.org.au](https://wires.org.au). And if you want to help critically endangered orangutans, already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to The Orangutan Project at the [orangutanproject.org](https://orangutanproject.org). 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 helps keep us going.

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

Andrea Chalupa: Original music in Gaslit Nation is produced by David Whitehead, David Whitehead, Martin Disenburg, Nick Farr, Daven Arriaga and Karlyn Daigle.

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