

Gaslit Nation Transcript

10 February 2021

“TRAITORS”

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/traitors-47353168>

Rep. Rashida Tlaib:

Thank you so much to my colleague for her incredible courage. I asked her to go last because I get... Because this is so personal. This is so hard because, as many of my colleagues know—my closest colleagues know—at my very first day of orientation, I got my first death threat. It was a serious one. They took me aside. The FBI had to go to the gentleman's home. I didn't even get sworn in yet and someone wanted me dead for just existing. More came later, uglier, more violent. One celebrating in writing the New Zealand massacre and hoping that more would come. Another mentioning my dear son, Adam, mentioning him by name. Each one paralyzed me each time. So what happened on January 6th, all I could do was thank Allah that I wasn't here. I felt overwhelming relief, and I feel bad for Alexandria, so many of my colleagues that were here. But as I saw it, I thought to myself, "Thank God I'm not there." I saw the images that they didn't get to see until later.

Rep. Rashida Tlaib:

My team and I decided at that point, we'd keep the death threats away. We'd try to report them, document them, to keep them away from me, because it just paralyzed me and all I wanted to do was come here and serve the people that raised me, the people that told my mother, who only had eighth grade education, that she deserves human dignity. People that believed in me. And so it's hard. It's hard when my seven brothers and six sisters beg me to get protection, many urging me to get a gun for the first time. And I have to tell you, the trauma from just being here, existing as a Muslimah is so hard, but imagine my team, which I lovingly just adore, they are diverse. I have LGBT staff. I have a beautiful Muslimah that wears her hijab proudly in the halls. I have Black women that are so proud to be here to serve their country, and I worry every day for their lives because of this rhetoric. I never thought that they would feel unsafe here.

Rep. Rashida Tlaib:

And so I ask my colleagues to please try not to dehumanize what's happening. This is real, and many of our residents from the shootings in Charlottesville, too, the massacre at the synagogue, all of it is led by hate rhetoric like this. And so I urge my colleagues to please, please take what happened on January 6th seriously. It will lead to more death, and we can do better. We must do better. Thank you.

Sarah Kendzior:

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

Andrea Chalupa:

I'm Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker, and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr Jones*. And the opening clip you heard was Representative Rashida Tlaib, reminding us what's at stake.

Sarah Kendzior:

And this is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the United States and rising autocracy around the world. So welcome to yet another Gaslit Nation Impeachment Week. Yes, we are covering an impeachment trial again, because two impeachments are what you get when a president begins his term as an enemy of America and ends it the same way. This week, the Senate will weigh evidence about whether Trump incited a violent coup on the Capitol—he did, it's all on video, he announced the coup in advance—and decide whether he should be convicted. The Senate is likely to acquit due to the fact that several GOP senators were complicit in the plot, including Ted Cruz, Josh Hawley, and Lindsay Graham, while other GOP senators are simply cowards and careerists. The lack of accountability poses an extraordinarily dangerous situation, as Trump and his crime cult remain an active danger to the United States whether they are in office or not.

Sarah Kendzior:

We will be covering impeachment throughout the week, with at least one bonus episode for our Patreon subscribers. So if you're not already signed up, join us at the Truth Teller level on Patreon to get those extra episodes there.

Sarah Kendzior:

Joe Biden has been President now for two and a half weeks, and while of course it's a refreshing change to not wake up every morning and see if Trump threatened to nuke another country or sell off another part of the United States, there is no reason to let down our guard. First, not only have major instigators and participants of the coup not been arrested, we haven't even received regular briefings about the investigations process, with the press circus focusing instead on clowns like Marjorie Taylor Greene instead of her powerful backers. We also still have to contend with an administration whose explicit goal was to destroy the United States from within, a goal that they nearly achieved. There are a number of threats left over from the Trump era that briefly dominated headlines and then disappeared, like a veritable artillery of Chekhov's guns.

Sarah Kendzior:

We're going to cover many of those threats today, but first, Andrea, what are your thoughts on the impeachment trial?

Andrea Chalupa:

Well, it's going to be another trial where the accomplices are going to acquit their Frankenstein monster. But understand that as demoralizing as that is going to be, we are getting closer as a country, if you think in terms of decades, in terms of the progress we're making, to stamp out the treat of white nationalist terrorism in America. The Republican party really wants to have a tyranny by the minority party, the ruling party, and that's why they have to steal these elections as part of a strategy for their own political survival at the expense of our democracy and basic social welfare programs.

Andrea Chalupa:

I'm reading right now an excellent book of an author we're going to have on the show, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, the author of Strongmen. In it, she talks about the rise of all these dictators over the last century, and what she keeps coming back to, again and again, are all the characters throughout history who could have stopped Mussolini from coming to power, who could have stopped Hitler from coming to power, but alas, they feared the left. So the story of the rise of dictatorships, the story of the rise of fascism is, at heart, a story of the fear of the left, the left being the workers, the left being a pushback against

exploitation by giant corporations, by banks, by the religious institutions, namely of course, predominantly Christianity. Not any spiritual, personal sense of Christianity, but an abusive power structure, greedy corruption, perversion of "Christianity". Again and again and again it's been horrific authoritarianism, with the exception of Communism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, but primarily, the story of dictatorship and fascism has been a pushback against the left.

Andrea Chalupa:

So if there's one thing that the Republican party fears more than their Frankenstein monster, Donald Trump, it's the left. And so what they're going to do, when you see them acquitting Trump and when you see Lindsay Graham using mafia tactics of threatening to bring in Cory Booker, randomly, and other Democratic senators as witnesses to try to Benghazi them and create some stupid scandals to try to harass them, essentially, it's mafia authoritarian tactics there; what they're really doing is trying to prevent workers' rights, they're trying to weaken the human rights urgency to try to combat the income inequality gap that is growing because of all the tax cuts for the rich and taxes being shouldered now by the disappearing middle class and the poor, and all the jobs that Republicans have allowed to go overseas so big corporations can exploit slave labor and child [labor] elsewhere. So it's a dark day, when once again we have an authoritarian body, which is the Republican party, choosing the side of dictatorship, which is Donald Trump, because they fear the left, they fear the workers, they fear equity.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, absolutely. First, I want to touch on what you say when you were saying that this is a mafia operation, because that's extremely literal in this trial. Trump's lawyers, who he selected after apparently rejecting fellow mafioso-linked actors and pedophile-linked actors, Alan Dershowitz and Rudy Giuliani, settled on Bruce Castor and David Schoen. So, who are they? David Schoen once represented Roger Stone and is quoted in a recent interview as saying, and I quote, "I've represented all sorts of reputed mobster figures: the alleged head of the Russian mafia in this country, Israeli mafia, and two Italian bosses, as well as the guy the government claimed was the biggest mafioso in the world." Schoen was also the last person to meet with Jeffrey Epstein before he allegedly died in prison. And, of course, that's yet another one of these cases that was dropped, remains buried, remains unexamined. Schoen has claimed that Epstein was murdered, and isn't claiming by whom. I've gone into this many times. I obviously do not think it was a suicide. I have a lot of theories on that, but wow! What an interesting choice of lawyer, Donald Trump!

Sarah Kendzior:

The other lawyer that he chose, Bruce Castor, declined to prosecute Bill Cosby on molestation charges in 2005. So again, we have this continuum of mafia ties, sexual assault defendants, pedophile defendants. I mean, it's a very disturbing and long-running pattern. As to the comments about their fear of the left, I think that's absolutely right, and that is why they have gone to such incredible lengths to minimize the experiences of Rashida Tlaib, who we heard in the beginning of the episode, but especially of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who came out and spoke about the Capitol coup as something that created its own trauma as well as reinvigorating prior traumas for her. And that certainly isn't unique for her. Many people who were trapped in the Capitol during the siege, or even just witnessing at home, had these feelings.

Sarah Kendzior:

And the reason they go after her so hard is not necessarily because of the left, exactly, but the way that she talks about her politics. Like, once somebody asked her, "Are you leading from the left? Where do you find yourself on the political spectrum?" And I can't remember the exact quote, but she basically said, "I lead from the bottom up. I focus on the people on the bottom. I focus on people who've been beaten down and abandoned and left behind by our corrupted society, by our broken institutions, and I try to even the score. I try to bring them up." And that is a very meaningful, powerful message. That's a populist message in the best sense of the word, not in the Trump demagoguery sense. And I think because she has managed to bridge that gap—there were plenty of people who were skeptical when she first appeared who have grown to admire her—she's also someone who young people like more than any political figure I've seen since Obama. She's somebody who children embrace. That is such a rare quality. You saw that with John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy. We saw it with Barack Obama. We're seeing it with her.

Sarah Kendzior:

She is deeply threatening as a political personality, and also as somebody who has actual policy positions that benefit ordinary people in the United States. She's backed there by Bernie Sanders, by Elizabeth Warren, by a number of people in Congress, and her very existence highlights what is possible and who is stopping it, whether it's being stopped by an overtly authoritarian GOP, or whether it's being stopped by corrupt corporate actors from within the Democratic party who know that the pursuit of accountability is going to lead to a deeper examination of their own flaws, their own complicity, their own incompetence and so on. So yes, I think you're right about that. Go on with whatever you're saying, or ...

Andrea Chalupa:

[laughs] I shall. There was an ABC/Ipsos poll saying how 56% of American say the Senate should convict Trump. So, the majority of Americans are in favor of Trump being held accountable. As this trial gets underway this week, we have a summary of some new reporting coming out, which we'll go into in depth more on this show. So we have more insurrectionists that are coming out in their trials saying that President Trump made them do it and they were only following orders, using the Nuremberg defense. The day before Trump's violent attempted coup on January 6th, white nationalist leader, Steve Bannon, who of course ran Trump's campaign and served him in the White House, said on his podcast that "all hell was about to break loose in Washington DC", referring to what was about to take place as a "revolution", as "historic".

Andrea Chalupa:

Trump wanted to make Michael Flynn, a traitor who sat next to Putin during a gala celebrating Kremlin propaganda and created a foreign policy crisis by reassuring the Kremlin, after President Obama, still in the White House, passed sanctions against Russia for attacking our democracy in 2016. Flynn, who pushed Pizzagate, which led to ongoing threats and harassment against a popular pizza place in the heart of our nation's capital; Pizzagate was the test run, essentially, of QAnon. Flynn has pledged allegiance now to QAnon. Flynn, who called on martial law to overturn our election and install Trump as a dictator. Flynn, who's own brother at the Pentagon slowed down the urgent response needed to protect our very democracy when it was under attack by Trump's violent insurrection. Alright?

Andrea Chalupa:

So Trump wanted to make Michael Flynn the head of the FBI, or his Chief of Staff in the final weeks in office, as Trump and his goon squad feverishly worked to overturn our election. Video surfaced of Roger Stone participating with the Proud Boys, the white terrorist threat—labeled accurately as a terrorist organization by the Canadian government—in Washington DC in mid December 2020. The Proud Boys are credited with helping organize the insurrectionist attack on Washington on January 6th.

Andrea Chalupa:

The traitor gang is all here. These guys are a sideshow for the Republican party. They are the stormtroopers for today's Republican party. From Oliver Darcy at CNN, he writes: "There's no real fight inside the GOP. If you ever want to understand where the Republican party is or where it's going, just pay attention to what is happening in right-wing media. Watch a few hours of Fox. Listen to a few hours of talk radio. And browse a few sites like Breitbart and the Gateway Pundit. That will give you a crystal clear indication of the GOP's current state. And if you do that today, you'll quickly observe that there's no real fight for the soul of the Republican party taking place, despite the huge amount of news coverage suggesting so. The party was remade in Trump's image over the last four years, and it remains in his image. All the prominent right-wing media figures are solidly in the MAGA camp." Again, that's Oliver Darcy writing for CNN.

Andrea Chalupa:

17 Republican senators are needed to convict Trump and bar him from ever running for office again, which would be like banning Trump from Twitter. It would allow us all to sleep better at night. They have their chance to protect our democracy from an aspiring autocrat. They will not take it, as we keep telling you. They remind me very much of these German politicians, as we mentioned, that thought they could control Hitler. They wanted to take advantage of the rise of Hitler, and meanwhile, they're just going to allow everything to be burned down for power, money, greed. That's all this is. It's very simple.

Andrea Chalupa:

The good news is the 2022 electoral map looks good again for the Democrats to hold onto the Senate, and maybe even expand the majority. Republicans have to defend 20 seats in 2022, Democrats have to defend only 14. Democrats do not need to defend any seats in states Trump won. Republicans have to defend two Senate seats in states Biden won. These are Wisconsin, which has Putin puppet Ron Johnson on the ballot. One of the most productive things you could do right now as a listener and as a person who cares about American democracy, is set up a monthly automated donation to the Wisconsin Democratic party to help them lay the groundwork early to defeat Johnson, who is a weapon of Putin's propaganda inside the Senate.

Andrea Chalupa:

Pennsylvania is the other state Biden won which has a Senate race. John Fetterman, the popular Lieutenant Governor in Pennsylvania is running. In Ohio, senator Rob Portman, a Republican, is not seeking reelection. Democrats already have a senator in Ohio. They could pick up another Senate seat. And in Alabama, Richard Shelby isn't going to run for reelection, so Doug Jones could and should run again in Alabama. Richard Burr of North Carolina will not seek reelection, which presents yet another possible pickup for Democrats. They came close in North Carolina in 2020 with Cal Cunningham, who was plagued by an easily avoidable cheating scandal. There has been reporting that Laura Trump is eyeing that Senate race for herself.

Andrea Chalupa:

So keep in mind, as dark as things are, we've got to keep this organizing energy going. We've got to keep our donations going. We have to check out the Gaslit Nation Action Guide at gaslitnationpod.com and adopt initiatives there and make sure you're part of a community, a group, where you live. Make sure you're working to clean up your local politics where you live, because we're up against actual authoritarianism in America.

[begin advertisement]

Sarah Kendzior:

This episode of Gaslit Nation is sponsored by Best Fiends, a puzzle game you can play on your phone. Best Fiends challenges your brain with fun puzzles, but it's a casual game, so it doesn't stress you out, which is just what we need right now. With Best Fiends, you can collect cute characters, solve puzzles, and play alongside your friends and family. There are also new in-game challenges and events every month, so the game always feels fresh. My family members love it, and they've already passed level 260. This is a great way for families and friends to relax while practicing social distancing. Everyone can play Best Fiends, but it's made for adults. Engage your brain with fun puzzles and collect tons of cute characters. Trust me, with over 100 million downloads, this five-star rated mobile puzzle game is a must-play. Download Best Fiends, free on the Apple App Store or Google Play. That's 'friends' without the R, Best Fiends.

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Sarah Kendzior:

If there's a lesson to learn from 2020, it's to never preemptively surrender and never decide in advance that some outcome is unattainable or that some battle is impossible. You saw that with Stacey Abrams, where she looked at the landscape of Georgia—where she was robbed of her win—and then went on to turn the state blue with a team of grassroots organizers. That's the spirit in the Democratic party that needs to be embraced, that kind of combination of strategy and perseverance and vision. And it's hard to judge exactly how Biden is doing, because he's been there for two and a half weeks. He's obviously issued a large number of executive orders, reversed many of Trump's executive orders; that's necessary, that's progress in the right direction. He's dealing with hollowed out institutions, purged agencies, massive national security crises, a pandemic, a Great Depression economy; it's hard to judge how he's doing. But I will 100% judge how Congress is doing, and Congress sucks. They're doing horribly. They're doing the same mistakes over and over again, and we're seeing this with the impeachment trial.

Sarah Kendzior:

You may recall that Andrea and I spent all of 2019 basically begging our representatives to hold Trump and his crime cult accountable through a rigorous, thorough impeachment on multiple articles that gave the full context of his criminality; Trump's long ties to the Kremlin, his history with transnational organized crime, and especially the connections through people like Michael Flynn—who Andrea just laid out his horrific career—Paul Manafort, Roger Stone, it is the same people over and over again. And you can add Bill Barr to that as he joined later in the year. They thought Mueller was going to take care of that. He, of course, did not. We devoted many episodes to his failures. But then what happened in Congress with that impeachment is they didn't even bother to use the Mueller Report, or use any of the

things that Mueller deigned to agree were illegal, illicit, anti-American and so forth. They wouldn't impeach him, for example, for obstruction of justice.

Sarah Kendzior:

And so here we are. We have had a siege. We have five people dead. We had a police officer beaten to death. We have the offices of our representatives destroyed with shit literally smeared on the walls. Nancy Pelosi's laptop, stolen, death threats to representatives, bombs placed in strategic locations, an enormous amount of evidence online, because the low level participants in this operation felt so confident that Trump, the pardoned king, was going to absolve them of all of their crimes, therefore making them not crimes, that they announced everything that they were doing in a way that was extremely easy for everyone to see, in a way that was so easy for Andrea and us to see that we literally announced an incitement special for January 6th on January 5th because we knew that this was coming. We knew a terror attack from within on our own country, abetted by the President and his crime cult, was coming. Like, everybody did.

Sarah Kendzior:

So this is yet another situation where, one, it's not that hard to prove the case, two, the case, nonetheless, needs to be proven to the fullest extent to Americans because they deserve to know not just what happened, but why it happened, who is complicit, why it wasn't stopped in advance, what institutions failed. They need that kind of information so that they can understand how their own government is representing them, where their taxpayer money is going, who exactly is in charge here.

Sarah Kendzior:

And so one obvious avenue to conveying that information to the public and pursuing accountability would be to have witnesses at the impeachment. And we're taping this Tuesday morning; to our knowledge, they're not calling just the most basic of witnesses. They're not asking, for example, other Capitol police to testify, even though one of their own was murdered. They're not asking people like the Secretary of State of Georgia, who was threatened on tape by Trump, to testify about the election fraud narrative that Trump and his crime cult tried to create as a pretext for violence on the Capitol. There are so many people who need to be called. They could call to the stand Rudy Giuliani, Roger Stone, Michael Flynn, and Steve Bannon, all of these other instigators. They're avoiding that as well. This is Pelosi and Schumer. They want to wrap this up quickly, they say, for the "good of America". This is not good for America. This is a repeat of your worst ideas, and there are representatives in Congress who fully know this.

Sarah Kendzior:

The impeachment managers are of such a higher quality of political official than their leadership, people like Jamie Raskin and Ted Lieu. They've been banging this drum of accountability for a long time. They've come up with concrete plans of how to obtain accountability, and transparency, and serving the American public, and getting rid of organized crime in government. They've proposed things like using inherent contempt, the power of the purse, when Trump was in office, constantly rejected and put down by Pelosi. And then, of course, Schumer is just as bad in the Senate.

Sarah Kendzior:

So yes, we know that the Senate is very unlikely to convict Trump and his cronies, even though they've committed one of the most serious criminal offenses against the United States in our country's history.

You can listen to our episode, Clear Intent, which is two hours long, where we describe how purposeful and destructive this was, and also the roots of it; that Trump, you can never forget, is a Kremlin asset. Trump is a career criminal. Trump is connected to transnational organized crime, and the reason he was installed into the White House was to gut our institutions and fill them with criminal lackeys that weaken our national security and give it an almost fatal blow. Our escape from being a full fledged mafia state—an authoritarian mafia state—was so incredibly narrow, I don't have the words. I don't think most of us have fully accepted that it didn't happen, because all of these guys are still out there and they're all getting let off the hook. And so we're going to get into some of that with Paul Manafort and others.

Sarah Kendzior:

But one opportunity to not let them off the hook is to have the most thorough and rigorous and transparent impeachment hearings that you can. Let the public know the full extent of criminality. We have a Democratic President, a Democratic Senate, a Democratic House. If they are doing this out of fear, which I think was a major factor when Trump was in power, that he was going to abuse his executive position and do things like perhaps even launch a nuclear weapon. That was something Pelosi was clearly worried he was going to do in his final weeks in office. She came out and said so. She went and met with the military, even though that violated all sorts of protocol. There were serious worries about what Trump was going to do with the full powers of the Presidency.

Sarah Kendzior:

He doesn't have those powers any more. It is time for accountability, no matter how long it takes. It is always worth it. This is our country, and we cannot get other things done when we have a transnational crime syndicate in the background, one that, by the way, targets the current President. You may recall the prior impeachment revolved around false accusations towards Joe Biden and persecution of his son, Hunter Biden. And I personally don't give a shit about Hunter Biden. I don't think he's some sort of exemplar of wonderful behavior, but nonetheless, these were just the most brazen, illegal, threatening actions. The witnesses at that prior impeachment trial all spoke about the threats—violent threats—to themselves and their family; Marie Yovanovitch, Alexander Vindman, Fiona Hill. This is mafia state culture, and we cannot thrive as a nation—we cannot battle the pandemic or climate change or fix our public schools or reinvigorate our broken economy—if we cannot get rid of these guys in the background who have been trying to destroy our country steadily for 40 years. That's how far back it goes when you're looking at people like Paul Manafort, Roger Stone, and yes, Donald Trump.

Andrea Chalupa:

So we had several Benghazi hearings. Remember Benghazi?

Sarah Kendzior:

Oh God.

Andrea Chalupa:

That whole dead horse that the Republicans enjoyed beating into a bloody pulp. The Atlanta Journal Constitution did an analysis that says, "Congress spent more time investigating Benghazi than it did 9/11." They brought in Hillary Clinton to testify for 11 hours. *11 hours*. What was the result of all those Benghazi hearings for all those years? Well, the Republican party took control of the White House and both chambers of Congress in the next election. Obviously, that was an election that was attacked by

the mass murdering xenophobic regime, the Kremlin, and there was all these shenanigans, from hacking of our election systems to a sweeping social media pollution campaign and mind hacking and all of it. But the thing is, close elections are easier to steal, so that election was just tipped over by our adversaries in the Kremlin with the help of the Trump crime family, of course, and their willing participation.

Andrea Chalupa:

But what matters is that the Republican party helped by coming after Hilary with all of these Benghazi hearings and creating this must-watch TV of the infamous 11-hour testimony that Hilary gave. This was obscene fascist pageantry. This was a Yanukovich going over his political rival, Tymoshenko, with Lock Her Up in Ukraine. This is what the Republicans were doing to Hilary. And it worked.

Andrea Chalupa:

So what we're telling the Democrats is don't be afraid to use your power—this conversation we keep having [laughs]—and please, you have such a solid case here, so please produce must-watch TV hearings investigating a violent attempted coup against our democracy. Bring in, as Sarah said, as we keep telling you, bring in all the many people, from Capitol police, the National Guardsmen, bring in all the people who could have been killed that day, who came close. Unfold for Americans how devastating this terrorist attack was. Unpack it, humanize it, give us heroes to share our national tragedy with. Help us mourn, help us heal, help us get to the bottom of this. And by carrying this out over the next two years, you understand you control the room, you control the narrative, you control the discourse. You're keeping it front and center that Donald Trump is an autocrat. If you try to sweep this trial under the rug, what you're ultimately doing is allowing Trump to reset the narrative, and come back stronger and more devastating, and make any mention of the 9/11 that happened to us on January 6th seem like old news.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yes, exactly. To that point, and the one that I raised before, they need to go over the specific individuals who have recurred again and again in all of our nation's greatest crises, held under Republican administrations for the most part, or those actors are not going to go away. And furthermore, they set a precedent for the new generation, people like Ivanka Trump, Jared Kushner, Stephen Miller and Josh Hawley and so forth, to retrace those steps.

Sarah Kendzior:

As you know, I have a book called Hiding in Plain Sight that traces Trump's path of criminality alongside the deterioration of the United States. My 10-year-old son refers to this book as “mommy's book about criminal boomers”, and that is because so many of the people in the early chapters just reappear in crisis after crisis. You have Roger Stone starting out in Watergate, you see Bill Barr in Iran-Contra, you see Robert Mueller blowing the 9/11 investigation, explicitly mentioned as somebody who was keeping evidence from light. He did it again with Jeffrey Epstein. Jeffrey Epstein is, again, connected to Trump and to all of his crime cult. You see Wall Street people that then became part of the Trump administration being involved in the 2008 financial crisis, and even benefiting from it; people like Steve Mnuchin, Wilbur Ross, and on and on and on it goes.

Sarah Kendzior:

Then, of course, our latest crisis is the pandemic. Guess who made it horrible? This exact crowd of people who profiteer off pain and are never held accountable, so they do it again and again. And what

we're seeing now is yet another recurring figure in the court system of Cy Vance. We discussed him before. We did an interview last week with Eliza Orlins, who is running for the Manhattan DA position that Vance currently holds. Cy Vance is known for letting Jeffrey Epstein off the hook, letting Harvey Weinstein off the hook, letting Dominique Strauss-Kahn off the hook, and, of course, letting Ivanka and Jared off the hook. And if he had actually pursued charges for them related to financial fraud and Trump Soho, Donald Trump may not have been the President. We may have managed to avoid this whole situation. But no.

Andrea Chalupa:

Cy Vance, you are going to be remembered by future historians. Congratulations to you.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. And it is just like another nasty ass, nepotistic ... God, I sound like Spiro Agnew. [laughs] Anyway, he's the son of Cy Vance, who featured in multiple administrations. We have all these entrenched families who are either actively criminal in their own right, like the Trump family, or they seem committed to cover-ups. Bill Barr is a bit of a hybrid of both. Cy Vance seems to be their cover-up guy, and the latest person who he is abetting is Paul Manafort.

Sarah Kendzior:

Manafort had among the most severe charges, including conspiracy against the United States, and severe punishment, for a while, of any of Trump's criminal lackeys, and for very good reason. Paul Manafort is a crime machine. He is drenched in blood money. Had he actually faced the full penalty for the crimes for which he was charged just recently—and let me be clear that this omits 99% of his criminal history in terms of what he actually ended up being charged with—he still was set to face about 305 years. Then the judge in that case, T.S. Ellis, was threatened. The jury in that case was threatened. He made a plea deal with Mueller that we knew was bullshit. We knew this wasn't going anywhere. We couldn't figure out why Mueller kept falling for it until we learned a bit more about Mueller, and that Mueller too acts as basically a cleanup guy for this operation, along with his long time pal, Bill Barr, going all the way back to the days of George H.W. Bush, and then we were a little less surprised and waited for the world to catch on.

Sarah Kendzior:

And so then what happened was all the people who initially said that Mueller is going to fix this, he's going to save this, and then he didn't, and then said that the courts were going to sentence Paul Manafort to life, and then they didn't. And then said, "No, Trump wouldn't be so bold to pardon Paul Manafort, that's just a confession of guilt, he won't do that," Trump then of course did that a couple of weeks before the Capitol coup. Then they said, "Don't worry, it's going to Cy Vance," to which we said a long stream of profanity that I'm not going to repeat here, because this is what happened.

Sarah Kendzior:

In the news yesterday from NBC, it says, "New York prosecutors lost their chance to further argue an appeal and pursue charges against former Trump campaign manager, Paul Manafort, after he was pardoned in a related federal case during Trump's last weeks in office. State judges ruled in October that the charges pursued by Manhattan District Attorney, Cy Vance, violated state laws regarding double jeopardy. Vance's office appealed, but the New York State Court of Appeals last week declined to review the lower court ruling. The order provided by Manafort's attorney to NBC News on Monday and signed

last Thursday by Chief Judge Janet DiFiore comes weeks after then President Trump pardoned his longtime ally. A spokesperson for Vance's office declined to comment. Manafort was charged in New York in connection with a multimillion dollar mortgage fraud scheme in 2019 according to court documents. The 69-year-old longtime GOP operative is accused of falsifying business records to illegally obtain millions of dollars as part of the year-long mortgage fraud scam."

Sarah Kendzior:

So, once again, you see Cy Vance blowing a case. It's too many cases for me to think this is unintentional, and I fear we're about to see a repeat with this again. I explicitly warned about this in Hiding in Plain Sight, that you cannot farm out the leftovers of the Mueller probe to Cy Vance and judges and prosecutors and District Attorneys like him, because this is what they will do.

Sarah Kendzior:

Andrea, I'm guessing you have thoughts about Paul Manafort being out in the world, running free?

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah, he's a danger. He's a personal danger to me and my family, clearly, because he's been attacking us. He's vindictive. There's a very strong connection in 2017 and 2018 between the people that the far-right media machine in America—the Republican party, Fox News, the Kremlin—who they relentlessly attacked. Those two people namely were my sister, the independent contractor for the Democratic party that flagged for both Republicans and Democrats alike that Putin's operative, Paul Manafort, was running Trump's campaign, which was a sign that the Kremlin was involved in Trump's election, or stood to benefit somehow. And she was right. She was absolutely vindicated.

Andrea Chalupa:

And another person was Serhiy Leshchenko, who was the independent investigative journalist in Ukraine that came out with the Black Ledger that was so damning. It showed off-the-book payments of several millions of dollars to Paul Manafort from Putin's puppet, Viktor Yanukovich, in Ukraine. That Black Ledger was so damning that it managed to get Manafort pushed off of Trump's campaign, visibly, even though Manafort remained in the background, clearly, and also helped with the transition.

Andrea Chalupa:

So the two people that the far-right propaganda machine went after—Kremlin and Republican party—were those two individuals; my sister and this Ukrainian investigative reporter. Relentlessly. And there was even a lock-step performance about it, especially in targeting my sister during Trump's impeachment trial, where Devin Nunes was mentioning her name constantly. And you see Paul Manafort's blood money stained fingerprints all over this.

Andrea Chalupa:

So the guy is a Goebbels. He's brilliant at leveraging the dark arts of propaganda as a weapon, and propaganda kills. And he's just mobbed up with the Kremlin right now, and has made a career off that for a very long time. And this is a time where, to have Paul Manafort walking around free when the Kremlin is openly at war with us, when the Kremlin unleashed a devastating Pearl Harbor cyber attack on our leading industries and chambers of government, why would you have Putin's operative out and about right now? This guy is a clear and present danger. He is a traitor. If you could not get him on this

financial fraud, then where are the laws about being a traitor? Last I heard, that's against the law, to be a traitor against your country. This man is a traitor, operating out in the open.

Andrea Chalupa:

And Cy Vance. As I said earlier, future historians of authoritarianism that are going to study this moment in American's history, not all names are going to make it into the shorthand of what happened to America in the early 21st century. Not all the names are going to be there in the history books for the kids. But Cy Vance stands a very good chance of getting his own special place in history as one of the people in a position of power who could have stopped this and did not because of his own greed and corruption. And here Cy Vance is again, where he pounced on the Manafort case instantly, where he brought those state charges instantly in March 2019, and right away I got a pit in my stomach knowing that Cy Vance was going to screw this up, and he did.

Andrea Chalupa:

There was a really good analysis, which we'll link to in the show notes, talking about how Cy Vance essentially created a case against Paul Manafort at the state level in New York which was going to immediately play into the hands of the double jeopardy problems. And as he did this—and he was so quick to do this—the very good patriots in New York state passed a law saying that in New York state, authorities could still pursue charges if a President abused their Presidential pardon. And that law was passed in 2019, several months after Cy Vance seized on his moment to go after Paul Manafort, using a doomed case of double jeopardy. So why the hell didn't Cy Vance, if he cared at all about this country, why didn't he wait to figure out how to pursue a very tricky case against Paul Manafort and not step into the double jeopardy trap? Why didn't Cy Vance wait?

Andrea Chalupa:

If he had waited, New York state, a couple months later, would have closed the loophole. Okay? They would have closed the loophole, allowing Cy Vance to go after Paul Manafort, and the double jeopardy issue would no longer be there. I mean, that's what that reads like to me. The fact that Cy Vance pushed this through before New York had a chance to fix its loophole, its law, that's extremely suspicious, and it's very much in the larger track record of doomed justice that Cy Vance has inflicted on our country.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah. And one thing to remember here is that it's not just Manafort who Cy Vance has been tasked with prosecuting, but Steve Bannon's case is also going to Cy Vance. Steve Bannon, of course, was indicted for illegal fundraising to build a border wall, and then, like Manafort, was pardoned by Trump. And now Vance is supposed to be dealing with that aftermath. So I think it's very likely that nothing will be done.

Sarah Kendzior:

And again, it is the same names over and over. If you listen to the very first Gaslit Nation episode where we describe how Trump got into power, all of the people who are involved in the Capitol coup are the same people who are involved in the 2016 election; Manafort, Stone, Giuliani, Bannon. And just to get a bit into what Bannon did—because he's another person who should be, one, indicted, but two, potentially called to testify about some of his statements—he was a key coordinator of this operation. On January 5th, the day before the coup, Bannon said on his podcast, "All hell is going to break loose tomorrow. Just understand this; all hell is going to break loose tomorrow. It's going to be moving, it's going to be quick." He then added, "So many people said, man, if I was in revolution, I would be in

Washington. Well, this is your time in history. It's all converging, and we're now on the point of attack tomorrow. And all I can say is, strap in. You've made this happen and tomorrow is game day."

Sarah Kendzior:

I mean, I don't know how much more explicit you need to be. And keep in mind, this is one of Trump's key White House advisors, his campaign manager, someone who possesses classified intelligence, security secrets, connections to the most powerful actions around the world, and is working to overthrow our country. I mean, that's what's happening here. That's what Andrea was saying. At what point did treason not count? At what point did treason not become the highest priority for a government to pursue?

Sarah Kendzior:

Time and time again, you can look through philosophers and politicians of history and they will say countries can withstand attacks from abroad, countries can withstand trauma from within, they cannot withstand treason. They cannot withstand this kind of sustained assault by horrific actors who have every intention of stripping this country down, dividing it into parts, and profiting off of its ruins. That's why all these guys got on board to begin with. And if they do not pursue accountability, whether in the court of Cy Vance, whether through the impeachment hearings, I don't know what's going to happen here.

Sarah Kendzior:

And one more thing about Bannon that I'm finding deeply unnerving is we know about his intent, we know that he organized this, we know it was purposeful, because he said it on social media platforms. Bannon, like Flynn, and of course like Donald Trump, has since been de-platformed, and this process has been proceeding apace basically since the immediate aftermath of the Capitol coup. A lot of the QAnon accounts were banned from places like Twitter and sometimes from Facebook. Then they moved to Parler, where they proceeded to blurt out even more violent plans and became subjects of FBI inquiry. On the whole, I think this is largely positive development. We obviously are in a disinformation war. We want disinformation to stop spreading and we have seen the real human consequences of that disinformation warfare, whether it's through getting criminals like Donald Trump into office, or spurring violent attacks and hate crimes. This is part of a broader culture of hate crimes against Black Americans, Muslim Americans, Jewish Americans, on and on it goes. So there's a broader, very disturbing, very horrifying political culture at work here.

Sarah Kendzior:

But the one, I guess, upside, you could say, to people like Trump or Bannon or Roger Stone or others being online and being prolific is that they cannot resist flaunting their plans and telling you what they're going to do. There have been many times where people have cited Gaslit Nation and been like, "Wow, Sarah, how did you and Andrea see this coming again and again?" And I'm like, "They told us! They literally told us." Like, they told us about January 6th, they told us about a number of crimes that they went on to then commit and receive no punishment for, they announced their most horrific policies during their campaign. It was part of the platform. None of this was difficult to detect. People seem to have a problem with discernment. They seem to have a problem with believing that they could really pull this off, that they meant what they were saying. They began parsing things about, this was literal or figurative. I mean, it was nonsensical. If you have any kind of mafia state or other authoritarian state, you knew exactly what they were doing.

Sarah Kendzior:

They also would announce their propaganda tactics. Bannon is infamous for talking about the firehose of shit, or whatever he called it, about putting out so much propaganda, so much bad information, that people give up on even the pursuit of truth and accountability. And so that is what he did. Those guys are gone now from our view, so I don't completely know what they're doing. Paul Manafort, for example, relatively quiet on Twitter. It wasn't until yesterday that I saw what was going on with his case. And Cyrus Vance.

Sarah Kendzior:

And so we may be reverting to the time period of basically Obama's second term where they were plotting all of this; they were getting ready for Brexit, they were getting ready for the US 2016 election—this is a transnational operation—and there were certainly signs of it. We were steadily warning throughout 2015 and 2016. We were certainly aware of the cyber tactics that were being tested on Twitter throughout 2014. Numerous people were warning about that in real time, especially Black women and Black female analysts of internet culture, like Sydette Harry and others; they all warned that something strange was going on. People ignored them, and as a result, we got Donald Trump as the President. And I worry we're going back into that time where we're not able to see what they're doing, and therefore we don't completely know what's coming.

Sarah Kendzior:

There have been some other dates bandied about for coup part two: I think they're talking about March 4th. I wouldn't mind this. I wouldn't mind them being booted off of these platforms, because I think that on the whole it's extremely harmful that they're there, if I felt that the intelligence community, the FBI, law enforcement, Congress, and everyone else who is supposed to enforce this accountability, was actually doing it, was actually prepared, instead of feigning shock. And never forget that; they feign shock to dodge accountability, not just for these bad actors, but for themselves and their incompetence and their inability to catch them or prevent these atrocities in time.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yes. And so all of these guys just need to pack up and move to Putin's Russia where they will be a lot more comfortable, because they can carry out their corruption and flourish off of blood money out in the open and they don't have to walk a thin line in trying to gaslight Americans. Because what's going on in Russia today, the protests after Navalny's arrest continued for a second straight weekend. There were sweeping arrests and police brutality, and still no sanctions by the Biden administration, which is, of course, frustrating, but obviously they have a lot to clean up and de-fumigate in the White House. Navalny has provided a specific list of who should be sanctioned and why. If you want to help protect Navalny, empower the thousands braving the cold and sadistic police brutality to demand human rights and freedom from Putin, sanction the oligarchs on Navalny's list. Sanction Putin personally.

Andrea Chalupa:

The US and the European Union have the authority to do this. I think it's concerning that, given all the suffering and the destruction the Kremlin has caused right here in the US, there have been no sanctions yet from the Biden administration. I'm concerned about how watered down the Biden approach may be. I know they're juggling a lot, but accountability will help them achieve their goals of cleaning up and protecting our democracy here at home.

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, I agree. And before we close out, I just want to bring up one big issue, which I fear may explain why the Biden administration is not pursuing sanctions yet on these oligarchs, and I fear this will extend into the future, which is, of course, that we are still under attack by Russia, which staged the largest cyber attack on the US in its history in 2020. It basically started a year ago, in March 2020, around the time that COVID-19 appeared, and it's still going on.

Sarah Kendzior:

And so if you're wondering what kind of things that kind of cyber attack could achieve, we have one horrifying answer yesterday in Florida. And we don't know who did this attack, yet, but I'm just going to tell you a little bit about it. From the Associated Press, they say, "A hacker gained entry to the system controlling the water treatment plant of a Florida city of 15,000, and tried to taint the water supply with a caustic chemical, exposing a danger that cyber security experts say has grown as systems become more computerized and accessible via the internet. The hacker who breached the system at the City of Oldsmar water treatment plant on Friday using a remote access program shared by plant workers briefly increased the amount of sodium hydroxide by a factor of 100, according to the Sheriff of that town."

Sarah Kendzior:

That is fatal. That is poisoning a town. That is what this individual or group—we don't know who did it—attempted to do. Fortunately, a supervisor caught it in time and managed to reverse it before it reached the water supply, but they don't know who did this attack. They don't know if it was foreign or domestic, but it's exactly the kind of thing that we've been worrying about from Russia.

Sarah Kendzior:

We did an interview with cyber security expert, Andy Greenberg, about his book Sandworm, where he described the kind of attacks that Ukraine faced when they were standing up against Kremlin aggression, which included taking down the power grid, causing mass blackouts. And that was something that we've long wondered if it was the leverage in 2016 to standing up against what was clearly a Kremlin hybrid mafia operation to bring Donald Trump and his criminal network to executive power. We wondered again and again, why did the FBI dismiss the warnings of people like Harry Reid? Why wasn't the Obama administration more aggressive? What happened to our intelligence services? And we knew that there had been many prior attacks throughout the second half of Obama's term; attacks on the State Department, the White House, the RNC, the DNC, and on and on it goes.

Sarah Kendzior:

The latest cyber attacks in 2020 were even more expansive and reached to nuke plants, to the DoD, to our broader infrastructure, to private companies. It's really horrifying stuff. And so my fear is that this problem, one, may cause more attacks like this on infrastructure in the future. There also could be attacks from other actors besides Russia. You may recall a bomb blew up Nashville's infrastructure on Christmas Day; the fact that people seem to have forgotten this happened and aren't really looking too closely into it is a sign of the times. But it also may be something that inhibits the Biden administration from taking action against Russia, and the thing I fear most is that it will inhibit them from protecting the American people, and that's what needs to be done.

Sarah Kendzior:

And we're at threat from multiple vectors. We're at threat from this cyber attack and its attack on infrastructure, which obviously can have grave consequences from everyday life, but the broader national security threat of a Kremlin asset having been in power, of the Russian mafia having made incredible inroads into our government and our private institutions, that is a threat that we've been living with for a long time, a threat that built over decades, culminated with Trump's term, and remains with us today.

Sarah Kendzior:

So people are going to have to choose. Officials are going to have to choose how transparent they're going to be with the public, how they're going to protect us, and how they're going to fend off this kind of threat. And I know that there are some things they can't tell us, necessarily, but I think this is a time of transparency. If you really want unity, if you really want trust, you need to get straight with the American people about what we're dealing with, because we see it with our own eyes. We saw what happened when a death cult came to power and had to contend with a pandemic. We're at nearly half a million dead. So, we can handle the truth. The question is whether you can handle delivering it.

Andrea Chalupa:

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

Sarah Kendzior:

We want to encourage you to donate at your local food bank, which is experiencing a spike in demand due to the coronavirus crisis.

Andrea Chalupa:

We also encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Syria. Donate at rescue.org. And if you want to help critically endangered orangutans, already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to the Orangutan Project at theorangutanproject.org. Gaslit Nation is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review on iTunes. It helps us reach more listeners. And check out our Patreon, it keeps us going. And you can also subscribe to us on YouTube.

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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.

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Original music in Gaslit Nation is produced by David Whitehead, Martin Bissenberg, Nick Far, Damian Areaga, and Karlyn Daigle.

Sarah Kendzior:

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Andrea Chalupa:

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