

Gaslit Nation  
The Tulsi Gabbard Episode

Andrea Chalupa  
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*Theme Music*

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

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

Sarah Kendzior: And this is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the Trump Administration and rising autocracy around the world. We're beginning our show today with very sad news. Elijah Cummings, the chairman of the House Oversight Committee, died suddenly last week at age 68. This is a tremendous loss for our country. Cummings is probably the most universally liked and trusted Democrat in Congress. Everybody respected him, including new and very progressive representatives, Pelosi and other old school Democrats, and the other Democrats who are deeply engaged in the Trump corruption investigations. In a fractious era, Cummings, who is known for his moral integrity and commitment to accountability, was a linchpin holding Democrats in Congress together, and now he's gone. Members of Congress seemed shocked by his death, including his close friends. Cummings had worked until the end, signing subpoenas hours before he died. His cause of death was listed as complications from a long illness, but the illness remains unnamed. Though he had had heart surgery in 2017, in September 2019, Cummings told The Baltimore Sun that he was in good health. Cummings is involved in the Trump-Russia investigation from the very start. He was the person who sent the letter to Mike Pence in 2016 documenting Michael Flynn's illicit activity, a letter which proves Pence knew of Flynn's crimes and did nothing about them. This is important now as people consider whether Pence can be impeached along with Trump. Cummings also oversaw the Michael Cohen hearing in February 2019, which is probably the most effective public hearing regarding Trump and his mafia ties, though we didn't know it at the time. Investigations were radically curbed or shut down after that point. When you watch that hearing, you can see the respect that Cummings commanded among his peers and his uncompromising stance against corruption. What he did cannot be replicated and he will be impossible to replace. Cummings spent the last two months of his life being attacked by the Trump administration while facing threats to his personal security. Immediately following Mueller's weak-willed testimony on July 24th, a testimony that nonetheless demonstrated Trump had committed numerous impeachable offenses, Cummings gave an impassioned plea for Americans to be vigilant and to fight for their democracy.

*[Audio Clip]: Elijah Cummings: "It's not about not liking the president; it's about loving democracy. It's about loving our country. It's about making a difference for generations yet unborn. That's what this is all about. And I'm begging, I'm begging the American people to pay attention to what is going on. Because if you want to have a democracy intact for your children and your children's children, and generations yet unborn, we have got to guard this moment. This is our watch."*

Sarah Kendzior: That clip of Cummings went viral. Three days later on July 27th, at around 6:00 a.m., Trump went on a Twitter tirade insulting Cummings. Here's a sampling of what

he said: "Representative Elijah Cummings has been a brutal bully, shouting and screaming at the great men and women of Border Patrol about conditions at the southern border, when actually his Baltimore district is far worse and more dangerous. His district is considered the worst in the USA. As proven last week during a congressional tour, the border is clean, efficient, and well-run, just very crowded. Cummings's district is a disgusting, rat and rodent-infested mess"—note that language of infestation, which we hear over and over again from Trump—"If he had spent more time in Baltimore, maybe he could help clean up this very dangerous and filthy place." Cummings responded by saying, "Mr. President, I go home to my district daily. Each morning I wake up and I go and fight for my neighbors. It's my constitutional duty to conduct oversight of the executive branch, but it's my moral duty to fight for my constituents." And in follow-up tweets, Cummings went on to detail the ways he's done just that. What no one knew at the time was that just hours before Trump's tweets, someone had tried to break into Cummings' home. On August 2nd, Cummings spoke publicly about the break-in, saying, and I quote, "An individual attempted to gain entry into my residence at approximately 3:40 a.m. on Saturday, July 27th. I was notified of the intrusion by my security system and I scared the intruder away by yelling before the person gained entry into the residential portion of the house." This prompted an investigation by congressional security officials as to, according to all places Fox News, and I quote, "whether the break in was a random crime or if there is a threat nexus tied to Cummings due to Trump's comments." And then Trump, hours after the news of that robbery was made public, tweeted sarcastically, "Really bad news. The Baltimore house of Elijah Cummings was robbed. Too bad." Officials never found the person who broke into his house or concluded whether Trump or anyone tied to or inspired by Trump was involved. We don't know now if this investigation is still ongoing. One surprising thing about Elijah Cummings is that even though he was one of the most determined investigators of Trump corruption, he was slow to call for impeachment compared to his colleagues. He finally did so on September 24th. As chairman of the House Oversight Committee. He then became one of three committee heads running the investigation. Cummings tweeted, "When the history books are written about this tumultuous era, I want them to show that I was among those in the House of Representatives who stood up to lawlessness and tyranny," and now, a few weeks later, he's dead. So Andrea, thoughts on Elijah Cummings, his legacy, his death, what the House is left to do now?

Andrea Chalupa: Well, I think Elijah Cummings stood for what is needed in this moment in history, and that is moral progress. Moral progress. You could advance in technology and science, but without the moral progress, you're empty as a society. Case in point, Nazi scientists that did experiments on live people, for instance. How many PhDs did those Nazi scientists have? But they were lacking in any morals, and so what we need in this moment to cleanse our system of Jeffrey Epstein, who threw his money around, including to M.I.T., what we need in this moment to cleanse our system from blood-soaked Russian oligarchs that throw their money around, including to institutions like Harvard and Cambridge and Oxford and so forth, and the Center for Foreign Relations, is moral progress. At the heart of everything that's needed in this moment right now is for the moral progress to catch up to where we are with advancements of science and technology, because without it, we're doomed. Elijah Cummings stood for that, and he showed up for his community, so for all of us feeling his great loss in this moment, the number one thing that you need to do to honor him, especially in this critical year that we are facing, which is 2020, where you have the Trump family that must stay in power to avoid facing justice—that is what was established by the Mueller Report, that Donald Trump is a criminal, and that he would otherwise be facing a court hearing if it weren't for the fact that he is president, based on some just a few decades old DOJ memos and so forth. Right? We'll

always keep reminding you of that, just you understand this is how high the stakes are in 2020.

So if you want to honor—and we all must now honor—the legacy, the hard work, the sacrifice of Elijah Cummings, how far he went as an example of the best of America, the best of what our nation is capable of, the best way to honor him now is to show up. Show up. Show up. And we now have to fight like hell, because if we don't, it's going to get harder to fight. If we don't fight our hearts out now, in the little time that we have left, the cage doors are closing on us, and pretty soon we're going to have to fight like the protesters in Hong Kong, where they show up to protest with a letter saying goodbye to their parents in their backpacks, because they might not come back, because he might be killed. That's what that's what the protesters are doing now in Hong Kong. So to avoid our country getting to that point, which it very well could—and remember, we are the crazy ladies that have been telling you what to expect, and people haven't listened to us for so long, and so now we're telling you, we're running out of time. We're running out of time, and so you need to show up. Show up for Elijah Cummings. Show up for your children's future. Show up for the freedom of our country. It's still only 2019, but we don't have that much time left, so you need to get together with your community. If you don't have one, join a community. On our website, GaslitNationPod.com, we have an action guide which tells you how to show up, where to show up, and to join a community. Build a community. Community is the vaccine against rising authoritarianism. Because even if Trump wins a second term and he just takes over the court system and he locks it down—and remember, we're always saying in authoritarian regimes, the court systems are the prison bars. So what's going to protect you locally? Your community, your community, your community. So join and strengthen your community and show up for each other, be there for each other, refuse to abandon each other no matter how dark things got.

Sarah Kendzior: Absolutely, and I think along with what you said about Cummings moral integrity, which was consistent—it's not this kind of vacillating component of his character like it is for so many others in Congress or so many other American officials—was just this courage, a steadfast refusal to buckle, no matter how obnoxious and cruel Trump and his lackeys were, and no matter how severe the threats to him were. We don't know the cause of this break-in. I just can't imagine how difficult and frightening it would be in this climate that we have, where political opponents of the Trump administration are routinely threatened, where judges in cases like the Manafort case had to have armed security. Just last week, we were discussing that viral meme video showing Trump assassinating the media activists, political opponents. You know, this is a climate of fear that they are trying to create, and of course, there are rational reasons to be afraid, but bravery is continuing to act for what's right in the face of that fear. It's not the lack of fear, it's persevering in that kind of horrific climate, and that is what he did until the end, and I agree that that is what we need to do as well.

Andrea Chalupa: And so let's look to the woman who is going to be filling his shoes now on the—giant shoes, because the man was a giant. So now the head of the oversight committee will be Carolyn Maloney, a Representative from New York State. So I have known her work for a long time, because she represents one of the largest, if not the largest community of Ukrainian-Americans, and Carolyn Maloney has been consistently strong on Ukraine's independence, and she's won awards. She won a big award from the Ukrainian community, and she's been very solid as a voice for Ukraine's freedom and fight for democracy, including standing up to Kremlin aggression.

Carolyn Maloney is also the backer of the First Responders Bill that John Stewart shamed Mitch McConnell into finally supporting, which would make funding for looking after our first responders who were there on 9/11, taking care of them, their families, so they don't have to go begging Congress all the time for funding, that's now permanent funding for them, and Carolyn Maloney was a big advocate behind that that made it possible. She's someone who is absolutely ferocious. The great Wayne Barrett, who you especially, Sarah, have cited a lot, who was one of the top investigative journalists that told us and warned us for several years who Donald Trump was. The great Wayne Barrett called Carolyn Maloney a tiger in the House on every dollar due New York. She gets high scores, mostly 100 out of 100 from unions, women's reproductive health groups, environmental groups, gun action groups. And she has a big fat F from the terrorist organization the NRA. She also was very outspoken in a really Handmaid's Tale-style committee hearing in 2012 under Darrell Issa, which was a discussion on women's reproductive health. There's a discussion on women's reproductive health that featured all-male religious leaders testifying to Congress, and Carolyn Maloney demanded that women's reproductive health expert Sandra Fluke be allowed to testify, and she walked out of that hearing. I think she's a very solid choice to now be the head of the Oversight Committee, and I think she's going to be a tiger going after Trump.

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Sarah Kendzior: I am frustrated once again with the pace of the impeachment inquiry, which, to my knowledge, hasn't fully started. They still don't have staff. They're still dealing with incredible obstruction from the Trump administration and its goons, who have been avoiding subpoenas like they're fucking Bartleby the Scrivener, and it's all like, "You know, I would prefer not to," instead of, I don't know, enacting inherent contempt and charging them with fines and putting them in prison, which the House has the power to do. They've basically been like, "Oh, yeah, that's too bad then." There has been some progress. There've been some powerful testimonies from witnesses, which is appreciated, and of course it's good that Congress, generally speaking, is on board with impeachment, especially since we're at the point where over half the country is on board with impeachment, so they have not just a constitutional oath to fulfill, but a public mandate. This is actually a popular process. But they need to be more assertive, and they need to be more consistent. And so hopefully she'll bring that forward. It's an incredibly frustrating time. Speaking of frustrating, shall we commence our discussion of the inevitable? Or do you have anything else to say about Cummings or impeachment?

Andrea Chalupa: I think in order to honor his legacy, we have to fight for democracy, and fight for it in spirit here at home, and especially against kleptocracy, which seeks to strangle democracy, because they want to spread that mafia state corruption. And in the 21st century, it's easier to do than ever before. So as we always say on the show, kleptocracy anywhere is kleptocracy everywhere, and that's something that presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard needs to understand, and so we're going to confront now her candidacy, which we've been avoiding doing. Right, Sarah? Because we just think she's obnoxious.

Sarah Kendzior: Yeah. We have tried. I just need to say this. Andrea and I have tried for so long to avoid the subject of Tulsi Gabbard, and the reason for this is that she is a longtime supporter of dictators, among them Assad, Sisi, Modi. She's backed a number of horrible policies, like blocking Muslim refugees to the U.S., tolerating Russian war crimes in Syria, voting against the Magnitsky Act, vouching for the Bill Barr fake version of the Mueller Report, and I think Andrea's going to tell you even more. We just did not think that

this fringe candidate who's been polling at under 1% deserved any oxygen, especially when famous Tulsi Gabbard fans like white supremacist Steve Bannon and Tucker Carlson already had that covered. Unfortunately, the topic of Tulsi became unavoidable this week when Hillary Clinton said the following, which we're going to just play a clip of, because it's been misquoted so much.

*[Audio Clip]: Hillary Clinton: They're also going to do third-party again. And I'm not making any predictions, but I think they've got their eye on somebody who's currently in the Democratic primary, and are grooming her to be the third-party candidate. She's a favorite of the Russians. They have a bunch of sites and bots and other ways of supporting her so far. And that's assuming Jill Stein will give it up, which she might not, because she's also a Russian asset.*

*Speaker: Oh yeah.*

*Hillary Clinton: Yeah, she's a Russian asset. I mean, totally. [End Audio Clip]*

Sarah Kendzior: Her comments created an absolute shit show in the Democratic primary, and now we are forced to discuss it, because Clinton is correct in her claims that the Kremlin will try to encourage third-party candidates. She's correct that they cultivated Stein in 2016 and before in 2015, as she's correct that they are interested in Tulsi Gabbard. And the reason they're interested in her is because she is interested in dictators. She is tolerant, at the very least, of the Kremlin and she's friendly with Trump associates. So it's really not complicated. However, there are some other issues that are complicated, and I think, Andrea, you had some thoughts on those.

Andrea Chalupa: She's frustrating. She's a big package of frustration in terms of, you know, she represents what the world absolutely does not need now, and we need to come together and finally confront it. Tulsi Gabbard reminds me a bit of Charles Lindbergh, the great aviator hero. He also served his country, and he was a Nazi sympathizer. He pushed for non-interventionism in regards to Hitler's aggression, his growing aggression. And there's a great novel by Philip Roth called *The Plot Against America* that envisions what the world would have been like, what our country would have looked like, if Charles Lindbergh had become President. He, too, had that banner of service to his country, and people like to use that shield in defending Tulsi Gabbard. Well, you know, any veteran out there, you went out and you sacrificed so that Sarah and I could speak our minds about what we think is best for our national security, and thank you for doing that. So thank you to Tulsi Gabbard for her service to our country, and I mean that sincerely to every veteran out there, without question. But I resent any veteran that hides behind their service as though they're above reproach, because all of us as citizens of this country are allowed and protected and having the conversations we need to have in order to protect our national security, in order to protect our allies, in order to build a better future for our children. That is our absolute right as citizens of this country, and we have to fight to protect those rights, and veterans literally have fought to protect those rights, so we thank you.

But what you have to understand is that Tulsi Gabbard, her position, especially on Assad, is alarmingly, alarmingly naive, or a more nefarious reading could be willingly, willingly deceptive. I don't know, but it's just a weird coincidence, as Sarah listed, that she defends a lot of autocrats. And it's not only reminiscent of Charles Lindbergh and his sort of image and his sympathies, but also Trump had a pattern that emerged in the election of defending autocrats, so we have to learn from Trump here and take those red flags

seriously and confront them, and that is what Hillary Clinton is doing. Hillary Clinton has been so objectified for decades that she simply does not care. She knows that she's a controversial figure. She knows that anything she says will be twisted and used against her, and it's all done by this shallow cable news bubble that demeans Hillary to the point of meaninglessness. Like, you've never seen anybody so objectified. So no matter how you feel about Hillary Clinton herself as a person, keep in mind that you've learned about her over decades through a corporate-driven media, through an actual Republican, longtime, well-funded effort to attack her. So there's always been that noise there that has muddied up the truth on who Hillary Clinton is, and it's impossible to escape. And Hillary Clinton's well aware of it. She told us about it as it was going on. She said, "Yeah, I'm the subject of a vast, right-wing conspiracy." She was correct.

She also told us exactly who Trump was when Trump was running for office, and people just dismissed her, and people went after her, and people muddied the waters on her. You had Ed Snowden, stuck in Russia, even calling her out and saying that there's no difference between her and Trump. Turned out there's a massive world of difference between her and Trump, and anybody, anybody who'd been paying attention and didn't have any sort of agenda, anybody that refused to be conformist in 2016 knew that. So Hillary Clinton is first and foremost here putting her country's interests first by pointing out the obvious and saying what needs to be said. This is such a testament to who Hillary Clinton is, that she's willing to do it early before it's too late, before things get very heated and this is some October Surprise comments from her. She's telling us now and up front, and she knows that there's going to be backlash for it, but she says it anyway, because it is correct. She's absolutely right.

Sarah Kendzior: It's interesting to me the way for the last, I don't know, couple years, but especially in recent months, so many people have been replaying these old clips of Hillary Clinton in 2016, laying out what Trump was about, laying out his connections to the Russian Mafia, laying out exactly how he would govern, including details about what he would do in Syria, what his relationship would be with Turkey. She releases this 20-tweet series of questions to him that are the questions that the media should have been asking and didn't, and still didn't, and still treats everything as a revelation. I'm sorry, but when you're professing shock continually, that's a coverup for your own negligence. If you didn't see this coming, it's because you weren't looking or because you were trying to cover it up, and now it is so overt that you can't deny it anymore, so you're trapped so you have to feign shock to try to preserve your reputation. But, you know, the Internet remembers. So too bad for you.

So in this case, we have Hillary being praised one day for her foresight, which honestly amounted to just doing her homework and conveying things that were fairly well-documented, but it's interesting more so that others weren't. And then she makes a fairly reasonable statement about Tulsi Gabbard, and it's just, we're back in conspiracy land territory, where everybody is saying that she went off the rails, "she's a conspiracy theorist". I do think she could have worded it more carefully, because she should have kept in mind that quite obviously the punditry has not absorbed the lessons of 2016. They have not learned the difference between an asset and an agent. Clinton was not saying that Tulsi Gabbard is like literally on the Kremlin payroll. She actually didn't use her name. She said—and this is true—that the Kremlin is interested in her, and that there is documented evidence of this interest, coverage in Russian media, bot farms coming out to support her, and so on. And Tulsi Gabbard, I think, was absolutely entitled to say she cannot control who supports her. I mean, that's true of absolutely anyone, but what you can control is your reaction to that, and whether you disavow that support. In the past,

Tulsi Gabbard has disavowed people's support. She disavowed David Duke, for example, when he endorsed her. She said, you know, "I don't want anything to do with you." Like that's the attitude that you should take, and she's shown she's capable of taking, but she did not take it in this particular case. She did not condemn the Kremlin. She did not go into, for example, what she would do to try to counter this Kremlin influence operation and Kremlin Mafia and kleptocratic operation should she hold office. Instead, she went on a tirade against Clinton. You're right that this backlash was inevitable. I am personally curious about the timing. I keep wondering if because we live in Trump time where every day lasts a century, whether by January people will have forgotten this entirely. And I do think that Clinton's goal was heading off a third-party candidacy. Obviously, she didn't want Tulsi Gabbard to be the new Jill Stein. But unfortunately, what it's created is Tulsi naturally fundraising off of it, using it to bolster her candidacy by reaching out to people who hate Clinton, which are, it's a very large number of people, and then other candidates just flailing around, trying to answer these questions about Tulsi Gabbard. In particular, Andrew Yang and Pete Buttigieg had pretty terrible responses. Beto O'Rourke kind of waffled and then ultimately brought it back to the big problem, which is Russian interference, and the fact that our President is a Kremlin asset with deep entrenched ties to Russian oligarchs, mafiosos, and to the Kremlin. That is what this comes down to. There's a broader issue at play, and that's the security of the 2020 election itself. It doesn't matter who is running or how great they are or what they stand for if we do not have a free and fair election. And at the present time, there is no guarantee that we're going to have that. The impeachment inquiry itself, as limited in scope as it is, is about that. It is about foreign interference in the upcoming election, which, of course, piggybacks off of the foreign interference that got Trump into office back in 2016. So it's very frustrating to me to just watch this play out. I feel like no one seems to have learned anything. We are reliving the same Clinton derangement syndrome again. We're reliving Jill Stein-type candidacy again. And the big issue, the fact that our country is under attack from both state actors, including the Kremlin and non-state actors, including this transnational crime syndicate and its various appendages, that's kind of getting buried in all this petty primary bullshit.

Andrea Chalupa: Yeah, and just Mayor Pete and Beto totally botching their response to this whole Tulsi Gabbard-useful-Kremlin-idiot thing just shows their first instinct was to be conformist. Right? You had this huge wave of Republican opportunists seizing on Clinton's comments and backing up Tulsi, and the bots firing off this big pro-Tulsi movement, and Mayor Pete and Beto just flubbed it completely. And so that really shows you that they're conformists, because they just buckled to the pressure, and they also seize on the opportunity to get attention for themselves here. We don't need leaders like that in this moment. We need moral courage. We need people that will stop and rightly point out that actually, the former Secretary of State is correct in her assessment. The Kremlin did this in 2016 to help bring Donald Trump to power. And yes, of course they would do it again in 2020, because the Kremlin playbook remains the same. They haven't been held to account for their attack on our democracy in 2016. Donald Trump made sure of that, and Donald Trump has been giving Putin what he wants on his wish list, including Syria. So we have to keep pointing out that the Trump Crime Family must again steal the Presidential Election in order to escape justice. The Republican Party must hold on to power in 2020 in order to escape accountability, and so must Putin, because if you have a Democrat winning the White House in 2020, what do you think the first thing they're gonna do is? Sanction Russia, but *actually* sanction Russia. Pass sanctions that really hold Putin's inner core of oligarchs accountable. And then one of the things you're gonna do is finally pass that big sweeping corruption investigation into Putin and his mafia state, which the Obama Administration passed as part of their punishment of Russia for attacking our democracy in 2016, which Trump completely refused to do. He just basically copied and pasted some

Forbes article on the richest Russians, and that was it. If a Democrat wins the White House in 2020, Putin and his regime and his court of oligarchs are in trouble, and they know that. So that is why they will be pulling out all the stops, just like they did in 2016, to make sure that their Russian asset stays in the White House. So Secretary Clinton is absolutely correct in her assessment of the Kremlin strategy in the upcoming 2020 election, and the stupid, conformist remarks by Mayor Pete and Beto just reveal that they were playing with popularity politics. They're playing with a calculating campaign, consultant-driven B.S. soundbites rather than the heart of our nation's security, which is confronting the many gray areas of Kremlin aggression and how it works.

Sarah Kendzior: It's very disappointing. I think when you call them followers and not leaders, that is exactly what's happening. And you know, what you're seeing is the same dynamic from 2016 in which they're following the leads of talking heads who lack brainpower. They're following the leads of weak-willed men who are so afraid of seeming alarmist that they let the fires rage right in front of their eyes, and don't do anything to try to put that out or even clarify why the fire is happening. It's amazing to me that we are three years into this, where there is just a wealth of atrocity carried out on a daily basis, that they do recognize. Both Beto and Buttigieg talk about, for example, gun violence, or they talk about the abuse of migrants at the border. This is connected to the fact that Trump is backed up by a mafia syndicate and the Kremlin. This is all of a piece. This is kleptocracy. This is authoritarianism. This is lawlessness. This is an administration that abuses its own citizens, that is anti-American in its very essence, that operates above the law because they have this backing. They have the backing of billionaires, of white supremacists, billionaires of autocratic states, of long-standing mafia syndicates, which we've gone into on this show so many times. It's not theoretical. We had a two-year investigation into it by Mueller, which was really the tip of the iceberg, because he kept narrowing his own scope. We've discussed the weaknesses of this, but [he] nonetheless came up with multiple counts of crimes and offenses, and they confess their crimes all the time. As we're talking about this, people are discussing Giuliani and his goon squad and the fact that they have all been engaged in a criminal dynamic aimed at basically overthrowing representative government in the United States for decades. So this is a severe crisis, and for them to just kind of blow this off and treat it as if it's ancillary to what the core concerns of 2020 should be because they are afraid of sounding too out there, it's pathetic. And I am glad that Beto, he walked this back in to take a look at the bigger picture, but Buttigieg, Mark Zuckerberg's buddy, did not. Andrew Yang did not, and people need to do this. And it really doesn't have to do, per se, with Tulsi Gabbard. I agree with everyone who's like, she's not the biggest problem right now, but she is a symptom of the biggest problem. The fact that Russia is interested in her and was doing the same propaganda and social media manipulation tactics as we've already seen be successful in 2016 is a problem. The Kremlin keeps operating by the same playbook because that playbook works. It's successful. It has gotten illicit actors into office. It has covered up crimes, and they are going to keep going and going and going with the complicity of American actors. Not everything is about blackmail and kompromat. You've got people voluntarily boarding this bandwagon off a cliff, pulling American democracy behind it. And so yeah, you should call that out in advance. And I hope Tulsi Gabbard changes her behavior. I hope she stops backing dictators. I hope she rejects the Kremlin. I hope she stands up for her country. People have the ability to redeem themselves. People have human agency. She can go and fight for her country again in a different way. I don't know what she will do that, but she has that choice.

Andrea Chalupa: Again, Republicans love Tulsi Gabbard, because her rise threatens to divide the Democratic vote, just like Jill Stein did in 2016. Stein won more votes combined



in the key states that brought Trump to power than his narrow victory in those states, so keep that in mind, that these third-party candidates do make a difference. We're not there yet as a country to have viable third parties. We need to first get far away from the threat of actual authoritarianism. We first need to defeat Trumpism in all its many forms. And so I want to also point out that this Tulsi Gabbard debacle of just her nonsense and Republicans seizing on it and so forth, it's reminded me why people like Gaslit Nation. Every time I turn on cable news, I listen to what they're saying on cable news, I'm like, oh, this is why people listen to our podcast. I'm not kidding. So let's just play a clip. Listen to Ayman Mohyeldin, who's normally good on MSNBC. Listen to the question he asks, how it's such a leading question. The answer is in the question itself, which is so weird. I don't know who the hell wrote this question for him, or why he thought it was acceptable to ask a question this way, but listen to the question he asks, and listen to the vacuous answer from Paul Rieckhoff, someone I haven't paid attention to in some time, but someone I always considered a strong voice for veterans. Maybe I'm sure he is, but his answer here is either naive, or I don't know. This is just a very frustrating exchange coming from the cable news bubble.

*[Audio Clip]: Ayman Mohyeldin: First, let me get your reaction to this feud that has taken place between. Former Secretary of State, Presidential nominee and front-runner Hillary Clinton and Tulsi Gabbard. I'm going to start by asking the same question I asked Congressman—former Congressman—Beto O'Rourke. Did Hillary Clinton misspeak? Is what she is doing now a disservice to the Democratic Party?*

*Paul Rieckhoff: Oh, I think there's no doubt. I mean, Democrats always eat their own. It seems like every week there's a new example. I'm a political independent. I watch from the outside like so many Americans, and this looks like more friendly fire from within the party. And I think the bottom line here is Tulsi Gabbard is actively serving in the Hawaii National Guard right now. She's on the Armed Services Committee. She's the first female veteran ever to run for president. If Hillary Clinton has more information, she needs to share it, not just on a podcast with David Plouffe, but with authorities and the federal government. Otherwise, it's something else and something more political. Now look, there may be elements that do—in Russia—do support Tulsi Gabbard. We've seen that in the media, but that doesn't mean she's an asset. I mean, it's a very dangerous allegation, and Hillary's got to provide receipts. [End Audio Clip]*

Andrea Chalupa: Now, let's unpack this a bit by playing an interview on the same network with Tulsi Gabbard talking about Assad.

*[Audio Clip]: Speaker: Do you think Assad is our enemy?*

*Tulsi Gabbard: Assad is not the enemy of the United States, because Syria does not pose a direct threat to the United States.*

*Speaker: What do you say to Democratic voters who watched you over there, and what do you say to military members who have been deployed repeatedly in Syria pushing back against Assad?*

*Tulsi Gabbard: People who have been deployed to Syria have been there focused on their mission, which has been to defeat ISIS. [End Audio Clip]*

Andrea Chalupa: So basically, Tulsi Gabbard saying that Assad does not pose a threat to United States. Think of Syria now and it has been for some time now. Syria is a Russian

proxy state. If Russia never got involved in the Syrian civil war, it's arguable that Assad would have been overthrown a long time ago and the Syrian revolution would have been victorious, and you'd have a different power structure in place. But right now, as it stands, Syria is a proxy state of the Kremlin. Because of that, Russia has a military base right on the Mediterranean. What can it do with its military base right in the Mediterranean? Well, basically, Russian ships can harass Western ships, use ships and so forth, just like they do around Crimea, where they openly attacked Ukrainian ships and took several Ukrainian pilots hostage, holding them in prison unjustly, illegally in Russia. There's the spreading of military might to create and worsen existing conflicts and create new conflicts and so forth. So that is why Syria matters, and as we mentioned in the last show, because of this horrible crisis of ISIS and Russian aggression in Syria, you need the U.S. on the ground in Syria in order to have stronger and direct intelligence on ISIS to protect not only our country, but our allies, including the EU. And also, it's the U.S. military that has been protecting the Kurds in Syria. So we're going to play Richard Engel on his impassioned explanation on why the Kurds matter.

{Audio Clip} Richard Engel: I've been following the Kurds journey, if you will, their search for a homeland for the last five years here in northern Syria. It really started in this little town called Kobani. That is where the Kurds first decided they were going to fight against ISIS. They weren't going to fall like all the other towns and villages. They were going to stand and fight. And the Americans saw them standing and fighting. And they formed this bond, a bond that lasted for the next five years. A close friendship. And while the Americans were protecting them, the Kurds carved out their own little enclave, their own little state. It was peaceful. It was generally egalitarian. It was feminist. It was a unique thing, men and women fighting together, co-ruling together. And they had hopes that this was going to last. Their hopes only got greater when the fight against ISIS ended. I was there in Baghuz. That's the last little pocket that ISIS was holding, and it took months for the Kurds, backed up by the Americans, to finally drive out ISIS from this final pocket and lock up the ISIS family members and ISIS detainees who were left in this village. And the Kurds held a celebration. The Americans came to the celebration, and they thought, "This is it. We've earned our place in the sun. We've earned our homeland." And then, out of a surprise, a total shock. They had inklings of this in the past. They knew that President Trump never really was bought into this idea. He'd threatened to pull out U.S. troops in the past, but he'd never actually done it. And then they saw that President Trump made a deal with Erdogan to allow the Turkish military to invade this homeland that they had created, and they pounded it for about 10 days. And then to end the offensive, that was the greatest betrayal, they say, of all time. When President Trump sat down with Turkey and decided to end this fighting, fighting which the Kurds say President Trump allowed to happen, that to end it, that the Turks would gain control of this part of northern Syria, creating a so-called safe zone. And now the Kurds say their future, they have no future. This little thing that they created—they call it Rojava—this little state has been gobbled up by Turkey, which will control and patrol the area. And American troops are leaving, the American troops who were protecting them. So they had a journey. For five years, they created something. That entity was attacked, and while they needed defense, American troops pulled out. And now they're left with less than they ever had before.

Andrea Chalupa: This Russian proxy state of Syria, at least during the Obama years, according to a report by a trusted human rights group on the ground in Syria, Russia killed more civilians in Syria than ISIS. You had a NATO commander testifying to Congress that Putin was deliberately, deliberately bombing civilians in Syria to create more refugees to flood and further divide the EU, to help bring to power the far-right Steve Bannon clown car politicians that are financially backed by the Kremlin and backed also by their bot networks

and so forth. So for somebody to say, especially a candidate for President of the United States, to say that Assad does not pose a direct threat to the U.S., that is the audacity of stupidity. There's absolutely no excuse to say that. It's like you're either willfully blind, or something. It's just absolutely naive and alarmingly simplistic. So in that cable news segment we played of both Tulsi Gabbard saying Assad does not pose a threat to us and also Paul Rieckhoff and his answer, that is just an example of American processed food, but in the form of information. It's like misinformation. I cannot believe that American audiences in the mainstream are being exposed to that. It's so sickening. It's like looking at bright yellow cheese in the grocery aisle that was chemically made. That's the information equivalent of what they're saying. And again, it reminds me, why our show—because, you know, Sarah, when Sarah and I talk to each other we're like, "Wow, people really like our podcast. There's some people out there that really like it." And I'm like, this explains why, because they're starved for nutrients from the cable news bubble. [laughter]

There's a famine. There's a famine of information out there on television.

Sarah Kendzior: No, I mean, that clip, it's a depressing clip because what you're watching is a man who—I don't mean the host, I mean the guest—who doesn't seem to have a grasp on the basic situation. When he said that Hillary Clinton should bring her concerns about Tulsi Gabbard, the potential Russian asset to the Trump administration, I mean, that was my favorite part of this. It's like, who is Hillary going to bring those concerns to? To Trump, or to Bill Barr, both of whom have threatened to jail her, have even implied she should be executed? Is she going to bring them to the FBI? You know, the FBI that's been gutted of all of its Russian mafia specialists? The FBI that basically—not rigged, per se—the FBI that influenced the election in the favor of her opponent, of Trump, the Russian asset back in 2016? Who exactly is enforcing accountability here? Like, what does this guy even think has been happening in our government since Trump took office? Like, it was so spectacularly naive. It was such a vision of a functional system that simply does not exist, and such negligence in addressing the fact that we do have subterfuge from within, that we do have an actual problem with treason. For the first time in American history, we have to ask questions like to what government is our president most loyal? Like, this is an unprecedented situation and you have to view everything through that lens, and especially questions of whether somebody is a witting or unwitting asset for Russia. Of course, you need to look at that in the broader context. And I've said this before: it's just like watching the country suffer bouts of collective amnesia over and over again, so they just lack all context to every claim.

You know, one of the things that disturbs me is that you even see this in the impeachment process. It's like they're trying to cultivate this quality. They're trying to say, you know, let's isolate this Ukraine 2020 issue from the Russia 2016 issue. It's like, well, good luck with that, man, because it's like all the same people getting involved there, and that's not really going to work out.

And I want to be clear: I'm not criticizing ordinary Americans for forgetting things, because it is a lot. I was thinking the other day about that week in September, where I think in one week's time, Trump asked the Taliban to meet with him at Camp David on 9/11, threatened to nuke a hurricane, and wanted to buy Greenland. That was like 48 hours. I had completely forgotten that those things had happened. And so when you live every day like that, you're not going to keep track of everything, like Andrea and I literally do for a living. We forget stuff, too, but we try our best to remember everything, to put it in historical context, to make the connections between what seemed like discrete actors, but are often people intertwined in one operation, to learn the histories and cultures and backgrounds of

every country that we cover, and when we lack information on that, we know we refer to people who know more. We don't know everything. We try to have some humility in that respect. And it's just weird. It's weird to me because I think some of it is Americans always take freedom of speech for granted, and they take a free media for granted, and they assume that we have all the time in the world to figure things out, that there won't be suppression of the body politic, that there won't be suppression of journalists, even though journalists are threatened probably more now than at any point in our history. And so they could take an opportunity to educate the public, and then they turned it into this nonsensical little bullshit spiel. I don't want to pile on this guy, because this guy is not like the worst guy. There's plenty more. I mean, you could get a whole network full of them, but it's a problem. Again, we have a symptom of a broader disease.

Andrea Chalupa: The cable news bubble is alarmingly simplistic. For instance, let's go through this with the Assad regime, and just really look at it up close to understand why Tulsi Gabbard must, must come out. And it's on her. It's on her. The onus is on her, not on Hillary Clinton, not on anybody else. Tulsi Gabbard has to account for her position on Assad and the mass-murdering Kremlin. And here is why. We're gonna break it down. The Assad regime is a brutal, mass-murdering dictatorship. It was like that before the Syrian uprising. This is why there was a Syrian uprising in the first place, and during the civil war, the brutality of the Assad regime continues, and it's been escalating, including in recent years, likely because Trump has created this vacuum of power in the world and given a green light to all these autocrats to behave badly and above the law, above any global accountability. So Assad's human rights crimes include—and this is from a May 2019 article in the New York Times—"Sweeping arrests for nonviolent dissent, the detention of women and children, the imprisonment of relatives of wanted people, the ordering of military attacks without apparent regard for the danger to civilians, and the harassment of the Kurdish minority." It also includes a sprawling network of torture prisons where at least 14,000 people have died and nearly 128,000 remain imprisoned or unaccounted for. So, like Putin in Russia, Assad in Syria operates above the law. The New York Times notes that children are killed or arrested for speaking out against Assad. Children. So one man—I'm quoting The New York Times article—"One man under surveillance for speaking a foreign journalist was shot in the stomach during a security raid and arrested in stable condition. He was taken to a military hospital known to be a torture site and died a week later with bruises on his body."

Assad kills or arrests children in order to remain in power. Assad keeps using chemical weapons that melt people's skin. That's not just a lethal weapon; it's torture. Chemical weapons are like torturing someone to death. The system of torture and political repression has been getting worse in recent years, and it's all connected. With Trump in power, you have increasing aggression from Erdogan, and increasing aggression from Putin, and increasing aggression from Assad. So another reason why Gabbard's position on Assad is so alarming, just in general, as we keep saying on the show episode after episode, there's no accountability, so we're going to keep getting these crises and worse. When we thought George W. Bush was going to be the worst president and then he gets thrown off that honor by Trump, it's because George W. Bush's war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq were never held accountable, so of course you're gonna get a Trump after a Bush. What we try to remind people that it's all about accountability, and Tulsi Gabbard has no right to throw that term "warmonger" around when she's backing Assad. It's like, you are a warmonger. Because if you don't stand up against a mass-murdering dictator, you're just going to create more mass-murdering dictators, and we saw this. We saw this with the rise of Hitler. In 1932, Stalin's genocide-famine started in Ukraine, where Stalin was deliberately mass-murdering millions of people, primarily Ukrainians. You had one

death certificate at the time where the cause of death was listed simply as Ukrainian. This was a genocide. And in Ukraine at the time, you had colonies of Germans living, and they fled the famine. They got out of Ukraine. They went back to Germany, and it was through their eyewitness reports that in Germany the famine was reported on. And so during the election, the Nazi Party seized on this, and they said, "Don't vote for the communists, because they're starving their own people." So the West at the time turned a blind eye. Britain and America, they turned a blind eye to Stalin's genocide-famine in Ukraine. Stalin got away with it. And what does Hitler do in 1933? What does he do right on the heels of Stalin's genocide-famine in Ukraine? What does Hitler do? He built his first death camp. The first death camp was built on the heels of Stalin's genocide-famine in Ukraine that killed millions.

So it's all connected. If an aspiring mass murderer sees another mass murderer get away with it, what do you think he's going to do? With Syria, with Assad using chemical weapons, guess who else is using chemical weapons? You have now reports coming out of Kurdish children being attacked using chemical weapons. Why do you think Turkey would use chemical weapons? Because Assad got away with doing it. There's been no accountability for Assad, so now you have turkey burning children alive, peeling off their skin with weapons. What do you think is going to happen? The people who refuse to hold mass-murdering dictators accountable are the real warmongers, and as we're always seeing on this show, it's not about firing up the tanks and jets and sending them over. No, it is about economically sanctioning the oligarchs that benefit from this blood money. It is about exposing their corruption. It is about asking your universities and your art institutions not to accept blood money because you're morally compromised if you do. It's a whole "banks, not tanks" strategy to fighting the spread of blood money-fueled kleptocracy, which the idiots that live among us and the progressive left have been either cheerleading for or turning a blind eye to, or abusing that term warmonger, and listening to RT and appearing on RT the entire time when Putin is waging war on Georgia, on Ukrainians, on Syrians, jailing opposition leaders, killing journalists, and so forth. You have to draw a strong moral line there. Moral courage is absolutely necessary. You must confront these guys, and hold them accountable, and not have anything to do with them.

I'm really tired of so-called Progressives that don't understand that we need not only to confront the corruption here at home, we need to have a strong social safety net so people don't fall through the cracks and get left behind, and then they're angry and vote for a fake populist like Trump. We need to have strong public schools so we develop critical independent thinkers who could read through the newspeak of corporate media, who could read through the newspeak of the bots that are polluting big tech and are funneling money to Big Tech, like Facebook and Twitter and so forth. We need to have a strong, social and progressive safety net here at home in order to battle all this. But at the same time, you also have to give support and fund the anti-corruption reformers and the independent journalists who are risking their lives in these kleptocracies and keeping us safe. Serhiy Leshchenko is a prime example. In Ukraine, he and his friends—including friends at the anti-corruption agency, which is a shining success story fighting corruption in Ukraine—they're now being attacked by Trump and Giuliani and their Kremlin associates, when normally it's always been a matter of U.S. foreign policy to fund those guys and support those guys, to help strengthen their work, because it not only protects them in that country, but it also protects us here at home. Because it was Serhiy Leshchenko that warned us about Paul Manafort and his links to the Kremlin.

Sarah Kendzior: I mean, one of the things that's very frustrating about watching this debate around Tulsi Gabbard is this false dichotomy of dictatorship versus war, where if

you oppose those who back dictators and who oppose any kind of just basic intervention, nonviolent intervention, the kind Andrea mentioned of sanctions, of targeting oligarchs, of targeting kleptocratic elites, you know, they'll oppose that as well, as if you could just, you can only have an Iraq War-type situation or you can have absolutely nothing. As if there's nothing in between. And there are so many different types of violence, and I think that a lot of people fail to grasp that. Like if the violence is in a government gassing people or gunning people down—although in the cases of many the administration she supports, they are doing exactly that—then they fail to recognize it as violence. And I actually think Americans, especially in recent years, with the strong emergence of Black rights groups, of Native Americans rights groups, and just a kind of broader reexamination of American history and of this insidious, quiet, suppressive violence that Americans, especially Americans of color, face on a daily basis, I think a lot of people's minds have been broadened as to what form violence takes. I always think about this because I studied Uzbekistan for a very long time, and other scholars of Uzbekistan tended to be very terrorism-oriented. They're always waiting for the outbreak of violence in Central Asia, for terrorism in Central Asia, particularly in the Fergana Valley, ignoring the fact that what citizens were living with on a daily basis because of a brutal authoritarian kleptocracy that was depriving them of rights, depriving them of resources, depriving them of freedom, was as bad in a way as an actual act of physical violence or warfare. People were dying from that. Kleptocracy kills. Blood money kills. White collar crime kills. So we need to kind of expand our definitions of political violence when evaluating these candidates, and if you're anti-war, then good. I mean, I'm also anti-war, and I like the idea of Tulsi Gabbard. We've talked about this in one of our bonus episodes. The idea of a veteran who opposes bloodshed and war and violence—great. Unfortunately, that's not the reality, because you could lack the war and still end up with that same political violence. If you do not hold corrupt and brutal leaders, businessmen, dictators, mafiosos, oligarchs, what have you, accountable. You need actual accountability to the public. You need actual protection of the public, and you need to prevent those types of abuses as well.

Andrea Chalupa: Yep, and I just want to close this out by saying Tulsi Gabbard is Donald Trump's foreign policy wrapped up in a prettier package. From Bill Browder, the champion of the Magnitsky Act, named for his lawyer accountant who was tortured to death in Russia for blowing the whistle on corruption—this is from Bill: "Tulsi Gabbard says that she doesn't control the Russian bots that support her, but she did control the hiring of Chris Cooper, the smear campaigner who was paid by Natalia Veselnitskaya and her Russian-backed sponsors to smear me and try to repeal the Magnitsky Act in D.C." The Magnitsky Act, which Tulsi Gabbard herself did not vote for. The Magnitsky Act, which confronts corruption. So how committed to fighting corruption here at home is Tulsi Gabbard if she wouldn't support the Magnitsky Act? Gabbard hired someone who worked as a Kremlin-linked lobbyist, the same woman who was in the infamous June 2016 Trump Tower meeting between idiot Don Junior, Paul Manafort, and Jared Kushner—Paul Manafort, who is now in prison. We all remember who Paul Manafort is, Putin's favorite political operative. Let's play that clip of Paul Manafort telling us everything we needed to know about Donald Trump and Putin.

*[Audio Clip]: Speaker: So to be clear, Mr. Trump has no financial relationships with any Russian oligarchs.*

*Paul Manafort: That's what he said. That's what I said. That's obviously what our position is. [End Audio Clip]*

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

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