

Gaslit Nation Transcript
22 April 2020
"Blood Money Brigade"

Sarah Kendzior:

That Jared and Ivanka's activity in office has abated enemies of America, like Russia, or states rife with human rights violations, like Saudi Arabia, has proven irrelevant to media personalities seeking to normalize them. After all, many of these media personalities are themselves the sons and daughters of the rich and powerful. The new American economy runs on purchased merit, and now we bear the consequences on a national security level. Adult children of authoritarian leaders are useful in multiple ways. First, they tend to be trustworthy confidantes in regimes rife with paranoia, as corrupt authoritarian states are.

Sarah Kendzior:

Second, they're excellent vessels for laundering money. Creating enough distance, the assets stolen from the state are harder to track. Third, they tend to have a warmer public profile which offsets the brutality of the dictator by distracting the population with pictures of their happy families or glamorous lifestyle. Fourth, a dynastic kleptocracy is the most reliable way to keep assets stolen from the state in the family. It therefore falls upon the authoritarian ruler to legitimize his offspring as successors should he be forced to leave office.

Sarah Kendzior:

For 40 years, Trump hobnobbed with elites from media, business, politics, and entertainment, and then with their offspring, as those professions became dominated by nepotism. In 2016, when Trump's "grab them by the pussy" Access Hollywood outtakes were released, America was introduced to what I have called the Billy Bush Principle: For every asshole, there is an equal and opposite asshole. When Trump says something vile, there is an elite laughing alongside him. When Trump makes a corrupt deal, another party makes or enables that deal. They become implicated by the threat of revelation and power is imbalanced by Trump's complete lack of shame.

Sarah Kendzior:

When Trump's Access Hollywood tape was released, Billy Bush, a first cousin of George W. and Jeb Bush, was fired from his job as a TV host for egging Trump on. But Trump, the shameless sexual assaulter, became the president. The Billy Bush Principle has been an effective deterrent to documentation of Trump team activity. The insularity of the New York and D.C. political and media worlds, combined with the erosion of media and political power in the heartland, means that Trump relies more on self-censorship than state censorship. He has acquired decades of secrets and is willing to weaponize them.

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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 upcoming journalistic thriller, Mr. Jones, which is available for streaming now in the UK and will be here in North America on June 19.

Sarah Kendzior:

This is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the Trump administration, rising autocracy around the world, and a global pandemic. This is, like, week one billion of the global pandemic and our self-isolation. Fortunately for you all, you have new reading material in my book, Hiding in Plain Sight, which as I mentioned is out now, is a bestseller. Andrea just read it and we're going to be doing a special episode coming up where we answer your questions about the book and some of the broader issues especially in light of this new ceaseless, ongoing pandemic heist crisis. But you had a section of the book you wanted to turn to, Andrea, or thoughts?

Andrea Chalupa:

Yes. I will save my immense enthusiasm for this book for the interview, but I just want to say even if I did not know you personally, I would still be obsessed with this book and buying up copies and giving them out to everybody that needs their eyes opened. I think Hiding in Plain Sight is an essential vehicle for helping open the eyes of people who do not yet understand how dangerous the Trump Crime Family is. I include Republicans in our lives, neoconservatives in our lives, and so forth. I think that your book is one that can transcend Party because you have such an earthy, empathetic way of writing that's inclusive and includes all of us.

Andrea Chalupa:

Plus, you give such an amazing tour of Missouri's painful history, which I think would definitely appeal to a lot of historically conservative voters that are being gaslit and are hurting right now under the Trump Crime Family and the Republican Party that's been enabling him. Bravo to you.

Sarah Kendzior:

Well, thank you.

Andrea Chalupa:

Great job. We'll get into that later. Everyone check out Sarah's book, Hiding in Plain Sight, and the part that I... Well, one of the parts that made my eyes pop out of my head because you just nailed it was where you called Ivanka and Jared the greater threat because we're not only up against Trump. If we defeat Trump in November, that's not the end. That's not the Hollywood happy ending that Americans tend to fall for, just like we did with electing Obama in 2008 thinking that he was our savior and our problems would be okay and racism was over. No. We are at the start of defeating Trumpism in America.

Andrea Chalupa:

Jared and Ivanka, as you point out in your book, are the greater threat. Here is a chilling, We Didn't Start the Fire rundown from your book, which I'm going to read from, from the chapter called The Late 2000s: Heirs to the Crash: "The ultimate manifestation of this national security threat is Ivanka and Jared, who have both seemingly violated the law in serious ways during their time in office, yet face no

consequences. In 2017, it was revealed that Kushner had lied on his security clearance forms more than any person in U.S. history.” and there's a footnote for that.

Andrea Chalupa:

“Ivanka had lied too, but not quite as much as Kushner, who was also reported to have committed the following acts: lobbied for a Qatari blockade after Qatar refused to provide his family a loan to pay off its massive debt, met with the president of a sanctioned Russian bank as part of yet another debt payoff scheme, met illicitly with other Russians connected with plots to subvert the 2016 election, worked with now convicted felon Michael Flynn to devise a secret back channel to the Kremlin, attended the notorious 2016 Trump terror meeting in which Russian election aid was offered and did not report it to the FBI, helped fire FBI head James Comey in an act constituting obstruction of justice.

Andrea Chalupa:

Oversaw the Cambridge Analytica linked digital influence in data mining operation that became a key subject of the Mueller probe, helped Saudi prince Mohammed Bin Salman cover up the murder of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi, illicitly proposed giving the Saudis nuclear secrets, conspired with the National Inquirer to threaten U.S. media figures and published propaganda for the Saudi regime, and used personal email and private apps to communicate with foreign leaders. Kushner did all this while keeping up ties to corrupt oligarchs and disgraced politicians around the world, including his old family friend, now indicted, Israel President Benjamin Netanyahu.

Andrea Chalupa:

The Jared Kushner security crisis exists in a perpetual cycle of deja news with documentation of his lawlessness recirculating without repercussions.”

Sarah Kendzior:

We're back in that cycle. I mean, to look at that now, for clarification, I wrote Hiding in Plain Sight over the first half of 2019. One of my hopes for it, and I'll discuss this more when we do our episode on it, is that it would become dated by the time it was published, that it would be irrelevant, that many of these problems would have been resolved, that we would be living in a freer country, a safer country, and a country where Kushner is indicted.

Sarah Kendzior:

But what's actually happened is that in addition to this We Didn't Start the Fire of crimes, he just has gone on to commit yet another year of crimes from the time I wrote that to the current moment, which include, as we're going to discuss on today's episode, the crimes that he, Ivanka and the Trump administration in general are committing with the exploitation of the coronavirus crisis, which they're using both for short-term profit and long-term destructive aims. Yeah, I'm back in that Jared Kushner deja news cycle, only it's been normalized, the influence of those two.

Sarah Kendzior:

I feel like we're now among the few that are routinely sounding the alarm on the severity of the threat they pose to U.S. public safety and to national security. People have absorbed it and accepted it. I know we're all diverted by a broader economic and public health crisis, but my god. I don't know. You can take it from here.

Andrea Chalupa:

We'll get more into this throughout the show because as we keep pointing out, Jared and Ivanka along with Donald Trump himself, they are the unholy trinity. They are the President of the United States, together, those three. Jared and Ivanka have survived all the purges, all the shake ups, all the Apprentices, all the reality show style firings because that's how dictatorships work. They're on the inside. They're family. As you explain in your book, you have your family in positions of power because that's how you can rob the state and get away with it because your family is directly benefiting and they're not going to turn on you.

Andrea Chalupa:

You're all in this together, and you have ways of consolidating your power to protect yourself and avoid accountability. It's classic, 101. Yanukovich, the Donald Trump of Ukraine, who was brought to power by Trump's campaign chairman Paul Manafort, he and his cronies—including his sons—they were known as "The Family." They've stolen—some of the higher estimates said a hundred billion was stolen from the Ukrainian state under Yanukovich and "The Family." That's just dictatorship 101, how it works.

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Sarah Kendzior:

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Sarah Kendzior:

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Andrea Chalupa:

In times like this where everybody feels powerless, I personally know... I mean, I grew up with that feeling, and I want to talk about that in terms of what to do about that and what I did about that. I think it's very important to share because in times like this when we all feel powerless, this is why art matters. Art matters. Art matters. Art matters. Because where our justice system fails, art can then rise up and demand justice. That's never been more important than now. Art is not only... I believe in the power of art therapy.

Andrea Chalupa:

I think everybody regardless of whether you think of yourself as an artist or not, you should definitely look into making some sort of art right now because art therapy matters. It can save lives. It can save your sanity. It can unlock parts of you you didn't even know existed. In times of great instability, as we are in now and we'll be for the foreseeable future, creativity is what is going to help you navigate this time. Work your creativity muscles. Whether you think of yourself as a creative person or not, everyone's minds are far more creative than they realize. It's up to you to unlock that.

Andrea Chalupa:

I have to tell you, when I took the injustice of my grandfather, my beloved grandfather, living through Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine, a genocide that most people, practically everyone around me in Northern California where I grew up had never heard of this crime before, this crime against humanity. That was part of this horrible gaslighting that I was under, this heartbreaking lack of justice. To write that wrong, I taught myself how to write a screenplay and then taught myself how to produce that screenplay and that became Mr. Jones, my film that's out now and coming to North America.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's out in the UK and coming to North America and that's directed by Agnieszka Holland. That was healing. That was a tremendously healing experience for me. I don't care what any review around the world says about my film. What I always am grounded in is the fact that a Ukrainian journalist kept me on the phone for hours after the film premiered in Berlin because this film meant so much to her and what her family had experienced. She knew this film practically better than I did. It was a film that was deliberately meant to heal a great justice because art matters, art heals.

Andrea Chalupa:

What we're calling on you to do, if you want to hang out with me and Sarah, because we are a community and as a community we look out for each other, we're calling on you to open up your inner screenwriter, your inner playwright, your inner radio play producer, and write a 5 to 10 page radio play that we will then produce with you for the show if you are the winning play. It's very simple. The criteria is very simple. This is the writing prompt. Write a play of justice being served to Ivanka and Jared. Nothing violent at all.

Andrea Chalupa:

Violence will automatically disqualify you, but justice, like the FBI being the FBI and arresting them for any of these crimes documented anywhere in the public domain, whether it's Craig Unger's book, whether it's Vicky Ward's book on Jared and Ivanka. There's so much in the public domain of the laws and other illegalities and corruption that Jared and Ivanka have committed, weakening our democracy and enriching themselves. Guess what? Write the stupidest play you can imagine. Write something zany. Write musical theater. Write a horror film. Write film noir. Write whatever your heart is telling you to write and don't be afraid to make it interesting.

Andrea Chalupa:

If you send us a 5 to 10 page script that's perfect, you will automatically be disqualified. We're not interested in perfect, so do not aim for perfect. Just aim for something that's completed and turned in. That's all you need to do. I promise you that I will read every submission that is sent to GaslitNation@gmail.com. I will record some feedback for you. The winning script will be developed and

produced and played on our show ahead of the 2020 November Presidential Election, which the fate of the world depends on.

Andrea Chalupa:

We will use your play to drive out the vote and remind people that it's not just about defeating Trump in the election of this year, but also defeating Trumpism, which could be a decades long battle. We all have to stay engaged in that fight, and art is just one way we're going to do that. Again, art matters. Art's never been more important to humanity than right now. Art is a vehicle for justice. Art is an important record that... Art is therapy. Art is everything. Art is an oxygen mask that we need in order to breathe in this cruel world. Please, 5 to 10 pages. Write it on a legal pad, a blank piece of paper, a word processor, it doesn't matter.

Andrea Chalupa:

Just submit it at GaslitNation@gmail.com and let's have fun with it. Let's just see what comes out of it. Again, your goal is not to submit something that's perfect. Your goal is to submit something that's interesting and that's all you have to aim for and just have fun doing it. If you're not having fun doing it, then stop doing it, but challenge yourself to do something creative even if you don't think of yourself as a creative person and just see where that goes.

Sarah Kendzior:

One thing that we need to always remember is that even when so many things are being taken away, whether it's our personal freedom, our economic stability, our sense of the future, of reality, there are things that are within our control. That is something that I've talked about in my work and in Hiding in Plain Sight. Some of that is your morals, your principles, how you treat other people. But for just sheer release, embrace your creativity in this time in some sort of fashion. Let your imagination go where it takes you. Because honestly, I think that our political failure is an extension of this failure of imagination.

Sarah Kendzior:

It's an extension of an unwillingness of people to let their minds go to the darkest places and imagine the worst possible outcomes. It's almost as if they think if they do that, that somehow they make those outcomes manifest or that it means that they want them. Whereas in reality when you're warning against something, when you're imagining a terrible possibility, it's to prevent it. It's to ward it off. Here, what we would like folks to be able to do is imagine some version of justice. It doesn't have to be like the traditional manifestations of justice because those have failed us, but just what does justice even mean.

Sarah Kendzior:

But like Andrea said, don't get too deep. Have fun with it. We're kind of making this one up as we go along.

Andrea Chalupa:

Go forth and create something. All right. Let's talk about the historic times that we live in and the latest history making headlines that came out of yesterday, Monday, April 20th, which was the worst day on record for the oil industry. The price of crude oil costs around negative \$37, which means you can get paid to take oil. You, of course, have no place to store it and that's part of the problem. It's more cost

effective to give away oil than to build new places to store it. That means there's a risk that oil is staying in pipelines underground and in the ocean where it can build up causing oil spills.

Andrea Chalupa:

This is a crisis that is going to see massive amounts of layoffs and possibly, if this panicked market isn't careful, environmental disaster, which will hurt, of course, not only fish and other wildlife, but the environmental devastation could further the economic devastation for local economies. Think of the oil crash as its own pandemic, an economic pandemic. Hundreds of oil companies could go bankrupt. That number could reach over a thousand oil companies filing for bankruptcy. Either scenario would set off a massive chain reaction. This is what financial analysts are calling a doomsday scenario.

Andrea Chalupa:

Even though there was a deal reached with the OPEC countries, which Donald Trump is taking credit for, it's too late for companies that were already suffering in the oil industry. It's too late. It's too late. It's just a matter of what the severity will be like and how severe the chain reaction will be. There's very little hope in this situation. This is something that I was following already because as anybody who follows Ukraine and Russia closely, the price of oil is always interesting.

Andrea Chalupa:

I think for anybody who cares about Ukraine's sovereignty as a critical human rights issue, there is this infinite hope that a country like Russia, which bases its national budget on the price of oil, that the price of oil dipping so low will be devastating for that country. There is that infinite hope, but that infinite hope is bullshit. We're going to go into why. This was an article that came out weeks ago that caught my attention. It was published on March 8th when the lockdown measures in the U.S. hadn't even taken effect yet. It was written by a financial analyst, Brian Sullivan of CNBC, who is a trusted expert on this oil crash.

Andrea Chalupa:

I'm going to read his article now: "Putin just sparked an oil price war with Saudi Arabia and U.S. energy companies may be the victims." Again, this is coming out on March 8th. "Vladimir Putin just sparked what could end up being the ugliest oil price wars in modern history, and American oil and gas companies may be the victims. This weekend Saudi Arabia dropped the oil bomb. It not only cut its forward crude price to Chinese customers by as much as \$6 or \$7 per barrel, but is also reportedly looking to raise its daily crude output by as many as two million barrels per day into an already oversupplied global market. Look out below.

Andrea Chalupa:

The move by the Saudis is both a market share grab and a loud signal to Moscow that it's done playing games. The dramatic action is in response to a contentious, and ultimately failed, OPEC meeting in Austria on Friday. OPEC members laid out a proposal to further cut oil output quotas by as much as 1.5 million barrels per day. OPEC itself was aligned on the deal, but non-OPEC member Russia said "nyet," effectively killing it. A source inside the negotiations tells me that as the two sides worked out production cut plans, in the end the red lines weren't even close. The source added that the Russians definitely don't want to continue to support shale at least in part because the Rosneft sanctions were still too raw.

Andrea Chalupa:

It was only three weeks ago that the Trump administration imposed sanctions on Russian oil giant Rosneft for transporting Venezuelan oil. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo believes that in helping Venezuela sell oil, Russia is effectively propping up the Maduro regime. Rosneft is run by Igor Sechin, a former employee and close friend of Putin. Connect the dots. Putin reacting to Trump. The Saudis, led by Energy Minister and the king bin Salman reacting to Putin. And American oil and gas workers and investors are caught in the middle of this epic ego battle. It couldn't occur at a worse time.

Andrea Chalupa:

Coronavirus is already slamming global oil demand and crude prices have fallen 30% this year. The industry is facing a three-sided attack: falling prices, a move of institutional investors to divest from fossil fuel companies, and crushing debt loads. This is where it gets interesting. Debt is the problem. The U.S. oil and gas industry has about \$86 billion of rated debt due in the next four years, according to Moody's. Nearly all of that debt is either junk rated, or rated just above junk. 57% of that is due in just the next two years." Do you see where this is going?

Andrea Chalupa:

"As oil prices fall and credit markets tighten, many companies won't be able to refinance their debts or extend maturities. Time is the only friend many companies now have. Most energy debt isn't due until 2022, so some producers may be able to hang on, hoping for a turn. But if a turn doesn't come, it will be brutal. Everyone seems to have a different opinion of how this ultimately plays out. The larger risk is that this pain seeps into the broader U.S. credit markets, all the time when the coronavirus is starting to impact the economy as well.

Andrea Chalupa:

If a few million Americans stop traveling and commuting and work from home instead, gasoline demand will plummet, putting further pressure on prices. As gas prices fall, you will no doubt hear the 'lower gas prices will rescue the consumer' angle. While there is a benefit to Americans saving on gasoline, it's unlikely any amount of additional consumer savings will mitigate the damage of an entire industry facing mass layoffs and huge capital spending cuts. It's not media hyperbole to call what happened in the oil markets historic. When the Russians walked out of OPEC's Austria headquarters, it suddenly became every country and every U.S. company for itself.

Andrea Chalupa:

Somewhere Vladimir Putin is looking at a map of Texas and smiling." That was back in early March and now here we are. The same author of this article, this is what he tweeted yesterday on this historic day of the oil plummet: "Something is broken, whether it's futures markets, a fund implosion, levered ETF impact, martians... I DON'T KNOW. But you don't go from \$0 to negative \$30 in an hour. I JUST DON'T KNOW." All right. Why would Russia and Saudi Arabia flood the market with oil when their economies depend on oil? According to Bloomberg, Russia gets nearly 40% of its budget revenue from oil and gas. People are trying to hail this as bad news for Russia.

Andrea Chalupa:

Let's all celebrate that Russia's going to have its hands tied and it's going to stop invading its neighbors who're going to be out of cash. Okay. Now, let's break this down. Putin, arguably the richest person of

the world, now factor in the wealth of the Russian oligarchs he essentially controls who have to do his bidding or else their fortunes get liquidated, they get arrested, their families mysteriously are killed, et cetera, that's a lot of wealth under Putin's control. He can still do things, like ensure private soldiers invade Ukraine and Syria, bribe politicians in countries he wants to control or seize, et cetera, et cetera.

Andrea Chalupa:

People rejoicing about the low price of oil and what that means for Russia don't understand that Putin and his court of oligarchs remain secure. It's the Russian people who will suffer now that oil prices have plummeted, but Putin doesn't have to care about the Russian people when there are no free elections in Russia. He has sadistic riot police to beat and arrest protestors. Russia is a mafia state. That's how a mafia state works. They can gamble with the revenue of their country because the people in power are all financially secure. Russia can flood the markets with oil, helping drive down the price of oil in the midst of this pandemic.

Andrea Chalupa:

They were doing all this when it was clear that there was a pandemic going on. Russia sent a group to China in that international mission of experts that went to China to learn everything they could about the coronavirus. The writing was on the wall. It was obvious that oil prices are going to further hurt by this growing pandemic. They don't care. Putin simply does not care. They've been saving up for this moment too with big cash reserves in Russia. It means that they're hunkering down to go to war like this.

Andrea Chalupa:

For Russia's calculation, it's far greater in their benefit to bankrupt the U.S. oil industry and weather that storm themselves with their cash reserves and their immense wealth among the power brokers of that country and just rely on autocratic tactics to keep the social unrest under sadistic control from mass arrests, stealing elections, et cetera. They're not beholden to the Russian people who are the ultimate victims of an oil price collapse.

Sarah Kendzior:

Right. No, I think this is really important because yesterday when I was watching what was happening to the oil industry and watching this historic chart where you could see the prices from 1950 and then this just unbelievable drop where they basically had to vertically expand how the chart worked to even show how much it had fallen. It baffled me just like it baffled the expert that you cited. When you were telling me about this yesterday—last night Andrea and I were discussing this on the phone—I found that explanation both plausible and chilling.

Sarah Kendzior:

One thing that we need to remember in the U.S. is that every quality of a mafia petrostate that Andrea was just listing in reference to Russia is extremely relevant to how the U.S. is going to respond to this crisis. To be clear, we have said from the beginning that we want an end to gas station dictatorships, that we want a Green New Deal, in part because these kinds of economies allow for the most nefarious and oppressive actors to retain full control over the population. But what we have here is basically rival petrostates, or should-be rival petrostates, like Russia and Saudi Arabia possibly coming in to buy out the U.S. market.

Sarah Kendzior:

Under normal conditions, you would have our own villains, our, like, J.R. Ewing type people, the Rex Tillerson's of the world, in some sort of oil war, having some sort of reaction. We have a Kremlin asset installed in the White House, and we have an administration that from the beginning has seen the U.S. not as a sovereign nation, not as a democracy, not as something that needs to be preserved, but as basically just a land mass of resources that can be stripped down and sold off for parts. We've seen foreign backers, the people who elevated Trump and his cadre of criminals into office, with the exact same ambitions.

Sarah Kendzior:

They do this by controlling debt. That's how they control individuals like Kushner. You saw Gutter paying off his debt for 666 Fifth Avenue. We know the conditions of Trump's debt and how the Russian mafia relationship with Trump was formed because they were able to get him back in the white collar crime game through investing in his own assets through his real estate. He welcomed it. I mean, this is key to understanding this whole horrible crisis, is that Kushner, Trump, Mnuchin, others in the White House... America First is a very ironic slogan for that. I mean, I'm not touting its fascist roots in the sense.

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm just saying these are anti-American representatives. These are white collar criminals. These are corporate raiders who have no respect for this country, no respect for this idea of representative democracy, no respect for the environment, no respect for an actual free economy freed from plutocracy, from oligarchy, for none of that. They're not necessarily going to see this as a bad thing. They're not necessarily going to fight for remedying the effects that this is going to have economically on our nation as long as they personally profit, as long as they profit as a crime family, as long as their cabal that's installed in the White House profits as a mafia state.

Sarah Kendzior:

I know this all sounds very complicated, but in terms of leverage, that puts us in a very bad situation. I don't know. Maybe you want to expand on this point.

Andrea Chalupa:

I mean, think about it, people who are poor are preyed on. There are always going to be vultures taking advantage of economic distress. If you look at the young women that were trafficked in Jeffrey Epstein's child trafficking network, they were often young, poor girls—girls taken from unstable home situations and poverty. Some of them were, some of them weren't. But anytime you have economic distress and poverty, there are always going to be vultures circling. Bankruptcy attorneys are already busy in the oil industry. Any signs of hope will not stop possibly a hundred, possibly hundreds of companies filing for bankruptcy over the next year.

Andrea Chalupa:

Some of these companies just might close down all together. What you're going to do is it's inevitable that you're going to have vultures circling and taking advantage of essentially a fire sale, gobbling up these companies for a cheap price. Any foreign actor, deep pocketed actor, like a Kremlin friendly state or even Russia with these deep pocketed oligarchs, could easily gobble up some of these companies and then further their foothold inside the United States. If you look at a country like Germany, Germany

arguably being the leader of the free world right now, but one horrible sort of Achilles' heel of Germany's leadership is that Germany's gas comes from Russia.

Andrea Chalupa:

You have a really strong business lobbying presence inside Germany, which puts pressure on sanctions against Russia and other accountability against Russia and so forth. It's something that has caused serious damage to Ukraine's struggle to stand up to Russia when you have Germany, which is supposed to help mediate that conflict, having German business interest whispering in its ear to try to go easy on Russia because the country's natural gas is coming from Russia. If you have a country like Russia coming in and gobbling up a bunch of these distressed oil companies, that's going to be leverage that the Kremlin will have on us domestically and on our foreign policy. That's worst case scenario of something playing out like that.

Sarah Kendzior:

Another thing to point to is that it is to the advantage of these governments and these administrations to let the coronavirus threat continue, to let people go untested, to let people go untreated, to let the economy collapse. There's been a lot of talk about "this threatens Trump's election prospects", but really the model to keep in mind is what Andrea was describing for Putin before, that when you have a rigged election, that kind of leverage goes out the window. Fortunately, we're not completely there yet. We're not in a completely consolidated autocracy, but we're obviously in one under severe threat.

Sarah Kendzior:

It's, of course, deeply frustrating for me and Andrea that people only now seem to be recognizing the severity of this as we're trapped in our home in a plague, unable to protest, with our ability to vote in question because the GOP is trying to strike down vote by mail. This is a frightening thing because what we have been striving for and what people who we admire like Elizabeth Warren or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez have been pushing for is deep structural reform, in part for humanitarian reasons, to make people's lives easier and safer and freer, but also to prevent this kind of criminal kleptocracy leverage from being used in a way that...

Sarah Kendzior:

Oh god, I mean, what we're headed for is so bad. We're so tired. I'm sure you could hear it in our voices. We're sort of watching these gullible trends and these culminations of things that we've been monitoring for a very long time come to fruition. Hopefully we're wrong about everything, but I wonder, should we move on to the astroturf protest or do you have more to say on the oil crisis?

Andrea Chalupa:

What I think is really interesting and worth watching is obviously the Republican Party has been co-opted by Donald Trump. Donald Trump is the Frankenstein monster of the Republican Party. But what's really interesting is if you look at Oklahoma, Cushing, Oklahoma is the biggest inland oil distribution center in the US, a busy hub of pipelines. According to local New 9 of Oklahoma City, one report from economists at Oklahoma State University says the oil collapse and the pandemic could cost Oklahoma 10,000 jobs and that's just in the energy sector.

Andrea Chalupa:

You have Senator Inhofe of Oklahoma, one of the reptilian Republicans in congress. He's one of the members of congress accused of dumping a bunch of stock due to reports of the worsening pandemic. He's an anti-science, pro-greed, climate change denialist. He wants to make English the official language of the U.S. Now he's begging his mafia boss, Donald Trump, to stand up to Trump's friends, Putin and MbS. Just in the last day, 24 hours ago, Senator Inhofe posted this letter essentially pleading with Trump to do something. It's like good luck with that, Senator Inhofe. Here's his letter that he posted on Twitter.

Andrea Chalupa:

"Dear Secretary Ross," This is, of course, to Wilbur Ross, who is part of this transnational crime syndicate masquerading as a government, and you Sarah in your book go into some of his swampiness. "Dear Secretary Ross, I write in response to your March 23, 2020 letter to me regarding my request for an investigation into the excessive dumping of crude oil by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Russian Federation. I appreciate that the administration is taking this situation seriously, but I remain concerned about the continued flooding of oil by Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Andrea Chalupa:

Despite recently agreed to production cuts by Russia, Saudi Arabia and members of OPEC, the global oil market is still well oversupplied as the price of oil has failed to stabilize. It remains clear that the Saudis and Russians continue to flood the global market in what I view as an effort to crush American oil and gas producers and capture their market share. These actions are hindering our economic and national security. Given these unfortunate circumstances, more must be done. I continue to believe the Trump administration must utilize all of its authorities," good luck with that," including tariffs on imported oil from Saudi Arabia and Russia, to punish this unacceptable behavior."

Andrea Chalupa:

He goes into trying to do some flattering. "President Trump has long been a champion for American workers and has fought for American interests when previous administrations have folded. The American oil and gas industry, including its thousands of workers, have been severely damaged by Russia's and Saudi Arabia's anti-competitive behavior. I believe the administration should utilize all of its tariff authorities, including those used to solve other trade imbalances like the Chinese steel and aluminum imports.

Andrea Chalupa:

Tariffs on imports of Russian and Saudi oil would place significant pressure on those governments to act to better stem the global flow of crude which would create stability for the oil market. For most of this year, the price of oil has been at or near 18-year lows which has resulted in layoffs and significantly reduced investment in America's energy infrastructure. This reduction in investment is of dire concern as America's energy independence is threatened.

Andrea Chalupa:

When our energy independence is threatened, our national security is threatened; therefore, I urge you to take further action and utilize your existing authorities, including your national security related Section 232 authorities, to place tariffs on imported oil from Saudi Arabia and Russia, to punish them for their destructive behavior." Hey, Jim Inhofe, you break it, you buy it. This is your guy. Now he's screwing you just like he's screwing the brown people and the black people that you can't stand. Welcome to the club of pain and anxiety and helplessness. You're in the club now. He doesn't care.

Andrea Chalupa:

Putin brought him to power and he needs Putin to help him steal this election in 2020. Jared Kushner, his son-in-law, practically had sleepovers with Saudi crown prince MbS. These are his pals. This is who he wants to become here in America. He will not save you, just like he's not saving us from all types of dangers that his family is creating just to enrich themselves.

Sarah Kendzior:

You can't make a deal with these people. I mean, as we've said many times before, you are making a deal with the Russia mafia. You are working with a proxy. You are working with somebody who isn't even for the sort of disgusting, relentless, ruthless brand of capitalism that the Republican Party and honestly quite a bit of the Democratic Party embodies. This is not to say that the opposite, the sort of Glenn Greenwald view of the world that Trump somehow is going to bring down this corrupt new order. All they're doing is making it more extreme. That's what Russia is. It's hyper capitalism. It's hyper oligarchy.

Sarah Kendzior:

They're taking it to another level where somebody like Inhofe and these other Republican actors are not quite corrupt enough. They're just more pawns. Every American that is not in Trump's innermost circle is a pawn, even at that level of wealth. They got into these alliances, they got into these agreements because they thought that they could prosper with Trump as a vehicle to their ambitions. Some of them have. People like Mitch McConnell, who also is quite content, by the way, to have Russia taking over factories and building products out of Kentucky...

Andrea Chalupa:

Oh, Deripaska. Deripaska got a sweet sanction deal.

Sarah Kendzior:

Exactly.

Andrea Chalupa:

Then his aluminum giant company announced plans to build a massive aluminum plant in Mitch McConnell's Kentucky, which is a short-term gain for long-term pain because then you have Oleg Deripaska who won the aluminum wars in the 1990s which had an actual body count. That guy is thugged out. If you have him on your territory, he owns you. That's what people don't understand is that the way mafia states work, it's golden handcuffs. Once you take their bribe in any way, shape or form, whether that's allowing a massive aluminum plant in your state, once you take their money in any way, shape or form, they own you.

Andrea Chalupa:

You are together now. There goes your sovereignty. Just like Senator Inhofe is owned by Trump now.

Sarah Kendzior:

The only way that some of these Republicans have found an out is just by quitting. That's why you saw this record wave of Republicans, including very high profile ones like Paul Ryan, resigning from Congress.

This is now a principled stance. They did not come out then and condemn Trump or expose his criminality or expose his secrets, all of which would have been useful things for them to do. They still probably want to get back in this game, but they were outplayed, they were outwitted because this has turned into a Frankenstein's monster situation for the GOP. It's going to get increasingly worse. I don't know.

Sarah Kendzior:

I mean, it's such a multi-faceted problem in terms of networks of corruption. There's absolutely no one to really root for here except for the American public who this is floating above us. This nexus of corruption is floating above us with its tentacles reaching down and strangling us standing here below watching everything fall apart. Because yes, of course, there's a part of us who are not going to exactly shed tears for the demise of the oil industry or certainly not for executives or for these corporations that are taking the bailout money that should be going to people, but the people who get hurt the most in our current setup, which does need to be changed, it needs to have its entire structure change.

Sarah Kendzior:

But at the moment, people that are going to be hurt are the folks you see losing their jobs, the folks you see in record red lines. This situation, many have noted, it's reminiscent in some ways of the fall and the collapse of the Soviet Union. It feels like that late period where you're watching an empire fall apart due to a culmination of pressure from without, pressure from within, and external crises. Coronavirus is sort of a Chernobyl of diseases. It's exposing so many flaws and hypocrisies that many elites had refused to confront head on. Now they are paying the price.

Sarah Kendzior:

But as it always works, the people who are most vulnerable to start with, most marginalized to start with, are paying the hardest price. You see this in who is getting the virus, who's getting treated for it or not getting treated for it, tested or not tested and so forth, who's losing their job, who's getting money. None of this is actually good. The lack of any kind of mechanism of accountability from Congress or even just like people speaking out and spelling out where this is going and the depth of this problem, the lack of that is really chilling.

Sarah Kendzior:

The fact that they've been on vacation, the fact that states have had to form regional alliances to get basic supplies, there is no one in charge here at the moment. Maybe there's some opportunity in that. I mean, at least people aren't in denial about the depth of the crisis anymore. I am happy to see people pushing for things like less fossil fuel dependency and Green New Deals and so on and so forth, but we've also said on the show that time is the enemy. The longer that you allow this mafia state, which at this point is basically a Kremlin proxy state, to remain in power, the worst the damage is going to be both on a humanitarian level, but also on basically an existential level.

Sarah Kendzior:

That's unfortunately the moment that we're in. Do you want to talk about the protests now?

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah. I think the astroturfing protest that we've seen where these idiots, white people, confederate flags. As we told you in last week's episode before these confederate flags I believe started sprouting up,

we told you that Trumpism is just another chapter in America's original sin of slavery, the genocide of Native Americans, and so forth. They proved that point for us by showing up and protesting Democratic governors mostly, with confederate flags. It's obvious who these people are and what they're after. They are the ideological heirs of America's original sin of slavery and genocide. Trump fanning those flames shows you what he's about.

Andrea Chalupa:

He's about Hitler cosplay. You don't get to be the king of birtherism. You don't get to be the man that targeted five children of the Central Park Five, being the cheapest bastard alive and then buying ads, buying up newspaper ads to try to frame five innocent children, as he did with the Central Park Five. You don't do all that without having a hidden Nazi agenda in your heart. You do not put Steve Bannon in the White House without being a Nazi yourself. Ivana Trump, as we pointed out in last week's episode, she said that her husband would read the speeches of Adolf Hitler.

Andrea Chalupa:

Donald Trump is the Nazi-in-Chief and that is his main agenda, enriching himself and carrying out his ideology of hate. The oil industry that's collapsing in America and the chain reaction of the credit crisis that's coming with it, there's nobody to look out for those people and those lost jobs, many of them in states that Trump won in 2016. There are no adults in the room to help them weather that storm. They, like the Democratic governors in California, New York, New Jersey and Michigan and elsewhere, are on their own. They're on their own. What we're seeing are people having to rise up and protect their communities because there is nobody home in The Oval Office.

Andrea Chalupa:

That guy is on Twitter, on Fox and Friends, in his own little Hitler cosplay mindset playing out his own fantasies right now and destroying innocent lives in the process.

Sarah Kendzior:

One thing that's important to point out, there's been so much coverage of these protests. The protestors claim that what they're protesting is their loss of civil liberties, their loss of freedom to go around infecting people as virus vectors. Some of them are claiming that the coronavirus is a hoax while wearing masks. The important thing to recognize here is that these protests generally tend to be just a couple hundred people. If you take an aerial view, there are shots posted from above looking down, it's like a tiny little crowd. It's less than you would find at a baseball or a small concert or something like that.

Sarah Kendzior:

The way that they film the protests in the media is with these extreme close ups, these in-depth interviews with people who seem to be... I mean, I'm sure some of them are sincere and to some degree I certainly share the frustration of being locked inside, but they are astroturf protests. The websites for them are all hosted by the same organization. They are basically just active pawns in this game that the Trump administration is playing of letting the virus fester, of letting it spread, of creating a permanent kind of crisis, a public health crisis, to which it's extremely hard for us to combat with the typical methods you would use to combat autocracy.

Sarah Kendzior:

They're doing that for their own financial and political gain. One thing that's frustrating about this is that yet again the media has learned nothing. We warned about airing the propaganda press conferences every day, about the health effects that it would have, about the effects it would have on our political culture. There has been so much criticism, a fairly unified kind of criticism coming out because they're putting out disinformation. It's become, like Andrea says, a Hitler cosplay style Trump rally substitute. Yet they air them live. They let this disinformation get out to the public, even when they're correcting in real time.

Sarah Kendzior:

CNN had some angry subheads describing it. I kept thinking, if people bring that up as kind of like, "Oh, the media is trying," it's like you still don't have to air it live. If this was Hitler speaking, if this was Mussolini speaking, if this was Milošević speaking, would you air it live? Would you feel like you're doing the responsible thing, like you're doing the right thing by allowing that propaganda and that hate rhetoric and that public health disinformation to be aired live at all? No, you shouldn't be doing it. They're doing the same thing with these protests. There is a tweet from media analyst Steve Krakauer.

Sarah Kendzior:

He says, "The lead story on CNN right now claims 'protests are erupting,' and cites Maryland's protests specifically throughout the beginning of the article. Government Hogan's staff says there were more media requests to cover the protests than actual protesters." This is just part of the media economy. They ignore the very protests that have been held over the last three years against the Trump administration. Those are actually the largest protests in American history. The initial Women's March got coverage, but the followup Women's March barely did.

Sarah Kendzior:

The March for Science, the Tax March, the March for Truth, the anti-gun violence march, got some, the migrants rights march, the daily Kremlin annex that is outside the White House, the sustained protest against ICE... these have been happening nationwide for years and they get very little coverage because the narrative that the media puts out, particularly outlets like The New York Times and CNN, but then, of course, outlets directly linked to the administration—well, those two are as well, but even more so like Fox—is to just buffer the Trump administration. It's to serve an appendage of them. They're continuing to do that.

Sarah Kendzior:

One of the things that frustrates me most here is that we're seeing, I think, another evolution of this propaganda tactic that they used before where it's basically projection, where they're putting out a narrative that they want to invert in advance so that when you raise the actual subject you sound like you're insane. For example, in 2016, we all remember Pizzagate, where Roger Stone and others had put out this myth that there is an undercover pedophile sex trafficking operation from a pizza shop in D.C. A man went in wanting to shoot it up.

Sarah Kendzior:

As a result of that, if anyone was trying to bring up one of the crises that was trying to work its way into the headlines and was suppressed—for example, Jeffrey Epstein and his actual pedophile sex trafficking network to which Trump is linked—but its predecessor operations like Craig Spence's sex trafficking operation that was put out through the George H. W. Bush White House, seriously you should look this

up, this is from the late '80s, to which many of the Trump actors were linked—if you brought up any of that sordid history, a history that seems to go all the way back to the days of Roy Cohn and J. Edgar Hoover, people would be like, "Oh, that's insane.

Sarah Kendzior:

That sounds like Pizzagate. You sound like one of those Pizzagate people. You sound like Alex Jones." Now when you have these astroturf protesters outside saying, "The Democratic governors or what not are the ones who are trying to bring a New World Order. They're the ones who are trying to take our freedom. They're the ones who are trying to destroy our economy," The actual people who are trying to do that is the Trump Crime Family and its mafia state. That is who is actually trying to consolidate corruption. You see this through the actions of people like Bill Barr who wants to use the coronavirus to allow indefinite detention of anyone who they deem an enemy.

Sarah Kendzior:

You see this certainly through the action of Kushner and others who are seeking to profit off the crisis, who are blocking the supplies of medicine and of other things that states need from reaching these states in a way that David Wallace-Wells at New York Magazine compared to the ways of the union tried to choke off the supply chains of the confederacy during the Civil War. That's the actual enemy here.

Sarah Kendzior:

What they're trying to do through these protests and its messaging is to make any discussion of the severity of the kind of autocratic measures that they hope to bring about make that impossible, make it sound, "Oh, you sound like those people out there with their signs if you complain about this. Oh, you sound like one of those New World Order lunatics." It's a very effective tactic. This is one of the reasons I think that facets of the mainstream media are covering it to such an extent is because they don't cover the Trump administration, they cover FOR the Trump administration. They help create these narratives.

Sarah Kendzior:

My advice on that is stop obsessing over the photos. Stop sharing them. Stop contributing to the sense that these are mass protests. Because in reality, including in "red states", the vast majority of people think that the measures that are being put in place to prevent the spread of coronavirus are fair. They think that they're necessary. They do not think that this is a hoax. They think that this is a genuine public health crisis because it is. That doesn't mean that people are happy. None of us are happy. We're frightened. We're exhausted. We're terrified also of the economic conditions.

Sarah Kendzior:

In that sense, I feel incredible kinship and sympathy with those who are out just sort of screaming in frustration over the situation. None of us want this. None of us like this. But these astroturf protests are just an example of narrative manipulation and it's very important to not take the bait, to emphasize what folks in these states are actually thinking, even though they're at home. I mean, that's another reason this is easy bait for the media is they could go out, they can get a picture of an outdoor activity. They can get a picture of some action that's not like somebody's screenshot of their Zoom page or something like that.

Sarah Kendzior:

A lot of it is just shameless kind of going for the lowest common denominator tactics, but it has serious repercussions.

Andrea Chalupa:

We want to just end the episode with an important public service announcement. Michael Cohen is out of prison due to risk of COVID-19, right, Sarah?

Sarah Kendzior:

Yeah, allegedly. This is what was announced, is that Cohen is going to be out. There are people that are jubilant at this news who are recasting him as some kind of patriot saying that he's going to write a tell all book. This is what Cohen himself was saying, even though he had previously promised not to do that. I mean, for God's sake, I hope people don't fall for the same bag of tricks. We saw it with John Bolton. We saw it with Anonymous. It's honestly exhausting. Because what we're seeing probably will be the rehab of a convicted criminal, somebody who repeatedly threatened violence against journalists.

Sarah Kendzior:

Then the next move, of course—and I would love to hear your thoughts on this—is the possibility of Manafort also being pardoned, who's far more dangerous even than Cohen.

Andrea Chalupa:

Manafort being released from prison early wakes me up in the middle of the night. This is a man who has blood on his hands. Manafort is inherently violent. He is a lifelong criminal. He is Putin's operative in the West, and he fooled you all on the Sunday talk shows. Okay?

Andrea Chalupa:

He played the Chuck Todd Industrial Complex, but Paul Manafort is the perfect case study of why white collar crime, like what he's committed and what he went to prison for and the decades of how he made his illicit money as the head of the so called the Torturer's Lobby in D.C., Paul Manafort is the perfect case study of why white collar crime can be and often is inherently violent and comes with a body count of innocent victims, as we saw in Ukraine where he brought to power Viktor Yanukovich, whose government hastily passed the so called dictatorship laws, whose government had snipers firing on protesters.

Andrea Chalupa:

Paul Manafort was advising Yanukovich throughout that. Then, of course, he brought Donald Trump to power and didn't take a salary. Why not? Because he was cashing in other ways, as the Mueller Report indicated, getting whole with Oleg Deripaska, a thugged out oligarch in Putin's court. Paul Manafort is dangerous. Anybody that's made decades of blood money should rot and die in prison. The fact that he got a slap on the wrist sentence by a judge that felt his life was being threatened and a judge that sang his praises as though he had a gun to his head...

Andrea Chalupa:

I mean, this is a sinister person who for the safety of society, for the safety of me and my family and my sister being somebody who blew the whistle on him, pointing out what was in the public domain on Paul Manafort, what a bad guy he was, and he relentlessly attacked her and pushed hate pieces on her,

trying to frame her and get her imprisoned, a mother of three, an innocent person, a citizen doing her public service to try to keep her country safe. If you want the backstory on that, we interviewed my sister Alexandra Chalupa. You can listen to those interviews. They're on website gaslitnationpod.com. Paul Manafort is a danger to society.

Andrea Chalupa:

He needs to stay in prison for my family's safety, for the safety of society. Because once he's out, he's going to be committing more crimes, just like he did when he was under house arrest. The best thing for the public is to keep Manafort in prison where he belongs. 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 to your local food bank, which is experiencing a spike in demand. We also encourage you to donate to Direct Relief at directrelief.org, which is supplying much needed protective gear to first responders working on the frontlines in the U.S., China, and other hard hit parts of the world.

Andrea Chalupa:

We encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Syria and refugees who are some of the most vulnerable people in the world to this pandemic. Donate at rescue.org. We also encourage you as always to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry. Donate to The Orangutan Project at orangutanproject.org. Gaslit Nation is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review on iTunes. It helps us reach more listeners. Check out our Patreon. It keeps us going.

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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 Visenberg, Nick Farr, Damian Arriaga, and Karlyn Daigle.

Sarah Kendzior:

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