

Gaslit Nation Transcript

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How the West Can Help Protect Civilians in Ukraine

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[intro theme music]

Sarah Kendzior:

I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the bestsellers, *The View From Flyover Country* and *Hiding in Plain Sight*, and of the upcoming book, *They Knew*, available for pre-order now.

Andrea Chalupa:

I am Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones* about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine. And if you want to host a screening of *Mr. Jones* wherever you live to help raise awareness of the ongoing genocidal war by Putin against Ukrainians, then reach out to the wonderful folks at West End Films in London and they can get you connected to your local distributor who could help you set up a screening wherever you live. It could be a fundraiser screening or a raise awareness screening. The email you want for that is info@westendfilms.com.

Sarah Kendzior:

And this is Gaslit Nation, a podcast covering corruption in the United States and rising autocracy around the world.

Andrea Chalupa:

This week's bonus episode for our subscribers at the Truth Teller level and higher on Patreon will be a live Q&A with our listeners, our subscribers at the Democracy Defender level and higher. We do a regular Q&A and for the first time ever we're going to have a live Q&A this afternoon. We've been promoting it on the show for several weeks now. If you are missing this one, there's going to be another one coming up over the summer you can go to. If you want the audio recording from that, sign up at the Truth Teller level or higher. Everybody at the Democracy Defender level and higher will get the full video recording of that. Sarah and I are gonna take showers for this. It's gonna be a big deal. So thank you everyone for supporting this show.

Sarah Kendzior:

<laughs> Yes. Alright, so today we have a very important interview coming up in this episode, which Andrea will tell you about later. But first I want to return to our coverage of the United States and the assault on democracy here. We've spent the last, I don't know, five or six episodes focusing almost exclusively on Ukraine and Russia, and it's essential to bring home the fact that many of the same individuals are implicated in Putin's war *and* in the Trump crime cult and its extended mafia network's assault on US democracy. As we've noted many times, Merrick Garland's DOJ has not risen to the task and has in fact enabled the coverup and the lack of accountability for the crimes committed by this mafia network, not just during Trump's tenure, but for decades on end.

Sarah Kendzior::

So I'm going to just bring you some new insights on that today. It has been 14 months since the Capitol attack and none of the criminal elites who orchestrated it have been brought to justice. With the exception of the arrests of Oathkeepers and Proud Boys—who are the middle men of the attack, not the criminal elites orchestrating it—the DOJ has focused excessively on the random people recruited by criminal elite networks to show up on January 6th. Meanwhile, Bannon, Flynn, Stone and other high level, actively dangerous operatives run free. Let's get real: If you are part of the coverup, you are part of the crime. That is the story of Merrick Garland's DOJ. They are an accomplice in the attack on American democracy. It's important to remember that this is the story of Merrick Garland's DOJ because right now the January 6th Committee is about to rewrite that story.

Sarah Kendzior:

You might be saying to yourself, “wait, the January 6th Committee and the DOJ are separate entities. How could one rewrite the story of the other?” The answer is that last week, the January 6th Committee announced that it is consulting Jamie Gorelick, the deeply corrupt mentor of Merrick Garland who we've covered on the show many times, to (and this is a quote from the *Washington Post*), “write its report about the attack on the Capitol, hoping to build a narrative thriller that compels audiences.” I do not disagree with the goal of making the report compelling, but I do disagree with the January 6th Committee hiring a corrupt lawyer deeply tied to both Garland and the Trump crime cult to oversee it, especially when this lawyer has a history of propaganda. We've discussed Jamie Gorelick on Gaslit Nation many times, but here is the short version: She is a lifelong friend and mentor to Merrick Garland and she is a protege of Alan Dershowitz..

Sarah Kendzior:

She was Garland's boss at the Clinton DOJ in the 1990s. Since quitting that job, she has moved through American life like the Forrest Gump of corruption. Among the things Gorelick has done (and this is the short version. Please consult gaslitnationpod.com for the full version); she wrote the memo that created a wall between intelligence agencies in the 1990s and helped make 9/11 possible and then refused to testify to the 9/11 about that, she profited from a massive student loan corruption scheme while representing Fannie Mae, lobbied for fossil fuel companies after they did oil spills, lobbied for the worst of Big Tech, lobbied for police officers who killed innocent Black men, *volunteered* in 2017 to be Jared and Ivanka's lawyer, thus enabling them to skirt legal requirements and infiltrate the White House. Gorelick did the same for Rex Tillerson, Rex Tillerson who received an Order of Friendship Medal from Putin in 2013 before becoming Trump's secretary of state. Gorelick was Tillerson's lawyer for that, to make sure he got in there despite his dangerous ties to the Kremlin.

Sarah Kendzior:

This is who Jamie Gorelick is. Merrick Garland's lifelong friend and advisor is entrenched in Trump's criminal network. When the January 6th Committee turns to Jared and Ivanka's lawyer to tell the story of January 6th, in which Ivanka was so involved—she was called to testify by the January 6th Committee—we have a massive problem. I was researching Gorelick to figure out why the Committee would select her and in the process I learned even more disturbing information about Merrick Garland and his recurring role, almost always with Gorelick, in shady political alliances involving US national security. In a previous episode called '[Merrick Garland Both-Sides the Coup](#)', I documented how there's been an elaborate propaganda operation surrounding Garland for over half a decade. The tactics of this include planting misleading articles in mainstream media outlets and spamming social media to make it

look like Garland did things like catch Timothy McVeigh or play a similar role in his prosecution. To be clear, Garland did neither.

Sarah Kendzior:

His role was minimal. He also did not catch the Unabomber. The Unabomber was turned in by his brother. These are all myths that if you're on Twitter at all, if you say the words "Merrick Garland", someone will show up in your mentions spouting this. But it is nonsense. And it's debunked by such things as being alive in 1995. These are very basic pieces of information so it's very disturbing that people keep lying about them in unison en masse. So anyway, check that episode for more about that propaganda. What I didn't know when we aired that episode in January is that the original version of this narrative first appeared in 2010 when Merrick Garland was considered as replacement for John Paul Stevens on the Supreme Court. And again, it reemerged in 2016 when, of course, he was nominated for the Supreme Court and Mitch McConnell and his goon squad vetoed that.

Sarah Kendzior:

But anyway, like I've said, this is the same narrative over and over again, often almost the same article over and over again in different outlets, and I have now found the template. The 2010 article from the *New York Times* is called, "How Bombing Case Helped Shape Career of a Potential Justice" and it has the prerequisite quotes from Gorelick—she's in every single one of these articles—and insinuations that Garland was more involved in [the] Oklahoma City [bombing] than he actually was, although interestingly, this article ultimately admits he really didn't do very much different in this respect than the articles that came later. But it also has something new. It has a new character witness for Garland, a new quote from someone he's been close to. And that person is Joseph diGenova. Who is Joseph diGenova? He is a Trump crime cult and oligarch lawyer with a long dark history in public politics.

Sarah Kendzior:

You may remember him from the 2020 attempted coup because he was part of the legal team that tried to turn over the election for Donald Trump. DiGenova is a close friend and associate of Rudy Giuliani and played a role in the Ukraine shakedown that led to Trump's *first* impeachment. In 2019, diGenova and his wife, Victoria Toensing, began representing Ukrainian oligarch Dmytro Firtash to help him avoid extradition to the US under a federal indictment while their partner, Giuliani, took over the operation to target Joe Biden in Ukraine. Firtash is a Kremlin lackey and a longtime partner of Paul Manafort and Toensing and diGenova were the people who hired the now indicted Lev Parnas for the Ukraine operation as Giuliani picked up where the then imprisoned Manafort left off. DiGenova was also part of the legal team that worked against Mueller when Mueller was investigating Trump in 2018.

Sarah Kendzior:

So I could go on and on about this guy because diGenova's illicit activity and criminal ties date back to the Reagan era. In fact, he was up to some things in the 1980s...I don't even want to say what they were but it's bad. I'll just say this is a very dangerous man and his wife is dangerous as well, so dangerous that the FBI raided her home in April, 2021 over her involvement in the Ukraine dealings. This home is also ostensibly diGenova's home because they're married, but the search warrant was in her name. In a May, 2021 court filing, investigators disclosed that in late 2019 they acquired a search warrant for Toensing's iCloud account and for that of Giuliani and for an email account belonging to her. And since then, what's happened to these folks, these anti-American actors, these potentially treasonous criminals? Nothing.

Sarah Kendzior:

Now remember, this is a man close enough to Merrick Garland that the *New York Times* sought him out as a reference for Garland. And what did diGenova have to say about Merrick Garland? He's a big fan. This is the quote: "Judge Garland"—This is diGenova talking—"is a profoundly serious guy who really should be the kind of person you want to have on the Supreme Court.", said Joseph E. diGenova, a Republican and US attorney in the Reagan administration. 'If Obama wants to get a fantastic judge on the court, he's got one ready to go in Merrick Garland.'" Merrick Garland, of course, did not get the job. It went to Elena Kagan. But notably, the attempt to install Merrick Garland in high office did not end there. Garland was initially considered as a replacement for Robert Mueller as FBI director in 2011, though Garland, at the time, expressed a lack of interest in the position. Gorelick was also considered for FBI head by the Obama administration.

Sarah Kendzior:

This is a terrifying prospect that was thankfully shot down at the time due to her extensive history of corruption, although that really wasn't much of an imposition for other, or maybe almost all heads of the FBI. Anyway, to sum all this up, it is alarming that the official story of January 6th will be guided by a woman who has worked for people like Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner, who are implicated in the January 6th attack. It is deeply troubling that Gorelick is serving as a bridge between the January 6th Committee and the DOJ under Merrick Garland and that both of them are tied to the Trump Crime Cult and its affiliates, including and especially Alan Dershowitz, Jared Kushner and Joseph diGenova. This is a massive conflict of interest at best and extraordinarily dangerous at worst. When you ask why Garland is not prosecuting elites who committed obvious crimes, or why the January 6th Committee let's crime cult members dodge subpoenas and has yet to hold hearings (as they once promised they would), these alliances are part of the answer. Andrea, any thoughts?

Andrea Chalupa:

I think what you're saying and the war that Putin is carrying out in Ukraine, all of that points to the urgency of accountability and shining a light on corruption in all its many forms, shining a light especially on fascism and the proxies used by fascists to come to power, consolidate power, stay in power and further enrich themselves and escape accountability and further their political violence, all in order to stay in power. So I think that's just the big connection between what you're laying out and what we're about to hear with this interview with a civil society leader from Ukraine. It was a huge shock, obviously, when Putin went total war on Ukraine. Ukrainians themselves did not believe it. I did not believe it. It seemed like more saber rattling from Russia, but the reality is that Putin did it in large part because the West did nothing to stop him all these years.

Sarah Kendzior:

Mmmhmm (affirmative)

Sarah Kendzior:

He invaded Georgia. No, no, let's start from the beginning. There was all this reporting on how Putin and his FSB crime cult in the Kremlin orchestrated apartment bombings in Moscow, killing Russian people to come to power and justify a brutal war that leveled Chechnya, that destroyed Chechnya. So that was the first warning sign. We should have stopped him there. We should have isolated that guy there. We should have treated him like the terrorist he is then, but we didn't, and then he went on to invade

Georgia. He went on to invade Ukraine. He went on to terrorize and commit massive atrocities in Syria, deliberately killing civilians in Syria, even though he was claiming to fight ISIS. No, he was going after hospitals. He was going after schools. He was going after all of the essential infrastructure to live life that we're now seeing him do now in Ukraine, the same playbook.

Andrea Chalupa:

And now he's doing total war against Ukraine. Oh, and let's also factor in how he tipped the vote in the very close Brexit vote. He tipped the vote in the very close Trump vote, giving the Trump campaign all of this much-needed help to win the 2016 election, and that was all documented in Robert Mueller's Russia report. We saw out in the open how Trump himself and others were welcoming that help. Even the idiot sons have admitted how much Trump businesses depend on Russian oligarch money. So all of this to say that without accountability, lives will be lost, genocides will be committed, millions of refugees will be created. Accountability is essential and people that try to kick that can down the road are only making things worse, as we're now seeing in Ukraine. That's the topic of conversation we're going to have for a very long time now because we have to. It's urgent.

Andrea Chalupa

So just to set up the conversation we're about to hear, I want to just give a quick news update of what's going on. Russia still remains frozen in Ukraine. As we keep pointing out, the military's suffering under its own kleptocracy, its own dysfunction, having believed its own disinformation that they'd be welcomed with flowers. That's not happening. So it's pretty much frozen and out of that frustration, Russians are openly committing war crimes in Ukraine, shooting civilians point blank, deliberately bombing civilians in major cities, putting a major city in the southeast, Mariupol—what was a jewel of a coastal city—in a siege, starving the people to death. There's reports in Mariupol that survivors of that siege are currently shooting and hunting stray dogs to eat them. Stray dogs are eating bodies in the street. This is the kind of stuff that was going on during the Holodomor, Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine.

Andrea Chalupa::

It's now going on under Putin today and we should have known that this would happen because for years now, Putin has brought back the cult of Stalin. And now look at what he's done to Russia. It's now back in Soviet times, the Great Terror. So with that, we had Alexei Navalny, the Russian opposition leader and the anti-corruption activist, he was just sentenced yet again in a Soviet trial. Another one. This time he's getting nine years in prison, nine, on trumped up charges. He does have a link to the outside world and was able to share a message calling on people to join him wherever you are to support his work through the Anti-Corruption Foundation to bring down Putin and his fascist, unbelievably corrupt regime. Navalny calls on people to join, please support the Anti-Corruption Foundation. We'll link to the info on how you can support that group in the [show notes for this episode](#), which will be available as always in the Patreon link for this week's episode.

Andrea Chalupa:

Just to give you an idea of the brave and important work they do, Navalny's team recently uncovered that one of the most expensive yachts in the world, the Sheherezade, a \$700 million mega yacht, likely belongs to... You guessed it: mass murderer and war crime enthusiast, Vladimir Putin. So if you care about that, if you care about bringing Putin to justice and standing up to him, go on to look up the Anti-Corruption Foundation. We'll link to it again in our show notes and you can support them there. Also out of Russia, you have Dmitry Muratov, who is the editor-in-chief of *Novaya Gazeta*, an

independent newspaper in Moscow. They're auctioning his Nobel Peace Prize medal to raise money to help Ukrainian refugees. So we have a lot of brave Russians who are putting their lives on the line, who are making great sacrifices to help Ukraine. Unfortunately, they are in the minority. The majority of Russians support Putin. The majority of Russians support Putin's war and it's extremely important for us to shine a light on that and understand why.

Andrea Chalupa:

A lot of that stems from their history. What the Russians see as the Great Empire, the Soviet Union, the Czarist Empire, the captive nations like Ukraine, the Baltic states and others that have suffered under Russian imperialism see that as genocide, see that as terrorism, see that as enduring trauma. This imperialist mindset that gives a lot of national pride, chauvinistic pride to the majority of Russians, that is something that has to be confronted and unraveled just like in the United States, we're confronting the Confederacy and the Neo-Confederacy and the Tiki torch wielding white boys who surround a statue of a brutal slave owner, General Lee, in Charlottesville. Just like we put a light and name and shame Trump's fascist American nationalist, America First neo-Nazi movement and all of their donors and all of the legal structures that empower them and allow them to steamroll over election protections, to steal elections, attempt to steal elections to come to power, just like you would not have any sympathy for the Trump mob that tried to violently overthrow our democracy, don't have any sympathy for the Russian fascists who are propping up Putin right now, because all of the work that we do in dictatorships and how they work, dictators rely on a base.

Andrea Chalupa:

Every single dictator has had a base of supporters. They are necessary. Without that base of supporters, the dictator's dragged out and killed. One of the many things protecting Putin right now is his base of supporters. They exist. They're real, and you are not helping *at all* the brave Russians risking their lives by ignoring that and refusing to shine a light on it and understand it. All these years we've been talking about dictatorship and how it works now will be very useful. And as part of that discussion, we're always pointing to Hitler and the rise of Hitler and how Hitler was empowered and how so many that were complicit in that, all these people that tried to use him to come to power, the propaganda, all of it of how it works, how dictator comes to power, now, what would be most useful is for us to understand what happened after war. What happened to all those Germans that supported Hitler and pretended not to?

Andrea Chalupa:

What happened during the Nuremberg trials? How did the Nuremberg trials come together? And what about the Nuremberg defense, where people said they were just following orders? How do you protect the world from the next Putin? Because I promise you, once Putin's gone there's going to be another fascist to replace him, just like when Trump's gone there's gonna be another Trumpist to replace him. You need to systemically get the rot out by the root and you have to understand how it works, why they're doing it, why they're motivated to do it, and there needs to be international pressure on that system in order to break it from the core. That has to include Nuremberg trials for the Russians that are carrying out war crimes in Ukraine, and also for Syria, and all of these Russian soldiers that are willfully shooting missiles at schools and hospitals and shooting civilians point blank, they need to be personally sanctioned.

Andrea Chalupa:

Their families need to be personally sanctioned. They need to be kept in Russia and unable to travel to anywhere in Europe and North America and elsewhere that cares about democracy and human rights. There has to be thousands and thousands and thousands of people on the sanctions list for carrying out these war crimes because it's not just Putin pulling the trigger. Yes, we acknowledge that a lot of Russians are deserting. Ukraine has been very clear that if they desert, they will be given money. They'll be given safety. They'll be treated humanely. Some are taking Zelensky up on this offer. Why aren't more doing it? Why are more choosing instead to deliberately mass murder civilians? That is a question we're going to be living with and must find the answers to in the years ahead. We must bring those people to justice because if we don't, another Putin will take his place and we'll be stuck fighting these same wars and dealing with these same mass casualties and mass refugee crises.

Andrea Chalupa:

The fascism in Russia is real. Don't try to sugarcoat it, Americans. I know Americans like to be Disneyesque and touchy-feel good and feel like, "Oh, but look at the brave Russians." The brave Russians exist. They're fearless. They're models for the rest of us, but their lives are in danger because of the fascists that are propping up the dictator at home. Their lives are not safe, their families are not safe until we pull fascism out by the root in Russia, in the US, wherever it is. Sarah and I are running a really important series this spring looking at American fascism and how it works and what we can do about it. We're shining a light on all the many different tools and techniques and impulses of fascism here in America. A series like that needs to be created just for Russia because all of us need to be prepared on how to hold those Russian war criminals accountable, not just for the safety of Ukraine and the rest of the world but the safety for Russians themselves so they can get back to their country, have a strong and safe democracy, Russian reformers and activists can stop worrying about their parents and they can live at home again, and they can breathe free Russian air again, and all those Russian kids on TikTok who are risking their lives to go out and read the Russian Constitution in the street and then getting manhandled by riot cops, they should be allowed to pursue whatever future they want inside Russia. Right now, they're being deprived of that because of the massive base of support of fascists—full blown fascists—that Putin currently enjoys. That's helping prop him up. That's a big discussion we're going to continue on this show. Now, we're going to go to an interview about how the West can do more to protect civilians in Ukraine from Putin's war crimes.

Andrea Chalupa::

Alright, so I'm joined by Olena Tregub. Since 2017, Olena is the Secretary General of NAKO (the Independent Defense Anti-Corruption Committee), an international oversight body created by Transparency International. NAKO's mission is to strengthen democratic oversight over defense spending and increase accountability and transparency of the sector. From 2015 to 2017, Olena led the National Authority for International Development Assistance Coordination as the director at Ukraine's Ministry of Economic Development. She oversaw a vast portfolio of international development projects and programs totaling \$12 billion. After a sharp increase of aid funds after Euromaidan, known as the Revolution of Dignity, she was responsible for establishing the assistance coordination mechanisms aimed at optimizing the involvement of international partners and aligning aid with national reform priorities. She worked on ensuring the efficient and transparent use of funds and public access to aid information by creating an online aid management system, openaid.gov.ua.

Andrea Chalupa:

So simply put, Olena is one of the superstars of Ukraine's civil society movement. She was very active on Maidan and she was one of the many reformers that came into government following the revolution. Now, with her unique perspective of oversight over Ukraine's defense industry, including corruption and lack of efficiencies and so forth, Olena is in an interesting role where she can see what the Ukrainian military has in its resistance against what we all considered to be the second most powerful military in the world, the Russian military, that's ongoing in its genocidal war against Ukraine. She also knows what Ukraine needs and what Ukraine's government and supporters are asking for in order to successfully defeat the Russians militarily because it doesn't seem like anything else... Well, short of Putin falling sick and dying or meeting an untimely end, it doesn't seem like anything else will really stop Putin at this point because the sanctions take forever to really kick in and he doesn't care about the people suffering. And he's just on this rabid quest to destroy Ukraine because the man is convinced of his own conspiracy theories about Ukraine and speaks about Ukraine in terms of genocide language, so this might have to get resolved on the battlefield, unfortunately. So Olena is in a unique position to tell us what Ukraine has militarily, what it still needs and how the West can do more to support in resisting Putin. Welcome to Gaslit Nation, Olena.

Olena Tregub:

Hi, thank you for inviting me.

Andrea Chalupa:

What support has Ukraine received from the US so far and what are your thoughts about President Biden's support for Ukraine?

Olena Tregub:

Initially, of course, we are grateful that the United States was able to warn the world about the plans of Putin to invade Ukraine, that everybody from the Western coalition of democracies, everybody was a little bit at least prepared for what's going to happen, at least on a mental level. So it is good that there is this anti-Putin coalition that was formed, but at the same time, when it comes to practical assistance, practical support for Ukraine to be able to fight off Russian aggression, I would say it's too little and too late what we are receiving, catastrophically too little and too late. And I can explain, for example, in terms of military assistance, it's the most important thing right now because it will determine how much of the territory Putin will be able to occupy.

Olena Tregub:

It will determine whether Putin will be able to take Kyiv or not. Unfortunately, Ukraine has not received this assistance from the United States. What we received is some fragments of assistance, some small tactical weapons, but they are absolutely not sufficient given how many different weapons the Russians have and are using against us. They're using strategic ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, supersonic missiles, thermobaric bombs, and basically the advanced weapons we've received from US are stingers and javelins and several helicopters. It's, of course, nothing compared to what we need and our army currently is not equipped. We are running out of our weapons. We do need more javelins. We don't have enough javelins. We need these bigger weapons even more urgently right now. So we need both.

Olena Tregub:

We need also urgently the support of United States to help us buy from other countries, to transfer from other countries that have Soviet weapons because we need tanks, armed vehicles, ammunition, artillery.

We're just running out of everything just because our defense industry, which actually my organization was reforming and overseeing, it's not prepared for this war. It was not really preparing for the full scale war and currently a majority of the factories, they don't even function and we cannot produce urgently all the weapons that we need. So the situation is critical. The situation is dire and we need the assistance immediately.

Andrea Chalupa:

Why are Soviet weapons important for Ukraine?

Olena Tregub:

This is because we need them today and we need to start operating them today because our military knows how to use them and they will be able to do it immediately once we receive those weapons. For example, when we receive javelins, the instruction is written in English. It takes some time for a military person to learn how to use javelin. Not many were trained how to use a javelin, just some. So, of course, in this situation, we need weapons that we already know very well how to use because right now we have maybe like, you know, several days before Russia will start their second wave of escalation. Maybe we have several weeks, we don't know but there is a feeling of urgency. We don't know if Belarus is going to formally put boots on the ground, tomorrow or day after tomorrow. We need to be prepared for this. And once you know, there is maybe some ceasefire in this war, maybe there is some time, then we need more modern weapons.

Olena Tregub:

Then we need those serious weapons like Patrio long range air defense systems that we were asking for even before the beginning of this war. We need serious drones that can destroy the Russian columns. We need all of that, but we will need time to learn how. We need modern jets right now. For example, we're asking for Soviet jets like MiGs, like SU. A pilot can learn how to fly a modern jet within one month, several months, and they can do it but at this stage of the war, the Soviet equipment is what's needed urgently the most right now.

Andrea Chalupa:

What do you say to anyone who would point out that, "Well, look how great Ukraine is doing with the javelins and stingers and helicopters we've already given them, so why don't we just keep throwing more of those at Ukraine?"

Olena Tregub:

You know, this is just PR. This is just a distortion of reality in public communication because, yes, there are a lot of stories covering how we are using javelins but you should analyze how many javelins we received and how many of them we are using. Actually, we're not even using all of them, I can tell you. We're using much more of our own, for example, tanks, our own artillery systems, much more than javelins, but it's not reported in Western media because it's not as pleasant to hear maybe for American taxpayers who are happy that javelins are helping us. Yes, javelins are helping us but javelins will not help us to win the war against Russia because it's not the most serious weapon.

Olena Tregub:

And yet, you know, a javelin is a lethal weapon and we don't understand why, for example, the Biden administration thinks it's okay to give us javelins but it's not okay to give us jets. Both are lethal weapons,

essentially and I think that what needs to happen is that Ukraine, we have the right to ask for what we need and we need to be listened to. If Ukrainians are asking for those MiGs, for example, they should be given those MiGs because Ukrainians know what they need. But currently the situation is that we are given what we are given. And we are thankful for what we get but it will not allow the Ukrainian armed forces to protect our civilians. Our civilians will keep dying from bombs, from cruise and ballistic missiles. We don't have the capacity to protect lives. We don't. And also Ukrainian armed forces, they don't have the capacity to completely stop Russian advances from the ground. This is their reality. And somehow I don't understand why there is this optimistic mood in the West because we were able to repel Russian aggression for 25 days, but it's not a victory. We are very, very far from victory. Without assistance from NATO, from the US, we will not be able to have any victory.

Andrea Chalupa:

What would you say to the concern that if the Biden administration gives jets to Ukraine or if NATO gives Patriot missiles to Ukraine, that this could be seen as a direct provocation of Russia and therefore lead to World War III and nuclear war with Russia?

Olena Tregub:

I just want to remind those who make this argument that Vladimir Putin doesn't need to be provoked to make a decision about aggression. For example, his current war of aggression against Ukraine is completely unprovoked by anything. He just decided to have this war because he can and because he calculated that there will be no consequences for him because when he enacted Crimea, when he started war in the East, there were no consequences for him so he decided now he can go further and he can be even more aggressive. This is the way his mind works. Vladimir Putin has zero self deterrence and he is always aggressive. It doesn't matter if you provoke him or not. Vice versa, if he sees weakness, this is when he has aggression and this is when he moves further. So in my opinion, what the US administration is currently doing, they are creating even more danger for Europe, for the Western world, because if Vladimir Putin occupies, for example, if they make a calculation that it's okay that Vladimir Putin can occupy half of Ukraine and it will be contained, that this war will not spread further.

Olena Tregub:

No, of course it will because Putin will create a military base for him in that part of Ukraine. He will just use it to start a bigger war because Ukraine is just an intermediary stop for him. As you know, Russian opinion polls show that the majority of Russians want their government to attack European NATO countries. They speak about it openly. It's a public demand and Vladimir Putin will do whatever is needed in order for him to preserve his power because he's desperately afraid to be in prison or executed for his multiple crimes and his corruption. Whatever he does, he does it just for him. He wants to stay in power and if staying in power means going to attack a NATO country, of course he will do it.

Olena Tregub:

Moreover, if the argument of NATO countries and of the Biden administration is that giving us jets can create provocation that Putin will decide to, what? Attack NATO for that? It will be Putin's decision and Putin, so far he has not yet... He will not decide to attack NATO based on that. He will decide to attack NATO when he would calculate that it is safe for him to attack NATO. For example, his calculation would be that he will use asymmetrical warfare against NATO. Even though NATO is 10 times stronger than Putin, he will just say, "I'm going to use nuclear force if you don't give me..." for example, Estonia. And

then there will be pundits on American television right saying that, "Okay, why would we risk in America, our a life? Let's just give him Estonia. Let's just exit NATO." This is what Putin wants.

Olena Tregub:

It's very sad that so far Biden's administration is playing along his playbook, unfortunately. It's very wrong that the Biden administration makes statements that "We will not use boots on the ground. There is no way we will implement a no-fly zone, no way we will give MiGs," because when they say this, they give Putin a green light for more aggression and more escalation and this is what is happening. You see, even though the Biden administration restrained themselves, they had very limited assistance for Ukraine, nothing really big, still what are we seeing? We're seeing that Putin is escalating every day. At this point, they're just destroying whole villages. They're just attacking residential buildings without any consideration for human life. They are shelling nuclear power stations. They are sending more powerful missiles. Why is this escalation happening? Then if he uses chemical weapons in Ukraine, if he uses even nuclear weapons, the Biden administration says, "No, we will not intervene even if Putin will use chemical weapons in Ukraine." That's pretty much what, already, the White House said. I think this is very wrong and it just encourages escalation on the behalf of Putin.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah. I think that pride in restraint that the US is showing, that Biden is showing, is a counter to George W. Bush and his administration which quickly drove Americans into war based on lies that unleashed a big trauma for the US that's been lasting with the forever wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. So when Biden shows his pride in restraint on this matter, it's coming from George W. Bush and what he did. It's something that Americans do want to hear and that they are comforted by, but obviously the other side of this is, to Putin, that restraint is translated in his mind as weakness and an invitation to keep going. So that's the whole enduring trauma of Bush's wars here is that it's forced Americans into a position essentially that is just going to invite greater aggression from Putin. And I want to point out three of Russia's main polling firms, three main polling firms in Russia that are considered objective and credible, every single one of them have polled Russians and seen that Putin's approval rating has never been higher.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's at 71% now because of his invasion of Ukraine. So this is something that Putin is glorifying in to excite the Russian people. He's created all sorts of disinformation to justify the sanctions and the international boycott, his propaganda machine even claiming there will be reparations for what the West is doing to Russians in terms of all these sanctions. So, Putin has never been more popular than he is right now among Russians. Where is that coming from? Because I know we in the West point out all the heroic Russians that are getting arrested for protests, but those are the minority. The majority of Russians support Putin and his war and what he's doing. And yes, they live in a totalitarian state now, but for the last eight years since this invasion started, Russians had access to credible objective information through all sorts of foreign sources and the internet.

Andrea Chalupa:

They could have sought out alternative viewpoints and a lot of books on history, a lot of facts. They had Memorial who was trying to show Russians all the atrocities committed under Stalin and so forth. So Russians that support Putin, they had other options all this time to get credible information but yet they chose to fall in line with Putin's aggression and terrorism. So could you speak a little bit about where you

think that comes from among Russians and what do you think will happen between Russians and Ukrainians moving forward? Do you think this is going to be a conflict that endures for generations?

Olena Tregub:

Yeah, sure. But before I speak about that, I just wanted to briefly address your earlier argument that Americans are afraid of the war of choice, of this third world war threat. There is a huge spectrum of things that can be done between doing nothing and going into the third world war. There are many, many ways how Ukraine can receive help without Americans going into the third world war. And right now, the Biden administration is doing the minimum unfortunately. I don't speak about sanctions, I speak about concrete rescue of civilian life, of a country that is fighting for democracy, for a foundation of liberty, all the values that we all share in our community of democracy. So, they are doing too little and this is why our argument is definitely we don't ask Americans to go to the third world war, but just doing much more is possible.

Olena Tregub:

And it's not a risk as it is portrayed in American media sometimes. My answer to the second question is yes, of course, this war is not about Putin. Putin is just the leader of Russia who happens to be the leader of Russia, who happens to be corrupt and too scared to step down, and he will do whatever is needed to stay in power. What is needed to stay in power is waging wars. Russia is a fascist society by now. It's very militaristic. They derive their pride from invading other countries, from hurting other people. Unfortunately, this is how right now the Russian culture is built, that they see themselves as some nation who is entitled to suppress all other nations around them. And the future of Russia is that it should be de-Putinized, demilitarized, it should be stripped of nuclear power and only then, maybe 50 years from now, it can become a normal democratic country.

Olena Tregub:

Otherwise, if Russia stays the way it is, there will be another leader after Putin who will want to wage another war in five or seven years from now. You know, it's just unfortunately the state that Russia has become and unfortunately the world has not really paid attention to what's happening with Russian society, Russian rhetoric. I just don't understand it. Russia has always been a huge, huge threat for the Western world, for the world order, but it was completely ignored because Russia was able to corrupt Western elites, Russia had money to spread their Russia Today propaganda all over the world. But Russians, at the same time, there was no reaction when, for many years now when Russian TV, they were all saying how they dream about sending nuclear weapons to nuke, for example, Warsaw, to nuke, for example, Baltic states. It's their national dream and they have huge support for this horrific, horrific, inhumane threat.

Olena Tregub:

It tells you what culture currently this country has. And we see right now that, you know, all these 200 troops which now are being sent to Ukraine, currently, already many died but currently there are around 100,000 troops in Ukrainian territory. They are not Putins. They are people who think it's okay to fight this war, who think it's okay to fight Ukrainians, to kill Ukrainians, to erase Ukraine from the face of the earth. It's unfortunately the ideology of the culture of this country. The world should deal seriously with this global threat. It's a much bigger threat than some terrorist organization because terrorist organizations, they emerge then they dissolve. And Russia is there. It's a big country. It exists and it'll

always be a threat unless there is some huge change, like I said, of the regime, of ideology, like it happened to Nazi Germany.

Andrea Chalupa:

What would you say to people in the West who have great sympathy for the Russian people and say, "Well, they're victims, they're brainwashed. Those polls can't be trusted even though they're by credible polling agencies because the Russians live in fear and they're staying home and remaining silent because they're scared." What would you say to that?

Olena Tregub:

It's exactly the same as saying that Germans who lived under Adolf Hitler, they were also victims and they were afraid to speak against Nazism. It's the same. Unfortunately, Russians had many, many chances to speak against Putin, to speak against the war, but it's their choice. They made a choice not to speak against it and currently, yes, it's becoming increasingly hard for them to speak out because their laws are now becoming more totalitarian, indeed. But even if when this soldier that we captured in Ukraine, he tells us that he did not want to go to war but he still went because what choice did he have? He said, "If I would refuse to go to war, I can go to jail." Well, it's a choice. He should have chosen jail but he decided to go to kill innocent women and children. You know? Unfortunately, this is the choice and they always have choice.

Andrea Chalupa:

What would you like to see from the US in terms of support to successfully defeat Russia?

Olena Tregub:

Well, I think that the US should just use its political, military, financial power that they have in the world to help Ukraine repel Russian aggression, to help Ukraine maintain the territory that we currently have, and it needs to be done not as slow and in a delayed fashion as it is done now, but in a more proactive way, not reactive way that Putin is ahead always and the US is behind. So yes, we need help, like I said, that we receive Soviet equipment. The US can help here because the US is the richest country out of all our allies and the US gave us this big, generous package of money that we can use for military assistance but we are not really using this money properly right now. We can pay to those Eastern European countries so they can buy some replacement weapons so they are not left defenseless.

Olena Tregub:

So this is urgent. And also, like I said, sending us more modern weapons on a later stage, also tightening sanctions is very important. Unfortunately, the big problem is that, you know, during this war, Germany paid to Russia probably 4 billion Euros for oil and gas which is financing directly the war. So if the US can help Europe to get rid of dependency on Russian oil and gas, this would be really big because Russia should be sanctioned and should be left without money completely, to the extent that officials in Russia can not open a computer because this computer doesn't have Microsoft functioning, doesn't have any other programs, that they are completely unable to conduct this war. Right now, Russian factories are manufacturing cruise and ballistic missiles around the clock because they are running low on missiles because they've fired, already, more than 1,000 missiles on Ukraine. And they make more of them.

Olena Tregub:

So the US should help us to the extent that Russia doesn't have materials, doesn't have the capacity to make more missiles. Otherwise, it just will be too tragic not only for Ukraine but for Europe. You see, these threats, they are huge because Vladimir Putin, he really wants to destabilize NATO and Europe. He wants Ukrainian refugees to be more than 8 million, which is currently projected by European governments. He wants tens of millions refugees. He wants to destroy basically Europe in order to control Europe, or part of Europe. That's his goal really, and the US should see this and prevent this from happening because it will be a major catastrophe. Moreover, all these bad regimes are looking right now at what Putin is doing—threatening the world with nuclear weapons—and that he's able to get away with anything basically, only because of him threatening the US with nuclear weapons. So, if the Biden administration doesn't change policy, what will happen is there will be massive nuclear proliferation of very bad actors after this war. The whole world can become chaotic and violent essentially, and it all depends on the right policy that currently our Western partners should implement. That's my message.

[outro theme music]

Andrea Chalupa:

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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 Oil Change International, an advocacy group supported with the generous donation from the Greta Thunberg Foundation that exposes the true costs of fossil fuels and facilitates the ongoing transition to clean energy.

Andrea Chalupa:

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

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