

Gaslit Nation Transcript

07 September 2022

“Semi-Fascist Kind of Life”

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/semi-fascist-of-71624071>

[opening — excerpt from Sarah’s upcoming book, *They Knew: How a Culture of Complacency Keeps America Complacent*]

Sarah Kendzior (00:00):

I have a reputation for bringing hidden truths to light, but the most damning truth about the Trump crime world is that very little of its illicit activity was hidden. It was out there, decontextualized and obscured, but reported in real time for decades on end. I stood out as an anomaly not for what I claimed, but that I thought it was important, particularly when it came to predicting how he would act as president. From 2015 until 2021, my response to inquiries about how I was able to predict Trump's behavior was, “It was in the public domain.” I lost track of the number of times I told a dubious reporter deeming my allegations of Trump and his associates’ past behavior “a conspiracy theory” to simply consult their old archives for proof. But it was the availability of archival materials that allowed me and other journalists and social scientists to put the pieces together. For nearly the entirety of Trump's campaign and tenure in office most media outlets remained free.

Sarah Kendzior (01:11):

Many offered archives that provided a window into decades of dirty deeds. But in the beginning of 2021, after democracy had been defenestrated, that window abruptly closed. “He who controls the past controls the future,” said Orwell, and now they who control the past decided people needed to pony up to see what had happened. By spring 2021, nearly every major news outlet had erected a paywall, often prohibitively expensive, that blocked content from general view. Journalists, both frustrated with the paywalls or facing layoffs after financial restructuring, quit and started their own newsletters or podcasts, many of which also required a subscription to access. What remained free of charge? Misinformation, propaganda and lies. Memes, fact-deprived political websites and social media gossip continued to circulate as the hard news hid away. Isolated bits of articles, headlines, quotations, paragraphs, floated around the internet, decontextualized and stripped of authorship or date of publication.

Sarah Kendzior (02:41):

People relied on each other to find out what a paywalled article was about, including articles about public health crises like COVID, and the summaries traveled like a bad game of telephone with the result that a lot of people spent late 2021 scarfing down horse paste. Local newspapers, severely downsized since the 2008 recession, paywalled their websites to stay afloat, leaving panicked citizens, relying on Nextdoor posts to navigate a dystopia. It is hard to imagine more fertile terrain for a propaganda war, one that the paywalled side is destined to lose. There is no longer a public sphere, but there is a public flat earth.

Announcer (03:34):

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[intro theme music]

Sarah Kendzior (03:53):

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: How a Culture of Conspiracy Keeps America Complacent*, out on September 13th and available for pre-order now. And you heard a clip of that earlier, so stay tuned for more on that.

Andrea Chalupa (04:15):

Yeah. Get the book.

Sarah Kendzior:

Get the book.

Andrea Chalupa

It's a Gothic ghost story true crime travel journey through America's free fall into the abyss. [laugh] I loved every minute of it. It was a page turner. What's gonna happen to this country? And also, not to be outdone, I've got a thing too—

Sarah Kendzior (04:39):

Do you wanna introduce yourself first, anonymous praiser of me?

Andrea Chalupa (04:43):

And I'm Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, the film, the Kremlin literally does not want you to see, and we know that because they keep shutting down screenings

Sarah Kendzior (04:57):

And this is *Gaslit Nation*, a podcast covering corruption in the United States and rising autocracy around the world. And yeah, between the two of us, we're gonna have a lot of interesting reactions to all of our creative works over the next wonderful couple of months. So, speaking of that, we have an announcement from our president, a couple of them actually. On August 24th, Joe Biden announced that we are in an era of "semi-fascism" and he said this in his speech to Democratic donors at a private home in Maryland before he did a rally. The full quote is, "What we're seeing now is either the beginning or the death knell of an extreme MAGA philosophy. It's not just Trump, it's the entire philosophy that underpins the... I'm gonna say something. It's like semi-fascism." And, you know, this may sound very Cher Horowitz from Biden.

Sarah Kendzior (05:59):

This sort of, "It's like, semi fascism. My God!" He actually makes a really good point here. I'm not sure he made it on purpose, but nonetheless, I agree with this formation. This is similar to what I've been saying for years and what I expand upon in great detail in *They Knew*, which is, Trump is not actually a fascist because fascism requires loyalty to the state. Fascism requires a desire to embody and expand the state if you are the leader of that state. And that is not and has never been what Trump wants to do. Trump

wants to destroy the state. He wants to destroy the United States and strip it down and sell it for parts to domestic and foreign forces, and he has been incredibly explicit about that. There are quotes from him, you know, going back to 2016 during the election, quotes from Bannon saying the same thing, lifelong quotes about how he reaps the benefits of catastrophe and sees disaster capitalism as his route to success.

Sarah Kendzior (07:05):

So, he's really a different kind of operative. He is a mafia state actor and he's surrounded by literal foreign agents, people like Paul Manafort and Michael Flynn and Tom Barrack. They are all registered as agents for foreign countries. You also have people like Jared Kushner who basically is an agent—or an asset certainly—of multiple foreign countries, including Israel and Saudi Arabia, and refused to register as such. So none of these people have as their foremost loyalty the United States, nor are they invested in its endurance. They are happy if it falls apart. That said, they use fascist tactics. They use fascist rhetoric. They foment coups. They streamline and normalize political violence. *They* may not be fascist. They may be out there chanting, “Make America great again” and saying “America first” when they really mean America last. They may be kleptocrats. They're supporters, these pawns that they use in their games to get what they want to boost their own wealth and power, they do support fascism.

Sarah Kendzior (08:11):

They often very frequently support white supremacists fascism, which is of course something that is as old as America itself. You know, the United States has always had selective autocracy practiced against native Americans, practiced against enslaved Black Americans. We have never been a full democracy. And so to say that we are dealing with “semi-fascism”, I think, is actually a very accurate way of putting it. I mean, the other thing of course is that—I hate to tell you this, everybody, but—it can get much worse. Andrea and I would not have this show and we would not be having this conversation, and she would not have her movie, *Mr. Jones*, and I would not have all my horrifying books if we were in full fascism. If we were in full fascism, we would be living how dissidents have had to live in Russia, for example, imprisoned or sent into exile. We would be contending with forces and threats to our ability to simply discuss the topic that are far greater than what we have now, but we are moving in that direction. And so I'm gonna get into the speech that Biden made September 1st, but Andrea, do you have any thoughts before I get into that? Yeah.

Andrea Chalupa (09:26):

I mean, I think Biden has been extremely measured in his response to Trump's fascist threat. I think he's been measured to a fault. I think he's done everything he could to act in good faith and put out olive branches and try to make deals and compromise, to the point where his base of supporters have been scratching their heads at times like, “What is wrong with you? Wake up.” I think the fact that Biden has finally stood up to this moment and done so by urgently passing a lot of historic, *historic* legislation. 2022 has very much been Biden's year. I think what gets lost in all of the fake outrage is the fact that Biden has been reserved, very reserved since becoming president. He ran a campaign for president, especially when it was in the general race, very much spelling out the soul of a nation.

Andrea Chalupa (10:24):

“The soul of a nation is at stake”, “We're at a very dangerous crossroads for our country's history, which way are you going to go?” People understood that clearly. And all the phone calls that I made to voters in battleground states talking to Republican voters, independents, Democrats, they all were saying the

same thing, that they're terrified of Trump and his death cult. And obviously what we saw, the fascist violent coup attempt by Trump and his followers orchestrated by a deeply funded operation that had a war room, an actual war room, that just made it all worse. So I think Biden did what he could to try to basically gain credibility in the eyes of people who are fence-sitters, gain sort of argument points with the idiot pundits on cable news TV by saying, "Look, I tried. I put out olive branches. I tried to be measured but the reality is there's a giant GOP elephant in the room and it wants to turn America into a fascist theocracy."

Andrea Chalupa (11:28):

It's plain as day. Never forget when the Supreme Court took away abortion rights. Remember, abortion is healthcare. Abortion is healthcare and it's nobody's business why a woman gets an abortion, period, but abortion is done for a lot of different reasons, including to save the life of a mother, including for the comfort of the mother so she doesn't have to carry around a dead fetus that she's painfully miscarrying. Abortion is healthcare. When the Supreme court went against science, went against facts, went against human rights and took away *Roe v. Wade*, which several of those justices during their confirmation hearing said under oath to Congress was settled law, when they did that they were gloating. They were bragging. Clarence Thomas was running down a whole list of human rights that they were going to take away from us in their quest to turn America into a fascist bureaucracy.

Andrea Chalupa (12:14):

This is how we lose democracies for generations to come. And I just wanna say that Biden is being extremely measured and the people that are both-sidesing this, especially the people at CNN that are desperate to try to cling onto their jobs during a right-wing takeover of the company and it's programming—the purge that's going on there at CNN currently of respectable journalists who stuck their necks out during the darkest days of the Trump regime—we're heading back into the dangerous territory, the same media landscape that in 2016 kept beating the dead horse of Hillary Clinton's non scandal email scandal. That's where we are. We're entering that. The ground is being fertilized for that level of nonsense. When Sarah and I launched this show, we did it with three episodes, our very first three episodes, where we look at the 2016 presidential election in America as a crime scene. And as part of that crime, the accomplice, we ran audio montages of major heavy hitters on cable news, shocked, you know, fake outrage, grasping their pearls over Hillary's emails, a non scandal email scandal which now seems extraordinarily quaint. Right? And so it just goes to show we're heading back into those dark days. So good for Biden for calling it out.

Sarah Kendzior (13:29):

Yeah, exactly. And I agree completely that we are re-entering the media landscape of 2015 through 2016, only there's no feigned naivete that they could pass off. There's no hypotheticals. We know exactly what happens when Trump and his cohort come to office. And in 2015 and 2016, in addition to the Hillary emails churn, we also saw a number of puff pieces about Nazis. We saw a lot of normalization of literal neo-Nazis, of unrepentant white supremacists, and that went on for a while, you know, kind of, swing back and forth once people realized the seriousness of the situation. I think Charlottesville was one of those moments that briefly changed that, but, you know, the pendulum swings back. And so it's important as we look at all of this to wonder, Why are these networks acting in tandem? We're gonna talk about Biden's speech in a second. The networks didn't air the speech.

Sarah Kendzior (14:29):

You know, this is the President of the United States doing a primetime address about grave threats to democracy. They didn't air it. There's obviously great interest in it. People talked about it nonstop after. So, you know, it would've been great ratings. So this is not financial. We're seeing this also along with changes in outlets like CNN or *Politico*, which is now going to be run by a guy who prayed that Trump would win. We're seeing changes within the entertainment industry at places like HBO Max. We're seeing an enormous number of layoffs. Some of this is just streaming getting very bloated during the height of the pandemic, the economy not being good. That's understandable. But who's getting laid off? Women, people of color—women of color—and a concerted effort to cancel a lot of the shows that have highlighted diversity.

Sarah Kendzior (15:21):

I think this is part of a broader pattern and this may seem kind of like a side topic, but it's not. Pop culture is a reflection of American reality. It also shapes reality and CEOs make concrete decisions about what that reality should be. One thing that's notable about Trump and his rise is that media executives worked against their own financial interest. They worked against their self-interest and it's very notable in America in this incredibly greedy country when someone does that. If they had dug deep into Trump's ties to Jeffrey Epstein, his ties to the mafia, his decades of criminality, they would've had explosive ratings. *Gaslit Nation* had explosive ratings as a result of this. They didn't want to because it's not about money. It's about something darker. It's about politics. And it's about a hardline push to the far right and a desire to bury stories, intimidate the people who tell them and elevate some of the worst elements in America.

Sarah Kendzior (16:22):

So who are those bad elements? We can switch to Biden's speech here. We'll see what he has to say. So on the night of September 1st, my birthday—also the day World War II was launched, so many, many symbolic things about September 1st—Biden gave a speech apparently directed by Dario Argento. You know, it was a very red speech. He had this backdrop, it was bright red. People who looked at that positively thought it was red for a warning sign. It was obviously fodder towards Biden's enemies who say that he's going to stage some sort of military action against his own citizens. They use the presence of military troops behind Biden to try to argue that point. Of course, there have been many presidents who have had members of the military stand behind them when giving a speech.

Sarah Kendzior (17:18):

This was actually not very unusual. As for the optics, we can debate that in a minute. My main take on this speech was, Where was this speech 18 months ago? Where was this speech in January 2021 or February 2021 when the vast majority of the country believed that Biden was the legally, rightfully elected president? This includes the majority of Republicans, definitely the majority of independents. Those numbers have gone down quite a bit over the last 18 months because of the right-wing propaganda apparatus, but also because of the lack of action by the DOJ and others towards the Trump crime cult, which has made a lot of people doubt their own memories of the January 6th attack and other events. So it would've been good if Biden had spelled out American values and our constitutional and civic obligations and what exactly we're fighting here back then. Instead, he called the GOP his friend. He said Mitch McConnell was trustworthy. We're gonna play a clip of this and I want you to notice what is missing here, which is mention of the elite operatives which surround Trump, which make events like his many crimes—obstruction of justice and so forth or the January 6th attack or the elections—possible. You know, this army of lawyers, this goon squad that surrounds him, they are not who Biden calls out. And so this is the clip

[excerpt from President Biden's September 01, 2022 speech]

President Biden (18:51):

Too much of what's happening in our country today is not normal. Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans represent an extremism that threatens the very foundations of our republic. Now, I wanna be very clear, very clear front: Not every Republican, not even the majority Republicans are MAGA Republicans. Not every Republican embraces their extreme ideology. I know because I've been able to work with these mainstream Republicans, but there's no question that the Republican Party today is dominated, driven and intimidated by Donald Trump and the MAGA Republicans. And that is a threat to this country. These are hard things, but I'm an American president, not a president of red America, blue America, but of all America. And I believe it's my duty, my duty to level with you, to tell the truth no matter how difficult, no matter how painful. And here, in my view, is what is true: MAGA Republicans do not respect the Constitution.

President Biden (20:10):

They do not believe in the rule of law. They do not recognize the will of the people. They refused to accept the results of a free election and they're working right now, as I speak, in state after state, to give power to decide elections in America to partisans and cronies, empowering election deniers to undermine democracy itself. MAGA forces are determined to take this country backwards, backwards to an America where there is no right to choose, no right to privacy, no right to contraception, no right to marry who you love. They promote authoritarian leaders and they fan the flames of political violence that are a threat to our personal rights, to the pursuit of justice, to the rule of law, to the very soul of this country.

[end excerpt]

Sarah Kendzior (21:07):

I actually wanna retract a little of what I just said, that he doesn't call out elite operatives, because it's possible that he does. It's possible that what Joe Biden means when he talks about MAGA Republicans, or not like the various people from QAnon on or even the Oathkeepers and other seditionists that stormed the Capitol, but maybe he really does mean people like Giuliani and Manafort and Stone and Bannon and these elite operatives that surround Trump. Why would he not specify that? Or does he mean people in the Republican Party, elected officials, these state GOP legislatures that have decided to literally throw out people's votes? Or the extremists on the Supreme Court? I mean, there are a number of options here and I think he's walking a fine line. Hopefully he's trying to not alienate the people who just simply don't define themselves as Democrats and probably don't define themselves as MAGA Republicans, but are just, you know, the disillusioned masses of which I am one.

Sarah Kendzior (22:12):

And I think he was maybe trying to be careful here and specify at least with people who he sees as an enemy of democracy, believe in the kind of things they're seeking to bring about. But, you know, really this is an issue of elite criminal impunity. This is an issue of power players with extreme wealth who work both within the halls of power as elected officials or appointed officials like on the Supreme Court, or outside of it, people like Leonard Leo and his financial backer, Barry Seid, and all of these oligarchs and plutocrats that pump dark money into the system. A lot of the time they're not exactly in allegiance to

“MAGA” or even to the Republicans, they're in allegiance to a very dark evil trajectory that, like I said, involves the destruction in the dissolution of the United States itself.

Sarah Kendzior (23:07):

It goes way beyond partisanship, which is something that... I don't know how to describe it. He didn't quite avoid it. I'm not sure he was specific enough. I mean, interestingly, the reaction to this was so ridiculous from the media. They were like, “How dare Joe Biden be so political? How dare he give this political speech?” First of all, I don't know how a speech by the President of the United States is not inherently political. And a speech by the president about democracy versus fascism is, of course, also going to be political and that is completely fine because the president is a political figure by nature. This is his job. He should have been giving speeches like this the whole time, you know, letting us know where he thinks America stands and what our values should be and do we have enemies in our midst?

Sarah Kendzior (23:59):

This is what he took an oath to do. So it's fine. I think sometimes what pundits mean is it's too partisan. But in this case, when the leadership of a party is behaving like an apocalyptic death cult, I think it is fine to call out that party in a completely fair speech. You would also call out the Democratic enablers who have not brought members of that party who have openly committed crimes to justice. But that would mean calling out Merrick Garland and members of his own administration who have also failed the American people in this regard by letting this threat. I've been talking for a while. Andrea, what's your take on what he had to say?

Andrea Chalupa (24:42):

Yeah. It's common sense. The sky is blue. [laughs] Earth goes around the sun.

Sarah Kendzior (24:49):

The sky is red now, man. It's red. Did you see... [laughs]. Sorry.

Andrea Chalupa (24:51):

Exactly. No, I think it was fine. I think it was all fine. I wanna remind people, it's just, we're hanging by a thread, our democracy. If you want guidance on what to do, you could of course go to the Gaslit Nation Action Guide, as well as our 2022 Survival Guide for these midterm elections, available on [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com). That's [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com). Obviously because of the shock of *Roe v. Wade* being overturned, there's been a massive deluge of especially women and young women registering to vote in states like Ohio that are essentially electoral autocracies, the red Republican hostage states. The Republicans in the local governments in states like Ohio and Missouri are allowed to be extreme because they've hijacked the elections there. They're like mini Russian governments, right? But still, they do make it as hard as possible to vote, which helps them. Remember, close elections are easy to steal.

Andrea Chalupa (25:55):

So if you want some hope, if you want to fight back, if you wanna channel your anger somewhere, definitely go to [gaslitnationpod.com](http://gaslitnationpod.com) and check out the 2022 Survival Guide because whoever we elect in these next coming months to key positions, you know, governor positions in the key states we absolutely must win, and electoral college of 2024, including the secretary of state races which are so key, we are protecting ourselves right now in these elections and these midterms from Trump's death cult, from Trump's Big Lie fascist propaganda machine. We are protecting ourselves now. We are protecting the

2024 race for the president now in these midterms and everything is at stake because if Trump or someone like him comes to power, we know what's going to happen. They're going to refuse to leave and it's going to be extremely hard to get them out.

Andrea Chalupa (26:48):

They're gonna do a better job purging. They're gonna be a lot more effective. They learned from their mistakes, just like Hitler did the first time around, and it's going to be game over for us. So we need to fight like hell now to secure the White House in 2024. A wonderful person that everyone should follow on how to do this who I cannot recommend enough is a wonderful expert on practical ways to be an activist, including in so-called red states, including in hostage states. His name is David Pepper. You can go to davidpepper.com. You can go to Twitter, @DavidPepper on Twitter. Google "David Pepper". Find David Pepper. Read books by David Pepper, read his articles, watch his videos. David Pepper is the real deal and practical guidance on how citizens no matter where you are and what you're up against can take matters in their own hands and push back against the threat of autocracy that's growing stronger every day in America with every purge outta CNN.

Andrea Chalupa (27:37):

So I do wanna underline the fact that we as Americans stand a very good shot at expanding Democratic majorities in Congress, in both the Senate and the House. The map looks a lot better for us. We can do it. We can fight like hell and do it. We have to be part of the coalition to protect our government from actual fascists. So I wanted to just say that. That's my response. I think Biden very much struck the perfect tone. It was a historic speech. I think the dumbing down of American media, of many talking heads across media keeping people deliberately dumb and in the dark, creating a lack of real nutrients in the information space, I think that was all deliberately done by the oligarchs that own those networks, that profit from them, that went to hold on to their Trump tax breaks.

Andrea Chalupa (28:26):

And I cannot emphasize enough that Hitler, all dictators, all dictators had the benefit of support from business elites who saw them as somehow lucrative, saw them as some sort of advantaged ally in protecting their business interests. All dictatorships are built on the useful idiots of the business elites who put greed in front of human rights and democracy and it's happening again in the United States. They think that they can continue to build this Frankenstein monster even though it's going to destroy them too. Look at the business elites of Russia. Many who were fine with Putin at first, were fine with the war crimes in Chechnya, were fine with the invasion of Georgia and so on, some of those guys are dead or forced to live abroad or flee the country. You have no control over a dictator. No one does. It's arrogance and ego that convinces guys like John Malone.

Andrea Chalupa (29:23):

And unfortunately, a lot of these billionaires have no shortage of arrogance and ego. They think they're masters of the universe because they've made a bunch of money and that their opinion is more important than ours, and I'm talking about the public's [opinion]. That's what we're up against. We're up against the business elite that wanna hold on to their Trump tax cuts, wanna hold on to corruption as an industry. They're afraid of reforms. They're afraid of progressives and they wanna be masters of the universe in bending opinion by owning newspapers and TV networks. It's an extremely dangerous situation so good for Biden for standing up against all of that with his speech, which I thought was



powerful, well done and effective. And you know it was because a lot of idiots out there grasped desperately for whatever they could to try to tear it down.

Andrea Chalupa (30:11):

But it just revealed their pettiness in the face of America, the most powerful nation in the world by far, falling off a cliff of fascism which would destabilize the entire world and empower terrorist regimes like Putin. Ukraine would be gone. Ukraine would be slaughtered if that were to happen. So much is at stake. So many democracies across Europe, the EU for instance, could get taken over as well. France, Germany, Austria, and so on and so on. So there's no end to it. And I wanna point out something for people to be aware of in terms of the fascist threat: Expect an uptick in desperate, extremely well-produced, slick, oily, insidious, aggressive, angry, bold, audacious lies against Ukraine and anyone who dares stick their neck out for Ukraine, anyone that dares to fact check the Kremlin. Why? Because Russia is losing the war. All of that money that American taxpayers and taxpayers in democratic nations around the world that we're sending to Ukraine, that money is going to keep Ukraine going as a country. Remember, major cities have been destroyed around Ukraine. Mariupol no longer exists.

Andrea Chalupa (31:32):

A jewel of innovation, a jewel of development on the sea, Mariupol's gone now. You have Kharkiv, which is a university city, the second largest city, parts of it are destroyed as Russia just lobbs missiles at it. Kharkiv, it was filled with young people. You have at least 7 million people displaced by the war. That's a brain drain. That is talent that Ukraine needs for the country to function. You have a crisis just to keep the country going in Ukraine because it's not just a genocidal war, it's an economic war against the country so that Ukrainian businesses fail, so people are unemployed, so that millions are homeless, forced into homelessness. That's what a refugee crisis is. So us, as taxpayers, we're keeping Ukraine simply functioning as a country. In addition to that, we're sending Ukraine some of the most advanced weaponry—precision guided missiles—so they could destroy ammunition warehouses, so they can destroy Russian missiles that are killing civilians around Ukraine.

Andrea Chalupa (32:35):

Okay? That's what we're doing. We're allowing Ukraine to weaken and defeat the Russian war machine that literally relies on carrying out war crimes. Russia's war strategy is just Neanderthal caveman club over the head war crimes. That is Russia's military. That's all they know is war crimes. We saw this in Chechnya when they leveled Chechnya. We saw this in Syria. We're seeing it now in Ukraine. They just do war crimes and genocide and systemic rape. And they're forcing nearly 2 million people out of Ukraine into Russia as captives, as hostages, including a quarter of a million children. And we know that Russia is one of the worst sex trafficking countries in the world. We know that Epstein had a lot of Russian connections, along with his good friend, Trump, right? He was accused of raping a child. It is terrifying about what is happening to the quarter of a million children that have been forced into Russia.

Andrea Chalupa (33:25):

I think about that every day. It breaks my heart. I'm so angry about that. So for people to complain, wherever they are in their privileged world, where they don't have to live in a bomb shelter with complete strangers, catching all sorts of colds diseases like some of my friends in Ukraine, having to take their children to bomb shelters where you pick up colds from all sorts of people, your kids pick up colds, right? You don't have bombs going over your head. You can build your business where you are. You're not forced into homelessness wherever you are. We have such luxury where we live. We are finally

uniting as global citizens to finally stand up to Russia's terrorism. After the world watched as the Russian regime, the terrorist regime destroyed democracy inside Russia, killed some of the best and brightest of Russia and then went on to destroy Chechnya went on to invade. Georgia went on to slaughter Syrians, creating millions of refugees from Syria, went on to prop a dictator in Venezuela who was starving so many of his own people in a famine that has created a refugee crisis out of Venezuela to rival the one in Syria, propping up a dictator in Cuba, right? That's still carrying out political arrests, and so on and so on. Oh, and propping up the hermit kingdom in another terrorist state, North Korea. And also being allies with Iran, another terrorist regime, right? We're finally, finally, after years of allowing the Russian terrorist state to go around buying up politicians, buying up propagandists, employing these unemployable aspiring Western journalists and turning them into propagandists in democratic capitals around the world, and funneling money—dark money—into political campaigns across the EU and the US, and trying to do these dark money investments to get a foothold into countries like Canada and so on and so on.

Andrea Chalupa (35:14):

Finally, we're doing something about it. Okay? So if anybody on the far left and the far right... I'm seeing Kremlin disinformation from some incredible people in progressive spaces saying, "Why are we sending billions of dollars to Ukraine when Mississippi doesn't have functioning, drinking water?" Anybody who says that doesn't understand Civics 101. Mississippi doesn't have basic drinking water because of the GOP fascists in Mississippi, a state that triggered the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* with their anti-human rights abortion law. Take that up with the Republican fascists that are holding Mississippi hostage. It is local state governments that determine quality of life issues like drinking water. The federal government gave Mississippi millions on infrastructure to improve their water, protect their water, and they did nothing with it, okay? So take it up with Republicans. You have to be so precise when we're up against powerful, powerful fascist forces, oligarchs at home and abroad.

Andrea Chalupa (36:13):

You have to be incredibly careful with your language because words matter. So if we are standing up finally, finally, finally, to Russia's terrorism, to Russia's fascism that empowers our fascist oligarchs here at home, we're finally doing something about that, yes, it's going to come at a cost. Yes, we're going to have to pay more in energy prices in some places. Yes, we're going to have to have our tax dollars go over there, but keep in mind Biden and the progressives in Congress wanted to go further on a lot of these big social safety net bills. They wanted to go further, but they were stopped by Mitch McConnell and Kyrsten Sinema, so it's not like it's either/or. We can have good things in America if we elect more Democrats to Congress. We can have great things in America. That's what terrifies the fascist oligarchs.

Andrea Chalupa (37:02):

It's why they're taking over places like CNN. It's not either/or. We can build a better America and also protect Ukraine from actual genocide, from fascism, because if Ukraine falls, that empowers the Kremlin and the Kremlin is going to continue to turn its aggression on us. The Kremlin is going to continue empowering fascists around the world and we're gonna pay the price for that, just like we saw in 2016 when they helped a disinformation conspiracy theorist come to power in 2016, who then continued to weaken our country from within and declare actual war on Americans, like literally declare war on Americans, harassing individuals across society on his Twitter account, obstructing justice on his Twitter account, harassing law enforcement on his Twitter account, inciting a deeply funded big networked fascist, violent attempted coup, which killed law enforcement. We're up against monsters. This is not a drill. These are the final years. We may look back on these being some of the best years of our lives

before everything fell. The same happened with Russia. Russia had moments of freedom. Russia had democracy at one time. It goes very quickly and it gets worse and worse as time goes on.

Sarah Kendzior (38:15):

Yeah and just to add to your point about Mississippi and Ukraine, you know, the model that the Trump crime cult and the broader network of the GOP and these hardline right-wing plutocrats would love to follow is what happened after the collapse of the USSR, which is that, with the exception of the Baltic states and a couple other places, the republics turned into small, independent, autocracies dominated by mobbed-up oligarchs, with the exception of Russia, which of course was a large autocracy dominated by mobbed-up oligarchs, who just stripped the land down, stole the resources, behaved with extreme violence, privatized everything and made a ton of money from corruption. And if you look at what's happening right now in Jackson, Mississippi—and I'm stressing Jackson because that is who is having the water crisis.

Sarah Kendzior (39:15):

It's the majority Black city of Jackson. And of course Mississippi's government, the GOP state legislature is a white, notoriously racist GOP state legislature. Why is it that way? For the reasons that have been historically true for decades, but especially since the partial repeal of the VRA; voter suppression, gerrymandering, assorted tactics like that. They don't care. The state government of Mississippi does not care if the people of Jackson, Mississippi have water because the majority of the people in Jackson, Mississippi are Black. And so what is the solution that is being proposed for this crisis? They wanna privatize it. They wanna privatize Jackson's water system. And this is something that not just Republicans, you know, it often is bipartisan, that just evil, rich people do with cities in the Midwest and South in particular that have large Black populations, sometimes with city's large Latino populations, they wanna privatize basic necessary resources like water.

Sarah Kendzior (40:25):

In St. Louis they were going after the airport. You know, things that people need. And then they wanna monetize them and they wanna control them. And this is exceptionally dangerous with climate catastrophes already happening because all of these crises we're facing, with floods, with a lack of water—you know, you see this in the Southwest as well and in California—they're all going to get worse and so there's going to be a resource war. They're trying to get in front of it and they're trying to determine which necessities are now privileged commodities, and they are counting water among them. And so my point is that when you look at what has happened to Ukraine, Ukraine was a battlefield for this exact same tactic for 30 years since the moment that it became independent. It was a place where corrupt Westerners and corrupt people from the former Soviet Union came in and stripped down and tried to steal from the land and steal from the people.

Sarah Kendzior (41:26):

And part of that was repressing democratic systems and democratic alliances, particularly the alliances that Ukraine was having with Europe versus with Russia. It was refusing to be Russia's vassal state, just as people in Jackson—which is a very politically active city—have refused to comply with the dictates of the GOP. This is an area where civil rights was born, you know, in the Black majority areas of Mississippi and Alabama, so you should never write off those states. You should never blow off those states and you really shouldn't be blaming the people of those states. Blame the leaders. And so this is a connected crisis. There's a lot to learn from examining what happened to Ukraine and learn, how is Ukraine fighting

back now? What are they fighting for now? Why is it worth supporting this fight now? You know, I think it's fine to say, "I oppose the war between Russia and Ukraine" (which is really Russia's war on Ukraine) because you oppose Putin, you oppose the Kremlin, invading Ukraine over and over and over again.

Sarah Kendzior (42:34):

It's like, Yes, I do oppose that. I do wish the Kremlin would stop doing that because that is the cause of that. That is the sole cause of this crisis. And that's just a very basic thing that people should know. And just as Americans, disenfranchised Americans, have been demanding voter rights and resources and all of these necessities for years and decades on end, Ukrainians were demanding freedom when Russia came in and took Crimea. They wanted assistance. They wanted aid. They wanted support. Did they get it? No. So this is not a situation where Ukrainians are like, "Hey USA, we'd like some military supplies" and then the US and Europe are like, "Yeah, great. Here you go, buddy. We see you as equals." That is not how it's played out at all. The only reason they're getting anything is because nothing was really done for eight straight years.

Sarah Kendzior (43:24):

And it finally hit a critical point where people were worried about nuclear war and it was a full fledged invasion with Russia saying that it was going to, you know, take down the entire country within a 48 hour period. That obviously didn't happen but please understand the background, the deep historical context of both of these crises in Ukraine and also in Mississippi. Let's switch gears. A lot of people have been asking us about the Mar-a-Lago raid and why Trump has been allowed to keep classified documents after having a career as a coup-plotting, mobbed-up criminal, impeached twice, listed in multiple indictments, and investigated by the government for 40 years. And would this be the moment where Merrick Garland finally, finally takes him down? And then I was hoping—because my concern is not only and not even primarily Trump—that perhaps the transnational crime syndicate that has surrounded Trump for 40 years would maybe be taken down and the enablers within our government, the corrupt institutionalists that made all this possible would finally have to tell the truth and confront the American public that has been demanding justice for so long.

Sarah Kendzior (44:42):

Is that going to happen? No, it does not look like it. And what is the pretext this time? Well, according to the *New York Times* which tweeted yesterday, I'm just gonna read this: "As the midterms near, Justice Department officials are weighing whether to temporarily scale back work in criminal investigations involving Donald Trump because of an unwritten rule forbidding overt actions that could improperly influence the vote." Now, this is just obscene. We went through this already. We went through this with the OLC memo that was supposed to keep a president from being charged with the crime even if the president is confessing the crime repeatedly on his Twitter account and on national television. That pretext, which was only that—he should have been indicted while in office—went away the minute that Trump left the White House and Biden became the president. He could have been arrested and indicted at any time.

Sarah Kendzior (45:39):

And even Robert Mueller, the famously reticent Robert Mueller, made that point when he testified to Congress in 2019. And so, you know, what has Garland been doing? Not much. Getting outrun by the January 6th Committee, which is like losing a race to a snail because they're not exactly on the ball either. I just wanna say that what we're seeing here with this midterms pretext, with this ever-expanding

definition about what is safe to discuss and what is safe to prosecute and what timeline in which that occurs is dangerous to democracy and even more so it is dangerous to national security given who Trump associates with, given that we know he stole classified information, and we talk about this quite a bit in the bonus episode, it's not limited to these physical files that he kept at Mar-a-Lago. This is an ongoing pattern of the Trump administration.

Sarah Kendzior (46:36):

We saw it with Kushner giving secrets to Saudi Arabia and then getting \$2 billion. There was a congressional investigation into that that died with the death of Elijah Cummings. There were a lot of investigations that died with him. But if you're gonna talk election interference, there's hardly a greater form of improper election interference or influence than refusing to prosecute a career criminal who attempted to overturn an election through a violent coup. I can think of very few things that, that top this—maybe like assassination or something—and so there's no way that the DOJ and Garland can claim that not indicting him, when they are aware he has committed a crime that he is an act of danger, is any less political than indicting him. It carries just as much moral and legal consequence to not indict him than an indictment would. It is as political.

Sarah Kendzior (47:32):

I don't think that the midterms are the real reason they're refusing to indict him. As I've said many times, I think they're refusing to indict him because they don't want to examine this broader transnational crime network that we've been discussing on *Gaslit Nation* for four years, because it includes their own contemporaries. In Garland's case, for example, it would include Jamie Gorelick, the lawyer of Kushner and Ivanka who got them into the White House, despite their lies on their security clearance forms and who is his lifelong best friend and mentor. It would mean examining failures in every administration, including the Obama administration, in which Biden was the vice president. Then you could go back into all the preceding state crimes, things like Iran Contra, which Bill Barr covered up before he covered up these crimes. You know, it opens up this giant chasm of depravity that they don't want citizens investigating.

Sarah Kendzior (48:29):

To sum up here, there are so many dangers in refusing to indict him and you first saw there was the crimes themselves and the fact that they're going unpunished, and these are serious offenses; plotting a coup, stealing classified files possibly related to nuclear material, obstruction of justice, et cetera. But what they're doing in their refusal to act is one, they're saying that political violence is acceptable. You know, we've said this many times on the show that a failed coup is a dress rehearsal and it's been God, what? 19 months? I mean, I've lost track of time. I can't do the math in my head because so much time has elapsed since January and all we've seen are low-level and occasionally mid-level actors held responsible while the actual elite operatives—people like Flynn, Bannon, Stone, Giuliani, and of course Trump himself and Kushner in that network—roam free, plotting coup 2, holding rallies, threatening the government, threatening the FBI.

Sarah Kendzior (49:20):

And I can't stand the FBI, but this is not the way to go about it. You don't try to encourage acts of terrorism against them. Second—and this is critical—the refusal to indict Trump makes simply running for office, declaring your candidacy, a get outta jail free card for any criminal who seeks to remain immune from prosecution. It sets a precedent. It says, “Oh, well, you know, I've got this 60-day window.

The DOJ can't do anything about me now sooooo... you know, I'm, uh, running for mayor. I'm running for Congress. I'm declaring my candidacy for president now." I mean, it's absolutely ludicrous and they keep expanding this so that it's not even just about a candidate, because let's remind everyone again: Trump is not on the ballot. He's not on the ballot for the midterms.

Sarah Kendzior (50:10):

And as I say, he's not on the ballot for 2024. There's nothing to do with an election year so what they've done is they've tried to expand the definition to saying, "Oh, it could influence a political party." I mean, that expands to absolutely everyone. We now really, by Merrick Garland's definition, should all have permanent immunity from prosecution because anything any of us say potentially influences an election. So there's that. And then third, if they really are gonna make this "unwritten rule" an actual rule, you are telling enemies of America exactly when to strike. If you are Russia, for example, remember what they did in 2016 with Trump asking Russia for Hillary's emails, with WikiLeaks' involvement, you know, Manafort getting the poll data, all of that would be fine under Merrick Garland's DOJ. Perhaps it is. He certainly could indict Manafort for that and he hasn't done it.

Sarah Kendzior (51:07):

It's saying you have a free pass. You have a two month season where you can just crime your way into office and we're going to do nothing to stop you. You could maybe, you know, plot another coup, commit some acts of terrorism. We're gonna do nothing. That is what this precedent would state. And so this is very grim. It's another reminder of how deeply intertwined Trump and the DOJ are. You certainly see this in the relationship that he's had with the FBI, with people like Giuliani, Felix Sater, who worked as an FBI informant and was also a Russian mafia member who's a business partner of Trump. We've gone into this many times. That is among the kind of dark nexus that they don't want people to explore and that is the real reason I think that very little is being done, but it has to be done.

Sarah Kendzior (51:58):

I wish Joe Biden would make a speech about this. I wish that we would go beyond just autocracy versus democracy and talk about mafia states and talk about organized crime and talk about plutocrats and kleptocrats and the incredible danger that kind of amorphous criminal elite activity that always goes over state lines, you know, that's performed by people who have multiple passports who put their money in offshore accounts, that really goes beyond the traditional conception of fascism, I wish he would make a speech about that. Robert Mueller did make a speech about that back in 2011, the so-called Iron Triangle speech. He actually warned exactly of what would transpire over the next decade, and then of course when he was in a position to stop it, he refused. We need answers to that as well.

Andrea Chalupa (53:00):

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 (53:10):

Pakistan has been decimated by record floods and people need help. To help the victims of the floods, donate to Pakistan Emergency Flood Aid at [https://www.launchgood.com/campaign/pakistan\\_emergency\\_flood\\_aid#!/](https://www.launchgood.com/campaign/pakistan_emergency_flood_aid#!/). Climate and economic crises are everywhere so please consider supporting your local food bank as well.

Andrea Chalupa (53:36):

We encourage you to help support Ukraine by donating to Razom for Ukraine a [razomforukraine.org](https://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](https://rescue.org). And if you wanna help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to the Orangutan Project at [theorangutanproject.org](https://theorangutanproject.org).

*Gaslit Nation* is produced by Sarah Kendzior and Andrea Chalupa. If you like what we do, leave us a review on iTunes. It helps us reach more listeners. And check out our Patreon, it keeps us going.

Sarah Kendzior (54:12):

Our production manager is Nicholas Torres and our associate producer is Karlyn Daigle. Our episodes are edited by Nicholas Torres and our Patreon exclusive content is edited by Karlyn Daigle.

Andrea Chalupa (54:25):

Original music in *Gaslit Nation* is produced by David Whitehead, Martin Vissenberg, Nik Farr, Demien Arriaga and Karlyn Daigle.

Sarah Kendzior (54:31):

Our logo design was donated to us by Hamish Smyth of the New York-based firm, Order. Thank you so much, Hamish

Andrea Chalupa (54:39):

*Gaslit Nation* would like to thank our supporters at the Producer level on Patreon and higher...