

Gaslit Nation Transcript

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Russia's Total War on Ukraine: One Year Later

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/russias-total-on-79028506>

[intro - theme music]

Sarah Kendzior (00:00:11):

I'm Sarah Kendzior, the author of the bestsellers, *The View from Flyover Country* and *Hiding in Plain Sight*, and of the book, *They Knew: How a Culture of Conspiracy Keeps America Complacent*, out now.

Andrea Chalupa (00:00:23):

I'm Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine, the film the Kremlin doesn't want you to see, so be sure to watch it.

Sarah Kendzior (00:00:38):

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

Andrea Chalupa (00:00:46):

This week is a very horrendous week for a long list of reasons, which we'll go through in a minute, but I just want to remind everyone you can join me for a movie night—a very special movie night—on Saturday, February 25th to mark the one year anniversary of the total invasion of Ukraine. To be clear, Russia's invasion started back in March, 2014, nine years ago, with the seizure of Crimea. But a year ago, the world woke up in horror to a Hitler-level attack of Russia invading at 4:00 AM, just like Hitler invaded Ukraine at 4:00 AM in those early morning hours, and doing what we've been warning for so long that they would do, which is carry out a genocide—Stalin 2.0, Holodomor 2.0—and it's all been happening since then as anyone that's followed this show has seen. So we could all honor that and also stay vigilant of the history that frames the horrors of today by watching *Mr. Jones*, my film directed by Agnieszka Holland, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine. The historian Tim Snyder was one of the many historians that helped us with this project; reading the script, watching an early cut and so on. The screening is organized by the Media and Democracy Project. It's going to be streamed over Zoom and it's going to be followed by a Q&A afterwards. If you want to sign up for that and join me to watch *Mr. Jones* this Saturday, just look for the signup sheet on the Patreon page for this week's episode. Thank you so much. Now this week, lots going on. It is not only the anniversary of the total invasion by wannabe Stalin Putin, it is also the anniversary of Ukrainians overthrowing Yanukovich, who was a very Trumpian, Trumped up, gold-loving, shameless wannabe dictator who was brought to power with the help of Donald Trump's long-time friend and neighbor, Paul Manafort, who became a hand to the king of Yanukovich, the Trump of Ukraine.

Andrea Chalupa (00:03:00):

Yanukovich also had a close-knit circle of family members and friends that enriched themselves from stealing from the country. His son, for instance, who was a dentist by training (just like Jared Kushner was a slum lord by training), so his son, who was a dentist by training, became worth a massive amount of money. Where did all that money come from? Ukrainian taxpayers. That whole family was overthrown in

a popular uprising. It was organic. No, the West did not want it. No, the CIA did not want it. In fact, you had European officials come over to try to broker a peace deal between the Ukrainian Trump and the massive angry protest movement that wanted him gone because they wanted to raise their children in a fair and free democracy with stability and anticorruption. And they wanted to be closely aligned with Europe.

Andrea Chalupa (00:03:52):

They wanted to get out of Moscow's orbit, basically, which is why they're continuing to risk their lives and fight today. So February also marks for Ukrainians the success of a popular uprising to overthrow Yanukovich, send him fleeing to Russia where he belongs and where the other Trump belongs, living in exile. And it marks Russia then invading Ukraine, first in Crimea and then in the far east, Donbas, a region of eastern Ukraine where my mother's family is from. And thus starts the nine years of Russia's war because Putin has to punish Ukraine for daring to grow into a successful democracy with increasing rights, increasing economic opportunities with increasing Western aspirations, and so on. The success story next door threatens to stabilize the broader region of Eastern Europe in these post-Soviet states, loosening Moscow's grip over its former captive nations that were part of the Soviet Union, AKA the Russian Empire.

Andrea Chalupa (00:04:51):

So Ukraine has to fall in order for the KGB dictatorship that runs Russia and likes to see itself as still being an empire in that part of the world, they have to destroy Ukraine, basically. That's the whole objective. They wanna swallow up Ukraine and absorb Ukraine again into the Empire. Why? Because as the saying in foreign policy goes: Russia with Ukraine is the United States. Russia without Ukraine is Canada. And I mean that with all due respect to our Canadian listeners. That's just a saying to just remind people of what the stakes are, of why Ukraine matters. Ukraine is rich in resources in the Black Sea, for instance. There's a lot of gas there that has yet to be exploited. There's a lot of industry, a lot of wheat, a lot of rich black soil and so on that could make any conquering empire a lot of money.

Andrea Chalupa (00:05:45):

A lot of stolen wealth. And that's been part of this. And of course Ukraine is also a cultural jewel for a country like Russia. The Kyiv Rus' Empire, the early medieval period empire that used to rule in Kyiv, that used to marry off royalty, marry off their own royalty to royal houses across the rest of Europe, including France, that kingdom eventually led to Muscovy, the far flung Moscow kingdom, and Belarus. So Russia and Belarus both claim their birthright of Kyiv. Kyiv is seen as sort of a Jerusalem of the slavs, so it has a lot of cultural value as well for showing how old an ancient Russia is in Russian's mind. But the reality is that Russia's just appropriated that history and it's really Kyiv and the Ukraine that's sprouted around Kyiv that considers itself the older culture, the older civilization, and so on.

Andrea Chalupa (00:06:43):

And that's how Ukrainians have seen themselves—as very different from Russians and as its own independent state, and Russia as sort of this temperamental teenager [laughs]. Sort of a younger society and so on, that's just hot blooded and just wanting to basically steal washing machines from Ukraine and so on. So that's basically the dynamics of where we are now. And in the backdrop of all this, there was a big motorcade that closed down the central streets of Kyiv today. Meanwhile, this air raid siren was going on, and it turned out this big VIP guest that shut everything down was President Biden. President Biden became the first president since George W. Bush's visit in 2008 to go to Ukraine. This was a very big deal. Biden, as vice president, had visited the country many times, including addressing the leaders in the parliament.

Andrea Chalupa (00:07:38):

He's always had a soft spot for Ukraine. He's always been very strong on Ukraine. And there was wonderful video images of Zelensky and Biden walking arm in arm in the center of Kyiv next to the gold dome churches, paying tribute to the fallen soldiers, and all of this while air raid sirens were going off, with the air raid sirens that Ukrainians are so used to living with. The Kremlin was given notice that the president of the United States was headed to Ukraine. The Kremlin was given advanced notice. And of course the Kremlin did not waste an opportunity. They made a big show by launching enough of a threat nearby, I believe over in Belarus, that the air raid siren system was triggered during Biden's visit. And that was of all, of course, deliberate. So Biden just stayed for a short while.

Andrea Chalupa (00:08:25):

And his historic visit, which would mean so much to that country, Biden was given a plaque for himself on the Walk of the Brave in Ukraine. He's going to go down in history as a hero of Ukraine. Why? Because as one young Ukrainian in Kyiv recently told me, Ukrainians are so used to fighting alone. They're so used to being left alone and abandoned by the rest of the world. That's part of the history of the Holodomor, s you see in my film, *Mr. Jones*. They're used to being sold out and all the great empires turning their backs on Ukraine and making money with Russia while Russia slaughters millions and so on. Any help at all is always a big surprise to Ukrainians, who are used to self-reliance. They even have a big reformist political party called Self Reliance.

Andrea Chalupa (00:09:15):

Self-reliance is a proud cultural movement among the Ukrainian grassroots groups. So all the aid that the US and other countries have been giving Ukraine is tremendous. It's very meaningful. And the Ukrainians are very grateful. At the same time, the global allies, the NATO countries and the NATO allies, led by the US, are also seen as—by all staunch defenders of Ukraine and democracy worldwide, not just Ukrainians, but there is growing concern—that the aid that Ukraine is getting to defend itself from existential threat and an actual genocide is a drip, drip, drip of aid, that there's just too much deliberation, too much consensus-building, too much handwringing over what the Kremlin will think and do and say, that the rest of the world is letting Russia get away with slaughtering civilians, get away with terrorizing civilians, lobbying missiles deliberately into apartment buildings and hospitals and schools and churches, and hundreds of cultural sites destroyed across country and so on.

Andrea Chalupa (00:10:15):

It's a genocide. It's a genocide that we're witnessing, a deliberate genocide, and they're not going to stop until the Russians are stopped. So the whole argument is, for the love of God, stop the slow walking of aid, get Ukraine everything it needs now to defend itself. If you're not going to have boots on the ground, if you're not gonna send NATO troops there, if you're not going to do a no-fly zone, then give Ukraine everything it possibly needs to close its skies. Get the tanks there now. There was a promise of hundreds of tanks, but when you look at the fine print and the details, oh, nope, sorry, not as many tanks as we promised because of this and this, this reason. Oh, you're gonna get them eventually, maybe by the end of the summer, maybe some in May.

Andrea Chalupa (00:10:56):

So it's all kind of a mess in terms of getting the urgently needed aid there in time to make any difference and that really serves the Kremlin's interest. What now needs to happen to kind of speed things up is get all the tanks there so Ukraine can defend itself, but also get planes. Get the jets there. Get Ukraine... Look at me, I'm like a military expert now. Get the F-15s that Ukraine needs in order to close its own damn skies. So if you're not going to give Ukraine a no-fly zone, as the Kurds got... When Saddam Hussein was trying to commit genocide against the Kurds, there was an international movement that

was organized to give the Kurds a no-fly zone to try to stop a genocide there. If you're not gonna do that for the Ukrainians, then give them tanks. Give them planes.

Andrea Chalupa (00:11:41):

Don't tell the Kremlin that you're going to slow walk aid—as you're openly doing. Don't tell the Kremlin that you're gonna wring your hands over their bombastic nuclear threats that are self-destructive by the Kremlin at the end of the day. Don't project to the Kremlin that you're holding yourselves back. Show a united front, a united sign of strength saying, “Everything's on the table. We're getting Ukraine everything it needs immediately. We're getting them the jets, we're getting them the tanks. We're getting them everything they need to 100% close their skies so not a single missile can go through.” Because if you do not end this now, it's going to drag on. And no Medea Benjamin and the Code Pink Movement and Seymour Hersh and the others, there's no giving up land for peace. There's no human sacrifice for peace because it doesn't exist.

Sarah Kendzior:

Mmhmm. <affirmative>

Andrea Chalupa (00:12:37):

You tried it with Hitler, with the Munich Pact. Hitler annexed parts of Czechoslovakia and Chamberlain was like, “Ah, let him have it.” [laughs] “We'll do a big peace deal. Hitler will promise he's not gonna go any further.” And everyone was so relieved by the Munich Pact. And then what does Hitler do? He then invades Poland with his friend Stalin and then we have World War II. So if you wanna stop this bubbling World War III energy that we're around right now, you gotta learn from the mistakes that led to the last war, World War II, which is appeasement. You have to show strength, you have to show solidarity. You have to militarily defeat Russia in Ukraine and you have to recognize the fact that Ukrainians are doing the fighting and the dying and being maimed for us, for the rest of the world.

Sarah Kendzior:

Mmhmm. <affirmative>

Andrea Chalupa (00:13:26):

They're the human sacrifice. And all they're asking for is that we don't leave any of them behind a new Iron curtain, because do you wanna live in a concentration camp? Do you wanna have your media freedom, your press freedom, your freedom of thought, your freedom of language, your freedom of movement? Do you wanna protect your children from being kidnapped and taken to Russia and put up for adoption, as thousands—thousands—of Ukrainian children have been kidnapped and put up for adoption in Russia? Do you wanna have your children trafficked? Do you wanna have your family raped? That is what is happening to the people left under Russian occupation. If you don't want that for your family, then don't force it on Ukrainians. There is no land for peace. That is a Chamberlain tragedy that did not work the first time and catapulted us down the path of a world war.

Andrea Chalupa (00:14:19):

We're not doing that again. We're going to defeat Russia and Ukraine. That is the only option Russia has given us. That is the only option Russia has given us. And I do commend Biden on a lot of things when it comes to Ukraine. But one thing, Biden, Jake Sullivan and Lloyd Austin and Antony Blinken have to be

better with, have to step up—and Victoria Nuland needs to come in and smack them around verbally, as she's wonderful at doing with people in general, as you sometimes kind of get an inkling of in some of these reports when she famously said, “Fuck the EU” back in the day under Obama, when they, when Merkel, was forcing and France, was forcing a policy of appeasement, Victoria Nuland said, “Fuck the EU.” I wanted to put that on a T-shirt along with her face. Yes.

Andrea Chalupa (00:15:03):

You gotta just smack people around and force the aid through that Ukraine needs. More tanks, significantly more, and for the love of God, stop wasting time and dragging out the debate on the planes. Get Ukraine the planes. You should have done that a year ago. You should have given all the aid now a year ago instead of offering Zelensky a ride out of there. All the time wasted handwringing over what the Kremlin might think and do has cost countless lives and created mass graves and sent thousands of children into the hands of predators across Russia for “adoption.” That is on the hands of the West for all the handwringing and wasting time. So Biden and your team: stop wasting time. Get those planes there to Ukraine tomorrow. Stop wasting time. They're fighting and doing the dying for all of us.

Andrea Chalupa (00:15:56):

The least you can do is give them the dignity and the tools to close their skies a hundred percent from a hundred percent of the Russian missiles lobbed at them, protect their civilians a hundred percent. Give them the tools they need to take back Crimea, where the minority religion with the indigenous group, the Crimean Tatars are being persecuted. One just died in prison. One of the leaders has died in prison. And take back Donbas, which is Ukraine. Take back all of those lands. Leave nobody behind. Do not allow the Russian terror to spread because if it spreads in Ukraine and this war drags on, and if Ukraine should fall, yes, they're going to Poland next. Yes, they're going to the Baltics. They don't care about NATO. Why? Because they've lost their minds in Russia. It's fascism, plain and simple. It's the same rabid, frothy-in-the-mouth dog fascism that's senseless.

Andrea Chalupa(00:16:50):

And the height of stupidity and self-destructive, as we saw coming out of Germany. Remember, Hitler was laughed at. The Nazis were laughed at. They were seen as clowns—destructive clowns, but they were not taken seriously. And when they came to power and were allowed to go unchecked for so long, look at the destruction they wrought. It's the same clown car right now, the same Michael Flynn conspiracy theorists running the Kremlin. And they have these delusions of grandeur and this xenophobia and this violent racism and this violent superiority complex just like the Nazis did back in Germany. And they have this weak population of Russians that have just allowed themselves to pre surrender to all this dictatorship, just like the Germans did under the Nazis. That's where we are. Same dynamics. And now it's our time to learn from World War II history and to stop things from getting worse by giving Ukraine everything it needs to defeat Russia once and for all.

Sarah Kendzior (00:17:46):

Yeah, absolutely. And I keep thinking how we made this exact argument a year ago in 2022, when many were denying that Russia was even going to launch a full, escalated reinvasion of Ukraine. And of course I emphasized reinvasion because the first invasion was in 2014 and it was because of the lack of action in response to that invasion, this collective shrugging of shoulders across the international community, the disrespect shown towards citizens of Crimea, shown towards Ukrainians who had suffered an extreme violation of their territorial integrity and of their sovereignty. And if the Obama administration and other Western countries had come to the aid of Ukraine at that time in 2014, we would not be in the position that we were a year ago in 2022, and they would not still be struggling now. You could go back into our

archives and listen to all of our episodes, from the launch of our show in 2018 when we were urging people to pay attention to Ukraine.

Sarah Kendzior (00:18:54):

Both in its own right, but also because it is a linchpin in this transnational criminal syndicate that is violating the sovereignty of countries around the world, including the United States. And you obviously see this with people like Paul Manafort and his goon squad of oligarchs, including people like Oleg Deripaska and the FBI agents who work for them, the people in Congress who work for them. Andrea's point that we do not have time, and Ukraine does not have time, and the United States does not have time, is the most essential one because one of the tactics that these tyrants use, as well as the institutionalists that abet them, is to run out the clock and to deceive people into thinking that they are incompetent when in fact they are apocalyptic in their ambitions. That's how Putin operated.

Sarah Kendzior (00:19:54):

That's one of the reasons so many thought that they wouldn't actually go through with a full invasion. And that's how Trump and his surrounding crime cult have operated. And in the case of Trump especially, they operate that way because they know that there is an institutional framework in place that will let them. And so while I'm glad that Biden has been more on the ball with Ukraine than with basically anything else that he's handled, it is jarring to witness the contrast. You can listen to our episode last week called "[East Palestine, Ohio](#)" about the toxic airborne event that is occurring there, which was caused by multiple administrations, by negligence and malice, frankly. When you're that enthralled to plutocracy, you can look at the treatment of covid, the refusal to try to prevent it in sensible ways, things like air filtration.

Sarah Kendzior (00:20:55):

You could look at most of all the fact that we have an unpunished coup and we have insurrectionists seated in Congress right now calling for things like "national divorce" and secession of states. And we've gone over this many times on this show about how all that would lead to is a bunch of oligarch-run mobbed up fiefdoms; a partitioned United States of America that serves nothing but the most sadistic plutocrats. That is why they want this. There's no such thing as a red state or a blue state. Marjorie Taylor Greene of all people should know that given that she lives in a "blue state" of Georgia, where she's proclaiming her desire for secession. But they create these narratives. They create these monocultures because they don't want to acknowledge the truth, which is that we are a diverse nation.

Sarah Kendzior (00:21:54):

We are a purple nation. We are purple like a bruise. We are held together by collective disillusionment and betrayal. And if we were to actually join forces, as you sometimes see, you know, I'm seeing this with East Palestine, with the reaction to this, where you see an across-the-board incredible frustration at the cruelty and the environmental annihilation and the political malfeasance aimed at people in that area, also in surrounding regions and also in the future unless the systemic problems behind them are actually dealt with. The people of this country can and should unite and should be extremely wary of anybody calling for secession—whether they are liberal, whether they are conservative—because it is all based on fantasies of things that don't exist. There is no uniformly red state or blue state or red city or blue city.

Sarah Kendzior (00:22:55):

You have hostage states. You have states like mine in Missouri where the legislature doesn't respond to the will of the people and often overthrows our votes. But what these oligarchs are seeking is the erosion of territorial integrity. And they obviously sought it and got it to some extent in Ukraine when they invaded in 2014 and took over Crimea. They sought it in the UK, which is one of the reasons that Russian oligarchs and mafiosos were backing Brexit. They were backing up the dissolution of the EU

because that makes their plans easier. They're doing the same thing in Canada. They do this all over the world. It is a violation of the collective will of the citizenry and of our ability to see our lives, to see our families. I'm just gonna make two points and they're related. If you think somehow that what's happening in Ukraine is not a big deal, or it should not be a focus, or if you're understandably frustrated that the US government seems to only show compassion and sympathy when it's coming to a foreign country.

Sarah Kendzior (00:24:04):

And that sympathy does not extend from the Biden administration to other groups like Yemenese or Syrians or Palestinians, and in fact the United States is helping a lot of the countries that are oppressing those groups, that's a completely valid concern. It doesn't do anything to change the fact that this is an ongoing attempted genocide of Ukrainian people by Russia, and stopping an ongoing attempted genocide is a worthy goal in and of itself. But it's also important to look at Ukraine, as we've said many times, as a place where these operatives experiment before they bring it to America. That's true with elections. It's notable to look at what they've done to Ukraine's power grid over the years, the times that they've caused blackouts to try to annihilate public safety, public health, etc. We're seeing some suspicious activity here. We're also seeing white supremacist groups just outright targeting our power grid.

Sarah Kendzior (00:25:04):

There are useful lessons to look at for Ukraine, but one of the things you should really look at is, well, what happens when someone splits up your country? What happens when they tear it apart? Do you find some sort of paradise where one group of people is happily living in one place and one group is living in another place and they get along and everything is fine? No. You find war, bloodshed, kidnapping, a ton of money being made illicitly going to the worst people in the world. You find families being separated. You find new state lines being built in areas that you once took for granted, you'd be able to travel around freely. You find military equipment being bought and sold on the black market, and overall a catastrophic brutal atmosphere that is just a humanitarian nightmare.

Sarah Kendzior (00:25:57):

That is what people in Ukraine are going through now. That's what Andrea refers to as a human sacrifice, where you have an enormous number of people dead and even more gone into exile, having to flee the border. We do not want that situation in the United States. It is bad enough here. So learn from the lessons of Ukraine and also be very wary—I mean be angry, honestly, be opposed to—the politicians who are putting out this red state, blue state secessionist bullshit rhetoric that does nothing other than to serve a plutocracy that wants to take your money and then kill you. That is what they're out to do. Alright, with no further ado, we have an interview to follow that up. Andrea, do you wanna tell everybody about the guest that we have on today?

Andrea Chalupa (00:26:51):

To honor this one year anniversary of the total invasion, the genocidal invasion, we have the historian Dr. Yana Prymachenko of Princeton University, who's going to walk us through the all-important historical context and from the conversation you'll hear the urgent, blinking, red light alarm that Putin is a product of Russia. And even after Putin's gone, we are still stuck with the genocidal monster of Russian imperialism. Without further ado, here is Dr. Yana Prymachenko.

[transition music up and under]

Andrea Chalupa (00:27:34):

Today I'll be interviewing Yana Prymachenko. A native of Ukraine, Dr. Yana Prymachenko received her PhD from the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. She was a research scholar at the Institute of History of Ukraine from 2003 to 2022. She joined the faculty at Princeton as a visiting scholar in the Fall of 2022. Her research interests vary greatly, ranging from the Soviet culture in the 1920s and '30s, the history of the Second World War, the memory politics in Russia and Eastern Europe, to the study of Soviet propaganda and informational wars. Dr. Prymachenko is the author and co-author of 10 books dedicated to the history of Ukraine. She made a significant media contribution to promoting historical knowledge in the public sphere. She is an author of more than 80 scientific, encyclopedic and journalistic articles. Her current research focuses on the mediatization of history and historical fakes in media. Welcome to *Gaslit Nation*, Dr. Prymachenko.

Yana Prymachenko (00:28:40):

Hello, Andrea. Thank you for inviting me.

Andrea Chalupa (00:28:43):

So obviously your work spans a lot that we talk about here on the show, as well as my film, *Mr. Jones*, about the Holodomor, Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine. And you have been very active as a historian in trying to fact check the Kremlin's war on historical truth and communicate real historical facts in the Russian language to reach audiences in Russia as well as Kazakhstan. Could you speak a bit about that work?

Yana Prymachenko (00:29:18):

Yes. It actually started in 2014 when Russia started the war against Ukraine. It was immediately after Euromaidan, annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. Russia used the frame of World War II to promote this war against Ukraine. They pretend that all Ukrainians like fascists. They declare that they fought against Ukrainian fascists, the Ukrainian junta. And they also tried to undermine the legitimacy of the Ukrainian state, declaring that this is such a special state which was created by Lenin and the majority of the territory was a gift of Stalin. So in such a way, they just tried to explain that we don't have any historical right to be an independent country. And historical community, I mean, professional academic community couldn't be a site of this war since there was a very big demand among broad public Ukrainians who wanted to understand what's going on.

Yana Prymachenko (00:30:21):

Is it true? What Russian propaganda disseminated? And we started a project which is called "Likbez: Historical front". It's an NGO which actually unites a lot of historians. Some of them are involved on a regular basis, others just involved for some particular projects. With distance 2014 until now, this is a very successful project in public history because we represent historical knowledge, and with the bank, Russian propaganda, historical propaganda. We published a two-volume history book about Ukraine from the very beginning since the end of World War III. This is a nonfiction book and it's a popular narrative of Ukrainian history. So we want to contribute in this war against Russia to defend Ukrainian history from this historical take and Russian mythmaking.

Andrea Chalupa (00:31:19):

And in terms of Russia's war on history and your efforts to confront that through the Russian language, getting the facts out there, what has the reception been like from people in Kazakhstan and Russia to your efforts?



Yana Prymachenko (00:31:36):

Well, we have a website, which is also called Likbez Historical Front. We put all the information, all our articles, on this website. It works both in Russian and in Ukrainian. But we started as Russian-speaking because we wanted to involve Russian-speaking audiences, especially in the East and South Ukraine, also in Russia and Kazakhstan. And I was surprised when in 2015 some people from Kazakhstan started to write me on Facebook, on my email, and I was surprised because they used my video about the Georgian Ribbon, and as you know, the Georgian Ribbon was used in 2014 as a marker of Russian imperial expansion that was widely used between the so-called militia men in Donbas. And I just debunked this myth about the Georgian Ribbon as a symbol of World War II because it was not true.

Yana Prymachenko (00:32:36):

And this video was disseminated. It became very popular in Kazakhstan. They even created a very interesting cover, a lot of shots. So they just illustrated what I told. And to understand that there are big demands of this historical knowledge, especially when we talk about World War II, not only in Ukraine but also in other post soviet republics who also feel a threat from Russia. And Kazakhstan now particularly feels this threat because they think that if Ukraine can't resist Russia, Kazakhstan will be next. So they're also very interested in historical topics, in historical propaganda, how historical propaganda works and how to actually deal with this propaganda.

Andrea Chalupa (00:33:21):

Yeah. In the years leading up to Putin's invasion of Ukraine and certainly accelerating during... What year is it now? Let's see, the invasion started in 2014 and we're now in the year 2023. So it's been nine years. We're at the nine-year mark of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. And during that time, the cult of Stalin has been accelerating out of Russia. Just recently, a bust of Stalin went up in Russia just feet away from a memorial to victims of Stalin's terror. In your opinion, why do you think Stalin has come back under Putin and what do you think that means for Russian society, that's suffered as well under Putin, just like so many groups of people? Because obviously Stalin committed several genocides and mass murdered some of the best and brightest across Russian society, and now they're forced essentially to worship him in a way with this resurrection of the cult of Stalin. Why is Stalin back? What does that mean? And what does that mean for Russian society moving forward in terms of how they confront their own pain and trauma and make sense of their own Russian identity in the world?

Yana Prymachenko (00:34:38):

Thank you very much for this question because I have particular interest in this topic. And actually, yes, there are these myths about Stalin as a hero, Stalin as a very good manager of the Soviet Union. And we were also interested in why it's revived, the resurrection of this cult of Stalin. And actually the answer is very simple: because Russia still uses these Soviet myths about great patriotic war. They deny the idea of World War II. They still believe that the war started in 1941, not in 193—

Andrea Chalupa:

'39.

Yana Prymachenko:

Yeah, exactly.

Andrea Chalupa (00:35:18):

1939 September being the time Hitler invaded Poland. And two weeks later, the Soviets invaded and the Soviets and the Nazis held joint military parades and conquered Poland.

Yana Prymachenko (00:35:30):

Yes, that's the period when actually Soviets and Nazis were allies until 1941. The problem is that in 1949, it was like a very big celebration, the 70-year anniversary of Stalin. And during this celebration, they published a very big and political biography of Stalin. And actually the problem is that this myth of great patriotic war and Stalin's biography just intertwined so closely that when you revive the myth of the great patriotic war—and we know that since 2005, Russia revived this Soviet myth of great patriotic war—you also revive the cult of Stalin because they're two things together. So the idea of Stalin as a very great commander, one who is actually a victor of World War II (or in the Soviet Union, the Great Patriotic War), was created in 1949 in particular in this biography.

Yana Prymachenko (00:36:31):

So there are two myths which are just intertwined; the myth of the great patriotic war and the cult of Stalin. Because actually the cult of Stalin, it started before World War II but it revived and Stalin became like a god in Soviet culture. It was in 1949. So when Russia started to revive this myth of the great patriotic war, they also started to revive the myth of Stalin, the cult of Stalin. And this is a very bad thing for Russian society. They couldn't cope with their trauma. And a very big problem is in 2021, Memorial society was closed in Russia. This was the only organization which actually dealt with the Great Terror, was Stalin's crimes, with Soviet crimes. And this organization was closed in 2021. So it's like a complete revival, renaissance of this cult of Stalin in Russia.

Yana Prymachenko (00:37:28):

And the other problem is that in the communist [inaudible], Stalin was like a God. And when he died during [inaudible], they created another cult: the cult of Great victory, which is also dangerous. So now they're just trying to revive this idea and actually Putin wants to become a new Stalin. So that's why they revived this cult. And he also needs this kind of great victory, or like Stalin this great patriotic war, and in such a way he wants to become another Stalin, another God in the opinion of Russian people. So it's a very dangerous thing actually, because when you deal with memory, with public policy, with memory politics, it could be very dangerous because we see that now this war in Ukraine... Well, Russian society supports this war in Ukraine, like 70%. And that's a very big problem. That's actually the consequence of the revival of this great patriotic war and the cult of Stalin.

Andrea Chalupa (00:38:37):

Both of which, as you point out, predate Putin. And I think the big headline of what you're saying is incredibly important, which is this cult of personality around Stalin and this cult of personality of the great victory, of the great patriotic war, which took on a religious fervor back in 1949, which went on for generations and it ramped up a lot, it accelerated under Putin. This all points to the fact that Putin is a product of Russia. Putin is continuing on a larger psychology, a larger embedded culture of Russia. He's not an architect driving this. He's more going back in time to the good old days in his mind and so many others who support him, because as we keep pointing out on the show, and as you know, dictators need a base of supporters. Dictators do rely on supporters.

Yana Prymachenko:

Yes, exactly.

Andrea Chalupa (00:39:43):

There's no dictatorship without some support. And so it's important for people to know that Putin is a product of Russia and why it's important for us to accept that is because even after he dies—and there's been all sorts of rumors for years that he's sick and so on, and he is getting up there in age—but even after he goes, there's going to be someone else to carry on the good old days, the religious fervor of the patriotic war and Stalin. What would you say to that? Do you believe that that's true, that even when Putin's gone, we're still left with Russia and what that means?

Yana Prymachenko (00:40:14):

Yeah, you are completely right. I completely agree with you that when Putin's gone, nothing changes. I mean the problem is that Putin is the product of Soviet security services. He's actually a product of NKVD and as we know—

Andrea Chalupa (00:40:29):

The NKVD being the Soviet secret police, which tortured my grandfather.

Yana Prymachenko (00:40:32):

Yeah. In 2005, Putin declared that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the major geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. And what he actually wants is revenge; a revenge that they lost the Cold War. And they just want to revive this Soviet Union, the friends of the Soviet Union, and since actually security service is now the ruling power in Russia, it's not only Putin but the whole Russian political elite, they all have this secret service background. They are deeply Soviet people and since this Soviet security system degraded, especially in the 1980s, and they just intertwined with criminal circles, this is a very, very dangerous situation because they use all possible means to achieve their goals. And their goal is to undermine the west; undermine the west from within because they understand that they couldn't confront the West because the West is very strong. And now the West unites around Ukraine. Yes, if Putin was gone, for example, tomorrow, nothing would change because the whole Russian light—this is a light of the security service—stays there. And for them, this idea of revenge is very important.

Andrea Chalupa (00:42:03):

And that brings us also to the Russian opposition as well because, as you mentioned, there was the organization Memorial, co-founded in part by the Soviet dissident Andrei Sakharov, Memorial being the oldest, largest, most prestigious NGO across Russia that was focused on historical truth and giving back dignity to the countless victims of Soviet terror and repression throughout the years. And as part of that research, they'd have historians and other researchers uncover mass graves from the 1930s during Stalin's Terror, and they paid the ultimate price being arrested, their lives destroyed and so on. Memorial dared to show my film in Moscow—it was the Fall of 2021—and the screening of *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine (the Holodomor)—the screening was shut down and shortly after, Memorial, which had faced years and years of pressure and harassment—extreme harassment—was finally shut down.

Andrea Chalupa (00:43:11):

And out of that reporting was a quote by some one Russian who was on the side of Memorial saying that what happened with *Mr. Jones* being shut down, the film, had nothing to do with the film, it had to do

with Memorial. And I just thought, what a blind spot [laughs]. I understand that we're supposed to be on the same side. We're all anti-fascist, we're all anti-Kremlin, Putin, but for a Russian opposition voice who's supposed to be on the side of historical truth to not see the significance of not just Memorial being attacked, but also with it a Holodomor, film that shows a persistent blind spot in the Russian opposition, that the world is dependent on in being part of the solution to decolonizing Russia's own understanding of itself, meaning stop being the cult of Stalin, stop being the religion of Stalin, and moving towards a more equal, just and democratic society. And you can't get there without confronting historical truths. And that they couldn't see the connection between the organization finally being shut down and the death knell for it being daring to screen a Holodomor film on the verge of Putin about to carry out Holodomor 2.0 in the image of his hero Stalin, what hope then do we have for the Russian opposition? And why do you think so many of them, including Navalny, have this blind spot towards Ukraine?

Yana Prymachenko (00:44:34):

Well, the problem is that many Russians, even those who declare themselves to be liberal, they are imperial. I mean, deeply inside, they still believe in empire. They have this imperial thinking in thinking about Russia as empire. The problem is that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia couldn't create their national project, and they started to revive the empire. This is the first big problem. The second big problem is that Russia didn't condemn the Soviet crimes. And that is why it's so important to recognize the Holodomor as genocide. This is not about legal responsibilities. This is about historical and political responsibility. And we didn't have this idea of Nuremberg II, which was promoted since 2008. And as you can see, all the countries that condemned the Soviet crime, the communist crime, they became prosperous democracies. I mean, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, I mean Ukraine, I mean the Baltic states. And those who pretend that nothing happened, that the Soviet Empire was like another empire—maybe good, maybe bad, but maybe not so bad.

Yana Prymachenko (00:45:46):

So I think that the main problem is that Russian society didn't condemn the Soviet crimes. And Memorial tried to change this situation, but this effort wasn't enough. And the main problem—which I still believe—is that many Russian liberals still have this imperial thinking and imperial understanding of Russia. For them, it's very difficult to understand that something changes and Russia needs to create their own national project. And actually, this is the responsibility of Russian intellectuals to create this national project for Russia. And what we see is actually very disappointing because Russian liberals talk about Ukraine, but Ukraine is fine. This is a democratic state and our major problem is this Russian full scale invasion. Until the war had started, we were a very prosperous country. We have our own problems like corruption, something like that.

Yana Prymachenko (00:46:45):

But still, we were progressing and we were a developing democracy while Russia just became an authoritarian state. And I think this is a very big responsibility of Russian intellectuals because Ukrainian intellectuals did their job.

Andrea Chalupa:

Mmhmm <affirmative>

Yana Prymachenko:

I mean, we did our job for Ukraine. We fought for democracy. We suggested our knowledge, we invested our knowledge in our country, in Ukraine, to make Ukraine a democratic country, prosperous country. And I have a lot of questions for Russian intellectuals, especially those ones who declare themselves to be liberal.

Andrea Chalupa (00:47:27):

Yeah, absolutely. Ukrainian intellectuals launched two popular uprisings in Ukraine. There was the Orange Revolution, which I believe was a Ukrainian journalist, a woman that was calling people to push back against a stolen election, or warned that they needed to be ready to rise up. And then you had, of course, with the 2013/2014 Euromaidan Revolution of Dignity, that was launched by a Ukrainian investigative journalist, Mustafa Nayyem, with a Facebook post, and it was all the journalists and intellectuals. So yeah, Ukrainian intellectuals have put their lives on the line to get Ukraine to where it is today, which was a democracy where the average Ukrainian lived better off than the average Russian, to the point where the Russian invaders are shocked by the wealth that they're seeing in Ukraine.

Yana Prymachenko (00:48:17):

Yes, exactly. And now many Ukrainian intellectuals fight against Russians in the ranks of the Ukrainian army. I mean, these are people with PhDs and they just fight. They decided not to stay away from this war. They just enrolled in the Ukrainian army to actually fight for Ukraine.

Andrea Chalupa (00:48:42):

Yeah. And it's heartbreaking to see a professor or somebody killed in the war defending their country. You're seeing people from all across society, like a very diverse group of people who keep society running, keep society flourishing, being killed in this war. And meanwhile, in Russia, you know, they're sending out criminals, the worst of the worst.

Yana Prymachenko:

Yeah.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's like Russia is ridding itself of the worst of its society and Ukraine is losing some of the best of its society.

Yana Prymachenko:

Exactly.

Andrea Chalupa:

It's this horrible imbalance which is going to impact both countries for many years to come. But Ukraine has had very strong institutionalized resistance that has fought for the survival of the country for generations. For generations. Russia, though... You don't see that same level of institutionalized resistance. The hundreds of thousands of Russians fleeing abroad are going abroad and just living their lives. You don't really see Russians forced to flee their homes because they don't want to live in an authoritarian state.

Yana Prymachenko:

Yep, exactly.

Andrea Chalupa:

They don't wanna be drafted, but you don't see them organize and protest.

Yana Prymachenko (00:49:53):

They didn't wanna fight for their country. I mean, they prefer to escape while we prefer to fight. I mean, in 2014, we ousted the dictator from our country. We fought for this. We have the Heavenly Hundred, people who sacrificed their lives for our freedom. And that's a very big question to Russian society. I think that what is very important in this war is to preserve our Ukrainian human capital because this human capital, it's really incredible.

Andrea Chalupa (00:50:24):

Yeah, it really is. And I just don't know... It's just a sad feeling that we're probably not going to... How do I say this? Because the Russian resistance, the Russian opposition, is so weak—and this is Russian friends of mine who are saying this as well here in New York City, some of whom had to flee Russia—because it's so weak and therefore not reliable, we basically have no choice as a world, anybody in the world, any global citizen that cares about democracy, we are then left with no choice but to defeat Russia militarily.

Yana Prymachenko (00:51:01):

Yes. Yes, exactly. The problem is that the Russian opposition is completely destroyed. I mean I think in 2015 when Nemtsov was killed was the end of Russian opposition.

Andrea Chalupa (00:51:13):

Exactly right. Boris Nemtsov— just just for our listeners—Boris Nemtsov was an incredibly charismatic and fearless Russian opposition leader who was an honorary Ukrainian. He would give speeches in Kyiv pointing out and making a very clear statement saying that Crimea is Ukraine.

Yana Prymachenko:

Yeah.

Andrea Chalupa:

And Ukrainians loved him. Russians loved him. And because he united the two countries in peace and was anti-war, he had to die. And so he was murdered in the shadow of the Kremlin. And in fact, in my film, *Mr. Jones*, a character that is murdered early on—he was assassinated—that character is killed with four bullets in his back, just as Boris Nemtsov was, in tribute to, as you said, the Russian opposition, the Russian resistance that actually mattered. And it was very much killed that day with Boris Nemtsov.

Yana Prymachenko (00:52:00):

You are completely right. That's exactly what happened in Russia. And there is no hope for Russia because their opposition's destroyed. The people don't want to fight for their country. There is no other

choice but to defeat Russia. Because it's a threat. It's not a threat for Ukraine, it's threat for all the civilized world.

Andrea Chalupa (00:52:24):

And Ukrainians faced the same bloody brutality and repression that Russians did. Ukrainians had their journalists killed, and their activists beaten, killed, tortured. Ukrainians went through that but they chose to fight against it and keep fighting, whereas Russians kept running away, basically. That's the attitude.

Yana Prymachenko:

Yeah. exactly.

Andrea Chalupa:

And so that's the problem is that we're in this situation that we're in because Ukrainians chose to fight, where Russians chose to basically run away.

Yana Prymachenko:

Flee.

Andrea Chalupa:

They fled. And we're left with Navalny, who has his own right-wing Russian chauvinistic past that he's been called out on. And if you push Navalny's team to talk about, "Well, where do you all stand on Crimea?" They don't wanna talk about that [laughs]. You know? So what we're saying is when you don't have an alternative, which is a very strong opposition resistance movement, you're forced to do the military route. And I'm telling you, this same phenomenon happened in Germany. Germans submitted to Hitler. Germany submitted to their journalists being killed, destroyed, forced to go abroad. Germans, they folded. German society gave in and justified and made excuses and quietly accepted what was happening.

Yana Prymachenko (00:53:53):

That's the same that they're now doing in Russian society because we have the same phenomenon. Germany in the 1930s was a Nazi state and the same we have in Russia. Now, it's a Nazi state.

Andrea Chalupa:

Mmhmm. <affirmative>

Yana Prymachenko:

It's very dangerous, because what happened in Russia, the so-called Weimar syndrome, when people start to believe that they lost the empire because of somebody's bad will and actually the West was the main rival, and they want their revenge. And that's exactly what happened in the 1930s in Germany because Germans also just blamed somebody for that they lost World War I, and they also wanted their range. So the situation is the same. And what we see now in Russia, it's like a revival of this cult of Stalin

but actually it's Soviet by nature. But it's generic Nazism. It's Nazis. And what we see now in Russian society is actually Nazism.

Andrea Chalupa (00:54:59):

Oh, yeah. Wagner, the private military force that has committed atrocities, war crimes across Syria and several countries in Africa, and it's funded by the Kremlin and run by Putin's oligarch, Prigozhin, Wagner is named Wagner because it was Hitler's favorite composer.

Yana Prymachenko (00:55:22):

Yeah, exactly. And the idea is the same actually. I mean that Putin's regime is extremely xenophobic, antisemitic, and we see this treatment of the representatives of other nationalities. And the other thing, I mean, this war in Ukraine has genocidal character because in April, 2022, Timofey Sergeytsev, who is a political analyst very close to the Kremlin, and he published his article, actually it's a Russian-read news agency that published his article which is called, "What Should Russia Do With Ukraine?" And actually this article suggests a genocide. It divided Ukrainians into three groups. The first one, which were called [inaudible], they need to be eliminated. The second group—the supporters, so-called—need to be punished, and the third group need to be assimilated. So this is like the program of genocide of Ukrainians. And that resembles the mass situation with Hitler and their genocidal policy.

Andrea Chalupa (00:56:35):

Yeah, without question. I mean, that's exactly what the Nazis did and there are so many examples of that. There's this story of how very early in the 1930s, I wanna say like 1934 or so, when the Nazis had first taken over Germany and turned it right away, within months, into a dictatorship, they announced a decree or whatever. They said, "There's four types of women in Germany. The first type are the blonde blue-eyed Aryans and only they are allowed to reproduce with Nazi officers to make lots of Nazi babies." And the fourth and lowest tier of women were the Jewish women and the slavs. And they weren't allowed to reproduce at all. And the joke was... So when the Nazis announced this, one of the journalists, an American, this really funny reporter by the name of Knickerbocker, he raised his hand and asked the Nazi official, "So why do Jewish women and Slavic women, why are they so privileged?"

Andrea Chalupa (00:57:34):

"Why do they get all the privileges?" It was funny, you know, because we don't have to reproduce with the Nazis. But so yeah, categorizing people and figuring out a genocidal solution to them is exactly what the Nazis did. And yes, it's what we're dealing with now; it's unfinished business of World War II because as we all know, the allies used one monster, Stalin, to defeat the other monster, Hitler. And in doing so, they basically let the other monster live and mutate. And now that monster's still around doing monster stuff, making havoc.

Yana Prymachenko:

That's correct.

Andrea Chalupa:

So right now, with our unfinished business of World War II, what advice do you have for world leaders, for the American public, and anyone around the world whose tax dollars are being used to help Ukraine



fight for survival? Why do you think this fight is so important for people anywhere in the world today outside of Ukraine?

Yana Prymachenko (00:58:35):

Well, because everyone avoids to call this war World War III, but actually it is, because the world which was created after World War II didn't exist anymore because, you know, the architecture of international security, which was created after World War II, it's completely ruined. And despite the outcome of this war in Ukraine, we need—I mean, the world community, not only Ukraine—we need to create another architecture of international security and to change our approach to such regimes like Putin, like the Iranian regime. And the other problem, very big problem, is China. China's actually very dangerous and China is a silent supporter of Putin in this war. What I want to tell you is that the situation is very dangerous because this war, it's really World War III because it changed our world dramatically, despite maybe some people just don't understand it, but directly or indirectly, this war will influence the whole world.

Yana Prymachenko (00:59:46):

And the other problem, very big problem, is that this war multiplied climate change challenges because we know that what is going on in Ukraine is not only war crimes against humanity, but it's also ecocide because a lot of Ukrainian black soil was poisoned, the ecosystem was destroyed, and all these have a very huge impact on the world. And we actually already have a food crisis. So this war is very important. And to pretend that you're not involved is to keep a blind eye. It's not a strategy. This is a very dangerous strategy because it's kind of like when World War II had started, nobody took it seriously until it was too late. And the cost of World War II was very great. The same is happening now in Ukraine. The global community needs to take this seriously because actually this is World War III.

Yana Prymachenko (01:00:45):

I know that people want to avoid this term because it's too scary, too dangerous, but this is true. The impact of this war will be tremendous. And it depends on a global community to reduce this impact, to help Ukraine, because Russia won't stop in Ukraine. They want more. And China actually supports Russia because they need this precedent to start their own war. This is a really global challenge and people need to understand this because this is not only a Ukrainian war. This is a global war: Global democracy against authoritarian rule. National, state, and global community against empire.

Andrea Chalupa (01:01:38):

Absolutely. I mean, China says the same things about Taiwan—

Yana Prymachenko:

Yeah.

Andrea Chlaupa:

—as Russia says about Ukraine. And when you see China supporting Russia in all sorts of ways, it's because they're whetting their appetite for seizing Taiwan.

Yana Prymachenko (01:01:56):

Yeah. They need this precedent. If Russia would be successful, it means that China can do the same. And this is a very dangerous precedent. We need to stop it now.

Andrea Chalupa (01:02:08):

Absolutely. And the only way empires die, as we see, is if they get some military defeat. That's how you end an empire, that's how you weaken an empire, is through military defeat.

Yana Prymachenko (01:02:22):

Yes, it's true. The collapse of all empires is actually like create this world war. We have the collapse of the empires after World War I. We have the collapse of the empires after World War II. And now we also see the collapse of empire, and this is actually literally World War III.

Andrea Chalupa (01:02:41):

Yeah, I remember I was in Kyiv in, I think it was 2015, and I was talking to a security expert who had just returned from Baghdad. He was on one of the last planes out of Baghdad when ISIS was coming into the area. And he said to me, "World War III has already started. The West just doesn't know it yet."

Yana Prymachenko (01:03:04):

Yes. Yes, it's true.

Andrea Chalupa (01:03:06):

I mean, if you look at what we're dealing with in the US; Putin, Russia pumps in millions of dollars into propaganda to try to create divisions here in the US. Russia had a hand, as we saw in the 400-page Mueller report, as we saw in the bipartisan senate intelligence report, Russia had a very big hand in bringing Trump the Republicans to power in 2016. And on top of that, fanning the flames that led to an attempted violent overthrow of our democracy on January 6th, 2021. And a mirror to that is the Nazis spending millions—millions of German marks—on propaganda inside Austria to try to incite a violent coup against the Austrian government so the Nazis would take over Austria. And they failed in their violent coup attempt, which did successfully assassinate the Austrian chancellor at the time. And, you know, it was like a failed attempt.

Andrea Chalupa (01:04:19):

But they did come back around and ultimately succeed. So what I'm saying is when we make these World War comparisons, Russia has been waging a war against us, whether we like it or not. We can't have rose colored glasses on it. They're at war with us and we choose how to respond to that. And the way we should respond to that is to force historical truths, spread the facts about historical truths, especially confront a lot of these Russian diaspora groups to do that work and engage in that work because they need to be part of the solution. Also, support Ukraine militarily. Stop the drip feed of aid and get Ukraine everything it needs to finally defeat an empire.

Yana Prymachenko (01:04:58):

That's exactly what we need to do. We need a plan and we need to understand that Russia is a dangerous enemy which actually wants to undermine the other countries, the western countries, Western democracy within. And we need to resist it. And actually, yes. Help Ukraine with weapons to stop this war in Ukraine.

Andrea Chalupa (01:05:22):

This is more than just Ukraine that's at stake.

Yana Prymachenko (01:05:24):

Yes. It's not only about Ukraine and I think there is an understanding of this among the global community. That's why Ukraine has such big support.

Andrea Chalupa (01:05:34):

Well thank you so much for this interview and thank you for all the work that you're doing. And I hope your efforts to try to spread facts about Ukraine's history and Russia's history and the Russian language reaches a wider audience of Russians now that they're abroad, many of them, and have access to a free press, free information.

Yana Prymachenko (01:05: 54):

Thank you. Thank you for having me. It was a pleasure.

[outro - theme music, roll credits]

Andrea Chalupa:

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Andrea Chalupa:

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