

Gaslit Nation Transcript

24 May 2023

“Dictatorship: It’s Easier Than You Think”

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Ilya Ponomarev (00:00:15):

Look, at the end of the day, this war would not end in Ukraine. This war can end only in Moscow. This war can end only when Putin's regime is replaced. And obviously, it would not be done by Ukrainians or by NATO forces, British forces, whatever. It'll be done by Russians. Somebody needs to do it. We are very thankful for Ukrainians who are helping us in terms of training our forces and providing us with the necessary equipment, but it's our job. It's not fair if Ukrainians will spill the blood for our freedom.

[theme music up and under]

Andrea Chalupa (00:00:57):

Welcome to *Gaslit Nation*. I am your host, Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine. Our opening clip was Ilya Ponomarev, a leader of the Free Russia Legion, speaking to LBC London. We're gonna go into what the Free Russia Legion is, whether it's real or not, and what it means for the potentially, you know, inevitable downfall of Putin. And we are doing a special fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants taping of *Gaslit Nation* with members of our Patreon community who are here in the audience. We're gonna go answer some questions from the folks that are here later on in the show with our two extraordinary guests—two Superwomen who are fighting the battle of human rights against fascism in the world—we have Kasia Babis, who's based in Poland.

Andrea Chalupa (00:01:55):

She is an activist and the illustrator of the *Gaslit Nation* graphic novel, *Dictatorship: It's Easier Than You Think*. She's been on the front lines of fighting the Trumpian government in power in Poland that has been consolidating media control, packing the courts with lackeys, and instilling an environment of hostility and fear towards LGBTQ people, women, immigrants, and banning reproductive healthcare leading to, I believe, at least one death of a woman due to those laws. And Kasia has really put her body on the line at protests and has been roughed up in all of that in standing for human rights. And she took the material that Sarah Kendzior and I wrote for this book during a very dark time of 2020 of the pandemic and Trumpian fascist hell, where he was blatantly stealing that election—or trying to—in plain sight, leading to this slow moving coup.

Andrea Chalupa (00:02:52):

Kasia took our dark, dark material—the stuff we talk about on this show—and she lightened it up with this hilarious personality and sense of humor and added all sorts of her own flourishes. And we were just laughing out loud when we got the pages back. So, Kasia, welcome to the show. Thank you so much for all that you do. And, my God, what was that experience like for you during the time of working on this book and how did you approach everything and how did you nail it so brilliantly?

Kasia Babis (00:03:20):

Wow. So, thank you for having me and thank you for working with me on this amazing book. Truly. I think it's pretty unique for First Second Books to hire not exactly script writers, comic script writers to write comics, but also people from other areas and people who have something interesting to say that is really fitting for a comic book form. And working with someone not strictly from a comic background is always very interesting. And you both did amazing work with preparing a script for me. It was really clear. So anyways, it was so funny and lighthearted for such a difficult topic, and a lot of your takes were very similar to ones that I'm usually making while doing cartoons, political satire. So it was very my style. It was, like I said, extremely funny.

Kasia Babis (00:04:25):

And the bits were very easily translatable to comic book form. And also the characters. The idea to create a narrator who is this shady but also likable character, that I could, through him, tell these amazing but also terrifying stories. It was such a fun narrative device. And also I think that my favorite part was character design for all the dictators. I loved drawing their facial features and different characteristics and making them into those cartoonish characters because I think it's a great tool to strip them of their inflated personas that they create to basically spread their propaganda and appear more frightening and masculine. And I think it strips away that fear of them, and it's easier then to make fun of them and poke at some of their flaws in a very effective way.

Andrea Chalupa (00:05:36):

Absolutely. I mean, your Trump was just like... You made his face physically look like an asshole. [laughs]

Kasia Babis (00:05:41):

[laughs] Oh, thank you.

Andrea Chalupa:

Those puckered lips.

Kasia Babis:

It's such a very good subject for a cartoonist and a lot of cartoonists from all over the world are having such a blast drawing him. And also in every take on him—because, of course, it's not the only book or comic strip that I was drawing him in—I have a different approach and he's... Yes, very grateful subject to every, every time I find something new in his facial features to cling on. So drawing it is very fun.

Andrea Chalupa (00:06:18):

And what was going on for you in your life? Because I remember Sarah and I signed that book deal right when the pandemic hit, and I was like, “Do we really wanna commit to this project when I'm about to lose my babysitter?” [laughs] Like, what are we doing? I had just had a baby and I suddenly had no childcare because my babysitter at the time was like, “Hey, there's like a killer virus, I'll see ya.” This whole idea was, Well, we might as well do it because the world's coming to an end and we don't know if we'll ever get the chance to say what we need to say. And so we went ahead and did it. And it was nuts. It was really, really nuts taking care of a baby and running the show and fighting Trump through the podcast and making phone calls to get out the vote and research all this darkness, but put it through this whole funny narrator bit. But what was that like for you? What was going on in Poland and for you in your life?

Kasia Babis (00:07:12):

Yeah, well, I could only imagine how hard it was for you with all that stuff; having kids and a job. I personally think I got it pretty easy compared to other people because I was working from home anyways for over a year and I didn't fear to lose my job. I don't have kids. So for me personally, it was... None of my close relatives got really sick, so I was not personally affected as much as some other people. But in terms of politics and what was happening in Poland and my activism, it was just crisis after crisis after crisis. The Polish government's maneuver to strip away the tiny bit of what was left of our productive rights was going on. And then the crisis on Belarusian border with refugees and then, of course, war—

Andrea Chalupa (00:08:24):

From the Middle East—

Kasia Babis:

Yes.

Andrea Chalupa:

—and I believe Northern Africa were being flown to the border of Belarus and Poland by the Kremlin, by Russia and the dictator of Belarus to try to put pressure on the EU, try to put pressure on Poland.

Kasia Babis (00:08:40):

Yes, and unfortunately that was the narrative that was used by our government: to not let these people in. And it's of course illegal. It's forbidden by international law to make pushbacks and that's basically what they did. And they explained themselves telling everybody that what is going on is a hybrid war by Putin to destroy borders of the European Union through Poland. And I was just trying to comprehend how those few hundred people are going to destroy us, exactly, because even if they were here legally, illegally, it doesn't really matter because international law is very simple. We need to take them and then clear their status because pushbacks, which are basically driving them back to the swamp, to the woods, and leaving them there to die from exposure, from dehydration (and some of them did die and people were starving and left without water.)

Kasia Babis (00:09:50):

Even activists were not let in to help them. We wanted to, and journalists wanted to know what's going on, but the whole area was basically closed by military and we were not let in, and nobody was allowed to help these people and clear their legal status or even get them water or shelter or any basic needs. I think we really need to remember that and to not forgive the Polish government for that, because in light of current events with Ukraine where we actually did help a lot, and I am proud to be Polish in these moments when we are helping. And our stance on Ukraine is, I think, very supportive and righteous. But we cannot forget what we, as a nation, did on the Belarusian border to those people.

Kasia Babis(00:10:45):

Even if it was like scheming on Putin's part, it doesn't matter. They are still people and we are not gonna fall because a few hundred or even thousand people came across our borders. We, Polish people during the world war, so we were flooding all over the world, and there are many countries who took in millions of Polish people, and nobody asked about our illegal status. And nobody asked, Are we really war refugees? Or maybe we have some ulterior motives and we just wanna get richer, or we want social

security of richer countries. So we were met with such amazing generosity from other countries. I think it's our turn and we need to do our part.

Andrea Chalupa (00:11:35):

Yeah, without question. That's all very well said. Thank you so much. What do you want people to know now about the situation in Poland, what you're up against?

Kasia Babis (00:11:44):

Well, basically, the government, the most heinous thing they did was the complete ban on abortion in basically what is now all cases, because obviously doctors are afraid to perform abortion, even if it endangers a woman's life and health, even if, like, the developing fetus has no brain, basically nobody will dare to risk legal repercussions for inducing forced... basically abortion. And not only doctors are afraid, but regular people too, because there are many cases when miscarriages are being investigated because you can't really tell on the early stages of pregnancy if the miscarriage was forced/induced by some kind of... As you well know, this is the most common form of terminating pregnancy. It's just a pill that you take.

Kasia Babis (00:13:00):

It's a medication, a drug that stops the pregnancy. So if you take this on purpose or by accident, you can't really tell, but police are still trying to investigate these cases. And even some people helping women to get pills are being prosecuted, like, their boyfriends who bought them for them or assisted in them taking them. So it's really, really scary. But we are still trying to help women and there are many organizations who try to send the pills to them or assist them and tell them when they can get them or where to go—basically somewhere beyond the Polish border—to get this procedure done because women are desperate. And, of course, as you mentioned, some of them have died. A few have tragically lost their life because the necessary medical care was pushed farther back and was delayed and delayed until it was too late basically.

Kasia Babis (00:14:13):

Even in the cases when the fetus is actually dead in the womb, some doctors will not intervene in any form because they're afraid of taking any action, really. And I see that happening in the US right now, and I was seeing that before it was all happening. If I am thinking correctly, you also had some changes in the highest constitutional court, and that allowed some states to try and ban abortions as well. And before that was happening, I also, in the discourse in the United States, see the exact same points that were brought up here many years ago, and here it developed to a situation where abortion is totally banned across the whole nation. So I am really scared for you too.

Andrea Chalupa (00:15:13):

Yeah, we're very... It's a nightmare what's happening here. We're living, so far, a very, very dark nightmare. How are you guys pushing back? Because the Trumpian government, the far-right government in Poland, they've captured the courts, they've captured state media... What else, what other power leverage that they have? How are you able to resist? What actions are you taking, or do you have levers of power?

Kasia Babis (00:15:41):

Yes. The first symptoms were, of course, the maneuvers at the constitutional courts. And these were some years ago, I can't remember right now, the first huge massive protests in Poland. It was defending

the constitutional court so it's not taken over, but the no justice government. And as it is with, I think, all really big protests, well, there were some battles that we won, but overall it really didn't make that huge of a difference because then, when they had a clear path to make any law they want, they tried for the first time to change the law on abortion and then there were huge protests, and I think they got a little bit scared back then because the change in the law was supposed to be more drastic, even though we also back then had the most restrictive abortion law in whole Europe, but still, they wanted to make it worse.

Kasia Babis (00:16:55):

And they did make it worse because the next time they tried to change the law, the protests were the biggest I have ever seen. And I am not that old, so maybe I haven't seen a lot. But also they were factually the biggest protest since the 1980s. And the last we've seen something like that was when the communist regime was falling apart. And it was truly an amazing formative experience... Amazing is a bad word, but it was a formative experience for me to engage in that because it was really a massive movement all across the country, all wearing black because black was worn by Polish women when we were occupied by other countries so we can sort of mourn for our country. So we were mourning once again. It was called the black protests.

Kasia Babis (00:17:51):

We were all wearing black. And I remember it was really rainy, so we all went out to the streets with umbrellas and I remember those pictures from Jones, from up above where all the streets are just flooded with black umbrellas. And it looked really... We felt so powerful back then just because we were supporting each other, and we felt like we are really changing something because how can they not listen to such a massive, massive crowd? And how can this government go on after they caused such a divide? But somehow, they always can do what they want and I think you know how it works, because you wrote a brilliant comic book about this so...

Andrea Chalupa (00:18:35):

Which you illustrated.

Kasia Babis (00:18:36):

[laughs] Yeah, that's why it was so easy to me. This is so clear what is happening, and yeah, this is happening all over again. And to be pretty honest with you, after all of that, I feel really powerless. And I had a crisis in my activism and political activity because, like I said, we did all that and it meant nothing. But for a few years now, I'm trying to come to terms with that. And this, by the way, is gonna be a whole point of my next... I don't know if next, because I have a few projects going on, and I don't know which one is gonna be first, but I'm working on a comic book based on my memories. And it's gonna be pretty much about that, about the reproductive rights in Poland and how it all influenced me and created me as an activist, as a person, and how to deal with that feeling of powerlessness and burnout in trying to fight for a change.

Andrea Chalupa (00:19:49):

Absolutely. Well, we look forward to having you back on the show to talk about your memoir when it's out. So there's a question in the chat about John Paul II. I don't know if you're familiar with him, but—

Kasia Babis (00:20:01):

[laughs] Oh, I am. I'm familiar with him.

Andrea Chalupa (00:20:04):

Was he a Nazi cutout during the war along with Pope Benedict? And do you see... So the question is, let me just read it: So, "for you and Kasia: Are Poland's and Texas's abortion laws John Paul II's revenge? Once a Nazi, always a Nazi. Both he and Benedict were at least cutouts during World War II." And cutouts are people who are essentially secret agents for, you know, collaborators. So, I don't know, I'm not like a John Paul II expert historian so I don't know what his involvement was during World War II, but what would you say to that?

Kasia Babis (00:20:46):

Okay, so I can say a lot of things and a lot of bad things about John Paul II. Basically, it's also a very huge character in my next comic book. It's a whole chapter devoted to him because actually, my generation in Poland was called Generation JP Second—that means generation of John Paul II—and it's ironic because back then, we were named that after he died because everyone thought we're gonna be so devoted to his message and his memory. But it turned out ironic because we all started to rebel against his maniac cult... Cult-like status in Poland. I was saying lately that Poland is not like a Catholic country as it was claiming to be for a long time. It's a Papist cult, basically, of a dead pope right now.

Kasia Babis (00:21:44):

We have thousands and thousands of statues of him. And in school, I remember it was the central character of all Polish identity. And so he was definitely covering up pedophilia in the Catholic church, and this is his biggest, biggest sin, so to say. He also had his share in the HIV epidemic in Africa because he was trying actively to maybe not ban, but really restrict access to contraception in underdeveloped countries. So this was definitely had its impact. And he, yeah... He was a bad person, but I have never heard about collaborating with the Nazis. This is something that has never come up. And trust me, the Left in Poland was Invigilating his character left and right.

Kasia Babis (00:22:59):

So either there is something I still don't know, but I don't think that part is true. It's also true that here in Poland there is common belief that he himself destroyed communism because in Poland, we really associate the return to power of the Catholic church with the fall of communism because the communists were not, obviously, not very fond of Christianity. So, all people in Poland... Not all, but many people in Poland believe that he was the main reason why the communist regime fell in Poland, which is obviously a little bit ridiculous. But yeah, I think the main focus right now in critiquing his character is his covering up of pedophilia. And this is a big discourse right now with Paul because in the mainstream, you can't really say that; you're gonna be ostracized and you're gonna be accused of being anti Polish and anti God himself if you dare to say he had anything to do with covering [up] pedophilia in the Catholic church.

Andrea Chalupa (00:24:20):

And you're based in Warsaw now?

Kasia Babis (00:24:23):

Yes.

Andrea Chalupa (00:24:24):

I wanna just let our audience know that I spent several months in Warsaw and I didn't wanna leave. And Warsaw, it's like a giant neighborhood in Brooklyn. It's just like everybody's wearing black, everyone

looks like they work in the arts or something. They all have dogs. They all just hang out in parks with their dogs and their black t-shirts and at least on Yelp, which is English language, all the reviews are written in English, like the number one... There's tons of vegetarian and vegan restaurants, which is important to point out for Eastern Europe where you think meat and potatoes is every meal. But it's a hipster kingdom, Warsaw, and I loved it so much. And the symbol is a mermaid, and my own symbol is a mermaid, so I felt like—

Kasia Babis (00:25:08):

Yeah, a badass mermaid with a sword and a shield.

Andrea Chalupa (00:25:11):

That's, yeah, that's how I see myself. [laughs]

Kasia Babis (00:25:13):

<laughs> Yeah, Warsaw is great. Many of my friends have a tattoo of that mermaid, actually. It's about a story. She was a fighter, and she was... She's a great symbol. Anyway, I love Warsaw too. I moved here from the eastern part of Poland not so... like an hour and a half by car so basically by US standards, it's practically Warsaw. But yeah, Warsaw is spoiling all us vegetarians, definitely. When I'm traveling across Europe—I've never been outside of Europe, but in Europe, when I'm traveling—basically everywhere it's harder to get a good vegetarian or vegan meal. And it's really green. We have a lot of trees in Warsaw and also a river in the middle of the city with beaches, and you can just chill and have a picnic and yeah, I love the city. It's really great. And I know that many of my haters on Twitter won't believe me, but I really love Poland too, and I wouldn't fight against it, against its government, if I didn't love it: I would just leave. So I care about this country. It's really sad because like you say, it can be pretty beautiful, so it's worth fighting for.

Andrea Chalupa (00:26:41):

Absolutely. Absolutely. So I wanna include Olga in this as well, but what about the Ukrainian situation? I mean, Warsaw, I think the population doubled with all the refugees that came in, and you were active in that. There was a *Gaslit Nation* listener that reached out to me saying that she wanted to go to Poland to help, and you very thoughtfully provided an extraordinary email of resources for anybody who wanted to just go to Poland and help. So talk to us about, like, what you've been doing because of the war, and what is the situation like now? Just talk us through that.

Kasia Babis (00:27:15):

Yeah. Well, not doubled, but we definitely have a lot of people that moved in here because, like I said, on this front, we acted like we should, and we really opened our arms and our borders and our hearts to all the Ukrainian people. And the first weeks were pure chaos, which was awful but also beautiful in the way that we all mobilized, because right now it's pretty much... It's calm. We know what's going on, and all the proper agencies are doing their work in helping people find housing and helping people move. But the first weeks, nobody knew what to do. We'd never seen a crisis like that. So everybody was helping however they could. So my fiance and some of my friends were... Basically anybody who had a car and some free time was driving to the border to offer their car to move people to places where they could stay for at least some time because people were just taking their backpacks and children and pets and sometimes walking to the Polish border because they were so afraid, or they were bombed.

Kasia Babis (00:28:38):

So it was as personal as it could get. We were driving to the border, taking anybody who wanted a lift, and we asked them, "Where do you want to go?" and driving them. I was helping in Warsaw in a center. There were a few that just popped up. It was totally from people. There were no government agencies overlooking that. We were just finding a place where we can store the resources and store people so they can spend a night and eat a warm meal and get some clothes and maybe get some legal advice or shoes. So, whatever they needed. People were offering their houses. Some of my friends were living with Ukrainian families for a while. Some business owners were offering places, like hotel owners were offering just rooms for free. And there were different groups of people helping exclusively pets, for example. Anyone who knew the language was translating.

Kasia Babis(00:29:55):

Everybody helped. Everyone I knew. I don't know a single person who didn't help in some way. So it was beautiful and uplifting, and I really regained a lot of faith in humanity and that, but also, it was so scary because we didn't know... Are we next? How long is Ukraine gonna last? Back then, we didn't think they're gonna be so brave and so good on the front, they're gonna be still fighting. So we thought, "Oh my God, are we next?" We were trying for a house and were thinking, "Should we buy it? Should we maybe escape to Germany?" Because we are so close to the border. And then my parents are living close to the border as well.

Kasia Babis (00:30:49):

Remember when the missile hit? It was stupid mistake as it turned out by... But everyone was ready, right? To fight or to flee. And people from other countries were asking me if I'm okay, which is pretty funny because Warsaw feels so safe. Oh, I remember there are some Facebook groups of Americans who want to visit Poland or such, so they were asking if it's safe to travel here. And it was so abstract for me because I'm just living my normal life, and people act like it's a war zone, but it's not so far away. It really is. And people are losing their houses and losing their close ones and genocides are happening. So how do you live your life and draw your silly comics and play with your pets and play the new *Zelda* game when right next to you people are fighting or mourning their relatives deaths?

Kasia Babis (00:32:03):

Some of my friends were crying because their boyfriends decided to go to Ukraine and fight. Some of my Polish friends decided they wanna not... Not my friends. I'm not gonna claim they're my friends, but I know some people who decided to go and fight with Ukrainians. So, it's so hard to comprehend. And of course, it was really sweet that the whole world and the American citizens as well were so concerned and wanted to help. But yeah, some people who wanted to come here and help personally, it was so sweet, but also it would be such a waste of resources to spend money on the tickets just to randomly go to a train station and give soup to people, because we have people... We have a lot of people who wanna help. What we didn't have back then was resources.

Andrea Chalupa:

Money.

Kasia Babis:

Yes.

Andrea Chalupa (00:33:04):

It's better to make a donation than to show up.

Kasia Babis (00:33:06):

Yes. Make a donation. You don't need to be here. We got this. Also, there was a huge scandal with..., I think it was an American guy who wanted to make an app to connect people, refugees escaping, with people who wanted to house them but he didn't think of dangerous situations like sex trafficking and exploitation. So actually my friend called him out on that, on Twitter, I think, and he completely bashed her and sent his fans to like, to also hate on her. And it was a whole thing. And it was funny because it was like a tech guy who thought he single-handedly resolved such a great humanitarian crisis. But it was a great lesson to always ask people on the ground what they need and really listen to what they need and not to try to act like a hero all the time.

Andrea Chalupa (00:34:11):

Absolutely. So, let's check in with Olga Lautman on the war. Olga, what is going on with all these reports that the Russian Freedom Legion is liberating Russia?

Olga Lautman (00:34:24):

First, before I start, I just wanna say how grateful I am to Poland, and, you know, and thankful, because luckily, Ukraine has a neighbor who really has balls and—unlike a lot of Western European countries—is not worrying about what Putin thinks before acting. The Polish government has been on the front lines with allowing weapons to pass through, with training Ukrainian military people, and doing everything in order to make sure that Ukraine defeats Russia. That's very interesting. Russia right now is occupied, securing, attempting to secure their border. This group... I'm not sure what this group is. Honestly, I don't believe in any Russians who are fighting against Russia and created a legion, you know, to go fight against Russia. Apparently—

Andrea Chalupa (00:35:19):

Yeah but, I just wanna jump in just to clarify for those not following this story.

Olga Lautman:

[laughs]

Andrea Chalupa:

There's been social media selfies going up of a very well armed militia called the Russian Freedom Legion. They have a Twitter account with several thousands of followers. They're apparently roped in with opposition figures like Mark Feygin, who's a civil rights lawyer—Russian civil rights lawyer that represented Pussy Riot—and others like that. And they claim that they've been fighting alongside the Ukrainians inside Ukraine. They're very secretive, you know, for obvious reasons you'd imagine, because they're Russians and the Russian military tends to be extremely brutal against so-called traitors. They even have a symbol for that, which is a hammer, where they killed one deserter or some, you know, somebody, a Russian—

Olga Lautman (00:36:12):

Well, that's Wagner. That's not the Russian military. Wagner.

Andrea Chalupa ([00:36:17](#)):

Wagner. [German pronunciation]. I've been told a million times by our listeners, it's Wagner.

Olga Lautman (00:36:20):

Wagner [laughs]

Andrea Chalupa (00:36:22):

But, so now the Russian Freedom Legion is in southern Russia, north of Kharkiv, in these villages right near Belgorod, as you'd say in Russian, and it's near a nuclear site, right? Where nuclear missiles are being kept? And there's social media videos and other images popping up of them taking selfies with a Russian border guard station that they emptied out because the Russian border guards fled. And they keep pushing and pushing and claiming that they're liberating these towns. So do you think this is really... Do you think the Russian Freedom Legion is real? Is it Ukrainian PSYOPs? Is it the CIA?

Olga Lautman (00:37:05):

I don't think it's Ukrainian. I still honestly haven't figured out what it is, except that, you know, I keep hearing there they take credit for certain things, but the operation itself is real. They did go and cross the border and they killed several FSB agents at the border post on the border between Ukraine and Russia, and then they continued moving in and they took over a police station. There were drone attacks against an FSB building yesterday and today, Russia still can't get them out. And now they put a general in charge who actually lost Kharkiv and lost during the counter offensive and Irkutsk and the rest of the cities that were temporarily occupied by Russia, they put him in charge of now bringing Belgorod. What it is, I'm not sure.

Olga Lautman (00:38:07):

But, you know what? As long as it keeps Russia occupied trying to secure, because they're gonna have to move their troops over to secure the border and it's a very, very long border between Ukraine and Russia. So right now, it's humiliating for Putin, it's humiliating for the Russian Defense Ministry, the fact that their border can be penetrated so easily with no hesitation and the fact that we're now 48 hours into whatever this is, and these people are still going. So, I mean, it's a good thing, but it speaks to the bigger thing of what's happening inside of Russia because this is just one small operation. But since last fall, I've been documenting pretty much the beginnings of the collapse of Russia. And you see... I mean, the minute you saw Wagner and Prigozhin start a public fight with the Russian Defense Ministry and the League and calling for the seizing of assets of the oligarchs.

Olga Lautman(00:39:19):

And the minute you saw this, I mean, this is something that was unthinkable in the Soviet Union. I mean, people would be executed for that. And here it is playing out on Telegram. He has obviously his loyal supporters, or the propaganda military bloggers. And obviously he ran a troll farm and he is extremely savvy at running information warfare operations as he did in the United States. And he was indicted for it as he does across Europe, you know, trying to split the far left and the far right, propping up the far right. And plus, we know his operations are across Africa, executions in Syria and whatnot. But that is also, again, just another bit of what is happening because just in general, Putin is losing control and you see more and more signs. And this actually started after Ukraine had a successful counter offensive.

Olga Lautman (00:40:24):

This is when the backlash against the Russian officials and defense ministry began on social media by Russians after the counter offensive. And it's only gotten worse. I mean, with every single defeat that they suffer with the fact that, you know, they claim to have Bakhmut 10 months later and it's not even

clear if they have it, and it's four and a half square miles. I mean, we're not talking about... At this rate, if they continue like this, they'll get the Kyiv in about 50 years because I mean, if it takes 10 months for four and a half square miles—to potentially have it, which they're not gonna have for long either, because the Ukrainian military surrounding them... And so it's just a mess in there. It really is just a mess. And then there's a fight, you know, that's been brewing between the Chechens and the Russian Orthodox Nationalists, and you have all these factions inside of Russia that, you know, were kept under control under Putin for 20+ years, all these factions are beginning to unravel. And the country is so big and so diverse that it's extremely hard with this to keep everyone in line.

Andrea Chalupa (00:41:47):

That's amazing. So would you say it's the beginning of the end for Putin?

Olga Lautman (00:41:52):

I would say it is, definitely. I mean, Putin's end is coming soon. One way or another, his end is coming soon. My worry is that this is not Putin's war. This is the Russian people's war. It is the Russian people who are executing Ukrainians, raping Ukrainians, robbing Ukrainians, creating the mass graves, so my biggest worry is that it is too easy to put it on a regime when you had close to a million Russians who fled Russia after mobilization—or the part-mobilization—yet they could have come out in the streets and toppled the government. And again, with your movie, *Mr. Jones*, I mean, this is something, this historical thing between Ukrainians and Russians goes back so many centuries. You pick up with Stalin and his genocide against Ukrainians, but this is something that goes back for centuries. This is not NATO, as pro Kremlin propagandists want us to believe. This is like a superiority that Russians feel; that they own Ukrainians and the Ukrainians are their slaves; that they own Belarusians and Georgians and Kazakhs and pretty much everyone who was under the whole Soviet Union. So it comes back to that. And I mean, Putin started the war because he was pretty much, you know, getting old and has nothing to leave like in the history book, so he thought reinstating or attempting to reinstate the Soviet Union would get him into the history book as someone, as a powerful leader, and have statues across Russia created for him and whatnot. And clearly we saw, you know, they wanted the opposite. They went in with occupying Crimea and parts of Donbas and they're gonna leave with absolutely nothing. And they'll be lucky if they have Belgorod because Ukrainians are thinking of creating a buffer zone just to make sure that Russia, you know, there's enough space between the border so this never happens again.

Andrea Chalupa (00:44:11):

Do you think the KGB dictatorship of Putin, do you think they're going to respond by using nukes?

Olga Lautman (00:44:17):

That question comes up pretty much every single time something happens and, I mean, Russia... Look, I can't predict whether Putin will use nukes or not. He probably would—tactical nuclear weapons, but I don't—

Andrea Chalupa (00:44:32):

What are tactical nuclear weapons?

Olga Lautman (00:44:35):

They're more localized. It's not a, you know, intercontinental ballistic warhead carrying a nuclear warhead.

Andrea Chalupa (00:44:43):

So against Kharkiv he could do it?

Olga Lautman (00:44:45):

He could do it, exactly. So, I mean, I would not discount it because, you know, I think that he's extremely capable of that. And Putin's government and Yeltsin's government and the Soviet communist governments, I mean, they've never had a respect for human life. Ever. I mean, Stalin, he committed genocide against Ukrainians but at the same time, he also sent how many millions of Russians to the Gulag for execution? You know? So it's a very cruel regime that, again, is very old and they use the same tactics and they've just never evolved mentally. So I wouldn't discount it. But again, it's not gonna change anything militarily. Even if he does choose to use tactical nuclear weapons inside of Ukraine, it will basically make a certain area uninhabitable, but that's it. I mean, it's not gonna change anything. Ukrainians aren't going to say, "Oh, wow, we just had a nuclear attack. So here, take Ukraine."

Olga Lautman(00:45:51):

If anything, they'll be screaming even louder that this is exactly what we're fighting against. The West is not gonna cave in and be like, "Oh my God, they used nuclear weapons and we just have to stop supporting Ukraine." So it's not gonna change anything militarily. So, I mean, hopefully he won't. Hopefully the people who are surrounding him understand this, and I'm pretty sure that they do, because if not, you even see how Putin has been pressuring Lukashenko to send in the Belarusian army over the past year. And even with Lukashenko, he's found every excuse under the sun not to send Belarusians because he knows that they'd both switch sides and start shooting Russians the minute they cross over the border. Not the whole military, but a good percentage will because Belarusians historically have nothing against Ukrainians. So that's why you see... We are now, what? 15 months or 14 months? Feels like 15th centuries into this and you see Lukashenko still hasn't pulled a trigger of using the Belarusian military to conduct operations inside of Ukraine.

Andrea Chalupa (00:47:08):

Yeah. And Vladimir Putin remains a master strategist.

Olga Lautman:

[laughs]

Andrea Chalupa:

I remember like, like back when the total war broke out—

Olga Lautman (00:47:15):

Can I just stop you one second? Everyone thinks that, you know, Putin is such a master strategist. I remember in the early 2000s watching, you know, people who were watching his body language and interpreting, what is he doing? What is he saying? What does he mean by this word? His only gift is the greed of the West. That's the only gift he has and that is the only reason the Soviet Union didn't survive, because he can buy Western politicians, hence Trump and that whole crew; he can buy Western propagandists, journalists and basically everything is because of money. If the money didn't exist, Putin would've been gone in 2008 after Georgia's invasion. Go ahead now. [laughs]

Andrea Chalupa (00:48:04):

Yeah, no, absolutely. Without question. So I remember a year ago when the total war broke out, you and I got on the phone right when it was all going down—that nightmare moment when the Russians invaded in those early morning hours, just like the Nazis did, invading the Soviet Union—and the first thing you said to me—and I will never forget this—you said, “Putin threw away 20 years of Spycraft in one night.”

Olga Lautman (00:48:38):

Mhmm. <affirmative>. Yeah. So Putin decided, because what happened is he calculated, as he's been cultivating, we see, Western figures inside of the United States and across Europe, you know, over the past 20 decades, he's been doing obviously the same in Ukraine. I mean, Ukraine had so many, you know Russian agents infiltrated within all their agencies.

Andrea Chalupa (00:49:02):

All working with Giuliani and Paul Manafort.

Olga Lautman (00:49:05):

[laughs] Apparently. Seriously. So he thought that Ukraine was gonna collapse from within. He didn't think that it was gonna be, because honestly, he should know, and that's why I was shocked, even, you know, and I had made jokes on my podcast the summer prior because I was warning about this full scale invasion for the year prior to this. And I made jokes and said, you know, I know Putin doesn't rely on this military because yes, they're cruel, they're evil, they will have no balance. They will target civilians. That's a strategic target. But at the same time, they've robbed everything. I mean, they have robbed everything. All the military leaders, all the defense industry companies, you know, for every million dollar contract, 100,000 goes into the pockets and 200,000 goes to something. So, I have said, you know, if he's relying on his military, that is not gonna work because the military, technically all the money and technology is parked in villas and yachts and offshore companies in the West. It's not inside of the thing. And we even see with these feared hypersonic missiles, where are they? You know, Russia was putting out propaganda videos over the past decade showing them coming to the United States. I saw the videos constantly. Where is his fleet of hypersonic... He even lost, the scientists died who made the hypersonic, who was responsible for the hypersonic weapons. Or arrested.

Andrea Chalupa (00:50:47):

Yeah those scientists were just arrested.

Olga Lautman (00:50:51):

Arrested. Yeah, last year they were arrested. There were several of them. They were actually accused of selling secrets to China, which is interesting. So when this started, he was factoring that this was gonna happen from within, that Ukraine will be taken, and then at the same time, the West was gonna do no more than offer their deep concerns. And here this obviously didn't happen. The West banded together stronger than ever. I mean, it is fascinating to see that NATO found its true mission. And, you know, and you see the real European/US/Canadian/Asian alliance so strong. And that's it. And as a result, what happened instead? He got sanctioned and everyone—literally: Europe, United States, everyone—started going after the money. They started breaking up all the operations that the Russian financed across Europe and the United States. I mean, I'm sure everybody sees now, like every other day there's a new indictment of Russians here who are attempting to help Russia bypass some sanctions.

Andrea Chalupa (00:52:06):

An American, a New York City attorney just got indicted by the DOJ.

Olga Lautman (00:52:10):

Yeah, there are so many, I wouldn't even know which one. There was a Greek national in New York for aircraft, sending aircraft. There were two Russians in Trump Tower in Florida that the FBI conducted a search and they were arrested for military, sending like dual use military, I believe, stuff and helping Russia evade sanctions. I mean, it's literally every week there is something. So right now, I mean, for 20 years Putin had all his agents on the ground. He had all the propagandists in place. He had RT, Sputnik, and all the media outlets embedded in Western society, Latin America, Africa, Middle East, all the spy networks, everything. And after this now, he blew it. I mean, all you hear is spy nets being exposed in Europe. I mean there's a whole series, a Danish investigation of a whole series of spies that were exposed and expelled from Denmark. Same is happening in Norway, Sweden, I mean, you name it, it's happening. Germany.

Olga Lautman (00:53:28):

Even the Germans, you know, who were kind of la di da and neutral, have now taken a very hard stance against Russia, especially after it came out that there was a violent coup attempt against them. And this is not even about... It's about Ukraine, but I mean, Putin's ambitions were bigger. It was gonna be Ukraine, it was gonna be Moldova, Georgia, and it was gonna continue on and on until he, in his head, reinstates the Soviet Union, and that's why it's so important to stop him in Ukraine.

Andrea Chalupa (00:54:03):

If everything you just listed; the breaking up of all these spy dens, the unity, the strength of NATO and the full-throated support of these Western leaders, including Germany which was stuck under Angela Merkel's appeasement policy towards Ukraine for so long, if all of this had been in effect years prior, on the heels of the Crimea invasion and Putin invading eastern Ukraine in the spring of 2014, Donald Trump would never have been president.

Olga Lautman (00:54:34):

Yeah. Well, first of all, I'll backtrack because Putin came into power in 1999 by blowing up apartments.

Andrea Chalupa (00:54:40):

You'd still have reproductive healthcare protected in every state. Sorry, go on.

Olga Lautman (00:54:45):

Yes. He came into power in 1999 by blowing up apartment buildings and killing Russians. That's how he came into power. Right after they committed a massacre. What we're seeing in Ukraine happened in Chechnya. From there, he committed assassination on foreign soil. We saw Litvinenko being poisoned by polonium—nuclear material—on British soil, used to take one of his people out. And that was just one of so many on foreign soil. Then we saw the biggest (and the first probably) and largest cyber attack against Estonia, basically making the country paralyzed for several weeks. And that was Russia behind it. Then we saw the invasion of Georgia; same exact operation like Ukraine where they, you know, use cyber attacks and disinformation campaigns. And then he called, went in and physically invaded and took parts of Georgia and again, it was a bloody massacre.

Olga Lautman (00:55:54):

Then we saw Syria. And I mean, they have committed countless atrocities. Out of the close to between 700,000 and 1 million Syrians who are dead, Russia's responsible for a large amount because of the air cover they provided for Assad and also for helping him cover up and running a disinformation operation for the chemical attacks that Assad was using against his people. So then Syria happened, and then we had Crimea, and Russia is... [laughs] Now I joke because I'm like, "Oh look, the little green men are going to Russia." Well, basically this is what happened in Crimea. Russia's little green men—which were mercenaries and, and intelligence operatives and military divisions—came in and seized Crimea and parts of Donbas. And then we had an attack on the Polish elections in 2015 where the Russians tapped the Polish prime minister and released conversations and hacked into emails and everything, which was a test for 2016. This was basically—

Andrea Chalupa (00:57:17):

In America's election. And there is Brexit. Brexit as well.

Olga Lautman (00:57:20):

Yes, and then Brexit and France and Germany.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yeah, Le Pen in France.

Olga Lautman:

I mean, literally, I think elections were interfered with between 2015 and 16. And then we have our influence agent. I mean, honestly, there's nothing more. He works for Russia and not, you know, since 2015—

Andrea Chalupa (00:57:42):

You're talking about Trump,

Olga Lautman (00:57:42):

Andrea, no. I went back to the late 1970s. His first deal was with a Russian mobster who was a Soviet op military pilot who came here with a dollar, in two years had like a million, and ended up buying several Trump apartments with 5 million in a suitcase, which Trump personally worked. That was 1984. And from there it just continued. He went to Moscow in '87. Allegedly a Russian spy claims that she's the one who targeted him. She worked in the Soviet UN mission to New York in 1985. So I mean, it's a very long history. Close to 40 years. And that's it. So if Putin had been... I mean, for your very short question, I gave you a long answer. Had Putin been stopped over a decade ago, we would've never had any of this.

Olga Lautman (00:58:49):

We would've never had this division because in 2015, this is how I actually got involved. I started seeing the same operations happening on the Russian side against the United States as what happened in Georgia, as what happened in Ukraine. It was identical with a blueprint. And that's how I got involved to see what in the world is going on and why I started investigating Trump; to see why him? What happened? That's when I uncovered all of that. You know, he works for... Not that he works for them, he's just a thug who basically makes money where it's easy. The Russian mafia flooded his properties over the past several decades with countless cash. And he was their guy to come in. They helped to get

him in. They used the same tactics that they used pretty much in Ukraine and other elections and society that they interfered with to install him.

Olga Lautman (00:59:57):

And as a result, we have literally a Kremlin operation that's still going on. I mean, it's still going on; this division, polarization. And this was exactly what Paul Manafort did in Ukraine in 2003. Literally, Ukrainians started fighting with Ukrainians. No one understood. Why is everyone so angry? Why is everyone fighting? And this is what Manafort did when he started working for the former treasonous president who was prosecuted for treason of Ukraine.

Andrea Chalupa:

Yanukovitch.

Olga Lautman:

Yep. And that's exactly what he did. It's the same identical playbook. I mean nothing... They didn't change anything except maybe the bots and trolls that didn't exist in 2003. So technology-wise, they expanded. Same playbook: divide and conquer. And that's what they've been doing.

Andrea Chalupa (01:00:50):

Yeah, Ukraine has always been a testing ground of Kremlin aggression.

Olga Lautman (01:00:55):

Of everything.

Andrea Chalupa (01:00:56):

That's why it's so important that we stop Russia in Ukraine.

[outro music - roll credits]

Andrea Chalupa:

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