

Gaslit Nation Transcript

14 June 2023

“Trump’s Arrest, Kissinger’s War Crimes, and the Long Hunt for Justice”

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[opening clip]

Special Counsel Jack Smith (00:30):

Good afternoon. Today, an indictment was unsealed charging Donald J. Trump with felony violations of our national security laws, as well as participating in a conspiracy to obstruct justice. This indictment was voted by a grand jury of citizens in the Southern District of Florida, and I invite everyone to read it in full to understand the scope and the gravity of the crimes charged. The men and women of the United States intelligence community and our armed forces dedicate their lives to protecting our nation and its people. Our laws that protect national defense information are critical to the safety and security of the United States and they must be enforced. Violations of those laws put our country at risk.

Special Counsel Jack Smith (01:24):

Adherence to the rule of law is a bedrock principle of the Department of Justice and our nation's commitment to the rule of law sets an example for the world. We have one set of laws in this country and they apply to everyone. Applying those laws, collecting facts—that's what determines the outcome of an investigation; nothing more and nothing less. The prosecutors in my office are among the most talented and experienced in the Department of Justice. They have investigated this case hewing to the highest ethical standards, and they will continue to do so as this case proceeds. It's very important for me to note that the defendants in this case must be presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law. To that end, my office will seek a speedy trial in this matter consistent with the public interest and the rights of the accused. We very much look forward to presenting our case to a jury of citizens in the Southern District of Florida. In conclusion, I would like to thank the dedicated public servants of the Federal Bureau of Investigation with whom my office is conducting this investigation and who work tirelessly every day upholding the rule of law in our country.

[theme music up and under]

Andrea Chalupa (03:02):

Welcome to the exciting world of combating dictators and their useful idiots. So many idiots, so little time. 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; the film the Kremlin doesn't want you to see, so be sure to watch it. And this is *Gaslit Nation*, a show about corruption in America and rising autocracy worldwide. Today is June 13th, 2023, a significant day in world history for two very important reasons. Number one, Donald Trump, the longtime Russian Mafia asset who came to power in 2016 with the help of the mass murdering xenophobic terrorist regime in the Kremlin was finally, finally federally arrested today. This, of course, marks the first time an ex-president of the United States was charged in federal court and arrested by the Feds. [celebratory music]

Andrea Chalupa (04:08):

According to a stunning federal indictment from special prosecutor Jack Smith—who I do finally admit is kind of hot—Donald Trump violated the Espionage Act 31 times because he's a well-known, well-documented traitor to our country. Just see the *Gaslit Nation* transcripts on our website at gaslitnationpod.com starting from the start of the show. The indictment also included, of course, obstructing justice (a longtime favorite of Trump and his family) and lying to the FBI. And, of course, it included these nightmare Zillow listing photos of boxes of documents in the Mar-a-Lago ballroom, the bathroom, the billiards room with the candlestick and Colonel Mustard and so on. So a close Trump aide, Walt Nauta, poor guy was also indicted because, you know, that's what you do when you're a useful idiot. You go down with the ship. They both surrendered to US marshals for an arraignment in Miami, Florida for a case to be overseen—get this—by Aileen Cannon. Good old Aileen, a Trump lackey judge appointed by Trump himself. That was the whole idea of becoming president: to appoint these judges and commit crimes and get away with those crimes. She could, of course, recuse. She hasn't yet as of this taping. And she might not. She doesn't have to. I mean, she ruled in his favor, obviously, when she was calling out the search of Mar-a-Lago by the Feds is going a bridge too far. She was overruled for that. So could she be held in check by our legal justice system in some way, shape, or form? She could, certainly. Something could come down the pike. There could be enough pressure. She might wanna wash her hands of this. She's young. She has a long career ahead of her. But keep in mind, a lot of judges have allowed a lot of horrible things to go on.

Andrea Chalupa (06:09):

I mean, look at the case of Chevron that was dragging out in recent years of a whistleblower there. Look at the Supreme Court. What happened to our reproductive healthcare reproductive rights? We lost *Roe v. Wade*. So yeah, this could end with the trial dragging out through the election. Trump possibly becoming the Republican party nominee. Yes, it all could play out this way. The Republican candidates in the arena were talking outta both sides of their mouths, blaming Biden's DOJ for this. Mike Pence was very clear to drop Biden's name so Biden was responsible for this. They're courting Trump's rabid base of supporters who, from Kari Lake to Large Marge to... the list goes on, have been threatening violence, saying that there's gonna be retribution for this. That one Elvira character—Elvira is cool, but like that one wannabe cheap version Elvira that Don Junior is dating, Kimberly Guilfoyle, she was like posting an Instagram saying, "Retribution is coming." I don't know. So anyway, they're fired up. They wanna do another January 6th to try to stop this. They're gonna make a ton of money off of this with their grievance politics, with their martyrdom. I mean, dictators of the past have done this. Hitler did this very well in his court hearings for his failed attempt to violently overthrow German democracy. It was his first attempt, the first go round with a Beer Hall Putsch. But yeah, so Trump's got that carnival car going. He's gonna make a lot of money off of this. He's going to consolidate the base, the trial is gonna drag on, and we're all gonna be biting our nails for Judge Cannon to recuse. And I'm not holding my breath for that. There's a lot more to say on this.

Andrea Chalupa (07:52):

We're going to let these events play out. And that brings me to the second most significant development of today, marking it yet again as an unforgettable day in world history. And that is—I kid you not, this is how the stars aligned, proving that we actually may be in a simulation—today is the publication day of the one and only *Gaslit Nation* book, the graphic novel, *Dictatorship: It's Easier Than You Think*, meaning it's out now, finally. All this talk, you can now get it. You can go to a bookstore and get it or order it at bookshop.org or wherever you get your books. The book's finally out. It's out. The baby's out. In *Dictatorship: It's Easier Than You Think*, we explain how and why dictators and wanna be dictators pack the courts with their lackeys. The book is narrated by a handsome Cary Grant character whose name is Judge Lackey.

Andrea Chalupa (08:44):

He walks you through the perks and pitfalls of becoming a dictator. Will Judge Cannon be a Judge Lackey? All eyes are on her. So we will go back into this big story in this week's bonus episode. In the meantime, you can go back to our first three episodes, which launched the show, where we look the 2016 presidential election as a crime scene. For more, join us on Patreon on Friday. We're going to be unleashing a free excerpt of a Patreon bonus special—the Trump Federal Arrest Super Special, I guess we'll call it—and you'll get a free excerpt wherever you get your podcasts, or you can get the full big shebang, the full thing, the extended version by making sure you're signed up joining our community of listeners at Patreon, at patreon.com/gaslit. That's patreon.com/gaslit. And Sarah, she will be joining us for that discussion if she's up for it, obviously.

Andrea Chalupa (09:45):

But she right now is signed up to be there and to dig into all of this, what it means, and to temper our expectations... Again, it's fine to celebrate because at the very least, this is driving Trump mad and he deserves that mental harassment after the years of toxic abuse he put us through as president of the United States, weaponizing the White House against us, weaponizing his Twitter account against whistleblowers, private citizens just fighting for their democracy. We endured years of abuse and so he needs a bit of that now and at the very least, he's being tormented by this. It does bug him and get to him. And obviously it's not consolation. We need to see him behind bars. We need to see Bannon, Manafort, Flynn, the whole Kremlin clown car finally behind bars, the whole pardon operation led by Kushner—Jared and Ivanka—which Giuliani, Trump's lawyer at the time, claimed they were selling (that Giuliani and Trump were selling) pardons for \$2 million a pop and splitting those totally illegal fees.

Andrea Chalupa (10:47):

Well, Giuliani said that. Giuliani lost his marbles a long time ago. He is probably speaking the truth on that. So who would be aware of Giuliani selling pardons for \$2 million a pop? That would be the guy that ran the pardon in operation, which was Jared. Jared, Jared, Jared. Jared and Ivanka were the gatekeepers of who got pardons and why. There's a reason why Steve Bannon was praising Ivanka on his podcast in the lead up to finally getting his own pardon. And those pardons were dangled as obstruction of justice, essentially: "Stay loyal to us. Mafia loyalty. Do not flip, do not work with the Feds like Mark Meadows is clearly doing now. Stay on our side. Stay united. Obstruction of justice." And remember, the Mueller Report was indeed a damning document of how the Russians brought the Trump family to power.

Andrea Chalupa (11:40):

And the Feds basically allowed Paul Manafort to obstruct justice and to hold back valuable information that would allow it to have gone even further. And guess who got pardoned? Paul Manafort. So his pardon and all those pardons need to be investigated, need to be overturned. There needs to be some sort of mechanism to overturn that. And Jared Kushner and Ivanka and Trump and Giuliani all need to be investigated for how they ran the pardon operation from the Trump White House. That's my big takeaway of the big Trump arrest carnival. Keep your eye on the ball, which is taking down the larger operation, which is still in effect and still helping plot coups, including Bannon helping with a violent coup attempt in Brazil, including Bannon helping bring George Santos into Congress with Russian oligarch-linked money and so on. So the whole violent coup operation of the Trump clown car is still in effect.

Andrea Chalupa (12:28):

And these investigations need to go further faster. Good on Jack Smith for finally doing this. It's still not enough, and we do need to keep up the public pressure for Judge Cannon and voice concerns about obviously the fact that she's a Judge Lackey, just like the narrative of our book, and so on. So that's just a

preview of the larger discussion we're gonna have later this week with Sarah, and we look forward to that. So look out for our Trump Arrest Super Special out on Patreon, a free excerpt wherever you get your podcasts out Friday. And if you wanna know why Trump had all those highly sensitive, highly classified national security documents, why he bothered to take those boxes in the first place, they weren't trophies; he was raking in money. He was raking in money with our state secrets, likely with the Russians, likely with Saudi Arabia, just like Jared Kushner did not get \$2 billion from the Saudis for being a financial wizard because he's simply not. He's a slumlord.

Andrea Chalupa (13:24):

So more on that in this week's Patreon special. If you're signed up on Patreon at the Truth-teller level or higher, you can join our live taping of *Gaslit Nation* on Tuesday, June 27th at 12:00 PM Eastern with Russian mafia expert Olga Lautman, who grew up in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn but, you know, somehow managed not to join the Trump crime family and instead works to expose them through her anti-corruption nonprofit in Denmark. Yes, Denmark is one of the least corrupt countries in the world through whatever analytics determine that. And one of the happiest, that's an interesting correlation likely. Olga will be on the show to give her take on the Trump arrest, what she thinks it means for 2024 and Russia's war in Ukraine, Russian spy operations in the West, and what can be done to expose and disrupt the Kremlin's networks. So to join that June 27th live taping of *Gaslit Nation* with Olga Lautman, our listeners at the Truth-teller level and higher will receive an event link on the morning of June 27th sent straight to their inbox as long as you're subscribed at the Truth-teller level or higher on Patreon.

Andrea Chalupa (14:31):

And if you're not, just go to patreon.com/gaslit and sign up there. That's patreon.com/gaslit. We look forward to seeing you there. Make sure to drop your questions in the chat. Now, before we begin this week's interview, I want to share a trailer for a must watch documentary out today that you can get on most streaming services like iTunes, Amazon, and so on. The film is called *Americonned* and it chronicles the root cause and threats to our democracy from income inequality, unchecked, corporate greed. This is an extremely powerful and important film because it underscores the fact that Trump is just the dancing orange clown of much larger forces propping him up, just like Hitler and Mussolini came to power with big corporate financial forces, as we document in our book out today too, *Dictatorship: It's Easier Than You Think*. There are many people who would rather usher in fascism than pay their fair share of taxes, and they'll find all kinds of ways to justify that and protect themselves, including, of course, waging culture wars and scapegoating vulnerable groups like LGBTQ people, especially children. I want to share the trailer now for *Americonned* since the film is out today, sharing a launch date with us; another weird star alignment reminding us what rot in our democracy we need to confront and take care of. We will air a full interview with the filmmakers behind *Americonned* as part of a special summer series we're running looking at the future of dictatorship, including AI and what AI means for mass job displacement and more. For now, here's the trailer for *Americonned*.

[film trailer]

Andrea Chalupa (18:16):

Now here's an interview all about a war criminal who kept popping up in our research on dictatorship for our book, *Dictatorship: It's Easier Than You Think*. And that is... [drum roll] Henry Kissinger, the *Where's Waldo?* of late 20th century dictatorships, especially of course in Latin America. Kissinger gets a special shout out throughout our graphic novel, so it's only fitting that we explore his legacy on the launch date of our book after Kissinger just celebrated his 100th birthday. Why? Because very clearly we are in a circle of hell and the only way we get out of it is by fighting for a fair minimum wage, organizing to

strengthen democracy protections and environmental protections in every district across America, and refusing to leave anyone behind. So without further ado, happy Publication Day, *Gaslit Nation*. Welcome to the world you intrepid, fearless little graphic novel, *Dictatorship: It's Easier Than You Think*. Get it wherever you get your books. Happy Publication Day to us and to all of our listeners. We hope you enjoy this book. We hope you get a copy for the young people among you; engage them on these issues, on this history; remind them that we've been fighting dictators for a really long time now and it's generational work, and we're going to get the progress we need eventually. We're gonna chip away, chip away at it. And one of the ways we do that is by keeping a public record through independent journalism and by preserving historical truths.

[transition music up and under, begin interview]

Andrea Chalupa (19:56):

Today we're joined by investigative journalist Nick Turse. Nick Turse is a contributing writer for *The Intercept* reporting on national security and foreign policy. He's the author, most recently, of the book *Next Time They'll Come to Count the Dead: War and Survival in South Sudan*, as well as, *Tomorrow's Battlefield, US Proxy Wars and Secret Ops in Africa*, and, *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam*. He has written for the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Nation* and *Village Voice* among other publications. He's received a bunch of awards and he is the managing editor of *tomdispatch.com*. And an extra guest tonight is my super teething baby you might hear in the background, but that is okay because at least this child is going to grow up knowing exactly who Henry Kissinger is, how dangerous he was and is, and hopefully she'll be part of the solution in fighting to prevent future Henry Kissinger. That's the goal of parenthood today. Alright, so Nick, Henry Kissinger just celebrated his 100th birthday. He's still alive and too many good people, like too many to count, have left us too soon, yet Kissinger is still here. Are we living in hell? What are your thoughts?

Nick Turse (21:18):

Well, it certainly seems so, but I'm also hopeful that your child's gonna be part of the solution to this.

Andrea Chalupa (21:24):

Well, she's certainly got her mother's stubborn streak! What else is there to know about Henry Kissinger? Everything we know is so bad. What did your most recent reporting in *The Intercept* uncover that's even worse than we already knew?

Nick Turse (21:36):

I think the key takeaway is that Henry Kissinger is responsible for more civilian deaths in Cambodia than was previously known and this is according to an exclusive archive of US military documents that I assembled and interviews that I did with Cambodian survivors and American witnesses of the US War there during the late 1960s and early 1970s. This archive offers previously unpublished, unreported and also underappreciated evidence of hundreds of civilian casualties that were kept secret during the US war in Cambodia from 1969 to 1973, and that remain almost entirely unknown to the American people. I went to Cambodia to do reporting for this and I spoke with more than 75 Cambodian witnesses and survivors. And from them, you know, I learned new details about the long-term trauma that they bore from the American War. So, taken all together, it adds to the list of killings and crimes that Henry Kissinger should—even at this late date in his life—be asked to answer for.

Andrea Chalupa (22:45):

And what led you to this reporting?

Nick Turse (22:47):

Well [laughs], I mean, really in some sense this project began for me 20 years ago when I was a graduate student. I worked on an epidemiological study of post-traumatic stress disorder among Vietnam veterans and did research at the National Archives. And while I was there, I stumbled on the records of a secret Pentagon task force that was set up in the wake of the Mili massacre, where American troops had killed 500 Vietnamese civilians. The US military was determined never to be caught flat footed by an atrocity scandal again. And this task force monitored reports of war crimes and tamped them down when they could. I used these files to write my doctoral dissertation and then go to Vietnam to track down witnesses and survivors first for the *Los Angeles Times* and then for one of the books of mine that you mentioned, *Kill Anything That Moves*. And I had a small subset of documents from that collection dealing with US war crimes in Cambodia.

Nick Turse(23:54):

And I conducted hundreds of hours more of archival research to bolster those files and then I set off to replicate work that I'd done in Vietnam. I traveled to extremely remote areas along Cambodia's border with Vietnam and found witnesses and survivors of the war there. Most of them knew the United States only through helicopter gunships that tore up their homes with machine gunfire and rockets and high-flying bombers that turned their villages into charred houses. These people never knew why Americans came and attacked them. They never had any idea that a man named Henry Kissinger bore a tremendous responsibility for upending their lives. That's what I found when I was in Cambodia, and that's how I got there in the first place.

Andrea Chalupa (24:41):

And put this into just the scale of it. What was significant about the bombing of Cambodia? Why did it happen? What was the justification? What was the scale? I mean, Nixon ran with the promise of bringing what I think he called like a dignified end to the Vietnam War and instead expanded it going into Cambodia. So could you give us a sense of what it was, how it happened, and just how immense this was compared to other big US bombing military incursions

Nick Turse (25:11):

Nixon ran the 1968 presidential campaign on the promise that he had a secret plan to end the Vietnam War and, you know, that he would achieve peace with honor. When he came into office, about a month into his tenure, Henry Kissinger was his national Security Advisor but wielded more power than any national security advisor before or since. He was really, in essence, co-president in matters of the war in Southeast Asia. And Kissinger sat down with his military attache—a man named Alexander Haig—and hatched a plan. He knew that there'd be a public backlash if America expanded its war into Cambodia. He knew that Congress would never approve an attack on a neutral country like Cambodia, so they came up with what came to be known as the secret bombing.

(26:08):

And it's called Operation Menu. It was kept secret from the American people, from Congress, even top Pentagon officials, through a conspiracy of cover stories, coded messages, a dual bookkeeping system... Basically, they conducted airstrikes in Cambodia, massive bombing by huge B-52 straddle fortresses that would drop 30 tons of bombs in one small area. Kissinger was very hands-on about this. There was a

colonel from the joint chiefs of staff named Ray Sitton who would come to the White House with a list of targets and maps and Kissinger would point and say, "Strike here, strike there." He was choosing exactly where these bombs would fall and then Colonel Sitton would backchannel the coordinates into the field, circumventing the chain of command. And then the authentic documents that were associated with the strikes were burned and phony target coordinates and forged data were provided to the Pentagon and to Congress.

Nick Turse (27:09):

So this was a secret war that was conducted without any thought to how it would affect the lives of Cambodians and it was all so that Nixon and Kissinger could win the Vietnam War. It was, you know, major Cold War power politics that they were trying to control and they were willing to sacrifice Cambodian lives for this. Of course, they ended up losing in Vietnam, losing in neighboring Laos, and losing in Cambodia, and in many respects ushering in the Khmer Rouge and the genocide that carried out there shortly thereafter.

Andrea Chalupa (27:47):

In all your reporting, were there any stories that really stuck with you that when you're trying to sleep at night you just couldn't get your mind off of?

Nick Turse (27:54):

Yeah, most definitely. I mean there were so many stories that I heard in Cambodia. You know, there was a village that I went to. I found it mentioned in the records. Rather, there was a phonetic spelling, a village called Maroen. There was actually no village in Cambodia called Maroen, but there was one called [inaudible] on the border with Vietnam. And I had some documents that said that on May 1st, 1970 US helicopters circled this village, opened fire, killed 12 villagers, wounded five others, and after this attack, the survivors fled their village to one called Kantuot. So I searched around for several days after I'd gotten close to where I thought this village was, and finally found my way there. I found the village chief and I showed him the records that I had. I read them to him through an interpreter.

Nick Turse (28:57):

And like so many of the Cambodian villages that I visited, focusing on one attack just baffled the residents because they were attacked so many times. They'd endured so many air strikes they couldn't recall one attack from another. But when I told him the date, he said, "Yes, on the far edge of that village many people died at that time. And afterward, the people left this village for another called Kantuot." So I knew I had the right place. And that village chief, a man named Chien Hang, lost his mother, his father, a grandfather, a nephew, a niece, and several other distant relatives to various US attacks. And, you know, he and other survivors there told me just about the relentlessness of these strikes. While we talked, you know, his eyes reddened and then they went vacant as he told me about people who were cut down by helicopters, machine guns, and homes that were blown apart by rockets.

Nick Turse (29:56):

He eventually slumped to his knees and basically crawled to a far corner of the room that we were in. It was things like this... I mean, the trauma was still so palpable and so fresh for people even decades later. It was always humbling to hear stories from people and also gut-wrenching. But people were willing to endure this, to talk with me and tell their stories. There was another in the records that I found that really, really stuck with me. And it was about another village where Americans attacked with helicopters, shot up the village, wounded a number of Cambodian civilians, and then the US helicopters landed a group of Allied South Vietnamese troops along with one US officer and they began looting this village.

There were two dozen wounded Cambodian civilians, including children, there. The Americans in the helicopters keyed in on one child. She was shot, she was bleeding. Some of the Americans wanted to take her for medical care, but the American officer who was on the ground had dragged a Suzuki motorbike on board the helicopter and told them, "Negative," they were weighed down by the bike and they had no room. So this little girl, maybe five years old, shot, bleeding, in desperate need of medical care was left there to die. And this is really what Henry Kissinger's legacy in Cambodia is.

Andrea Chalupa (31:39):

How many people would you say Kissinger is responsible for killing in total? In your *Intercept* piece, you go in and brilliantly lay out the horrible result of what he did, how it led to a lot of political instability and really shook up the region and led to a lot of bad people coming to power in those places. Could you talk about the overall death count of Kissinger?

Nick Turse (32:01):

It's difficult to say how many Cambodians were killed by the American War, by Kissinger's policies. You know, estimates run the gamut from Kissinger's own admission that the war killed 50,000 Cambodian civilians to estimates of hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths. But I talked to a man named Ben Kiernan. He was the former director of genocide studies at Yale University and one of the foremost authorities on the US Air Campaign in Cambodia. And he offered an estimate of as many as 150,000 Cambodian civilians. I think it's a reasonable figure and perhaps a conservative one, but it's still a mammoth figure for a tiny country like Cambodia. And to put it in perspective, it's six times the number of non-combatants that are thought to have died in US airstrikes in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen during the 20-plus years of the war on terror, and this number is according to, to Air Wars, the UK-based airstrike monitoring group.

Nick Turse (33:07):

So in Cambodia alone, say 150,000 civilians. Also helped usher in the Khmer Rouge to power in Cambodia. They were a fringe group when the American War began—just a couple thousand people—but they had a tremendous recruiting tool, which was the American bombing. They went around to villages and told people that the only way to stop it is to join their movement. In a couple short years, they had an army of 200,000 Cambodians. They took over the country. They instituted a campaign of overwork and torture, murder that killed about 20% of the population: 2 million people. So while the Khmer Rouge is responsible, culpable for that, Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon, they also bear a responsibility for it. Beyond Cambodia, I talked to Greg Grandin, who's one of Kissinger's, I think, best biographers and I asked him just how much blood he thought Henry Kissinger had on his hands between Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao, is support of dictatorial regimes in South America, his responsibility for other genocides in East Timor and Bangladesh, and all told Greg Grandin and gave me an estimate of about 3 million people who he thought Henry Kissinger was at least partially responsible for their deaths. So we're talking about massive numbers. I mean, an arch war criminal.

Andrea Chalupa (34:40):

Wow. Okay. And that's with us tax dollars. So tell us about the attempts over the years to have Kissinger arrested for war crimes.

Nick Turse (34:49):

Yeah, I mean this has gone on quite some time. In 2001, Christopher Hitchens put together a book length indictment; *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*. In the early 2000s, Kissinger was sought for questioning in

connection with human rights abuses by South American military dictatorships. But, you know, he ducked investigators and declined to appear in court and fled to France once after receiving a summons. So he was never charged or prosecuted for deaths in Cambodia or elsewhere. But I talked with a man named Peter Tatchell. He's an Australian born human rights campaigner who's lived in the United Kingdom for many years. And he actually tried to bring a case against Kissinger in 2002 when Slobodan Milošević, the former president of Yugoslavia, was on trial for war crimes. Tatchell said, "Why isn't Kissinger also in the dock?"

Nick Turse (35:54):

So he applied for an arrest warrant at a magistrates court in London under a parliamentary act that incorporates the laws of war in British law and he sought to have Kissinger arrested for commissioning, aiding, and abetting war crimes in Southeast Asia. The judge denied that application and said he wasn't presently able to draft a suitably precise charge. And Tatchell tried to get other people to take up the case. He tried to contact human rights groups in America to get them to take action but he said there just wasn't any appetite for it. But, you know, when I talked to him recently, he said that he still thought that Kissinger should have his day in court and that age shouldn't be any barrier to justice. He told me that those who commit or authorize war crimes have to be held to account.

Andrea Chalupa (36:47):

Yeah, absolutely. One of the most chilling things you write in this piece, I'll read from it now: "We know from Holocaust survivors, for example, that trauma can have intergenerational effects that can be passed on, whether genetically or otherwise. Even at this late date, the pain of America's war in Cambodia lives on, along with the architecture of that country's agony."

Nick Turse (37: 06):

Yeah, I mean, this was something that was really palpable when I spoke to people in Cambodia. I mean, all these people, they were true survivors because they'd lived through not only the US bombing, but the Khmer Rouge genocide that followed. So they'd endured tremendous amounts of trauma. I mean, off the scale. I've talked to war victims all over the world. I've covered conflicts, ethnic cleansing campaigns, but rarely have I encountered people who've endured more trauma than Cambodians. But even having lived through that genocide, all that violence, none of it erased or diminished the trauma that they felt from, from the American war. In some sense, what was so shocking to them beyond the tremendous violence was that they just didn't understand why it had happened. And I was asked that over and over again. You know, they weren't involved in the Vietnam War in any way.

Nick Turse (38:08):

They really had no frame of reference for what was happening to them. These were rural farm folk living in remote villages. They'd never seen machinery, technology like US helicopters before. And when they first started flying over their villages, people said they would come out and they would just stare at them because they didn't know what these machines were or why they were there. But they learned to fear them because the machine guns would open up on them. They'd start firing rockets. And again and again, people just asked, "Why did this happen? Why did it happen here? Why did they attack us?" These were questions that, you know, I I tried my best to answer, but I don't think I was ever able to provide a satisfactory response. It's just something that haunted them for decades and continues to.

Andrea Chalupa (39:05):

Why throughout all of this does Kissinger remain this influential statesman?

Nick Turse (39:11):

It's a very good question. I wish I had a satisfactory answer. Henry Kissinger has been able to, I think his entire life, evade responsibility and he's done so by masterfully manipulating the press in many ways. I mean he's really one of the only figures—maybe the only one—to escape the swirl of the Watergate scandal in the Nixon White House. Certainly anyone else that was high up there was really caught up in that. But he always had a lot of press contacts and shared information. He just found ways to slip free of scandal again and again. It's been the hallmark of his entire career. I don't know, actually, how to answer it beyond that he was just such a skilled operator and just convinced people that he was always the smartest guy in the room. He's often, especially when he's been called a war criminal, he tries to turn it around on those who make the claim and say that, you know, actually anyone who would make such a claim is shameful and to use that language demeans and belittles what it is to be a war criminal and what war crimes are. But if you look at Kissinger's record, of course, this fits the very definition of a war criminal and war crimes.

Andrea Chalupa (40:36):

Yeah, no, absolutely. And I just wanna point to some recent moments in the first half of 2017 when there were still people in the mainstream media who were giving Trump a pass and thinking that it wouldn't be so bad. And then suddenly he fires Comey [laughs] and that was a big, big red flag. And people started to wake up from that. And I think it was like the morning after Trump fires Comey, he has Kremlin officials in the Oval Office, and there's Kissinger like some *Where's Waldo?* of terror, just making an appearance just to add to the horror of this national crisis. It was just so strange. Do you see a line connecting this casual cruelty of Kissinger and Nixon and their culture of corruption and Trump?

Nick Turse (41:23):

Yeah, I mean, I think there's certainly a throughline in many respects, and I think failures of accountability for people like Kissinger and any kind of real accountability for Richard Nixon, it's fueled continued lack of accountability in the year since. So in that sense, there is. And your mention of Kissinger being on the scene and in the Trump White House, and he was brought in as an advisor to sit down, I think presidents have used this again and again. Democrats too. Bill Clinton used the "gravitas" of Henry Kissinger to burnish his credentials in terms of diplomacy and foreign affairs. And I think a lot of people have used Henry Kissinger for cover to show that they were serious-minded when it comes to international relations. Kissinger has used that to his advantage to show that he's still a power player and has the ear of presidents. And not only used it to his advantage to burnish his image, but also that of his business, Kissinger Associates. It's been behind the scenes in many respects a major player in international affairs, brokering deals between corporations and nation states around the world.

Andrea Chalupa (42:45):

And I have to point out, as a Ukrainian American, Kissinger always took a position of, "Ukraine is Russia, it's in their orbit. It's this buffer state," basically taking away the agency of Ukrainians themselves. And I wanna point out that in 2016, during that hotly contested Democratic primary, Bernie Sanders versus Hillary, it was just this really record scratch moment when you have this energizing force as Bernie Sanders who's awakened this whole young, up and coming group of voters who are super inspired by him and Hillary Clinton's debating Sanders, and she name drops Kissinger as someone she would take advice from. And it was just like, what a misfire given such a tough fight that you're in. I mean, you pretty much just answered that. So my question that I had for you on that was who was she signaling to, do you

think? And I think you've just said it, it was just the deep reach of Kissinger and like the corporation states and so on.

Nick Turse (43:40):

Yeah, I think, you know, Kissinger has for decades sold this image of seriousness, a sober statesman dispassionately wielding power politics. And I think that Hillary Clinton, just like her husband, Bill, they latched onto this. And Kissinger's hard-mindedness, they could use it to their advantage. Of course, Democrats are always labeled soft when it comes to international relations and Kissinger provides that hard edge, I think, that they were able to latch onto. Bernie Sanders was very forceful in that moment in the debate and he brought up Cambodia specifically, that Kissinger had killed many people and that he wouldn't be going to Henry Kissinger for advice. And you mentioned, you know, just at the start of this about Ukraine and Kissinger seeing Ukraine as in the orbit of Russia, and I think this has been a hallmark throughout Kissinger's career: he's always been willing to sacrifice people for the sake of power politics and grand strategy. So whether it's people in Ukraine or it's people in Cambodia, I think Kissinger has always thought that the political ends justified the means. So if the lives of people got in the way he was willing to sacrifice them for whether it was Cold War power politics, or more recently the world that we're living in today.

Andrea Chalupa (45:11):

You should really partner with Adam McKay, who of course directed the Cheney film, the Dick Cheney film, *Vice* and *Don't Look Up*. I could see you guys doing a Kissinger dark, dark, dark, dark, dark comedy. It's just nuts to me that this man's walking around. I have to share a personal story. I dunno, I came out of the cradle just knowing Kissinger was a war criminal. I don't know what it was. I don't know why some people... You know, I mean, you've gone over this already, but I always made a promise to myself growing up that if I ever found myself in the same room with Kissinger, I'd like, pour my wine on him or whatever. And lo and behold, I'm covering the Republican National Convention as a journalist, and I'm in the same room as Kissinger.

Andrea Chalupa(45:54):

And I was like, "oh damn," and I'm holding a glass of wine. I'm like, *here's your chance, here's your chance*. But I do have to say, he was sitting in the middle of a harem of giant, thick-necked white men that looked like they were grown in a corn field. Just like the whitest of whitest meat and potatoes Republicans. I don't mean to dehumanize them, but it was just like this weird thing. It was like everyone that he was surrounded by was like an offensive lineman in a suit, because this was a Republican convention and I was just... So I couldn't have even physically gotten to him if I wanted, to be fair. But yeah, so I wanted to also ask you in all seriousness, because I was going through your work and reading your reporting and I was just thinking, How does Nick function? All the horror that you've seen, all the evil you've stared in the face, all the victims that were just carelessly just tossed aside by these seemingly insurmountable powerful forces. You've covered war crimes across the African continent by US forces and allies and so on. I just wanna know if you could just share what helps sustain you in your work? I know it's very hard. I imagine it must take a toll. It takes a toll on all of us who have to cover these stories again and again. But if you could just share because that's the question that kept coming up: "Wow, Nick must be so resilient," to really be on this beat for as long as you have.

Nick Turse (47:13):

That's very kind. It does take a toll after a while but I think what's always kept me going in these circumstances—and I kind of alluded to it earlier—is that people are always... I don't know if eager is the

right word, but their willingness to speak to me about the most horrific days of their lives, the greatest traumas that most of us can even imagine. I think there's something innate in people, that they want this to come out, and that if someone is willing to listen, at least in, in my experience, people are willing to talk. If you show that you are interested in hearing their story and you're willing to sit and really talk to them about it, not just parachute in and ask a couple questions about trauma and then leave, if people see that you're willing to walk this hard road with them, they're willing to do that for you. And the fact that people are willing to tell me these stories, I find it extremely humbling and I feel that I have a duty then, an obligation to try and tell them as best I can. It's not often that you're able to even get anything tangible for people, but most people, I think they want their story out there. They see that there's worth in that, that people should know about this, that it shouldn't be covered up. And if they're willing to endure retraumatization and talk to me about these, then I feel that it's something that I have to do. It's sustained me throughout my reporting all these years.

Andrea Chalupa (48:54):

Well, thank you so much for doing it. I mean, you're so courageous and just by being defiant, there's so much power in that. Your work is going to make a really big difference in raising a new generation of thinkers and doers to have zero tolerance for Kissingers of today and tomorrow. So thank you so much, Nick, for being here. Greatly appreciate all that you do. Come back again if you have something else you wanna talk about. I'm super grateful for journalists out in the field like you.

Nick Turse (49:20):

Thank you so much. I really appreciate you having me on.

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