

Gaslit Nation Transcript

22 November 2023

“What Comes After Putin?”

<https://www.patreon.com/posts/what-comes-after-93314469>

[Mercedes Benz advertisement]

[Big Sky Resorts advertisement]

[opening clip]

Anand Giridharadas (00:01:00):

It is a story of unrequited love, right? The people America loved least have made America what it is and made it true to itself, and have forced it to get truer to itself every generation. And I think one of the other things I've learned is that people are not motivated to mitigate threats. Going to voters and saying, “There's a threat to democracy.” People are motivated to also build something. So, what do you want to do by saving democracy? What is the kind of multiracial democracy we're building? And by the way, no shade to other countries, but there's actually very few countries in the world that are trying to build a multiracial democracy. You know, Europe is strongly majority white populations with carefully managed minority groups, right? India, great country. My family comes from there. Not a country of immigrants. China, not a country of immigrants. Japan, not a country of immigrants. We are trying to do an extraordinary thing. And I would love to hear us talk about that more and offer it to the American people as a vision that is more thrilling than the vision of dystopia, every man for himself, and hatred.

[intro theme music up and under]

Andrea Chalupa (00:02:15):

Welcome to *Gaslit Nation*. I am your host, Andrea Chalupa, a journalist and filmmaker, and the writer and producer of the journalistic thriller, *Mr. Jones*, about Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine. This November marks the 90th anniversary of this little known genocide, so I'm asking my listeners to join me in lighting a candle, taking a picture of the candle, and posting it on your social media with the hashtag #shinealight #holodomor_90. And this is a campaign launched by my friends at the Holodomor Research and Education Consortium, which were historical advisors on not just my film, *Mr. Jones*, and also this week's guest, Anne Applebaum, her brilliant book, *Red Famine: Stalin's War in Ukraine*, but also they were wonderful advisors helping us with the *Gaslit Nation* graphic novel. So I will be lighting a candle and posting a picture of it in honor of the 90th anniversary of the Holodomor, Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine, and using the hashtags #shinealight and #Holodomor_90. Thank you all who join me in this important commemoration.

Andrea Chalupa (00:03:32):

So our opening clip was Anand Giridharas, the author of *The Persuaders*. It reminds me of the founding story of our Thanksgiving holiday, celebrated of course on the third Thursday of November, established by Lincoln. Thanksgiving is a national day of unity to share gratitude for what matters most in life. Our family, our friends, our communities. This holiday came out of the abolition movement—some people

don't know—thanks to an abolitionist by the name of Sarah Josepha Hale. Called the Mother of Thanksgiving, Hale was a poet, a journalist, a novelist, an editor, and a philanthropist instrumental in the founding of Vassar College. She's also famous for writing *Mary Had a Little Lamb*.

Andrea Chalupa (00:04:28)

For decades, Hale advocated for a national day of Thanksgiving. Decades. She wrote letters to presidents and governors, and it was finally Lincoln who saw the opportunity. The symbol of Thanksgiving was the pumpkin, which represented the quaint farms of New England and not the big agriculture of the South with its brutality of slavery. So Thanksgiving was very much a symbol of abolitionist New England, with its pumpkin fetish and human rights organizing. The South hated it and refused to celebrate on this day, with Texas (being Texas) holding out until 1880. So forget the nonsense romanticism of the pilgrims and the Native Americans who would go on to suffer one of the worst genocides in history, if not the worst. Thanksgiving is actually a tribute to the women and artists relentlessly campaigning for the American experiment to live up to its founding promise. Happy Thanksgiving everyone, especially to all you ladies out there fighting the good fight wherever you are. And along that note, I received this message from a listener that I'm so thrilled to share.

Andrea Chalupa (00:05:47):

She writes, “Hi, Andrea. When I listened to you talk about how energizing and gratifying phone banking is, I didn't believe you until yesterday. I joined a phone bank with the Working Families Party to help people call on their representatives to support a ceasefire. And you are SO RIGHT.” She puts in caps, SO RIGHT. [laughs] I'm gonna show that to my husband. See, I told you so! As I always say on the show, phone banking is my cocaine. It can take getting used to, but once you're in the zone, you are in the zone. And those who know know what I'm talking about. Thank you so much for that kind message. I appreciate everyone who phone banks and helps in any way they can. It is all so meaningful. Now, about the ceasefire. As you may have seen in the news, young voters/Gen Z polled overwhelmingly want a ceasefire. As I keep pointing out, the status quo is changing. Inside the Beltway, they're always the last to know.

Andrea Chalupa (00:06:49)

And one may argue that polls don't matter because most people, especially Gen Z, don't pick up their phones. So how can the polls be accurate? And that's all fair. But if you look at the largely peaceful protests for a ceasefire, the organizers, the news and history explainers on, yes, TikTok, this is a culture being led by Gen Z and millennials who will soon become the largest voting block in America and are largely more politically active than their parents. This is real power. The establishment needs to take this seriously and not have Pikachu face. Here's an interview with two young voters in Michigan. Michigan, a state where Democrats are passing a massive amount of quality of life progressive legislation thanks to a tiny, tiny majority in their state government. Now, here are these voters. answering the question of how Biden can earn their vote. And keep in mind, they're residents of a state where they see government being active, government getting big shit done. And here's what they have to say.

Young Michigan Voter:

Mr. President, I've seen you take key humanitarian steps, but I think the next step is a ceasefire. I think that that would go a long way with voters.

Andrea Chalupa (00:08:12):

Not since the 2016 election has foreign policy had such an impact on a US presidential election. We're going to go more into this later in the episode. For now, in gratitude to our community who keeps our show going, we're choosing not one but three supporters this month in our Patreon community to receive a thank you gift of a signed copy of Gaslit Nation Presents... the graphic novel, *Dictatorship: It's Easier Than You Think*. And these three supporters are the 3 Ds: Denise, last initial A, Dawn, last initial N, and Deborah, last initial NK. And that's D for Dankeschön. Denise, Don, and Deborah, look out for a message from me. Thank you all so much. And this Saturday, as a celebration of our Patreon community, I'm hosting the first ever Gaslit Nation Make Art Workshop where I walk you through my secret sauce for making art and ways that it may be helpful to your process or inspire you to start seeing yourself as the natural born artist that you are. Art is survival. Art is a gas mask. Art is resistance. That's why all artists get rounded up and liquidated first. We're dangerous. So let's be dangerous together. The Make Art Workshop will be a special podcast that goes live this Saturday only on Patreon. which you can get access to by subscribing at the Truth-teller level or higher on Patreon. And that's at patreon.com/gaslit. Thank you to everyone who supports the show.

Andrea Chalupa (00:09:56):

Okay, so climate crisis time. You may have seen the disturbing report from the UN that the earth will reach three degrees Celsius of warming by the end of the century, twice the amount of the ambitious reduction targets set by the Paris Agreement. That would be catastrophic. We're already getting a preview of that with massive fires and stronger, wetter hurricanes. This is something that obviously keeps me up at night. It keeps you up at night. Many of you have written in about this. So we're going to have, of course, for all of our sanity and for our action plans to fight for survival, we're going to have guests on the show to help us make sense of the ways we get out of this, to ensure a livable future, a sustainable economy in harmony with our mother earth. One person who kept warning us about this decades ago was of course Carl Sagan. I want to play a clip of his 1990 talk that remains urgent today, but it also connects to the larger theme of this episode. We'll play that clip now.

[begin audio clip]

Carl Sagan (00:10:56):

How much money do you think the United States has spent since 1945 on the Cold War? Sometimes I ask this question and from the back of the audience comes an answer: "Billions and billions." [audience laughs]. A huge underestimate, billions and billions. The amount of money that the United States has spent on the Cold War since 1945 is approximately \$10 trillion. Trillion. That's the big one with the T. What could you buy for \$10 trillion? The answer is you could buy everything in the United States except the land. Everything; every building, truck, bus, car, boat, plane, pencil, baby's diaper, everything in the United States except the land. That's what we've spent on the Cold War. So now let me ask, How certain was it that the Russians were going to invade? Was it 100% certain? Guess not, since they never invaded. [audience laughs]. What if it was only 10% certain? What would advocates of big military buildup have said? That would have said, "We must be prudent. It's not enough to count on only the most likely circumstance. If the worst happens, and it's really extremely dangerous for us, we have to prepare for that. Remote contingencies, if it's serious enough, have to be prepared for."

Carl Sagan (00:12:53):

It's classic military thinking: You prepare for the worst case. And so now I ask my friends who were comfortable with that argument, including the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal*, why doesn't that same argument apply to global warming? You don't think it's 100% likely? Fine. You're entitled to think that. If it's only a small probability of it happening, since the consequences are so serious, don't you have to make some serious investment to prevent it or mitigate it? I think there's a double standard of argument working. And I don't think we should permit it.

[end audio clip]

Andrea Chalupa (00:13:39):

Yes, we need to, without a doubt, upgrade our national security to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The Pentagon knows that well. They've issued reports warning that the climate crisis will make the world "ungovernable" given mass displacement. One thing Sagan may not have imagined is that in the 21st century, Russia can invade the US without firing a shot. The Russians helped bring Donald Trump and his family to power in 2016. That's the findings of the Mueller report and the Senate Intelligence report, which goes even farther. So we need to upgrade our national security for the 21st century to deal with that, which brings us to American-made oligarch, Elon Musk. Here he is waxing poetic about Russia's genocidal invasion of Ukraine, which Russia (which desperately needs a war to distract their beaten down population and the rising poverty rates and corruption), they need this war to stay in power. Russia shows no sign of wanting an off-ramp, no sign of wanting negotiations. And all negotiations that have been attempted over the years, Russia has just used to stall for time. So here's Elon Musk showing his so-called sensitive side, which we're about to fact check after this clip.

[begin audio clip]

Interviewer (00:15:02):

So, Volodymyr Zelensky said that he's not, or has said in the past he's not interested in talking to put directly. Do you think he should sit down—

Elon Musk (00:15:08)

Yes.

Interviewer (00:15:09):

—man to man, leader to leader, and negotiate?

Elon Musk (00:15:13):

Look, I think... I would just recommend, do not send the flower of Ukrainian youth to die in trenches. Whether you trust Putin or not, just don't do that. Um... Whoever goes on the offensive will lose massive numbers of people. Um... And history will not look kindly upon them.

[end audio clip]

Andrea Chalupa (00:15:39):

It's hard to believe that Musk cares about any human life, given how his own children hate him, but also given that he's turned Twitter into the largest platform of Russian and Chinese disinformation, according to one EU report. And he regularly amplifies dangerous anti-Semitic hate, including agreeing with a Nazi who claimed Jewish people promote hate against White people. And that's just like a tiny bit of a long list. His company is catering to Republicans and trying to grab all their ad money for 2024. So Twitter is now Fox News on steroids. Musk just launched a lawsuit against Media Matters for their investigation showing Twitter ads running next to pro-Nazi White Pride posts. As I've always said, Putin has an ax to grind over the collapse of the Soviet Union. Musk has an ax to grind over the end of apartheid in South Africa. And the only journalist he named in his lawsuit happens to be Asian. He does this at a time of violence towards Asians in America, driven by hard-right hate machines like Twitter. To add to the growing threats against free speech, Ken Paxton, the corrupt attorney general in Texas, is launching an investigation of Media Matters. This is legal warfare, the same legal warfare Peter Thiel used to bring down Gawker.

Andrea Chalupa (00:17:07):

For Musk and Thiel, it was never about free speech. It was always about hate speech. It was always about genocidal scapegoating. It was always about violent intimidation tactics to bully their political opponents into submission; to steamroll over them as they consolidated and built political power, turning America into a dictatorship where they can live free, enriching themselves, free of any restraints and accountability, and they can just push whatever policies they see fit, design the world to their whims. And that's very much what all autocrats want as well. That's why they're all aligned with each other. And so what's the solution? How do we stop this? The solution—which we needed yesterday and the day before that—is to wean the US government off of Musk and Thiel's companies. They both have massive contracts with the US government. The DOJ is dependent on Thiel's Palantir, and a software that lets the government map criminal networks, which means it can also be used to map dissidents. That's information that could be fed to intelligence to dictators around the world.

Andrea Chalupa (00:18:23):

Musk's government contracts, of course, include NASA. None of this can be replaced overnight, but the process needs to already be underway. Their competitors need to be incentivized to provide the innovation needed to fill the gaps as this weaning off process is carried out. We cannot have our government so dependent on anti-democratic oligarchs. If the State Department saw this in a country like Ukraine, they would demand, they would put pressure for immediate changes. At the state and federal level, we can also pass basic laws that preserve a right to free speech on social media, but not hate speech, just like we have laws against hate crimes. These solutions are an urgent matter of national security, meeting the growing threats of the 21st century. To win the war against the dictators in their war—their war, they're at war with us—of autocracy against democracy worldwide, we need to weaken the financial and political power of their oligarchs, destroying our democracy from within.

Andrea Chalupa (00:19:32):

This is all tied into the climate crisis, which is why we brought Carl Sagan into this episode. Musk and Thiel are climate crisis denialists and cheerleaders for Russia, a gas station dictatorship that has issued reports claiming that it will financially benefit from climate change when Siberia thaws, producing farmland, which is all nonsense, of course. Climate activists, like all human rights activists, used Twitter

to organize, to build power, to fight back. Now that power has been taken away **for a reason**. Musk should never have been allowed to purchase Twitter in the first place. If all these solutions sound radical, If this sounds like a socialist wet dream, that's because we're already so far gone, living in the hangover of the Reagan revolution; a full-on war on government, on regulation, on safeguards for our democracy, We lost the Fairness Doctrine under Reagan, which then gave rise to Fox News. And now here we are, facing off with a zombie apocalypse death cult known as Trump's base. It's the government's job to protect us. Government cannot be run like a business with services being cut to give more money to shareholders aka the ultra wealthy with their unsustainable tax cuts. Our government is complicit in letting the free market survival of the fittest run amok. Sure, the market has spoken and advertisers are fleeing Twitter, but the damage is already done. Musk's Twitter has consolidated right-wing hate and let dictatorships like Russia and China pour their gasoline all over our fire.

Andrea Chalupa (00:21:20):

For more on the stakes, this week you'll hear Part II of my discussion with Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Anne Applebaum, the author of classics *Gulag*, *Red Famine: Stalin's War on Ukraine*, and *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism*. We recorded this conversation the Friday before the big weekend election in Poland that finally saw a liberal coalition defeat a far-right Trumpian government that had packed the courts and turned state media into its own Fox News. That's a big contrast to Argentina's recent election that brought to power a fake populist, Trump-loving, climate crisis denialist in a bad Elvis wig. And that, of course, is Javier Malé. With his chainsaw-wielding shenanigans, the belligerent TV pundit and far-right economist won hearts and minds, especially among young voters on TikTok, who only know economic decline in Argentina under the Perón machine, under the so-called liberal establishment. Historian Ruth Ben-Ghiat, who I did a live taping with in September, shared how worried she was about this election. This Argentinian Trump has played down even the atrocities carried out under Argentina's right-wing dictatorship, where an estimated 10,000 to 30,000 people were killed. And now here we are.

Andrea Chalupa (00:22:50):

Don't underestimate that same self-destructive anger among voters in the 2024 election. We can avoid that if Biden does more to forcefully stand up to Russia, including Netanyahu's Russian-aligned ruling coalition of terrorists. The Israel-Hamas war is in Russia's interests. It divides the global democratic alliance, including right here at home, heading into a critical election that Russia needs Biden to lose and Trump to win so they can end all support for Ukraine and just run amok globally. That's why Putin backs the genocidal leadership of both sides. We expect the worst from Hamas, a terrorist group that flat out lies on TV about not targeting civilians. But it's amazing how similar Netanyahu, a wannabe dictator, is to Putin. During a time of war, his government secretly rushed to give his office 56 million shekels, including 30 million to renovate his official residence in Jerusalem. Meanwhile, his son is in Miami avoiding military service like the children of so many oligarchs in Russia. Listen to CNN's Jake Tapper break it down. If you think I'm being a Che Guevara t-shirt wearing bleeding heart hippie by calling for a ceasefire, you can find this full clip in the show notes. I strongly urge you to listen to the whole thing. I'm going to play a large portion of it because it's important for people to understand Israel's ruling far right is aligned with Russia for a reason. Their terror tactics and genocidal ambitions and war crimes are driven by unchecked corruption and greed, just like in Russia. And we cannot let them or Russia get away with these war crimes. There must be accountability here.

[begin [audio clip](#)]

Jake Tapper (00:24:46):

Israeli finance minister Bezalel Smotrich. Smotrich is a hateful anti Arab bigot. He's a far-right politician in the Netanyahu coalition and he has broad powers over civilian issues in the West Bank. Haaretz reports that since October 7, more than 170 Palestinians have been killed in clashes with Israelis across the West Bank. Now, way back in 2005, when Israel was withdrawing from Gaza, Smotrich was arrested by the Israeli Security Services, the Shin Bet. Smotrich was arrested under suspicion of planning terrorist attacks. He was held by the Shin Bet for three weeks. He was suspected of planning to block major public roads and damage infrastructure. That's according to Yedioth, a major Israeli newspaper. In 2019, the former deputy head of the Shin Bet called Smotrich a "Jewish terrorist". That's according to Israel's Channel 13. Now, Smotrich denies those claims. He stated he was proud of his role in opposing Israel's expulsion from Gaza, "noting that he was freed without any charges being filed against him," according to a report from the *Times of Israel*. Oded Bisharat writes in *Haaretz* on Monday of this week that Smotrich "seized the disaster that has befallen the country as an opportunity to plunder the West Bank."

Jake Tapper (00:26:25):

"The settlers, who share his messianic ideology, have begun to carry out their plans to purge the area of its Palestinian population." As with this scene you see, of armed Israeli settlers—zealots, extremists—harassing Palestinians, wreaking havoc in the West Bank. And then there's the minister of national security, Itamar Ben-Gvir. "Immediately upon hearing of the criminal Hamas attacks," Bisharat writes, "Ben-Gvir was calling for a sequel to the 2021 Arab-Jewish riots in order to devour what is left of Israeli democracy." This includes armed militias subordinate to Ben-Gvir wandering the streets of Tel Aviv and "the thought police hard at work arresting civics teacher Dr. Meyer [inaudible] for posts on Facebook opposing the Israeli army's operations in Gaza and for showing compassion for Palestinian suffering." Of course, Ben-Gvir's first targets, he writes, "Israel's Arab citizens who have been harassed, indicted and arrested. Not only is the blood of human beings being spilled, so is the blood of Israeli democracy, or what is left of it. Around it, a crazed band is dancing joyfully." Ben-Gvir "has declared war on the Arab community and not a single word has been uttered by the Israeli mainstream against this shameful spectacle." Yesterday, Ben-Gvir posted this video bragging about how Hamas terrorists are receiving the "most stringent conditions." 8 handcuffed terrorists in a dark cell, iron beds, toilets in a hole in the floor, to which Israeli citizen Gil Dickmann tweets to Minister Ben-Gvir, "Itamar, I'm begging. My cousin is now in the hands of Hamas."—who has kidnapped his cousin. "Your words about the dark dungeon, the hole in the floor, the handcuffs and the humiliation put her in real danger. Your every tweet is a match that burns the hearts of our families. I'm begging, Itamar. There are Israelis there whose life and death are in the hands of your tongue. Please stop."

Jake Tapper (00:29:01):

But thinking about such things does not really seem to be Ben-Gvir's way. He is an openly racist anti Arab member of a far, far, far-right party that Netanyahu joined with to form his coalition. Ben-Gvir's vile views, we should note, are no surprise. Until 2020, Ben-Gvir had a portrait in his home of Baruch Goldstein. Baruch Goldstein is a Jewish terrorist who murdered 29 Palestinian worshippers in the 1994 Cave of the Patriarchs Massacre. In 2015, Ben-Gvir attended a notorious "wedding of hate" in the West Bank. At this "Wedding of Hate", the murder of Palestinians was celebrated, including the murder of a Palestinian infant.

[end audio clip]

Andrea Chalupa (00:29:59):

Biden can and must stand up to that. Because in Israel, it's the same war of autocracy versus democracy we're fighting here at home. That's what voters need to see. Once again, never since the 2016 election has foreign policy had such a big impact on a US presidential election. The status quo may not want to accept that, as they carry on business as usual. I've been desperately trying to wake them up. You cannot win against public sentiment, just like Putin couldn't get young Russians to think he's cool by releasing a pro-Putin rap song, which became the most thumbs down disliked video in Russian YouTube history. Don't blame the voters, don't blame the young people, blame the establishment for putting their heads in the sand, just like Argentina. There needs to be a ceasefire and there needs to be global pressure on Israel for a change in leadership, which can happen now under the current government, the current parliament, the current parliament. Biden can amplify calls for Netanyahu to resign and he can amplify the calls of anti-corruption reformers, just as he has done in Ukraine. Biden can hold Israel accountable to international laws just like he does in Ukraine.

Andrea Chalupa (00:31:16):

So moving on, so you'll hear in this conversation with Anne Applebaum how Russia weaponizes vulnerable refugees from Africa and the Middle East, deliberately bombing, for instance, civilians in Syria to create more refugees to flood and divide Europe, while at the same time financially propping up anti-immigration right-wing parties across Europe and engaging in all sorts of hacking campaigns to influence elections. It's happening today in Finland, a staunch ally of Ukraine. For decades during the Cold War, Finland was unofficially a satellite state of the Soviets under what was known as Finlandization, a term that people often mistake as meaning "neutral" when in reality it was coerced neutrality as Soviet agents and their useful idiots created an oppressive culture of censorship. And that was throughout the Cold War. That's over.

Andrea Chalupa (00:32:10):

Finland is free and amazingly in NATO. So Russia is trying to undermine all that by weaponizing vulnerable refugees. More on that in the show notes for this week's episode. It's a story worth tracking. This is warfare in the 21st century. You don't need to fire a shot. This is why we all need to just be hypervigilant now because, yes, the 2024 election is between democracy vs autocracy, which is why Biden must be more forceful in standing up to Russian-aligned autocrats and wannabe autocrats, and that includes Musk and Netanyahu, important nodes in Russia's war against the democratic world. It's like the pumpkin pie and Thanksgiving story; at first, the corrupt forces will resist. They'll fight you with culture wars, but eventually, over time, our efforts to protect human life will become celebrated traditions of progress. Happy Thanksgiving, everyone.

[transition music]

[begin interview with Anne Applebaum, Part II]

Andrea Chalupa (00:33:20):

In terms of Russia's operations over the last decade plus, you have the Russian-backed regime in Syria and the refugee crisis coming out of Syria that has been part of this overall refugee crisis that has been inflamed by Russian disinformation, leading to a hyper politicalization of these far-right parties. And then you have the same over with the Russian-backed regime of Venezuela, another refugee crisis that's flooding our cities. You have this refugee center in Staten Island that's being terrorized by mobs of Trump supporters, blasting lights, blaring car horns, and so on. So my larger point is, it just seems that Russia has made great strides in destabilizing major regions of the world and deliberately creating these refugee crises. Is that how have they been so effective to do that? Where did we miss opportunities to try to prevent those refugee crises from even happening in the first place? It seems like they're just winning. It just seems like they've had this soviet apparatus in place of just trying to get their tentacles and create so much chaos and weaponizing chaos and we've been bearing the brunt of it and we've had no response to this.

Anne Applebaum (00:34:33):

So there is no question in my mind that the Syrian refugee crisis was deliberately created. I mean, it happened because the Russians intervened in the Syrian war and made sure that Assad won, essentially. They decided that it was in their interest to send troops on the ground and airplanes and people, and they made sure that Assad won. We at that time didn't think Syria was our problem. Europeans didn't think Syria was their problem. You know, again, this was one of the backlashes of Iraq. We don't want to intervene in this, you know, yet another Middle Eastern country, and we don't have the confidence that we can make any difference, and the Russians did have that confidence. And they said, "Right, we're going to go in, we're going to make sure the dictator wins. And as he takes back territory, he's going to expel people." You know, people are going to run away because anybody who was opposed to him knows that now they're liable to be arrested and imprisoned and probably murdered. And so they're going to leave their country as fast as they can and move to Turkey and move to Lebanon and eventually try and cross the Mediterranean and come to Europe. So that was a deliberately created crisis. It was part of a plan. It had a big impact on European politics. It's certainly responsible for the rise of the far right in Poland, probably also in Italy. I mean, you can go down the list. It had the impact that it was supposed to have. And, of course, it was accompanied by trolling, memes, whatever; all the online amplification and messaging that you know and you've talked about on your podcast many times.

Anne Applebaum (00:36:00):

Venezuela is also a Russian ally. Venezuela is an interesting case actually. The Venezuelan regime is extremely unpopular. The Venezuelan opposition has had excellent leaders. It is capable of mobilizing people. It can get a million people on the streets of Caracas, or it has done in the past. Why doesn't the Venezuelan opposition win? That's because the regime in Venezuela has outside support. It has support from Russia. It has support from China. It has investments from Iran. The Turks participate in the Venezuelan gold market. Essentially, autocracies from around the world, some of whom have no historical relationships with Venezuela—I mean, what's the Iranian Venezuelan historical link? I mean, nothing. The only links that they have are ideological. But regimes from around the world have entered Venezuela. Venezuela is now essentially a kind of criminal mafia state, an almost kind of narco state. And they participate in this Venezuelan kleptocratic system, whether it's buying stuff up there or profiting off the Venezuelan oil reserves, whatever it is, they've kept the Venezuelan regime in charge and we haven't had a counter strategy to that.

Anne Applebaum (00:37:15):

I wrote an article in which I called this kind of conglomeration of autocracies, some of which have very different ideologies. I mean, again, what does theocratic Iran and communist China and nationalist Russia really have in common? Nothing except that they all hate and fear the language of democracy in the democratic world, they all seek to undermine our systems, and they're all very happy to come to the aid of other fellow autocrats in other places. It took us a long time to see that this was happening and as I've already said, we don't have a strategy. We didn't have a response, we didn't have a way to push back, we didn't see it coming soon enough and fast enough. One Venezuelan opposition leader I know once said... I said, "Well, you get help from foreigners, other people, American money and whatever, Spanish and European money has helped the Venezuelan opposition." He said, "What we get is a drop in the bucket compared to what the Venezuelan regime gets from Russia, from China, from Iran, from Turkey, from Cuba." I've left out Cuba, which is probably the most important outside influence in Venezuela. You know, they work together and we seem unable to do that.

Andrea Chalupa (00:38:21):

Right, because then the left will say, "It's regime change! It's the CIA fomenting a coup." That's what they would say. And so what happens then with these mafia regimes? How are they eventually overthrown? Is it just game over and it becomes a black hole of corruption for generations and generations and that's it? Is there a way out of that state capture, of that level of corruption?

Anne Applebaum (00:38:48):

I mean, I don't have a formula that will tell you how to change regimes in Russia and China. I wish that I did. And I'm not sure that it's something we can do. I'm not sure that's what we have... We don't have the tools for that and I'm not sure how we would do that. We can begin to create our own, certainly around particular issues. For example, around kleptocracy or around internet regulation, we could begin to create alliances, you know, groups of other countries that wanted to act together with us, you know, towards a certain end. I mean, actually the defense of Ukraine is an example of how that's worked. As I've said, the United States is not acting alone; it's acting with Great Britain, with the European Union, with Germany, with Poland, with the Baltic states, but also with Japan, with Australia, with South Korea. I think at the Ramstein meetings—these are the meetings where they talk about weapons for Ukraine—there are more than 50 countries present who are willing to do something to help Ukraine. Beginning to think in terms of those kinds of alliances, you know, What can the democratic world do together? What are the ways in which we can act together? I mean, actually there was the beginning of that in Venezuela, where we had South American plus European plus the US and Canada acting in concert in Venezuela. And that version of it didn't work, but maybe others can. So again, thinking in terms of international alliances.

Anne Applebaum (00:40:13):

I would also say, I'm beginning to think that there are ways in which the democratic oppositions in these countries can also begin to act together with one another. And this is not my idea. There are now leaders, there's a Venezuelan leader called Leopoldo Lopez, there are Iranians, there are Russians, there are others who are beginning to say, "Aren't there ways in which we can help one another, raise money together, do campaigns together?", you know, because they also are beginning to realize that there's more in common between the democratic oppositions in many of those countries than there ever has been historically. Again, historically, Venezuela and Iran, not related, you know? Now, maybe actually,

you can see tactics being used by the regime in Iran and Venezuela and vice versa, and maybe it's time for the opposition movements also to begin acting in concert together. So I think some element of the answer lies there. How do we begin to rethink our international relations and how do the international democracy movements begin to act in different and more coordinated ways? I think that's the beginning of the answer.

Anne Applebaum (00:41:22):

You probably need more in Russia to effect political change. I don't think there's gonna be a street revolution there and I don't think the idea that we're gonna start one is a good idea, but that doesn't mean that we can't be thinking about how to talk to Russians, how to reach Russians, that we can't be thinking about the Russian exile community as a force for conversation and for talking to Russians inside the country, and maybe eventually as a kind of alternative elite to begin developing. I mean, there are other things that we can do.

Andrea Chalupa (00:41:50):

Yeah, and as you say, investing... I think what these dissident groups need to bring these different opposition groups together is investment. They need investment. They need security guarantees. And I feel like the State Department should be at a minimum wanting to produce conferences, bringing them together, independent media.

Anne Applebaum (00:42:10):

One of my problems is that there's too many conferences and then nothing happens after the conference. But there are conferences, there are meetings. There's a thing called the World Movement of Democracy, which is kind of sponsored by the National Endowment for Democracy, which is a kind of quasi independent... It's not a government institution, but it has some congressional funding. And there's another thing called the World Liberty Congress, which is new, which is trying to bring together opposition leaders from all over the world. So, they exist. The question is, When will they begin to gain some momentum? When will they begin to have real money to do things when too much of our kind of support for democracy around the world in the last several years has been about supporting civil society, helping election monitors. And the people who are really on the front line, who are risking arrest, risking even murder in order to lead opposition movements in a place like Venezuela or Burma or Belarus, we've been much more hands off towards them. And actually those are the people we need to be remembering that we have to support.

Andrea Chalupa (00:43:15):

Why have we been hands off towards them?

Anne Applebaum (00:43:17):

That leads back to the previous part of the conversation. You know, we were reluctant to be seen helping the opposition in an autocratic country. Sometimes there are other, you know, sometimes we have a relationship with the government. We don't want to be supporting the opposition. We don't want to be seen meddling in politics abroad. Sometimes they're even, you know, those are legitimate considerations. But often the effect is, as I said, that we will pay for the election monitoring organization,

but when the election is rigged and the opposition loses and the leaders are thrown in jail, then that's somehow not our problem anymore.

Andrea Chalupa (00:43:54):

What comes after Putin? If Putin were to succumb to whatever, you know, if he should get a grenade thrown on his next flight and there's no more Putin, is the war in Ukraine over and who do you think is going to win the succession war of the Kremlin?

Anne Applebaum (00:44:10):

One of the weird things about succession in Russia is that not only do we not know who would succeed Putin, we don't know how that person would be chosen. So there is no Soviet Communist Party, there's no Politburo, there's no Council of Elders, there is no succession process at all. I can't tell you who would replace him, I can't tell you how that happens. What does it look like? Does the army choose him? Do the oligarchs choose him? Does the security services choose him? I don't know. Even in China we would have a better, at least there would be the Chinese Communist Party, right? If Xi Jinping falls out a window, we know who would choose the successor. And in Russia we don't. And what that means is that whenever Putin leaves power, however it happens, there will be a crisis and there will be a competition of some kind. And whoever immediately follows him will almost certainly be much weaker than he is because whoever follows him will also immediately be the focus of competition from different groups and from others who are trying to take over the state. My view is that that's good. My opinion is that I don't care who follows Putin—it could be anybody—because whoever it is will have two advantages over Putin.

Anne Applebaum (00:45:24):

Number one, I've just said: he—and it will definitely be He—will be weaker, but he will also be someone who can disengage from Ukraine because it's not his war. I'm not saying that he will or that he's certain to do it, but he will find it easier to do it should he want to end the war. So that gives him, from my view, an immediate advantage. For Putin, I don't know to what degree maybe we've over-thought this. Maybe we've imagined that Putin, his pride is connected to it and his identity and his power and so on are now connected to winning the war. Maybe that's really true. Maybe he could also end it if he wanted to. After all, he controls all of the media, all the narratives. If he decides it ends, then all he has to do is make up a story about why it's over and then it's over. And then what? Then what's gonna happen? Nothing. It doesn't mean he'll be overthrown the next day. But whoever comes next is better in my view. And so I don't see why we should ever make any effort to save him or worry about what happens to him or be concerned that he might drink... I don't know what they do in Russia. They eat poisoned sushi or something. I mean, so I'm not worried about him. And essentially, any change of power is better.

Andrea Chalupa (00:46:37):

Absolutely. And so in terms of... Gosh, I have a million questions for you, so I'm trying to like, which ones do I cram in with the time we have left? In terms of authoritarianism, we have this homegrown authoritarian movement; these people who are cheerleading Trump, cheerleading Putin, despite Trump's very clearly genocidal rhetoric, including some that has been clearly lifted from Hitler. What is that seduction? What is that attraction to authoritarianism? Where does that come from? Give us your Freudian sense of that.

Anne Applebaum (00:47:13):

So, I did write a book about this. It's called *Twilight of Democracy*. It takes about two hours to read. So it's not like a super long book or anything. I'll try and précis it now. The human attraction to authoritarianism has been part of the history of mankind from the very beginning. And in fact, most human societies from the time that we began to organize society have been autocracies. And so it should not surprise us that people are still attracted to that form of government. I suppose we are surprised in America because we became very complacent about our democracy. We assumed that it could never end. We assumed that people, you know, understood the rules of it and would always want to go along with them and keep those going. But, you know, America's founding fathers were not complacent about democracy. And when you read what they were saying at the time they were at the Constitution, you know, they were, you know, there's the famous Alexander Hamilton quote about a demagogue who will someday arise and so on. And they were beginning to think already at that time about how do we write the rules to make it more difficult for a demagogue to take over. And actually, that's one of the reasons why we have our weird electoral college and our institutions that are constantly checking one another. It's maybe even the explanation for our current stasis. But that there could be a demagogue who would upset the democratic system was part of the awareness for many hundreds of years.

Anne Applebaum (00:48:39):

There's a lot of research into why people are attracted to certain kinds of language or certain kinds of regimes. And there's a lot that has shown that... I used in my book the work of somebody called Karen Stenner, who's a kind of behavioral psychologist, who writes about how for some people, living in a time of extreme change, when there's constant shifting social change, demographic change, political change, and particularly informational change—you know, we live in a world now where there's kind of new news bulletins every five minutes where you see conflicting narratives all the time—does produce in some people a desire for homogeneity. You know, “I want everything to go away. I want there to be one voice. I want there to be unity. I want there to be one leader. I don't wanna live in a multicultural society or a diverse society where there are lots of different kinds of people saying things, I'm uncomfortable with that. I want there to be one person saying one thing.” And that is an autocratic impulse. And that we see in a part of the US political spectrum now. I should say it's an impulse that can be left-wing and it can be right-wing. At the moment, the largest and most apparent dominant form of it is on the right in the United States anyway. You can find a left-wing version in Venezuela. You found a left-wing version in the Soviet Union some decades ago. But right now, it is people on the right who are most bothered by the chaos of modern life and by the conflicting language who want this autocratic solution. And by the way, the radical attack on American institutions, on Congress, for example, that you're seeing now from that group of congressional radicals, Trump's attack on the FBI, on the so-called deep state, all of that language is designed to inflame precisely those people who are afraid of change and are afraid of conflict and who want autocracy. You know, “Let's strip away all that democracy stuff. Let's forget about this dysfunctional Congress. Let's just have one person who can decide everything.” And that impulse is there, and you can hear it. And there are people out there who are trying to spread it and increase it right now.

Andrea Chalupa (00:50:56):

What do you say to those who on Twitter are screaming about how Putin is going to lob a nuclear weapon into their backyard in Ohio or Texas and therefore we must sacrifice Ukraine? It seems that

Putin's nuclear blackmail works. We see a lot of hand-wringing from officials and we see a lot of panic over it, even on social media. Will Putin use a nuclear weapon? And what should the world's democratic alliances' response be to his nuclear blackmail? And how should the public think about it?

Anne Applebaum (00:51:53):

So I feel blessed that on Twitter I have not seen anyone worrying about nuclear weapons landing in their backyard in Ohio. So I feel grateful that that hasn't crossed my screen yet. Maybe it soon will. But the irony is, of course, who should actually be worried about nuclear weapons? Who would be the actual victim of nuclear weapons? The Ukrainians. The Ukrainians would be. In any scenario that you can think of where Putin would use nuclear weapons, Ukrainians would be the victims. And if they're not bothered, that should maybe be a hint to the rest of us not to be. My Iranian friends have iodine pills and they carry them around with them, just for the record. There are a number of reasons, I think, why, although at the beginning of this war in Washington and the Pentagon and elsewhere, people really were worried about nuclear weapons. There was a lot of conversation about it and a lot of concern about it. That has become tempered for a number of reasons. One, because it's become pretty clear that even in Ukraine, it's not clear how Putin could use nuclear weapons in a way that would help him win the war. Wind blows to the east, you know, in that part of the world. If you dropped a weapon somewhere on the current battlefield, you would kill a lot of Russian soldiers and maybe a lot of Russian civilians as well. So it's hard to see why he would do that or how that would help him win.

Anne Applebaum (00:52:55):

If he were to use a nuclear weapon in any other way, he would have an immediate response. The United States has said, I think both in public and in private, that the response would be "catastrophic". That's the word that's been used. They may have been more specific off the record. I've heard various scenarios about what that response might look like. But it would certainly be very bad for Russia. But the Chinese have also been really clear, really, every time they talk about the war, one of the first things they say is nuclear, this must not become a nuclear conflict. And since only one side in this war has nuclear weapons, that's a message that's being sent to the Russians. So you have to assume that there is pressure from China as well. And I'm told there has also been behind the scenes Chinese pressure on Russia saying, "Don't do it." So the Russians have good reasons, both because of fear of retaliation and because of fear of losing their most important trading partner, they would have good reasons not to do it. So that kind of combination of factors, I think, means that people are less worried about it than they were in March of 2022. The chance of the Russians using nuclear weapons is never zero, but there's also no indication that anything that we are doing is likely to raise those chances. So, again, the US was afraid in the beginning that if there are too many sophisticated American weapons in the war, that would create some kind of backlash, but really at each phase, you know, American artillery, American long range missiles, American planes, American tanks, German tanks, you know, European tanks of other kinds, long-range British and French missiles, which have been really important in the last few weeks, you know, all those things have now been used, and they haven't led to nuclear escalation.

Anne Applebaum (00:54:35):

I mean, and all the other ways in which Russia could escalate, they've done it already. You know, they've used cruise missiles against Ukrainian cities. I mean, they've gone out of their way to murder Ukrainian civilians. You know, they've launched attacks on Kyiv and on Lviv and on Kharkiv. There was one in Kharkiv yesterday. So they continue to escalate themselves and are helping Ukraine with self-defense

and with taking back its territory. It doesn't appear to be a proximate cause of that escalation. They're escalating and we're responding. So at the moment, I am worried about a lot of things to do with this war; I am not worried right at the second about nuclear weapons. So if you're in Ohio and you're worried about one landing in your backyard, I don't think it's a very high probability.

Andrea Chalupa (00:55:19):

Putin has a long list of enemies. And so he'll get to you eventually, but not anytime soon.

Anne Applebaum:

Ohio is not the top of his list, right.

Andrea Chalupa:

What about Angela Merkel? How should we think of her legacy? Was she somebody that was essentially an architect of appeasement? How do you think history will remember her in terms of Russia?

Anne Applebaum (00:55:38):

Gosh, Angela Merkel already seems like a long time ago to me, maybe it's because to me time is now moving so quickly. Singling out Merkel, I think, is wrong because I think she was a reflection of a broader way of thinking in the West, which began/really has its origins in the early 1990s or even earlier. You know, there was an idea that if we trade with Russia, we will create peace with Russia. And actually this goes back, the West German pipeline relationship with the Soviet Union goes back to the 1980s. They were building pipelines then with very explicitly that intention. Willy Brandt, who was German Chancellor back in the Cold War, would openly say, We wanna build these pipelines because we wanna create a system of mutual dependence that will create the peace and make sure that there's no war between East and West Germany or between West Germany and the USSR. And this way of thinking really lasted through the 90s when it was then applied to China. The idea was that if we trade with China, we'll create some kind of mutual dependency. And there was even an idea that through trade and through contact, democracy would somehow spread from Europe and the United States to Russia and China as well. And that was really the kind of the founding myth of the beginning of this era of globalization, the globalization that included Russia and China. And Merkel was really the last believer in that or the most prominent anyway of the last several years. And she kept believing up until the very end that the best way to deal with Russia was to maintain these ties, was to create important business links, you know, and even to build a brand new pipeline. This was the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

Anne Applebaum (00:57:16):

To some extent, some of this was about money. The German business community put a huge amount of pressure on her and she, you know, went along with it. There was a belief that people were gonna make a lot of money out of this pipeline, that it was gonna be good for German business. The German business model incorporated the idea of cheap gas from Russia. There were a lot of financial arguments for the pipeline, and that part of the German business community that is... You know, so the German gas and oil lobby is extremely powerful. I mean, I wrote probably more than one article pointing out that actually Germany did more business with Poland than it ever did with Russia in the last several years. German business with Poland was like a million different small companies trading, I don't know, shoes and

tomatoes and canned raspberries or something. And that was the nature of that trade. And those people weren't at the level of political lobbyists very loud. But the oil and gas industry, they were very loud, very present, very much a part of the German political conversation, especially in the Christian Democratic Party. And that's my understanding, that those two factors were what kept her believing right up until the very bitter end that there was some way to accommodate Putin and some way to appease him and some way to prevent war by continuing to speak to him and by continuing to trade with him. In retrospect, it was a mistake. I mean, at the very least, I think 2008 was a wake-up call after the Russian invasion of Georgia, but 2014 should have been really a wake-up call. And that was the moment to arm Ukraine, to say, "Okay, we understand what your intentions are towards Ukraine and we will now help the Ukrainian army build itself." And maybe had we done that, had there been a kind of military buildup in the eastern part of NATO as well, maybe we wouldn't be where we are. But really nobody had that mindset after 2014. And here, it's not just Merkel I blame. It's really two American presidents and a whole lot of other European leaders. It wasn't just her decision not to arm Ukraine.

Andrea Chalupa (00:59:18):

Final question: The Holodomor, Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine, you wrote an extraordinary book, *Red Famine*, and in Chapter 11, I believe it was, you cite testimony that my grandfather gave as a survivor of the famine to the U.S. Congress, and I learned about that through your book! And there's still recordings of my grandfather's voice that I could hear all these years later.

Anne Applebaum:

That's great.

Andrea Chalupa:

So thank you so much for that extraordinary book. And I want to ask you, could you just tell our listeners who by now are Ukraine experts, so they could tell their friends and their families, what significance does the Holodomor, Stalin's genocide famine in Ukraine from 1933, have today with Russia's genocide in Ukraine?

Anne Applebaum (01:00:01):

I don't want to say that the past is the same as the present, and I'm always kind of careful to avoid that, but there is a way in which, you know, the Holodomor I argue in my book was Stalin's response to what he perceived as the threat of independent Ukraine. He saw Ukraine as a country that wanted a different path and whose existence actually was a threat to the idea of a unified Soviet state. So the Ukrainians were a threat to the Bolsheviks. And he had seen this, you know, he traveled in Ukraine in 1918 during the Civil War. He was afraid. There had been a really violent peasant uprising at that time. He was afraid of that repeating itself. After he began the process of collectivization in the Soviet Union, there were another series of peasant uprisings in Ukraine. There began to be real anger inside the Ukrainian Communist Party. He was worried that Ukraine was gonna go off the rails and would somehow upset the whole apparatus. And this was at a moment of particular weakness for Stalin because collectivization was going so badly. And so he used the famine, which already existed—there was hunger created by the failure of collectivization—he used that moment to kind of exacerbate and increase the famine in particular in Ukraine.

Anne Applebaum (01:01:17):

He sealed the borders of Ukraine. There were a number of rules passed, decrees inside Ukraine that made the famine worse in Ukraine, that made the process of collecting not just grain but all kinds of other food from Ukraine. Their food was stolen from them, just so... I guess people, your listeners know this already, but it wasn't caused by the weather. It was caused by activists stealing grain in order to increase the famine, in order to pacify and Sovietize Ukraine, and to make Ukraine a fit into the Soviet Union. It eliminated—numbers are still unknown, but—something like 4 million people. And as part of that same process, he also arrested and in some cases murdered Ukrainian intellectuals, writers, artists, painters, and even eventually the Ukrainian Communist Party itself was also decimated. And that idea that we need to kind of pacify Ukraine, this you can hear an echo of in the language of Putin. So Putin also, since 2014, has seen Ukraine as sort of the carrier of a dangerous ideology. And that ideology is democracy. And democracy, the rule of law, anti-corruption, the fact that there were young people on the Maidan in 2014 carrying EU flags and repeating slogans about democracy, when Putin saw that, he thought, Right, that's exactly the thing that I am afraid of in Russia. And so he was afraid that this Ukrainian desire for something different, this desire for their country to be different and become something different, would somehow infect Russia. And so first in 2014 and then again in 2022, the attempt is to pacify Ukraine, to undermine Ukrainian democracy, to destroy the Ukrainian state before it becomes a threat to his form of kleptocratic power. And in that sense, there's a parallel to the famine. The purpose of this war is to pacify Ukraine, to Russify Ukraine, to, I don't know what... This is probably not a word, to kleptocratize Ukraine, to make it into a Russian style, top-down hierarchical mafioso state. So that was the kind of Ukraine he's been trying to create all along and that's what he would like to do at the end of this war. And so there is a parallel in both situations; in Moscow in the 1930s and then again in Moscow in the 2010s and 2020s. The leader sees Ukraine as a kind of threat to his power. And in that sense, history is repeating itself.

Andrea Chalupa (01:03:41):

Anne Applebaum, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, author of several must-read books, thank you so much for coming on *Gaslit Nation* and for all that you do.

Anne Applebaum (01:03:49):

Thank you. Thanks so much for asking me.

[outro theme music - roll credits]

Andrea Chalupa (01:03:59):

Our discussion continues and you can get access to that by signing up on our Patreon at the Truth-teller level or higher. To help people in Maui rebuild after the fires, donate to the Maui Strong Fund at hawaiicommunityfoundation.org. That's HawaiiCommunityFoundation.org. Since Matt Gaetz and the rest of the Kremlin Kaucus want to hurt Ukraine, Ukraine needs all the help it can get as Russia's genocide continues. Donate to Razom for Ukraine at razomforukraine.org. We encourage you to donate to the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian relief organization helping refugees from Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan. Donate at rescue.org. And if you want to help critically endangered orangutans already under pressure from the palm oil industry, donate to The Orangutan Project at theorangutanproject.org.

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