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SUBJECT John Loftus: The Belarus Secret

JENNIFER JORDAN: You're On the Agenda.

On the Agenda originates from Boston, Massachusetts and it also reaches people throughout New England and upstate New York with issues of concern, alarm and interest.

Today On the Agenda we have John Loftus, author of "The Belarus Secret," a newly released book which looks painstakingly into the path of Nazi war criminals from the Byelorussia region of the USSR; came to the United States of America with the sanction and protection of the State Department.

Mr. Loftus is here to take us through that history On the Agenda. Join us.

Mr. Loftus, welcome to On the Agenda today.

Let's start with definitions. Where and what is Byelorussia?

JOHN LOFTUS: It's a little known country. It's in the eastern provinces of Poland, in the western provinces of the old Russian Empire. And it's officially an independent nation with a seat in the UN. But it's really little more than a Soviet puppet state. All of its foreign policy is conducted by Moscow.

JORDAN: Within the citizens of Byelorussia, and something that with a Nazi takeover -- where were they and how did they fit in -- were they like all the Russian peasantry, or all the Russian citizenship?

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LOFTUS: They were a little different Byelorussia was one of the most conquered nations on earth. It lay across the principal invasion route for anyone traveling from Europe to Moscow; everyone from Napoleon to the Crusaders passed through their country.

And as a result they took a very laissez-faire attitude toward occupiers. They'll be here for a while, then someone else will come in. So they were pretty much used to the idea of someone taking part of their homeland.

Byelorussia was also unique in another way. In the 13th Century it was the border area where most of the Jews fleeing Western Europe were dumped. It was called the Settlement of the Pales, one of the most densely populated Jewish areas in the world.

The Jews that arrived in Byelorussia brought with them a great many skills from Western Europe and so they really took over the shops and the trades. There developed a great deal of hostility between the Orthodox Byelorussia peasants and the predominantly urban Jewish population. Some towns in Byelorussia were 90 percent Jewish.

Over the years the anti-Semitism grew and continued to grow. And so by the time that World War II came around, most of the population were quite eager to see hard times fall upon their Jewish neighbors.

In the beginning when the Nazis and their collaborators moved the Jews into the ghetto, that meant that all their homes and businesses were available for the Christian population. It was a gigantic windfall.

When the Jews tried to escape from the ghetto the peasants were given a kilo of sugar for every Jew they captured.

According to the SS polls of the population, 80 percent of the Byelorussia population sided with the Germans during World War II and not with the Soviet Union.

So the -- the old saying, it takes a hundred people to kill a Jew; ninety-nine to shrug their shoulders and one to pull the trigger. I think that was probably true in Byelorussia.

JORDAN: But we -- you said recently that the population was strongly Jewish. Now I'm sure this is an age-old question will go down in the history books, but why did they put up with it if they were stronger in merchantry [sic] and stronger in industry, and stronger in the creative and productive forces?

LOFTUS: Because they were still only ten percent of the total national population. And because they were so concentrated in the urban areas, they had no contacts, no relation-

ship with the peasants, who had primarily an agricultural economy.

And some of the Byelorussian Jews would collect taxes for the absentee Polish landlords. So the only contact the peasantry had was with the tax collector. And anti-Semitism became a popular cause long before Hitler's armies invaded Byelorussia.

JORDAN: All right. So then you see the Nazi army moving in through Byelorussia and the Byelorussian Christianity soldiers [?] taking sides and at the sides of the Nazis.

Where and when did we start seeing the real pogrom start with Byelorussia and the -- and, well, the Holocaust of Byelorussia that's accounted in your book?

LOFTUS: It started quite early. Even before the invasions. The Nazis had recruited teams of Byelorussian intelligentsia to go in with the SS and assist them with the occupation and control of the homeland.

When these teams arrived they were installed as mayors and police chiefs. And they secretly drew up lists of their neighbors to be executed by the SS. Anyone who was a potential opponent of Nazi rule. Polish intelligentsia, Catholic clergy, Jewish intelligentsia.

So the few pogroms of the first few months of the occupation were limited to those groups who might organize resistance. Then the wholesale killings started.

Eichmann asked that an experiment be carried out in Byelorussia.

JORDAN: ...who Eichmann is?

LOFTUS: Adolf Eichmann was in charge of the final solution for the Third Reich. He was the one who was to devise a plan for getting rid of Europe's unwanted Jewish population. He thought of deportation; of sending them to Palestine. Eventually he hit upon the idea of simply sending them out to the Byelorussian pale where they could be worked to death or starved to death and no one would care.

Now, in October, 1941, Stanislas Stankovich, who had been appointed by the SS as mayor of the little town of Borasau [?] was given orders to carry out the first experiment on mass murder.

He was told by the SS to have his police force murder every Jewish man, woman and child in the county. His police shuttled the Jewish population out in trucks to large pits that on the road leading out to the airport. The Jews were placed

in layers, laid down in pits and then they were shot through with machine guns, so they could save ammunition by shooting through two rows of bodies at once. A layer of dirt was shuffled over them, and the next layer of Jews were made to climb down into the graves.

The worst part of the atrocities weren't discovered until after the war, when Western doctors and Soviet physicians were doing autopsies in the graves. They could find no bullet wounds on the infants. Apparently they figured that the children were too small to climb out of the graves, they were simply buried alive.

Between 6,500 and 7,000 Jews were executed in Borasau in a single day.

The atrocities so revolted some German intelligence officers who witnessed it that they later turned up at the Nuremberg war crimes prosecution as witnesses for the prosecution. Stanislas Stankovich was denounced at Nuremberg, placed on their wanted lists. He was denounced in the United Nations. He was even mentioned in the Floor of Congress as an example of the sort of person who should never be allowed into America.

At the very time, in 1948, that our congressmen were holding Stankovich up as a black example, American intelligence had put him in charge of a refugee camp in West Germany, and put him on the American payroll.

Despite the fact that he was rejected six times for a visa, as a war criminal, as a communist collaborator, as a Nazi collaborator, he was brought to this country and given a good job with Radio Liberty and he died here a citizen of the United States just before we could bring him to trial.

JORDAN: Your book, "The Belarus Secret" deals with the -- these Nazi war criminals and the Byelorussian Nazi war criminals coming in and living rather a nice life in New Jersey specifically. All I can say is, how and why? Where did this begin that our government started sanctioning these people and bringing them in and allowing them -- and not only allowing them -- giving them a free ticket?

LOFTUS: Well, it wasn't our government. Both President Truman and Roosevelt specifically prohibited bringing in Nazi collaborators or war criminals. There was a minority group in the State Department that thought that Dewey would get elected president in '48 and they took things on their own. They were warning war criminals to go into hiding so they couldn't be subject to extradition to the Soviets. And these people sincerely believed that the Soviet Union was going to invade West Germany in 1948. And so they were desperate for any form of intelligence behind the Iron Curtain. Well, the Byelorussian collaborators promptly said that they had been

-- had a great deal of experience in spying behind the Iron Curtain, since they'd done it for the SS. And they were more than willing to continue doing it for the British. And the British have actually turned these groups over to the Americans.

JORDAN: Are the Americans in doing this, or the State Department in allowing them to come in, in effect turning its back a second time by sanctioning these -- the criminals of those crimes?

LOFTUS: Yeah, I think a lot of people during the Cold War felt that, well, World War II is over, the Nazis are defeated nothing we can do will bring the Jews back, let's use whatever we can to find the real enemy, the communists.

JORDAN: Uh-huh.

LOFTUS: Unfortunately, they broke all the rules of the intelligence profession.

You see, Congress had passed a law, saying if you want to bring in people with loathesome backgrounds who are ineligible for American citizenship, you can do so under a special law, provided the Attorney General and the head of the CIA agrees. Well, the State Department didn't want the CIA to know what they were doing. And so they smuggled these people in without background checks. If they had done the background checks -- if they had let CIA do the research, they would have discovered that these people -- many of them -- were working on both sides of the fence. They had been spying for the communists before, during and after the war.

The Soviet Union was delighted to have the Americans and British recruit these war criminals, because they were the one group of people that Soviet military intelligence had penetrated during the World War II. This was the center of the Soviet partism warfare area. They had spies at every level of the collaborators. So when we brought the collaborators here, we brought the Soviet agents among them as well.

JORDAN: Can you expect to defend freedom, which is evidently why we bring these people in and have them work in anti-communist, anti-Soviet nature -- but can we expect to defend the freedom of our country and other countries by defending the rights of these blatant killers?

LOFTUS: Well, intelligence is a very, very tough profession. And I think that as with the German rocket scientists, sometimes you have to make hard decisions, that no matter how loathesome a person is, that maybe his interest to the national security outweighs that.

Now those are really tough decisions to make.

JORDAN: Who makes them?

LOFTUS: Well, when it goes by the book, Congress is involved in it, the president is involved in it, the heads of the intelligence services. These are pretty reasonable people who feel the same revulsion that you and I do towards them, so when they finally approve to bring someone in under the lawful program it's usually because they have a very, very good reason.

That's not what I'm talking about here. What happened in this case, is that it was illegal immigration. That the official channels in government knew nothing about them. And because it was illegal it had to be covered up. The CIA could not be let in on what was happening. And that caused numerous disasters.

During the 1950's when the CIA took over at least in name the State Department operations, they were supposed to be running parachute drops behind the Iron Curtain. The CIA didn't know that the agents they were using were people that had been identified five and ten years previously as communist agents.

We lost virtually our entire intelligence network behind the Iron Curtain as a result of these penetrations. The CIA finally forced the OPC unit to drop using the emigre groups. They were an unmitigated disaster.

For 30 years the CIA has been blamed for these covert operations. Wrong agency.

I saw a very, very classified document which the head of the CIA addressed to the Army War College and indicated that he strongly protested against these operations but had been ordered to cooperate.

JORDAN: The agency responsible is?

LOFTUS: Well, the State Department. But, you see, under the Eisenhower administration apparently these programs received sanction at higher levels; someone with enough authority to order the CIA to cooperate.

Eisenhower had three special assistants that ran these operations. They were sort of to protect him in case anything went wrong. And they were C.D. Jackson, Nelson Rockefeller, and Richard Nixon.

Now you can imagine by 1960, when the last OPC operation, the Bay of Pigs has been lined up, and all the other ones have been disasters, and the Nazi groups have been dropped because of communist penetration, and even the head of the British service that sold us these Nazi groups, Kim Philby, is getting ready to defect to Moscow.

Richard Nixon may not have wanted all this to come out at that time. It would have been embarrassing to his political career, to say the least. I think that's why the coverup lasted so long.

So many of the people that were involved with these State Department operations back in the 40's and the early 50's later went on to develop very, very prominent political careers. It was not the sort of thing they wanted to surface.

JORDAN: And didn't.

You are On the Agenda. My name is Jennifer Jordan and we're talking with John Loftus, author of "The Belarus Secret," which deals with Nazi war criminals and their happily ever after life in America, with the State Department's sanction.

Mr. Loftus, how did you get involved and how did you get your hands on these documents?

LOFTUS: Well, I was a trial attorney, criminal division and was getting ready to come back to Boston, had always planned to come back to private practice. And I saw a note that a new unit, the Office of Special Investigations had been formed to centralize efforts to hunt Nazi war criminals. Well, I spoke a little German, I had the right intelligence background, so I thought I'd go over for a few months and ended up staying more than two years.

Like all of the attorneys I was given a regional group of cases to work with; my region happened to be Byelorussia.

But going through all the files I noticed that there were striking inconsistencies. The FBI, for example, was pretending not to know information in one case that it had already learned two years previously in another case. And it happened too often to be a coincidence.

So I very carefully made up a list of possibilities to explain how these inconsistencies...

JORDAN: What kind of inconsistencies did you find? I mean, just to give us an idea?

LOFTUS: Documents out of sequence. Leads would come up. Army counterintelligence would write to the FBI and say this man, Emmanuel Jaziek [?] is a suspected war criminal. He emigrated illegally to this country. We want you to investigate. Well, when the FBI went to visit Jaziek, it wasn't to investigate him for his Nazi background, it was to recruit him. The FBI already knew that the Byelorussians were being funded by the State Department fund group.

So they were recruiting their own Byelorussian Nazis to

spy on what the other intelligence agencies were doing.

When we finally got a glimpse of what was happening I asked the Justice Department for permission to investigate further. I went directly to each of the intelligence vaults. But I didn't go up to the top levels of the Pentagon, I went right down to the clerks in the vaults, flashed my Justice Department credentials, and when they checked back with their security office, they found that I had more security clearances than almost anyone in government. At that point they said, well, sure, give you the files.

As the stuff started to come out most of the people in the intelligence community were pretty revolted when they discovered what was in the files. They were very helpful. And often I would say, well, look, we don't want to get your agency involved, you're only peripherally here; we want to go back and get the agency that did it.

JORDAN: Uh-huh.

LOFTUS: And so don't blow the whistle on your guys. Blow it on another agency. And so they all blew the whistle on each other. And before it -- all of the agencies what would happen, I had gone through each of the vaults, cross-referenced the documents, and we knew exactly what had occurred and why.

JORDAN: Now has the government given you sanction to publish the book?

LOFTUS: Oh, yeah. I asked -- when Stankovich died I realized that this was crazy, that I could spend another two and a half years building a case and the guy could drop dead again. And besides, I was really more interested in another section, the Public Integrity Section that was investigating the coverup -- Congress. So I asked the Justice Department, the CIA, the Pentagon, everybody else, if I could write a book only about the dead Nazis, and I would submit it for review to the intelligence community and we'd see if they'd clear it. And so they agreed.

JORDAN: They did.

In other words, there are more living still in this country...

LOFTUS: I...

JORDAN: Is that the goal of your book, to force an action by the government to either get them out or to force the American public to say, wait a minute, what's going on here -- do you want the dirty laundry aired a bit?

LOFTUS: Yeah, I think there's -- it's really too late to do anything to the individual Nazis. There's a very limited number of attorneys that can process these cases -- maybe all told we can do 40 to 80 cases before the last Nazi dies in America.

JORDAN: Uh-huh.

LOFTUS: At least we're making the effort. We're setting the historical precedent that people like this will never get away with it as long as they live. They might be next. We're always going to be pursuing them.

Most importantly, it's -- the reason I wrote the book was to teach the American people that, as Churchill says, it was not only wrong; it was a mistake. That using such people is not only morally offensive but it's counterproductive to national security.

The Soviets had a field day making propaganda against the Americans. They would tell people, go ahead and listen to Radio Liberty, the broadcaster there is Stanislas Stankovich, the man who murdered your cousins. You know we played right into their hands.

The one insuperable advantage we have over the Soviets in foreign affairs was our good name, that people trust us, we're a moderate, responsible country. There were about a handful of reckless amateurs in the intelligence community took over programs and virtually dictated foreign policy. They engineered coups during the Cold War. They recruited secret police organizations -- some of which make the SS look tame by comparison.

They conducted these activities with only the most minimal approval within the Executive Branch without Congress knowing anything about it.

And I think it's time that the American people demanded that Congress take area of responsibility back over.

The Constitution says that only Congress has the power to determine eligibility for citizenship but for the last 30 years that power has been exercised secretly and abused by various people within the intelligence community and Congress has done nothing about it.

JORDAN: If you were to illustrate those with true guilt to raise their hands, and to say we went beyond the powers of government, we went beyond the powers of the justice and blah-blah-blah, who'd be raising their hands? Is it the Nelson Rockefeller group and those three that you mentioned?

LOFTUS: Yeah, I think they were policy figures. People told me that everything was approved at the White House level, which would indicate that those three people knew.

But more directly, the guys that were directly on -- Allen Dulles and Frank Wisner. Those would be the people who more than any one were responsible for this program.

I talked to retired intelligence officials who had worked with both men and they all come up with the same verdict: they were warned over and over again that using these people was reckless, there was a tremendous risk of penetration. That it was bound to backlash sooner or later. Nevertheless they kept on with it. They had an ideological commitment that these secret armies behind the Iron Curtain would actually somehow manage to defeat the largest police state in the world.

JORDAN: Is our...

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